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**Review of the doctoral dissertation entitled**

**“Erosion of the Collective Memory on the Example of Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank”, written by Asad Taffala, under the supervision of professor Anna Potyrała, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. 2016, 168 pages.**

In the contemporary world, we experience global unification tendencies, but more and more often we can observe contrary tendencies of multipolarity in politics as well as in the context of religion, culture and ethnicity. One unified world does not exist. There are many realities, which coexist with each other, although they are often completely contradictory. Palestinian refugees are a good example of a necessary coexistence with host communities. Such a situation has a significant impact on the development of an individual and collective identity. The author is right to point out that collective memory is one of the basic determinants of a community and its members' identity. It is an element of a social bond – an important factor, which integrates a community in the domain of values and ideas (page 2). On the other hand, an erosion of the collective memory, which consequently disrupts channels of communication, causes atrophy of the means of

communication and the content, which has a dramatic negative influence on national or ethnic identity of any community.

### **1. Comments regarding methodology.**

According to the author, the aim of this dissertation is to analyze the phenomenon of collective memory – a case study of Palestinian refugees living in refugee camps located in the West Bank. This analysis presents an erosion of the Palestinian collective memory as well as designate the content of the collective memory in different generations of Palestinians, regarding means and channels of communication between generations which are used to preserve and protect collective memory (Page 12). The outlined complex aim of this study and the desired effect, as well as the kind of factors which are associated with the effect are correct in my opinion. Further in this chapter the author lists other aims of the study, which are: proving that the process of handing down collective memory between three generations of refugees (fathers, sons, grandsons) living in the refugee camps in the West Bank of Jordan failed and that the content of the collective memory (stories, fairy tales, knowledge) which refers to their former lives in villages and the experience of displacement in 1948 is gradually eroding (page 13). Such a construction is in fact a hypothesis, to which the author refers in a descriptive (indirect) way, not an aim.

It is very important to formulate the study problems well. It requires thoughtfulness and knowledge, and in the literature on methodology, study problems are presented as an important issue, the fundamental question, assumption, conjecture, which needs an answer. A problematic situation precedes the statement of the problem. The author pointed out 5 study problems in the form of questions which are to help verify the hypothesis regarding collective memory. The most important questions are:

- Has the NAKBA generation managed to hand down the knowledge, stories and images of the lives that they had before the exodus in 1948, as well as the experience of the exodus and deportation to the next generations?
- Have the next generations (sons and grandsons) received the necessary elements that form the collective memory, and do they possess suitable channels and tools to hand down the knowledge to the next generations?
- Were there any unsuccessful attempts to pass on the collective memory, and if with passing time and the changes and transformations that are taking place, the memory will vanish?

The latter two questions regard variables other than age, such as sex, education, place of living, which influence the process of passing on the collective memory.

Both qualitative and quantitative study methods have been utilized in this work. The qualitative study methods utilized by the author are: description and the genetic method (the author presents events from the past in the chronological order and in the genetic approach, he demonstrates that each event has its genesis and consequences), case study, and institutional and legal analysis. The quantitative methods, which are used to measure the phenomena studied, facts and processes were utilized, amongst others, in the form of presenting statistical data.

The author describes two research tools used in this study (pages 17 -19): observation and interview. Participant observation is not only a way to record facts, events and phenomena. It is a unique way of observing, collecting and interpreting data in their natural course of happenings and being in the direct sight and hearing of the observer. The author rightly points out that utilizing this tool requires the ability to judge one's own (subjective – reviewer's note) impressions and the interpretation of observed reality. On the other hand, including the description of the technique of interview, the questions asked seem to be unnecessary, especially that a sample of the questionnaire is in the annex on pages 165-167.

The author accompanied the method and the research tools used, with a comment which specified the study domains in which they were used, but in my opinion the study process was not divided into stages and specific actions undertaken to achieve goals of this study were not presented in a clear way.

## **2. The structure of the dissertation and substantive comments.**

The content list gives us an overview of this dissertation. The content list is a layout of the study. The first important issue is numbering the chapters. From the point of view of the reader, a consistent numbering of the sub-chapters would be a better choice.

The dissertation consists of five chapters, a list of maps, a list of tables and an annex. The structure of the work is included in the content list and it is logical and consistent.

**Chapter One - Introduction.** In the introduction, the author justifies the choice of topic, formulates aims, methodology, terminology and outlines the structure of the work. In my opinion, the size of this chapter (24 pages) is disproportionate in comparison to the main body, which has 32 pages. In the first sub-chapter the author outlines the aim of this study and does a review of studies to date on collective memory. The review regards classical sociological sources from the Durkheim school and Arab and Israeli literature. The chapter starts with the notion of a global village without explaining the definition. It is important to explain it because the thesis of the destruction of collective memory is based on the idea of globalization and consequently the disappearance of group identities, globalization and other regional unification tendencies have a major influence on the conceptualization of historiosophical research and collective memory. The author also analyzes the idea of identity, which is shaped, to a great extent, by collective memory, and again does not elaborate on this notion and does not refer to any research or debate on cultural and religious identity, which is important from the Palestinian point of view. A presentation of the historic discourse only through

historic analyses, regarding the creation of Israel in 1948 and the wave of immigration, without a cultural context, is in my opinion a serious flaw in presenting the issue in question. What is more, the author does not elaborate on the topic of the sub-chapter. It is discussed indirectly in the next chapter. The methodological issues described in the next two sub-chapters have been discussed earlier in the work. The 4<sup>th</sup> sub-chapter presents terminology and definitions i.e. collective memory, actors of memory, channels of passing on the collective memory, medialization and the Palestinian refugee. What is missing is an explanation of the key word, which is, among others, used in the questionnaire questions – NAKBA. Although the meaning is mentioned on page 12: ‘the exodus that Began in 1948 (called NAKBA) (...)’, in my opinion an explanation of this expression should be more direct, detailed and contextual. The idea of an ‘identity’, which is associated with the collective memory and is analyzed by the author, is not explained in the terminology paragraph either.

Chapter two is entitled: ‘**History of the Palestinian Refugee Question**’ and it contains two parts that present the problem of the Israeli-Arab conflict as the determinant of the Palestinian displacement and the characteristic of the United Nations Relief and works for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The author starts his analysis in the year 1947, in which The General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution on dividing the territory of Palestine into two countries – and Arab one and a Jewish one, and states that the rejection of this plan by the Arabs led to the deportations of the Palestinian people from their land. Such an approach to the cause-effect issue is not justified. Description of the war in 1948, called ‘war of independence’ by the Israelis, and ‘day of the catastrophe’ (NAKBA) by the Palestinians, should be accompanied by an analysis of the international situation, the policy of the British on their mandate territory of Palestine, as well as actions undertaken by Zionists in order to promote Jewish colonization i.e. aliyahs, kibbutzs. Regarding the Arab-Israeli war as a determinant of the Palestinian displacement, it is important to differentiate between two armed conflicts: the conflict between the Jewish community and the Arabs in

Palestine before the creation of Israel that lasted from December 1947 to May 1948, and the war between Israel and its neighbors that lasted till the middle of 1949. The lack of contextual analysis is a serious flaw that may lead to a simplification and generalization. Pointing out the war of 1948 as the direct cause of the Palestinian expatriation (NAKBA) is correct. In the context of the issues being analyzed and the formulated definition of 'a refugee' (pages 21 – 22). The presentation of the subsequent armed Arab-Israeli conflicts from 1967, 1972 and 1982 is unclear. The statistical data regarding the number of refugees in 1948 and shortly afterwards seems to be disorganized (pages 28,29,30,36).

While describing the complex issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the author did not avoid making general judgements without presenting relevant historical facts, e.g. 'despite calls that the Israelis have issued, the reality on the ground was very different as the brutality of the newly founded Jewish state was evident'(page 29). Such a general statement in a scientific paper requires scientific evidence. In this particular case, there are confirmed historical facts that support the statement, e. g. B. Morris (2001), cited by the author, who documented 24 cases of using terror or mass murder by the Israelis, such as those in Dajr Jasin, Saliha, Lod or al-Dawajima.

Further in this dissertation, the author describes UNRWA, which is undoubtedly a very important organization for the functioning of the camps and survival of the refugees. However, the topic of the issues analyzed in this work does not justify such a detailed description of this organization, its donors and every department. It would be justified to elaborate on the department of education (pages 59, 68-69) and actual educational programs regarding the collective memory or developing the national identity of refugees living in camps in the West Bank.

The third chapter entitled **Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank** consists of three parts, in which some of the refugee camps in the West Bank were characterized. The living conditions, refugees' needs and the answer to the needs were presented. There is an 11-page-long introduction in which information about

the wars in 1967,1973 and 1983 is presented again (see pages 39-42 and 75-76), and there is again a passage on the conflict between the Palestinian and Jewish communities in 1948 (page 74). Further in the chapter, the author presented the main steps of the peace process and the involvement of the international community in this process (inter alia Oslo Accord or Camp David). The actions undertaken to solve the Palestinian issue in the political context were described again in the sub-chapter no. 3, so these parts of the chapter are not coherent, although the description of the peace process is an important part of this work, that shows the efforts to improve the situation of the Palestinian refugees. Since the topic of the chapter is introduced by describing the actions undertaken by the UN, and it is a contextual and general description, sub-chapter no. 3 entitled '**Needs and responses regarding Palestinian refugees**' should include a description of these actions on the regional and local level, such as the presented analysis of the consequences of the building of the separation barrier.

The description of the refugee camps is a valuable one because it shows the places where the interviews took place and the social-economic situation that influences the collective memory. Most of the essential information about the camps and their functioning comes from UNRWA. It is a good source of information because they update their data regularly and the data are easily accessible on their website, but because the author comes from an Arab background, so there is no language barrier, which is often the case among western researchers, one would expect more varied sources of information on the life in the refugee camps. A good but rare example of activities undertaken in refugee camps is the presented program of the 'Project Hope' NGO (page 95), however, the source of information is not given.

Chapter four is entitled '**Investigation of Collective Memory – interview approach**'. This chapter contains the author's research results and it is very valuable material that shows the channels of passing on collective memory, the content of the memory, as well as the causes of the erosion of collective memory in the Palestinian population in question. In the first part of the chapter the author

describes in detail the population sample that consisted of 75 interviewed men and women, who live in 7 refugee camps in the West Bank. It is a relatively large sample, considering the methodological recommendations regarding quality research.

The statistical data and the results of interviews were correctly used to analyze the variables regarding the channels of passing on collective memory between Fathers, Sons and Grandsons. The findings that the generation of Fathers prefers oral narration as a channel of passing on collective memory, and at the same time it is the cause of erosion because the generation is dying out, are of important value. Thus, one should ask the question why the stories are not written and published. Here the author identified two main problems, which are: the high level of illiteracy and including reading books as a channel of passing on the memory only by the generation of Grandsons, among whom there is a high percentage (32%) of those (people below 30 years old) who do not consider themselves a link in the transfer of collective memory. Participants with college education pointed at scientific research and popular science books as an important channel of passing on collective memory. The author pointed at the fact that there are no educational programs at schools that would, in an effective way, teach about the collective memory or were direct channels. Interestingly, despite bans and obstacles from the Israeli side, visits to the places of living of the NAKBA generation, keeping ownership documents and keys to abandoned houses, and the traditional clothing and food, are the main channels of passing on collective memory in the domain of knowledge of the area and cultural patterns. At the same time, knowledge of the experiences from the exodus and deportations erodes to the largest extent. The new channel intuitively used to pass on memory are media, especially the 'Palestinian Alienation' series.

At the end of the chapter, the author refers to other specific issues, and answers the research questions directly (pages 132-136). The research chapter is the most valuable part of this dissertation and a successful exertion regarding the



criteria of scientific research. However, the author could include more citations from the extensive interviews.

In the fifth chapter entitled **Conclusions**, the author summarized the analyses done in the previous chapters and relates them to the aims and research issues from the first chapter. The author's significant achievement is the second part of the summary that regards present challenges and predictions of the future of the collective memory of the Palestinian refugees.

The author correctly states that: *'the future of the Palestinian collective memory depends on the effort of the Palestinian people to protect and to transfer it down to next generations'*. The author not only points out the responsibility of the three generations analyzed, but also the responsibility of the institutions of the Palestinian government for creating and realizing programs and projects whose main purpose is to bring up a generation that will be aware of its duties towards the collective memory. The author rightly states that 'after the expulsion from their homeland in 1948, memory is the only element that still holds Palestinians together as a nation' (page 140).

In the end, it is worth highlighting the postulate which is universal, not only in the case of the collective memory of the Palestinian refugees, but also in all situations regarding the identity of nations, ethnic or cultural groups. This postulate is the activation of the younger generation in the involvement of new technologies to programs, projects and activities to preserve collective memory.

### **3. Sources**

The author collected literature, which is listed in the bibliography on 11 pages. There are 161 items such as legal acts, monographs, scientific articles, reports and other materials, divided into the following categories: primary sources (28), monographs (82), scientific articles (18), newspaper articles and press releases (14), internet sources (16) and others (3). The choice and the use of the sources is correct. Works of Polish scientists who wrote about the Palestinian issue or the identity or

collective memory issues are scarce . The author refers in his work to A. Szpocinski (1983: 129-130, page. 19; 1983: 134 – 135, page 20) or B. Szacka (2005: 32-45, page 19), but the works are not included in the bibliography. There is not even a footnote. It is the same in the case of the reference on page 21: Korzeniewski, 2007: 9.

Taking into account the fact that the dissertation is written in English, not referring to works of Polish scientists to a small extent, influences the evaluation of this work, however, one can, as in the case of many other works, require to complete the bibliography from other sources. In my opinion, one of the monographs which is lacking in this work's bibliography, includes in-depth analyses concurrent in many points with this dissertation, i.e. the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, or the bilateral Palestinian-Israeli conflict, context and the course of NAKBA together with refugee issue as well as the analysis of the actions undertaken by UNRWA is a book written by James L. Gelvin 'The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War', Cambridge University Pres 2007.

#### **4. General and detailed comments**

As general comment, there are only three issues that need attention:

- Due to the number of the abbreviations used, a list of the abbreviations is necessary;
- Chapters do not have summaries;
- The work should have more clear, consistent numbering of the subchapters.

Detailed comments include the following issues:

- The dissertation is written in English but there is an incomprehensible Polish passage (page 4);
- Some items that are cited are lacking in the bibliography (pages 19 – 20);

- Sporadically, there are stylistic errors that impair understanding and complicate translation of the text

There are two interesting issues of which I did not find any explanation in this dissertation:

- (1) What is the influence on studying the erosion of the collective memory in three generations, starting from the NAKBA generation of the armed conflicts from the years 1967, 1972, 1982 that are described in this dissertation? Thus, if they do have an influence, why were the other conflicts from the years 1964, 1965 and 1973 excluded?
- (2) Does the author know of any particular educational programs in the Palestinian refugee camps run by UNRWA that have an influence on the continuation of the collective memory? If yes, which and to which domains (contents) do they refer to?

The third interesting issue regards the postulate of engaging the younger generation into passing on the collective memory with the use of the internet and social media:

- (3) Does the author know of any events, actions or other activities in social media in the domain of shaping historical knowledge of NAKBA (e. g. presentation of the places destroyed together with their history, families that used to live there etc.) or ethnic and cultural (e. g. folk clothing, traditional dishes etc.). If yes, a presentation of them would be of interest.

## **6. Conclusion**

All in all, this dissertation meets the relevant norms and requirements regarding the content and form, despite the critical comment that appear in this review. It is an original work and added value to the study on collective memory, and in a broader sense, on the national identity of the population of Palestinian refugees that live in the camps in the West Bank of Jordan.

**The reviewed dissertation, from the scientific point of view, meets the requirements of the Act on Scientific Degrees and Titles. Therefore, I recommend to promote Assad Taffal to the next stage of the Phd granting process.**

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