Origins of the Palestinian refugee problem: Changes in the historical memory of Israelis/Jews 1949-2004

Rafi Nets-Zehngut
The major historical issue in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict is the causes for the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Among the Israelis/Jews exist two main narratives regarding this issue: the Zionist one – the refugees fled, for various reasons; and the critical one – some fled while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli security forces. This study explores the way the Israeli/Jewish historical memory (i.e., the Israeli/Jewish research community) related to this historical issue from 1949 until 2004. According to the findings, until 1957 this memory exclusively presented the Zionist narrative. However, from 1958 to 1976 this Zionist trend largely continued, but was accompanied by considerable critical studies. Later, from 1977 to 2004, this memory was characterized by the almost exclusive adoption of the critical narrative (with major increase in its significance since 1988). These findings contradict the way the literature relates to this memory as almost exclusively Zionist until the late-1980s. Other aspects of this memory are also discussed, such as the explanations for its characteristics, the significance of non-academic scholars, the contribution of scholars who reside externally to the given country, state-research community relations, and the influence of present interests on the portrayal of the past and gender issues. The findings have theoretical implications for collective and historical memories.
**Introduction**

Parties to intractable conflict develop a collective memory of it, which plays an important role in the conflict. It shapes the psychological and behavioral reactions of each party dichotomously, positively towards itself and negatively towards the rival. The realization of the importance of this memory has led to recent great interest in it among politicians and scholars. One of the main sources that influences this memory is the historical memory of conflict – the way scholars view the events of the conflict (Devine-Wright, 2003).

More specifically, the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict (hereafter "the conflict") is by and large an intractable conflict. The main historical issue in this conflict is the causes for the exodus of the Palestinian refugees during the 1948 War. This article explores the Israeli/Jewish historical memory regarding the 1948 exodus between 1949 and 2004. Then, theoretical implications of the findings are discussed.

**Literature review**

*Collective and historical memories*

Collective memory in general is defined as representations of the past that are collectively adopted by the society (Kansteiner, 2002). The "collectives" which adopt these representations are usually discussed in the literature as countries, or groups within them (e.g., ethnic or religious). During conflicts the parties develop collective memory composed of the way they perceive the events that led to the eruption of the conflict and those that occurred during the conflict. This memory is usually rigid and biased, because it supports the interests of the parties holding it (Bar-Tal, 2007; Nets-Zehngut, 2007).

Collective memory is powerfully influenced by the present via two main paths: first, culturally, through the inevitable impact of the culture on the way people view the past. Second, instrumentally, through the conscious deliberate manipulation of the past for the interests of the present. This latter path, also referred to as creating a "useable past," influences the collective memory through activities of various institutions. A major role in the modern era, however, is reserved in this
regard for the state. The state uses its various institutions in order to construct the collective memory in a manner that accommodates its national interests. Nonetheless, in recent times the state has less importance in this regard due to processes of globalization, fragmentation and privatization of societies, and the decline of nationalism (Devine-Wright, 2003; Winter & Sivan, 1999).

A main source for influencing the collective memory is the historical memory. The scholars that construct this memory are usually discussed in the literature as academics from the country in question. The main manifestations of this memory are books or academic articles in which the scholars publish the findings of their studies. Based on these studies, state and social institutions disseminate the desired narratives among the society. In this way they influence the collective memory, in addition to the direct influence on the collective memory of the studies themselves (Gelber, 2007; Wertsch, 2002; Winter & Sivan, 1999).

The historical memory is considered by and large to be less biased than the collective one since it uses scientific methods and aims at objectivity. Criticism against the alleged objectivity of this memory is raised, however, by scholars from various disciplines. It is argued that due to cultural and instrumental influences, historical memory cannot be objective (Kansteiner, 2002). Specifically regarding the latter impact, of interests, it is argued that in the modern era scholars often serve the state in legitimizing the national narratives it favors, also in the context of conflicts (Devine-Wright, 2003). Another aspect of the state-scholars relations is that the state sometimes disrupts scholarly research, for example, by preventing access to state archives and employing censorship procedures (Rosoux, 2001; Wertsch, 2002).

The factors that promote changes in the historical memory are not discussed at length in the literature. It is suggested that such changes would occur for two reasons. First, the notion that a certain narrative of the past is inaccurate and therefore should be replaced. Such a notion could be the outcome of a discovery of new evidence about the past, or the use of new analytical tools or theoretical perspectives (Wertsch, 2002). Second, changes of the identity of the scholars can lead to changes of the history is written. For example, it is argued that the way the American history was written was changed due to the increased representation of women and minorities among professional historians (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob, 1994).
The 1948 Palestinian refugees

The Palestinian refugee problem is one of the biggest obstacles to resolving the conflict, and was a major stumbling block in the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians in the 1990s. In the framework of this political and psychological salience, the historical aspect of this problem (the causes for the exodus of the Palestinians) is of central importance. It determines to a large degree the party to the conflict who is responsible for this problem (Lustick, 2006).

Various causes for the Palestinian exodus were identified in the literature: Cause 1, the initiation of the war – Since the Palestinians initiated the 1948 War they are responsible for its outcomes, including the exodus of the refugees. Cause 2, leadership calls (inclusive) – The leaders of the Arab countries and of the Palestinians issued inclusive and explicit calls, often by radio broadcasts, for all Palestinians to leave their localities. Cause 3, leadership calls (partial) – The above leadership, at the Palestinian national, or Arab/Palestinian local level, issued calls for the Palestinians to leave. These calls were on a local-partial basis (for some localities), or for humanitarian reasons (regarding women, children and the elderly). Cause 4, fear – The Palestinians feared of the Jews/Israelis, as usually happens during wars. Cause 5, societal collapse – Since the beginning of the war the Palestinian society gradually collapsed due to the flight of its elite, internal cleavages, and defeat on the battlefield. Cause 6, flight – The Palestinians left their localities, before or after the battles took place, without mentioning the reasons for this flight (e.g., they "ran away" or "fled"). Cause 7, expulsion – Some of the Palestinians were expelled/evacuated by the Jewish/Israeli security forces. Cause 8, psychological pressure – the Jewish/Israeli security forces put psychological pressure upon the Palestinians. This included threats and "friendly advice" that it would be better for them to leave, or they would be hurt. Cause 9, frightening attacks – the Jews/Israelis sometimes attacked Palestinian localities in order to frighten their residents and make them run away. All the causes are assembled in table I.
Table I – List of causes for the 1948 Palestinian exodus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The initiation of the 1948 War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leadership calls - Inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Leadership calls – Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Societal collapse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flight (without details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Psychological pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Frightening attacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the Israeli/Jewish side exist two main narratives regarding the causes for the exodus: Zionist and critical. In general, the Zionist narrative attributes no responsibility for the exodus to the Jews/Israelis, but only to the Palestinians/Arabs. As such, it relates mainly to causes 2 (leadership calls - inclusive), 4 (fear) and 6 (flight), and occasionally also to cause 1 (initiation of the war). It also categorically rejects the assertion that the Palestinians were expelled, and argues that the Jews/Israelis tried to convince the Palestinians to stay, but usually failed (Bar-Tal, 2007; Nets-Zehngut, 2008, in press). In contrast, the critical narrative is more complex and attributes responsibility to both parties. As such, it relates to Zionist causes (4 and 6), in addition to other causes: 2 (leadership calls - inclusive), 3 (leadership calls - partial), 5 (societal collapse), 7 (expulsion), 8 (psychological pressure) and 9 (frightening attacks) (Morris, 1987).

One of the major differences between the two narratives regards the leadership calls' cause. The Zionist narrative relates in a major manner to cause 2; while the critical one relates in an insignificant manner to cause 3. Nevertheless, the major difference between the two narratives regards cause 7 (expulsion). According to the critical narrative, some of the Palestinians were expelled (or were made to leave – causes 8 and 9). As mentioned, the Zionist narrative categorically denies any expulsion claim, or making the Palestinians leave.

The literature relates to the Israeli/Jewish historical memory regarding the 1948 exodus as if until about the late-1980s it was by and large exclusively Zionist (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-On, 2004; Zand, 2004). At that time a group of Israeli/Jewish scholars, most commonly called "The New Historians", published a few books that criticized various aspects of the Zionist narrative regarding the conflict. Some of that criticism dealt with the causes of the 1948 exodus. Benny Morris, the most well-
known scholar among this group, presented in his 1988 book a wide discussion of the critical narrative regarding this exodus. This literature does not relate in a systematic manner to the extent the current historical memory adopts the Zionist or the critical narratives.

Despite the above description of the literature, until today no study has concentrated on the historical memory regarding the 1948 exodus, from 1949 until now. The current article aims at filling this gap.

**Methodology**

This article deals with studies written by academics, as well as journalists and other members of the general public.

**Language**

The article includes only studies which were written in Hebrew and English (the most important foreign language used in Israel).

**Authors**

The article deals only with studies done by Jews, from Israel or abroad. This is based on the assumption, that only their studies would have a meaningful impact on the Israeli-Jewish collective memory regarding the 1948 exodus. In contrast, studies conducted by Palestinians (from Israel or outside), or by Arabs, were not included in this research. It was assumed that studies of such scholars would not be accepted by most Jews in Israel, who would regard them as the enemy, and therefore untrustworthy (Gabbay, 2007; Kamen, 2006; Morris, 2006). The research also does not deal with third party studies, such as those of non Jews/Palestinians/Arabs. It was assumed that such third party research would also have a smaller impact on Israeli-Jews (in contrast to Jewish studies). Such scholars are perceived in Israel as "outsiders to the Israeli/Jewish boundaries". At any rate, the current study finds that most of the non Arabic/Palestinian research regarding the 1948 exodus, and the more significant one, was conducted by Jews (from Israel or abroad).
Types of studies

This article deals with studies published as books, articles in academic journals, or chapters in edited volumes. Books published in Hebrew as well as in English are counted twice. When the same scholar has published studies of all three types, only the book is included.

Finding the studies

The identification of the studies was conducted in four main ways: (1) Database indexes – Three main databases for articles were searched: "Haifa" (containing Hebrew articles published since 1977); "Rambi" (articles mainly in Hebrew and English published since 1966); and ISI/Web of Science (articles in English published since 1965). Books were searched using the "ULI" database - the united catalog of books in all the higher education institutions is Israel. All the databases were searched using the following concepts/keywords: Refugees, Palestinian refugees, Palestinian refugee problem, 1948 War, the War of Independence (the Jewish name for that war), and the "Nakba" (the Palestinian name of that war, meaning catastrophe). (2) Manual search – 20 journals which deal with Israel or with the conflict were searched, 15 in Hebrew and five in English. (3) Examining the bibliography of the identified studies – Each study which was identified as relevant was examined for its bibliographic list for reference to additional relevant studies. (4) Interviews – Interviews were conducted with five main relevant scholars, and they were asked about relevant studies.

Analyzing the studies

The contents of the identified studies are analyzed, quantitatively and qualitatively (Glassner & Morena, 1989). The text in the studies is coded according to the nine causes for the 1948 exodus in order to determine the narratives presented in them. In addition, major characteristics of the studies are analyzed.
The findings

General

92 relevant studies are identified in the research, the vast majority books. The following table assembles major characteristics of the studies, dividing them into four periods in time.

Table II – The studies which dealt with the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of period</th>
<th>Name of period</th>
<th>Years of period</th>
<th>Length in years of period</th>
<th>Total studies published in period</th>
<th>Ratio of Zionist vs. critical studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Israeli Zionist studies</td>
<td>1949-57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4Z:*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Israeli Zionist studies and external critical studies</td>
<td>1958-76</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16Z:8C:*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Initial Israeli critical studies</td>
<td>1977-87</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1Z:14C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One additional study was neutral, presenting the Zionist and the Palestinian (total Jewish responsibility for the exodus) narratives.

The studies in the table are categorized as Zionist or critical according to the main cause which differentiates between them (cause 7, expulsion). When a study mentions expulsion (not in an insignificant manner), usually in addition to other causes – the study is categorized as critical. When the expulsion cause is not mentioned, but other causes are, such as mainly cause 2 (leadership calls-inclusive) and 6 (flight) – the study is categorized as Zionist. In addition, each name of a period includes the place of residence of the scholars when they published their studies – Jews from Israel ("Israelis") or abroad ("external"). Column 6 shows the ratio between Zionist and the critical studies. All the studies appear in the references section (by alphabetical order), despite the fact that some are not being cited; as well as in the on-line Appendix A (according to the publication date).

Let us now turn to describing the four periods: the scope per year of publication of studies, the place of residence of the scholars while publishing the studies, the content of the studies (Zionist or critical), the scope of the discussion of the causes for the exodus in the studies, and the kind of evidence used to support the arguments regarding these causes. The distribution of the studies into periods is based on all these characteristics of the studies.
Period 1 (1949-57)

The studies of this period were published at a rate of 0.6 studies per year. **Place of residence of the scholars** – most of the studies, four out of five, were written by Israeli scholars. **Content of the studies** – the four Israeli studies describe the Zionist narrative. In most of the cases cause 6 (flight) is mentioned, and cause 2 (leadership calls - inclusive) is not presented. This relative absence of cause 2 might suggest that it was added to the Israeli narrative in a later phase, in order to support it in the controversy over this issue between the Israelis and the Arabs/Palestinians. A typical example of the Zionist narrative is the following quote "... as towns and villages were conquered ... the number of Arab refugees who left their houses and ran away to the Arab areas rapidly grow ..." (Vilnai, 1949, 21). The fifth study, the external one, is as if "neutral" – it presents the narratives of both parties to the conflict, Zionist and Palestinian, without asserting a judgment about them (Hurewitz, 1950). **Scope of discussion and supporting evidence** – Most of the studies discuss the exodus very briefly, in a few sporadic sentences; and the kind of evidence which supported their arguments about the exodus is not mentioned.

Period 2 (1958-76)

The studies of this period were published at a rate of 1.3 studies per year. **Place of residence of the scholars** – 12 of the period's total studies are written by Israelis, and the remaining 13 by external scholars. That is, in this period external scholars entered the research scene in a meaningful manner. **Content of the studies** – 11 of the 12 Israeli studies describe the Zionist narrative. They relate mainly to causes (flight), as well as societal collapse, while in some studies stress is placed on the cause leadership calls - inclusive. Occasionally it is denied that the Palestinians were expelled, and it is mentioned that the Jews tried to convince the Palestinians to stay (e.g., in Haifa), but that the latter declined. Salient among these studies is that of Natanel Lorech, due to the centrality of this scholar and the importance of his book (Lorech, 1958). An example from this period is Shmuel Katz's assertion that "No one expelled the Arab refugees from the Land of Israel. The vast majority left of their free will, due to the order or encouragement of their leaders" (Katz, 1972, 24). The only exception in the Israeli studies which presented the critical narrative is that of Akiva Orr and Moshe...
Machover (Israeli, 1961). Their study mentions causes 1 (initiation of war), vaguely 2 (leadership calls - inclusive), 6 (flight), and 7 (expulsion).

In contrast to the Israeli studies, a slight majority of the external ones (seven out of 13) present the critical narrative, relating meaningfully to cause 6, expulsion (Don, 1958; Gabbay, 1959; Safran, 1969a, 1969b; Kurzman, 1970; Sachar, 1972, 1976). For example, Nadav Safran asserts that "… until about the end of May-beginning of June 1948 the refugees left areas under Jewish control, and they left despite continuing efforts of the Jews to convince them to stay. From that period onwards, they were expelled from almost all the new areas which were brought under the control of Israel" (Safran, 1969a, 31). Some of the studies also relate to the psychological pressure cause. Of the remaining six studies, one contains the Zionist narrative (with emphasis on cause 2, leadership calls - inclusive), but with a restriction of a low scale of expulsion in a few villages (Syrkin, 1966); and four describe the Zionist narrative (Sachar, 1958; Kimche & Kimche, 1960, 1961; Parzen, 1962). The sixth of the non-critical external studies is neutral (Laqueur, 1969).

By and large, studies which dealt with the exodus very briefly, as in the first period, are exceptional. A considerable number of the studies deal with the exodus more lengthily, especially Rony Gabbay's (a few dozen pages); and others which discuss the exodus in a few pages (e.g., Michael Assaf's and Shmuel Katz's). In addition, relating to the kind of evidence which supports the description of the exodus in the eight critical studies (one Israeli and seven external) – three of them do not mention such evidence (Gabbay, 1959; Kurzman, 1970; Sachar, 1976), while the remaining five relate to various sources. Two studies are based on secondary sources;\(^5\) two on personal experience of Nadav Safran as a soldier in the 1948 War (before he left Israel - Safran, 1969a, 1969b); and one study relates only partly to newspaper articles (Israeli, 1961). In summary, of the total Israeli and external studies of this period, most of them present the Zionist narrative, and about a third the critical one.

*Period 3 (1977-87)*

The studies of this period were published at a rate of 1.4 studies per year. *Place of residence of the scholars* – 13 of the period's total studies are written by Israeli scholars,\(^6\) while the remaining two by an external one, Nadav Safran. That is, a major decrease in the number of external scholars. *Content of
the studies – the vast majority of the studies (14) describe the critical narrative. That is, in this period Israeli critical scholarly research actually began as a phenomenon. Besides relating all of them to the expulsion cause, and one also to the psychological pressure cause, they mention also other causes such as mostly flight and fear. It is claimed, for instance, that "Following this event [the rebellion of the residents of Lydda] the Arabs of Lydda and Ramle were expelled … there were three main reasons for the Palestinian exodus: about a third … ran on their own out of fear for their lives … about a third ran due to activities of siege, shelling and occupation by the 'Hagana' and the IDF forces. About a third was actually expelled after the occupation" (Pail & Zoar, 1985, 25, 43). The exceptional study describing the Zionist narrative was written by the Israeli scholar Michael Cohen (1982).

The trend which started in the previous period (wider scope of discussion) continued also in this one. Some of the studies discuss the exodus in a few pages (e.g., Avnery, 1980; Kamen, 1984; Labrecht, 1987), while the rest in about a page. With regard to primary supporting evidence for the critical narrative, there are two main phases. Until 1982 such supporting evidence regarding expulsion or psychological pressure is the testimonies of 1948 war veterans - Yitschak Rabin and Mordechai Maklef in Bar-Zoar's study (1977, 1978), Nadav Safran himself (1978, 1979), and Yitschak Rabin and Igal Alon in Yitschaky's (1982). In contrast, in the second phase, from 1984, some of the studies are based on Israeli archival documents (Kamen, 1984; Segev 1984, 1986; and partly Flapan, 1987). The remaining critical studies mostly do not mention evidence to support their arguments regarding the exodus, or relate to secondary sources (e.g., other studies).

**Period 4 (1988-2004)**

The studies of this period were published at a rate of 2.8 studies per year. *Place of residence of the scholars* – of the period's total studies, the vast majority (42) were written by Israelis and the remaining five by externals (Finkelstein, 1987; Karsh, 1997, 1999; Kimmerling & Migdal, 1993, 1999). *Content of the studies* – The vast majority of the studies (43 of 47) describe the critical narrative, usually without relating to the leadership calls' causes. Among the critical studies is that of Shabtai Teveth, who explicitly discusses, among others, expulsion of Palestinians after the establishment of Israel (Teveth, 1990). Two additional studies include essentially the Zionist narrative
but with restrictions: regarding the citizens of Lydda and Ramle who were "encouraged to leave" (Harsagor & Western, 1997), or a low scale expulsion in a few localities (Wallach & Cohen, 2000). Only two studies include the Zionist narrative with no restrictions – one regards various villages in the Galilee region (Koren, 1988) and one regards Haifa (Goren, 1996). Therefore, in this period the Israeli critical research was consolidated.

The most salient among the critical studies is Benny Morris's, mainly due to his first book ("The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem"), which was later translated into Hebrew. The book is the first devoted to the critical narrative about the 1948 exodus, describing it in detail regarding almost every locality, using extensively mainly Jewish/Israeli primary documents and with high methodological quality. Morris was also a highly prolific writer who published nine relevant books. Many studies written onwards by other scholars adopted his findings.

The scope of discussion in this period is drastically expanded. A considerable number of studies deal with the exodus in entire books or chapters in edited volumes or entire articles (e.g., Morris, 1987, 1991, 2004; Gelber, 2001, 2004; Pappe, 1992, 2004; Nimrod, 2000); while many address it in a few pages. In addition, in this period quite a few studies (and certainly the salient ones discussed above) base their arguments on primary archival documents, mostly Israelis, as well as British, American and international.

**Summary and discussion**

The characteristics of the Israeli/Jewish historical memory regarding the 1948 exodus can be summed up as follows. In period 1 very few studies were published each year, written almost exclusively by Israelis, and essentially present the Zionist narrative. Most of them discuss the exodus very briefly and do not mention the sources upon which they base their Zionist narrative. In period 2 many changes occurred. The rate of publication doubled, and most of the studies were written by external scholars. In addition, the studies mainly contain the Zionist narrative, though accompanied by a substantial presence (about a third) of critical studies, written almost exclusively by external scholars. Furthermore, the scope of discussion of the exodus expand, while some of the critical studies do not mention the sources for their critical arguments. Those that mention their sources relate mostly to
insignificant ones (e.g., secondary sources and newspapers), besides that of Nadav Safran, who bases his arguments on his personal experience. In period 3 the rate of publication remains the same as in the previous period, but changes occur in other characteristics. The vast majority of the studies were written by Israelis and are critical. While the scope of discussion of the exodus remains the same as in the previous period, in many of the critical studies a change occurred. Initially some of them base their arguments on war veterans’ testimonies, while later others are based mostly on archival documents. In period 4 various changes continued to occur, for example, the rate of the publication doubled compared to the previous period. As in the previous period, the studies were almost exclusively written by Israelis and are critical. However, this period is also different from the previous one since some of its studies deal with the exodus in a much wider scope; are based on a large volume of archival documents; and are written, by and large, for the first time also by Israeli academic scholars.

This period also starts with the publication of the 1988 important book of Benny Morris. Therefore, the literature describing this memory seems to be inaccurate. This memory was partially critical already since 1958; and since 1977 it was almost exclusively critical (with major increase in its significance since 1988).

More specifically, differentiating between Israeli and external studies: while the Israeli ones until 1976 almost exclusively present the Zionist narrative, from then onwards a dramatic change occurs. They present almost exclusively the critical narrative. The external studies were present in a significant manner only in the second period, presenting mostly the critical narrative. In the two following periods they were present only in a minor way, presenting exclusively the critical narrative.

*Explaining the findings*

This research provides additional support for the arguments presented in the literature, that collective and historical memories are influenced by the present (see onwards). However, the research also articulates two aspects of these arguments. First, it provides a description of the societal and political phenomena which influenced the way the 1948 exodus was presented in the studies. Second, it provides a description of the actual impact of these phenomena on the scholars while conducting their research. Let us elaborate on these two points.
Various phenomena occurred during the research period and influenced the historical memory of the exodus (Bar-On, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2007; Shapira, 1997, 2000; Zand, 2004). We will start by discussing the phenomena which influenced Israel and Israeli scholars, and later deal with the external ones.

During the first two periods of the studies, until the 1970s, various occurrences in Israel were significantly promoting Zionist studies and preventing critical ones. Israel was involved in the conflict, and despite gaining victories, generally felt insecure in its existence. This promoted collectivism, patriotism and conformism. At the same time, the Palestinians were not central in the Israeli public sphere until the late 1960s-early 1970s, resulting in limited research about the 1948 exodus. In addition, the extent of taboo regarding the critical narrative about the 1948 exodus was high. Describing this narrative was perceived as providing the Arabs/Palestinians with ammunition in their international political struggle with Israel regarding the Palestinian refugees.

Furthermore, the Israeli-Jewish society had a few major relevant characteristics: (1) It was oriented toward collectivism and conformism due to the social background of its Ashkenazi elite; the threat of the conflict described above; and the traditional inclination of the majority of the massive immigration to Israel after its foundation. This significantly prevented critical thinking and activity. (2) The media was largely controlled by state or political parties – the radio and the television (from the late 1960s) completely, and the main newspapers largely. This prevented dissemination of critical ideas and information. (3) the "Mapai" political party, and its successor, "Ma'arach", were in power from 1948 until 1977. They were highly in line with, and supported by, the Israeli social elite (e.g., scholars, journalists and authors). This prevented the elite from being too critical of the Zionist narrative and ideology supported by these parties.

In contrast, from the 1970s until 2004, critical research gradually became in Israel more acceptable. Israel became more secure in its existence due to its economic and military strengthening, the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, and the 1990s peace talks (including the 1994 peace agreement with Jordan). In addition, the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1982 Lebanon War raised wide criticism against the political and military elites. Furthermore, the centrality of the Palestinians increased, reaching its peak since the eruption of the 1987 Intifada – leading to increase in the research
conducted about the 1948 exodus. Simultaneously, the extent of taboo regarding the critical narrative decreased, due to the more secure feeling of Israel, and various processes which took place in Israeli society.

Various processes transformed this society: (1) It became less collectivist and conformist and more individualistic and critically-oriented. This was due to a change-of-generations process, in which the "Tashach" - the more conservative and Zionist oriented generation - gradually gave more control in Israel to the younger, more open and critical generation; a decrease in the extent of threat of the conflict; and the less traditional second generation among the Jewish immigrants. In addition, Americanization (and later globalization) processes occurred promoting individualism, human rights, pluralism, and critical thinking; and various social cleavages (based on religion, economic status or origin) emerged or were enhanced, and led to the fragmentation of the society. (2) From the mid-1970s the main newspapers became more privately owned and commercially oriented, to the extent that in the mid-1990s it was exclusively so. In addition, the mid-1990s experienced a wide deregulation of the electronic media, which led to the opening of dozens of new radio and television channels. All this led to a wider dissemination of critical ideas and information. (3) In 1977 a political turnover took place in which the "Ma'arach" party was replaced by the "Likud" party. This led to a rift between the state institutions and the social elite, and the latter felt more free to be critical. (4) With regard to the research community in Israel, three processes took place. First, a change-of-generation process among scholars; second, critical theories (e.g., post-modernism or multi-culturalism developed in the western academia) gained more impact; and third, Israeli archival documents regarding the 1948 War were declassified from the early 1980s, allowing for the conduct of document-based research.

For theoretical purposes, the above described phenomena can be conceptualized as the following variables: (1) Situation of the conflict; (2) Extent of centrality of the topic of the memory; (3) Extent of taboo regarding the alternative/critical narrative about the topic of the memory; (4) Characteristics of the society; (5) Characteristics of the media; (6) Characteristics of the party in power; (7) Characteristics of the research community. (8) Characteristics of the international arena.

The above described phenomena influenced Israeli scholarly research regarding the 1948 exodus. Until the 1970s it significantly promoted Zionist studies and prevented critical ones; and
generally the opposite since the late 1970s. This took place via two major mechanisms: "self-censorship" and "institutional preventive measures".

The "self-censorship" is an outcome of several factors: (1) The wish not to provide the Arabs/Palestinians with ammunition in their political struggle with Israel (Bar-On, 2004; Shapira, 1997); (2) Until the 1970s the hold of the Zionist ideology was very high, often making scholars biased (Bar-On, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2007; Shapira, 2000); (3) Concern of members of the “Tashach” generation, who took part in the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, that they would be harmed if their activities were exposed (Shapira, 2000); (4) Psychological difficulties of people who expelled Palestinians in 1948, due to the contradiction between these acts and their socialist values; or because the expulsion scenes were difficult to cope with (Bar-On, 2004; Shapira, 1997); (5) Concern of scholars from every generation that sanctions (as part of the “institutional preventive measures” described below) might be executed against them if they acted critically.

The "institutional preventive measures" are composed of two kinds of activities: those that occurred according to the phases of research conducted by scholars; and general ones. The first kind was composed of the following activities: in the pre-research phase (1) A few of the studies included in this research are publications of PhD dissertations. Critical PhD research would not have been approved in the Israeli academy in the earlier more conformist periods (Gabbay, 2007). (2) Until the 1990s Zionist oriented studies/scholars were more likely to be funded by Israeli institutions, including the academia, than critical studies/scholars (Morris, 2006; Zand, 2004).

In the research phase (3) Until the late 1970s scholars could not conduct research based on critical testimonies of Jewish 1948 war veterans. These veterans were also highly characterized by "self-censorship" (Nets-Zehngut, 2010). As described above, only since the late 1970s some of these veterans were willing to provide critical testimonies. (4) Israeli documents from the 1948 War kept in Israeli archives were classified and could not be examined for at least 30 years, and usually more. In the early 1980s many of these documents were declassified (Morris, 2006; Shapira, 2000; Zand, 2004).

In the post-research phase (5) Censorship – studies which dealt with the conflict were subjected to censorship, sometimes unofficial (from the security establishment), and always by the
military censorship. These processes were eased over the years, especially since the 1990s (Morris, 2006; Bar-On, 2004). (6) Some studies were rejected by publishers (in the case of books), or found not suitable for publication in academic journals (in case of articles) since they contained critical findings (Kamen, 2006; Morris, 2006; Orr, 2006).

The second kind of "institutional preventive measures" included two general activities: (1) Mainly, the Israeli academia, which was conservative in its attitude until the 1990s, did not hire critical scholars (Morris, 2006; Zand, 2004). (2) In at least two instances, when the Israeli High Court of Justice was asked by scholars to declassify documents in Israeli archives, or to allow publication of a book containing sensitive data, these appeals were rejected (accordingly, Morris, 2006; Yitzchaky, 1982).

Summarizing the explanations to the findings. All that is described above influenced mostly Israeli scholars in various phases of the research: the reasons why research about the 1948 exodus was conducted, what made it possible to find critical information (testimonies and documents) about the exodus, and what enabled critical studies to be published and achieve resonance in the public sphere. These were the reasons for the almost total lack of critical Israeli studies in the first two periods, and the almost exclusively critical studies in the following two periods.

In contrast, these phenomena and mechanisms were much less relevant to external scholars. They might have been affected mainly by only three components of the two mechanisms: the wish not to harm Israel in its political struggle; and the difficulty in getting critical war veterans’ testimonies or archival documents. This is why most of the analyzed external studies, as early as the second period, were critical, and could mostly be written by academic scholars.

Additional aspects for consideration

Pioneering study. Benny Morris’s first book (“The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem”), later translated to Hebrew, was central among all the analyzed studies. It is the outcome of the phenomena described above, as the explanations to the findings (e.g., change-of-generations process, more open society, etc.). However, this pioneering study can also be regarded as another theoretical variable, the ninth one. It significantly contributed to the wide adoption of the critical narrative among
the scholars in the fourth period. This was an outcome of the book's own characteristics described above, and the political and social circumstances in which it was published (e.g., the eruption of the first Intifada and later the peace process) (Shapira, 1997).

*Non-academic scholars.* The literature usually relates to historical research as conducted by academics (professional historians). This research suggests a relation to a wider category, "the research community", which includes academic and non-academic scholars. Studies regarding the 1948 exodus written by non-academic scholars were found in this study to be most significant. First, almost all the studies which were conducted by Israelis between 1949 to the early 1990s - whether they contained the Zionist or the critical narrative - were conducted by non-academic scholars. Israeli academics almost totally refrained from writing about the 1948 exodus during that period. This illustrates the strength and effectiveness of the two described preventative mechanisms – especially regarding academic scholars. In addition, among the Israeli scholars, the non-academic ones were almost exclusively the ones to conduct critical studies about the 1948 exodus from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. They, including significantly Benny Morris, contributed to the fact that Israeli academic scholars started from the early 1990s writing critically regarding the 1948 exodus.

*Getting beyond the country's boundaries.* The literature regarding collective or historical memories usually discusses countries or groups within them. The current research suggests it is worthwhile to expand the discussion (e.g., while dealing with a country) beyond the country. Countries do not operate in a vacuum, and therefore external influences upon them are also important, in two aspects: (1) The literature usually deals with scholars from the country whose collective/historical memories are discussed. This research suggests considering scholars who live externally to the country (e.g., Jews from outside of Israel). Until 1976 external scholars were almost exclusive in publishing critical studies. (2) Israel was influenced significantly by the western international community with regard to, for example: Americanization and globalization processes, critical scholarly theories, and technological and deregulation influences in the media. These are all examples of the eighth variable described above (characteristics of the international arena).

*State-research community relations.* Israeli academic scholars served the state passively, by publishing until the early 1990s almost no studies which dealt with the 1948 exodus. By this, they
essentially left the public sphere to other institutions, including those of the state, which disseminated the Zionist narrative. In contrast, Israeli non-academic scholars had been publishing studies about the 1948 exodus since 1949. However, until 1976 they went in line with the Zionist narrative almost exclusively (serving the state actively). From 1977 they almost exclusively stopped serving the state and presented the critical narrative.

Another aspect of the state-research community relations is, that the state prevented for many years critical research. This was done, for example, directly by classifying archival documents, censorship and court decisions; and indirectly by influencing various social institutions (e.g., academy and media). As time passed, the state had less direct and indirect impact on the research process (e.g., regarding privatization of media or censorship). However, it was a decision of the state which allowed the declassification of Israeli archival documents from the 1948 War. Those were most of the documents on which Benny Morris based his pioneering book (as well as preceding scholars). Archival documents are very important for research (more than testimonies of war veterans, which can be distorted). Therefore, the role of the state as the supervisor of state archives, even in later periods, is of significance.

Influence of present interests on the portrayal of the past. The influence of present interests on Israeli scholars was the following: in the first two periods there was a strongly held notion in Israel (state institutions and society, including scholars of all kinds) that the interest of Israel was to present the Zionist narrative regarding the 1948 exodus. Supporting Israel in its political struggle in the international arena was of paramount importance. Parallel to this, various characteristics of Israel and the conflict also supported presenting the Zionist narrative (e.g., collectivist society, insecure situation in the conflict).

As time passed, the influence of the present (e.g., the more secure situation of Israel, or later, focus on human rights in the international arena), had a profound impact. It gradually decreased the hold of this Zionist oriented notion in society, including among scholars. At the same time, among state institutions, this notion remained high (partly due to the 1977 political dramatic change, when the right-wing "Likud" party came to power). From the third period on, another outcome of the influence of the present started gaining momentum among some scholars, mostly non-academic ones. This was
the interest of exposing the truth about the past, for various reasons (Bar-On, 1990; Bar-Tal, 2007): for pure scholarly reasons; as a manifestation of the maturity of Israel's society, as well as a way to allow it to mature; and for political motivation (from the left-wing), as a way to promote peace between Israel and its rivals (e.g., Labrecht, 1987; Flapan, 1987). These latter scholars were thus less motivated to present the Zionist narrative; and as non-academics they were also less subject to the "institutional preventive measures" imposed by the Israeli academy. This shift allowed them to start publishing critical studies from the third period on.

On the other hand, the Israeli academic scholars were also influenced by the decrease in the "supporting Israel" interest, and the increase in the "exposing the truth" interest. However, they were subject to the conservative approach of the academy. Thus, these academics were able to join this critical trend only about 15 years later, in the early 1990s.

Therefore, both interests ("supporting Israel" and "exposing the truth") were manifestation of the influence of present interests on the historical memory. However, at different periods these interests had different degree of impact on different Israeli factions. In addition, while the former interest led to describing the past in a less accurate manner (the Zionist narrative), the latter one led to doing it in a more accurate way (the critical one).

Among the external scholars, the "supporting Israel" interest had from the beginning only a partial hold; and they were not subject to most of the "institutional preventive measures" mechanism, that the Israelis experienced. Thus, only less than half of the external studies of the second period present the Zionist narrative. Later, even this partial hold of this interest was decreased and probably gone, as all the external studies are critical.

*Gender representation.* The representation of women among the scholars was very low. Only eight studies (9% of the total studies) were written by seven women. Among the eight, four were written as co-authors with men. The majority of the women's studies (seven) were written from 1994 onwards. This phenomenon can be partly explained by the fact that scholarly work in Israel was in the past conducted more by men. In addition, it seems historical aspects of wars are more researched by men.
In conclusion, collective memory of conflicts is significantly influenced by historical memory. According to this research, the Israeli/Jewish historical memory regarding the Palestinian refugee problem was dramatically transformed from 1949 to 2004 (from Zionist to critical) due to various social and political occurrences.
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This article is part of a larger project, ending in mid-2010, which explores the way seven main institutions in Israel presented between 1949 to 2004 the causes for the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Four societal institutions: the research community, memoirs of Jewish war veterans from the 1948 War, non-governmental organizations, and newspapers. In addition, three state institutions are analyzed: the National Information Center, the Israeli army (IDF), and history and civics textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education (in contrast to textbooks used in the educational system, which were analyzed in previous studies). All this empirical data is used for developing a model of change and fixation of collective memories of conflicts.

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Notes

1 The book is mistakenly dated as published in 1987, though actually it was published in 1988 (Morris, 2006).

2 Interviews were conducted with Ronny Gabbay (published his study in 1959), Akkiva Orr (published his study in 1961), Tom Segev (starting 1984), Charles Kamen (1984) and Benny Morris (starting 1988).


4 Two of the studies also related to low scale expulsion of Palestinians (Zeev, 1966; Oren, 1976).

5 Peretz, 1958 refers to an Israeli government publication and a study written by an Arab/Palestinian scholar – Fayez Sayegh; while Sachar, 1972 refers to Gabbay's study.


7 As was done with John (external scholar) and David (Israeli) Kimche's studies – since Migdal is an external scholar, the books he wrote with the Israeli scholar Kimmerling are categorized as external.

8 It should be though noted, that also critical scholars have reached the conclusion that expulsion did not take place in Haifa.

9 However, the situation was dynamic. As time passed during these two periods, and more towards the end of the second one, the inclination changed towards being more open to critical studies.

10 Some of these people, those who were active in 1948, are referred to as the "Tashach" (in Hebrew, 1948) generation.

11 Despite setbacks due to the eruptions of two Palestinian uprisings (Intifadas) in 1987 and 2000.
Appendix A – List of Studies

(The order of the studies is according to the year they were published. In each year, studies which are in Hebrew are listed before those in English)

Period 1 (1949-57) – Israeli Zionist studies


2. No editor (1949) *Shana Alef Lemedinat Israel* [Year 1 for the State of Israel]. Tel Aviv: Yemey Zikaron.


5. Menahem, Talmai (1953) *Kach Lacham Israel* [This is How Israel Fought]. Tel Aviv: Israel.

Period 2 (1958-76) – Israeli Zionist studies and external critical studies


17. Zeev, A. (1966) *Kach Kama Medinat Israel* [This is how Israel was Founded]. Tel Aviv: Levin-Epstein.


Period 3 (1977-87) – Initial Israeli critical studies


34. Safran, Nadav (1979) Medinat Israel Veyechaseya Im Artsot Habrit [The State of Israel and Its Relations with the United States]. Tel Aviv: Shoken.

35. Pail, Meir (1979) Myn "Ha'agana" Letsva Ha'agana [From the "Hagana" to the Defense Army]. Tel Aviv: Zemora, Bitan, Modan.


89. Yahav, Dan (2004) *Mekorot Lashichsooch Hatsiyony-Phalestiny – Hasiper shel Nilmad, lo Supar Ve'eyno Mukar* [The Origins of the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict – The Narrative which was not Learned, not Told and is not Known]. Tel Aviv: Iton 77.
