

Self-Censorship in Conflicts: Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus

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The typical collective memories of societies involved in intractable conflicts play a major role in the eruption and continuation of the conflicts, whereas the positive transformation of these memories to being less self-serving promotes peacemaking. A major factor that inhibits such transformation is self-censorship. Self-censorship, practiced by members of a society's formal institutions, inhibits the dissemination of alternative, more accurate narratives of the conflict that may change dominating biased conflict-supporting memories. Despite the importance of formal self-censorship in maintaining collective memories of conflicts, little empirical and theoretical research has examined this phenomenon. The present study addresses this omission. It examines the self-censorship practiced from 1949 to 2004 in 3 formal Israeli institutions (the National Information Center, the IDF/army, and the Ministry of Education) regarding the main historical event of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus. This is done by analyzing all of these institutions' publications produced throughout the 56-year research period and interviewing their key position holders. The results show that the institution gatekeepers practiced self-censorship for 5 reasons: garnering international support, mobilizing citizens, the impact of Zionist ideology, institutional norms, and fear of sanctions. The empirical findings are used to elicit theoretical insights, such as a definition for formal self-censorship, the difference between self-censorship practiced by gatekeepers (from formal and informal institutions) and that practiced by ordinary individuals, the 5 reasons for such self-censorship

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(distinguishing between 2 categories—intrinsic and extrinsic reasons), and the reasons that led the gatekeepers to admit that they had self-censored.

Keywords: collective memory, narratives, official memory, Palestinian refugee problem, self-censorship

“‘*Forgetting*’ . . . is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.”

Paraphrase of Ernest Renan

Parties involved in a severe intergroup conflict carry in their collective memories narratives, defined as “social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events” which “are accounts of a community’s collective experiences, embodied in its belief system, and represent the collective’s symbolically constructed shared identity” (Bruner, 1990, p. 76). These narratives describe the historical and current events relating to the conflict. Typically these narratives are distorted and biased in favor of the ingroup, providing a simplistic black-and-white view of the conflict. The narratives usually play an important role in providing the rationale for the eruption of the conflict and its continuation, in maintaining ingroup mobilization for participation in the conflict, and in creating unity and solidarity (Bar-Tal, 2013a; Paez & Liu, 2011). It is thus not surprising that societies make significant efforts to uphold these conflict-supporting narratives through formal institutions, educational systems, research communities, the media, and cultural channels, as well as preventing the formation and the dissemination of alternative/counter narratives (Bar-Tal, 2013a; Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014). The alternative narratives consist of stories that provide different social constructions of interrelated sequences of historical and current events with new implications (Lindemann, 2001). For example, in the context of conflicts, such narratives (compared with the conflict-supporting narratives) typically present the ingroup more negatively (e.g., as carrying immoral acts, or lacking sincerity in negotiating for peace) and/or the rival more positively (e.g., as longing for peace and acting accordingly) and as also being a significant victim of the conflict (Bar-On, 2001).

When conflict-supporting narratives are well-institutionalized in a society’s memory, its members tend to search and absorb information

that is in line with their themes, adhere to them, and avoid contradictory information (Porat, Halperin & Bar-Tal, in press). This information processing reflects sociopsychological barriers that prevent progress toward the peaceful resolution of such conflicts (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011).

In addition to this bias in information processing, there are also other sociopsychological mechanisms that prevent alternative information that contradicts dominant conflict-supporting narratives from reaching society members. These mechanisms support the process of “forgetting,” addressed in the above quote by the famous 19th century French scholar Ernest Renan, in reference to the (non-) recollection of past events that portray a society negatively. One central mechanism is self-censorship, defined as the act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information (that is regarded by the withholder as true) from others (Bar-Tal, 2013b, in press). As noted by Staub (1999), self-censorship can have destructive effects when practiced by public and societal institutions like the media being involved parties or bystanders to human rights abuses and atrocities, such behavior can lead to genocide. The present article focuses on this mechanism, because, despite its significant influence on the way society members deal with alternative conflict narratives, some of its aspects have not yet been discussed in the literature.

In examining the use of self-censorship, we employ a case study method, investigating its practice by Israeli Jews in relation to the historical narrative of a major event, the 1948 Palestinian exodus. This line of study allows us to clarify, empirically and conceptually, the nature of self-censorship and its causes. We concentrate on the examination of the self-censorship of gatekeepers—society members working in Israeli formal institutions charged with the dissemination of national narratives. This is because gatekeepers have a significant influence on the formation and adoption of historical nar-

ratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and also on other conflicts worldwide).

As Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg (2011) pointed out, the research regarding collective memory is divided into memory texts, memory production, and memory reception. This article deals with memory production—often neglected in research—placing the spotlight on how gatekeepers selectively create the official memory of the state.

Self-Censorship – Theoretical Background

The study of collective memory in general, and that of conflicts in particular, has recently attracted substantial attention from scholars worldwide. Interest in collective memory has been steadily growing among social scientists and historians since the seminal work by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950–1992), who unveiled its crucial importance in the life of a collective (see, e.g., Paez & Liu, 2011; Winter, 2010; Zerubavel, 1995)

Collective memory is generally defined as a set of representations about the past that are collectively adopted. These representations are assembled in narratives that recall the past events on a certain theme (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011). They can have various levels of importance for the society at hand (Kansteiner, 2002), though the collective memory will typically focus on major events—those that have major significance for that society (Nets-Zehngut, 2013a). Collective memory is of special importance because it influences people's psychological reactions, including emotions, worldviews, trust, stereotypes, and prejudice, and consequently also courses of action on both the individual and collective level (Paez & Liu, 2011; Wertsch, 2002; Winter, 2010). Thus, the understanding of collective memory is necessary for the understanding of societal functioning and behavior in the present and societal aspirations and goals for the future (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Connerton (1989) pointed out that “our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past. We experience our present world in the context which is causally connected with the past event and objects” (p. 2). Although collective memory usually aims to serve the present needs of society members, rather than present an objec-

tive chronicle of events, it is sometimes based on historiographical accounts, that is, the ways historians view the events of the past. History tries at times to be accurate in portraying the past, and it may therefore challenge the hegemony of certain biased narratives that are dominant in the collective memory (Schwartz, 1997). One of the fundamental debates in memory studies is between the Construction and the Selection approaches with regard to the shaping of the social representations of the past (Neiger et al., 2011). According to the former approach, the events of the past are of little importance in shaping the memory, whereas according to the latter, the shaping of memory is mostly in selecting what to highlight and what to hide. As will be described below, the case study discussed in our research supports the Selection approach: Our findings show how information on the 1948 expulsions was self-censored—omitted by gatekeepers from the publications of their institutions.

Self-censorship is a mechanism that is very relevant to the study of collective memory. This is because it often refers to the non-transmission of more accurate information, transmission that may weaken the grasp of the dominant narratives over a society's collective memory. It is actually a general sociopsychological phenomenon occurring throughout the world in many contexts and forms. The brief definition of self-censorship that we offered above suggests that the actor must have the information, perceive it as truthful, and believe that the information has implications for the society as a whole, for other society members, for another group or people, or for one's strongly held worldview (see Bartal, 2013b, *in press*). The present conception limits the nature of self-censorship to knowledge perceived as factual information. It focuses on withholding information believed to be truthful, rather than on withholding an opinion that implies a personal view, vision, judgment, and so on that are subjective outcomes of information processing (see Barendt, 2005 for elaboration). The act indicates that the individual intentionally and voluntarily decides to withhold (rather than share) this information, despite the fact that no formal obstacle (e.g., censorship) exists preventing him/her from sharing it. This behavior implies that individuals informally partially influence the free flow of information. They decide not to reveal truthful in-

formation to their family members, close friends, colleagues, media, leaders, or fellow society members, for various reasons. In most cases, they believe that exposing the information will come at a cost, and therefore they decide not to reveal it. Thus, self-censorship differs from conformity, which is based on the perception of being a minority. In the latter case, individuals may change their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors to match those of others who are in a majority (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Additionally, while the principal motivation to exercise self-censorship is often to protect the group, in cases of conformity the primary motivation is always to protect oneself. Of special interest are societal cases in which it is clear that the self-censored information may contribute to the improved performance of the society and/or prevent future wrongdoing on its part, and individuals still withhold it from other society members (see Bar-Tal, 2013b, *in press*).

Self-censorship has been noted by behavioral and social scientists and most of them have referred to the widespread phenomenon of withholding information and opinions. In microsocial environments and especially in families, it is viewed as secret keeping, and family experts have discussed it extensively (Petronio, 2010; Vangelisti, 1994). It has also been noted in the context of organizations, especially in the framework of discussions about organizational malfunctioning and whistleblowing (Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003; Near & Miceli, 1996). Finally, self-censorship has been observed in mass media or in other societal-cultural agencies (Antilla, 2010; Kenny & Gross, 2008). Several studies have pointed to a number of causes of self-censorship, notably addressing the fear of social isolation when one provides information that contradicts hegemonic opinions (e.g., Filak, Reinardy, & Maksl, 2009; Noelle-Neumann, 1989). A similar cause, fear of social sanctions, has been offered by the *groupthink theory*, which relates to self-censorship practiced by individuals taking part in group discussions to reach a decision about a certain topic (Janis, 1982), although this discussion may also be seen as belonging to the conformity analysis.

In the context of conflicts, with which we are concerned here, studies discuss self-censorship in reference to interstate and intrastate wars, totalitarian regimes, colonialism, genocide, and

the War on Terror, usually documenting it as practiced in informal/societal institutions, with little conceptual development. Examples include self-censorship practiced by French film directors dealing with the 1954–1962 war in Algeria with regard to atrocities committed by the French (Austin, 2007); by the Hong Kong media avoiding criticism of Chinese political repression (Ngok, 2007); and by the American media (Mitchell, 2003) and even academia (Bhattacharjee, 2006) during the War on Terror. In the context of conflicts—and specifically with regard to their historical and contemporary narratives—researchers explain self-censorship as primarily resulting from a person's fear of sanctions (social and tangible) he or she might face should he or she not practice self-censorship. Broadly defined, these sanctions may include criticism, isolation, social rejection, termination of funding for operations, difficulty in disseminating various types of texts, confiscation of materials, arrests, and even physical harm (e.g., Austin, 2007; Hutt, 2006; Nets-Zehngut, 2011a; Ngok, 2007). More specifically, research from conflict zones such as Turkey (Burris, 2007) and Israel (Finlay, 2005), and with conflict-related groups such as supporters of Al-Qaeda (Finlay, 2014), has shown that individuals who publically disseminate information contradicting an official narrative are perceived by their group members as deviants and labeled as self-hating, traitors, disloyal, mentally weak, ignorant, or even pathological. Consequently, these people become more restrained in their maverick activity to avoid these social sanctions.

Other causes for self-censorship in the context of conflicts as discussed in the literature, albeit to a lesser extent, are the wish to achieve approval and respect from the dominant sector in a society (Dixon, 2010; Maksudyan, 2009), and the wish to prevent possible harm to the country (Akçam, 2010; Bhattacharjee, 2006). In addition, among the causes noted are the wish to prevent damage to intersocietal relations if previous wrongdoings by one society are exposed (Branche & House, 2010), the attempt to avoid paying reparations or giving back territory that was taken unlawfully (Dixon, 2010; Sand, 1999), and the desire to preserve the nation's unity (Boyd, 2008; Branche & House, 2010).

The present article aims to contribute to the study of self-censorship by offering four inno-

vations in its focus. First, it investigates the expression of self-censorship in formal state institutions. Second, it focuses on its performance by gatekeepers. Third, it directly and systematically focuses on the examination of the underlying motivations behind these individuals' self-censorship by interviewing them. Finally, to date, no research has systematically and empirically examined self-censorship among gatekeepers regarding historical narratives. Specifically, then, we will focus on self-censorship carried out by gatekeepers in these formal Israeli institutions regarding historical information dealing with the 1948 exodus.

Israel and Its Memory of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is by and large an intractable conflict, having lasted for about a century while causing severe material, physical, and psychological damage to the involved parties (Caplan, 2010). One of the key events in both the Israeli-Jewish and the Palestinian collective memories of the conflict is the 1948 War, during which the Palestinian exodus took place. In this exodus, hundreds of thousands¹ of Palestinians left the area held by Israel at the end of the war, and the Palestinian refugee problem was thus created. Since 1948, the refugee problem has been a major issue in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, which will need to be addressed in the resolution of this conflict. Furthermore, the Arabs and Palestinians have conducted a wide-scale diplomatic campaign against Israel, demanding the refugees' return (Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009; Lustick, 2006).

The parties to the conflict hold different narratives regarding the causes of the exodus. The main Palestinian narrative maintains that by and large all the Palestinians were expelled (Abdel-Jawad, 2006; Nets-Zehngut, 2011b, 2014). In contrast, among Jewish Israelis, the Zionist-dominant narrative² accepts no responsibility for the exodus, denying expulsions by arguing that the Palestinians fled willingly, mainly because of their leadership's blanket calls and those of Arab leaders to leave their localities, but also because of fear (Caplan, 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009).

Since 1948, this Zionist-dominant narrative has been disseminated in Israel through various channels, including formal institutions. The fo-

cus of this article is on three such major institutions: the Publications Agency at the National Information Center ("Information Center"), the Israeli army (Israel Defense Forces - IDF), and the Ministry of Education.³ For example, a 1971 Information Center pamphlet reads, "The refugees were not expelled by Israel in 1948. They largely left of their own will, following the calls by the Arab leadership who asked them to leave their homes in order to make it easier for the Arab armies to destroy the Jews" (Rupin, 1971, 27). Similarly, a 1979 IDF publication states that

the Arabs of Eretz-Israel started collapsing quickly. This collapse was combined with the calls of the Arab countries to the Eretz-Israel Arabs to leave their localities, in order not to interfere with the operations of the Arab armies . . . and it was most evident in the mass flight of the Arabs from their localities to the Arab countries. (Hakrav, 1979, p. 9)

Until the late 1970s, these formal institutions were extensively supported in their dissemination efforts by the publications of informal Israeli-Jewish institutions (e.g., scholarly studies, newspapers articles, 1948 war veterans' memoirs, and various history textbooks used in the education system without having been formally approved by the Ministry).⁴ The Zionist-dominant narrative of the exodus, like the narratives disseminated regarding other confrontations of the Jewish

¹ The exact number of the refugees is disputed and it ranges between some 520,000 to 850,000.

² It should be clarified that the "Zionist-dominant" narrative mentioned here is a historical narrative (addressing what happened in the past), in contrast to the Zionist ideology (a motivation and plan for future action). Moreover, there is a difference with regard to the topics of the historical narrative and the ideology. The historical narrative we address here is about the past events of the 1948 Palestinian exodus, whereas the Zionist ideology is largely about establishing a home for the Jews in Eretz-Israel (in Hebrew, the "Land of Israel"). Thus, people who hold the Zionist ideology may hold various historical narratives, including the Institutional/Zionist or the Critical/post-Zionist.

³ In general: Bar-Tal, 2007; Caplan, 2010; and specifically regarding these three formal institutions: Nets-Zehngut, 2008, 2012b, 2013a, 2015a, in press. As for the Ministry of Education, we refer here to textbooks approved by it to be used in the educational system.

⁴ Generally, Nets-Zehngut, 2012a; and specifically regarding the research community: Nets-Zehngut, 2011a; Ram, 2011; regarding war veterans: Shapira, 2000, Nets-Zehngut, 2015b; and regarding unapproved textbooks: Firer & Adwan, 2004; Podeh, 2002.

people throughout history—for example, regarding the Masada battle with the Romans ending in 73 AD, the Bar Kokhba revolt, a later rebellion against the Romans (132–136 AD), and the Tel Hai battle with the Palestinians in 1920 (Zerubavel, 1995)—was accompanied by themes of heroism and justness.

In the late 1970s, various informal Israeli-Jewish institutions began challenging the Zionist-dominant narrative's hegemony within Israel. Many scholarly publications and newspaper articles presented a narrative (the "Critical narrative") that contradicted parts of the Zionist-dominant narrative. This trend was based on the exposure of new documents, oral accounts by war veterans, and publications of new biographies and autobiographies providing unequivocal accounts of the expulsion (Nets-Zehngut, 2011a, 2012a, 2012c, 2015b).⁵ According to this emerging narrative, although some of the Palestinians indeed left willingly (e.g., because of fear, societal collapse, or calls by the leadership for a partial and temporary evacuation), others were expelled by the Jewish and later Israeli combat forces. This informal change intensified in the late 1980s, with the commencement of a historical revisionist period commonly referred to as the "New Historians" era (Caplan, 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009, Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2014). This informal critical activity influenced one formal institution in Israel—the education system. Beginning in the year 2000 and at least until 2004, all history textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education presented the Critical narrative (Nets-Zehngut, 2013b). For example, Eyal Naveh's textbook asserts that,

During the battles over the land, hundreds of thousands of the local Arabs were expelled or fled to the neighboring countries. . . . Some of them fled before the Jewish forces reached a village or an Arab neighborhood in the city, and some of them were expelled by the conquering force. (Naveh, 1999, pp. 138, 143)

The Information Center and the IDF, however, continued to present the Zionist-dominant narrative, at least until 2004 (Nets-Zehngut, 2008, 2012b, 2015a, in press).

This description provides the context for the present study. Three formal Israeli institutions (the Information Center, the IDF, and the Ministry of Education) have largely maintained a

biased Zionist-dominant narrative regarding the exodus through the years, even after the Critical narrative had become widely validated in scholarly research and war veterans' memoirs, and disseminated by informal institutions. In this context, our study examines two research questions: Did gatekeepers in these three institutions practice self-censorship when presenting the causes for the 1948 exodus, and if they did, what motives guided this practice?

Method

The study employed two types of data: publications and interviews. Initially, it examined the way the causes of the 1948 exodus were presented in the publications produced by the three institutions over 56 years—from 1949 (right after the establishment of the State of Israel) to the end of 2004 (before the research began). These three institutions present Israel's official memory and are imperative channels in disseminating historical government-supported narratives of the conflict to Israelis: the Information Center, the main institution in Israel for disseminating information to citizens; the Information Branch in the Chief Officer's Headquarters of the IDF Education Corps, the main unit for disseminating information to soldiers; and the Ministry of Education, charged with disseminating information to children and youth. In examining the first two institutions, we reviewed the books, booklets, and periodicals that they disseminated through the Information Center's regional stores, through public libraries, through targeted distribution to journalists and teachers, and to the soldiers in their bases. In examining the material of the Ministry of Education, we focused on the approved history and civics textbooks for use in middle-schools and high-schools belonging to the state-secular education system (Israel's central education system). Students either buy these textbooks in bookstores or receive them in their schools.

All relevant publications produced by these three institutions in the years 1949 through 2004 were analyzed in this research. This full coverage lends validity to our findings with

⁵ To clarify: the "Critical" narrative of the exodus is a specific Israeli example of an "alternative" narrative, discussed above. It is an alternative to the Zionist-dominant narrative of the exodus, initially dominant in Israel.

regard to the way the institutions presented the exodus. The publications were traced in the institutions' libraries, national archives, academic libraries, and the personal collections of their former staff. In total, 63 relevant publications were traced: 20 by the Information Center, 24 by the IDF, and 19 by the Ministry of Education. The publications were content-analyzed (Glassner & Moreno, 1989) to determine the narratives presented in them with regard to the exodus's causes (e.g., Zionist-dominant or Critical, as exemplified above in the Israeli Memory section). Two scholars conducted the content analysis by interpreting the narratives. The findings of this analysis have already been published in several studies cited in the above review of Israel's memory of the exodus, regarding the way the three formal institutions in question presented the exodus. Therefore, the present article does not elaborate on the analysis's results, but rather describes them briefly in this Israeli memory review, focusing instead on the self-censorship that was practiced in producing these publications.

In the next phase, interviews were conducted with 33 key people who worked in the three institutions (e.g., heads of the IDF Information Branch, directors of the Information Center, and history team leaders in the Curricula Branch at the Ministry of Education), in different points in time and for varied periods (usually several decades), covering this period almost fully. Most of them were involved directly with the production of the institutions' relevant publications (as their authors or the authors' supervisors), and a minority of them indirectly (e.g., history and civics supervisors in the Ministry of Education, influencing the textbooks' approval and dissemination). The interviews, which constitute the core of the present study, were conducted with all living and available officials, currently or formerly holding senior positions in the three institutions and being responsible for their publications. Exceptions are the commanders of the IDF Information Branch; because of the fast turnover in the Branch (commanders were replaced every two-three years), only some commanders were interviewed, covering the main segments of the entire research period. When the first author approached all the interviewees, they were told that the research was part of a doctoral dissertation examining the way their institutions presented the causes of

the 1948 exodus and aiming to understand the reasons behind this presentation, to explore the dynamics of official memory. The dissertation's designated audience was presented as academics and intellectuals in the general public. Only a handful of people approached for interviews refused, saying they were too busy or providing no reason. All interviewees agreed to mention their names with regard to the relevant aspects of their testimonies that will be mentioned in the study, except for two, who asked to remain anonymous (interviewees 7 and 8 in Table 1).

Semiconstructed questionnaires were employed for the interviews—with some individuals interviewed more than once—allowing the interviewees to address various issues on their own initiative (Berg, 2009). The interviews were conducted in Hebrew (in the interviewees' homes and offices or in cafes), audio-taped, and then transcribed. The following are several of the central interview questions: "Why were the publications in question produced?"; "Were you aware of the Critical narrative about the causes of the 1948 exodus and did you believe it to be true?"; "What narrative did you include in the publications that you produced?"; "What reactions did the manuscripts of the publications (and later the publications themselves) elicit, and how do you explain these reactions?"; and "Why did you include the narrative that was eventually contained in your publication(s)?"

This final question allowed us to obtain the reasons for self-censoring, and we categorized the reasons according to the interviewees' responses to it. Two researchers conducted the categorization (with 92% agreement), yielding the following categories of motives: (a) A motive to improve Israel's international image (e.g., when an interviewee said that he or she avoided presenting the Critical narrative so as not to support the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign against Israel); (b) a motive to mobilize citizens (e.g., when self-censorship was explained by the interviewee with the wish to increase the identification of the publications' audience with Israel and/or instill in it desired values and worldviews that promote participation and contribution to Israel); (c) a Zionist-ideological motive (e.g., when interviewees addressed Zionism as the cause for their self-censorship describing the huge impact of this ideology at that time); (d) the institutional norm of presenting the state's point of view (e.g.,

Table 1
Details Regarding the Interviewees Who Were Mentioned in the Article

No.	Interviewee	Positions
		The 20 interviewees who self-censored
Information center		
1	A	In the Agency (1970–2003), including its chief editor (~1992–2000) and its director (2000–2003)
2	B	Author of a publication (1976)
3	C	In the Agency (1961–2000), including its chief editor (~1966–1973), and its director (1973–2000)
4	D	In the Agency (1963–1985), including its chief editor (1973–1985), and onwards in other senior positions in the Center, including member of its managing committee (1985–1999)
5	E	In the Agency (1958–1973), including its director (1961–1973), the Center's deputy director (1973–1978) and its director (1978–1996)
6	F	Director of the Center (1996–2003)
IDF		
7	G	Author of publications in the Information Branch (~1991–1994)
8	H	Author of publications in the Information Branch (~1991–1994)
9	I	Head of History Department ^a (1955), deputy chief officer of the Education Corps (1961–1963), and its chief officer (1963–1968)
10	J	Head of a department in the Information Branch (1969–1972), and holding senior positions in the History Department (1973–1988, as well as onwards in reserve—1989–2004)
11	K	In the Education Corps (1985–2004), including officer in the Information Branch (1995–1997), and its head (1999–2002)
12	L	In the Information Branch (1967–1972), including its head (1969–1972), deputy chief officer of the Education Corps (1974–1977) and its chief officer (1977–1980)
13	M	Head of the Cinematography Unit (1983–2004)
14	N	In the Education Corps (1956–1971), including officer in the Information Branch (1959–1965), its head (1965–1968), and deputy chief officer of the Education Corps (1969–1971)
Ministry of Education ^b		
15	O	National Inspectors Branch: Civics inspector (1973–1993)
16	P	Author of a textbook that was written in the 1960s–1970s
17	Q	Curricula Branch: Head of civics team (1970–1994)
18	R	Curricula Branch: Member of high school history team (1975–1983)
19	S	Curricula Branch: Head of mid- and high schools history teams (1984–1998)
20	T	National Inspectors Branch: History inspector (1970–1993)
		Curricula Branch: Member of civics team (1970–1972)
		Curricula Branch: Member of high school history team (1973–1991)
IDF		Interviewees who were mentioned in the article from the remaining 13 interviewees
1	U	Author of publications in the Information Branch (in regular service—1992–1996, and later also in the reserve service)
2	V	In the Education Corps (early 1970s–1991s), including officer in the Information Branch (1978–1982), its head (1987–1988), and deputy chief officer of the Education Corps (1988–1991)
Ministry of Education		
3	W	National Inspectors Branch: History inspector (1993–at least 2004)

^aThe History Department in the IDF was highly connected to the activity of the Information Branch in the Education Corps by providing documents and guidance in writing publications and by supervising their content. ^bTwo units in the Ministry are relevant here: the Curricula Branch was in charge since the late 1960s on, inter alia, writing textbooks (until the late 1990s). The National Inspectors Branch includes inspectors in charge on studying in Israel the various fields (civics, only from 1970 to the early 1990s).

when the interviewees said they presented the Zionist-dominant narrative because, as state employees, they felt it is more appropriate to present the State of Israel's narrative and not their personal views); (e) the institutional norm of transmitting unequivocal messages (e.g., when the interviewees said they thought that soldiers should be presented with a simple narrative⁶ (as the Zionist-dominant narrative is) so as not to confuse the soldiers while in battle; (f) fear of sanctions (e.g., when interviewees said they refrained from presenting the Critical narrative because of a fear of concrete sanctions, such as censorship, public criticism or demotion.

Results

The analysis of the three formal institutions' publications revealed, as mentioned above, that from 1949 to 2004 they presented the Zionist-dominant narrative exclusively. The single exception to this was the Ministry of Education, which, in 2000, started presenting the Critical narrative in the history school textbooks that it approved. Of the 33 interviewees, 20 were found to have practiced self-censorship, with most saying that they self-censored. This practice was determined unequivocally on the basis of either explicit use of the term "self-censorship" by some of the interviewees or on the basis of them indicating a decision not to present the Critical narrative in the publications. All of these 20 interviewees said that they knew that expulsions had taken place but did not want to expose this fact voluntarily.

Of the remaining 13 interviewees, three did not censor themselves: these are the authors of three Critical textbooks from 1999 that were approved by the Ministry of Education in 2000. The remaining 10 presented the Zionist-dominant narrative in publications, but did not say that they self-censored, nor was there any clear evidence for this practice. Therefore, we cannot determine whether they self-censored, and if they did, why they did so. Addressing the reasons for these remaining interviewees' behavior and responses is beyond the scope of the present research. Nonetheless, we can speculate as to some reasons for their behavior. It is possible that at least some of these interviewees presented the Zionist-dominant narrative rather than the

Critical narrative because they believed the former to be true, thus committing no self-censorship. Taking into consideration the wide practice of self-censorship in these institutions by other officials (see below) throughout almost the entire research period, however, this explanation seems highly unlikely. More plausible explanations may be that these interviewees simply refrained from saying that they self-censored, even though they did so, either because they were ashamed of doing something that is presently perceived by many as inappropriate, or because they were concerned that if their past self-censorship would be made public, they would be subject to negative social reactions. These reasons appear even more likely in light of the current high prevalence of the Critical narrative of the exodus in Israel. There were no personal differences (e.g., whether or not an interviewee was still working in the analyzed institution) or situational differences (e.g., where the interview was conducted) that could explain why some interviewees said that they self-censored and others did not. For example, some still-working interviewees said they self-censored, whereas others did not, and the same is true for retired interviewees.

Of the 20 interviewees who said they self-censored, six worked in the Information Center, eight in the IDF, and six in the Ministry of Education. Collectively, they held their positions in these institutions largely throughout the research period, from the 1950s to at least 2004. In other words, even looking only at these 20 interviewees, we were able to cover all three institutions and largely the entire research period. [Table 1](#) presents these 20 interviewees and their most relevant positions, mostly senior ones, addressing each by a single letter so as to maintain his or her anonymity. Beyond these 20, the second part of the table also includes the details of some of the remaining 13 interviewees, who are cited in this article for other relevant reasons.

As for other general characteristics of the people who appear in [Table 1](#): Most inter-

⁶ The Zionist-dominant narrative is simpler and more unequivocal in comparison with the more complex Critical narrative.

viewees were men (83%), and most of them did not work in state institutions other than those mentioned in the table (in which many of them worked for long periods of time). Many of those who assumed their positions up to the 1970s might have been hired or promoted in these institutions in part because of their affiliation with the leading Mapai political party (and its successor, Hama'arach). These two parties were in power in Israel for the first three decades following its establishment in 1948.

The Practice of Self-Censorship

The 20 interviewees who were found to have practiced self-censorship did so by presenting the Zionist-dominant account of the exodus, altogether avoiding presentation of its Critical narrative. They did so despite the fact that at the relevant times in the past they were not given explicit orders to censor the Critical narrative and even though they were all aware of the Critical narrative and viewed it as the true historical account. For example, referring to his work in the Information Center, C. explained: "The topic of expulsions was not mentioned . . . we practiced self-censorship about what could have been written and what not. We practiced self-censorship about controversial topics" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 9 and 17, interviewing C⁷, December 12, 2006; and similarly see C's colleagues: R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing D, January 7, 2009; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing E, August 21, 2006). As this example demonstrates, the interviewee referred directly to the use of self-censorship in the context of the exodus. Indeed in some cases the interviewees themselves made the link between self-censorship and the exodus, whereas in other cases they referred to the use of self-censorship in more general way (i.e., the exodus was in the background and the connection between the self-censorship and the exodus was made by the researchers).

The situation in the IDF was similar. I. told of the assumption underlying the work at the Chief Education Officer's Headquarters: "The general premise was that we all do not deviate; we are all patriots, all Zionists, do not want to admit that we expelled refugees" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 2, interviewing I, June 22, 2006; for further support see Bar-On, 2001; R. Nets-

Zehngut, interviewing G, September 11, 2007; Nets-Zehngut, interviewing H, September 24, 2007; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing L, June 19, 2007; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing M, December 23, 2007; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing U, June 21, 2007; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing V, February 16, 2009). Similarly, in the Ministry of Education, R explained that there was general agreement that the expulsion would not be included in the Curricula Branch's publications, an agreement that he himself termed "self-censorship" (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing R, December 24, 2007; for support see also Mathias, 2005). According to R., talking about himself and his colleagues at the Curricula Branch: "None of us dared to convey the narrative of the expulsion" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 13, interviewing R, December 24, 2007). He further stated that he

wrote an article on auto-censorship—we already [censored ourselves] in advance. People do not want to work on a new curriculum and later have people say, "These weirdoes, these flakes, they think we're going to approve something like this?" They want to see it realized. There's almost an understanding that we don't have the final say and that if the politicians rise in harsh protest against what we've done, the chances of it passing are slim. (R. Nets-Zehngut, 13, interviewing R, December 24, 2007; see also R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing O, April 11, 2009)

Next, we present the causes that were noted by the interviewees for practicing their self-censorship.

Causes for Self-Censorship

The content analysis of the interviews yielded five major motivations/causes for self-censorship:

Protection of Israel's international positive image. This motive relates to actively protecting Israel's positive image in the eyes of the international community. Indeed, as noted previously, the Arab countries and the Palestinians launched a wide-scale diplomatic campaign against Israel in 1949, demanding the return of

⁷ This initial, and other initials that appear as references, are the initials of all the interviewees who are mentioned in the article (see these interviewees listed in Table 1). The references with full names that appear after or before some of these initials are other sources that support what appears earlier in the quotes. Because these other sources are not interviewees in this article, we did not use initials for them.

the Palestinian refugees and claiming that they had been expelled. Israel categorically rejected this demand, viewing it as a major threat to its security. In this context, describing the Zionist-dominant narrative was perceived by the staff of formal institutions as supporting Israel's positive international image, because this narrative rejected Israel's responsibility for the exodus. The Palestinians left willingly; they were not expelled, and therefore Israel was not obliged to allow their return. In contrast, describing the Critical narrative would have presented Israel negatively, as having acted immorally or illegally.

Many Information Center publications, for example, address this diplomatic campaign. One, for instance, asserted that, "Alongside the real war being waged on us by the Arabs, along the borders and in terror attacks against civilians, an Arab information war is being waged across the world. This Arab information, aided by anti-Semitic elements—governments and individuals—is directed against the State of Israel and the Jewish people" (Rupin, 1971, 5; and see also, e.g., Yechasei, 1968; Eliave, 1970). Clearly, the Center's staff wanted to prevent any possible harm to Israel resulting from the inclusion of the Critical narrative in its publications, since these could have fallen into the hands of Arab states, the Palestinians, or third parties in the international community, and consequently used for anti-Israeli political goals. Maintaining Israel's positive image abroad was thus a central mission of the Information Center's staff (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing A, August 17, 2006; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing D, January 7, 2009). Similar justifications were heard from those having served in the IDF's Information Branch. Indeed, especially before the 1970s, the Branch emphasized the importance of presenting Israel in a positive light with regard to the exodus (Bar-On, 2001; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing I, 22 June, 2006; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing K, March 8, 2009; Milhemet, 1957; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing V). This is evidenced, for instance, by I.'s account:

The refugee problem is a standing problem in the UN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because there is a resolution supporting the refugees' return, and we continuously face the entire world, making great efforts to persuade it that they [the Arabs/Palestinians] are to be blamed for the entire affair. (R. Nets-Zehngut, 5, in-

terviewing I, June 22, 2006; and similarly: R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing K, August 3, 2009).

Staffers at the Ministry of Education were also influenced by this reasoning and therefore acted similarly. According to R., "We were influenced by the general atmosphere, and the general atmosphere was a highly defensive one" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 3, interviewing R, May 15, 2009; and similarly: R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing Q, December 14, 2007).

Mobilization of Israeli Jewish citizens.

The second cause we found relates to the mobilization of Israeli Jews to cope with the threats and difficulties facing Israel. Especially in the first few decades after 1948, Israel experienced severe security and economic difficulties. Therefore, the staff of the examined institutions felt there was a major need to establish among the state's Jewish citizens a positive view of its conduct in the conflict—an image that would promote strong patriotism and identification with the country so that the citizens would be mobilized to defend it and contribute to it.

An illustration of this can be found in a publication by the Information Center describing two of its goals:

(C) To contribute to the strengthening of the citizens' identification with the state, its democratic regime, its national goals, and its challenges; (D) To cultivate good citizenship and increase the citizens' willingness to physically take part in shaping its political, social, economic, and cultural character. (Annual, 1998, p. 235; and similarly: Rupin, 1971)

This argument was of special importance in the IDF, where soldiers are expected to fight and risk their lives for the collective. Avner Shalev, former head of the Information Branch and later the Chief Officer of the Education Corps, openly explained his approach in his writings:

The soldier needs a sense of purpose that arouses the willingness to fight, and he carries within himself the courage to fulfill any duty, the capability to withstand the suffering of war and the willingness to sacrifice his most important possession—his life. . . . The duty of education is to bring the soldier to a willingness, a willful decision, stemming from recognition of and identification with the goal. (Shalev, 1982, p. 149; see similarly also Eshkol, 1995)

And K, former head of the Information Branch, relays a similar explanation regarding the work of the staff at the Branch after the

outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, when the Branch decided to strengthen soldiers' identification with the state and its narrative: "We are now working in the IDF as 'agents' of the state, because of the sense that the civilian system's influence on the soldiers has weakened . . . in Operation Defensive Shield [2002] we went back to using the "identification with the mission" theme. This is how we mobilized people. In contrast, in the Disengagement [from the Gaza Strip, 2005], we mobilized them using the theme of the "obligation to conduct the mission" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 3, interviewing K, June 20, 2007). The situation at the Ministry of Education was similar. Michael Ziv, for example, who served as History National Inspector in the 1960s, viewed the teaching of history not as a neutral task, but as "aiming to direct in a certain direction, instill values, and teach the student the worldview most desirable for society" (from the writings of Ziv, as quoted in [Podeh, 1997](#), p. 8). He believed that the goal of education was thus to instill in the students a sense of identification with the state and its Zionist-dominant narrative so that they would be willing to defend its existence, and it was therefore necessary to ensure that the materials selected for the history curriculum served this goal (see also a similar approach by subsequent History National Inspectors: Inspector S – R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing S, May 7, 2009; and Inspector W, - Peffer, December 29, 2003; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing W, December 26, 2007).

The all-encompassing impact of the Zionist ideology. As mentioned, we differentiate here between two concepts: the Zionist-dominant historical narrative of 1948 (describing what happened in 1948) and the Zionist ideology. Adherence to the Zionist *ideology* contributed to the gatekeepers' tendency to present the Zionist-dominant *historical narrative*. This observed cause relates to the significant impact of the Zionist ideology, which inhibited the Critical narrative's presentation. Until the late 1970s, Jews from across the political spectrum were highly influenced by this ideology, which held a hegemonic status in Israel (see [Eshkol, 1995](#); [Shimoni, 1995](#)). As [Liebes \(1997\)](#) pointed out specifically about Israeli-Jewish journalists, the dominant status of this ideology made it very hard for them to report on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a manner that deviated from this ideology. Such a

state of affairs caused many of the Jewish gatekeepers to be biased in their approach toward the conflict, including the specific case of the exodus, and inclined to see Israel as eternally just and moral in its conduct.

In the IDF, for example, N. stated that, "In my opinion, some of us were very blocked off to other opinions regarding the Zionist story, and we even diminished, suppressed, and parenthesized facts that surfaced, that were clearly facts, like the expulsions" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 10, interviewing N, May 15, 2007). Similarly, in the Ministry of Education, R. asserted that "The Zionist hegemony was very strong in this regard . . . we had this prepared response regarding how the issue should be addressed; they left, the leaders made them flee, encouraged them to flee" (R. Nets-Zehngut, 2, interviewing R, May 15, 2009; similarly see R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing O, September 23, 2007).

Institutional norms. The staff in these state institutions adopted several institutional norms, and these often promoted self-censorship, in spite of the fact that there was no formal censorship. Two such norms were found to have played a role.

Presenting the state's point of view. This norm relates to all three institutions. Because the staff worked in state institutions, they assumed that they should present Israel's formal point of view or historical narrative in their institutions' publications, rather than any narrative or facts that might contradict this narrative. Because the official position regarding the exodus was and is the Zionist one, this is what they believed they should present. For example, as E. describes himself and his colleagues at the Information Center:

Usually we were very very loyal, not only to the official line of information . . . so it's true that we were seen as agents of the state. First of all, we really were agents of the state. Anyone working at the Information Center is an agent of the state. That's just how it is. (R. Nets-Zehngut, 5, interviewing E, August 21, 2006; see also R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing A, August 17, 2006; R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing D, January 7, 2009)

This point of view was also present in the IDF. As M, head of the Cinematography Unit, stated: "The fact that an IDF document (and a film is a lasting document) is an official document—like the authorized voice of the IDF—significantly influenced the [Zionist-dominant]

phrasing regarding the creation of the Palestinian refugee issue” (R. Nets-Zehngut, 4, interviewing M, April 13, 2009). Finally, R from the Curricula Branch of the Ministry of Education asserted:

The education system is a national system, and if you look at the tone that was set by Shevach Eden [the first Head of the Curricula Branch], he said ‘We need to compose books that are in line with the goals of education in Israel, according to the definitions in the national education law. (R. Nets-Zehngut, 1, interviewing R, May 15, 2009)

Transmitting unequivocal messages.

Because of the army’s vital role in protecting Israel, the staff members in the IDF believed that no risks were to be taken, and the norm was therefore to present the soldiers with simplistic, clear black-and-white messages (as the Zionist-dominant narrative is). Such messages were assumed not to raise doubts in time of combat, as the Critical narrative would have done, as it is complex and attributes the responsibility for the exodus to both parties. For example, as K., former head of the Information Branch, testified, “Military thinking is forever dichotomous. It thinks in black-and-white. You can’t prepare for an assault if you don’t think in black-and-white” (R. Nets-Zehngut, 3, interviewing K, June 20, 2007). Similarly, J, also of the Information Branch and later a senior officer in the History Department, stated: “The informational message to the entire army must be unequivocal and must not raise any doubts. There’s also no room for criticism” (R. Nets-Zehngut, 6, interviewing J, April 4, 2009; and similarly: R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing N, March 6, 2009).

Fear of sanctions. Members of staff at the three institutions thought about the possibility that, should they write critically, this could result in negative consequences for themselves *and their publications*. Potential consequences mentioned by the interviewees included, for example, use of military censorship, censorship by their supervisors, public criticism (e.g., by the media, academia, or the political system), demotion to less-desirable positions, and rejection of their critical publications. This fear inhibited critical writing among many of them, and led them to censor themselves preemptively—although this behavior was based on speculation because no formal instructions were issued by the authorities to direct the content of the publications.

F, who served as the Information Center’s director, exemplifies this motive in his explanation that he viewed “producing something in this [critical] style [as] inappropriate. Take into consideration that, significantly, every critical journalist examined everything that the state produced very critically, and that is why I tried very hard to avoid entering this whirlwind” (R. Nets-Zehngut, 8, interviewing F, December 11, 2009; and similarly: R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing C, December 12, 2006). A, who served in the Agency for 33 years and was its director for some time, provides an example of such a whirlwind. In 2002, the Agency produced a publication addressing various Palestinian organizations such as Fatah and Hamas. When the minister of education at the time, Limor Livnat of the center-hawkish Likud Party, heard about the publication, she reproached the Agency staff (who felt very uncomfortable) and vetoed it (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing A, August 17, 2006). A similar approach was evident among interviewees from the IDF. For example, G. described the care taken by the branch’s soldiers when drafting publications in the 1990s addressing sensitive issues such as the exodus: “The general tendency was definitely to avoid provocations [deviation from the Zionist-official narrative], knowing quite well that the publications were read and examined, and any excessive word could bring harm and trouble with it” (R. Nets-Zehngut, 5, interviewing G, September 11, 2007; and similarly: R. Nets-Zehngut, 5, interviewing U, June 21, 2007). G also described an incident from the early 1990s in which a general in IDF reserve service was not pleased with the IDF publication’s portrayal of a battle in which he had taken part. The general complained to the Education Corps Chief Officer, who consequently castigated those who had issued the publication (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing G, September 11, 2007).

Finally, this fear of sanctions also exerted its impact within the Ministry of Education. R told us about the way it influenced the Ministry’s work:

I call it ‘political pressure’ because there was constantly the concern that if a question [about our publications] were raised in the Israeli Parliament, there would be a scandal . . . many things could have been done to us. They could have told us: “Go be school inspectors; enough, we’re sick of you as writers”. (R. Nets-Zehngut, 5, interviewing R, September, 11, 2007)

Generally, all five causes of self-censorship presented above were reported by the interviewees throughout the research period (1949–2004). Nonetheless, some causes were differentially influential at different periods of time. For example, the impact of “promoting Israel’s positive international image” was especially strong until the 1970s, when the Palestinian/Arabic diplomatic campaign demanding the Palestinian refugees’ return was at its peak (Bar-On, 2004; Caplan, 2010). As the campaign became less intense, the impact of this cause declined as well (although it continued to have an effect). Similarly, the impact of the Zionist ideology was especially strong until the late 1970s, when Israel was more collectivist and conformist, fighting wars on several fronts and struggling with economic challenges. Following many political and social processes that were taking place in Israel (e.g., democratization and later globalization, as well as generational turnover, economic growth, and military victories), leading to a more open society, the impact of this ideology decreased (Eshkol, 1995; Shimoni, 1995). Another example is the IDF norm of transmitting unequivocal messages. The early mid 1990s were characterized by positive events: the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, interim agreements between the parties, and a permanent peace agreement between Israel and Jordan. They allowed the IDF staff to partially ease its grasp on this norm. However, with the eruption of various violent incidents between the Israelis and Palestinians in 1996, and more so since 2000 (with the collapse of the peace talks and the eruption of the second Palestinian Intifada), this norm has regained prominence (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing K, June 20, 2007). Lastly, the fear of sanctions has grown in influence since the 1977 political turnover, in which the Likud center-hawkish party triumphed over the Ma’arach center-dovish party after three decades of hegemonic rule by the latter. The staff at the Ministry of Education—until 1977 largely affiliated with the Ma’arach party—worried that their center-hawkish minister of education saw them as untrustworthy. Therefore, they were particularly cautious in their behavior, hoping to avoid sanctions (R. Nets-Zehngut, interviewing R, May 15, 2009). In sum, as we can see, the impact of these causes for self-censorship has been moderated by various social and political processes. Nev-

ertheless, the causes are not mutually exclusive, but should be seen as additive, all leading to avoidance of presenting the Critical narrative even by those perceiving it as truthful.

Discussion

The present study illustrates the wide practice of self-censorship regarding the historical narratives of the exodus by most gatekeepers from three major Israeli formal institutions: Of 33 interviewed gatekeepers, 20 said that they had practiced self-censorship. Self-censorship may in fact have been more widely practiced, as 10 of the remaining 13 interviewees may have censored themselves despite not having said that they did so. This phenomenon was not rare. Self-censorship regarding many of the conflict’s events was very prevalent in Israel until the 1980 to 1990s, and is still prevalent, though to a lesser extent, as has been found in studies that addressed Israeli societal institutions such as war veterans and the media (e.g., Bar-On, 2004; Ben-Ze’ev, 2010; Shapira, 2000). In other words, the interviewed gatekeepers were largely within the norm at the time that they self-censored. Moreover, it should be noted that in the production part of the memory dynamics, the three analyzed government agencies were found to be adhering fully to the Israeli master Zionist-dominant narrative of the conflict, one that largely presented Israel very positively and its rivals very negatively (e.g., Oren, Nets-Zehngut, & Bar-Tal, 2015). Furthermore, they presented the narratives included in their publications as the objective truth about the past.

The research identified five causes for the self-censorship practiced by these gatekeepers: promotion of Israel’s international positive image, mobilization of the Israeli-Jewish citizens, the overarching impact of Zionist ideology, institutional norms, and a fear of sanctions. The impact of the first cause—promoting Israel’s international image—was enhanced by the fact that these formal institutions officially represent Israel. Their staff members thus felt that if people in their positions presented the 1948 expulsions, the damage to Israel would be more severe, compared, e.g., to such an admission by societal institutions that do not officially represent Israel. Of special interest is the finding that the reported motives by the interviewees were

also dependent on the characteristics of the context in a given period.

It should be noted that practicing self-censorship did not lead the interviewed gatekeepers to internalize the Zionist-dominant narrative and believe it to be truthful. Even after self-censoring, they believed the narrative they presented was not the accurate narrative. In other words, the interviewees were not motivated by cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) because of a discrepancy between their action (self-censoring, not presenting the Critical narrative) and internal beliefs (that the Critical narrative is true) to change their beliefs in accordance with their actions. Nonetheless, they might have experienced a dilemma whether to present the Zionist-dominant narrative or the Critical one.

The study offers several contributions:

Definition of self-censorship. We initially proposed a definition for self-censorship (see above) and then used it in the empirical study as a basis for identifying this phenomenon. Self-censorship is conducted consciously and therefore we emphasize that the act is intentional and voluntary. In this sense, the interviewed gatekeepers differed from the participants in Milgram's famous experiment (Milgram, 1974). The latter were ordered to carry out a certain act (administer painful electric shocks) while the former were not ordered to censor the Critical narrative. Indeed, the voluntary aspect of self-censorship is at the core of our definition of self-censorship. Going back to the definition, individuals hold information that they regard as truthful and valid and not as a subjective opinion or account of events. This definition is limited to cases in which no formal constraints exist to exposing the information, such as formal censorship forbidding the information's dissemination.

Self-censorship conducted by gatekeepers and ordinary people. We suggest differentiating between self-censorship carried out by gatekeepers and that conducted by ordinary people. The former are defined as those individuals who hold roles in which they disseminate information to the public (e.g., politicians, journalists, teachers, and filmmakers). According to Pettigrew (1972), gatekeepers are those "who sit at the junction of a number of communication channels, are in position to regulate the flow of demands and potentially control deci-

sional outcomes" (p. 190). Gatekeepers hold institutional roles charged with dissemination of information, and they are responsible for this process. Thus, they have control over the contents of the disseminated information. Working in often-credible institutions with resources, power, and staff, gatekeepers significantly influence the flow of information and thus the contents of knowledge held by society members. In contrast, ordinary individuals, who do not hold such positions within the state or other systems, do not have this type of power.

The classical literature on the relationship between status and conformity also predicts differences between leaders (highest status society members in the chain of information dissemination), gatekeepers, and ordinary individuals (who do not have any privileged status). According to this literature, whereas leaders tend to be less conformist than the average, individuals with high status (such as gatekeepers) tend to be more conformist than any other subgroup (Harvey & Consalvi, 1960). This finding helps illuminate why the gatekeepers examined in the current article practiced self-censorship—despite their status, they saw their work as representing institutions and their leaders—whether in the government, the IDF top command, or the Ministry of Education.

Further differentiation should be made among gatekeepers, as the self-censorship of those working in formal institutions (e.g., various ministries or the army) may differ from that of gatekeepers working in informal institutions (e.g., the media or academia). The former institutions are characterized by an explicit agenda to mobilize the citizens for political goals of the state, and they also represent the country internationally. The latter institutions have different and varied explicit missions and do not represent the country internationally (at least not officially). These differences offer some of the explanation as to why informal Israeli institutions like academia presented the Critical narrative of the 1948 exodus as early as the late 1970s (see Nets-Zehngut, 2011a), whereas the three analyzed formal Israeli institutions for the most part refrained from doing so until as late as 2000 or 2004.

Intrinsic and extrinsic causes of self-censorship. The present study focuses on the reasons the gatekeepers chose to self-censor,

as elucidated in the interviews. It reveals that five main factors motivated the interviewees in the case examined: garnering international support, citizens' mobilization, hegemonic ideology, institutional norms, and possible sanctions. We realize that this list is not exhaustive, and additional causes may be found in other cases (see Bar-Tal, *in press*). Moreover, to extend the conception, we suggest differentiating the detected causes into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic category includes causes that stem from the internal conviction and motivation of the individual regarding a given topic. These may be derived, for example, from the held political ideology or a sense of patriotism, and they are exemplified by the first four theoretical causes suggested above (international support, citizens' mobilization, hegemonic ideology, and institutional norms). Despite the intrinsic nature of these motivations, they are aimed at protecting the given collective—in the case of the present research, the State of Israel. The causes contained in the first category are closely related to one's identification with his or her ingroup (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). The process of identification with the group indicates that an individual's sense of self and self-interest becomes inextricably tied to group interests and therefore he or she cares about the wellbeing of the group and tries to protect it against various threats and dangers. Indeed, research has shown that high-identifiers are more conformist in expressing opinions about controversial topics (Huddy, 2001; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008). This process is considerably magnified in times of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013a; Brewer, 2011). The acceptance of the institutional norms is similar to the "agentic state" proposed by Milgram (1974). In such a state, individuals view themselves as mere instruments of an authority and as lacking any responsibility for the acts they perform. This perception, and consequently behavior, characterizes many institutions such as the military, bureaucracy, and schools, and it might be that our gatekeepers were in this state.

The second category contains causes of an extrinsic nature, meaning that they stem from external motivating factors. Specifically, this category includes the sanctions that gatekeepers try to avoid. People self-censor to protect themselves from possible negative consequences,

brought about by outside sources (e.g., social exclusion by friends, tangible punishment by the authorities, etc.) in case they publically present alternative, controversial, and seemingly group-harmful information (see also Austin, 2007; Hutt, 2006; Maksudyan, 2009). Such behavior is in line with the observations on the avoidance of negative sanctions in the literature on conformity (Schachter, 1951).

Why did the interviewees expose their past practice of self-censoring? Looking at the data, we try to answer an important question: Why is it that so many senior gatekeepers were willing to say that they had practiced self-censorship? Several explanations can be proposed. Initially, it is important to consider the declining role played by some of the factors that originally led to self-censorship: (a) In the early 2000s (when the interviews were conducted), Israel was less concerned with protecting its international image, compared with its focus on this image in the first decades after Israel's establishment, under the diplomatic campaign demanding the return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel (Bar-On, 2004; Susser, 2004). (b) Since the 1980s to 1990s, Israeli-Jewish society has become significantly more democratized and later globalized (see, e.g., Aronoff, 2000; Azaryahu, 2000), making it more pluralistic, critical, and individualistic. Legitimate voices appeared that presented various misdeeds carried out by Israeli Jews throughout the conflict (Ram, 2011). (c) The Critical narrative became prevalent in Israel when the interviews were conducted, compared with the periods in which the majority of the publications saw light. By this time, even a number of leaders had already addressed acts of expulsion in 1948 war (Nets-Zehngut, 2012a). (d) All but two of those interviewed were already retired at the time of the interview, and were therefore less guided by their respective institutions' norms, and less concerned by possible sanctions, allowing them greater freedom to speak out.

Production of self-censorship. The study reveals that the decisions to self-censor were made in different forums. Some of them were made individually, by one person alone working on a specific publication. On other occasions, these were communal decisions, made by a team of people working on a specific publication, after a discussion took place whether to include certain information or not.

The significance of revealing self-censorship.

What is the significance of the change that the gatekeepers underwent, realizing that they can now say they self-censored—a statement that may not have been acceptable in the past? Three main points of significance can be noted: (a) On the institutional level, because most of the gatekeepers (except for two) had retired by the time of the interviews, they could not have influenced the content of their institutions' future publications by including the Critical narrative of the exodus, or other topics. The two nonretired gatekeepers, however, potentially could have done so, thereby influencing the Israeli-Jewish collective memory to be less conflict-supportive (Paez & Liu, 2011). (b) On the societal level, if the people who say they self-censored do so publicly (e.g., in an academic or news article), they could reveal to others their institutions' biased practice in portraying the history of the conflict. This, in turn, could lead some society members to adopt a generally more critical approach to the outputs of these institutions. It could also specifically lead to increased societal openness to the alternative narratives that were self-censored. Because typical dominant narratives are conflict-supportive, support for alternative narratives that at times are less biased in favor of the ingroup should generally promote peace (Tint, 2010). (c) On the psychological–personal level, exposing past self-censoring could, as described above, promote healing among people who feel uncomfortable with their self-censoring.

In conclusion, the current study joins a growing literature on sociopsychological barriers that prevent society members from acquiring information that might lead to the unfreezing of their held conflict-supporting narratives (e.g., Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011; Kelman, 2007; Ross & Ward, 1995). Whereas past research has focused mostly on the selective, biased, and distortive information processing or specific contents serving as barriers, in this study we explore another sociopsychological mechanism raising barriers to the dissemination of alternative counterinformation: self-censorship by gatekeepers. By deciding to voluntarily withhold truthful information, they prevented the dissemination of knowledge about immoral acts by the Israeli forces, which could have had an effect on society members in their understanding of the historical narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This, in turn, could have countered the somewhat blind glorification

of the ingroup and led to the realization that the rival is also a victim in this conflict. The study indicates that self-censorship is an individual sociopsychological mechanism with significant societal implications and should be a subject of further research. Although we are aware that our case study is not identical to other conflict case studies, we believe that some similarities exist. As described in the literature review, members of rival parties often self-censor information that presents their party negatively, for various reasons. Thus, our empirical analysis about Israeli self-censorship, and its theoretical analysis, can help to better understand, at least in part, instances of self-censorship conducted in other conflicts.

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