Major events and the collective memory of conflicts

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Abstract

Collective memory of conflicts is assembled around major events, such as, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the 1948 Palestinian exodus from the central cities of Lydda and Ramla. To date, however, various theoretical aspects of major events of conflicts have not been considered in the literature. This article addresses this lack by exploring for the first time the way in which the causes for that exodus were presented in Israel from 1949 to 2005. Methodologically, this is based on studies that have analyzed separately the publications by various Israeli state establishments (e.g., national Information Center, Ministry of Education, the National Archive, and the army – IDF), and those by various Israeli-Jewish societal establishments (e.g., the research community, newspapers and 1948 war veterans). Empirically, the findings here describe the dynamics of the memory of that exodus in an integrated manner, as they are described in many studies. They demonstrate that until 1969, the Lydda-Ramla exodus was presented in Israel as an outcome of a willing flight -- while since the 1970s, as an outcome of a willing flight accompanied by expulsion. Other relevant occurrences are also described. Theoretically, the article contributes various insights, pertaining, for example, to: the five Manifestation
Characteristics and the two Influence Characteristics of major events of conflicts; the eight determinant factors that shape the impact of these events; and the dynamic nature of the representation of major events. Taken altogether, this article contributes to the empirical and theoretical research on the major events in conflicts.
**Introduction**

Intractable conflicts are prevalent worldwide, significantly damaging the countries of the involved parties and the lives of their citizens. They concern concrete issues, such as territories, natural resources, and self-determination. They also involve, however, wide-scale socio-psychological dynamics that play an important role in the eruption of the conflicts, their continuation, and their eventual resolution (e.g., emotions, identity, political attitudes and collective memory – all pertaining to the conflict). Among these socio-psychological dynamics, collective memory is particularly significant (Lawson and Tannaka, 2010; Paez and Liu, 2011).

Collective memory is formed around major events, such as, a significant defeat in the battlefield or a major massacre. Thus, through the study of major events of conflicts, valuable insights can be obtained about collective memory of conflicts. To date, however, many *theoretical* aspects of such major events have not been addressed in the literature. The current article addresses this lack using a case study approach. It examines the process that took place in Israel between 1949 and the early-2000s regarding its memory of one major event – the occurrences surrounding the Palestinian exodus from the cities of Lydda and Ramla during the 1948 War. This exodus was one of the events that led to the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. This case study is chosen for several reasons: the centrality in the world of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the facts that the 1948 Palestinian exodus is the most important historical event in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the Lydda-Ramla affair is the most important event in the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Moreover, to date, no *empirical* study has systematically examined in an integrated way the occurrences that took place among various Israeli institutions from 1949 to the 2000s, in relation to this case study. Based on the empirical dynamics of this affair, in the “Summary and discussion” section of the article various theoretical insights regarding major events of conflicts are provided, insights that have not been yet discussed in the literature.

**Background**

*Collective memory and national narratives*

Memory studies have recently undergone significant growth, mostly regarding conflicts (Tint, 2010). Collective memory is generally defined as representations of the past that are collectively adopted, representations which are assembled in narratives (Kansteiner, 2002).

The concept of “narrative” appeared in social sciences decades ago and soon gained a central place in their vocabulary. On the general level, this concept refers to a story about events occurring over time that has a plot with a clear starting point and endpoint that provides
sequential and causal coherence (László, 2008; Pals, 2006). While narratives can be personal, the current paper deals with collective national narratives, defined by Bruner (1990) as, "social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity" (p. 76; similarly see also Pease, 1997). These narratives provide cultural scripts that proliferate in a society and offer its members a way of viewing their collective past, their unique characteristics and guiding collective practices, and their collective future targets. At times, the national narrative arena can be quite homogenized, characterized mostly by one dominant national narrative. At other times, that arena can be more heterogenic, characterized, for example, by one somewhat dominant narrative, competing for hegemony with one or more counter narratives. Counter narratives consist of stories that provide alternative social constructions of interrelated sequences of historical and current events with new implications.

National narratives are naturally influenced by the national ideology. This ideology is composed of several main elements that are situated on a spectrum with universalistic and particularistic poles. According to the elements that are situated on the universalistic pole, all people are divided into nations, and for the benefit of all mankind, people should live within their nations where they will obtain their ultimate expression and proper existence. According to the elements that are situated on the particularistic pole, each nation is unique in its history, culture and values. These two poles are in tension, and nations adopt different positions on the spectrum according to their situation (e.g., in times of troubles with other nations – a particularistic inclination, and in times of prosperity – a universalistic one). These positions influence the narratives that nations hold in the following ways in general: a particularistic position produces a narrative that presents the given nation uniquely positively and its rivals negatively, while the universalistic inclination leads to tolerance and acceptance toward all nations (Seglow, 1998; Triandafyllidou, 1998).

Collective memory is a general category which includes various kinds of memories. Naming five of the main kinds: First is popular memory, defined as representations of the past held by the society’s members, best manifested directly by public opinion surveys (Midelton and Edwards, 1997). It significantly influences the psychological reactions (e.g., emotions, attitudes and motivations) and the behavioral reactions of the people holding it, and is therefore accorded great importance. This importance is one of the main reasons for the recent growth in memory studies (Devine-Wright, 2003; Paez and Liu, 2011). Second is the official memory,
representations of the past adopted by state establishments. This memory is manifested, for instance, in publications by state ministries and the army (Wertsch, 2002). The third kind is the historical memory, that of the research community – academic and independent scholars, who represent the past in their studies (Winter and Sivan, 1999). Fourth is the cultural memory, the way the society views its past via newspaper articles, monuments, buildings, etc. (Assmann, 1995). Fifth and final is the autobiographical memory, that of the people who experienced firsthand the events under discussion. This is a primary source for the past (in addition mainly to documents), and is therefore usually accorded importance (Jennings and Zhang, 2005). The significance of the latter four kinds of memories is primarily that they influence the popular memory, the importance of which was explained above (Paez and Liu, 2011; Wertsch, 2002). In addition, official memory has its own separate importance: it represents countries in the international arena and thereby influences their interactions with other countries (Langenbacher, 2010).

To focus on collective memory of conflicts: this type of memory consists of the narratives held by a party to a conflict that describes the conflict’s eruption and its course. A typical narrative of conflict is significantly biased and distorted, characterized by a simplistic black-white view in favor of the in-group (a phenomenon typically titled “the politics of memory”). From another perspective, such a narrative will be largely particularistic in its characteristics.

When such a narrative is adopted in the collective memory it plays a major role in the course of a conflict, insofar as it shapes the psychological and behavioral reactions of each party positively towards itself and negatively towards its rival. Such memory is instrumental during the climax of a conflict, since it provides each party with the socio-psychological basis needed to meet the enormous challenges that intractable conflict demands. It also promotes a positive image of the country internationally, and therefore, the support of the international community. Eventually, however, this memory also inhibits management of a conflict, its peaceful resolution, and reconciliation between the parties. Thus, the more significantly a party’s memory can be positively transformed so as to hold less biased and distorted narratives[^1] – when there is factual basis for such a transformation (which is usually the case) – the more the party’s psychological reactions will accommodate the rival and view it in a more legitimized and humanized manner. This will increase the likelihood of managing the conflict and achieving peace and reconciliation (Devine-Wright, 2003; Paez and Liu, 2011).

Such positive transformation of a collective memory of a conflict can be accomplished in a variety of ways -- such as conflict management in collective conflicts, whether inter- or
Conflict management largely refers to attempts to reduce the level of conflict, hostility and violence between rivals, as well as negative outcomes; and thus can lead to peaceful resolution of a conflict (Jeong, 2010). A conflict management process can be implemented by various actors: unilateral (one of the rivals), bilateral (both of them) or multilateral (the rivals and third parties) (Bercovitch and Regan, 1999). The literature typically discusses various methods for managing conflicts such as military and peace enforcement interventions (Boulden, 2001), international adjudication (Bulter, 2009), mediation (Bercovitch and Schneider, 2000), diplomatic interventions (Dixon, 2006), and humanitarian interventions (Wheeler, 2003). The literature, however, typically does not discuss the method of addressing the collective memory of rivals as a method of conflict management.

Collective memory of conflicts (and in general) mostly refers to the narratives of major events. These events are generally defined as, “[…] extraordinary events, relevant to group members’ lives, which are widely publicized through group’s channels of communication and provide information that cannot be disregarded” (Bar-Tal and Labin, 2001, 268). In the context of conflicts, these events relate to a given conflict’s history. The importance of these events is great, and the salience of their memories is proportional. Such events can be relatively short (e.g., a particular one-day event), or long (e.g., a long-lasting war). They can be divided into “sub-major” events, such as those that occurred in particular places -- e.g., the Iwo-Jima battle as part of the major event of the WWII Pacific battles (Esaiasson and Granberg, 1996; Yadgar, 2004). The WWI Armenian genocide by the Turks (Dixon, 2010), the 1937-38 Nanking massacre of some 300,000 Chinese by the Japanese (Takashi, 2006), the killing of 14 Irish protestors by British soldiers in the 1972 Bloody Sunday incident (Conway, 2008), and the 2002 Nord-Ost Russian theatre siege by Chechens terrorists/liberation fighters (Russell, 2005), are all examples of major events of conflicts.

Although many studies have empirically addressed the role of major conflict events in the memory realm, to date no study has systematically addressed these events with a theoretical focus. Therefore, there exists no theoretical discussion, for example, of: 1) the major events’ characteristics (e.g., how they can be identified or the types of impacts they have on the memory); 2) the factors that cause events to be “major” in the memory realm; 3) the differing roles of major events in societal establishments as opposed to state establishments; and 4) these events’ dynamic nature (e.g., the extent to which they become more or less “major” over time). The current article addresses this four-fold lack (and thereby also contributes to the literature on collective conflict management). This is done using a Grounded Theory approach: constructing theoretical insights
from available empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The case study that will be used for this purpose is the Israeli-Jewish memory of the Lydda-Ramla exodus. Let us now describe the case’s background.

**Israel and its memory of the 1948 exodus**

The Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict has lasted for a century causing significant damages to the involved parties. To focus on the Israeli-Jews, the conflict has become, mainly since the 1948 War, the main issue in their existence, ideology and identity. Since the foundation of the State of Israel, its establishments disseminated among the Israeli-Jews the Zionist[^2] narrative exclusively of the conflict as a whole. Generally, this inclusive narrative, dominant in Israel, represented in a biased way the Arabs/Palestinians and the Israeli-Jews as narratives of conflicts typically do – the former negatively and the latter positively (Bar-Tal, 2007; Caplan, 2010).

The major historical event in this inclusive narrative is the Palestinian exodus during the 1948 War. Some 650,000 Palestinians left the area which Israel seized at the end of the war, and the Palestinian refugee problem was created. Since 1948, this problem has become a major matter in Israeli-Arab/Palestinian relations, with major psychological and political implications (Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009; Lustick, 2006; Nets-Zehngut, 2011a). The Israeli Zionist dominant narrative took no responsibility for the exodus. The Palestinians, it argued, left willingly because of both blanket appeals from the Palestinian leadership and Arab states, and of fear of the Jews and later the Israeli-Jews. Acts of expulsion by Jewish/Israeli military forces were not noted and were often denied (Bar-On, 2004; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009). In the first decades after the 1948 War, the Zionist inclusive narrative of the exodus was widely disseminated among Israeli-Jews by various societal institutions (e.g., academia, war veterans’ memoirs, and newspapers) and state institutions (e.g., Information Center, Ministry of Education and the army – IDF[^3]).

Beginning mainly in the 1970s, the hegemony in Israel of the inclusive Zionist narrative of the conflict began to be challenged by Israeli-Jewish societal establishments which presented counter narratives regarding various aspects of the conflict. For example, regarding the 1948 exodus, many scholarly studies (Nets-Zehngut, 2011b) and daily newspaper articles (Nets-Zehngut, in preparation), as well as some 1948 Jewish war veterans’ memoirs (Nets-Zehngut, 2012c) began to present a critical narrative (at times called a "post-Zionist" narrative). According to this narrative, some Palestinians left willingly (e.g., due partially to calls by Arabs or their leadership to leave, as well as to fear and societal collapse), while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli-Jewish fighting forces.
In the late 1980s, this societal change intensified with the commencement of an historical revisionist period commonly called the "New Historians" era. New additional historical studies presented critical counter narratives regarding additional aspects of the Zionist narrative of the conflict, or supported criticism raised earlier. As for the exodus, the historian Benny Morris supported a critical narrative in his comprehensive book (Morris, 1987; hereafter “Birth”)[1]; other studies also provided such support, although less wide in scope (Caplan, 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009). Thus, beginning in the late 1980s and at least until 2004, the critical narrative was, for the most part, the exclusive one among Israeli-Jewish studies (Nets-Zehngut, 2011b). Moreover, the publication of critical newspaper articles also increased from the late 1980s until at least 2004 (vast majority; Nets-Zehngut, in preparation), as did similarly critical 1948 war veterans' memoirs (about a third; Nets-Zehngut, 2012c). Beginning in the 1990s, some history textbooks which were used (without approval) in the educational system began to present the critical narrative (Podeh, 2002).

As for the approach to the exodus of Israeli state establishments, at least until 2004 the IDF and the Information Center (Nets-Zehngut, 2012b; Nets-Zehngut, 2008, respectively) continued to present for the most part the Zionist narrative. The situation in the Ministry of Education, however, was somewhat different (Nets-Zehngut, 2012a). While until 1999 its approved history and civics textbooks presented by and large the Zionist narrative, since 2000 they have presented the critical one (at least until 2004).

The abovementioned more critical era of the societal institutions was an outcome of a gradual shift in Israel, which had started in the 1970s and reached a climax in the late 1980s (e.g., Samocha, 1999; Yadgar, 2005). It was a shift from a strong inclination towards the particularistic pole of nationalism until the 1970s (which largely presented Israel as isolated in a hostile region), towards the universalistic pole. This shift allowed for the construction and the wide dissemination of a narrative which Yadgar (2005) calls a “peace narrative,” regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a narrative generally emphasizes humanistic values and peace, and more specifically – presents Israel in a less exclusively positive way and the Arabs/Palestinians less negatively, and as possible partners for peace[5].

**Methodology**
This article is based mostly on studies – mentioned throughout the article – which are the outcome of a larger project which was conducted between 2005 and 2011. This project examined the presentation, between 1949 and 2004, of the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus, among all of the publications of several Israeli-Jewish institutions: the research community, newspapers,
memoirs of 1948 war veterans, the national Information Center, IDF and the Ministry of Education. All of these publications were written by Jews in Hebrew (exceptionally, studies of the research community written in English were also analyzed), and they were traced in 24 state, public and private archives and libraries as well as in six databases. Some of the main databases are the "ULI" index (which covers the libraries of all the higher education institutions in Israel); the "ISI/Web of Science/Knowledge" database (the main source for academic articles worldwide, mostly in English), and the “Haifa Index” (the main source for academic articles in Hebrew). All of the traced publications underwent content analysis in order to identify the narrative of the exodus which they present (Glassner and Moreno, 1989). That is, the Zionist or the critical narratives, with the expulsion cause differentiating between them (when significant expulsions were mentioned, the memoir was coded as critical, and when they were not mentioned – as Zionist). In total, the project includes 1,076 bibliographical items such as books, academic articles, booklets and newspaper articles. The project also used 96 interviews with 60 key people who worked in all of the institutions during almost the entire research period (for example, prominent scholars, journalists and war veterans). The interviews – with some interviewees more than once – were conducted using semi-constructed questionnaires, allowing the interviewees to comment on various issues on their own initiative (Berg, 2009). Some of the main relevant questions structuring the interviews were: “Why were the publications at hand produced?”; “Were you aware of the critical narrative about the causes of the 1948 exodus?”; “What narrative did you include in the publications?”; “Why did you include in your publications the narrative that they eventually contained?”; and, “What reactions did the manuscripts of the publications (and later the publications themselves) elicit and how do you explain these reactions?”. Thus, the interviewees provided explanations for the way the causes for the exodus were presented in the publications and other relevant dynamics.

The studies that are based on the above project and used here dealt also with certain aspects of the Lydda-Ramla affair, but only in passing -- they did not focus on this affair, but on the 1948 exodus as a whole. Moreover, each of these studies dealt with only a few of these aspects, usually related to only one Israeli institution (e.g., the research community, newspapers, the Ministry of Education, the IDF, the national Information Center, and war veterans’ memoirs), and/or to one period of time. To date, all aspects of the Lydda-Ramla affair – as discussed in studies spanning the entire time since 1949, regarding all relevant institutions – have never been assembled in one study that focuses on this affair. Thus, until now it was not possible to empirically explore the relationship between these aspects and their impact on the memory of this affair and on that of the 1948 exodus at large. Consequently, the theoretical implications of the
empirical findings of all studies relating to this affair as a major event have also never before been explored.

**Lydda and Ramla, 1948**

*The actual events of the 1948 Lydda-Ramla exodus[^7]*

Lydda and Ramla are ancient cities (Ramla dating back to the 8th century and Lydda to 6,000 BC) located between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. They were two of the major Palestinian cities from the commercial, administrative, and population points of view, until 1948. Throughout the 1948 War, including during attacks by the IDF on the two cities beginning on July 9th, some of their residents were fleeing. This was mainly due to fighting, food shortages, and the generally worsening conditions. On July 11th and 12th, the two cities surrendered and were seized by the IDF. Despite this, on July 12th the Palestinians in Lydda attacked the Israeli soldiers, but were quickly crushed, and many of them were killed. Following this, and with the approval of Israel’s Premier, David Ben-Gurion, most of the Palestinians in the two cities – some 50,000 to 60,000 people – were expelled toward the areas controlled by the Arab forces. Only a minority of Palestinians, about 1,000, who were mostly Christians or those who had collaborated with the IDF, were allowed to stay (Kadish, Sela and Golan, 2000; Morris, 2004). Let us now explore the way in which this exodus was presented by Israeli-Jews.

*The representation of the 1948 Lydda-Ramla exodus*

The way in which the case study was represented in Israel from 1949 to 2005[^8] is divided into two main periods: from 1949 to the end of the 1960s, and from the beginning of the 1970s to 2005. During the first period, Israeli-Jewish establishments presented exclusively the Zionist narrative of the Lydda-Ramla affair. They argued that the Palestinians left Lydda and Ramla willingly, at times in response to orders from the Arab/Palestinian leadership. Occasionally they also asserted that the Israeli-Jews asked the Palestinians to stay, but that they refused. These assertions were intended to show that the Israeli-Jews did not want the Palestinians to leave (and therefore surely did not expel them).

The Zionist attitude during the first period was demonstrated by both societal and state establishments. Among *societal* establishments, this attitude was manifested, for instance, through studies by the research community (historical memory; Nets-Zehngut, 2011b) and memoirs by Jewish 1948 war veterans (autobiographical memory; Nets-Zehngut, 2012c). For example, Yerucham Cohen, a 1948 war veteran, writes in his 1969 book: “The citizens of the city [Lydda …] asked, according to the orders of the Arab leadership, permission to leave the city and
go to the area controlled by the Jordanian legion […] In response they were told [by the IDF] that if they respect the Israeli law no harm would be done to them and they could stay in their places, but they insisted [on leaving]. The same day and the following one, more than 30,000 residents of Lydda passed the lines [to the Jordanian-controlled area]. The residents of Ramla did the same” (Cohen, 1969, 160). The state establishments, such as the Ministry of Education and the IDF (i.e., official memory; Nets-Zehngut, 2012a, 2012b), provided the same account of the case.

During the second period, beginning in the 1970s, various societal establishments began to crack the Zionist hegemony, mostly toward the end of that decade. This was done via newspaper articles in the five main dailies (cultural memory; Nets-Zehngut, in preparation), memoirs of Jewish 1948 war veterans (Nets-Zehngut, 2012c), and via studies by the research community (Nets-Zehngut, 2011b).

As for the newspapers, in 1972, for example, Arie Yitschaky wrote in a newspaper article that the people of Lydda and Ramla partly fled and partly were expelled (Yitschaky, 1972). Later, in 1978, a controversy surrounding the "Hirbet Hiza" film erupted. This film describes the 1948 expulsion of the residents of a Palestinian village. It was produced by Israeli-Jews, and was to be broadcast on the Israeli national television channel – as it eventually was. The media dealt extensively with questions as to whether the film should be broadcasted, and whether expulsions did take place in 1948 (Gertz, 1983; Shapira, 2000). Most of the newspaper articles claimed that they did take place, some asserting this specifically regarding Lydda and Ramla (Nets-Zehngut, in preparation).

The following year, 1979, saw the eruption of a controversy that focused on the Lydda-Ramla affair. At that time the memoir "Pinkas Sheirut" (Hebrew for "Notes of Service") was published by Yitzhak Rabin, a mid-level officer in 1948 and later Israel’s Premier until 1977, prior to the memoir’s publication. In the draft of his memoir, Rabin included a section describing the expulsion of the residents of the cities of Lydda-Ramla in response to an order from David Ben-Gurion to him and his direct commander, Yigal Allon. This section was censored, but leaked to the Israeli media and reached a wide audience. The newspapers (and the media at large) presented Rabin’s version of the expulsion extensively, usually along with Yigal Allon’s version that claimed that expulsion did not take place (e.g., Alon, 1979; and in general: Nets-Zehngut, in preparation; Kidron, 2001; Shapira, 2000).

This controversy had a huge impact on Israel, since it was the first time the expulsion in Lydda and Ramla had penetrated so significantly into the public sphere. On the one hand, it significantly reduced the level of taboo regarding the discussion of the 1948 expulsions in connection with various other Palestinian localities. As Uri Avnery, a 1948 war veteran and a
leading peace activist and journalist, said: “No doubt that Rabin broke a taboo which existed all the time [regarding not mentioning the 1948 expulsions]” (Avnery, 2008, 2; see also Tishler, 2008). The impact of this was two-fold (Nets-Zehngut, in preparation, 2012c)[9]. First, it caused people such as war veterans, journalists and scholars to feel freer to publically mention the 1948 Lydda-Ramla expulsions, as well as the expulsions in other localities. Second, Rabin’s censored section was often mentioned in newspaper articles, scholarly studies and war veterans’ memoirs as proof of this expulsion, and contradicted the inclusive Zionist narrative of willing-flight. After 1979, at least until 2004, most newspaper articles mentioning Lydda and Ramla claimed that expulsion did take place (Nets-Zehngut, in preparation). On the other hand, the controversy increased the *centrality* in Israel of the exodus. More discussion of the inclusive exodus began to take place, especially involving Lydda-Ramla (and, as previously mentioned, this discussion became more critical).

Following Rabin’s memoir controversy, memoirs related to the Lydda-Ramla expulsion by other war veterans, were published. Examples include: David Ben-Gurion’s in 1982 and 1986, Amir Rafael and Magen Amnon’s in 1989, Shnuel (Mula) Cohen’s in 2000, and Uri Yarom’s in 2001[10].


Thus, since the late 1980s, the vast majority of internal and external studies that have addressed the Lydda-Ramla affair have related to the expulsion of the residents of these two cities (Nets-Zehngut, 2011b).

A significant development that occurred in late 1988 was an article published by Benny Morris in the American semi-academic journal “Tikkun.” Morris claimed that until recently, internal and external Jewish historians writing about the Zionist movement and the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict were “Old Historians.” They provided distorted historical narratives aimed at presenting Israel positively, that were less accurate than those from the late 1980s
provided by the “New Historians,” including Morris himself. To illustrate this argument, Morris starts the article with the Lydda-Ramla affair and uses it as his main example, juxtaposing the Old Historians’ Zionist narrative of the affair (e.g., that of Natanel Lorech and Elchanan Oren) with the critical one presented in the censored section of Rabin’s memoir (Morris, 1988).

The article had several important effects. Of the two major ones, first and foremost was its bringing the wave of critical studies by the New Historians to public awareness. Thus, mostly until the mid 1990s, this critical phenomenon, its causes, characteristics and impacts, were highly prevalent in the Israeli-Jewish public sphere. Thereby, the article contributed to the resonance, dissemination and impact of critical studies in general, and specifically of those related to the 1948 exodus. Consequently, the Israeli-Jewish collective memory of the conflict became more critical regarding certain aspects (Bar-On, 2004; Caplan, 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009). Second, this article was the direct cause for the eruption of the controversy between Shabtai Teveth and the article’s author Benny Morris, which took place in the renowned Israeli newspaper “Ha’aretz” and in international academic publications in 1989-1990. The controversy – initiated by Teveth, a leading historian who probably saw himself as one of the Old Historians and who felt it his duty to come to their defense – centered on aspects of the 1948 War, including the Palestinian exodus. It was the major historical controversy that Benny Morris encountered after publishing his 1987 book. In the current context this controversy is important, since Teveth explicitly agreed that expulsion took place in 1948. Coming from him, this strongly supported the critical narrative of the exodus (Nets-Zehngut, 2012e).

In contrast to the above widespread societal change since the 1970s, as the Lydda-Ramla expulsion began to be significantly discussed, some state establishments, such as the national Information Center[12] and the IDF (Nets-Zehngut, 2012b; Nets-Zehngut, 2008, respectively) continued to present the Zionist narrative at least until 2004. Until 2000 this was also true in Ministry of Education approved textbooks (Nets-Zehngut, 2012a). However, since 2000 there has been a shift. A history textbook written by Ktsiya Tavivian and approved at the time by the Ministry, described the Lydda-Ramla expulsion (Tavivian, 1999). Similarly, in 2005, the Israeli National Archive published a book with documents pertaining to the late Premier Yitzhak Rabin, describing the Lydda-Ramla expulsion (Rosental, 2005).

Summary and discussion

The Lydda-Ramla affair has been a (sub) major event in the Israeli-Jewish memory of the inclusive 1948 Palestinian exodus. Its characteristics, however, differed between its two periods. During the first period (1949-1969), via each of three types of memories (historical,
autobiographical and official), this affair was seen by Israeli-Jews as one among several events in various localities whose residents left willingly. In some other localities, such as Haifa and Jaffa, however, the number of Palestinians affected by the exodus was similar to that in Lydda and Ramla. Thus, this affair was not of particular note during the first period, since it was not viewed as unique to its locality. Its medium co-salience is demonstrated by the fact that compared to events in most other localities (such as villages), the Lydda-Ramla affair has been discussed more often and more extensively (e.g., in an entire paragraph or book chapter). Therefore, it had a somewhat significant Zionist impact on the Israeli-Jewish memory of the inclusive 1948 exodus. It served as a typical event of memory of conflicts, a particularistic one: positively portraying the Israeli-Jews as not expelling Palestinians. It was part of the national dominant narrative of the exodus.

During the second period (1970-2005), however, the situation changed dramatically. All types of discussed memories (historical, autobiographical, cultural and official) began to feature the expulsion of Lydda and Ramla. Suddenly the affair was considered to be unique: as the major event of the inclusive 1948 exodus; as the major example of the counter-critical narrative of that exodus. This was part of a general shift in Israel from the hegemony in the national narrative of the particularistic inclination to a more universalistic one. The affair’s salience manifested itself in a number of ways. It was discussed even more often than before, and at more length -- for example, in featured newspaper and academic articles (Nets-Zehngut, 2012c, in preparation; Nets-Zehngut, 2011b). In addition, due to its enhanced salience, Peretz Kidron, the English translator of Rabin’s memoir, sent the censored section to “The New York Times,” and from there it boomeranged back to the Israeli media (Kidron, 2001). Furthermore, Yigal Allon ignited controversy surrounding the censored section of the memoir. Most likely Allon would not have done this had the expulsion in question been on a smaller scale, such as in a small village. The above actions of Kidron and Allon both exemplified and promoted the Lydda-Ramla affair’s salience. As we saw, these actions led to the Rabin controversy, which reduced the taboo surrounding the discussion of the expulsion in Lydda-Ramla, as well as of those conducted in other localities. It increased the centrality in Israel of the 1948 Palestinian exodus as well. These influences merged with similar influences, such as the “Hirbet Hiza” controversy, and later with the publication of critical document-supported studies. Thus, since the late 1970s, more and more studies, newspaper articles, and memoirs have been published discussing the Lydda-Ramla expulsion, among others.

Thus, the Lydda-Ramla affair became the most important event contributing to the transformation of the Israeli memory of the inclusive 1948 exodus, from Zionist to critical (a
transformation described in the “Background” section). This is why, for example, Benny Morris chose this affair as the only local affair to which he dedicated a whole article (his 1986 article – Morris, 1986, that was among several articles he published about the 1948 exodus in the mid-1980s). This is also why Morris used this affair as his first and most important example in his “Tikkun” article, in which he attacked the “old Zionist historians.” As described above, the latter article was important in bringing the wave of New Historians’ critical studies to public awareness, thereby contributing to the overall critical trend in Israel. It was also the direct cause of the Teveth-Morris controversy, which supported the critical narrative of the exodus. This shift occurred also in state establishments, which produce the official memory of the State of Israel as well. When, in 2000, a textbook approved by the Ministry of Education mentioned the 1948 expulsions, and when the National Archive did so in 2005, the only specific localities they mentioned were Lydda and Ramla.

The Lydda-Ramla case study makes a variety of theoretical contributions.

1. The manifestation characteristics of a major event. The abovementioned ways in which the Lydda-Ramla affair has been discussed since 1949 can be theoretically conceptualized as the general ways in which a major event manifests itself. Five such manifestation aspects are suggested: (1) The frequency with which the event is discussed in the public sphere – is it discussed, for example, in many newspaper articles and scholarly studies or in just a few of them? (2) The scope to which the event is discussed in the public sphere – is it discussed, for example, in length or briefly, in entire scholarly articles and books or in only one sentence? (3) Leakage to the media – do the event and its narratives leak to the media even though legally they are forbidden to be discussed publically? (4) Public controversy – do public controversies erupt regarding the historical narratives of this event? (5) The context in which the event is discussed, which refers to what is being said about the major event -- is it discussed as an important event or as a marginal one?

2. The influence characteristics of a major event. The two periods that divide the representation of the Lydda-Ramla affair were very different. During the first period, when societal and state establishments almost exclusively presented the inaccurate Zionist narrative, the affair had some salience in supporting the dominant Zionist narrative of the inclusive 1948 exodus. During the second period, however, when these establishments began to significantly present the event as expulsion, the Lydda-Ramla affair gained even more salience. This time, however, the narrative was more accurate, one that challenged the dominant Zionist narrative.

Thus, theoretically, a major event can also be characterized by its influence on the memory of a conflict, divided into two main concepts: (1) The direction of its impact – whether
the major event supports a dominant narrative or counter/alternative narratives. In our case, discussion of the Lydda-Ramla affair initially supported the dominant Zionist narrative of the inclusive 1948 exodus exclusively, but later the same affair was used to challenge this narrative. (2) The *extent* of its impact – the impact that an event has on the memory of its larger context (in our case, the inclusive 1948 exodus). This spectrum of impact moves from somewhat significant to broad. The spectrum actually reflects to what extent an event is “major” in the memory realm. In this case, the Lydda-Ramla affair initially had a somewhat significant impact on the memory of the inclusive 1948 exodus, but later a major impact. The integrated influences of these two concepts, in different combinations, determine the characteristics of the impact an event has on the memory of a conflict.

3. *Interim summary – the manifestation and influence characteristics of a major event.*

The table below assembles these two types of characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifestation Characteristics</th>
<th>Influence Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of discussion</td>
<td>Direction of impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of discussion</td>
<td>Extent of impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic of leakage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic of controversy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Context of discussion</td>
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The Manifestation Characteristics can be used as the “operationalization” of a major event, ways to identify events that *might* be major in the memory realm. However, determining whether an event is *actually* a major one depends on the Influence Characteristics. Nonetheless, these two types of characteristics – Manifestation and Influence – are interconnected, and thus typically they will become symbiotic (i.e., an event that is discussed widely will tend to have a significant impact on the memory itself). The direction of influence between the two types of characteristics is mutual: for example, the fact that an event has significant impact will increase the frequency and scope of its discussion, while more frequent and wider discussion will raise the impact of the event.

4. *The factors that determine the Manifestation and Influence characteristics of a major event.* The factors that contribute to the Manifestation and Influence Characteristics of the Lydda-Ramla affair are divided into two categories: those that refer to the affair’s past (1948,
when the exodus took place), and those that refer to its present implications (after the affair took place).

The past factors refer to the actual facts of the Lydda-Ramla exodus, and there are three such relevant facts: (1) There were a large number of involved Palestinians, from two important cities. (2) After the two cities were conquered by the IDF, most of their residents were expelled, an act which had major negative significance for the Palestinians and the international community. According to major Israeli-Jewish sources (those that most Israeli-Jews view as credible and therefore relevant to the current discussion), the affair was the only large-scale exodus that involved expulsion (Morris 1987, 2004). Integrated with the first fact, this second fact acquires additional significance: not only did the Lydda-Ramla exodus involve the largest scale expulsion in 1948 (compared to that of other localities), it was also large in absolute numbers. As such, it challenged both the Zionist particularistic narrative of the Lydda-Ramla exodus and that of the inclusive 1948 exodus. This means that many Palestinians were also expelled in 1948 and that not all of them left willingly; (3) The expulsion was personally authorized by Ben-Gurion, the actual commander of the IDF and Israel’s Premier, as opposed to a local low-level commander. This implies the possibility that expulsions may have taken place also in other localities in 1948 under implicit or explicit orders from Ben-Gurion or his assistants.

Theoretically, these three specific factors can be conceptualized as the following integrated general factor: characteristics of the major event, which refers to the features of the event, or what actually happened. This would include, for example, the number of people involved (the more people involved, the greater an event’s impact); the severity of the activities that occurred during the event (e.g., looting Palestinian property is decidedly less severe than expelling people); and the identities of people involved (the more senior the involved people, the greater the impact).

Moving to the present-context factors, these include macro factors (those that pertain, for example, to wide-scale societal and political processes), and micro factors (those that pertain to more minor aspects, in our case, the Rabin memoir controversy).

The macro factors consist of both those that promoted the presentation of the less accurate particularistic Zionist narrative during the first period, as well as those that promoted the presentation of the more accurate universalistic critical narrative during the second period. These factors are composed of social, economic and political developments that occurred in Israel over the years as discussed in various studies (Bar-On, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2007; Caplan, 2010; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009; Mathias, 2003; Nets-Zehngut, 2012f; Shapira, 2000).
Largely, until the 1970s, Israel was involved in the conflict, and despite gaining victories, its citizens generally felt insecure regarding the State’s existence. This promoted collectivism and conformism among Israeli-Jews. In addition, the security threat combined with initial major economic difficulties highlighted the need to mobilize the citizens to cope with these challenges, to be patriotic, and to contribute their share to the struggle. At the same time, the Palestinians were not central in the Israeli-Jewish public sphere until the late 1960s-early 1970s, resulting in limited research and public discussion about them (see below). In addition, publicly describing the critical narratives was prohibited, since it was perceived as providing the Arabs/Palestinians with ammunition in their international diplomatic struggle with Israel. Since 1949, this struggle has centered on demands that the Palestinian refugees should return to Israel and that Israel should retreat from areas it has seized.

Furthermore, Israeli-Jewish society had a few major relevant characteristics: (1) It was oriented toward collectivism and conformism due to the social background of its Ashkenazi elite (those coming from Europe); to the threat of the conflict described above; and to the traditional characteristics of the majority, from Eastern Europe and Arab countries (that constituted the massive immigration to Israel after its foundation). All of these factors significantly prevented critical thinking and activity and led to low political tolerance; (2) The Israeli-Jewish media was largely controlled by the state or political parties – completely, in the case of radio and television (operating as of the late 1960s), and to a large extent where major newspapers were concerned. This prevented dissemination of critical ideas and information; (3) The "Mapai" political party, and its successor, "Ma'arach," were in power from 1948 until 1977. They were very much aligned with, and supported by, the Israeli social elite (e.g., scholars, journalists and authors) -- who were thus less inclined to object the Zionist narratives and the ideology supported by these parties.

In contrast, from the 1970s until today, critical narratives, universalistic in their nature, have gradually become more acceptable in Israel as a result of many changes. Israel has become more secure in its existence, due to its economic and military strengthening, the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, and the peace talks of the 1990s (including the 1994 peace agreement with Jordan). Consequently, there has been less need to mobilize the citizens. In addition, the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1982 Lebanon War raised wide societal criticism against the political and military Israeli-Jewish elites, promoting general societal criticism. Furthermore, the centrality of the Palestinians increased, reaching its peak with the eruption of the 1987 Intifada – leading to a higher prevalence of the Palestinians in public and academic spheres. Simultaneously, the extent of taboo surrounding the critical narratives decreased, due to the decrease of the Arab/Palestinian campaign against Israel.
Moreover, various processes have transformed the Israeli-Jewish society: (1) It has become less collectivist and conformist, and more individualistic and critically-oriented. This is due to a generational turnover, in which the 1948 generation – the more conservative and Zionist-oriented generation – gradually gave more control to the younger more open generation. Other reasons for this shift include a decrease in the threat of the conflict, as well as the influence of the less traditional second generation of Jewish immigrants. In addition, Americanization (and later globalization) processes occurred, promoting individualism, human rights, pluralism, and critical thinking. Social rifts as well (based on religion, economic status or origin) emerged or were enhanced, leading to fragmentation of the society. (2) Beginning in the mid-1970s, the major newspapers became more privately owned and commercially oriented, and by the mid-1990s they became exclusively so. In addition, Israel in the mid-1990s experienced a wide deregulation of electronic media, leading to the creation of dozens of new radio and television channels. All of these media related changes have led to a wider dissemination of critical ideas and information. (3) In 1977, a political turnover took place in which the "Ma'arach" party was replaced by the "Likud" party. This led to a rift between the state establishments and the social elite, and made the latter feel freer to be critical. (4) With regard to academia in Israel, three processes took place. First, a generational turnover among scholars occurred; second, critical theories (e.g., postmodernism and multi-culturalism developed in western academia) gained more influence; and third, Israeli archival documents regarding the 1948 War and other subsequent events began to be declassified in the early 1980s, allowing for the publication of studies that supported critical narratives. All of the four integrated changes above increased political tolerance and universalism in Israel, and led to the wider presence and acceptance of the critical narratives.

Theoretically, the specific abovementioned phenomena can be conceptualized as the following six general macro factors: (1) characteristics of the conflict; (2) the centrality of the context of the event; (3) characteristics of the in-group’s society (e.g., the extent of political tolerance and characteristics of the media); (4) characteristics of the party in power within the in-group; (5) characteristics of the international status of the in-group; and (6) the passage of time (which can lead to generational turnover and the declassification of archival documents).

Moving on, there are three micro factors, which relate to Rabin’s memoir: (1) Rabin was Israel’s Premier prior to the publication of his memoir and the leak of its censored section. As such, he was a central figure in Israel with high credibility, facts which contributed to the resonance and wide acceptance of his version of the Lydda-Ramla affair (among many, e.g., see Adar, 1981; Tishler, 2008). (2) The fact that Rabin’s section was censored also contributed to its resonance and wide acceptance. People are compelled by possibilities of hearing new things,
especially if those things are perceived to be secret (Melman, 2007; Zamir, 2007). Moreover, being aware of the general taboo in Israel against discussing the 1948 expulsions, many people could have been led to think that Rabin’s version was the accurate one. A headline on a 1981 newspaper article discussing the censored section demonstrates this point, saying: “Rabin Reveals what is Forbidden” (Adar, 1981; Nets-Zehngut, in preparation). (3) The controversy that erupted after the publication of the censored section – mostly due to Yigal Allon’s rejection of Rabin’s version – also contributed to the section’s resonance. It was widely discussed in the media, the Israeli parliament, and among the public. Since prior to this controversy descriptions of 1948 expulsions were hardly ever mentioned by Israeli-Jews in the public sphere, the expulsion cause of the Lydda-Ramla exodus benefited highly from this public exposure.[18]

Theoretically, these three specific micro factors can be conceptualized as the following integrated general factor: characteristics of the exposing occasion. This factor refers to the first time a counter narrative of a major event significantly penetrates the public sphere and challenges the hegemony of a dominant narrative. Examples of characteristics of the exposing occasion include: characteristics of the person who exposes the counter narrative – the group he belongs to, his seniority and credibility (if he is an in-group person with high seniority and credibility, the exposure will have a stronger impact); occurrences following exposure of the counter narrative, such as leaking of a censored text to the public sphere or eruption of a public controversy (such a leak or controversy will usually increase the impact); and the type of evidence that supports the counter narrative (primary evidence such as testimony originating from the in-group will typically generate a greater impact than secondary out-group evidence).

The following table assembles the eight factors that determine the Manifestation and Influence Characteristics of a major event.
Table 2 – The Determining Factors of a Major Event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past-Context Factors</th>
<th>Present-Context Factors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the major event</td>
<td>Macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conflict</td>
<td>The conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality of topic</td>
<td>Centrality of topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>The society</td>
<td>The society</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ruling party</td>
<td>The ruling party</td>
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<tr>
<td>The international status</td>
<td>The international status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The passage of time</td>
<td>The passage of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Micro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exposing occasion</td>
<td>The exposing occasion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cumulative impact of these eight factors determines the Manifestation and Influence characteristics. Among these factors, four have an especially strong impact: characteristics of the major event, the conflict, the society, and the international status.

5. The dynamic nature of the memory of a major event. As we saw, the impact of the Lydda-Ramla affair on the Israeli-Jewish memory, and its direction, have both changed over the years. That is, there was a double dynamic in the representation of this event. This was an outcome of the various factors discussed above. This phenomenon reflects another theoretical characteristic of the memory of a major event: its dynamic nature.¹⁹

In conclusion, the Lydda-Ramla affair has been a (sub) major event in the Israeli-Jewish memory of the inclusive 1948 Palestinian exodus – the central historical event in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The above described dynamics of the affair are a significant indicator of the shift in Israel since the 1970s from the particularistic pole in the national narrative realm, to a more universalistic one. The description of the affair’s dynamics – assembling them as they are presented partially, in passing, and separately in many studies – constitutes the empirical contribution of the article. Without the assembly of all this data, the dynamics of this affair could not have been explored. Based on these empirical findings, the article contributes new insights to the theoretical understanding of major events, addressing the lack of such insights in literature about collective memory of conflicts in general, and particularly about collective conflict management. The article introduces the five Manifestation Characteristics and the two Influence Characteristics of major events of conflicts, the eight determinant factors that shape the impact of these events, and the dynamic nature of the representation of major events – all of them theoretical aspects of major events of conflicts that have not been yet discussed in the literature.

The findings of this article contribute to the promotion of conflict management in collective conflicts worldwide. Consequently, or in addition, they contribute to the possibility of
peaceful resolution of a conflict, and in the post-conflict phase – to the rivals’ reconciliation (thereby decreasing the possibility that the conflict will erupt again). These widespread possible uses of the findings are an outcome of the significant impact of the collective memory of conflicts on the psychological reactions of the rivals, and consequently – on their behavior. The potential contributions of these findings are also an outcome of the focus in this article on major events of conflicts -- which are those that most significantly influence the memories of rivals.

Specifically, the article’s findings allow for the identification of those historical conflict events that are central in their impact on the collective memory of the conflict among the rivals (using the suggested five Manifestation Characteristics of major events). Moreover, the nature of the impact of these identified events on the memory of the societies can be analyzed, using the suggested two Influence Characteristics of major events (direction and extent). Additionally, the suggested factors that determine the Manifestation and Influence Characteristics of a major event – past and present (macro and micro) – can help in two ways. First, they increase understanding of the reasons why an event is major, and second, they present factors that assist in addressing that event in such a way that will increase its desired impact as a major event (e.g., exposing the truth about it by a central and credible person in that society).

Finally, the analysis of the dynamic nature of major events brings up the possibility of transforming the way in which major events are presented in order to use them as vehicles for promoting conflict management, peace, and reconciliation. For example, this can be done by deliberately exposing a difficult truth about a central topic that was presented until then in a biased manner in favor of the ingroup. All of these methods can be used by third parties as well as unilaterally and bilaterally, to promote positive changes in the collective memory of rivals. These methods can be used, in addition, by state and societal institutions, in official publications and speeches, as well as by educational textbooks and curricula, cultural channels, scholarly studies and the media.
Notes

1 That is, more universalistic in its inclination.

2 There are various Zionist narratives. The article focuses on the political Zionist narrative which was dominant in Israel in the first period after its establishment.


4 Morris – an Israeli-Jew who received his PhD at Cambridge University – is a central scholar in researching the 1948 Palestinian exodus. His 1987 book was the first to focus on the exodus while being based on a broad selection of archival documents, considering most of the Palestinian localities in detail. Since 1987 he has published many other studies about the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, none however as pioneering as his first book. Initially he had basically dovish political inclinations, to the extent of refusing to serve as an IDF reserve soldier in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some of his critics at that time therefore argued that his political attitudes led to biased critical scholarly findings. Since the early 2000s, however, he began expressing more hawkish leanings, for instance in his views on the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 (Rappoport, 2001; Shavit, 2004).

5 For the causes of this shift see in the “Summary and discussion” section, point 4 (The factors that determine the Manifestation and Influence characteristics of a major event), the macro factors.

6 For a complete list of the sources see Nets-Zehngut, 2011c.

7 The description below is based on consensual Israeli-Jewish sources that present a critical version of the actual exodus of the residents of Lydda and Ramla, supported by many documents and testimonies. Israeli-Jewish sources are chosen here since they most significantly influence the Israeli-Jewish memory of the conflict, including that of the exodus. It should be noted, that there is disagreement among Israeli-Jewish scholars with regard to other aspects of the events in Lydda in 1948, including: whether or not a massacre took place after the seizure of the city, and whether the expulsion of its residents was premeditated or simply a consequence of a complex and ill-conducted battle (Kadish and Sela, 2005).

8 From right after the end of the 1948 War until 2005, the time until which there is relevant data.
See also, for example, the paragraph below about Benny Morris’ article in “Tikkun” mentioning this censored section.

For the full details of the books, see: Nets-Zehngut, 2012c. The descriptions of the expulsion in Ben-Gurion’s memoirs were added by their editors, Gershon Ryvlin and Elchanan Oren.

In the Kimche and Kimche book, only John was “external.” Kurzman described expulsion only in Lydda and Sachar, describing tough psychological warfare that the Israeli-Jews conducted against the residents of the two cities, encouraging them to leave.

The Information Center started mentioning the 1948 exodus only in 1968 (due to the low centrality in Israel of the Palestinians until that time) and the Lydda-Ramla affair only in the 1970s.

Based on the current consensus among Israeli-Jewish scholars, the assumption of this article is that the critical narrative surrounding the actual occurrences in 1948 in Lydda and Ramla is more accurate than the Zionist narrative.

This direction has implication for the accuracy of the description of the major event. Typically, as discussed above, a dominant narrative is significantly biased and inaccurate. Thus, when a major event is used to challenge the hegemony of a dominant narrative, this will be done while providing a more accurate narrative; and the reverse. Indeed, the Lydda-Ramla affair was eventually presented more accurately than initially.

The spectrum does not start from a “no impact” point, otherwise the event would not be regarded from the start as “major.”

Despite setbacks due to the eruptions of two Palestinian Intifadas in 1987 and 2000.

“Centrality” refers to the presence of a topic in the public sphere, and the degree to which that topic gets the public's attention (Bar-Tal, Raviv and Freund, 1994).

A comment should be provided about the last two factors, two and three (censorship and controversy): they had an impact, since resonance and dissemination are highly important in memory dynamics. For example, when Michael Bar-Zohar discussed the Lydda-Ramla expulsion while citing Rabin in his 1977 book, there was no resonance to it (Nets-Zehngut, 2012c).
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