The right to tell the (right) story: journalism, authority and memory

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In an interview on the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day in 1965, Ya’akov Talmon, one of Israel’s most respected historians, said: ‘personally I feel that maybe, in this generation, we had better yield to Rengelblum … to Tzvia Lubetkin and to Abba Kovner … and listen to Natan Alterman and to Uri Tzvi Greenberg.’ Here, Talmon conceded his authority, as professional historian, to relate the story of the past and positioned himself as yielding to Holocaust survivors and victims who were ‘there and then’, and to poets who, while they did not witness the events, have unique tools to represent them. Talmon’s argument, one that echoes Aristotle’s claim about the inferiority of history as compared to poetry, illuminates the complexity of the concept of cultural authority and highlights the struggle for the authority to shape society’s collective memory.

This study focuses on the nature of cultural authority. It contextualizes its exploration in the field of journalism and explores the cultural battle over the right to shape society’s stories of the past. In doing so, it seeks to illuminate a perspective insufficiently studied in collective memory research and communication studies. To date, most studies have analysed collective memory as it has appeared in texts (museums, books, films, etc.) and few studies have explored collective memory by studying audience perceptions (Schuman et al., 2003). This article applies a complementary perspective: it focuses on the preconditions for authorship that provide writers with the mandate to shape society’s collective memory through daily newspapers.

The research follows earlier studies of the role of journalists as agents of memory and issues of journalistic authority (Edy, 2006; Kitch, 2005; Meyers, 2002), and, following the narrative approach, it explores the writers who shape
narratives. Hence, this study focuses less on the texts and more on the people behind the texts. The research elaborates the complex nature of journalistic authority. It explores the preconditions for authorship and analyses the ways in which those preconditions constitute and shape it. Carried out by analysis of Israeli daily newspapers published on Holocaust Memorial Day throughout the first 50 years of the state of Israel, the study traces the biographies and writings of those authors whose articles were published in the special Holocaust Day issues, and asks – to whom does society entrust the authority to tell its most important stories? Thus, the study seeks to develop further the connection between collective memory and journalistic authority: first, by exploring the preconditions for authorship and the interrelations between the different sources of authority; and, second, by exposing the role of those preconditions in the process of shaping the different commemorative narratives of society.

The article unfolds in the following manner: first, the presentation of the theoretical framework elaborates the relations between collective memory, journalism, and Holocaust representation.

Second, the different sources of authority that provide writers with the mandate to shape Holocaust memory in Israeli daily newspapers are elaborated, with close attention directed to the complexity of relations between the sources. The deconstruction of journalistic authority in relation to its sources and the analysis of the dynamics of the preconditions for authorship illuminate the perspective proposed here, that perceives the granting of journalistic authority to be a dynamic and complex process.

Finally, trauma theory is applied to interpret the research’s findings. Doing so, the study reveals the subterranean forces that shape society’s collective memory and shows how different sources of authority shape different narratives. The article concludes by examining an alternative, more constructive, journalistic commemoration narrative, as a potential turning point in commemorative discourse. Hence, it suggests that professional-journalistic sources of authority can help society in the process of working through the trauma.

Collective memory, journalistic authority and Holocaust representation: the theoretical framework of the study

Collective memory studies postulate that each community develops its own memory of the past that marks the boundaries of the group. Collective memory defines the relationships between the individual and society, enables the community to preserve its self-image and to transfer it through time (Halbwachs, 1992 [1950]). Later scholars (Olick and Robbins, 1998; Schudson, 1995; Zelizer, 1995) advanced and developed Halbwachs’ work in various ways, and in doing so elaborated the following fundamental features of social memory work.
First, collective memory is a process that is a constantly unfolding, changing and transforming. Furthermore, memory is a tool that works simultaneously in two temporal dimensions: current events and beliefs guide our reading of the past, while the schemes learned from the past shape our understanding of the present (Schudson, 1997). The process of shaping collective memory is neither linear nor logical, it is dynamic and unexpected (Zelizer, 1995: 221).

Second, collective memory is functional in the social, political and cultural realms. Among its primary functions, collective memory is a form of cultural negotiation in which different stories vie for a place in history (Sturken, 1997: 1). Hence, collective memory contains two complementary components: the common consciousness shared by members of social groups regarding their past and the system of mnemonic signifiers placed across time and space in order to publicly narrate and affix these perceptions (Bar-On, 2001).

Finally, collective memory appears in the form of narratives. Arranging the past through a narrative can justify past activities and reinforce present ones. In the process of narrative creation, collective memory uses historical sources, but it does so in a selective, creative manner and thus blurs the line between fact and fiction (Zerubavel, 1995). Such a need to structure life into a narrative reflects a struggle against the arbitrariness of human existence (Schudson, 1995).

Journalism and/as collective memory: journalists as collective memory agents

Two seminal works demonstrate the similarity between historical research and media studies. Hayden White (1973) argued that historians focus on traumatic events and transfer them into defined genres that make those events more accessible to the readers. In the same year, Gay Tuchman (1973) demonstrated how journalists make news by routinization of the unexpected. Accordingly, scholars of history and journalism have exposed the socially constructed nature of their fields and elaborated the ways in which routine practices connect narrative and authority. As Barbie Zelizer noted: ‘the function of narration in the production of historical text constitutes a viable and effective way for the narrators to position and uphold themselves as authorities in culture’ (1992: 199).

Media research acknowledges the similarity between the process of shaping collective memory and journalistic practice. Journalists choose which stories or facts have importance. They select facts, construct them into cultural-interpretative frames, and thus give them meaning. In summary, journalists ‘lean’ on the past in order to give meaning to the present. Similarly, journalism and narration are linked closely together in regard to social memory.
Furthermore, in applying the cultural approach to communication, researchers argued that journalists, like storytellers, shape their stories according to the cultural environment (Bird, 1990; Roeh, 1989). Indeed, following Peter Novick’s (1988) observation that every group has its own historians, Itzhak Roeh claimed ‘every collective writes its own newspapers’ (1994: 13).

Despite the growing role and authority of journalists in shaping our understanding of collective pasts (Zelizer, 1993b), the role of journalists as memory agents has been marginalized in the larger field of collective memory research (Zelizer, 2008: 80). Meyers (2007) suggests that this is due to the perception of journalism applied by researchers as well as journalists. For example, application of the objective-natural paradigm to journalism has led researchers to overlook the role of journalists as social storytellers and as members of an interpretative community (Zelizer, 1993a). Thus, in contrast to the assumption in collective memory research that the media serve as a mediating factor, the approach applied in this study follows Kitch’s (2008: 318) perception of journalism as a process rather than a product and turns the focus inwards to explore journalistic practice itself.

The process of shaping collective memory is ongoing and involves political, cultural and sociological confrontations as different interpretations compete for their place in history (Sturken, 1997). Newspapers have a distinctive role in such a competition: on the one hand, they serve as a platform for social-cultural struggle and, as such, they can grant authority to society’s storytellers. On the other hand, they are also actors in the same competition and perceive themselves as the authoritative storytellers of society. Therefore, the article exposes the complex interrelations between journalism and other spheres of social life, as well as intra-relations within the field of journalism.

**Holocaust representation**

Some scholars consider the Holocaust to be an ‘event at the limit’; that is, an event that challenges traditional categories and conceptions (Friedlander, 1992a). LaCapra (2001) claimed that there is an excess at the heart of such events that escapes all manner of representation, and thus they cannot be explained in one coherent discourse (Lyotard, 1988: 55–7). Accordingly, the debate about Holocaust representation involves two perspectives: the historical-philosophical (Jay, 1992) and the cultural (Hartman, 1994). Both perspectives discuss epistemological questions (can one represent the Holocaust?) as well as ethical questions (what is the appropriate way to represent the Holocaust?).

These claims illustrate the challenges to journalists’ involvement in commemorating the Holocaust. The first and most notable challenge is the use of language. For many scholars, the Holocaust is a phenomenon that cannot be contained by language (Friedlander, 1984); even realism collapses when facing
the horrible reality (Ezrahi, 1980). According to Eli Wiesel (1978), any attempt to transfer the Holocaust into text necessarily leads to falsification: ‘Auschwitz defies imagination and perception; it submits only to memory. Between the dead and the rest of us there exists an abyss that no talent can comprehend’ (Eli Wiesel in Schiffrin, 2001: 524–5).

By inference, the underlying fear is that daily newspapers, which use everyday language routinely, will dilute the intensity of these events. That is, this debate raises the concern that Holocaust discourse in daily newspapers can lead to trivialization of the Holocaust. This may be the reason why, when dealing with Holocaust, newspapers assign more space to poets and artists and use biblical-festive language (Cohen et al., 2002: 53).

Therefore, several perspectives have been applied in the debate about Holocaust representation: first, Holocaust survivors stress the structural tension between, on the one hand, the need if not the imperative to convey the events they witnessed, and, on the other hand, the inability to narrate it. In many respects, this tension has led to frustration and silence (Laub, 1992). Second, according to a hierarchy of testimonies, oral testimonies should be preferred because storytellers re-present the events, while written testimonies only represent them. That is, narrative conventions are less determinative in oral testimonies (Langer, 1991). On another level, which is elaborated later in the article, a structural tension exists between narratives of survivors and of historians (Jay, 1992).

In summary, Holocaust representation deals with the inadequacies of language in representing the events. As such, studies of Holocaust representation integrate not only questions of ethics and aesthetics, but also of authority.

The research

The research corpus

The assumption underlying this study is that the Holocaust is one of the enduring components of the Israeli collective memory: ‘[The Holocaust is] the primary myth of Israeli politics and the moral foundation of a new Israeli civil religion’ (Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1983: 137). Hence, Israeli society needs to tell itself its version of the Holocaust story repeatedly, throughout its changing circumstances.

The findings presented here are the result of having applied qualitative analysis to investigate the special Holocaust Memorial Day editions published by seven Israeli dailies over the last 50 years. Overall, the research corpus consisted of 312 such special issues. Given that each of the seven newspapers represents a social-political group (secular or religious, center or periphery), or different genre of journalism (elite, popular), collectively they serve as a rich source that represents the trends and changes in Israeli collective memory.
**Analysis categories and issues analysed**

The rationale for analysing newspapers along a time axis assumes that chronological analysis of newspapers can reveal how society shapes its ideological framing and perceives its self-image over time (Nir and Roeh, 1992). Thus, historical research of newspapers enables the exploration not only of what happened and when, but also how systems of meanings were created (Carey, 1974).

Socially, Holocaust Memorial Day is one of Israel’s most important rituals and thereby an event with great potential for understanding meaning making. Indeed, this day is involved in expressing what Yael Zerubavel (1995) defined as the ‘master commemorative narrative’ through which a society constructs guidelines and a point of view towards its past.3 The political process that led to the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day, and especially its positioning in the Israeli/Jewish calendar (between the Passover celebration of freedom and the adjoining Memorial and Independence Days), are together illustrative of the central Zionist narrative and emphasize the dominant place of Holocaust commemoration in it (Handelman and Katz, 1990; Young, 1990: 59).

Further, Holocaust Memorial Day editions of Israeli daily newspapers serve as an efficient tool for exploring both collective memory and journalistic authority for several reasons. First, unlike other media (e.g. movies or literature), such special editions provide a very systematic, solid research corpus: all newspapers must deal with the same subject every year, on exactly the same day. Second, the analysis of several different newspapers enables us to study the way different sub-groups of society remember its past and exposes the social and political struggle between these groups for the power and authority to shape society’s collective memory. Finally, due to the frequency of their publication – daily – and dependence on both a broad audience of readers as well as the political establishment, daily newspapers serve as a ‘cultural seismograph’ that is sensitive to social, political and cultural changes.

Therefore, these special editions lie at several crucial intersections: between politics, ideology and commercialism; between newspapers as providers of current information and remembrance of the past; and between the sanctified commemorative ritual and the routine, everyday nature of newspapers.

Furthermore, the commemorative issues extend to the limit the view of the role of journalists as an interpretative extension of society and culture. Readers do not expect reports about what happened, but rather elucidation of the meaning of what happened. Thus, these issues exemplify the cultural approach that perceives the media as a social ritual and that places emphasis on the socio-cultural function of the media in constructing and shaping the community (Carey, 1989, 2000; Schudson, 1997; Zelizer, 1993a). Accordingly, this article underlines the interrelations between the storytellers, their stories and the contexts in which they work.
How social fields interrelate is a difficult question, especially for studies that look at the journalistic field and for those whose first concern is with the internal workings of the field. In order to deal with these difficulties, this study has deconstructed the concept of journalistic authority into its roots and sources. Consequently, the following is a presentation of the results of applying the abovementioned theoretical concepts in tracking the complex interrelations between the journalists’ biographies, the content of their stories and their techniques of attaining authority.

Findings

The analysis revealed the complex process involved in determining the authority of the storytellers to engage in telling the story of the Holocaust. In general, it appears that the writers attempted to establish their own authority by drawing upon different authoritative sources. The article argues that only the combination of several sources bestows storyteller status. Furthermore, over the 50-year period studied, there were changes in the ‘inner hierarchy’ between the different sources of authority.

The analysis of the research corpus identified five main authoritative sources:

**Biographic source**: As direct witnesses, Holocaust survivors attained the status of the storytellers of the Holocaust, and, accordingly, they compose the most dominant group of writers in all newspapers. Throughout the years, the list of those entitled to that authority expanded concurrent with extension of the concept of ‘witnessing’. In this process, children of Holocaust survivors, other family members, or even young Israelis who took part in commemorative travels to Poland gained recognition as ‘witnesses’.

**Official source**: Many writers in the newspapers’ special issues were members of political parties or government officials. This was the case primarily during the state’s formative years, when the struggle for hegemony in shaping Holocaust memory was part of the nation-building process. Unlike survivors, who were direct witnesses of the events, these writers gained authority through institutional status. Thus, they played a significant role in shaping the memory of the events, despite the fact that they had no personal experience of them.

**Academic source**: After the Six-Day War of 1967, newspapers featured reports from academic studies about the Holocaust and interviews with Holocaust researchers. The unique status that society granted to the academy and belief in researchers’ capability to present the ‘truth’ are the sources of their authority. Yet Holocaust survivors have frequently challenged scholars whom they consider are not sufficiently authoritative.

**Cultural source**: Many writers gained authority to take part in shaping Holocaust memory due to their role in other cultural fields, such as literature
or poetry and, later, visual media. This shift reflected changes in Israeli culture from literature to the visual media of cinema and television.

*Professional-journalistic source:* The analysis found that journalists were the weakest authority group and that they had to apply different techniques to retain their authority.

As will be demonstrated in the following section, identification of these five main authoritative sources reveals the complexity of the preconditions for authorship involved in establishing journalistic authority, the multi-layered authority needed to tell the Holocaust story, and the complex interrelations that developed in this extended process between the different sources.

*Biographic source: the survivors’ voice – combining the private with the official*

The most dominant group of writers was those who had a direct biographical connection to the Holocaust; namely Holocaust survivors, but also those who lost their families or who succeeded in escaping Nazi Europe. However, such first-hand experiences were not sufficient to establish journalistic authority and Holocaust survivors had to reinforce their authority, principally, through political and cultural sources.

The analysis found that there was a strong connection between, on the one hand, the narratives and their source and, on the other, the (private) story and the need for social-cultural authority. Almost all the writers took part in the (right) events. However, the analysis also reveals the complexity of cultural authority. It seems that being part of the historical events was a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The writers drew their authority from the present as well as from the past, and many of them played key roles in the Israeli political sphere or were among the cultural elite. Some were members of the Israeli parliament, others played an active role in political parties, and others took part in political-linked institutions such as Yad Vashem, the national center for Holocaust research and commemoration.

The findings suggest that a basic precondition for attaining authority, which enables authors to take part in shaping the Holocaust memory, is the integration of biographical and official sources. In this way, the newspapers could integrate the trustworthiness of the private memoir with collective ideological lessons.

The question of authority touches on one of the most controversial issues in Holocaust memory research: who shaped Israeli collective memory during the state’s formative years? Yablonka (2000: 315) argued that it was the survivors who, in many ways, shaped Israeli Holocaust commemoration. In contrast, Zertal (2005) argued that the dominant commemorative public discourse excluded the Holocaust survivors’ voice. The survivors did not shape
the memory of the event they themselves experienced, but rather the official Zionist establishment, who did not witness the Holocaust, and used its commemoration as a political tool.

My findings are closer to Zertal’s critical point of view, but reveal a more complex picture that actually combines the different approaches. The party-political newspapers, which dominated the Israeli press in the early years of the state, had to introduce stories that served their ideology. These newspapers involved Holocaust survivors, but only those who could integrate their own private (reliable) story with the collective (ideological) one. Therefore, although the dominant group that shaped Holocaust memory consisted of Holocaust survivors, not all survivors could take part in that process, only the ‘right’ ones, only those who could provide the ‘right’ story.

For example, for many years, Israeli society commemorated the Holocaust by emphasizing the heroism of the ghetto fighters and the partisans who fought against the Nazis. As Feldman (1992: 223) put it: ‘for us the Day of Holocaust and Heroism was not Martyrs’ Day as my current Israeli calendar translates it, but rather a celebration of resistance and national pride’. Many of the writers integrated the personal and the political because they were at the ‘right’ place, acted ‘correctly’ and thus could provide the ‘right’ story. Members of the underground movement, who played an active role in the ghetto uprisings or fought with the partisans against the Nazis were the most appropriate group of survivors because they fitted in with the Zionist narrative.

These findings also illustrate a major social process of subjugating the individual (story) to the collective (ideology). Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1987) claimed that the traditional (Jewish) response to catastrophe is collectivization, mythologization and ritualization – a process that, via collective narrative, gives collective meaning to a personal experience. Zertal (2005) argued that the nation-state took the place of the traditional community and ‘nationalized’ Holocaust remembrance for political and ideological ends.

The study reported here illuminates one mechanism of this process: the manner in which newspapers used ‘private,’ hence reliable, stories to promote their own ideology.

**Biographic vs academic sources**

The role of intellectuals and academic researchers in shaping Holocaust commemorative issues became dominant since the late 1960s. Such a development was due not only to changes in the field of journalism, but also in academia (Oron, 2003: 46). Nevertheless, since the 1980s many voices started to challenge their authority. The main attack on the academic professionals came from Holocaust survivors who did not agree with historians’ conclusions regarding the Holocaust. In its 18 April 1985 issue, Davar published an article responding to a television program during which two of Israel’s most prominent historians, Anita Shapira and Yehuda Bauer, discussed the actions of the Jewish paratroopers sent to occupied Europe. Baruch
Kamin wrote: ‘not only did Professor Bauer’s words have no bearing on the truth; he also misled Professor Shapira … that operation is well remembered by me, because I organized it …’

Similarly, Yedioth Ahronot published a long article about new psychological research on 27 April 1995 that claimed that there is no such phenomenon as the ‘second generation’ and that children of survivors have no distinctive psychological symptoms. The editors allocated a prominent place to this article and, interestingly, placed photos of famous Israeli artists who are also children of Holocaust survivors amidst the text, and quoted their responses to this research. Juxtaposing famous cultural figures and their emotional reactions to the ‘cold’ ‘objective’ scientific argument informs us about the most popular newspaper’s position in the argument between the biographic and the academic sources of authority.

Yehoshua Iveshitz (Holocaust survivor and journalist at HaTzofe) also discussed the tension between the historians and the survivors: ‘Any time I hear “those researchers” I feel a sharp stab to my heart…. I do not know what other conclusions they can reach and what other damage they can bring upon us’ (in Goldberg, 1998: 169).

Such comments exemplify the immanent tension that Martin Jay described between first-order narratives of the survivors, which have to be incoherent because of the fundamental unintelligibility of the events they experienced, and second-order narratives of historians, whose main goal is to make sense of the events (1992: 104).

The dispute between academic researchers and Holocaust survivors led the newspapers to prefer the involvement of writers who held two sources of authority – biographic and academic. Therefore, since 1989, many have included interviews with academic researchers who were survivors, hence emphasizing their ‘double authority’.5

Biographic authority as an instrument in political discourse
While Holocaust survivors remain the most dominant group of writers in Holocaust Memorial Day editions, their writing has undergone a number of modifications that were the result of changes in the Israeli press, as well as in Holocaust discourse.

Throughout the years, journalists and writers have had to underline their biographic relationship to the Holocaust. The expansion of Holocaust discourse and changes in Israeli journalism (due mainly to the decline of party-political newspapers and the rise of commercial ones) increased the ‘competition over authority’ and the need for writers to present their source of authority. Hence, during the 1980s and 1990s, writers have had to ‘present their credentials’ in order to take part in Holocaust discourse. This change is present in all newspapers and in different contexts. In the issue of the religious-Zionist newspaper, HaTzofe, Yehoshua Iveshitz criticized Zionist accusations of the passivity of Holocaust victims (8 April 1983). He presented
a number of cases in which Jews revolted against the Nazis. To establish his credentials, he mentioned that his grandfather had led one revolt and claimed that one of his teachers and other people he had known led other revolts. *Davar* of 29 April 1984 published a story about a German soldier who gave water to Jews in the trains on their way to the death camps. The story was by signed four Holocaust survivors. It seems that this unusual story needed more than one witness. Similarly, at the end of a personal testimonial story that appeared in *HaTzofe* (22 April 1998), the writer signed the article: ‘Eliezer Zalfrond, Haifa, Kzetnic A6632 (survivor of Auschwitz, Buna Monowitz, Buchenwald, Dachau and the death trains)’.

The research revealed the transformation of symbolic capital between social fields. During the 1950s and 1960s, the official-political source of authority was essential and newspapers used writers’ symbolic political power to shape the Holocaust memory. Since the 1980s, writers have used their symbolic power as survivors to participate in the political discourse. This illustrates changes in both discourses: the prestige attained by survivors over the years and the decline in political involvement in the press. For example, at the end of personal testimony about his experience during the Holocaust (*Al-HaMishmar*, 7 April 1994), the writer added an appeal to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin:

Mister Prime Minister, 50 years have passed since the day I saw the German tanks entering my village. I knew it was the beginning of the end. I knew that if I survived, I would fight against all they stood for. I am still trying to do so. That is why I voted for you, please don’t disappoint me.

In the same way, but from the opposite end of the political spectrum, Yehuda Ariel wrote in *HaTzofe* (22 April 1998) against Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s intentions to negotiate land for peace agreement: ‘all the people, and especially Holocaust survivors and their children, should object to any attempt to give up our fathers’ land’. His personal biographic authority is interesting. He writes that he is not a survivor but ‘I live with the Holocaust by marriage.’

**Widening biographic authority: gradual expansion of witnessing**

Throughout the years, the biographic source of authority to tell the Holocaust story has undergone a process of expansion and the exclusive status of Holocaust survivors has corroded. The study’s findings indicate three different levels of witnessing.

On the first level are Holocaust survivors with first-hand experience. Over the years, the story of the survivor-writers expanded. In doing so, famous Holocaust survivors gained the status of witnesses not only to their own experience during the Holocaust, but also to the entirety of the Holocaust story. Writers like Noah Kliger expanded their writing to many aspects of the Holocaust, beyond their private experience. Noah Kliger has been writing about
Holocaust issues for more than 50 years. He started by writing memoirs about his personal experiences during the Holocaust. Over the years, his authority strengthened so that he attained recognition as an authority who can write about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as well as about the Jews in Tunisia during the Second World War. Kliger is involved in routine journalistic work, but writes about Holocaust-related issues on special occasions, such as commemorative rituals, as well as in response to actual routine events. The mixture of the professional and the biographic sources of authority, together with his longevity and seniority of 50 years in journalism, have given him the special status of ‘Holocaust journalist’, who can write beyond his personal experience.

The second level of witnesses is composed of family members of Holocaust survivors, including their children, referred to as the ‘second generation’. For them, the Holocaust is not an historical event from the past, but a continuous everyday presence. Indeed, the ‘second generation’ was so dominant in Israeli Holocaust discourse during the 1980s that it blurred the distinction between the historical event and its cultural representations, between the Holocaust and the Holocaust-memory (Holtzman, 1992; Wardi, 1992).

On the third level of witnessing stand Israeli youth, who have participated in the many commemorative trips to the death camps in Poland. Since its emergence and continuous growth as cultural phenomenon in the 1990s, these trips have given these teenagers the status as ‘witnesses of the witnesses’ (Feldman, 2000), and thus enabled them to take a central part in shaping Holocaust memory. For example, on the cover of the commemorative supplement of Yedioth Ahronoth (26 April 1987) was a photograph of concentration camp and the headline read: ‘I don’t want to go back there ever again.’ This headline did not quote a Holocaust survivor, but rather a young girl who had visited Auschwitz as part of a school trip. The main story of that particular edition was an article that followed the diary the pupil wrote during the journey. The focus was not on the suffering of the Holocaust victims, but rather the horror that young Israelis experienced during their visit. This issue symbolizes the transference of the Holocaust discourse from the actual event to its commemoration, thus the focus drifted, proverbially, from the diary of Anna Frank to that of an Israeli present-day schoolgirl.

Biographic and cultural source: survivor-journalists, authors and the official point of view

There is a strong connection between the fields of literature and journalism in Israeli-Jewish culture and, for many years, the same word (sofer) was used in Hebrew to describe both author and journalist.

Many who wrote for Holocaust Memorial Day editions also published books and memoirs about their experience during the Holocaust. Some of their books had been published in Hebrew or in Yiddish during the pre-state period. Quotes from those written in Hebrew were prevalent in commemorative issues
during Israel’s first two decades. This illuminates another strong connection between the political establishment and the daily newspapers: for example, the newspapers published chapters from books written by well-known figures, people whom readers could recognize and with whom they could identify. During this period there was a strong link between most of the publishing houses and the political establishment, consequently the chapters published in the newspapers underwent two levels of filtering: first by the publishers and then by the newspapers’ editors. For example, Davar, the daily newspaper of the dominant party (Mapai) obtained many of its texts from books published by Yad Vashem. In the 24 April 1968 issue of Devar, the editors wrote the following about texts devoted to Holocaust Memorial Day: ‘All the material in this page was transmitted to the editors by Yad Vashem.’ This exemplifies the situation in which a political newspaper serves as a channel for messages from the establishment to its public. During these years, private commercial newspapers were marginal in Israeli journalism; hence, the dominant voice was that of the political party newspapers that constituted the Zionist establishment.

These findings illustrate the relatively weak autonomy of Israeli press during these early years of the state’s existence. Indeed, the press held an inferior position in interrelations between journalism, publishers and political parties. Thus the Israeli press was another instrument (along with the education system, economic institutions, etc.) used in the political struggle for hegemony that was part of the process of nation building. The press presented the official point of view directly, via survivors who had the official authority, or by presenting chapters of memoirs that other ‘approved’ survivors wrote.

Visual media and popular culture became central to Holocaust discourse mainly after the broadcast of the mini-series Holocaust in 1978, which aroused public debate regarding interrelations between the Holocaust, its cultural representations and popular media (Shandler, 1999).

During the 1990s, television assumed the role the literary field played in the 1950s and 1960s. Instead of presenting chapters from books and memoirs, newspapers focused on Holocaust Memorial Day broadcasts. Hence the official ceremony was broadcast live to the public (as a media event), and so became a central part of the ritual. In a sense, television broadcasts and programs became the ritual; television became the ‘site of memory’ and supplied the common content to the social ritual of Holocaust commemoration (Meyers et al., 2009).

Interestingly, since 1990, the daily television criticism sections have been published in Holocaust-related commemorative supplements, not in their regular place in the newspaper. This shift of focus from the literary field to television reveals not only the newspapers’ sensitivity to cultural changes, but also the growing significance of commercial authority at the expense of political authority.

Alongside the rise of television programs, newspapers opened the commemorative discourse to other fields of popular culture and thus gave legitimization and authority to journalists who did not otherwise write about the Holocaust.
For example, on the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day on 13 April 1988, a unique performance by two of Israel’s most famous singers, both children of Holocaust survivors, Shlomo Artzi and Yehuda Poliker, took place in Tel Aviv. The enthusiastic reviews were located on the front pages of the commemorative supplements, not in the newspapers’ culture or music sections. Thus, popular culture had gained enough power to become a dominant factor in Israeli Holocaust commemoration (Meyers and Zandberg, 2002) and this enabled a wider range of journalists to take part in shaping Holocaust memory.

In summary, these findings illustrate a number of changes in the social, cultural and journalistic fields. First, other voices and different points of view replaced the former dominant hegemonic voice that began to decline. Second, while party-political newspapers can repeat, each year, similar stories with the same ideological lessons, commercial newspapers look for new themes, stories and writers. Thus the strengthening of the commercial press at the expense of the political press widened the Holocaust discourse.

Conclusions: professional-journalistic authority – towards alternative commemorative discourse?

This article discussed the complexity of the concept of journalistic authority in relation to the shaping of collective memory. Five main sources of authority were identified and the thesis offered that only the combination of several sources is sufficient to bestow the status of storyteller on the writer.

One of the most evident findings in this research is the marginal role played by one distinct group of writers-journalists. Only on rare occasions was there evidence of a journalist who wrote about the Holocaust solely by virtue of his/her professional authority. Journalists always needed an additional source of authority: political newspapers looked for writers who were part of the official establishment, while commercial newspapers found journalists who were also Holocaust survivors. The research traced the changing interrelations between journalism and other social fields, and found that the press tended to cede authority to external factors: politicians, intellectuals, poets, figures from popular culture and others. This illustrates the relatively weak autonomy of the journalistic field. From the perspective of field theory (Benson and Neveu, 2005), given the ever-changing circumstances over time, journalism was always closer to the heteronomous pole and external factors determined its position.

Trauma theory provides a very insightful approach for the integration and interpretation of these findings. As a research tool, trauma theory reveals how different authoritative voices confront trauma in different ways by representing and constructing different discourses. Dominic LaCapra (1994) advanced a conceptualization that claims that groups and individuals ‘act out’ and/or
‘work through’ trauma outside of the therapeutic framework in order to relate it to the cultural domain, mediated by society’s memory agents. Accordingly, trauma is *acted out* when it is repeated, compulsively rehearsed, and the differences between the past, present and future go unrecognized. Historical traumas may provoke a generation-long *acting out* in the form of denial and violence (Frank, 2007: 312). *Working through* also involves a mode of repetition, but one that offers a measured critical perspective on problems, seeks to control action in a responsible manner and advances desirable change. This implies the possibility of judgment that is argumentative, self-questioning and related in mediated ways to action (LaCapra, 1994: 209–10).

LaCapra’s conceptualization offers insights into the findings of this study: for example, the research findings indicate that the dominance of biographical and political-related factors led Israeli commemorative discourse to a sanctification of the Holocaust. This process created preconditions for authorship only for the ‘right’ people who could tell the ‘right’ stories, and thus, to the construction of a discourse dominated by a ‘redemptive narrative’ (LaCapra, 2001). The dominance of this redemptive narrative has great significance. From the cultural-theoretical perspective, there is a fear that the redemptive closure will erase the ‘excess’ of unbearable events, an erasure that creates a tendency towards ‘closure without resolution’ (Friedlander, 1992b: 54). From a political perspective, the redemptive narrative of the Holocaust indicates that Israeli society has yet to begin *working through* the trauma of the Holocaust. Some even see the redemptive narrative as a force preventing Israel from becoming more civil egalitarian society (Zertal, 2005).

The article suggests an alternative commemorative discourse, one that tends towards *working through* the trauma, one that can be found in the newspaper *Ha’aretz*. One of the main explanations for its alternative position is its emphasis on the professional journalistic authority at the expense of biographic and official authorities, together with the more universalistic-humanistic ideology of the newspaper. Reliance on journalists and their professional practices has positioned *Ha’aretz* in opposition to the other newspapers, as it presents a much more critical and self-reflexive commemorative discourse (Zandberg, 2008). *Ha’aretz* has not engaged the same writers to comment on the Holocaust commemorations, rather it has distributed the authority to address this subject to its different staff writers. Furthermore, it has also published translated articles from foreign newspapers on a regular basis, relying only on their professional-journalistic authority and not on the national to biographic one.

This action was taken in parallel with the adoption of an alternative commemorative narrative. *Ha’aretz* is the only Israeli newspaper that consistently called for and applied a more critical, self-reflexive Holocaust discourse. This view stands in stark contrast to views evoked by the rest of the Israeli press: moral rebuke of the world for its impotence during the Holocaust and calls to ‘learn’ the lessons of the Holocaust. *Ha’aretz* has
turned against this nationalistic framing and has called upon Israeli society to implement such learning by changing its policy regarding its Arab citizens and the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (Editorial of 20 April 1982). Similarly, the newspaper devoted a major portion of the 23 April 1998 commemorative edition to discussing the role of the Holocaust in Israeli-Arab society and ways to use commemoration as a bridge between the nations.

In addition, unlike other newspapers, at Ha’aretz different staff journalists have been involved in reporting on Holocaust commemoration. Ha’aretz’s strategy ‘deconstructs’ Holocaust discourse according to its journalistic divisions and does not change its professional routine. Hence, the reporter who covers the education system writes about commemorative rituals in schools; the reporter responsible for covering the ultra-orthodox religious sector reports about religious commemoration of the Holocaust; and so forth. Thus, Ha’aretz is the only newspaper in which the authors’ professionalism is the main component of their authority as storyteller. Hence, the newspaper contains Holocaust commemoration within its journalistic norms.

This article suggests seeing the alternative commemorative discourse presented by Ha’aretz as a challenge to the dominant Israeli form of commemoration. Paraphrasing White (1974), the alternative commemorative discourse exposes ‘the commemorative text as a journalistic artifact’. It also ‘normalizes’ Holocaust remembrance instead of sanctifying it, allowing for a more critical and self-reflexive discourse. Relying on journalistic-professional authority, Ha’aretz creates a narrative that enables a process of working through the trauma instead of reproducing the nationalistic commemoration.

Furthermore, major changes in commemorative cultural authority may enable journalists to play a more significant role. Due to natural processes, the number of witnesses is declining and in a few years, there will not be many survivors left to talk about their direct experiences. This survivors’ authority, too, has weakened with expansion to the second and third generations. It will be interesting to note, in years to come, whether Israeli journalists will fill this vacuum, and if so, whether this process will have an impact on society’s collective memory.

Finally, further exploration of the journalistic authority that provides writers with the mandate to shape a society’s collective memory could be advanced via a comparative perspective that explores how different cultures commemorate different traumatic events.

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Notes

1. Emmanuel Rengelblum was a historian who documented everyday life and death in the Warsaw Ghetto prior to his own execution by the Nazis in Warsaw in 1944. Tzvia Lubetkin was among the leaders of Warsaw Ghetto uprising and later a public figure in Israel. Abba Kovner was a partisan during the Holocaust and later a poet in Israel. Two of the most prestigious Israeli poets, Natan Alterman and Uri Tzvi Greenberg lived in Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel during the Holocaust.

2. The newspapers are: Ha’aretz (1922– ), a private-commercial newspaper and considered to be Israel’s elite newspaper. Yedioth Ahronoth (1939– ) is a private-commercial newspaper, the most popular newspaper in Israel. Davar (1925–96) was owned by the Labor Federation (Histadrut) and dominated by the leading party Mapai. Al-Hamishmar (1943–95) was the newspaper of the socialist party, Mapam. Herut (1948–65) was owned by the right-wing party, Herut, then the main opposition party, until the 1977 elections. Then, as part of the Likud party, it became the dominant factor in Israeli politics. HaTzofe (1938– ) is owned by the National-religious party Mafdal. HaModia (1949– ) is the official newspaper of the ultra-orthodox party Agudat Israel. See Caspi and Limor (1999) for more information about the newspapers.

3. To date, few studies have been conducted about Holocaust memory in the Israeli press. Cohen et al. (2002) conducted a comparative analysis of the coverage of Nazi trials by several newspapers in Germany and Israel. Zuckermann (1993) and Nossek (1994) analysed how Holocaust memory has infused coverage of political and military events. Zuckerman dealt with the dominant role played by Holocaust discourse in coverage by the Israeli press of the first Gulf War in 1991. Nossek demonstrated how Holocaust memory has shaped coverage of terrorist attacks.

4. Detailed discussion of all these sources lies beyond the scope of this article. However, since our main purpose is to demonstrate use of the theoretical tool to analyse sources of authority, this article focuses mainly on the most dominant source – the biographic. In doing so, the analysis investigated the interrelations between the biographic and other sources of authority, and the changes in these relations that have evolved over the years.

5. For examples, see Yedioth Ahronot interviews with: Professor Tzvi Bachrach (2 May 1989), with Professor Moshe Zukerman (8 April 1994) and with Dov Levin (2 May 2000). See also Ha’aretz, 30 April 1992 and Davar, 18 April 1993.

References


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