

## **Palestinians and Israelis Collaborate in Addressing the Historical Narratives of their Conflict**



by Rafi Nets-Zehngut

### **Abstract**

*Since the summer of 2000, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been going through rough times on both the political and military levels. This generally applies as well to societal collaboration between the parties. Despite this multi-level gloomy state of affairs, one type of societal collaboration flourishes: addressing the historical narratives of the conflict. Since the early 2000s, nine such projects have been conducted by Palestinians and Israeli-Jews: PRIME, 'Shared Histories,' 'Circles of Knowledge,' 'Zochrot,' 'History's Double Helix,' 'Shared Narratives,' 'Van Leer,' 'IHJR,' and 'Gabay-Kazak.' This article assembles for the first time these projects and discusses them methodologically using: 1) interviews conducted with the directors of most of the projects, 2) other studies, and 3) primary sources (the projects' publications). It describes the projects, highlights the importance of presenting them to the societies of both parties, and discusses their characteristics as bottom-up projects. It also explains the conservative orientation of official institutions, leading to a lack of similar top-down projects; the differences between contemporary and past aspects of the conflict; and the uniqueness and special contribution of such pre-resolution activity. Moreover, the article explains the prevalence of this activity since the early 2000s, lists the positive effects of the projects on the involved parties, and explains how the fact that they were conducted by the rival parties contributed to their success.*

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## Introduction

Since the summer of 2000, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been going through rough times. The second Palestinian uprising (Intifada) erupted, the peace process collapsed, and intense violence has been practiced by both parties at various times.<sup>1</sup> This dire state of affairs has not been limited to the political and military levels alone, but also largely includes the societal level. Until the summer of 2000, widespread collaboration had been taking place between the parties in the cultural, educational, economic, tourism and peace-promotion spheres. Since that time, however, this activity has sharply declined.<sup>2</sup> Despite this multi-level gloomy state of affairs, one type of societal collaboration between the rivals is currently being practiced, and in fact flourishes: addressing the historical narratives of the conflict. Since the early 2000s, nine such projects have been conducted by Palestinians and Israeli-Jews and have had various positive impacts on both. The current article reviews all of these projects while discussing particular aspects of them.

## Literature review – Historical narratives of conflicts

Collective memory is generally defined as representations of the history of a group that are adopted as the true representations of the past. These representations are assembled in coherent and meaningful ways in narratives.<sup>3</sup> Collective memory and historical narratives in general, and those of conflicts in particular, have recently gained salience in academic, public and diplomatic spheres.<sup>4</sup> Narratives of conflicts describe their major events,<sup>5</sup> typically not accurately. They are selective and biased, and provide simplistic black-and-white views of the conflicts, in ways that support the interests of the parties holding the particular narratives. These narratives usually touch on at least four main themes: de-legitimization of the rival, positive image of the in-group,

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell Bard, *Myths and Facts: A Guide to the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (Chevy Chase, MD: AICE,

<sup>2</sup> Mordechai Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace – A History of the Israeli Peace Movement*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996); Naomi Chazan, “Peace Action and Conflict Resolution: An Israeli-Palestinian Exploration,” in *Arab-Jewish Relations: From Conflict to Resolution*, eds. Eli Podeh, Asher Kaufman and Moshe Maoz, (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 283-317; Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Wolf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies” *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 179-97.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, “Introduction” to *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-61; Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz, “Introduction: Mapping Memory,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 1-13.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of major events in conflicts and the impact of their characteristics on their memory, see Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Major Events and the Collective Memory of Conflicts” *International Journal of Conflict Management* (in press, 2013).

presentation of the in-group as the sole or main victim, and justification of the conflict's outbreak (when the in-group initiated the conflict).<sup>6</sup> As such, these narratives play two important roles in the conflict. The first is an internal role. When an in-group adopts such narratives, they then become part of its members' popular memory. The narratives then influence the in-group's psychological reactions (e.g., emotions, perceptions and motivations) and consequently their behavioral reactions - negatively towards the rival and positively towards themselves. Thus, the narratives promote a hostile approach towards the rival and the mobilization of these members to be patriotic and to contribute their share to the struggle.<sup>7</sup> The second role of these narratives is an external one - they present the in-group positively to the international community, promoting its support of the in-group.<sup>8</sup>

Adoption of such typical historical narratives of conflict by the collective memory of countries is often perceived as functional during the conflict's climax, due to the internal and external effects described above. However, such narratives also eventually inhibit peaceful resolution of the conflict and the parties' reconciliation. Internally, the in-group members are discouraged from signing a peace agreement with a rival that is perceived so negatively and as so untrustworthy. Externally, the rival is discouraged from negotiating with an in-group whose narratives are so biased against it. Thus, the more a party's narratives can be transformed into less biased ones – as long as there is factual basis for such a transformation, and usually there is – the more the party's psychological and behavioral reactions can accommodate peace and reconciliation. The rival then can be viewed in a more legitimized, humanized and differentiated manner. From the rival's point of view, observing such positive transformation within the in-group will encourage them to take part in peace and reconciliation processes.<sup>9</sup> Such transformation, however, is difficult to achieve, partly because conflicts typically cause collective traumas to the involved parties.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal, "Socio-psychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts" *American Behavioral Scientist* 50 (2007): 1430-53.

<sup>7</sup> Dario Paez and James Liu, "Collective Memory of Conflicts," in *Intergroup Conflicts and their Resolution – A Social Psychological Perspective*, ed. Daniel Bar-Tal, (New York: Psychology Press, 2011), 105-124; Barbara Tint, "History, Memory and Intractable Conflict" *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 27 (2010): 239-56.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in *Power and the Past – Collective Memory and International Relations*, eds. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 13-49; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Internal and External Collective Memories – Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus" *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6/1 (2012): 126-40.

<sup>9</sup> Yeudith Auerbach, "National Narratives in a Conflict of Identity," in *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Ya'acov Bar-Siman-Tov, (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010), 99-133; Bar-Tal, "Socio-psychological Foundations."

<sup>10</sup> With regard to collective traumas and their healing, see, for example: regarding various countries in Europe – Conny Mithander, John Sundholm and Maria Holmgren Troy, *Collective Traumas: Memories of War and Conflict in Twentieth-Century Europe*, (Brussels, Bern, Berlin,

Positive transformation of historical narratives of conflicts can be a unilateral act of a party to a conflict, or a collaborative endeavor, conducted by both parties. The current article focuses on the latter type of activity, as it has been conducted by Israeli-Jews, Israeli-Palestinians and Territories-Palestinians<sup>11</sup> in relation to the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **The Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict and its memory**

The roots of this conflict lay in the late nineteenth century, when Jewish Zionist pioneers settled in Palestine/*Eretz Israel* (Hebrew for “the Land of Israel.”) Beginning in the early twentieth century, acts of violence were carried out by the local Palestinians against the Jews and the relations between the two peoples gradually deteriorated. In late 1947, the Palestinians, backed by several Arab nations, initiated a war against the Jews and later Israel. Israel won the war, resulting in some 650,000 Palestinians becoming refugees (the ‘1948 Palestinian Exodus.’) Over the years, Israel and the Arab countries fought several additional wars: in 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2006, although in 1979 a peace agreement was signed with Egypt. In 1987, Palestinians from the Territories initiated the first Intifada, leading to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the 1990s, which, as noted above, collapsed, leading to the eruption of the second Intifada. The Israelis, however, signed a peace agreement with the Jordanians in 1994. In 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza Strip and passed it to the Palestinians.<sup>12</sup>

For the Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians, their conflict is the primary issue in relation to their existence, ideology, and identity. Until the late 1970s, both parties largely addressed the history of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict similarly.<sup>13</sup> They held typical narratives of conflicts as described above, significantly biased and distorted, each party presenting itself positively and its rival negatively. Specifically, the dominant master narrative of the *Israeli-Jews* was the *Zionist*<sup>14</sup> one, blaming the Arabs/Palestinians for the outbreak of the

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Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford and Vienna: Peter Lang, 2007); regarding the Palestinians living in Israel – Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “The Collective Self-Healing Process in Intractable Conflicts – The Israeli-Palestinians’ Case” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 30/2 (2012): 243-267; and in general, with examples about the Holocaust, and conflicts in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe – Ervin Staub, *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict and Terrorism*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Those from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (hereafter oPt, occupied Palestinian territories). The term ‘Palestinians’ refers to those from Israel *and* the oPt. A minority of the participants were Jews living outside of Israel.

<sup>12</sup> Dov Waxman and Ilan Peleg, *Israel’s Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (Kansas City: University of Missouri Press, 2009); Tessler, *A History*.

<sup>13</sup> Both parties see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of the wider Israeli-Arab conflict.

<sup>14</sup> There are various Zionist narratives. This article refers to the *political* Zionist narrative, which was dominant in the first period after the establishment of Israel.

conflict and its continuation and de-legitimizing them. In contrast, the Jews/Israeli-Jews were portrayed positively as peace-loving and moral, and as the sole victims of the conflict.<sup>15</sup> The dominant master narrative that the *Palestinians* held was largely a mirror image of the Zionist narrative, blaming the Jews for the outbreak of the conflict and its continuation, while attributing no responsibility to themselves.<sup>16</sup> This state of affairs certainly did not promote peace and reconciliation.

The *Palestinians* for the most part have independently continued to hold the abovementioned narrative to this day.<sup>17</sup> Since the late 1970s, however, the *Israeli-Jews* have taken a significantly different path. At that time, members of various Israeli-Jewish *societal* institutions began to present a critical narrative of the conflict, at times entitled “post-Zionist.”<sup>18</sup> For example, the scholar Yeoshua Porat argued that the 1936-39 Palestinian uprising was directed mainly against the British and not against the Jews.<sup>19</sup> Many scholarly studies and daily newspaper articles, along with some 1948 Jewish war veterans’ memoirs, also began to present a Critical narrative of the 1948 Palestinian exodus. According to this narrative, some Palestinians left willingly while others were expelled by the Jewish/Israeli-Jewish fighting forces.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Israeli-Jews have argued that the Zionist pioneers acted against the local

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal, *Li-beyot ‘im ha-sikhsukh: nituah psikholgi-bevrati shel ha-bevrab ha-Yehudit be-Yisra’el* [Living in a Conflict: A Psychological-Social Analysis of the Jewish Society in Israel], (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007), (Hebrew); Ruth Firer and Sami Adwan, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in History and Civics Textbooks of both Nations*, (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche, 2004); Asima Ghazi-Bouillon, *Understanding the Middle East Peace Process – Israeli Academia and the Struggle for Identity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Eli Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948-2000)*, (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Salch Abdel Jawad, “The Arab and Palestinian Narratives of the 1948 War,” in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict – History’s Double Helix*, ed. Robert Rotberg, (Indiana, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 72-114; Neil Caplan, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict – Contested Histories*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Michael Milstein, “The Memory that Never Dies: The Nakba Memory and the Palestinian National Movement,” in *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, ed. Meir Litvak, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 47-69.

<sup>17</sup> Abdel Jawad, “The Arab and Palestinian Narratives;” Mustafa Cabha, *Hafalestinim – Ham Bepzurato* [The Palestinians – A Nation in the Diaspora], (Ra’anana: The Open University, 2010) (Hebrew); Caplan, *Contested Histories*; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Palestinian Autobiographical Memory regarding the 1948 Palestinian Exodus” *Political Psychology* 32 (2011): 271-295.

<sup>18</sup> Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “The Inclusive Israeli Memory of the Palestinian Refugee Problem” *Peace Review* 24 (2012): 187-94.

<sup>19</sup> Yeoshua Porat, *Tsemihat ha-tenu‘ab ha-le’umit ha-‘Arvit-ha-Palestina’it 1918-1929* [The Evolution of the Arabic/Palestinian National Movement 1918-1929] (Tel Aviv, 1976), (Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup> Regarding: scholars – Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: Changes in the Historical Memory of Israelis/Jews 1949-2004” *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (2011): 235-48; and regarding newspapers and 1948 War Veterans – Nets-Zehngut, “The Inclusive Israeli Memory.”

Palestinians, taking their lands and closing their trading markets,<sup>21</sup> and that in an agreement with Abdallah, King of Jordan, the Jews divided the Territories in 1948.<sup>22</sup>

Beginning in the late 1980s, this societal change intensified in Israel with the commencement of a historical revisionist period commonly called the “New Historians” era. New historical studies criticized various previously unchallenged aspects of the master Zionist narrative, or supported criticism raised earlier. The same challenges and criticisms appeared in newspaper articles, war veterans’ memoirs and NGOs’ publications,<sup>23</sup> and later, although less extensively, within some state institutions too (e.g., the Ministry of Education approved textbooks and a book published by the Israeli National Archive).<sup>24</sup> Scholarly studies, testimonies given, and newspaper articles written by Jewish veterans of the conflict, all formed a solid basis for concluding that the Critical narrative regarding the conflict is more accurate than the Zionist one.

## Methodology

This article is based on both primary and secondary sources: publications that were produced as part of the nine projects, studies that were published about some of these projects, other relevant studies,<sup>25</sup> and interviews conducted with participants in certain projects – mostly as their directors or co-directors. The latter participants were not only knowledgeable about these projects, but also generally about the activities of Israelis and Palestinians in the realm of the narratives of their conflict. They included Umar Al-Ghubari, Hilel Cohen, Eyal

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<sup>21</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>22</sup> Dan Shifman, *Optsiyah Yardenit [Jordanian Option]* (Ramat Efal: Yad Yabenkin, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1986), (Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> Caplan, *Contested Histories*; Ghazi-Bouillon, *Understanding the Middle East*; Shlomo Zand [Sand], *Hahistorian, Hazman Vebadimyon: Measkolat ha’anal” Vead Harotseach Hapost-Tsiyony* [The Historian, the Time and the Imagination: from the School of Les Annales to the Post-Zionist Murderer] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), (Hebrew). Regarding: newspapers, war veterans memoirs and NGOs – Nets-Zehngut, “The Inclusive Israeli Memory;” and textbooks used in the educational system – Firer and Adwan, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*; Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

<sup>24</sup> Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Israeli Approved Textbooks and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus” *Israel Studies* 18/3 (in press, 2013); Yemima Rosental, *Yitzhak Rabin: Rosh Hamemshala shel Israel 1974-1977, 1992-1995: Minbar Mismachim Metekufot Behayav* [Yitzhak Rabin: Prime Minister of Israel 1974-1977, 1992-1995: A Selection of Documents from Periods of his Life] (Jerusalem: The Israeli National Archive, 2005), (Hebrew).

<sup>25</sup> For example, studies that address the collective memory of conflicts, reconciliation and transitional justice processes, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli-Jewish society, and the situation of the Palestinians in Israel and abroad.

Nave, Paul Scham, and Yohanan Tzoreff.<sup>26</sup> The interviews – some written and others conducted in person<sup>27</sup> – used a semi-structured questionnaire allowing the interviewees to address topics on their own initiative in addition to the prepared questions.<sup>28</sup> Several of the main topics that the interviewees were asked to address were: whether they knew about other relevant projects; the reasons for the dearth of such projects until the early 2000s and their prevalence thereafter; the reasons why formal institutions did not conduct such projects; the characteristics of the projects; the extent and type of involvement of third parties in the projects; the positive impacts of the projects on the parties involved and the projects’ roles in promoting peace. The use of these diverse methodological tools – primary and secondary, written and verbal -- was intended to gain as much understanding as possible about these projects. Let us turn to the findings of the research.

### **Addressing the historical narratives of the conflict**

Since the early 2000s, Palestinians and Israeli-Jews have collaboratively addressed the history of the conflict in nine projects.<sup>29</sup> This involved mostly reducing the differences between the narratives of the two parties; agreeing on two parallel but legitimate narratives; discussing the possibility in general of properly addressing their historical narratives; and acknowledging that each party might have several narratives on the same topic rather than just one. The projects described below are not a representative sample of these types of projects; they represent *all* of these types of projects that have been conducted since the early 2000s, to the best of our knowledge.

The *first* project was begun in the early 2000s by PRIME (‘Peace Research Institute in the Middle East’).<sup>30</sup> Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish scholars and teachers developed three booklets jointly, in workshops conducted over several years, which juxtaposed each party’s main narrative concerning their interrelationship from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 2000s. Some of the main topics addressed were the 1948 and 1967 Wars and relations between the Palestinians and Jews in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Regarding the 1967

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Zochrot’ (Head of the Palestinian Villages Tours and the Palestinian Refugees Return Activities); ‘Van Leer’ (Director of the project); PRIME; ‘Shared History and Shared Narratives’ (Co-Director of the latter two projects), and ‘Circles of Knowledge’ (director of the project), respectively. See below more details about these projects.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews in writing were conducted with people the author was unable to meet in person, such as those who lived in other countries.

<sup>28</sup> Grant MaCraken, *The Long Interview*, (London: Sage, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> According to this research, no other relevant projects were conducted: see interview of the A. with Paul Scham, in writing, July 7, 2012; interview of the A. with Hilel Cohen, Jerusalem, 15 May 15, 2012; interview of the A. with Eyal Nave, Kfar Saba, July 4, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On, “Shared Histories Project: A PRIME Example of Peace-Building Under Fire” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 17 (2004): 513-21.

War, for example, the Palestinian narrative presented in the booklet claims it was a purely aggressive act by Israel, wishing to conquer more Arab lands. In contrast, the Israeli narrative states that the War was a necessary preventive measure aimed at countering an imminent and certain Arab attack that could have extinguished Israel. The booklets were published gradually over the years – in 2003, 2005, and 2007 – each one covering a different period: and an inclusive textbook comprised of all three previous booklets was published in 2009. These were written in Hebrew and Arabic, and are currently being used in schools among both parties.<sup>31</sup>

The *second* project – ‘Shared Histories’ – involved three Jerusalem-based institutions: ‘The Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace,’ ‘Panorama’ (‘The Palestinian Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development’), and ‘Yakar Center for Social Concern’. In 2002, these institutions organized several workshops in Israel and Cyprus made up of Palestinians and Israeli-Jews (historians, geographers, journalists etc.) to present and discuss the historical narratives of both sides regarding various major events of the conflict that occurred between 1882 and 1949. The topics discussed included: the Zionist settlement in Palestine/*Eretz Israel* (1982-1914), the Palestinian national movement (1919-1939), the UN resolution of 1947 to establish Jewish and Palestinian states, the 1948 War, and religious aspects of the conflict. The aims were mainly to increase mutual understanding and respect regarding the narratives and to explore the differences between the two parties’ narratives. An example of such differences lies in the topic of nationalism. According to the Palestinian narrative, their ancestors lived in Palestine before the Jews did. Certainly by the 1920s and most likely much earlier, a Palestinian identity and nationality existed that were very different from those of the other residents of the region. According to the Israeli narrative, however, the Arabs of the *Eretz Israel* were never a national group; they were largely undifferentiated from the inhabitants of what is today Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. In 2005, the content of these workshops was published in a book.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-on, Adnan Musalha and Eyal Nave, *Lilmod et Hanerative Habistory shel Ha’aber – Falistinim Veisraelim* [Studying the Narrative of the Other – Palestinians and Israelis] (Beit Jallah: PRIME, 2003), (Hebrew); Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-on, *Lilmod et Hanerative Habistory shel Ha’aber – Falistinim Veisraelim, Helek 2* [Studying the Narrative of the Other – Palestinians and Israelis, Part 2] (Beit Jallah: PRIME, 2005), (Hebrew); Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-on, *Lilmod et Hanerative Habistory shel Ha’aber – Falistinim Veisraelim, Helek 3* [Studying the Narrative of the Other – Palestinians and Israelis, Part 3] (Beit Jallah: PRIME, 2007), (Hebrew); Dan Bar-on and Sami Adwan, *Lilmod et Hanerative Habistory shel Ha’aber – Falistinim Veisraelim* [Studying the Narrative of the Other – Palestinians and Israelis] (Beit Jallah: PRIME, 2009), (Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Scham, Walid Salem and Benjamin Pogrund, *Shared Histories – A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2005).



The *third* project – ‘Circles of Knowledge,’ directed by Yohanan Tzoreff – was conducted between 2002 and 2009 at Bar-Ilan University. Among Israeli-Jews it targeted teachers and educators at religious high schools (Yeshivot for boys and Ulpanot for girls), as well as lecturers at orthodox teacher training colleges (in total, 123 participants from 37 institutions). Among the Palestinian participants were 32 teachers from high schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Both parties met separately throughout the year, learning various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its history. Then a five-day summer seminar was conducted, usually overseas, during which the Israeli and Palestinian groups met face-to-face. In these seminars each party was exposed directly to the narratives of the conflict held by the other and tried to legitimize or bridge gaps between them. Follow-up national and bi-national sessions were conducted for participants who wished to create shared educational messages and materials for implementation in their institutions.<sup>33</sup>

The *fourth* project was conducted by the Israeli-Jewish peace NGO Zochrot (Hebrew for “remembering”). Between 2003 and late 2011, Zochrot produced 45 booklets, each describing the history of the Palestinians in specific localities and their experiences during the 1948 War (e.g., the reactions of the Palestinians to the 1948 War, the battles, the Palestinian exodus, the fate of the Palestinian refugees in their new locations, and their attempts to return to their localities). The booklets are based on Israeli-Jewish studies (many by the historian Benny Morris) and the testimonies of Palestinian former residents of these localities, collected by the Palestinian and Jewish staff of ‘Zochrot.’<sup>34</sup> Regarding the 1948 Palestinian exodus, for instance, the testimonies from these Palestinians did not present only the official Palestinian narrative which attributes the exodus to full expulsion of the Palestinians by the Jews/Israeli-Jews.<sup>35</sup> Such an example is the testimony of Ibrahim Abu Sanina from A’Jalil: “Why did the people of A’Jalil leave from here [in 1948]? Not far from here six people of the Shubacky family were murdered, but Arab propaganda made it seem as if the entire family was murdered, about 100 people. So everyone ran away from here in fear.”<sup>36</sup> ‘Zochrot’ also prepared an educational kit describing

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<sup>33</sup> Interview of the A. with Yohanan Tzoreff, in writing, December 7, 2012; Report. No date. *Circles of Knowledge: Report*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University. It should be mentioned, that a similar project was conducted between 2005 and 2009 by Yohanan Tzoreff under the auspices the Israeli Ben-Gurion University, involving 61 Jewish participants from 13 schools, but without collaboration with Palestinians.

<sup>34</sup> Eitan Bronstein, “The Nakba in Hebrew: Israeli-Jewish Awareness of the Palestinian Catastrophe and Internal Refugees,” in *Catastrophe Remembered – Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees*, ed. Nur Masalha, (London and New York: Zed, 2005), 215-41; see <http://www.zochrot.org/>, accessed 9 June 2012. Umar Al-Ghubari, interviewed as part of this research, is in charge on producing these booklets, including conducting the interviewees with the Palestinians.

<sup>35</sup> Abdel Jawad, “The Arab and Palestinian Narratives,” Nets-Zehngut, “Palestinian Autobiographical Memory.”

<sup>36</sup> Zochrot A’Jalil, *Zochrot A’Jalil* [Remember A’Jalil] (Tel Aviv: Zochrot, 2004), 4-5, (Hebrew).

the Palestinian history prior, during, and after the 1948 War, which since 2009 has been distributed among Israeli-Jewish history and civic teachers.<sup>37</sup>

The *fifth* project – ‘History’s Double Helix,’ headed by Robert Rotberg – was conducted in 2003 in the form of a conference that took place at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish (accompanied with several American) scholars discussed various aspects of their narratives of the conflict, including the dynamics of the narratives in their societies, their impact, and the possibilities of mutually addressing their narratives. For instance, it was suggested that it is important for Palestinians and Israeli-Jews to acknowledge the narratives of the Other and to respect them; it is not necessary to agree with them. Specific historical subjects that were addressed included: the parties’ narratives of victimhood, the right to the disputed territory, the morality of the Zionist movement and pioneers, the Israeli settlements, Palestinian terrorist attacks, and the reasons for the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak. As for this summit, for example, the Palestinians claim that it failed mainly because Barak did not properly address their needs. In contrast, Israelis largely claim that Barak offered Arafat “almost everything” and that Arafat’s refusal to accept Barak’s generous offer was a sign that the former did not really want peace. The outcomes of the conference were published in 2003 in a brief report and in 2006 in an inclusive book.<sup>38</sup>

The *sixth* project – ‘Shared Narratives’ – was conducted in 2006 by Paul Scham, Walid Salem and Benjamin Pogrud. They organized a conference in Istanbul with Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish (and some American) scholars at which each party presented its narratives regarding various aspects of the conflict. Specific topics addressed were: Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, the right to the land, the impact of the Holocaust on the Israeli memory of the conflict, the Palestinians’ 1948 *Nakba*, and the religious sites (mainly Jerusalem). The Palestinian master narrative that emerged was generally that of a people unjustly deprived of its land by invaders, while the Israeli master narrative depicted a justified “return” of those dispossessed many generations before. Discussions of the specific and master narratives were accompanied by a debate about the differences between the two parties’ narratives and the possibilities of negotiating these differences. The edited transcripts of the

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<sup>37</sup> Orr Kashty, “Mitachat Leapo shel Misrad Hachinuch Irgun Smol Mefits Lamorim Chomer Limud al Hanakba Hafaletinit” [“Under the Nose of the Ministry of Education, a Leftish Organization Disseminates to the Teachers Educational Material about the Palestinian Nakba”], *Haaretz*, June 4, 2009, (Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> Respectively, Deborah West, *Myth and Narrative in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Cambridge, MS: World Peace Foundation, 2003); Robert Rotberg, *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History’s Double Helix*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

conference were published in 2013 as a special issue of the journal *Israel Studies*.<sup>39</sup>

The *seventh* project was conducted in 2006-07 by the Israeli 'Van Leer Institute' and the 'Palestinian Sartawi Center for Peace Studies' at Al-Quds University.<sup>40</sup> A series of encounters were conducted between Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish students in which talks about the history of the conflict were delivered by lecturers from both parties, followed by discussions. Afterwards, a series of booklets (and accompanying teachers' guides) were produced describing in Hebrew and Arabic the Palestinian and the Israeli-Jewish narratives concerning such topics as: Jerusalem, the 1948 War, the Palestinian refugees, the right of return, and the Israeli settlements in the territories. As for the latter, for example, one of the booklets presented the Palestinian view that the settlements are part of a broad plan among the Jews to cleanse the Palestinians from their land. This plan, the booklet indicated, was reinforced after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel in the 1967 Six day war, which led to a wide establishment of settlements. In contrast, some of the Israeli-Jews (e.g., the religious ones) view Israel's right to the establishment of settlements to be based on, inter alia, God's promise of *Eretz Israel* (In Hebrew the Land of Israel), including the territories, to the Jewish people. The Jews are currently in a process of redemption, an idea that is strengthened by the possibility of their living in the territories.<sup>41</sup> The booklets were intended for mid- and high school pupils of both parties.

In the *eighth* project, Israeli-Jews and Palestinians cooperated under the auspices of the 'Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation' (IHJR), based in The Netherlands. This institute conducted four sub-projects that allowed each party to present and discuss its narratives on four topics: the 1948 War in general, sacred sites, the 1948 Palestinian refugees, and the 1948 events specifically in the city of Haifa.<sup>42</sup> In this framework, scholars from both parties met and discussed these topics. Based on these projects, three books written by scholars from both parties have already been published in 2011. The first pertains to the 1948 war (presenting narratives of both parties separately, published in Arabic, Hebrew and English);<sup>43</sup> the second concerns 1948 Palestinian refugees (containing analysis by scholars from both parties of the memories of students from both parties on this topic, published in

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<sup>39</sup> Interview of the A. with Paul Scham; Paul Scham, Benjamin Pogrud, and As'ad Ghanem, Special Issue: "Shared Narratives - A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue" *Israel Studies* 18/2 (2013): 1-158.

<sup>40</sup> Interview of the A. with Hilel Cohen.

<sup>41</sup> Elkana Markovitz and Ahmad Muhamad Hasan Al-Sheih, *The Jewish Settlements in the Territories – the Israeli National Narrative, the Palestinian National Narrative* (Jerusalem: Val Leer), (Hebrew).

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.historyandreconciliation.org/mideast>, accessed 2 June 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Motti Golani and Adel Manna, *Two Sides of the Coin, Independence and Nakba*, (The Hague: IHJR, 2011).

English/Arabic and English/Hebrew editions);<sup>44</sup> And the third addresses sacred places (presenting in English a common narrative of three sacred places for both parties – the Cave of the Patriarchs, the Tomb of Samuel, and Temple Mount). As for Temple Mount in Jerusalem, for example, the book describes its history from the Roman and Byzantine Period to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 B.C.E., by the Muslim Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab in 638, by the Crusaders around 1099, by the Ayyubids and Mamluks as of 1187, the Ottomans in 1516, by the British in 1917, the Jordanians in 1948, and by Israel in 1967. The fate of the Jews and the Arab residents of the land throughout these periods is described.<sup>45</sup>

The *ninth* and last project was conducted by the scholars Shaul Gabay (Israeli-Jew) and Amin Kazak (Palestinian). It was based on the belief that knowing and respecting the narratives of the Other is vital for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2012, they published a book in English that presented side-by-side each scholar's perspective on various historical issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The main topics addressed were the ties of both people to Palestine/*Eretz Israel*; exile and nationalism; the British Mandate period; the 1948, 1967 Six day and 1982 first Lebanon Wars; the 1987 first Palestinian Intifada; the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; the 2000 second Intifada; and the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip. As for the second Intifada, for example, the Palestinians generally claim it erupted as a popular response to the dire situation in the occupied territories and the unsuccessful peace process. The official Israeli narrative, however, is that the Intifada was organized by Arafat in order to advance the interests of the Palestinians in the peace process.<sup>46</sup>

## Summary and discussion

Since the early 2000s, the Palestinians and the Israeli-Jews have collaborated on nine projects in which they addressed the narratives of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict. The readership of the products of these projects was diverse and included mostly students from the educational system (who were exposed to the published or designed educational materials) and the general public (who were exposed to the published scholarly books). This state of affairs of wide collaboration is especially noteworthy since it occurred during a period in which the political, military and societal situation between the parties was dire. The official and societal institutions of both parties (e.g., the

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<sup>44</sup> Sami Adwan, Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Menachem Klein, Ihab Saloul, Tamir Sorek and Machmoud Yazbak, *Zoom in: Palestinian Refugees of 1948, Remembrances*, (The Hague: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> IHJR, *Sacred Sites in the Holy Land: Historical and Religious Perspectives*, (The Hague: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Shaul Gabay and Amin Kazak, *One Land Two Stories*, (New York: Livingston, 2012).

governments, the media and cultural channels) presented each other negatively for the most part, and conveyed a pessimistic picture of the current state of the conflict. Therefore, *it is important to bring these historical collaborative projects into both parties' awareness* in order to show the parties that peace-oriented activity did in fact occur in the 2000s. There are forces within each society that do try to promote peace, despite the fact that largely there were no other significant efforts in this direction during most of that period. This will contribute to the amelioration of the image each party has of its rival and to the increase in hope for resolving the conflict.<sup>47</sup> Several more aspects should be addressed.

#### *A. Top-down and bottom-up activities*

The findings demonstrate the difference between *top-down and bottom-up* activities. While top-down activities between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews were largely in a stalemate, bottom-up activities flourished. The latter activities have an incremental and latent positive impact on the socio-psychological sphere of the parties, ameliorating mutual psychological reactions (see below). Consequently, in time, this can increase the chances that the official institutions of both parties will promote top-down peace oriented activities. In other words, such bottom-up activity can have an indirect positive influence on future top-down processes.

These bottom-up projects were conducted by members of societal institutions only, mostly scholars – a phenomenon which is understandable since they are experts on the history of the conflict. Some of these projects also involved teachers, peace activists and people with direct experience, that is, who took part in the conflict. As mentioned, *no official/state institutions participated in them*. How can we explain this more conservative approach of Israeli state institutions towards the history of the conflict? Four explanations are suggested, for example, regarding the conservative approach of Israeli state institutions towards the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus (i.e., reluctance to present the expulsion cause).<sup>48</sup> First, the state institutions represent the state, and therefore their staff is more cautious about their activities, in order not to damage the state by presenting in public non-Zionist narratives. Second, the formal agenda of some state institutions is to present the state positively in order to mobilize the citizens. Third, Israeli society is more heterogeneous than its state administration; therefore there were maverick individuals and groups in the societal institutions that deviated from the dominant Zionist narratives.

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<sup>47</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal and Gavriel Salomon, "Israeli-Jewish Narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Evolvement, Contents, Functions and Consequences," in *History's Double Helix: The Inter-wined Narratives of Israel and Palestine*, ed. Robert Rothberg, (Bloomington, IN, 2006), 19-46; Paez and Liu, "Collective Memory;" Tint, "History, Memory and Intractable Conflict."

<sup>48</sup> Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "The Israeli National Information Center and Collective Memory of the Israeli-Arab Conflict" *The Middle East Journal* 62 (2008): 653-70; Rafi Nets-Zehngut and Daniel Bar-Tal, "Transformation of the Collective Memory of Conflicts: A Conceptual Framework and the Israeli Case of the 1948 Palestinian Exodus" (under review, 2012); Podeh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

Fourth and last, individuals in the state institutions are more vulnerable to disciplinary measures and sanctions that can be used against them in case they deviate from the Zionist narratives. Eyal Nave added another explanation, a general fifth one: since the early 2000s, the hawkish Likud party has been in power. This party, and its coalition political parties, would not look favorably upon state institutions challenging the dominant Zionist narrative of the conflict by presenting counter narratives that present Israel less positively or its rivals less negatively.<sup>49</sup>

Encouragement for such bottom-up activity had already been expressed in 1998 by the prominent Palestinian scholar Edward Said. He claimed that Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals and scholars should collaborate in addressing the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because their official institutions are not likely to do so.<sup>50</sup>

### ***B. Contemporary and past aspects***

The findings of these projects also demonstrate the differences between *contemporary and past aspects* of the conflict. The present is very contentious and therefore the parties cannot agree on many aspects of it. By contrast, as time passes, prior events become less contentious;<sup>51</sup> therefore, the parties can adopt less biased narratives about such events and accept the existence of narratives that differ between the rivals, etc. That is why the past is currently being recruited for the service of the present in order to promote peace. The parties bypass the difficult present and collaborate on the historical level.

### ***C. Pre-resolution projects***

Such projects as those addressed here are often discussed in the literature as occurring *after* the resolution of conflicts.<sup>52</sup> To the contrary, the given projects have been conducted *before the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*. This highlights the uniqueness of this phenomenon between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. In addition, the potential *impact* of such *pre-resolution* projects is especially significant because they can promote the resolution of the conflict

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<sup>49</sup> Interview of Author's with Eyal Nave. Nave also supported the first explanation, regarding the fact that the state institutions represent the state.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Said, "New History, Old Ideas," *Al-Abram Weekly*, May 21–27, 1998.

<sup>51</sup> Stefan Berger, "A Return to the National Paradigm? National History Writing in Germany, Italy, France, and Britain from 1945 to the Present" *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005): 629-78; Wolf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies" *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 179-97; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "The Passing of Time and the Collective Memory of Conflicts – Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus" *Peace and Change* 37 (2012): 253-285 (the latter article discusses 15 ways in which the passing of time influences the memory of conflicts).

<sup>52</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma Bennink, "The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process," in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Ya'acov Bar-Siman-Tov, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 11-38; Dean Alexander and Cherif Bassiouni, *Post-Conflict Justice*, (NY: Transnational Publishers, 2002); Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past*, (New York: Routledge, 2010).

(in contrast to post-conflict similar projects). This is the case since they can promote reduction of negative stereotypes and prejudice, increase trust and empathy towards the rival, and enhance critical reflection regarding one's own in-group.<sup>53</sup>

***D. Reasons for pre-2000s lack of projects and their abundance thereafter***

How can we explain the *lack* of historical collaborative activity before the early 2000s, and its *prevalence* thereafter? The explanation is diverse and is the outcome of the accumulated impact of various factors.<sup>54</sup> Generally, until the late 1980s – with less awareness of the importance of the historical narratives of conflicts and less centrality<sup>55</sup> of the Palestinians in Israel – the parties saw no need to collaborate in the realm of narratives. Beginning in the late 1980s, the extents of this awareness and centrality increased. Still, the parties did not collaborate in this realm until the late 1990s, because only the political realm was considered to be central and promising, via the peace negotiations. Over long periods during this decade, the end of the conflict seemed near, via signing a peace agreement. Thus, the parties neglected the narrative realm, seeing it as unnecessary.

The situation changed drastically in the early 2000s, with the eruption of the second Intifada and the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. First, the deterioration of the political and military state of affairs, as described above, inhibited the practice of many societal activities that require a calm political and military climate. For example, Israeli-Jewish tourism and economic activities in the area of the Palestinian Authority require that the latter is allowed to enter that area – which is currently generally prohibited by Israel or is very limited. Collaborating with regard to historical narratives is, however, different. Such projects can be conducted despite such military, political and physical obstacles; therefore, initiators of these projects sought to conduct them as they were feasible. Second, the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process led some people to look for deeper causes for its failure than had been previously found. Paul Scham, for example, felt that inability to understand the historical assumptions of the Other was part of the failure of Oslo. Third, various western countries and international organizations felt there was a need to financially support such narrative oriented activities, in order to promote peace in the region. This was done not

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<sup>53</sup> Adwan and Bar-On, “Shared Histories Project;” Bar-Tal, *Li-beyot ‘im ba-sikhsukh*.

<sup>54</sup> Bar-On, *In Pursuit*; interview of the A. with Hilel Cohen; Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement*; Interview of the A. with Eyal Nave; interview of the A. with Paul Scham; Paul Scham, “The Historical Narratives of Israelis and Palestinians and the Peacemaking Process” *Israel Studies Forum* 21 (2006): 58-84.

<sup>55</sup> By “centrality” it is meant the extent to which a topic is present in the public sphere and is discussed – see Daniel Bar-Tal, Amiram Raviv, and Tamir Freund, “An Anatomy of Political Beliefs: A Study of their Centrality, Confidence, Contents, and Epistemic Authority” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 24 (1994): 849-72.

only for the sake of the involved parties, but also in order to promote world order. The Middle East conflict was perceived as undermining such order. All of these projects benefited from such financial support. Fourth and last, as described above, worldwide awareness of the importance of historical narratives of conflicts increased as time passed -- due to their internal and external impact on conflicts themselves (i.e., influencing society members, and their rivals, as well as the international community). Exposing conflicting parties to the narratives of their rivals, legitimizing both narratives, and reducing gaps between them, are considered to significantly promote peace. This awareness, prevalent also among Palestinians and Israeli-Jews, has grown stronger over time. All of the publications produced through the above nine projects, in addition to interviews conducted with some of their participants, described the importance of this aim -- to promote peace -- as a motivating force in conducting them the projects.

#### *E. The projects' positive impacts*

Evaluating the positive impacts of the projects on the parties is a difficult task. The impacts differed between each party, between the projects' participants and their societies at large, and also between the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish participants in the projects. The projects themselves also differ from one another -- for instance, some seem to be more influential than others (e.g., PRIME's, 'Circle of Knowledge' and 'Zochrot's more so than 'Van Leer's).

Nevertheless, in analyzing the findings carefully, several positive impacts emerge.<sup>56</sup> First, the projects helped to popularize to some degree among scholars and the general public the idea that the two parties have different narratives of the conflict, and that some "acknowledgement" (as Paul Scham puts it) of the Other's narrative contributes to peace. Second, the projects succeeded in exposing members of each party (including the students at the educational systems) to less negative and less biased narratives *of the rival*, in contrast to the typical portrayal of the rival as holding extremely negative and biased narratives. Some of the projects (e.g., 'Van Leer's and 'Shared Narratives') enabled each party to show the Other that they held several narratives -- some more negative and others, less -- as opposed to just one negative narrative. 'Zochrot' made a special contribution in this regard -- the personal stories of the Palestinians, translated into Hebrew, opened a unique window into the Palestinians' narrative. Their perspective on 1948 was transmitted by telling their personal stories in their own words (in contrast to the more 'dry' descriptions of the past in academic publications). Thus, these

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<sup>56</sup> Adwan and Bar-on, *Lilmod Part 2*; Adwan and Bar-on, *Lilmod Part 3*; Adwan and Bar-On, "Shared Histories Project;" interview of the A. with Umar al-Ghubari, in writing, July 8 2012; Interview of the A. with Hilel Cohen; interview of the A. with Yohanan Tsoreff; IHJR, 'Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation,' <http://historyandreconciliation.org>, accessed 3 June 2013; interview of the A. with Eyal Nave; Report, *Circles of Knowledge*; interview of the A. with Paul Scham; Scham, Salem and Pogrund, *Shared Histories*.



projects are particularly powerful in influencing Israeli-Jews, by arousing their human feelings of empathy and solidarity with the Palestinians. Third, through the collaboration between the parties, the projects succeeded in moderating the conflict's narratives that the projects' participants held prior to the projects. The participants discussed their differing narratives and were able to gain a deeper understanding of them -- which allowed for the transformation of *their own narratives* into less biased ones that used use less negative language. Fourth, the projects increased within each party the awareness of a positive inclination within the other party, shown by their being open to taking part in such projects.

All of the above relates to the positive impacts on the rivals' societies at large and the projects' participants. These diverse impacts – as they relate to the societies at large – were more significant in their impact on the Israelis than on the Palestinians. The less biased booklets and textbooks (PRIME's and 'Zochrot's more so and 'Van Leer's, less) were distributed more widely in Israeli schools (Jewish and Palestinian) than in schools in the Palestinian Authority. This was mostly due to a more conservative approach among the latter, and because 'Zochrot' operates only in Israel. Similarly, the activity of 'Circles of Knowledge' was wider in scope among the Israelis than among the Palestinians. This does not mean that the projects encountered no problems at all in Israel. For example, PRIME's booklets were disqualified by the Israeli Ministry of Education for use in the educational system. They are nevertheless still being taught in some schools and provide teacher guides for study of the history of the conflict. The booklets are also being used in various informal societal contexts such as: private seminars for social workers and teachers, academic and public libraries, dovish political parties, NGOs, and various associations. 'Zochrot' also encounters hindrances from the Israeli Ministry of Education in disseminating to the educational system its educational booklets, but still succeeds partially in doing so.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, in its early stages of operation, 'Circles of Knowledge' encountered difficulties in getting the collaboration of Israeli educational institutions because of the left-wing label the project had acquired.

While the above positive impacts relate to both parties, although somewhat more to the Israeli-Jewish society, the following two positive impacts relate exclusively to the *Palestinians*. First, in times of conflicts, members of the weaker party (from the military point of view) often exhibit symptoms of Learned Helplessness. This refers to a feeling of lack of control over their lives, because the stronger party dominates their activities, daily movements, education, economy, and so on - sometimes even determining whether some of them will live or die. This causes psychological problems, including anger

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<sup>57</sup> Kashty, "Mitachat Leapo."

towards the oppressing party.<sup>58</sup> Largely, this was the situation for the Palestinians in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until recently, especially among older generations.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, by conducting these projects the Palestinian *organizers* took some control over their own destiny and thereby influenced it, an activity that empowered them. It also contributed to their knowledge and awareness about 1948, and strengthened their feeling in the justness of their moral stand about it.<sup>60</sup> Second, specifically with regard to ‘Zochrot’ – its activities of systematically collecting and documenting the oral history of the Palestinians with regard to many of their localities, contributed to the Palestinian *interviewees* in a number of ways. They felt that their personal stories were valuable since others were interested in hearing it. They are responsible to their families and people for passing their knowledge on to future generations – and they are doing it. All of this was an *empowering* process for them.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, many of them had not told their stories about 1948 until these projects were conducted because of psychological difficulties such as shame, fear, trauma, lack of hope, and feeling that they themselves lacked value. Their stories were thus ‘stuck’ inside of them, inhibiting their wellbeing. Telling their stories of trauma and defeat provided them with a feeling of relief, some form of partial *healing*. This was especially true in telling their stories to the Israeli-Jews, who had caused their 1948 trauma, a process that was especially difficult and required extra courage.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted that some of the projects got widespread international attention, mainly PRIME’s, and ‘Zochrot’s to some extent. For example, PRIME’s project received some ten Israeli and mostly international peace awards, its booklet was translated into eight languages, it got extensive international media coverage, and its concept was adopted for use in other conflicts (see below). This international affirmation *indirectly* supported the implementation of PRIME’s project among the Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians. It encouraged PRIME’s participants to continue in their work,

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<sup>58</sup> Zeynep Cemalcilar, Resit Canbeyli and Diane Sunar, “Learned Helplessness, Therapy and Personality Traits: An Experimental Study” *Journal of Social Psychology* 14 (2003): 65-81.

<sup>59</sup> Dan Rabinovitch and Khaula Abu-Baker, *The Upright Generation*, (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002), (Hebrew); Khalil Rinnawi, *Haevra Ha’aravit Bisrael: Seder Yom Ambivalenty* [The Arabic Society in Israel: An Ambivalent Agenda], (Tel Aviv: The Management College, 2003), (Hebrew).

<sup>60</sup> Interview of the A. with Umar al-Ghubari, and Eyal Nave; as well as Report, *Circles of Knowledge*.

<sup>61</sup> Some of the *organizers* at ‘Zochrot’ were also empowered by this aspect, feeling that they are institutionalizing and preserving the history of their people and making it more of a ‘real’ science, and not ‘just’ popular folkloristic stories.

<sup>62</sup> Interview of the A. with Umar al-Ghubari. For literature on the positive impact on individuals of addressing their memories of past traumas of conflicts, see Myriam, Denov, “Coping with the Trauma of War: Former Child Soldiers in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone” *International social work* 53 (2010): 791-806; Kenneth Miller, and Andrew Rasmussen, “War Exposure, Daily Stressors, and Mental Health in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: Bridging the Divide between Trauma-Focused and Psychosocial Frameworks” *Social Science & Medicine* 70 (2010): 7-16.

despite obstacles they encountered in Israel and the Palestinian Authority from various formal and informal institutions.<sup>63</sup>

All of the projects above had a profound impact through their promotion of peace, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By “*promoting* peace” it is not meant that the projects led to the resolution of the conflict; but that they *contributed* to its resolution on the psychological level. However, such partial and indirect influence is also of importance. Specifically, we are talking about a relatively large number of projects (nine), which were conducted over a long period of time (about a decade), by both rivals, involving figures and institutions from various walks of life, whose products were distributed among diverse audiences (e.g., the educational system and the general public) with whom they sometimes significantly resonated. The educational system is especially important in this regard since the teachers who took part in the projects and the projects’ published educational products have continued to positively influence students year after year. All in all, consequently – as described in the literature review section and based on extensive literature<sup>64</sup> – positive transformation of the popular memory of the people promotes positive transformation in other relevant ways, psychologically, and as a result: in their behavior regarding the conflict.

The above discussion related to the positive impacts on the *rivals* themselves. In passing, it should be added that some of the projects had positive impacts also *internationally*. For example, the widespread international resonance of the PRIME project inspired and guided similar projects between rivals in other conflicts worldwide, such as in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Qatar, Malaysia, and Germany, as well as between Russia and Georgia and among Japan and Korea and China.<sup>65</sup>

#### ***F. Local conduct of the projects***

The nine projects were conducted almost exclusively by *Palestinians and Israeli-Jews and not by third parties*.<sup>66</sup> This phenomenon contributed in at least three major ways to the positive impact of these projects on the rivals: (1) Cultural differences between third parties and the people who are the objects of these

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<sup>63</sup> Interview of the A. with Eyal Nave.

<sup>64</sup> For support of the positive impact of negotiation between rivals regarding historical narratives of their conflicts see Bar-Tal and Salomon, “Israeli-Jewish Narratives;” Rothberg, *History’s Double Helix*; Paez and Liu, “Collective Memory;” Tint, “History, Memory and Intractable Conflict.”

<sup>65</sup> Interview of the A. with with Eyal Nave.

<sup>66</sup> Differentiating between ‘conducting’ (actually taking part in the projects), and their ‘initiation,’ some of the projects were *initiated* by people who are not from the Middle East. For example, Elazar Barkan – an Israeli-Jew, but living in the US, co-director of an institution in The Netherlands who initiated the IHJR project), Paul Scham – an American Jew who was one of the organizers of the ‘Shared History’ and ‘Shared Narratives’ projects, and members of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

activities, with whom they might collaborate – in this case, Palestinians and Israeli-Jews – might inhibit the positive impact of the projects. The third parties might not understand the specific complex context and motivating forces of the rivals dealing with such sensitive topics.<sup>67</sup> Such a problem does not exist for our purposes here, because the projects were conducted for the most part only by the parties to the conflict themselves.<sup>68</sup> The Palestinians and the Israeli-Jews typically objected to the intervention of third parties with regard to the *substance* of the projects. They agreed to get financial and logistical aid from third parties, but not intervention in the content of the publications. This was an outcome of the feeling that “they, the third parties, do not understand the complexity and emotional particularities of the conflict for us, the involved parties.”<sup>69</sup> In other instances – such as in the case of the activities of ‘Zochrot’ – third parties did not intervene, trusting the NGO’s professionalism.<sup>70</sup> (2) Historical narratives that are presented before the in-group by its own members are usually perceived as more credible than those presented by outsiders.<sup>71</sup> This is especially important when *counter* historical narratives are presented, those that present the in-group less positively or its rival less negatively (compared to the in-group’s dominant narratives). The fact, then, that these projects were conducted by Palestinians and Israeli-Jews, contributed to their positive impact on the parties.<sup>72</sup>(3) Lastly, the projects had a particular positive impact on the Palestinians, in the context of the Learned Helplessness phenomenon, as described above.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, beginning in the early 2000s, the Palestinians and the Israeli-Jews have collaborated on nine projects which addressed the history of their conflict. This article assembles for the first time these projects, describes them, highlights the importance of presenting them to both parties, and discusses their characteristics as bottom-up projects. It also explains the conservative approach of the official institutions which led to a lack of similar top-down projects, the difference between contemporary and past aspects of the conflict, and the uniqueness and special contribution of such pre-resolution activity. Furthermore, the article explains the lack of such activity until the early 2000s and its prevalence thereafter, lists the positive impacts of the projects on the

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<sup>67</sup> Rachel Kerr, “Review of Books on Transitional Justice” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5 (2011): 319-30; Patricia Lundy, “Exploring Home-grown Transitional Justice and its Dilemmas: A Case Study of the Historical Enquiries Team, Northern Ireland” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3 (2009): 321-40.

<sup>68</sup> Interview of the A. with Eyal Nave; Interview of the A. with Paul Scham.

<sup>69</sup> Interview of the A. with Eyal Nave.

<sup>70</sup> Interview of the A. with Umar al-Ghubari.

<sup>71</sup> Anita Shapira, “Hirbet Hiza – Zikaron Veshchecha” [“Hirbet Hiza – Remembrance and Forgetfulness”], *Alpaim* 21 (2002): 9-53, (Hebrew).

<sup>72</sup> Interview of the A. with Umar al-Ghubari; Interview of the A. with Eyal Nave.

parties involved, and explains how the fact that they were conducted by the rival parties contributed to their success. For their benefits in promoting peace, let us hope that more such projects will be conducted in the future.

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**How to quote this article:**

Rafi Nets-Zehngut, *Palestinians and Israelis Collaborate in Addressing the Historical Narratives of their Conflict*, in "Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC," n.5 July 2013  
*url*: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=334](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=334)