"Seeing Through a Glass Darkly": Israeli and Egyptian Images of the Other During the Nasserite Period (1952–1970)

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Introduction

About two decades ago, I began to study Israel's place in the Middle East. My interest stemmed from two considerations: First, the peace process that began with the 1993 Oslo Accords believed to herald a new era, in which Israel would be more integrated in the region as a result of growing Arab recognition of it. Second, my own realization that the academic separation between Israel and the Middle East—the fact that Israeli studies have traditionally been isolated from Islamic and Middle East studies—was a mistaken institutional decision motivated by ideological and practical reasons. Consequently, Israelis have developed a perception of the Middle East that separated Israel—politically, economically, and particularly culturally—from the Arab-Muslim Middle East. The need to form a Jewish-Zionist identity also necessitated an independent academic historiography—a process that has been impressively accomplished by various departments of Jewish and Eretz-Israel studies at various universities. This development further institutionalized the academic separation between Jewish-Israeli studies and Orientalism—the discipline that included the study of Islam, Middle Eastern history, and languages (such as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish but not Hebrew). This separation, it should be emphasized, did not exist in the German universities from which leading professors came to Palestine and

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established the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the Mandate period. However, with the establishment of the Institute of Jewish Studies in 1924, and the Institute of Oriental Studies two years later, this separation was institutionalized and later reproduced in other Israeli universities (Lazarus-Yaffe, 1999; Milson, 1997; Podeh, 2006, pp. 93–100).

My assessment that this separation was artificial and detrimental to scholars in both fields prompted me to focus on the question whether Israel—not only geographically speaking—should be considered part of the Middle East. More concretely, should we speak of Israel *and* the Middle East or Israel *in* the Middle East? Far from being a question of terminology, this duality represents in essence a core issue: Do Israel and the Middle East constitute two distinct or complimentary entities (Podeh, 1997)? My intellectual journey also included the development of a graduate course called "Israel in the Middle East"—a title with a clear statement about my proclivity—which has been taught since 1997. Though modest, my suggestion to teach such course in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies was designed to initiate a dialogue on whether Israel should be part of the Middle East. Although this was meant as a purely academic rather than political exercise, it was based on the conviction that studying both sides would yield a better understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict.[1] It was here that I first encountered Daniel Bar-Tal's academic literature; while drafting the course's syllabus, I thought that the students required an understanding of some cultural and psychological aspects of the conflict from the Israeli side. As a historian, the psychological insights derived from the material opened new vistas for me and my students; they were important in motivating me to investigate the importance of images and perceptions of the Other in intractable conflicts—of which the Arab-Israeli conflict is undoubtedly a primary example (Podeh, 2004). My subsequent venture into the study of views of the Other in history textbooks—this time in the Israeli education system—was influenced by Bar-Tal's influential work on the topic (Bar-Tal, 1998; Podeh, 2002).[2]

It is a given that stereotypes, and prejudice, and images of the Other play a significant role in conflicts between states and individuals. The Arab-Israeli conflict is no different from other international and regional intractable conflicts, in which the view of the Other, filtered through various state socialization agents—such as the media, the education system, the arts, and others—shapes decision-makers' beliefs, attitudes, and emotions (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). In analyzing how people process information, Alexander George (1980) posited that beliefs and images about the environment, which are used by individuals to fashion a

[1] It is interesting to note that one of my Ph.D. students, Nimrod Goren, whose dissertation was jointly supervised with Daniel Bar-Tal, founded later a think tank called Mitvim—The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies—one of the major tasks of which is to deal with Israel's place in the Middle East.

[2] Many years later, Daniel Bar-Tal and Sami Adwan collaborated in an international research team (in which this author was involved as well) in a project initiated and sponsored by the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, called "Victims of Our Own Narrative: Portrayal of the 'Other' in Israeli and Palestinian Schools Books." http://d7hj1xx5r7f3h.cloudfront.net/Israeli-Palestinian_School_Book_Study_Report-English.pdf.

relatively coherent way of organizing and making sense of confusing signals, may be biased and stereotyped since information processing is selective.

Societies engaged in intractable conflicts develop a conflict ethos, which, according to Daniel Bar-Tal (2013), is "a configuration of shared central societal beliefs that provide a dominant orientation to a society; these beliefs illuminate the present state of affairs and conditions and set goals for the future." This ethos, in his opinion, "binds the members of society together, along with the goals and aspirations that impel them toward the future" (p. 174). According to Bar-Tal's typology, the challenges of intractable conflict fuel eight themes of societal beliefs in the conflict ethos: (1) justness of one's own goals, (2) delegitimization of the opponent, (3) self-victimization, (4) positive collective self-image, (5) security, (6) patriotism, (7) unity, and (8) peace. Research shows that delegitimization plays a highly important role in analyzing the image of the other. By denying the adversary's humanity and morality, delegitimization constitutes a psychological permit to harm the delegitimized group, by violent means if necessary. His research identifies several forms of delegitimization: dehumanization, outcasting, trait characterization, use of political labels, and group comparison (Bar-Tal, 2013; Bar-Tal & Hammack, 2012).

It was only natural that an article in a book dedicated to Daniel Bar-Tal's academic contribution deals with images and perceptions of the Other. Though his contribution was mainly in the theoretical field, he argued that "without the study of context it is impossible to understand the functioning of individuals in groups because human thoughts and feelings are embedded in historical, social, political, and cultural contexts" (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005, p. 7). Therefore, this chapter explores Egyptian and Israeli perceptions of the Other within a specific historical context: the stormy years of the Nasserite period (1952–1970). The main thesis is that both countries developed a diabolical image of each other, which hampered the chances of conducting a serious peaceful dialogue. These mutual negative images trickled top down to society and became an integral part of each nation's collective memory.

The Nasserite View of Palestine and Israel

Egyptian interest in the Palestine conflict began in the monarchy period (1923–1952), particularly during the years of the Arab Revolt (1936–1939). A combination of domestic and external factors triggered Egypt's involvement in the Palestine issue, which King Faruq used to bolster his shaky legitimacy, since the opposition forces, such as the Muslim brotherhood, often flogged him with the Palestine whip. Palestine also constituted a core element in the growing importance of pan-Arab ideology in Egypt's intellectual and political life, as a result of which Egypt's aspiration to play a pivotal role in Arab politics required active involvement in the Palestine question. Finally, Egyptians shared with Arab Palestinians a history of anti-imperialist and anti-British struggle (Gershoni & Jankowski, 1995). Growing commitment to the Palestine cause eventually led Faruq to intervene in the 1948 War, though his major concerns were Hashemite aggrandizement plans and the

imminent threat to his own legitimacy. Although it had joined the Palestinian and Arab chorus against the UN Partition Plan, Cairo had no difficulty in adopting a realistic attitude toward the existence of a Jewish state after the war (Doran, 1999).

Before seizing power in July 1952, Nasser experienced the Palestine problem first hand, participating as an officer in several battles in 1948. The war was crucial in crystallizing his awareness and understanding that Egypt's problems were in Cairo and not Palestine: "We were fighting in Palestine," wrote Nasser in his *Philosophy of the Revolution* in 1953, "but our dreams were centered in Egypt. Our bullets were aimed at the enemy in its trenches before us, but our hearts hovered over our distant country, which we had left in the care of the wolves" (Nasser, 1955, p. 21). While besieged in Faluja in Palestine, Nasser and his fellow Free Officers realized that "the biggest battlefield is in Egypt." In fact, Faluja appeared to them as a microcosmos of Egypt, which, "too, is besieged by difficulties and enemies; she has been deceived and forced into a battle for which she was not ready" (ibid, pp. 22–23). Palestine was not the reason for the 23 July Revolution, as Nasser emphasizes in the *Philosophy*, but it added impetus to a deeply ingrained process. Interestingly, Nasser's acquaintance with a certain Israeli officer during the armistice talks is described in a factual manner devoid of negative overtones (ibid, p. 24). A similar attitude is reflected in his brief memoir of the war, published in 1955 (Khalidi, 1973).

In the immediate post-1952 period, domestic problems and future relations with Britain were the prime foreign policy issues rather than Palestine (Aburish, 2004; Mohi El Din, 1995). Interestingly enough, Nasser maintained surreptitious contact with Tel Aviv (including Prime Minister Moshe Sharett) in 1953–1954 through several intermediaries and did not rule out the possibility of reaching some accommodation with Israel (James, 2006).

However, as Nasser consolidated his rule, Israel and Palestine gradually emerged as pivotal elements in his rhetoric. The two issues were, in fact, interconnected: by supporting one (Palestine), Nasser was bound to negate the other (Israel). Four reasons led to Nasser's changed outlook: First, the fact that since the 1948 War, Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip, with its Palestinian population, meant that it could no longer ignore the Palestine question. Second, Palestine had since emerged as the ultimate source of regime legitimacy and a core element of the pan-Arab ideology; the liberation of Palestine, therefore, was intertwined with Arab unity (Sela, 1998; Telhami, 1992). As a result, any leader aspiring to Arab leadership was compelled to place the Palestinian cause at the top of his agenda.

The third reason was the growing conviction that Israel wished to eliminate the Palestine problem and expand its territory from the Nile to the Euphrates, in line with the biblical borders of the Promised Land. This belief was confirmed, in Egyptian eyes, by three developments: the first was the discovery of a Jewish espionage group responsible for several terror incidents in Cairo and Alexandria in July 1954, which was masterminded by the Israeli intelligence. Operation Suzanna (or "the Mishap," as it became known in Israel) contributed to a growing sense of mutual mistrust, and Egyptian Jews were consequently considered potential traitors (Heikal, 1986). The second event was Israel's attack on Gaza, on 28 February 1955,

in which 31 Egyptians were killed. The scale of the raid surprised and humiliated Nasser, leading him to believe that its coincidence with the formation of the Western-led defense organization Baghdad Pact was part of a concerted Israeli-Western conspiracy against him. Moreover, the raid convinced Nasser that all the messages that had been conveyed to him by Western intermediaries were designed to lull him into a state of false security. Israel, in the Egyptian view, "was determined to challenge the rising star of Egypt by every means at its disposal, and primarily by force" (ibid, pp. 66–67). The raid, therefore, had "a dramatic effect on Egyptian images of Israel" (Gordon, 2006; James, 2006), setting Nasser on a collision course with Israel. The third event was Israel's participation, along with Britain and France, in the 1956 Suez War (termed *al-udwan al-thulathi*, the Tripartite Aggression). More than anything else, this collusion (*mu'amara*), substantiated Israel's role as an imperialist stooge bent on conquering Palestine and the entire Arab world (Stein, 2012). Thus, by defending Palestine, so it was argued, the Arabs were effectively defending the Arab world from the Zionist threat.

The fourth reason for the change in Nasser's policy was connected with his need to compensate for the absence of a specific program of action against Israel with growing rhetoric. Political, military, and financial considerations motivated Nasser to adopt a "short-of-war" policy based on economic boycotts, maritime blockades, and Fidayyin raids from Gaza. His propaganda increased in intensity, and state propaganda included anti-Semitic and Nazi elements with increasing frequency (Beinin, 1998). In the aftermath of Nasser's policy shift in 1956–1960, some 36,000 Jews were forced to leave Egypt, and their property was in most cases confiscated (Laskier, 1992). Ironically, his inflammatory rhetoric eventually became a self-made trap, as the Arab enthusiasm it aroused contributed significantly to the escalation leading up to the 1967 War.

The negative image of Israel, Zionism, and the Jews was disseminated through various state agencies. Of particular importance were Nasser's speeches and interviews delivered in the state-controlled media (newspapers, radio, and TV). While Nasser's negative expressions were usually oblique (see below), radio and TV broadcasts, as well as books, booklets, and propaganda pamphlets published by the Ministry of National Guidance, Ministry of Education, and the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, used direct and explicit negative epithets in their publications and teaching materials (Harkabi, 1976; Klein, 1997). In fact, Egyptian propaganda included all the forms of delegitimization identified by Bar-Tal: dehumanization, outcasting, trait characterization, political labeling, and group comparison (Harkabi, 1967, 1976).

Close scrutiny of Egyptian propaganda reveals the centrality of four themes: first, the need and desire to destroy Israel, either by active involvement of the Arabs or by some other unspecified divine interventions. The terminology used to portray this theme was rich and often direct: liquidation, wiping out, annihilation, purification, cleansing, throwing into the sea, destruction, elimination, and disappearance (ibid). Often enough, Nasser and certain state agencies used ambiguous expressions, such as "liberation of Palestine," "restoration of the stolen rights," "just solution for the Palestinian people," and "solution based on UN resolutions," which were construed by Israel as euphemisms for the same target of eliminating Israel

(ibid). According to Harkabi's meticulous study, the direct terms appeared more frequently in local media, while more euphemistic expressions were more frequent in foreign media.

The second theme of Egypt's propaganda was the depiction of Israel as an expansionist enemy aspiring to control the region between the Nile and the Euphrates. The mission of the Arab states was to defend themselves against the inherent imperialism of Zionist ideology (Harkabi, 1976). The third theme was the equation of Israel and Zionism with Western imperialism and colonialism. According to the Egyptian and Arab view, Israel functioned as a "spearhead," "bridgehead," "base," and "instrument" of imperialist forces. The memory of the crusaders' invasion was often evoked, linking the establishment of Israel to a chain of transient imperialist invasions of the Middle East, in which the Jewish settlements were no more than colonies. The fourth element of Egyptian propaganda was the use of delegitimizing anti-Semitic terms and labels. One major feature was the descriptions of the vileness of the Jews, depicted as monsters, cancer, thorns, vipers, octopi, spiders, parasites, riffraff, demons, monkeys, pigs, dogs, microbes, bacteria, a fifth column, and other negative characteristics. Also common was the association of Israel and the Jews with the fabricated *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was widely translated and circulated by state agencies in Arabic and English from the mid-1950s onward. Publication of these and similar anti-Semitic pamphlets "exposed" the ways in which the Jews achieved influence and world domination (Harkabi, 1976; Lewis, 1986). These treatises were backed by the dissemination of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in Arabic during and after the Suez War (Laskier, 1992).

Anti-Semitic themes were also prevalent in Egyptian films produced during the Nasserite period; Jewish figures were often stereotyped, associated with usury, greediness, cunning, seduction, and the Satan (Shafik, 2007). Demonization of the Jews was also found in the Egyptian romance literature (Somekh, 1996). Moreover, the Jewish community in Egypt was portrayed as an alien and mostly European society, servant of wider Jewish and Zionist interests, and part of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. The Jews were blamed for exploiting Egyptian society's honesty and hospitality in order to promote their own economic aspirations (Mayer, 1987).

In the early 1960s, the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic image of Israel had become well embedded in Egyptian political culture, as attested by two official documents. The first was the National Charter—probably the regime's most important ideological document—drafted in 1962, which stated, "The insistence of our people on liquidating the Israeli aggression on a part of Palestine land is a determination to liquidate one of the most dangerous pockets of imperialist resistance against the struggle of peoples…Our pursuit of the Israeli policy of infiltration in Africa is only an attempt to limit the spread of a disruptive imperialist cancer" (Rejwan, 1974, p. 262; Stein, 2012, pp. 62–63). The second was the Charter of the Arab Tripartite Federation, consisting of Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, which was proclaimed in April 1963. Its text, which stated that "unification is a revolution because it is closely tied to the question of Palestine and the national obligation to liberate it," was interpreted by Israel as a direct Arab call for Israel's annihilation (Podeh, 2004, pp. 86–87).

Nasser's setbacks in the Arab world—particularly the dissolution of the union between Egypt and Syria in 1961 (the United Arab Republic)—as well as Egypt's military involvement in Yemen, reinforced his commitment to the Palestinian cause. In response to Arab accusations of inactivity vis-à-vis Israel, Nasser initiated the establishment of the palestine liberation organization (PLO) at the Cairo Arab summit in January 1964: Under Ahmed al-Shukeiri, the PLO became an Egyptian proxy in the Arab-Israeli conflict, serving as a cover for avoiding war with Israel. Nasser's support of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian cause in the years 1964–1967 grew in direct proportion to his inactivity against Israel (Shemesh, 1996).

The escalation that led to the outbreak of the June 1967 War was accompanied by increasingly frequent declarations in the Egyptian media, touting Israel's liquidation as a national aim (Harkabi, 1976). Even Nasser's rhetoric drifted in that direction. Thus, for example, in a speech on 26 May, following the evacuation of UN forces on the border and the closure of the Tiran Straits, Nasser declared that "the [impending] battle will be a general one and our basic objective will be to destroy Israel" (Laqueur, 1969, p. 335). In a speech 3 days later, Nasser insisted that war was not about the UN forces or the Tiran Straits but dealing with the entire Palestine problem (ibid). With that, Nasser completed the circle that had begun with limited interest in the Palestinian issue in 1954 and ended with a full-fledged commitment. His overconfidence fed by enthusiastic Arab support of his moves, Nasser fell victim to his own inflammatory rhetoric of the preceding years; it became a trap of his own doing, which blurred his ability to distinguish between image and reality.

The Israeli View of Nasser and Nasserism

The results of the 1948 War presented a paradox to Israel's political leadership: On the one hand, Israeli leaders developed a sense of contempt and derision for the Arab states, their corrupt regimes, and the indolent leaders who had led their people to such a crushing defeat at the hands of the Jews in a war of "the few against the many." On the other hand, Israeli leaders feared a second round against the Arabs, whose goal would be the annihilation of the Jews and the obliteration of the shame of defeat. The sense of historic Jewish victimhood caused fear to override hope (Bar-Tal, 2001). As early as 1949, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion expressed his concerns of a unified Arab world that would act against the Jews, using the historic comparison with the crusaders. Ben-Gurion's profound knowledge of history taught him that the emergence of a charismatic leader is a necessary precondition for unity and spiritual rejuvenation. He was especially apprehensive of the emergence of leaders of the stature of Prophet Muhammad, founder of the puritanical Wahhabiyyah movement in the Arabian Peninsula Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab or secular Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). It was the latter who particularly haunted Ben-Gurion: In his diary, he confessed that the fear of "the possibility of our annihilation" still gnawed at him in view of the "existence of sixty or seventy million Arabs—and it is possible that a Mustafa Kemal will rise up among them" (Shalom, 1995, p. 39).

The 1952 revolution in Egypt was initially welcomed by Israel. The impression was that the group of young officers from the middle and lower-middle class would better represent Egypt than the wealthy illegitimate elite under King Faruq. Israel hoped that the new regime would not need to use nationalist anti-Israeli rhetoric to compensate for a lack of political legitimacy and would thereby establish a congenial basis for direct dialogue. Thus, on August 18, 1952, speaking to the Knesset, Ben-Gurion welcomed the new regime. Israel also initiated secret contacts with Nasser in 1953–1954; although they failed to produce any tangible results, participation in these talks signaled that Nasser and Egypt did not desire war (Sheffer, 1996).

To become acquainted with Nasser's worldview, his booklet, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, was translated by the military intelligence, and attention was directed to Nasser's conceptualization of Egypt's leadership role in three circles—the Arab, the African, and the Islamic. The simplistic interpretation in Israel (and in the West generally) was that Egypt was bent on attaining hegemony in these spheres. It was believed that Israel constituted an obstacle to Egypt's aspirations. Ben-Gurion was greatly influenced by the booklet, as evidenced by his frequent references to it in his diary. At a Knesset debate in early 1956, Ben-Gurion concluded that "the ambition to destroy Israel is planted deep in Nasser's heart and is a cornerstone of his nationalist viewpoint" (Podeh, 2004, p. 76). A careful reading of *The Philosophy*, however, would substantiate that this conclusion was derived not from the actual text but from Ben-Gurion's interpretation of it and his negative image of Nasser.

By early 1956, then, Nasser's image in Israel had become highly negative. The change in the Israeli view was the result of a spiral of several events, beginning with the detention of an Israeli ship and its crew passing through the Suez Canal, in September 1954. It continued with the two death sentences in the trial of the Egyptian Jews involved in Operation Suzanna in January 1955. For some unknown reason, the Israeli leadership believed—following some secret diplomatic exchanges of third parties with the Egyptian regime—that Nasser had promised to refrain from passing death sentences. Israeli disappointment was also expressed by Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, who usually advocated a moderate and restrained policy vis-à-vis Nasser. In his diary, he concluded, "We have lost our faith in him as a result of the hangings" (Podeh, 2004, p. 77). Next, following a series of border infiltrations from Egypt, which involved sabotage and murder, Israel initiated the Gaza operation in February 1955 (see above). Nasser's negative image in Israel (and in the West generally) was strengthened by several policy choices made by Nasser in 1955: his opposition to the Baghdad Pact, a pro-Western defense organization, his participation in the Bandung Conference of nonaligned countries, and recognition of the People's Republic of China. The event that fixed Nasser's negative image was, however, the Czech arms deal, which was viewed by Israel as altering the regional balance of power and concurrently giving the Soviet Union a foothold in the Middle East. Nasser's July 1956 decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company served as ultimate "proof" of Nasser's aggressive ambitions, "confirming" his imperialist desire to seize control of the oil fields and achieve dominance in Arab and Islamic circles. This negative image of Nasser and

Nasserism, formed during the years 1954–1956, would not change until Nasser's death in September 1970.

Israeli discourse on Nasser and Nasserism, as reflected in the media and decision-makers' rhetoric, included three major themes: one, the perception of Nasser as a kind of Arab Hitler or Mussolini, associated with Nazi type of activity and ideology; Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution* was portrayed as the equivalent of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The perception of Nasser as an expansionist and imperialist, bent on attaining hegemony in the Arab, Muslim, and African circles, was seen as a reflection of Nasser's desire to acquire "living space" for Egypt—a term borrowed from the Nazi term *lebenstraum*. This analogy was immediate and self-evident for the generation that had personally experienced or closely followed the Holocaust. The conflation of Nasser with Nazi ideology stimulated delegitimation and dehumanization of Israel's enemy and laid the groundwork for Israel's use of force against Egypt during the Suez War.

For example, Ben-Gurion informed the Knesset when introducing his new government in November 1955, immediately after the signing of the Czech arms deals:

> The rulers of Egypt are buying these arms with one goal only: to uproot the State of Israel and its people…The head of the ruling military faction in Cairo has announced that its war is aimed not only against Israel but against world Jewry and against Jewish finance which rules the United States. *This kind of talk is known to us from Hitler's day* [my emphasis], and it is highly mystifying that the Czechoslovakian government in particular is ignoring the Nazi dogma that is being sounded anew on the banks of the Nile…There is a duty to inform all the aggressors of the world…[that] the Jewish people in its land will not be as sheep to the slaughter… Not many nations fight for their freedom and their existence. What Hitler did to six million helpless Jews in Europe will not be done by any enemy of Israel to the free Jews rooted in their homeland. (Podeh, 2004, pp. 77–78)

Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal was interpreted as an attempt to conquer "living space" stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. If he succeeded, Ben-Gurion warned, he "will be able to continue to weave his expansionist designs toward Jordan, Syria and Iraq, which will facilitate the encirclement of Israel. And no force will then be able to prevent him from executing the rest of his plan to create the Egyptian Empire" (ibid, p. 81).

A major event that further reinforced the aggressive image of the Egyptian leader was the unification of Egypt and Syria and the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in February 1958. The Israeli Foreign Ministry viewed the unification as "the beginning of the fulfillment of Nasser's vision of an Arab empire signifying one nation, one government and one leader—Nasser" (Podeh, 2004, pp. 82–83). With the formation of the UAR, the fear that a charismatic leader of the caliber of Bismarck or Atatürk would unify the Arabs appeared to be coming true in the form of Nasser. The "aggressive" interpretation of the unification reverberated in the Israeli press and in the Western press translated into Hebrew. The press frequently used the term "Anschluss," identified in the Western collective memory with the annexation of Austria by Hitler, to describe Egypt's domination over Syria. The UAR was seen as the realization of Nasser's vision of an Arab empire, as out-

lined in *The Philosophy*, and the first step on the road to Nasser's control over Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and the remaining major oil states (Podeh, 2004).

From the establishment of the UAR onward, Israel consistently viewed almost all developments in the Arab world—such as the civil war in Lebanon and the toppling of the Western-oriented Hashemite monarchy in Iraq (July 1958)—as a product of Nasserite machinations. Ben-Gurion viewed the Iraqi coup as "the gravest development [in the region] since World War II." According to his pessimistic and disillusioned analysis, "all the Arab states will be in Nasser's hands soon." Ben-Gurion viewed the developments in the Arab East as a clear parallel to Hitler's designs for Europe:

> What happened with Nasser happened with Hitler… No one paid attention that Hitler had already stated what he wanted. It was all in his book, the methods too. Hitler told the truth. No one believed him when he said it. The same is true for Nasser. Nasser put his cards on the table. He clearly stated what he wants in his booklet *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. He wants three things: he wants to be the ruler of the Arab nations, to be the head of Islam, and to be the dictator of the African continent. And he goes about this step by step. All that I have heard about him shows that he is not a fool, he is cunning as a snake. He knows how to speak to each person in his own language. (Podeh, 2004, p. 84)

Nasser's involvement in Yemen since September 1962 was considered another attempt to control the Arabian Peninsula and the oil fields. Even the formation of the Tripartite Federation between Egypt, Iraq, and Syria in April 1963 was seen as an ominous threat, particularly the wording of the charter—"Unification is a revolution because it is closely tied to the question of Palestine and the national obligation to liberate it" (Podeh, 2004, p. 86). In an unusual step, Ben-Gurion dispatched personal letters to numerous heads of states around the world that maintained diplomatic relations with Israel, to alert them to the dangers facing Israel. The letter emphasized that "this is the first time in our generation that a constitutional document by three states designates the annihilation of Israel as one of the primary, and perhaps the primary goal of the unification of Arab armies." Ben-Gurion emphasized that, in contrast to Israel's quest for peace, as stated in its Proclamation of Independence, "the aspiration to annihilate Israel has been harbored by the Arab rulers ever since the reestablishment of the State of Israel" (Podeh, 2004, p. 87).

In the early 1960s, Nasser hired German scientists, some of whom had served the Nazis during World War II, to build his long-range missile program. Though Nasser's decision was largely based on commercial considerations and these experts' availability, his association with ex-Nazi experts further "substantiated" Nasser's image in Israel as "a Hitler" bent on the destruction of the Jewish state (Bar-Zohar, 1965).

The third element in the Israeli discourse on Nasser was the Egyptian leader's depiction as a dictator, heading a regime that was bent on exploitation and oppression of the common people, rather than achieving a classless society and social justice, as propagated by official state media. No longer was it presented in the Israeli press as "progressive" or "revolutionary" but rather as a corrupt dictatorship. The most widespread term used to describe Egypt's new ruling elite was "gang" (*knufiyya* in Hebrew); Nasser was often called a "dictator" and "despot" (*rodan* in Hebrew).

The use of these terms emphasized the moral superiority of Israeli democracy over the Egyptian totalitarian regime. In addition, Nasser's military rank of colonel during the revolution was used extensively to deride his status and highlight the illegitimate nature of the regime, which came to power by coup rather than by democratic means. A typical depiction of Israel's view of the Egyptian regime appears in a speech by Ben-Gurion in early 1956:

> A revolt took place in Egypt… Several military figures took control of the regime. Their intent at first might have been perceived as changing the condition of the Egyptian people. There is no nation in the world where illness and ignorance are so shocking as in Egypt… Yet this man announced publicly that his intention was that Egypt shall head all the Arab nations, lead the Muslim world, and hold hegemony over the entire African continent. If so, there are two ways to accomplish this: the long and difficult way, by correcting the wretched situation in Egypt…or a second way, by external conquests and war with those whom the Arab nations hate—a war with Israel. The rulers of Egypt have chosen the second way. (Podeh, 2004, pp. 80–81)

This negative view of Nasser, coupled by mutual mistrust, sabotaged the peaceful discussions that had begun in Paris in September 1965 between a high-ranking Egyptian official and Israeli Mossad agent. Following the initial contacts, head of the Mossad, Meir Amit, was invited to Cairo in February 1966. However, Prime Minister Eshkol (who succeeded Ben-Gurion in 1963) was persuaded by his ministers and advisors to suggest a European venue for the meeting, against his and Amit's better judgment. The insulting Israeli response foiled the continuation of the dialogue. Undoubtedly, the opportunity missed by Israel was a result of the highly negative image of Nasser, developed in the preceding years, which led Israeli decision-makers to treat peace overtures with skepticism and suspicion because of the enemy's "known" duplicity (Podeh, 2015).

The opportunity that such talks offered to trigger a change in Israel's image of Nasser quickly disappeared as developments escalated toward war in mid-1967: What started as an Israeli-Syrian air clash in April erupted into a political and ultimately military showdown in May to June. As the situation escalated, Arab enthusiasm for war heightened, and Egypt's inflammatory propaganda machine increasingly used derogatory language, in which Israel's liquidation became its main aim (Harkabi, 1976). Thus, when Nasser, called for "the destruction of Israel" in one of his speeches on May 26, 1967, the response of Prime Minister Eshkol and the Foreign Ministry was a deep sense of fear. The Foreign Office instructed its representatives to maintain an aggressive line: "Nasser's image [should be portrayed] as the Hitler of the Nile who has always sought hegemony in the Middle East. To fulfill this goal: 1. He was prepared to make use of the experience of Nazis and to be aided by war criminals; 2. He disseminated *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Arabic translation, as well as varied anti-Jewish literature; 3. He openly announces his intention to annihilate Israel" (Podeh, 2004, p. 89). A message sent by Eshkol to President Johnson emphasized the threat of Israel's annihilation and invoked the memory of the Holocaust (Podeh, 2004). This was not merely a cynical attempt at enlisting Western support; it was a genuine reflection of the Israeli image of Nasser and Nasserism.

Conclusions

Mutual Egyptian and Israeli perceptions during the Nasserite period followed patterns that are typical of intractable international conflicts. Each party developed a collective memory and ethos that included negative images and stereotypes. Unsurprisingly, the diabolical images that the parties developed of each other shared certain features. Thus, each side viewed its adversary as an imperialist, expansionist aggressor, bent on achieving hegemony and acquiring territory, either in the three circles of influence according to the Israeli interpretation or from the Nile to the Euphrates, according to the Egyptian interpretation. In addition, both parties, according to the framework developed by Bar-Tal and Hammack (2012), used delegitimizing and occasionally dehumanizing elements in their rhetoric, including outcasting, trait characterization, and group comparisons. Thus, demonization occurred on both sides of the border; often enough, events were interpreted in a way that dovetailed with the "established" images of the adversary.

Interestingly, the two parties did not possess an ingrained negative image of the other at the outset; Nasser initially did not consider Israel an immediate enemy and had no preconceived negative image of Jews and Israelis. Likewise, the Israeli decision-makers initially viewed with favor the toppling of the monarchy and the seizure of power by the young officers. Nonetheless, a spiral of events in 1954–1955 triggered mutual suspicion and mistrust. From the Egyptian point of view, it appeared as if "the Israelis dealt him [Nasser] one humiliating blow after another" (Aburish, 2004, p. 73). From an Israeli perspective, Nasser emerged as the epitome of their worst fears, evoking immediate and remote memories of annihilation and the Holocaust. At that point, images and historical reality became interwoven, and the negative images became solidified and entrenched by the Suez War. These images changed little since then, even when peace feelers were sent to the other side. In this respect, the Israeli-Egyptian conflict, like other intractable conflicts, involved leaders (and societies) with closed minds and fixed images of each other. One may wonder if the same process of demonization has been ongoing between Israel and Iran in recent years (Ram, 2009).

Palestine and Israel constituted two sides of the same coin for Nasser, growing commitment to the first and necessitated hardening the position vis-à-vis the second, first rhetorically and then practically, as seen by the escalation leading up to the June 1967 War. The entanglement of Palestine in Egyptian foreign policy, which was also due to the centrality of the Palestinian cause in pan-Arab ideology, gradually receded in the Sadat era. Yet, an analysis of Israeli-Egyptian relations shows that reality and image were intertwined; "Every 'reality,'" wrote Harold Isaacs, "is made up of the sum of somebody's images; every 'image' is part of someone's reality. Images, moreover, appear in the eye of the beholder" (Isaacs, 1975, p. 258).

In spite of these negative mutual images, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty in 1979. In his speech at the Knesset, on 20 November 1977, Sadat acknowledged the existence of a psychological barrier between the two sides: "A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action,

deed or decision. A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier," he concluded, "which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem."[3] Interestingly enough, 35 years after the signing of the treaty, this barrier still exists, at least on the Egyptian side. An examination of current Egyptian school textbooks demonstrates that they are replete with biases, omissions, and delegitimizing elements (Podeh, forthcoming). This historical context of the cold peace between Israel and Egypt substantiates the argument that the two parties have not yet reached the stage of reconciliation (Podeh, 2007). This stage, according to Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004), begins "when the parties in conflict start to change their beliefs, attitudes, goals, motivation and emotions about the conflict, about each other, and about future relations" (pp. 22–23; see also Bar-Tal, 2013). Unfortunately, it is doubtful whether this process will begin before a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at hand. Meanwhile, the parties, according to a famous saying attributed to Apostle Paul in a different context, will continue "seeing through a glass, darkly," meaning that at present they suffer from an obscure or imperfect vision of reality, which may disappear at the end of time.

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