Israeli Approved Textbooks and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus

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AND THE 1948 PALESTINIAN EXODUS

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ABSTRACT
A country’s official memory of a conflict in which it is involved is of great importance. One of the main presenters of that memory is the Ministry of Education, through the history and civics textbooks it approves for use in its educational system. This article explores for the first time the content of Israeli textbooks approved from 1959 through 2004 regarding one of the main events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Did the textbooks present a Zionist narrative regarding the causes of the exodus (willing flight of the Palestinians), or a critical narrative (willing flight accompanied with expulsion)? Methodologically, the article uses content analysis of all the relevant textbooks, as well as interviews with senior staff at the Ministry and other appropriate figures. The research found that this official memory was dramatically transformed from being initially totally Zionist to eventually being totally critical, since 2000. Other aspects of this memory are also explored such as the reasons behind the presentation of these narratives, the external and self-censorship mechanisms that mediate the impact of these reasons, the manifestation and consequences of these mechanisms, as well as the modus operandi of the Ministry.
INTRODUCTION
A country that is involved in an intractable conflict usually presents a biased official memory of this conflict. In support of a country’s own interests, its memory distorts the past so as to portray the country itself positively and its rivals negatively. This memory plays a central role in the conflict by influencing the psychological and behavioral reactions of the parties to their rivals. Therefore, such memory is important for scholarly research, and is the main reason for the recent increase in memory studies.

Israel has been involved since its foundation in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict (the “conflict”), which has been intractable throughout long periods. The Ministry of Education has been a central state institution for disseminating the conflict’s narratives among the Israelis. The history and civics textbooks approved by the Ministry for use in the Israeli educational system represent the Ministry’s official memory of Israel.¹

These textbooks relate, inter alia, to one of the main historical events of the conflict² – the exodus of the Palestinians³ during the 1948 War; these textbooks reflect the Ministry’s memory regarding that exodus. This article explores that official memory from the 1950s to 2004, while discussing various aspects of it that have not previously been discussed. This is done from the perspective of a collective memory of conflicts. Therefore, a review of that perspective is required.

BACKGROUND
Collective Memory
Collective memory is defined as representations of the past that are collectively adopted.⁴ It is a general term that includes several types of memories, two of the main ones being popular memory and official memory. Popular memory is defined as representations of the past held by the society’s members, and it is most accurately documented through public opinion surveys.⁵ Official memory is defined as representations of the past adopted by institutions of the state. This type of memory is shown through publications by state ministries and the army, by anthems, and by national celebrations and museums.⁶ Official memory influences the popular memory internally, within countries, and also represents a country externally, in the international arena.⁷

Specifically, collective memory of a conflict consists of narratives that describe the major events⁸ that led to the conflict and those that determined the conflict’s course.
Typically, the dominant narrative of a conflict is biased in favor of the group that has adopted the narrative. Among the institutions that present the official memory of conflicts is the Ministry of Education. The educational realm is attributed significant importance regarding the popular memory construction because it influences students for many years (elementary school through high school), in an authoritative manner and context (the class), and at an early formative stage. This is why many scholars attribute significant impact of textbooks on the popular memory of students. Consequently, considerable research has been conducted on history textbooks – focusing on their representation of conflicts. However, the vast majority of these studies deal with textbooks used in the educational system, and not those that are approved by the ministries. Despite the importance of textbooks used in the classroom, there is often a big difference between the content of textbooks that are not approved by the Ministry of Education and those that the Ministry has approved. The latter textbooks undergo an approval process by the Ministry or are written by it, both processes that can significantly influence their content in the direction that the state prefers, and thus represent its official memory.

Nonetheless, even when approved history textbooks in relatively obscure countries have been analyzed, the analysis has focused mostly on the descriptive aspect of the textbooks as opposed to their explanatory aspect. No interviews have been conducted with the people who took part in writing the textbooks in order to understand exactly the reasoning behind the textbooks’ content. Also there has been no systematic analysis of the Ministry of Education’s modus operandi in producing the textbooks. All this leaves the explanatory aspect of the content of the approved textbooks to be understood based only on evaluations – which are only partly valid. Moreover, often textbooks in question were approved in a relatively short period of time, jeopardizing analysis of long-term patterns. Lastly, used or approved textbooks that have been analyzed typically represent only a small or partial cross-section of their type. They are only samples, and not representative ones; thus their analysis does not provide the entire picture regarding the textbooks in a specific country in a specific period.

Research on the way history textbooks address conflicts – particularly research pertaining to textbooks that have been approved for use in educational systems – is somewhat partial. This article aims to address this partiality of the research. It will also explore what the Ministry of Education, as a formal institution, perceived as the appropriate and necessary popular memory for students to adopt. To these ends, the
article will analyze the ways in which all history and civics textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education throughout most of its history have presented the causes for the exodus. In addition, the study uses interviews with the Ministry's senior figures and other relevant people, and analyzes the *modus operandi* of the Ministry, in order to construct valid explanations of the findings. Specifically, the official memory of the Ministry of Education regarding the conflict (including the 1948 exodus) has never been researched. Important studies of Israeli textbooks have been conducted, but they differ in many ways from the current study. Previous studies, for example, focused on *used* textbooks, which do not reflect the official memory of Israel; or they represent only a partial cross-section of their type and not all of them.

*Israel and Its Memory of the Conflict*

The Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict has lasted for about a century, causing significant damage to the involved parties. It has become, mainly since the 1948 War, the primary issue in the Jewish (and later Israeli-Jewish) existence, ideology, and identity. Since the foundation of the State of Israel, its institutions have exclusively disseminated among the Israeli-Jews ("Israelis") the Zionist narrative of the conflict as a whole. Generally, this narrative has portrayed the Jews, and later the Israelis, in a way typical of narratives of conflicts. Selectively, the narrative has presented a simplistic, black-and-white description of events. The Arabs, including the Palestinians, have been blamed for the outbreak of the conflict and its continuation, delegitimizing them, while the Israelis have been portrayed as peace loving, moral, and the sole victims of the conflict.

One of the central historical events of the conflict has been the exodus of some 650,000 Palestinians during the 1948 War. This event, which led to the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, has great political, psychological, and social importance for both parties. Since 1949, the Arabs, including the Palestinians, have conducted a widespread diplomatic campaign against Israel, demanding the return of the refugees. Since the 1990s, this problem has been a major obstacle in the peace negotiations between the parties. The Zionist narrative takes no responsibility for this exodus, but blames it exclusively on the Arabs, including the Palestinians. The Palestinians, it argues, fled willingly due to blanket appeals from their leadership and from the Arab states to leave their localities, as well as due to fear of the Jews. Acts of expulsion by the Jewish/Israeli fighting forces are not noted and are even denied.
Israel has disseminated the Zionist narrative – regarding the 1948 exodus, for example – through, inter alia, the publications of the national Publications Agency or those of the IDF (the Israeli army). Until the late 1970s, the state was almost totally supported in this dissemination endeavor by members of various Israeli societal institutions, such as intellectuals, scholars, journalists, and authors.

The dominance in Israel of the Zionist narrative regarding the conflict began to be challenged mainly in the late 1970s. Members of these societal institutions started writing critical publications confronting various aspects of this narrative. In regard to the Palestinian exodus, for example, many scholarly publications and newspaper articles, as well as some 1948 Jewish war veterans’ memoirs, have presented a critical narrative regarding the exodus.

A narrative is labeled “Zionist” here because the narrative that presented the willing flight of the Palestinians in 1948 was predominant during the first decades of Israel, when most Israeli-Jewish society subscribed to the Zionist ideology. This is why counter narratives to this narrative were called, inter alia, “post-Zionist” – that is, appearing or gaining prevalence after the Zionist narrative. Moreover, calling the willing-flight-plus-expulsion narrative a “critical” one does not mean that this perspective denies Eretz-Israel as the homeland of the Jews, or that it rejects other fundamental aspects of the Zionist ideology. It also does not mean that an author who presents the critical narrative has not adopted the Zionist ideology. Critical tendencies, to various degrees, exist in the Zionist ideology. However, there was a need for the purposes of this research to call the different narratives by different names; in order to facilitate discussion about them, the terms “Zionist” and “critical” were chosen for this reason. Moreover, whether a publication is labeled critical or Zionist in this study is based only on its way of addressing the causes of the 1948 exodus. It is neither based on the way the publication addresses other events of the conflict, nor on how the author of the publication categorizes him/herself (e.g., as critical or Zionist).

According to this narrative, some of the Palestinians left willingly (due, for instance, to partial calls by Arab, including Palestinian, leadership to leave, fear, and societal collapse), while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli fighting forces. The expulsion cause stood in sharp contrast to the dominant Zionist narrative.

This societal change intensified in the late 1980s with the commencement of an historical revisionist period commonly called the "New Historians" era. New history books criticized additional aspects of the Zionist narrative of the conflict, or supported
criticism that had been raised earlier. A major figure among these critics was the historian Benny Morris. His most frequently discussed findings deal with the exodus, published in a book of broad scope. He rejected the Palestinian claims about a Jewish master plan to expel the Palestinians, while supporting the critical narrative regarding the causes of the exodus. Major scholarly debates regarding the 1948 exodus erupted at that time in Israel and abroad. For example, Norman Finkelstein argued that the Palestinians were for the most part expelled. Ilan Pappe and Nur Masalha argued that the Jews had a master plan to cleanse the area of Palestinians. Morris objected to both assertions. He, however, claimed that a transfer ideology was prevalent among some of the Yishuv leaders; a claim that Ephraim Karsh rejected. A major debate also took place between Morris and Shabtai Tevet -- the latter, for example, claimed that expulsions did not take place prior to the establishment of the State of Israel; the former claimed that they did.21

Aside from the scholarly realm, since the late 1980s, publication of newspaper articles and of 1948 war veterans’ memoirs critical of the exodus increased. In addition, Israeli NGOs began to present more significantly the critical or Palestinian narratives in their publications.22 The Publications Agency and the IDF continued, however, to present the Zionist narrative, at least until 2004.23

THE RESEARCH
The research period in this study is 46 years, from 1959 (when the first list of textbooks approved by the Ministry was published24), to 2004 (right before the research began in 2005). The findings are based mainly on the textbooks and on interviews, in addition to relevant literature.

Each spring, the Ministry of Education publishes lists of books approved for use in the educational system for the upcoming school year ("textbooks list").25 The textbooks analyzed in this research were all of the textbooks included in all of the lists designated for the State Schools division of the educational system during the 46 years of this research.26 This division is the largest in the educational system, comprised of Jewish-secular schools. Only history and civics textbooks were analyzed, since they address the history of the conflict. Only mid-school and high school textbooks are analyzed, because they address the 1948 exodus more extensively and in more detail than do elementary school textbooks.27 In addition, the civics textbooks were designated only for high schools. These textbooks were written by private sector authors (scholars or
teachers), the staff of the Curricula Branch at the Ministry, or by staffs of institutions for writing textbooks (e.g., Matach, abbreviation for Technological Educational College).

All of the textbooks traced in this study have undergone content analysis in order to determine whether they contain Zionist or critical narratives, as described above. This was determined by whether a textbook presents the expulsion cause (of the exodus). A textbook stating that the Palestinians left willingly in 1948, for various reasons (e.g., due to fear or to calls by their own or other Arab leaders), was coded as containing a Zionist narrative of the exodus. Textbooks with a narrative claiming that some Palestinians left willingly for various reasons (e.g., due to fear, calls by leaders, or societal collapse), while a significant number were expelled, were coded as critical. Occasionally, a narrative here was labeled “Zionist-critical”, as it maintains both that most Palestinians left willingly while an insignificant number were expelled.

Therefore, three types of narratives were observed, located on a spectrum: the Zionist narrative (the Palestinians left willingly) at the right end of the spectrum, the Zionist-critical narrative (willing flight accompanied by an insignificant expulsion) at the center, and the critical narrative (willing flight accompanied by significant expulsion) at the left end of the spectrum. Other aspects of the textbooks, such as the extent of discussion of the exodus, were analyzed as well.

Three units in the Ministry influenced the content of the approved textbooks and their lists: The Textbooks Authorization Branch, which publishes the lists of textbooks ("Authorization Branch"); the Curricula Branch, which is in charge of writing curricula, and previously, of textbooks ("Curricula Branch"); and the Chief Field Inspectors Branch, which is in charge of the study of various fields, or for the purposes of this research, of history and civics ("Inspectors" and "Inspectors Branch"). Interviews were conducted mostly with people from these three units: one from the Authorization Branch, four from the Curricula Branch, and three from the Inspectors Branch. Most of the interviewees held the highest positions in their relative branches between 1970 and the late 1990s, dealing with history and civics textbooks. Five scholars from academic institutions who were authors of textbooks included in the textbooks lists were interviewed as well. These 13 interviewees consist of all of the living people connected to all of the analyzed textbooks. Therefore, the interviews provided a solid foundation for the analysis. These were in-depth interviews, using semi-structured questionnaires with opportunities for the interviewees to freely discuss topics as they saw fit. They dealt with general descriptions of the modus operandi of the various branches, with the
reasons for presenting the exodus the way it was interpreted, with reactions to the textbooks, etc.

THE FINDINGS

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION’S THREE RELEVANT UNITS

The Authorization Branch

According to Israeli law, a national school cannot use textbooks that have not been approved by the Ministry. The Authorization Branch has led this approval process since the 1950s. A textbook must be approved by two experts who are recommended to this Branch by the appropriate Inspector (the History Inspector): an experienced teacher and an academic expert/historian.

The Curricula Branch

This unit was established in 1966 and included, until the 1990s, teams for writing textbooks for the Jewish secular division. The teams that were relevant for our purposes were: Mid-School History, High School History, and High School Civics. Their members were characterized by significant support for the liberal educational approach. This approach endorses more professionalism in teaching, focuses more on the needs of the students (as opposed to those of the state), promotes critical and independent thinking, and encourages pluralism in terms of educational materials. Many of the teams’ members were also critical in their general approach and dovish in their political attitudes.

As of the 1980s, criticism has been raised of the Branch’s textbooks. It has been argued that these textbooks are often of low quality and that in a democracy they should not be written by the state. Since the 1990s, these arguments, combined with budget cuts by the Ministry of Finance, dramatically decreased the Curricula Branch’s ability to produce new textbooks. During the 1990s, the Branch teams coped with these cuts by publishing bids for writing textbooks. Private sector authors or publishers who won the bids wrote the textbooks under the supervision of the Branch teams – which thereby acquired indirect influence over the textbooks. Since 2000, the Branch has had no part – not even an indirect one – in writing textbooks; they have been written only by private sector authors.
Until the late 1990s none of the Branch textbooks – being state-written – went through the approval process of the Authorization Branch; rather, they were included automatically in the lists of approved textbooks. Since the 1980s, seven additional academic institutions were also exempted from the approval process (i.e., Matach). Beginning in the late 1990s, the Curricula Branch started gradually submitting its textbooks for the approval of the Authorization Branch – as did the seven other institutions and private sector authors.38

The Inspectors Branch
The History and Civics Inspectors of this Branch, established in the 1950s, have kept in constant communication with teachers, monitoring their work and ensuring that it is up to date. Most of the Inspectors have supported the national educational approach, through which the teaching of history is aimed at strengthening the connection of the students to Israel via the Zionist ideology, in order for them to serve their country.39 The Inspectors have significantly influenced the content of the textbook lists in three main ways. First, they have recommended pedagogical and academic experts for the textbook approval process to the Authorization Branch. Second, their permission has been required in order for members of the Curricula Branch Teams to conduct workshops with teachers and students regarding experimental textbooks. Third, they have determined the content of the matriculation exams and have been in charge of checking the exam results.40

THE TEXTBOOKS

THE ANALYZED TEXTBOOKS
Nineteen textbooks deal with the exodus, and they are listed in Appendix A. Most of their authors, through textbook no. 7, were interviewed in this research.41 According to the interviews, no approved relevant42 textbooks were omitted from this research.

The Narratives of the Textbooks
The 19 textbooks are divided into three periods, according to the narratives they presented regarding the exodus. The periods are determined by the time when the textbooks were placed on the textbooks list, as presented in Appendix A.
Table 1. Periods in the Narratives of the Approved Textbooks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Length (Years)</th>
<th>No. of Textbooks Entering the List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zionist textbooks</td>
<td>1959–1975</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zionist and Zionist-critical textbooks</td>
<td>1976–1999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Critical textbooks</td>
<td>2000–2004</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the first period (1959–1975) the textbooks presented the Zionist narrative exclusively, describing various causes of a willing flight of the Palestinians: mainly a general inclusive call by the Arab, including Palestinian, leadership for the Palestinians to leave, and stating only that the Palestinians "left"; as well as, less frequently, that the Palestinians fled due to fear. Rarely, other causes were mentioned, such as the collapse of the Palestinian society, the Palestinians’ reluctance to live as a minority in Israel, and simply the initiation by Palestinians of the 1948 War (i.e., the Palestinians started the war and are therefore responsible for its results, including their exodus). A few textbooks asserted that the Jews tried in vain to convince the Palestinians to stay in their localities (in some cases referring to those who lived in Haifa; in other cases, regardless of where the Palestinians lived). Below is a typical Zionist narrative, written by Natanel Lorch, a leading Israeli scholar of the 1948 War:

The Arabs of Eretz-Israel declared their obstinate objection to the establishment of a Jewish state. This objection led to the War of Independence [the common title in Israel for the 1948 War] and to the creation of the refugee problem […]. In the dispute about the future of the refugees […] the Arabs assert that they were forcibly and atrociously expelled from their homes, but this is not the truth. Mainly, in localities which were seized – including in a big city like Haifa – the Jews asked their [Arab] neighbors to stay, but the latter preferred exit to exile, instead of accepting a Jewish rule. The Arab leaders encouraged them to flee and disillusioned them in promises, that in a few weeks they would return with the winning Arab armies. More than this, those leaders that incited for war were the first to leave.43

In the second period (1976–1999) eight textbooks entered the list, half of them presenting the Zionist narrative, and half a Zionist-critical narrative.44 An example of the latter narrative describes its part of an insignificant expulsion:

Even though it was not the policy of the “Hagana” [Jewish pre-Israel main fighting force] to encourage the flight of the Arabs, still a few hostile villages which threatened the road to Jerusalem were evacuated by the commanders of the “Hagana”. Lifting the siege on
Jerusalem was one of the central operations in the war. Therefore, a few villages which served as bases for the enemy were forcibly evacuated […] and their residents joined the flight. However, these were just a few incidents which took place at a later phase, and the number of people involved was too small to influence the scope of the mass flight, or to explain it.45

The four books that entered the list in the third period (2000–2004) presented the critical narrative as it pertained mainly to the causes of Palestinian fear and the Palestinians’ willing flight, and occasionally to a collapse of the Palestinian society – all including discussion of a significant expulsion. The "call of leadership to leave" cause was not mentioned in any of them, contrary to the significant inclusion of that cause in the two previous periods (mainly the first one). An example of the critical narrative is the following quote from Eyal Naveh's textbook:

During the fights over the land, hundreds of thousands of the local Arabs were expelled or fled to the neighboring countries […] During the flights many of the local Arabs were expelled. Some of them fled before the Jewish forces reached the village of an Arabic neighborhood in the city, and some of them were expelled by the conquering force.46

Thus, textbooks gradually became more critical as time passed, at first totally Zionist in their perspective, and in the end, totally critical.

**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEXTBOOKS**

The vast majority of the textbooks were history texts and their authors were of two types. The authors of the textbooks from the first period47 were all private sector people or employees of the Ministry (all, however, holding positions that did not involve writing textbooks). These positions included, for example, a member of various curriculum committees, a high school principal, a general manager of the Ministry, a History Inspector at the Ministry, and a member of the Higher Educational Committee of the Ministry.48 During the second period, the vast majority of textbooks were written by the Curricula Branch.49 Lastly, the textbooks of the third period were written mostly by private sector people.50 Thus, a circular process took place in which the textbooks were initially written by people (or by those in a non-writing-textbooks capacity); then, beginning in the mid-1970s, by the state (through the Curricula Branch); and finally, as of the mid-1990s, by private sector people again (most of whom have not held Ministry-related positions).
THE REASONS BEHIND THE TEXTBOOKS’ NARRATIVES

The First Period

The seven textbooks of the first period (and the first one of the second period) were written in the context of high intractability and threat of conflict, along with an intensive international Arab, including Palestinian, campaign against Israel. Israel was a multicultural society coping with severe economic and societal difficulties, dominated by the conservative 1948 generation. Moreover, as described above, the critical activity of the Israeli societal institutions at that period was marginal. Therefore, in that period there was a consensus in Israel among education professionals that the national educational approach should be implemented in order to mobilize its youth and to protect Israel’s international image. Thus, all eight of these textbooks presented the Zionist narrative. For example, Ya'acov Landau, who co-authored a textbook published in 1964, was aware at that time, as were his co-authors, of the critical narrative. He explained, however, that in 1964 the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 was not discussed in Israel. And indeed, his textbook presents the Zionist narrative.

For the reasons above, these eight textbooks were placed on the approved textbooks list. Most were taken off the list during that period, partly because new textbooks were being written by the Curricula Branch, and partly because the Authorization Branch was notified by the publishers of these textbooks that their inventories were minimal and that no new textbooks would be printed.

The Second Period

In the second period, among its seven remaining textbooks, six were written by the Curricula Branch (two were Zionist and four Zionist-critical), and the seventh by a private sector author, Eyal Naveh.

Focusing first on the Curricula Branch textbooks, the question arises as to whether the Branch staff was aware of the critical narrative. As found in the research – they were aware. The sources of this knowledge were diverse. The staff members were very meticulous in keeping their knowledge updated regarding new publications, newspapers articles, etc. Accordingly, they were exposed to the early critical activity of various societal institutions regarding the exodus. During this period (until the mid-1980s, during which the Curricula Branch textbooks were written), authors of these textbooks possessed significant knowledge. Altogether, for example, three of them
were familiar with: five critical studies of the research community; four critical 1948 war veterans' memoirs; the critical activity of the dovish Matzpen NGO; critical articles published by the maverick influential weekly *Haolam Hazeh*; critical newspaper articles published in Israeli dailies as well as foreign newspapers and journals; and stories told verbally by 1948 War veterans.\(^{55}\)

Despite this knowledge, the Curricula Branch did not publish textbooks containing the critical narrative. It was not because this narrative was regarded as incorrect; to the contrary, the interviewees in this research regarded it as accurate. This was due to the Branch staff’s self-censorship (as Yehoshua Mathias termed it), describing the consensus in the Ministry not to present in the textbooks the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.\(^{56}\)

The two main reasons for this censorship were:

1. Mobilizing the students – portraying Israel positively to the students would develop among them patriotism and attachment to Israel, enabling them, when they grew up, to cope with the various difficulties that Israelis experience and to contribute to their country.\(^{57}\)

2. Supporting Israel's international image – portraying Israel positively to the international community would help it cope with the Arab, including Palestinian, international campaign. In contrast, description by an official Israeli institution such as the Ministry of expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 would damage that image. As Mathias says: "There was a feeling that we [at the Curricula Branch] had to contend with a controversy [the Arab campaign … :] there was an impact of the general feeling, and the general feeling was very defensive."\(^{58}\) Ada Moshcovits describes this dual (internally and externally) positive portrayal of Israel regarding the exodus: "We [at the Curricula Branch] thought about the positive image of the country […] the aim was not criticism […] not] under any circumstances. Surely it was in everybody's head, even among the most leftish among us."\(^{59}\) This purpose was especially important because the Ministry is a state institution and as such represents Israel.

Three additional factors supported this self-censorship:

3. Impact of the Zionist ideology. In the Curricula Branch the members of the High School History and Civics Teams were by and large more politically dovish than the members of the Mid-School History Team or the History and Civics Chief Inspectors. Therefore, the former were less inclined to adopt the Zionist ideology, including the Zionist narrative. This difference has been more relevant since the 1980s,
because until then the impact of the Zionist ideology was generally strong among all of the Ministry's staff. Mathias explains:

The [Zionist] hegemony was very strong in this regard. This [the critical narrative regarding the exodus] did not cross our mind. It looked for us [the Curricula Branch staff] common sense [the Zionist narrative ….] when we wrote [about that exodus] it was as if there was a ready answer about what should be written […] they [the Palestinians] left, the leaders […] encouraged them to flee.

(4) Institutional norm – among the Ministry staff there was a stronghold for the norm of "presenting the state's point of view", even if this point of view was different from their private one. Since the state adopted the Zionist narrative, this narrative is the one that should be presented.

(5) Sanctions – the Curricula Branch's activity was significantly influenced by external censorship. This censorship took place when self-censorship did not prevent presentation of the critical narrative, and was mostly retrospective, occurring after the textbooks were published. However, since the Branch staff was aware of the external censorship, they censored their textbooks in advance out of concern over sanctions that could have been implemented against them if they presented the critical narrative. The sanctions could have been concrete (that is, personal – being transferred to a less desirable position or being fired); or general (having a textbook disqualified); or psychological, such as subjection to harsh public or colleagues' criticism. Ada Moshcovits describes the impact on her and her colleagues in the Curricula Branch of criticism by the teachers after the publication of the "Arab-Israeli Conflict" kit in the mid-1970s: "The awful attack on us, we were in shock. [The teachers accused us, h]ow can you even present that we [the Jews] are responsible [for the 1948 exodus due to expulsion]? They [the Palestinians] ran away.

External censorship, conducted by various entities, was not a formal mechanism but it still had significant influence on the content of the textbooks. The History Chief Inspectors determined the identity of the experts who reviewed the textbooks, the extent of the teachers' cooperation with experimental textbooks, and the questions on the matriculation exams. The ministers of education also had significant impact on the content of textbooks, because the less dovish they were, the more they were in favor of the Zionist narrative. For example, Zevulun Hammer of the rightist religious Mafdal party (minister of education between 1977–1984 and 1990–1992) was not content with the activities of the Curricula Branch prior to his appointment, considering it not Zionist
enough. He closely monitored the Branch after his appointment. The Authorization Branch determined the textbooks to be approved. The teachers influenced the textbooks through their feedback regarding the experimental versions of the textbooks written by the Branch, which affected the content of the textbooks’ final versions (teachers’ choices of textbooks to use had a strong impact on textbook publication and approval, i.e., publishers stopped publishing books that teachers rejected, which in turn were removed from the textbook lists).

Members of Knesset, mostly those from its Education Committee, also had an impact. When they heard that the Curricula Branch had published textbooks that deviated from the Zionist consensus, they questioned the minister of education about it and ordered the Branch staff to appear before them and explain their activities. In the mid-1970s, for example, the Education Committee, considering the “Arab-Israeli Conflict” kit not Zionist enough, demanded that the kit either not be used in the education system, or that responsibility for writing textbooks be transferred to another entity. The rightist Knesset Member Geula Cohen visited the Curricula Branch and (at times resorting to “terrible screaming”) strongly criticized its members. The Education Committee also recommended the disqualification of Danny Ya’acoby’s textbook in the early 2000s.

The general public, academia, and the media reacted to the publications of new textbooks by writing articles, sending letters to the Branch, by approaching the Education Minister or Knesset members, etc. The Curricula Branch staff took these responses strongly into consideration.

Since the mid-late 1970s, the macro circumstances gradually changed and increased the chances that the Branch textbooks would deviate from presenting the Zionist narrative. The intractability and threat of conflict decreased (partly due to the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt); the economy of Israel grew significantly; the Israeli society became more open, individualistic, critical, and pluralistic; and the 1948 older generation gradually gave way within various institutions to a younger, more open, generation. Moreover, since the late 1970s Israeli societal institutions started becoming more critical in general, specifically regarding the exodus (including Benny Morris's first book from the late 1980s).

The 1977 political upheaval (when the center-right Likud party ended three decades of hegemony of the center-left parties) further contributed to the change in macro circumstances: it promoted societal critical activity, but also led, in the state
institutions during most of the second period, to conservatism due to the impact of the more hawkish ministers of education. However, all these macro changes had little impact on the Curricula Branch textbooks as they were published only until the mid-1980s, when the impact of these changes was still marginal.

Micro circumstances also promoted change in the textbooks away from the Zionist narrative, though to a lesser extent than did macro changes. These textbooks were written by members of the Curricula Branch, many of whom were dovish politically, who supported the liberal educational approach. Therefore, their inclination toward the critical narrative was among the micro circumstances leading to changes in textbooks. Additionally, most of the textbooks were written for high school students, who were considered more suited to reading critical textbooks than were mid-school students. Textbook authors favored including non-Zionist narratives in textbooks meant for these more mature students.

The accumulation of these macro and micro influences allowed for just a slight deviation of the Branch's textbooks from the Zionist narrative in the second period. Ada Moshcovits describes this attitude of the Branch: "We did not bring extreme ideas on purpose […] we did not go forward with a red flag and break through barriers […] we converged to the center […]"; Mathias also explains: "We developed books that were not really mainstream, slightly on its side, tickling it […] we did not want to make an issue out of it […] we converged to the consensus." Therefore, while two of the textbooks present the Zionist narrative, the remaining four present the Zionist-critical narrative, and use delicate words such as "evacuation" when discussing expulsion.

The last textbook of the second period was the first after two decades to be written by a private sector author (Eyal Naveh, 1994), who explained that he decided to include the Zionist narrative because it was the official narrative of the State of Israel, as presented in various official publications that he had.

The Third Period

During the third period, four textbooks were published in 1999 and were included on the 2000 approved textbooks list. At that time, the macro influences described above reached their climax, and thus their impact was significant. As a result, the authors of these textbooks felt that the critical narrative was so accepted in Israel, and supported by so many academic studies, that not including it in their textbooks would be improper.

Further factors that encouraged them to present the critical narrative were the international support worldwide for acknowledgement of past injustices in conflicts, the
authors’ support of the liberal educational approach, the transformation of Israeli society into a more pluralistic and critical one, the authors’ relatively young ages (compared to the 1948 generation), and the 1990s peace process, which signaled that the conflict might be ending. An additional factor affected Naveh and Tavivyan: as non-government employees, they were much less influenced than the Curricula Branch staff by external censorship. Both of their textbooks were approved by the Authorization Branch, with no comments submitted by the experts regarding the critical narrative included in them (Ya'acoby's textbook was the last relevant textbook of the Curricula Branch that did not need Authorization Branch approval). The history experts who examined the two textbooks were also aware of the academy's wide acceptance of the critical narrative.  

This, however, was not the end of the story for two of the textbooks – Naveh's and Ya'acoby's. Articles published in late 1999 and 2000 in American newspapers described their critical content regarding various topics on the history of the Jews and of Israel. In response, several entities, mainly in Israel, demanded that these textbooks be disqualified for use in the Israeli educational system. The "Group of Professors for Political and Social Strength" was the main entity that attacked Naveh's textbook, which was saved from being disqualified by the dovish Minister of Education Yossi Sarid. Ya'acoby's textbook’s fate, however, was different. It was initially attacked by the Shalem Center research institute; later, the Likud Minister of Education Limor Livnat set up a committee to investigate its content. There was also widespread public debate about the textbook, taking place through the media and the Ministry of Education. Eventually, Livnat disqualified the textbook and it was taken off the 2001 textbooks list. The committee’s report, which criticized many aspects of the textbook did not, however, criticize its description of the critical narrative of the exodus. It was not this narrative that accounted for the textbook’s disqualification but other topics. Thus, the extent of the taboo regarding the critical narrative of the exodus was very low even among conservative people and entities in Israel. Eventually, of the four initial textbooks, only three remained on the 2001 approved list– Domke’s, Tavivyan's, and Naveh's. These books continued to be approved each year until at least 2004.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION
The official memory of the Ministry regarding the exodus, as presented in its textbooks, was gradually transformed from 1959 to 2004. It started as completely Zionist and remained so for almost two decades. In the second period the official memory was very
similar, although it became slightly transformed into partly Zionist and partly Zionist-critical. In the third period, it underwent a dramatic change and became completely critical.

These findings demonstrate that until 1999 the Ministry’s official memory was largely a typical memory of conflicts, as described above. It was distorted and biased in favor of Israel, ignoring the 1948 expulsions. The change since 2000, however, demonstrates a drastic transformation of that memory. This is especially noteworthy, since this transformation occurred in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before it was resolved – in contrast to what the literature typically asserts (that transformation of the collective memory of conflicts will occur after their resolution). This affirms the Israeli society as mature, critical, and open enough to acknowledge its own responsibility for its conduct in 1948.

The main logic in the earlier periods for formulating the textbooks in a Zionist manner was two-fold. Internally, a positive representation of Israel as not having expelled the Palestinians in 1948 would promote a better popular memory of the conflict among students. Such a memory is an important determinant of the students’ social identity, and thus would enable them, when they became adults, to properly cope with the conflict and contribute to Israel. Externally, portraying Israel positively would support its image in the international community, one that significantly influenced the parties to the conflict.

A taboo (which was initially very strong, weakening over time) surrounded the critical narrative within the Ministry. Various characteristics of Israeli society, of the conflict, and of the international arena, determined how powerful this taboo was at any given time. This taboo was mediated by self-censorship practiced by the staff at the Ministry, for five main reasons: mobilizing students, supporting Israel's international image, the impact of the Zionist ideology, an institutional norm of presenting the state's point of view, and a concern about sanctions. These sanctions were practiced via the external censorship mechanism conducted by many entities such as the History Chief Inspectors, the ministers of education and the Authorization Branch, the teachers, the members of the Knesset, the general public, academia, and the media.

This taboo was manifested in several ways: First, obviously, it was demonstrated by not presenting the critical narrative, only the Zionist one. Second, the "Selective Adoption" phenomenon reflected this taboo. This was the use of sources that included the critical narrative -- but only the parts that support the Zionist narrative, ignoring
their discussion of 1948 expulsions. For example, scholar Michael Hed published a textbook in 1976 for the Curricula Branch, using a well-known 1959 study by Ronny Gabbay, *A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict*– only to support the Zionist narrative, ignoring Gabbay's discussion of 1948 expulsions. Third, the “Euphemism” phenomenon – the use of mild, vague, rather than harsh definite language – served to protect Israel from negative implications in connection with Palestinian expulsion. This appeared in the four publications that presented the Zionist-critical narrative; words such as "evacuation" and "removing" (of the Palestinians) were used instead of “expulsion”. The Euphemism phenomenon was deliberate, and it meant to reduce both the damage to Israel's image and criticism that might be raised against the Curricula Branch. Fourth, the "Softening References" phenomenon – discussion of aspects that minimize the impact of the description of expulsions also pointed to the taboo regarding the critical narrative.

Three of the Zionist-critical textbooks that described low scale expulsion of Palestinians also provided information that minimized the effect of the expulsion. One of them emphasized that the Hagana had no policy to encourage the flight of Palestinians. It also asserted that the evacuations took place in hostile villages and at a later phase of the war, were very important for the Jewish victory, and involved only a small number of Palestinians. Similarly, in two other textbooks, after describing expulsion, the text discusses positive Jewish activities, which counteract the idea of expulsion. One textbook describes efforts by the Jews to prevent the Palestinians from running away, while another informs us that the Palestinians were allowed to stay in their homes. These two “counter-expulsion” descriptions are salient since they relate to the citizens of the Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramla, which in fact experienced the widest scale expulsion in 1948.

In regard to the timeline for adoption of the critical narrative, this research demonstrates that members of the Curricula Branch had for the most part already personally adopted the critical narrative of the exodus at an earlier period (e.g., at least from the 1970s). The textbooks did not do so until 2000. As for the politicians– that subject is not examined here, but two things can still be said about it: There was no criticism against the presentation of the critical narrative in Ya'acoby’s textbook; and Morris asserted that in early 2000s Livnat mentioned in public the expulsions of 1948. This means that she apparently also adopted the critical narrative.
In conclusion, this study sheds light on the official memory of the Israel Ministry of Education regarding the exodus since the 1950s. In this framework it discusses systematically the narratives held by the Ministry, the reasons for holding these narratives, the external and self-censorship mechanisms that mediate the influence of these reasons, the manifestations/consequences of these mechanisms, and the modus operandi of the Ministry. All of these findings are firmly validated by the fact that they are based on all of the relevant textbooks published over the vast majority of the Ministry's operation, as well as on interviews. The findings are relevant mostly to the specific educational context of Israel and the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, as well as regarding the official memories of Ministries of Education in other conflicts and countries worldwide.
APPENDIX A
LIST OF THE TEXTBOOKS APPROVED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION THAT WERE ANALYZED

Comment: the textbooks [all in Hebrew] do not appear in the endnotes. At the end of each textbook, in parentheses, the first year it was found in the textbooks list is mentioned, and then the additional years in which it remained in the list.

PERIOD 1 (1959 – 1975): ZIONIST TEXTBOOKS


The four Zionist-critical textbooks are marked with an asterisk


9. The Arab-Israeli Conflict Kit.*


**PERIOD 3 (2000 – 2004): CRITICAL TEXTBOOKS**


## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Relation to the Study/Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authorization Branch</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Binyanim Levy *</td>
<td>Head of Branch</td>
<td>1992–2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currícula Branch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shifra Kulat **</td>
<td>High School History Team – Member</td>
<td>1973–1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yehoshua Mathias ***</td>
<td>High School History Team – Member</td>
<td>1975–1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High+Mid School History Teams – Head</td>
<td>1984–1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Danny Ya'acoby</td>
<td>High School History Team – Member</td>
<td>1993–1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ada Moshcovits</td>
<td>Civics Team – Head (since its foundation)</td>
<td>1970–1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspectors Branch</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shlomo Netzer ****</td>
<td>History Chief Inspector</td>
<td>1970–1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Michael Yaron</td>
<td>History Chief Inspector</td>
<td>1993–at least 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dan Giladi</td>
<td>Civics Chief Inspector</td>
<td>1973–1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Authors of Textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ya’acov Landau</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Michael Hed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Eyal Naveh</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ktsiya Tavivyan</td>
<td>&quot;Matach&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Neima Barzel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Levy has worked in the Ministry since 1974 in various positions, including as a Chief Inspector.
** Kulat was a member of the Civics Team between 1970 and 1972.
*** Mathias is especially important for this research because he also researched the activity of the Ministry.
**** Netzer served also as the first Civics Chief Inspector from 1970 to 1973.
NOTES

The author wishes to thank the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for supporting the writing of the English version of this article. Gratitude is also conveyed to the reviewers of this article and the editor of Israel Studies for their helpful comments.

1. Israeli history textbooks and history education in general, are not meant only to construct the collective memory of students, but are also meant to develop students’ critical thinking on various issues.


3. The analyzed textbooks referred to the Palestinians, mostly in earlier times, as “Arabs”. For consistency, however, the article refers to them throughout as “Palestinians”, except when providing quotes that refer to them as Arabs.


Amézola, “A ‘Necessary’ Dictatorship: The ‘Age of Rosas’ in Argentine History Textbooks published between 1956 and 1983 and the Defense of Authoritarianism,” *Paedagogica Historica* 43.5 (2007): 669–84; Katalin Morgan, “Scholarly and Values-driven Objectives in Two South African School History Textbooks: An Analysis of Topics of Race and Racism,” *Historical Social Research* 35.3 (2010): 299–322. There is, however, debate in the literature about the extent of the impact of textbooks. Some scholars maintain that textbooks do not have a significant impact on people, and/or argue that other agents of memory have more impact, e.g., the media, and cultural channels; e.g., David Carrier, “Art Museums, Old Paintings and our Knowledge of the Past,” *History and Theory* 40 (2001):170–89; Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg, *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* (New York, 2011); or in certain contexts – oral history transmitted within families, Nur Masalha, “Remembering the Palestinian Nakba: Commemoration, Oral History and Narratives of Memory,” *Holy Land Studies* 7.2 (2008): 123–56. Without ranking the relative importance of various agents of memory, it seems that textbooks do have an impact on students. This is partly due to students’ exposure to textbooks over many years, the books’ authoritative tone, and their use during the formative years of children.


12. For such main studies see note 10 regarding textbooks used.


22. NGOs’ critical activity before the late 1980s was very marginal.


24. The first list was actually published in 1958, but could not be found; only lists from 1959 and later could be found.

25. The process of approving textbooks has been prevalent only since the late 1990s. Previously (mainly since the 1980s), many that were not written by the Ministry of Education were used in the educational system without approval.

26. The lists from the following years were examined: 1959, 1962, 1966, 1970, and 1975–2004. As for the lists published between 1959 and 1974 that were not examined, these contained no textbooks that were not covered in this study.


29. This threefold categorization of narratives does not necessarily capture all of the small nuances of the description of causes for the exodus. It seems, however, that it does capture the main differences among the descriptions, and this categorization is necessary in order to discuss the textbooks in a general manner.

30. Except for the author of one textbook, no. 12, who could not be traced since he has left Israel. Two other authors passed away.

31. See Appendix B for the 13 interviewees and their relevant details.


33. Interviews with Binyamin Levy, June 2007; Eyal Naveh, September 2007; Ministry of Education Approval of Textbooks Instructions 1.1.03 [Hebrew].


38. Elie Podeh, *Defamation of the Embarrassment and Thanks to Cover-Up* (Jerusalem, 1997) [Hebrew]; and interviews with Binyamin Levy 2007, Yehoshua Mathias 2007, and Ada Moshcovits 2007, Civics Inspectors between 1973 and 1993; Dan Giladi, was an exception, because he partially also endorsed the liberal educational approach.

39. From Ziv's documents, as cited in Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks*.


41. Except for authors of textbook nos. 8, 12, and 16.


43. See textbook no. 5, pages 47 and 48.

44. See textbook nos. 9, 11, 13, and 14.

45. See textbook no. 9.2., page 5.

46. See textbook no. 19, pages 138 and 143.

47. In addition to the author of the first textbook from the second period.

48. Respectively, Shmuel Etinger – author of textbook nos. 1 and 7, Shlomo Kirshenboim – textbook no. 3, Eliezer Riger – no. 4, Michael Ziv– nos. 5 and 7, and Ya'akov Katz – no. 8 (based on author's interviews with Shlomo Netzer 2007 and Dan Giladi 2009); also see Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks*.

49. Except, as mentioned, the first and last textbooks of the second period (nos. 8 and 15), both written by private people.

50. The edited textbook no. 18 was published by the Curricula Branch and was edited by one of its staff (Danny Ya'acoby). However, its chapters were actually written mostly by private people (author's interview with Danny Ya'acoby, in writing, May 2009). The last textbook of period 2 was also written by a private author (Eyal Naveh), and can be added to privately written textbooks of the third period.

52. Phone interview with Ya'acov Landau, June 2009.

53. Naveh's textbook was approved for General History studies and not for Jewish and Israeli History studies.

54. Reference is made, as an example, to the knowledge of three staff members: Shifra Kulat, Yehoshua Mathias, and Ada Moshcovits.


57. Interview with Yehoshua Mathias 2007, 2009; Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks*.

58. Interview with Yehoshua Mathias 2009, 3.


61. Interview with Yehoshua Mathias 2009, 2.


63. This term means all kind of activities – or non-activities – aimed against presenting the critical narrative in the educational system.


65. Interview with Ada Moshcovits 2007, 5.


67. Interviews with: Ada Moshcovits 2007; Yehoshua Mathias 2009. See also onwards the difference between Yossi Sarid and Limor Livnat.

68. Author's interviews with: Shifra Kulat 2007; Ada Moshcovits 2007.

70. Author's interviews with Ada Moshcovits 2007, 4 and 7; Yehoshua Mathias 2007, 11 and 14.
72. This is indeed the case. A study found that almost all of the important studies published by Israeli-Jewish scholars since the late 1970s present the critical narrative with regard to the exodus – see Rafi-Zehngut, “The Causes for the Exodus of the Palestinian Refugees during the War of Independence as they Appear in Studies of Jews from Israel and Abroad,” *Politika* 21 (2012): 151–79 [Hebrew].
73. Author's interviews with Ktsiya Tavivyan, phone, June 2009; Danny Ya'acoby May 2009; Eyal Naveh 2007 and 2009. All the detailed discussion in this article regarding the authors of the textbooks of period 3 refers to the three authors mentioned here, who were interviewed during the research, and not to Eliezer Domke who was not interviewed as he had passed away.
75. No. 14.
77. No. 9.2.
78. Respectively, textbooks nos. 11 and 13.
79. Author's interview with Benny Morris June 2006.