

**Comments on Nurit Peled-Elhanan's paper:  
"The Presentation of Palestinians in Israeli Schoolbooks  
of History and Geography 1998-2003"**

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## **Introduction**

The thesis of Dr. Peled-Elhanan's paper<sup>1</sup> is that Israeli school textbooks of history and geography reflect a racist approach to the Palestinians, and even implicitly legitimize their massacre. "All Palestinians," she claims at the outset, "are presented stereotypically in racist vocabulary and images as a group which is a threat, a problem to be solved, or a developmental burden."<sup>2</sup> Further on in her paper, she alleges that "reports about massacres of Palestinians ... are never told from the victims' point of view. Rhetorically, these reports are constructed in a way which legitimizes them, for they have all brought about positive changes for the Israelis."<sup>3</sup>

Being familiar with the work done by the CMIP on Israeli school textbooks, I was puzzled by these very serious accusations and felt it necessary to investigate their foundations. My conclusions, as detailed below, confirmed my initial impression that Dr. Peled-Elhanan's paper is extremely biased and a projection of her own political axioms.

A preliminary observation is in order concerning the source material used for that paper. It is astonishing that her peremptory general statements are actually based on a study of only seven textbooks. Since Israeli schools use a large variety of textbooks and new ones appear every year, one wonders how such a small number could be regarded as a solid base for the kind of claims made by Dr. Peled-Elhanan. CMIP, for instance, examined over 450 books for its two reports on the attitude of Israeli school textbooks to the Palestinians.<sup>4</sup> It is also rather surprising that she completely left out of her study textbooks on language and literature as well as of civic studies, all of which are extremely important for a study of 'the other' – as we at CMIP have learnt from our experience. Regardless of these serious lapses, however, I focus my critique of the paper in relation to the seven books she did use.<sup>5</sup> One should also note that Dr. Peled-Elhanan has put together a theoretical framework which stretches the definition of racism to include cases that researchers would normally categorize under 'ethnocentrism'.<sup>6</sup> In any case, let us see whether the various assertions floating in the paper have any scholarly basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nurit Peled-Elhanan is a part-time teacher in the School of Education at Tel Aviv University. In October 2003, at the request of the PA, she presented a version of this paper at a meeting of the subcommittee on the Middle East of the political committee of the Council of Europe devoted to the revision of Palestinian and Israeli school textbooks. To-date her paper has not been published in any scholarly journal. The title of her essay is abbreviated below as Presentation.

<sup>2</sup> Presentation, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> The reports are available on the website <http://www.edume.org>.

<sup>5</sup> They are referred to here by the serial numbers in her list of sources – Presentation, pp. 19-20 and also in the Appendix below.

<sup>6</sup> See her criticism of such researchers, Presentation page 17.

## Assertion no. 1

“The denial of Palestinian national and territorial identity is one of the core messages of Israeli textbooks.”<sup>7</sup>

We can observe that this assertion is contradicted by the extensive use in the books of the term ‘Palestinian’ in discussions of the historical conflict between two national movements in the country. Here is a short list of examples. **Book 2**: “the Palestinian national demands” (page 160), “the Palestinians' national awakening” (page 166), “the Palestinians’ arguments against Zionism” (page 181) and other such mentions on pages 161, 167 and more. **Book 3**: “the crystallization of Palestinian nationalism” (page 79), “the Arab-Palestinians’ national demands” (page 83), “Palestinian nationalism” (page 92) and other mentions on pages 81, 87, 95, 182 and more. **Book 4**: “the Arab-Palestinian public” (page 95), “the Arab-Palestinian nation” (page 272) and other similar mentions on pages 94, 237, 267, 268, 271, 282, 304 and more. Furthermore, the Israeli student is required to write an assignment on this topic: “point out the steps in the development of the Palestinian national movement in the years 1919 – 1939.”<sup>8</sup> These are hardly indications of the “denial of Palestinian national identity” claimed by Dr. Peled-Elhanan.

The same is true of references in the textbooks to today’s Palestinians. So, for example, the following quotation from **Book 3** describes the Palestinian *Intifadah* of 1987 as a national outburst on the part of the population of Judea and Samaria / the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip against Israeli control: “*Intifadah* means ‘shaking off’ in Arabic. The Palestinians and, following them, the whole world, thus named the uprising of the population in the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza against the Israeli regime. The *Intifadah* erupted in late December 1987 in a refugee camp in Gaza and quickly spread to the whole of the [Gaza] Strip and the [West] Bank. Store shut-downs, demonstrations by crowds, and the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails were the chief manifestations of this national outburst, which was unprecedented in the history of the Israeli presence in the Territories.”<sup>9</sup>

That book follows the same line in referring to the Arab-Palestinians who are citizens of the state of Israel: “the Arab citizens of the state of Israel are Israeli solely because they were defeated as Arabs. They are Palestinian Arabs who were forced, by virtue of historical circumstances – calamitous from their point of view – to make a compromise with reality and become citizens of a state which was established to their detriment ... The wars of 1967 and 1973 constituted additional phases in the awakening of the Israeli Arabs’ national awareness ... Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the basic demand of the overwhelming majority of the Arab sector [in Israel] has remained as it used to be: not secession and not even autonomy, but rather full equality of rights with the Jewish citizens of the state. The ‘Palestinization’ of the Arab citizen is usually the other side of his becoming more Israeli, more aware of his rights.”<sup>10</sup>

## Assertion no. 2

“Their [Israel’s Palestinian citizens] discrimination is represented as a national necessity.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Presentation, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> **Book 2**, p. 185, Question 6 A.

<sup>9</sup> **Book 3**, p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> **Book 3**, pp. 210-11.

<sup>11</sup> Presentation, p. 1.

I have read and re-read several times all seven books used by Dr. Peled-Elhanan in her research and have not encountered any evidence that would confirm her statement.

### **Assertion no. 3**

“[Israeli schoolbooks] teach that although the Israeli non-Jews are lawful citizens they must be kept from 'invading state lands,' for they threaten to 'create a non-Jewish [territorial] continuum which would separate these areas from the state of Israel.’<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Peled-Elhanan apparently thinks that secession should be regarded as one of the rights of the Arab minority in Israel, so that any measures taken against such an eventuality supposedly amount to outright discrimination. If there were such a right then her statement would be valid. However, very few states, if any, would willingly relinquish territory under such circumstances, and Israel is no exception.

### **Assertion no. 4**

“The Palestinian occupied territories are depicted as part of the state of Israel, but their Palestinian inhabitants are missing from maps, photographs and graphs. This is a device to legitimate the conquest and the occupation of these lands.”<sup>13</sup>

A map which appears on the next page in Dr. Peled-Elhanan’s paper (taken from a book which is missing from her list of sources) refutes this assertion. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip are indeed shown as parts of Israel, but the Palestinian villages in them are marked on the map. Similar maps appear in **Book 6**, page 170 and **Book 7**, page 122. A photograph of Palestinian youths throwing stones at Israeli soldiers during the *Intifadah* against Israeli occupation appears in **Book 3**, page 255, and **Book 4**, page 321. These are hardly a “device used to legitimate occupation.”

### **Assertion no. 5**

“The books present the ideal of an Arab-free land as a condition for the existence of the Jewish state.”<sup>14</sup>

Nowhere in the textbooks examined by Dr. Peled-Elhanan is such a condition stated. The only condition mentioned in the books as necessary for the existence of the Jewish state is Israel’s military power. Although the mass Arab flight from areas occupied by Israel in 1948 is regarded as “a miracle,” as she correctly quotes,<sup>15</sup> it is not seen as a condition. In fact, the term ‘miracle’ suggests that the event was neither planned in advance nor even anticipated.

One cannot help observing that Dr. Peled-Elhanan employs a crude mechanism of fabrication. First she quotes a text from **Book 3**, page 195 which speaks of the Arab flight that solved “an awesome demographic problem;” then she adds a clause of her own (“which could have been an

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<sup>12</sup> Presentation, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Presentation, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Presentation, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

impediment in the way of”); and finally she combines all that with a text from page 184 of the same book referring to “the realization of the dream the Zionist fought to realize for more than half a century, the declaration of the state of the Jews.” The combination is misleadingly presented as being taken from page 195 of the book.<sup>16</sup> A supposed condition is thereby made up and presented in factual language on page 1 of her paper.

#### **Assertion no. 6**

“The non-Jews, regardless of their origin and faith, are sometimes called by the generic hyperonym Arabs.”<sup>17</sup>

In Dr. Peled-Elhanan’s view this is racism, because it involves “genericisation” and “impersonalisation.”<sup>18</sup> To illustrate her assertion, she gives the following supposedly incriminating quotation, in which the Arab population of Israel is collectively referred to, believe it or not, as Arabs. “The Arab population: within this group there are several religious groups and several ethnic groups: Muslims, Christians, Druze, Bedouins and Circassians. **But since most of them are Arab they shall be referred to henceforth as Arabs.**”<sup>19</sup> Actually, the quotation tends to exonerate the author from the alleged brand of racism, since he does mention explicitly the religious and ethnic diversity of this population. Apparently, in order to avoid being called racist by Dr. Peled-Elhanan, the author should always refer to this population as ‘Muslim-Christian-Druze-Bedouin-Circassian Arabs.’ One wonders whether it is necessarily racists who prefer the shorter and less cumbersome version.

#### **Assertion no. 7**

“Geography books exclude the ‘non-Jews’ from development graph” (Figure no. 1, which should properly be no. 2).<sup>20</sup>

This statement is indeed followed by a graph on the next page, in which a note limits the data about Israel to the Jewish population only. What Dr. Peled-Elhanan fails to tell us is that the ‘racist’ graph is not Israeli. It was prepared by the UN in the 1995 ‘Human Development Report’ – as is clearly stated in English beneath the graph. Presumably, the note was inserted by the author of the textbook in order to make it clear to students that the data in the graph does not adequately reflect Israeli reality.

#### **Assertion no. 8**

“The Palestinian problem is never presented as the problem the Palestinians have, as refugees or an unprivileged minority in their own land.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Presentation, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Presentation, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Presentation, p. 3 – Dr. Peled-Elhanan's emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Presentation, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Presentation, p. 6.

The Palestinian problem is usually presented in Israeli textbooks as the result of a conflict between two national movements over the same piece of land (see, for instance, **Book 3**, page 76 on the essence of the conflict). I see no reason why this would not be a proper way to present the problem. The suffering of the Palestinian refugees and the problems of the Arab minority in Israel are a result of the Jews' victory in the 1948 war. Had the Arab side been victorious in that war, one would talk today of the suffering of the Jewish refugees and the underprivileged Jewish minority in Arab Palestine. It seems quite legitimate, and I suggest even preferable, to define a problem by the cause rather than the aftermath.

### **Assertion no. 9**

Dr. Peled-Elhanan quotes an Israeli researcher who claims that "Israeli curriculum planners have never resigned themselves to man-made borders ... nor have they given up teaching about the Greater 'promised' Land of Israel."<sup>22</sup> She then goes on stating: "As figure no. 4 (Israel after the Oslo Agreements) demonstrates very vividly, with the two soldiers bursting out of the map [of Israel] towards Syria and Lebanon, international laws and decisions are presented as inapplicable. The soldiers reassure the readers that we have not resigned and will not abide by man-made decisions and borders."<sup>23</sup>

On page 8 we see a map of Israel decorated at the top with two armed Israeli soldiers. The text accompanying the map gives an account of the different borderlines with Syria, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority.<sup>24</sup> Nothing in the text supports the claim, made twice in the quotation above that Israel will not abide by man-made borders, least of all the part that refers to Israel giving Sinai back to Egypt following the conclusion of the treaty between the two countries.

Dr. Peled-Elhanan's use of an illustration to "prove" Israel's aggressive intentions, while ignoring the accompanying text, which would prove the opposite, is more than plain distortion. It indicates her unserious approach to data and evidence. On the same footing, I would conclude, having taken a closer look at the two soldiers, that even though one of them aims his weapon towards Syria, the other one points his gun towards his comrade, which means – according to Dr. Peled-Elhanan's interpretation – that an internal war in Israel is just as likely as an Israeli attempt to change the border with Syria by force.

### **Assertion no. 10**

"The map representing the 'Arab population in Israel' leaves the Palestinian areas, which it depicts as an integral part of Israel, colorless, and the legend specifies that these areas are 'areas without data', namely that no one knows who lives there."<sup>25</sup>

Undeniably, there are some maps in Israeli textbooks which show the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as parts of Israel. However, in the same textbooks there are also maps which exclude those territories from Israel and show them as separate entities, whether indicating the

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<sup>22</sup> Presentation, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Presentation, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Apparently, the map was drawn before the conclusion of the peace treaty with Jordan in October 1994 and Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Presentation, p. 11 (the map is on page 10).

territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority or not. The above-mentioned map on page 10 clearly belongs to the second kind, even though Dr. Peled-Elhanan claims otherwise.

Her sarcastic remark at the end of the quoted statement is aimed at creating the impression of deliberate disregard in Israeli textbooks of the Palestinian population of the territories. Actually, the truth is more prosaic: since civil authority over the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza was transferred to the PA, following its establishment in 1994, Israeli authorities have had no access to data concerning this population. Obviously, the Palestinians constitute the overwhelming majority in these areas, but the precise percentage of this majority in relation to the Jewish population in the area is unknown, given the absence of accurate data since 1994.

### **Assertion no. 11**

“In both maps (6, 7) Arab cities within the state of Israel such as Acre and Nazareth are also omitted. These are examples of ‘Toponymic silences’.”<sup>26</sup>

In fact, Acre does appear on Map 7 (which is found on page 23 in **Book 6**, not 16, as mistakenly written in the paper). One should add that Acre cannot be considered an Arab city, since it has a Jewish majority of some 70%. Nazareth appears on many other maps, e.g.: **Book 6**, pages 8, 9, 126, 129, 141, 169, 170, 223, 233; **Book 1**, pages 16, 145, 202, 209, 292; **Book 7**, page 122; **Book 2**, page 337. Furthermore, important Jewish cities are also missing from the above-mentioned maps. So, for instance, Map 6 does not include Holon, Ramat Gan, Rehovot, Rishon Letziyon, Hadera and others and Map 7 omits the names Ashdod, Bat Yam, Petah Tikva, Tiberias, and others. Would Dr. Peled-Elhanan consider these as well cases of ‘toponymic silences’?

### **Assertion no. 12**

“All other refugees, such as Rwandans, Haitians and Jews, are depicted as human beings and their stories and routes are detailed in verbal texts and in maps. In the case of [the Palestinian refugee camp of] Jabalia, neither the caption nor the heading mentions who lives there and why, thereby emphasizing it is a depiction of a place, a phenomenon, not of people.”<sup>27</sup>

This statement accompanies a photograph of the refugee camp of Jabalia in Gaza taken from **Book 7**. At the upper part of the photo the reader can see the last line of some text, of which Dr. Peled-Elhanan tells us nothing. The full text on page 153 in **Book 7** gives the story of the Palestinian refugees: the circumstances under which they had to leave their homes, the route of their wandering, and the difficult conditions in the refugee camp. The aerial photograph of the camp is presented to students as an illustration of those hardships – as is clearly said in the Hebrew caption on the left side of the photograph, not as a simulated target for bombardment as cynically implied by Dr. Peled-Elhanan.<sup>28</sup> The text ends with the following statement: “The problem of the Arab refugees is a complicated political problem and a painful human problem. It constitutes one of the most difficult and complex issues in the age-old Israeli-Arab conflict. In the framework of the negotiations on peace agreements between Israel and her neighbors, this

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<sup>26</sup> Presentation, p. 14. Map 6 is on page 12, and map 7 is on page 13.

<sup>27</sup> Presentation, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Presentation, p. 14.

issue too is brought on the table. Undoubtedly, its solution is going to be crucial for the achievement of peace in the Middle East.”<sup>29</sup>

**Book 4** also refers to the refugee problem in detail on pages 238-9, and the same text appears in **Book 3**, pages 194-5. On page 267, **Book 4** features a photograph of a small family of Palestinian refugees whose shock and fatigue are apparent on their faces; and another photo of a wandering family of refugees is shown in **Book 2**, page 313.

In short, Israeli textbooks seen by Dr. Peled-Elhanan do tell the story of Palestinian refugees and treat them as human beings, but she chose not to notice this.

### **Assertion no. 13**

“Arabs (both Jewish and Muslim) and Arab countries are marginalized in Israeli history schoolbooks, as they are marginalized in Israeli social discourse.”<sup>30</sup>

To illustrate her point, Dr. Peled-Elhanan quotes a sentence from **Book 5**, page 269, which mentions Yemen as a far-away country compared to Russia, Romania, and the Balkans. “Needles to say,” she comments, “Yemen is the closest to Jaffa port, and the question is why is it mentioned as the most ‘far away’? The only answer is that the implied centre of the ‘mental map’ of the writers is still Eastern Europe, the spiritual centre of Zionism and the origin of the dominant social group in Israel.”<sup>31</sup> Whatever one may say about Dr. Peled-Ehanan’s allegations, the one obvious untruth in her statement is the ‘fact’ on which she bases it. Contrary to her assertion, Yemen is indeed the farthest from Jaffa among the countries mentioned. I have not been able to find data in relation to Jaffa itself (which is some 60 km from Jerusalem), but the distance between San’a and Jerusalem is 2,036 km, while the distances between Jerusalem and Odessa (the main Russian port from which Jewish immigrants came to Palestine), Bucharest and Belgrade are 1,672 km, 1,613 km, and 1,930 respectively.<sup>32</sup>

### **Assertion no. 14**

Under the title “Racist Cartoons,” Dr. Peled-Elhanan inserts the following statement: “Israeli schoolbooks never show Palestinian faces, only the ‘object-signs’ of their stereotype.” To this statement she attaches an illustration showing an Arab dressed in traditional clothes and followed by a camel, to prove the racist perception of the Palestinian population in Israeli schoolbooks.<sup>33</sup> To emphasize the point, she also quotes a text describing Arab society as “traditional and objects to changes by its nature, reluctant to adopt novelties” and apprehensive of modernization.<sup>34</sup>

Is it really true that Israeli textbooks never show Palestinian faces? Here are some examples to the contrary, taken just from the books examined by Dr. Peled-Ehanan. In **Book 5** on page 370 there are two photographs of Palestinians plowing their land and walking on a Jaffa street at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On page 372 we see Bedouins making coffee, and on page 373 –

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<sup>29</sup> **Book 7**, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup> Presentation, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Presentation, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> See “The Great Circle Distance Between Cities” <http://www.wcrl.ars.usda.gov/cec/java/lat-long.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Presentation, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

Palestinians leading a camel caravan loaded with oranges bound for Jaffa for export. On page 375 there is a photograph of two Arabs talking to a Jew in Jaffa. In **Book 2**, on page 166 there is a photo of Temple Mount in Jerusalem showing a group of demonstrators against Jewish immigration. A photograph on page 313, showing a Palestinian family leaving its village in 1948, has already been mentioned. **Book 3** features a photograph of the Palestinian leader Haj Amin al-Husseini on page 93; and one of the late Chairman Yasser Arafat shaking hands with the late Prime Minister Rabin in Washington on page 256. The two photographs reappear in **Book 4**, on pages 95 and 322 respectively. We mentioned earlier the photograph of the shocked family of Palestinian refugees on page 267. **Book 1** has a photograph on page 202 of a man driving a tractor or similar machine in the Arab sector of Nazareth. In **Book 6**, page 17 we see a photograph of Christian Palestinians praying in a church, and another one of Druze religious leaders gathering in a house of prayer. Dr. Peled-Ehanan's claim regarding this point is clearly false.

As for what she calls 'racist cartoons', these would more properly, and in less inflammatory language, be regarded as 'stereotypical illustrations'. There are some four or five of those appearing in **Book 1**. This is an illustrated book, full of cartoons and illustrations of various kinds. We may notice that cartoons of ridiculed figures are reserved in the main for Jews. So, for example, there are two graphs where Arab males and females are represented by stereotypical figures while Jewish males and females are represented by ridiculous cartoons."<sup>35</sup> There is also a cartoon figure of a Jew quarreling with a stereotypical Arab over a map of the country.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, there is a stereotypical illustration denoting Jews by a figure of a rabbi reading the Torah,<sup>37</sup> which represents the Jewish population in the same way as the Arab with a camel represents the Arabs in general. There is one case in which both Arab and Jew are represented by similarly drawn cartoon figures, each pulling the map of the country to his side, and one cannot tell who is who.<sup>38</sup>

The same book also contains non-stereotypical illustrations of Arabs. On page 195 we see a mechanic at work and children at school, none with stereotypical characteristics. On page 196 we see a businessman wearing a suit and holding a pack of banknotes. This illustration is attached to a paragraph mentioning the rise of income levels in Arab villages. In a chapter about Arab cities in Israel we see an illustration of people standing in line, probably in a bank, and they are all dressed in ordinary clothes; the lady at the end of the line even wears a miniskirt.<sup>39</sup>

If there are texts in which Arab society in Israel is presented as traditional and reluctant to change, there are others referring to it as dynamically changing. Here is one example: "Since the establishment of the State [of Israel, in 1948], this society [i.e., Arab society in Israel] has experienced modernization: The standards of education and living are rising constantly; agriculture, which has shifted to modern methods of cultivation, is no longer the main source of income; most of the population works in the industrial, services, and commercial sectors; and one important change has taken place in the status of women – most women acquire education, and the number of women who work outside the homes is on the increase."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> **Book 1**, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 160.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201.

<sup>40</sup> **Book 7**, p. 109.

Similar texts appear in other books, but let us focus on **Book 1**, from which Dr. Peled-Elhanan took her quotation. I quote: “The penetration of modernization and education was greatly facilitated due to a new leadership that emerged in the 1970s. It was a young and educated leadership that demanded from the government larger budgets and made efforts to develop the village and initiate investments and special projects.” “The number of educated people has increased and they stand in the frontline of the demand to change the village structure, develop community services and introduce novelties of modernization.”<sup>41</sup> The picture of Arab society given in this book, and in other books as well, to Jewish pupils is evidently not one of sheer aversion to change – as Dr. Peled-Elhanan alleges.

### Assertion no. 15

"Promoting the ideal of an Arab-free country: The legitimization of massacres."<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Peled-Elhanan tries hard to find the slightest indication in Israeli textbooks of support for, or at least implicit endorsement of, the massacre of Palestinian civilians. Since she fails in that endeavor she resorts to other tactics, such as claiming that Israeli textbooks encourage this sort of action by showing its ‘utility’ for the Israeli cause.<sup>43</sup> Her problem is that there is no such expression in connection with two of the three cases she refers to, Qibya and Kafar Kassem. It is true that the massacre which took place in Deir Yassin in 1948 accelerated the flight of the Palestinians from the war zones, as indeed Israeli textbooks state. However, no Israeli textbook claims that the massacre of Qibya (1953) or Kafar Kassem (1956) brought any benefit to Israel. Confronted with this problem, Dr. Peled-Elhanan claims that the Kafar Kassem massacre benefited Israel because it brought about a court ruling against obeying unlawful orders.<sup>44</sup> That result, though, is evidently the exact opposite of legitimizing massacre.

Having failed to substantiate her allegation, Dr. Peled-Ehanan went with a fine toothcomb through reports in Israeli textbooks on these massacres in order to find incriminating nuances. She quotes a sentence from one book, which says that the massacre of Deir Yassin “did not **inaugurate** the ‘panicked escape’ of the Arabs ... **but accelerated it greatly**,” and comments that “both ‘inaugurate’ and ‘accelerated it greatly’ are positive, if not festive terms.”<sup>45</sup> Without getting involved with her semantics, I refer the reader to a parallel text written by the same author, in which the sentence in question is phrased differently, without the word ‘inaugurate’, which may indicate that the author does not really stick to “festive” language. The sentence reads: “the mass flight of the country’s Arabs had already begun before, but the news of the massacre in Deir Yassin accelerated it greatly.”<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the Kafar Kassem massacre, she says that “most books fail to mention that the sentence of the murderers ‘was sweetened’, as Bar-Navi [the author of another book] puts it.”<sup>47</sup> The impression one would get from this formulation is that Bar-Navi is sympathetic to the commuting of the sentence. What Dr. Peled-Elhanan pointedly fails to do for her English audience is to tell them that in this respect ‘sweetened’ is the exact Hebrew equivalent of

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<sup>41</sup> **Book 1**, pp. 196-7

<sup>42</sup> Presentation, p. 17, and see the accusation in the first paragraph of this essay.

<sup>43</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Presentation, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Presentation, p. 17, emphasis is hers.

<sup>46</sup> **Book 4**, p. 228.

<sup>47</sup> Presentation, p. 18.

‘commuted’, and so equally neutral. Here, for instance, is a passage from **Book 2**: “[Henri Petain] was tried in France in August 1945 and was sentenced to death on the charge of treason. His sentence was sweetened to life imprisonment.”<sup>48</sup> It is a safe guess that no one would claim that an Israeli textbook favors the commuting of a death sentence passed on a pro-Nazi leader.

Concerning the case of Qibya, Dr. Peled-Elhanan states that “the report about the massacre ... headed by Ariel Sharon is often termed ‘punishment’ and is always accompanied by a heroic poem and photographs of the killers, many of whom are today’s venerated leaders.”<sup>49</sup> Actually, none of the three books which refer to Qibya calls the massacre ‘punishment’. As for the so-called heroic poem, it appears only once, not ‘always’, and has nothing to do with Qibya. It is about adventurous Israeli youths who endangered their lives to try and reach Petra in Jordan in the 1950s. In fact, the Israeli government at the time acted against that adventurism and even forbade the broadcasting of the song on the national radio. All these details were available to Dr. Peled-Elhanan in the sources she used, and they appear alongside the photograph she chose to insert in her presentation.<sup>50</sup> One should also remark that two photographs accompanying reports on Qibya in Israeli textbooks show soldiers who took part in military operations against Arab villages in neighboring countries which served as bases used by terrorists to attack Israel in the 1950s. Furthermore, the Qibya operation is not regarded as a massacre in Israeli texts, including textbooks, since it did not involve the deliberate shooting of civilians, in contrast to Deir Yassin and Kafar Kassem. In Qibya soldiers blew up 45 houses after occupying the village at night, mistakenly assuming that the inhabitants had all fled during the battle, and later the bodies of civilians who had hidden inside the houses, close to 70 of them, were found in the rubble. Two of the thirteen soldiers appearing in the photographs, not ‘many’, later became well-known leaders: Ariel Sharon, and Raphael Eitan (the latter was eventually Chief of Staff of the IDF).

One can only express one’s surprise, not to say amazement, that in her reading of reports on Deir Yassin Dr. Peled-Elhanan did not seem to have encountered the unambiguous denouncements appearing in Israeli textbooks. Here is what two textbooks write on the subject: “The massacre of Deir Yassin shocked the [Jewish] community. The [main Jewish military organization] Haganah, the Jewish Agency [the de-facto government before the establishment of the state], and the Chief Rabbinate strongly denounced it. The directorate of the Jewish Agency expressed its ‘feeling of loathing and horror vis-à-vis the barbaric manner in which the action was carried out’ ... the massacre of Deir Yassin has stained the Hebrew community’s struggle for survival and independence.”<sup>51</sup> On Qibya, **Book 4** comments: “The Armistice Committee and the UN Security Council condemned the operation and in Israel as well a public debate arose regarding its justifiability.”<sup>52</sup>

In the textbooks’ reports on Kafar Kassem there is nothing to indicate a favorable approach. **Book 2**, which discusses the massacre in detail, refers to the victims as ‘murdered’, and reviews contemporary public reaction denouncing it.<sup>53</sup> In it an entire paragraph is devoted specifically to the pronouncement in the verdict at the end of the trial stipulating that every soldier has the obligation to measure the lawfulness of orders by moral criteria, and to refuse to obey unlawful orders so as not to incur criminal responsibility.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> **Book 2**, p. 202.

<sup>49</sup> Presentation, p. 18

<sup>50</sup> Presentation, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> **Book 3**, p. 184; **book 4**, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> **Book 4**, p. 273.

<sup>53</sup> **Book 2**, p. 335.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Dr. Peled-Elhanan pronouncement that there is a legitimization of the massacre of Palestinians flies in the face of evidence, and is incomprehensible except as showing that her basic motivation is not the search for facts.

### **Relevant Evidence in Books not Consulted by Dr. Peled-Elhanan**

The evidence we have presented, taken from the sources Dr. Peled-Elhanan did use, is more than sufficient for refuting her accusation of racism leveled at Israeli school textbooks. However, for an overview of the actual orientation of Israeli textbooks concerning the issue of racism one may well consider the references aimed at actively combating racist prejudice against Arabs – notably in language and literature textbooks – an elementary procedure in which Dr. Peled-Elhanan has no interest.

Here are some examples:

- 1) “Many people think that doves are peace loving birds. This view is incorrect; it is a prejudice: people believe it without checking. There are many prejudices. For example:
  - The Jews dominate the world and exploit all its inhabitants.
  - Black people are inferior; they are incapable of being scientists.
  - The Arabs understand the language of force only.

Compile during the [school] year a long list of prejudices. Write them down in a special folder to be named ‘So they say, but it is not true: Prejudices’. Try to attach a fitting illustration or cartoon to each prejudice. Be ready to explain orally why these are prejudice.”

*Did I Understand?*, Grade 7, Part 5 (1993), p. 259

- 2) “The lady from the second floor opened her mouth and said that the Arabs are exactly like Jews. There are villains among them, as well as decent people, and they should not be labeled.”

*What’s the Connection? What’s the Interpretation?*, [upper grades, Elementary School], Part 2 (n.d.), p. 184

- 3) “Strange, I never played with an Arab boy before ... Bashir and I ate together in the shade ... after lunch we played more. Before we parted we had exchanged addresses and promised to write to each other. I hope we meet again.”

*Windows 1: Reader for State Schools*, [lower grades, Elementary School], (1993) p. 83

Had Dr. Peled-Elhanan seen such references, and a great many others in textbooks she did not bother to look at, she might have been less adamant in her position. Apparently, she preferred to look the other way.

### **Conclusion**

From what we have shown, it is clear that Dr. Peled-Elhanan set out with the objective of labeling the Israeli curriculum racist. Motivated by her personal political agenda rather than an investigative spirit, she shot her arrow and then drew a target around it – or stated her preconceived thesis and then tried to find evidence for it. That was not an easy task, since Israeli school textbooks do not contain significant racist material, but she was not deterred by this

problem. She made a formidable effort to find supposed evidence, whatever the cost. In fact, the cost has been high in relation to academic criteria:

- A highly selective use of source material, leaving out all references which contradict her thesis (Assertions 1, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15)
- The deliberate misinterpretation of facts in order to coerce them into her thesis (Assertions 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15)
- Inaccurate, distorted, and even downright false evidence (Assertions 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15)

This heavily politicized and thus biased approach distorts the material to produce a picture to her liking. This is not a scholarly work.

### **Appendix: Dr. Peled-Elhanan's Source Material**

1. Aharony, Y. and Sagi, T. (2002) *The Geography of the Land of Israel – A Geography textbook for grades 11-12* (GLI), Tel Aviv, Lilach Pub. **[Book 1]**
2. Avieli-Tabibian, K. (2001) *The Age of Horror and Hope – Chapters in History for grades 10-12* (HH), Tel Aviv, Centre for Educational Technologies Pub. **[Book 2]**
3. Bar-Navi, E. (1998) *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century – A History of the People of Israel in the Latest Generations, for grades 10-12*, Tel Aviv, Sifrei Tel Aviv Pub. **[Book 3]**
4. Bar-Navi, e. and Nave, e. (1999) *Modern Times Part II – The History of the People of Israel, for grades 10-12*, Tel Aviv, Sifrei Tel Aviv Pub. **[Book 4]**
5. Eldar, Tz. And Yaffe, L. (1998) *From Conservatism to Progress: History for 8<sup>th</sup> grade* (FCP), Jerusalem, Ministry of Education and Maalot Pub. **[Book 5]**
6. Fine, Tz., Segev, M. and Lavi, R. (2002) *Israel: The Man and the Space – Selected Chapters in Geography* (IMS), Tel Aviv, The Centre for Educational Technologies Pub. **[Book 6]**
7. Rap, E. and Fine, Tz. (1994/1998) *People in Space – A Geography textbook for 9<sup>th</sup> grade* (PIS), Tel Aviv, The Centre for Educational Technologies Pub. **[Book 7]**