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by Tamar Sternthal

## Passing Over the Facts

While an admired professor, Joseph Ellis of Mount Holyoke College, was making national headlines for having fabricated tales about his supposed service in Vietnam, another Professor Ellis was also peddling a bogus story. Marc Ellis, a university professor of American and Jewish Studies and director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, has often served as a spokesman for the Palestinian cause and has used his title to gain credibility as a supposed expert on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It was clearly because of his "Jewish credentials" that the *Houston Chronicle* printed Ellis' April 12, 2001 column entitled "A Place for Palestinians in Passover prayers," in which he made the argument that Palestinians are now struggling for freedom from the Israelis just as the Jews sought their freedom from Egyptian slavery in the Passover story. While the *Chronicle* noted Ellis' position at Waco's Jewish studies center, it omitted some other details from the professor's bio—his service on the national advisory committee of the Arab-American Affairs Council, his appearance on Jordanian television likening Palestinians to Jewish victims of Nazis, and his authoring of ads for United Palestine Appeal.

The point of Ellis' column, none too subtle, is that Israelis are oppressors just like the Egyptians were. He writes:

Today, with Israeli gunships daily firing rockets into defenseless Palestinian towns, cities and refugee camps, it is difficult to accept the Passover narrative in its deepest implications. We as Jews are free, are "in Jerusalem," but is that freedom at the expense of others? If Palestinians are being taught the "lesson" of opposing Israeli power and standing up for their rights and dignity, if the message from the Israeli government to the Palestinian people is surrender or die—a message not unfamiliar to Jews—do we repeat this story at the Passover table?

The comparison, of course, is nonsense, and the implicit accusation against other Jews is offensive—that Jews who celebrate Passover but who are not supportive of the Palestinian uprising against Israel are immoral.

Ellis goes on to deceive his readers with a pernicious lie about alleged Jewish guilt in

the death of a Palestinian "friend." He writes:

During these days of celebration I will remember my first Palestinian friend, Nyaela Ayed, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 1999. Nyaela was a health advocate and planner who studied in the United States and who was known by all as a gentle and principled person. I last saw her in Jerusalem in 1998 and spent many hours speaking to her about her life and the future of her people. I also visited the land her family owned in Jerusalem that Jewish settlers coveted. These settlers were willing to pay large sums of money for a small piece of land that would then forever be removed from Nyaela's family and from her people. The Ayeds refused to sell the land. A short time later, Nyaela was murdered, a single stab wound to the heart, a professional execution.

There is just one problem with this account, an account which was particularly chosen to illustrate supposed Jewish oppression of blameless Palestinians. The "professional" executioner was Arab.

According to a Feb. 12, 1999 *Jerusalem Post* story, Nyaela was killed by a Palestinian who mistook her for a Jew as she walked through a Jewish neighborhood of Jerusalem. The killer went to the Musrara neighborhood intent on killing a Jew, and admitted his crime to police that day when he realized he mistakenly killed a Muslim.

The *Post* spells the victim's name Naela Hamdan Kara'in, which is somewhat different from the name given by Ellis, but such apparent discrepancies are quite common when rendering Arabic names into English. For example, Ms. Kara'in's PhD degree from Johns Hopkins was under the name Naela Hamdan Ayed.

Unfortunately, the *Chronicle* did not respond to CAMERA's requests to issue a correction concerning this egregious deception, which was particularly ironic given the author's lofty moralizing.

The newspaper did, however, publish a reader's letter exposing Ellis' false tale of Jewish treachery. That writer noted that Ellis "wrote about his observance of Passover—he might also do well to ponder the Ninth Commandment: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,' Exodus 20:16."

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