Still Photographs, Dynamic Memories: A Study of the Visual Presentation of Israel’s Past in Commemorative Newspaper Supplements

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This article investigates the ways in which Israel’s history was presented via photographs and texts in commemorative supplements of three Israeli newspapers marking the country’s anniversaries. Based on theoretical works that describe and define national identity, the creation of collective memories and the social role of photography, this article explores the supplements through their selection of events, narrators, continuity and coherence strategies, construction of time, and their definition of the national group.

The article argues that a gradual change in the supplements demonstrates changes in the way Israelis perceive their collective memories, and the relevance of those memories to their ever-changing present. While the earlier supplements perceive Israeli past through an authoritarian master narrative, some of the later supplements tend to interpret this past through varied perspectives and as a tool of many, sometimes contrasting, causes. Furthermore, although all the supplements narrate their stories through similar “protagonists,” similar events, or even the same photographs, this presentation serves varied interpretations. This phenomenon demonstrates the effectiveness of visual imagery in the processes of both constructing and deconstructing collective memories.

In the introduction to Israeli Memory, a commemorative supplement celebrating Israel’s jubilee, the publisher of Ma’ariv, one of Israel’s three mass circulation Hebrew-language dailies wrote: “Leafing through this issue is not essentially different from browsing through a regular family album” (Nimrodi, 1997, p. 7). This potent metaphor—a family browsing through its own photo album—offers an
excellent starting point for studying the ways in which newspapers recall and shape collective national memories. Portraying the nation as a family of newspaper readers bound by collective visual memories seems to highlight the constructed nature of this phenomenon and presents an opportunity to explore the mechanism through which national narratives are created and activated via the press.

In this study the term “commemorative supplement” refers to newspaper supplements that chronicle national history through visual images and texts. The researched supplements were published by three Israeli dailies—Ma’ariv, Yedioth Ahronoth, and Ha’aretz—in commemoration of Israel’s 20th, 25th, 30th, 40th, and 50th anniversaries. The creators of the supplements acted under the assumption that most Israelis, or at least those who participate in this media ritual by buying the newspapers, share a common “visual reservoir” that creates a basic framework in which Israelis can communicate their identity. Furthermore, photographs are valuable for the national group, since they are, to some extent, flexible. While written texts leave relatively limited space for possible interpretations, the “open” nature of the photographic image enables the reader to interpret it in varied ways, and so seemingly static photographs gain dynamic interpretations over the years.

The fundamental argument underlying this study is that the commemorative supplements published by Israeli dailies play a role in the large-scale efforts to construct an Israeli national identity and an Israeli national history. Borrowing from Karl Deutsch (1966, p. 96), I define the supplements as “national equipment,” since they construct shared symbols and thus enable Israelis to communicate through them. The supplements select and emphasize some events while omitting or downplaying others, and then present the events reported upon as a meaningful continuity. By doing so, the supplements place sporadic historical occurrences into a formative narrative that permits Israelis to explain their history in ways that justify their acts, and charges their shared national time with meaning.

At the same time, a systematic investigation of the developments and changes in those supplements reveals a contradictory trend in the use of this “national equipment.” Analysis of the dynamic interrelations between texts and visual images in some of the later supplements highlights the incorporation of this fundamentally constructive framework as a means of deconstructing the memory of the national past, by narrating several simultaneous and competing memory versions. In the context of this specific case study, the tensions between uniform and multi-voiced versions of the national past are highly related to the recent debates over “old” and “new” Israeli historiography (Morris, 1988, 1994, 1999; Pappe, 1993, 1996; Shapira, 1997).

The attempt to expose the biases and suppressions of the “old” established pro-Zionist historiography has been often accompanied by an overall attack of the objective model. It is now clear that the old historiography, or for that matter any historiography, serves goals, promotes morals, and should be understood within
the context in which it was written. This development opened the way to the acceptance of popular interpretations of the past as valid research topics. It became clear that “history” and “memory” are always interconnected (Ram, 1996, p. 16). And so the claim that early Israeli historiography served and reflected Zionist hegemonic thinking is addressed in this article within the context of a new realm. It is popular memory, rather than academic historiography, that is being investigated, and the changing use of the same journalistic format offers a unique opportunity for comparison.

This article also contributes to the study of journalistic conventions and practices in several ways. The news media tend to affiliate with the present, and so in this case, the supplements’ declared intention to deal with the past acts as an extreme example of a deeper journalistic tendency: the media never operate solely in terms of the present. Newspaper articles and television news exist within a cultural context that relies on the assumed knowledge of the common past shared by the consumers. The visual commemorative supplements are not different in this sense from any other journalistic report; they are just more revealing. The same is true in regard to the journalistic use of visual imagery: photographs are always utilized for many different goals. The supplements suggest an illuminating instance of this tension between photography’s high truth-value and its symbolic power. Finally, the supplements provide a crystallizing example of the ways in which journalists and other commemorators establish their status as authoritative narrators of the past.

The article contains three parts: first, I address the theoretical foundations of my study. Second, I explore the supplements’ narratives in conjunction with five main factors: the selection of events; the role of the narrator; the narrative’s continuity and coherence; the construction of time; and the definition of the group according to the narrative. Finally, I position those findings in a larger historical perspective.

National Equipment

Following Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995), current researchers such as Greenfeld (1992) argue that nationalism locates the source of individual identity within the “People.” By the same token, Anderson (1996) defines a nation as an imagined community, in which the members of the group feel and act as though they know one another—as though they actually belong to the same intimate group. This bonding of nation-size groups into quasi-clans is achieved through the spread of a shared symbolic system that is established and transformed through “equipment” such as rituals (Kertzer, 1988; Marvin & Ingle, 1999), traditions (Cardiff & Scannell, 1991; Hobsbawn, 1983) and collective recollections (Connerton, 1989; Schudson, 1992, 1994).

In this context, the newspaper supplements that were researched in this study act as means of recollecting and shaping Israeli collective memories. Moreover, the supplements take part in an ongoing effort to construct national time: first,
from the aspect of the yearly cycle of national life, it is essential to remember that the supplements are mostly published on Israel’s Independence Day. Thus, they assist in the process of sanctifying the secular calendar through national rituals, or in Walter Benjamin’s words: “Calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness” (1968, p. 261). Second, through the recollection of the nation’s history, the supplements shape the group’s perception of “its” own time. The supplements—alongside other means—break the linear continuity of time via the division between secular continuation and holy peaks (Eliade, 1954).

Memory Work

Although the term “collective memory” was first coined by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 2), French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992) is usually recognized as the founder of the field of collective memory research. As a follower of the Durkheimian school, Halbwachs identified individual memories and collective memories as tools through which the social group establishes its centrality in the individual’s life. Since Halbwachs published his original work, the field of collective memory has been researched by many scholars who disagree with Halbwachs on many important issues. But the basic arguments made by Halbwachs still endure as the guideline for any collective memory study. That is, social groups construct their understanding of the world by establishing a shared version of the past. This shared perception defines groups and enables them to create boundaries that separate them from other groups who share other memories of the past, or rather, other interpretations of the same past.

Collective memories are constructed through an ongoing communicative process in which symbols, narratives, and commemorations are created and used (Gillis, 1994). “Memory work” by its nature is a dynamic procedure (Schwartz, 1982). This is so since interpretation of the past is a tool that helps groups justify themselves and understand the present. And because the present is always changing, the past is “recruited” over and over again in order to give the present its “right” meaning (Zelizer, 1995).

Several issues that stand at the core of memory studies are addressed through this study. According to traditional perceptions, the historian documents the past “just as it was” and thus enables the facts to speak for themselves (Roeh, 1994). In contrast, popular memory is bound to be inaccurate and incomplete. In reference to the history/memory question Pierre Nora (1997) offers a more complex analysis of the relations between the two entities. According to Nora, memory is the significant product of a traditional society, in which people lived “inside” the past through long-existing traditions and shared values. In contrast, a historical perception of the past is a product of a secular and critical society, in which the past is viewed from the “outside,” and without a possibility of sharing it with previous
generations. The only points at which history and memory meet are “memory sites” that contain both symbolic and functional meanings.

All of the photographs that appear in the supplements under examination are historical evidence in the sense that they portray concrete events that are part of Israeli national chronology. At the same time, the photographs are also part of the national memory, in the Noraiian sense, since they enable group members to relate to the collective. Because the photographs are presented in the supplements as emblems of a collective experience, the consumption of the supplements, and the identification of the well-known images are all part of a large-scale attempt to create a national identity. That is, the relations between the photographs and the readers’ memories are an illustration of the larger process of creating national groups: the photographs, as memory sites, materialize the abstract notion of an “imagined community.”

The ability to construct the past is an asset that is not equally distributed in societies. Hence specific sub-groups created through common professional or political affiliation can become “interpretive communities” that offer distinct perceptions of the past, and themselves (Zelizer, 1993). The supplements examined here reflect this struggle over the right to interpret the past. Those individuals who created them, mainly journalists, play a more active role than do audiences in the shaping of the nation’s recollection of the past. At this point, I would argue that the changing size and composition of the groups that interpreted the visual images in the researched supplements over the years reflects an important aspect of the struggle for the right to interpret Israeli past.

The Social Use of Photography

In Camera Lucida (1995, p. 26), Roland Barthes defines two complementary ways of reading a photograph: the *studium* is a view that is always mediated through prior knowledge and social training. It is a way of seeing a photographic image that evolves from what we already know (or rather, ought to know as members of a certain culture) about the context of the photographed event. The *punctum* is the “private” way of interpreting a photograph, which is determined by a person’s own experience. The *punctum* manner of seeing an image is not learned and it is not predictable. It reacts to a photograph instinctively, and thus it might disturb the more stable and “educated” *studium* interpretation.

This study explores the interaction between those two elements, within the national context. On the one hand, the reproduction of well-known historical, or even canonic photographs on Israel’s Independence Days seems to embody the *studium* perspective: in order for the supplements to fulfill their purpose as “national tools” it is essential for them to stress the assumed inherent and appropriate meanings of the images. On the other hand, the ongoing recycling of those images through the years, and the expansion of the interpreters’ community seems to slip a *punctum* element into this official sphere: the ability to shift photographs from
their supposed original context into other varying (or even contrasting) contexts undermines the authority of the *studium* interpretation.

The powerful coupling between a real life referent and its simulated signifier gives photography the highest possible truth-value and is the key to understanding its intensive social use: first, photography enabled people and societies to create a chronological continuity of their private and public histories (Goldberg, 1991). Second, the invention of photography redefined the boundaries of acquired knowledge. Third, the vast spread of photography created visual icons that are perceived as being able to capture both a passing fragment of reality, and at the same time, point to a broader picture (Marling, 1991; Melion & Küchler, 1991; Zelizer, 1992).

The aforementioned assumption that photographs can duplicate reality “just as it is,” is also the main reason for the complexity that characterizes the social use of the photographic image: first, it is crucial to remember that photographs “tell us something about real life, but not exactly what is real about it. We are left with the formulation whereby the photograph is a specifically selected and yet ambiguous image, something like a sentence extracted from a novel” (Kaufmann, 1982, p. 195). Second, the meanings of photographs are never self-evident. Photographs, like all other kinds of representations of reality acquire their meaning through a context (Sontag, 1977; Zelizer, 1998).

Thus, this article does not investigate photographs per se, but rather their dynamic interpretations under the changing political and cultural circumstances of Israeli reality. The texts that accompany the studied images could be perceived as “translating,” “invading,” or “cooperating” with the photograph, but at any rate, it is clear that photographs are never understood without some sort of mediation. Hence, at this intersection between visual imagery and the narration of the past it is important to keep in mind that “images, like histories and technologies, are our creations, yet also commonly thought to be ‘out of control’ or at least out of someone’s control, the question of agency and power being central to the way images work” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 6).

Decoding Commemorative Narratives

According to Zerubavel (1995) the accumulated outcome of different national commemorations is the master commemorative narrative that functions as a large scale moral, an ideological lens through which the group members view their past and present. Since I wish to study the ways in which the supplements are utilized as “national equipment,” my inquiry aims to identify the narratives that are constructed through the supplements. Five narrative elements come to the fore in my analysis: the selection of the events featured in the supplements; the identity of the supplements’ narrators and their positioning within the context of the stories they tell; the means through which the supplements construct continuous and coherent narratives; the construction of time frames unique to the na-
tional group; and the definition of members of the national group, supposedly the protagonists of these stories. The investigation combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis.5

In the period surveyed, Ma’ariv, Yedioth Ahronoth6 and Ha’aretz published 10 commemorative supplements. An overview of the supplements reveals some general characteristics:

- Over the years there has been a gradual increase in the tendency to publish commemorative supplements. While in 1958 none of the three newspapers published such a supplement, in 1998 Ma’ariv published three commemorative supplements, and Yedioth Ahronoth published one supplement.

- Over the years there has been a dramatic increase in the importance of visual imagery in the supplements. While the non-commemorative supplements of 1958 featured tiny photographs mostly depicting politicians, later supplements gradually enlarged the size and variety of the photographs, while reducing the length of the texts. This change can probably be attributed to changes in professional journalistic conventions, to the growing commercialization of the Israeli press and to the influence of television. Current Israeli newspapers are more visually based, and so are their supplements.

- Considering the relatively small number of supplements that were studied, it is difficult to reach any decisive conclusions regarding the difference between the elite and popular press. But, in general, it seems as though popular newspapers are more likely to print commemorative supplements. While from 1958 to 1998 Ha’aretz and Davar, two elite newspapers, published only two commemorative supplements, Ma’ariv and Yedioth Ahronoth, two popular newspapers, published eight supplements.

**Selection of Events**

The following section investigates the details that construct the plots presented in the supplements (Table 1). In order to do so it is first essential to identify what types of events were highlighted through the years and in which periods. The coding categories were devised to highlight and contrast major themes in Israeli history.7 The goal of the coding process was to categorize the photographs within the context of their presentation. Hence, the coders were instructed to rely—among other indicators—on the specific texts that accompanied the photographs in each of the supplements. This was done in order to unify the coding process, and as a way of operationalizing the theoretical tenet that photographs do not carry inherent meanings that exist beyond the context of their use. And so, for instance, a 1951 photograph depicting two Israeli children, probably new immigrants holding loaves of bread (Israeli Memory supplement, p. 22) was placed independently by all of the coders in the “economy” category (instead of in “migration and development” or “other”) because the text that accompanied the photograph dealt first and foremost with the economic gaps that had grown within Israeli society since the 1950s.

The most salient finding in this category is that the Israeli-Arab conflict is
the most frequent photographic theme in all of the supplements, with the exception of the 1998 *The Scroll* supplement. While all of the seven supplements dedicate the largest number of photographs per issue to the conflict, there is a very limited presentation of all other components of Israel’s history. Therefore, the main themes of the Zionist ethos such as the absorption of the Diaspora Jews, the fructification of Israel’s deserts or the birth of a new Hebrew culture go almost unmentioned. Thus the findings reflect a society that perceives itself first and foremost, through its conflict with the surrounding Arab countries and the Palestinians.

In contrast, *Ma’ariv*’s 1998 supplement *The Scroll* presents an alternative mechanism for selecting events: the supplement deals with Israeli reality by focusing on Israel’s Declaration of Independence, which is called in Hebrew *The Scroll of Independence*. And so the declaration is used as a starting point that enables the editors and writers to comment on Israeli reality by constantly comparing the original text with their interpretation of its fulfillment. This focus on the declaration enabled the editors of the supplement to select somewhat marginal photographs such as Thai workers in Israel, the first Israeli Miss Universe, or a popular Israeli TV talk show.

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The Narrator

In general, through the years, four salient trends can be observed: first, there is a shift from one authoritative narrator, who is a journalist, to several narrators, some or all of whom are not journalists. Second, there is a growing emphasis on the role and importance of the photographer as a narrator. Third, there is an increasing attention to the selection and construction processes made by the editors and writers, which can be sensed through their self-reflective writings. Finally, over the years and via the layering of different types of narration, the supplements tend to present more complex patterns of relationships between different narrators.

There are three relatively earlier cases in which the narrators of the supplements are unidentified. For example, in Ma’ariv’s 1968 supplement there are no credits for the writer, or for the photographers. The decision to avoid any reference to the creators of the supplement strengthens the narrative’s authority, since it supposedly details the events exactly as they appeared, without any mediation. In contrast, the most recent 1998 supplements present several complex narration conventions. Ma’ariv’s supplement The headlines, the photographs, the memories and Yedioth Ahronoth’s supplement 50 years in headlines and pictures are unique in their focus on the role of photographers as narrators: Micha Bar-Am in Ma’ariv and David Rubinger in Yedioth Ahronoth. The preface to Yedioth Ahronoth’s Rubinger supplement addresses the issue of the narrator’s authority in the following way:

Here we are in front of you. We are the first draft of history. We are the headlines you read, the photographs you saw. We are here with the happy hours and the sad moments. We made your heart glow. We sometimes made you shed a tear. We are the draft (p. 2).

This paragraph and the others that follow create the image of a national community of readers who consume the same description of events and react to those events in a uniform manner. The community is kept abreast of the events that tell themselves through headlines and photographs. Hence this kind of presentation conceals the role of the journalists who actually turn the events into headlines, and at the same time, reduces the distance between the event and its reporting: when the headlines speak for themselves in the name of history, it is clear that the headlines—that is the newspaper—are an integral part of history itself.

The two other supplements issued by Ma’ariv in celebration of Israel’s 50th anniversary—Israeli Memory and The Scroll—present a multi-voiced version of the narrator role: the 66 photographs in Israeli Memory are accompanied by 61 short texts, written by 61 writers, many of them not journalists. In a similar manner, a large number of politicians, academics, journalists and others took part in writing The Scroll. The combination of the declaration’s paragraphs, the writers’ texts, and the accompanying photographs creates a complex structure of contrast-
ing interpretations and reflects a struggle over authority. Thus for example, a paragraph of the declaration that describes the ancient longings of Diaspora Jews for the land of Israel (pp. 12–13, see figure 1) is coupled with a text written by a Jewish-Syrian Rabbi who migrated to Israel in 1992. The text is accompanied by two photographs (Figure 1): on the left side of the double-spread appears a full-page reproduction of the very famous 1949 photograph depicting a crowd of Russian Jews surrounding Golda Meir, in front of Moscow’s central synagogue. This is, supposedly, the “appropriate” photograph that suits this paragraph since it features a visual icon that was identified through the years with the struggle of Russian Jews over their right to migrate to Israel. At the same time, the smaller second photograph, in the right side of the spread challenges this ideological construction: it is a 1995 photograph showing a group of furious new immigrants from Ethiopia demonstrating against the Israeli policy that denied their family members the right to migrate to Israel. This subversive coupling undermines the hegemonic presentation of Israel as a country that absorbs all Jews, without discrimination or preference.

FIGURE 1. The Scroll supplement, Ma’ariv 1998.
Continuity and Coherence

The two earliest supplements construct tightly continuous and coherent plots that reinforce the official Israeli master commemorative narrative. The choice of photographs and supplementary texts strengthen a narrative that describes Israel as a small and courageous country fighting a successful holy war against its diabolical enemies. Thus for instance Ma’ariv’s 1968 supplement reinforces this interpretation by the continuous presentation of Israeli soldiers storming enemy posts (p. 9; p. 18; p. 43, etc.), while enemy soldiers are presented either as corpses (p. 27) or as POWs (p. 16; p. 30). Moreover, all the enemy’s casualties shown in the supplement are soldiers, while all Israeli casualties (p. 7; p. 15, etc.) are civilians. The only case in which enemy soldiers are shown as active and victorious is in the photograph depicting the Jordanian soldiers conquering Jerusalem’s Old City during the 1948 war (p. 12). But even this deviation strengthens the master narrative since the Jordanian soldiers are shown leading a group of elderly ultra-Orthodox Jews into captivity. And so, the enemy is again portrayed as cruel and weak, since it can only win a battle against ultra-Orthodox civilians, who are not active participants in the Zionist war effort.

The construction of this mythical narrative of a holy war in this early supplement is also supported by various textual omissions: the well known photograph (p. 31, see figure 2) from the 1956 war of Israeli paratroopers in the Mitle Pass in the Sinai desert is accompanied by the following caption: “It is morning in the Mitle. The rising sun crowns the heads of the warriors with a halo, while they are leaning on their weapons, as if they are praying (p. 31).” The headline reduces the gap between the concrete and the mythical even more by titling the photograph “A prayer in the battlefield” while ignoring the fact that soldiers in the photograph are not praying, but rather cleaning their weapons.

The coherence of the plot is challenged when the content of the photographs seems to contradict the master narrative. The most significant example of this phenomenon is found in the case of photographs that document internal tensions within Israeli society. Those tensions are a source of in-group violence that should be condemned and targeted “out” towards the external enemy. Hence, for example, a 1959 photograph showing demonstrators from a poor neighborhood in Haifa raising the Israeli flag in the “wrong” way—that is, as a protest against the state’s authorities—is accompanied by a text that amends the inner social wound by relating it to a later, seemingly unrelated heroic external conflict:

The demonstration in Vadi Saliv led to an increase in funding to improve conditions in poor neighborhoods. The ethnic tension [between Jews of Middle Eastern and European origins] would disappear in later days, when the constant Arab threat blurred the differences between Jews, and gave birth to the magnificent fraternity of May and June 1967 (p. 34).
FIGURE 2. Ma'ariv's 1968 supplement

Photography: Abraham Vered
At the opposite end of this continuum, two of the latest supplements—Ma’ariv’s 1998 The Scroll and Israeli Memory—present the most complex and fractured narration patterns. Although the subjects of the photographs appearing in Ma’ariv’s 1998 Israeli Memory supplement are relatively similar to those of the photographs that appeared in previous supplements—mainly photographs of events related to the Israeli-Arab conflict and internal Israeli politics—the diversity of writers and perspectives offers a diversity of narratives.

The variety of perspectives sometimes causes a situation in which a photograph is used in order to discuss a subject that does not seem related to the “original” subject of the photograph. Also, since this supplement does not offer any one over-reaching meta-narrative, the only continuity in Israeli Memory is to be found in the scattered smaller mini-narratives that describe more than one photograph. While the other separate photographs create separate references, these linked photographs also offer us a lesson, or a moral. And so for instance, positioning the photograph of an anti-Rabin demonstration (p. 84) on the right side of a double-page spread, and then “continuing” it, on the left side of the spread with Yitzhak Rabin’s last photograph (p. 85) taken at a peace rally, establishes the reason for the murder and suggests that not only an individual, but rather a whole political sector, was responsible for it.

Judging by its leading textual component, The Scroll supplement undoubtedly presents a coherent and continuous narrative: it focuses on Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and it presents the declaration’s paragraphs in their original order. But the structuring of the supplement via the additional written and photographed interpretations creates a situation of maximal discontinuity and incoherence. One of many examples of this mechanism is found in the two pages that accompany the declaration’s paragraph that calls the Jewish world to support the newborn Jewish State (pp. 60–61). The added text in this case was written by an Israeli politician who calls for the strengthening of the relations between Israel and world Jewry. The full-page 1950s photograph on the left side depicts David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, and his wife Paula during a parade. Up to this point, Ben-Gurion’s photograph and the text seem to follow the spirit of the original paragraph and conventional Zionist perceptions. But the addition, on the right side, of a smaller photograph of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew who spied for Israel undermines this “natural order.” The positioning of Pollard’s photograph in this context hints at the often-complex relations between Diaspora Jews and Israelis, and to the problems that might evolve from the fact that such Jews, who are citizens of other countries, identify with Israel.

In a sense, this elaborate interpretive dimension of The Scroll is very similar to the one found in the aforementioned Israeli Memory supplement. But, at the same time, the two supplements also act as mirror images of one another. While in Israeli Memory the “anchors” of the supplement are the photographic icons, in The Scroll it is the Declaration text that provides the foundation for the supplement’s story. While in Israeli Memory the “stable” and agreed upon meaning of the fa-
mous photographs is in many cases undermined by the interpretive texts, *The Scroll* uses an opposite mechanism: the declaration’s text is the consensual factor that supposedly bears the agreed upon meaning, while the photographs, suggest a subversive interpretation. Finally, after the two supplements activate those two opposing mechanisms they achieve a similar outcome: both of them undermine the assumption that “national assets” such as the Declaration of Independence, or canonic photographs have one stable interpretation which is shared by all group members.

**Construction of Group Time**

In general, all nine supplements besides *Ma’ariv*’s *The Scroll* follow, as a principle, a chronological flow moving from the past to the present, or toward a more recent past. This seemingly smooth movement seems to serve a linear and secular perception of time, but I would argue that all of the supplements deviate—in varying degrees and in different ways—from this chronological route in ways that reflect rhetorical and ideological arguments. Moreover, in most cases, those departures from the linear progression of time reinforce the notion that the nation is a group that has its own time that does not necessarily coincide with regular time.

The two most radical reflections of the “national time” perception could be found in the early *Ma’ariv*’s and *Ha’aretz*’s 1968 supplements. In both supplements, the photographs are not dated. In some cases, the accompanying texts refer to the photographed events and specify their dates. In other cases, there is a reference to some other date that is somehow related to the photographed subject. In regard to continuity, the accompanying captions and texts in both supplements create a flow, which is more closely related to national-circular time than to historical-linear time. Thus, for example, in *Ma’ariv*’s supplement “Sinai, for the first time,” the headline of a photograph from the 1948 war, hints at the 1956 and 1967 wars, in which the Israeli army fought, again in Sinai. This method of time construction relies on the assumed common knowledge of the group members. Moreover, the absence of dates, or the reference to other “relevant” dates, furthers the process of making symbols out of the photographs. If the photographs are not anchored to a specific date, they can easily be perceived as symbols of other events, or of some broader phenomenon.

The two 1998 supplements that combine historical front pages with the photography of Bar-Am and Rubinger follow, in principle, a chronological flow. But at the same time the two supplements challenge this linear progression through subtle and overt strategies. They structure their “national time” through the relations between the historical front-pages, the accompanying photographs, and the accompanying captions. In both cases, the original-historical front page bestows upon the two-page narrative the aura of authenticity, since it supposedly depicts the past “as it was.” From this point onward, the accompanying photograph and caption can create a story through varying time coordinates that are supposed to bear a meaning that is known to the group members.
This kind of rhetoric is most evident in cases where the accompanying photograph that supports the textual argument was not actually taken during the event reported upon. Hence, for example, Bar-Am’s photograph (p. 45, see figure 3) of Golda Meir in an army helicopter (Figure 3) accompanies the front page that reports the events of the 1973 war. The photograph shows Meir holding her forehead while looking rather depressed. This portrayal suits the accompanying caption that describes the mishaps of the war as the reason for Meir’s later resignation. The caption does not mention the fact that the photograph was actually taken in 1970, three years before the war (Bar-Am, 1996).
Such examples assist the process of deciphering commemorative narratives, since they are extreme manifestations of more subtle, yet routine tendencies. This kind of overt transfer of a photograph from its “original” context highlights the selective and rhetorical dimensions that are always part of the creation of chronologies of a nation’s past. Moreover, such a relocation of a photograph into a new context is a real-time demonstration of how visual icons are created. Finally, the combined process of transferring and then relocating underlines the way in which “national time” works: the justification of such a “time shift” is that the 1970 photograph fits into (and thus reinforces) some assumed communal knowledge and/or emotional reactions to the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath.

Definition of the Group

The final section of my investigation explores the ways in which the supplements define Israeli society and establish its boundaries. It is my view that the frequency of appearance of different group members, and members of other national groups, in the photographs points to their social importance. To some extent, this is a circular ritualistic process of setting boundaries and establishing status: the supplements represent the way in which society perceives itself, and at the same time, the supplements construct this perception.

Not surprisingly, more than 60% of the photographs in all the supplements feature secular and national religious Israeli Jews (“other Israeli Jews” in Table 2). At the same time, it is interesting to find that five of the eight supplements do not include any photographs (0%) of Israeli Arabs, while the other three supplements depict them in less than 4% of the photographs. This is while Arab citizens of Israel compose 19% of Israel’s population. The same tendency is true, in less dramatic proportions, for ultra-Orthodox Jews. From a ritualistic perspective it could be argued that the supplements set social boundaries by out-grouping those members of society who do not take part in its two main social rituals: according to the prevailing Zionist point of view, Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews are perceived as people who do not participate in the sacrifice ritual of defending the country (i.e. in most cases do not serve in the Israeli army), and in the fertility ritual of building it.

Social Roles

Arabs from neighboring countries and Palestinians are usually depicted as enemies, and in several cases, as negotiators in the context of peace talks. Israeli Arabs are so rarely documented in the photographs that it is impossible to talk about their conventional social role. Ultra-Orthodox Jews are usually presented in the context of the secular-religious tension. That is, in most cases, they are shown confronting secular Jews or policemen. An important change in their role can be noticed in *Ma‘ariv*s 1998 *Israeli Memory* supplement: two of the photographs
have a political context and they could be interpreted as a reference to the growing power of ultra-Orthodox parties in the current Israeli political scene. The third photograph (p. 88) shows ultra-Orthodox volunteers gathering the remains of victims of bus bombings and bringing them to proper burial. Hence partial participation of group members in the great sacrifice ritual enables them to take part in the group’s commemorations.

Among the different roles other Israeli Jews fulfill in the photographs, the most salient is the role of the combat soldier, and thus, there is a vast difference in the relative presentation of Israeli men and women. To a large degree, the Israeli soldier is the distinctive protagonist of all of the supplements, and so the changing representations of the Israeli soldier are a useful tool for studying the ever-changing nature of collective memories. In a previous section, it was pointed out that Ma’ariv’s 1968 supplement features many photographs of active and victorious Israeli soldiers. Later supplements are still dominated by heroic shots of Israeli soldiers, but they also present a small group of less heroic visual images. For instance, the 1988 Ma’ariv supplement presents, for the first time, an Israeli soldier confronting a (Palestinian) woman (p. 30), and the 1998 Israeli Memory supplement presents, for the first time, a photograph of Israeli prisoners of war (p. 51).

### Table 2: Definition of the Group

| Year | Ha’aretz | Ma’ariv | Ma’ariv | Ma’ariv | Ma’ariv | Ma’ariv | Ma’ariv | Bar-Am | Ma’ariv | Memory | Ma’ariv | Memory | Bar-Am | Ma’ariv | Memory | Ma’ariv | Yedoith | Ahronoth | Rubinger |
|------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1968 | (N=78)  | (N=88) | (N=112)| (N=83) | (N=48) | (N=84) | (N=58) | (N=19) |
| Ultra-orthodox Israeli Jews | 5.1% | 4.5% | 2.6% | 3.6% | 4.1% | 3.6% | 5.1% | 5.2% |
| Other Israeli Jews | 65.7% | 66.2% | 69.9% | 72.4% | 75.0% | 77.5% | 64.0% | 89.6% |
| Israeli Arabs | 0.0% | 2.2% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.4% | 0.0% |
| Palestinians | 7.7% | 0.0% | 1.8% | 6.0% | 8.4% | 4.8% | 5.1% | 5.2% |
| Other Arabs | 10.2% | 11.3% | 6.2% | 8.4% | 6.4% | 4.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Non-Israeli Jews | 11.3% | 11.1% | 2.6% | 1.2% | 2.0% | 1.1% | 8.6% | 0.0% |
| Other Non-Israelis | 0.0% | 5.7% | 14.2% | 8.4% | 4.1% | 7.1% | 13.8% | 0.0% |
| Not clear | 0.0% | 9.0% | 1.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

Still Photographs, Dynamic Memories
FIGURE 4. *Ma’ariv’s* 1968 supplement

Photography: Boris Carmi
FIGURE 5. *Ma’ariv’s* 1988 supplement

Credit: Avraham Vered

Photography: Boris Campi
What makes this process of altering the image of the Israeli soldier so fascinating is the fact that in several cases the same photographs are used in order to narrate contradictory stories: in *Ma’ariv*’s 1968 supplement (p. 30) the page documenting the 1956 war contains three photographs (p. 30, see figure 4): a large photograph of an Israeli soldier resting in a deserted Egyptian post and beneath it,
two smaller photographs of Egyptian POWs and of a pair of military shoes that were abandoned by a fleeing Egyptian soldier. Ma’ariv’s 1988 supplement documents the 1956 war (p. 7, see figure 5) through the same shoes and prisoners’ photographs and a photograph of Israeli soldiers parachuting in Sinai (p. 7, see figure 5). Ma’ariv’s 1998 Israeli Memory supplement uses the same shoes’ photograph (p. 34–35, see figure 6) while coupling it with a heroic shot of a young Israeli soldier. Each of the two photographs occupies a whole page.

The headline of that page in the 1968 supplement is “Sinai, for the second time” and the shoes’ photograph caption reads: “The deserted shoes have become the symbol of the Egyptian’s fighting abilities in Sinai.” The additional text uses moralistic and political arguments to justify the sudden attack on the Egyptian Army. The additional text in the 1988 supplement briefly describes the main phases of the war. The text of the 1998 supplement was written by Yigal Lev, a veteran journalist who fought in the war. Lev compares the photographs of the deserted
shoes and the young soldier and his two personal perspectives—the one of a young soldier and the second, of a much more mature viewer. He claims that those two photographs are symbols of the arrogant “fleeing/winning” myth that dominated Israeli discourse for many years by contrasting Israeli heroism with Arab cowardice. This myth, he explains, cost Israel and its enemies many more years of war and pain.

Hence, in this case, the comparison between the 1968 and the 1998 usage of the same photographs demonstrates the dynamic role of visual memory. While in 1968 the photographs were used in order to justify the Israeli attack, in the 1998 supplement the same photograph is used in order to prove the opposite. Furthermore, both texts use time in order to bolster their arguments: the 1968 supplement uses the past—which is not “visible” in the photograph—in order to justify Israel’s attack, while the 1998 supplement uses the future—which was also not “visible” in the photograph at the time—in order to prove that the previous beliefs were wrong.

Private and Public

Although it is difficult to determine who exactly is “famous” and under what circumstances, it seems as though most of the people featured in a majority of photographs are “ordinary.” At the same time, both the “ordinary” and the “famous” people shown in the photographs are participating in public activities. That is to say that the supplements, generally speaking, ignore most day-to-day aspects of private Israeli lives. Following the same line, it is interesting to note that the while the “expended” (and thus virtual) “Israeli family” is represented in the supplements through its moments of joy and agony, there are no real families appearing in the supplements. The most important social unit structuring Israeli society is absent from the supplements, and so are the actual private activities that real-life Israeli family members are mostly engaged with.

The covers of six out of the ten supplements feature unknown Israelis. Those anonymous Israelis are mostly young, and they are usually related to the national project through a physical symbol such as their clothing, or the fact that they are holding an Israeli flag. In Imagined Communities (1996, p. 10) Benedict Anderson describes a similar phenomenon, which is the building of a tomb for the Unknown Soldier. According to Anderson, the ability to imagine the nation is attained through a mixture of distancing and concretizing: on the one hand, there is the tomb, the ultimate physical monument, built on the nation’s soil. On the other hand, there is the “unknown” soldier who is unknown since he is an emblem of a social construct, that is, an emblem of an imagined community. Only by removing the soldier from the private and the real can he be transformed into a public symbol. The same effect is gained through the presentation of these unknowns, but at the same time emblematic Israelis on the covers: they can only become public symbols through their anonymity.
Conclusion

A recent study of the journalistic use of collective memory (Edy, 1999) suggests that “commemorative journalism seems to offer us the best chance to reexamine our past. However, the exercise may appear unproductive because the past in these stories typically seems to be irrelevant to the present” (p. 83). Contrary to this assertion, I would argue that the findings of this study highlight the importance and relevance of commemorative journalism to our understanding of both the past and the present. The commemorative newspaper supplements researched here offer a unique means of understanding the ways in which Israelis perceived both their past and present at different stages of the country’s history. Furthermore, a comparison between the earlier and most recent supplements illuminates the ways in which Israeli popular memory has been constructed and deconstructed through the years.

The findings emphasize the interwoven connections between the message of collective memory narratives and the manner in which they are being told. Different components of narrative construction were used in each of the supplements in order to tell different stories about Israel’s past. Moreover, although most of the supplements display Israel’s past through similar protagonists (mainly Israeli Jews), similar events (mainly violent aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict), or even the same actual photographs, their presentations offer a variety of historical readings. This phenomenon demonstrates the centrality and usefulness of visual imagery and visual icons in the construction of collective memories.

More specifically, the activation of different storytelling strategies in the supplements reflects a spectrum of possible narrating patterns: at the one extreme stands the uniform and authoritative narrative of the earliest supplements. These supplements depict Israeli history through a distinctive Zionistic master commemorative narrative, and so they tell their story via one omniscient narrator and a tight plot that places every possible occurrence within one ideological context. Those early supplements tend to omit or downplay problematic events or perceptions that contradict the official plot. When such events or perceptions are dealt with the supplements accompany the uneasy visual representations with rhetoric that downplays the visual effects and positions the problematic event within the constructive context of the great national epic.

At the other end of the spectrum stand some of the most recent supplements. Although in many cases the visual raw material those supplements use is similar to that used in the earlier supplements, the decentralization of the narrator’s role and the fragmentation of the larger narratives offer historical readings that interpret Israeli history through varied perspectives and in the service of many causes. In fact, those later supplements demonstrate a seemingly oppositional use of “national equipment”: although those supplements commemorate Israel’s national history on Israel’s Independence Day via Israeli popular media, the accumulated outcome of their presentation stresses the inconsistencies of the national story.
The latter group of supplements challenges the very existence of a unified Israeli national narrative on several levels. First, the ways in which those supplements use canonic photographs or texts contradict the notion that those photographs or texts bear an agreed-upon meaning shared by all Israelis. Second, this kind of historical presentation questions the existence of a national “Israeli family,” or rather emphasizes its constructed qualities.

By offering those conflicting interpretations, such supplements reflect larger shifts within Israeli society, and transfer the academic disputes over the representation of Israel’s past into a more popular and accessible realm. Supplements such as *Israeli Memory* and *The Scroll* reflect a heightened awareness of the interrelations between collective memory and nation building, and of the selective nature of this process. At the same time, unlike their academic counterparts, the creators of such “subversive” supplements do not specifically regard Israeli journalists of earlier years as hegemonic memory agents. This is to say that—at least in the examples studied here—the current critical journalistic reading of Israel’s past does not incorporate a critical probe of the journalists’ own professional community.

Notes

1 I originally planned to analyze another two daily newspapers—*Davar* and *Hadashot*, but they did not publish photographic commemorative supplements in any of the investigated years.

2 Some of the supplements that were published through the years—such as the 1958 supplements—are not analyzed here. Those supplements appeared on Israel’s Independence Day but rather than chronicle Israel’s history they contained interviews and features about varied issues. The exclusion of such supplements is not based on the assumption that they have no role in the large-scale process of structuring collective memories. Rather, their exclusion suggests that those supplements operate via different means and mechanisms than the commemorative-photographic supplements.

3 At the same time, it would be misguided to identify all of the new historical research with postmodern or relativistic approaches. Some of the most important accounts written by “new historians” still aim do depict history “just as it happened” (Morris, 1994). For an extensive exploration of the sociology of the “new historians”’ debate see Ram, 1996.

4 The Israeli “new historians’” debate, bears of course some similarities to other recent “historians’ debates” in France and Germany (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p.127)

5 In order to create a reliable foundation for comparison, the two quantitative examinations refer only to eight of the ten researched supplements. This distinction is made since my quantitative analysis aims to study the photographs and texts that were chosen by the editor/s of the supplements. This definition excludes from the quantitative analysis, and only from it, two supplements—*Ha’aretz’s* and *Ma’ariv’s* 1978 supplements—that feature only reprints of historic front pages and articles, and thus do not include separate photographs that were chosen especially for the supplement.


7 Three Israeli coders coded the data and 35% of the photographs were coded by all three of them. The nominal Krippendorff Alphas for the two variables were 0.857 for selection of events, and 0.946 for identity of group members.

8 The Supplement’s title in the tables is “Bar-Am” since most of its photographs were taken by Micha Bar-Am.

9 The Supplement’s title in the tables is “Rubiger” since all of its photographs were taken by David Rubinger.

10 Israeli foreign relations, excluding Israeli-Arab relations.

11 The table excludes photographs that do not feature people. In some cases N is greater than the number of photographs in the supplement since some photographs feature members of several national or ethnic groups.

12 I initially planned to break the “Israeli Jew” category into smaller sub-groups based on origin ethnicity and precise religious affiliation. But since the photographs do not facilitate such meticulous distinctions, the “Israeli Jew” category distinguishes only between orthodox Jews and other Jews, since it is physically (i.e. according to clothing) possible to gather this data from the photographs.

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