

A Report to the Brandeis Community on the Events of November 2013
Involving Brandeis University and Al-Quds University

December 9, 2013

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Introduction

This report reviews the circumstances surrounding the rally that took place at Al-Quds University on November 5, 2013, and Brandeis University's subsequent suspension of its ten-year institutional relationship with AQU. Photographs of that rally, posted on media sites, prompted some to denounce Al-Quds University and to call on Brandeis to sever this longstanding partnership altogether. We hope this report clarifies the nature and sequence of relevant events and helps inform the judgments of members of our university community.

On November 12, Brandeis President Fred Lawrence and Provost Steve Goldstein asked us to report on the rally and on actions taken by Al-Quds University officials in response to it. We arrived in the West Bank on the weekend of November 15 for a previously scheduled week-long trip to work on joint scholarly and academic projects. On November 17, President Sari Nusseibeh of AQU issued a statement to his university students concerning their conduct on campus. On November 18, President Lawrence suspended the partnership. On November 21, President Lawrence also suspended AQU President Sari Nusseibeh from the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life.

Given that Brandeis University suspended the partnership before we completed our discussions with Al-Quds University officials, we believe it is necessary to provide not only an account of the November 5 rally and of AQU's academic and political setting, but also information regarding the response of AQU officials to the rally and the decisions of Brandeis University in response to actions taken at Al-Quds. Finally, we offer our own recommendations regarding the future of the partnership and of Sari Nusseibeh's position on the Ethics Center board.

The authors of this report--all long-time members of the Brandeis University community and long-term participants in the Brandeis/Al-Quds partnership--engaged in extensive conversations at Al-Quds University over five days (November 16-20, 2013). During that time we were able to speak to the highest-ranking members of the AQU leadership, including President Sari Nusseibeh and Executive Vice-President Imad Abu Kishkek, academic deans, and faculty heading the departments of English, Political Science and American Studies among others. We also met with the internal committee appointed by the Al-Quds administration to investigate the rally; members of this group include the dean of student affairs, the head of the security unit, and the head of the university's finance and administration division. We have also drawn selectively on media coverage and correspondence within and between the two university communities.

This report, while drawing on our recent experience and conversations on the AQU campus and on many years of partnering with faculty from that university, necessarily has limitations. We are dealing here with very recent and combustible events and actions spanning two very different and complex university environments. In such circumstances, different people naturally glean different impressions and

reach varying conclusions. We have confidence, however, that our account in this report is significantly more accurate and authoritative than anything circulated to date about the November 5 rally and its aftermath.

This document offers five principal findings, which we summarize here and explain at length in the “Conclusions” section below:

1. *The November 5 rally included glorifying portrayals of hatred and violence that are antithetical to the institutional values of both Brandeis University and Al-Quds University.*
2. *Al-Quds University officials responded promptly and appropriately to the November 5 rally by communicating to both internal and external constituencies that the rally violated university policies and principles.*
3. *While we understand the reasons why many people were disturbed or offended by Sari Nusseibeh’s November 17 letter to his student community, the letter expressed neither intolerance nor hatred.*
4. *Al-Quds University is playing a courageous frontline role in working for peace by engaging those minority factions in its midst that hold extreme attitudes.*
5. *Given the active role that the Al-Quds University administration took in response to the event, and given the university’s enduring and vital work in promoting cross-cultural understanding and peace, we call on Brandeis University to resume and indeed redouble its commitment to this scholarly partnership.*

We appreciate that President Lawrence has elected to keep the channels of communication open with Al-Quds University. We understand that any process for resuming the partnership will require time and the patient efforts of many individuals in both university communities.

We strongly hope that such efforts will bear fruit. The Brandeis University partnership with Al-Quds University has for years reflected the deepest Brandeis values: the pursuit of truth, peace, and mutual understanding under the most challenging of circumstances. The partnership has not been built on politics. We have built it on a shared interest in ideas that animate scholarship and teaching and on a commitment to the crucial role of higher education in strengthening civil society and international cooperation in both the American and the Palestinian contexts. Continuing work with Al-Quds University on projects of mutual scholarly concern is one small but essential way in which Brandeis University can fulfill its mission of promoting social justice worldwide.

Background

Al-Quds University is a Palestinian institution with its main campus in the village of Abu Dis, located a few miles east of Jerusalem's Old City. The campus is situated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or "West Bank," immediately beyond the wall separating the Territories from East Jerusalem and Israel proper; the wall in fact lines the campus. Established in 1994, it enrolls approximately 13,000 students in a range of fields including medicine, law, engineering, business, and arts. It is supported by a combination of public and private funds. Although the university is comprised of several campuses, including institutes and specialized programs in Beit Hanina and Ramallah, a women's college in East Jerusalem, and a Jerusalem Studies Center in the Old City, the vast majority of Al-Quds students and faculty are concentrated at the Abu Dis campus.

The partnership between Al-Quds University and Brandeis University was established in 2003 by former Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz and Al-Quds President Sari Nusseibeh. Faculty, staff and students from Brandeis and Al-Quds Universities have been working together for more than a decade on projects related to effective teaching, academic administration, research and scholarship, and mutual understanding. Signature projects have included student seminars in Istanbul, West Bank, and Waltham that have brought together Brandeis and Al-Quds University undergraduates for intensive academic inquiry; a joint review and revision of the Al-Quds University economics, psychology and political science curricula; workshops on pedagogy, course design, assessment, and faculty mentoring; the development of a joint manual on effective teaching; an international conference on women's leadership; and individual, departmental, and university-wide faculty and graduate student exchanges and conversations in fields ranging from computer science to health policy, second-language teaching and program assessment. Many of these activities are documented at www.brandeis.edu/aqu. Principal funding for the partnership came from the Ford Foundation. The partnership's current funding comes from a California-based family foundation and from a Bronfman Foundation seed grant awarded by Brandeis.

Sari Nusseibeh has been president of Al-Quds University since 1994. Trained as a philosopher at Harvard and Oxford, he gave the prestigious Tanner Lectures at Harvard University in 2008. He has held lectureships, board memberships, or fellowships at universities as diverse as Johns Hopkins, the Sorbonne, Oxford, Rice, Birzeit, University College London, and the Hebrew University, as well as Woodrow Wilson and Radcliffe Institute Fellowships. He has received awards and honorary degrees from institutions in Italy, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and the United States, and he holds the UNESCO Chair of Freedom of Expression at Al-Quds University.

President Nusseibeh has a long record of working for peace within the Palestinian community, and has repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to cooperate with Israeli individuals and institutions even in face of intense criticism from his own community. For example:

- Dr. Nusseibeh was the Palestinian leader of the Nusseibeh-Ayalon initiative, a peace plan and process that he founded with Ami Ayalon, the former head of the Israeli Shin Bet. The goal of this process was to generate grassroots support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict organized around shared fundamental principles.
- Under Dr. Nusseibeh's leadership, Al-Quds University has developed academic relationships with all of the major Israeli universities, in sharp contrast to the other Palestinian institutions of higher education. Selected activities include a joint "virtual history" of Jerusalem in cooperation with Hebrew University; a cooperation in law with Tel Aviv University; and projects related to children and disabilities with Haifa University. There have been many more.
- Dr. Nusseibeh has publicly called for Palestinians to give up the right of return, an enormously courageous stance on a highly sensitive issue within the Palestinian community.
- For his consistent work toward peace in Israel-Palestine, Dr. Nusseibeh has won, among others, the Siegfried Unseld Preis (with Amos Oz), the Seeds of Peace Award, the Foundation for Middle East Peace Award, the Common Ground Award, the Lew Kopelow Award, and the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Medal.

President Nusseibeh's recent books in English, *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* (FSG, 2007) and *What is a Palestinian State Worth?* (Harvard, 2011) are major contributions to the literature on the Middle East. Both offer nuanced and thoughtful perspectives on the prospects for Palestinian self-governance and coexistence with Israel; the latter book also focuses on the crucial role of education in shaping Palestinian civil society and fostering peace.

The Setting

Al-Quds University is located within "Area B" which, according to the Oslo accords, designates territory under Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control. The IDF visits the area often; its patrols sometimes dissolve into clashes between soldiers firing rubber bullets and gas canisters near and into the campus and students and local youth throwing stones.

The tensions of life in the West Bank and the circumstances of the Israeli military occupation frequently spill onto campus. The administration has to work to try to contain conflicts between residents and groups of students, as well as internecine

confrontations among student groups affiliated with the various Palestinian political parties. Under the terms of Israeli military control, the Al-Quds University security staff are not permitted to carry weapons. In the months before the November 5 rally, there were frequent confrontations involving young Palestinian men (some of whom are students) and Israeli soldiers patrolling the area. On approximately four occasions this fall, Israeli soldiers responded to such events by firing tear gas into the campus, at least once sending many dozens of canisters into the university's central quad. On the afternoon of Sunday, November 17, we witnessed one such clash at the main gates of the university. Our view allowed us to see one student as he was hit by a rubber bullet and at least a dozen being treated by paramedics. We ourselves experienced the debilitating effects of riot control gas.¹

Like universities in the United States, Al-Quds hosts a wide range of student clubs and organizations, but those that vie for representation on the student council are political auxiliaries to the national parties. As student organizations, these groups also apply for and receive permits from the administration to hold rallies on the Al-Quds University campus when those gatherings conform to university regulations.

The November 5, 2013 Rally and its Aftermath

The November 5 rally was sponsored by an Al-Quds University student organization whose name translates loosely as "Islamic Bloc" or "Islamic Association," an affiliate of the Islamic Jihad political party. The Al-Quds investigative committee, which was appointed on the day after the rally to recommend appropriate sanctions and consider policy revisions aimed at preventing future such events, noted that this group, like the others on campus, is "always trying to popularize their ideology." This student faction, we were told, had recently had a "misunderstanding" with another student group and sought to use this "militaristic show" to exaggerate its own local strength.

Such student organizations are more powerful than their American counterparts in at least two ways. The major groups that vie for posts in student government are direct affiliates of national parties, which may also provide external funding and advisement. These student clubs thus often have access to significant organizational, ideological and material resources from beyond the confines of the campus. They are also able to mobilize their student members to conduct consequential actions on campus. At the beginning of the fall semester, for example, student groups

¹ One online reporter has suggested that the Palestinian media "fabricated" this event. This points to the importance of seeking fully reliable sources of information on such incidents.

demonstrated to protest the failure of the administration to implement new rules governing registration.

We understand that the Al-Quds student constitution includes a clear statement that activities that harm students, staff or the university are not acceptable. At the beginning of the fall semester, the offices of security and student affairs convened a meeting of representatives of the various factions to formalize a commitment between the students and the university as to the policies governing public events. Each student group that proposes an on-campus activity files an application for permission; the form for this application includes general “guiding rules” governing such activities, and administration representatives negotiate with the group as to the specific parameters of each event. The student group’s application for permission to stage the November 5 rally proposed four activities: a ceremony honoring the three best students in each school with awards; speeches; a dramatization that was to relate in some way to student life on campus; and Islamic music.

The rally did not in fact follow this plan. Instead, it featured young men dressed in black military-style outfits, wearing black masks, and sporting fake automatic weapons. The event included speeches, songs, chants and, as we understand it, a dramatic re-enactment of a recent death of a member of Islamic Jihad in a clash with Israeli Defense Forces. Photographs show formations of perhaps 20 to 40 persons standing at attention and extending their arms in a fascist-style salute. The student group that sponsored the rally unequivocally denied that this salute was related to Nazism. They claimed in a response to President Nusseibeh’s letter that “raising our hands was an expression of a pledge in sync with the anthem, ‘For my University.’” We address this position below.

Clearly the event violated on several counts both the individual grant of permission for this rally and written agreements between the administration and student groups regarding the conduct of all rallies. Those agreements explicitly ban military-style events, the wearing of military uniforms of any nation or group, and the carrying of weapons, real or fake. The banners on the ground representing the Israeli flag also violated university policy, which does not tolerate disrespect for any nation or its symbols. We were told that on other occasions, Al-Quds University staff had physically intervened in such displays and had removed Israeli flags when they were treated disrespectfully during similar rallies. Dr. Nusseibeh had in the past personally instructed students that he would close the university if they failed to remove similar flags from the ground.

In this instance, however, a highly charged political atmosphere with a potential for violence led university security officials to determine that any intervention or confrontation carried serious risks. Earlier that day, there had been heightened levels of tension between students associated with Islamic Jihad and students associated

with Hamas; some Hamas students had begun to assemble in the lower campus in a manner that threatened the social order. While Al-Quds University authorities had, for example, once closed the campus due to an unacceptable Hamas event, on this occasion the leadership was concerned that terminating the rally, and thus putting several groups of energized students into contact, might lead to violence between the groups. They decided to allow the rally to proceed and to deal afterwards with the deeply offensive aspects of the event and the violations of university rules.

Immediately after the rally, the Al-Quds University student affairs staff convened an emergency meeting of the leadership of all the student groups. They expressed clearly and forcefully that the rally violated university policy.

On November 6, Executive Vice President Imad Abu Kishek issued the following statement, which was made available to Brandeis University and to multiple news outlets:

The event on November 5 at Al-Quds University was led by people from outside the University. The threat of violence implied by the military dress, the fake weaponry, and the fascist salutes are not acceptable on our campus. The University administration will be conducting an investigation immediately to determine who was responsible and to ensure that this kind of thing does not happen again.

The statement that the event was led by outsiders turned out to be an oversimplification. While some non-students participated in the event, we were told by the investigative committee that students were the principal organizers and comprised the bulk of the rally's participants. However, since the student group is associated with a national political party, it is also likely that outsiders helped determine the content of the event. The rally included professionally printed banners, which also points to outside support.

Also on November 6, President Sari Nusseibeh and Executive Vice President Imad Abu Kishek appointed a committee to investigate the circumstances of the event and to recommend sanctions for individual participants as well as revisions to university policy. The committee consists of the dean of student affairs, the heads of employee affairs and campus security, and members of the academic staff. Its mandate includes making sure that the approval and monitoring process involving student affairs and security is effectively coordinated and pursuing a program of informational workshops to communicate to students precisely what is and is not allowed in student events. The investigative committee's work was still in process on November 20, when we left Al-Quds, but we were able to meet with the committee to ask them questions and learn of their preliminary findings.

On November 6, photographs of the rally were published on a blog site. The photographs were then re-posted on other sites by bloggers and news organizations. Attention immediately focused on the partnership between Brandeis University and Al-Quds University. The focus on Brandeis was heightened by the publication of an article called "Brandeis University: School for Scandal" in the *Washington Free Beacon* on November 11.²

Tensions on the Abu Dis campus were exacerbated on November 12, when a Fatah-affiliated group invaded a classroom to confront a professor. We do not know the details regarding this incident, but we know that the Al-Quds University administration considered the event a serious threat to the climate of respect and openness that predominates on campus.

On both Monday November 11 and Friday November 15, President Lawrence condemned the rally at Al-Quds University in his blog, saying that it "clearly expressed hatred." He also spoke with President Nusseibeh on Wednesday November 13, requesting that the Al-Quds President issue a further University statement that would be posted on their web site in both Arabic and English. As has been reported publicly, as a result of their conversation President Lawrence then shared with the Al-Quds University president a draft of the kind of statement that he would have liked President Nusseibeh to issue.

On November 12, President Lawrence requested that we conduct a fact-finding mission as part of our previously scheduled visit to Al-Quds University over the period November 16-20. Among other things, we were charged with communicating to President Nusseibeh the urgency of President Lawrence's request that he issue a statement in Arabic directed to his own community.

Much of our time during our visit to the Al-Quds main campus was spent undertaking our previously-planned partnership activities, including proposed research exchanges, a women's leadership institute, and curriculum development in the English department. We also spoke at length with leaders of the University about the rally and the Al-Quds University response.

² The *Washington Free Beacon* is a publication of the Center for American Freedom. Its online masthead describes the publication as "[d]edicated to uncovering the stories that the professional left hopes will never see the light of day." The Brandeis Office of Communications has told us that "the *Washington Free Beacon* article was the direct result of a 'no comment' given by Brandeis University because we did not wish to make a statement without more information."

Our work was further disrupted on Sunday, November 17 by a clash between Palestinian youth and a detachment of Israeli soldiers at the main gate to the campus. We do not know exactly how this clash started.³ By the time that we could see the confrontation, tear gas had been deployed and young men were throwing stones. Soldiers directed approximately 10-20 canisters of tear gas at the young people on the edge of campus, but also directed many additional canisters into the middle of the university quad. Each of us observed these events from a centrally located administration building, where we also experienced the effects of the gas.

On that evening (Sunday, November 17), President Sari Nusseibeh posted on his university website a letter in Arabic addressed to the Al-Quds University student community. Dr. Nusseibeh explained to us that through this letter he sought to address a larger set of pressing issues involving his university, included not only the November 5 rally but other threats of violence, including the intimidation of a faculty member by members of the Fatah party and internecine clashes involving both student political organizations and non-political student groups.⁴

On Monday November 18, President Nusseibeh sent to President Lawrence an English-language translation of his letter. Later that same day, Brandeis University announced an immediate suspension of the partnership, calling President Nusseibeh's statement "unacceptable," "inflammatory," and "intolerant." The Brandeis University statement included a link to a pdf of the English version of President Nusseibeh's letter, which constituted the first publication in English of that document. Since we were still in the middle of our fact-finding process, no report from us was available to the Brandeis administration at the time that the partnership was suspended.

Also on Monday, November 18, the Al-Quds University Dean of Student Activities convened a meeting of representatives from Palestinian universities to address the broad issue of the policies governing campus speech and campus demonstrations. The explicit goal of this meeting, held on the Al-Quds campus, was to promote a culture of tolerance and respect at Palestinian universities.

³ The missions of such units in visiting the campus remain unknown to us.

⁴ We do not mean to suggest that the campus feels unsafe to us. Quite the contrary; even given our belonging to a university community with strong ties to Israel and the Jewish community worldwide, we have always received enthusiastic welcomes and words of appreciation from students, faculty and staff there. It is precisely because the administration there promotes civility and intellectual discourse so consistently that these moments of incivility immediately strike them as unacceptable aberrations.

On Tuesday November 19 or Wednesday November 20, Brandeis University staff took down the partnership web site, hosted on the Brandeis University domain. It was restored on Friday November 22, with a note indicating that the partnership was suspended. Sometime during the week following the suspension, two paragraphs were removed from the June 19, 2011 entry on "Brandeis First," the blog of President Fred Lawrence. The excised paragraphs were those describing President Lawrence's June 2011 visit to Al-Quds University, in which he saluted the universities' "mutual commitments to excellence." These paragraphs were restored by Friday, December 7. We have been told by the Office of Communications that their staff was overzealous in temporarily removing this section of the blog in response to unauthorized usage of this material, including photographs, by other media outlets.

On Wednesday, November 20, the *Times of Israel* printed an interview with Sari Nusseibeh, in which the Al-Quds University president directly condemned the November 5 rally, saying that "trampling on Israeli flags and behaving as though sympathizing with Nazi or fascist ideology in no way represents our university values."

On Thursday November 21, Brandeis University suspended Sari Nusseibeh as a member of the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, saying that such a suspension was consistent with the suspension of the partnership. President Nusseibeh has been a member of the Center's board since 2000, pre-dating the partnership between the universities.

On Friday, November 22, President Fred Lawrence publicly indicated that he is "dedicated to keeping the lines of communication open between our institutions."

Conclusions

Our clear impression from the five days we spent at Al-Quds University was of a leadership that was angry and appalled by the character of the November 5 rally and determined to counteract and prevent such gestures expressing hatred and activities promoting violence. What we heard and witnessed there was consistent with the spirit of cross-cultural respect that has been a hallmark of the partnership from the beginning.

We believe that mutual respect includes trusting our partners' judgment about how best to communicate their messages to their students so as to achieve our shared goals. We are acutely aware that Al Quds University is a more highly politicized institution than most Americans are accustomed to, and it resides within a broader context heavily influenced by regional geopolitics.

If any such partnership is successfully to bridge such wide cultural and religious chasms, members of both communities will be asked to accept a strategy of engagement that will require fortitude and patience and, from time to time, forbearance. Below we offer our conclusions and the reasoning behind them.

1. The November 5 rally included glorifying portrayals of hatred and violence that are antithetical to the institutional values of both Brandeis University and Al-Quds University.

The tone and content of the event, as described above in this report, were offensive. The rally explicitly glorified and promoted violence, and it degraded a national symbol. This kind of speech clearly contravenes deeply held values articulated in many venues by the leadership of both Brandeis University and Al-Quds University.

As noted above, the student group that organized the event has denied that the gestures seen in the photographs are related to or inspired by Nazism. In this claim, they have support from some scholars on both campuses who tell us that a similar salute is used by other Middle Eastern political groups. However, the gesture of the upraised right arm is in our time well known around the world for its association with Nazism. Even if the origins of any particular use of the gesture lie elsewhere, those who perform it can be expected to know that it will be seen as an expression of support for a type of hateful fascism and as a symbol of hatred towards the Jewish people in particular. Clearly it has no place on any university campus.

2. Al-Quds University officials responded promptly and appropriately to the November 5 rally by communicating to both internal and external constituencies that the rally violated university policies and principles.

We want to emphasize that in the immediate aftermath of the November 5 rally, Al Quds University reacted on numerous levels to clarify university policies and tighten their enforcement. Within 24 hours, the University administration had taken steps to address the unacceptable elements of the rally directly with student leaders, it had issued a direct and unambiguous condemnation of the event, and it had set up a formal investigative committee. In our view, these were prompt, appropriate and thorough responses. These actions are consistent with the attitudes and behavior of the leadership of Al-Quds University over many years in promoting and elevating the values of tolerance of and respect for “democracy and openness toward other world cultures,” as Sari Nusseibeh put it, and specifically in demonstrating respect for and pursuing cooperation with institutions associated with Israel and the Jewish community more broadly.

Moreover, the Al-Quds administration is taking a leadership role in confronting these problems across the Palestinian university network. By convening a meeting of student affairs representatives to create new policies for Palestinian campuses, Al-Quds University has initiated a very positive systemic process for ensuring that such displays will not occur again.

3. While we understand the reasons why many people were disturbed or offended by Sari Nusseibeh's November 17 letter to his student community, the letter expressed neither intolerance nor hatred.

President Nusseibeh's letter to his students was issued in Arabic on the Al-Quds University web site on the evening of Sunday, November 17. Very soon after receiving a translation of this statement into English, President Lawrence suspended the partnership with Al-Quds University, calling President Nusseibeh's words "inflammatory" and "intolerant." Because President Lawrence pointed to this letter as providing a basis for the suspension and because it has been the subject of subsequent public commentary, we address it here at some length.

We understand why many readers were offended by some of the content of the English translation of the letter. In the absence of a greater knowledge of the Al-Quds University context or the background of Sari Nusseibeh, and without the ability to read the text in the language in which it was originally composed, many readers have perceived in the letter an indifference or even hostility toward the Jewish people and towards the state of Israel. We believe that a closer and more thorough reading of the letter in its full context is essential.

In writing the letter, President Nusseibeh addressed a problem more generalized than the November 5 rally alone, namely the violation of a range of pluralistic norms and policies on the AQU campus. These included clashes between student groups and the confrontation of a faculty member by a group of angry students. The arrival of Israeli soldiers, and their use of tear gas on the afternoon the letter was composed, also clearly influenced the atmosphere on campus.

In our view, the letter reflects a genuine effort of a University president to reach his students in prose chosen to engage them in productive conversations about the values of peace and mutual respect. "To express any position or opinion in a way that inspires hatred against others," President Nusseibeh wrote, "violates the concept of respect, which is one of the fundamental elements of freedom. The four lengthy paragraphs of the letter that condemn violence and hatred and articulate the "noble human values" of "freedom, democracy, and pluralism" have received too little attention.

President Nusseibeh begins his letter to his students by focusing on media attacks against their university. His use of the term “Jewish extremists” is jarring, and his anger at the attacks made on his university is palpable. But over the past twelve years, Americans and people around the world have had ample education in distinguishing between the use of the term “Islamic extremist” and criticisms of Muslim people in general. Presumably the same distinction applies when speaking about other groups. Observers may believe that Nusseibeh is wrong in characterizing certain individuals as “extremists.” But we do not believe the use of this term – or even the fact that President Nusseibeh starts his letter with this theme – expresses hatred toward the Jewish people or even an intolerant attitude.

We spoke with President Nusseibeh about his use of the Arabic word “majzara” to describe the Holocaust. In Arabic, the word can mean anything from “massacre” to “slaughter” and even, in some contexts, “genocide.” In any case, it is a word that connotes killing on a massive scale. His students, reading the Arabic, would have understood this clearly. If the translation of the word as “massacre” suggested to President Lawrence or others that President Nusseibeh was downplaying the scale of the Holocaust, this is entirely contrary to the Al-Quds University president’s intent and to his history of acknowledging the Holocaust in its full horror. Indeed, the phrase preceding that sentence condemns “inhumane, anti-Semitic, fascist, and Nazi ideologies” and dissociates them from the values of the university.

From our conversations with President Nusseibeh, it is clear that his intent was to raise the issue of the seriousness of the Holocaust by putting it in terms that would resonate with Palestinian concerns. In this regard, President Nusseibeh follows the line of thinking advocated by Yehuda Bauer, the leading Israeli scholar of the Holocaust. “If you want to teach about the Holocaust to Palestinians – as difficult as that might be – you have to start with the Nakba,” Professor Bauer said recently. “When I teach African-Americans, I begin with slavery. When I talk to Rwandans, I begin with discussing the genocide in that country. You have to start with the perspective of the class. That is just good teaching.”⁵

It is important to recognize the challenges of teaching tolerance and understanding in a polarized setting such as the West Bank--or, for that matter, Brandeis. This is exactly why it is so important to promote scholarship that teaches from dual perspectives, in the manner of the groundbreaking new book *Arabs and Israelis* by Brandeis University scholars Shai Feldman, Khalil Shikaki, and Abdel Monem Said Aly. Sari Nusseibeh was attempting to seize a “teachable moment” precisely so that students would understand the genocidal horrors of fascism and its potential effects. There is no evidence, particularly in light of the fuller statement and of Nusseibeh’s

⁵ Quoted in Stephen D. Smith, “You Cannot Teach the Holocaust to Palestinians!”, *Times of Israel*, November 27, 2013.

long and very public history, that the sentences on the Holocaust suggest hatred or intolerance.

No doubt President Lawrence would have preferred the November 17 letter to take a different and more direct form, something more like the unambiguous condemnation of the rally issued by Al-Quds University Executive President Imad Abu Kishek ten days earlier. But if one of the purposes of the letter was to communicate clearly to organizers of the November 5 rally that their speech and actions were unacceptable, then the message clearly hit its mark. Within hours of the posting, the Islamic Jihad faction responded swiftly and defensively on its own website. It would appear that President Nusseibeh's words in Arabic had very much the effect that outsiders were hoping for.

On November 21, three days after Brandeis posted the English translation of Sari Nusseibeh's letter to his students, President Lawrence suspended President Nusseibeh from the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, with the explanation that this action was consistent with the suspension of the partnership. As we have noted above, the letter violated no ethical standards by expressing intolerance or hatred. Moreover, Dr. Nusseibeh's membership on the Center's board dates from 2000, three years before the formal partnership between the two universities was established. For these reasons, and because Dr. Nusseibeh serves on the board as an individual and not as a representative of his institution, we do not agree that his suspension follows from the suspension of the partnership. We believe that this action does a serious disservice to a man with a longtime record as a courageous man of letters and a man of peace. It also violates the principle of maintaining dialogue even with those with whom we disagree.

4. Al-Quds University is playing a courageous role in working for peace by engaging those minority factions in its midst that hold extreme attitudes.

Although the large majority of Al-Quds University students identifies with moderate political parties such as Fatah, the full spectrum of Palestinian political opinion is represented on the university campus. This includes several student groups associated with some of the factions most bitterly opposed to the state of Israel such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. These groups represent a small and highly factionalized minority of the Al-Quds University student body, but they are a campus presence. As student organizations, all of these groups receive permits from the administration to hold rallies on the campus when those gatherings conform to university regulations.

If one ultimate goal of both universities is to promote a culture of peace and mutual respect, then it is better, whenever possible, to engage the more extreme political elements and to use the campus as an educational oasis for exposing students to the

range of interpretations and options that exclude violence and hatred. Indeed, a willingness to engage rather than ignore or isolate extreme elements is an approach to intercommunal conflict that has been a fundamental principle for many years within the Brandeis University program in Coexistence and Conflict.

Rather than distancing itself from the efforts of the Al-Quds administration, we believe that Brandeis University should be actively embracing and supporting such efforts. Our Al-Quds colleagues work on the front lines of several cross-cutting ideological conflicts under extraordinarily challenging circumstances. They must make judgment calls on a daily basis in a volatile social and political environment where the consequences of bad decisions are much graver than administrators face on an American campus.

We recognize that abhorrent speech events happen on all college campuses, including our own; that these events do not at all speak for the university as a whole; and that universities are charged with the challenge of educating students for a civil society in which such acts will not recur. It is thus crucial to exploit such student events as opportunities involving heightened attention to the salience of the values of tolerance rather than as occasions for rupturing a longstanding institutional relationship.

Supporting the Al-Quds University administration in these efforts will take courage on the part of Brandeis University. Some members of the extended Brandeis community will continue to believe that any expression of anti-Israel or anti-Jewish sentiments on the Al-Quds campus is reason enough for Brandeis to sever its partnership. We believe, on the contrary, that having the courage to persist in the face of disturbing and even abhorrent speech is the more promising path to peace and the path consistent with Brandeisian values.

5. Given the active role that the Al-Quds University administration took in response to the event, and given the university's enduring and vital working in promoting cross-cultural understanding and peace, we call on Brandeis University to resume and redouble its commitment to this scholarly partnership.

The Brandeis University partnership with Al-Quds University has for a decade reflected the deepest Brandeis values: the pursuit of truth, peace, and mutual understanding under the most challenging of circumstances. The partnership has not been built on politics. We have built it on a shared interest in ideas that animate scholarship and teaching and on a recognition of the crucial role of higher education in strengthening civil society and international cooperation in both the American and the Palestinian contexts.

We view recent events through the lens of our long experience with both Al-Quds University and its president. Our Al-Quds colleagues have stood up on many occasions--publicly and privately--to those in the Palestinian community who reject

cooperation with institutions associated with Israel or the Jewish community. The courage that they have shown in pursuing these relationships, including their relationship with our own university, should play an important part in the judgment that thoughtful members of the Brandeis community make about the Al-Quds actions and statements of recent weeks.

We believe deeply that this partnership represents a very important substantive and symbolic commitment to the idea that building bridges is essential, even and especially when that task is difficult. Our Al-Quds University colleagues are working on the front lines to create a Palestinian society where tolerance and respect for all people -- including the Jewish people and the people of Israel -- is a fundamental value. But in doing so, they have to find ways to engage effectively with the opponents of peace. Continuing our work with Al-Quds University on projects of mutual academic concern is one small but essential way that Brandeis University can seek to actualize its mission of social justice and the building of a better world.

Timeline of Major Partnership Activities and Events of November 5-22, 2013

1997: Sari Nusseibeh visits Brandeis and spends a week on campus as the first distinguished visitor of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life.

2000: Sari Nusseibeh is named by President Jehuda Reinharz as a founding member of the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life.

2003: Brandeis and Al-Quds University receive the first funding from the Ford Foundation to initiate the partnership between the universities.

2004: The partnership develops a joint plan for projects to be conducted under the fuller Ford Foundation grant, which is awarded in 2005.

2005: (July) Imad Abu-Kishek (currently Executive Vice-President of Al-Quds University) arrives to spend two years at Brandeis for advanced study and administrative rotations in order to help develop capacity and create an administrative strategic plan at Al-Quds University.

2005: (December) A Brandeis delegation, including members of the Office of Communications, visits Al-Quds University.

2006: (February) Communications, library, and technology administrators from Al-Quds University visit Brandeis.

2006: (February) *The New York Times* publishes feature article on the partnership

2006: (March) Faculty and students from the Al-Quds University American Studies master's program participate in a study tour in the U.S. that includes two weeks at Brandeis

2006: (May) Brandeis welcomes seven members of the Al-Quds University administration; Brandeis holds a special event featuring photography by Mike Lovett from his December 2005 visit to Al-Quds University.

2006: (May) Dean Elaine Wong and Professor Sue Lanser make assessment visit to Al-Quds University to explore avenues for teaching improvement and curricular development

2007: (Summer) Fifteen undergraduates from Al-Quds University and Brandeis meet in Istanbul for two-week text-based summer seminar on the topic, "What Makes a Good Society?"

2007: (October) Five Brandeis faculty and staff members travel to Al-Quds to offer workshops on effective teaching and to meet with administrators and faculty on a range of topics

2007: (October) Sari Nusseibeh visits Brandeis for a Meet the Author session in conjunction with the publication of his memoir *Once Upon a Country* and also discusses the future of the partnership with President Reinharz, administrators, and faculty.

2007: Six Al-Quds faculty members and senior administrators spend a week at Brandeis meeting faculty and students, visiting classes, and forging research relationships

2008: (April) Brandeis Chief Information Officer Perry Hanson, and Graduate Professional Studies Executive Director Sybil Smith travel to Al-Quds University to meet with administrators and faculty about library and technology services and continuing education, respectively.

2008: (August) Fourteen undergraduates, seven each from Brandeis and Al-Quds University, meet in Istanbul for a second text-based seminar.

2008: (November) Sari Nusseibeh delivers the Tanner Lectures in Human Values at Harvard University.

2009 (May): Brandeis University and Al-Quds University jointly host a conference on "Women, Leadership, State, and Society," featuring Brandeis faculty member Anita Hill and others.

2009: Five Al-Quds faculty members and five Al-Quds students spend a week at Brandeis.

2011: (June) Fred Lawrence visits Al-Quds University in June 2011, extolling the partnership and saying in his blog at the time that "[t]he key to this partnership is that its roots are our institutions' mutual commitments to excellence." During this same period, several Brandeis faculty members, administrators, and students from

the Istanbul cohorts meet intensively with counterparts at Al-Quds on such topics such as student services, department chairing, assessment of learning, mentoring of junior faculty, and the creation of a manual on effective teaching to be posted on both universities' websites.

2012: In conjunction with the completion of the Ford Foundation grant, Brandeis commissions a thorough evaluation of all aspects of the partnership. The resulting evaluation paints a positive picture of partnership achievements.

2013: The partnership receives new funding commitments through a Bronfman Foundation grant to Brandeis, and from a family foundation based in California.

November 5, 2013: Rally held on Al-Quds University campus by student group associated with Islamic Jihad. Participants are dressed in military garb, wear black masks, brandish fake weaponry, and perform a Nazi-style salute.

November 5, 2013: Immediately after the rally, the student affairs leadership of Al-Quds University meets with student leaders, including both those who organized the rally and other parties, to communicate that the style and the message of the rally violated university policy and are unacceptable on campus.

November 6, 2013: The Al-Quds University leadership appoints a committee to investigate the circumstances of the November 5 rally, and to make recommendations to prevent a recurrence of the aspects of the rally that violated university policy.

November 7, 2013: Imad Abu Kishek, executive vice president of Al-Quds University, issues a statement directly condemning the rally, including the military garb and the Nazi-style salutes. His statement is reported in multiple articles regarding the rally, and the Brandeis senior administration is apprised of Dr. Abu Kishek's position.

November 11, 2013: "Brandeis: School for Scandal" article appears in the *Washington Free Beacon*, directly attacking Brandeis for its participation in the partnership with Al-Quds.

November 11, 2013: Fred Lawrence posts on his blog condemning the rally.

November 12, 2013: Provost Steve Goldstein, writing also on behalf of President Lawrence, asks that the Brandeis delegation visiting Al-Quds over the next week glean as much information as possible and report back to the Brandeis administration.

November 12, 2013: Al-Quds University students associated with the Fatah faction disrupt the classroom of a faculty member associated with one of the Islamist parties.

November 13, 2013: Fred Lawrence calls Sari Nusseibeh, and asks him to personally condemn the rally in a new statement in both English and Arabic.

November 15, 2013: Fred Lawrence posts a second statement on his blog condemning the November 5 rally and commenting more generally on issues of hate speech.

November 16, 2013: Brandeis faculty arrive on Al-Quds University campus for previously scheduled meetings related to faculty research partnerships and the development of a women's leadership institute.

November 17, 2013: A clash erupts on the edge of campus between Palestinian youth throwing stones and Israeli soldiers. The Israeli soldiers respond with tear gas, firing canisters both at the youth at the edge of campus and lobbing additional canisters over one of the main teaching buildings into the central campus quad.

November 17, 2013: Sari Nusseibeh posts a letter in Arabic, addressed to Al-Quds University students, on the AQU web site.

November 17, 2013: The student organization associated with Islamic Jihad posts a response to Sari Nusseibeh's on its own web site, both defensive and angry at what it perceived as direct criticism by the university president.

November 18, 2013: Sari Nusseibeh sends, at Fred Lawrence's request, an English translation of the letter to the Brandeis president.

November 18, 2013: Brandeis announces suspension of the partnership and posts the English translation of Nusseibeh's letter on its own web site. Brandeis calls the Nusseibeh letter "inflammatory" and "intolerant."

November 18 or 19: Brandeis takes down the Brandeis/AQU partnership web site.

November 20, 2013: Sari Nusseibeh gives an interview to the Times of Israel, in which he explicitly condemns the November 5 rally, including the Nazi-style salutes.

November 21, 2013: Brandeis University suspends Nusseibeh from the advisory board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life.

November 22, 2013: The partnership web site is restored, after adding a notice about the suspension of the partnership.

November 22, 2013: Sari Nusseibeh gives second interview to the Times of Israel, in which he claims that President Lawrence has "gone overboard" in his reaction to the controversy at Al-Quds University and Nusseibeh's letter to his student community.

November 22, 2013: Brandeis issues a statement indicating that President Lawrence plans to keep the channels of communication open with President Nusseibeh, but that he will not engage further in discussion through the media.