Creating a Tradition of Collective Amnesia: The Reception of Knowledge Within the Jewish Chronicle Regarding the Armed Resistance Against the British in Mandatory Palestine

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This article will analyse the reception of knowledge within the *Jewish Chronicle's* coverage of the armed resistance against the British in Mandatory Palestine between 1944 and 1947, arguing that it created a tradition of 'collective amnesia'. It will begin by outlining a brief history of Palestine during the years of Mandatory rule, before discussing the *Jewish Chronicle* in more depth.

Under the governance of Britain since 1917, Palestine was home to both an Arab and Jewish population, each of whom desired self-determination, and both of which had been promised it by the Balfour Declaration. During the years of Mandatory rule, the Jewish Agency represented the Jewish community in Palestine and had a military arm known as the *Haganah*. The *Haganah* was the sole armed organisation amongst Palestinian Jewry until 1931, which saw the establishment of the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*. The *Irgun* was a body of Revisionist Zionist Jews who actively sought to establish a Jewish state, with free immigration, on both sides of the River Jordan. They subsequently separated from the *Haganah* over political differences in their shared desire for a Jewish national home. The *Irgun* considered the *Haganah* to be too passive and the *Haganah* regarded the *Irgun* as too extreme. During the Second World War, both organisations pledged allegiance to the ruling government of Britain and ceased their campaign for an independent Jewish state. As a consequence, a proportion of Jews in the *Irgun* who disagreed with such a ceasefire left the organisation and formed a new movement called the *Lehi* in 1940. The *Lehi* believed that they held no allegiance to the British Government and continued their active campaign for a Jewish national home throughout the war, even seeking possible co-operation with the Nazis. In 1944 the *Irgun* also resumed operations against the British. Following the end of the Second World War, there was a brief period of co-operation between all three organisations from 1945 to 1946, which came to an end with the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946. The armed struggle against the British in Mandatory Palestine finally drew to a close with the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the withdrawal of British troops.

Established in 1841 and continuing to be published to the present day, the *Jewish Chronicle* possesses an established tradition of being the self-proclaimed 'organ of Anglo-Jewry'. The *Jewish Chronicle*'s coverage of the struggle against the British in Mandatory Palestine between 1944 and 1947 has not been sufficiently analysed by historians. This article will help counter this scholarly absence by examining how the *Jewish Chronicle* presented the activities of the two main organisations involved in the anti-British struggle, the *Irgun* and the *Lehi*, between 1939 and 2009. It will explore the use of myth in such coverage and illustrate the process by which the *Jewish Chronicle* reflects the realities that concern Anglo-Jewry, describing how they culminate in the creation of 'collective amnesia'. It will commence, however, by arguing that absence does not signify 'collective amnesia', but the presence of lived memory.

The first retrospective article detailing the *Irgun* was published in October 1957. The earliest one mentioning the *Lehi* was published in September 1954. However, there is a twelve-year gap until the next mention of the *Lehi* in the *Jewish Chronicle*. The absence of any coverage relating to the *Lehi* directly in the intermediate years between 1954 and 1966 could suggest the presence of collective forgetting by the *Jewish Chronicle* and, to a certain extent, the Anglo-Jewish community whose viewpoint it considers itself to inform and reflect. To substantiate, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger state: 'Collective memory is generally understood to entail the narration and representation of the past, while collective forgetting is antithetically thought to be a silencing and muting of the past'.[1]

Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger expand on the historiography of memory and forgetting by declaring that, subsequently, 'What can be heard, seen and touched has become the cornerstone of memory'.[2] That memory has undergone a process

1. V. Vinitzky-Seroussi & C. Teeger, 'Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting', *Social Forces*, 88:3 (2010), p.1103
2. Ibid

of materialisation is especially evident in Nora's research on sites of memory. In his key thesis, Nora emphasizes the production of manufactured, as opposed to organic, memory by proclaiming: 'we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left'.[3] Similarly, Jonathan Boyarin believes that absence cannot be equated with forgetting, as the relationship is not one of two opposites but, instead, one of direct proportion.[4] Furthermore, Yerushalmi argues that employing justice and forgetting as autonyms should replace the use of memory and forgetting as opposites, as 'Strictly speaking, peoples, groups, can only forget the present, not the past'.[5] Subsequently, 'When we say that a people 'remembers' we are really saying that a past has been actively transmitted to the present generation and that this past has been accepted as meaningful'.[6]

Thus, if the above theoretical arguments are applied to the *Jewish Chronicle*'s coverage of the armed resistance against the British in Mandatory Palestine, it could be suggested that the seeming reluctance of the newspaper to print coverage relating to the *Irgun* between 1948 and 1957, and the *Lehi* from 1948 to 1966 (excluding September 1954), may be due to the fact that its memory was still 'lived' or 'organic': one that was yet to be replaced by a constructed memory. If such events were still part of the lived memory of the community, regardless of whether they were repressed due to being assigned low levels of contemporary significance, then representation through a constructed memory was not required. Furthermore, whether or not this memory was considered meaningful would influence its later transmission as a constructed entity to future generations.

Support for this theory could be found through the fact that Zionism and the relationship between Britain and Israel was a key topic of interest within the Anglo-Jewish community throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Events debating these issues frequently occurred amongst the pro-, non-, and anti-Zionists within the Anglo-Jewish community during the period concerned. Furthermore, when articles did start to appear on the *Lehi*, they were either obituaries or book reviews. Thus, such articles were motivated by either the death

of the source of 'natural' or 'organic' memory, or by the creation of a constructed memory that also signalled the erosion of the 'lived' group memory. It is also significant that such a memory only possessed enough cultural importance to be transmitted to the next generation as an incidental piece of life history or potentially entertaining literature, and not on its own greater socio-political merit.

The reasoning behind the absence of articles detailing the *Irgun* appears to possess a slightly different motivation. Although it can be assumed that the gap between publication of articles at the time of the events and those that followed is also due to the presence of lived memory, when those articles do appear their motivation is somewhat altered. Once articles detailing the *Irgun* begin to be semi-regularly published, they seem to be prompted by either the achievement of former *Irgun* members in Israeli politics (notably former *Irgun* leader Menachem Begin who was Israel's sixth Prime Minister), or by the appearance of new evidence relating to the events of the period in question. Thus, the inclusion of these articles appears to have been motivated by the fact that refusing to acknowledge such information would be perceived as deliberately aiding the construction of 'collective amnesia'.

According to Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger, such an occurrence signals the presence of 'covert silencing' in the realm of memory, as discussion relating to a particular event is only occasioned when it has become socially and politically unacceptable not to remember it.[7] However, such remembrance is often superficial in nature and lacks sincerity, as it is frequently combined with another ulterior purpose.[8] For example, articles that deal with the early memory of the *Irgun* also contain a contemporary message to readers. The memory of one particular incident, frequently Deir Yassin (the notorious attack by *Irgun* and *Lehi* forces on a Palestinian Arab village in 1948), is used to improve the memory and contemporary image of one personality, often Menachem Begin.

That the *Jewish Chronicle* encourages the misremembering of events relating to the *Irgun* and the *Lehi* is especially evident through its use of myth. Despite publishing articles stating that there is new evidence to the contrary, the *Jewish Chronicle* sporadically insists on supporting and replicating the traditional historiographical divide between the *Haganah*, the *Irgun* and the *Lehi*. In this discourse, which is present in much

3. P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), p.7
4. J. Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1992), pp.1-2
5. Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p.117
6. Yerushalmi, p.109

7. Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, pp.1115-1116
8. Ibid

of the established secondary literature on the subject, the *Haganah*, even during the period of the United Resistance Movement, are portrayed positively, the *Irgun* negatively, and the *Lehi* even more critically. Despite declaring its intention to uncover 'What really happened at Deir Yassin', an article published in 1984 substantiates the established perspective by replicating such positions, as does an article published in 2006.[9]

Scholars agree that the use of myth within a society offers insight into the concerns of that particular socio-political environment. Thus, it could be suggested that throughout the articles analysed, a concern for the perception of both Israel's past and present is revealed. In order to not condone terrorism, whilst also not condemning the struggle and outcome of the Jewish desire for independence, it was necessary for the *Jewish Chronicle* to categorise those involved into varying degrees of acceptability. Furthermore, according to Yerushalmi, modern Jews base their past on myths.[10] Therefore, if this is applied to coverage of the struggle for Jewish independence in the *Jewish Chronicle,* a desire within Anglo-Jewry to justify the reality of both their present and their past appears evident.

Concurrently, such coverage also reveals the realities that concern Anglo-Jewry, in particular challenges to the legitimacy of Israel and the issue of 'dual identity' (the interplay between Britishness and Jewishness). It is through the portrayal of a patriarchal relationship between Britain, the parent, and Palestine, the child, that the *Jewish Chronicle* seeks to dissolve any tension regarding the issue of 'dual loyalty'. This is achieved through the employment of child-like language, particularly with reference to the *Irgun* during the 1970s and 1980s. An article published in June 1977 states that Ben-Gurion was 'misled' over the intentions of the *Altalena*, an *Irgun* arms ship, in 1948.[11] Furthermore, an article published in August 1981, detailing the King David Hotel explosion in July 1946, is entitled the 'Irgun's bombing blunder', thus diminishing the significance and intent of the act.[12] The importance of the use of such language is that it creates a defensive portrayal of both the *Irgun* and the *Haganah* during the struggle for Israeli independence. This is achieved through the deliberate employment of language that implies an immature state of affairs; with actions being taken that are not really properly thought through, or whose intent is misconstrued. Those who perpetrate such events are portrayed as naughty school children who are not playing by the proper rules of engagement of the British Empire, with the latter acting as the long-suffering but ultimately fair parent. This portrayal can be seen as an attempt to rebuff the internalised negative view held by Britain regarding the situation in Palestine. Much of the secondary literature on the subject not written by former *Irgun* or *Lehi* members presents the Jews and the Arabs as behaving equally badly by squabbling not only with each other, but also amongst themselves. Furthermore, the British are presented as having let down both the Jewish and Arab populations of Palestine by allowing the situation to escalate into a full civil war.[13] Such approaches repeat the patriarchal parent and child dialectic**.**

Any remaining concerns regarding the issue of 'dual identity' and the legitimacy of Israel are further illustrated through the creation of a narrative that places the armed struggle against the British in Mandatory Palestine within a wider discourse, including the fight against the Arabs, the Holocaust and the Second World War. It is through the portrayal of the founders of both the *Irgun* and the *Lehi* that this narrative becomes especially apparent. In an article published in June 1991, *Irgun* founder David Raziel is positively remembered, as opposed to the apolitical obituaries of other former *Irgun* and *Lehi* members, due to the fact that he died fighting the Nazis in 1941.[14] Similarly, in a 'Letter to the Editor' published in April 1996, *Lehi* founder Avraham Stern is also excused from judgement. It states that:

> As for the Nazi-Lehi connection, it should be recalled that every Zionist leader sought in some way to save Europe's Jews from the expected horrors, including working with – and in some cases, helping – Nazi Germany. None of them really succeeded.... If Stern had managed in 1941 to create an opportunity to save Jewish lives, the judgement of historians may have been different.[15]

As a consequence of this amalgamation of the two narratives – the Second World War and the

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9. *Jewish Chronicle*, 20/01/1984; *Jewish Chronicle*, 10/03/2006
10. Yerushalmi, p.99
11. *Jewish Chronicle*, 10/06/1977
12. *Jewish Chronicle*, 14/08/1981
13. N. Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War: Voices from Palestine, 1945-1948* (London: Bodley Head, 2009); J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, Lehi, and the Palestine Underground, 1929-1949* (New York: Avon, 1978)
14. *Jewish Chronicle*, 07/06/1991
15. *Jewish Chronicle*, 12/04/1996

fight for Jewish independence – any possible tension with regards the issue of 'dual loyalty' is relieved, as both parties are portrayed as being on the same side. Furthermore, such linkage provides the narrative of Jewish independence with added legitimacy, as the implication is that both conflicts possessed equal moral validity. This suggests that not only was the *Jewish Chronicle* concerned about the possible accusation of 'dual loyalty', but that it also had reservations about any potential challenges to the legitimacy of the creation of Israel, and thus wanted to avoid such an occurrence. Additionally, the adoption of such a narrative reveals the specifically Jewish nature of the memory presented by the *Jewish Chronicle*. To elaborate, Spiegel explained how, for Jews, the Holocaust put to rest a progressive view of history that was replaced by a medieval approach to the past.[16] Consequently, Rosenfeld argued that analysis of Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory,* indicated that all subsequent events were to be understood through pre-existing paradigms, of which the Holocaust

was the most influential.[17]

Ultimately, the politics of memory operational in the *Jewish Chronicle* support the notion that 'collective amnesia' is created through its coverage of the armed struggle against the British in Mandatory Palestine. However, this is not indicated by the lack of such coverage in the immediate years following the establishment of the state of Israel; during this period the events concerned are still part of 'living' or 'organic' memory. Rather, 'collective amnesia' is constructed through the presence of articles that employ myth and covert silencing in the realm of memory.[18] Subsequently, it is evident that the deliberate use or avoidance of certain terminology by the *Jewish Chronicle* in its coverage of the struggle for Jewish independence indicates an awareness of the sensitivity of the subject within and outside of Anglo-Jewry. This is particularly apparent regarding the issue of 'dual loyalty', whilst also revealing the socio-political dimensions of the 'collective amnesia' created by the *Jewish Chronicle*.

16. G.M. Spiegel, 'Memory and History: Liturgical Time and Historical Time', *History and Theory*, 41:2 (2002), p.150

17. G.D. Rosenfeld, 'A Flawed Prophecy? Zakhor, the Memory Boom, and the Holocaust', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 97:4 (2007), p.515
18. Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, p.1114-1116

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