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Narrative wars and “the days”

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The seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot are known in Israel as “the days” – a reference to days of the Omer and also the special days marking the catastrophes and triumphs of modern Jewish history.

In this period, we move from Holocaust Remembrance Day, to Memorial Day for those killed in the wars against Israel, followed immediately by Independence Day, and ending with Jerusalem Day, marking the miraculous return to the Holy City in the 1967 war. This period is an emotional roller-coaster marking the events of the past 70 years.



The four “days” are also a form of resistance in the narrative wars that are being waged in support of the myths in which Israelis are portrayed as evil occupiers and neo-colonialists, oppressing innocent Arab victims.

Holocaust denial is a central part of this framework. Throughout the Muslim world, the culture of conspiracy, combined with anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiment, have fostered these myths. The president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, wrote his doctoral thesis in Moscow on “The Secret Connection between the Nazis and the Leaders of the Zionist Movement,” which included a large measure of Holocaust revisionism. It was published in Amman in 1984.

More recently, in a text prepared for the United Nation’s Durban Review Conference in April, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad referred to the “ambiguous and dubious” events of the Holocaust. UN officials persuaded him to change the language, and instead he denounced the “pretext of suffering” used by Israel, but the difference was of little consequence.

Holocaust denial and revisionism are also used to erase the reality behind the establishment of Israel. Since Arab leaders rejected the 1947 UN Partition Plan (“two states for two peoples”), they have continued to press for its reversal. In their fictitious version, which is now widely accepted in Europe, as well as on university campuses in North America (York University, in particular), and among many journalists, the terror campaigns and wars have been edited out. The 22,000 Israeli soldiers and civilians who gave their lives (and the countless more who were injured) to preserve Jewish rights are being recast as invaders and villains.

This narrative is enhanced by the image of the Palestinians as innocent victims – an indigenous people supplanted by colonialists (“the Jews”) supported by capitalist European powers. Israel’s acts of self-defence have been twisted into “war crimes” and “collective punishment” by supposedly moral organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Oxfam. In Israel, with massive support from European governments and wealthy, misguided Diaspora Jews, an industry of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gives legitimacy to this mythology.

The celebration of Yom Ha’atzmaut – Independence Day – is a reassertion of the historic reality, in opposition to campaigns that deny the Jewish people the right to sovereign equality. With more than 50 officially Islamic states (including, of course, Ahmadinejad’s Iran), and more than 30 Christian countries, many of which include an official church, the labelling of the world’s single Jewish state as “racist” or “discriminatory” reflects discrimination and double standards. Such rhetoric is in itself racist and an expression of the new anti-Semitism, which attacks the Jewish nation as a collective.

And finally, Jerusalem Day is a reminder that the Holy City has been central to the Jewish people for 3,000 years. The 1967 war ended generations of foreign occupation, and rebuilding began. Far from “Judaizing” Jerusalem, which is another myth in the Palestinian/Muslim/NGO assault, Israel has ensured full Muslim and

Christian access to their religious sites. This stands in sharp contrast to the systematic desecration of synagogues and cemeteries, particularly during the Jordanian/Palestinian occupation following the 1948 war, and the complicity of the "international community" in the violation of the armistice agreements guaranteeing free access to sacred sites in Jerusalem.

By reminding us and the world of the realities of modern Jewish history, the "days" serve as an antidote to the revisionism designed to replace these events with demonizing mythologies.

As in the Passover seder and the retelling of the Exodus, we need to teach our children about these recent realities, or we will lose our history.

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