



Beyond the Destruction of the Other's Collective Memory

Blueprints for a Palestinian/Israeli Dialogue

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THE DESTRUCTION of the collective memory of the Other, through the construction of one's own, is a central element in the formation of national identities. Violence, direct as well as symbolic, plays thereby a crucial part, as collective memories are produced, reproduced, disseminated and consumed within concrete historical power relations, interests, and conceptual possibilities and limitations. In the case of Palestine/Israel, control of the collective memory is part of the internal and external violence each of the rival collectives applies to secure its reconstruction. That is, the way the two sides to the conflict construct their collective identity is a dialectical process whose impelling force is the total negation of the Other. Within this dialectic, each side sees itself as a sole victim while totally negating the victimization of the Other. The violence used in order to conquer the centers of power relations and dynamics aims at positioning more 'effectively' one's own narrative, interests, values, symbols, goals and criteria, while at the same time ensuring that those of the Other are marginalized, excluded or destroyed. Incommensurability has the upper hand and dialogue has no chance of finding a starting point. Collective self-constitution, negation of the legitimacy of the Other's otherness, victimizing the Other and refusing to acknowledge the Other's suffering become inseparably bound up with each other. The self-proclaimed victimhood, the refusal to acknowledge the evil inflicted on the Other and the insistence on being sole victim are fused into the kind of practice which reflects the position of the Other. In the case of Israeli/Palestinian coexistence, the struggle over control of the memory of victimization is a matter of life and death, and

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suffering and death – as actuality and as memory – are philosophical, political and existential issues.

Palestinian Mainstream Responses to the Holocaust Memory

A synchronic and diachronic reconstruction of Palestinian intellectual responses to the Holocaust enables us to identify four major attitudes. These, naturally, vary and coexist while remaining fluid. There is also an historical change in the self-positioning of each of these responses in Palestinian intellectual self-reflection and in cultural politics.

The few scholars who have looked into the question of the Holocaust/Nakbah representation among the Palestinians agree that responses to the Holocaust move from total denial of the event, through indifference towards it, to acknowledging that it happened while minimizing its dimensions and its moral significance, to full acknowledgment not just of the event but also of its universal moral implications as a unique stage in the history of human evil (Bishara, 1995: 56–74; Nevo, 1989: 2241–50). Until recently the main development had been the move away from a total denial towards acknowledgment with minimization of its moral significance, as is manifest in the works of journalists, historians and political writers ever since the Nakbah of 1948.

Zionism has worked systematically on mystifying the Holocaust and structuring modes of control over the representation of its memory; it has become a salient feature of the Zionist educational system. At the same time, Zionism insists on denying the Nakbah and refuses to admit Israel's role in the Palestinian suffering as victimizer. The 1953 Knesset made control of the Holocaust memory a matter of law, and a special governmental agency was created, *Mosad Yad Vashem*, to protect, represent and police the official memory of the dead as part of the Zionist narrative to which *galut* (life in Diaspora) inexorably leads to *geula* (redemption), and *shoah* (Holocaust) to *tekuma* (resurrection) (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a: 161–77).

On the Palestinian side, the equation between the Nazi regime and the crimes it committed on the one hand, and the state of Israel and the way it has treated the Palestinians, on the other, recurs in many studies. Israel is often seen as a 'Nazi-Zionist entity' and its practices characterized as 'Nazi Zionist crimes' (Rabin and Horovitz, 1993).

Adding to Palestinian unease in dealing with the Holocaust memory is the counter-equation Israelis have made of Palestinian nationalism, with Nazism embodied in the persona of the Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and his notorious handshake with Hitler. The Mufti spent part of the war years in Nazi Germany and served for a while as a main propagandist voice for the Arab world.

The way Palestinians refer to this chapter in their history reflects the general attitude towards the Other among Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals: a total negation of the otherness of the Other as well as the realization of how an instrumentalist attitude towards historical knowledge does service in the present constitution of collective identity. When some

Palestinian historians admit that it was a mistake for the Mufti to work so closely with the Nazis, they add that Hajj Amin should not be judged so severely as the Holocaust occurred in a period of Palestinian history in which they themselves suffered growing defeat and despair (Alush, 1967: 151). Moreover, the Mufti was a product of his time. As Naji Alush states, the sympathy of the masses throughout the Arab world was with the enemies of French and British colonialism. Recently, a more critical approach of the Mufti's actions has emerged.

Some Palestinian historians concede that the Fascist ideology itself attracted some young radicals in the Arab world as well (Alush, 1967: 151–3), but in the case of large segments of the Arab world in general, and in that of the Mufti in particular, most see the pro-Nazi attitude as 'pragmatism': hatred of Britain rather than love for the Nazi regime (Mattar, 1988: 99–107).

In the 1980s, as it became quite unacceptable both among Western and Eastern intellectuals, Arab historians turned their back on this kind of apologetics. When writing on the episode, they began to use a discourse similar to the one Israeli historians employ when discussing the relations between Jewish leaders of the Stern Gang and the Nazis, or when writing about those Zionist emissaries who negotiated with the Germans on behalf of the Jewish Agency. 'The Mufti', writes Ali Muhafaza, 'was willing to cooperate with the devil' (Muhafaza, 1981: 259).

Admittedly there is another trend according to which, since the Mufti had no involvement in the extermination of the Jews, there is no room here for postulating a moral dilemma or adjudicating wrong-doing. In the assessment of most Palestinian historians, the Nazi Germans simply exploited Hajj Amin for their own purposes (Muhafaza, 1981: 268–70).

The whole problem of the Mufti's cooperation with the Nazis was pushed to one side, partly because Israeli biographies of the Mufti began appearing at around the same time, which accepted the Palestinian perspective on the Mufti's stay in Germany and attributed the same pragmatic nature to his activities, and partly because of growing criticism of the Mufti altogether in the Palestinian historiographical milieu (Al-Ghuri, 1973, II: 181–9).

Denial was replaced by a strategic acknowledgment of the Holocaust and the Jewish suffering, which questioned the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy and did its best to normalize it. As the power to tell the story and to eliminate the counter-narrative is an integral part of the actual military and political struggle over non-symbolic resources such as land and political power, the war over the land, the struggle over the legitimization of sovereign national existence and that over who is the victim and who is the victimizer became inseparable parts of the overall symbolic and military confrontation between the two collectives. By the same token, since it was regarded as a vital element in the ability of each side to eliminate the Other, or the Other's legitimacy, control of the collective memory and the destruction of the Other's memory have become central elements in each of the rival education systems.

Normalizing the Holocaust entailed a continued refusal to acknowledge the scale and moral significance of the Holocaust (Nevo, 1989). Some Palestinians, among them Azmi Bishara, have criticized this attitude as an educational and political mistake (Bishara, 1995). Indeed, it seems that until recently there has been no analysis of the systematic extermination by Nazi Germany of the Jews or a reflection on the horrendous magnitude of the killings; in short, there is still today in many Palestinian intellectual circles, a consistent effort to marginalize, if not normalize, the event, and to present it as a Zionist exaggeration (Hadawi and John, 1960: I, 349–51).

We hardly find any systematic study on the subject during the 1970s and 1980s in the central Palestinian academic stages (Nevo, 1989) and even more popular literacy on this subject is fragmented and disoriented. It seems to us that this silence and avoidance of addressing the challenge of the Holocaust is an important positioning to be critically addressed. At the same time, as part of the same attitude, there was a dominant trend which presented the Palestinians as the real Jews and as the ultimate victims of western history. This was in effect a way of appropriating the moral capital the Jews had gained through their suffering. Tahir Al-Matukal, the general secretary of the Palestinian writers, and himself a well-known Palestinian poet, conveyed this idea as follows:

Many years ago you were collapsing under the murderers of Dachau./ Your father was slaughtered in the Warsaw Ghetto./ You suffered the agony of your sister's rape at Auschwitz./ Have you forgotten? How could you constitute a new Auschwitz in the center of the desert?/ How did you dare to transfer a people from its land? How did you dare to burn the children?/ Have you forgotten? (Al-Matukal, 1989: 63)

In a similar way, Mahmud Darwish addresses the very same connection between the use the Jews in Israel have made of the Holocaust memory and the uncompromising struggle the Palestinians are waging over the land and its identity. Darwish warns against coming out with such declarations as 'I am a Jew', as Kamil Bulata had done. In his eyes, this way of self-identification is but another aspect of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian identity. The danger, as far as Darwish is concerned, is that this dialectics could make the Israeli aggressor appear to have the upper hand in the battle over who is the ultimate victim:

As he needs to load his memory with the armed legend and the uniform of the victim, the Israeli has to empty the Palestinian memory from its ties to the Arab place, history and space, and equip him with the newly developed Jewish consciousness of the time. It won't take long and the Israeli will also claim to be the authentic Palestinian. (Darwish, 1987: 46–7)

But is the Israeli memory really so 'empty' that it needs to be loaded further? Does it not have its own content of suffering and victimhood? While safeguarding Palestinian collective memory from the destructive means of the

Other side, Darwish seems to ignore the otherness of the Israeli and the dialectics of its/his collective memory, which necessarily collides with the legitimacy and needs of the Palestinian otherness.

Recently there has been a call to abandon the way of refusal and to overcome the inability to acknowledge the Holocaust and its universal implications. It was first heard among Palestinians in Israel who were members of the Israeli Communist Party, such as the writer Emil Habibi.

When he spoke out in favor of a Palestinian acknowledgment of the Holocaust and its universal moral implication Habibi did so from a humanistic perspective. Habibi's dialectical presentation of the Jewish Holocaust memory becomes important when we want to clarify the special link that connects Palestinians and Israelis, and challenge the ethnocentrism on both sides which enables the victimization of the Other while maintaining the self-conception of victim. Habibi's was a general Palestinian conception in which the Holocaust is acknowledged as a Jewish tragedy which the Jews are being compensated for at the expense of the Palestinians. Habibi explicitly states that one cannot equate the Nazi extermination of the Jews and the Israeli expulsion of the Palestinians. He then brings up another, new notion, according to which Palestinians too are the victims of the Nazi regime since they were victimized by a second generation of Nazi victims who not only did not learn the lesson of the Holocaust, but defiled the Holocaust memory by perpetrating similar crimes against the Palestinians (Habibi, 1986: 27).

While Habibi appears to be one of the first Palestinians to confront the question of the Palestinian attitude towards the Holocaust memory head on, two Palestinian intellectuals, Edward Said and Azmi Bishara, and several authors in the wider Arab world as well, have since gone even further in criticizing past attitudes and are now developing a new approach that has led not only to the universalization of the Holocaust memory, but also to some conclusions that bear heavily on the examination of the Holocaust/Nakbah dialectics. We will focus on the works of Said and Bishara for the simple reason that, up until now, they have been the only Palestinian intellectuals to challenge the traditional Palestinian reaction to the Holocaust.

As he has done before in his earlier works, Said has written recently that the full cost of the Jewish Holocaust is to be seen in a kind of moral handicap for the Jews with regard to their dispossession of the Palestinian people (Said, 1997). Said's depiction of the Zionist instrumentalization of the Holocaust could not be more apt. The Zionist, and later Israeli, educational network instrumentalized the Holocaust memory in the service of practical needs and in order to justify or veil a systematic immoral treatment of the Palestinians and other Others. Elsewhere we have called this kind of revivification of the dead Israel's 'evil industry' (Gur-Ze'ev, 1999).

For Edward Said and Azmi Bishara, their familiarity with neo-Marxist and postmodern discourse, and, in the case of Said, the pivotal role he has

played in shaping the postcolonialist approach, is behind their deconstructive attitude to the Palestinian collective memory, which enabled them to further the deconstruction begun by Habibi of the Palestinian attitude to the Holocaust memory. Similarly, post-Zionist scholarship, not least under the influence of Said himself, has developed a critical deconstructive approach towards the Israeli collective memory (Gur-Ze'ev, 1999; Pappé, 1995: 66–90).

Openly criticizing the Palestinian tendency to marginalize the Holocaust, both Said and Bishara in recent publications argue that, for the Palestinians themselves, confronting the subject of the Holocaust memory within the Palestinian context is of vital importance. In this they are supported by the Lebanese writer, Hamza Sarayah and the Sudanese Salih Bashir, who in the columns of *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Ahram* have taken a similar stance (Sarayah and Bashir, 1997).

The new approach to the Holocaust memory that they represent contains four possible new avenues for future Palestinian treatment of the issue at hand. All four directions can be found as well in the works of those few Israelis who recently have begun to deconstruct their side's instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory.

The first direction is one that adopts a critical, albeit empathic, stance towards the past Palestinian and Arab denial and minimization of the Holocaust (Bishara, 1996: 102–7). In the case of Bishara, the empathy follows directly from the Arab nationalism he claims himself beholden to. Thus, it is important to him to convince his audience that a different approach is not necessarily tantamount to an a- or anti-nationalist approach. His commitment to the nationalist discourse appears also when he writes about the question of Jewish nationhood. Bishara declares that there is no such a thing as a Jewish nation – as also stated in the Palestinian charter, Judaism is a religion, not a nation.

Bishara's particular angle, as a supporter of Arab nationalism, not only Palestinian nationalism, leads him to examine not just Palestinian attitudes, but also, and mainly, other Arab positions. From our point of view, Bishara's parameters distance him from confronting the dialectics of the Holocaust/Nakbah memories head on, a distancing which leaves him within an ethnocentric framework of discussion.

Thus, from within the national perspective, Bishara directs a systematic and forceful deconstruction at a range of Palestinian and Arab responses: from total disregard to support of the Nazi solution to the Jewish question (Bishara, 1995: 60–4). According to him, the Arab response to the Holocaust was not framed by anti-Semitic tendencies, but rather by its reaction to the Zionist project. That is, for Bishara, the past denial of the Holocaust by the Arabs formed a natural response to the instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory by the Zionist movement and, later, Israel.

As to the particular Palestinian attitude, Bishara attributes the roots of the Palestinian denial to the necessity for them to come to grips with the European crime before it becomes possible to discuss their own tragedy.

The Holocaust memory is that other memory, more awesome, more horrific, through which the Palestinians are expected to deal with their own memory. No wonder that one of the more effective ways of dealing with the predicament this created, claims Bishara, was to deny the authenticity of that other memory.

Bishara's main point is that, in the 1950s, the Palestinians developed an anti-colonialist counter-prism to help them deal with the Holocaust memory: the Holocaust was denied and seen as a Zionist invention, as part of a general Palestinian perception of Israel as omnipotent and a crypto power. Israel was conceived as so powerful that it could engineer a myth of such horrendous content for its own purposes.

Anti-Holocaust attitudes, prevalent among radical circles in the Arab world at the same period, were somewhat different. Here, the treatment of the Holocaust was an integral part of the production of anti-Jewish literature, consisting of a history of Jewish evil that found its culmination in the crimes committed against the Palestinian people. The Holocaust was not so much denied as it was explained as something the Jews had brought upon themselves. This was hardly a coherent stance: at times the event had never occurred, at times it was minimized and at times it was even justified (Nevo, 1989).

Bishara shows how the Arab denial and minimizing of the importance of the Holocaust favor, rather than harm Israel in its struggle while it cultivates the image of the victim (Bishara, 1995: 56). The explicit argument of Bishara is that acknowledging the Holocaust is instrumentally justified for the Palestinian cause.

Thus, Said, too, strongly criticizes the traditional Palestinian response to the Holocaust. He views it in the context of lost opportunities to develop a different approach:

Perhaps the Eichmann trial was useful to the Arab side during the psychological battles of the 1960s as a way of exposing Israeli callousness to the Arabs, and not especially as an attempt to acquaint Arab readers with details of the Jewish experience. (Said, 1997)

Said warns particularly against any cynical instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory of the kind exercised by the Zionist movement and the state of Israel. In claiming this, Said is joined by a small number of critical Israeli writers (Ben-Amos, 1988; Ben-Naftali, 1993: 57–78; Diner, 1986: 20–3, 1996: 50–3; Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a).

Implicit in Said's thesis is the argument that the Palestinian instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory in the past as in the present makes them as guilty as Ben-Gurion and Netanyahu, who have justified Israeli crimes against Palestinians on the basis of the Holocaust memory. As a recent example of the cynical exploitation he deplores, Said refers to the recruitment of Roger Garudy to the Palestinian cause in Europe, which in Said's eyes is entirely counter-productive. Like Bishara, Said claims that

such acts not only work to diminish the universal lesson to be learned from the Holocaust memory control, but also obstruct rather than serve the Palestinian cause and the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians (Said, 1998).

As to Said's demand to the Palestinians to acknowledge and learn from the universal lessons of the Holocausts, we may see it as generated either by his modernist commitment to humanism or by his postmodernist commitment to overcome collective identities and ideological frameworks.

Said, however, also reveals a pragmatic concern for counter-productive Palestinian conduct. As does Azmi Bishara, for example, when he inveighs against allowing a stage in *Al-Hayat* for David Irving as counter-productive exploitation, and joins earlier calls to the paper to refrain in the future from publishing the work of someone who is a Holocaust denier, a psychopath and anti-Semite (*Al-Hayat*, 1 and 2 August 1992).

Said and Bishara both voice their dissatisfaction with the more recent writings on the Holocaust among other Arab and Palestinian writers. Denial and minimization have been replaced by a repressive tendency to 'exile' the Jewish Holocaust from the general discussion of the horrors of Nazism. Thus, they find in Palestinian and Arab writings total condemnations of Nazism, or for that matter, condemnation of race ideologies, but without any mention of the historical context in which these politics had been practiced against the Jews. Bishara points out that even Charles Issawi, an established expert on race theories, nowhere in his studies mentions a link between general race ideologies and past practices against the Jews of Europe (Bishara, 1995: 67).

What preoccupies Bishara is that, while in the 1990s there has been a tendency in the Arab world to accept the moral and universal lessons of the Second World War, these were not applied to the Jewish Holocaust. Even humanists in the Arab world, remarks Bishara, are still afraid of mentioning the Holocaust, since they feel it may harm the general Arab interest.

The second direction singled out by Said and Bishara is a continuous recognition and criticism of the way Israel and Zionism have instrumentalized the Holocaust. But, unlike in the past, this is not done in a way so as to minimize the Holocaust memory. In his *The Politics of Dispossession* Said has already explained how functional the Holocaust memory is for the young state of Israel by showing how the meaning of the 'redemption' changed in Zionism after the Holocaust. Palestine became the refuge, an affirmative action for those dispossessed Jews not massacred by the Nazis (Said, 1994: 34).

Nevertheless, Said does not object to the rejection of the Zionist instrumentalization of the Holocaust, but urges the Palestinians to concentrate on defending present-day Palestinian politics from the defamation cast upon them by Israel and its supporters in the West in the name of the Holocaust memory. He recalls that when Barbara Walters interviewed Arafat in 1979, she acted as a prosecutor bent on exposing Arafat's latent Nazism, by referring again and again to the PLO charter's vow to destroy Israel. 'She was,

in fact, raising the specter of the Holocaust before her audience's eyes' (Said, 1994: 66).

But even these and other examples of American Jewish instrumentalization of the Holocaust memory for contemporary political purposes – such as the elevation of the Jewish community's suffering above that of the African-Americans and Indians (whose history of suffering has not been given a museum such as the Jews now have in Washington) – should not diminish the universality of the Holocaust memory. In fact, Said goes even further and adds that, despite the occurrence in the past, before and after the Holocaust, of mass massacres and ethnic cleansing, 'the uniqueness of what had been done to the Jews, in terms of our horror and collective human guilt, should not be minimized' (Said, 1997: 2).

Sarayah and Bashir, mentioned above, show in their own work how the world at large has succeeded in facing its conduct during the Holocaust, more courageously, that is, without succumbing to Israeli manipulation of the Holocaust memory. Thus France brought Maurice Papon to trial and the Republic's president admitted that France bears responsibility for sending Jews to their death; the Swiss are now willing to examine the behavior of their banking system during the war; the Catholic Church has issued an apology for its role in the Holocaust; and Germans began to look in the mirror when they decided to buy Daniel Goldhagen's book. But in all these places, there is nonetheless strong criticism of Sharon's Israel as a stubborn, racist and occupying state (Sarayah and Bashir, 1997).

A third new avenue of examination offered in these works is the reassessment of the Mufti's connection with the Nazis. Bishara criticizes the Israeli historiographical attempt to create an alliance between the Mufti and the Nazis in the collective Western and Israeli memories and sets out to put the episode within a different context. That is, Zionism and not Nazism was the main issue for the Palestinians; this was true in the past and is true today. Nazism and Fascism were marginal and quite often misunderstood phenomena for the Palestinians, including for the Mufti during his honeymoon with Hitler. Unlike Hajj Amin al-Husayni there were members of the Palestinian political and social elites who still hoped, during the war years, that Britain would adopt a more pro-Palestinian policy.

The final avenue that has opened in the new approach we are outlining here is the beginning of a search into the possible connection between Holocaust memory and Nakbah memory as part of a more general effort to find a basis for a viable Israeli–Palestinian coexistence. Admittedly any sensitivity to this connection, not to mention its critical analysis, is almost totally absent in the Israeli and Palestinian intellectual discourse and cultural politics.

Bishara and Said, each from his own particular location, are aware of the difficulties inherent in such a dialogue. Bishara circumvents the need to face the dialectics of the Holocaust/Nakbah memory constitution, by focusing on a pragmatic, national, approach to the question. Hence, he sees a new Palestinian attitude to the Holocaust memory as leading to a

Palestinian recognition of the state of Israel, notwithstanding the unjust events on which the state was founded; it cannot and should not be discredited and it has its needs and rights.

Bishara's, in a way optimistic, conclusion is that the principal step to be taken in order to enter a substantial dialogue is a Palestinian recognition of the legitimacy of Israel, and, of course, a complementary Israeli recognition. Moreover, his partner in such a dialogue is the essential Israeli, be he a soldier or a politician. Said, on the other hand, not only is more cautious but also seeks a dialogue with Jewish, that is, not only Israeli, intellectuals. Said warns against a head-long dive into a dialogue that can only be of the most sensitive nature, and suggests beginning it among Arabs and Jews outside Palestine, who 'are capable of fully appreciating and, in a sense, transcending' the tragedies of each other (Said, 1997: 3).

For us, one of the most impressive and constructive conclusions emerging from Bishara and Said's journey into the past is their clear assertion that the Holocaust and the Nakbah cannot be equated. In the words of Said, it is foolish to equate mass extermination with mass expulsion; they are not the same; neither can the one justify the other. Neither event should be minimized. In fact, argues Said, the equation, so common in Arab and Palestinian literature, is one of the main reasons why the Palestinians have not been able to cope effectively with the Israeli instrumentalization of the Holocaust.

Bishara too argues strongly against any comparison. The instrumental justification Bishara adduces for this is that comparison relativizes and contextualizes the Israeli occupation of Palestine in a way that could entail relativization and contextualization of the Holocaust on the one hand, and the Palestinians' dispossession on the other. The Palestinians ought to be able to grasp the Holocaust as leading to the creation of Israel, without in any way diminishing the severity of what Israel has done to them in 1948 and since. Said recognizes that the task is a most difficult one. For one thing, the total absence of the Palestinians from Jewish thought and philosophy does not bode well for a promising start on the part of the Israelis. The equality that is demanded is one that makes room for attention, consideration, integrity, respect vis-a-vis the validity of the horrors and fears of the other side (Said, 1994: 167).

Responses

Bishara and Said herald a new approach among Palestinians towards the mechanisms of constitution and control of the Palestinian/Israeli collective memories, particularly in the way they challenge the place of the Other and the Other's memory within each collective memory. We would like to take this point further and suggest possible explorations of the Holocaust/Nakbah connection as proposed by Bishara and Said.

We discern three possible avenues from here. One is to navigate cautiously, as Bishara and, to a lesser extent, Said do, between continued commitment to the nation, accepting its discourse and collective memory,

and a refusal to succumb to attitudes that minimize the universal – or even if one allows for it, the subjective – significance of the Other's catastrophe.

For both Bishara and Said, Holocaust and Nakbah are connected as two horrendous, albeit unequal, crimes: the one is presented as a prelude to the second. The Palestinian cause is strengthened not by denying the Holocaust, or disregarding or minimizing it, but rather by showing the full magnitude of its evil and horror while asserting that its ultimate victim is the Palestinian through his systematic victimization by the victims of the Holocaust.

A second option is the one suggested by Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (but rejected by Ilan Pappé). Gur-Ze'ev sees it as most important that, when calling for a dialogue, this dialogue should be between parties who are not committed to asymmetrical claims for suffering, hierarchical conceptions of victimhood and ethnocentric conceptions of justice. 'There is suffering and injustice enough for everyone', says Said, and one could not agree more (1994: 167). According to Gur-Ze'ev, the dialogue that we are invited to become equal partners facing each other's suffering, united in responsibility to the Other, responding to its suffering. Prominent Palestinian intellectuals, such as Said and Bishara impose a clear moral hierarchy and a sharp ethical asymmetry within this invitation for a dialogue. By doing so they block the prospect of a genuine dialogue between the rival parties, using this invitation as a manipulative act in the service of the Palestinian national struggle. This inequality is established by the claim according to which Jews suffered any injustice by the Palestinians: the Palestinians on the other hand, suffered not from the Nazis, but from the Israelis. Central to this trend is the avoidance of treating the Muslim and Arab involvement in the Nazi army (and the special role of the Mufti) on the one hand, and the suffering inflicted on the Jews by the Palestinians during the last hundred years, on the other. According to Said:

Unless the connection is attempted which shows the Jewish tragedy as having led directly to the Palestinian catastrophe by let us call it necessity (rather than pure will), we cannot coexist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering. (Said, 1997: 3)

Said, rightly sees the dialogue as a 'moral imperative', which demands from the Palestinians acknowledgement of Jewish suffering, inflicted on them by the Nazis, and from the Jews acknowledgement of the tragedy they inflicted on the Palestinians. 'This means that, as Palestinians, we demand considerations and reparations from them . . .' (Said, 1997: 4).

For Gur-Ze'ev what is 'missing' is the Palestinian recognition of the injustice inflicted on the Jews throughout their history in the Diaspora and the Palestinian part in their present tragedy. He maintains that the Holocaust is the story of death, while the Nakbah is the legacy of suffering. The first is a manifestation of total evil and has no justification or dialectical dimensions. The second is a manifestation of injustice and thus totally

different. They meet on the ontological level and it is this that enables the dialectics of Holocaust and Nakbah memories. Gur-Ze'ev does not accept the representation of the Palestinians as mere victims, nor does he subscribe to the view of the Zionists as colonizers and the Zionist project as but a local version of Western colonialism. Gur-Ze'ev demands equality in judgment and argues that the asymmetrical perception of reality, and its reflection in the 'dialogue', promises a life-and-death struggle which dehumanizes both parties. Within the ethnocentric rhetoric, argues Gur-Ze'ev, there is no reason not to accept the Zionist ideology and its justification of the Jewish claim on Israel. The same manipulation can successfully be achieved for the Palestinians within the framework of nationalism to justify their claim to be the ultimate victims of Nazism and of Western colonialism. The aim of counter-education is to overcome this dialectic, which victimizes both collectives as part of their self-construction and provides a moral imperative to destroy the Other.

A third option is the one suggested by Pappé, which refers not only to the distinction between evil and injustice insisted upon by Gur-Ze'ev, but also to the chain of victimization. Both authors agree that the direct relationship between the Palestinians as victims of the Israelis and the Israelis as past and present victimizers of the Palestinians plays an important role in determining the conditions of the dialogue. For Pappé this conclusion means that the imbalance of power and blame is rooted in a 'relative' evil: the colonial and postcolonial history of the place. The historiographical assessment leads him to accept different levels of deconstruction vis-a-vis the contemporary victimizers, the Israelis, and the present victims, the Palestinians.

While agreeing with Gur-Ze'ev that Zionism is not a case of pure colonialism, Pappé nevertheless supports the principal definition of Zionism as a colonialist movement and thus accepts that Palestinian violence and counter-violence cannot be judged in the same way as Zionist violence and counter-violence. Both Pappé and Gur-Ze'ev find a more complicated, not to say anti-colonialist context, for the examination of violence. Bishara, to a point, shuns this kind of examination as he presents himself as both a Nasserite and a student of the Enlightenment and the Frankfurt School (Bishara, 1997: 7–25), two affiliations that, in their different perception of violence in the human experience, cannot coexist.

Pappé claims that, although there was violence, no injustice was inflicted by the Palestinians on the Israelis, just as no injustice was inflicted by the Algerians on the French colonialists although there certainly was violence. In the reformulation of collective memory currently under way in South Africa, the Africans are not diminishing the catastrophes that propelled white settlers to come to South Africa. While reintroducing the crimes of Apartheid into the collective memory, the dialogue here creates space for the traumas that led whites to leave Europe in search of another 'homeland'. Similarly, one cannot equate injustice and Palestinian resistance to Jewish expulsion and ethnic cleansing.

Both writers of this article agree that whichever avenue for dialogue is suggested as forming an adequate response to this Palestinian challenge, nothing justifies the hegemonic Israeli representation of the Holocaust memory or the Israeli denial of major responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinians and their Nakbah.

Accepting that ideology, critique and non-ethnocentric-oriented multicultural reconstruction will lead to more reflective attitudes and more humanistic orientations towards the suffering of both sides, the next important step to be taken is probably to formulate what conclusions we can draw from this recognition of the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakbah memories for a continued Israeli/Palestinian dialogue. The starting point, we think, is overcoming nationalism and ethnocentrism. Critical Theory and postmodern elaboration of the historical constitution of the subject, knowledge, identity and memory, together with empirical studies, should impel this deconstruction and reformulation of the hegemonic Palestinian and Israeli narratives.

But those who go down this road will encounter many obstacles. Adopting a critical 'humanist' or 'universal' approach which does not simply dismiss humanism, they will find themselves set apart from the accepted intellectual, cultural and emotional levels within the history of 'their' societies. They are in eternal exile. Can they still be considered as 'Palestinians' or 'Israelis'? This is but one question to be answered within this future dialogue. Moreover, theirs is a realistic as well as constructive position. Or would it be better if one still could navigate, as Bishara suggests, between the national collective will and memory, and a humanist and universal approach? Or should we first wait, as Said suggests, for the fruits of a dialogue between Diaspora groups less captivated by the national collective memory and its control? Or should we do this as part of a continued decolonization process, as suggested by Pappé? Or should we do it as part of a counter-education that will challenge all forms of collectivism and strive for dialogical communities which are anti-ethnocentric-oriented as advocated by Gur-Ze'ev?

Our main question in this article is how far can both sides emancipate themselves from the narrative of their own collective, distance themselves from the realm of self-evidence, needs, criteria and perspectives and move towards a deconstructive posture, and how important is it for coexistence? Our intention is to deconstruct the scheme that produces not only this 'both sides', but also the symbolic and direct violence they perpetrate.

Should a deconstructive approach be directed equally to all narratives, collectives and the power relations which historically constitute them? This question, as far as the Palestinian case is concerned, has not as yet been fully answered by even the most open and critical among Palestinian intellectuals.

Conclusions

After years of denial and minimization of the event's memory and its universal implications, a new Palestinian attitude has recently been formulated towards the Holocaust memory.

In their bold challenge to mainstream and past Palestinian perceptions and utilization of the Holocaust memory, Edward Said and Azmi Bishara have exposed the tension between the collective national memory on the one hand, and critical a-national positions on the other. Neither is ignoring the one for the sake of the other. Thus, even in this new approach the national narrative or interpretation always hovers in the background, even if minimized and censured. It may be argued that, if this is so, a certain level of violence, mainly symbolic, will remain. Symbolic violence enables non-symbolic violence to operate according to both its positive-creative and negative-destructive potentials. The bottom line is that where there are remnants of any unwholesome destructive approach, the way is left open to turn human subjects into objects, mere symbols of the system (Baudrillard, 1983: 5). At the end of the day, they may still be agencies of the self-reproduction of the system and its internal and external colonization practices which will culminate in the destruction, digestion, marginalization or disregard of the Other and its otherness. To put it more bluntly, will Israelis and Palestinians then still be educated as potentially only either victims or perpetrators?

On the theoretical level, the new Palestinian approach outlined above calls for a continued dialogue that will address the gaps and the tensions between critique and commitment to emancipation, between the understanding of power relations and the production of collective identities, as narratives, between the contingent apparatuses of self-affirmation and the victimization of the Other. A thorough look into the moral imperative of such an analysis is warranted.

The hope of the authors of this article is that relativism, contingency and anti-foundationalism, however important they are, will not have the last word, and that even in a postmodern, postcolonialist and multicultural world one can and should address questions of injustice and be a politically active ironist, without the confinement of the iron cage of ethnocentrism or the false naïveté of an easy-going optimism.

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