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Approval and rejection of history textbooks and curricula and the political agenda in the State of Israel

Introduction

Over the last two decades, education ministers from opposing ends of the political spectrum have disqualified textbooks and curricula in history and civics, or, have intervened in order to prevent disqualification. The disqualification was accompanied by public debates in the Knesset and the media. What can we learn from the rejection of textbooks and criticism of history curricula? The repercussions would indicate that history textbooks are an important medium – agents of socialization – in creating a national memory and defining a collective identity and values¹.

Furthermore, their approval, and especially their rejection, reflect perceptions with regard to the role of the state as an involved educational authority in shaping the character of Israeli society. In Israel, history, has become the main device for achieving ethical and national goals in education²; this, in order to integrate the younger generation in building the nation³.

¹ D. Bar-Tal, *The Rocky Road towards Peace: Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict the Israeli Case*, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1996 (in Hebrew), 33; A. Ben Amos, *Introduction* [in:] *History, Identity and Memory: Images of the Past in Israeli Education*, ed. A. Ben Amos, Ramot, Tel Aviv 2002 (in Hebrew), 7-9; Y. Matthias, *Nationalizing Education – History in State Education*, [in:] *History, Identity and Memory: Images of the Past in Israeli Education*, 180.

² Y. Matthias, *Nationalizing Education*, 22; A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History: Values and Goals in the History Curricula 1956-1995*, [in:] *Values and Goals in Israeli School Curricula*, ed. A. Hoffman, I. Shanel, Beit Berel, Kfar Saba 2002 (in Hebrew), 131-132.

³ D. Bar-Tal, *The Rocky Road towards Peace*, 33; E. Podeh, *History and Memory in the School System: the Arab Israeli Conflict through History Textbooks in Israel 1948-2000*, [in:]

The main question is under what circumstances were history textbooks and curricula placed on the political agenda and what happened as a result?

This study examines the procedures for acceptance and rejection of history textbooks together with the professional and political authorities involved. The examination investigates the reasons for disqualification over past generations, pointing to changes in values, in educational messages and in the collective memory in Israeli society⁴.

The administrative-organizational aspect of history textbook approval

In the first years of the State chaos prevailed in the field of textbooks. Pupils used a wide selection of books of varying types, some out of date. The books did not always meet requisite standards and were sometimes only used following pressure by interested parties (mainly authors and publishers)⁵.

In 1954, the Education Ministry began approving books to be used in schools. A department was established headed by the supervisor for textbook approval⁶. After appraisal by two Hebrew University staff-members or retired teachers, the book and the opinions of the appraisers were discussed in one of the textbook approval committees organized according to age group and subject. These were authorized to either approve or reject a book completely, or to request corrections. The committee members remained anonymous to prevent pressure from publishers or authors. Books approved were included in the list of textbooks⁷. Although the textbook approval process established in the late '50s has raised the standard of books published, both official and non-official sources nevertheless present some ethical problems.

So, for instance, in certain circumstances the books were appraised by people who had themselves written books similar to those being examined. Another major problem concerned books written by Education Ministry employees. Apparently, supervisors and directors published textbooks without permission from the ministry director.

The committees' requests for corrections in the books created a great deal of tension in the textbook approval supervisor's relations with the publishers. Sometimes the book was not sent for reappraisal. In other instances,

History, Identity and Memory: Images of the Past in Israeli Education, 69-70.

⁴ E. Podeh, *History and Memory in the School System*, 70.

⁵ C. Platner, *Authorization of textbooks*, "Haaretz" (19.8.1960), State Archives, GL12664/7.

⁶ Y. Matthias, *Nationalizing Education*, 169-170.

⁷ Letter from S.P Elroi, Department A Government Offices Inspectorship, to Y. Levenor, deputy director of the Education Ministry (1.11.1959), State Archives, GL 12664/7.

books that had received a 'negative' review were nevertheless included in the 'approved' list⁸.

The publishers, together with the authors and members of the academia, pressurized the committee to approve books. President Yitzchak Ben Zvi's book, *HaYishuv Batkufa HaOttamanit*, was a typical example. The president's personal secretary informed the director of the Education Ministry that a popular version of the book would be suitable for senior high school classes. He wrote: 'perhaps the important period of Ottoman rule in the Land of Israel could be included in the history curriculum as of next year'⁹. The director replied, that 'the ministry intends to bring the President's book, *HaYishuv Batkufa HaOttamanit*, to the attention of high school head teachers and history teachers ... this book will be available for use as a text or reference book as part of the history syllabus for 10th - 12th grade.'¹⁰

This was apparently an offer one could not refuse

One of the most difficult problems concerning the process of textbook approval is the printing of new editions of old textbooks. The question is, is it really a 'new edition' or just a 'new printing'?

According to State Comptroller officials, one notices 'the introduction into schools, year after year, of new editions that are almost no different from earlier ones.' He added – 'we were prevented from investigating the basic facts of this matter by interested parties in school management'¹¹. An article from the early 60's stated that 'there is an approved list of dozens of books in the schools that have not been changed or have only undergone minor changes. Some of the arithmetic books appear especially absurd, as the questions bear no relation to current market reality'¹².

The publishers, justified producing new printings on the grounds quoted below:

⁸ Letter from Elroi to Levenor (1.11.1959).

⁹ Letter from Dr M. Mendes, personal secretary to the President, to Dr M. Avidor, director of the Education Ministry, (21.9.1959), State Archives, GL 1825/2.

¹⁰ Letter from Dr M. Avidor to Chief Education Officer (11.10.1959), State Archives, GL 1825/2.

¹¹ Protocol of discussion between Mr. A. Israeli and Mr. A. Koppelowitz (17.8.1960), State Archives, GL 1654/1.

¹² "Haaretz" (26.11.1960), State Archives, GL 1854/1.

1. 'The custom of passing on used textbooks contradicts the rules of elementary hygiene, an issue specifically mentioned in the recommendations of the Geneva Convention.
2. 'From an aesthetic point of view, a child usually does not enjoy old, worn out books that are passed down to him, and so his respect for books, and even for learning as a whole, may be affected.'
3. 'Psychologically speaking, a child derives great pleasure from receiving new things. A nice-looking book will motivate the child to read it again.'
4. 'Old books require constant repair due to extensive wear and tear.'¹³

The sources show that the publishers and authors, and other interested parties constituted a strong textbook pressure group and the Education Ministry found it difficult to resist.

However, in 1967, a short time after the Six Day War, Aharon Yadlin, deputy Education Minister, conducted a general examination of approved textbooks. This was in order to reassess 'the pedagogical level, scientific validity and reliability of the facts included in approved textbooks'¹⁴.

Strengthening national awareness

One of the main criticisms against history textbooks has been that they do not contribute enough to strengthening students' national awareness. Below, we shall see that this argument has even appeared on the public agenda.

Protest of the 'nationalist groups'

In 1958, Knesset Member (MK) Arieh Ben Eliezer (*Herut*-right wing party) called for the establishment of an enquiry committee on the history of the War of Independence. He claimed that for the first decade of the state 'a pointless attempt was made to erase all mention of the existence of the Jewish underground and its liberation activities'. In his opinion all the people of Israel had a part in the renewal of Israel's independence, but 'against this truth stands the officially backed distortion that tried to uproot glowing pages of courage and self-sacrifice from the living history of our people'. Likewise, inculcating historic truth would contribute, towards 'love

¹³ C. Platner, *Textbook approval*, "Haaretz" (19.8.1960), State Archives, GL 12664/7.

¹⁴ Discussions on textbook approval problems at the office of deputy minister A. Yadlin (19.7.1967), State Archives, GL 7992/9.

of Israel' and uniting the whole nation against its enemies. He suggested 'that the Knesset decide upon establishing a special parliamentary committee that would work together with historians in Israel on researching the history of the War of Independence as a war against foreign rule and a defensive war against invading armies.'

Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion (Labor party) replied to Ben Eliezer that he was not aware 'of any parliaments that occupy themselves with writing history'. This could lead to politicization in the research and teaching of history. He maintained that the State had been established by virtue of the generations of pioneers who settled the land and fought for Jewish security and labor, and not because a foreign regime had been expelled. When Ben Gurion asked: 'Why would you come up with this strange idea that parliament should write history?' Ben Eliezer answered: 'so that sir may appear here as a witness and be interrogated'. Eventually the motion was removed from the agenda¹⁵.

This dispute between Ben Gurion and Ben Eliezer reveals the political struggle over shaping the national memory that began immediately after the establishment of the State. Consequently, the intense involvement of the Knesset regarding questions concerning the content of history textbooks and curricula should not be surprising. In extreme cases, the dispute resulted in the withdrawal of books.

Experiential learning to strengthen patriotism

A short time before the Six Day War (1967) MK Michael Chazani (National Religious party) proposed a motion that broadened the scope of the dispute beyond the history of the War of Independence. It dealt with 'teaching the history of Zionism, the State and the War of Independence in high schools'. The immediate reason for the proposal was a survey that the journalist, Geula Cohen had conducted among senior high school students in Tel Aviv. According to Chazani, the survey revealed, 'ignorance of State and pre-State history and the current situation of diaspora Jewry, and ignorance even of the first stanza of the national anthem'. He was convinced that parents and teachers had severed their Jewish roots 'when they were educated in the lap of Enlightenment literature that scorned its past (the diaspora Jew), and on its critical and self-flagellating literature'. His solution

¹⁵ Protocol of the discussion in the plenum, Sitting no. 463 Third Knesset (28.5.1958), Knesset Archives.

was 'Jewish education', creating experiences for deep Jewish awareness to instill patriotic and social values.

MK Emma Talmi (Labor Party) suggested a similar motion that demanded experiential and analytical study, moral values instead of rote learning of facts and dates. She maintained that: 'it is not enough to know history. One must feel the past and understand it. With all due respect to facts, one has to provide them in sequence, in context, and as a whole. '... dates, names, battles, and people – that's not history; it's a catalogue'. MK Rachel Tsabari (Labor party), claimed that from the point of view of learning content the national awareness of youth has weakened because 'world culture has infiltrated into our lives more and more. The question is, what should our cultural relationship be with the world?'

In Tsabari's opinion, 'the events leading up to independence, are closer to us in time and there are still people living among us who took part in them. These people can accompany the students in their studies and on trips. 'Experience – that is the beginning and the basis for identity and belonging' (my emphasis).

In face of the growing numbers of voices from the entire political spectrum calling for increased national education in history studies, MK Avneri's (*HaOlam Hazeh* – radical left wing party) solitary and unique voice stood out, declaring, 'there has been no reference to our being connected to a certain space (semitic space); our proximity to a certain culture (Islam); to the fact that one must learn about the nearby culture, the culture of the neighboring people'¹⁶.

The approach that claims that one must use experiential and demonstrative education to strengthen national awareness among the students is expressed. In a letter sent by Ben Zion Eshel, the director of the committee for government names to the director of the Education Ministry (13.12.1957), he complained that 'in contrast to the obvious and fixed policy of all other states to adorn classroom walls with maps of their country, with us a map of Israel can hardly be found'. 'Is it not the first duty of Jewish awareness to always put our country before us? With this objective is it enough to just have diagrams and map segments in textbooks?'¹⁷

¹⁶ Excerpt from protocol of a plenum discussion of MK's Chazani, Talmi, and Tsabari's motions for the agenda. Meeting 134, 6th Knesset (10.1.1967), State Archives.

¹⁷ Letter from Ben Zion Eshel to the Education Ministry's director (13.12.1957), State Archives, GL 1654/1.

Second protest of nationalist groups

After the rise to power of the *Likud* (right wing party) under Menachem Begin in 1977, *Herut* party members again brought up the claim that existing history textbooks downplayed the 'nationalist groups' (Revisionists, *Beitar*, *Etzel* and *Lehi* fighters) and their part in the establishment of the State, describing them negatively and using hateful expressions. In particular, Shlomo Horowitz's textbook *A Brief History of Israel in the Modern Period* (part 3) created an uproar. The claim was made that the book describes the revisionist movement as right wing dreamers and social reactionaries with fascist tendencies. Horowitz's book highlights the Labor party's extensive contribution to the establishment of the State while ignoring and scorning the revisionist movement¹⁸. MK Joseph Rom (*Likud*) submitted a question on the same topic to the deputy minister (no date). The question deals with 'the disappearance' of nationalist groups and literature and history writers associated with them ideologically. The deputy minister replied that in the new book *The National Movement and the Establishment of the State of Israel* published by the Curriculum Center, Jabotinsky's ideas together with those of others, identified with the nationalist groups were presented in detail.

European history and Jewish history – what is the correct balance?

Another facet of the criticism over the lack of national messages in history studies concerns the fear that the universal messages embodied in general culture may prevail over the national messages of Hebrew, Jewish culture.

In the mid-80s the rise of *Shas*, an ultra-orthodox Sephardic party, and its entry into the coalition was accompanied by a call to strengthen Jewish history studies at the expense of European history and culture. This trend is found in MK Rabbi Joseph Azran's (*Shas*) proposal, 'Christianity studies in the form of art history', (26.2.1990). Azran said, 'on the one hand there is a lack of Jewish Torah content and on the other there is such an emphasis on Christianity in the guise of art'. He argued against the study of problematic Christian motifs such as the crucifixion of Jesus and Christian anti-Semitic propaganda such as Shakespeare's play 'Shylock'. M. Tamir, the Education Minister's advisor on art, responded, 'when teaching art in elementary schools we are very careful not to relate to the subject of nudity (Greek and Roman statues) as the children are not mature enough'. As for Christian motifs, he

¹⁸ Letter from Joseph Levin to deputy Education Minister Miriam Glaser-Tassa (11.1.1982), State Archives, GL 17941/17.

emphasized 'that Christianity is not taught in itself but as part of art history studies'. As for nudity at high school level he admitted that in fact 'there are art schools that teach with models (nude models), but there also, study takes place in an inner room, with drawn curtains; other pupils do not enter the room and all this is the responsibility of the school alone, and not by authority of the Education Ministry'. In conclusion, he stated that, 'there is no directive to teach either nudity or Christianity in art lessons'.

MK Rehavam Zé'evi (*Moledet* – secular radical right wing party) and an Eretz Israel Museum board member, argued that it is impossible to ignore Christianity and other religions when teaching art history. Nonetheless, he complained that Jewish art is not taught in school, only general art and in his opinion, general art studies and music come at the expense of Jewish history studies, Bible and *Moledet* (homeland studies).

MK Bar Zohar (Labor party) concluded, 'it is impossible today to imagine art without studying religions on one hand and nudity on the other. Do not censor art studies. Tomorrow we will be required to remove a certain type of music and the next day we will begin to burn books'¹⁹.

The issue of relative proportionality between Jewish national history studies and European history and culture including humanistic values has always accompanied the critical discussions about history textbooks and curricula. It could be said that the direction was of almost total dominance in favor of Jewish history in the 50s and 60s in order to balance between the 'two histories'. Amos Hoffman claims that in the 1955 curriculum Jewish history held absolute dominance; in 1961 the ratio was 70% to 30%; in the 1975 curriculum 55% to 45% and in 1995 there was a change – only 43% Jewish history and 57% European history²⁰.

In 2011, the issue was again raised by MK Ronit Tirosh (*Kadima*, past CEO of the Ministry of Education). She argued that learning history should include 'the specific history of the Jewish people over the ages'. Therefore, it is strange that 'Second Temple period studies were removed from the syllabus while giving more time to other subjects, further removed from the Jewish people's past'²¹.

Seemingly, she complained about the removal of Second Temple period studies from the syllabus because it was an era comprising heroic times with courageous battles, occupation and the struggle for autonomy and even

¹⁹ Education committee (26.2.1990), Knesset Archives.

²⁰ A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History*, 135-148.

²¹ Motion for the agenda by MK Ronit Tirosh (24.7.2011), Knesset Archives.

complete independence (Ezra and Nehemia, Hasmoneans, the Jewish Roman War, Bar Kochba). A pupil living in the sovereign State of Israel, fighting for its independence could easily identify with his ancestors' acts of courage and his national awareness would thus be strengthened.

Post-Zionism in textbooks?

Until the 70s the Zionist narrative had not been challenged in history textbooks. However, with the growing trend of post-Zionist historiography in academic research of the 80s and 90s there was concern that these concepts could also infiltrate into school textbooks. 'The first harbinger' of an argument about post-Zionism in textbooks appeared during the 70s, even before the impact created by academic publications adhering to this approach. The discussion focused on 'preventing distribution of textbooks among pupils in vocational schools because of its anti-Zionistic trend'. The book in question was *Leket LeChinuch* Book 3 written by the Ministry of Labor and the Federation of Student and Working Youth for high school students of vocational schools. The purpose was to study the Israel-Arab conflict. Education committee chairman MK Shechterman's (*Likud*) main complaint was that the authors present only the Arab-Palestinian point of view on the conflict and completely disregard the Zionist position. Shechterman cited from the book: '...the Arabs see the reality of Israel in the heart of the Middle East as an obstacle preventing Arab unity, as a bridgehead for superpowers lusting after Arab oil... there is great interest in the Egyptian view through Egyptian eyes, Ahmed's eyes.'²² He demanded that the book be banned immediately.

MK Zevulun Hammer (National Religious party) said that 'The book does not include answers for troubled youth, and most of the sources come from the world of Arab thought'²³. Speakers from the center and left of the political spectrum attacked Shechterman and Hammer's viewpoint that textbooks 'should imbue our children with national values' (Shechterman). They claimed that 'acquiring knowledge about the other side would not harm our youth' (MKs Mouyal and Shimoni [Labor party]). MK Isaac Ben Aharon (Labor party) added a comment about the generation gap: 'the youth do not necessarily accept the basic beliefs of the veteran generation and so complete answers must be given to questions asked... what our enemies

²² Letter from the Education committee chairman Abraham Shechterman to Education Minister Aharon Yadlin (9.12.1974), State Archives, K 503/15.

²³ Notice to the press from the Knesset's education committee discussions (7.1.1975), State Archives, K-503/15.

say must be heard'. MK Meir Pail (*Sheli* – radical left wing party) praised the pedagogic endeavor of this textbook, to deal, for the first time, with the State of Israel's main problem.

In retrospect, all the speakers, from the right and from the left, understood that this was about a new phenomenon: complete authorization to present the Arab narrative on the Israel-Arab conflict in history textbooks. By the end of the discussion the committee had not reached an operative decision. The Labor minister director, Israel Goralnik, undertook to prepare a revised and updated version of the book for the new school year²⁴.

Since the 80s historical research has emerged questioning the widely held interpretations of the values that motivated the actions of the Zionist movement leaders and the fledgling state. Basic principles were challenged, such as the War of Independence, the problem of refugees, Israel's leaders' struggle for peace, and more. According to the critics, historians Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim, and political scientists Baruch Kimmerling, Uri Ram and Gershon Shafir have exceeded the accepted boundaries of Zionist debate and should therefore be perceived as post-Zionists. In 1988, Benny Morris used an alternative term 'new historians' for himself and his colleagues. Either way, their views stand in total contradiction to traditional Zionist interpretation²⁵.

In view of these studies, criticizing the Zionist narrative, political elements began to express their concern that post-Zionistic perceptions might also infiltrate into school history textbooks and affect pupils' national awareness. Thus, controversy erupted over the use of new history textbooks. Their authors were accused of adopting post-Zionistic approaches and demands were voiced to disqualify books. In September 1999, the author Aharon Meged, attacked Eyal Naveh's textbook *The 20th Century on the Threshold of Tomorrow*. He claimed that the book expresses a post-Zionist trend and that whoever studies it, 'would not only receive a deceptive and warped picture of reality on the eve of the establishment of the State ... but also be deprived of any feeling of justification for our existence here'²⁶. 'Women for Israel's Future' published a notice calling for teachers, parents and pupils 'not to buy, not to teach or study' Naveh's book. He 'rewrites our history

²⁴ Letter from Nissim Almog, Education minister's assistant, to MK Shechterman, Education committee chairman with copies to MKs Yadlin and Baram (4.2.1975), Knesset Archives, K 503/15.

²⁵ L.G. Silberstein, *New Historians and Critical Sociologists, between post-Zionism and post-Modernism, Theory and Criticism* (1996) 8:105. (in Hebrew), 105.

²⁶ A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History*, 153.

... trains the student to identify with the Arab side...’ In contrast, articles were published encouraging the critical study of history, and development of a moral approach to the position of the ‘other’. In November 1999 the Knesset Education committee discussed Naveh’s textbook. The initiative for the discussion came from, ‘Professors for a Strong Israel’ (a politically right wing lobby) with the intention of recommending a delay in distributing the book until corrections had been made. A former attempt had failed to delay the book’s distribution via notices to parents and teachers in the press. Indeed, the Education committee was divided in its opinions, but the then Education Minister, Yossi Sarid, supported the book unconditionally and would not permit a repeat examination of its content. Thus, the initiative to disqualify the book failed²⁷.

A year later, a completely different situation developed around *Olam shel Tmurot*, written by Danny Yaakobi of the Ministry of Education and Culture’s Curriculum Department. This book was apparently written from the perspective that since Israel is in the midst of a peace process with the Arab world a new and critical outlook vis-à-vis the Israel–Arab conflict is required.

Thus, the addition of chapters on the Oslo accords, peace with Jordan and a critical analysis of the Palestinian refugee problem, is quite understandable²⁸. Dr Yoram Chazoni, President of *Machon Shalem* (an academic institute with a nationalist orientation) asserted that ‘this is not the story we all know, the classic Jewish Zionist story. We are talking about a different narrative, one that describes a different story with different messages and values’²⁹. He specified that key personalities such as Weizmann and Ben Gurion simply ‘vanished’ from the book, there is no mention of ghetto uprisings; illegal immigration and the underground are hardly mentioned; the only picture in the chapter on the establishment of the State is of ‘Palestinian refugee children in Jordan 1949’; in describing the Six Day War there is no mention of the blockade of the Tiran Straits, and in the description of the 70s there is no reference to the terrible terrorist attacks in Israel and abroad.

The concern that post-Zionistic messages from academia might be slipped into schools cast a constant shadow over the committee’s discussions. MK Ze’ev Boim (*Likud*) said, ‘there is a hidden agenda here, to present

²⁷ E. Naveh, E. Yogev, *Histories: Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past*, Babel, Tel Aviv 2002 (in Hebrew), 13-14.

²⁸ A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History*, 154.

²⁹ Protocol No.193 Knesset Education committee (20.11.2000), Knesset archives.

Zionism, if not as a crime against humanity, then as a crime against the Palestinian people...’ Limor Livnat, the Education Minister (*Likud*) accused the academics and Danny Yaakobi, the author of being partners in an evil conspiracy, ‘you are attempting, in the hope that we and others will not notice, to implant this new history, this post-Zionism, into the education system.’ The chairman of the committee, MK Zevulun Orlev, (*Mafdal*, a religious right wing party) emphasized that a decision had to be reached. This, despite the warning that Prof. Michael Abitboul, head of the Ministry of Education’s Pedagogic Secretariat, made ‘... we have been told by the press that the Knesset’s education committee is about to disqualify a textbook... today it’s a history book, tomorrow a civics book and the day after an oral Torah book. Where will it end if political bodies start to interfere in our pedagogical agenda?’

The Knesset education committee’s decision on the issue of Yaakobi’s book included the following clauses:

1. Textbooks are not solely academic and scientific documents, but serve also to educate our pupils in values and principles.
2. The committee demands that the ministry postpone the use of the textbook until the requisite corrections and revisions have been made.
3. The committee rejects the attempts at delegitimization of its involvement in the use of textbooks and curricula and declares that it sees it as its duty to ensure that curricula and textbooks are used for educational objectives according to the law.

In effect, the book was disqualified and shelved by the Education Minister. She viewed the book as ‘a fundamental, ethical and Zionist failure’³⁰.

In response, the Israel Historical Society published a statement that the education committee’s action ‘represents deliberate political intervention in teaching content. The control of textbooks should be left in the hands of professionals, academic researchers and educators alone’³¹.

The significance of the rejection of Yaakobi’s book and the attempt at rejecting Naveh’s book is that the State sees itself as an educating agent

³⁰ A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History*, 156; E. Naveh, E. Yogev, *Histories: Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past*, 13.

³¹ A. Hoffman, *Between National and General History*, 154-155.

responsible for spreading an educational Zionist message, and is permitted to disqualify books that present contrary narratives³².

Ten years later MK Muhamed Barake (Arab party) proposed a motion on the 'rejection of a history book in the *Shaar Hanegev* high school that included the Palestinian narrative'. The book was banned by the head of the Pedagogic Secretariat, Dr Zvi Tzameret.

Eyal Naveh, one of the authors of 'studying the historical narrative of the other', claimed that this unique textbook encourages critical thinking. It consists of two separate narratives – the Zionist and Palestinian – placed side by side in one book without a connection between them. The narratives appeared on each page with an empty space in the middle – which has a symbolic meaning and didactic potential – for students to comment. The head of the Pedagogic Secretariat, Zvi Tzameret, prohibited teaching the book. He justified this on the grounds that the book was misleading and contained factual errors, and that it had not been approved by the ministry³³.

Historian and Middle East expert, Elie Podeh³⁴ argues that three basic approaches have developed in the debate about teaching history in Israel:

- A. The national-establishment approach – history is not a neutral subject. It has national and ethical goals. The State molds the nation's collective memory.
- B. The academic-critical school – the national educator tends to mythologize and heroize history. One should strive for historical truth. It is permissible to be ashamed of acts and events in one's nation's past³⁵.
- C. The synthetic approach – national history has lights and shadows. One must set national and social goals in education, but also educate for humanistic, and not only national ethnocentric values.

With regard to Arab relations these approaches can be matched to parallel stages in human life and the development of the state.

Childhood – 1948-1967: the national-establishment approach held sway; with disregard of the Arab environment and negative or stereotypical descriptions of Arabs, de-humanization and de-legitimization.

³² F. Pingel, *Unesco Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, Mofet, Tel Aviv 2015 (in Hebrew), 6-9.

³³ Ohr Kashti, "Haaretz", 24.10.2010.

³⁴ E. Podeh, *History and Memory in the School System*, 73-76.

³⁵ Y. Matthias, *Nationalizing Education*, 27.

Adolescence – 1967-1984: the synthetic approach was prominent; a more balanced presentation of the Arab position and the Israeli–Arab conflict, with emphasis on the importance of studying the other side’s views³⁶.

Adulthood – from 1984 onward: the critical academic approach also became evident; education for Jewish–Arab coexistence and inter-cultural relations. Questioning accepted Zionist truths³⁷.

Generally speaking, on the subject of national awareness in Israel today there has been a degree of polarization with regard to textbooks. The Right maintain that the new history textbooks are attempting to undo Israel’s national memory. The books are overflowing with humanistic universalism and blur Israel’s path and mission. In contrast, the Left complain of a tendency to national isolation and an absence of criticism. It protests against ethnocentric excess and suppression of narratives of oppressed groups. Israel Bartal, the historian, believes that this criticism from both sides is actually a badge of honor demonstrating the strength of educational critical thought and the autonomy of historical research in Israel. Historians and textbook writers have not surrendered to nationalistic fundamentalism on the one hand or post-Zionistic radicalism on the other³⁸.

The Ethnic Divide

In the 70s and 80s Israeli society tackled the ethnic divide - the Mizrahi Jews’ claim of deprivation and discrimination that perpetuated their marginal position in all walks of life: politics, society, economy and more.

Especially memorable were The Black Panthers, a protest group (established in 1971) whom the then prime minister, Golda Meir, called ‘not nice’, and the unfortunate expression used by Dudu Topaz – *tchachtchachim* (‘riffraff’) – during an election rally for the Labor party in June 1981.

The rise of the *Likud* government in 1977 definitely created the feeling that the Jews from Islamic countries would now receive political representation more befitting their relative quota in the population, but maybe because of this they were overly sensitive to every expression of ‘Ashkenazi superiority’ over them. This was expressed on one hand, with the demand to remove insulting racial stereotyping in existing textbooks: and on the other hand,

³⁶ D. Bar-Tal, *The Rocky Road towards Peace: Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict the Israeli Case*, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1996 (in Hebrew), 35, 70, 75, 89.

³⁷ D. Bar-Tal, *The Rocky Road towards Peace*, 90-91; E. Podeh, *History and Memory in the School System*, 78-86.

³⁸ I. Bartal, *History, Memory and Education: Israel 2003*, [in:] *Army, Memory and National Identity*, ed. M. Naor, Magnes, Jerusalem 2007 (in Hebrew), 175-176.

with the demand to write new textbooks that would fittingly represent their contribution to Jewish culture throughout the ages, their Zionist activities and their achievements in Israel.

In 1970, a teacher in Tiberias sent a letter to the then Education Minister, Yigal Alon, protesting the opening article written by the historian, Jacob Leschinsky, in the book *Jews in the Silent Countries*, that teachers used for Soviet Jewry solidarity day. She wrote: Leschinsky claims that 'Oriental Jewry's part in national Jewish life has been feeble particularly for the last 500 years ... Ashkenazi Jews are the most creative branch and the focus of all the public and cultural movements of the Jewish people'³⁹. The minister expressed concern for and solidarity with the Jewish communities in underdeveloped countries: 'the term silent, distressed Jewry includes both the Jews behind the "Iron Curtain" in Communist countries and the Jews behind the "Sand Curtain" in Arab countries'⁴⁰.

In 1976 MKs Jacques Amir and Eli Mouyal presented a motion in the Knesset. Its title: 'The exclusion of North African Jewry in history textbooks used in high schools'. The Education and Culture committee conducted two comprehensive meetings on the topic (3.11.1976 and 15.11.1976). During the first meeting, Shlomo Shavit, head of the Curriculum Department's history team, announced that a committee had been established to deal with the integration of Oriental Jewish culture into the curriculum. He also reported on the progress of programs which would provide a greater emphasis on Oriental Jewish culture. As for Ephraim Shmueli's history book, Mr. Shoal, deputy director of special topics, announced that the author had already been asked to correct the book four years ago. Since corrections had not been carried out it had been removed from the Education ministry's recommended book list for schools three years ago (Shmueli's book was removed from the list in the 1977 school year).

MKs Shulamit Aloni and Yair Peretz (Labor party) cautioned against hasty preparation of additional textbooks about Jews from Islamic countries. They called for deeper scientific research on the subject and warned against a tendency to deal with folklore and not history. Likewise, they complained of the lack of cooperation between the academic university research and

³⁹ Letter from Talia Noy, Erlich School, Tiberias to the Education Minister Yigal Alon (29.10.1970), State Archives, GL 13026/1.

⁴⁰ Minister Yigal Alon's letter to Talya Noy, Erlich School, Tiberias (24.2.1971), State Archives, GL 13026/2.

the Education ministry's curriculum department⁴¹. In the second meeting (15.11.1976) MK Geula Cohen quoted from Kirshenbaum and Horowitz's books that depict Oriental Jewry as uneducated, superstitious and primitive. She demanded to have the books disqualified immediately. In her opinion, it is not enough to correct textbooks but the subject of Oriental Jewish heritage should be incorporated in teachers' training. MK Ora Namir (Labor party) demanded that prominent Oriental Jewish intellectuals be coopted to participate in committees that prepare curricula in history and literature.

In contrast, MKs Isaac Ben Aharon, Yossi Sarid and Meir Pail cautioned against incorporating a stereotyped idealization of the Oriental Jewish heritage, as too, in similar measure, of the Ashkenazi Jewish culture of the *shtetl* (the small Jewish towns in Eastern Europe). Zionism was not established in order to copy and glorify the diaspora in the Land of Israel. 'All the fond memories of what was, and its idealization, will lead to atomization' [splitting Israeli society into different ethnic groups] (Meir Pail). Pail thought that education should provide a 'melting pot' for the various ethnic groups. MK Haviv Shimoni (Labor party) opposed the 'melting pot' policy and called for cultural pluralism and studying the heritage of Oriental Jews in order to create cultural and historical models with which the pupils could identify⁴².

Ben Eliyahu, a senior official in the Education Ministry, forbade the use of Shmueli and Kirschenbaum's books in schools (both books were eventually removed from the approved book list). To conclude the debate the committee published recommendations:

1. Increase the awareness of North African Jews' heritage and ensure the subject is adequately covered in the curriculum.
2. The physical removal from schools of all textbooks that distort the image of North African Jewry.
3. The Curriculum Department expedite the preparation of textbooks according to the new curricula proposal.

The committee recommends including the various ethnic groups in committees and bodies that deal with the subject on the agenda⁴³.

⁴¹ Knesset Education committee's first meeting (3.11.1976), press announcement, State Archives, K 504/25.

⁴² A. Ben Amos, *Impossible Pluralism? European Jews and Oriental Jews in the History Curriculum in Israel*, [in:] *Education towards the Twenty First Century*, ed. D. Chen, Ramot, Tel Aviv 1995 (in Hebrew), 272.

⁴³ From the protocols of two meetings of the Knesset Education committee and press notices on the subject of 'The exclusion of North African Jewry's past in history textbooks used in high schools' (3.11.1976, 15.11.1976), State Archives, K-504/25.

It can be surmised that concrete steps were taken from an institutional-organizational level. In 1976, the Education Ministry established a 'Center for the Integration of Jewish Oriental Heritage'. This body was responsible for changes in the curricula and promoting research on the history and culture of Jews from Islamic countries. The political public struggle of Jews from Islamic countries, especially the political lobby in the Knesset together with intensive academic-research activity that began in the 70s created a definite change in the way Jews from Islamic countries were portrayed in textbooks⁴⁴.

Nonetheless, during the 80s the Education Ministry continued to receive complaints about discrimination against Oriental Jews in textbooks, and about their depiction in an insulting and distorted manner. MK Ovadia Eli (*Likud*) presented a question to the Education Minister Yitzchak Navon (1985) claiming that there was no mention in the curriculum or textbooks of Zionist activity and immigration from Arab lands. Minister Navon refuted this claim and submitted documentation disproving Eli's statements⁴⁵.

Kirshenbaum's textbook continued to be the object of public criticism in the 90s even though it had been officially disqualified many years before. Artist Meir Gal published a protest art display named 'Nine (pages) out of 400' in which the artist appears, dressed in black holding those pages devoted to the history of Oriental Jews in Kirshenbaum's voluminous textbook *Modern History of Israel* that he studied in the 70s. In this fashion he maintained that Israeli society relates to them as a group devoid of history. It wiped them out of its textbooks. Yet, when they are mentioned, it is only in the context of their Zionist activities and immigration to Israel and not in the context of immigration to other countries, their development of a unique culture or joining national and social movements in their countries of origin⁴⁶.

Generally speaking, in the 80s the Ministry of Education adopted a policy trying to fight the portrayal of negative stereotypes of Oriental Jews in textbooks. Guidelines were given to authors of new books, and old books that did not comply with an egalitarian approach were completely withdrawn⁴⁷. The sentence, 'books that do not present a fair, non-stereotyped

⁴⁴ A. Ben Amos, *Impossible Pluralism? European Jews and Oriental Jews in the History Curriculum in Israel*, 272-273; Y. Matthias, *Nationalizing Education*, 176-177.

⁴⁵ Parliamentary question 1428 of MK Ovadia Eli and Minister Navon's reply, State Archives, GL-18176/10.

⁴⁶ A. Raz-Krakotzkin, *History Textbooks and the Limits of Israeli Consciousness*, [in:] *History, Identity and Memory*, 61.

⁴⁷ Eliezer Shmueli's letter to MK Mattityahu Peled (8.11.1985), State Archives, GL-18176/10.

portrayal of the citizens of Israel and the region and their diverse cultural backgrounds are completely rejected, became, a sort of guiding motif in official ministry documents regarding writing new textbooks and evaluating old ones, with respect to ethnicity.

The uniqueness of the Holocaust and its historical message

The Holocaust was not taught systematically as an historical subject in high schools until the end of the 1960s. Schools dedicated a few isolated classes to the subject mainly as part of Holocaust and Martyrs' Remembrance Day. These classes lauded the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in contrast to the rest of the Jews who were 'led like sheep to the slaughter'. The rebels are 'Hebrews' or even 'youngsters from Israel' and there is almost no mention of communist fighters, Bundists or Revisionists. The education system, as to the Israeli public as a whole, tried to deal with the Holocaust primarily on an emotional level⁴⁸.

The difficulty of teaching the emotional dimension of the Holocaust through textbooks can be understood from the following incident: K-Zetnik's book *The House of Dolls* was recommended in the early 60s by the Education Ministry for 'home reading' for 11th and 12th grade on the Holocaust. The book contains descriptions of young Jewish girls forced into prostitution in a women's camp by the German forces. David Unger, whose 16 year old daughter had to prepare a book report on the *House of Dolls*, subsequently sent an angry letter to Chanoch Rinot, the Education Ministry director. Unger wrote that although 'doctors sometimes use "shock" treatment for mental health patients, I have yet to hear that such treatment can also help the healthy'. He concluded his letter with a question: 'I am interested to know what educational purpose this book may have?'⁴⁹ The director replied: '*The House of Dolls* offers an artistic and highly creative representation of the Holocaust. In this book, human impurity and purity are revealed, the inhuman and superhuman as one. In short, a sublime rendition of tragic yet noble courage – herein lies the educational worth of this book... – a holy book'⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ R. Firer, *The Holocaust in High School Textbooks in Israel 1948-1982*, "Studies on the Holocaust Period" (1984) 3: 243-258. (in Hebrew), 244-248; E. Naveh, E. Yogeve, *Histories: Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past*, Babel, Tel Aviv 2002 (in Hebrew), 44-46, 60-61.

⁴⁹ Letter from David Unger to Dr Chanoch Rinat, director of the Education Ministry, (18.4.1963), State Archives, GL-1825/2.

⁵⁰ Letter from Dr Chanoch Rinot to David Unger (18.6.1963), State Archives, GL-1825/2.

By the end of the 70s a public leaning was discerned towards securing the position of the Holocaust as a compulsory subject for matriculation in the framework of the history syllabus. However, the pedagogic question remained: should one present it as a memory on the emotional-experiential level or teach it mainly on a cognitive level?⁵¹

Furthermore, should one derive national ethnocentric lessons from it that affect only the Jewish people and the State of Israel or could we also draw universal and humane conclusions about human nature, the value of life and the importance of democracy.

According to the latter approach, one can compare the Holocaust with other 20th century genocides (see below).

The controversy over the Holocaust's educational messages was expressed in the 1980s by presenting German as well as German-Jewish history in textbooks. The old textbooks (Horowitz, Shapira) demonized Germany and the German people by using critical expressions, such as: 'the crazy Nazi animal', 'dark forces', 'murderous instincts', 'sick fantasies'⁵².

In order to remedy the situation a joint committee of German and Israeli researchers was established to carry out a reciprocal examination of textbooks in Israel and Germany. In general, it can be said that the suggestions contradict a broken, pathological view of German history. They emphasize the need to view it within balanced European or even universal contexts, and the importance of highlighting positive aspects, such as Germany's contribution to western civilization. The researchers even suggested portraying Nazism as a general European phenomenon on the one hand, as well as a specifically German phenomenon on the other. This was in order to 'prevent a stereotypical perspective about the unique evil of the German people that necessarily led to the Holocaust.'

Between 2010-2020, a second Israel-German committee for checking textbooks in History, Geography and Civics was established⁵³. Seemingly, the committee's findings in the 80s were implemented in the new textbooks. According to the report, Germany is portrayed in a positive light before and after World War II. It is described as a central European state with a long term influence over western civilization; discoveries and inventions,

⁵¹ E. Naveh, E. Yogev, *Histories: Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past*, 60.

⁵² R. Firer, *The Holocaust in High School Textbooks*, 244-248; A. Kizel, *Subservient History: a Critical Analysis of History Curricula and Textbooks in Israel 1948-2006*, Mofet, Tel Aviv 2008 (in Hebrew), 100-105.

⁵³ F. Pingel, *Unesco Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, Mofet, Tel Aviv 2015 (in Hebrew).

literature, culture and art. Politically it is mentioned as the birthplace of the Enlightenment and emancipation, as a democratic, tolerant and pluralistic state. When referring to negative political trends in modern times such as imperialism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism they are regarded as a European phenomenon and not just German. This is in contrast to the old textbooks that described Germany's 'special path' as leading to Nazism.

Germany's positive image in new textbooks arises mainly from the ongoing close relations between the two countries in many spheres and the economic success and political empowerment of Germany. Another reason is the passing of time since the Holocaust and the growing mortality of Holocaust survivors living amongst us.

The Israeli–German Committee of experts viewed Nazism and German history through a universal lens. During the 90s a fundamental controversy erupted, surrounding an attempt to perceive the Holocaust itself through a similar lens. The question of the Holocaust's uniqueness arose: should its significance be examined only in the unique, national-ethnocentric context of the Jewish people and the State of Israel or as part of a general world phenomenon of genocide in the 20th century?

At the beginning of the 1990s, an initiative evolved with the purpose of preparing a curriculum dealing with genocide in the 20th century. The curriculum was to deal with the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire during World War I (the first genocide in the 20th century). There are some who believe that the initiative to deal with the Armenian massacre in particular, and genocide in general, was in large part connected to the left wing victory in the 1992 elections. It was only natural that an Education Minister committed to humanistic values would seek the preparation of a curriculum presenting the Holocaust in a universal context⁵⁴.

Dr Yair Auron of the Kibbutzim College of Education was responsible for developing the new syllabus, which was approved by the Education Ministry (10.11.1993). He wrote, 'when teaching the Holocaust one should maintain that the value of any man's life is the same in that he is a man, whether Jew, Gypsy, Armenian or Arab.... This is a synthesis of the unique with the general'⁵⁵. Auron also wrote: 'Israeli society may be facing a new

⁵⁴ Y. Auron, *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide*, Dvir, Tel Aviv 1995 (in Hebrew), 329; I. Gur Zeev, *Philosophy, Politics and Education in Israel*, Bitan, Tel Aviv 1999 (in Hebrew), 74.

⁵⁵ Y. Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 330.

stage in defining its identity and thus defining its historical awareness and its relation to the Holocaust⁵⁶.

However, the author's enthusiasm was premature. The curriculum, entitled 'Genocide in the 20th Century', was never implemented. It was shelved a few days before its official presentation to teachers and pupils⁵⁷. The report that disqualified the curriculum, stated: 'Genocide studies is a new research field and those working in it are still deliberating and fumbling in the dark ... in addition the program is disconnected from the general historical context of the Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I...' But the report's final comment was: 'in its current format the program is more suited to activities in a social studies lesson or in youth movements than to history lessons for grades 11-12. It is therefore inappropriate for use as a unit in the history curriculum.'

The main advantage of the curriculum, which deals with humanistic-ethical dilemmas, is ironically the reason for its disqualification⁵⁸.

One of the reasons for the disqualification of the curriculum on the Armenian genocide may be the school of scientific positivism, according to which one should strive for scientific objectivity, for the professional neutrality of the historian, avoiding ethical contexts and moral dilemmas as far as possible⁵⁹.

As a result of the disqualification of his curriculum, Auron, regretted his earlier optimism and wrote: 'In January 1995, the experimental curriculum "Genocide in the 20th Century" that I edited was disqualified, most of which, dealt with the Armenian genocide. It seems that Israeli society, for both internal and external reasons, is still not ready to handle this subject'⁶⁰.

What are 'the internal and external reasons' that Auron refers to? One of them (an internal reason) is the mentioned desire to preserve scientific positivism in teaching history and the Holocaust. Another internal reason may be the need to preserve the distinctiveness of the Holocaust in the educational system due to a national ethnocentric outlook. There is a constant fear that universal conclusions might be drawn from the Holocaust based on comparisons with other genocides and lead to its 'dwarfing' or relativization.

⁵⁶ Y. Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 330.

⁵⁷ I. Gur Zeev, *Philosophy, Politics and Education in Israel*, 79.

⁵⁸ A. Kizel, *Subservient History*, 124; I. Gur Zeev, *Philosophy, Politics and Education in Israel*, 79-81.

⁵⁹ I. Gur Zeev, *Philosophy, Politics and Education in Israel*, 75-81.

⁶⁰ Y. Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 330.

The external reasons that Auron hints at are the very close military economic and political ties which existed between Israel and Turkey at that time. The Turks imposed a 'veto' on any recognition of the Armenian massacre as a holocaust and even objected to public debate in Israel on this topic in the written and electronic media.

As a result of the flotilla to Gaza in 2010 and a deterioration of relations with Turkey, the Foreign Ministry removed its objection to conducting a public debate in the Knesset on the Armenian genocide. In 2011, Reuven Rivlin, the speaker of the Knesset, declared that each year a discussion would be held in the Knesset plenum. This is a change of direction.

Conclusion

The decisions taken regarding the approval or rejection of textbooks and curricula were based on different reasons which varied over time. From an administrative-organizational aspect, the approval process by a reader-reviewer committee was deficient for the following reasons: the committee members included administrators and supervisors who authored their own competing books. Likewise, publishers, authors and academics pressured the committee to approve books of their preference. A clear example of influence on the committee by a well-known author was the proposal by President Yitschak Ben-Zvi's office to add a new subject to the curriculum – the *Yishuv* during the Ottoman period – in order to incorporate his book as a textbook. Another problem was the publishers' disregard of requests to carry out fundamental corrections; they covered up by publishing new editions, essentially just new printings that included a few slight corrections at most. The publishers cited hygienic, aesthetic, psychological and economic reasons to justify new textbook printings; this way they increased their profits, since parents were expected to buy these 'so called' new books, each year.

Another important factor influencing disqualification of existing textbooks in favor of writing new ones is the political lobby. Thus, for instance, the Knesset's North African Jewry lobby succeeded in carrying out an administrative-organizational revolution in the 70s and 80s. Within its framework, institutions were established that researched the history of Jews in Islamic lands, wrote curricula and textbooks on the subject and distributed them throughout the educational system. At the same time, all textbooks that contained negative, racial stereotypes of Jews from Islamic countries were removed. The elimination of patronizing attitudes in the fields of ethnicity and gender became one of the basic guidelines of the Education Ministry and of textbook writers.

Another example of a political lobby can be found in the 'nationalist groups'; underground veterans of the *Etzel*, *Lehi*, *Beitar* and Revisionist movements protested deliberate distortions and falsifications in descriptions of their role in the struggle for Israel's independence. They even demanded the intervention of the Knesset in correcting textbooks and writing new ones. There is no doubt that this was a struggle over the creation of a national identity. Initially their campaign was unsuccessful. Political hegemony remained in the hands of the Labor movement which naturally dictated its own form of national identity. However, after the *Likud's* rise to power in 1977 protests claiming historical falsification were renewed, and this time they succeeded in bringing about the disqualification of two well-known textbooks by Horowitz and Kirschenbaum.

A third factor bearing on changes in history textbooks and curricula concerns the need to reinforce national awareness. The young State of Israel, surrounded by enemies, used the study of history as a central discipline for the bestowal of national and social values. From here we understand the perpetual dissatisfaction felt within the political system over the national values of the country's youth. An interesting suggestion by Knesset members to bolster national awareness was the implementation of experiential teaching to give significance to historical events and to create a learning experience by conducting discussions with former soldiers, for example, and more outings to battle locations, Zionist settlements and archaeological sites.

Another aspect of strengthening national awareness was the question of balance between the teaching of Jewish history and the teaching of European history and culture. Advocates of the nationalistic approach protested over-emphasis of humanistic-universal values and the Christian world view which embodied the basis of culture and art. Opposing, the followers of the humanistic-universal approach protested against education towards ethnocentric and patronizing patriotism.

The fourth factor, leading to the disqualification of books and curricula, is the perceived threat to the State's basic values. The two most striking examples are concern over post-Zionism and the issue of the lessons of the Holocaust.

With the development of academic historiographical research, known as post-Zionism, during the 80s and 90s, the fear arose that these ideas might accidentally seep into textbooks, deliberately or covertly. The central theme of the opposition's argument was that the great danger posed by post-Zionism derived from its bestowal of complete legitimacy upon the Arab-Palestinian narrative, in other words, viewing the conflict through

'Ahmed's eyes'. The fear of post-Zionism brought about the rejection of one textbook (after printing) and a failed attempt at disqualifying another. The Knesset justified its intervention by claiming that a textbook is not solely an academic-scientific document but that its purpose is to also educate towards values and a world view.

Holocaust education as a compulsory subject in history began towards the end of the 70s. The dominant attitude at that time was to teach the Holocaust as a unique historical phenomenon and to draw particularistic-national lessons from it regarding only the Jewish people and the State of Israel. The Israel-German committee that examined textbooks in the 80s, challenged the 'special path' theory of German history and claimed that German and German Jewish history should be examined through the prism of European comparative history. This approach was adopted in new textbooks and the outcome was a very positive image of Germany before and after Nazism as the cradle of enlightenment, emancipation, democracy and culture.

In the 90s an unsuccessful attempt was made to present the Holocaust as a genocide belonging to humanity as a whole, from which humanistic-universal lessons could be learned concerning the nature of man, the value of life and the strength of democracy. The reasons for rejecting the program that dealt with the Armenian genocide by the Turks in WWI were manifold: political, professional etc. However, the main reason for that disqualification was the will to preserve the unique national narrative of the Holocaust.

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Approval and rejection of history textbooks and curricula and the political agenda in the State of Israel

What can we learn from the rejection of textbooks? The repercussions would indicate that history textbooks are an important medium – agents of socialization – in creating a national memory and defining a collective identity and values. Furthermore, their approval, and especially their rejection, reflect perceptions with regard to the role of the state as an involved

educational authority in shaping the character of Israeli society. In Israel, history has become the main device for achieving ethical and national goals in education.

The main question of this research is: under what circumstances were history textbooks and curricula placed on the political agenda and what happened as a result? This study is based on an historical analysis of primary sources from both State and Knesset archives. It examines the procedures for acceptance and rejection of history textbooks together with the professional and political authorities involved. This examination can point to changes in values, in educational messages and in the perception of identity in Israeli society.