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Transformation of the Official Memory of Conflict: A Tentative Model and the Israeli Memory of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus

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Abstract Collective memory of an intractable conflict is an important determinant of the psychological and the behavioral dynamics of the parties involved. Typically biased, it delegitimizes the rival and glorifies the in-group, thereby inhibiting peaceful resolution of the conflict and reconciliation of the parties. Therefore, the transformation of this memory into a less biased one is of great importance in advancing peace and reconciliation. This article introduces for the first time a tentative model of that transformation, describing the seven phases of the transformation process and the five categories of factors that influence it. Methodologically, this is done using a case study approach, based on the empirical findings regarding the Israeli official memory from 1949 to 2004 surrounding the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus. This memory is represented by *all* of the publications produced during the 56-year research period of the Israeli army (IDF), the National Information Center, and the Ministry of Education. While until 1999 this inclusive memory was largely Zionist (i.e., all the Palestinian refugees left willingly in 1948), since 2000, it has become partially critical because the Ministry of Education has begun adopting the critical narrative (i.e., some left willingly while others were expelled).

Keywords Collective memory · Official memory · 1948 Palestinian exodus · Nakba · Palestinian refugee problem · Israeli–Palestinian conflict · Narrative · Memory transformation · Memory change

Introduction

Conflicts between and within countries are a common worldwide phenomenon. Of special importance are intractable conflicts: those that are violent, longstanding, perceived as

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irresolvable and of zero sum nature, and that involve members of the rival societies in profound ways (Auerbach 2009; Coleman 2006; Bar-Tal 2013). Examples of such conflicts include those in Sri Lanka, Kashmir and the Middle East—all of which threaten the well-being of the societies involved and of the international community in general. These conflicts concern concrete issues such as territories, natural resources, self-determination, and basic values. Their resistance to peaceful resolution, however, also lies in an intense socio-psychological infrastructure that plays an important role in the conflicts' eruption and maintenance. This infrastructure evolves in order to cope with the conflict successfully and becomes part of the culture of conflict (Ross 1998). It consists of three pillars—collective memory, ethos, and collective emotional orientation (all pertaining to the conflict)—which lead to a one-sided orientation towards the conflict, eventually fueling the conflict's continuation and inhibiting its de-escalation and peaceful resolution.¹

Nevertheless, with time, some of the intractable conflicts de-escalate and even embark on the process of peace making. This process is usually preceded, accompanied, or followed by a transformation in the socio-psychological infrastructure, such as changes in conflict goals, and shifts toward less de-legitimization of the rival or a less positive assessment of the in-group. Such a transformation supports the initiation of a peace process and/or its success, as well as the reconciliation between parties in the post-conflict phase. Therefore, we propose that the socio-psychological infrastructure is not a frozen system but is dynamic and transforms with time—especially in light of changes in the conflict's context.

The objectives of the present article are: first, to investigate a case of transformation in one important element of the infrastructure, the collective memory; and secondly, to propose on the basis of this case study a tentative model that describes the transformation in the propagated conflict-supporting official memory. Thus—using case study methodology—we build our analysis inductively beginning with a presentation of the case study (Creswell 2008). We focus specifically on analyzing the Israeli² official memory of causes of the Palestinian exodus during the 1948 War. This exodus constitutes a major historical event in the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict (the “conflict”), and this article provides many new empirical findings about Israeli memory of this event.

Collective Memory Literature Review

The study of collective memory in general, and that of conflicts in particular, has recently attracted substantial attention from scholars worldwide (Booth 2001, 2009; Devine-Wright 2003; Winter 2010). Collective memory is generally defined as a set of representations about the past that are collectively adopted (Kansteiner 2002; Wertsch 2008a). These representations are assembled in narratives that recall the past events on a certain topic.³

¹ Ethos of conflict is defined as a configuration of central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society experiencing prolonged intractable conflict. These beliefs revolve around eight themes such as the importance of security, patriotism, unity of the society and peace as the ultimate desire. Collective emotional orientation refers to the characterizing tendency of a society to express particular emotions in conflict situations, for example fear, anger, or hatred. For both phenomena, see Bar-Tal (2007, 2013).

² By “Israeli” memory or society it is meant the *Israeli–Jewish* memory or society.

³ Following Bruner, we conceive collective narratives as social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events. They are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system, and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity—see Bruner (1990).

Collective memory is a general category that includes various kinds of memories as subcategories. Two such subcategories are: *popular* memory, the narratives held by society members, best manifested via public opinion surveys (Midelton and Edwards 1997; Paez and Liu 2011). This memory significantly influences the psychological reactions of the people holding it (e.g., their emotions, perceptions and political attitudes, and consequently, their behavior), and therefore, is accorded great importance (Shelter 2010; Paez and Liu 2011). The second is *official* memory, the narratives adopted by a society's formal institutions. Many of the latter institutions are *state* institutions; we will therefore focus on them, recognizing that official memory can also be propagated in societies that do not have their own state but do have formal institutions. Official memory is manifested via official publications by state institutions such as ministries; by programs on state controlled television channels; and through history textbooks in countries with centralized educational systems (Connerton 1989; Wertsch 2002; Paez and Liu 2011; Zheng 2008). The narratives held by the official memory may at least partly be adopted by segments of society, and thereby penetrate into the popular memory (Paez and Liu 2011; Tint 2010); Wertsch 2002; Zheng 2008). In addition, official memory has its own separate importance: it is imparted to society members continuously, affects formal decision making, and is presented in the international arena as the national narrative (Langenbacher 2010; Olick 2007).

Collective memory, including its popular and official subcategories, is often influenced by *formal/analytical history*: i.e., the way historians view the events of the past. This history is typically more accurate in portraying the past than collective memory, and therefore may challenge the hegemony of certain narratives in the latter memory (Novick 2000; Winter and Sivan 1999).

Focusing on the collective memory of an *intractable conflict*, it consists of the narrative held by a party to a conflict, describing the eruption of the conflict, its course and its major events. Typically, it does not purport to provide an objective history of the past, but instead tells a narrative that is functional and relevant to the society's present existence and future aspirations. It is constructed to fulfill these functions in a satisfactory manner. By its nature, this narrative supports the continuation of intractable conflicts and often is hegemonic, at least during their climax (Hayashi 2008; Heisler 2008; Gocek 2008). In terms of particular content, the conflict-supportive narrative typically touches on four important themes: justification of the conflict's outbreak and the course of its development;⁴ de-legitimization of the opponent; positive image of the in-group; and presentation of the in-group as the main if not sole victim of the conflict (Bar-Tal 2013). Such a narrative is typically significantly selective, biased and distorted; thus it provides a simplistic, black-and-white view of the conflict. Collective memory that holds such narrative plays an active role in the course of conflict by negatively shaping the attitudes, emotions and motivations towards the rival, and positively those towards the in-group (see, as an example, the collective memory in the case of Cyprus by the two rival sides (Papadakis et al. 2006)). Studying this memory is therefore essential not only for revealing how society views its past, but also and especially for the understanding of societal functioning and lines of actions in the present, as well as societal aspirations and goals for the future (Booth 1999; Devine-Wright 2003; Paez and Liu 2011).

As noted, use of a society's biased memory of conflicts is functional during peaks of the conflicts, since it provides each party with the socio-psychological basis needed to meet the enormous challenges that such a conflict demands, and supports the country's international image. However, a typical memory of conflict leads to the building of mistrust, hostility and hatred; all of which feed continuation of the conflict. Therefore, transformation of this

⁴ When the in-group initiated the conflict.

memory into one that is less distorted and biased (when there is factual basis for such a transformation, as is usually the case) promotes peaceful resolution of the conflict. This transformation propels the emergence and solidification of beliefs, attitudes and emotions that change the views of the rival. It is then that the rival can be viewed in a more legitimized, humanized, personalized, and differentiated manner (Tint 2010; Wertsch 2002). Therefore, understanding the characteristics of such a transformation is of great importance (Auerbach 2009; Lustick 2006).

Transformation of the collective memory of conflicts has been discussed in the literature mostly in a fragmented manner. At times, it has been presented as the outcome of *collaborative* activity by formal historical commissions that synchronize the narratives of two rivals (e.g., Kopstein's regarding the Czech–German historical commission, or Willis's regarding the French–German one; Kopstein 1997; Willis 1965). Other studies discussed a number of factors that influence a *unilateral* transformation, undergone by one party to a conflict, such as: the signing of a satisfactory peace agreement that may leave a party to a conflict with sufficient positive motivation to transform its memory (Kelman 2004); the cessation of violence between parties that ameliorates the perception by each party of its rival (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005); and the exposure of new information (such as documents, or testimonies) surrounding the conflict that might encourage re-evaluation of the conflict in mass media, scholarly publications (formal history), or other institutions and channels. Often such an exposure of documents may occur when archival documents become declassified several decades after the given event had occurred (Brandenberger 2009; Kansteiner 2002). Additional factors noted in the literature, were: a shift in the interests of a society's elite that promotes a memory change in support of these interests (Olick and Robbins 1998); and a generational turnover. Young generations are often more critical towards existing narratives than older ones, and therefore may challenge the hegemony of these narratives (Berger 2005; Hirsch 1997; Meckel et al. 2008). A gap between the narrative of the official memory and the one contained in the autobiographical memory (e.g., war veterans) may also change the official memory in order to accommodate the autobiographical one (Rosoux 2001); and the extent of political tolerance and freedom of speech within a country has an impact as well. This influences the ability to publicly present alternative narratives that may challenge the hegemony of a dominant narrative. The lower the degree of political tolerance and freedom of speech, the less possible it is for such alternative narratives to develop (Crenzel 2011; Waldman 2009). Two final factors that were discussed were the interest of the international community, which might encourage reconciliation between parties in conflict—including transformation of their memories; (Kriesberg 1998) and a change in the party in power, making it easier or harder to transform the collective memory (Wertsch 2002).

Nonetheless, discussions in the literature of factors influencing *unilateral* transformation of memory, have rarely been theoretically elaborated upon (observing, for example, that some factors can work both ways, promoting memory transformation or inhibiting it). Neither have these studies differentiated among the various types of memories concerned (e.g., popular or official). Most importantly – discussion of such factors has been *scattered among many studies rather than assembled into one, not integrated and used for the construction of a theoretical framework*. Therefore, to date there has been *no conceptual framework that describes a process of the fixation and transformation* of the collective memory of conflicts.⁵ The current article attempts to address some of these lacks. It

⁵ This missing framework—involving integration of the factors and the process—refers to all kinds of memories, including popular and official.

contributes a new look into the phenomenon at hand by proposing a tentative model that describes the relevant factors (including many not discussed in the literature), elaborates and integrates them, and suggests a *unilateral* fixation/transformation *official* memory model that is influenced by all of these factors. We will now describe the background of the case study that was used to construct this model.

Background: The 1948 Palestinian Exodus

The Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict is a prototypic intractable conflict which has lasted for about a century, causing severe material, physical and psychological damages to the involved parties. The central event of the conflict for the Israelis and the Palestinians is the 1948 Palestinian exodus. During the 1948 War, some 650,000 Palestinians left the area which the State of Israel held at the end of the war, and the Palestinian refugee problem was created. This event is considered by the Palestinians to be their “master trauma” and is a cornerstone of their identity (Volkan 1997). Since 1948, the refugee problem has become a major stumbling block in Israeli–Arab/Palestinian relations; Arab countries and the Palestinians have conducted an intensive diplomatic campaign demanding the return of the refugees into Israel. When negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians began in the 1990s, this problem became one of the major issues that needed to be resolved in order for the parties to reach an agreement (Caplan 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon 2009; Lustick 2006).

Israelis and Palestinians have differing narratives regarding the causes of the exodus. The former hold two main narratives, Zionist and critical (occasionally labeled recently “post-Zionist”). The Zionist narrative attributes no responsibility to the Israelis, and holds the Arabs/Palestinians entirely responsible for the exodus. Specifically, it argues that Palestinians fled willingly—mainly due to fear and in response to blanket calls by their leadership and by the Arab states to leave their localities, in order to avoid interfering with the invading Arab armies that arrived to fight the Jews. Acts of expulsion by Jewish and later Israeli fighting forces, according to this narrative, are not noted and even denied. According to the critical narrative, some of the Palestinians left willingly (due largely to fear or to calls by their leadership for evacuation of some areas), while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli fighting forces. As for the Palestinians, their official memory and scholarly work maintain that all of the Palestinians were expelled (Abdel Jawad 2006; Caplan 2010; Nets-Zehngut 2011a). We will now describe the dynamics of the official memory of the 1948 exodus in Israel from 1949 to 2004.

Dynamics of the Israeli Memory of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus

In our study the Israeli official memory is represented by the three main institutions that have dealt with the memory of the conflict: the National Information Center, the Israeli army (IDF), and the Ministry of Education. The Information Center was the primary institution in Israel until 2004 that was charged with disseminating governmental information to the public at large (mainly through its Publications Agency; Nets-Zehngut 2008). The IDF is the most central institution in Israel, with immense influence on every aspect of life (Cohen 2010). The mandatory 2 to 3-year service, followed by reserve service for men every year for approximately two decades after the initial service, is an important socialization agent. IDF’s Publications Branch at the Headquarters of the Education Corps is in charge of disseminating information to the soldiers through various publications (Nets-Zehngut 2011c). Lastly,

the Ministry of Education disseminates knowledge to the youth through school textbooks. Each year the Ministry publishes a list of textbooks that are approved for use in the Israeli educational system. Among them are textbooks in history and civics, some written by scholars and others by the Ministry's staff (Nave and Yogev 2002; Podeh 2002).⁶ The above three state institutions address such topics in their publications as the conflict and the 1948 exodus, and are influenced by Israeli societal institutions that include the research community (academic and independent scholars, who present the formal history), the media, cultural channels and NGOs. For this reason, the dynamics of these societal institutions during the 1949–2004 research period will also be discussed.

Moving on to the dynamics of the collective memory of the exodus in Israel, immediately after the end of the 1948 War, the extent of taboo surrounding the subject of expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 was low. Shortly thereafter, however, when the diplomatic campaign of the Arabs/Palestinians against Israel began, the extent of this taboo increased dramatically. Revealing the 1948 expulsions was perceived by Israel as severely damaging its interests and supporting the refugees' return demand. Therefore, beginning in 1950, the narrative in Israel regarding the exodus was almost exclusively the Zionist one—asccribed to by *all* three state institutions.⁷ Therefore, the starting point for the transformation process addressed here is an *exclusively Zionist official memory*.

The research period is divided into two main parts—1950 to the late 1970s, and the late 1970s to 2004. Generally during the first period, the context was highly unsupportive of transformation of the official memory of the exodus from its Zionist hegemony; therefore the transformation process did not advance. During the second period, however, this context changed and became conducive to such transformation, which progressed through various phases.

Specifically, during the *first* period, scholars and journalists had little motivation to search for critical primary information that could have supported the critical narrative, and war veterans too were not inclined to provide such critical testimonies. Various factors led to this conservative and conformist approach among societal institutions (and among the state institutions that presented the Zionist narrative). The conflict was highly intractable until the 1979 Israel–Egypt peace agreement, and the Palestinian collective memory of the conflict was perceived by the Israelis as biased (Nets-Zehngut 2011c). In addition, Israeli society was highly consensual and its elite highly homogeneous; the party in power since Israel's establishment (*Mapai*, and its successor *Ma'arach*) agreed with the societal elite in such a way that inhibited societal criticism. Also, political tolerance was low—the media were largely publicly–politically owned or monitored, and therefore conformist (Bar-On 2004; Caspi and Yehiel 1999; Tokatly 2000; Zerubavel 1995). Furthermore, the Palestinian exodus was not considered a central issue in Israel, and was therefore the subject of very little research and discussion. Its importance, however, was relatively high in light of the international diplomatic campaign conducted by the Arabs/Palestinians against Israel with regard to the Palestinian refugees, which contributed to a high degree of taboo surrounding revelations that supported counter-narratives. This taboo was increased by the desire of Israeli state institutions to present Israel positively to Israeli–Jewish citizens (as not having

⁶ This last study deals with textbooks *used* in the educational system and not necessarily approved by the Ministry of Education. In contrast, the textbooks that are discussed here are only those *approved* by the Ministry—examined in the “Fixation and Change” study for the first time—and as such represent the Ministry's official memory (these textbooks are intended for the secular–governmental system, the largest school system in Israel).

⁷ Generally, Caplan (2010), Nave and Yogev (2002), Podeh (2002), and Shapira (2000). And specifically regarding the three state institutions: Nets-Zehngut (2011c).

expelled the Palestinians in 1948), in order not to interfere with the need to mobilize citizens to participate in the conflict (Bar-On 2004; Podeh 2002; Shapira 2000). Moreover, throughout most of this period, the Ministry of Education was characterized by a nationalistic educational approach (promoting a positive image of Israel among students). In addition, Israeli archival documents about the 1948 War were still classified; the 1948 conservative generation was the dominant one in Israel (Bar-On 2004; Nave and Yogev 2002; Podeh 2002; Israel's status among the international community was low, due to the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign; worldwide, support for reconciliation processes was almost nonexistent; and critical historical theories were not yet prominent, but just beginning to appear in the western academia (Bar-On 2004; Nave and Yogev 2002; Zand 2004). Lastly, the very traumatic experience of the Holocaust had a number of notable effects: It caused to partial moral disengagement which blocked seeing Palestinians as victims and it generalized views of threat to Palestinians focusing on their desire to annihilate Jews and thus desensitized their suffering (Nave and Yogev 2002; Shapira and Allon 2004).⁸

Due to the fact that the above described context was not supportive of memory transformation, research activity regarding the exodus was relatively low and rarely resulted in critical products. Such activities were hindered by difficulties in locating primary information that could support the critical narrative (due largely to classification of archival documents and self-censorship by Jewish 1948 war veterans), as well as by self-censorship by the scholars/journalists themselves, even if they did find critical primary information. External censorship had an impact as well, such as state censorship of the content of the publications and refusal by publishers to publish critical manuscripts (Bar-On 2004; Nets-Zehngut 2011b; Shapira 2000).⁹ It is therefore not surprising that until the late 1970s, Israeli *societal* institutions (e.g., research community, newspapers and memoirs of Jewish 1948 war veterans) presented primarily the Zionist narrative regarding the 1948 exodus in their publications. Exceptions were mainly articles in the *Haolam Haze* and *Kol Ha'am* maverick newspapers, as well as minimal activity of a dovish NGO (*Matspen*)—all of which presented the critical or Palestinian narratives (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).¹⁰ In sum, all of the factors described above inhibited transformation of the Zionist official memory, due to the near total lack of any critical activity by societal institutions that could have challenged its dominance.

In the second period, however, a significantly more supportive context for memory transformation evolved, due to many changes: conflict wise, Israeli society wise, and in regard to the international community. Over the years, after the late 1970s and until 2000, the intractability of the conflict largely decreased and Israel gained confidence in its own existence.¹¹ This, together with a more open Israeli society, led to a gradual openness in

⁸ In addition, a recent public opinion study, which examines the Israeli–Jewish popular memory of 23 major events of the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict, found that Israeli–Jews who hold a strong memory of the Holocaust are more inclined to hold a Zionist narrative of the 1948 exodus—and not a critical narrative of it (Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal, *The Israeli Memory of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian Conflict—Public Opinion Study* [in preparation]).

⁹ For example, in the late 1950s, the scholar Ronny Gabbay was not able to search classified archival documents or to hear from 1948 war veterans he interviewed about expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. Moreover, in the early 1960s, scholar Akiva Orr was not able to get his critical manuscript accepted by any publisher (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

¹⁰ Regarding *Haolam Haze*, see Arel (2006); regarding “Kol Ha'am,” see Kantsler (1984); and regarding “Matspen,” see Yuval-Davis (1997).

¹¹ Aside mainly from a setback due to the eruption of the first Palestinian uprising (Intifada) in 1987, and until the early 1990s—Sharvit and Bar-Tal (2005).

some sectors of this society to the Palestinians—humanizing them, acknowledging their suffering, and recognizing their rights. In addition, Israeli society became more fragmented and less cohesive. The *Ma'arach* party was replaced in 1977 by the *Likud* nationalistic party, causing a rift between the Israeli societal elite and the state (making the former more critical of the latter). Political tolerance increased (e.g., the media started becoming more private-commercial oriented and therefore less conformist; Bar-On 2004; Tokatly 2000; Zand 2004; Zerubavel 1995). The centrality of the Palestinian issue and of the exodus increased, mostly since the eruption of the 1987 Palestinian Intifada, while the extent of taboo regarding the critical narrative of the exodus decreased (Bar-On 2004; Shapira 2000). Furthermore, a more liberal-critical educational approach was partially adopted by the Ministry of Education (parallel to the nationalistic one); Israeli archival documents pertaining to the 1948 War began to be declassified in the early 1980s; and a generational turnover process took place: the 1948 generation was gradually replaced in key positions by a younger and more open generation (Bar-On 2004; Nave and Yogev 2002; Podeh 2002). Internationally, the extent and impact of the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign regarding the 1948 Palestinian refugees drastically decreased; support for reconciliation and acknowledgement of past wrongdoings began to gain momentum in the world (especially since the 1990s); and the influence of the critical western academic approaches on Israeli scholars increased (Ghazi-Bouillon 2009; Nave and Yogev 2002; Zand 2004). Lastly, the impact of the Holocaust decreased, making many Israeli-Jews, especially the younger ones, be more open in their approach to the Palestinians and critical about the way they are being treated by Israel (Nave and Yogev 2002; Shapira 2000).

These many changes in the second period provided a more supportive context for critical-alternative societal activity. Scholars and journalists became more motivated to examine the exodus by searching for documents about it in archives and by interviewing 1948 Jewish war veterans. Beginning in the late 1970s, these veterans were also more willing to expose the 1948 expulsions (e.g., Moshe Carmel, 1948 commander of the north front, in a 1978 newspaper article; Carmel 1978), and since the early 1980s some archival documents from 1948 have been declassified. The scholars and journalists were also less inclined toward self-censorship regarding the critical information they found in their search, and confronted fewer external obstacles publishing such information. In addition, some of the 1980s critical studies were based on archival documents—in contrast to previous ones based on war veterans' testimonies, a fact which contributed to their considerable persuasiveness and impact. The language of the studies also made a difference—for example, Morris's 1991 book in Hebrew got much more coverage in the Israeli newspapers compared to its 1988 English version—partly due to the language difference (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

Examples of critical studies include (Nets-Zehngut 2011c): those of Michael Bar-Zohar (1977), Meir Pail (1979) and Simcha Flapan (1979), as well as several academic articles by the historian Benny Morris from the mid-1980s along with his important book of 1988,¹² *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*. This book was the first to focus on the exodus based on many critical documents, mostly Israeli, and was one of the books by the so-called New Historians who criticized various aspects of the Zionist narrative of the conflict. Morris's activity exemplifies the opportunities that were created by the new context. He belongs to the younger more critical first generation of Israel, influenced by his studies in Britain, who in the early 1980s was able to examine declassified archival documents, with no need to self-censor his findings which supported the critical narrative (Bar-On 2004; Caplan 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon 2009; and Morris, “interview”). Publication of critical studies

¹² The book was published in 1988, and not in 1987, as is printed in it by mistake (Morris, “interview”).

regarding the exodus grew so significantly that, since the late 1980s, they have constituted the vast majority of published studies addressing the 1948 exodus (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

As a result of this critical societal activity, reports of scholarly studies with their critical narrative and primary information supporting them, began to penetrate the Israeli sphere in the late 1970s. Newspapers articles also began at that time to expose new information about the exodus (e.g., as part of the 1978 *Hirbet Hiza* film controversy, see below), and since the late 1980s most newspapers have been doing the same (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

The more open approach of Jewish 1948 war veterans towards the 1948 expulsions was also manifested in their memoirs. A major example is the 1979 memoir (*Pinkas Sheirut*) of Yitzhak Rabin, who was the Israeli Prime Minister prior to publishing this memoir.¹³ Many other memoirs published since the late 1980s also exemplified this more open approach (Nets-Zehngut 2011c). Lastly, in the 1980s, dovish NGOs started challenging the Zionist narrative more actively with, for example, the establishment of the *Alternative Information Center* in 1984, *Gush Shalom* in 1993, and *Zochrot* in 2002 (AIC, *The Alternative Information Center—Information Pamphlet* [no date]; Bronstein 2005; Nets-Zehngut 2011c; Shalom 2003).

The more supportive context during the second period that promoted *publication* of critical studies, newspapers articles, and war veterans' memoirs, also contributed to their *dissemination* and resonance in Israel. The *particular characteristics* of these various critical publications also contributed to their dissemination. For example, since the late 1970s, war veterans' memoirs and scholarly studies in the form of books have been published by prestigious publishers. In addition, some of the 1980s critical studies—in contrast to preceding ones based on war veterans' testimonies or not based on any primary sources—were based on archival documents, a fact that contributed to their considerable power and impact. The language of the studies also made a difference—for example, Morris's 1991 book in Hebrew got much more coverage in the Israeli newspapers compared to its 1988 English version, due in part to the language difference (Bar-On 2004; Caplan 2010; Morris, "interview;" Zand 2004).¹⁴

During the second period, three main historical *controversies* regarding the 1948 exodus occurred. The first erupted in 1978 following the production of the film *Hirbet Hiza* which described expulsion of Palestinians in 1948;¹⁵ the second took place in 1979 in connection with the Rabin's memoir and its relation to the expulsion of the Lydda–Ramla expulsion (Kidron 2001; Labrecht 1987);¹⁶ and the third, in 1989–1990, was sparked by the different historical views between the historians Shabtai Teveth and Benny Morris over the latter's book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Ghazi-Bouillon 2009). These controversies both demonstrated and contributed to the increase in the exodus's centrality. All

¹³ Rabin included in the manuscript of his memoir a description of the expulsion of the citizens of the Palestinian cities of Lydda and Ramla. This paragraph was censored, but leaked to the public sphere and received widespread attention—see Rabin (1979) and Shapira and Allon (2004).

¹⁴ Most of Morris's five academic articles from the mid-1980s were also poorly disseminated. This was partly because they were written in English and were academic articles that were read only by members of the research community (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

¹⁵ In 1949–1950 a controversy developed over the book "Sipur Hirbet Hiza" (in Hebrew: the Story of Hirbet Hiza), upon which the above mentioned film is based. This controversy, however, hardly dealt with the historical aspect of the exodus (whether expulsion took place). It dealt mostly with aspects such as damage to the Jewish soldiers' honor by discussing the expulsions, and ignoring immoral conduct of Arabs/Palestinians in the 1948 battles: Shapira (2000).

¹⁶ For an analysis of the Lydda–Ramla expulsion as a major event in the memory sphere, and an analysis of the general characteristics of major events, memory wise, see Nets-Zehngut (2013a).

three—and mostly the last one—contributed to the dissemination of the critical narrative and its adoption in Israel, challenging the hegemony of the Zionist narrative.

The staffs of the three *state* institutions were well aware of the changes that had occurred since the late 1970s with regard to publications by *societal* institutions dealing with the exodus. They also believed that the critical narrative, rather than the Zionist one, regarding the exodus was the accurate one. However, the staffs at the *Information Center and the IDF Education Corps* continued until 2004 to present the Zionist narrative. Haim Ofaz, the Head of the Publications Agency in the Information Center from 1973 to 2000, explained this phenomenon: “[...] the expulsion was not mentioned [...] they [the 1948 Palestinians] were not expelled but left on their own initiative [...] it was a taboo [...] we had self-censorship [...]”¹⁷

Four of the reasons for this self-censorship were shared by *both* institutions: (a) Damage to the citizens’ mobilization—concern that the exposure of the Israelis to the critical narrative would impede their mobilization to support Israel. It would damage their belief in the justness of Israel’s goals in the conflict and their collective positive self-image. (b) Damage to Israel’s international image—concern that adoption/presentation of the critical narrative would tarnish the image of Israel in the international community and reduce its support for Israel. These two reasons were specifically relevant to these state institutions, since they were representing the State of Israel (Nets-Zehngut 2011c). Two additional reasons also had an impact: (c) Sanctions—the staff of these two institutions was concerned about possible sanctions against them had they presented the critical narrative. They could have been fired, transferred to less favorable positions, or “just” being highly reproached; and (d) Institutional norms—the norm of “presenting the state’s point of view” was prevalent in both institutions, meaning that their staff was required in their publications to present the formal-Zionist stand regarding the exodus, rather than their personal views.

At the *IDF* another relevant norm had a conservative impact: “transmitting unequivocal messages.” Due to the vital function of the army as the protector of Israel, no risk could have been taken in educating the soldiers. Therefore, the policy was to present to them simple, clear, black-and-white messages that are sure not to raise doubts in time of combat. The alternative-critical, narrative is complex in that it attributes responsibility for the exodus to both parties, and would therefore be inappropriate for the soldiers’ education. This perspective has been especially prominent since 2000 with the collapse of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process and the eruption of the second Palestinian Intifada (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).¹⁸

Finally, two developments in the *Information Center* specifically inhibited transformation of its memory since the late 1990s. First, its head since 1996 was a liberal person—appointed by a liberal Minister of Education—who objected to propaganda publications produced by state institutions. Therefore, he was against producing any new publications about historical events, including those referring to the 1948 War and the exodus. Since the previous relevant publications of the Center presented the Zionist narrative, his approach prevented transformation of the Center’s official memory. Second, in the late 1990s, the Center encountered major budget cutbacks, significantly reducing its personnel and scope of operation—a situation which helped to implement the policy of stopping production of new publications (Nets-Zehngut 2008).

The situation in the Ministry of Education was somewhat different from that of the above two state institutions. Indeed, until 1999 the Ministry’s list of approved textbooks contained only history and civics textbooks which presented largely the Zionist narrative. This was

¹⁷ Authors’ interview with Haim Ofaz, Jerusalem, December 2006, p. 9 and 17. This was also the situation in the IDF—see Nets-Zehngut (2011c).

¹⁸ With regard to the two initial concerns (citizens’ mobilization and international damage), see also, for example, Bar-On (2004) and Shapira (2000).

mostly due to the same four first reasons which influenced the previous two state institutions (citizens' mobilization, international image, sanctions and institutional norms). However, four history textbooks which were published in 1999 and included on the Ministry's list in 2000 contained the critical narrative. This meant that *in 2000, the official memory of the Ministry was transformed* (Nets-Zehngut 2011c, 2013b).¹⁹

The authors of these textbooks explained²⁰ that they included the critical narrative in their textbooks for various reasons, the main one being due to the prevalence of that narrative among various Israeli societal institutions. The critical narrative was already largely accepted in Israel. Presenting the Zionist narrative in the textbooks, therefore, would have been "inappropriate." The authors also knew that the critical narrative was supported by many studies (Benny Morris's was the most important one). Additional reasons were the younger age of the authors (compared to the 1948 generation), the growing political tolerance of Israeli society, the foreseeable end of the conflict due to the 1990s peace process, and their belief in Israel having adequate strength to protect itself. They also had fewer reasons to self-censor. Three of the four were not employed by the Ministry of Education. Due to budget cutbacks and structural changes, the writing of textbooks was transferred to private authors—who were consequently less concerned with possible sanctions against them than the staff of the Ministry had been. Moreover, all three supported a liberal educational approach (encouraging students to think independently and critically), and therefore, favored presenting to students the truth about the conflict's history. In their view, there was no internal need for a biased Zionist-oriented education in order to mobilize students. Externally, they were influenced by the international trend of supporting reconciliation processes, including acknowledging past wrongdoings. Such an approach, in their view, would better serve Israel in the international community than would adherence to an inaccurate Zionist narrative. For much the same reasons, the four textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education (Nets-Zehngut 2011c, 2013b).

This transformation of the official memory was not, however, the end of process. Limor Livnat, a new Minister of Education from the *Likud* party (2001–2006), disqualified one of the four textbooks arguing that it was not Zionist enough on certain topics. Thus, only three critical textbooks have been included since 2001 in the list of approved textbooks, at least until 2004 (Ghazi-Bouillon 2009; Nave and Yogev 2002; Nets-Zehngut 2011c).²¹

A Model of Fixation and Transformation of the Official Memory of Conflicts

Based on the above description of the dynamics of the memory of the exodus in Israel, we will now propose a tentative model that describes the transformation of official memory. Although this model is developed on the basis of the specific case study, its various elements are supported here by a variety of theories, socio-psychological research, and studies regarding case studies of other conflicts (though it is acknowledged, that this model may not be compatible to the analysis of all the conflicts).²² It may serve as an initial basis for an exploration of the transformation of collective memories in societies involved in various conflicts.

¹⁹ This article deals with approved textbooks of the national–secular division of the educational system, the main division in Israel.

²⁰ The explanation below refers to three of the four Authors, those who were interviewed—the fourth passed away.

²¹ It should be mentioned, though, that the reason for the disqualification of this textbook was *not* related to the 1948 exodus. Livnat, and a committee appointed by her which examined the textbook, opposed the way it presented other events of the conflict, as well as the lives of the Jewish Diaspora, Nazism, etc.

²² Since the occurrences in Israel regarding the memory of the exodus were discussed above, in order to avoid repetition, relation will be made in the model mostly to these other supporting sources.

General

We begin our analysis with definitions of two key concepts. The first one, “*Fixation* of an official memory” is defined as an adoption by all of a country’s formal institutions of a certain narrative about a given past event, and adherence to this narrative throughout a long period. The second concept “*Transformation* of an official memory” is defined as an adoption by the state institutions of an alternative narrative regarding that event, one which at least partially contradicts the narrative which had been maintained by them until the transformation took place. Manifestation of the transformation has to be made public, for example, by presenting the alternative narrative in official publications or on national monuments. The transformation can be total (e.g., in all of the state institutions), but usually will be, at least initially, partial (e.g., take place only in some of these institutions).

Transformation of an official memory begins when the hegemony of a dominant narrative is challenged by exposure of new primary information that supports the alternative narrative (Brandenberger 2009). This exposure might be based on a number of sources, mainly archival documents or first-hand testimonies.²³ The new information might be discussed in scholarly publications or newspapers articles; therefore, any analysis of memory transformation has to take into consideration societal institutions’ activity. Consequently, this information, and the narrative it supports, might reach the state institutions and influence their official memory. This information (and the alternative narrative it supports) usually impinges *negatively* on the given country. This is why a country usually resists the inclusion of the alternative narrative in its official memory. Nevertheless, at times state institutions do adopt an alternative narrative, in which case *their official memory is transformed*. The present article focuses on this type of new information and alternative narrative (impinging negatively).

The described model relates to a common situation, in which two main narratives, dominant and alternative, compete for the supremacy in the state. However, in reality there might be more than two main competing narratives—and the model is also applicable to these situations. The main components of the model are the phases of the fixation and transformation process and the categories of factors that influence it.

The Transformation Process

We propose that the transformation process includes seven phases. The first refers to the appearance of a *Conducive Environment* supporting the search for new primary information that can challenge the hegemony of the dominant narrative in the official memory. Such an appearance is influenced by external and intra-societal factors which will be discussed later (e.g., the circumstances of a conflict, political tolerance within a country, and its international status).²⁴

The second phase, *Search*, refers to the seeking of new primary information which supports an alternative narrative. Usually, the search is conducted by scholars, through primary source archives or via interviews with people who have first-hand experience.²⁵ At times journalists too may

²³ Though testimonies are often perceived by professional historians as suspicious and in need of further support.

²⁴ The circumstances in Turkey, extreme until the 2000s, regarding the fate of the Armenians during WWI, exemplify the absence of such a conducive environment. For example, the international status of Turkey was bad (attacked by the assertion that a genocide was conducted against the Armenians) and internal political tolerance was low—see Akçam (2010) and Gocsek (2008).

²⁵ For example, see scholarly studies in post-Franco Spain, clarifying Franco’s responsibility relative to the 1930s civil war—see Boyd (2008); or studies conducted recently in Russia regarding the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939—see Wertsch (2008b).

conduct such interviews in their investigations. If the search does not yield new critical primary information, the process stops. Even if such information is found, the process might still not proceed for two reasons: first, the person who finds the new information may decide not to expose it (e.g., by publishing a book) because of self-censorship or for other reasons. Secondly, even if that person decides to expose the information, he/she might be prevented from doing so for various reasons (e.g., state censorship). Thus, this phase includes not only discovery of critical information that supports the alternative narrative, but also the possibility of exposing it.²⁶

The third phase of the transformation process, *Exposure*, pertains to the disclosure of new critical primary information and the alternative narrative it supports to the public sphere. This can be performed through sources such as a book, an article or a booklet. These products can be based on at least three main sources: (a) primary information obtained in the previous phase, *Search*; (b) testimonies provided by individuals who experienced the discussed events first-hand, such as war veterans' memoirs. These people do not need to search archives for information, since they took an active part in the events. In their case, then, the process will skip the *Search* phase and move directly from the first phase to the current one. However, the content of the memoirs, with regard to which narrative they support, is also influenced by the first phase (*Conducive Environment*); and (c) publications which are based on the previously noted two sources. For example, a book is published that quotes previous books, which in turn use primary sources such as archival documents and first-hand testimonies.²⁷

The fourth phase is *Dissemination* of the alternative narrative and the primary information that supports it. The dissemination can be carried through various routes such as word of mouth, conferences, professional journals, and the Internet. The media, however, has a central role in this phase, by means of its various channels (newspapers, television, radio, etc.). Effective dissemination can cause the process to advance in a few directions, at times simultaneously. It can continue directly to transformation of the memory (see below, phase F, *Initial Absorption*). In other cases, it may remain in the *Dissemination* phase and not progress further. Occasionally it advances to the next phase (E, *Contest*).²⁸

In the fifth, *Contest*, phase, controversies take place between supporters of the dominant narrative and those of the alternative one, regarding which narrative is the accurate one.²⁹ Typically, the controversies are initiated by supporters of the dominant narrative in a

²⁶ For example, more scholarly activity is currently being conducted in Turkey regarding the Armenians' claim that Turks carried out a genocide in WWI. This includes, for instance, holding academic conferences and conducting studies. Until recently, such activity was very rare—see descriptions of such activity in Akçam (2010) and Göcek (2008). The circumstances in France, extremely prevalent until the 1990s, regarding the French torture of Algerians during their 1954–1962 War were similar. Academic scholarly and journalistic investigative activities regarding the torture issue were minimal, and in any case, highly influenced by self and external censorship—see Branche and House (2010) and Macmaster (2002).

²⁷ Examples are critical products such as scholarly studies, newspaper articles, memoirs and films. These appeared during the last period in Turkey, and even more so in France, regarding the alleged wrongdoing in the past by the Turks and French. See descriptions of such products in Akçam (2010) and an example of such a product in Bardakci (2009) and Branche and House (2010). The same is true regarding similar products appearing in Japan, largely since the 1990s, dealing with its wrongdoings against the Chinese in their 1937–1945 war and against the Koreans between 1931 and 1945—see Er (2002), Hayashi (2008) and Takashi (2006).

²⁸ An example of this phase is the way in which a 2009 critical book about the Armenians was received in Turkey (Bardakci 2009): the societal newspapers hardly discussed it and the national media—not at all. See Tavernise (2009). Similarly, the film “The Battle of Algiers” was banned for many years from screenings in France because it showed the French torturing Algerians—see Branche and House (2010). It should be noted, that the *Dissemination* phase can take place before, during or after the following *Context* phase. Some dissemination, though, is always required before the *Contest* phase can occur—a fact which leads to the current placement of the *Dissemination* phase in the process, prior to *Contest*.

²⁹ Examples are controversies which took place in France regarding the torture issue (Macmaster 2002), or in Japan regarding its wrongdoing towards the Chinese and the Koreans (Hayashi 2008).

defensive reaction to the exposure and dissemination of the new information and the alternative narrative supported by it. Such supporters do not initiate a controversy if the topic of the discussed narratives is not important enough, or if the alternative narrative is not threatening the hegemony of the dominant one. Hence, some transformation processes might not include this phase. Nonetheless, when controversies do occur and the alternative narrative “fails,” it may be pushed into oblivion, at least for some time. In contrast, when it does not fail, and more importantly, when it “wins,” the process may move to the next phase of *Initial Absorption*, the sixth one. In this phase, the alternative narrative is adopted by at least a minority of the state institutions, an act which is manifested in their products, such as published books and films. This represents an initial transformation of the official memory.³⁰

The seventh and last phase actually includes two alternative sub-phases: *Increased Absorption*—in which the alternative narrative increases its scope of adoption by state institutions, potentially becoming the exclusive one; and *Decreased Absorption*—in which the alternative narrative decreases its scope of adoption. This increase/decrease can take place *inter-institutionally*, when more/fewer institutions adopt the alternative narrative, or *intra-institutionally*, when the initial absorbing institution increases/decreases the scope of its adoption (e.g., by reducing the production of publications that include the alternative narrative, as happened in regard to the Israeli textbooks: a decrease from four critical books to three).³¹ The following figure describes the process and its phases (Fig. 1).

Influencing Factors

The transformation process depends on a number of factors, which we grouped into five categories (Table 1). These factors were elicited through analysis of the case study presented above. The categories are described below according to their relative influence on the process, beginning with the most important ones. This description also outlines hypotheses that can be derived with regard to the impact of these factors on the official memory. All of this is supported by various theories and occurrences in studies regarding other case studies of memories of conflicts.

The Conflict The first category pertains to the characteristics of the rival party and the nature of its relations with the given party. It includes at least two factors: The first is *the characteristics of the conflict*. The more intractable, violent and threatening the conflict is, the less likelihood there is for memory transformation.³² The second factor is *the rival's approach to the topic of the memory*. When the given party perceives the official memory of its rival (as well as the position of the rival's academic and intellectual circles) as mobilizing for the conflict, thus biased and distorted, it will tend more to resist transforming its own official memory.³³

³⁰ Such an example is the French film “The Intimate Enemy” made and broadcasted in 2000 on a French public TV station, providing evidence from French war veterans of massive tortures conducted against the Algerians (Branche and House 2010).

³¹ An example of increased absorption took place in France regarding the Algerian torture issue—in 2001 French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin acknowledged the tortures and condemned them—see Hayashi (2008).

³² For example, regarding the situation among Israelis—Ben-Josef Hirsch (2007); and among the Palestinians—Cabha (2010). See also the above discussion of literature on collective memory regarding the factors that influence memory transformation: signing a peace agreement and cessation of violence.

³³ See support in the GRIT model for the impact of reciprocity in parties' interactions, used by the American Senator George Mitchell in his negotiations between the rival parties in Northern Ireland—see Mitchell (2000). The reverse is also true: see, for example, nine projects conducted by Palestinian and Israeli scholars and educators since 2000 negotiating the historical narratives of their conflict (Nets-Zehngut 2013c).

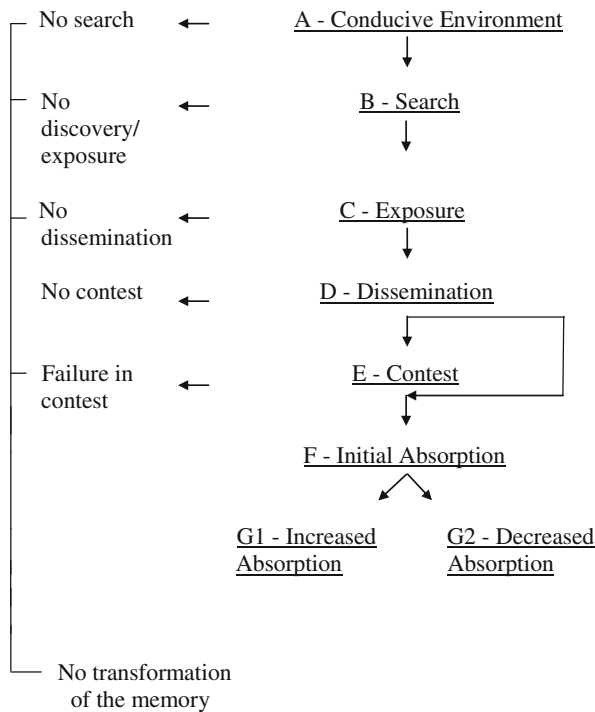


Fig. 1 The transformation process

Societal Characteristics This category refers to various features of the society involved in the transformation process, features which are *indirectly* relevant to the process. It includes at least four factors. The first is the *societal homogeneity*, which refers to the extent to which the society, and its elite, is homogeneous in terms of their views on the conflict, religion, politics, or origin. The more homogeneous it is, the more of its members will conform to the dominant narratives, and consequently inhibit memory transformation (Forsyth 1992). The second factor is the *party in power*. The more this party is nationalistic, the more difficult it will be to transform the official memory. Furthermore, the more this party is in agreement with the societal elite, the less this elite will challenge the state and the narratives it supports.³⁴ The third factor is *political tolerance*, which refers to the extent of openness in the society to ideas and information which negate the views of the majority and the state institutions. The less tolerant a society is, the more it will resist alternative narratives (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003).³⁵ The fourth factor is *culture*, defined broadly. It includes not only a collection of values, beliefs, and traditions which are adopted by a certain group (Barker 2008), but also other relevant psychological and societal characteristics of a given society. Cultural orientation may support or inhibit memory transformation.³⁶

³⁴ See, for example, the difficulties Japan has had in changing the content of its official history textbooks that deal with its war with China (Nozaki 2008). See also the above comments on collective memory with regard to a factor that influences the memory (change in the party in power).

³⁵ See above remarks on collective memory with regard to the factor “the extent of political tolerance and freedom of speech”.

³⁶ For example, the Ubuntu culture of the blacks in South Africa views all people as equal, connected to and influencing each other, as well as belonging to the human race and therefore deserving of human treatment. Such a culture encourages an empathic attitude toward the rival, and thereby promotes memory transformation (see Tutu 1999; Stone et al. 1982).

Table 1 The factors of the transformation model

No. of factor in a category	The categories of factors			
	1—The Conflict	2—The Given Country	3—The Topic of the Memory	4—The Core Institutions
1	Characteristics of the Conflict	Societal Homogeneity	Importance	Characteristics of the Core Institutions
2	Rival's Approach to the Topic of the Memory	Party in Power	Centrality	Characteristics of the Products of the Core Institutions
3		Political Tolerance	Extent of Difference between the Dominant and the Alternative Narratives	Time
4		Culture		Mistakes
				International Status
				International Influences
				5—The International Context

The Topic of the Memory This category pertains to characteristics of the topic of the memory that is subject to potential transformation. It includes at least three factors. First is *importance*, which indicates the extent to which the topic is important to the given party (e.g., because it influences its positive image or the resolution of the conflict). This factor works in two contradictory ways: the more important the topic is, the harder it is to transform the official memory since this might lead to greater damage to the society.³⁷ On the other hand, the more important the topic is, the more people will think and debate about it, a process that might eventually lead to the transformation of its memory (Yadgar 2004). The second factor is *centrality*, which means the extent to which the topic is present in the public sphere and is discussed. The less central it is, the less it will be researched or discussed in the public sphere, and the less attention alternative publications will receive (Bar-Tal et al. 1994). The third factor is *the extent of difference between the dominant and the alternative narratives*. Typically, as mentioned earlier, the alternative narrative presents a given society more negatively than the dominant one. Therefore, the larger the difference between the two narratives (that is, the more negatively the alternative narrative presents the given society), the more that society will resist adoption of the alternative narrative.³⁸

Characteristics of the Core Institutions of the Transformation Process This category refers to the features of the institutions in which the process of transformation takes place. It includes at least four factors connected with the given institutions which are *directly* related to the transformation process. The first factor is *the characteristics of the core institutions*—both societal and state—which *operate in the transformation process*. These are the institutions which are directly and most importantly involved in this process. They differ from one another, for example, with regard to their institutional norms (some might be more closed and conservative, and others, less), aims, modus operandi, climate, or the characteristics of their key people. Of the various institutions involved, the most frequently engaged *societal* institutions are: the research community, cultural channels (e.g., literature, films and theatre), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the mass media. Typically, scholars from the research community search for and expose new primary information (e.g., archival documents). In cultural channels, war veterans also expose new primary information (e.g., by publishing their memoirs), as do films and theater. NGOs may disseminate new information too. The media might mostly distribute new information, and occasionally expose it by conducting investigations. By carrying out these functions, societal institutions influence state institutions, which produce the official memory. The *state* institutions that are most directly involved in the process are those from the Executive Branch, which actually bear the official memory. Among them, for example, are the national Information Center, the army, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education.³⁹ The second factor in this category is *the characteristics of the products of the core institutions*. Such products consist mostly of published materials (e.g., booklets or history textbooks), although they can also be films, plays, exhibitions, etc. They can present the dominant narrative or the alternative one; in the latter case, they promote transformation of the official memory. These products can differ greatly, according to such characteristics as follows: the language in which they are written (local or foreign), the kinds of publications (academic articles distributed only to scholars or books with wider distribution), the prestige of their authors,

³⁷ See support in studies on change of attitudes and beliefs—Brinol and Petty (2005).

³⁸ See support in the research regarding change of attitudes and beliefs (Hayes 2007; Wyer and Albarracín 2005).

³⁹ Institutions of the Legislative and the Judicial Branches are less meaningful in the transformation process, though they can still influence it. For example, they can block or facilitate the dissemination of information (e.g., the courts may rule classification or declassification of an archival document).

and types of evidence that support their claims (primary or secondary). For example, alternative books written in a local language, by a prestigious author who supports his/her claims with primary sources, are more likely to support a memory transformation.⁴⁰

The third factor is *time*, which has several main implications. The passing of time may lead to the appearance of new alternative information that sheds different light on an event because of the declassification of archival documents that have been typically classified for at least 30 years (Winter 2010).⁴¹ The passage of time may also lead war veterans to heal from psychological wounds caused by the war and therefore become ready to talk about difficult events of the war in which they participated (Ben-Ze'ev 2010; Rosoux 2001).⁴² Moreover, as time passes, a generational turnover takes place. Often it may support memory transformation because the younger generation is more open than the older one (Hirsch 1997; Kansteiner 2002, Meckel et al. 2008).⁴³

The fourth factor is *mistakes*—situations in which the transformation process progresses due to errors which support the alternative narrative, made by people in societal and state institutions. Some examples are: classified alternative documents that are given by mistake to scholars searching in archives, texts of publications that relate by mistake to the alternative narrative, and censorship that fails to observe alternative content in publications (Nets-Zehngut 2011c).

International Context This category consists of at least two factors. First is *international status*—the image in the international community of a given country. This factor works in two contradictory ways: the more positive an image is, the more a country is inclined to transform its official memory, since it will not worry that a memory transformation will lead to a very negative image of it.⁴⁴ On the other hand, at times a negative image will encourage a country to transform its memory in order to show the international community: “yes, we did wrong in the past, but we are currently mature enough to admit it.”⁴⁵ The second factor is *international influences*, which relates to the functioning of international institutions, dominant values, or technological innovations. For example, international institutions can promote processes and norms of reconciliation, including admitting wrongdoing in conflicts, thus creating a climate for the memory transformation (e.g., the United Nations or the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa).⁴⁶ International academic institutions may also develop more critical approaches by offering alternative narratives parallel to the dominant one, which may be implemented in history textbooks used in educational systems (Nave and Yogev 2002). Moreover, these approaches may influence the research conducted by scholars in a given country. In addition, technological innovations such as the Internet allow for extensive information dissemination that may penetrate a given society (Tokatly 2000). The degree

⁴⁰ See support in the research regarding change of attitudes and beliefs—Brinol and Petty (2005), Cialdini and Goldstein (2004), and Wyer and Albarracin (2005), as well as Nets-Zehngut “interview.”

⁴¹ And see also above literature review of collective memory regarding the exposure of new information that promotes memory transformation.

⁴² See also above literature review about collective memory of conflicts regarding factor 6 (gap between the official memory and the autobiographical one).

⁴³ For a review of these and other more minor impacts of the passing of time on the collective memory of conflicts see: Nets-Zehngut (2012). See also above literature review of collective memory regarding the generational turnover factor that influences memory transformation.

⁴⁴ See support in the Pluralistic Theory in International Relations (Nicholson 2003).

⁴⁵ Germany in post WWII is such a case, for example, regarding its efforts with France and the Czech Republic to acknowledge past evils and consolidate this acknowledgement in historians' committees, history textbooks, etc. (see above references).

⁴⁶ See also the above discussed Czech–German and French–German committees for historical narratives' coordination. See also above literature review on collective memory regarding the “interest of the international community” factor.

of influence attributable to such international sources depends, *inter alia*, on the extent to which the boundaries of the given society are permeable to the external influences.

In summation, we suggest that the presented factors play an important role in the process of transformation of the official memory; they may inhibit or facilitate the transformation. We realize that additional factors may be added to this list. The main purpose of the present list is not only to outline the most important factors in our opinion that emerged from the analysis of our case study, but also to provide concrete illustrations of this complex process that depends on multiple factors. The table below assembles the 15 factors of the five categories.

This model depicts a dynamic nonlinear process that does not have to come to its successful conclusion through all the phases. It can stop at any phase without proceeding further at all or just for a certain period of time. It should be stressed that new critical factual information cannot always change the official memory of a conflict. Such transformation is an outcome of all the factors discussed above and more, including the need of countries to shape the identity of their citizens in a manner that fits their interests. The public exposure of such information, though, is an important factor in the transformation.

Conclusions

In the last few decades, the study of collective memory of conflicts has emerged as one of the central areas of research in social sciences. That area is important, *inter alia*, since this memory significantly influences the dynamics of conflicts. The purpose of this memory is usually not to illuminate the past objectively, but to construct a history that is functional and relevant to the society's present existence and future aspirations. Therefore, a society constructs a narrative that has some basis in actual events, but is entrenched in the particular socio-political-cultural context that imprints its purpose: to serve the societal needs and goals in the changing conditions (Halbwachs 1950; Liu and Hilton 2005; Hilton and Liu 2008; Southgate 2005). The constructed selective and biased narrative, when it becomes part of the memory, plays an especially important role in intractable conflicts because it not only sheds light on the course of conflict and provides a coherent and meaningful picture of the history of the conflict; it also serves as an epistemic basis and rationale for the evaluation of conflict situations, decision making, and selected courses of action (Devine-Wright 2003; Paez and Liu 2011). It provides a simplistic, black-and-white picture of the conflict in which its goals are justified, the in-group is glorified and presented as the sole victim, and the rival is delegitimized. In thus fulfilling its functions, the memory of conflict serves as a barrier to the peacemaking process and reconciliation (Halperin and Bar-Tal 2011).

In this state of affairs, transformation of the collective memory of conflict is closely associated with conflict resolution and reconciliation. This transformation contributes significantly to peace and reconciliation, while also being influenced by them. Such transformation is thorny, because it often requires a "looking into a mirror" which can lead to the recognition of having performed negative deeds in a way that impinges upon one's positive self-image. The present paper contributes to the literature by suggesting a tentative model for the transformation of *official* memory of conflicts. Specifically, the model outlines the phases through which the process of the transformation takes place. Thus it systemically organizes the process, presenting its holistic picture and pointing out the factors that play a role in it by inhibiting or facilitating it. The model was constructed according to the dynamics of the Israeli memory of the 1948 exodus. However, due to the model's general structure it can be used for the analysis of the dynamics of the official memory in some other conflicts. As we showed while presenting the model, it is supported by the dynamics of the memories of various other conflicts.

Saying this, we recognize that the proposed model is a tentative one. It probably does not capture all the characteristics of the transformation processes that have taken place in all the conflicts worldwide. For example, it might be that in large scale societies transformation processes are different from the one that took place in a small one like the Israeli society (containing some 600,000 Jews in its foundation in 1948 and even today only about 6 million). Therefore it is suggested that future studies need to examine the validity of the suggested model and update it with their findings.

The model describes the reciprocity between bottom-up and top-down processes that together lead to memory transformation. Largely, *bottom-up* societal processes and activities in the Israeli society (e.g., research community, media, war veterans, and NGOs) contributed to the opening of this society to new narratives. This, in turn, led to a *top-down* activity—the declassification of documents stored in state archives that describe the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. Consequently, *bottom-up* activity took place—the publication of studies that include these documents (i.e., formal history). These studies challenged significantly the hegemony in Israel of the Zionist conflict-supportive narrative of the exodus. In turn, a *top-bottom* process occurred, as one of the state institutions (the Ministry of Education) transformed its official memory of the exodus.

With regard to that specific case of the 1948 exodus, the article *contributes empirical data about its dynamics in Israel*. In this framework, the analysis showed that the official memory of the exodus was transformed by a bottom-up process—that is, the change was gradually introduced by individuals in the societal institutions of the research community and mass media, as well as in cultural products. The case shows that state institutions have great difficulty accepting changes that have negative implications for their society, since they represent the country. Often they change the official memory only when the evidence for the alternative narrative is already well disseminated and absorbed by societal institutions. But even in these cases, as the present study shows, the inhibition is great. In the case of the exodus, this is one of the crucial issues that are raised in the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians (Caplan 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon 2009; Lustick 2006). It is therefore not surprising that despite the fact that many Israeli societal institutions adopted the critical narrative during the early period, the Israeli state institutions resisted it. The Ministry of Education was the *only* such institution to transform its memory into a critical one—despite the well-solidified evidence of the Israeli research community and war veterans in support of the critical narrative.⁴⁷ Even this adoption by the Ministry of Education did not occur until more than two decades after societal institutions started significantly adopting the critical narrative. Moreover, even this minor change was partly reversed with the ascendance to power of a nationalistic Education Minister.

The transformation process which took place in Israel had various implications for the international political realm. For decades after the 1948 War, Israel refused to acknowledge the Palestinian 1948 tragedy and any kind of political responsibility for the exodus (Sasser 2004). In contrast, the 2000 Camp David and the 2001 Taba Israeli–Palestinian peace summits witnessed a significant change. At that time, the critical narrative was so accepted in Israel that it was hard for Israeli negotiators to ignore it, as was done before. Therefore, they expressed in the summits a basic willingness to publicly acknowledge the Palestinian 1948 tragedy, implicitly, and indirectly accepting Israel's shared responsibility for it as well. This was a significant factor promoting prospects for achieving peaceful settlement of the conflict (Ben-Josef Hirsch 2007; Lustick 2006).

⁴⁷ For example, Morris (1987), Pail (1979), Safran (1978), and Segev (1986).

The transformation process also influenced the Israeli *popular* memory of the 1948 exodus by decreasing the grasp of its Zionist narrative. When so many societal institutions, as well as one important state institution, presented widely the critical narrative, this influenced the way that the public viewed the exodus. A 2008 public opinion survey conducted among a representative sample of Israeli-Jews found that only 41 % of them still held the Zionist narrative, while 39 % held the critical narrative and 8 % the Palestinian one (12 % did not reply). That is, 47 % of the members of this sector (39 % + 8 %) believed that some or all of the Palestinians were expelled in 1948 (more than those holding the Zionist narrative claiming no expulsion—41 %). This state of affairs represented a major shift in Israeli popular memory of the exodus, which was much more Zionist oriented in the first decades after 1948 (Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal, in preparation).

Consequently, popular memory influences the national and international politics in relation to the conflict. For example, the survey research also found that people who held a critical narrative of the whole-conflict⁴⁸ were more inclined to choose dovish parties in parliament elections. These people were also less inclined to have negative feelings towards Palestinians (e.g., hatred, fear, rage and de-legitimization), and were more supportive of signing peace agreements (all such views sharply contrasting with those of people holding a whole-conflict Zionist narrative; Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal, in preparation).⁴⁹

The above discussion illustrates that analyzing the transformation of *official* memory, as this article does, is important. Official memory not only *represents countries in the international arena*, thereby influencing their relations with other countries, including their rivals (Langenbacher 2010; Nicholson 2003). It also significantly *influences the popular memory* of their citizens, which subsequently shapes their psychological and behavioral reactions to conflicts (Connerton 1989; Wertsch 2002; Zheng 2008).

In summation, we believe that the study of collective memory of conflicts requires a deepening research into the question of how this memory changes. The present article provides a tentative tool for such analyses.

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⁴⁸ That is, inclined to portray the various events of the conflict more accurately and less biased.

⁴⁹ Similarly, Israeli-Jewish hawks are more inclined to object compromises required for peace agreements—see Bar-tal (2001).

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