A Pedagogy of Horror – the Holocaust in Israeli schoolbooks

Una pedagogía del horror: el Holocausto en los libros de texto israelíes

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Abstract

The paper summarizes a study of twenty-six Israeli schoolbooks of History and Holocaust studies, used in mainstream secular schools. It focuses on the representation of Holocaust victims in these schoolbooks. The study adopts a social semiotic approach to text analysis and attempts to reveal the interest of the rhetors and designers of schoolbooks through the analysis of representations, conceived of as motivated signs. The paper's argument is that regarding the Holocaust, Israeli schoolbooks often adopt the Nazi-German narrative and perspective, which is not responsive to victims' suffering, and represent them in a de-personalized way as icons, symbols, and specimens of categories. The paper ends with the schoolbooks' portrayal of Palestinians as Nazis.

Key words: Holocaust representation, atrocity photographs, multimodal analysis, motivated signs, Nazification of Palestinians.

Resumen

Este artículo resume un estudio sobre veintiséis libros escolares israelíes de Historia y estudios sobre el Holocausto, utilizados en escuelas laicas convencionales, y se centra en la representación de las víctimas del Holocausto en los libros escolares israelíes. El estudio adopta un enfoque de semiótica social para el análisis de textos e intenta revelar el interés de los retóricos y diseñadores de libros escolares mediante el análisis de las representaciones, concebidas como signos motivados. El argumento del artículo es que, en relación con el Holocausto, los libros escolares israelíes adoptan a menudo la narrativa y la perspectiva

nazi-alemana, que no responde al sufrimiento de las víctimas, y las representan de forma despersonalizada como iconos, símbolos y especímenes de categorías. El artículo termina con la representación de los palestinos como nazis en los libros de texto.

Palabras clave: Representación del Holocausto, fotografías de atrocidades, análisis multimodal, signos motivados, nazificación de los palestinos.

Introduction

The Questions

Upon considering the exposure of schoolchildren to photographs and verbal descriptions of German atrocities, year after year, the question is, how can we read these photos and texts and make children read them? Do the atrocity photos act like clichés, empty signifiers that distance and protect the viewers from the event? Have they become "degraded from a document containing context to a symbol lacking substance"? (Chéroux 2001*)*. Does the repetition of horrid stories and photographs dull our response to contemporary instances of brutality, discarding them as something already known or, on the contrary, does their repetition in itself retraumatize, turning distant post-memory viewers into surrogate victims who, having seen the images so often, have incorporated them into their own narratives and memories, and have thus become all the more vulnerable to their effects? (Hirsch 2001, 8). Do the images of cruel perversity enable memory, mourning, and working through? (ibid. 5). Can these images enable a responsible and ethical discourse regarding contemporary suffering of others?

Some scholars believe that atrocity photographs resist mourning (Hirsch 2001). Their display creates nothing more than "horrid fascination" (Baudrillard, 1984) and degrades the victims every time they are viewed: "If the images were taken by the Nazis to degrade their victims, are we not colluding with them by displaying them? Do we have a right to show people in their last moments before facing death to support propaganda, for whatever purpose?" (Struk 2008, 115).

Methodology

The study adopts a social semiotic approach and uses methods of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress 2012. Machin. 2013.). It attempts to reveal the *interests* of schoolbook rhetors and designers and their pedagogic purposes through the examination of the semiotic means of representation, such as discourse, genre, layout and visual elements.

Social Semiotics assumes that meanings and knowledge are *made* in signs or sign-complexes in specific modes, none of which are arbitrary (Kress 1993). Signs are shaped by their history and current usage in a given culture (Kress 2010), and are motivated, not always intentionally, by ideology, perspectives, values, and the position of the sign maker regarding the intended message and its recipients. These can be inferred from the text and testify to educational purposes and power relations. The meaning of every sign - be it verbal or visual, is determined not only by the sign's inherent qualities but also by the way it interacts with the other signs, by its location in a certain site (e.g. a page in a schoolbook) at a certain moment, by its material features, and by its metaphoric qualities.

Social semiotic inquiry asks semiotic questions in order to answer social ones. The social question of the present study is, what is the pedagogic purpose of Israeli schoolbook writers of history and Holocaust studies? The semiotic question is, what are the means by which these books depict Holocaust victims?

Pedagogic discourse is a composite of instructional discourse, or the content of a school subject, and regulative discourse, or the social relations, underlying a specific pedagogy (Bernstein 1996). Therefore, "pedagogic discourse cannot be identified with the discourses it transmits […]. It is the pedagogic principle which appropriates other discourses and brings them into a special relationship with each other, for the purpose of their selective transmission and acquisition at school" (ibid. 46). Schoolbooks transpose verbal and visual signs from other sites such as political and historical sources and *re-contextualize* them in the pedagogical discourse according to its specific goals. The *interest* that motivates the *recontextualization* of images and texts is "professionally shaped," and "it is one means by which power enters into

the transposition of meaning." (Kress 2020,35). It is power that transforms content and meaning according to the way schoolchildren are encouraged to relate to the subject matter, and to the way its representation is designed to affect them. The researcher encounters the new sign and asks, what motivated its production or was criterial in its making? "That which is taken as *criterial* will be the *signified*." (Kress 2020, 35).

Both photographs and texts, selected according to what is deemed pedagogically relevant, are then *transformed* and create new relations between the semiotic and the "out of semiotic" (Chouliaraki 2006), namely with the social sphere in which they are used.

The social Context of the study

Israel has interpreted the slogan Never Again! as "Never Again to Us!" Not as "Never Again to Anyone!" (Elkana 1988). This interpretation leaves only two options: to sacrifice others or be sacrificed, to kill or to be killed, and therefore it is key to understanding Israeli sentiments and actions toward Palestinians and the Arab neighbours.

Israeliness was constituted first against the image of East European studious weak Jews, most of whom perished in the Holocaust without resistance. These, according to the first Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, were the Jews we do not want to be (Segev 2019). He stated publicly, "call me anti-Semitic but I must say this. [...] We do not belong to this people; we revolt against such a Jewish people. We do not want to be such Jews." (Segev, 2019, 448). The second group against which Israeliness was constituted is the Arabs who, according to Ben-Gurion, replaced the German Nazis as the potential exterminators of the Jewish people, after Israel has befriended Germany in 1953 (ibid.). Both groups are depicted in schoolbooks as absolute "others". In the discourse of a "state for a persecuted nation," the former despised Jews, who perished dishonourably without fighting back, became the potential "us" who may perish again, this time at the hands of "Nazi Arabs". All Israeli Jews, even those whose ancestors were not affected by the Holocaust, are perceived as the "hereditary victims," and feel they live in a world populated by Jew-hating murderers (Bauman 2001, p.14). "The world [is] defined by its intention

and determination to destroy the Jews."(Illouz, 2021). All share the trauma of the annihilation of European Jewry, which became Israel's "chosen trauma." Psychoanalyst Vamık D. Volkan, who coined the term, defines chosen trauma as the shared images of specific historical events "during which a large group suffered loss or experienced helplessness and humiliation in a conflict with a neighbouring group." (2015, 13). The traumatic experiences and the damaged self-images associated with the mental representations of the traumatic event are "deposited into the evolving self-representation of children of the next generations, as if these children will be able to mourn the loss or reverse the humiliation." Such depositing constitutes "an intergenerational transmission of trauma." (ibid.). Thus, it "is woven into the canvas of the ethnic or large group tent and becomes an inseparable part of the group's identity." (ibid.). A good example is the student who has recently emigrated from Ethiopia and told her college teacher: "I wanted to feel Israeli, so I went to Auschwitz."

"When a present-day conflict begins with current enemies, "chosen traumas" are reactivated along with entitlement ideologies, [which] refer to a shared sense of entitlement to recover what was lost in reality and fantasy during the collective trauma" (Volkan 2015, 16-17). The fears, expectations, fantasies, and defenses associated with a chosen trauma reappear when both conscious and unconscious connections are made between the past trauma and a contemporary threat. This process magnifies the image of current enemies and current conflicts. As we shall see later, Palestinians are represented in schoolbooks, as in the socio-political discourse in Israel, as potential or actual Nazis. The current events of hostility reactivate a sense of victimization, and the sense of revenge becomes exaggerated, and may perpetuate otherwise unthinkable cruelty against others. "Leaders intuitively seem to know how to reactivate a chosen trauma, especially when their large group is in conflict, or has gone through a drastic change, and needs to reconfirm or enhance its identity." (ibid.) For example, President Hertzog equates the Hamas attack of October 7.2023 against Israel, after decades of siege, to Nazi Antisemitic crimes (Goldberg, 2024): "Not since the Holocaust have more Jews been murdered on one day […] Not since the Holocaust have we seen such images of innocent Jewish mothers and children, teenagers and old women loaded

into trucks and taken away into captivity."[1]

Chosen traumas are similarly recalled during the anniversary of the original event, and the ritualistic commemoration helps bind the members of the large group together (ibid.). In Israel, Holocaust Remembrance Day serves as an opportunity for politicians and prime ministers to stir up fear and animosity toward the Palestinian co-citizens, subjects and neighbours, conflating them with German Nazis. Illouz contends that having been mentally and emotionally trained to live in fear, Israelis do not possess and cannot acquire the political maturity of truly democratic citizenry, for they will always yield to their fear. Their perception of the world as enemy, gradually shaped the Zionists' attitude toward Arab-Palestinians, whose anti-colonialist resistance is attributed to hatred of Jews, both by politicians and in textbooks.

Judith Keilbach (2009, 62) argues that "depending on the 'national' meaning of the Holocaust and the dimensions that one part of the population experienced, the use of pictures and their underlying motifs vary enormously." For example, the achievement of the Allied soldiers is emphasized by pictures showing the horrifying condition of survivors, and the cleaning up of the cadavers in the camps. These photographs, implicitly and invariably, "take the soldiers' point of view, showing the unimaginable horror to which 'our boys' were exposed."

Holocaust photographs and stories are mostly used to authenticate the Zionist narrative "from holocaust to resurrection" in which the Holocaust becomes the "distillation of history, and Zionism its ultimate conclusion." (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005, 166). This narrative asserts that the Jewish people "almost miraculously, arose like a phoenix from the ashes, and started anew immediately after the Holocaust, building a national home in the Land of Israel, despite the putatively immoral opposition of the Palestinian inhabitants of the land and the entire Arab world." (Bashir and Goldberg 2019).

Thus, as Holocaust historian Hannah Yablonka observes, "we only teach our students that we are victims" and educate "generations who do not understand what normalcy is." She calls the constant preoccupation with Holocaust atrocities "necrophilia," contending that "this unending harping on the Shoah as the most important thing, has destroyed Zionism and turned

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1   President Hertzog, *The Time magazine* October 9, 2023.

Israel into 'an alternative to disaster' and nothing more." (Alfasi 2021).

Holocaust Instruction

Holocaust instruction in Israel is compatible with its ever-growing presence in the public sphere and its transformation into the main component in the formation of national identity (Naveh 2017, 280). During the 1950s and 1960s (Yablonka 1994) the topic of the Holocaust was all but ignored in the Israeli national memory. The Final Solution, during which millions of helpless Jews were slaughtered, was the antithesis to the national ethos that the education system sought to consolidate. Preparing the young generation for the task of defending the country in the face of its enemies was the educators' main priority (Resnik 2003) and Holocaust victims and survivors were typically viewed with contempt, for they undermined the Zionist project by letting the Nazis murder the future population of the state of Israel. A dichotomy was drawn between "them," who embodied the contemptuous diasporic past and "we," the resurrected Zionists of the future, who had buried the past. (Naveh 2017, 276).

However, after the setback of the 1973 war, Holocaust education was upgraded by the state as it sought "to shape national subjects that would voluntarily continue to live in Israel despite the security problems and would be eager to defend the homeland with their lives" (Resnik 2003, 310). Since then, the Holocaust has been taught as part of the Zionist narrative and has gradually become the central event of Jewish history (Oron 1993). It has thereby replaced the event of the establishment of the state of Israel, and is gradually replacing Zionism, not only as the defining element of Israeli identity, but also as the ultimate criterion according to which all the actions of humankind are interpreted (Naveh 2017).

The primary message conveyed by Israeli education is that antisemitism, which drove the Holocaust, was the incentive for the establishment of the state of Israel, and its raison d'être. From this discourse follows that only a Jewish state, wherein Jews form the majority, can guarantee security to each individual Jew in the world. As Holocaust historian Omer Bartov observes, regarding Holocaust Museum Yad-Vashem, "The visitor should leave with

the thought that had there been a Jewish state before the Holocaust, genocide would not have occurred; and since genocide did occur there must be a state." This is clearly expressed in a text for pre-school children:"A Holocaust is a huge disaster. And this disaster happened to the Jewish people not in the Land of Israel but in other, different countries all over the world. Jews can travel and visit other countries, but every Jew should know that Israel is his only true home"[2]In a Teacher's Guide of a holocaust education program for second grade (Dagan, B. 2020):"The students will understand that during WWII the Jews did not have a state. The establishment of the state of Israel guarantees our security and safety. We are in conflict with the neighbouring all the Arab countries, but now we can defend ourselves."

And for high school students:"The Zionist movement saw in the Shoa the proof that the Zionist way was the just one. The wish to establish a Jewish state was grasped as the need of all Jews in the world." (Mishol 2014, p.354) .

All Holocaust schoolbooks end with Israeli high school students marching on the path to Auschwitz, wrapped in Israeli flags, in a gesture of victory of Zionism over National Socialism. Bartov (1996, 178) phrases it as follows: "Just as the state can be traced back to the Holocaust, so too the Holocaust belongs to the state: the millions of victims were potential Israelis. And more: all Israelis are potential victims in the past, the present, and the future."

Representation of the Holocaust in Israeli Schoolbooks

Israeli students learn in horrifying details all about the process of annihilation "but no room is made for the annihilated themselves" (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005, 166). Historian Moshe Zuckerman (2023) argues that Israel betrayed the real Jewish victims by turning them into an ideology of victimhood. The exterminated Jews have become "a huge mass of anonymous objects (the six million), in which the Jewish individuals have become part of the practice of non-remembrance through the routinized fetishism of Holocaust 'memory'". (Zimmerman and Zuckerman 2023, 11). What matters is that the annihilation of European Jews happened. The particular victims matter less.

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2   https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5502051,00.html

Visual representation

Most images in Israeli schoolbooks represent Holocaust related concepts: hunger, starvation, labelling (the yellow badge), or the final solution. Hence, although the images are traumatizing and constitute what Yablonka calls "the pornography of evil," the students are prompted to think about Holocaust sufferers conceptually and to categorize them as they would categorize phenomena in any other subject matter.

Specimens of categories: The Badge as a Criterial Feature: explicit and implicit motivation.

Image 1. Keren 1999. *Journey into Memory*. Courtesy of Mapa Pub. Tel Aviv Books. The photographs are 1.Heinrich Joest. Warsaw Ghetto, Poland. September 19, 1941. Yad Vashem archive 2536. 2. Hanna Lehrer's photo: Yad Vashem Photo Archive 14081189

In *Journey into Memory* (Keren 1999), in a chapter titled "The Nazis devise plans to uproot and isolate the Jews," the photo of the woman arm-

band seller appears on the top center of the page and is probably the most salient image in the double-spread, given its placement and the horrific human image it presents. The photo was taken by Nazi amateur photographer Heinrich Jost, on his birthday trip to the ghetto, to celebrate his new Lycra camera. Alongside this photo is a drawing of a Star of David, alluding to the badges she is selling and signaling that this is the *criterial feature* of the photo, and the reason it was chosen. A diagonal vector connects the armband seller to a little girl who is positioned directly below a ruined Jewish shop, at the bottom of the page. She wears a badge with the Star of David. Her name and history are not mentioned, but in the archive of Holocaust Museum Yad Vashem, she is identified as "Hanna Lehrer, 6 years old, a Munich Jew, who wears both her personal golden Jewish star around her neck and the mandated Yellow Star badge identifying her, isolating her, and alienating her from other Germans. Hanna was later sent to Riga, Latvia, where she was killed." (Yad Vashem / United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archive). The badge is likewise placed beside her photo, magnified and in colour, emphasizing its prominence as the *criterial feature* that should be the focus of attention. The vector signifies that the woman and the girl are of the same order; two parts of a taxonomy whose criterial feature is the badge. The caption under the photograph of the girl includes questions: "A Jewish girl from Germany with a yellow badge. When was the yellow badge used to identify Jews in the past? What is the difference between past usage and that of the Nazis?" These questions clearly divert the focus from the little badge bearer to the badge itself. Whereas the woman was photographed by an independent amateur photographer, the girl's photo served to identify her on the ID cards the Germans issued for Jews. Van Leeuwen (2008, 42) observes that *identification* entails defining social actors not in terms of what they do, but in terms of what they, more or less permanently or unavoidably, are. Once Hannah was photographed, she was transformed into a specimen of the category of *Jewish children to be burned*. Marianne Hirsch (2001, 25) notes that "the very fact of their existence may be the most astounding, disturbing, incriminating thing about these photographs" that were taken for "identification, visibility, and surveillance, not for life but for the death machine that had already condemned all of those thus marked, with an enormous J in gothic script."

(ibid. p 27). In other words, such ID photographs of children and adults, index extermination (Hirsch 2001, 74).- The knowledge that she will die, that she has died, is transmitted by their very presence (Hirsch 2012, 231). The Israeli schoolbook classifies Hannah as an anonymous specimen of a different category, that of the *yellow star bearers*. But in both cases, her function is to feature metonymically as a specimen of her category, and not as an individual worth remembering and commemorating.

Although the explicit motivation to display these photographs was the badge, the question is, what was the implicit motivation to show these particular photos, a woman who seems "as if she was about to topple over and die the next moment," (Schwarberg, 2001) and a little frightened child who is about to be murdered. Although the students are prompted to focus on the badge, it is obvious that the photographed woman and child attract their attention. Hence it seems that the implicit motivation to choose these photographs must have been to "punch the students in the guts" as the inspector general said back in the 1990s (Miron 2005) , to remind them what happened to little girls and mothers when they lived in other countries, and hence assure their loyalty to the state, and "not to let the fire of vengeance die out".

The Boy from Warsaw ghetto – an icon and a symbol

Most photographs are de-contextualized or cropped and thus function as symbols and icons of the annihilation of Jews. Readers receive no information about the photographic event, the photographer, or the photographed subjects. Didi-Huberman (2012, 34) is concerned that the iconic use of cropped pictures points to "inattentiveness" toward the pictures and the events they represent. Rather than cropping, he urges viewers to imagine the unimaginable and make, an "effort of archaeological work […] that will relate the pictures in a constant sequence of collisions and connections, fractions or transformations." He therefore recommends that the photographs be left intact. In a similar vein, Lewis (2001, 349) speaks about "scholarly sloppiness" and argues that such tampering would never be permitted with verbal texts. "the cropped version of the photograph never carries a statement that it has

been cropped from a larger photograph. In fact, [...] not one example has been found where the reader is informed that some cropping has taken place."

Cropping detracts from the documentary value of the photograph "the meaning of the photograph can be significantly changed [...]particularly when supported by a carefully written caption, it is a practice judged to be unacceptable and unprofessional" (ibid.).

Image II. Forcibly pulled out of bunkers.17 © National Archives, Washington, Stroop Report Image No 89835b. Yad Vashem Archives 26655. 1065/848

One of the cropped photographs in which the unknown victim has gained "international prominence" (Ruth Ayab 2020) is the boy from Warsaw ghetto who raises his arms in surrender. Though Israeli schoolbooks often show the whole photograph of the Jews who were pulled from the bunker by force, they do not give any information about the people in the photograph, and use the cropped boy as a symbol. However, the cropped photograph came to symbolize adult male cruelty to children instead of commemorating the

uprising of the ghetto against Nazi might. Avieli-Tabibian (2009), displays the boy alone, de-contextualized, at the top left corner of every page of the chapter *The Armed Struggle of the Jews.* Thus, the uprising is symbolized not by one of the fighters nor by anyone who could commemorate the resistance and the revolt, but by a cropped photograph that was used by the Nazis as an icon of their achievement- the unredeemable annihilation of Warsaw Ghetto and of Jewish life. Avieli-Tabibian (2009) also presents a painting of the boy , by Michael Bak , on the entire front cover. The painting shows him from behind so that the viewer is placed in the position of the soldier Josef Blösche, who aimed his rifle at him. Since in Hebrew the front cover of a book is called its "gate," the student enters the book through this picture in the position of Blösche, through the symbol of Jewish annihilation. The painting was given a universal title, *Icon of Loss*. Bak has painted the boy dozens of times in numerous scenes, with or without a face, in a variety of cultural and religious contexts. In one of these the boy is nailed to the cross, and in another he carries the cross on his back along the Via Dolorosa in East Jerusalem. Thus, the icon is disengaged, in Rothberg's words, "from exclusive versions of cultural identity" and demonstrates "how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites." It also points to the similarities of racial and religious wars, be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim (Rothberg 2009, 11, 95). The designer of the schoolbook chose the one which places us in the position of the boy's potential or real killer. We see only his back covered with what resembles the yellow *Juden* badge, his knapsack, and his raised hands. The boy faces a wall covered with the same yellow badge that covers his body; he is threatened from behind while coming up against the wall in front of him. This may be the wall that separated the ghetto from the Aryan section of Warsaw; or it may be the Wailing Wall in East Jerusalem, symbol of Jewish catastrophe and exile, which welcomes him at the moment he is caught by the Germans, just before his probable death, but blocks him instead of saving him. Though the painting is very different from the original photograph it could never be mistaken for any image other than that of the boy from Warsaw ghetto. This reinforces his status as an icon.
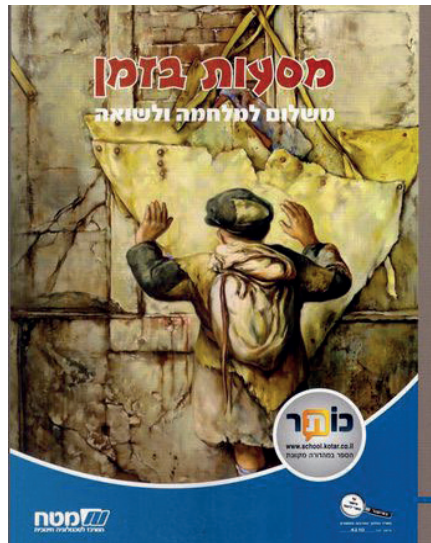
Image III. Avieli-Tabibian 2009. (Samuel Bak, Icon of Loss, 2008, 152×122 cm). Courtesy of the Center of Educational Technologies.

In Mishol (2014, 289-294), we see the boy from Warsaw at the bottom of each page of the chapter on the direct shooting of Jews by the Einsatzgruppen in the Ukraine. In addition, this icon of the annihilation of European Jews appears at the bottom of every page of Mishol's chapter about North African Jews during the Holocaust, and thus represents the exterminated Jews all over the world.

The cropped picture of the boy features, de-contextualized, on many of the schoolbook covers as well: trodden under a gigantic boot (Gutman 2009), raising his arms in front of Hitler and Stalin under a huge yellow *Juden* badge (Inbar and Bar-Hillel 2010), or floating in murky air above the warlords and the machines of war (Mishol 2014). In all these portrayals, he is looking out at the viewer with the pleading, frightened, innocent look Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) defined as a "demand." This look can be interpreted as a demand for responsibility or rather for response-ability in the sense that Levinas imparted to the term (Liss 1998, 112). However, in Israeli discourse, his demand is often interpreted as a call for vengeance against all those who *wish* to exterminate "us" again, exemplified in the play written by Israeli

playwright Hanokh Levin, *The Patriot*. In the play Mahmud, a little Palestinian boy, stands with his hands up, just like the boy from Warsaw, as an Israeli soldier holds a gun to his head. The Israeli soldier named Lahav (which is the Hebrew word for Blade), addresses his own mother as he aims the revolver: "He will avenge your blood and the blood of our murdered family, as then, mother, when your little brother stood alone in front of the German at night" (cited in Hirsch 2012, 144).

The Ivangorod mother- transmitting Nazi logic

The traumatizing images of atrocity, which the schoolbooks display, are ruled by what Marianne Hirsch (2001, 26) terms "the murderous National Socialist gaze", and the Nazi perspective often comes across as objective and factual. The following example suggests that Israeli schoolbooks are trapped in this gaze and reproduce it not only through the photographs, but also in the texts and in the questions that accompany the photographs. Thus, the textbooks often prompt young students to adopt the Nazi logic, which presents the victims as *Stücke* (pieces, units) as the Germans called them, or as ultimate "others."

Image IV. Einsatzgruppen murdering Jewish civilians in Ivangorod, Ukraine, 1942. Credit: Jerzy Tomaszewski, Poland. Yad Vashem Archive, Photo Collection 143DO5

One of the photographs that "made history," was widely disseminated and is immediately recognizable, is the photo of the Ivangorod mother being shot by German soldiers as she protects her child with her body (Struk, 2011). The mother, cropped from a larger image, was transformed into an icon of the murder of Soviet Jews by direct shooting. This photo became what photography historian Vicky Goldberg (1991,145) termed a "secular icon," namely a photograph that possesses intense symbolic impact through representations that inspire a degree of awe, mixed with dread or compassion, and that seem to encapsulate such complex phenomena as the power of the human spirit and universal destruction.

Image V. The cropped photo. Yad Vashem Archive 65779

The cropped photo appears in most publications including Israeli schoolbooks. Its *criterial features* are both concrete and conceptual, as in most icons: the shooting and the act of "mothering". The woman is no doubt aware that her act of protection is futile, yet all mothers can identify with her, because her act evokes the most universal quality of humanity (Chouliaraki

2006, 144). The killer and the two rifles behind him symbolize the height of male evil. This photo not only reports on a shocking possibility, but actually induces the shock. It raises the most fundamental moral question: how can a young mother and a baby be condemned to death? In so doing, it drives the viewers to demand that justice be restored (Chouliaraki 2006).

Schoolbooks usually present the cropped photo in its iconized state, sometimes devoid of details of time and place, and none of them discusses the photo and its trajectory, or its impact. They use it to discuss the method of direct killing and its "shortcomings", and to explain the transition to gas trucks as a more efficient means of exterminating the Jews. In most books, the cropped image is directly below the heading: "Searching for alternatives to direct shooting," thereby prompting readers to focus on the method of killing rather than on the killing of mother and child. In the schoolbook *Destruction and Heroism* (Hertz 2015) the cropped photo appears on each page of the chapter on the Holocaust and is thus transformed into a symbol of the entire process of extermination. It reappears in the sub-chapter on the Final Solution at the top of the page, alongside a photograph of an inscription a murdered Kovno Jew wrote in Yiddish with his blood, as he lay dying on the floor of his kitchen: "Jews Revenge!" Although the two murders were committed and recorded in two different locations 692 km apart, Ivangorod in the Ukraine and Kovno in Lithuania, in this layout it seems that the call for revenge from Kovno pertains to the murder of the mother and the child in Ivangorod, and hence to all the murders of Jews across the USSR. Since the word "revenge" is written in Hebrew letters, Israeli students may regard it as a call addressed to them directly, urging them to become indignant (Keilbach 2009) and to seek revenge. A poem about the massacre in Ponar, Lithuania, 726km. distant from Ivangorod, is placed under both photos, across the entire width of the lower part of the page, uniting them.

The three items (two photos and a poem) are thus detached from their original contexts and are recontextualized in the schoolbook, where they form a new complex sign that functions as a myth; and like many other myths, it represents horrendous injustice, sacrifice, noble humanity and the call for eternal revenge. The newly made sign combines three constitutive elements of our life: the feminine motherhood; the masculine - both the Nazi murderer

and the Jewish call for revenge; and the spiritual poetry that commemorates people's suffering caused by human barbarity. The new motivated sign connotes the concept of the human spirit that endures "in spite of everything": motherhood manifested to the last breath; a call for revenge written in blood by a dying man; and poetry composed by those who were about to be executed.

The Verbal Text

As mentioned above, the verbal texts within which this photo is embedded prompt readers to focus on another aspect altogether, namely the technical flaws of the method of direct shooting. In Hertz (2015, 108), the text begins thus: "The method of direct killing had its shortcomings: it was slow, wasted a lot of ammunition (at least one bullet per person) and was hard to conceal. The explosive sounds of shooting were heard from afar. The method presented certain hardships as far as the German soldiers were concerned as well: the work was dirty and required direct contact between murderer and victim. Hitler quite likely issued the order to extend the extermination of the Jews to other parts of Europe already at this stage […] This is why the Germans searched for more effective alternatives for the mass murder of the Jews."

The expository, dispassionate reasoning style of this description shifts the focus abruptly and changes the meaning of the photograph, from a representation of inconceivable cruelty and suffering, to an indication of the logistical problems of the German killers. The shift is so unsettling and surprising that one is moved to wonder about its educational purpose, and about the interest or the motivation of those who introduced it. What we experience here is the interplay between the extreme nature of the subject matter and the "normality" of the text, which is considered problematic by scholars such as Friedländer, Diner, Rothberg, or LaCapra. By noting that the method of direct shooting "had its shortcomings," and presented "certain hardships," the schoolbook neither invalidates nor rejects the method of direct killing, but rather adopts an objective and neutral position on the matter; it examines the method technically, and weighs its pros and cons, so as to convince readers that gassing was a better alternative. Gutman (2009, 228) explicitly invites

readers to view the photo of the Ivangorod shooting through Nazi eyes. The photograph is embedded in a text about the "search for alternatives to direct shooting." Below the photo, there is a question: "What were the reasons that drove the Nazis to seek alternatives to the direct shooting of Jews according to this photograph?" This question, which also appeared in the final History examination (matriculation) in winter 2022, explicitly directs the students to adopt the perpetrators' perspective along with their murderous logic. It prompts students to consider the photo of the woman, who is trying in vain to protect her child with her body, not as criminalizing evidence, as a devastating shocking image of the darkest evil and the loftiest expression of motherly devotion, but as an example of a rather sloppy method that needs to be improved, as proof of the waste of ammunition, inefficiency, and disturbing experience on the part of the German soldiers.

Students may be drawn to calculate how many bullets the German murderer had to spend on this woman and her child. At least two. But what if the child moves? What if the mother starts running? Maybe three bullets. Maybe four. The students may also ask themselves more humane and unanswerable questions such as "What thoughts ran through this mother's mind as she was forced to march to this site with her child? Did the boy try to run away, shocked and confused? Was the father killed first, before their eyes or is he one of the diggers in the distance?" (Lower ibid.) But instead of addressing the photographed people, the books emphasize the unnecessary hassle for the German soldiers, who only sought to do their duty, and for whom physical contact with the victims was terribly annoying. Hence, gassing was a far more efficient method. In this way, students are taught the bureaucratic thinking of the industrial mass murder, along with the total indifference to human life and human expressions of despair and helplessness.

The historical recount

The texts assume that this issue is debatable, that there were or can be arguments for and against method of extermination of people, and that some arguments can convincingly justify such an action, according to certain norms or logic.

Friedländer (1984) calls this writing "bureaucratic, rational and factual" or the "historiography of 'business as usual'," which, he asserts, is typical of textbook writing but should not be applied to writing about events such as the Holocaust. He (1992) argues, that when we seek to explain the Holocaust according to known norms or logic, we arrive at the limit of representation.

Naveh et al. (2009, 267), describe the solution to the sloppy method of direct shooting, using the genre of the *historical recount*, (Coffin 2006), called in other studies the realistic descriptive narrative (Chouliaraki 2006, 99). The recount is best suited to a seemingly dispassionate report, and it is the most common genre of textbook writing about the Holocaust (Peled-Elhanan 2023). This genre aspires to "objectivity at the expense of emotionality" (Chouliaraki 2006, 111) and tends to create the impression that the events are reported from a "universal" perspective, even if this is patently not the case. As Coffin (2006, 151) shows, recounts merely appear to be factual reports and their "objectivity is to some extent a rhetorical illusion." Discursively, the "objectivity" or "factuality" is construed "through the absence of direct, explicit forms of evaluation and the exclusion of competing, alternative interpretations" (ibid.). Adopting the recorder voice, (Coffin 2006, 152) the recount maintains the illusion of "history telling itself" (Barthes 1986) but the facts do not speak for themselves. Unlike the chronicle, which is, as Barthes argues, "discourse that does not signify," for it is "limited to a pure unstructured series of notations" (1986, 131), in the recount, despite appearances, "events are selected, edited and linearized" (Coffin ibid.) within what Hayden White calls "a specific framework of interpretation." (1992, 6). The writer of the recount obeys certain rules of re-contextualization dictated by his or her interest, affiliation, or ideology. The chronicle found, for instance, in the historical Annals, was written by an author who did not know how the future would play out. "The chronicler has no knowledge of the future and the historian does," and therefore the historical recount "describes past events in light of subsequent ones, unknown to the actors themselves" (Ricoeur 1984, 144).

The objective character of the recount is achieved, inter alia, through the exclusion or suppression of human agency by the use of the *passive form* or *grammatical metaphors*. Things happen without anyone willing them to

happen or making them happen. Take, for instance, this sentence: "Death in gas trucks was meant to reduce costs and solve the emotional hardship that arose during the direct shooting of Jews" (Naveh et al., 2009, 267). Death and the "emotional hardship" are the principal actors in this sentence, and they act (reduce, solve, arose) on their own volition. The recount refers to non-human participants which are often constituted by means of nouns and grammatical metaphors such as "the killing," or "the war," "the methods" that had their "shortcomings", or "the feelings that were forming during the operations."

The stages of the historical recount: the passage to gas

1. *Background or orientation* – provides a summary of previous historical events or conditions: "Having experienced technically and morally killing with gas in the euthanasia operation, in summer 1941, the Nazis began to prepare for the mass extermination of the Jews with gas." (p. 267).

2. *Record of events* – sequencing events as they unfold over time: "In the autumn of 1941 killing began in hermetically sealed gas trucks into which the exhaust pipe of the car was inserted. The Jews were loaded onto the truck, which would drive slowly around the designated area, until it was clear that all its cargo had suffocated and died. From the end of 1941 until this method was discontinued, some 400,000 people, mostly Jews, were murdered in these trucks, in a slow and excruciating method of killing." (ibid.)

3. The last and optional stage of the recount is *Deduction:* drawing out the historical significance of the events recorded. Coffin (2006, 56) states that "often a deduction explicitly interprets the historical meaning of events." She adds that in the deduction stage "a judgment is made concerning the historical significance of the events recorded, [but] typically, such judgments emerge 'naturally' out of the *record of events* stage," (p. 57) because the recorder voice "assumes or simulates reader alignment with the writer's world view, thus minimizing the amount of explicit interpersonal work to be done, in terms of negotiating with diverse audience positionings" (ibid. 151-152). Naveh et al. (2009, 287) assert without doubt that "the murder of the Jewish people is unique in the history of mankind and there has never been any mas-

sacre like it in the civilized world,"

Time is the major dimension according to which the recount is structured (Coffin 2006). The texts unfold with temporal expressions, typically functioning as a point of departure of each thematic unit: in the autumn, in the summer, from the end of 1941 until the discontinuation of this method, etc. Yet the temporal or additive connectors may assume the function of causal links. As Kress (2003, 3) explains: "The simple yet profound fact of temporal sequence and its effects are to orient us towards a world of causality […] and the narrative is the genre that is the culturally most potent formal expression of this." The background and the events are linked both temporally and causally. "Having experienced" denotes both chronology and causality, meaning that both "because" and "after" they had experienced killing with gas, the Nazi soldiers, having been trained to do something technically and to accept it morally, proceeded to do it efficiently on other occasions.

In terms of context, the content of the historical recount consists of "contact between different peoples, conflict and war" (Coffin 2006, 57). The emphasis is placed on groups of people, realized through generic participants as in the texts studied here: Germany and other states, the German soldiers and the Jewish victims, who are presented as homogeneous entities. In the paragraph quoted above, the non-human participants are the killing and the exhaust fumes. The human participants are objectified and labelled "cargo." Defining human beings as cargo is typical of racist discourse, such as that found in reports about the slave trade. This term entered Nazi terminology as well. For example, in his interview with Gitta Sereny in 1971, Franz Stangl, former Commandant of the Treblinka extermination camp, declared that he regarded the Jews as "cargo" to be dispatched:

"So, you didn't feel they were human beings?" [Asked Sereny].
"Cargo," he said tonelessly. "They were cargo." (Sereny 1974, 216).

Stangl justified this choice of the word by describing the victims as naked, huddled together, and whipped like animals. He compared the Jewish victims to cows that he saw in a slaughterhouse or to lemmings who inexplicably rush to their death.

By labelling the victims "cargo," Naveh et al.'s apparently neutral text adopts the Nazi de-humanizing perspective of the Jewish victims, especially

since the word "cargo" is not put in quotations marks. The linguistic choices annihilate the sufferers, and remove them from the existential order to which the readers belong.

In the *Deduction*, appearing to make a factual statement as they conclude the chapter, the authors deliver their judgment on a highly controversial topic, namely the uniqueness of the Holocaust, which has been debated by scholars, among them Naveh himself (2017), for several decades. The schoolbook declares that this genocide was unprecedented "in the enlightened world," which probably includes the USA, Australia, and other "enlightened" countries and colonial powers that perpetrated genocides, overlooking genocides in the Balkans, Rwanda, North Korea, Sudan or the Congo, to mention but a few. Typically of the recount, "there is an absence of negotiation and argumentation, and the writer does not invite the reader to challenge the view of events presented" (Coffin 2006, 58). Readers' acquiescence with this conclusion is neither suggested nor discussed, but simply assumed. Had they not assumed readers' acquiescence with this ideological conclusion, the authors could have exposed before them the complexity of this notion, or would have phrase this statement as a question, "Is this catastrophe that overwhelmed the Jews of Europe an incomparably unique historical phenomenon, or is it a case within the category of genocide?" Landau (2016, 4-5).

The dispassionate assertive writing of the recount dominates most mainstream secular schoolbooks. This "'textbook style" teaches the students to remain uninvolved and to approach both the events and the victims in a detached, "scientific" or "agoraic" manner (Chouliaraki 2006). The seemingly unbiased or bureaucratic discourse of history employed by the schoolbooks engenders the rational inductive questions that prompt readers to focus on situations, phenomena and events, of which people are specimens or indices, rather than on the individual human suffering and cruelty. This style, which lacks "empathic unsettlement" and transmits the Nazi perspective regarding their Jewish victims, is directed to Israeli students about to join the army and carry on a regime of occupation and oppression. It seems, as was mentioned before, that the rhetors' interest is to guarantee the students' loyalty to the state and not "let the fire of vengeance die out."[3] However, this fire is not di-

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3   Avraham Green, general secretary of the Pedagogic Council in the Ministry of Education. In: Miron 2005.

rected against the German perpetrators and their collaborators in Europe, but against Palestinian colonized subjects and citizen (Goldberg, 2024).

The Representation of Palestinians

While the memory of the Holocaust is a pillar of Israeli consciousness, the memory of the Nakba is forbidden today by the state. (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2019, 134).
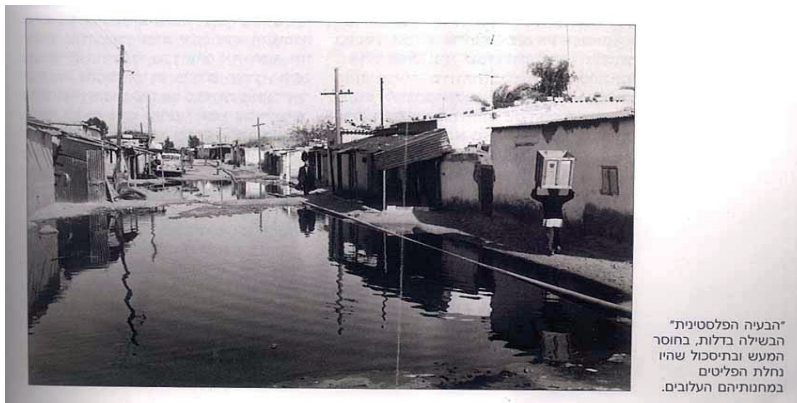
The Palestinian problem - a motivated sign

"הבעיה הפלסטינית"
הבשילה בדלות, בחוסר
המעש ובתיסכול שהיו
נחלת הפליטים
במחנותיהם העלובים.

Image VII. The Palestinian Problem. (*MTII.2000.* 239).

The researcher asks, what motivated the choice of this photograph and its definition as the Palestinian problem, although there is nothing Palestinian about it? The criterial features of the photograph should be made clear in the caption and in the text in which the photograph is embedded. Caption: "The 'Palestinian problem' has ripened in the poverty, inactivity and frustration that were the lot of the refugees in their miserable camps." Main text: "Although Israel came victorious out of the survival-war that was forced upon her, the Palestinian problem would poison for more than a generation the relation-ships of Israel with the Arab world and with the international community".

Though we cannot be sure, the verbs *ripen* and *poison* may indicate the motivation for choosing the photograph. The criterial features of the image seem to be the extreme neglect and the stagnant water, an environment where poisonous diseases ripen. The Palestinians are never depicted in schoolbooks as individual people but as the problem they constitute for the Israelis, or as disease, as Ben Gurion called them ("Raah Hola" Pappe 2017). It is a self-directed problem that acts independently of human actors and must be solved.

While the Jews are presented as having endured 2000 years of hardship, pogroms, and Holocaust in their native countries, before being rescued by Zionism and the state of Israel, the Palestinians are denied their suffering and their own Holocaust, the Nakba. The destruction and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine are reported in schoolbooks only by way of its favorable consequences for the Jews as in: "From the Jewish point of view Plan D[4] was an enormous success. It strengthened the military power of the Jewish community[…]It created a [Jewish] territorial sequence as a 'strategic asset.'"(Blank 2006).

No room is made for the fate of the surviving victims or their testimony and the loss of human life is usually reported in approximate quantities. For example, Hagiladi in summing up the consequences of the 1948 war, give the exact figures of Israeli losses – "6000 killed, of which 4,500 soldiers and 1,500 civilians, and more than 30,000 wounded" (Hagiladi and Kassem, 2007: 20). However, regarding Palestinian losses the book provides estimated quantities:

"There were many casualties, many villages were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees" (ibid.).

School curricula fail to take account of the history of Palestine since the Second Temple period. They present The Promised Land as the provenance of the Jewish-Christian civilization, while denying its Arab-Islamic history, including the four hundred years of Ottoman rule, which are barely mentioned in Israeli schoolbooks. The actual Arab presence on the land is deemed inconsequential, and consequently rejected to the point of obliteration. (Raz-Krakotzkin 2005).

Palestinians are never depicted as people like us, modern, professional, and have never been considered as candidates for assimilation or integration.

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4   The ethnic cleansing of all the Palestinian villages between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Visually they are absent from maps and stereotypically represented by racist icons, such as a nomad with a camel or a primitive farmer behind a plough carried by two oxen (Peled-Elhanan 2012). Their dehumanization, objectification, and Nazification legitimate their persecution, their exclusion, and their symbolic and physical elimination.

Nazification of Palestinians

Schoolbooks nazify Palestinians explicitly and implicitly and attribute their actions of resistance to Israeli occupation to Anti Semitic hatred of Jews. The Israeli victims of terrorist attacks, whether soldiers or civilians are equated to helpless Jews in European ghettos. *Focus on History* (2020,136) for instance specifies: "In Palestinian terrorist attacks, Israelis experienced "loss, bereavement, and existential danger, which allowed them to identify more easily with Holocaust survivors"(bold in the original). These experiences allowed Israelis to gain a sense of their vulnerability and helplessness, or in other words, their "Jewishness."

Enlisting the authority of leaders, the books quote former foreign minister Abba Eban, who spoke of Israel's "Auschwitz borders," and former prime minister Begin, who equated Arafat to Hitler and declared that Israel's attack on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon had saved us "from another Treblinka" (Bar-Navi 1998).

Nothing positive is ever written about the Palestinians or the Arab neighbours, their cultures are never described, and they are all portrayed as seeking to "exterminate us again," out of "Arab Antisemitism" (Mishol, 2014a). "This, of course, justifies a brutal response to the threat." (David Grossman, 2002).

In conclusion, regarding the Holocaust, Israeli schoolbooks often present the Nazi-German narrative and its perspective, and prompt the students to disregard details such as individual people and concentrate on the larger event and its logic. Regarding the Palestinians, the books adopt Israeli military-political perspective, depicting them as problems, threats, and Nazis. Both perspectives are those of the perpetrators, who are not responsive to their victims' suffering. The educational message is that these "others" should

not inspire empathy or mourning.

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