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Teaching the Holocaust in Palestine

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Of all countries, Holocaust education in Palestine is most difficult due to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



While to others Holocaust education is not exclusively a Jewish issue, Holocaust education to Arabs, and in particular to Palestinians, is a purely Jewish concern. Palestinian society is deeply wounded and the pain and suffering is in the present while the Holocaust suffering was in the past. Here, the obstacles lie on three levels: political, educational, and religious.

On the political level, it is most challenging to tell the victim suffering from the occupation of its homeland and expropriation of their lands to get educated about the suffering of the perpetrator.

Thus many Palestinians raise the question: Why should we learn about the Holocaust? My response: The values of Holocaust education lie in the following: (1) It is a sign of respect for the truth.

When truth is denied or ignored, it destroys those values one cherishes; (2) It is the right thing to do. Being criticized for doing it does not mean not to do it; (3) Holocaust denial and distortion is historically wrong and morally unacceptable; (4) The need to learn the tragic lessons of the past in the hope to avoid their recurrence in the future; (5) To promote intellectual knowledge and learning as encouraged in the Holy Quran.

Our motto: "I do not know but I want to know;" (6) Without knowing about evil, we cannot understand the meaning of good; (7) To make this world a better place in showing empathy and compassion for the suffering of others.

On the educational level, the Holocaust is not taught neither in Palestinian schools or university

It is simply totally ignored even as part of history courses. Thus Palestinians are either ignorant of this tragic event or perceive it as the cause of their 1948 *Nakba* (Catastrophe) celebrated by Israelis as the Day of Independence, or believe it is Zionist propaganda.

In Palestine, **radical religious teaching of Islam** advocates a clash between Islam on the one side, and Judaism and Christianity on the other misinterpreting the verses in the Quran and the Sunnah to support that claim and explaining Quranic verses out of context.

For instance, the verse, {"And thus we have created you a centrist (temperate/middleground) nation,"} is interpreted to say: "Muslims are middle between Jews who killed prophets and Christians who made their prophet God." Or in the Fatihah Surah when it says: "Guide us to the right path, the path of those whom you have blessed (Muslims instead of believers), not those who incurred your anger (Jews instead of non-believers), or those who are lost (Christians instead of hypocrites).

Also, one of the widespread Hadith attributed, or to be correct misattributed, to the Prophet says: "The Day of Judgment will not arrive until the Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims will kill them. Even if a Jew hides behind a rock or a tree, the rock or the tree will say: 'O Muslim, O worshipper of God! There is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him', except the salt bush [*Gharqad*], for it is one of the Jews' trees."

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Teachers in school claim that “in this Prophetic Saying [*Hadith*] he [Muhammad] tells us of one of the forms of the battle between Muslims and Jews...” The sanctity of life is expressed in many verses in the Quran such as: {“Nor take life – which Allah has made sacred – except for just cause.”} [al-Isra Surah, verse 33].

The Quran affirms: {“We have sent you as a mercy to mankind.”} [Al-Anbia Surah, verse 107]; this mercy includes all human beings including Jews, Christians, and non-believers. No doubt, such a *hadith* contradicts the following verses: {“Had your Lord pleased, He would have made you one nation.”} [Table Surah; 48]; {“Had it been God’s will, He could have made them all of one religion.”} [Shurat Surah, verse 8]; {“There shall be no compulsion in religion.”} [Baqarat Surah, verse 256]; {“Say: This is the truth from your Lord. Let him who will, believe in it, and him who will, deny it.”} [Cave Surah; 29]; {“Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding the things about which they differed.”} (16:124)

It also contradicts the narrative related by Al-Bukhari: “A funeral procession passed by the Prophet, and he stood up in respect. A companion said to him: “The funeral is of a Jew.” The Prophet responded: “Was it not a human soul?”

The Quran reveres both The Torah and The Bible describing them as Holy Books. It also refers to Jews and Christians as: “People of the Book”; or “Those who were delivered the Book.” There are 60 verses which directly addresses Jews in the Quran such as: {“Children of Israel, remember the blessing I have bestowed on you, and that I have exalted you above the nations.”} [Cow Sura; verse 47]; {“Children of Israel, remember that I have bestowed favors upon you, and exalted you above the nations.”} [Cow Sura; verse 122]

Strategy for Holocaust Education

The approach of teaching is most important when teaching sensitive subjects. Thus, I encourage active learning through the adoption of the following steps for teaching such a controversial topic: (1) teaching creativity and critical thinking; (2) teaching *wasatia* and moderation; (3) teaching about the Holocaust along with other genocides in modern history such as Rwanda, explaining linkages with the Nakba, and linkages with other international genocides.

Also, finding a textbook in Arabic to use proved most difficult thus I have co-authored a book with my colleagues Zeina Barakat and Martin Rau titled: *Holocaust Human Suffering: Is there a way out?*

In conclusion, when Palestinians ask me: Why should we learn about the Holocaust while Israelis have made the use of the term Nakba, referring to our 1948 catastrophe, an illegal term and banned it from their schools? My answer is short and simple: “Never mind what the other does. By learning about the Holocaust, you are doing the right thing.”

Mohammed Dajani Daoudi is founder of the Wasatia movement in Palestine, and Professor of Political Science at Al-Quds University. Read other articles by Mohammed.

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