

Memories of Clashes, Clashes of Memories: The 1970s Events and the Making of National Identity in Jordan

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the construction and transformation of Jordan's nationalist discourse, focusing primarily on the role of historical memory in the construction of national identity. Special attention is given to the role of the 1970s military clashes between the Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM)¹ and the Jordanian army and the collective memory attached to them in transforming this discourse. It seeks to situate these events and memories within the complex intersection of history, nationalism, and politics of identification. The 1970s events represent a turning point in the history and politics of Jordan, and thus have had far reaching implications for the construction of the state and the means by which visions of statehood are transmitted to local populations.

The paper is based on a fieldwork research which was conducted in Wadi al-Hadadeh, Jordan, located in the Eastern part of Amman. Residents of this urban district are of both Jordanian and Palestinian origins. The researcher collected most of the ethnographic data through conducting oral history interviews with residents, not only because there is little written documentation about the clashes but also because oral history is concerned more with meaning than with events.

Key Words: Collective Memory, History, National Identity, 1970s Clashes, PRM, Jordan

Introduction

Throughout its history, Jordan has faced significant internal and external challenges to its sovereignty and national security. The unique historical and political context within which Jordan was established has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation-state's interest, identity and development, and subsequently in defining the nature and context of relations among its diverse populations and groups. Like most local nationalisms in non-Western societies, national identity in Jordan is a product of the complex intersection of colonialism and modernism. Though it was launched in the name of all Arabs with the ultimate goal of creating a strong pan-Arab state, the Arab revolt [*al-thawara al-arabiya*], led by the Hashemites against the Ottomans in 1916, laid the foundations for the creation of Jordan. In partial fulfillment of British wartime commitment to the Hashemites, Jordan (then Emirate of Transjordan) was established in 1921. Therefore, Jordan as a state was founded before the concept of a nation was crystallized and before civil institutions were established.

Questions and meanings of collective identity, including national identity, in Jordan are constantly in flux. The "structural relationship" (Lynch 1999:257) between national, regional and international public spheres underlies the making of Jordan's national identity and national culture. Among the unique features of Jordanian nation-state is the existence of competing and overlapping forms of collective identities such as tribalism, pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. These constituent elements, however, are not mutually exclusive, for they overlap and complement on another. This implies that national identity is one among several ways in which people may experience a sense of belonging.

¹ The rise of the Palestinian Resistance Movement, situated as an anti-colonial movement, marked the formation of a new Palestinian collectivism along the lines of popular struggle. The idea of popular armed struggle as a means of achieving national liberation was developed earlier but fully matured and gained momentum after the second Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

As mentioned above, the 1970s clashes represent a turning point in the history, politics and society of Jordan. Tension between the Jordanian government and the Palestinian Resistance Movement began to surface after the establishment of the PLO in 1964, intensified after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and continued to develop until it culminated in the military showdown in 1970. The Jordanian government sought to keep the *fidâ'iyîn*² under control, but they demanded more freedom of action. Several *fidâ'iyîn* organizations established a 'state within a state' inside Jordan and subsequently assumed many of the Jordanian state's functions. Several interconnecting local, regional and international forces and developments precipitated tension between the two sides and turned them against each other. To regulate the restless relationship between the two sides, several agreements were concluded, but these were continuously either violated or not taken seriously by either side. The government became determined to quell the *fidâ'iyîn* when conflict and tension became acute. When peaceful solutions failed and tension peaked, armed conflict became inevitable and fighting eventually broke out.

Most writing about the clashes has been done by foreign scholars who have lacked an intimate familiarity with the social and political contexts of the clashes, relying heavily on military reports and/or officials' and politicians' testimonies. In general, scholarly studies that have examined the clashes, as of yet, fall short for a number of reasons. First, most, if not all, studies have focused on the official point of view, examining only the political and military dimensions of the clashes (how and why they happened). Second, studies have marginalized the unofficial point of view. No scholarly study, as of yet, has examined the popular memories and narratives of these clashes. This has created a situation of memory void. It is true that people's memories are marginalized; yet it would be misleading to speak of a total forgetting even if past experiences remain enclosed within the individual's memory. Third, scholars have often presented only one version of the story. In the case of local writers, the writer's ethnic background has dictated what to examine, whom to blame, and whom to victimize. Fourth, most scholars have dealt with Jordanians and Palestinians as unitary objects, paying little attention to the different groups that exist within each community. Fifth, most of the academic literature on Palestinians in Jordan and Jordanian-Palestinian relations lacks the participatory methods. Most of this literature utilizes surveys as a primary method of investigation.

Outcomes of the Clashes

The Arab-Israeli war in 1967 played a significant role in crystallizing and transforming the ideologies and practices of the Palestinian Resistance Movement. The war and its disastrous outcomes created a golden opportunity for the rise of Palestinian guerrillas as major regional actors (Sayigh 1992). They mobilized their supporters around the ideology of national struggle through armed resistance. The movement, however, was afflicted from the beginning with internal tensions and factionalism which seriously called into question its goals, effectiveness and development.

The 1970s clashes had by no means completely eliminated the power of the PRM but had weakened it to a level that compelled its leaders to reevaluate their positions, agendas and politics, but more importantly their relations with other Arab states. The end of the clashes and the subsequent eviction of the *fidâ'iyîn* from Jordan marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Jordan: an era during which the process of constructing and asserting a national identity took a different twist. Slogans such as "Jordan for Jordanians" and "Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine" began to permeate the official discourse and spread to the popular level. Moreover, slogans such as "unity of Jordanian and Palestinian people" and "the one big family" were repeatedly used by officials to stress and nurture the union between people on both banks of the river and inside Jordan. Moreover, one of the immediate results the 1970s events was the intensification of the struggle between the Jordanian regime and the PLO over the representation of Palestinians and their homeland. In October 1974, the Arab League Summit in Rabat, Morocco finally recognized the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of Palestinians. On the other hand, the outcome of the clashes solidified Jordan's sovereignty and boosted King Hussein's and the army's reputation, particularly among Jordanians. They were depicted as the ultimate saviors of the country and its sovereignty.

² 'Fidâ'iyîn' is another term used to refer to Palestinian guerrillas. It is derived from the Arabic word 'fida' which means sacrifice. *Fidâ'iyîn* are "those who sacrifice themselves or assume suicidal mission" (Schiff and Rothstein 1972:31). According to Amoss II, *fidâ'iyîn* are "those who sacrifice themselves, originally in the defense of Islam, now in defense of their nation. Originally this term was applied to members of certain Shi'a schismatic sects after the seventh century. Later it became identified with the agents of the Fatamid dynasty in Egypt in the tenth century. Still later it became generalized to designate warriors stationed along the borders of Islamic states, whose duty was to defend the Islamic community from hostile invaders" (1980: xxi).

Triggering Memory

Because there are no physical markers associated with the 1970s events, people's memories are usually triggered by everyday social interactions. Therefore, markers that evoke memories of the past occur in the present. Memories of the clashes have changed over time but have not deteriorated or faded. They are still vivid in people's minds awaiting a trigger to be unleashed.

People's memories of the clashes are not substantiated through "multiple forms of public commemorative rituals" (Zerubavel 2000:5). Commemoration of public events like wars is usually organized by the state. The Jordanian state, however, neither organizes nor permits any public commemorative rituals or ceremonies related to the clashes. It fears that such rituals may provoke actions of violence and cause more polarization and rift rather than solidarity and reconciliation. After all, Palestinians represent almost half of Jordan's total population. Although the state, through its army, claimed victory and was able to evict the Palestinian guerrillas from Jordan, the 1970s tragic episode is still considered "an open wound in the national psyche" (Abu-Odeh 1999:278). The clashes represent a vividly remembered experience that evokes contested memories and interpretations. Moreover, people's memories of the clashes are not mediated by public representations, such as films, TV shows, songs, museums, or monuments; they are rather based exclusively on personal and collective experiences. Thus people tend to preserve most of their memories of such a traumatic past primarily through private telling.

Markers that provoke people to remember the clashes introduce a "seed of memory" into the body of testimony (Halbwachs 1980:25) and bring the clashes to the forefront. Once memories are triggered, people become possessed by them, especially if these memories are peppered with haunting stories of death and torture. Some people get emotional and begin to weep as they recall the past and narrate their memories.

People's memories are evoked by temporal markers, such as when the year 1970 is brought up in a general conversation. In most people's minds, the year 1970 is primarily associated with the clashes, which have become a central temporal reference and a key past event in peoples' memories. Because the clashes have resulted in significant transformations and changes, people's memories of the past seem to revolve around the periods before and after 1970.

Memory is also triggered by spatial markers, such as when people visit places or sites where major episodes of fighting took place. A spatial framework is necessary to locate memories of past experiences, for "it is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present" (Ibid:157). People invoke and recapture the past through physical surroundings. Thus the past is rooted in place and the invocation of a historical memory unfolds within a spatial framework. In the case of the clashes, these physical surroundings, however, do not represent "spatial loci" (Zerubavel 2000:139) of public commemoration. Their symbolic significance relates to different individuals in different ways.

People also remember the clashes when names of political and military figures who were directly involved in them are mentioned in some context. The name of Wasfi al-Tall, in particular, is automatically linked with the clashes. Many people consider al-Tall to be the mastermind of the whole army-fidâ'iyîn episode. He was the Jordanian Prime Minister and Minister of Defense when the fidâ'iyîn were completely evicted from Jordan in 1971. Al-Tall was assassinated by a Palestinian guerrilla group, called Black September (an arm of Fatah), in Cairo, Egypt, in November 1971. Thousands of Jordanians, headed by King Hussein, participated in the funeral amidst cries for revenge from the crowd (Susser 1994:169). Many Palestinians still believe that al-Tall was responsible for crushing the Palestinian Resistance Movement in Jordan. In contrast, Jordanians consider al-Tall a national hero, a martyr (*shahid*) who died in defense of Jordan. They mourned his death by hanging black flags inside and outside their houses. Um Jamal remembers how she reacted when she heard the news of al-Tall's assassination: "When I heard that he got killed, I just burst into tears. I, like many other people, wore a black dress for almost a week as a sign of mourning." Um Nayef³, too, remembers al-Tall as, "people of his character are very few; he was a real man. I swear to God that I did not mourn the death of my two-year child as much as I mourned his death." This demonstrates the charisma that al-Tall had, an ξ which people continue to admire at present.

³ Both Um Jamal (65 years) and Um Nayef (59 years) are housewives. They are neighbors.

One of the most powerful memory triggers occurs when people discuss Jordanian-Palestinian relations and the significant changes they have undergone over time. People from both sides seem to agree that the clashes have played a significant role in transforming the nature and context of these relations. Abu Mohammed⁴ indicates as he discusses the current status of Jordanian-Palestinian relations that “there is no problem between people. They [Jordanians and Palestinians] have been living like brothers and sisters for a long time, but strangers and traitors would always turn them against each other. Have you forgotten what Israel and other traitors did in 1970? They made the brother kill his brother.” In this case, the past is invoked to serve as a framework to understand the present. Some scholars, as well as people, believe that the clashes and their outcomes have created a serious rift and tension between Jordanian and Palestinian communities.

Residents of Wadi al-Hadadeh, in particular, remember the clashes as they trace the development of the district over time. They discuss how the district was not densely populated or built up during the 1960s and early 1970s. They stress how the district was caught in crossfire and how residents during fighting were vulnerable to bullets and rockets from both sides. The two forces had bases at the opposite ends of the district. Due to its location- next to Hussein refugee camp and Jabal al-Hussein which were major *fidâ’iyîn* bases, and Jabal al-Qosur and Jabal al-Qal’a which were major army bases-, the district of Wadi al-Hadadeh witnessed heavy fighting during the army-*fidâ’iyîn* military clashes. Several *fidâ’iyîn* organizations established bases and weapon- storage houses inside and around the district before fighting broke out

Sites of Remembering

In general, people’s memories of the clashes are protected by a “collective secrecy,” (Zur 1998:173) which stems from a larger “culture of secrecy” (Feldman 1991:11). People discuss them informally in private settings. Therefore, the issue of trust is very crucial when it comes to creating spaces for remembering. As Zur notes, “the smaller and the more intimate the group of close confidants- family, friends and others perceived to be on the same side- the safer [people] feel to express themselves freely” (1998:166). Petet (1995), too, points out that in an Arab context, one is cautioned not to trust people beyond the circle of kin. As a result, memory resides primarily in the family.

In the initial stage of research, many residents were unwilling to discuss the clashes and narrate their memories. For most people remembrance of the clashes is considered “politics [*siyasa*],” a realm that one should not venture to engage in. Most people often use general linguistic codes, describing the whole episode as “*fitna* (sedition),” and blame a third party, usually Israel and the US, for instigating it. Here are examples of some people’s initial reaction when asked about the clashes:

We put this issue behind our backs and thanks God people have moved on. We should now focus on our common enemy, Israel, which is behind all our problems. We should wake up from our deep sleep and realize that Israel has been ruining our lives for a long time (Abu Madi, 65 years)

Everything is written, go and read about them in books. Why me? It’s over and I do not remember any thing (Suleiman, 51 years)

Women are usually more hesitant than men to invoke and narrate their memories. In a society where traditional gender roles are collectively held and respected, women are not supposed to discuss any topic with a ‘stranger,’ particularly a male stranger, let alone to invoke personal and familial memories of past events and experiences. When asked about her recollections of the clashes, Um Bilal⁵ responded with a light sense of humor: “Are you trying to ruin my life!! I swear that my husband would divorce me today before tomorrow if he heard that I was discussing *politics* with you.”

Older women, however, can sometimes escape traditional gender roles. Most of my female interviewees were from the older generation. Women’s narratives and experiences, which are usually marginalized in collective memory projects, constitute a central part of this study. Most women assumed additional responsibilities at times when husbands and fathers were involved in fighting, or were arrested and detained.

⁴ Abu Mohammed (50 years) owns a small restaurant in the district.

⁵ Um Bilal (43 years) used to work at a kindergarten school in the district but she retired three years ago.

Though people became less reluctant to discuss the clashes and narrate their memories once I entered their circle of trust, they continued to fear discussing them in front of strangers or people they did not know and trust. Several people refused at the beginning to narrate their memories in the presence of other people, claiming that they had no information that pertains to the clashes. Most of them changed their minds when they were later interviewed individually in private settings. Some actually became key informants throughout the research period. Once people agree to narrate their memories, the issue of confidentiality becomes critical. For them, the source of memory (the identity of the narrator) can be more dangerous and troublesome than the content of memory itself.

Vivid Memories

Most of the older people still vividly remember details associated with the clashes such as how old they were, where they were, and what they were doing when fighting broke out. Inhibited and repressed traumatic events such as wars usually generate repetitive memories and collective distress (Paez et al. 1997). As Wachtel notes, “memories confront each other, intermingle, fuse or erase each other” (1990: 10-11). Memory is truly “a battlefield” (Thomson 1998). Some stories do not reflect a first-hand experience as they are based on other people’s experiences and memories. People, especially the younger generation, narrate stories they hear directly or indirectly from relatives, friends, or others. Retold narratives usually undergo a change of emphasis and context, as narrators often improvise on them and add to them their own experiences or views. Thus there is a memory chain in which one memory triggers other memories. This demonstrates that the process of memory narration is constantly in flux and is continuously transformed by changes in identity and social experiences (Zur 1998). It also indicates that memory is socially constructed and is recalled to us through others (Halbwachs 1980).

Popular memories may resist or conform to the official memory. Most Jordanians produce memories that largely conform to the dominant official account. In contrast, Palestinians, especially supporters of *fidâ’îyîn*, produce memories that challenge the official representation of the past. Counter-memories, which oppose the dominant official memory, may remain marginal, localized, and fragmented. They are usually constructed and circulated within informal networks and thus remain secondary to the official memory. Both Foucault (1977) and Gramsci (1971) argue that subaltern thought in general and counter-memory in particular are fragmentary and incoherent. Counter-memory, which forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspective about the past, is not “a rejection of history, but “a reconstitution” of it (Liptiz 1990:213). Counter-memories may not produce a narrative of their own as long as they remain in the realm of belief.

The Jordanian official narrative holds that the *fidâ’îyîn* alone should be blamed for the 1970s tragic episode. The state stresses that it had to defend itself against aggression. This official narrative is expressed mainly in officials’ and state spokesmen’s memoirs, speeches, and interpretations. On the first day of fighting (September 17), the Jordanian government issued the following statement, which was broadcast on the national radio:

The Jordanian armed forces entered Amman in the morning of 17th September to reestablish law and order and protect the lives, property and freedom of the Jordanian people and foreign nationals present in the country. This action was taken after the complete failure of the central committee which represented all commando organizations to agree on an immediate start to implement agreements reached on July 10th and September 15th. 1970s (Snow and Phillips 1971: 93).

More importantly, few texts were published at the end of the clashes to present the official account. *Al-fida’iyun bayn al-riddah wa al-intihar* [Fidâ’îyîn between Retreat and Suicide], for instance, was published in 1973 by Mudirriyyat al-Tawjih al-Ma’nawi of the Jordanian armed forces. This book glorifies the historical role of the Jordanian army in defending Arab causes in general and the Palestinian question in particular, as well as its continued preparedness to defend other Arab countries. It also lists different kinds of violations committed by several *fidâ’îyîn* organizations inside Jordan. According to the book, the army was able to restrain itself and avert clashing with the *fidâ’îyîn* several times. When it was left with no other choice but to fight, the army fought with dignity and pride to restore security and re-impose law. The book ends with a verse from the Quran: “*Wama dhalnahum wa lakin kanu anfusahum yadhlimun* [we never inflicted injustice upon them but they inflicted it upon themselves]” (Mudirriyyat al-Tawjih al-Ma’nawi 1973).

Because the clashes are excluded from educational curricula at all levels and are not discussed in the public arena, younger people's knowledge of them remains very limited. Younger people's primary source of information, therefore, comes from the memories of the older generation, mainly family members and relatives who witnessed or experienced the clashes. Their understanding of the past is mediated by experiences, images, and stories- both positive and negative- passed down to them through a process of selection and reworking. Even when they have the opportunity to read the written literature, younger people are more receptive to the older generation's narratives, especially if there is a veteran in the family, than to scholarly analytical works. They tend to question the 'truth' of written accounts and narratives. From their perspective, it is in the spoken words where one can find fair representation of the past.

Memory and Politics of Identification

People revisit the past and invoke memories of the clashes within different contexts and for different purposes. Memory is embedded in their politics of identification. Palestinians invoke the past to construct a victimized collective identity, as they prefer to view and interpret the clashes from the perspective of a victim. They stress that the ultimate goal of the whole episode was to liquidate the Palestinian resistance and crack down on Palestinians in general. As Lambek and Antze note, "when memories recall acts of violence against individuals or entire groups, they carry additional burden- as indictment or confession, or as emblems of a victimized identity" (1996: vii). Politics of victimization becomes an indispensable staple of a collective memory which in turn becomes both a means and an end for the elaboration of a collective identity (Hoffman 2000).

In contrast, Jordanians invoke the past to construct national narratives and myths. One could argue that Jordanian nationalism lacks national myths, narratives, or heroes. Narratives and stories about the clashes are essential to the unofficial nationalist discourse in particular. In this case, memory serves as a source of national honor and pride.

Invoking the past serves as a site of power. Jordanians revisit the clashes to stress their Jordanian identity and that guests [Palestinians] should be grateful towards their hosts rather than aggressive. They use the eviction of the *fidâ'îyîn* and people who supported them to send a message to immigrant communities in general and Palestinians in particular that they would face the same destiny if they ever tried to rise up against the Jordan and its people.

In most of their narratives, people tend to focus on the pre-fighting period during which the *fidâ'îyîn* had the upper hand and were involved in daily contacts with people. *Fidâ'îyîn* organizations established most of their bases in residential areas, especially in and near refugee camps. Most recollections from the pre-clashes period concentrate on two main themes: the *fidâ'îyîn* -Jordanian honeymoon and the *fidâ'îyîn*'s irresponsible actions. Jordanians, for instance, stress how they welcomed the *fidâ'îyîn* in the early stage of the *fedai* action, when it was targeting Israel. They remember how "they shared bread and salt with the *fidâ'îyîn*," "how they used to pray for them after each prayer to be victorious," "how they were donating money and sacrificing souls for their cause," and "how they and their children were joining and following them blindly." People looked at the *fidâ'îyîn* with pride and hoped they would achieve what Arab regimes and armies could not. Like Palestinians, Jordanians bestowed public praise on the *fidâ'îyîn* for being prepared to fulfill their nationalist and religious duties. Arab masses in the entire Arab world showed exuberant admiration for the *fidâ'îyîn*, who represented people's hope to restore the Arab dignity and self-esteem that were shaken after the 1967 war.

When the *fidâ'îyîn* relocated their bases to Jordan, people felt that it was their duty, as Muslims and Arabs, to support the movement's legitimate cause. The mission of liberating Palestine and the holy al-Aqsa Mosque was seen as the responsibility of all Muslims and Arabs in the entire world.

People would then switch to narrate how this *fidâ'îyîn*-Jordanian honeymoon was short-lived, as members of some guerrilla organizations began to harass people and break the law when tension between them and the government peaked. They felt their kindness and hospitality to the *fidâ'îyîn* were betrayed, employing proverbs such as "*ily bishrab min bei mush lazim yermi hajar fih* (he who drinks from a well should not throw a stone in it)" and "*khairan ti'mal sharan tilga* (good you do but evil you get in return)."

Jordanian veterans who were stationed in the Jordan Valley area in the 1960s narrate stories of how they helped the *fidâ'îyîn* infiltrate into the occupied territories to launch attacks against specific Israeli targets. They provided the necessary military cover for these operations. *Fidâ'îyîn* leaders confirmed this help. Like civilians, veterans would then switch to narrate stories of how they became a primary target for the *fidâ'îyîn*.

Salibi states that the *fidâ'iyîn* clearly wanted at some point the military show in the country to be exclusively their own, which was enough to drive a wedge between them and the Jordanian army (1993:228). Yasser Arafat admitted in an interview after the clashes that one of the main mistakes committed by the resistance movement in Jordan was treating the Jordanian army as an enemy rather than an ally (Susser 1994).

A Contested Massacre

When we examine memory conflicts, we should take their rhetoric seriously; references and labels that people choose are essential to our understanding of their narratives and memories. Jordanians and Palestinians use different labels to refer to the clashes. I should note here that these labels were first produced and used by officials during and following the clashes. They, however, later became common idioms in both official and unofficial discourses. Palestinians refer to them as “black September,” “September massacres,” and “September tragedy.” *Aylul al-Aswad* [Black September] is the most commonly used one. Palestinians tend to stress the large numbers of casualties on the *fidâ'iyîn*'s side. According to several Palestinian estimates and publicized figures, between 20,000 and 30,000 Palestinians were killed in the clashes. In November 1970, Arafat stated at a press conference in Kuwait that “Amman was bombarded with about 120,000 tons of bombs by the Jordanian army” (Al-Tall 1986:77). At another conference in Jordan, Arafat reported that the death toll reached 7,000 on the Jordanian side and 20,000 on the Palestinian side. A month later, he admitted that he gave exaggerated numbers to solicit sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause from the international community (Ibid: 77).

In contrast, Jordanians refer to the clashes as “September events,” “*fidâ'iyîn* events,” or “white September.” *Ahdath al-Fidaiya* [*fidâ'iyîn* events] is the most common label. They tend to minimize the number of fatalities and to make the clashes look less tragic or warlike. At a press conference after Jerash-Ajloun clashes in 1971, Wasfi al-Tall, the Jordanian Prime-Minister and Minister of Defense, announced that “Abu Amar (Yasser Arafat) and his stations had lately been reporting imaginary stories about the occurrence of massacres. They reported that their death toll was 30,000 in Amman, 750 in Irbid, and 6,000 in Jerash. However, it was later revealed that only 18 people were killed in Jerash clashes” (Alwatha'iq al-Urduniyya 1971:180).

After the clashes, Jordanian and Palestinian officials were embroiled in a statistical warfare over death tolls:

The Red Cross estimated that about 3,000 were killed and 10,000 wounded. Arafat later stated that only 900 *fidâ'iyîn* had been killed, but claimed civilian casualties in the range of 20,000. Some Jordanian authorities insist that only 1,000 armed men were killed, one-half of whom were Jordanian soldiers, and that very few civilians were killed or wounded. The Jordanian minister of information stated that September 1970 fighting had produced about 2,000 to 2,500 fatalities and 5,000 to 6,000 wounded (Quandt et al. 1973:129).

A Plot (Mu'amara)

In most of their narratives, people depict the whole army-*fidâ'iyîn* episode as a plot which was designed by local, regional, and international forces. Such interpretation requires that “we conceive of memory as a multidimensional, displaced, and local-global construction” (Swedenburg 2003: xxix). Thus people's memories of the clashes ought to be situated within local, regional and international contexts, which all are interconnected and overlapping. Most Jordanians and Palestinians believe that Israel, U.S.A. and other Arab countries- including Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya- played a major role in instigating the crisis and exacerbating the tension between the army and the *fidâ'iyîn*. Each side, however, blames the other for participating in the plot and committing betrayal.

Most Jordanians and Palestinians believe that Israel, through its policies and hired agents, instigated the conflict and escalated the situation. According to most people's narratives, Israel, backed by the US, feared the rising power of the *fidâ'iyîn* and thus sought to destroy the Palestinian resistance movement. It feared the rising local, regional and international support that the PRM was soliciting. Within this context, people note that Israel “hit many birds with one stone,” weakening both the Jordanian army and the Palestinian *fidâ'iyîn* by playing them against each other and subsequently securing its existence. They stress that Israel was the real winner of the clashes.

People point out that some Arab countries had a hand in creating tension between Jordan and the PRM. Like Israel, some Arab regimes feared the rising power of the PRM and the popular support it was reaping inside their own countries, and thus sought to crush it on another country's soil.

Jordan's National Identity Aftermath the Clashes

Arguing that the colonial institutions of law and the military play both a repressive and a productive role in shaping postcolonial national identities, Massad (2001: 278) notes that “national identities and cultures in the postcolonies are not only modes of resistance to colonial power, they are also the proof of colonialism’s perpetual victory over the colonized.” Jordanian nation-state and national identity have emerged as bi-products of both national and colonial agendas and policies. Fathi calls this type of nationalism “a defensive and protective nationalism” (1994: 100). The nature and context of national struggle against the Ottoman rule and later the British mandate have played a crucial role in defining the nation-state’s interest, identity and development. Though a state-led nationalism has prevailed since the establishment of the state in the early 1920s, the regime has constantly sought, through different policies and initiatives, to promote a popular nationalism that would encompass all citizens regardless of their ethnic, religious, class or gender backgrounds.

National identity in Jordan remains fragmented; its ingredients are a mixture of tribal, pan-Arab, and Islamic elements. A core component of this identity is manifested in the stress on “unity in diversity” of the national community (Ibid: 238). Jordanian-Palestinian relations, both official and popular, and the controversies that engulf them represent an integral element of this identity and in the debate over its applications and implications.

The 1970s events have had far reaching implications for the transformation of Jordan’s nationalist discourse. The outcomes have complicated the task of foraging and asserting an inclusive collective identity. The clashes and people’s memories of them have become central to the formation of identity differences which are enhanced as the contrasts between people have become sharper through time. At the same time, the state has sought to achieve national reconciliation and protect the national cohesion which is still considered one the critical and sensitive issue that both officials and people have to grapple with.

In the post-clashes period, the top priority of the state was to consolidate its power and restore order. Consequently, national reconciliation by bringing Palestinians and Jordanians together was much needed to achieve these ends. Promoting the principles of national unity and cohesion was, and still is, considered the ultimate guarantee for Jordan’s survival and security. The regime feared that more polarization and rupture would put the country back in crisis. Catchphrases such as “one big family” and “one big tribe have become recurrent idioms in the official discourse since 1970.

Immediately after the clashes, King Hussein and high-ranking government officials made several visits to Palestinian camps in Jordan and received several Palestinian delegations from the two banks to get across the message that Palestinians represent a central segment of Jordan’s social matrix. In most of his speeches, King Hussein would always emphasize the sanctity of national unity. On February 5, 1971, he addressed the nation on the Sacrifice Eid day [*Eid al-Adha*] and stated:

National unity is the first fact in the Jordanian entity; it is the real brotherhood that brings together the worker and his work-mate, the student and his class-mate, and the soldier and the fedai on the battlefield..... Law and order are the frameworks that can protect the core of this unity and gives it the power to be a productive and progressive force...Henceforth, there should be no hatred and mistrust in our lives but rather love and sacrifice. We should all stand and work together in one camp rather than many camps to achieve our common goals and hopes (al-Watha’iq al-Arabiyya 1971:119)

Along these lines, Jordan had to reaffirm and renew a sense of belonging among its subjects and to interpellate them as identical. It had to secure the loyalty of its subjects and defend its legitimacy and sovereignty. In doing so, the state has relied heavily on archaeology and folklore, in particular, as vigorous instruments for constructing a “collectively held past,” necessary for “the definition of the nation as a distinct community” (Foster 1991:241).

The Hashemites and the Army: Master National Emblems

The reputation of King Hussein and the army skyrocketed among Jordanians during and after the clashes. They became master symbols of the rejuvenated Jordanian identity. The outcomes of the clashes helped consolidate King Hussein’s power and legitimize the Hashemite rule in Jordan. The king secured the loyalty of the army and people, who began to view him as the savior of the country and ultimately the head or father of the Jordanian family. Following the clashes, Jordanians began to stress the noble heritage of the Hashemites as direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. As Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe (1999) point out, it is now the nature, not the fact, of the Hashemite rule that is occasionally contested.

Moreover, people began to view the Hashemite rule as necessary to keep the country in order and balance. Abu Madi⁶ believes that “if the king were from the north, the south, a Bedouin, or a Palestinian, it would be almost impossible to rule the country.” It is worth noting here that only one attempt of assassination has been made on the king’s life since the end of the clashes but he escaped many attempts during and before 1970.

The clashes also boosted the Jordanian army’s reputation. A major campaign of army recruitment, which targeted Jordanians and excluded Palestinians, followed the clashes. People used to drop out of school and college to join the army. Hassan, for example, was a first year-college student when he dropped out and joined the army in 1972:

It was a very honorable thing to be in the army and serve the country. Everyone was joining the army and I did what most people were doing. I remember that 10 students from our class joined the army on the same day.

After the clashes, army members were receiving special treatment not only from people in the street but also from bureaucrats. They therefore used to put on their military uniform when visiting any state department to take care of personal affairs.

Wearing his full military uniform, King Hussein began, immediately after the clashes, to spend more time socializing with army members to secure their loyalty and reward them for the victory over the *fidâ’îyîn*. He would always praise the courage and strength of the army and its noble role in defending not only Jordan but also other Arab countries.

Songs and special programs about the king and the army jammed the Jordanian TV and radio waves after the clashes. These songs played a major role in asserting the central role of the king and the army in Jordan’s national identity.

Suspects and Targets

The immediate impact of the clashes on the domestic arena was widely felt by all citizens. The clashes “put a lid on political activity in the country....[and] marked a return to pre-1967 conditions with suppression of political parties and a tight control of freedom of expression” (Rath 1994:535). Martial law was maintained and consistently reinforced, especially against Palestinians. Immediately after the clashes, restructuring the status and role of the Palestinian community was placed high on the state’s agenda. Palestinians became a primary target for state agents’ and peoples’ harassment in both public and private places. They found themselves in a situation where they had to contain the rising harassment against them without reporting to the police. Their fear that the police would side with Jordanians against them was justified. In this context, they usually use the proverb: “*Lamîn tishki hamak idha kan al-qadi qarimak* [to whom should you report your worries and problems if the judge himself is against you].” Jordanians began to view Palestinians as suspects and inflicted their hatred for the *fidâ’îyîn* on them.

When the *fidâ’îyîn*’s popularity and power were rising remarkably in Jordan, Palestinians were able to assert their Palestinian identity freely in public. Their support for the *fidâ’îyîn* was a source of national pride. This, however, changed after the clashes when most Palestinians began to conceal any marker or symbol that would reveal their Palestinian identity. Some of them began to identify themselves as Jordanians rather than Palestinians to avoid harassment and interrogation. Abu-Odeh (1999) argues that Jordanians’ sense of guilt toward Palestinians, which developed after the June 1967 defeat, was replaced by a Palestinian sense of guilt toward Jordan after 1970. Palestinians became uncertain of Jordanians’ reaction towards them. To avoid more harassment and interrogation, most of them opted to stay home at the end of the clashes.

In contrast, Jordanians developed a stronger sense of their Jordanian identity after the clashes. They used different symbols to assert this identity in public, such as displaying the Jordanian flag and the King’s pictures on houses and cars, wearing the red and white shmagh, stressing their tribal last names. As Salibi points out, “the surge in Jordanian patriotism which had grown in the course of the confrontation with the *fidâ’îyîn*, mainly but not exclusively among the Transjordanians, provided the Jordanian monarchy with a substantial popular legitimacy” (1993:248). Jordanians celebrated the victory over the *fidâ’îyîn* as a victory over Palestinians in general. The outcome of the clashes was seen as a golden opportunity to gain more privileges and be favored over Palestinians.

⁶ Abu Madi (59 years) is retired from the army.

Conclusion

Oral history in general and popular memories in particular are usually told from a multitude of points of view. Oral history is “often the place where the tension between competing historical and political aims is most apparent” (Popular Memory Group 1998: 81). Unlike official history, oral history is less concerned with events than with their meanings. This, however, does not mean that it lacks any factual validity. Invoked from below, popular memories may serve to capture what history is unable to capture or explain (Dirlik 2000).

As has been discussed before, the complex intersection of history and memory has played a pivotal role in shaping and transforming the nature and agendas of Jordanian nationalist discourse. The 1970s events and the collective memory attached to them represent a turning point in the history and politics of Jordan in general and Jordanian-Palestinian relations in particular. They have had profound implications for Jordan’s domestic and foreign affairs and subsequently have played a significant role in shaping the nature of state-people and people-people relations. The clashes have greatly contributed to transforming the ongoing tension between citizens of Jordanian and Palestinian origins. Memories of the clashes have created pivotal structures on what it means to be a Jordanian or a Palestinian. Moreover, they have been central to the construction of the state and the means by which visions of statehood are transmitted to local populations.

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