The Israeli army's official memory of the 1948 Palestinian exodus (1949-2004)

Rafi Nets-Zehngut

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**Abstract**
The Publishing Branch at the Education Corps of the Israeli army (IDF) is its main unit charged with disseminating information to its soldiers. This article seeks to determine whether this branch, from 1949 to 2004, chose the institutional/Zionist (voluntary flight) or the critical (voluntary flight accompanied by expulsion) narrative as its official memory of the 1948 Palestinian exodus. By analysing all of the Branch publications produced during that period, the article determines that the Branch presented largely the institutional narrative. Various related phenomena are discussed: the reasons for the publications’ narratives, centrality and collective amnesia, internal and external memories, and self and external censorship.

Countries involved in an intractable conflict usually present an official memory of the conflict that favours their own actions and interests, portraying themselves positively and their rivals negatively. This memory plays a central role in the conflict by influencing the psychological and behavioural reactions of the involved parties towards their rivals as well as their images in the international community. Therefore, the memory of conflict is important for scholarly research and accounts for most of the recent growth in memory studies.1 Despite this importance, memory studies have rarely dealt with armies as manufacturers of official memories – as we will do in this article.

Israel has been involved since its founding in the largely intractable Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, and as a result the Israeli army (Israel Defense Forces – IDF) is a central institution in Israel. The Publishing Branch in the Headquarters of the Education and Youth Corps² (hereafter the ‘Education Corps’ and the ‘Branch’) within the IDF, is one of the major institutions in Israel generating the official memory of the conflict, pays particular attention to the conflict’s main historical event – the exodus of the Palestinians during the 1948 War. This article empirically and theoretically explores the official memory of this exodus from 1949 to 2004.

I. Collective Memory

Collective memory is generally defined as representations of the past that are collectively adopted.³ These representations relate to major events⁴ which are of special importance to the collective (e.g. a state), and are assembled in narratives.⁵ Collective memory is not a constant but rather a process; it does not ‘exist’ somewhere, but rather it is the process of metaphorically ‘remembering’ past events.⁶

Collective memory is a general category which includes various types of memories.⁷ The two types that are most relevant for the current discussion are popular memory and official memory. Popular memory is defined as representations of the past held by a society’s members. It can be documented directly by public opinion surveys⁸ and indirectly through mass media, art, literature,⁹ and other cultural expressions. The two main approaches to the study of popular memory are (1) the individualist one: a psychological perspective, or memory viewed as the aggregated individual memories of

² The Corps has also been called the Education and Youth Regiments Corps, among other names.
the group’s members; and (2) the collectivist one: a sociological perspective which focuses on the social and public ways in which the past is presented by the group. The individualist approach largely corresponds to the public opinion survey direct method of documentation, while the collectivist approach is more consistent with the indirect documentation of popular memory via mass media, art, and literature. The two approaches influence each other – for example, groups (collectives) provide definitions and contexts for the memories of their members (individuals), while individuals influence the way groups portray their pasts.10 Popular memory significantly influences the psychological reactions – including emotions, attitudes, motivations, sense of national identity, and behaviour – of the people holding the memory, and is therefore accorded great importance.11

Second is official memory – the representations of the past adopted by the institutions of the country and manifested, for example, in publications by state ministries and the army, as well as in textbooks approved for the educational system. Official memory strongly influences popular memory owing to the vast power of the state. In addition, a nation’s official memory represents that nation in the international arena and thereby influences its interactions with other countries. Because of its major impact, the leaders of states and of states’ institutions strive to shape official memory in ways that fit their own interests.12

One of the principal topics of collective memory – popular or official – is conflict. Memories of conflict consist of the narratives describing the conflict’s course and events that led to it, while portraying the group holding the memory positively and its rival negatively. Such popular memory of conflict plays an active role in the course of the conflict by shaping the psychological reactions of the people. During the climax of an intractable conflict, this memory functions as a provider of the socio-psychological foundation needed by the people to meet the enormous challenges that the conflict demands. However, this memory also inhibits the resolution of the conflict.13

Among the state institutions which operate in the realm of the memory of conflict is the military establishment. The activities of the armies and their involvement in wars form a principal topic of memory studies, but armies also take part in shaping these memories. Armies are perceived as the defenders of their nation, garner great prestige, and highly influence society as a whole. Their special impact is partly due to their role in the construction of the memory of conflict. They have the expertise, the control of archival documents, the resources, and often the relevant personnel in service to produce the

11 Paez and Liu, ‘Collective Memory’.
official memory. In particular, armies have a unique impact on their soldiers – they influence the way they behave in battle.\(^\text{14}\)

In summary, the official memory of a conflict is of major importance. Typically, the research on it focuses on various state institutions (mostly in the educational system), but ignores armies. In addition, this research tends to be superficial, mainly based on circumstantial or external evidence. The specific people who shaped the official memory are not interviewed, and the modus operandi of their institutions is not explored. This article aims to fill this gap by analysing the official memory of the Branch regarding the 1948 exodus, using, among other things, interviews with key relevant people. This memory, as well as that of the IDF regarding the conflict as a whole, has never before been researched, nor has the Branch’s modus operandi.

II. The Israeli Memory of the Conflict

Since the formation of the State of Israel, its institutions have by and large disseminated among the Israeli-Jews (‘the Israelis’) the institutional, also called the ‘Zionist’, narrative of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict exclusively. Generally, this master narrative has portrayed the Arabs/Palestinians and the Jews/Israelis as narratives of conflicts typically do – in a simplistic, self-serving way.\(^\text{15}\)

The central historical event in this master narrative is the Palestinian exodus during the 1948 War. This event created the Palestinian refugee problem, which has developed great political, psychological, and social importance for both parties. The institutional narrative assigns no responsibility for this exodus to the Israelis. The Palestinians, it argues, left willingly because of fear and blanket appeals from the Palestinian leadership and the Arab states. Acts of expulsion by Jewish/Israeli fighting forces are not noted or are even denied.\(^\text{16}\) For the Palestinians, the events of 1948 and its exodus are considered the *Nakba* (Arabic; ‘Catastrophe’) and their narrative largely argues that the exodus was caused by expulsion.\(^\text{17}\)


The State of Israel disseminated the institutional narrative – regarding the 1948 exodus, for example – through the Publications Agency at the National Information Center and the Israeli educational system. Until the late 1970s, publications of various Israeli societal institutions (e.g. research studies, newspaper articles, and the memoirs of 1948 Jewish war veterans) also presented almost exclusively the institutional narrative.

In the late 1970s the dominance in Israel of the master institutional narrative began to be challenged by Israeli societal institutions. For example, many scholarly studies and newspaper articles, as well as some veterans’ memoirs, presented a critical narrative regarding the exodus (since the late 1980s sometimes called a ‘post-Zionist’ narrative). According to this narrative, some Palestinians left willingly (e.g. because of fear, or calls by Arab or Palestinian leaders to leave some localities, or societal collapse), while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli fighting forces. The expulsion cause sharply contrasts with the institutional narrative.

This societal change intensified in the late 1980s with the commencement of a historical revisionist period commonly called the ‘New Historians’ era. New historical studies criticized additional aspects of the institutional master narrative of the conflict or support criticisms raised earlier. Historian Benny Morris, for example, supported the critical narrative of the exodus; as a result, from the late 1980s until at least the mid-2000s, the critical narrative was presented almost exclusively in Israeli studies. Moreover, since the late 1980s, more critical newspaper articles (the vast majority of them) and critical veterans’ memoirs (about a third of them) have been published. Beginning in the early 2000s, many Israeli NGOs, scholars, and educators started collaborating with Palestinian

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23 Nets-Zehngut, ‘Israeli Memory’.
colleagues on projects in which the parties negotiated the content of the historical narratives of their conflict.24

Of the state institutions, the Publications Agency continued until at least 2004 to distribute the institutional narrative of the exodus. However, the Ministry of Education’s approved history and civics textbooks contained the institutional narrative almost exclusively until 1999, but exclusively the critical narrative after that (at least until 2004).25 Textbooks used in the educational system without approval presented the critical version as early as the 1990s.26

III. The IDF

The IDF has been accorded great importance in Israel as the defender of the nation. But it originally had an additional major function. As a new state formed of immigrants, Israel had to cope from its inception with enormous social, economic, and security challenges. Therefore, its leaders viewed the construction of a united and patriotic society that could cope with these challenges as their crucial task. The IDF has been a major tool in accomplishing these tasks. Founded in May 1948, it performed civic functions—such as absorbing the flood of immigrants, diminishing ethnic gaps, providing basic education, settling the land, and disseminating Zionist ideology—in addition to military ones. These combined functions reflect the nationalistic model of the IDF.27

Over the years, however, this widespread nationalistic role of the IDF has changed. On the military level, the security threat that the Israelis felt for many years decreased; the need to evacuate the Yamit region as part of implementing the peace agreement with Egypt caused a wide controversy in Israel; Israel was criticized for allowing the IDF to invade Lebanon in 1982; and the IDF was criticized for its conduct towards the Palestinians, mainly after the first Palestinian uprising (intifada) in 1987. Moreover, as of the 1990s, many soldiers serving in the army on a long-term basis began to look at military service no longer as a national mission, but as a normal career, as in the civil sphere. On the societal level, various government ministries began to take on many more of the civic functions previously conducted by the IDF. These military and societal changes led to a gradual decrease in the prominence of the IDF in Israel since the 1980s.28

26 Podeh, Arab-Israeli Conflict.
IV. Methodology

The research period is 56 years, from 1949 to the end of 2004, and the findings are based mostly on interviews and the Branch’s publications.

The interviews were in-depth, using semi-structured questionnaires.\(^{29}\) They dealt with descriptions of the modus operandi of the Branch and with the reasons for the formation of the official memory that the publications presented. Some early heads of the Branch or its officers had died, and later heads/officers were more important for this research because of changes in Israel over time. Therefore, a reasonable distribution of Branch employees was interviewed, with extra weight being given to those who served more recently. Many interviewees had transferred over the years to relevant positions in the Education Corps hierarchy that influenced the Branch operation. All these people were interviewed about all their relevant positions, inside and outside the Branch. Finally, several interviewees served in two army units relevant to the Branch’s activity: the Cinematography Unit at the Education Corps headquarters (the ‘Headquarters’), and the History Department in the Operations Directorate.

Altogether, 26 interviews were conducted with 14 people: five served as heads of the Branch; nine served in the Branch, mostly as officers or authors of its publications; four were heads of sections or of the Educational Academy; two held relevant positions in the Headquarters; one was the head of the Cinematography Unit; and four served as deputy chief officers of the Education Corps or its chief officer. The last two interviewees were from the History Department – one of its former heads and a former head of two of its sections, as well as the Department’s associate head.\(^ {30} \) Appendix A assembles the interviewees in alphabetical order, and Appendix B groups them according to their positions (showing that the interviewees were involved with the Branch’s activities from the 1950s through the vast majority of the years until 2004, often overlapping). Thus, the interviewees provided a solid foundation for the following analysis.

The publications were traced in various national, academic, and IDF libraries. Starting in the late 1980s, most (five) of the publications were included in kits that also contained films produced by the Cinematography Unit. Some of the publications in these kits could not be traced, so their analysis is based on the films. The publications, all in Hebrew, underwent content analysis to determine the type of narrative regarding the exodus that they included.\(^ {31} \) The causes of the exodus that they espoused were coded with numbers, one for each cause.\(^ {32} \) Most publications contained the institutional or the critical


\(^ {30} \) Since some people served in more than one position, the numbers given add up to more than 14 people.


\(^ {32} \) That is: 1 = blanket calls of the Arab/Palestinian leadership to leave; 2 = psychological warfare conducted by the Jews; 3 = fear; 4 = collapse of Palestinian society; 5 = voluntary flight in general, without reference to specific causes of the flight; 6 = expulsion; and 7 = lack of a positive plan for the Palestinians (for their national and societal development). They only had a negative
narrative (as described above), the expulsion cause being the difference between them. This meant that when significant expulsions were mentioned the publication was coded as critical; otherwise, they were coded as institutional. Other aspects of the publications, such as the extent of their discussion of the exodus (e.g. a sentence or a chapter) and the degree of their focus on the Palestinians (e.g. central to the discussion, or more peripheral), were analysed as well.

V. The Publishing Branch

The Education Corps in the IDF is charged with providing basic education to soldiers, entertaining them, guiding commanders regarding leadership, and disseminating information among soldiers (mainly regarding the conflict). The last two functions (guidance and information dissemination) have been conducted by a branch in the Headquarters that has changed its name several times over the years, but is usually called the Publishing Branch.33

The assumption of the Branch in regard to the activity of disseminating information is that the combat capability of IDF soldiers is not determined solely by their physical-technical fitness but also by their mental approach. Avner Shalev – a former head of the Branch and later a chief officer of the Education Corps – explained:

The modern person is characterized with higher criticism and scepticism, and he is not inclined, as in the past, to obey orders … he does not identify with. The soldier needs a sense of purpose, which arouses in him the willingness to fight, and the willingness to give his most precious thing – his life … education is aimed to bring the soldier to willingness, which means a willing decision, resulted from knowing and identifying with the purpose … there is another factor … which characterizes the conduct in the Israeli society and in the Jewish nation in general, and that is a high degree of scepticism and critical approach.34

Therefore, there is a need to persuade the soldiers of the justness of the IDF and of Israel’s conduct in the conflict.

The Branch approached this mission in two main ways.35 The first was orally, through lectures given in the army bases by external instructors, the commanders of the units, or their educational officers, as well as in external workshops. The second way – and foremost for this article – was through publications, which were of three types:36 (1) The

plan, to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel. This plan failed when the Jews won the battles; therefore the Palestinians had no reason to remain in their localities and fled.

34 Shalev, ‘Hinuch’, pp. 149, 171; see also Eshkol, Balev Vebaruach.
35 Shalev, ‘Hinuch’.
36 Author’s interview with Mordechai Bar-On, in writing, March 2009. Also: Eshkol, Balev Vebaruach; Shalev, ‘Hinuch’.
Hanchayot Hasbara Lamefaked series (in Hebrew; ‘Information Instructions to the Commander’, hereafter ‘Instructions’) began to be published in the 1960s and was based on the rationale that the IDF commanders should educate their soldiers on issues that included the justness of the IDF’s and Israel’s conduct. The series was published on a weekly basis, each issue containing 10 to 20 pages, in the form of articles mainly devoted to contemporary and historical issues pertaining to the conflict. (2) The Moresht Hakrav shel Tsa’al series (in Hebrew; ‘The Combat Heritage of the IDF’, hereafter ‘Heritage’) began to be published in the early 1970s and was designed for commanders of units as well as for instructors. Each issue contained a few dozen pages focusing on historical aspects of the conflict. They were formulated in a pedagogic way, outlining educational aims of lessons and appropriate structures for them, while providing posters and slides. (3) Various general publications, including kits, were produced in order to aid the commanders and instructors. Some were booklets that had a pedagogic emphasis (as in the Heritage series) covering diverse aspects of the conflict. The three types of publications (hereafter ‘publications’) were a unified framework for explaining the IDF’s point of view regarding the conflict.

The general approach of the Headquarters/Branch to the conflict is divided into four main periods:37

(1) 1948 until the early 1980s. Especially at the beginning of this period, when Israel coped with the greatest threat from the Arab countries, the nationalist concept, emphasizing the IDF as protector and servant of the state, prevailed. This approach emphasized ‘identification with the mission’ (the Zionist mission of establishing a homeland for the Jews in the Land of Israel), and the justness of Israel’s conduct in achieving this mission. ‘Conflict language’ was used – largely presenting the Arabs/Palestinians as bad and the Jews as good. The aim was to encourage soldiers to fight for Israel.

(2) The early 1980s until 1994. During this period, as mentioned above, the nationalist approach towards the IDF declined. Awareness grew in the Branch that the IDF was now operating in a divided and pluralistic society rather than in a relatively united one in its perspective on the conflict. Therefore, parallel to the nationalist viewpoint (which remained the preferred one, although less prominent), the Branch adopted a new approach in order to motivate the soldiers to conduct their controversial tasks – ‘adhering to the IDF’s missions’. On the basis of the concept of the rule of law, in a democratic state, soldiers should execute their missions regardless of their personal opinions. This position included the implicit assumption that the publications should serve the needs of the IDF first and foremost, and not, as before, the state’s needs exclusively. Simultaneously, IDF commanders began to be regarded as professional soldiers (rather than servants of the state, as before). Use of the language of conflict continued.

(3) 1994–2000. During this period both approaches, ‘identification with the mission’ and ‘adhering to the IDF’s missions’, continued. However, owing to the

37 Eshkol, Balev Vebaruach; author’s interviews with Orna Kotler, 2007, and with Udy Ferber, over the phone, February 2009.
Israeli-Palestinian peace process a double sequential change occurred regarding the language used. Between 1994 and 1996 the Branch took the approach of replacing the language of conflict with the language of peace (a less dichotomous and more nuanced one). However, between 1996 and 2000, because of the violent events of the annual Nakba Day and those of the Western Wall’s tunnel, the Branch backed off from the peace language. Usage of conflict or peace language was determined by events – conflict when the conflict was violent, and peace when it calmed down.  

(4) 2000–2004. The eruption of the second Palestinian intifada in late 2000 made the Branch realize that the conflict had not ended and might continue for many years. The party that would win would be the one that believed most in the justness of its cause. Moreover, the common feeling was that civil society in Israel was providing less support to the interests of the state regarding the conflict, and that to compensate, the IDF should provide stronger support. The Branch therefore began again to stress ‘identification with the mission’ less than ‘adhering to the IDF’s missions’. Accordingly, the connection of the Jews to their land, as well as the morality and justness of their conduct in the conflict, was given greater emphasis, and there was a partial retreat from the peace language.

As for interrelations between the Branch and other Israeli memory agents (initially societal agents): most of the Branch’s publications were written by its soldiers, but based in part on scholarly studies, memoirs of war veterans, newspaper articles, or interviews with members of societal institutions such as scholars, veterans, and journalists – some of whom actually wrote publications. The Branch, however, interacted with state agents as well. For example, its soldiers who authored publications would often base them on such official publications as those of the History Department in the IDF, the National Information Center, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.38

VI. The Cinematography Unit and the History Department

These two army units were very relevant to the Branch’s activities. The Cinematography Unit was established in 1982, and in cooperation with the Branch produced all the information kits included in the research. Yoav Shpigel, its head since 1983, directed and co-wrote all the films which are analysed in this article. The History Department was established in 1952 in order to research the 1948 War, and later researched other events of the conflict.39 The Department was related to the Branch’s activity in three ways.40

38 Author’s interviews with Orna Kotler, 2007; with Yechiam Padan, Hod Hasharon, June 2007; and with Yeshayahau Tadmor, Tel Aviv, June 2007.
40 Author’s interviews with Mati Greenberg, 2007; with Orna Kotler, 2007; with P.A., Tel Aviv, September 2007; with Yechiam Padan, 2007; and with Yeshayahau Tadmor, 2007.
First, it provided sources for the Branch’s publications, including its own publications. Second, it examined the historical content of the Branch’s publications, at the Branch’s request, on a regular basis since the late 1990s. The Branch was not required to adopt the Department’s comments, although it usually did. The Cinematography Unit also asked the Department to approve the historical content of its films. Third, the Department wrote some publications for the Branch, mostly towards the end of the research period.

VII. The Publications

In total 25 publications that deal with the 1948 exodus were traced and are assembled in Appendix C. Publication no. 1 (The War of Independence – Main Points for Publicity) was published in 1957 and is based on well-known research regarding the 1948 War conducted by Natanel Lorech, the founder and first head of the History Department. Publication no. 3 focuses on various aspects of the Palestinian refugees. Three additional publications deal with fighting units of the Jewish community or the IDF that took part in the 1948 War, and three others deal with the conflict. Five more publications are from the ‘Instructions’ series, seven more from the ‘Heritage’ series, and the remaining five are information kits.

VIII. The Narratives of the Publications

Throughout the research period all of the publications present the institutional narrative regarding the exodus, except for six which present narratives that are very similar to the institutional one. The institutional publications give various causes for the exodus. Most assert that the Palestinians left voluntarily, without referring to specific reasons for their flight. Some provide as causes the collapse of Palestinian society, calls from the Arab/Palestinian leadership to leave, and fear of the Jews. Occasionally a lack of a positive plan among the Palestinians is mentioned. A few publications assert that the Jews tried to persuade the Palestinians to stay in their localities, but in vain (the city of Haifa is a main example). Below is a typical description of the institutional narrative:

the Arabs of Eretz-Israel [Hebrew; ‘Land of Israel’] started collapsing quickly. This collapse was combined with the calls of the Arab countries to the Eretz-Israel Arabs to leave their localities, in order not to interfere with the operations of the Arab armies … and it was most evident in the mass flight of the Arabs from their localities to the Arab countries … the flight … was contrary to the will of the Jewish community in the land, which on a few occasions called the Arab residents to stay in their localities. Several major factors caused the fast collapse of the local Arabs … the local leadership was disintegrated [and there was a] lack of a positive operation plan.43

42 The Israeli-Jewish common name for the 1948 War.
43 Appendix C, publication 16, p. 9.
Of the remaining six non-institutional publications, four present an institutional-critical narrative. They state that the Palestinians left willingly for various reasons, except for an insignificant number who were expelled.\textsuperscript{44} For example, one publication, along with discussing mainly voluntary flight, describes two instances of expulsion. First, some 70 residents of the Deir Yassin village were transferred after it was seized by the Jews; second, Bedouin tribes were driven away from the area of Rosh Pina: ‘the “Matate” operation [of the Jewish military forces] that started on May 3rd in which all the area between Rosh Pina and Tabcha was cleared … the Bedouin tribes that lived there were driven away beyond the border’.\textsuperscript{45} Another example is a publication from 1974 by various authors: while Natanel Lorech’s chapter describes the institutional narrative exclusively with regard to several main Palestinian cities, Meir Pail’s chapter, along with describing voluntary flight from a few villages, also describes the expulsion of the citizens from several villages in the Hula Valley and from the village of Kolonya.\textsuperscript{46}

The remaining two non-institutional publications present an institutional quasi-critical narrative – i.e. mainly voluntary flight, with marginal flight due to psychological warfare conducted by the Jews. That is, no actual expulsion.\textsuperscript{47} For example, the important 1957 book The War of Independence – Main Points for Publicity describes the implementation of psychological warfare as well as mainly voluntary flight:

> While the Arabs of Safed ran away, the Arabs of the villages and tribes of the Hula Valley were driven away. This was [done] by psychological means: spreading rumours and threats, which, after the lesson given their brothers in Safed, had an impact also among these Arabs.\textsuperscript{48}

In summary, the official memory of the Branch regarding the exodus presented largely the institutional narrative until 2004 – that the Arabs/Palestinians exclusively were responsible for the exodus.

**IX. The Reasons for the Publications’ Narratives**

Until the 1967 Six Day War the Branch produced only three publications which dealt with the exodus. This was a result of the Palestinians’ low centrality (see below) in Israel. That war heightened awareness of the Palestinians; therefore the Branch decided to pay more attention to the exodus in its publications (something similar happened after the eruption of the 1987 intifada).

The Branch’s staff (as well as the heads of the Headquarters and the History Department) was well informed about topics related to its work, including the exodus. Avner Shalev, a major figure in the Headquarters in the 1970s, described it: ‘we [at the Headquarters/Branch] read everything … as one in charge of education, I felt that our

\textsuperscript{44} See Appendix C, publications 4, 11, 15, and 17.
\textsuperscript{45} Appendix C, publication 4, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{46} Appendix C, publication 11.
\textsuperscript{47} See Appendix C, publications 1 and 2.
\textsuperscript{48} See Appendix C, publication 1, p. 51.
duty was to read every publication published in Israel that related to our work’. According to the Headquarters, including the Branch, the critical narrative regarding the exodus. For example, Yeshahayau Tadmor said: ‘I knew that a big part of the Palestinians in 1948 were expelled … of course we knew.’ Avner Shalev also asserts: ‘part of it was the Haifa case of [the Jews saying] “remain” and they ran away, villagers ran away since they were afraid of the approaching IDF, and incidents when they were expelled … we knew, mainly in the south, that they were expelled.’ The critical narrative was surely widely known as of the 1980s, when that narrative became, as we saw, quite prevalent in Israel.

Despite this familiarity with the critical narrative, the Branch did not present it in its publications. This was not because that narrative was regarded as incorrect; in fact, it was the opposite – the interviewees in this research regarded it as the true one. The reasons for this omission were not the same prior to and after the 1980s.

Until the 1980s the Branch wished to present Israel positively. This wish – manifested in self-censorship of the Branch staff – was caused by five reasons. The two main reasons were:

(1) Mobilizing the soldiers – internally, conveying a positive picture of Israel would strengthen the IDF soldiers’ patriotism, attachment to Israel, and willingness to fight or even die for their country.

(2) Supporting Israel’s international image – externally, doing so would help it to cope with the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign. A 1957 publication by the Branch describes this concern by saying that the refugee problem is ‘a powerful weapon in the Arab campaign against Israel in the international arena’.

Three additional reasons supported this self-censorship:

(3) The impact of Zionist ideology within the Branch precluded a critical orientation. Until the 1980s most of the Branch’s and Headquarters’ soldiers – especially the senior ones – were highly supportive of Zionist principles; their perceptions of

49 Author’s interview with Avner Shalev, 2007, pp. 2 and 11.
50 Author’s interview with Yeshahayau Tadmor, 2007, pp. 7 and 10.
51 Author’s interview with Avner Shalev, 2007, p. 6.
53 For example, author’s interviews with Mati Greenberg, 2009; Orna Kotler, 2007; Dorit Novak, 2007; and Yoav, Shpigel 2007.
55 Yom Ha’atsmaut [Independence Day – 1957] (IDF, Chief Education Officer, 1957) [in Hebrew], p. 16.
56 Eshkol, Blev Vebaruach.
the conflict were therefore biased, and they were inclined to see Israel as always just and moral in its conduct. Yeshahayau Tadmor described this phenomenon:

Some of us [in the Headquarters/Branch] with regard to the Zionist story were pretty deaf to other opinions, and also diminished, repressed ... facts that surfaced ... like the expulsion [in 1948]. In that period [until the 1980s] we did not ponder about it [the critical narrative]. Not me. Not the friends around me ... I was totally a slave to the Zionist perception ... I had no minimal sensitivity, empathy or questioning.57

Yechiam Padan describes the atmosphere at the Branch in the 1970s similarly: 'everybody had the same views, there were no arguments, the attitude was that everybody thinks the same [in an institutional manner]'58

(4) The organizational perspective – factors that relate to the IDF as an institution, its organizational aspects – also contributed to the practice of self-censorship, which included:

(4.1) Institutional norms that led the soldiers at the Branch/Headquarters to be conservative and conformist. The first such norm was 'presenting the state’s point of view': people serving in a state institution should present its narrative (the Zionist one, in our case) rather than their private version. The second norm was 'discipline' – an army, as an institution with a critical function, is characterized by a high degree of discipline, and thus the soldiers would not allow themselves to deviate from the official-institutional position of the Headquarters/Branch.59

The third norm was the need for 'unequivocal messages'. Because of the vital function of the army, publications needed to transmit simple and clear messages to the soldiers. Messages must not raise doubts, as the critical narrative about the exodus would have done. As Orna Kotler explained, 'The military way of thinking will always be dichotomous. It is a black-and-white format. You cannot create a situation of intensive assault if you do not think in black and white.'60

The IDF had little interest in presenting the critical narrative, for two more reasons:

(4.2) The IDF itself expelled Palestinians in 1948. Therefore, presenting this fact in public would have resulted in international and internal-Israeli criticism – all directed at the IDF.

(4.3) The IDF benefited somewhat from the expulsions, by acquiring, for example, some land, houses, trucks, and other property that the Palestinians left behind. Thus, presenting the critical narrative in public might well have supported the Palestinians’ attempts to get their property back or to receive compensation. The two latter points were especially salient in reducing critical tendencies in the first few decades after

57 Author’s interview with Yeshahayau Tadmor, 2007, pp. 7 and 10.
60 Author’s interview with Orna Kotler, 2007, p. 3.
1948, because many soldiers who participated in the 1948 expulsions remained on active duty in the IDF, or with other security institutions.\textsuperscript{61}

(5) Sanctions constituted another strong reason for the Branch’s practice of self-censorship. The Branch’s activities were supervised by an ‘external censorship’ (see below) mechanism; therefore its soldiers, even in high positions, were concerned that sanctions would have been implemented against them had they disseminated the critical narrative. Natanel Lorech, for example, explained that he was especially aware of the military constraints regarding publications while he was writing them.\textsuperscript{62} This factor has been more influential since the 1980s, when the hegemonic impact of the Zionist ideology on the Branch decreased, and the atmosphere there became more pluralistic.

External censorship of the Branch’s activities was composed of several elements:

(1) Within the Headquarters, people with dovish-critical views were not recruited to serve as reservists in the Branch.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, high-ranking personnel examined drafts of the publications.\textsuperscript{64}

Additional supervising elements operated externally to the Headquarters:

(2) The History Department examined the Branch’s publications from the historical perspective. The Department itself was subject as well to supervision regarding its presentation of the 1948 War (including the 1948 exodus), as illustrated by the famous \textit{Sefer Hamedina} (‘The Book of the State’) incident from the early 1950s. This History Department book was censored with regard to certain actions of the Jews, including the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.\textsuperscript{65} Mati Greenberg explained that the History Department operated dogmatically, attributing total, or almost total, merit to the Israeli side. Regarding the 1948 exodus he said that ‘until then [the New Historians’ era beginning in the late 1980s] it was obvious, it was the popular version, the Zionist one … it was accepted … the activity [of the Department] was to disseminate this version, not to confront it’.\textsuperscript{66}

(3) Senior 1948 War veterans – many people who participated in the 1948 War also censored the Branch’s activities. They continued in the first decades after the war to serve in high positions in the Israeli security system and in the IDF. Many of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} B. Morris, ‘Papers on 1948 Expulsions of Arabs Stay Closed’, \textit{Jerusalem Post}, 30 May 1985; Shapira, ‘Hirbet Hiza’. See also below on the external censorship mechanism (3).
\item \textsuperscript{62} N. Lorech, \textit{Hayom Ifne} [The day will turn] (Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense Publisher, 1997) [in Hebrew].
\item \textsuperscript{63} Author’s interviews with Mordechai Bar-On, 2009, P.A., 2007, and Yeshayahau Tadmor, 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Author’s interviews with: M.B., Tel Aviv, September 2007; Nir Mishory, in writing, September 2007; P.A., 2007; Yechiam Padan, 2007; and Yoav Shpigel, 2007, 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Bar-On, \textit{Zikaron Basefer}; Lorech, \textit{Hayom Ifne}.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Author’s interview with Mati Greenberg, 2007, p. 11.
\end{itemize}
them opposed the presentation of the critical narrative about the exodus and some of them were involved in the Sefer Hamedina incident.67

(4) Military official censorship also occurred, especially prior to the 1970s.68

(5) Further censorship in the form of ad hoc retrospective supervision was conducted by senior figures within and external to the IDF. At times they harshly criticized the Branch’s staff – after the materials in question were published – for including what was in their view inappropriate text. Such incidents taught the soldiers to be cautious regarding their publications in general, and the exodus in particular.69

The aforementioned sources of self- and external censorship were reinforced until the late 1970s by several macro influences. Israeli-Jewish society was by and large collectivist and closed, with a low political tolerance. The threat from the Arab countries was significant and the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign was significantly damaging Israel’s international status during most of that period. The 1948 War generation also held key positions in Israel at the time. In addition, very little critical societal activity took place.

In the 1980s the above macro circumstances changed, increasing chances for transformation in the way the Branch’s publications presented the exodus. Israeli society became more open, critical, and pluralistic, with higher political tolerance; Israel became more secure in its existence; the impact of the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign decreased; and the 1948 generation gradually gave way within various institutions to a younger, more open generation. Moreover, since the late 1970s, Israeli societal institutions started (as described above) to become more critical in general and in particular with regard to the exodus.70 These societal changes were also observed by some of the Branch staff members, who were thus less influenced by the Zionist ideology and more politically dovish. As a result of all these changes, beginning in the 1980s, the Branch partially adopted the ‘adhering to the IDF missions’ approach. However, there was no change in the way the exodus was presented. Despite the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, there was no peace with the other Arab countries and the Palestinians. Indeed, the following two decades were characterized by sharp ups and downs in the conflict. The IDF, an institution which has a most vital function – protecting the existence of Israel – could not allow itself to convey to its soldiers complex and critical messages that could undermine their capability of protecting Israel. This meant that there was still a need to adhere to the institutional narrative of the exodus.

In the context of the 1990s peace process, but without certainty about the direction of the conflict, the Branch could allow itself in 1994 to adopt a slight change – from the

67 Author’s interview with Udy Ferber, 2009.
69 Author’s interview with P.A., 2007.
language of conflict to the language of peace. Yet, the instability of the conflict, mostly
due to clashes with the Palestinians, led the Branch in 1996 to abandon the language of
peace for a compromise, a peace/conflict language depending on what was happening in
the conflict at the time. In 2000, when the second Intifada erupted, the Branch took one
more step backwards, to enhance the ‘identification with the mission’ approach (which
was the exclusive narrative until the late 1970s). This was also a reaction against the
critical and pluralistic processes in Israeli-Jewish society. Orna Kotler explained this
aspect of the activity of the Branch after 2000:

We are operating in the IDF now on behalf [of the state], because we feel that the [Israeli] civil
system is weakened in her impact on the soldiers … one of the main tasks … is to strengthen the
Zionist identity of the IDF’s commanders and soldiers, an identity which hardly exists … and this
is why the messages of the IDF [in its publications] regarding the Zionist aspect are very clear.71

For all these reasons, the Branch by and large presented the institutional narrative
throughout the research period. Mordechai Bar-On explained that the working assumption
in the Headquarters was ‘we are conformist, we are all patriots, we are all Zionists, we do not want to admit that we expelled refugees’.72

Despite all this, the Branch produced six publications that seem non-institutional:
institutional-critical or institutional-quasi-critical publications. The reasons for present-
ing these slightly deviating from the institutional narratives were diverse:

(1) Mistakes were made – in a few cases references to expulsion appeared by mis-
take. For instance, in publication no. 17, in one place it is asserted that the citi-
zens of the Palestinian cities of Lydda and Ramla left voluntarily, while in another
that they were expelled.73

(2) There was a hierarchy of causes – among non-institutional causes of the exodus,
psychological warfare is a less problematic one for Israel than expulsion, and is
therefore considered preferable for the Branch’s publications.74 Psychological
warfare, for instance, was given as a cause for Palestinian citizens leaving the
Hula Valley (publications 1, 4, and 15) and the villages near Kfar Menachem
(publication 2).

(3) The Deir Yassin events75 – publication 4 denies that citizens of this village were
massacred, while claiming that some of them, those captured by the Jews, were
transferred to the Arab quarter in Jerusalem. Expulsion was the cause stated in
this case, because massacre would be a much more problematic explanation for

72 Author’s interview with Mordechai Bar-On, Jerusalem, June 2006, p. 2; also Bar-On, Zikaron
Basefer. Similarly, see also author’s interviews with P.A., 2007, M.B., 2007, Udy Ferber,
73 Author’s interview with Mordechai Bar-On, 2009.
75 On the 1948 Deir Yassin affair, see Laor, Anu Kotvim.
Israel – expelling the Palestinians proves that the attacking Jewish forces did not intend to massacre the residents (see above ‘hierarchy of causes’ explanation). Furthermore, the attack on the village was conducted by the dissident Jewish organizations Etzel and Lehi, and was strongly denounced at the time by their opponents in the Jewish community, the mainstream Hagana organization. The members of the Hagana were by and large members of the Mapai and later the Hama’arach political parties, which came to control the state establishment, including the Branch. Therefore, the Branch did not hesitate to present the dissident organizations in negative terms, as having expelled the Palestinians, as part of the general antagonism against Etzel and Lehi.

X. Centrality and Collective Amnesia

The findings demonstrate the importance of the phenomenon of ‘centrality’ (in our case, of the Palestinians in Israel). ‘Centrality’ refers to the extent to which a topic is present in the public sphere. Only three publications dealt with the 1948 exodus in the approximately two decades preceding the 1967 Six Day War, but the war changed this state of affairs. As Mati Greenberg explained:

Until 1967, by and large, there was consensus … Meaning, it was black and white … the War of Independence was right … there was also no Palestinian representation … after the Six Day [War] when we touched the [Palestinian] problem … there was a need to address the problem and provide an answer to the question of what we were doing in the territories [the West Bank and Gaza Strip].

As a result, the number of publications, as well as the scope of their discussion of the exodus, began to increase in the late 1960s and accelerated from the mid-1970s. This higher rate of publication ceased in late 1980, partly because the publications in use by the commanders and instructors had been produced previously. The production of new publications was resumed in 1989 because of the eruption of the first Intifada; in the 1990s the Israeli-Palestinian peace process had the same effect. In contrast to previous publications, which discussed the exodus mostly in the context of the 1948 War, publications from 1989 on widened the context of the conflict, focusing on the Palestinians.

The centrality issue relates to an important theme discussed in the literature, ‘collective amnesia’ (also known as ‘silence’ or ‘forgetting’) – a phenomenon whereby past

76 A. Yitschaky, ‘Deir Yassin: Lo Berei Hakum’ [Deir Yassin: not in a twisted mirror], Yedioth Hahronoth, 14 April 1972 [in Hebrew].
77 Regarding causes 2 and 3, see author’s interview with Mordechai Bar-On, 2009.
79 Author’s interview with Mati Greenberg, 2007, p. 10.
events are not discussed in public. This was, as Yitzhak Laor noted, prevalent in Israel during the first decades after its establishment, with regard to many aspects of the conflict, including the 1948 exodus. Collective amnesia is usually discussed as a dichotomous phenomenon (in which a certain topic is either publicly discussed or not), with no concrete way of measuring it. The current article, however, offers three other observations about collective amnesia: (1) Extent of collective amnesia – this amnesia is not a dichotomous phenomenon in our case, with either no Israeli publications discussing the exodus, or many doing so, with no middle ground. The degree to which a topic is discussed is located on a spectrum between these two poles. In the current research, this extent is operationally translated to ‘the rate per year of publications produced that deal with the given topic (the 1948 exodus)’. (2) Scope of discussion – when a given topic is dealt with in the memory realm (e.g. in a publication), a spectrum exists that represents the extent to which the topic is discussed. It can be discussed briefly (e.g. in a sentence) or extensively (e.g. in a special chapter or even a whole publication). (3) The context of discussion – again, when a topic is being discussed, as opposed to being ‘silenced’, the context in which it is discussed is also a manifestation of the extent of its centrality. It can be discussed as a peripheral topic or as a central one. For example, in our case, the publications produced beginning in 1989 discussed the Palestinians in a more central context (i.e. within the conflict, with a strong focus on them), than did the publications produced before (peripherally, or as one aspect of the battles in 1948).

These three observations suggest three ways of operationalizing collective amnesia in order to measure it.

XI. Internal and External Memories

I suggest that collective memory (and each of its types) includes two types of submemories, internal and external. In our case, internal official memory and external official memory were observed. The internal memory is what the people who produced the publications of the IDF really thought about the exodus and included in internal discussion and documents of the IDF. As we saw, they considered the critical narrative to be the true one – so this narrative characterized the internal official memory of the IDF. In contrast, the external memory is what is presented in public. The external official memory of the IDF, as manifested in its publications, presented the institutional narrative. So there was an incompatibility between the internal and the external official memories.

The above distinction has wide implications. For example, the literature typically discusses only the external official memory (e.g. publications and textbooks). External official memory is indeed an important phenomenon, partly because as an external manifestation of the past it influences popular memory and international diplomacy. This is also why the current article focuses on external official memory. Nonetheless, internal official memory is also important, in particular for the following three reasons: first, internal memory is the

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81 Laor, *Anu Kotvim*.  
one that influences the behaviour and the activities of state institutions. Second, internal official memory might not be influenced by some factors that influence external official memory (or if influenced by these, to a different degree). For instance, the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign is not significantly taken into consideration with regard to the internal official memory of the IDF, but it is of vital importance regarding its external memory. Likewise, institutional norms, mistakes, and centrality influence the external official memory more than the internal one. Third, internal official memory is generally not influenced by external censorship (e.g. state censorship of publications). In contrast, the external official memory is highly influenced by external censorship.83

XII. Self-Censorship

The literature typically addresses self-censorship as a uniform phenomenon.84 In contrast, the current article suggests a distinction between two types of self-censorship, based on the reasons for it: endogenic and exogenic. Endogenic self-censorship stems from internal reasons or motives, within the people. Several of the reasons for self-censorship described above are endogenic (mobilizing the soldiers, supporting Israel’s international image, the impact of Zionist ideology, and the organizational aspect – point 4.1, institutional norms). Exogenic self-censorship, in contrast, stems from external sources (the organizational aspect: points 4.2, 4.3, and 5 – sanctions).

This distinction has various implications, some of which are described briefly here. First, the two types of self-censorship influence each other. When endogenic self-censorship is high, external censorship will be practised less. It will be rendered less necessary while people censor themselves because of their own internal motivations. In contrast, when endogenic self-censorship is low, external censorship increases. Second, the processes just described can vary among different time periods. For example, self-censorship in the IDF until the early 1980s was by and large endogenic (as Israel was highly collectivist and patriotic). Since the early 1980s, however, with pluralism expanding in Israel and in the IDF, the extent of endogenic self-censorship has decreased, leading to an increase in exogenic self-censorship. Third, endogenic self-censorship seems to be a more powerful tool for censoring alternative-critical narratives than exogenic self-censorship. People who are motivated to censor themselves only because of external influences might find ways to bypass external censorship and expose alternative-critical information to the public, at times anonymously. Fourth, endogenic self-censorship takes place in public as well as in private settings. In contrast, exogenic self-censorship occurs by and large only in public, when exposure of the allegedly inadequate narratives might indeed result in sanctions.

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83 For the implementation of the difference between internal and external memories in relation to other types of memories (i.e. autobiographical and historical – that of academia), see R. Nets-Zehngut, ‘Internal and External Collective Memories of Conflicts: Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus’, International Journal of Conflict and Violence VI (2012), pp. 126–40.

XIII. Conclusion

The above empirical and theoretical contributions are salient because the official memory of armies is rarely discussed in the literature, and especially because the official memory of the IDF in the context of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict has never previously been examined. The official memory of the IDF regarding the exodus was, by and large, institutional between 1949 and 2004. Although such an outcome was predictable, the paths that were taken in shaping this memory help us understand the actual relationship between this memory and the social, political and organizational contexts.

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Appendix A. Interviewees

List of interviewees and the number of interviews conducted with each interviewee:

1. A., P. (1 interview)
2. B., M. (1)
3. Bar-On, Mordechai (4)
4. Ferber, Udy (1)
5. Greenberg, Mati (4)
6. Kotler, Orna (2)
7. Mishory, Nir (1)
8. Novak, Dorit (1)
9. Padan, Yechiam (1)
10. Shalev, Avner (2)
11. Shpigel, Yoav (4)
12. Tadmor, Yeshayahu (2)
13. Weis, Victor (1)
14. Zamin, Ze’ev (1)

The first two interviewees asked to remain anonymous and therefore are identified only by their initials. Of the interviewees, during the periods relevant to this research, 3 served in the army as part of the two- to three-year mandatory service, the Hova in Hebrew (nos. 1, 2, and 9 above); 11 served as career officers as part of the Keva service (nos. 3–8 and 10–14); and 2 served in the reservist service, Miluim (nos. 5 and 9). (Some served in more than one type of service.)

Appendix B. List of Interviewees according to Their Relevant Positions

Heads of the Branch

1. Tadmor, Yeshayahau (1965–68)
2. Shalev, Avner (1969–72)
Various Positions at the Branch

Five were officers/authors of publications, and four were Department/Academy heads.

1. Tadmor, Yeshahayau (1959–62; Educational Academy head, 1962–5)
2. Shalev, Avner (Educational Academy head, 1967–9)
3. Greenberg, Mati (Section head, 1969–72)
4. Padan, Yechiam (1972–6, and later in the reserve)
5. Ferber, Udy (Educational Academy head, 1978–82)
6. B., M. (three years in the early 1990s)
7. Mishory, Nir (three years in the early 1990s)
8. A., P. (three years in the mid-1990s)

Relevant Positions in the Headquarters

1. Weis, Victor (mid-2006 until at least 2007)
2. Zamin, Ze’ev (~2003 until at least 2006)

Head of the Cinematography Unit

1. Shpigel, Yoav (1983 until at least 2009)

Deputy Chief/Chief (DC/C) Officer of the Education Corps

2. Tadmor, Yeshahayau (DC, 1969–71)
3. Shalev, Avner (DC, 1974–7; C, 1977–80)
4. Ferber, Udy (DC, 1988–91)

The History Department

1. Bar-On, Mordechai (Department head, 1955)
2. Greenberg, Mati (Sections head and associate head of the Department, 1973–88; also very active in the reserve, from 1988 until at least 2007)

Other Relevant Positions in the Education Corps, but External to Its Headquarters

1. Tadmor, Yeshahayau (education officer of the IDF Officers’ Academy, 1956–9)
2. Ferber, Udy (editor of the IDF’s Bamachane newspaper, 1984–7)
3. Novak, Dorit (head of the Culture and Heritage Branch at the Headquarters, 1991–2)
4. Kotler, Orna (deputy director and later director of the IDF Academy for Developing Leadership, 1997–9, 2002–4)

Appendix C. Analysed Publications

The analysed publications below of the Publishing Branch are all in Hebrew.
10. Hama’avak, Hama’avak al Haderech Leyerushalim (Bemilhemet Ha’atsmaut) [The battle on the road to Jerusalem (in the War of Independence)] (Chief Education Officer – Publishing Branch, 1974).
15. Benetivey, ‘Benetivey Kravot – Milhemet Ha’atsmaut’ [In the battles’ paths – the War of Independence], Moresht Hakrav shel Tsa’al XIX (Chief Education Officer – Publishing Branch, 1978).


25. Hitpatchut, Hitpatchut Hayechasim bein Israel La’afalestinim – Bein Sichsuch Leta’alich Mediny [The development of the relationships between Israel and the Palestinians – between a conflict and a political process] (Education and Youth Corps – Publishing Branch, 2005).