

Perceptions of the Holocaust in Palestinian Public Discourse

IN A CONTROVERSIAL ARTICLE, published in Tel-Aviv University's periodical *Zmanim*, under the title "The Arabs and the Holocaust. The Analysis of a Problematic Conjunctive Letter," 'Azmi Bishara, a Palestinian intellectual and currently member of the Israeli Knesset wrote the following:

The connection of the Arabs to the history of the Holocaust is indirect. The scene of the disaster was Europe, and the perpetrators of the extermination acts were European, but the Palestinians paid the reparations first and foremost in the Middle East. This is probably the reason that the discussion of the Holocaust in the Arab context always evolves around its political implications, and circumvents the event itself. The basic Arab anti-Zionist stance determined their attitude toward the Holocaust, as towards anti-Semitism in general. This stance is not the cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but its outcome. Anti-Jewish texts were engaged in the justification of the Holocaust and with its denial as a Zionist hoax—a rhetoric which, among other things, was an attempt to deal with the Zionist instrumentalization of the Holocaust.¹

This abstract successfully epitomizes the essence and the spirit of Palestinian attitudes towards the Holocaust since the immediate post-1945 period. The Palestinians view the Holocaust within the context of the general Arab struggle with Zionism and of their particular tragedy and sense of victimhood. The preoccupation with the Holocaust in the Palestinian public discourse began in the 1940s, and seems to have intensified over the years. Frequent references to the Holocaust were and are made by all political and ideological movements, yet there is no one coherent Palestinian narrative. Despite its great similarity to the general Arab discourse on the Holocaust, the Palestinian discourse developed some unique traits due, first and foremost, to the prominence of the Palestinian issue in the Arab-Israeli

conflict. In view of the extent of the period under review and the paucity of research on this important issue,² this paper seeks to examine these traits and identify some broad characteristics of Palestinian representations of the Holocaust.

TOWARDS DENIAL: 1945–1948

The origins of the Palestinian discourse could be discerned in the period before the end of the war. The growing realization of the extent of the Jewish tragedy brought about mounting pressure by the Zionist movement to hasten the rescue of Jewish survivors and refugees and to allow increased Jewish immigration to Palestine. Understanding the repercussions of the possible success of this Zionist effort on the struggle over Palestine, Palestinian public figures and the press had to address, willingly or unwillingly, the issue of the Holocaust in their response to the evolving political conditions. Two approaches seem to have emerged simultaneously since these very early days.

One, which was shared by other Arab leaders, acknowledged the Jewish tragedy in Europe but rejected any linkage between it and the situation in Palestine. It argued that the entire world should participate in solving the problem of the Jewish refugees, rather than turning it into an aggression against the Arabs. It also accused the Zionists of exploiting the suffering of European Jews for their own political purposes.³ The second, sought to understate or minimize the meaning of the Holocaust by using ambiguous terms or depicting it as a problem of civil discrimination. Responding to a statement on the Palestine question made by British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin on 13 November 1945, the Arab Higher Committee rejected any link between the problem of European Jews and Palestine. It stated that the Arabs had recognized the gravity of the Jewish problem and expressed their compassion for the persecution suffered by the Jews and other people in Europe, but there was no reason why they should be responsible for its outcome.⁴ In other words, the Jewish problem was that of persecution not of extermination, and on a par with other groups' sufferings. Therefore, once the Nazis were gone, the problem was solved and Jews could return to their homelands.

The term *idhtihad* (persecution/oppression) employed by Palestinian spokesmen to describe the fate of the Jews may have been used because of the absence of more precise terms during the early post-war period. However, considering the wealth of the Arabic language, the use of such

an ambiguous word, which later came to dominate the Palestinian and Arab discourse on the Holocaust, might have been intended to minimize the gravity of the Jewish tragedy.⁵

In his testimony before the Anglo-American Committee, which examined the Jewish refugee problem, Sami Taha, secretary of the Arab Workers Union in Haifa, said that the Arab workers sympathized with members of the Jewish faith persecuted in Europe. They know, he added, that “these persecutions against the Jews and Catholic Church” were part of a broader phenomenon due to racism and religious fanaticism, thereby blurring the distinction between the extermination employed against the Jews and the campaign against crosses in Germany.⁶

These statements were reflected in the press commentaries. Daily *al-Difa'* complained over the “hue and cry” and “gross exaggeration” in confining the difficult situation in Europe to the Jews alone. Tens of millions suffered, but the Jews alone are referred to. The truth, it concluded, is that the propaganda over the situation of the Jews in Europe is “an unparalleled plot in modern times.” In fact, the Jewish problem is not as severe as the Zionists describe, since many Jews were returning to Germany and many were “seen in the newly opened nightclubs.”⁷

Filastin was more blunt in understating the scale of Jewish suffering, as early as two weeks after the end of the war, stressing the instrumentalization of the victims for achieving political goals:

The Jews have grossly overstated the number of their victims in Europe, in order to gain the world's support for their imagined catastrophe. Time will show that the Jews were those whose casualties are the lowest compared with other people, and that their propaganda and their ‘haggling’ over ‘these victims’ [sic] as a means to establish a Jewish state in Palestine.⁸

The Palestinian defeat and displacement following the war in 1948 made them even less inclined to acknowledge the Holocaust, and manifestations of denial became ever more prevalent. Ever since the 1930s, Palestinians exerted efforts to refute Zionist/Jewish historical claims as a series of lies. Denial of the Holocaust, which increasingly played a central role in shaping Zionist and Israeli identity and psyche, was aimed at demolishing the moral-historical basis of Zionism and the State of Israel.

Since the Palestinians regarded themselves as the victims of Zionism, they could not accept the victimhood of their enemy, as it might give it some moral justification. In addition, acknowledging systematic Nazi policy to exterminate all Jews might give implicit credence to the Zionist claims that

the Jews were indeed a people and a persecuted one, who therefore had the right for statehood.

Denial reflected Palestinian frustration and anger over the refusal of the international community to recognize their national disaster as an equal if not greater tragedy than the Holocaust and acknowledge the “historical sin” of the establishment the State of Israel. Combined with the presentation of the Zionists as a much more powerful force than they had actually been, denial also helped Palestinians to reconcile between the absolute helplessness of the Jews during the world war and their victory over the Palestinians and Arabs only three years later in 1948.

ALLEGED ZIONIST-NAZI COLLABORATION

With the consolidation of the PLO since the 1970s, a semi-official Palestinian narrative seemed to crystallize in PLO-sponsored publications, focusing on the accusation of Zionist-Nazi collaboration. Most important is the book published in 1984 by senior PLO official Mahmud ‘Abbas, known as Abu Mazin, based on his doctoral dissertation.⁹

The thrust of this argument, presented in a special entry in the *Encyclopaedia Palaestina*, asserts that:

The activities of the representatives of the Zionist movement who collaborated with the Nazis in Eastern Europe reflected official Zionist policy, and constituted part of the Zionist plan that sought to establish a racist Zionist entity in the land of Palestine. In order to achieve this goal, the Zionist movement insisted on full collaboration with the Nazis and on giving them any assistance to get rid of the Jews who opposed emigration to Palestine in return for allowing the emigration of the Zionists.¹⁰

Some of those who emphasize the so-called Nazi-Zionist collaboration simultaneously deny the Holocaust or minimize the number of Jews who perished. The most glaring example is ‘Abbas’ thesis, which is devoted to proving this collaboration, but at the same time casts doubts on the 6,000,000 figure and describes it as a Zionist invention, citing French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson and Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*.¹¹

The adoption of the collaboration theme by Palestinians stemmed from several reasons. The stress given by Zionists to the collaboration of the Palestinian leader, the Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husayni, with the Nazis, necessitated a counter accusation, a sort of a mirror image of the Zionist charges. Jewish immigration, particularly from Germany,

during the 1930s had a decisive impact in tipping the balance in favor of the Jews in Palestine. The 1933 “Transfer (Ha’avara) agreement,” signed by Haim Arlozorov, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, and the German government, facilitating Jewish emigration, provided the Palestinians with a case to prove the so-called Nazi-Zionist collaboration. Many writers present this agreement as the cornerstone of the Nazi-Zionist collaboration. They argue that the agreement helped Germany break the boycott organized by non-Zionist Jews and other anti-Fascist groups, thereby inflating the power of Jewish organizations worldwide. Thus while they portray non-Zionist Jews as principled moral persons, they describe the Zionists as cynical manipulators who care only for their narrow interests.¹²

Some Palestinian writers conclude that this alleged collaboration was not only motivated by pragmatism but also by the ideological affinity between Nazism and Zionism, claiming that many Nazi leaders sympathized with Zionism and its goals. Issa Nakhle, for instance, attributed the “mutual admiration” of both movements to the great similarity between them.¹³ Likewise, claims of such collaboration magnified the sophistication and Machiavellian nature of Zionism in explaining Palestinian failures.

The most serious accusation against the Zionists is their cooperation in the extermination of European Jews. Palestinian writers claim that the Zionists agreed to the extermination of non-Zionist Jews or of Jews that were of no use for building the Zionist state, in order to push the remaining Jews, particularly the young and strong, to Palestine. They claim that the Zionists jointly participated with the Nazis in administering the extermination camps and operations. They also charge the Zionists of intentionally thwarting all attempts to save Jews by sending them to other countries except Palestine, since their main goal was not to save Jews but to use them as “raw material” for the Zionist state. Ahmad Jabir, for one, maintains that the Zionists signed secret agreements with the US and British governments to prevent the entry of Jews to these countries. However, since not all Jews could come to Palestine, the Zionists “unhesitatingly condemned them to death.”¹⁴

Another allegation is that most heads of the Judenrats in the Ghettoes were Zionists who, motivated by their Zionist ideology, collaborated with the Nazis in order to save themselves. ‘Abbas and Faris Glubb insist that the Zionists did not organize even one rebellion against the Nazis. Instead, they foiled the resistance attempts of non-Zionists, who were truly anti-Fascist. Since both authors could not ignore the Zionist affiliation of some Ghetto rebellion leaders, most notably Mordechai Anielewicz in Warsaw,

they assert that these individuals acted in violation of the policies of their movements.¹⁵

A writer in the PLO's organ *Filastin al-Thawra* blames the entire Jewish bourgeoisie of collaborating with the Nazis in Germany, Poland, and France. He accuses Jewish leaders in France of attaining the status of "honorary Aryans" for themselves, while helping the Nazis send thousands of other Jews to Auschwitz.¹⁶

Several writers pointed to the activities of Yisrael Kasztner, who headed the Jewish Aid and Rescue committee in Budapest in 1944,¹⁷ as the most prominent manifestation of this so-called collaboration. They all attribute Kasztner's activities to his Zionist ideology which sought to save a few Zionists, who would immigrate to Palestine, while helping the Germans to transfer hundreds of thousands of others to the death camps. As the affair elicited a heated political commotion in Israel in the early 1950s, Glubb and 'Abbas maintain that the Israeli Security Services killed Kasztner in order to "prevent the dissemination of more facts on the collaboration between the Jewish Agency and the Nazis."¹⁸ Since Kasztner came in close contact with Eichmann in 1944, advocates of the collaboration theme allege that the Israelis abducted Eichmann because he was the Nazi official most knowledgeable of the Zionist-Nazi collaboration, and the Israelis wanted to prevent the publication of these embarrassing facts.¹⁹

While accusing the Zionists of collaborating with the Nazis, most writers, who discussed their own history during the war, evade the moral implications raised by the collaboration of Hajj Amin al-Husayni with Nazi Germany. Many excuse Husayni's action as political pragmatism, necessitated by pro-Zionist British policy, and argue that Husayni opposed Nazi ideology and could not be blamed for the Nazi policy *vis-à-vis* the Jews. Historian Bayan al-Hut refutes all accusations against Husayni for taking part in the extermination of Jews as a Zionist slander. She maintains that his activities against Jewish emigration from Europe during the war were not morally wrong but a political necessity, since such emigration meant the dispossession of the Palestinians. Al-Hut expressed understanding for Hitler's fight against the Zionists, but conceded that the means he used were too harsh. Islamist writers go further in justifying Husayni's activities, asserting that the Allies were not better than Hitler and that "had Germany and Italy won the war, Palestine would have been better off than its present fate under Zionist rule." However, appealing to French readers in 1978, senior PLO leader Salah Khalaf condemned Husayni's action as harmful to the Palestinians, saying he took to extremes the Palestinian strategy of seeking external alliance.²⁰

EQUATING ZIONISM AND NAZISM

Another theme, which also emerged in 1945, equated Zionism with Nazism. Testifying to the Anglo-Arab Commission, Jamal Husayni, member of the Arab Higher Committee, said that when he heard David Ben-Gurion speak, it was “as if I heard Hitler’s voice . . . the same tone and spirit.” Ahmad Shuqairi, representative of the Arab Office responsible for publicizing the Arab case in the West, maintained that the Zionists’ claim that they are more capable of developing Palestine is tantamount to the Nazis’ assertion of their right to dominate Europe because they are better organized.²¹

Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians was compared to that of the Nazis, or even worse. A common characteristic of this theme is to add a swastika to Israeli figures in newspaper caricatures or to pictures of Israeli leaders, and using the term Zio-Nazism in Palestinian publications. The implication, often a very explicit one, was that the Palestinians were the true victims of Nazism.²²

Palestinian writers also attempt to establish a resemblance between Zionist and Nazi ideologies. The common Nazi Zionist ideal of racial purity, these writers contend, brought the two movements to believe in their racial superiority and instigated aggression towards other people. The Nazis used the slogan of *Lebensraum* (living space) to justify their aggression, while the Zionists legitimize the conquest of Palestinian lands by the slogan of “secure borders.”²³

The equation of Zionism and Nazism, which remained a dominant theme in the Palestinian discourse, aims, as does Holocaust denial, at undermining the moral base of Zionism, by attributing to it the most commonly abhorred attributes. Moreover, it might also provide moral justification for all the means used in the struggle against it. Criticizing Israeli policy, the Palestinian Authority organ *al-Hayat al-Jadida* claimed that the emergence of Zionism “encouraged the rise of terrorist and racist ideologies such as Nazism,” and then pointed to the “great similarity” between the two movements as both espouse a belief in their racial superiority. This resemblance, it asserted, was also the basis of their mutual hatred. The Jews betrayed Germany during World War I, and the Nazis explained their anti-Semitism as a punishment for this betrayal. The “racist Zionist entity,” it continued, has implemented methods of daily terror which duplicate Nazi terrorism, a similarity that shows the “common roots of Zionist and Nazi thinking.” and also proved the collaboration between the Zionists and the Nazis during the war. The collaboration, in turn, refutes the “false

claims by the Zionists over the massacres that were supposedly committed against the Jews.²⁴

A statement distributed by the Palestinian Information Ministry on 22 April 1996 reiterated the same motif. "While the Israeli government is speaking about the atrocities committed against the Jews at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Dachau," it said, the Palestinians "are still experiencing the legacy of this catastrophe, being applied against them by the ancestors of those Jews" and "our homeland was transformed to a big concentration camp."

THE NAKBA AND THE HOLOCAUST

The representations of the *nakba* and the Holocaust that have undergone simultaneous changes, have been strongly interrelated in the Arab discourse since the establishment of the state of Israel. Jews and Israelis may dislike and reject the comparison between the two. The linear sequence of events: Holocaust—the establishment of Israel—the *nakba*, cannot be ignored and it reinforces the linkage, which is unlikely to fade away. Palestinian-Jordanian writer and commentator Rami Khouri and others are aware of this objection and accept the substantial differences between the Jewish and Palestinian experiences, but maintain that from the Arab perspective "it is politically less compelling."²⁵

The terminology and discourse of the Holocaust had a profound effect on the Palestinian discourse on the *nakba* from its early emergence. In the preface to the Arabic translation of Robert Faurisson's book *The Historical Lie: Were Six Million Jews Killed?*, published in Beirut in 1988, the translator Majid Hillawi bitterly admitted and complained that the Arabs and Palestinians accepted the Holocaust as a criterion for many of their political, cultural, and artistic decisions and repeat "the Zionist lies in order to gain international sympathy" by describing the suffering of the Palestinian people in terms invented by the Jews such as "Holocaust," "massacre," "victimhood," "diaspora," and "memory."²⁶

Other aspects of Holocaust terminology have been cast into the Palestinian discourse on the *nakba*. "Destruction and redemption" (*shoah u-geula*) "Holocaust and rebirth" (*shoah u-tehiya*) turn into "*nakba* and resistance" (*nakba wa-muqawama*) "perseverance and resistance" (*israr wa-nidal*).²⁷ From marking the demise of the Palestinians, in contrast to the establishment of the state of Israel, the *nakba* is being reconstructed as a founding myth to shape the memory of the past as well as serve as a

springboard for a hopeful future. "We do not seek to be captives of history or victims of the past. The Palestinian people have launched a redemptive journey to the future. From ashes of our sorrow and loss, we are resurrecting a nation celebrating life and hope."²⁸ These words of the official Palestinian People's Appeal, issued on 14 May 1998 by the PNA and read by Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish at the end of the march commemorating the 50th anniversary of the *nakba* speak for themselves.

The *nakba* is presented as a unique and acute "unprecedented historical experience," that is "a scar on the forehead of the world and a calamity for humanity."²⁹ Lebanese writer Joseph Samaha went even further, claiming that the *nakba* "is the moral heir of the Holocaust."³⁰

The question of victimization and victimhood, which was crucial for the representation of Jewish experience and identity, is a major component of Palestinian narrative. Scholars of history and memory point to the development of a "culture of victimhood," as part of an ethnic and national identity that involves the recognition and rectification of past evils by, among other things, the payment of compensations and the inclusion in the national memory.³¹ The Palestinian discourse on victimhood, however, preceded this trend which evolved in the 1980s and 1990s. The Palestinians perceived themselves as "the victims of the greatest act of horror of the 20th century."³² Hazim Saghya, a Lebanese editor of the daily *al-Hayat*, contended that the Palestinians were envious of the Jews who became the "model of victimhood" and of their "profitable" tragedy.³³ Hence, the Palestinians strove to gain a "status of victimhood" and recognition of their tragedy. They should require to be added "to the list of Holocaust victims" and be entitled to restitution. This recognition also entails the acknowledgment of the responsibility for the *nakba* by Israel and by the West, which was blamed for hastening to relieve its conscience after the Holocaust by granting a state to the Jews. The Palestinian People's Appeal called upon the world "to undertake not only a recognition of guilt and admission of culpability in relation to the Palestinian people, but also to undertake an active and massive process of rectification to secure the implementation of Palestinian rights."³⁴ Moreover, there is an expectation for an implicit apology by Israel and Britain to the Palestinians, as the apologies made to the Jews by Spain, France, and Portugal and by Pope John Paul II in his 16 March 1998 document "We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah."³⁵ More militant Palestinians called for the establishment of a special tribunal to sentence Israeli "war criminals" for crimes committed against Palestinians.³⁶

Another means of memorialization of the Holocaust is by museums and memorials. Probably agreeing that the subtext of a memorial museum is

“that by virtue of prior suffering, collective existence should be recognized and honored by the wider civic culture,”³⁷ Palestinians became aware that there is no museum or memorial which records their suffering. Hence, Palestinian writer Rasmi Abu ‘Ali and others suggested erecting a Palestinian center to memorialize the Palestinian catastrophe and heroism or an Arab museum for “Zionist victims,” as a suitable answer to all the Jewish memorials “effectively used by the Israelis and Zionists to keep the world’s conscience agitated and troubled.”³⁸

The major effort in this direction was made by a group of Jews and non-Jews in 1995, who launched the Deir Yasin Remembered project, aiming at building a permanent memorial at the site of the former village of Deir Yasin within sight of Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center. “Deir Yasin Remembered has grown out of the voice and vision of those, like Elie Wiesel, who extol the virtues of remembering and never forgetting the suffering of any people,” wrote Daniel McGowan in the preface of his book *Remembering Deir Yassin*. He defined the goal of the project as “the resurrection of . . . [an] important piece of Palestinian history as a way to create a future where Israelis and Palestinians can live together in a just and equitable way.”³⁹ Deir Yasin, which was constructed over fifty years as a symbol of the *nakba*, “a key element in the Palestinian transformation of the events of 1947–49 into a cosmic injustice,”⁴⁰ is becoming the focus of memorialization and another manifestation of the changing perception of the *nakba*. Rami Khouri considers the proposed venture as part of a necessary process of mutual re-humanization and transformation of the current cycle of mutual denial to “a more morally responsible and historically constructive cycle of acknowledgement of the past, understanding, compassion and ultimately, forgiveness and reconciliation.”⁴¹ Khouri’s words on the Deir Yasin Remembered project are perhaps the most explicit expression, linking the reconstruction of the meaning of the *nakba* and the revision of the Holocaust representation in the Arab world. The two processes developed simultaneously and independently but were inter-related, deriving from the peace process and the changing perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

THE NEW APPROACH TO THE HOLOCAUST

Discontent with the Arab representation of the Holocaust gave rise in the mid 1990s to a new trend among Arab intellectuals, calling for a new approach to the Holocaust. The gist of this approach is the acknowledge-

ment of the Jewish suffering as a crime against humanity and the separation of its human aspects from the discussion on the Holocaust and its political repercussions. Theories of conflict resolution promote acknowledgement and forgiveness in achieving lasting reconciliation for contracted conflicts “rooted in psychological dynamic of victimization.”⁴² This is a fundamental assumption in the new Arab approach.

The motif of mutual recognition of the Jewish and the Palestinian tragedies as a paramount element in any reconciliation between the two peoples is central to this new approach, shared by Palestinian, Lebanese, and North African writers and intellectuals. An acknowledgement of its centrality was expressed in the official Palestinian People’s Appeal on the 50th anniversary of the *nakba*. “While we extend a compassionate recognition of the unspeakable Jewish suffering during the horror of the holocaust [sic], we find it unconscionable that the suffering of our people be denied or even rationalized.”⁴³

The prominence of the Holocaust in the West prompted Palestinian professor for comparative English literature Edward Said to reach the conclusion that the Arabs should “accept the Jewish experience in all that it entails of horror and fear . . . This act of comprehension guarantees one’s humanity and resolve that such a catastrophe should never be forgotten and never again recur.” Said claimed that a link exists between what happened to the Jews in World War II and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, and unless this connection is recognized there will be no foundation for coexistence. Although he attached no conditions to the “comprehension and compassion,” he believed that “such an advance in consciousness by Arabs ought to be met by an equal willingness for compassion and comprehension on the part of the Israelis and Israel’s supporters.”⁴⁴

A historical reconciliation does not only mean recognition of past suffering and its importance to the collective memory of each people, but requires the creation of a new narrative which takes into account the histories of both peoples. “While neither people should be expected to change its national narrative, it will be necessary for both to take account of elements of the other’s,” wrote the Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi.⁴⁵ Said propagated the idea of a new joint Israeli-Palestinian narrative “free of ethnocentrism and religious intolerance.”⁴⁶

The deconstruction of this discourse by the conventional terms of Holocaust historiography can easily show that they are charged, in different degrees, with sophisticated motifs of Holocaust denial discourse. Undoubtedly one may find elements of relativization and political instrumentalization. The recognition of the Holocaust is instrumental, and the

persecution of the Jews is acknowledged, but at the same time is linked to the Palestinian tragedy and its acknowledgement by Israel and the West. The comparison between the two, either directly or by inference, involves by definition the relativization of the Holocaust. The recognition of the Holocaust is not only a basis for reconciliation but also a means for the realization of Palestinian national aspirations.

In his response to Bishara's article on the Arabs and the Holocaust, the Israeli historian of the Holocaust Dan Michman, questioned the motives behind those who propagate the need to resist Holocaust denial and derive universal lessons from the Holocaust. Does their attitude reflect a humanistic, liberal, and enlightened approach or an attempt to be politically correct? Is the universalization of the Holocaust the only legitimate interpretation, and is it not itself a manipulation?, he challenged. Michman believed that universalization neutralizes the Holocaust from its Jewish context.⁴⁷ Bishara rejected Michman's interpretation and insisted that his attitude emanates from an unequivocal rejection of Holocaust denial, relativization, and belittling of the Holocaust. Concurrently, he maintained that the Jews carried out the first genocide in History under the Biblical leader Joshua, hinting perhaps of the similarity between Judaism and Nazism.⁴⁸

THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AND THE HOLOCAUST

The establishment of the Palestinian Authority [PA] in 1993 as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process did not constitute a turning point in the Palestinian approach towards the Holocaust. The major traditional themes of the discourse, discussed above, prevailed and continued to serve as a means for the deligitimization of Israel and Zionism. However, Palestinian politicians, writers, and intellectuals took an active role in the crystallization of the new approach toward the Holocaust. The issue of the Holocaust remained a prominent issue on the Palestinian agenda due to actual events, which brought the issue to the fore, such as the unmaterialized visit of PA chairman Yasir 'Arafat to the Washington Holocaust Museum or to internal debates on the Palestinian curriculum.

In mid-January 1998, on the eve of a renewed round of talks between the Palestinians and Israelis in Washington, members of the American Middle East team initiated the idea of 'Arafat's visit to the museum as a gesture of reconciliation that could improve the atmosphere of the Washington talks. 'Arafat was willing to accept the initiative but the visit did not take place since the museum's board of directors refused to extend him an official VIP invitation.⁴⁹ The cancelled visit turned into a subject of debate

in Palestinian and Arab circles. Should 'Arafat visit the Memorial Museum? What does the visit signify? 'Arafat reportedly had a genuine interest in the Holocaust and was keen to visit the museum and witness for himself the woes incurred by the Jews during the war. The visit could give him an opportunity "to share with the Jewish people its historical pains and to bring the two peoples closer to each other," claimed his adviser Ahmad Tibi.⁵⁰ There were those who believed that the Holocaust Museum visit should take place to promote understanding and reconciliation; there were those who conditioned the visit on a mutual gesture of acknowledgement by Israel of the suffering it inflicted on the Palestinians; and those who absolutely rejected the visit. 'Arafat's acceptance of the invitation to visit the Holocaust Museum did not stem from his personal desire to do so but from a wise political calculation, argued *al-Sharq al-Awsat's* editor, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid,⁵¹ but Shafiq al-Hut, Palestinian member of the PLO Council, thought that 'Arafat was ill-advised when he agreed to visit the museum. Al-Hut criticized the Arab writers who believed that changing the Arab position toward the Holocaust would lead to the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to historical reconciliation. From this point of view he embarked on an analysis of "the Arab position" toward the Holocaust in an attempt to prove that the Holocaust became a problem for the Arabs with its politization and sanctification. However, he asserted, no Arab or Palestinian could contest it from a human or religious perspective.⁵²

Palestinians were concerned about the political implications of Pope John Paul II's visit to Israel in March 2000 and his apology to the Jews. PLO representative to the Holy See, 'Afif Safieh, hoped that the Pope's message would not be exploited by the "Israeli state and its powerful machine to grant Israel immunity from legitimate criticism from here to eternity." Safieh, like other Palestinian writers, trusted that the Pope's apology would prompt Israel to conduct its "own self-examination and soul searching," admit the injustices it had inflicted on the Palestinians and issue a historical apology to pave the way for peace and reconciliation.⁵³

The statement of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Shaykh Sabri 'Ikrima, made a day prior to his meeting with the Pope, received the greatest attention. The Holocaust, he said, had been exaggerated by Israel to gain international support. While insisting that he did not deny the Holocaust, he asked why "this Holocaust in particular" was more important? "When it comes to our cause, nobody pays attention," he said. "It's not my fault that Hitler hated the Jews," he stated, adding: "they hate them just about everywhere."⁵⁴

Following the convening of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in Sweden in January 2000, Hamas issued a press release saying that the Forum "aimed at forging history by hiding the truth about the

so-called Holocaust.” The Zionist entity used “psychological and ideological terrorism” through the conference and the “Nazi Holocaust story,” the statement asserted, and called upon states to renounce their “sympathetic understanding of Zionist arrogance and continuing blackmail.”⁵⁵

During a symposium held in April 2000 in Cyprus on “How to Strengthen Peace through Education,” PA Undersecretary of Planning and International Cooperation, Anis al-Qaq, favored including the subject of the Holocaust in the PA school curriculum.⁵⁶ His remarks provoked angry reactions, as well as outright rejection. Reiterating a traditional Arab argument, Musa al-Zu‘but, chairman of the Education Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) denied any attempt to include the history of the Holocaust in the curriculum. “The Holocaust has been exaggerated in order to present the Jews as victims of a great crime,” he said. “If the purpose is to express sympathy, this is useless for us since we are the ones who suffered as a result.” Another PLC member and Fatah activist, Hatim ‘Abd al-Qadir, considered teaching the Holocaust “a great danger to the developing Palestinian mentality.” The Jews, he said, should learn first about the Palestinian disaster, which is still alive, whereas “the so-called Holocaust has already been moved into the museum of history. If such a decision [about teaching the Holocaust] is made, it will undoubtedly ruin the Palestinian dream and aspirations. It will entirely obliterate the past, present and future of the Palestinians.”⁵⁷

Palestinian spokesmen presented the widespread belief in the Holocaust “myth” in the West as an indication of Jewish control of the world media at the expense of the Palestinians whose own tragedy did not get comparable recognition. The international Jewish media extensively exploited Hitler’s deeds, wrote Sayf ‘Ali al-Jarwan in *al-Hayat al-Jadida*: “The truth is that the Jewish deportation is a false myth called by the Jews ‘Holocaust’ and exploited by them to create feelings toward them . . . Although Hitler’s campaign against the Jews inflicted on them a degree of oppression it offered them a certain service which they still continue to reap its fruits.”⁵⁸ The Jewish preoccupation with the Holocaust was described by Professor Hasan Agha on PA TV as a profitable investment, in which the Jews have had great experience since the time of the Merchant of Venice.⁵⁹

In the Palestinian TV program “Pages from our History,” broadcast on 29 November 2000, the anniversary of the 1947 UN resolution on the partition of Palestine, ‘Isam Sisalim, history lecturer at the Islamic University in Gaza, considered an expert on Jews and Judaism, referred to the Holocaust as a lie. “No Chelmo, no Dachau, no Auschwitz! [They] were disinfecting sites.” He accused the Jews of inventing the lie of extermination in order to

justify the establishment of Israel, a “foreign entity, implanted as a cancer” in the Arab land. “They always portrayed themselves as victims, and they made a Center for Heroism and Holocaust. Whose heroism? Whose Holocaust? Heroism is our nation’s, the holocaust was against our people.”⁶⁰ An article published in *Palestine Time*, raised a similar accusation, describing Zionist Jews as “God’s Lying People,” whose lies are readily accepted in the West, “where the mass media are controlled by Jews.”⁶¹

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the Holocaust was and still is a crucial and central component in the reconstruction of the Palestinian national narrative. In the wake of the peace process and the globalization era in the early 1990s the perception of the Holocaust and the *nakba* seemed to change, but the process was nipped in the bud. The eruption of the crisis in Palestinian-Israeli relations in September 2000 reinforced the themes of Holocaust denial and renewed the sanctioning of the traditional Arab approach to the Holocaust, striving to delegitimize Israel, Zionism, and the Jews.

NOTES

1. ‘Azmi Bishara, “The Arabs and the Holocaust. The Analysis of a Problematic Conjunctive Letter,” *Zmanim* 53 (Summer 1995) 54–71. [Hebrew]

2. Joseph Nevo’s article “The Attitude of Arab Palestinian Historiography toward the Germans and the Holocaust”, in *Remembering for the Future* (Oxford, 1989) Vol. II 2241–2250 provides only a partial coverage of the topic. Ilan Gur Zeev’s discussion on 98–122 “The Palestinian Control of the Memory of the Shoa and Nakba,” in his *Philosophy Politics and Education in Israel* (Haifa, 1999) [Hebrew] minimizes the dominant more negative aspects of the Palestinian discourse and overemphasizes the new approach discussed below.

3. *Al-Difa’*, 23 May, 30 July, 7, 15, 29 November, 12 December 1945.

4. *Filastin*, 12 December 1945.

5. *Al-Difa’*, 19 January 1945, 13, 14 January, 24 March 1946.

6. *Al-Difa’*, 31 March 1946.

7. *Al-Difa’*, 9, 19, 30 July, 7 November, 31 December 1945, 9 May, 15 August 1946.

8. *Filastin*, 17, 23 May 1945.

9. Mahmud ‘Abbas, *al-wajh al-akhr al-‘alaqat al-siriyya bayn al-naziyya wal-sahuniyya* (Amman, 1981); Faris Yahya [Glubb], *Zionist Relations with Nazi Germany* (Beirut, 1978); Mahmud al-Labadi, “Jawla fi al-‘aql al-i‘lami al-Sahyuni,” *Shu’un Filastiniyya*, September 1979, p. 123; Yusuf Haddad, “al-tmathul wal-ta’awun bayn al-sahyuniyya wal-naziyya,” *Shu’un Filastiniyya* No. 209 (August

1990), p. 69; Mahmud 'Abd al-'Al, "al-jusur al-sirriyya," *al-Hurriyya*, 11 February 1990.

10. "Al-naziyya wal-sahyuniyya," in *Encyclopaedia Palaestina* (Damascus, 1974) Vol. 4. See also Issa Nakhle, *Encyclopaedia of the Palestinian Problem* (New York, 1991) Vol. II:892ff.

11. Abbas, *al-wajh*, B, G, 30. Needless to say, Hilberg gives makes no such assertion. See a similar contradiction in Rafiq Shakir Natsheh, *al-isti'mar wa-filastin: Isra'il mashru' isti'mari* (Amman, 1984), 147–151.

12. Glubb, *Zionist*, 21ff; *Encyclopaedia Palaestina*, 1974; Natsheh, *al-Isti'mar*, 152; 'Abd al-'Al, "al-Jusur," 11 February 1990; 'Abbas, *al-wajh*, 13, 22; Haddad, "al-tamathul," 69.

13. *Encyclopaedia Palaestina*, "al-naziyya wal-sahyuniyya;" 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, "al-ibada al-naziyya lil-yahud wa-asbabih," *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, 183 (June) (1983) 68–69; 'Abd al-'Al, "al-jusur," 28 January 1990; Nakhle, *Encyclopaedia* Vol. II:873–74; 'Abbas, *al-wajh*, 18–19.

14. Haddad, "al-tamathul," 72; Masiri, "al-ibada," 69; Glubb, *Zionist*, 51ff; Ahmad Jaber, "khulafa' wa-'umala' al-gestapo," *Filastin al-Thawra*, 13 December 1986; 'Abd al-'Al, "al-jusur," *al-Hurriyya*, 28 January 1990.

15. Glubb, *Zionist*, 37–50; 'Abbas, *al-wajh*, 172ff.

16. "Bank Ferenheim mawwala su'ud al-haraka al-naziyya," *Filastin al-Thawra*, 1 June 1985.

17. For a discussion of this case, see Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale*, (New Haven, 1994), 145–171.

18. Natsheh, *al-isti'mar*, 150–151; Nakhle, *Encyclopedia*, 875; Glubb, *Zionist*, 57–64 and the *Encyclopaedia Palaestina* "al-naziyya wal-sahyuniyya," citing him, Abbas, *al-wajh*, 56–57.

19. Glubb, *Zionist*, 65–68; Haddad, "al-tamathul," 71; 'Abd al-'Al, "al-Jusur," 28 January 1990.

20. 'Ali Muhafaza, *al-'alaqat al-almaniyya al-filastiniyya min insha' mutraniyya al-quds . . . wahata nihayat a-harb al-'alamiyya al-thaniyya, 1841–1945* (Beirut, 1981), 259, 269; Bayan Nuwayhad al-Hut, *al-qiyadat wal-mu'assasat al-siyasiyya fi filastin, 1917–1948* (Beirut, 1981), 460–62; Mufid Abdul Hadi, *The Other Side of the Coin: A Native Palestinian Tells his Story* (Nablus, 1998), 61; Ahmad Nawfal and 'Awni Jadu' al-'Abidi, *Safahat min hayat al-hajj amin al-husayni mufti filastin al-akbar wa-qa'id harakatih al-wataniyya* (Zarqa', 1985), 134–36; Abou Iyad, *Palestiniens Sans Patrie* (Jerusalem, 1979), 63–64 [Hebrew].

21. 'Azriel Karlibach, *Anglo-American*, (Tel-Aviv, 1946), Vol. I:356, Vol. II:486 [Hebrew]; see also *al-Difa'*, 1 January, 28 February, 8 April 1946; *al-Sha'b*, 9 September 1947.

22. *Ma'ariv*, 16 April 1984 citing Palestinian participants in an Israeli-Palestinian meeting held at Harvard University; *Filastin al-Thawra*, 27 December 1992; Mustafa Ikhmis, *al-Sahyu-naziyya: qatiluha qabla an taqtulakum* (Bethlehem, 2000). See also the frequent use of the term in the notices of the Drive the Zionists Into the Sea association that appeared in msanews@msanews.mynet.net.

23. Hasan Sa'ib, *Zionism and Racism* in PLO Research Center: Palestine Essays No. 2, (Beirut, 1968); Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya, "safahat min ta'rikh al-qadiyya al-filastiniyya hata sanat 1949," Jam'iyat al-kharijiyyin fi al-Kuwait, *al-qadiyya al-filastiniyya fi arba'in 'aman bayna drawat al-waqi' wa-tumu'at al-mustaqbal* (Kuwait, n.d.); *Filastin al-Thawra*, 30 April 1983; Marwan Darwish, *al-Judhur al-ta'rikhiyya li-hizb al-likud (al-takatul)* (Nablus, 1996), 10.
24. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 3 September 1997.
25. *Jordan Times*, 27 January 1998.
26. Robert Faurisson, *The Historical Lie: Were Six Million Jews Killed?* (Beirut: 1988), 18; Hazim Saghiya, *Defending Peace* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1997), 69.
27. *Al-Hayat*, 19 April 1998; *al-Quds*, 15 May 1998.
28. *The Palestinian People's Appeal on the 50th Anniversary of the Catastrophe "Al-Nakba,"*—www.pna.org/mininfo/nakba.
29. *Al-Quds*, 15 May 1998.
30. *Al-Hayat*, 21 May 2000.
31. Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," *History and Memory*, 5(2) (1993), 136–7; Guli Neeman-Adar, "A History of Memory: The Changing Status of the Holocaust in the Conscious of the Jews in the United States," *Zmanim*, 57 (winter 1996–7), 19 [Hebrew]; *New York Review of Books*, 8 April 1999, 6.
32. Rashid Khalidi, "A Universal Jubilee? Palestinians 50 Years after 1948," *Tikkun*, 13 (2) (March/April 1998), 54–6; Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (New York, 1994), 121; *al-Abram Weekly*, 14 May 1998.
33. Hazim Saghiya, *Defending Peace*, 67–8.
34. *The Palestinian People's Appeal*—www.pna.org/mininfo/nakba; see also *Al-Hayat*, 20, 21 January, 15 May 1998; *al-Abram Weekly*, 14 May 1998; *Jordan Times*, 9 May 1998; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 27 January—Mideast Mirror, 27 January, 11, 18, 25 May 1998; *al-Quds*, 16 February, 15 May 1998; "1948–1998 in the Eyes of Two Peoples," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, V(2) (1998), 24, 31, 33.
35. *Al-Abram*, 22 March 1998; *Al-Quds*, 24 April 1998; Interview with Rashid Ghannoushi, 10 February—MSANEWS, 12 February 1998.
36. *Al-Hayat*, 28 April 1998; *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 11 May 1998.
37. Charles Maier, *Ibid.*, 145.
38. *Al-Hayat*, 4 February 1998; *al-Abram*, 27 May 1998; Rashid Khalidi, *Tikkun*, 56.
39. Daniel A. McGowan and Marc H. Ellis (eds.), *Remembering Deir Yassin. The Future of Israel and Palestine* (New York, 1998).
40. Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, *Palestinians. The Making of a People* (New York, 1993), 152.
41. *Jordan Times*, 22 April 1997; *Ha'aretz*, 24 April 1997.
42. George E. Irani, "Islamic Mediation Techniques for Middle East Conflicts," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, 3(2) (June 1999) (INTERNET edition).

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44. *Al-Hayat*, 5 November 1997; *al-Ahram Weekly*, 6 November 1997; *Ha'aretz*, 20 February 1998; *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August–September 1998.
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46. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 15 January 1998.
47. Dan Michman, Responses, *Zmanim*, 54 (Winter 1995) 119.
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50. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, *al-Nabar*, 21 January 1998; Arol (Arabia on line), Haitham Ibrahim, "Arafat's Holocaust Museum Visit Lopsided Gesture"—www.Arabia.com.
51. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 22, 24, 25 January 1998.
52. *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, 6 February 1998.
53. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 20, 23 March 2000; *al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 March 2000.
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55. Hamas Press Release, "On the Stockholm Conference concerning the So-called Jewish Holocaust," 3 February 2000; Reuven Paz, "Palestinian Holocaust Denial," *PeaceWatch* 255, 21 April 2000.
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57. *Al-Risala*, 13 April; *al-Istiqlal*, 20 April 2000.
58. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 2 July 1998; this article aroused a strong Jewish protest. See above.
59. Agence France Presse, 29 August 1997.
60. PATV, 29 November 2000—Palestinian Media Watch (PMW); *Jerusalem Post*, 5 December 2000.
61. *Palestine Times*, 114, December 2000. See a similar theme in an article by Taysir Khalaf, a Palestinian writer living in Doha, in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 14 November 2000.