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Educating in the Rupture: The Holocaust and the Nakba as Memories to Be Reconnected. Interview with Nadim Khoury[1]

Educare nella frattura: l'Olocausto e la Nakba come memorie da riconnettere. Intervista a Nadim Khoury

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ABSTRACT

Two scholars in educational sciences engage in a dialogue with the Palestinian political philosopher Nadim Khoury on the relationship between the Holocaust and the Nakba and on the possibility of

[1] The interview was conducted remotely by the two authors on January 16, 2026. It was carried out in English and is reproduced in full in the present contribution. Paragraphs 1 and 3, which provide the introduction and commentary on the interview, are attributable respectively to Lorenzo Zaffram and Alessandro Vaccarelli.

bringing these two memories into conversation within a perspective of peace and reconciliation, even in the dramatic context currently affecting the Palestinian people. Khoury reflects on the ambition of a project that seeks to place side by side historical traumas that have shaped mutually exclusive national narratives, while acknowledging its fragility, made even more evident after 7 October 2023 and the events in Gaza. The interview also addresses the legacy of the Oslo process, the politics of school textbooks, and the asymmetries in the teaching of history. The reflections accompanying the dialogue highlight the relevance of this approach within European and international educational spaces, where the Holocaust occupies a central place in civic education while the Nakba remains largely marginal, underscoring the urgency of developing a more established public history of the Nakba in dialogue with the memory of the Holocaust.

Keywords: Nadim Khoury, Nakba, Holocaust, memory education.

RIASSUNTO

Due studiosi di scienze pedagogiche dialogano con il filosofo politico palestinese Nadim Khoury sul rapporto tra Shoah e Nakba e sulla possibilità di rimettere in relazione queste due memorie in una prospettiva di pace e riconciliazione, pur nel tempo drammatico che il popolo palestinese sta vivendo. Khoury si confronta con l'ambizione di un progetto volto ad accostare traumi storici all'origine di narrazioni nazionali reciprocamente esclusive, riconoscendone però la fragilità resa ancora più evidente dopo il 7 ottobre 2023 e la risposta genocidiaria a Gaza. L'intervista affronta il lascito del processo di Oslo, la questione dei libri di testo e le asimmetrie nell'insegnamento della storia. Le riflessioni che accompagnano il dialogo evidenziano la rilevanza di questo approccio negli spazi educativi europei e internazionali, dove la Shoah è centrale nella formazione civica mentre la Nakba resta molto marginale, sottolineando l'urgenza di una più consapevole public history della Nakba intrecciata alla memoria della Shoah.

Parole chiave: Nadim Khoury, Nakba, Shoah, Educazione alla memoria.

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1. INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS

Nadim Khoury is an intellectual of Palestinian origin and is currently an Associate Professor of Political Philosophy in the *Department of Law, Philosophy and International Studies* at Inland University (Norway). He trained in the field of political theory and philosophy in France and obtained a PhD in political science in the United States. He taught in Palestine at *Al-Quds Bard College* and later became affiliated with Inland University in Norway. His philosophical background, as emerges from his works

(Khoury, 2018; 2017) and from the interview included in this article, continues to deeply inform his scholarly work, both in terms of approach and the methodologies adopted. His research has focused on issues related to collective memory, particularly within the Israeli-Palestinian context (Khoury, 2025; 2023; 2019; 2016).

The authors of this article encountered Nadim Khoury through the reading of an essay entitled *"Olocausto/Nakba, un "contro-pubblico" della memoria"*, included in the Italian translation of a volume edited by Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg entitled *"Olocausto e Nakba. Narrazioni tra storia e trauma"* (2023). The volume offers an epistemologically and politically courageous perspective, in which authors of Jewish and Palestinian origin open the way to the possibility of constructing a dialogue between the events "Holocaust" and "Nakba" with the aim of deconstructing dominant, antithetical, and exclusive narratives, while promoting the creation of a "new grammar and a new syntax" for the development of more complex national narratives that may prove more effective in fostering peaceful coexistence. The objective pursued by the editors and contributors is marked by a high level of complexity: the Holocaust and the Nakba are considered "foundational pasts," borrowing the concept from Alon Confino (2012), which assume the consideration of one's own historical trauma (the Holocaust for the Israeli people and the Nakba for the Palestinian people) as foundational to their identity, thereby implying the denial of the other's trauma and leaving no room for any form of recognition or dialogue. This is, in the words of Daniel Bar-Tal (2025), an "intractable conflict," involving memories and narratives whose transformation into peaceful forms appears far from achievable.

During the interview, we asked Nadim Khoury to discuss the potential and the limits of constructing a dialogue between the Shoah and the Nakba; the developments and main stages in the building of this dialogue; the role of textbooks in the construction of national narratives; and the influence of the massacre of October 7, 2023 on his intellectual and personal activity.

According to Khoury, the construction of a dialogue between the Holocaust and the Nakba does not aim to initiate a comparative confrontation between different events, but rather to identify the premises of their intersection, both from a historical perspective and from the standpoint of memory. From a historical point of view, it is easy to think that the events intersect due to their temporal proximity ("The height of the Holocaust is 1941 to 1944/45 and the Nakba is 1947 to 1949") even if that assumption is problematic: in fact, Khoury affirms that the partition of Palestine and the Holocaust were treated separately. The idea of the partition of Palestine as a reparation of the Holocaust came after by the Zionist movement. It is more correct to read the historical intersection between the Holocaust and the Nakba in a wider view of the history of the XX century: Khoury, recalling Hannah Arendt and Aimé Cesar lectures, claims that the two events should be considered "two expressions of similar dynamics", above all, of Colonialism and Ethno-nationalism; from the perspective of memory construction, the recourse to subjective and biographical experiences helps to understand this encounter. In this regard, Khoury refers to the work of Alon Confino included in the volume by Bashir & Goldberg concerning the case of Genya and Henryk Kowalski, a couple of Holocaust survivors who refused to appropriate Palestinian homes in 1949 (Confino, 2023).

The distinction that the scholar establishes between the two levels, historical and memorial, is significant because, while historiographical research advances according to criteria of scientific rigor, memory does not follow the same path and very often serves as the basis for political projects; therefore, it must be critically examined:

> "I am aware that I am making a very simplistic distinction between memory and history, but it is useful for this context. Memory is about how we remember this past, how it is commemorated, how it used by political actors. That is a separate question from the questions of history. They relate, they overlap, but it is a separate question, and the potentialities and the limitations are also different".

What Khoury states echoes the reflections on the "abuses of memory" of the intellectual Tzvetan Todorov, who emphasizes the need to problematize the contents conveyed by collective memory, the ways in which it has been constructed, and the purposes that such memorial construction intends to pursue (Todorov, 2018).

The idea of constructing a dialogue between these two traumatic memories on which Khoury has worked is closely linked to Todorov's concept of "exemplary memory." Memory, understood as a process of selecting events, between oblivion and preservation, may take a dual form: a "literal memory," which assumes the preservation of the event in its literalness and does not lend itself to abstractions or categorizations for understanding other realities; and an "exemplary memory," capable of using the preserved event to read and interpret different contexts, in other times and in other places, thereby placing itself in the service of the present.

In the interview, Khoury emphasizes how the Oslo Accords (1993) constituted a watershed, though not without problems, in the construction of a possible dialogue between the Holocaust and the Nakba, insofar as this event created a kind of "dialogue industry" that had not existed before. The scholar uses the term "industry" considering the numerous economic investments involved in promoting the peace process:

> "In the case of Oslo, a lot of money was pumped into shallow attempts to bring Israelis and Palestinians to speak to one another. Israeli-Palestinian theater, football. It is strange to think about now, but in the 1990s this was a significant phenomenon".

The construction of dialogue presupposes conditions that make it possible, and certainly the Oslo Accords opened up a space for discussion, albeit with significant critical issues. In any case, the Nakba and the responsibilities of the State of Israel toward Palestinian exiles were never addressed since the negotiations were based on the borders of 1967. This therefore revealed the fragilities of the agreement and contributed to defining the boundaries and the modalities through which Palestinian memory was to be constructed, and consequently how this possible dialogue between the Holocaust and the Nakba should be carried forward:

> "So, the Oslo peace process created the conditions for dialogue, but it also dictated the terms of that dialogue. It created a space to talk, but it also told us how to talk, what history to talk about, and toward what ends. That is the paradox I try to identify".

This had a fundamental impact on the construction of institutional memory beginning with school textbooks. Khoury states that with the Oslo peace process, for the first time Palestinians had the possibility of publishing their own textbooks, albeit under the supervision of Israel, the United States, non-governmental organizations, and others, provided that they respected the conditions imposed by the peace process, under the threat of its interruption. This produced a "dilemma" concerning which

Palestinian history should be narrated in textbooks, preventing authentic recognition, at least within the framework envisioned by Bashir & Goldberg (2023). The peace process was built on a framework based on the borders of 1967, completely bypassing the question of the Nakba and Palestinian refugees ("Any history before 1967 is irrelevant"), thus making recognition partial and asymmetrical.

The decision to interview Nadim Khoury was guided by his interdisciplinary training, which combines political philosophy, social sciences, and expertise on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making him a privileged interlocutor for exploring the dynamics of collective memory construction and the dialogue between the Shoah and the Nakba. Through his direct experience, from an "internal" position within the conflict, and his theoretical reflection, Khoury offers a unique perspective on the processes of memory construction, with particular attention to national narratives and the political constraints that shape them. This provides important reflections that can enrich the field of memory pedagogy, since this interview makes it possible to show two sides of the same coin, raising a key question: what uses do we make of memory?

On the one hand, the elaboration of memories is inherently conflict-laden, especially when it concerns traumatic memories of groups struggling for the same space, as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this case, "foundational pasts" assume a main place within political agendas that do not always focus on the implementation of mutual recognition. On the other hand, it demonstrates how memory can be elaborated in an ethical and critical manner, offering those involved in education tools to promote critical thinking, dialogue, and recognition, as demonstrated by Khoury's work on the intersection between the Shoah and the Nakba.

2 THE INTERVIEW WITH NADIM KHOURY (JANUARY 16TH, 2026)

LORENZO ZAFFRAM: THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE HERE. WE WANT TO START ASKING YOU HOW YOU WOULD DESCRIBE YOUR PROFESSIONAL PROFILE AND WHICH INSTITUTION OR ORGANIZATION ARE YOU CURRENTLY AFFILIATED WITH?

Nadim Khoury: I am trained as a political theorist and political philosopher. Philosophy is where it all started for me, and I did my MA in philosophy at the University of Lille in France. When I went to the University of Virginia to do my PhD, I moved to a political science department, because political theory is a subsection of political science in the US. Ever since this shift, I've been moving away from philosophy and more towards the social sciences, although philosphy never leaves you.

My trajectory has taken me to France, to the US, then back to Palestine where I taught at *Al-Quds Bard College* in occupied Jerusalem. After Palestine, I moved to Norway. I am currently an associate professor at the University of Inland Norway, where I teach in a program of international studies.

Research wise, I've always been interested in issues related to collective memory. I've been involved in memory studies, which is an interdisciplinary field of study since my PhD. I've been approaching the question of memory from different angles and with a special interest in Palestine/Israel that drives most of my research questions. It's what drives me as an individual and this is where I come from. The research problems that I ask have their sources in questions that affect me and affect my people.

LORENZO ZAFFRAM: THANK YOU. WE HAVE READ AND WE HAVE STUDIED THE VOLUME EDITED BY BASHIR AND GOLDBERG (2023) WHICH INCLUDES A CONTRIBUTION BY YOU. THE PROJECT IN THAT BOOK IS TO ESTABLISH A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE HOLOCAUST AND THE NAKBA AS TOOL OF PEACEBUILDING. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IT? WHAT POTENTIALITY AND WHAT LIMITATIONS DO YOU SEE IN THAT KIND OF DIALOGUE?

Nadim Khoury: This is a broad question. I will begin by giving you a broad answer, then we can go into detail. This is an ambitious project. The Holocaust and the Nakba are two historical tragedies that have shaped and informed two mutually exclusive national narratives, Israeli and Palestinian. In a context of apartheid, occupation, settler colonialism, and now genocide, thinking about a relationship or dialogue between the two seems impossible. It is also challenging, because it challenges the settler-colonial and ethno-national frameworks in which Israelis and Palestinians operate, politically, cognitively, and epistemologically.

Regarding the potentialities and limitations of the project, it depends on what level you examine the connection. Broadly speaking, the project works on different levels, history on one hand, and memory on the other, with different ramifications for each. If you want to examine potentialities and limitations of the project, you first have to examine both separately.

Let us begin with the historical approach. First, this is not a comparative exercise. The Holocaust and the Nakba are very different when it comes to the context in which they operate, the magnitude of the crime, and the nature of the crime. But they occur within a similar historical period. The height of the Holocaust is 1941 to 1944/45 and the Nakba is 1947 to 1949. So, historically speaking, these two events, albeit from different contexts, meet. And the question is, from a historical point of view, where do they meet? When do they meet and how do they meet? How are they connected? And how should we study this connection?

This is a historical enterprise that can be analyzed at different levels of analysis. If you think of history purely in national terms, you end up with the simple narrative that there was a Holocaust, therefore there was a need for a Jewish state, which led to the Nakba. But historically, that is not at all how it happened. Zionism exists already from the end of the 19th century, and the question of Palestine was not directly related to the Holocaust in the very beginning. If you look at the text of the UN Partition Plan of 1947, the Holocaust is not invoked as justification. The partition of Palestine and the Holocaust are treated as formally separate questions. Surely, the connection was made by the Zionist movement at the time, but the idea of Israel as a reparation for the Holocaust came retrospectively. It does not follow the simple narrative that begins with the Holocaust, leads to Israel, which then leads to the Nakba.

But if you think of history at the macro level, a different picture appears. If you focus on larger historical dynamics that shaped the 20th century, be it the collapse of empires, ethno-nationalism, or colonialism, then the Holocaust and the Nakba appear as two expressions of similar dynamics. They manifest themselves differently, but they tap into similar historical forces. Colonialism is one such force. As Aimé Césaire and Hannah Arendt showed from an early stage, the Holocaust cannot be separated from the larger history of colonialism. While they were writing about colonialism in Africa, the connection extends to the colonial context of Palestine and the Middle East, where the collapse of the Ottoman empire intersected with European colonial expansion and Zionist settler colonialism. The rise of ethno-nationalisms is another macro-historical dynamic. Mark Levene's chapter, for example, contextualizes the Holocaust and the Nakba within a process of nation-state building in the first part of the 20th century,

with its entanglement with violence, ethnic cleansing, population transfer, and partitions. But he sets aside the larger historical framework of settler colonialism, which I disagree with.

So, at this macro level there are many connections. But if you turn to micro history, you can find other connections, focusing on individual encounters. How is it that Holocaust survivors who went to Palestine encountered the Nakba within just a few years? Think about how direct this is: these people experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, and within three or four years some of them were fighting with Zionist militias, killing and expelling Palestinians. Alon Confino's chapter captures this dilemma when he looks at the marginal case of Holocaust survivors who refused to take over a Palestinian house, saying: "I can't do that. This is what we experienced. I cannot reproduce the same mechanisms of expulsion and ethnic cleansing here." The chapter by Mustafa Kabha also works at this level, focusing on the specific case of the Palestinian communist Najati Sidqi and his opposition to imperialism and fascism.

The second conversation is memory. I am aware that I am making a very simplistic distinction between memory and history, but it is useful for this context. Memory is about how we remember this past, how it is commemorated, how it used by political actors. That is a separate question from the questions of history. They relate, they overlap, but it is a separate question, and the potentialities and the limitations are also different.

The book does important work here, thinking about the way memory operates both competitively—how the memory of these two events can negate each other—but also how they can be linked productively, how they can be put into dialogue. This is where art becomes particularly important. Literature, novels, painting have a capacity to connect these things in ways that make us think differently. The novels of Elias Khoury or Ghassan Kanafani, for example, are resources for thinking about how we can remember the past of the Nakba and the Holocaust differently. This is why they play such an important role in the book. There is also a forward-looking dimension to the question of memory. It is not simply about how we think about the past differently, but about what that means for the future. How can a dialogue between the Holocaust and the Nakba inform projects about binationalism, decolonization, transitional justice?

These connections at the level of history and memory raise a series of issues, historical, political, but also epistemological, disrupting things at a very basic foundational level. This is why Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg refer to it as a "new grammar of trauma and history." A new grammar means that you are trying to rethink the basic way you think about these things, how you structure your relationship to the past, to others' past, to tragedy, to mass atrocities and so forth. How do you disrupt the national framework, the colonial framework to think of a future together?

The focus on this new grammar is the strongest aspect of the project, but potentially, also its weakest. You can try to change the grammar, but a new language will not necessarily follow. The risk is that the entire enterprise remains a theoretical exercise that does not develop into something else. But this is the nature of any theoretical project: it opens a space, but it cannot fill it.

LORENZO ZAFFRAM: THANK YOU VERY MUCH. YOU'VE BEEN, YOU'VE BEEN VERY CLEAR. NOW, WE WANT TO FOCUS MORE ABOUT HOW THESE TWO TRAUMAS HAVE BEEN LINKED TOGETHER DURING THE TIME. YOU HAVE WRITTEN THAT FROM OSLO ACCORDS A SPACE HAS BEEN OPENED, EVEN IF IT WAS A FRAGILE SPACE, BECAUSE THERE WAS NOT A SYMMETRICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE PARTS. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PROCESS OF THIS LINK: WHAT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN IT STARTED, MAYBE BEFORE THE OSLO ACCORDS, AND HOW IT DEVELOPED DURING THE TIME?

Nadim Khoury: This taps into my chapter specifically, and also a book I am currently writing on the

topic, so I am very much in the thick of these discussions.

Let me explain why I have focused on the Oslo peace process. Someone could object: Oslo failed. It also did not last long. It starts in 1993 and collapsed around 2000. Not only that, but the peace process explicitly sets history and memory aside. If you read accounts by the negotiators, they all say: let's not talk about the past and focus on where we can agree: a piece of land here, security arrangements there. This is what they called "pragmatism." And pragmatism meant that history and memory should be avoided.

This, however, is not enough reason to dismiss Oslo as a political and sociological factor for understanding these dialogues about history. The Oslo peace process created a dialogue industry that didn't exist before. This happens with most peace processes, not only in Palestine/Israel. The very idea of peace, of engaging with the enemy, translated into another question: how do we talk to the other (in some case, a mortal enemy). This is why pedagogical projects are so central: what history textbooks do you write after war? Peace as an *institution* brings about such projects. This was the case since the end of World War I, when the League of Nations instituted bilateral historical commissions that brought together historians from different countries to deal with post war history writing. Germany and France are a good example.

In the case of Oslo, a lot of money was pumped into shallow attempts to bring Israelis and Palestinians to speak to one another. Israeli-Palestinian theater, football. It is strange to think about now, but in the 1990s this was a significant phenomenon.

To be clear, I am interested in Oslo because I am interested in the conditions of possibility of dialogue: what are the material, political, epistemological conditions of dialogue? Dialogue doesn't emerge out of nowhere. There are conditions, there are times when people talk and times when they do not talk. The Oslo process created a specific time and way to talk, including about history and memory. Before Oslo, Israelis didn't recognize Palestinians, and the PLO didn't recognize Israel. There was no mutual recognition on which to base any dialogue. After the mutual recognition of Oslo, the idea of dialogue became possible.

In that sense, Oslo created an opening. But at the same time, this was also a closing. The mutual recognition was highly asymmetrical: the PLO was recognized as a representative of a people, Israel was recognized as a state. The asymmetry shaped the entire process, and it dictated the terms of the dialogue. When it came to the Nakba, Oslo essentially excluded it. The negotiation was on the basis of the 1967 borders. Any history before 1967 is irrelevant. The refugee question was postponed and Israel rejected any responsibility for it.

So, the Oslo peace process created the conditions for dialogue, but it also dictated the terms of that dialogue. It created a space to talk, but it also told us how to talk, what history to talk about, and toward what ends. That is the paradox I try to identify. My conclusion is this: Nakba and Holocaust deliberations were largely enabled by the process but also fell outside its ideological framework. In that sense, they act as a kind of countermemory.

LORENZO ZAFFRAM: THANK YOU. BEFORE YOU HAVE MENTIONED TEXTBOOKS AND YOU'VE WRITTEN ABOUT IT IN YOUR CONTRIBUTION IN "OLOCAUSTO E NAKBA". EVEN IF HOLOCAUST AND NAKBA ARE GENERALLY NARRATED SEPARATELY WITHOUT A REAL RECOGNITION OF THE OTHER'S TRAUMA, WE HAVE CASES ON WHICH THIS DIALOGUE HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT. WE ARE THINKING ABOUT THE PRIME PROJECT (2003). WHAT ROLE DO YOU ATTRIBUTE TO EDUCATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PEACE?

Nadim Khoury: Let me preface my answer by saying we should treat peace as a political category, not as an a *priori* normative good. Peace is a political project like any other, with potentially good and potentially disastrous consequences, and it should be studied as such. So, when it comes to textbooks, you must think of them within the framework of the politics of Oslo: what they allow, what they do not allow, and why? Textbooks are crucial to the Oslo period because for the first time Palestinians had the right to write their own history. Before Oslo, they could only use Jordanian or Egyptian textbooks that were supervised and censored by the Israelis. With Oslo, they were suddenly given autonomous powers to develop their own curriculum. This raised a fundamental question: what Palestine do you teach? You now have the right to *officially* engage in national history through textbooks, but you are doing so in the context of ongoing occupation. Nothing has been resolved yet. You have simply agreed to negotiate. Occupation is growing, settler colonial violence continues, and yet you are expected to write textbooks as if things are on their way to being settled.

Not only that, Palestinian textbooks were written under strict supervision by Israel, but also NGOs, the United States, and donor countries. Everyone was examining them and saying: the history you tell must fit within the framework of Oslo. If it doesn't, we will withdraw funding, punish you, use this as an excuse to stop negotiations. The typical line, one you still hear today, was: "Until Palestinians are taught not to hate Israelis, we cannot negotiate." This is a direct use of textbooks for political purposes.

When it comes to mutual recognition, there is none of that in Israeli and Palestinian textbooks. They developed very separately. Israel has sovereignty and writes its textbooks without external supervision. It also has a longer institutional history as a state, so its textbooks evolved with the state. Palestinians, by contrast, only began writing their own textbooks in the 1990s. These are very different processes.

There was perhaps a moment in the 1990s when Israeli textbooks opened up slightly to the question of Palestine, but it was very timid. On the Palestinian side, there were demands to recognize Israel, and at some point, discussions arose about whether Palestinians should teach the Holocaust. Needless to say, there was no equivalent demand for Israelis to teach the Nakba. This asymmetry reflects the status of Holocaust memory as a signifier of globalized Western civilization, while treating the Nakba as a minor and local tragedy that is only significant for a particular group (Palestinians). This created real problems on the Palestinian side: how can we teach the Holocaust when they do not even acknowledge us?

So, textbooks are fascinating to study from the point of view of the politics of peace. Ideally, in a world where just peace existed, textbooks would obviously play a crucial role. This is why institutions like UNESCO invest so heavily in them. What you tell future generations helps in shaping the future. But ideal theory rarely works in practice, and in the context of Israel-Palestine it was almost absurd: Palestinians were being told their history should reflect Israel as a neighbor, when Israel is in fact an occupier. How does a student sit in class and read history that describes as a neighboring state the very state that has colonized them since 1948? I realize you may want me to say something more uplifting, but because textbooks have been used so viciously for political ends in this context, I am genuinely skeptical.

LORENZO ZAFFRAM, ALESSANDRO VACCARELLI: HERE IS THE LAST QUESTION, WHICH IS MORE PERSONAL, SO BE FREE TO ANSWER OR NOT. OCTOBER THE 7TH HAS MARKED UP A PROPER RUPTURE IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONTEXT AND LOOKING AT YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY, WHO WAS NADIM KHOURY BEFORE THAT DATE AND WHO IS NADIM KHOURY NOWADAYS? HOW THAT EVENT AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT AFFECTED YOUR WORK, YOUR PERSPECTIVES AND YOUR CATEGORIES AS A RESEARCHER?

Nadim Khoury: This is perhaps the hardest question you have asked me. Palestinians are still in the process of understanding what has happened to them and what will they will become after this. For two years we have been living in the immediate. We lost track of the past and the future. We don't know what we were or we still do not know what we will become.

I will say two things. On one hand, nothing has changed, because everything we saw is something we had seen before. This is why the Nakba is such a key notion for Palestinians. It is not a past injustice, but an ongoing, that has morphed from ethnic cleansing, to apartheid, and now to genocide. What changed the last two years was the magnitude. The killings, expulsion, and destruction reached levels we have never witnessed. When October 7th happened, I was in Palestine celebrating my father's birthday. He was born on October 7th, 1948. You can imagine the symbolism of that date. We woke up and watched things unfold, and on that same day I automatically thought this will lead to genocide.

I think many Palestinians thought the same, because of everything that had come before. Israeli colonization has trained us to accept a kind of moral geometry whereby for every Israeli killed, twenty or thirty Palestinians must be killed. That is how it has always operated. That is what we grew up knowing. So, when we saw the numbers of Israeli victims reaching over 1100, our minds immediately started calculating: 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 Palestinians. Israel had been us trained all our lives to do this horrible arithmetic.

In that sense, nothing changed. We knew what would come. But knowing something is different from watching it happen. When you see it, it destroys you. Everything becomes absurd, including scholarship. I did not lose my home. My family has not been decimated. They are from East Jerusalem and the West Bank. But still, nothing I had written made sense anymore. The Holocaust-Nakba work, in particular, felt suddenly absurd. Something I had believed had political, ethical, and epistemological potential felt impossible. How could we even think this way when Palestinians are suffering a genocide? I am currently writing a book on memory politics and the Oslo peace process, and suddenly I felt the book made no sense. Why even write this?

The Gaza genocide created skepticism and disbelief. I am still trying to make sense of it. But you also realize that thinking academically means you are not always responding to the present. You are disconnected in time. Maybe in thirty years this will make sense in a way it does not now. It also made me think about who we are writing for. We are not journalists. We are not always addressing the present. But as scholars writing in the present and for the present, we have a duty towards the present. One thing I did consistently these last two years was talk to people, journalists, students, retirees. Suddenly everyone wanted to know about Palestine, and I tried to use my academic training to tell them as much as I could.

These are disjointed thoughts, I know. But as I said, it is difficult right now understanding where I am as a Palestinian, before asking where I am as a Palestinian scholar. There is a lot of trauma. There is also a lot of policing and censorship when it comes to Palestine, and that has affected us too. In the years to

come we will hear more, understand more, and we are going to have to reckon with this genocide. It is going to be very, very difficult.

ALESSANDRO VACCARELLI: THANK YOU, NADIM. IT WAS GREAT TALKING TO YOU. YOUR REFLECTIONS IN THE LAST QUESTION RESONATE TO ME A LOT: JUST BEFORE THE 7TH OCTOBER I FINISHED MY LAST MANUSCRIPT ABOUT THE "MEMORY OF SHOAH" SO THAT EVENT SHOCKED ME TOO.
I WANT TO TELL YOU THAT I ALWAYS HAD A LOT OF ATTENTION FOR NAKBA AND FOR HOLOCAUST. I AM NOT PALESTINIAN, I AM NOT ISRAELI. I AM A PEDAGOGIST AND I BELIEVE THAT MEMORIES – NOT MEMORY – CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ENRICH OUR ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY BUT IS IMPORTANT TO SUSTAIN THE PEACE PROCESS THROUGH THE PUBLIC OPINION.
I WAS IN PALESTINE WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. IN 2000, I HAVE BEEN IN RAMALLAH WITH AN NGO, CROCEVIA, WORKING WITH TEACHERS IN RAMALLAH AND EIN 'ARIQ. I HAD A FRIEND, ISMAIL NJOUM, A BIG MAN, THAT NOW IS DEAD. IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO SEE WITH MY EYES THE SITUATION THERE AT THE TIME, SO IT IS EVEN MORE STRUGGLING TO IMAGINE WHAT THE SITUATION IS NOW. IT IS INCREDIBLE, BECAUSE YET IN 2000 IT SEEMED VERY STRONG. WHAT IS THE SITUATION LIKE NOW?

Nadim Khoury: Yes, very different from today. But it was already cooking beneath the surface. That is what makes the Oslo peace process historically interesting: it created a strange moment, quite unique in historical terms, where some people genuinely believed things were moving towards a solution. It generated all sorts of discourses and projects. But for those who knew what was building in the background, it was horrific. Because there is a link from the peace process to where we are now, genocide. And it is a dark link.
It is quite strange for people who lived through that period to see the shift. When I speak to younger Palestinians, they did not live through the 1990s, they did not experience that strange moment. It was a false illusion of hope, but also a powerful one. People believed in it. I grew up in the 1990s and people were saying: in two years you will have a state. Things did not turn out that way.
It is interesting that you mention how this has affected your relationship to Holocaust memory. I think the genocide in Gaza is going to completely change that relationship, not only in Israel-Palestine, but everywhere. I have been talking to friends who say: the Holocaust will never be the same after this. Which is a striking thing to say. Obviously, they are not referring to the history, but to the memory of the Holocaust, to what we thought that memory stood for, the underlying humanity it was supposed to sustain. That has collapsed in ways that are confusing for many people, particularly in the West. The book needs to be updated to address this present. I have spoken with Bashir Bashir and they are thinking about adding an introduction to address it. I will also address these in the book I am currently working on and try to bring this conversation into the present.

ALESSANDRO VACCARELLI: WE ARE READY. OUR AIM IS TO INTRODUCE IN ITALY - IN AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE - THAT IDEA. WE ARE AWARE THAT THIS POSITION MAY TOUCH UPON A SIGNIFICANT TABOO, AND WE DO NOT ASSUME THAT IT WILL MEET WITH UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT.

Nadim Khoury: In this sense, the book has offered tools to think of this connection seriously.

2. RUPTURES AND MEMORIAL RECONNECTIONS, WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CONFLICT: BUILDING NEW PATHS, HERE AND NOW

Among the most striking elements in the interview with Nadim Khoury, at least two deserve to be taken as interpretative turning points, especially if we speak from Europe, here and now, in a time marked by wars fought elsewhere, polarization, and the radicalization of public discourse.
The first concerns the autobiographical and epistemological dimension; the second relates to the role of intellectuals in shaping public opinion. When we asked what changed after 7 October, Khoury answers clearly: a genocide is underway. Truly a second Nakba (Khoury, 2025, Vaccarelli, 2025). Everything has changed. Not only politically, but in the very way of inhabiting the role of the intellectual. What had been thought, written, and elaborated - including the project of bringing the Holocaust and the Nakba into dialogue - now appears to require revision, reconsideration, and, in a certain sense, postponement in the face of the ongoing catastrophe, which demands equally urgent responses. Theoretical reflection seems out of time, lacking the minimal conditions for being practicable. The rupture is so radical that dialogue between memories - and the hopes that sustained it - becomes almost unspeakable amid the violence of the present.
The interview situates the issue within a broader genealogy. Already during the climate of the Oslo Accords, the theme of historical memory - also at the level of textbooks and school education - had experienced certain advances. Oslo opened a space for dialogue, but also rigidly delimited its boundaries, producing a memory narrative reflected in curricula, textbooks, and official narratives. Textbooks thus became a decisive field of memory politics, though without genuine mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians. Israel, as a state with consolidated institutional structures, has always developed its textbooks autonomously; Palestinians began doing so only in the 1990s, under limited autonomy and constant external supervision. During those years, some timid Israeli openings could be observed, yet Palestinians were asked to recognize Israel and to teach the Holocaust for its universal values, without any symmetrical request regarding the Nakba. School textbooks thus reveal themselves as central political instruments: they can shape memories and, in perspective, possibilities for peace; or they can consolidate exclusive national narratives, hindering critical and inclusive thinking and reciprocal knowledge of each other's suffering.

Rethinking today the Holocaust-Nakba project means updating it in light of events still unfolding and whose consequences remain unpredictable. Born from utopian and transformative aspirations, it now appears confronted with a dystopian wall, where any grammar of dialogue risks remaining without language and without future. Khoury's words invite us to consider the position from which one speaks: it is not merely a theoretical standpoint, but a historical and existential location. Speaking from within an open wound, from the signs of an ongoing genocide, means weighing every word against the gravity of the present and recognizing that the legitimacy of discourse also depends on the material and symbolic conditions in which it takes shape. This applies not only to Khoury as a Palestinian, but also as an intellectual. Questions multiply: How do we write? For whom do we write? Intellectuals are not always journalists, nor do they speak exclusively to the present. Yet they operate within public responsibility. Khoury recounts speaking with journalists, students, and ordinary citizens suddenly eager to understand Palestine. He sought to use his training to explain as much as possible yet felt that what he was writing seemed addressed almost to another historical time.
This does not imply a theoretical refutation of memorial reconnection, but clarifies its political

difficulties. The "new grammar of history and memory" evoked in the volume Holocaust and Nakba (Bashir, Golberg, 2023) remains epistemologically powerful: it means dismantling closed national frameworks, interrupting competitive victimhood, and rethinking the relationship between trauma and future. Yet without a shared "language" - that is, without minimal political and symbolic conditions of reciprocal recognition - this grammar remains suspended. One need only consider narratives that deny genocide, or at least genocidal intentions identified by many observers in what is occurring in Gaza and in processes unfolding in the West Bank, marked by colonial expansion through military and juridical-political mechanisms. One may also consider how Gaza's and Palestine's future is imagined from outside: ethnic cleansing and projects of economic reconversion, as in the Trumpian idea of the "Gaza Riviera," framed more as a *Board-of-Peace* rhetoric than as justice. The ideas of two peoples and two states, or of a binational state, appear increasingly distant, if not horrifyingly improbable.

After 7 October, what previously seemed a fruitful attempt at shared elaboration becomes nearly impracticable amid catastrophe, not because dialogue between memories is ethically improper, but because historical time is dominated by urgency and extreme asymmetry. Theory seems addressed to a future that does not coincide with a present marked by dystopia and pessimism.

Yet the interview does not conclude in abandonment. Rather, it reveals a decisive tension and impetus: precisely because Holocaust memory is sometimes perceived as instrumentalized in public discourse to silence Palestinian suffering, a renewed need emerges to rethink it critically, freeing it from political misuse. In this sense, the Holocaust/Nakba perspective retains value, not as an immediate tool of pacification, but as a long-term device capable of preserving critical space. This holds particular significance in Europe and for those - also within Jewish communities in the diaspora and in Israel - who express dissent, support for the Palestinian people, and firm critique of colonial domination and ongoing operations. In Italy, beyond critical Jewish intellectuals such as Anna Foa (2024), one may consider the group *Mai più indifferenti. Voci ebraiche per la pace*[2], which continues to denounce events in Gaza and the West Bank and to demand justice for Palestinians. Genuine "traitors to ethnic and national compactness", as Alex Langer would say (Vaccarelli, 2026), showing courage and coherence even when accused of betrayal by those enclosed within exclusionary identity logics.

In Paulo Freire's pedagogical vision, authentic liberation of the oppressed also entails liberation of the oppressor. According to his perspective, oppression is exercised not only "with weapons in hand," but through consent - explicit or silent - to dominant narratives, colonial ideologies, and racist substrata sustained by self-justifying representations of the "enemy." The formation of ordinary citizens thus becomes decisive. European memorial paths rightly include the Holocaust as foundational to civic conscience (Bravi, 2014; Vaccarelli, 2023). About the Nakba, however, too little is known. Even solidarity mobilizations sometimes rely on slogans rather than historical depth. International public opinion has played a significant role in supporting Palestinians, often compensating for political inertia or explicit governmental support for Israeli military operations or settler violence. Political consequences may be limited, but symbolic and cultural impact has been considerable. Accusations of antisemitism have been frequent. It is essential to distinguish clearly between real antisemitism - which exists and must be unequivocally opposed - and political criticism of Israeli government actions. Many mobilizations reflect not latent antisemitism, but the outcome of Holocaust education that has transmitted

[2] https://www.maiindifferenti.it/

the universal value of dissent in the face of genocide, as Anna Foa argues:

> «What are we to do, for example, when students - while at times adopting slogans that we might in some cases define as antisemitic - are protesting against what are in fact real massacres? Should we simply limit ourselves to denouncing them as antisemites? I cannot fail to recognize in many of their slogans, however confused and inadequate they may be, the very teaching that has been part of our memorial education: that the Shoah must serve as a lesson and a warning for all genocides, that this must never happen again to anyone, not only to the Jews»[3] (Foa, 2024, p. 61).

This reinforces the urgency of long-term cultural and educational work on the encounter of histories and memories within Europe, which must assume responsibility for antisemitism and the Shoah, tragedy that shaped postwar geopolitical balances, including processes leading to the establishment of Israel and the conflict with Palestinians. Edward Said (2011) recognized Israel as a decisive historical outcome of the Holocaust and European Jewish suffering yet insisted that this recognition could not exclude responsibility toward Palestinians from 1948 onward. Khoury, in his interview, clearly highlights how complex the connections between the two historical experiences are, and how they take on different meanings and relevance when considered at the levels of history, microhistory, and memory.
The aim is not paralyzing guilt, but a gaze capable of holding together memory, justice, and universal rights, in the spirit of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (2021).

It is therefore necessary to build, alongside public Holocaust memory, a more incisive public history of the Nakba. The theoretical framework referenced by Khoury, in dialogue with Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, offers a way of removing memory from competitive victimhood and situating it within a critical reflection on twentieth century and contemporary dynamics, perhaps beginning with history teaching and textbooks, here and now.
Does the term Nakba appear in Italian and European curricula? This is a concrete research question that young scholars such as Lorenzo Zaffram, co-author of this article, are addressing. Naming events within a semantic frame shaped by lived historical experience means recognizing a memory with interpretative autonomy and decolonial force, capable of activating cognitive and emotional decentering. In this respect, Holocaust memory has much to teach.

Ultimately, the interview places us before the paradox of thinking in times of catastrophe: reflection may appear inadequate yet abandoning it would surrender the field to closed and exclusionary narratives. The present meaning of this perspective is not to guarantee immediate peace, but to preserve a critical and formative space that may become intelligible - and perhaps practicable - in another historical time. A form of intellectual resistance that we assume, within our own educational space, as a present and future commitment.

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