

Deanship of Graduate Studies

Al-Quds University

249

Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli History

“Case Study: The Holocaust”

Ref.

249A-0-0-01 DS

119.7

I84
2001

Suheir Jaouni Ishtayeh

Library	المكتبة
Act No :	رقم المتسلسل:
College :	الكلية:
	Main

M.A. Thesis

2001

المكتبة الرئيسية



249A-0-0-0-1

Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli History

“Case Study: The Holocaust”

By

Suheir Jaouni Ishtayeh

سحر جانوني اشتايه

971120

B.A.: Birzeit University, Palestine

8045

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
Department of Regional Studies

Al-Quds University

November 2001

Al-Quds University

Jerusalem

Center for Area Studies



جامعة القدس

القدس

مركز الدراسات الإقليمية

عنوان الرسالة : دور الذاكرة الجماعية في كتابة التاريخ الإسرائيلي

المشرفين :



(التوقيع)

المشرف الأكاديمي الأول : د. عصام نصار



(التوقيع)

الممتحن الخارجي :

د. محمود محارب

قدمت هذه الرسالة استكمالاً لمتطلبات درجة الماجستير في جامعة القدس تخصص دراسات إقليمية / برنامج الدراسات الإسرائيلية .

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at Al-Quds University.

اعداد الطالب : سهير الجاعوني

لجنة المناقشة :



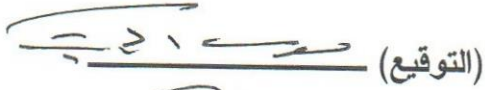
(التوقيع)

د. عصام نصار



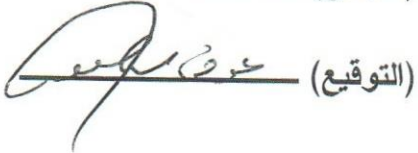
(التوقيع)

د. محمود محارب



(التوقيع)

د. موسى البديري



(التوقيع)

أ. عوض منصور

تاريخ نقاش الرسالة : 2001/7/15

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this humble work of mine to three dear persons whose understanding and support and continuous encouragement made this accomplishment possible. They are my mother, my father and my dear husband.

I would like to thank Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh for his prominent guidance and the Palestinian Center for Regional Studies for giving me the opportunity to pursue my higher education on account of time and duty.

I also thank Dr. Aziz Haidar for enriching my perception with deep thought and Mr. Awad Mansour for adding the value of reason to my academic approach.

Most importantly I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Issam Nassar for his time and kind supervision.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Munther Dajani whose first and foremost encouragement put me on the right track.

A final word of gratitude, I dedicate to my best friend Iman Nijem for lightening up my heart and soul.

Declaration:

I certify that this thesis submitted for the degree of Master is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed *Suheir Jaoumi Ishtayeh*

Date: ... *29 Nov 2001* ...

Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli History

"Case Study: Holocaust"

Table of Contents

	Abstract	1
	Introduction	5
I	Collective memory in relation to building the national and political identity	11
I.1	The past and the present and the emergence of nations	11
I.2	The act of commemoration	13
II	Political dimensions of the Holocaust memory in Israel	18
II.1	Political dimensions of the Holocaust in the 1950s	21
II.2	Transformations in the Israeli attitude towards the Holocaust after 1967	23
II.3	Holocaust commemoration in Israel	25
II.3.a	Communal Commemoration	30
II.3.b	Individual commemoration	35
III	Holocaust narrative and its interpretation	37
III.1	The political powers of mythic narratives	39
III.2	Other mythic narratives	39
III.3	The mythic understanding of the Holocaust	40
III.4	The literature of the Holocaust	42
III.5	Yad Vashem	44
	Conclusion	47

Abstract:

This study explores the construction of collective memory as reflected in the Holocaust commemoration in Israel, an important boundary in the historical sequence of the Israeli people being a group moving throughout time. It examines the relation between history and memory at that particular event; the role of commemorative narratives and rituals in contemporary social life, and their impact on the political sphere. It further elaborates on the process through which members of the Israeli society remember and interpret the different events that are being stressed and highlighted through out that period as part of the historical trail of the Israeli people. How is the meaning of the past reconstructed and modified over time?

This study is based on the assumption that collective memory, in Israel as well as in other states in the world, relies solely on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another¹. Of course it is this kind of historical narration that influences most members of the community simply because it is what people carry around in their heads. People always look upon the past in a certain way and this determines their ideas about politics and society.

This study also exhibits the wide range of Holocaust commemorations practiced by the Israeli community, both formally and informally, that contributed a great deal to the establishment of a firm base upon which history is remembered and registered in the minds of every generation. An example of these commemorations are holiday

¹ Zerubavel, Yael. Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1995. p. 22

celebrations, festivals, monuments, memorials, songs, stories, plays and educational texts.

In short this study focuses on the role played by collective memory as part of the Israeli nation building process with a special emphasis given to the different stages this collective memory has undergone and the effect of each on the community at the time of its perfusion.

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في شكل البناء الاجتماعي للذاكرة الجماعية المستخدمة في موضوع المحرقة "الهولوكوست" وذلك على اعتبار أن المحرقة منعطف تاريخي للشعب الإسرائيلي الذي يعتبر بدوره مجموعة تتحرك وتتقدم في خط زمني معين. كما تبحث هذه الدراسة في شكل العلاقة ما بين التاريخ والذاكرة ضمن الفترة الزمنية المعينة إضافة إلى الدور الهام الذي تلعبه النشاطات الاستذكارية في الحياة الاجتماعية المعاصرة وأثرها على المحيط السياسي. كما تتطرق الدراسة إلى عملية الاستنكار التي تقوم بها الأفراد والجماعات الإسرائيلية من أجل التأكيد على أحداث معينة غيرت مسار الشعب "اليهودي". كيف تمت عملية إعادة إحياء الماضي ضمن سياق الحاضر؟

تعتمد هذه الدراسة على افتراضية ان الذاكرة الجماعية في إسرائيل، كمل في معظم دول العالم، تعتمد بشكل أساسي على عملية نقل المعلومات من جيل الى آخر. ويمكننا القول بأن هذا الشكل من القص التاريخي له تأثير كبير على الناس والمجتمعات لأنه باختصار يترسخ في العقول ويحدد الأفكار والمواقف التي يحملها الناس تجاه السياسة والمواضيع الاجتماعية. وتستعرض هذه الدراسة الأساليب الإستذكارية المتعددة التي استخدمها ويستخدمها الإسرائيليون رسمياً واجتماعياً في سبيل ترسيخ ذكرى المحرقة وتحديد الأطر الثابتة للتاريخ الإسرائيلي

فيما يتعلق بهذا الحدث، ومن ضمن الفعاليات التذكيرية المستخدمة في هذا السياق الأعياد

والاحتفالات والأغاني الشعبية واقامة المناصب التذكيرية.

كما تبحث الرسالة ايضاً في حقيقة ان هذه الفعاليات الاستذكارية بدأت بشكل مركز وكبير بعد

اقامة الدولة الاسرائيلية وخاصة بعد محاكمة ايخمان في القدس. فقبل اقامة الدولة كانت ذكرى

الهولوكوست شبه معدومة بدليل ان اللذين درسوا في المدارس الاسرائيلية في تلك الفترة،

سنوات الخمسينات، لم يتلقوا أي معلومات عن الهولوكوست او ذكراها من خلال المنهاج

المدرسي.

كما يمكن اعتبار الاحتلال الاسرائيلي للاراضي الفلسطينية في عام 1967 كنقطة تحول في

الرؤيا الاسرائيلية للهولوكوست حيث اصبح من المصلحة الاسرائيلية الظهور بموقف الضحية

بدل الطاغية المحتل.

أخيراً تبحث هذه الدراسة في الدور الذي لعبته وتلعبه الذاكرة الجماعية في عملية بناء الدولة

الاسرائيلية. كما تشير الى المراحل المختلفة للذاكرة الجماعية وأثر كل منها على المجتمع.

Introduction

Israel is a society of settlers (according to Israeli terminology they are referred to as “immigrants”).¹ No common history on a joint land is recorded. Yet the Israeli identity has been constructed, its culture revived, and most importantly its past have been “recreated”. This process, as will be seen in this study, depended heavily on history and tradition. However, this dependence is proved to be selective, since certain historic incidents emerged as “heroic”, others were suppressed to the extent of a complete wipe out. This suppression and elaboration somehow reconstructed a new national memory and tradition for the Israelis, according to which every new Israeli generation is educated and brought up.²

“David” for example, is the engine for Israel’s imagination and for Israel’s public history.³ This “David” is no doubt a literary imaginative construction made by many hands. No one can get behind that construction. However, that construction is partly deliberate as a means of political propoganda. Such portraits that are generated by a certain memory simply dominate the imagination of Israel.

Collective memory, in the Israeli case as in other cases, simply relies on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. The kind of history that has the most influence upon the life of the community and the course of events is the

¹ Zerubavel, Yael. Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1995. p. 22

² Ibid p. 22

³ Brueggemann, Walter. David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination & Memory. New York, Fortress Press, 1985. p. 14

history that common people carry around in their heads. People, almost always, picture the past in some fashion or another and this picture determines their ideas about politics and society.

The Holocaust has been commemorated throughout the world in various ways and by many different populations.¹ The fact remains that the Holocaust was not entirely an Israeli catastrophic event. Other groups of people, such as gypsies, socialists and intellectuals were equally and dramatically tormented by the Nazis. However, the Israelis successfully used the machinery of commemoration to reflect the Israeli entirety of the Holocaust.

On the other hand, every group that was affected by the Holocaust developed a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. These reconstructed images provided the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allowed it to recognize itself through time.

“Can history be viewed as distinctly parallel to collective memory? The answer is yes.”² History and collective memory can be portrayed as two polar representations of the past. History is the product of a scholarly scrutiny of the records of the past, while collective memory is viewed as an organic part of social life that is continuously transformed in response to society’s changing needs. Thus when tradition weakens and social memory is fading, history emerges as the primary mode of knowledge

¹Wistrich, Robert and Ohana, David. The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma. London, Frank Cass, 1995. P147.

²Zerubavel, Yael. Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1995. p. 22

about the past.¹ On the other hand, historians may strive to become detached analysts, but since they are members of their own societies, they tend to respond to prevalent social ideas about the past. Along that line, some Israeli historians have utilized the basic premises of collective memory into shaping up history.²

However, collective memory, in spite of its dynamic character, is not an entirely fluid knowledge nor is it totally detached from historical memory. It continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas. For example, in the 1950s, there was no political consensus regarding the Holocaust at that time. The memory of the Holocaust and its victims was accompanied by unending political strife. Therefore it might be true that history and memory do not, after all, operate in a totally detached manner.³ There is conflict as well as interdependence.

The Israeli society have used a wide range of commemorations, both formal and informal, to fuel the vitality of collective memory and establish a firm base upon which history is remembered and registered in the minds of every generation. Holiday celebrations, festivals, monuments, memorials, songs, stories, plays as well as educational texts, are all being used as means of constructing a collective memory, by which the Israeli identity is firmly rooted within the souls of all Israelis and non-Israelis in order to generalize and monopolize their sufferings. Thus eliminating the

¹ Ibid p 22.

² Zerubavel, Yael. Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press. 1995. p. 22

³ Wistrich, Robert and Ohana, David. The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma. London, Frank Cass, 1995. p. 128

possible questioning of the origins of certain historical facts from within the Israeli historical records, and consequently the very core of Israeli identity. One prevalent commemoration form of the Holocaust is individual commemoration basically portrayed through inscription added to individual tombstones.¹

It is worth noting however, that children in the Israeli society are subject and exposed to such acts of commemoration at an early age.² This, in itself, boosts the vitality of collective memory and exceeds the influence of any history book or teacher. So, we may say that early childhood education reinforces shared images and stories that in turn reinforces the group's memory. Through visual arts, the Holocaust is being relived by the Israeli generations.³ Texts, collections of photographs, and slides are all means of visual arts resources used in schools to enhance Holocaust teaching and commemoration. Students respond more strongly to visual materials than to oral discussions or written texts. Thus teachers, all over Israeli schools, tend to use photographs and films in their curriculum.

In chapter one of this study, collective memory is examined in terms of its relation to the process of building the national and social identity of the Israelis. Emphasis is given to the selectiveness and creativity of collective memory and how it tends to blur the line between the real and the imagined. This chapter further elaborates on how the Israeli reconstruction of symbolic continuities and discontinuities in the Israeli history

¹Ibid p. 149

²Shimoni, Gideon. The Holocaust in University Teaching. Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1991. p. 1

³Ibid. p. 1

was clearly designed to support the ideology of the Israeli national revival. Thus the colonization of Palestine, in Israeli terms, represented a national goal.

Chapter two deals with the political dimensions of the Holocaust Memory in Israel and to what extent does the tendency to view issues through a political prism contribute to the remembrance and conception of the Holocaust during the 1950s. This chapter also focuses on the Eichman trial and its purpose in defining the moral obligation of the world towards supporting the establishment of an Israeli State. Further elaboration is also made in regard to the Israeli attitude towards the Holocaust, which is categorized into four types: the radical, the patronizing, the defensive-consensual and the enigmatic position. Moreover, the political dimensions of the Holocaust after 1967 are also examined in chapter two in terms of the overwhelming silence that that American Jewish leadership abided by before 1967 and the outbreak of commemorating events afterwards. This chapter also exhibits the different patterns of Holocaust commemoration in Israel. These patterns lie beneath the realms of individual and communal rituals. Monuments, memorial stones, commemorative inscriptions, museums, literature, and many others are the ways Israelis commemorated the Holocaust.

Chapter three focuses on the Holocaust narrative and its interpretation, in addition to the political powers of mythic narratives through literature works and political expressions. Additionally, this chapter lists other examples of mythic events such as Tel-Hai, Bar Kokhba and the Fall of Mas'ada. This chapter also sheds some light on the literature of the Holocaust and the importance of art in conveying the required