Looking backward to the future: Counter-memory as oppositional knowledge-production in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

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Abstract
This article examines a strategy of peace activism that gained visibility in the last decades: memory activism. Memory activists manifest a temporal shift in transnational politics: first the past, then the future. Affiliated with the globally-circulating paradigm of historical justice, memory activist groups assume that a new understanding of the past could lead to a new perception of present problems and project alternative solutions for the future. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and discourse analysis among memory activists of the 1948 war in Israel since 2001, the article examines the activist production of counter-memory during active conflict. Using Coy et al.'s typology of oppositional knowledge-production, the article shows how the largest group of memory activism in Israel produced 'new' information on the war, critically assessed the dominant historical narrative, offered an alternative shared narrative, and began to envision practical solutions for Palestinian refugees. However, the analysis raises additional concerns that reach beyond the scope of the typology, primarily regarding the unequal power relations that exist not only between the dominant and activist production of oppositional knowledge, but also among activists.

Keywords
Collective memory, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, memory activism, oppositional knowledge, social movements, transnational politics

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In recent decades, the past has become a significant site for national and transnational political debates and struggles (Barkan, 2000: x; Bickford and Sodaro, 2010; Olick, 2007; Olick and Coughlin, 2003; Torpey, 2001). Following a shift from grand visions for the future to addressing difficult pasts, ideas and strategies for creating a peaceful and stable democratic nation-state have focused on addressing a difficult past as a crucial first step. This shift has challenged social movements and peace activist groups, which are traditionally future-oriented and often bracket contested and polarizing pasts in order to highlight common ground (Goldfarb, 2009). A new approach to peace activism has emerged in line with past-oriented politics: *memory activism*, or the commemoration of a contested past in order to influence public debate, primarily towards greater equality, plurality, and reconciliation. The interaction between past and future that characterizes memory activism in comparison to more traditional peace movements highlights some of the normative assumptions, tensions, and difficulties of addressing a contested past in public, especially in active conflict. More generally, it helps us understand how the past shapes our shared perceptions of the future and vice versa (Gutman et al., 2010).

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Israel during 2006–2011, composed of 40 semi-structured interviews and participant-observation among three groups of memory activists, as well as discourse analysis of their publications and events, the article follows the largest group of memory activism in Israel, the predominantly Jewish-Israeli *Zochrot* (female plural 'we remember,' in Hebrew). Similarly to other groups of memory activism around the world, Zochrot uses a contested and silenced past and commemorative practices to create a new vision for the future. The group has been documenting, collecting, and distributing Palestinian memories of the 1948 war by infusing two highly familiar and dominant cultural and commemorative practices in Israel with new meaning: *tours* of the ruins of pre-1948 Palestinian villages and *testimonies* of their former inhabitants, now refugees, that are performed during the tours, as well as recorded and collected in archives and information centers. By so doing the activists attempt to go beyond the discursive idiosyncrasy of each of the conflict side's national narrative and influence the Jewish-majority-dominated public debate. The article begins by examining the counter-intuitive emergence of memory activist groups in Israel during a protracted conflict and then moves to analyzing the activist attempts to reframe the public debate on the conflict's origin and project a new resolution for the future.

An analytical lens from the study of peace activism and social movements best registers the shift in temporal relations among memory activists: first the past, then the future. Peace activists and social movements have been analyzed as struggling over framing and reframing public debates and discourses (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1980; Steinberg, 1999). One of the strategies for this intervention according to Coy at al. (2008), is producing *oppositional knowledge* and claims against the dominant knowledge and claims. Coy et al. define the creation of oppositional knowledge as 'the production and dissemination of alternative understandings and visions' to the dominant ones that wish to shift 'the normative center of society' (2008: 5.7). Oppositional knowledge consists of questioning and subverting the common sense and envisioning alternative 'ideological and strategic visions' for the future (2008: 5.5). Coy et al. provide four discursive types of oppositional knowledge-production by peace activists and social movements:

The counter-informative type of knowledge publicly introduces new information or 'the untold story' and highlights the selectivity and partiality of the dominant knowledge that was made available to the public by those in power (2008: 5.1). *Critical-interpretive* knowledge questions existing knowledge on a moral or social basis and offers a new interpretation of the dominant political claims (2008: 5.2). *Radical-envisioning* and *transformative* knowledge ask not what exists in the present, but what should be in the future, envisioning alternative outcomes and offering practical solutions respectively. Radical-envisioning goes back to the original intent of an idea, and envisions alternative routes to the present and future if this original intent was preserved (2008: 5.3); the transformative type of knowledge describes ways to achieve such alternative routes as well as to gain the attention and response of power-holders (2008: 5.4). 'It is the four approaches working together in interlocking ways that make oppositional knowledge so powerful,' Coy and his colleagues conclude (2008: 5.5).

This model, which has been developed from studies of the American peace movement in the second half of the 20th century, seems particularly suitable for analyzing activism in past-oriented politics. This is because such political debates usually involve knowledge and interpretations of the past that touch upon the fundamental organizing principles and moral assumptions of a society. Similarly, producing oppositional knowledge 'is deep-rooted in the vision of society as a collective where concepts and norms are developed through interaction, disagreement and emergent consensus.' It is also the place in which, Coy et al. argue, 'the process of persuasion takes place,' through 'a dialogue of ideas' (2008: 5.6).

Analyzing the case of memory activism in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict using the typology of oppositional knowledge-production brings important insight into the temporal dimension of visions for political change among peace activist groups. It also raises additional concerns that reach beyond the scope of this typology and the 'dialogue of ideas.' Primarily, the activist use of dominant memory practices drawn from the local cultural repertoire in the production of oppositional knowledge in Israel raises questions regarding the inequality that underlies any process of knowledge-production, including among those who produce oppositional knowledge.

The transnational shift to past-facing politics and the strategy of activism that goes hand in hand with it cause tensions among nation-states' leaderships, which are often reluctant to address past wrongs. This reluctance heightens during national or ethnic conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). Although national discourses often import, appropriate, and deploy dominant transnational discourses that would grant them international legitimacy (or lessen pressures to deploy those), the appropriation often accommodates national interests and fortifies hegemonic historical narratives rather than addresses difficult pasts (Gutman, 2011). In order to understand this dynamic, in the following sections I break down the past-oriented political discourse to three levels of analysis: (1) the globally-circulating transnational paradigm of historical justice; (2) the national political discourse and public debate on the contested past in Israel; and (3) memory activism in Israel. I provide historical and theoretical background for the transnational calls for addressing past wrongs as a precondition for reconciliation and the Israeli public debate and political discourse on the conflict's past, particularly in the context of the Oslo Peace Accords (1993) and their aftermath in the early 2000s. I then move to illuminating my

conceptualization of memory activism, and its counterintuitive emergence in the Israeli–Palestinian context of the early 2000s. The second part of the article analyzes memory activist efforts in Israel to reframe the dominant discourse on the conflict's past using Coy et al.'s typology of oppositional knowledge, and concludes with a review of aspects that exceed the typology, particularly the power relations that underlie any type of knowledge-production, yet are heightened in the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Historical justice and transnational past-facing politics

One of the central globally-circulating discourses in this regard is *historical justice*. This discourse brings together history, memory, and transnational politics to highlight the significance of coming to terms with a difficult past in order to achieve a more equal and peaceful future. This approach gained prominence and popularity together with the growth of the human rights paradigm from the 1970s, the democratization of Latin American states in the 1980s, and the fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe since 1989 (Wilson, 2001). It has given rise to international debate on how to deal with the gross violence of the 20th century, as well as more distanced atrocities such as slavery, colonialism, and the treatment of indigenous people. Demands for restitution have been made by different groups around the world, ranging from economic compensation or redistribution of resources, to criminal persecution of perpetrators and rehabilitation of victims of persecution and imprisonment, and political and cultural-symbolic public recognition of atrocities (Barkan, 2000; Berg and Schaefer, 2009: 1–2; Torpey, 2003). Various practices and institutions have been utilized to deal with these debates and demands in specific cases, including truth and reconciliation, historical commissions, international and local courts, educational programs, economic development, memorials, monuments, archives, and official apologies (Barkan, 2000; Berg and Schaefer, 2009: 1–2; Bickford and Sodaro, 2010; Olick, 2007; Torpey, 2003; Wilson, 2001).

Historical justice is an influential paradigm for societies in ongoing conflicts as well. It supplies a vocabulary and shapes groups' identities and political claims (Theidon, 2006). The conflict that I examine here is one in which the shift from future to past in the political arena and the centrality of claims for historical justice have been extremely visible: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. As future visions for the region were stymied by the failure of the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993, the second half of the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century saw each side fortify its position as violence and physical separation increased. The past has become a central and crucial arena for political struggle on the present state of the conflict and its (projected) future resolution.

Historical justice has been used in the region around the 50th commemoration of the Nakba[1] by Palestinian intellectuals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Israel, and the Arab world, who called for truth and reconciliation regarding historical rights to the land (Hill, 2008). Since 2001, Israeli peace activists on the far left have been both responding to and reproducing the Palestinian claims and making their own claims to recognition of Palestinian suffering in 1948. Primarily, they have established and made public a historical and commemorative record of Palestinian suffering against widespread silence and denial, making *commemorative claims* to remember the Palestinian displacement and loss and to address them (Berg and Schaefer, 2009: 2). A second type

of claims for historical justice, *transformative claims* for a profound social and political change of present society derived from the 'prolonged disaster of the past' (Berg and Schaefer, 2009: 3; Torpey, 2001: 337), were also made, gradually expanding and becoming more concrete towards the decade's end. Transformative claims stem from viewing a society as embedded in unjust structures and institutions from the past (political, social, economic, and legal) that continue to shape present society as unequal (Berg and Schaefer, 2009: 3).

A conceptual and historical context for memory activism in Israel in the next section will help understand the specific relationships between the universalistic imaginary associated with historical justice that is carried out by memory activists and national politics during active conflict.

Memory activism: Conceptual and historical background

Memory activism can be viewed as a knowledge-based effort for consciousness-raising and political change. Like some other peace activist efforts, it uses a range of cultural practices, visual media, and spatial actions to produce and distribute knowledge. Unlike more traditional peace activist groups, this knowledge is about a contested past in order to expand and enrich the dominant collective memory and reframe public debate (Gutman, 2011; Katriel and Gutman, in press). Unlike social movements and peace activism that traditionally focus on present problems that prevent the progression towards a better future, memory activism focuses on the past as a strategy to change public perceptions of the present and future. It therefore requires a different model of political change.

As mentioned, memory activism goes hand in hand with the shift in transnational politics that has challenged more traditional models of political change that are used by social movements. According to these models, social movements and peace organizations in particular are not only first and foremost future-oriented (a polarizing past is often intentionally put aside), but they also rely on a progressive, linear plan to move from present problems to a predetermined future solution, using preset means (Hermann, 2009; Lofland, 1993). Memory activism seeks instead to first look backward to intervene in society's dominant understanding of the past in a way that affects the understanding of present problems and projects future resolutions (Gutman, 2011).

Memory activism usually appears in post-conflict situations, often when the violent past is well-distanced in time and is no longer highly visible in space. This is the case, for example, of hundreds of local initiatives to commemorate the pre-war Jewish past in post-socialist Poland, most commonly through physically recovering Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, but also using tours, tour guides, maps, and artistic and educational work (Lehrer and Waligórska, 2013; Waligórska, 2014). Recovering the silenced past within the contemporary landscape is also evident in Spain, where a chain of civil society organizations known as the Historical Memory Movement has been exhuming mass-graves from the Civil War and Franco dictatorship periods to reclaim the state's historical memory (Jerez-Farrán and Amago, 2010).

In Israel, however, memory activism emerged during active conflict. I studied the emergence and activities of three groups of memory activists in Israel since 2001 through discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, which was comprised of

participant-observation of their activities and 40 semi-structured interviews. The study (held in periods during 2006–2011) reveals their practices, strategies, constraints, and conflicts as they evolved through a decade marked by increased polarization between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Palestinians and within the left. Against the background of rival Israeli and Palestinian national historical narratives, each of which mirrors the other and is infused with memories of 'its own' victims and heroes, memory activists in Israel are unique for focusing not on Jewish, but on Palestinian memories – memories of the other.

Here I focus on the largest group of memory-oriented peace activism in Israel, Zochrot, which was founded primarily by and for Jewish-Israelis. The group seeks to impact Jewish-Israeli public opinion by producing knowledge of the pre-state Palestinian life in the territory and their fate in the 1948 war with the hope that this would lead to public acknowledgment and to taking responsibility for Palestinian displacement and loss (Bronstein, interviews 2008, 2009, 2010; Musih, interviews 2008, 2009; U, interview 2009). I see these efforts in Israel as a case of memory activism, because similarly to other cases around the world, the Israeli activists disseminate a different understanding of the past, which would bring a different understanding of present problems and, in turn, project a new resolution for the future (Gutman, 2009).

Despite the similar model of political change, the emergence of memory activism in Israel in 2001 is doubly counterintuitive: both as a case of memory activism in the midst of an ongoing national conflict and as a case of a past-oriented peace movement. The remainder of this section presents the context in which memory activism formed, and why activists chose to appropriate and apply the transnational historical justice discourse to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The failure of Oslo and split in the 'Peace Camp'

In the early 2000s, in the aftermath of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, peace activism in Israel was in crisis. Having failed to end the occupation of the OPT and bring equality to Palestinian citizens inside Israel, it was also increasingly delegitimized in Israeli society (see Hermann, 2009). The central strategy of peace activism in the Oslo period, bi-national 'people-to-people' meetings, was now highly criticized by scholars and peace activists who took part in them. These projects, which brought Israeli and Palestinians to meet in small groups, bloomed in the 1990s with the support of European and American funding. However, according to the critics, these meetings reproduced the power relations between the two sides instead of changing them; their focus on breaking psychological stereotypes excluded political discussion of serious issues like the 1948 war and accountability (Challand, 2011; Tamari, 2005). Zochrot's co-founders, for example, educators and youth group counselors in a Jewish-Arab school, expressed similar criticism and recollected that 1948 was particularly inaccessible to the bi-national groups they were counseling in the 1990s (Bronstein, interview 2008; Musih, interview 2009; U, interview 2009).

The failure to see the Oslo Accords through to their second and third stages after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by a right-wing Jewish religious fundamentalist in 1995, the break of the Second Intifada (upheaval) in the OPT in 2000, and

the killing of 13 Palestinian citizens by Israeli Border Guards caused major breaks within the Israeli left, which has constituted much of 'the peace camp.' The left was split: the majority of left-wing voters moved further to the center and right-wing, embracing Prime Minister Ehud Barak's narrative that 'there is no partner for peace on the Palestinian side' (Rabinowitz, 2001: 33–34); a minority moved further to the left, exploring new strategies of peace activism at the beginning of the 2000s.

Memory activism was one of these new strategies that rejected the common 'dual narrative discourse' – the dominant zero-sum construction of Israeli and Palestinian national narratives. Instead these new strategies concentrated on one-sided calls for justice for the excluded Palestinian side as a trust-building step (Challand, 2011; Hill, 2008). Three groups of peace activists focused on Palestinian memories to guide learning, documentation, and dissemination of the Palestinian experience of the 1948 war and the Nakba. These efforts offered an ethical remembrance (Hirsch, 2001) of the catastrophe of the other – Palestinians in 1948 – which contends with the dominant national master narrative of the Jewish majority, and with the ethical remembrance of Jewish suffering and redemption.

Historical justice, particularly truth and reconciliation arguments, framed these efforts, which produced knowledge on the Palestinian experience of 1948 as a gesture of regret, an act of acknowledgment, and a first step towards future resolution (Gutman, 2011). I observed that memory activists in Israel of the 2000s used the transnational paradigm of historical justice and its universalistic assumptions for two additional purposes: first, as an external language that can reframe the local zero-sum game construction (of Israeli-Zionist and Arab-Palestinian national narratives) of the public debate. This was a difficult task, however, as historical justice-oriented politics has also contributed to the fortification of this dual-narrative construction: the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships each called the other to publicly acknowledge the historical right of its people to the (same) territory before any future negotiations could be made (Hill, 2008). Second, this transnational vocabulary and its normative basis also served the activists in defining their position versus the state and when looking outside to other networks of activists, funders, and intellectuals around the world.

The shift of focus from 1967 to 1948

The split in the Israeli left and the occurrences of 2000 precipitated a discursive move within the Jewish-Israeli far left, from a focus on the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as the point of departure for the conflict and its resolution to 1948 as the significant historical moment. This was a radical shift: 1967 marks the beginning of an occupation that can be removed and is limited to the West Bank and Gaza (Shenhav, 2010); however, an emphasis on the 1948 war that followed the establishment of Israel as the orienting event can be seen as delegitimizing the very formation of the Jewish state. This shift could be traced back to a discourse that was set in motion in the late 1970s with the publication of a revisionist history of the 1948 war by Jewish-Israeli scholars (Nets-Zehngut, 2011). A similar focus was also dominant among Palestinian leaders and intellectuals in Israel, the OPT, and the Palestinian diaspora around the 50th anniversary of the Nakba in 1998 (Hill, 2005).

The Jewish-Israeli academic discourse was introduced by Jewish-Israeli historians and sociologists who studied in the West. With the opening of some Israeli state archives of the 1948 war and early years of the state 30 years later, these 'New Historians' and 'Critical Sociologists' revisited the history of 1948 in academic publications and on the pages of *Ha'aretz* newspaper (Israel's left-leaning daily) (Morris, 1987, 1990, 2007; Ram, 2007).

Memory activists are part of this shift to focus on 1948: they have been using the revisionist history to legitimize their claims, and also added to the body of knowledge on Palestinians before and during 1948, primarily through testimonies, remapping, and touring. Documentation and dissemination of Palestinian memories and history, through online archives of testimonies, photographs, and maps from pre-1948 Palestine, was a pressing need in the battle to foreground a long-silenced past as the new focal point of the conflict. This made them a target for a largely defensive battle of the state and right-wing groups. The activist documentation and commemoration have borrowed from the rich memory culture that each side of the conflict has developed. Both of these memory cultures are well-rooted in nation-building processes, as the next section specifies.

The local memory cultures in Israel and Palestine

Collective memory is a central platform for political mobilization and national identity construction in both Israeli and Palestinian societies. Each has a thriving memory culture that connects identity with territory, and is mobilized in relation to the present state of the conflict.

The Palestinian people maintain a struggle that vouches for their memory of 1948. In the face of radical erasure from the Israeli national landscape, history textbooks, and the dominant collective memory, Palestinians within and outside Israel struggle to maintain their memories and identity as rooted in their villages and neighborhoods in pre-Israel Palestine (Abu-Lughod, 2007; Bresheeth, 2007; Davis, 2007, 2011; Slyomovics, 1998). This connection between their national identity and their lost territories since 1948 is at the heart of their national struggle. There is, on the one hand, a severe lack of official documents, and those that remain are scattered between different states' archives. On the other hand, there has been much private preservation of keys, ownership bills, pre-1948 identification cards, personal documents, and photos (Feldman, 2008), documentation of specific villages and communities (Davis, 2007, 2011; Slyomovics, 1998), and non-written or spoken practices used to transmit memories of pre-1948 life and the war experience to future generations (Allan, 2007).

A surge in Nakba commemoration emerged around its 50th anniversary in 1998. The anniversary was marked by marches in the OPT and in Lebanon, a new publication of the history of 1948 by Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi featured in the daily pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat*, a series on 1948 on *Al-Jazeera*, art events, films and exhibits, and additional efforts to systematically record the testimonies of the remaining pre-1948 generation Palestinians, such as at the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah (Hill, 2005).

On the Israeli side, Israel's modern Jewish nationalism, Zionism, has always been infused with memory, from the Jewish diaspora through Zionism in Palestine to the

nation-state of Israel (Ram, 1998). Some studies analyze the enactment of the national past from Biblical times to more recent history as deeply rooted in the national landscape (Handelman, 2004; Katriel, 1996; Zerubavel, 1995). The land has many national memorials and monuments dedicated to the Holocaust, war victims and heroes, and terror victims (Handelman, 2004), and Israelis are encouraged to hike, appreciate the new forests and ancient olive trees, and reinterpret the national myths (Katriel, 1996; Zerubavel, 1995). A great deal of non-official, individual, and local commemorations of Jewish victims and heroes take place as well, especially through memorial books and films (Melamed, 2013; Slyomovics, 1998: xiii).

Counter-memory as an oppositional knowledge-production endeavor in Israel

Memory activist efforts to produce knowledge that is not commonly available or considered legitimate and to offer an alternative frame for discussing the conflict today fits Coy et al.'s concept of oppositional knowledge-production (2008). How memory activists work in Israel to reframe the post-Oslo dual-narrative frame by producing counter-memory is analyzed using Coy et al.'s four types of oppositional knowledge.

Counter-informative knowledge – Memory activists in Israel produce and disseminate what has been missing from the dominant narrative of the conflict's origin in their minds – the traumatic Palestinian experience and memory of the 1948 war. They organize tours to pre-1948 Palestinian sites around the country and prepare a booklet with historical, geographical, sociological, and cultural information on each site, its former residents before 1948, and the events that took place there during the war. The sources are primarily revisionist historiographies by Palestinian and Israeli scholars, and refugee testimonies collected by Zochrot or Palestinian organizations and archives. A Palestinian refugee who was a resident of the site before 1948 also joins the tour to testify in situ. Memoirs of Israeli combatants of the 1948 generation who took part in battles in the area visited are sometimes consulted as well. Each booklet and tour is dedicated to one or two locations, and together they form an archive of Nakba events around the country. During the tour, signs with the name of the village and its public institutions before 1948 in Arabic, Hebrew, and English are placed on site to remind passers-by of the erased village that is usually unmarked in official signage or maps. Many of these Palestinian lands have been transformed into national parks (Kadman, 2008), and the signs are often removed by Jewish-Israeli hikers.

Similar to the ideal type of counter-informative knowledge, this information is offered in Israel 'to widen the discussion and possibly change the political assessment people make or the outcomes they desire' (Coy et al., 2008: 5.1). However, the pre-1948 Palestinian life and their collective experience during the 1948 war are not new information to Jewish-Israelis, but more of a contested 'public secret' (Stoler, 2009). Rather visible in the landscape and publicly articulated in the years immediately following the war, the displacement of Palestinians and the destruction of their villages in 1948 were intentionally unspoken in most circles and gradually erased from the landscape from the 1950s until the late 1980s (Kadman, 2008; Kletter, 2006; Shai, 2006). As mentioned, since the late 1970s, the issue has gradually returned to speech and public consciousness

(Pappé, 1996, 1998; Ram, 2007). Through academic scholarship, the arts, and memory activist groups, it has also attained cultural capital in these fields. In the dominant public debate and political discourse such engagement with the Nakba was met with rage; it was contested by counter-arguments, sanctions, and scholarship geared towards the reinstatement of the legitimacy of the Zionist narrative and the ethical remembrance of Jewish suffering.

The activists document and disseminate the long-silenced Palestinian experience and memories not only through publications and archives, but primarily using commemorative practices which are popular in their society. Tours by foot were originally used to cultivate a Zionist identity and create attachment between immigrant Jews and their Biblical homeland before the establishment of the state of Israel and as part of its nation-building process (Katriel, 1996). Refugee testimonies are a genre of documentation and commemoration that carries unique legitimacy and authority locally and transnationally, which are entangled with an ethical duty to remember (Allan, 2007; Moyn, 2011; Yablonka, 2003). The effect of using legitimate and authoritative practices drawn from the cultural repertoire of Jewish-Israelis and Western historiography to publicly communicate long-silenced Palestinian memories raises additional questions about the mediation and reception of activist knowledge production that are not currently explained by the oppositional knowledge typology. The fact that these Palestinian memories are directed to an audience of Jewish-Israelis adds another complication.

The goal of Zochrot is to raise '[a]wareness and recognition of the Nakba by *Jewish-Israeli people*, and taking responsibility for this tragedy,' as an essential step 'to ending the struggle and starting a process of reconciliation between the people of Palestine-Israel.'[2] This citation clearly expresses the idea of historical justice, according to which accountability for difficult or contested past events is necessary for the creation of a more tolerant and peaceful society in the future (Barkan, 2000; Berg and Schaefer, 2009). According to this argument, Jewish-Israelis are addressed because they are the ones who are called to take responsibility for the suffering and displacement of Palestinians. Moreover, Jewish-Israelis are well aware of the Israeli collective memory of the 1948 war which has been institutionalized in the state's social calendar and education system, but do not know enough about the Palestinian experience which continues to be forgotten or denied (Bronstein, interview 2008). However, this one-sidedness raises additional complexities to this activist endeavor of oppositional knowledge-production on the conflict's past as will be elaborated later on.

Critical-interpretive knowledge – Memory activists in Israel wish to counter the hegemonic Zionist narrative and question 'the moral or social basis for how that information is presented, interpreted, and used' (Coy et al., 2008: 5.2). They are most critical regarding the state and society's decades-long silencing and exclusion of Palestinian citizens and non-citizens from Israel's national history and collective memory, as well as erasure from the national landscape. While acknowledging the legitimacy and authority ascribed to the tour and testimony in Israel, Zochrot activists question the social and moral basis of the state use of these commemorative practices to produce an exclusive account of the county's past.

As part of the production of critical-interpretive knowledge, memory activists in Israel offer 'an alternative interpretation of what the picture painted by the power-holders

means' (Coy et al., 2008: 5.2). For example, in a gallery talk at Zochrot's Tel Aviv head-quarters for the exhibit 'Constituent Violence' in 2009, Israeli curator and scholar Ariella Azoulay argued that the articulation of the Palestinian loss in the 1948 war by both Israeli and Palestinian national narratives as a solely Palestinian disaster that is unrelated to Jewish-Israelis has worked to create a separation between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Palestinians. This separation has gradually become fixed and is taken for granted by both sides. Exhibiting and analyzing 200 photos of the 1948 war in Zochrot's gallery, Azoulay recounted the Nakba in her talk and described the process through which Jewish-Israelis came to see it as 'what Palestinians see as a disaster.' She argued instead that the Nakba is 'an absolute catastrophe' for both Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis, and 'a component and product of the Israeli regime.'(Azoulay, 2009: 9–10).

The production and dissemination of the first type of oppositional knowledge – counter-informative knowledge on the Palestinian loss and displacement in the 1948 war – has been quite successful. Ironically, the success in disseminating this knowledge was due to the state's reaction at the decade's end: 'the Nakba Law' which bans Nakba commemorations during Israeli Independence Day by state-funded organizations, and other amendments directed at Palestinian citizens.[3] Instead of blocking knowledge of the Nakba, 'the Nakba Law' helped disseminate it widely among Jewish-Israelis. 'Seven years ago I didn't know what the Nakba was; now it is in the newspaper, and not only the name, the paper writes what it is!' a participant in Zochrot's tours and other activities stated to me when the law was first proposed (P, interview 2009). However, the reinterpretation of the events of 1948 and the counter-claim that was articulated by Azoulay and Zochrot have been less successful to date, although Zochrot's co-founder Norma Musih sees such reinterpretations as crucial: 'It is not enough to study the facts. Interpretation is the key.' This means that knowledge produced by activists can be used for various goals and by various social agents and institutions which do not necessarily link it with Zochrot's vision for the future. She also believes that interpretation of the information should be accompanied by a personal 'psychological-emotional process of self-realization' (interview, 2010), whereas Coy et al. highlight a change in the cognitive level of decision-making and reassessment. What means and types of oppositional knowledge-production may advance other processes of transformation which are not cognitive is a question to be explored in future studies.

The third and fourth types of oppositional knowledge that concern envisioning alternative routes from the past to the present and offering practical solutions for future resolution, became more central in the second half of the decade, after the activist production of counter-informative knowledge was already underway. More recent projects of envisioning an alternative route from 1948 to the present and the design of practical solutions for the future are shown in what follows using Coy et al.'s remaining two types of knowledge.

Radical-envisioning – Tracing the current conflictual relationship and separation between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Palestinians back to the conflict's origin is a journey to the root of the conflict. As mentioned, Zochrot's activists claim that life before the 1948 war was quite the opposite from how it is today and from how it has been presented in the prevalent Zionist narrative and collective memory. Zochrot describes the

pre-conflict period as characterized by more or less peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs in British-Mandate Palestine. According to this claim, this coexistence was hijacked by the Zionist leader and first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, who mobilized the Jewish community around the threat of Arab aggression and built around it a military force and a Jewish state (Azoulay, 2009). Going back to the pre-1948 coexistence, before the militarization and separation, Zochrot imagines what the present would look like if the original relationships were reclaimed (Coy et al., 2008: 5.3). This alternative knowledge about coexistence in the past projects a different understanding of the present and a future vision to aspire to: peaceful relations between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Palestinians in a shared territory instead of the ongoing separation, polarization, and militarization that continues from 1948.

Transformative knowledge – Given their alternative route from the conflict's past to its present state and desired future, ways to reroute from the present conflict and reclaim the original relationships between Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine in the future are discussed in Zochrot's closed and open meetings. Commissioned works by intellectuals, legal experts, writers, and Palestinian refugees envision alterative solutions. Underlying many of these alternatives in the second half of the decade was creating 'a narrative of the place' instead of the polarizing dual-narrative construction and the post-Oslo argumentation. 'There is nothing we can do with national narratives, except accept and reproduce everything the Palestinians state [in their national narrative],' states Musih (interview, 2009), taking a historical justice lens to the current construction of the conflict's past in the Israeli public debate. 'Instead we are trying to build a narrative of the place … . This narrative is shared on the basis of participation in the responsibility. It is also yours what has been destructed, because there were here in the past relationships [between Jews and Palestinians] that … [were] different, and can also be different today.'

Preservation against further destruction of pre-1948 buildings was another channel of activity in the 2000s: Zochrot has taken legal action against real estate developers and state agencies in order to prevent further destruction of Palestinian ruins. It historically won an appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court against the Jewish National Fund which was ordered to mention in its signage of today's 'Canada Park' near Latrun, three Palestinian villages that existed there until 1967, not 1948 (*Ha'aretz*, 2005). Towards the decade's end, a vast urban planning project of the rebuilding of specific destroyed villages has been brought forth in a special issue of the group's literary magazine, *Sedek*, accompanied by public symposiums and exhibits, alongside literary collections that envision life after the return of Palestinians to their lands. Yet the group's primary recommended activity in the 2000s was still tours of pre-1948 Palestinian villages, especially in and around one's place of residence.

Power and inequality in the production of oppositional knowledge

What characterized Zochrot's oppositional knowledge-production, as well as other memory activist groups in Israel in the 2000s, was the awareness their founding members had of both the manipulation of knowledge about the past in the dominant collective

memory and 'their own power to construct new cultural identities' (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003: 383, in reference to Cohen and Aratto, 1992). The chosen vehicle to deliver the manipulation, the tour and testimony, was taken primarily and explicitly from the repertoire of Jewish-Israeli memory culture. In this sense, they produced counter-memory as a knowledge-based strategy for political change.

Despite the paradoxical dissemination of this counter-memory among the Jewish-Israeli public through the Nakba Law, engaging with Nakba memory in Israel is still a marginal phenomenon. Furthermore, oppositional knowledge-production regarding the 1948 war remains unequal not only between the activist and hegemonic perceptions of the past and political claims, but also within Zochrot. The processes of knowledge-production about the 1948 war have been historically asymmetrical and unequal between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Palestinians, due to the results of the war: Israeli historiography is based on documents which were well-preserved in state archives, while Palestinian historians have to rely on oral history, which is still considered among historians as unreliable and less able to contribute new information to the historical record in most cases (Craimer, 2006; Moyn, 2011). This inequality in knowledge-production creates a central tension between the national narratives that also penetrates the activist efforts. In fact, this inequality is maintained by the force of the dual-narrative construction of the conflict in public debate and political discourse despite the activist effort to reframe and subvert this discursive construction. The use of commemorative practices that were used for Zionist education as a platform to grant authority and legitimacy to Palestinian memories of 1948 embodies the depth of this tension. First, the attempt to compensate for the silenced history and memories by filling in the gaps in the dominant collective memory with knowledge produced using the cultural practices that excluded Palestinians from it in the first place embodies the danger of producing a second exclusive narrative, Palestinian in this case, to counter the Zionist narrative. Such a narrative would maintain the dual-narrative construction. Reusing hegemonic cultural memory practices with critical distance and self-awareness, on the other hand, may undermine the power of these practices to communicate these contested memories among the Jewish-Israeli public.

The solution Zochrot offers to this problem is a shared 'narrative of the place' based on Palestinian testimonies and Jewish-Israeli mediation. Yet this shared narrative is again a reaction to the current state of polarization that is facilitated and justified by the dual-narrative structure: if the Palestinian story is accepted by Jewish-Israelis, it is because Jewish-Israeli activists deliver it and make it 'ours' (Jewish-Israeli), rather than 'theirs' (Palestinian). If the story is rejected, however, the carriers are demonized for supporting 'their' (Palestinian) historical truth and rights over 'ours' (Jewish-Israeli). In both cases, the risk of reproducing the dual-narrative construction as a zero-sum game exists and can block efforts to reframe the public discourse on the conflict.

In other words, the shift in temporal relations among memory activists to address the past first, and then the future offered alternative knowledge and claims on the conflict's point of departure and its resolution; yet the unequal power relations that underlie the protracted conflict constrain not only the reception of these claims in Israeli public debate and political discourse but also the activist effort itself of oppositional knowledge-production.

Conclusion

This article has described and analyzed memory activism in Israel from its counterintuitive formation during active conflict to its efforts to reframe the past-oriented discourse in the first decade of the 21st century. Using Coy et al.'s four types of oppositional knowledge-production (2008), I found that Zochrot activists produced 'new' information together with a critical assessment of the prevalent national narrative as exclusive and one-sided. Offering 'a shared narrative of the place' as an alternative to the dual-narrative construction of the dominant public debate and political discourse, the activists began envisioning practical solutions, such as inclusive signage in national parks, preservation of the remains of the pre-1948 Palestinian built environment, and local plans for the return of Palestinians who were internally displaced in 1948 and are Israeli citizens.

Looking at counter-memory production in Israel through the typology of oppositional knowledge-production suggests that the typology should be widened to include aspects of knowledge-based peace activism that transcend its current lens. Among them, I have addressed the existing inequalities in any process of knowledge-production: not only between dominant and oppositional-knowledge producers, but also within activist groups who produce oppositional knowledge in a context of growing polarization and power asymmetries. Future studies could address additional aspects that acceded the typology, primarily the use of dominant cultural practices that can amplify and legitimate the production and dissemination of oppositional knowledge, but also risk the production of yet another exclusive account; and processes of personal transformation beyond cognitive decision-making.

Moreover, the interaction between past and future that characterizes this case of memory activism in comparison to more traditional peace movements reveals the dynamics of a past-oriented political discourse in the transnational and national realms, as well as among activist groups that act as middleman. This interaction also provides a lens to view not only how the past shapes our future – as the prevalent post-Oslo discourse entails – but also how future visions can shape our understanding of the past, even forming a 'memorial intervention,' as the case of memory activism in Israel has demonstrated. Future studies of collective memory and identity, national and ethnic conflict, and social movements should take into account both of these dimensions: transnational discourses, national politics, and activists that link the two, as well as the temporal relations that underlie the political claims of activists, governments, and transnational discourses.

Notes

1. *Al-Nakba*, the catastrophe in Arabic, is the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians by Israeli forces in the 1948 war.
2. According to the group's 2009 mission statement, fourth paragraph, my emphasis.
3. Amendment number 40, section 3b, to the budget law 1985 was approved in the Israeli parliament on 22 March 2011.

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Author biography

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Résumé

Cet article examine une stratégie du militantisme pour la paix qui a acquis une notoriété internationale au cours des dernières décennies : la mémoire militante. Le militantisme de la mémoire nous invite à un véritable saut temporel en matière de politiques transnationales : du passé en premier lieu au futur ensuite. Adhérant au paradigme mondialisé de l'équité historique, les groupes de militants de la mémoire suggèrent qu'une nouvelle compréhension du passé pourrait conduire à une nouvelle perception des problèmes actuels et apporter des solutions alternatives pour le futur. À partir d'une série de données ethnographiques collectées sur le terrain et de l'analyse des discours militants de la mémoire sur la guerre de 1948 depuis 2001, j'examine la production d'une contremémoire militante lors des phases actives du conflit. L'utilisation de la typologie de la production contestataire de la connaissance décrite par Coy et al. permet de mettre en évidence la production, par le plus important groupe de militants de la mémoire, de nouvelles informations sur la guerre, d'évaluations critiques du récit dominant, de récits historiques alternatifs et de possibles solutions pratiques pour les réfugiés palestiniens. Cette analyse soulève cependant d'autres questions qui dépassent le cadre de cette typologie, principalement en ce qui concerne l'inégalité des relations de pouvoir entre la production dominante et la production contestataire de la connaissance, mais aussi entre les militants eux-mêmes.

Mots-clés

Mouvements sociaux, mémoire collective, mémoire militante, connaissance contestataire, conflit israélo-palestinien, politiques transnationales

Resumen

El artículo analiza una estrategia de activismo por la paz que ganó visibilidad en las últimas décadas: el activismo por la memoria. Activistas por la memoria manifiestan un cambio temporal en la política transnacional: primero el pasado, luego el futuro. Afiliado con el paradigma global de circulación de Justicia Histórica, grupos de activistas por la memoria suponen que una nueva comprensión del pasado podría conducir a una nueva percepción de los problemas actuales y proyectar soluciones alternativas para el futuro. A partir de un trabajo de campo etnográfico y del análisis del discurso de los activistas por la memoria de la guerra de 1948 en Israel, desde 2001, examino la producción activista de la lucha contra la memoria durante el conflicto activo. Utilizando la tipología

de Oposición Conocimiento-Producción de Coy al., muestro cómo el mayor grupo de activismo por la memoria en Israel produjo "nueva" información sobre la guerra, evaluando críticamente la narrativa histórica dominante, ofreció una narrativa alternativa compartida, y comenzó a imaginar soluciones prácticas para los refugiados palestinos. Sin embargo, el análisis plantea preocupaciones adicionales que van más allá del ámbito de la tipología, principalmente en lo que refiere a las relaciones desiguales de poder que existen no sólo entre la producción dominante y la activista de los conocimientos de oposición, sino también entre los propios activistas.

Palabras clave

Movimientos Sociales, memoria colectiva, activismo por la memoria, conocimiento de oposición, conflicto palestino-israelí, política transnacional