



Published on *The American Task Force on Palestine* (<http://www.americantaskforce.org>)

[Home](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#)

The knowledge constituency versus the ignorance lobby

Media Mention of Hussein Ibish in NOW Lebanon - June 9, 2014 - 11:00pm

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/550810-the-knowledge-constituency...> [1]

The knowledge constituency versus the ignorance lobby

The saga of Prof. Dajani is a subset of a broader Arab struggle between the forces of intelligence and stupidity

Chalk up another victory to the mighty Arab ignorance and stupidity brigade. Or should we?

Professor Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi, who runs the Al-Quds University Department of American Studies and University Library has been allowed to resign his position following the uproar over a trip he led of Palestinian university students to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some Palestinians, including some of his own university colleagues, attacked Prof. Dajani with a mishmash of incoherent and utterly irrational condemnations.

The whole saga has been most impressively chronicled by the redoubtable Matthew Kalman of the Israeli

newspaper *Ha'aretz*, whose [latest report](#) [2] suggests that Prof. Dajani sought and received promises of

support from the university leadership, only to have his resignation letter accepted rather than rejected. Presumably Al-Quds University just doesn't want to hear any more criticism and prefers to turn its back on the entire "controversy" rather than uphold academic freedom in its own institution.

Prof. Dajani told Mr. Kalman that he saw his letter of resignation as "a kind of litmus test to see whether the university administration supports academic freedom and freedom of action and of expression as they claim

or not." If this was indeed a test, they just got a resounding F.

But the whole squalid affair is redolent with Palestinian, and broader Arab, collective neurotic symptoms about others. What, after all, do Palestinians have to gain by insisting their students remain ignorant of the Holocaust? Prof. Dajani argued from the outset that it is essential to understand the Israeli mentality and the Jewish experiences, especially in Europe during the first half of the 20th century, that inform it. It's an unassailable argument.

Nonetheless, there are those, including professors, who, with a straight face, argue that Palestinians should only be taught, and by implication think, about their own Nakba.

Others tried to argue that the problem was not with the trip to Nazi death camps itself, but rather that Prof. Dajani's trip was coordinated with an Israeli university that took Jewish students to a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank.

Shock! Horror! Normalization! It's laughable.

There's little hope of Israelis and Palestinians improving their dreadful relationship without, among many other things, trying to understand each other's histories and narratives. That's hardly a panacea. Real coexistence can only emerge in the absence of occupation, and the structural relationship of dominance and subordination built into that profoundly unhealthy and abusive structure. But better mutual understanding may be an essential component of helping to end the occupation and the conflict.

Even if none of that's true, knowledge is, nonetheless, power. The constituency for keeping Palestinian students ignorant of certain facts, presumably because they present the truth about Jewish suffering in Europe during the 20th century and that this complicates the understanding of Jewish Israelis simply as oppressors in the occupied Palestinian territories, is a perfect example of the "stupidity lobby."

And it's not just restricted to Palestinians and their relationship to Jewish history and the Holocaust. There is a broader conflict throughout Arab culture between those who want to embrace the world, in all its complexity and challenges, versus those who want to crawl inside a warm cocoon of insularity. Relying on nostalgic fantasies about former periods of greatness, the broad Arab ignorance constituency is very powerful.

It includes not only Islamists and other religious dogmatists, including apolitical clerics, but also strident nationalists, leftists, fascists, and chauvinists of every possible variety. Among all of these groupings, as well as the important open-minded and globally-conscious constituencies that are most in favor of engaging the world, there are people who push back against insularity. But for the past century at least, the majority trend in the Arab world has been to try, insofar as possible, to shut out knowledge of and engagement with outsiders, except for commercial purposes.

Many Arabs seem to be suspicious of and hostile towards real knowledge of others (as opposed to myths and stereotypes, of course), and even more engagement with them. Too many of us just don't want to hear it. Those, like Prof. Dajani, who try to break through this curtain of insularity are frequently punished, or at least criticized, for their embrace of broader realities, some of which are uncomfortable and destabilize reassuring mythologies.

Prof. Dajani says he doesn't regret the turn of events. Why should he? He's done something noble and constructive, and he will continue to do so without the support of his former university, through many other venues such as his Wasatia movement. But he, and all those like him throughout the region who want to smash the shackles of decades of carefully cultivated ignorance and embrace history and reality in all its

troublesome complexity, are pointing the way.

The whole Arab world is at a turning point. If it continues to allow the stupidity and ignorance lobby, in all its myriad forms, to insist on cultural insularity, chauvinism, and deafness to the outside world, it will remain utterly stuck and unable to successfully join and compete in a globalizing world. But if the intelligence and knowledge constituency, as embodied by Prof. Dajani and so many other important leading Arabs, succeed in turning their societies away from decades of enforced parochialism, they will be among the most important groups in building a better future for the Middle East.

The saga of Prof. Dajani, and the whole battle between the Arab ignorance versus knowledge constituencies, is far from over. My money is on the intelligence community ultimately defeating the stupidity brigade, but it's going to be an uphill struggle.

TAGS: [Palestinian Society](#) ^[3]

[Events](#) | [Daily News](#) | [About Us](#) | [Resources](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[!\[\]\(a03a7eb2f4046e1d3c76772003e549ea_img.jpg\) Front Page Features](#) [!\[\]\(844169987a590ed8c7e31d5d18950e8d_img.jpg\) World Press Roundup](#) [!\[\]\(2af34e678d9364b2f32b7174f4964d2c_img.jpg\) ATFP in the News](#) [!\[\]\(70453908cab6780413d48bd2b8b15c53_img.jpg\) Policy and Analysis](#)
[!\[\]\(00c909e82d9243e04b2a707a76cc895d_img.jpg\) Briefing Summaries](#)

Source URL (retrieved on Nov 22 2019 - 2:11am):

http://www.americantaskforce.org/in_media/mm/hussein_ibish/2014/06/10/1402372800

Links:

[1] <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/550810-the-knowledge-constituency-versus-the-ignorance-lobby>

[2] <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/outside-edge/.premium-1.597485>

[3] http://www.americantaskforce.org/palestinian_society