



Controversies of Historical Narratives of Conflicts: The Israeli Case of the Palestinian Refugee Problem

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Abstract

Collective memory of intractable conflicts significantly influences these conflicts. It is composed of the historical narratives of the conflicts, narratives which are often addressed in controversies regarding their accuracy and use. These controversies significantly affect the extent to which these narratives are adopted in the given society/country. To date, however, many theoretical aspects of such controversies have not been addressed in the literature and this also holds true for empirical features of historical controversies in Israel with regard to the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian (“conflict”). This article addresses these shortcomings.

Methodologically, the article uses content analysis of publications and interviews with key people in the institutions that produced these publications. *Empirically*, the article for the first time assembles all the main historical controversies taking place in Israel from 1949 to 2004 with regard to the major historical event in the conflict: the Nakba/1948 Palestinian exodus (“exodus”). Additionally, *empirically*, and *theoretically*, the article offers these contributions: a typology of controversies (inter- vs. intra-group, societal vs. state, public vs. private, and public – concrete vs. general), a description of their four aspects (historical, instrumental, interpretational and methodological), a discussion of controversy consequences, and a description of the factors that determine their importance in the memory realm.

Introduction

Collective conflicts are a common phenomenon worldwide. Of special importance are the *intractable* conflicts: the violent ones that last for at least several decades, perceived as unsolvable and zero sum, involving members of the rival societies in profound ways. These conflicts concern concrete issues that must be addressed, such as

territories and natural resources.¹ However, these conflicts also involve collective memory (CM) pertaining to the conflict.²

This CM plays a significant role in shaping the psychological reactions of the rival parties and consequently their behavior (in addition to a direct impact of the memory on behavior).³ The content of this memory is constructed in historical narratives whose adoption in a society is significantly influenced by controversies. More specifically, supporters of contradicting narratives surrounding an event in a conflict dispute which narrative is the accurate one. "Winning" such a controversy promotes the prevalence of the winning narrative in the CM. Consequently, controversies significantly influence national and international politics pertaining to conflicts indirectly, via the collective memory. Despite their importance, to date various empirical, and especially theoretical, aspects of controversies regarding historical narratives have not yet been properly addressed in the literature. This article addresses this gap while relating to the controversies which have broken out in Israel regarding the historical narratives of the 1948 Palestinian exodus.

¹ Auerbach 2009.

² Tint 2010.

³ Paez and Liu, 2016.

Theoretical Background

Collective Memory

The study of CM in general, and especially that of conflicts, has recently attracted substantial scholarly attention worldwide. This is due to the realization of the major impact of memory on human life.⁴ CM is generally defined as representations of the past of a group, assembled in narratives, which are adopted by a group.⁵ “Narrative” refers to a story about event/s occurring over time that has a plot with a clear starting point and endpoint and provides sequential and causal coherence.⁶

CM is a general category which includes various types of (sub) memories. The main relevant ones are (Nets-Zehngut 2011b): 1) *Popular* memory, defined as representations of the past held by society members, best documented directly by public opinion surveys. It significantly influences the psychological reactions (e.g., emotions, ethos, political attitudes, and identity) and the behavioral reactions of the people holding it, and therefore is accorded great importance. 2) *Official* memory, meaning the representations of the past adopted by the formal institutions of the society. In many cases these institutions refer to *state* institutions and therefore the article focuses on them, recognizing that official memory is also perpetuated in societies that do not have their own country (e.g., minority groups). This memory is manifested, for instance, by publications of state ministries and the army, national museums and monuments, and textbooks approved for use in the educational system. 3) *Autobiographical* memory refers to people who experienced the discussed events firsthand. This is a primary source for the past (in addition to documents) and is therefore usually accorded importance. It is manifested in various ways, such as memoirs and testimonies. 4) *Historical* memory is the way the research community⁷ – scholars from the academy as well as independent scholars – views the events of the past in its studies. 5) *Cultural* memory is the way the society remembers its past via newspapers, films, buildings, etc. The significance of the latter four types of memories is mostly that they influence the popular memory (the importance of which has been explained above).⁸ In addition, the official memory has its own significant importance: it represents countries internationally, and it thereby influences their stand in the international community and in their relations with their rivals (where conflicts are involved).⁹

The CM of an *intractable conflict* includes the historical narratives held by a party to a conflict that describe its eruption and its major events. These narratives typically touch on four main themes: justification of the conflict’s outbreak (when the in-group initiated the conflict) and its course; de-legitimization of the rival;

⁴ Auerbach 2009, Devine-Wright 2003.

⁵ Kansteiner 2002.

⁶ Bruner 1990.

⁷ A term defined by Nets-Zehngut, 2011a.

⁸ Nets-Zehngut 2011b, Paez and Liu 2016.

⁹ Ben-Joseph Hirsch 2007, Connerton 2009.

positive image of the in-group; and presentation of the in-group as the sole victim of the conflict. The narratives are typically selective and biased, and thus provide a simplistic and black-white outlook. They play an active role in the course of conflict by shaping the abovementioned psychological and behavioral reactions of the party usually in a distorted manner, positively towards itself and negatively towards its rival.¹⁰

The biased characteristics of the typical narratives and memory of a conflict are usually considered as functional during its climax. They provide each party with the socio-psychological basis needed to meet the enormous challenges that the conflict demands (e.g., creating patriotic citizens who are willing to fight for their countries), as well as promoting the country internationally. These characteristics, however, eventually also inhibit the de-escalation of the conflict, its peaceful resolution, and reconciliation between the parties. For example, how can society members trust their rivals enough to sign a peace agreement with them, when the historical narratives portray their rivals so negatively. Thus, the more significantly a party's memory is transformed to hold less biased narratives – when there is factual basis for such a transformation, and usually there is – the greater the chances will be for peace and reconciliation.¹¹ However, such a transformation is difficult to implement, and controversies are one of the main mechanisms¹² that allow for these transformations to take place. Thus, let us now address controversies.

Controversies about Historical Narratives

These controversies occur when two or more narratives compete for supremacy in the memory sphere (e.g., in order for more people to adopt them in their *popular* memory or so that more state institutions – which maintain the *official* memory – will present them in their formal publications). The controversies relate to various topics such as nationalism, identity, civil religion and multiculturalism.¹³ They are more common, though, and attract the most scholarly attention, when they address *conflicts*, broadly defined to include inter- and intra-state conflicts, totalitarian regimes, genocide and social rifts. The current article focuses onward on controversies about historical narratives of *conflicts*.

Such controversies occur all over the globe and address various aspects of conflicts.¹⁴ For example, the literature discusses controversies between France and Algeria, regarding torture of Algerians by the French in the 1954-1962 French-Algerian War;¹⁵ in Germany, regarding the extent of cooperation of the ordinary Germans with the Nazis in executing Jews (the Goldhagen controversy);¹⁶ between Japan and South Korea and China

¹⁰ Paez and Liu 2011, Tint 2010.

¹¹ Auerbach 2009, Lustick 2006, Paez and Liu 2016.

¹² Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal 2014.

¹³ For example, Anderson 2006, Berger 2005, Hazareesingh 2009.

¹⁴ For a description of many such controversies see Nave and Yogev 2002.

¹⁵ Berger 2005, Macmaster 2002.

¹⁶ Hasian and Frank 1999, Rensmann 1999.

regarding Japanese imperialistic activities and atrocities from 1937 against the Chinese and later against the Koreans;¹⁷ in South Africa, regarding the commemoration of Apartheid history in Freedom Park;¹⁸ in Russia, regarding the commemoration of World War II in Moscow's Victory Park;¹⁹ and in the U.S., regarding the massacre of Native-Americans at Wounded Knee in 1890,²⁰ or about the Enola Gay exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum dealing with the bombing of Hiroshima in World War II.²¹

These controversies occur because people are aware of the major importance of CM.²² As Foucault explains, memory is a major factor in social conflicts; controlling the public memory leads to controlling also its behavior. This is why the elite protects the hegemony of the dominant narrative that fits its interests (usually a typically biased narrative of conflict), against any counter narratives (often less biased narratives that provide a more balanced and accurate, and less self-serving version of the conflict) that are aimed at challenging this hegemony.²³

Controversies occur in various platforms, such as the media, the research community, the courts (e.g., in Japan there has been a 30-year legal battle by historian Ienaga Sabur to include a critical description of Japan's past in its history textbooks),²⁴ Senate committees (e.g., in 1992, the Canadian Senate subcommittee on veterans' affairs discussed "The Valour and the Horror," a documentary series about World War II),²⁵ museums (e.g., the mid-1990s Enola Gay exhibition),²⁶ and Ministries of Education (e.g., controversies about history curricula and textbooks since the 1980s in Britain, Australia and Canada, and mainly since the 1990s in the U.S., Russia and several East European countries).²⁷ A narrative which "wins" a controversy, if it is a dominant narrative (usually a biased self-serving one), will strengthen its grasp on the CM, thereby inhibiting peace and reconciliation; and if the counter, less biased, narrative wins, it may replace the previously dominant narrative in the CM (or at least weaken the latter's grasp), leading to the reverse.²⁸

¹⁷ Nozaki 2008.

¹⁸ Baines 2009.

¹⁹ Shleifman 2001.

²⁰ Morris and Stockey 2004.

²¹ Hubbard and Hasian 1998.

²² Taras 1995.

²³ Foucault 1977.

²⁴ Nozaki 2008.

²⁵ Taras 1995. See also Morris and Stockey 2004.

²⁶ Hubbard and Hasian 1998.

²⁷ Nave and Yogev 2002.

²⁸ Kansteiner 2002.

In Summary

Research about controversies addresses their various *empirical* facets (though usually not as widely and systematically as provided below), and typically uses its findings only rarely for *theoretical* conceptualization. Thus, for example, there is a lack of theoretical analysis of the typology of controversies and of the various aspects of a given topic that the controversies address, their consequences, and the determinants of the impact of specific controversies. Moreover, controversies in Israel regarding historical narratives of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, or more specifically, of the 1948 exodus, have only partially been discussed *empirically* in the literature, typically separately from each other, and again – without *theoretical* elaboration.

Therefore, the current article will address these empirical and theoretical gaps. This will be done while analyzing controversies of historical narratives of the exodus, using a “grounded theory approach”: constructing theoretical insights from available empirical data about the exodus’s controversies.²⁹ Before moving to the research, a background of this case study is required.

Case Study Background - The Israeli CM of the 1948 Exodus

The Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict has lasted for a century, causing significant damage to the involved parties. Since the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, its institutions have almost exclusively disseminated the Zionist narrative of the conflict as a whole among Israeli Jews. Generally, this inclusive narrative has portrayed the Arabs/Palestinians and the Israeli Jews in a biased manner, as narratives of conflicts typically do – unrealistically, the former too negatively and the latter too positively.³⁰

The major historical event in this inclusive narrative is the Palestinian exodus during the 1948 War. Some 650,000 Palestinians left the area in which the State of Israel was established, and the Palestinian refugee problem was created. Since 1948, this problem has become a major issue in Israeli-Arab/Palestinian relations, with major psychological and political implications. Since that time the Arabs/Palestinians have also conducted a wide diplomatic campaign against Israel, demanding the return of the refugees, and since the 1990s, it has been a major concern, to be determined in the peace negotiations. The Zionist narrative took no responsibility for the exodus. The Palestinians, it argued, left willingly because of blanket appeals from the Palestinian leadership and that of the Arab states, and due to fear of the Jews and later the Israeli Jews. In the first decades after the 1948 War, the Zionist narrative of the 1948 exodus was widely disseminated among Israeli Jews by various Israeli societal and state institutions.³¹

²⁹ Glaser and Strauss 1967.

³⁰ Bar-Tal 2007.

³¹ In general: Bar-Tal 2007, Podeh 2002, Ram 2011; and specifically regarding war veterans’ memoirs – Nets-Zehngut, 2017; the National Information Center – Nets-Zehngut 2008, the IDF – Nets-Zehngut 2015, and approved books by the Ministry of Education – Nets-Zehngut 2013.

The hegemony in Israel of the inclusive Zionist narrative began to be challenged mainly from the late 1970s. Focusing on the 1948 exodus, at that time many scholarly publications and newspaper articles, as well as some memoirs by 1948 Jewish war veterans, presented a counter narrative that challenged parts of the Zionist narrative ("*critical narrative*").³² According to this narrative, some of the Palestinians left willingly (e.g., due to fear or leadership calls for a partial leave-taking), while others were expelled by the Jewish and later Israeli fighting forces. The acknowledgement of partial expulsion challenged the hegemony of the dominant Zionist narrative.

This *societal* change intensified in the late 1980s with the beginning of a historical revisionist period commonly called the "New Historians" era. New additional historical studies criticized additional aspects of the Zionist narrative of the conflict, or supported criticism raised earlier. As for the exodus, the historian Benny Morris supported its critical narrative in his comprehensive book (*The Birth Of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*)³³; and such support, though less wide in scope, was also provided by studies of other scholars as well subsequent ones by Morris.³⁴ Thus, from the late 1980s and at least until 2004, the critical narrative was, for the most part, the *exclusive one among Israeli Jewish studies*.³⁵ Moreover, since the late 1980s and at least until 2004, the publication of critical newspaper articles (by a vast majority) and critical 1948 war veterans' memoirs (about a third) also increased.³⁶ Later, beginning in the 1990s, some history textbooks used (without approval) in the educational system began to present the critical narrative.³⁷ The year 2000 witnessed another change, this time in the Israeli official memory: all the newly *approved* history textbooks of the Ministry of Education were critical regarding the exodus.³⁸

As for the Palestinians, they largely claim that the 1948 exodus was an outcome only of expulsion.³⁹

Let us now turn to the research which examined the controversies taking place in Israel regarding the exodus.

³² Regarding scholarly publications see Nets-Zehngut 2011a; newspaper articles – Nets-Zehngut, 2011c; and war veterans' memoirs – Nets-Zehngut, 2017.

³³ Morris 1987.

³⁴ Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009, Ram 2011.

³⁵ Nets-Zehngut 2011a.

³⁶ Regarding the newspaper articles see Nets-Zehngut in preparation; and regarding the war veterans' memoirs see Nets-Zehngut, 2017.

³⁷ Podeh 2002.

³⁸ Nets-Zehngut 2013.

³⁹ Abdel-Jawad 2006, Nets-Zehngut 2011b.

The Research

Methodology

The research examined the way the causes of the 1948 exodus were presented in the publications produced by seven main Israeli institutions in 56 years: from 1949 (right after the establishment of Israel) to 2004 (before the research began, in 2005). Three state institutions represent the *official* memory: (1) The Publications Agency of the National Information Center, the main institution in Israel for disseminating information among its citizens; (2) The Information Branch of the Education Corps of the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces), the main army unit for disseminating information among soldiers; (3) The Ministry of Education, regarding approved history and civic textbooks for middle and high schools for use in the national-secular educational system (the main system in Israel). The four *societal* institutions which have been examined are: (1) The research community (representing the *historical* memory); (2) Memoirs of Jewish war veterans who participated in the 1948 War (*autobiographical* memory); and the last two represent the *cultural* memory: (3) Non-governmental organizations, specifically the four which were found to address the 1948 exodus: "Matspen," "Alternative Information Center," "Gush Shalom" and "Zochrot;" (4) Newspapers – the articles of the five main Israeli dailies: "Al-Hamishmar," "Davar," "Ha'aretz," "Ma'ariv," and "Yedioth Aharonoth." The research also examined the processes that took place before, while and after these publications appeared.

All of the analyzed publications of the seven institutions which were produced during the research period were written in Hebrew by Jews. Their texts were analyzed in order to determine the narratives they presented regarding the exodus (e.g., Zionist or critical – as these narratives have been described above), as well as other characteristics (e.g., the scope of discussion regarding the exodus in the publications).⁴⁰ The research also used 96 interviews with 60 key people who worked in all of the institutions during the entire research period. This was done in order to get information about the way the seven institutions operated. The interviews were conducted using semi-constructed questionnaires, allowing the interviewees to comment on various issues on their own initiative.⁴¹ The wide scope of the study in terms of research period (56 years) and the investigation of the seven institutions provide a solid base for the discussion of the controversies. Its findings are assembled in some of the articles and book chapters the following part of the article refers to.

The Empirical Findings

The following table assembles all of the relevant main controversies which took place from 1949 to 2004.

- Table 1 about there -

The controversies are presented in the table, horizontally according to the institutions where they took place, and vertically according to the periods of time they occurred. They are numbered consecutively according

⁴⁰ Glassner and Moreno 1989.

⁴¹ MaCraken 1988.

to the times they erupted. All of them took place in Israel, and a minority of them, as will be mentioned, were also conducted abroad (although they were anchored in Israel).

Controversies in the three *state* institutions (columns I-III) – At times controversies erupted between members of the staff. These addressed whether to use the Zionist or the critical narratives in the publications they were producing. Such controversies took place in the Ministry of Education in the early 1970s, for example, while preparing the "Arab-Israeli Conflict" kit, and at the IDF and the Information Center mainly since the late 1980s while preparing various publications. One more relevant controversy took place in a state institution, the Ministry of Education:⁴² In 1978 the "Hirbet Hiza" film controversy erupted, and was manifested in the newspapers as well. Thus, it will be discussed below as part of the newspaper controversies.⁴³

Moving to the controversies in the *societal* institutions (columns IV-VII) –

Controversies which took place in the newspapers (column IV) – Five main controversies took place:

1. The first occurred in 1949-1950 regarding the book *Sipur Hirbet Hiza* (in Hebrew "The Story of Hirbet Hiza"). This 1949 novel was written by a renowned Israeli-Jewish author, Izhar Smilansky, and its title story describes the capture of a Palestinian village by this name ("Hirbet Hiza") in 1948 and the expulsion of its residents. The newspaper articles, written mostly by war veterans, journalists, politicians and intellectuals, mainly discussed the appropriateness of the discussion of the expulsions: whether it damaged the honor of Jewish soldiers and Israel or promoted the morality of Jewish society, as well as whether the story ignored injustices conducted by the Arabs/Palestinians.

2. The second newspaper controversy occurred in 1978 and dealt with a film which was produced based on the above story and was supposed to be broadcast on Israeli television. Initially, the controversy dealt mainly with the question of whether the film should be broadcast. Discussion took place simultaneously in the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of television programming. After it *was* broadcast, the argument continued mostly in newspapers articles written by the same types of people as in the 1949-1950 controversy. The articles related to various topics: claiming that the film damaged Israel in its defense against the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign, that the Arabs/Palestinians also conducted injustices, and that expulsions were minimal or did not occur at all, in contrast to assertions that the expulsion should be discussed in order to maintain Israel's morality, and that expulsions did take place and were not rare.

3. The third controversy erupted in 1979 around Yitzhak Rabin's memoir *Pinkas Sheirut* (Service Notebook). Rabin was a mid-level officer in 1948 and Israel's Prime Minister prior to the publishing of his

⁴² In 1999 and 2000 two additional controversies occurred in the Ministry regarding the history textbooks of Eyal Nave and Danny Ya'acoby (respectively, "Hamea Haesrim," and "Olam shel Tmurot"). However, these controversies did not address the 1948 Palestinian exodus, although these textbooks presented its critical narrative (Nets-Zehngut 2013).

⁴³ Regarding the Ministry of Education – Nave and Yogev 2002, and Nets-Zehngut 2013, regarding the IDF – Nets-Zehngut 2015, and regarding the Information Center – Nets-Zehngut 2008.

memoir. He included in his manuscript a section describing the expulsion of the residents of the Palestinian cities of Lydda and Ramla – the largest expulsion in 1948. This section was censored from the published memoir, but was leaked to the public in the U.S. and then in Israel, gaining wide resonance. In this controversy Rabin's version of the expulsion conflicted with that of some senior Jewish 1948 war veterans (mainly Igal Alon), claiming that the residents of these two cities had not been expelled.

4. The fourth controversy took place in 1986 and dealt with the academic article we will call the "Intelligence Document." This article was published that year by Benny Morris based on an intelligence document of the IDF. According to the article, part of the Palestinians' exodus was caused by activities of the Jewish/Israeli military forces, including expulsions. Several scholars and war veterans related in newspaper articles to the historical aspect of Morris's article.

5. The fifth controversy took place in 1989 and involved seven articles, some of Benny Morris and mostly of a leading Israeli historian, Shabtai Teveth. Teveth, called an "old historian" by Morris, criticized various facets of Morris's *Birth* book. For example, he claimed that Morris's methodology was deficient (e.g., not using enough Arabic/Palestinian sources), and that expulsions took place only after the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, and not before. Morris replied to Teveth, defending his methodology and the critical narrative (including the execution of expulsions prior to May 1948).⁴⁴

Controversies in NGOs (column V) – NGOs were involved in controversies mostly from 1967 until the early 1970s. Members of the dovish NGO "Matspen" (in Hebrew "Compass") gave talks in Israel and in Europe about the conflict and the 1948 War, presenting either the critical or the Palestinian narratives regarding the 1948 exodus. Often Jews from their audiences confronted them, arguing that the Palestinians were not expelled, but left willingly – and disputes evolved around this topic.⁴⁵

Controversies were also manifested in 1948 war veterans' memoirs (column VI) – This took place only from the late 1980s, and even since then, not in a regular manner. Various memoirs related to the question of whether or not expulsions took place in 1948 – some claimed they did, and others that they did not.⁴⁶

The research community (column VII) - Three main concrete controversies took place.

1. The first occurred in 1986 regarding the "Intelligence Document" article, described above. In the research community, it took place in a symposium, by and large in the same way as in the newspapers.

2. The second controversy took place in 1989-1990, again between Shabtai Teveth and Benny Morris, but this time in academic platforms, mostly in the U.S. and Britain. Teveth presented his aforementioned arguments against Morris in two articles: in the American journal *Commentary* and in the British journal *Middle*

⁴⁴ In general, regarding all the newspaper controversies, see Nets-Zehngut in preparation; regarding the 1949-1950 and the 1978 controversies see also Shapira 2000; and regarding the 1978 controversy see also: Kidron 2001.

⁴⁵ Nets-Zehngut, 2017. "Matspen" established another NGO, "Isarka," which operated on its behalf abroad.

⁴⁶ Nets-Zehngut, 2017.

Eastern Studies, and Morris replied in an article in the American journal *Tikkun* and in his British published book *1948 and After* (using mostly the same arguments).

3. The third controversy took place in 1996-1997 between Moshe Tsahar (senior Jewish 1948 veteran from the city of Tiberius) and Benny Morris. Tsahar criticized Morris's claim in an academic article published in the Israeli journal *Alpaiim* that the Jews had acted provocatively against the Palestinians in Tiberius, encouraging them to leave the city. He claimed in a responding article that the Jews had acted peacefully, and Morris responded in another article (all articles, in *Alpaiim*).⁴⁷

Summarizing all the controversies presented in the table, until the late 1970s very few controversies took place in Israel regarding the exodus, and most of them were low scale and private in nature (in talks given by "Matepen"/"Isarka" members or within the Ministry of Education). Exceptional was the 1949-1950 *Sipur Hirbet Hiza* controversy, but it took place right after the establishment of the State of Israel. Only about three decades later, from the late 1970s, did a significant change occur, when more controversies took place in public and on a wider scale.

Discussion

The above *empirical* findings of the research lead to the following *theoretical* contributions.

1. Typology of controversies. The literature typically discusses controversies as a unified phenomenon, as if all controversies are the same. The current research, though, identified various types of controversies, each with different causes, characteristics and consequences. The following typology describes these different controversies.

1.1 - Inter- vs. intra-group controversies. Controversies will usually be conducted between supporters of narratives that are members of the two rival parties (e.g., France-Algeria, Japan-South Korea and Japan-China), or between members of the same given party (e.g., Germany, South Africa and Israel). These two types of controversies will here be termed, respectively, "inter-group" and "intra-group" controversies, and they are significantly different in various aspects:

(a) **Causes** – Inter-group controversies will typically be initiated by the victimized party, demanding that the perpetrator acknowledge its wrongdoings. Intra-group controversies, however, will usually be initiated by supporters of a dominant narrative in a party when they identify that a counter, less biased, narrative is challenging the hegemony of the dominant more biased and self-serving narrative (e.g., when a book is published with a new, more critical, view on the conflict⁴⁸);

⁴⁷ Nets-Zehngut 2011a.

⁴⁸ Counter narrative will typically present the in-group more negatively or the rival more positively – compared to the dominant narrative. For example, the critical narrative about the 1948 exodus portrays the Jews more negatively than the Zionist narrative does, as having partially expelled Palestinians in 1948.

(b) **Platforms** – Inter-group controversies will typically take place more in the international arena, while intra-group controversies typically occur more in the in-group arena (i.e., international vs. local, for example, media, scholarly publications and cultural channels). Additionally, only inter-group controversies can be conducted in diplomatic channels, between the formal foreign affairs institutions of the two parties;

(c) **Consequences** – When the perpetrator “loses” in inter-group controversies (e.g., it acknowledges its wrongdoings by adopting a more critical narrative) the direct outcome will usually involve an apology to the victimized party and/or offering reparations. However, when a dominant narrative “loses” in an intra-group controversy, the direct outcome will typically be a decrease in its grasp of the in-group’s CM.⁴⁹

For lack of space and based on the current research, *the article now focuses only on one type of controversy, intra-group controversies.*

Typically, two main narratives are involved in *intra-group* controversies: a dominant narrative (usually a typical narrative of conflicts described above) and a counter narrative (one that challenges the hegemony of the dominant one, usually one that is less biased and more peace-supportive). Therefore, *the article will focus on this dual situation*, although the following analysis is also relevant to situations which involve more than these two narratives.

Three additional typologies are suggested below regarding *intra-group* controversies.

1.2 - Societal vs. state controversies. Some controversies take place in *societal* institutions while others occur in *state* institutions. *Societal* controversies involve societal memories (i.e., historical, cultural, autobiographical and popular), and they typically directly influence these memories (e.g., controversies between scholars directly influence the historical memory).⁵⁰ The controversy participants have no concrete aim but to prove the justness of their claims. These controversies are also usually public in nature (see the following), and they take place *after* the appearance of the publications that include the counter narratives. For example, the 1989-1990 Teveth-Morris controversy regarding the *Birth* book took place in media and scholarly channels, directly influenced cultural and historical memories, and had no concrete aim but to prove the justness of the claims of its participants. It was also public in nature (taking place in newspapers articles and scholarly publications), and all this occurred after *Birth* was published.

In contrast, *state* controversies involve the official memory, with the concrete aim of directly influencing it, and are at least in part private (see as follows). They also they take place before *or* after the given publication

⁴⁹ See below for more about the consequences of *intra-group* controversies.

⁵⁰ Each controversy might indirectly influence other types of memories: e.g., the Teveth-Morris controversy influenced the official memory as it is presented in history textbooks (making the *Birth* book more salient to the late 1990s authors of the critical textbooks) (Nets-Zehngut 2011d).

appears. Examples are the controversies in the Ministry of Education in the early 1970s, as well as in the IDF and the Information Center from the late 1980s.⁵¹

1.3 - Public vs. private controversies. Differentiation should also be made between public and private controversies. The public ones take place before a relatively large number of people (typically through the media, though also via scholarly publications), and usually relate to major topics, such as an important book. Thus, such controversies usually have wide resonance and impact in a country. Private controversies, in contrast, take place among a relatively small number of people (e.g., members of a team that produces a new publication), or a small audience (e.g., listeners to a talk by *Matspen* members). While private controversies, for example in talks, typically do not have much influence on the CM, when they occur in state institutions they are of importance because they determine the content of the institutions' publications (i.e., their official memory).⁵²

1.4 - Public – concrete vs. general controversies. Lastly, public controversies are divided into *concrete* and *general* ones. Public-*concrete* controversies deal with a specific exposure regarding a narrative (e.g., new testimony or a newly published book), take place in a relatively limited timeframe (e.g., in the time shortly after the book was published) and involve specific people (e.g., Yitzhak Rabin vs. Igal Alon or Moshe Tsahar vs. Benny Morris).⁵³ Public-*general* controversies, in contrast, relate to a general polemic atmosphere in a society regarding a certain topic. The questions hang in the air; for example, which is the accurate narrative?⁵⁴ Usually, such controversies will not relate to a specific exposure or publication, will not be so limited in time, and will not necessarily involve specific people. For example, beginning from the late 1970s, there was a public-general controversy in Israel regarding the 1948 exodus, largely lasting until the early 1990s. Therefore, for instance, 1948 war veterans related to the 1948 expulsions in their memoirs, including refuting or supporting claims of expulsions.⁵⁵

Summary of the typology. A wide and complicated social phenomenon like historical controversies cannot be analyzed properly, empirically and theoretically, before understanding its different components/types. Otherwise, the analysis might be relevant only to one component/type of controversy and not to others (e.g., relevant only to societal controversies and not to state ones). In other words, typology is the prerequisite cornerstone of any analysis of controversies (i.e., scholars determine which type of controversy they address, and analyze it based on the characteristics of the chosen type). The above typology provides such a platform for the following analysis. This typology differentiated between inter-group and intra-group controversies, and among

⁵¹ Nets-Zehngut 2011a, 2011c, 2013, 2015, 2017.

⁵² Nets-Zehngut 2011a, 2011c, 2013, 2015, 2017.

⁵³ Though specific people participate in concrete controversies, this does not have to be in-person. Rabin's version of the events in Lydda and Ramla was very salient in the controversy regarding his memoir. However, he himself did not participate in the controversy, explaining that according to the law he was not allowed to do so.

⁵⁴ For additional aspects of controversies (e.g., instrumental or interpretational) see below: "Four aspects of controversies."

⁵⁵ Nets-Zehngut 2011a, 2011c, 2013, 2015, 2017.

the *intra*-group ones, distinguished between societal vs. state, public vs. private, and public-concrete vs. public-general. There can be various combinations of the abovementioned types of controversies, such as societal-private controversies, societal-public controversies, etc.

2. Four aspects of intra-group controversies. The literature typically discusses controversies about historical narratives of conflicts from a point of view which is here termed "historical;" that is, which of the two competing narratives *accurately* describes a given event. For example, were the Palestinians partially expelled in 1948 (critical narrative) or not (Zionist narrative)? This historical aspect is indeed important, but the current research suggests three more aspects which are often discussed in controversies:⁵⁶

2.1 - Instrumental – This aspect faces the future, considering what the consequences of presenting/adopting a certain narrative will be; will it serve the interests of the country or damage them. For example, many Israeli Jews claimed, mostly until the late 1970s, that presenting the critical narrative regarding the exodus would damage Israel's image in the context of the Arab/Palestinian diplomatic campaign against it. Others, on the other hand, mostly since the late 1980s, have argued that presenting the critical narrative will strengthen Israeli Jewish society and promote peace with its neighbors;

2.1 - Interpretational – This aspect faces the past, considering the context in which the given event happened. People often say: "Yes, it happened (*historical* aspect), but how should we evaluate what happened in the context in which it took place?". For example, many Israeli Jews have said that indeed Palestinians were expelled in 1948, but argued that in light of the fact that the Arabs/Palestinians had initiated the 1948 War, and due to the severe threat that the Jews had felt at the time, expelling Palestinians was justified;

2.3 - Methodological – This aspect addresses the question of whether scholarly studies were well executed from the methodological point of view. For instance, Benny Morris was partly criticized by Shabtai Teveth for not using sufficient Arab/Palestinian sources.

Summary of the four aspects. The first three aspects – historical, instrumental and interpretational – are relevant to all types of memories and publications, while the latter aspect (methodological) is relevant only to historical memory as it is represented in scholarly studies. All four aspects were used in various controversies in an integrative manner, influencing each other. For example, if a study was not executed well *methodologically*, it was argued that its *historical* findings were inaccurate. Or an *instrumental* factor (damage to Israel's international image if presenting the critical narrative), supported presenting the Zionist inaccurate narrative (*historical* aspect). Moreover, an *interpretational* aspect overrode the *historical* one for some Israeli Jews ("yes, we did expel them, but it was justified in the difficult past context").

The four aspects were dominant in controversies regarding the 1948 exodus to differing extents in different periods. For example, the very early 1949-50 "Hirbet Hiza" controversy dealt mostly with the *instrumental* aspect (e.g., whether discussing expulsions damaged the honor of the Jewish soldiers) and not with

⁵⁶ Nets-Zehngut 2011a, 2011c, 2013, 2015, 2017.

the *historical* one. The 1979 *Pinkas Sheirut* controversy dealt mostly with the *historical* aspect – whether the residents of Lydda and Ramla were expelled or not. The *methodological* aspect appeared in controversies only in the 1980s, after archival documents had been declassified and discussed in studies. At that time their usage was discussed in controversies (e.g., the "Intelligence Document" controversy). When it became obvious – mostly based on these archival documents – that expulsion did take place in 1948, the *interpretational* aspect became more prevalent. Then, many Israeli Jews said that the expulsions had been justified.

These four aspects are manifested differently in the various types of controversies discussed in the above typology. For example, the *historical* aspect is discussed more in societal controversies, those that are conducted between scholars or direct-experience people. These people have the knowledge to address the accuracy of the way past events are presented. Similarly, the *methodological* aspect is typically discussed in societal controversies, those that involve scholars. The *instrumental* aspect is more salient in state controversies. Since state institutions represent the country internationally, and since part of their agenda is to mobilize the citizens, they put greater emphasis on this aspect (in comparison to societal institutions). This is the main reason why Israeli state institutions were more conservatively Zionist than societal institutions in presenting the causes for the 1948 exodus (see above background of the case study).⁵⁷

3. The consequences of intra-group controversies. The literature typically does not theoretically and comprehensively discuss the consequences of these controversies (and surely not with differentiation between the various types of controversies, as suggested above); this is a gap which will be addressed now.

The current article found that controversies have various consequences, as will be exemplified here regarding *societal-public-concrete* controversies. These consequences are situated on a chain of influences with three main links: 1) *Technical Consequences* – 2) *Memory Consequences* – 3) *Political Consequences*.

3.1. - Technical Consequences – There are three main such consequences:

(a) **Increase of centrality** – The discussion of the *topic* in the public sphere during the controversies increases its centrality⁵⁸ within the in-group;

(b) **Dissemination of the two narratives** – The two narratives which are discussed in the controversies are disseminated, for instance, via media, scholarly and cultural channels. The counter narrative especially benefits from such dissemination, since it typically encounters obstacles in its dissemination due to various types of censorship practiced against it. Controversies provide a by-pass to these obstacles;

(c) **Results of the controversies** – The extent of adoption in the various types of memories of the two competing narratives is influenced by the results of the controversies. Occasionally it is hard to determine the

⁵⁷ Nets-Zehngut 2008, 2013; Podeh 2002.

⁵⁸ Centrality means the degree of salience in the public sphere and the degree to which a topic gains the public's attention (Bar-Tal, Raviv and Freund 1994).

"winning" narrative in a controversy. However, in such instances it is often possible to see which narrative has gotten more support. In other cases, analysis of the controversies does provide insights about their results.

3.2 - Memory Consequences - The technical consequences subsequently lead to the memory consequences; they influence the CM of a given topic within a party. There are three main memory consequences:

(a) The grasp of the dominant narrative over the CM remains as it was prior to a controversy (e.g., there is no difference in the extent to which this narrative is presented in scholarly studies – historical memory – or in newspaper articles – cultural memory);

(b) This grasp increases at the expense of a counter narrative (i.e., the dominant narrative becomes more prevalent);

(c) This grasp decreases in favor of a counter narrative.

It should be noted that a controversy in each type of memory directly influences the memory it is part of as well as indirectly affecting other types of memories. For instance, a controversy between war veterans – autobiographical memory – directly influences this memory as well as other memories such as official, popular or historical (e.g., scholars use the testimonies of the war veterans).

3.3 - Political Consequences - Subsequently, the memory consequences lead to the *political* consequences. These consequences can be internal ones, within the given party (e.g., impact on the elections), and/or external ones, in the international arena (e.g., impact on the peace process with the rival, or change in the international image of a country).

Illustration of the 3-part chain of influences with the 1948 exodus case study. The *technical* consequences of the exodus's controversies increased the centrality in Israel of the 1948 exodus,⁵⁹ contributed to the dissemination of its critical narrative,⁶⁰ and largely resulted in a greater advantage for this narrative. Regarding some controversies, it is hard to determine their "winning" narrative. However, in the central controversies surrounding the 1949-1950 book *Sipur Hirbet Hiza*, the 1978 film "Hirbet Hiza" and the 1986 article "Intelligence Document", the critical narrative was supported in more newspaper articles than the Zionist narrative. Moreover, the 1979 *Pinkas Sheirut* controversy promoted more 1948 war veterans to present the 1948 expulsion and Rabin's version of the Lydda-Ramla expulsion was often mentioned in scholarly studies and newspaper articles.⁶¹ Finally, regarding the 1989-1990 Teveth-Morris controversy, Teveth explicitly agreed that expulsions did take place in 1948 (though not prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, but only

⁵⁹ Nets-Zehngut, 2011c, 2017.

⁶⁰ See the discussion in the "Summary and Conclusions" section below.

⁶¹ Nets-Zehngut, 2017.

afterwards). This was strong support for the critical narrative.⁶² Thus, in our case, the results of the main societal-public-concrete controversies regarding the exodus largely supported its critical narrative.

These technical consequences subsequently contributed to *memory* consequences in Israel by increasing the grasp critical narrative in various types of memories. For example, they contributed to the dramatic increase since the late 1970s of newspaper articles and scholarly publications that have presented the critical narrative (respectively, cultural and historical memories), to the significant increase since the late 1980s of 1948 war veterans memoirs that have presented this narrative (autobiographical memory), and, in addition, since 2000 to the presentation of this narrative in all history textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education (official memory).⁶³ The above technical consequences, together with the preceding memory consequences, contributed to a transformation of the Israeli Jewish *popular* memory regarding the exodus; it has become less Zionist and more critical. A public opinion survey conducted in 2008 among a representative sample of Israeli Jews found that only 41% of them held the Zionist narrative, while 39% held the critical narrative and 8% the Palestinian one (12% did not reply). In other words, 47% members of this sector believed that some or all of the Palestinians were expelled in 1948 (more than those holding the Zionist narrative claiming no expulsion). Since no such surveys had been conducted in the past, it is not possible to compare the 2008 results to previous ones. However, it is safe to assume that if such a survey had, for instance, been conducted in the 1950s-1960s, it would have resulted in a much more Zionist oriented popular memory.⁶⁴

Lastly, the memory consequences subsequently contributed to *political* consequences. Three illustrations of such latter consequences are provided: (1) The Israeli-Jewish popular memory – This memory has influenced the national and international politics of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict. On a national level, regarding the influence of *popular* memory of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict as a whole,⁶⁵ the research revealed that Israeli Jews with a whole-conflict popular memory inclined to be critical⁶⁶ were found to be more inclined to choose dovish parties in national elections. Impact was found also on the international level, where people who were inclined to have a *critical* popular memory were less inclined to hold negative emotions towards Palestinians (e.g., hatred, fear, rage and de-legitimization), less inclined to feel despair at the conflict's possible resolution, and were less resistant to signing peace agreements with the Palestinians and the Syrians;⁶⁷ (2) The Israeli *official* memory – This memory, as presented in approved history textbooks, was transformed, as mentioned, to being critical regarding the exodus since 2000. This had double political implications: a change in

⁶² Nets-Zehngut, 2011c.

⁶³ Nets-Zehngut 2011a, 2011c, 2013, 2017.

⁶⁴ Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal 2016.

⁶⁵ That is, memory regarding 24 major events of the conflict.

⁶⁶ That is, inclined to portray Israel not so positively and/or its rivals not so negatively.

⁶⁷ Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal 2016. Similarly, Israeli-Jewish hawks are more inclined to object compromises required for peace agreements (Bar-Tal 2001).

Israel's position and image in international politics (realizing that Israel is open to accepting, if even partially, the critical narrative),⁶⁸ and a change in its national politics of identity (e.g., educating the students about the expulsions and thereby constructing a more critical and multi-dimensional identity);⁶⁹ (3) the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – For decades after the 1948 War, Israel refused to acknowledge the Palestinian tragedy of 1948 and to take any responsibility for the exodus. This certainly did not contribute to the resolution of the conflict. However, since the late 1990s the critical narrative regarding the exodus has been so accepted in Israel that it has been hard for Israeli negotiators to ignore it, as previously. Consequently, in the 2000 Camp David and the 2001 Taba Israeli-Palestinian peace summits, they expressed Israel's basic willingness to publically acknowledge the 1948 Palestinian tragedy and to implicitly and indirectly acknowledge Israel's shared responsibility for it. This was quite a significant factor in promoting prospects for peace.⁷⁰

Summary of consequences. The below table assembles the three types of controversy consequences.

- Table 2 about here -

It should be noted, that these three types of consequences are interconnected, and do not necessarily move from the first through the second to the third; reverse influences are also possible. For example, a *political* consequence of officially acknowledging responsibility for past wrong doings in public influences the popular memory (memory consequence). Moreover, influences within the same type of consequences also occur (e.g., as we have seen, preceding transformations in Israeli historical and cultural memories contributed to a similar transformation in the popular memory). Similarly, internal *political* consequences influence the external political consequences (e.g., electing a more hawkish government reduces the chances that a country will officially acknowledge responsibility for the country's past wrong doings in public).

Summary and Conclusions

CM of conflicts significantly influences conflicts from the socio-psychological perspective. Since this memory typically includes biased narratives that inhibit peace, its positive transformation to include less biased narratives promotes peace. Such a transformation is significantly influenced by historical controversies, since they challenge the hegemony of dominant conflict-supportive narratives. Based on the characteristics of these controversies, including their results, the controversies might contribute to such positive transformations.

Controversies are in fact the “battlefields” about the historical image of the conflict that replace its actual battlefields, starting immediately after the latter have ended. The controversies occur worldwide, especially in recent periods, since more critical counter narratives appear so often, challenging the hegemony of longstanding

⁶⁸ Bronner 1989, Nave and Yogev 2002.

⁶⁹ Mathis 2005, Nets-Zehngut 2013.

⁷⁰ Lustick 2006.

dominant biased narratives. In response, supporters of dominant conflict-supportive narratives rush to defend their hegemony. Therefore, exploring the dynamics of these controversies is of importance.

The current article offers empirical and theoretical contributions about controversies.

Its *empirical* contribution is assembling and analyzing all the controversies that occurred in Israel between 1949 and 2004 regarding the causes of the 1948 exodus. As far as is known, this is the first such research carried out over such a long period and in such a precise manner, also taking into consideration controversies in other conflicts.

The *theoretical* contributions are diverse. The study provides a typology of the different types of controversies: inter-group vs. intra-group, and among the latter type – societal vs. state, public vs. private, and public-concrete vs. public-general. Subsequently, focusing on the *intra*-group controversies, the article discusses the four aspects that controversies address: historical, instrumental, interpretational and methodological. The three categories of consequences of the controversies (technical, memory and political), each with its various specific consequences, are then discussed. All this provides a solid base for the theoretical analysis of controversies of historical narratives of conflicts.

Let us hope that more controversies will take place, providing the possibility for more positive memory transformations to occur, resulting in increased chances for peace and reconciliation.

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Table 1 – The Controversies regarding the 1948 Exodus

						The Institutions
Ministry of Education	IDF – Information Branch	Publications Agency in the Information Center	Newspapers	NGOs	1948 War Veterans' Memoirs	Research Community
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			(1) 1949-1950 – the book "Sipur Hirbet Hiza"			
				(2) 1967- early 1970s - controversies with members of "Matspen"/ "Isarka"		
(3) Early 1970s – intra-institutional controversy regarding the "Arab-Israeli conflict" kit						
(4.1) 1978 – the film "Hirbet Hiza" *			(4.2) 1978 – the film "Hirbet Hiza" **			
			(5) 1979 – the book "Pinkas Sheirut"			
			(8.1) 1986 – the "Intelligence Document" article **			(8.2) 1986 – in the symposium about the "Intelligence Document" article **
	(6) From the 1980s – intra-institutional controversies in various times	(7) From the 1980s – intra-institutional controversies in various times				
			(10.1) 1989 – Shabtai Teveth vs. Benny Morris **		(9) From the late 1980s – indirect participation in controversies	(10.2) 1989 – Shabtai Teveth vs. Benny Morris **
						(11) 1996-1997 – Moshe Tsahar vs. Benny Morris

* This controversy took place simultaneously in the Ministry of Education and the newspapers.

** This controversy took place simultaneously in the research community and the newspapers.

Table 2 – The Three Types of Controversies' Consequences

No.	Consequences		
	Technical	Memory	Political
1	Centrality of topic	Dominant narrative's grasp <i>remains the same</i>	Internal
2	Dissemination of narratives	Dominant narrative's grasp <i>increases</i>	External
3	Results of controversies	Dominant narrative's grasp <i>decreases</i>	