Palestinian autobiographical memory regarding the 1948 Palestinian exodus

Rafi Nets-Zehngut
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**Background**: Collective memory of intractable conflict is an important sociopsychological phenomenon which influences the psychological and behavioral reactions of each party to the conflict. This memory is composed of two kinds of memories: autobiographical memory—the memory of the people who experienced the given events directly—and indirect-collective memory—the memory of the people who learned about the given events second hand, via books, etc. **Purpose**: This study explores the characteristics of Palestinian autobiographical memory with respect to the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus and how it relates to other Palestinian memories of that exodus (official, historical/academic, and indirect-collective). From these empirical findings, theoretical insights are concluded. **Method**: This is done by analyzing the content of four oral history projects of 1948 Palestinians refugees (in total, 131 interviewees from 38 localities). In addition, the content of these projects is compared to the accounts of documented Israeli history (using the research of Israeli historian Benny Morris). Studies of the other Palestinian memories are also used. **Findings**: The findings reveal that the Palestinian autobiographical memory is not a typical memory of conflict (e.g., with relatively low focus on the expulsion cause for the exodus). It is also compatible to a large degree with documented Israeli history. However, it is very different from other Palestinian memories of the exodus (official, historical/academic, and indirect-collective), which focus almost exclusively on the expulsion cause. Other empirical findings and their explanations are discussed. The findings have mostly theoretical implications regarding various kinds of memories of conflicts (and memories in general), as well as some methodological implications with regard to the usage of oral history.

**KEY WORDS**: 1948 Palestinian refugees, collective memory, autobiographical memory, official memory, oral history, Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict
**Introduction**

In the course of intractable conflict, parties form a collective memory of it. Typically, this memory is biased, negative, and antagonistic towards the rival. As such it plays an active role in the course of the conflict, negatively shaping the psychological and behavioral reactions of each party towards the rival (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006). Collective memory in general is composed of two components: autobiographical memory—the memory of the people who experienced the given events first hand, directly; and indirect-collective memory—the memory of the people who learned about the given events second hand, via books, stories, etc. (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

The main primary sources that shape indirect-collective memory are documents and oral history. These two sources are used by various institutions (mostly the research community, hereafter “historical memory”) to publish articles and books that influence the indirect-collective memory. Documents were until recently the traditional and almost exclusive sources for historical scholarship. Oral history is another source for historical scholarship, but viewed with skepticism by supporters of document research, arguing that it is distorted and cannot be trusted (Sharpless, 2006).

More specifically, in the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israelis (i.e., Israeli-Jews) and Palestinians have each formed a collective memory of it. Among the topics of these memories, the exodus of the Palestinian refugees during the 1948 War is the major one (Lustick, 2006). The central question regarding this exodus is its causes—whether the refugees left willingly or were expelled; and variations on these possibilities? Israeli historical memory regarding the 1948 exodus is almost totally based on documents (Gelber, 2007), while the Palestinian parallel memory is based almost totally on oral history (Abdel Jawad, 2006).

The 1948 exodus can serve as a case study for examining various theoretical aspects of the collective memory of conflict, focusing on autobiographical memory. Therefore, the main empirical purpose is to explore the content and characteristics of this latter memory and the extent to which it is antagonistic towards the rival or biased. How does it relate to other kinds of memories (i.e., indirect-collective, historical, or official)? To what extent can it serve as a source of historical analysis? A more peripheral purpose of the study is methodological—finding out whether oral history in general, and Palestinian oral history in particular, can serve as a source of historical research. This overall purpose is important because it relates to an important phenomenon (collective memory), with wide implications for intractable conflicts, as well as in other contexts.

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1 That is, autobiographical memory is one component of the collective memory, which is manifested, among other ways, via oral history (i.e., the people who experienced the events directly provide testimonies about them).
This purpose will be carried out by evaluating the content of Palestinian oral history, while juxtaposing it to Israeli documented history (both with respect to the 1948 exodus). Since oral history is one of the manifestations of the autobiographical memory, this evaluation and comparison will allow the desired exploration of the specific characteristics of this Palestinian memory. From these specific characteristics, general theoretical insights can be gained. In addition, the Palestinian autobiographical memory regarding the 1948 exodus has not been systematically explored on a grand scale (in contrast to the existence of many Palestinian oral history projects which describe disparate events). The current study partly fills this gap.

*Literature Review*

*Collective Memory*

Intractable conflicts inflict severe destructive experiences on the conflicting parties, materially, physically, and psychologically (Nets-Zehngut, 2009). Therefore, since these conflicts persist for a long time, the involved societies and their members must adapt to their harsh experiences. One of the psychological forms of adaptation is the formation of the collective memory of conflict.

Collective memory, in general, is a set of representations of the past that is adopted by the society and its members (Kansteiner, 2002). In conflict situations, this memory includes the given party’s views of the events that led to the eruption of the conflict and those that occurred during it. It presents a coherent and meaningful socially constructed narrative, which justifies the given party’s role in the conflict. As such, it motivates society members to cope with the conflict and contribute to their party’s efforts to win it (Devine-Wright, 2003).

As described earlier, collective memory of conflict is composed of two main components: autobiographical memory and indirect-collective memory. However, collective memory is almost always discussed in the literature as a uniform phenomenon, without differentiating between its two components or discussing their mutual influences. Autobiographical memory is essentially based on the direct experience of the events of the conflict. The indirect-collective memory has various origins: the historical memory, the official memory (i.e., the way the state views the events of the conflict), cultural channels (e.g., films and literature), the media, or NGOs. These origins can use primary sources (i.e., documents or oral history), or secondary ones (e.g., books published by scholars containing primary sources; Gelber, 2007; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Winter & Sivan, 1999).

The collective memory of a conflict is discussed in the literature as being typically rigid and biased, since it is influenced by the present interests of the party holding it (the “presentism” phenomenon). It is also dichotomous, portraying the ingroup in a positive manner, while describing the rival group in a negative way. As such, it plays an active role in the course of the conflict, negatively shaping the
psychological (and therefore also the behavioral reactions) of each party towards their rival (Bar-Tal, 2007; Devine-Wright, 2003). For example, research has found that antagonistic Israeli-Jewish collective memory of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict is positively correlated with negative emotions towards Arabs and Palestinians (e.g., hate, fear, despair, and anger); as well as with objections to signing peace agreements with the Syrians and Palestinians (Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, in press; for similar findings in other conflicts see Devine-Wright, 2003; Winter & Sivan, 1999).

Typical antagonistic collective memory is functional for the needs of a society during the climax of an intractable conflict. Nonetheless, this kind of collective memory also inhibits deescalation of the conflict and its peaceful resolution. Therefore, it is of vital importance that parties to conflicts are able to acquire a more realistic and less biased collective memory (when there is a factual basis for such a revised memory). This can facilitate the formation of a more positive set of psychological and behavioral reactions towards the rival party. In so doing, the likelihood of achieving peace is increased. However, acquiring a nonantagonistic collective memory is highly dependent upon the conflict’s situation; usually it will happen after the conflict has resolved and the violence has stopped (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006; Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2007; Rotberg, 2006).

Recognition of the importance of creating a more realistic collective memory in order to advance peace has led to its growing centrality among politicians, peace activists, and scholars (Devine-Wright, 2003; Rotberg, 2006).

Documents and Oral History

Two primary sources cultivate the indirect-collective memory of conflict—documents (documented history) and oral history. Documents are usually of official or semiofficial type (such as military orders or reports), that describe the past events of the conflict (Nets-Zehngut, 2007; Winter & Sivan, 1999). Oral history refers to eyewitness accounts, usually interviews, of direct participants in the conflict’s events. These interviews are taped or filmed and are conducted by scholars, semiofficial institutions, or by civil society institutions such as commemoration organizations or peace activists (Thomson, 1998).

Until the 1960s, documents were the traditional and almost exclusive source of scholarly historical research (Sharpless, 2006; Winter & Sivan, 1999). In the past few decades, however, oral history has emerged as an additional source for historical scholarship. In North America it was initiated mostly as an archival practice for preserving valuable historical information of prominent members of society. In Europe, and to a lesser extent also in Latin America and Africa, it evolved as a social practice by social historians. It gave voice to “hidden histories,” those of less hegemonic groups (such as ethnic minorities, women, workers, or the weaker parties in conflicts). These groups’ histories were rarely documented, and
therefore their voices were not heard in standard documented histories (Crothers, 2002; Grele, 2006; Sharpless, 2006; Thomson, 1998).

Oral history has been viewed, by and large, with skepticism by supporters of document research (Sharpless, 2006; Thomson, 1998). They challenged oral history’s contribution to the study of history, arguing that it cannot be trusted due to distortions caused by the passage of time between the event itself and the recording of it and the physical deterioration of the brain. Psychological factors were also thought to contribute to distortion: political agendas, nostalgia, manipulation, the personal biases of both interviewee and interviewer, apologetic tendencies, and the influence of collective retrospective versions of the past (in other words, the official, historical, and collective memories).

Oral historians respond to these critics in various ways. They maintain that documents are also selective and biased, and that while interviews cannot provide an exact reconstruction of the past, partial factual reconstruction is possible. In addition, highly important or extraordinary events are better remembered than less important ordinary ones. Furthermore, often the information obtained from interviews cannot be obtained by any other means and therefore is highly valuable (Grele, 2006; Thomson, 1998).

The Palestinian Refugee Problem

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is by and large an intractable conflict. It has lasted for about a century, causing severe damage to the involved parties. The most central historical issue of the conflict is the causes for the 1948 Palestinian exodus. This issue has great political, psychological, and social importance for both parties (Lustick, 2006; Nets-Zehngut, 2008, in press).

Politically, determining the party responsible for the exodus influences the negotiations regarding the solution of the refugee problem. This issue was a major obstacle in the peace process during the 1990s. Psychologically, for the Israelis it is difficult to discuss the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, mostly since it seems to present them as acting in an immoral or illegal manner. For the Palestinians this issue is a very painful one, it is the “Nakba”: the catastrophe that led to their exile, the cornerstone of their social identity. For them it is better to present the exodus as caused by the Israelis, not only for the political reason discussed above, but also for a psychological reason. It is better for their own self-esteem, as well as for the way they are perceived, as being expelled from their sacred land. This is better than being seen as having left willingly due to fear, calls of their leaders, collapse of the Palestinian society, or earlier flight of their leaders (Bar-On, 2006). The psychological aspect is influenced, among both parties, by the need for positive personal and social self-esteem, as described in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The social aspect is an outcome of the psychological one. Benedict Anderson related to this issue in terms of nation construction (Anderson, 1983). The leaders of both peoples prefer to construct instrumental history of their nations, to support their
nations’ interests. Such a portrayal of history helps in constructing a united patriotic society, one which copes with the difficulties of nation building and the conflict’s process. In our case, a Zionist nonexpulsion narrative serves Israel well in this regard; while for the Palestinians this is true regarding an expulsion narrative.

The Israeli collective and historical memories for the causes of the 1948 exodus, at least until the late 1970s, have essentially adopted the Zionist narrative of the exodus. They attributed no responsibility to Jews/Israelis for the exodus of Palestinians (including for expulsion), but rather blamed only the Palestinians and the Arab countries. The Palestinians fled willingly, mainly because they were encouraged to do so by their own leadership and by the Arab states (Bar-Tal, 2007; Lustick, 2006; Nets-Zehngut, 2006). This is also true regarding the official memory of Israeli state institutions, for example, the way the national Information Center presented this issue (Nets-Zehngut, 2008), the Israeli Army (Nets-Zehngut, 2010a), or the Ministry of Education (Nets-Zehngut, 2010b).

This began to change in the late 1970s with the emergence of a critical/post-Zionist period in Israeli historical scholarship. For example, Israeli scholars started presenting a critical narrative with regard to the 1948 exodus (Nets-Zehngut, in press). This criticism trend intensified in the late 1980s with the commencement of the period called the “New Historians” era (Zand, 2004; Nave & Yoge, 2002). These historians criticized various aspects of the Zionist narrative of the conflict. The major figure among these critics, the one who conducted the most thorough research on the 1948 exodus, is the historian Benny Morris. According to the critical narrative presented by him, and other scholars, many of the Palestinians left willingly, due to fear and collapse of the Palestinian society, while others were expelled by Jewish and later Israeli security forces (Morris, 1987).

The events of the 1948 War, including those pertaining to the 1948 exodus, were vastly documented by Jews and later Israelis. In addition, Israeli historical memory of the causes of the 1948 exodus is based almost exclusively upon these documents. These include mostly the orders, reports, and protocols of the paramilitary Jewish organizations (e.g., the “Hagana”) or later the “IDF” (Israeli Defense Forces; Gelber, 2001, 2007; Morris, 2004). Oral history is rejected by Israeli historians as a scholarly source. They claim it is inaccurate due to distortions, the deterioration of memory over time, the selectivity of memory, ideological and political agendas, and the negative impact of the ongoing conflict. In addition, Palestinian historical scholarship/memory regarding the 1948 War is perceived by leading Israeli scholars as politically biased. They argue, for example, that it is “... usually polemic or apologetic memoirs and rarely scholarly research... Arab scholars have scarcely endeavored to find out what really happened, when, how and why” (Gelber, 2001, p. 2; for by and large the same negative view about Palestinian scholars see also Morris, 1997; Sela, 1991).

From the other side, Palestinians’ official, historical, and collective memories regarding the 1948 exodus are almost unanimous in claiming that the refugees were expelled. They also reject the claim that the exodus was an outcome of
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encouragement by the Palestinians’ and Arab countries’ leadership to leave. This can be learned from various studies conducted in various locations. For example, three studies examine the Palestinian official memory regarding the 1948 exodus, as presented in Palestinian history textbooks used in the Palestinian Authority (Firer & Adwan, 2004; IPCRI, 2003, 2004). All of these studies find that the books present only expulsion as the cause of the exodus. With regard to the Palestinian historical memory—Palestinian scholars categorically reject the Zionist narrative of the exodus and to a large degree also the post-Zionist one. First, and in general, they claim that the Israeli narratives regarding the exodus are based disproportionately on Israeli, American, and British documents and overlook Arab-Palestinian sources. This inhibits understanding of the Palestinian perspective on the exodus.

They also criticize the Israeli post-Zionist narrative of the exodus with regard to the scope of the expulsion (claiming the vast majority if not all of the refugees were expelled); its background (e.g., regarding the question of whether a transfer ideology or Jewish expulsion plan existed before or during the war); the reasons that the Palestinians left (e.g., arguing that the Arab-Palestinian leadership did not order or encourage the refugees to leave); and regarding events that took place in specific localities (Abdel Jawad, 2006; Abu-Lughod, 1991; Jaber, 1999; Masalha, 1991). Also, other Israeli studies have commented that among the Palestinians the narrative regarding the case study gives total responsibility to the Israelis (e.g., Sasser, 2004). And lastly, with regard to collective memory—a public opinion survey examines the memory of the Palestinians residing in Israel (Steinmetz, 2003). It finds that 71% view the exodus as caused by expulsion, 8% as caused by Expulsion and Arab Orders (while the rest gave other reasons for voluntary flight or did not know). Such expulsion-oriented characteristics of the Palestinian collective memory were also diagnosed in another study (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998).

Palestinians have almost no documentation regarding the 1948 War and the Palestinian exodus. They do, however (especially since the 1990s) have various oral history projects about these topics. Nonetheless, there is no integrated data or analysis of all of the manifestations of the autobiographical memory of the 1948 exodus as presented through these projects. Palestinian scholars rely almost totally on Palestinians’ oral history with regard to the conflict in general, and the 1948 exodus in particular (Abdel Jawad, 2006; Jaber, 1999).

Research

Data

General. The comparison will be drawn in reference to 38 localities that experienced the exodus of Palestinians during the 1948 War. Let us describe the data that will be used for this comparison.

Israeli documented history. The scholarship of Benny Morris is chosen to represent Israeli documented history because Morris has conducted the most
thorough research on the 1948 exodus. In addition, major findings relevant to the present study (e.g., about the actual causes for the exodus of Palestinians, including expulsion) have been accepted by many Israeli scholars (Bar-On, 2004; Nets-Zehngut, in press). Further, Morris’s research addresses in detail every locality involved in the 1948 War (Shlaim, 1995). These qualities of Morris’s research thus allow for a comparison to be drawn between his findings and those of Palestinian oral history that relate to 38 localities.

Morris published his first book on the refugee problem in the late 1980s (“The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949”). His research is based almost totally on documents, mainly official or semiofficial government or military documents prepared by the prestate Yishuv (“Jewish community”) administration or by the state of Israel, as well as official governmental and military American, British, and international documents (Morris, 2004). This article will relate particularly to Morris’s findings regarding the refugee problem as they are presented in his most recent relevant book, “The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited” (2004).

**Palestinian oral history.** The four Palestinian oral history projects examined in the article are presented in Table 1 below.

Here are some details regarding the four projects: First, Zochrot is an NGO founded in 2002 by a group of Israeli-Jews with the aim of raising awareness among Israelis of the 1948 Nakba (Bronstein, 2005; Zochrot, 2010). Zochrot’s office is in Tel Aviv and the organization employs mostly Jews as well as some Palestinians. Zochrot’s activities include organizing tours to the Palestinian localities destroyed in 1948, giving lectures, participating in demonstrations, taking legal action to preserve Palestinian sites, and publishing booklets on Palestinian localities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Coordinator of the Project</th>
<th>Year the Project was Published</th>
<th>Background of Project</th>
<th>Nationality of Coordinator</th>
<th>No. of Localities Researched</th>
<th>No. of Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zochrot (NGO)</td>
<td>2003–’06</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>Israeli (Jewish &amp; Palestinian)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bat-Shalom (NGO)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>Israeli (Jewish &amp; Palestinian)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nafez Nazzal (Ph.D. dissertation)</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>~100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 38* ~131

*On four occasions the same localities appeared in more than one project, and thus the total is not 42 but 38.
Between 2003 and 2006 Zochrot published 17 such booklets in Hebrew (only 14 of them were found relevant to the 1948 exodus). Each booklet describes the historical, cultural, and economic background of the discussed locality, while focusing on the events of the 1948 War that led to the Palestinian exodus. The description is based partly on Palestinian and Israeli academic and popular sources, and mostly on the testimonies of internally displaced Palestinians (IDPs). Most of the interviews were conducted by Zochrot’s employees or volunteers (Jewish and Palestinian), except for two which were conducted by employees of Palestinian refugee organizations. Only the testimonies that appear in these booklets were analyzed.

Second, Bat-Shalom is an Israeli (Jewish and Palestinian) feminist organization founded in 1994. Its aims are to promote a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, protect human rights, and advance an equal voice for Jewish and Palestinian women in Israeli society (Bat-Shalom, 2010; Testimonies, 2005). It operates from Jerusalem and Affula in Israel, and its activities include organizing demonstrations, exhibitions, workshops, and tours to destroyed Palestinian villages, as well as publishing a Testimonies booklet (2005). The booklet, which is analyzed in this article, was published in Hebrew and contains two testimonies of Palestinian women IDPs taken by members of Bat-Shalom (only one of the testimonies was found relevant to the 1948 exodus).

Third, the Journal of Palestine Studies (“JPS”) is published since 1971 by the Institute of Palestine Studies which is situated in Beirut, Lebanon, with offices in Washington, Paris, and London (IPS web site, 2010). The institute was founded in 1963 and incorporated in Lebanon as a private, independent, nonprofit Arab institute. JPS is an academic journal, the main English-language quarterly devoted exclusively to the study of Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1988 an article was published in JPS that included the testimonies of four Palestinian refugees who described the events that led to their exodus in 1948 (Refugee Interviews, 1988). All these four testimonies were included in the study. The four interviewees who gave the testimonies were residing at the time of the interviews in Jordan and Lebanon and were interviewed by correspondents of JPS.

Fourth, Nafez Nazzal is a Palestinian historian currently from Brigham Young University in the United States. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in the mid-1970s in Georgetown University, Washington DC. His dissertation concentrated on the 1948 exodus of Palestinians from the Galilee (a region currently the north of Israel). In this framework he interviewed 111 Palestinian refugees from 25 localities in the Galilee, who at the time of the interviews were residing in cities and refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. All the interviewees were adolescents or older in 1948. Of the 25 localities addressed in Nazzal’s study, only 23 were analyzed in the current study (the names of the remaining two villages were not traced in Morris’s book for the sake of comparison). Therefore, the actual number of interviewees regarding the 23 researched localities is estimated proportionally at around 100. Nazzal published a small part of his findings in 1974 in an article, and all of them later in an English-language book (Nazzal, 1978), the latter which will be analyzed here.
These four projects were chosen for this study since they are broad in the diversity they represent: They were conducted in various years over a long period (i.e., 1978, 1988, 2003–2006, 2005); by both activists and academics, from both sides of the conflict (i.e., Israeli-Jews and Arab/Palestinians). In addition, the interviewees were Palestinian refugees from all areas of Eretz-Israel (the Jewish name for that territory prior to the establishment of Israel) and Israel, where the exodus took place in various phases of the 1948 War. At the time of the interviews the interviewees were residing in diverse locations (Israel and Arab countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan). Furthermore, the projects relate to a large number of localities (38) and interviewees (about 131).

Methodology

General. In order to conduct the comparison, a table was constructed to compare the causes for the Palestinian exodus in the 38 localities according to Benny Morris versus the Palestinian projects.

Valid Testimonies. A few Palestinian testimonies were disqualified for this study because they did not deal with the 1948 exodus (but rather, for example, with the lives in a Palestinian village prior to 1948), or because the locality was not traced in Morris’s book. In addition, in the present study only testimonies of direct comprehended experience were analyzed, a basic principle of oral history (Grele, 2006). Thus, testimonies about events in another village that were based on what the interviewee was told by another person, or events which occurred before the interviewee reached the age of five, were not included in the analysis. Few testimonies from activists’ projects fell into this latter category.

Five categories of causes for the exodus. The causes for the exodus of the refugees were classified into five categories, based by and large on Morris’s classification and symbols: “E” represents Expulsion by Jewish and later Israeli forces. “F” represents Prior Fear, such that Palestinians fled prior to the initiation of a military attack. This cause integrates two of Morris’s classifications, which Morris himself mentions are difficult to distinguish between—“F” = Fear of being caught up in fighting and “C” = flight due to the Fall of a Neighboring Town. “M” represents flight caused by a Military Attack on the locality (i.e., flight that occurred at any time from the beginning of a military attack until its end, including after the locality was seized by Jewish-Israeli forces). “A” represents abandonment on Arab Orders/Encouragement for the Palestinians to leave. “W” represents Whispering Campaign against Palestinians as a kind of Jewish psychological warfare. Usually, both Morris and the Palestinian interviewees mentioned more than one cause regarding each locality.

As Benny Morris (2004) mentions, it seems difficult to distinguish between the four psychological influences on flight: Prior Fear of being caught up in the fighting (F), flight due to the Fall of a Neighboring Town (C), abandonment on Arab Orders/Encouragement to leave (A), and the psychological warfare of the
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Whispering Campaign (W). Thus, a primary distinction is made here between flight that took place before military attack (Prior Fear, F, that includes also Fall of a Neighboring Town, C) versus flight that took place during or after Military Attack (M, a cause that is used also by Morris). Major importance is attributed to this F-versus-M distinction since it is significantly different to flee before the battle is on, as opposed to when it is on or when the locality is seized by your enemy. In addition, this behavioral distinction allows for a more accurate diagnosis of the events based on actual behavior and not on psychological hypothesis.

In contrast, the Arab Orders/Encouragement (A) and Whispering Campaign (W) causes are accorded less significance in the study. They are treated as useful but noncentral information. The above discussion explains why the E cause (which is obviously the most central one) and the F-versus-M causes are given special emphasis in the analysis of the findings, whereas the A and W causes are emphasized less.

Manner of classification of the causes. The data underwent textual analysis in order to determine the causes of the exodus. Two clarifications are required. First, the determination of the cause of Expulsion (E) was made for instances when actual expulsion took place; that is, when the Palestinians were ordered and/or forced to leave their localities. Second, identifying the causes of the exodus in Morris’s book was determined according to the text in the book, and not according to the list the book provides of all the Palestinian or mixed (Jewish-Palestinian) localities and the causes for the exodus of their inhabitants. This was done in order to ensure an accurate account of the book’s description of the exodus.

Findings

General characteristics of the two histories. The Israeli-documented history relating to the localities discussed the various relevant events of the 1948 War (e.g., Jewish-Israeli or Arab military operations and strategic plans), while focusing on the Palestinian exodus. Its structure was academic, meaning, the book was professionally edited, used third-person language, was structured, progressed systematically according to time and place, and provided references (i.e., to various documents) for its assertions.

In contrast, all four Palestinian oral history projects focused on the discussed localities as their main topic, while usually relating to a wider spectrum of time than Morris’s work. That is, all the projects typically began with a description of economic, social, cultural, and historical aspects of the discussed locality prior to 1948. All the projects also related to the fate of the Palestinians after they left their locality.

In terms of the structure of the projects, there were differences mainly between activists and academic projects. The testimonies of activists projects were usually not structured according to time and place and seemed only lightly edited, sticking to the vernacular language of the interviewees and the
inconsistency of the interview. As an example we can relate to the testimony of Ibrahim Abu Sanina from A’Jalil: “Why did the people of A’Jalil leave from here? Not far from here six people of the Shubacky family were murdered, but Arab propaganda made it seem as if the entire family was murdered, about 100 people. So everyone ran away from here in fear. Everyone ran away in every direction” (Zochrot A’Jalil, 2004, pp. 4–5). In contrast, the testimonies of the academic projects were more edited and structured (mostly Nazzal’s testimonies, similar to Morris’s academic structure). As an example from an academic project we can relate to that of Issa Tathamuni from Beisan: “. . . the Jews ordered all the Arabs to leave, carrying them in trucks to the river and forcing them to cross to Transjordan” (Nazzal, 1978, p. 49).

Table 2 below assembles the overall crude findings of the study.

Structure of Table 2. The localities in the above table are organized according to the four projects, and are ordered first by the date of the projects’ publication (starting with the most recent) and second within each project, in alphabetic order according to the name of the locality. The first two projects were conducted by activists, while the last two were conducted by academics.

Internal coherence in Palestinian oral history. As mentioned above, on a few occasions localities appeared in more than one project. Thus, before comparing Israeli documented history to Palestinian oral history, there is a need to form a unified Palestinian oral history regarding these three localities. The first such locality is Acre (items 2, 15, and 16 in Table 2 below). The causes attributed for the flight from Acre were FM (item 2), F (item 15), and M (item 16). These versions of the three testimonies can thus be joined as “FM,” as in item 2, since this categorization reflects the combined causes mentioned in all the testimonies. For the sake of clarity, items 15 and 16 in Table 2 are marked in square brackets ([]) and are not taken into consideration in the analysis of the findings.

The second locality is Ayn Ghazal (items 8 and 17), for which the cause of exodus was designated M (item 8) and ME (item 17). The unified designation regarding Ayn Ghazal is determined to be ME (item 17), since this designation combines the versions of both testimonies and thus describes the overall situation in greater detail. Thus, item 8 is marked in square brackets and is not analyzed. The third locality, Haifa, was marked FM for both item 10 and item 19—and so it remained. For the avoidance of repetition, item 10 was marked in square brackets and excluded from the analysis.

Comparison between the two histories: Causes F, M, and E. Table 3 below assembles the preliminary crude findings from Table 2 while focusing on causes F, M, and E (in Table 2—columns III and IV for the Israelis vs. columns VI and VII for the Palestinians).

Row 1 in Table 3 (“Identical histories”) refers to all localities for which Israeli and Palestinian accounts of the causes of exodus were identical. Twenty-six localities (68%) met this definition; for 11 of these, Expulsion (E) was one of the causes.
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Table 2. Cause of Exodus from Palestinian Localities: Comparison between Israeli Documented History and Palestinian Oral History—Raw Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Locality</th>
<th>Israeli Documented History</th>
<th>Palestinian Oral History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flight F, Expulsion E, Details A, W</td>
<td>Flight F, Expulsion E, Details A, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>III F, IV E, V A, W</td>
<td>VI F, VII E, VIII A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A’Jalil</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Acre (Ako)a</td>
<td>FM W</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A’Lajjun</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Al-Haram(Sidna Ali)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Al-Lydda(Lod)</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>M E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Al-Ramle(Ramle)</td>
<td>FM E</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ayn Al-Mansi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>FM A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>[Ayn Ghazalb]</td>
<td>[M] [A]</td>
<td>[M] [FM]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bir Al-Sava (Be’er Sheva)</td>
<td>FM E</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>[Haifaf]</td>
<td>[FM] [A]</td>
<td>[FM]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Isdod</td>
<td>FM E</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lifta</td>
<td>FM A</td>
<td>F E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sheich Muanis</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sochamata</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>[Acre (Ako)a]</td>
<td>[FM] [W]</td>
<td>[F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>[Acre (Ako)a]</td>
<td>[FM] [W]</td>
<td>[M]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ayn Ghazalb</td>
<td>M A</td>
<td>M E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Farradiyya</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Haifa</td>
<td>FM A</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Akbara</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Al-Bassa</td>
<td>FM E</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Al-Birwa</td>
<td>M FM</td>
<td>AW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Al-Ghabisiya</td>
<td>E FM</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Al-Sumeiriya</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Al-Zib</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Beisan (Beit Shean)</td>
<td>FM E W</td>
<td>FM E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Edh Dhahiriya Et Tahta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ein Ez Zeitun</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>M E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>El Khalisa</td>
<td>F W</td>
<td>FM A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Ghuweir Abu Shusha</td>
<td>FM W</td>
<td>FM W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hitin</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Kabri</td>
<td>FM A</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Kafirs Misr</td>
<td>F A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Kuweikat</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>M E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Lubiya</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>FM A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Majid El Kurum</td>
<td>FM A</td>
<td>FM A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Safed</td>
<td>FM E A</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Saffuriya</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Safsaf</td>
<td>FM</td>
<td>FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Sha’b</td>
<td>FM E</td>
<td>FM E A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Tarshia</td>
<td>M E</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aAcre is discussed in three projects, see: # 2, 15, 16.
bAyn Ghazal is discussed in two projects, see: # 8, 17.
cHaifa is discussed in two projects, see: # 10, 19.

Key: E = Expulsion, F = Prior fear, M = Military attack, A = Arab orders to leave, W = Whispering campaign.
Table 3. Comparison between the Two Histories: Causes F, M, and E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Outcome of Comparison</th>
<th>No. of Localities</th>
<th>% from Total 38 Localities</th>
<th>Locality Item No. in Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Israeli and Palestinian accounts were identical</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>2–6, 9, 11, 13, 18*, 19–21, 24, 25**, 26–28, 30–36, 40, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agreement on no E, Disagreement on F vs. M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1, 7, 22, 29, 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Israelis say yes, Palestinians no)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>23***, 38, 39, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Palestinians say yes, Israelis no)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12, 14, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Almost identical, and specifically regarding the important E cause (ME vs. E)
**Almost identical, and specifically regarding the important E cause (ME vs. FME)
*** (E vs. FM)

Row 2 in Table 3 refers to localities for which neither side cited Expulsion (E) as the cause of exodus, but where there was disagreement nonetheless as to the causes Military Attack (M) or Prior Fear (F), or both (FM). For example, M on the Israeli side and FM on the Palestinian side, or FM on the Israeli side and F on the Palestinian side. All together there were five localities (13%) like this. Thus, for 81% of localities (68% + 13%), there was compatibility between the two histories with regard to all causes of the exodus (68%) or insofar as both sides agreed regarding the absence of the most important E cause (13%).

The major differences between the two versions are represented in rows 3 and 4, which together comprise 19% of the total localities. Row 3 includes four localities (11%) for which both the Israeli and Palestinian versions point to the existence of the F/M/FM causes. In addition, the Israeli version claims that Expulsion (E) took place in these localities, whereas the Palestinian accounts do not claim that expulsion took place. Row 4 comprises three localities (8%) in which the opposite is the case—both the Israeli and Palestinian accounts assert that one or more of the F/M/FM causes were relevant. However, the Palestinian projects claim in addition that Expulsion (E) took place in these localities, whereas the Israeli account does not.

The AW causes. Table 4 below details the use of the two causes A and W in Israeli documented history versus Palestinian oral history.

As can be seen in Table 4, both parties used the A/W causes about the same number of times: Both used the A cause 7 times, and the W cause was used four times by the Israelis and three times by the Palestinians. For only two localities (items 30 and 36) the causes of exodus were identical in the versions of both parties. In the seven instances where the A cause was attributed by Palestinian
Palestinian Autobiographical Memory

Table 4. Comparison between the Two Histories: Causes A and W

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Israeli Documented History</th>
<th>Palestinian Oral History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Times Used</td>
<td>Locality Item No. in Table 2</td>
<td>No. of Times Used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A = Arab orders to leave</td>
<td>7: 12, 17, 19, 32, 33, 36, 38</td>
<td>7: 3*, 7, 22*, 29, 35, 36, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>W = Whispering campaign</td>
<td>4: 2, 26, 29, 30</td>
<td>3: 3, 22, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The W cause is also used regarding this locality.

witnesses, the A cause almost always took the form of advice by Arab forces (mostly the Arab Liberation Army) that Palestinians evacuate women, children, and the elderly in order to prevent them from being harmed in the fighting.

It should be noted that in four localities (items 4, 7, 29, and 31), Palestinian witnesses asserted that Jews approached them to calm their fears and to ask them to live in coexistence and peace. These were positive actions by the Jews that stand seemingly in contrast to the practice of a whispering campaign (W).

*Activists vs. academic projects.* It is interesting to examine the extent of compatibility between the histories while differentiating between activists and academic projects. This is particularly true with regard to the more central F/M/E causes. This comparison also touches on all the contextual aspects of these projects: The activists projects were conducted by laypeople and in a nonacademic sphere, very recently (2003–2006), only by Israeli citizens (Jews and Palestinians), and all the interviewees were residing at the time of the interviews in Israel. In contrast, the academic projects were conducted by academic scholars, earlier (1978, 1988), by Arabs and Palestinians working outside Israel, and the interviewees were residing at the time of the interviews in Arab countries. Thus, the findings of this comparison in Table 5 below have implications regarding all these aspects.

Table 5 includes all 42 cases, including the three localities that were discussed in more than one project (so as not to jeopardize the comparison between the two kinds of projects). The major finding here is regarding row 1. This row shows the number of localities for which the comparison bore identical histories—highly similar among activists (67%) and academic (66%) projects. In addition, and not based on the table, the Expulsion (E) cause was mentioned for 40% (6 of 15) of the localities addressed by the activists’ projects, and regarding 30% (8 of 27) of the localities addressed by the academics’ projects.

Discussion

As described in the literature review, typical collective memory of conflict is antagonistic and biased; and the Palestinian official, historical, and collective
memories are highly expulsion oriented. Therefore, one might expect to find the Palestinian oral history examined here to be compatible with the Palestinian official, historical, and collective memories. That is, the Palestinian autobiographical memory described in these projects would present a typical antagonistic narrative of conflict. Yet, the findings of this study provide a significantly different picture.

*Extent of compatibility of Palestinian autobiographical memory with Palestinian official, historical, and collective memories.* The study finds a large discrepancy between the three latter expulsion-oriented memories and the autobiographical one. As described in Table 2, the Palestinian autobiographical memory presents exclusively the expulsion cause (E) only with regard to one (3%) locality. This cause is presented with regard to an additional 13 (34%) localities, but is then accompanied by the causes of Prior Fear and/or Military Attack (F/M). The remaining 63% of the localities are not addressed with regard to expulsion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Outcome of Comparison</th>
<th>No. of Localities</th>
<th>% from Total of Type of a Project (15 or 27)</th>
<th>Locality Item No. in Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activists Projects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Israeli and Palestinian accounts were identical</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>2–6, 8–11, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agreement on no E, Disagreement on F vs. M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1, 7, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Israelis say yes, Palestinians no)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Palestinians say yes, Israelis no)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Activists</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Projects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Israeli and Palestinian accounts were identical</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>18*, 19–21, 24, 25**, 26–28, 30–36, 40, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agreement on no E, Disagreement on F vs. M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16, 22, 29, 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Israelis say yes, Palestinians no)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23***, 38, 39, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agreement on F vs. M, Disagreement on E (Palestinians say yes, Israelis no)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Activists &amp; Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Almost identical, and specifically regarding the important E cause (ME vs. E)
**Almost identical, and specifically regarding the important E cause (ME vs. FME)
***(E vs. FM)
Therefore, the autobiographical memory attributes relatively low responsibility to expulsion. *Arab Orders and Whispering Campaign (AW) in Palestinian autobiographical memory*. Palestinians attribute the exodus to Arab Orders (A) in seven (18%) localities. This is significant since it stands in contrast to the Palestinian historical and official memories that such orders were not given. While 18% seems negligible, it is still significant considering that the Israeli narrative also attributes this cause to only seven localities (though mostly different localities than the Palestinians). Thus, seemingly, this cause was just not prevalent.

In addition, regarding four (10%) localities, Palestinian witnesses assert that Jews approached them to allay their fears and asked them to live in coexistence and peace. These were positive actions that stand opposed to the Whispering Campaign (W) practice. Therefore, regarding both Arab Orders and positive Jewish actions, the Palestinian autobiographical memory is not apologetic and does not portray the Palestinian side in a purely positive manner, or the Jewish side purely in a negative one.

**Extent of compatibility of Palestinian autobiographical memory with Israeli documented history.** Based on the literature review about oral history versus documented history in general—as well as on these histories in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—one might expect to find the Palestinian oral history regarding the 1948 exodus to be largely incompatible with a parallel documented Israeli history. The findings, however, are significantly different. Both histories were found to be identical regarding 68% of the localities; while for an additional 13% they were compatible in asserting that no expulsion took place. These findings suggest a high degree of compatibility between the two histories.

**Summary of the descriptive aspect of the Palestinian autobiographical memory.** Surprisingly, this autobiographical memory was not found to be like a typical memory of conflicts, on two levels. First, by its own content—expulsion was not found to be a central cause of the exodus, but Prior Fear and Military Attacks were. In addition, percentages of Arab Orders to leave were not insignificant, and some positive Jewish actions were described. By this it was found to be very different from the Palestinian official, historical, and collective memories. On the second level, the comparative one—autobiographical memory is found to be highly compatible with Israeli-documented history. It is not argued that the Israeli-documented history contains the “truth” about the past, and because of the high compatibility, that the Palestinian autobiographical memory therefore contains the “truth” as well. Such a high degree of compatibility, however, does suggest that both histories provide, at least to a high degree, an accurate description of the given events. While documented history is never described as being inherently inaccurate and biased, oral history (including specifically the Palestinian one) is described as such. Therefore, this high degree of compatibility does describe Palestinian autobiographical memory more favorably than usual. In summary, the
autobiographical memory diagnosed in this study cannot be described as containing highly biased, inaccurately antagonistic elements, but by and large the contrary.

**Extent of representation of the Palestinian autobiographical memory by the four oral history projects.** The Palestinian autobiographical memory is discussed here based on four oral history projects. However, it seems that there are many chances that the findings about this memory represent to a large degree the overall Palestinian autobiographical memory about the 1948 exodus. Support for this assumption can be found in the wide and diverse nature of the four projects described above (e.g., in terms of areas of the localities, place of residence of the interviewees, and the large number of localities and interviewees). All of these different characteristics of the four projects did not seem to make any significant difference in the way the autobiographical memory is presented in them.

One more aspect should be pointed out in this regard—the 38 localities discussed in this article are those which were chosen by the coordinators of the oral history projects (Arabs, Palestinians, or Israeli-Jewish peace activists). It seems safe to assume that these coordinators did not deliberately choose a small number of localities which experienced expulsion in 1948, therefore producing nonexpulsion-oriented autobiographical memory of the exodus. If they had some intention of choosing “appropriate” localities for their projects, more likely they would have chosen localities with no significance in this regard, or more localities which did experience partial or exclusive expulsion. For example, taking into consideration the political, psychological, and social aspects of the refugee problem, exclusive expulsion might better serve the Arab/Palestinian/peace activists purpose in presenting Israel more negatively. This leads to the conclusion that the sample of the 38 localities discussed in the study does not represent an exceptionally more moderate (less expulsion oriented) Palestinian description of the exodus.

Lastly, and with regard to another aspect—the above referred to wide and diverse nature of the projects and this provide a considerably solid basis for the validity of the findings.

**Reasons for the difference between the Palestinian autobiographical memory and the Palestinian official and historical memories.** What are the reasons for the sharp difference between the former memory and the latter two? One explanation might be that one of the memories is historically more accurate than the others. However, this explanation seems not to be plausible. After all, the differences in the memories are too wide, and there is high compatibility between the Israeli documented history and the Palestinian autobiographical oral one. The question also arises as to why the official and historical memories are so similar in their expulsion-oriented content. It seems that the major explanation for this difference can be attributed to the “presentism” phenomenon—the political, psychological, and social significance of the refugee problem described earlier. The official and historical memories are more suited to the expulsion narrative, since they are influenced by this triple significance of the problem. The people who construct
these two memories (politicians and scholars) probably felt the Palestinian nation would be politically, psychologically, and socially damaged if the expulsion narrative was not described with these two memories. This point was enhanced since these two memories (and especially the official one) represent the Palestinian nation.

In contrast, the refugees who directly experienced the exodus probably to a large degree did not feel they represented the Palestinian nation. They did not feel that this triple significance of the problem should be taken into consideration while providing their testimonies. Therefore, they “just” describe their experiences with regard to the exodus.

Support for this explanation can be found in the view, described above, of Israeli scholars on the Palestinian historical memory of the conflict as highly biased. Additional support can be found in the fact that a similar phenomenon (official biased memory of this same 1948 exodus) also took place in Israel. The Israeli national Information Center presents the Zionist narrative regarding the 1948 Palestinian exodus for the same triple reasons described above (Nets-Zehngut, 2008), as well as among Israeli-Jewish scholars until the late 1970s (Nets-Zehngut, in press). The same phenomenon also occurs regarding history textbooks in the Israeli educational system, insofar as the way in which they describe the conflict (Podeh, 2002).

_Difference between the two components of the Palestinian collective memory._ The overall Palestinian collective memory is found, as mentioned, to be expulsion oriented to a large degree, but not exclusively (71%: expulsion, 8%: Expulsion and Arab Orders, and the rest: other reasons for voluntary flight, or did not know). This memory includes the autobiographical memory and the indirect-collective memory. The autobiographical memory is found to be less expulsion oriented and much more voluntary flight (for various causes) oriented. Therefore, it seems safe to generally assert that the indirect-collective memory is much more expulsion oriented than the autobiographical one. This former memory is probably responsible for most of the expulsion orientation of the overall collective memory.

What are the reasons for this difference between these two memories, the autobiographical and the indirect-collective? One major explanation comes to mind. The autobiographical memory is formed essentially according to the actual events. It is not influenced (at least not to a large degree) by the political, psychological, or social considerations; or by the official and historical expulsion-oriented memories. This is an interesting finding in and of itself. In addition, as mentioned in the literature review, research has found that highly important or extraordinary events are remembered better than less important ordinary ones. For the Palestinians the “Nakba” is surely a highly important event, a fact which might have contributed to lesser impact of distortions of time on this memory. Apparently, this memory represents, to a large degree, the actual events.

In contrast, the indirect-collective memory is formed based on various second-hand sources like the autobiographical memory, as well as the official and
historical memories. While the former memory leans less towards the expulsion cause and more towards various voluntary flight causes, the latter two memories lean in the opposite direction (by and large, towards an exclusive expulsion explanation of the exodus). Naturally, the impact on the indirect-collective memory of these latter two memories is stronger than that of the autobiographical memory. These two former memories are much more enforced and disseminated by various state and social (e.g., media and cultural) channels. Therefore, the indirect-collective memory is formed in a more expulsion-oriented manner. In other words, the autobiographical memory is not a typically antagonistic memory of conflict, while the indirect-collective one is much more so.

Support for these explanations can be found in the literature. Discrepancy between the autobiographical memories of the Germans and the French, respectively, regarding their conflict until 1945, and the countries’ official memories, is found to decrease the impact of the official memories on the collective ones (Rosoux, 2001). That is, the autobiographical memories mitigated the impact of the official memories.

In summary, the autobiographical memory tends not to be expulsion oriented, the indirect-collective memory is highly expulsion oriented, and the collective memory is mitigated by the autobiographical memory to be expulsion oriented to a large degree. In addition, the official and historical memories indirectly influence the collective memory through their impact on the indirect-collective memory.

Positive transformation of Palestinian collective memory of conflict. The autobiographical memory is found largely to be an atypical memory-of-conflict. This makes it a possible primary source for supporting positive transformation of the Palestinian collective and historical memories, to becoming less antagonistic memories of the conflict. All this, of course, when there is a factual basis for such a transformation.

On the other hand, the indirect-collective memory is a more typical memory of conflicts. It seems to be more biased and distorted than the autobiographical memory. Therefore, this memory is the leading candidate for being the subject of a process of positive transformation among the two components of the collective memory. In addition, it is easier to transform such a memory (which is based on indirect sources) than a memory which is based on direct experience (like the autobiographical memory). In contrast, the autobiographical memory is a much less relevant candidate for such a transformational process. It is not only that this memory is not a typical memory of conflicts; it is also harder to change a direct-experience memory, if at all.

Theoretical implications. Various theoretical implications are included in the above discussion, and the main ones will be addressed here. First, this study finds evidence that autobiographical memory of conflict can be largely atypical-memory-of-conflict (e.g., largely accurate and not biased or antagonistic). Such characteristics of this memory can be explained by three main reasons: (1) People who directly experienced the events and describe them in oral history projects do
not feel that they represent their nation (in contrast, for example, to leaders). As such, they do not take into consideration in their testimonies political and social implications which might bias them. (2) Such people are not so influenced by historical or official memories. They experienced the events and know what happened; they do not need “others” to tell them what happened. (3) Memories of important events (like the exodus/Nakba) are better remembered than insignificant ones.\(^2\)

Second, the study shows that such relatively “nonconflict-oriented and accurate” autobiographical memory can exist also in circumstances which might have been expected to influence it in the opposite direction. The exodus/Nakba is the most central event for the Palestinians (with significant political and social implications), and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an ongoing violent conflict. Such circumstances, according to the literature, should have made this memory more biased and conflict oriented. Despite these circumstances, this is not the case. This phenomenon also accentuates the significance of the study’s findings.

Third, collective memory is usually discussed as an inclusive phenomenon, without differentiating between its two components. Based on this study we might discuss this memory as an integrated phenomenon, differentiating between the autobiographical and indirect-collective memories. Each of the two memories is very different from one another. The autobiographical is less likely to be conflict oriented and inaccurate, not so influenced by historical and official memories, and is harder to be transformed. In contrast, the indirect-collective is more likely to be conflict-oriented, more influenced by historical and official memories, and easier to be transformed. Therefore, a more nuanced discussion of collective memory might have various theoretical and subsequently practical implications.

An example of a practical implication might be regarding positive transformation of memories. The bearers of the indirect-collective memory will often be the younger generations (in contrast to the older one, that experienced the given event directly), and sometimes also new immigrants. Such groups will often be the appropriate candidates for positive transformation of their memory.

Fourth, when the autobiographical memory is relatively “nonconflict-oriented and accurate,” it can be the appropriate vehicle for the positive transformation of its counter component, the indirect-collective memory. After all, this memory is a direct one of “one’s own” people. As such—if given the appropriate centrality and dissemination—it can be accepted with trust by the bearers of the indirect-collective memory.

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\(^2\) These three reasons provide the main explanations for the high compatibility between the Israeli documented history and the Palestinian oral one. This explanation is based mainly on the methods used for eliciting the narratives of the exodus (documents and oral history), and not the sides that used it (Israelis and Palestinians). Both documents and the autobiographical memory (presented in the oral history projects) were probably accurate to a large degree in representing the exodus. The documents were accurate (as usually is asserted in the literature), while the autobiographical memory was so for the above three reasons.
Fifth, the study provides some partial and intuitive evidence regarding the impact of present interests on historical and official memories. The Palestinian autobiographical memory is found to be incompatible with these two latter memories. These memories are very conflict oriented and apparently partly biased (especially the official one). It seems safe to partially attribute the characteristics of these two memories to the political, psychological, and social implications of the 1948 exodus. Therefore, and more generally, when the bearers of these two memories (especially the official one) see themselves as representatives of their nation, and the topic of these memories has central implications, there are more chances that these memories will be biased and conflict oriented.

Methodological implications. Oral history is highly criticized by supporters of documents research. It is not argued here that oral history does not have its problems. However, the present article provides evidence that Palestinian oral history is not that problematic as a scholarly source. By and large, relatively small degrees of distortions are found due to political agendas, manipulation, apologetic tendencies, and the influence of the official and historical memories. It is also found to be accurate in a significant manner (at least by the standard of comparing it to Israeli documented history). These findings support oral history in general. They suggest that it should be regarded more seriously, examined concretely, and not be categorically rejected. Scholarly usage of appropriate oral history can promote research in various ways. It can explore the autobiographical memory, widen and deepen the scope of documents-based research (since not all the information about the past is included in documents), and help in solving historical controversies. This is true regarding many conflicts (where often the weaker party largely uses oral history) as well as in contexts other than conflicts.

In Conclusion

This study examines for the first time overall characteristics of the Palestinian autobiographical memory regarding the 1948 exodus, as it is manifested in oral history projects. This memory is found to be largely nonconflict-oriented, highly compatible with Israeli documentary history, and very different from other Palestinian memories about that exodus.

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