

## Palestinian Collective Memory and the Holocaust

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### Introduction

In March of 2014, Professor Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, a Palestinian professor from Al-Quds University, took a group of 27 Palestinian students to visit the Nazi concentration camps at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The trip was part of a joint program between the German Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Tel-Aviv University, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. The purpose of the program was to teach Israeli and Palestinian students about the “suffering that has helped shape the historical consciousness of the other side,”<sup>1</sup> as well as to study the impact of empathy on reconciliation and peace. Professor Dajani experienced such a severe backlash from Palestinian society in general and Al-Quds University in particular, that he resigned from the institution where he had been successfully teaching for over thirteen years.<sup>2</sup> Why did Palestinians react so strongly to the visit of these students to Auschwitz-Birkenau? What was it that they found threatening? This article seeks to understand why learning about the Holocaust can be seen as threatening to the Palestinian collective memory. It is necessary to first define what collective memory is and then understand it within its Palestinian context. Next, Professor Dajani’s trip to Auschwitz will be explored in depth along with the subsequent reaction all within the context of the Palestinian collective memory. This will be undertaken using the recent publication from Professor Dajani called, *Teaching the Holocaust in Palestine: Reconciliation in the Midst of Conflict* which is a comprehensive academic analysis of the trip.

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<sup>1</sup> Kalman, M. 2014a. "Palestinian Students Visit Auschwitz in First Organized Visit". *Haaretz*. Web. March 28, 2014. Retrieved: Nov. 17, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Among many other accomplishments, Professor Dajani founded in 2001 the American Studies Institute at Al-Quds University and founded in 2007 Wasatia, a movement promoting Islamic tradition of moderation, tolerance, non-violence, and compromise.

Finally, there will be an exploration of whether or not learning about the Holocaust can enrich Palestinian collective memory instead of being perceived as threatening while persisting to remain a taboo topic. Peace in the Holy Land is dependent upon both the Palestinians and the Israelis being able to truly see each other through the tragedies which shape the psychology of the Other.

### **Understanding Collective Memory**

Collective memory is representations of the past, assembled in narratives that are adopted by a group as truthful. Contemporary use of the word began with the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). In 1925, he published his famed *Social Frameworks of Memory* (*Les cadres sociaux de la memoire*) where he gave the term “collective memory” a theoretical weight previously unknown. Carol Bardenstein explained that, “the construction of collective memory is inextricably linked with the construction of collective identity and imagined community in the present. Maurice Halbwachs described this feature of collective memory thus: ‘every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. These reconstructed images provide the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allow it to recognize itself through time.’”<sup>3</sup> Wolf Kansteiner defined collective memory as representations of the past that are collectively adopted.<sup>4</sup> Collective memory includes several main kinds of memories: popular memory, official memory, autobiographical memory, historical memory and cultural memory. Popular memory is made up of narratives held by the members of a society. Official memory is made up of narratives adopted by a society’s formal institutions. Autobiographical memory is formed by

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<sup>3</sup> Bardenstein, C.B. 1999. “Trees, Forests and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory,” in: *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. eds. Bal, M., Crewe J.V., Spitzer, L. Hanover. pp. 148-151.

<sup>4</sup> Kansteiner, W. 2002. “Finding Meaning in Memory: Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” in: *History and Theory*, 41 (2002): pp. 179-197.

individuals who directly experienced the events themselves. Historical memory is the way that the research community views the event in its studies of the past. Finally, cultural memory is the way that the society views its past via newspapers, monuments, memorials, films and buildings.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, there is a deep relationship between collective memory and narrative. When a narrative is adopted, it becomes part of the collective memory of the group. Group identity is also predicated upon memory. Professor Meir Litvak of Tel Aviv University echoes Halbwachs and explains that,

“No group identity exists without memory as its core meaning; the sense of continuity over time and space is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. Every group develops the memory of its own past and so highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. These reconstructed images of the past provide the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allow it to develop a historical identity. The past the group prizes is domestic: the histories of foreign lands are alien and incompatible with its own past. National identity requires both having a heritage and believing it to be unique.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Palestinian Collective Memory**

It is significant to mention from Litvak's echoing of Halbwachs that amidst the development of collective memory a unique identity is highlighted vis-à-vis other groups. The Palestinian national identity does this in relation to the group identity of the Zionists and then the Israelis. The collective memory of the Palestinian people is a phenomenon which presents a challenge to the Zionist narrative that gave definition and meaning for the creation of the State of Israel. Therefore, anything which gives justification to the Zionist narrative is seen as an anathema to the Palestinians. The political ramifications of the Holocaust can be seen as directly leading to the strengthening of international will which supported the creation of the State of

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<sup>5</sup> Nets-Zehngut, R. 2012. “The Passing of Time and the Collective Memory of Conflicts: The Case of Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus,” in: *Peace & Change*. Vol. 37, No. 2, April 2012. pp. 254-255. Also: Nets-Zehngut, R., and Bar-Tal, D. 2014. “Transformation of the Official Memory of Conflicts: A Tentative Model and the Israeli Memory of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus,” in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 27 (1). pp. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Litvak, M. 2009. *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*. New York. p. 1.

Israel in May of 1948. The ramifications of this event are collectively remembered by the Palestinian people as the *Nakba* or ‘catastrophe’.

*Al-Nakba*, or *al-Karithah* (the Catastrophe), was a formative event for Palestinian collective and national identity formation. The Palestinian nationalist progress which occurred at varying degrees over a period of thirty years from the end of World War I in 1918 until the *Nakba* in 1948 was demolished as a result of the Israeli (victory) success in state formation. *Al-Nakba* came to describe the consequences of the 1948 war and refers to the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who lost their land, property and status as a result of this war.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the same word that the Palestinians use for this event can be translated in Hebrew to *Shoah* which is the proper word for the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup> Thus, there is a clear linguistic connection between the *Shoah* and the *Nakba* imbued with the deepest of meaning for each respective side.

When asked about whether or not the collective memory of the Palestinian people can be independently defined instead of being tied to its reaction to Zionism and to the State of Israel, Professor Dajani replied that some think that it can but that the majority believe it cannot. The reason for this is that the elders of this generation are the last survivors of the *Nakba* itself. Their children are known as second-generation *Nakba* victims just as there are Jews who are recognized as being second-generation Holocaust victims. Collective trauma and the feeling of loss deeply affect national memory and are transmitted generationally. Palestinian second-generation *Nakba* victims were raised in squalor on stories of what “home” and prosperity used to look like and the nostalgia of ‘return.’ Blame for their daily struggle was focused solely on

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<sup>7</sup> Dajani-Daoudi, M.S. et al. 2015. *Teaching the Holocaust in Palestine*: Jerusalem & Jena. p. 9. n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> This is because the etymology of the word Holocaust comes from the Greek: ὁλόκαυστος (holókaustos): hólos, "whole" and kaustós, "burnt". It can therefore be understood to refer to the Jews being a sacrifice and the Nazis as the priests who were fulfilling the will of God.

Zionism and its successes in the land which was once theirs. Their *Nakba* experience was traumatized more by the 1967 June War defeat which they described as *Naksa* (Setback) rather than describing it as it really was, ‘a defeat.’ That war resulted in Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. The continuation of the occupation and lack of full political independence is the “elephant in the room” and directly prevents the Palestinians from being able to ‘move on’. Professor Dajani is convinced that once there is a peace agreement and the independent State of Palestine is created, the Palestinian vision will become clearer and the burdens of the past will make way for state building. “Now the vision is warped by the conflict and there is a bleak situation where the other is not being perceived as a peace partner but as the enemy despite the 1993 Oslo Accords. Once you move away from conflict to reconciliation and peace then Palestinian perspective of the Holocaust will be much more realistic. It will be humanistic and moral.”<sup>9</sup>

Palestinian nationalism has its foundation in the belief that the Arab population of Palestine is collectively distinct while being part of the broader Arab nation and the Islamic world. The idea is the product of modernity, modernization, and contingent political developments, like all other nationalisms in the Arab world.<sup>10</sup> The Arab inhabitants of Palestine wanted the benefits of solidarity and attachment embodied in nationalism.

“Nationalism is one of the most forceful agents for the construction and reconstruction of collective memories. The producers of nationalism shape collective identity by the recover, reconstruction, or invention of a collective national past. Nationalism identifies the available repositories of the past and selects fragments or elements of past periods, events, symbols, or heroes from which it creates a new unified collective past. The national past is, in fact, memory rather than historical past. It is planned and constructed by the engineers of national identity, who pick from history those ‘great moments’ in whose recovery or renewed identity the promise of national revival is found. The strong and interdependent links between nationalism, identity and memory materialize in the sites and rituals of commemoration, where the national movement fuses and molds the collective memory into collective identity.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> From the author’s interview with Professor Dajani-Daoudi which is included in the Appendix below.

<sup>10</sup> Litvak (2009). *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Litvak (2009). *Ibid.* p. 14.

As seen above, the ritual of commemoration is the glue which holds nationalism, identity and memory together. The *Nakba* has been the formative ritual to commemorate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In his lecture at the Sorbonne in 1882, Ernst Renan famously noted, “Suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require common effort.”<sup>12</sup> So in the Palestinian collective memory, the *Nakba* functions as the force that unify and motivates towards common effort. Any suffering which distracts from this, especially the suffering of the Jews who are perceived to have subsequently caused the *Nakba*, can be seen as being destructive to the national collective memory and to undermine the Palestinian collective narrative which deletes the Holocaust from its context. Abdullah Dweikat, a local news commentator, wrote on the website for a television station in Ramallah called Al-Watan, “Let us first pay attention to our martyrs and their families.” He described the trip to Auschwitz as a “pilgrimage”.<sup>13</sup> Even more dangerous is the phenomenon of *modular transfer* where the engineers of national identity seek to equate the entirety of the Holocaust with that of the *Nakba*. The prevalence of the terms ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘genocide’ in the Palestinian rhetoric are integral to this idea. The attempts to show the Israeli security establishment as the modern day equivalent of the Nazis is sadly well-known in the rhetoric of Palestinian media.<sup>14</sup> This is evidenced by the wide spread belief among the masses of Nazi-Zionist collaboration and the widespread popularity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

### **The Holocaust as a Method of Commemoration for Israeli Collective Memory**

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<sup>12</sup> As quoted by Litvak (2009). *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Kalman, M. 2014b. “Palestinian Teaches Tolerance via Holocaust,” in: *The New York Times*. Apr. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Web. Accessed: Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> See the comic in Appendix B for an example of this phenomenon.

Israel is largely made up of immigrants from other countries that have different backgrounds and cultural experiences. Creating a national collective memory has been a conscious endeavor on behalf of the State of Israel since its foundation. It is natural that the greatest catastrophe to befall the Jewish people since the time of the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. would become a central component in the construction of the Israeli national identity. Commemoration of the Holocaust is intended to serve as a lesson for both the individual and at the national level. One of the national lessons of the Holocaust is to say that the Jews need to take their fate into their own hands and rise up against common threats. The collective memory of the helplessness of the Jewish victims created an Israeli ethos of the need for security and military strength. There are three factors which entrenched and fortified the Israeli mentality to be able to face the continual onslaught of Arab armies and Palestinian resistance. The first was the mentality of a nation under siege, the second was a history of many generations of persecution commemorated in national holidays and the third is the existential fear which resulted with the near extinction of European Jews in the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup>

Israeli High School students commemorate the Holocaust by going to Auschwitz. On the one hand such a trip is seen as formative for Israeli collective memory. On the other hand, Palestinians have seen this as a form of indoctrination and a meta-explanation for why the *Nakba* and the continued occupation and persecution of the Palestinian people are necessary.

“Those events that are commemorated are invested with extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past. Thus commemoration serves as the active agent behind both memory and identity as it lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events that embody our deepest and most fundamental values. Public commemoration is also a medium for transmitting messages to a broader public. Participation in rituals of public commemoration reinforces a sense of shared national identity based on a common collective memory. New nations, which are fragile and feel that their national identity is threatened, tend to intensify the commemorative effort.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rouhana, N.R. & Bar-Tal, D. 1999. “Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case,” in: *American Psychologist*. 53. pp. 767.

<sup>16</sup> Litvak (2009). *Ibid.* p. 15.

Yad Vashem is Israel's official memorial for the victims of the Holocaust. Once a year on Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, all of Israeli society collectively stops and stands silently wherever they happen to be so as to commemorate the victims of this heinous historical crime. The nation's leaders will use this day, and the venue of Yad Vashem, to communicate messages to Israelis which are intended to be deeply integrated into the collective consciousness of the nation. All who share in this day are sharing in the national identity of the Israeli people.

### **How Pain and Suffering Affects Collective Memory**

Pain and suffering, just like happiness, are perennial emotions shared among all of humanity. When suffering is experienced or witnessed, it blinds and blocks out all other perceptions. It becomes the loudest voice that affects the collective memory of the people. As Dajani says, "suffering tracks our memories and remembering historical suffering shapes our community narratives. Those narratives become the interpretative frameworks providing resources for healing, but also scars that can be crippling. The narratives focus upon particular historical events, they also de-emphasize or even block out other historical events. This impacts us on personal levels, but also socially. Thus memory embedded in narratives constitutes our personal and group identities with either horizons open to reconciliation or barriers to sustainable peace."<sup>17</sup> If the inhabitants of the Holy Land are able to empathize with each other and find a way to be compassionate, both sides will be in a deep dialogue that is conducive for peace building.

### **The Palestinian Trip to Auschwitz**

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



When Professor Mohammed Dajani reflected on the Palestinian perspective on the Holocaust as being seen through the lens of the *Nakba*, he came to the conclusion that this phenomenon is a denial of history which must be addressed on a wide scale for the well-being of the Palestinian people.<sup>18</sup> When the Holocaust is explored by Palestinians, it is seen through the lens of Palestinian modern history which means that it is directly linked (has a direct relationship) to the Nakba. According to Dajani, the only way to separate the two historical tragedies is by educating Palestinians about the Holocaust in schools and universities: “Unless students get a good education about what had happened, they will (keep) continue comparing it to the Nakba.”<sup>19</sup> In the attempt to correct this, Prof. Dajani decided to independently partner with the German Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Tel Aviv University, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev to take Palestinian students to Auschwitz in Poland. This was organized within the trilateral transdisciplinary project titled, *Hearts of Flesh – Not Stone* and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).<sup>20</sup> “As scholars, [the facilitators] were interested in the dynamics involved in experiencing the suffering of the other within existing conflict situations and how such experiences impact feelings of empathy and ultimately, reconciliation.”<sup>21</sup> There were two groups that were part of this endeavor. The first was the organizers and facilitators and the second group were the Palestinian participants themselves. Built into the program was intentional diversity whether it was in the disciplines or the people represented. What is

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<sup>18</sup> Daoudi, M. D. & Satloff, R. 2011. “Why Palestinians Should Learn About the Holocaust,” in: The New York Times. Web. Mar. 29th, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Epstein, N. 2014. “Mohammed Dajani Daoudi - Evolution of a Moderate,” in: *Moment Magazine*. 17 July 2014. Web. 14 Dec. 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Many have pointed out the historical irony that Germany began as the perpetrator of the Holocaust and has transformed into the enabling agency that financially is supporting reconciliation efforts between Israelis and Palestinians so as to end the violence. This perhaps lends legitimacy to the idea that when one nation’s collective memory is transformed it can be of assistance to other nations still immersed in conflict.

<sup>21</sup> Daoudi, M.D. et al. (2015) Ibid.

important to focus on is what united them was their respect for the dignity and wellbeing of the persons participating in project endeavors.

To fully understand the Palestinian's experience of the trip, one must delve into the individual stories of the participants. All of them experience the Israeli occupation on a daily basis whether by going through checkpoints, being in Israeli jails, knowing people who were killed or in prison as well as the extensive difficulty of travelling abroad. In order to get to Auschwitz, the participants had to go through numerous checkpoints and cross the Allenby Bridge in order they could fly out of the International Airport in Amman, Jordan. "Thus even traveling away from Palestine involved harsh personal experiences which reinforced traumas of the conflict; one student participant was denied entry to Jordan by the Israelis at the Allenby Bridge for political reasons being a member of Hamas and thus could not join the group and had to return back."<sup>22</sup> Thus, it was through the Palestinian participant's individual experiences of the Israeli occupation that the Holocaust was viewed and understood. Students comments throughout the experience reflected how they understood the suffering of the Jews through the interpretive framework of Palestinian suffering. Based upon clear principles, the facilitators did not want to interfere in this process and left the participants go through the reflections undisturbed.

### **Palestinian Public Opposition to the Trip**

What surprised the facilitators, and Prof. Dajani in particular, was the intensity of the Palestinian opposition to the trip. The main argument against the trip was that it was treasonous for Palestinians to acknowledge the suffering of the "other" especially when the "other" are their occupiers, i.e. the Israelis. The general feeling was that such empathy with their own perpetrators – the Israelis - would undermine Palestinian narrative of suffering, loss of identity

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<sup>22</sup> Daoudi, M.D. et al. (2015) Ibid. p. 11.

and political rights. An especially important reason for the backlash (opposition) was that since the Israelis consider it illegal to commemorate or study the Nakba in their educational curriculum or in public speeches, so as a tit-for-tat, there should be no mention of the Holocaust in the Palestinian educational curriculum. Because of this, the experience of the enemy's suffering is seen as a violation of justice for the Palestinian people as a whole.

Others were opposed because they viewed the trip as organized in collaboration with Israeli universities as 'normalization' with the enemy. Professor Dajani was called the 'King of Normalization,' and as such was labeled as 'traitor.' Nine student organizations at Al-Quds University issued a communique headed by the title, "Normalization Equals Treason." The University administration issued a statement saying it had nothing to do with the trip, while the University Union of Workers, Teachers, and Staff expelled Professor Dajani from its membership despite the fact he was not a member. Demonstrations on university campus, death threats, and lack of faculty support pressured Professor Dajani to resign his academic post as Director of the American Studies Graduate Program he founded, and his administrative post as Rector of Libraries at the university. The episode climaxed in torching Professor Dajani's car as a personal ultimatum to silence his call for Holocaust education.

### **Transforming Collective Memory**

Two years ago, Rafi Nets-Zehngut and Daniel Bar-Tal wrote an article titled *Transforming of the Official Memory of Conflict: A Tentative Model and the Israeli Memory of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus*. The article examined the Israeli collective memory of what transpired in 1948 to the Palestinians and how it has transformed over the past 67 years. The authors recognize that collective memory is typically biased and delegitimizes the rival while glorifying the in-group which in turn inhibits peaceful resolution of the conflict and

reconciliation of the sides. They proceed to introduce a model for transforming the conflict, describing the seven phases of the transformation process and the five categories of factors that influence it. It is important to mention that Israel was able to go through this transformation from a place of national strength which is not the case for the Palestinians. Professor Dajani would assert that first the Palestinians must have their national independence to regain security, dignity and self-confidence before they could embark on a similar transformational process. Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal explain that during the first period after the *Nakba*, “[Israeli] scholars and journalists had little motivation to search for critical primary information that could have supported the critical narrative, and war veterans too were not inclined to provide such critical testimonies.”<sup>23</sup> It can be reasoned that this ‘first period’ has continued for the Palestinians since 1948 and inhibits the majority of those who influence Palestinian collective memory from supporting a critical narrative of their own history which is essential for the transformation process.

The seven phases of the transformation process as described by Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal begins with a “*Conducive Environment* which supports the search for new primary information that can challenge the hegemony of the dominant narrative in the official memory.”<sup>24</sup> Evidence for this phase happening among the Palestinians can be seen in the statement by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas who called the Holocaust, “the most heinous crime to have occurred against humanity in the modern era”.<sup>25</sup> Abbas’ 1982 dissertation on the secret relationship between Nazism and Zionism was instrumental in instilling into the Palestinian collective consciousness the idea that the Holocaust was some form of

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<sup>23</sup> Nets-Zehngut, R., and Bar-Tal, D. 2014. *Ibid.* p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Rudoren, Jodi. "Mahmoud Abbas Shifts on Holocaust." *The New York Times*. Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Web. Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Rudoren, Jodi. "Mahmoud Abbas Shifts on Holocaust." *The New York Times*. Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Web. Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

propaganda to justify the establishment of the State of Israel and elicit international sympathy for the Jews. Thirty two years after Abbas' publication, he determined that there was a conducive environment which allowed for him to recognize the extraordinary character of the Holocaust. Although it can be claimed that Abbas' made this statement to impress diplomatic goodwill to world Jewry during an American sponsored negotiations, it must be noted that this statement came a month after Professor Dajani's students returned to Palestine. No effort was made by PA President Abbas to meet with Dajani and his students to convey a similar message to the Palestinian public. Were this done it would have helped the transformation process immensely.

The second phase is the *Search* and "refers to the seeking of new primary information which supports an alternative narrative. Usually, the search is conducted by scholars, through primary source archives or via interviews with people who have first-hand experience."<sup>26</sup> This phase culminated with Professor Dajani's trailblazing trip with his students to Auschwitz. In the trip, scholars and students together sought out primary information so that they could reinforce a change in their perspective of the Holocaust. Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal point out that this process is difficult to proceed if the alternative narrative can't be widely exposed. This is where the third phase of *Exposure* becomes relevant. The new critical primary information and the alternative narrative needs to be supported in the public sphere. Professor Dajani's Wasatia movement was founded to spread an alternative narrative of moderation and reconciliation through critical reasoning. Dajani's lectures, videos, documentary films, and interviews are the primary sources of information needed for this phase which includes testimonies of the Palestinian students who experienced the transforming experience.

The fourth phase is *Dissemination* of the alternative narrative and the primary information that supports it. As evidenced via the numerous news articles and interviews which

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<sup>26</sup> Nets-Zehngut, R., and Bar-Tal, D. 2014. *Ibid.* p. 78.

have appeared as a result of the trip<sup>27</sup>, evidence for this phase can be identified. The next phase of *Contest* is where the Palestinian collective memory is currently stalled. *Contest* is where controversies take place between the supporters of the dominant narrative and those of the alternative one to determine which narrative is the accurate one that will prevail. Sadly, the dominant narrative of the Holocaust being seen as the suffering of the enemy which perpetuated the Nakba holds onto the consciousness of the majority of the Palestinians.

Professor Dajani suggests that there are moves that Israel can make to help the Palestinians move from the stage of *Initial Absorption*. The fact that teaching the Nakba is illegal in the Israeli Education system contributes to the lack of desire on behalf of the Palestinians to learn about the Holocaust. Furthermore, there needs to be extensive recognition of Muslims who supported the Jews during the Holocaust. Robert Satloff wrote a book called *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* in October 2006 which extensively documents this history.<sup>28</sup> Yad Vashem, as the official Holocaust museum of the State of Israel, should dedicate a day to commemorate the Muslims who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Professor Dajani seeks to emphasize that there should not be a consciousness of “empathy exchange”, i.e. “if you show me empathy, I will show you empathy”. The Palestinian national consciousness needs to be transformed into a proactive desire to do the right thing. Professor Dajani maintains that the message of moderation in the Quran as well as in other holy books supports this idea and this is why his movement seeks to address Islamic extremism in Palestine and abroad. All these factors will help the Palestinian collective memory initially absorb the new narrative and overcome the fears which chain it to its past. This will then facilitate the completion of the sixth phase which is where the alternative narrative is

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bibliography below.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006)

adopted by at least a minority of the state institutions. So if the Palestinian Ministry of Education incorporates a curriculum which teaches about the Holocaust outside of the context of the *Nakba*, this phase can be seen as being completed. The final seventh phase is where there is increased and decreased absorption of the alternative narrative. In this phase the new narrative becomes the dominant national collective narrative.

## **Conclusions**

This article examined how the Holocaust affects Palestinian collective memory. This was done through the case study of Professor Mohammad Dajani-Daoudi's March 2014 trip to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland with 27 Palestinian students. The purpose of the trip was to teach students about the suffering that helps shape the historical consciousness of the other side and to learn about the impact of empathy on reconciliation in midst of conflict. By doing so, Professor Dajani hoped that the students would understand that learning about the Holocaust is the "right thing to do". But this was increasingly difficult because of the Palestinian participant's individual experiences of the Israeli occupation from which they then viewed the Holocaust. Their comments throughout the experience reflected that they understood the suffering of the Jews through the interpretive framework of Palestinian continued suffering where they argue Jewish suffering came to an end but that their own is still ongoing. The severe reaction of the Palestinian public to this trip which led to Professor Dajani's resignation from the university and the torching of his car was explored and gave definition to how studying about the Holocaust touches on a taboo nerve for Palestinian collective memory. The open wound of the *Nakba* in the Palestinian collective memory is a direct motivator towards common effort. Any suffering which distracts from this, especially the suffering of the Jews who are viewed to have subsequently caused the *Nakba*, can be seen as being disruptive to the collective national

memory. According to the seven stages of transformation that national memory needs to undergo, the process can be seen to have begun. Israel has within its power to help or hinder this process along by teaching the *Nakba* in their educational system as a legitimate narrative of the Palestinian people, recognize Muslims who saved Jews during the Holocaust and end the occupation in the context of ensuring equal rights and representation for the Palestinian people. But in the end, the transformation of the Palestinian collective memory is a process that the Palestinian people must undergo on their own the results of which will be conducive for peace.



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## **APPENDIX A – Interview with Professor Mohammad S. Dajani-Daoudi**

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Professor Mohammad Dajani-Daoudi granted me an interview via Skype which is included below:

R= Raanan- Author of this article as the interviewer

MD= Prof. Mohammad Dajani-Daoudi

### **R- Can you please tell me about how the Holocaust affects the Palestinian Collective Memory?**

MD- Does the visiting of Auschwitz necessarily mean a clash with the Palestinian national narrative? Is it about ignorance because it is not in their education and they do not know much about it? Is it because of the fact that they link the 1948 Nakba to the Holocaust and believe that if the Holocaust had not taken place that the Nakba would not have taken place? And so is it in that sense they believe that because they have nothing to do with the Holocaust that they are still paying the price of the Holocaust by having western support for the establishment of Israel in their homeland which resulted in the dispossession of their homeland and their statehood and their identity? So there are many issues that are involved when dealing with this subject and they are complicated and complex because one of the related motifs is victimhood. [The Palestinians] do not want to share their sense of victimhood and what happened in the Holocaust is part of a war and a world conflict and as a result many suffered. The Russians lost 20 million people. In this way, they [the Palestinians] try to keep [the Holocaust] away from them. It is deeply embedded in the culture and how people are brought up politically. It is because of the conflict that they are sensitive about it. At the same time we should not ignore the fact that the timing [of the negative reaction to Prof. Dajani's trip to Auschwitz] happened during the collapse of the negotiation process. That is why maybe it was not well received.

### **R- If we look at the language itself, if you were to translate Nakba into Hebrew, would it not be Shoah?**

MD- Yes, that is exactly the same word. The Palestinians also use the word *al-Karithah* which more accurately is like Shoah. What is a catastrophe to the Jews does not have the same meaning to Palestinians because the Nakba is somewhat different from the Holocaust in terms of the ideology of what it meant. This is where the Palestinians failed to understand the Holocaust. The Holocaust was meant to eradicate a people, a nation, a religion, a culture [the Jews] by force, killing and terror – so people who were interned in the Nazi death camps were not sent there for imprisonment. They were sent there to be annihilated. This is the difference with the Palestinian case. Here the Palestinians look at the walls and the prisons and the barbed wire and the guards and they see themselves superimposed into the Holocaust narrative. But they fail to see the goals and impact of the whole thing. What needs to be done here is a need for an awakening. Both people need to start to look at one another as human beings and try to see the suffering and pain

of the other. In this way the Palestinians can overcome their own psychology because also the fact that the Nakba is not over yet but the Holocaust is over. This is part of the problem. The Holocaust took four years and the Nakba continues over 60 years. And so it is ongoing and as a result it has no end and that is what keeps the problem going. And this is why having empathy for the Holocaust victims becomes so important. They [the Palestinians] need to overcome that. It does not help that the Israelis have made it illegal to teach about the commemoration of the Nakba in their schools. You can not tell a people to erase their history and erase their past. The world can not do it with other people. The Germans can not do it with the Jews so why is it expected that it can happen with the Palestinians so that they forget their past. The Palestinians can not forget the past but can at least put it in its place and move onto the future. We can not keep making the past our future. We need to be able to move on. It is very similar to the process that happened with the Jews. They moved on from the bigger catastrophe that took place with them. That is where the Palestinians can learn from the Israelis to move on.

**R- Do you think that there is a collective memory of the Palestinian people that is not something which is formed in reaction to Zionism and to the State of Israel? Can it be defined in its own independent way?**

MD- Maybe to some it would but to many it would not. You know this is part of the old generation who have seen the Nakba or who are the second generation of the Nakba. It is difficult for them to overcome their feeling of loss and being able to move on. This is because the occupation is still there and I think it is the elephant in the room so they are unable to move on because of the problem of the occupation. I believe that once there is peace and once there is a State of Palestine and once we can move away from the conflict the vision will be 20/20 and will be more clear. Now the vision is warped by the conflict and there is a situation where the other side is not seen as a peace partner but as an enemy. Once you move from that then your perspective of the Holocaust will be much more humanistic and realistic. It will be much more moral.

**R- Do you think that there can be a Palestinian collective identity and memory that does not find the Holocaust threatening?**

MD- I can even imagine it as a reality today in the sense that part of the reaction that took place for this trip is that many Palestinians as a whole started asking, "why shouldn't we learn about the Holocaust." The argument is that we must move on and grow up. We do not need to link everything to the Nakba and to your case and we need to look at it from a humanist perspective. Do not link it whether or not they recognize your Nakba for you to recognize their Holocaust that is the wrong equation. On the contrary, do it because it is the right thing to do. Once you are convinced that this is the right thing to do, then you can have a collective memory that sees the Holocaust as a heinous crime and the crime of the century as [President Mahmoud] Abbas said. The Palestinians did not oppose what he said. But I do not know what would happen if Abbas would go as a Palestinian leader and visit Auschwitz. That would bring it more home. That is a taboo. We need to shatter the wall and make tracks in it and so eventually it will fall down. I do not believe that there is anything wrong with learning and education and knowledge. This is the main argument with the Palestinians as a whole. Look, your religion tells you, that the Quran tells you, 'Those who are with knowledge and not to be equated to those without knowledge'.

And the Prophet is quoted to have said that, "Seek knowledge from cradle to grave and even in China." And in this way we are seeking knowledge in Poland in Concentration Camps. Why not? This is education and learning. You can not deny it. It is historically wrong to deny it because it did take place. It is morally wrong because there were millions of people who suffered – 10 million people: 6 million Jews and 4 million non-Jews. So for the memory of those victims it is important to move on and recognize it. I think that one of the problems is that there were Muslims who supported the Jews during the Holocaust, but the Jews do not recognize that. Robert Satloff wrote a book (*Among the Righteous: Los Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*- Oct. 2006) about that and made a film as well based on interviews. He tried to get Yad Vashem to accept Muslims into the righteous of nations and give them recognition for being pious, but Yad Vashem has refused to do so. This is also not helpful for people to move on.

**R- So there are steps that Israel can take to help the Holocaust become more acceptable within the Palestinian discourse.**

MD- Definitely so. I myself do not believe in the exchange of saying: 'You show me empathy and I will show you empathy.' But I do believe in doing the right thing. I am showing you empathy for your suffering not because I am seeking to please you but I feel that I need to do it for me, not for you. It is the right thing to do. If you feel the same way towards the Palestinians and recognizing their suffering in 1948 and not only then but until this very day with what is happening in terms of all the suffering that they have. Their loss of identity and self respect and loss of hope. When they see all these settlements growing or statements from Israeli officials or religious people that the Palestinians do not belong here or that the settlements are taking away our land. How can we ask or even discuss the Holocaust in such an environment. How can we expect them to understand that this is something that affects the psychology of the Jew and then hope that he will understand it. So it is a top job to do and I believe that Palestinians will have a collective memory that will show recognition for the Holocaust and will show respect for the memory for those who died there. I believe that they will have no problem with that. The problem is first their ignorance with that. Second, the conflict that is feeding the problem. Even until now we have a religious enmity that is growing between the Muslims and the Jews and that is being fueled by Muslim extremists and Muslim interpretation of their own Islam and Hadith. This is part of the growing problem that we are facing today.

**R- I wanted to ask a last question about recent statements that have been made by President Rivlin about Israel and Palestine coming together in a confederation and whether or not this could provide a model for a future collective memory together.**

MD- I think that it is a good idea but the problem is that in order to do this it can not happen with the State of Israel and an entity of Palestine. There should be one stage that happens before that which is recognition of Palestine as a state. This mutual recognition can be done with two states and in this way we are talking about equality and justice because if this is happening only according to the present status quo it is happening according to inequality and injustice and imbalance. So we believe in the Wasatia movement which is all about balance and justice. In this way there should be a State so that there will be equality and balance between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. We can not do it with the status quo of today because the PA

has no real status internationally or legally. Its status has expired. Originally, it was for four years (1996-2000). So you can not do it with the PLO. It does not exist. It is an entity. Even the name is anachronistic: Palestine Liberation Organization. You do not want with the Palestine Liberation Organization because the word Palestine denies recognition of Israel and liberation – you do not talk about liberation and you do not want an organization because it is not in balance with the state. And so that is why the first step is to acknowledge the state and create the state and from there create a confederation between two states and even if Jordan is involved that will be balancing in the sense that it will be three states and they can all become a very viable and strong Federation.

### **APPENDIX B – Famous Palestinian Comic Comparing Jews in the Holocaust with Palestinians under the Israeli Occupation**

Below is the Palestinian comic comparing a Jewish child and a Nazi soldier during the Holocaust with a Palestinian child and an Israeli soldier in modern days:

