

NARRATIVE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: STORY AT WORK IN ISRAEL

by

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ABSTRACT

Collective memory plays an important role in conflicts, either by sustaining the identity of victimhood of the ingroup and dehumanization of the outgroup, or by providing a means to reconciliation that is more compatible with the group's true identity. This thesis examines how collective memory can be shaped by narrative in different forms: political rhetoric, fiction writing, and personal testimony. Menachem Begin used rhetoric first to shape the collective memory in favor of Zionism, relying on biblical imagery and history, then he used rhetoric, relying on the same biblical notions, to create a possibility for peace with Egypt. Amos Oz's work as a novelist illustrates how fictional retellings of the "truth" can demonstrate the complexity of a conflict in a way that nonfiction writing and political rhetoric can not. Finally, personal testimonies of Israeli soldiers and American Jewish scholars complete the task, covering topics that even Oz feels are too difficult.

INDEX WORDS: Religion, Narrative, Israel, Palestine, Reconciliation, Collective Memory

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For Mimi and Granny

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 NARRATIVE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY	1
What is collective memory?	4
How Does Narrative Shape Collective Memory?	8
How Might Narrative Create the Possibility of Peace In Israel?	12
2 THE RHETORIC OF MENACHEM BEGIN: EVIDENCE OF TRANSITION.....	16
Collective Memory and the Growth of Zionist Popularity	19
Transformation at Camp David: What Made it Possible?	30
3 AMOS OZ: USING REMEMORY IN ISRAEL.....	37
Amos Oz	38
Soldier and Peace Activist	39
Oz on Fact and Fiction	41
The Power of Words	42
Addressing the Metanarrative: <i>A Perfect Peace</i>	43
Yonatan and Azariah: A Synthesis of Opposites	45
Yolek and Srulik: Oz's Own Personality Comes Through	50
4 TRUMPING THE NARRATIVE OF VICTIMHOOD.....	57
<i>Breaking the Silence: Soldiers Speak Out</i>	60

<i>Wrestling With Zion: Reflecting the Heterogeneity of Jewish Thought</i>	64
5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND POSSIBLE FUTURE STUDY	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY	73

One has a magnum opus in one's head which one envisages being the ultimate truth or the absolute pinnacle of beauty, but one ends up writing what one can. The best that you can write will always be a long way from what you really wanted to write.

—*Amos Oz, "Between Europe and the Negev Desert"*

CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

When people say that there is no way to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts with deep historical roots, they are testifying to the lethal power of collective memory. Undoubtedly, memories can be dangerous; a potent and often skewed sense of memory has fueled many of today's confrontations. This is memory as a source of unforgiveness. However, memory is a bipolar phenomenon; it can be deadly but also be crucial to reckoning constructively with past evils. This is memory as a path to forgiveness, which begins with truth and requires a sense of empathy that often results from an open accounting of the past.¹

Collective memory reflects the identity of a people expressed through stories. It can be changed when stories are shared, expanding the base of memories from which each individual draws a sense of identity. The exercise of making a candid acknowledgment of the past in a public/political setting was undertaken on a grand scale by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the purpose of transforming collective memory. South Africa's truth commission was considered by many to have been successful in reconciling the divided nation, and since then, much attention has been given to the productivity of "facing the past...for the purpose of shaping the future."² Truth commissions have been created in many conflict zones and have been contemplated for many more. This paper will examine the problem of collective memory in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. After demonstrating why a similar truth

¹ William Bole, Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Robert Hennemeyer, *Forgiveness in International Politics: an Alternative Road to Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 14.

² James L. Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 1. This volume analyzes empirical data from surveys to determine whether South Africa's TRC was effective in achieving reconciliation among South Africans. This analysis will not be included in this paper, which is more interested in how the TRC set an example for looking at the past in order to shape the future.

commission would not work in Israel/Palestine at the present time, this thesis will explore the underlying element that makes truth commissions valuable—their ability to change collective memory—and what alternative methods exist for accomplishing the same goals.

Particular attention has been given by scholars and pundits to the parallels that exist between the South African situation under apartheid and the current conflict between the state of Israel and the Palestinian nation. The late Edward Said made the following comparison: “[W]hat the Israelis are now doing on the West Bank and Gaza is really repeating the experience of apartheid.”³ Said likened the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to the creation of Bantustans in South Africa, which allowed for a “phony appearance of self-rule” while denying rights and opportunities to the inhabitants.⁴ In addition, Said referred to the wall that Israel has been constructing to keep Palestinians from crossing in and out of Israel as the “apartheid wall.” Because of this, he believed that “the only way this problem is going to be settled, as in South Africa, is to face the reality squarely on the basis of coexistence and equality, with a hope of truth and reconciliation in the South African style.”⁵

There are, however, differences between the two conflicts that make a replication of the truth commission impossible for now. The most obvious difference is that apartheid was already abolished at the time of the truth commission. A united government was already in place. Other key differences are that: (1) in South Africa, the empowered group remained a minority, whereas in Israel, Jews have grown into a

³ Edward Said, “Returning to Ourselves,” in *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*, ed. Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 419-431.

⁴ Edward Said, “A State, Yes, But Not Just For Palestinians” in *Power, Politics, and Culture*. 432-436.

⁵ Said, “A State, Yes,” 435.

majority; (2) the white settlers in South Africa did not have an ancient tie to the land; and (3) the settlers in South Africa were not victims of the Holocaust. These three factors may be the key reasons why international pressure has not mounted against Israel the way it did against the leaders of apartheid. Israel's claims are popularly believed to be more valid than those of the Afrikaners. In addition to these differences there are institutional concerns in that the necessary institutions for a truth commission do not exist in Israel/Palestine. There is not a united government and the leaders of each nation fail to recognize each other's legitimacy with any consistency. No group exists that would be authorized to offer amnesty to perpetrators, or that would be trusted by a large enough number of constituents to attract participants. All of these reasons (and more) combine to make the idea of a truth commission an unusable one for advancing peace in Israel now. The problem of dealing with the past and the potential benefits of doing so, however, still exist. This paper will explore not only the underlying reason why truth commissions are believed to be effective—the transformation in collective memory—but also alternative methods for achieving the same result.

Social scientists have researched the importance of collective memories in shaping behavior in conflict. Ed Cairns and Michael Roe write that groups in conflict “are often left with a sense of ‘victimhood’ that stems from unacknowledged and unreconciled historical losses. These in turn represent a powerful barrier to traditional methods of peacemaking and diplomacy and create new senses of wrong and injustice, thus creating the potential for future conflict.”⁶ Alternative methods must be developed for resolving conflicts, such that collective memory might be addressed despite the

⁶ Ed Cairns and Michael D. Roe, *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 4-5.

impossibility of a truth commission. This paper will explore the role of collective memory in conflict and ways that collective memory can be transformed without the formal institution of a truth commission. With two divided, antagonistic governments and without an institutionalized structure for increasing peace, there must be alternate routes to the same end of uncovering truth in a way that creates a possibility of peace instead of destroying it. Before looking at what alternative methods might exist, it is appropriate to first explain what collective memory is and how it affects conflicts.

What is collective memory?

Sociologists have studied the idea of shared memories, or collective memory, building on the concept as introduced by Emile Durkheim in 1912 (translated to English in 1947.)⁷ Durkheim proposed that societies could be identified by “collective representations,” or sets of beliefs that were common to the average members of a single society. Maurice Halbwachs built on Durkheim’s ideas, determining that memories are both private and shareable, that remembering and forgetting are social processes, and that there are as many collective memories in a society as there are social groups. Halbwachs differentiated memory into two types: historical (learned) and autobiographical (experienced). Individuals who share learned and experienced memories form a group, and their memories can be considered “collective.” In Halbwachs’ view, a group’s memories of the past are determined in part by present contexts as current beliefs, interests, and aspirations shape various views of the past. New experiences add to the body of memory and shape memories of the past. Therefore, collective memory is fluid.

⁷ This discussion of Durkheim, Halbwachs, and Mack is based on Patrick Devine-Wright, “A Theoretical Overview of Memory and Conflict” in *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, 9-33.

Yael Zerubavel cautions that Halbwach's view overemphasizes the fluidity to the degradation of history. She views the phenomenon as a negotiation with historical records and political agendas, transforming their interpretation, "selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of that record."⁸ This is the type of transformation that is evident in the cases studied here. This paper will look at three examples of how collective memory can be impacted by the telling of stories. First, I will demonstrate how Menachem Begin interpreted history differently at different times, transforming memory with his rhetoric. Second, I will investigate Amos Oz's self-appointed vocation to keep the past from being forgotten. Finally, I will relay the stories of soldiers from Israel and their efforts to balance the collective memory about the occupied territories. In each case, there is an effort to change the emphasis in a story that is at least partly known already. Begin, Oz, and the soldiers each, for different reasons, use stories from the past (both distant and immediate) to change opinions of their audiences.

John Mack builds on Halbwachs by focusing on the significance of social remembering in subjugated and subordinate social groups, such as Israelis and Palestinians. Victimization, as Mack calls it, is the process by which each group comes to identify itself as the victim of another. In conflict, collective memory may solidify identity of the ingroup (us) as a victim of the outgroup (them). The effects are an increased cohesiveness within the ingroup and glorification of the members of the ingroup, along with a parallel dehumanization of members of the outgroup. These two effects together justify violence. "Socially shared emotional 'wounds' such as actual battlefield defeats [are] particularly powerful in motivating the repair of national and

⁸ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 5.

collective pride through vengeful, violent military actions.”⁹ These remembered “wounds” may have taken place the day before or generations before. Mack outlines a few factors that motivate a person to take violent vengeful action against the outgroup: (1) the perceived total significance of the original wounding event, (2) the individual’s personal memories of their circumstances of learning about the event, (3) their affective responses, and (4) their sense of belonging with the people who actually suffered. The second factor—personal memories of *learning* about the original event—is of particular interest as it suggests the idea that learned memory (as opposed to experienced memory) plays an important role in motivating violence. Therefore, memories from multiple generations may be at work. Joseph Montville provides further insight into this accumulation of collective memory:

Sometimes we must deal with both historic and personal loss in the same people. Thus, the Jews in Israel might be recent victims of Palestinian terrorist bombings in buses or outdoor markets. But they also have an internalized memory of Christian oppression in Europe throughout the ages and the nightmare of the Holocaust....Palestinians share the collective Arab memory of humiliation by European imperialism starting with Napoleon’s landing in Egypt in 1798, and more specifically their own defeat, displacement, and expulsion when the Jewish state was formed in 1948.¹⁰

In addition to this passing on of memories from previous conflicts to younger generations, particularly long conflicts can solidify collective memories of victimhood. Daniel Bar-Tal observes that “collective memory preserves experiences of violence and the feelings that accompany them,” and that groups selectively remember the role that their enemy played in initiating or continuing the conflict, while remembering only their

⁹ Devine-Wright, “A Theoretical Overview,” 15.

¹⁰ Joseph V. Montville, “Justice and the Burdens of History,” in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Boston: Lexington Books, 2001), 129-143.

own group's self-righteousness and justification.¹¹ This selective memory over a long period of time causes societal beliefs to emerge that de-legitimize the opponent and solidify the group's identity as victim. The research of social psychologists corroborates this theory and also suggests a way out. James Pennebaker's empirical research concluded that "collective memories were the result of an interactive process that took the form of a *collective narrative*, a consensual story about a particular event or person from the past".¹²

Others in the field of social psychology have used a discourse analytic approach, "focusing on conversational discourse as the sole process of remembering and forgetting."¹³ These discourse analysts regard accuracy of memory as insignificant and instead analyze how events are recounted in conversation, how the stories are shaped and fitted to the particular context of the dialogue, and "what the participants in the interaction accomplish—such as to establish identity, claim membership of a group, to blame, to justify, and so on."¹⁴ Culture theory builds on the idea that such accounts, texts, and other documents and symbols "do not carry meaning passively," but rather that social recollections are "actions" and "starting points for the co-construction of mutual pasts." In the words of Patrick Devine-Wright, culture theorists view collective memory as "an important constituent of culture, articulated in and created through the narration of stories," which "then becomes a changeable repertoire of both action-structuring and

¹¹ Daniel Bar-Tal, "Conflicting Memories and Time," in *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, 77-93.

¹² Devine-Wright, "A Theoretical Overview," 28, citing J.W. Pennebaker, *On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories* (unpublished manuscript, 1992). Emphasis mine.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29, citing D. Middleton and D. Edwards, *Collective Memory* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

action-determining possibilities.”¹⁵ Thus the importance of story to collective memory is identified. Collective memory is created, and changed, in the telling of stories. This paper requires a deeper look into the phenomenon of collective memory being altered by narrative.

How Does Narrative Shape Collective Memory?

Narratives establish and articulate the identities of groups and individuals. The exchange of stories accomplishes two tasks: it recognizes the humanity and suffering of the storyteller, and it adds to the milieu of stories that constitute a group’s collective memory. Montville notes the importance of storytelling to the Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa:

Storytelling is also a form of ritual testimony that has healing powers....Victims in the process restore and regain their lives so that they can move on....For all its imperfections, the TRC has made a major contribution....Storytelling has had its impact... Even without expressions of remorse or repentance by perpetrators, a TRC performs the crucial task of acknowledgment of the victim’s loss....This provides a crucial assurance to the victims that their future safety is protected.¹⁶

The victims, in telling their stories and knowing that they were heard, would, in the words of Desmond Tutu, “be acknowledged to be persons with an unalienable personhood.”¹⁷ According to Aryeh Neier, failure to acknowledge these victims’ stories would be to “argue that those people do not matter, that only the future is of importance,” and would “perpetuate, even compound, their victimhood.”¹⁸ The first function of

¹⁵ Ibid., 31, writing about the work of J. Straub, “Collective Memory and Collective Pasts as Constituents of Culture: An Action-Theoretical and Cultural Psychological Perspective,” in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 52, 1993, 114-121.

¹⁶ Montville, “Justice and the Burdens of History,” pp. 129-143

¹⁷ Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 30.

¹⁸ Aryeh Neier, “Why Deal with the Past?” in *Dealing with the Past: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, ed. Alex Boraine, Janet Levy, and Ronel Scheffer (Cape Town: Institute for Democracy in South Africa, 1997), 2-18. This book includes transcripts of presentations at a 1994 conference of the IDASA

storytelling, then, is to recognize the personhood and importance of victims of violence. The second is to add to the collective memory of a society the untold stories of individual members. Diverse stories exist in every society, and an understanding of reality is, as Judith Butler writes, dependent on “the ability to narrate ourselves not from the first person alone, but from, say, the position of the third, or to receive an account delivered in the second.”¹⁹ Emilie Townes argues for the recognition of diverse stories in the formation of collective memory in this way:

the story can be told another way. It can be told in such a way that the voices and lives of those who, traditionally and historically, have been left out are now heard with clarity and precision. Even more, these voices can then be included into the discourse—not as additive or appendage, but as resource and co-determiner of actions and strategies.²⁰

The acknowledgment of the narratives of each group and member of a society is what leads to reconciliation. As Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson write, the acknowledgment of the past allows a society “to develop a common and shared memory, and in so doing creates a sense of unity and reconciliation for its people.”²¹ This second function of storytelling, that of adding to the body of collective memory, combines with the first function, acknowledging the personhood of victims, to make a reconciliation possible. This reconciliation is the way out of the cycle of victimization. Collective memory is changed through the selective addition, deletion, and emphasizing of stories. It is accomplished not by forgetting, but by “remembering in a certain way.”²²

called “Justice in Transition: Dealing with the Past.” Aryeh Neier is with the ACLU and Human Rights Watch in New York.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 8.

²⁰ Emilie Townes, *Beginning with Imagination: Proceedings too Terrible to Relate* (unpublished manuscript, 2004). Emphasis in text.

²¹ Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson, n.d., “Symbolic Closure Through Memory, Reparation, and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies,” as cited by James L. Gibson in *Overcoming Apartheid*, 6.

²² Bole, et al, *Forgiveness in International Politics*, 3.

The use of narratives to “remember in a certain way” is the subject of this paper.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

When Ghandi said that love is the force that can liberate, he meant we have to love our enemy....But how can we love our enemy? There is only one way—to understand him. We have to understand why he is that way, how he has come to be like that, why he does not see things the way we do.²³

He claims that this work, to understand the enemy, and “to make the truth available” is “the work of writers, preachers, and the media, and also [religious] practitioners. Each day, we practice looking deeply into ourselves and into the situation of our brothers and sisters. It is the most serious work we can do.”²⁴ He views the underlying truth of every conflict to be the realization that the enemy is human and that the fault can not lie solely on one side. He charges writers, media, religious leaders, and community members with the task of making these truths known. This is in part because of his recognition that those who are caught up in the conflict often do not have a way to make themselves heard.²⁵ Other voices are needed to make these truths known. Paul Tillich teaches that the *courage to be* is not just the capacity to survive, but also to insist on our own dignity and the dignity of others, even in difficulty. This courage is especially important, and especially elusive, in times of extreme cultural and political strife, when identity and memory are uncertain or painful. In these instances, the responsibility of making peace imaginable falls to those whose lives are not threatened. Those who *can* imagine peace must do so and help others to create a narrative that allows for peace. A new narrative must be constructed, reconciling history and memory, including a plurality of voices, making a peaceful future possible. Memory can not be ignored or forgotten.

²³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

Toni Morrison's work as a novelist exemplifies perfectly this function of storytelling. Morrison explores the role of the writer in uncovering truth in her essay, "The Site of Memory."²⁶ She writes about her job as a completer of the task begun by writers of slave narratives in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These writers, Morrison states, knew that literacy was power, and they used their power to "change things," but because of the limitations faced by the writers of that time period, they were burdened with "shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things."²⁷ Morrison sees her task as determining "how to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate,'" uncovering the truths of the lives of slaves, and writing to make them available and understandable to present and future generations.²⁸ Morrison says that "the exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse, even when we were its topic."²⁹ In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, both parties have belonged to marginalized categories, and have faced the task of uncovering the truth of their stories and making it known.

Morrison invented a term, *rememory*, to describe both the act of remembering and the object of memory. In the novel *Beloved*, the characters play with the idea of a dynamic collective memory while on a broader level, Morrison is altering the collective memory of her readers as the novel develops by adding the stories of the characters to the readers' understanding of slavery. She creates a narrative which reconstructs identity and

²⁶ Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory" in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* ed. William Zinsser (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 87, 91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

history by cycling back through the past, integrating it with a newly imagined grace. Morrison demonstrates that repetition can be used to create rather than to destroy by weaving a thread of healing and hope into the story of destruction and systematized dehumanization. Working through history with a new outlook and a new hope, she can point out a grace that would otherwise be unseen, or even nonexistent. Her work is a perfect fulfillment of the idea of imagining grace for the neighbor. By giving a voice to memory, a new path can be created, a new grace can be imagined, allowing an escape from the previous cycle of horrors while acknowledging that the horrors did exist and have an impact. She is, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, making the truth known. Her work is a prototype for what may be accomplished by narrative in peacemaking efforts.

How Might Narrative Create the Possibility of Peace in Israel?

Morrison's process of rememory offers a process for hope to the situation in the Middle East. The power of collective memory can be harnessed and used to improve relations between the groups. The interaction between Israelis and Palestinians shows how narratives become intertwined as relationships link humans to one another. Each group's identity is partly defined by its interaction with (and hatred for) the other group. Before any solution will be viable, there must be an effort to reduce the tensions. Morrison's rememory offers a way to achieve that ambitious goal, by providing a method for re-writing history, without neglecting the master narrative, in a way that ends the violent cycle and allows a new peace to be imagined and created. Forgiveness is dependent on acknowledging the past and not forgetting it, but remembering it *in a certain way*. Sharing stories and expanding the narratives that form the collective

memory reduces the probability that individuals and groups will deny the humanity of the enemy. Identity takes on a new form that is not solely contained in victimhood, and reconciliation becomes possible. Tutu calls on the Nguni notion of *ubuntu* to describe his vision of the importance of acknowledging the humanity of the enemy.³⁰ *Ubuntu*, he writes, is the idea that “a person is a person through other persons...I am a human being because I belong, I participate, I share...what dehumanizes you dehumanizes me.” Robert Detweiler’s experience in West Germany in the 1950s led him to a realization of this same idea, though he did not call it *ubuntu*. He says that the war and suffering stories he heard there

had a profound effect on me; in some ways I have never recovered from them. They are a part of my identity, although I was not the sufferer. They taught me that narrative and survival are intertwined, indeed that story is always, one way or another, about survival....Our narratives have become intertwined, to the extent that I can’t think my story without thinking yours.³¹

Detweiler’s proposition is that as we learn each other’s stories, we take them in as part of our own. Our own memory and identity change as we encounter the memory and identity of others. Such dialogues, however, require the initiative of those in power to be effective politically. Those who can articulate will dominate and the oppressed often have no voice. For peace to be accomplished, it must be a goal of the more articulate party. It is important that those who *can* imagine grace (including third parties) between the two nations take over the discourse and express their vision in a way that allows others to share in the imagination of grace.

³⁰ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 31.

³¹ Sharon E. Greene, “A Conversation With Robert Detweiler” in *In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler*, American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion: 71, ed. David Jasper and Mark Ledbetter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 433-450.

Collective memory can be transformed by public presentations of individual memory—such presentations accumulate to create a diverse body of memory that includes a plurality of stories, making it impossible to deny the humanity of the enemy. Liberation and transformation are accomplished primarily by reducing a group’s identity of victimhood, and by humanizing the enemy. Herbert Kelman writes that

the primary feature of the identity change constituting reconciliation is the removal of the negation of the other as a central component of one’s own identity....Changing one’s own collective identity by removing the negation of the other from it implies a degree of acceptance of the other’s identity....What is essential to reconciliation, in my view, is that each party revise its own identity just enough to accommodate the identity of the other.³²

He also notes that this change is made possible when the readiness to change the identity “stems from the fact that the new identity is actually more consistent with the person’s own, pre-existing value system.”³³ In the case of Israel and Palestine, Marc Gopin makes a similar argument. He asserts that forgiveness and forbearance are actually more consistent with the religious identities of people on both sides.³⁴ His work calls for the re-establishment of this element of religious identity as a means of approaching the conflict. He urges Israelis and Palestinians to recognize their common humanity and the interconnectedness of their pain in the way that Tutu and Detweiler have urged.

This paper will examine how discourse has been used to promote a revised, peace-oriented collective memory in Israel/Palestine. The leaders involved in the Camp David Accords were motivated by the political concerns of territory and security to find a way to imagine peace; they then used their voices to achieve one step toward making that

³² Herbert C. Kelman, “Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective,” in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111-124.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Marc Gopin, “Forgiveness as an Element of Conflict Resolution in Religious Cultures,” in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Boston: Lexington Books, 2001), 87-99.

possibility a reality. Their rhetoric resulted in a shift in the collective memory of Israelis, giving many a new vision of identity and their relationship to neighbors. As Amos Oz writes, “an overwhelming majority of Israelis responded to Sadat’s peace initiative with a burst of emotion, changing their minds almost overnight and giving back to Egypt every grain of Sinai’s sands.”³⁵ Each of the leaders first had to adjust their own “memories” of the situation, opening their minds to a new rememory. In addition to the example of these political leaders, there have been others who have worked to change collective memory by sharing their visions with the public. Amos Oz uses fiction to illustrate the plurality, complexity, and depth of the varying perspectives of Israelis of the first and second generation. He then adds his own personal memoir to the collective memory, demonstrating the value of personal testimony, putting his own story next to those being shared by soldiers in venues such as a recent museum exhibit called “Breaking the Silence.” Through this exhibit, soldiers from the Israeli Defense Force spoke out about the truth of their activities while in the service of their country. The goal is “for the Israeli public to know what we’re really doing in Hebron and what it’s doing to us,” according to former soldier Yehuda Shaul, now serving as a reservist in the Nahal Brigade currently stationed in Hebron. The exhibit consists of photos and testimonies of soldiers who were required to serve in a disputed region. It demonstrates an effort to change collective memory, asking Israelis to look honestly at the actions of its army. All three forms of narrative examined here—political rhetoric, fiction, and personal testimony—have been effective in some change in collective memory.

³⁵ Amos Oz, “Has Israel Altered Its Visions?” translated Maggie Goldberg-Bartura and Amos Oz in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 4-18.

CHAPTER 2

THE RHETORIC OF MENACHEM BEGIN: EVIDENCE OF TRANSITION

Oh G-d of Israel, guard your soldiers and bless their swords, which are forging anew the covenant You made with Your chosen people and Your promised land.

—Menachem Begin, May 1948

In the Jewish teachings, there is a tradition that the greatest achievement of a human being is to turn an enemy into a friend, and this we do in reciprocity... Everything belongs to the past... We shook hands, and thank God, we again could have said to each other, 'You are my friend.'

—Menachem Begin, March 1979

The rhetoric of political leaders generally has an immediate goal, such as sovereignty, territory, or security. Often this rhetoric depends, however, on appeals to a broad collective memory to strengthen its effect. In its engagement with collective memory, rhetoric can also revise the grand narrative by emphasizing those aspects that support the speaker's intentions and suppressing those that do not. This phenomenon was visible in the process leading up to and following the Camp David Accords, signed in 1979 by Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter of the United States. While the leaders involved in the Camp David Accords each had specific, immediate political goals, the rhetoric indeed relied upon and had an effect upon the collective memories of the groups involved, in a way that created a possibility for more peaceful relations between Israel and Egypt.

The collective memories of Arabs and Israelis had become drastically divergent through the decades of wars between them, and these collective memories, or grand narratives, had been strengthened by the words of politicians, carefully crafted to justify

the positions of their own groups and discredit those of their opponents. Each side saw itself as a righteous victim and the other as an unreasonable, hateful, and dangerous enemy. The year before the Camp David summit, Menachem Begin's speeches emphasized the victimhood of the Israelis, suppressing any notion of brotherhood between them and their neighbors. At the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in March 1979 (five months after the conclusion of the Camp David meeting), all three leaders affirmed that the collective memories had been transformed. Carter's words provide the most succinct summary of the new view of history:

for much too long, the people of Israel and the people of Egypt—two of the nations of the children of Abraham, trusting in the same God, hoping for the same peace—knew only enmity between them. That time, thank God, is now at an end.³⁶

Instead of the divisive memory which focused on the bloody disagreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the three leaders reached back to their *religious* histories and found a new (old) context for the relationship. No longer did each side see the other only as a violent offender, denying the brotherhood that existed between the two groups. In addition to acknowledging their shared history, both Begin and Sadat called on the traditions in their religions of forbearance, of seeking peace, and of resisting violence. At the close of the Camp David meeting, Begin's public comments called on the ancient friendship of his people with their neighbors, and on his religion's tradition of peace:

In the Jewish teachings, there is a tradition that the greatest achievement of a human being is to turn an enemy into a friend, and this we do in reciprocity...Everything belongs to the past...We shook hands, and thank God, we again could have said to each other, "You are my friend."³⁷

³⁶ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter*, 1979 Book 1 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1908), 522.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1522.

Sadat's remarks on the same occasion reflect a similar sentiment, calling on religious tradition and a shared memory:

Pursuing peace is the only avenue which is compatible with our culture and creed. Let there be no more wars or bloodshed between Arabs and Israelis... Let us work together until the day comes when they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.³⁸

After thirteen days together at Camp David in relative seclusion, these leaders were able to access their common history and to call on the peaceful traditions of their religions to transform collective memory. The idea of brotherhood was reintroduced into the narrative. From that point, it was no longer necessary or even possible to encounter the enemy without recognizing its common origins, its own traditions of peace. By revising the grand narratives of their own groups, the leaders were able to successfully transform memory and make some progress toward peace. Forgiveness became possible.

This chapter will outline how Menachem Begin used religious themes, calling on collective memory in his political rhetoric throughout his career, and also how this use changed during the Camp David era. Before Begin, leaders in Israel relied upon appeals to collective memory to strengthen their claims. This chapter will begin by exploring this tradition that Begin inherited and mastered. Beginning with his early career as a leader in the Zionist paramilitary group Irgun, continuing into his career as prime minister, and concluding with the Camp David period, Begin relied upon collective memory and had a part in changing the collective memory in making both enemies and friends.

³⁸ Ibid., 1522.

Collective Memory and the Growth of Zionist Popularity

Religious beliefs and the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible, as vehicles of collective memory and identity, have had an impact on politics leading up to and following the creation of the state of Israel. The effect is present, but often elusive. It is elusive because the original Zionists did not design their movement on religious beliefs, and diplomats have necessarily justified their support for Israel on nonreligious grounds. However, the notion of fulfillment of Hebrew Bible prophecies has been a powerful, although perhaps intangible factor—from the selection of Palestine as a location for Israel to the support offered to the Jewish state in current American politics. The religious undertones of the movement and, at times, the direct appeals to religious collective memory have significantly boosted the success of the Zionist endeavor. Political leaders, as well as voters, have been influenced by the consciousness of a “return” of the Jewish people to their “promised land.” By referring to the West Bank areas not as occupied territory but as “Judea and Samaria,” Menachem Begin reclaimed the land as wholly and rightfully belonging to the state of Israel, as the heir of God’s eternal promises to Abraham and his descendants. His rhetoric was met with reverence and enthusiasm among the American Christian communities, adding to the widespread support for Zionism and for the state of Israel in American leadership. This portion of the paper seeks to identify the way that appeals to collective memory, in the form of biblical and religious identity, have been incorporated into the political arena by Begin and his predecessors. Beginning with the origins of the Zionist movement, this section will examine the presence of religion as collective memory in political discussion regarding Israel through the present day.

Stage One: Appeal to Scripture in the Early Days of Zionism

Theodor Herzl, although not the first Zionist, is generally associated with the earliest phase of Zionism. His vision and determination in establishing a Jewish state made him the most influential figure in gaining international support for the movement, and in outlining the practical implementation of the plan.³⁹ For Herzl, rationale for the formation of a Jewish state was not based on religious land claims, but on social, economic, and political concerns. The original goal was to prove that Jews do not need “host nations” to succeed economically and that the Jews on their own could achieve more than any other country.⁴⁰ His view was that the Jews were unified as a people more by their collective memory of the discrimination they suffered than by their faith, even as their faith may have been the sole way in which they were not fully assimilated with those who persecuted them. While he was motivated by largely nonreligious and non-biblical concerns, Herzl recognized that appealing to religious sentiments would increase the power of his campaign. He considered several possible sites for the new Jewish state, including Argentina and Uganda, before settling on Palestine, noting that “Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvelous potency.”⁴¹ Herzl’s ultimate decision may have been influenced to some degree by American evangelical leader William E. Blackstone, among others. Upon hearing that Herzl was considering other possible locations, Blackstone sent him a Bible, having marked each passage that referred to Palestine, and expressing his view to Herzl that Palestine was the only appropriate site for the Jewish

³⁹ Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 106.

⁴⁰ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959).

⁴¹ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover, 1988), 96, as cited by Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 108.

state.⁴² Herzl realized that appealing to collective memory by employing the images of Jews as a “chosen people” and of their effort as a “return” to the “promised land” would generate greater Jewish enthusiasm for his movement, even though its leaders were primarily motivated by non-religious concerns.

These same images were used to encourage American Christian communities to support Zionism as well. In particular, Blackstone led a campaign to garner support for Zionism from United States Presidents William Henry Harrison (1891), Theodore Roosevelt (1903), and Woodrow Wilson (1916). Although he appealed to broader humanistic concerns in his public communications with political leaders, he was motivated by his belief that the return of Christ was eminent, and that the restoration of Palestine to God’s chosen people was critical for the coming of the kingdom of God to earth.⁴³ This underlying theological position is visible in the inclusion of the following statement into his argument: “Why not give Palestine back to them? According to God’s distribution of nations, it is their home—an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force.”⁴⁴

Blackstone’s efforts influenced the Zionist movement, which began as a secular endeavor. Biblical prophecy did not constitute the basis of the original idea for a Jewish homeland, but it played into the widespread acceptance of the notion. Herzl increasingly used biblical arguments in his political rhetoric. In 1903, at the Sixth Zionist Congress at Basel, Switzerland, Herzl argued for Palestine as the location for the Jewish state (against

⁴² Michael Prior, “Israel-Palestine: A Challenge to Theology,” in *Faith in the Millennium*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 68.

⁴³ William Blackstone published *Jesus is Coming* in 1878, which used prophetic texts from the Bible which speak of restoration to support his Zionist and dispensationalist theology. By 1908, the original 96-page volume had been expanded to a 250-page 3rd edition.

⁴⁴ Prior, “Israel-Palestine: A Challenge to Theology,” 68.

those who supported locating it in Uganda) by quoting Psalm 137:5, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither.”⁴⁵ On the day of his burial in 1904, Herzl was compared to Moses, who was allowed to see the promised land, but not live in it.⁴⁶ Thus, even while Herzl’s motivations were not based on the Bible, he incorporated biblical images, perhaps at the suggestion of American Christians such as Blackstone, and his movement came to be seen by many as a religious one. This association with the Bible had two effects: it increased the popularity of his own movement by appealing to a widely accepted narrative, and it also transformed the way many interpreted the biblical narrative—emphasizing the link between ancient Israelites and modern Zionists.

Much support was drawn for the state of Israel by American religious leaders who viewed the new Jewish state as a fulfillment of the promises made by God to the ancient Israelites. This line of thought, which was developed in England primarily by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), is called *dispensationalist* and is characterized by literal interpretations of scripture. Cyrus Ingersoll Scofield, a later leader in the dispensationalist movement, explains: “Not one instance exists of a “spiritual” or figurative fulfillment of prophecy....Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel is always Israel, Zion is always Zion....Prophecies may never be spiritualized, but are always literal.”⁴⁷

Dispensationalists believe that the Bible spells out seven periods, or dispensations,

⁴⁵ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁷ Scofield, Cyrus I. *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course* 19th ed. (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1907), 45-46. This quotation is taken as cited by Stephen R. Sizer in “Dispensational Approaches to the Land” in *The Land of Promise* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 145. Scofield’s reputation, in addition to his scholarship, is questionable. He never attended a university which could have granted such a degree. He is infamous for his abandonment of his first wife and two daughters, refusing to support them with his wealth, and for defrauding congregations and refusing to make restitution for their financial losses. He is believed to have received funding for his work from Zionist groups in Boston. His ideas are largely dependent on the work of John Nelson Darby, a British dispensationalist, although he never mentions Darby in any citation or otherwise. Despite this questionable character and authority on scripture, his Reference Bible has been widely relied upon by fundamental Christians in America.

through which humanity must pass, as if through tests, before God's kingdom can be established on earth. The first dispensation is creation, and the last will occur when Christ returns and establishes an exclusive Jewish kingdom on earth.⁴⁸ This belief was the motivation behind Blackstone's letter to Herzl urging him to select Palestine as the site of the new Jewish homeland. The influence of these religious leaders, along with other factors, on British⁴⁹ and later American opinion and American leadership has resulted in a very strong alliance between the United States and Israel. This section of the paper will explore the development of that alliance and its reliance on the use of the master narrative and collective memory of dispensationalists. During the first period addressed here, the rhetoric was more political than religious and called on nonreligious interests. This bit of history is included here as background. Beginning again in 1948, the religious appeals became more evident in politics, due in no small part to Menachem Begin.

Stage Two: Developments in Zionism from Balfour (1917) to the State of Israel (1948)

In 1917, Dr. Chaim Weizmann was elected president of the English Zionist Federation, and he immediately sought a declaration of support from the British government for the Zionist movement. He appealed to the British government, as had Herzl, on the basis of the economic advantages that could be realized by Europe by having a western presence in the Middle East to protect access to Egypt and the East, and to serve as a barrier between the West and the threatening Arab world.⁵⁰ Britain agreed

⁴⁸ Stephen R. Sizer, "Dispensational approaches to the land," in *The Land of Promise* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 143-144.

⁴⁹ Arthur Balfour and his contemporary, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, were raised in dispensationalist churches, and thus may have been motivated by religious concerns as well as colonial ones.

⁵⁰ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 120.

that a westernized Palestine would be to its advantage, and agreed to officially support the Zionist movement. After several drafts were proposed and revised, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur James Balfour, issued the following “declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations”:

His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.⁵¹

The *Declaration* was intended to generate international Jewish support for the Allies, even while it signaled betrayal to the Arabs, who had been given control of Palestine in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Britain. Indeed, the *Declaration* was a bold one, in which “one nation solemnly promised to a second nation that country of a third.”⁵² After all, the land did in fact already belong to another people. In 1919, Jews constituted only 9.7 percent of the population in Palestine and owned 2.04 percent of the land.⁵³ The land was not “without a people” as the popular slogan suggested, but was actually twice as thickly populated as the United States.⁵⁴ In this period, reliance on biblical imagery and prophecy was less important, as imperial interests motivated Britain to support Zionism, initiating a new level of western interest in creating a state for Jews. Britain governed Palestine on behalf of its Jewish and Arab inhabitants from 1918-1948.

⁵¹ The *Declaration* was included in a letter from Secretary Balfour to Lord Rothschild, who was head of the Zionist Federation in Great Britain, dated November 2, 1917.

⁵² Arthur Koestler, *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine, 1917-1949* (London: MacMillan, 1949), 4. Included here as cited by Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 125.

⁵³ Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated By Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 21. Included here as cited by Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 125.

⁵⁴ Prior, “Israel-Palestine: A Challenge to Theology,” 77.

Differences of opinion did arise, however, as it became evident that Britain foresaw a state in which Jews and Arabs would share the land and its government. As Britain began to soften its support for Zionists, the United States stepped in to make up the difference. In 1945, Harry S Truman entered the White House and became a key supporter for a Jewish state in Palestine, replacing Britain as the biggest ally for Zionists. With his support of Zionism, Truman gained loyalty of Jews in America, while simultaneously pleasing those in America who feared the mass immigration of European Jews escaping the terrors of the Nazi regime.⁵⁵ He acknowledged to Arab ambassadors that he acted in consideration of his Zionist constituents, being that he did not have “hundreds of thousands of Arabs” to consider in the voting public in America.⁵⁶ As Britain was unable to successfully establish a long-term plan for the cohabitation of Jews and Arabs in Palestine, the matter was submitted to the United Nations (UN) in 1947. The UN developed a plan to partition Palestine into two states, with an internationally governed Jerusalem. The plan, which was unpopular among Arabs, led to such a reaction among the inhabitants of Palestine that Britain decided to exit the scene and leave matters completely to the UN. Upon the departure of Britain, with a reduced security force in place, the superior Zionist forces were able to execute their plan to take over as much territory and exterminate as many Arabs as needed to take control.⁵⁷ On May 14, 1948, Britain left Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion (who became the first prime minister of the new state) declared the establishment of a state of Israel, and President Truman immediately authorized its recognition by the United States. The following day,

⁵⁵ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 131.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵⁷ Zionists executed *Plan Dalet*, which called for the acquisition of territory and expulsion of the Arabs. According to Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 72, the execution of *Plan Dalet* is the principal explanation for the departure of most of the Arabs of Palestine.

Menachem Begin, whose militaristic group Irgun was influential in encouraging the British to leave Palestine,⁵⁸ delivered a speech over the radio which he closed with the following prayer:

Oh G-d of Israel, guard your soldiers and bless their swords, which are forging anew the covenant You made with Your chosen people and Your promised land.⁵⁹

Thus, the religious element had not disappeared from the rhetoric of Zionist leaders. His words reflected the theme that influenced political leaders and citizens: the theme of a “return” of the Jewish people to their “promised land.” By referring to the West Bank areas not as occupied territory but as “Judea and Samaria,” Begin reclaimed the land as wholly and rightfully belonging to the state of Israel, as the heir of God’s eternal promises to Abraham and his descendants. During this period, there began a renewed sense that Israel was enacting the plan of God by reclaiming “Biblical Israel.” Israel enjoyed the support of the United States and established a sovereign government that was recognized by the West.

Stage Three: Zionism is Challenged Again and Biblical Imagery is Revived

In 1967, Israel struck Egypt and other neighbors, stating that “the imminence of Arab aggression which threatened the very existence of the state” (that sense of aggression which was exuded by President Nasser of Egypt) made it necessary for Israel to defend itself. In the war that followed, the “Six Days War” (June 5-11, 1967), Israel gained control of the West Bank (from Jordan), the Golan Heights (from Syria), and Gaza and the Sinai (from Egypt). The territory gains were a challenge to international law, and

⁵⁸ Robert C. Rowland, *The Rhetoric of Menachem Begin: The Myth of Redemption Through Return* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 1.

⁵⁹ David Niv, *The Irgun Zevai Leumi*, n.d., <<http://www.csuohio.edu/tagar/begin.htm>> (March 21, 2005).

led the UN to convene an emergency session, in which it was almost unanimously voted that there should be a withdrawal of forces to the June 4, 1967 boundaries. The Security Council passed Resolution 242 (November 22, 1967) which called for such a withdrawal, noting “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.” However, the considerable amount international pressure did not persuade Israel to withdraw. Rather, it led to a revival of the use of biblical imagery to justify its (now broader) land claims. L. Nelson Bell, Billy Graham's father-in-law and editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote in July 1967:

That for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives the student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the *accuracy* and *validity* of the Bible.”⁶⁰

This statement makes clear the importance of biblical narrative in interpretation of events in Israel. Following 1967, Israeli governments sought to acquire and control Arab land within “Biblical Israel,” with the remainder of Jerusalem and one-third of the West Bank seized and controlled by the Israeli government in the first ten years following the war.⁶¹ Even as the American Christians were using the return of the Jews to Palestine as a way of supporting their own faith, the Israelis were benefiting from broader support of Americans as a result of the use of a collective narrative—the Bible—to justify actions.

Following the election of Menachem Begin as prime minister of Israel in 1977, the state began to settle the remainder of the occupied territories.⁶² Begin’s identity was centered on his Jewish heritage, and his worldview was determined by this identity. He was the first prime minister to use the biblical names Judea and Samaria to refer to the

⁶⁰ Donald E. Wagner, “Evangelicals and Israel: Theological Roots of a Political Alliance” in *The Christian Century*, November 4, 1998. 1020-1026. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 142.

⁶² Niv, *The Irgun Zevai Leumi*.

West Bank, clearly calling upon a biblical identity and collective memory to indicate that these areas would be considered an integral part of the Land of Israel.⁶³ Soon after the election, he traveled to an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, Ekon Moreh, and declared it to be part of “liberated Israel.” His words reflected the theme that influenced political leaders and citizens: the theme of a “return” of the Jewish people to their “promised land.”

In November of that same year, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt made a historically important move by visiting Jerusalem. Sadat made his nation’s relationship with Israel a priority of his administration as president of Egypt, and he took an initiative in building the foundation for the dialogue that would eventually lead to a peace treaty granting the Sinai back to Egypt. This early visit began in earnest the dialogue between the two countries and clearly demonstrated Sadat’s commitment to finding a possible agreement. During that visit, Begin’s speech to the Knesset shifted focus from recent history to biblical history, asserting that God’s covenant with the Jews was as relevant in the current day as it had been when the Bible was written.⁶⁴ His response to Sadat’s claim that Israel had taken Arab land included the following:

No, sir, we took no foreign land. We returned to our Homeland. The bond between our People and this Land is eternal. It was created at the dawn of human history. It was never severed....When we were exiled from our country by the force that was exercised against us, even when we were far away, we did not forget this Land, not even for a single day.⁶⁵

Begin was sincerely appealing to the religious sense of both his constituents as well as other international leaders to justify the actions of his country. His rhetoric relied upon

⁶³ Rowland, *The Rhetoric of Menachem Begin*, 3.

⁶⁴ Rowland, *The Rhetoric of Menachem Begin*, 5.

⁶⁵ Menachem Begin, “Text of Address by Mr. Menachem Begin, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, At a Special Session of the Knesset,” (Israel Information Centre, 20 November 1977), 5.

ancient biblical history for its context, and the technique, in the end, was effective in helping Sadat understand the Israeli position.

Stage Four: A New Perspective on the Biblical Past

Sadat used that Jerusalem visit to gain understanding of the position of the Israelis, and in January of the following year, his understanding was made publicly known in an interview he gave to an Egyptian magazine, in which he acknowledged the vulnerability of Israelis, “surrounded by millions of hostile Arabs.”⁶⁶ This interview demonstrated Sadat’s attempt to understand Israeli identity and also helped his own constituents to share in that understanding of their enemy. Montville claims that Sadat’s statement set the stage for the Camp David Accords.⁶⁷ The recognition by Sadat of the ethos of the Israelis as a vulnerable and special group made a reconciliation possible. Begin had succeeded in gaining for his people an internationally accepted identity that is rooted in the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible. In turn, Sadat’s words helped Begin visualize the possibility that hostility might no longer be necessary. With his position having been recognized and accepted by Sadat, Begin was eventually able to concede the Sinai, and to imagine the possibility of peace. He then was able to use the peaceful traditions of his nation as a beacon of hope, no longer needing to use the collective narrative exclusively as a justification for violent self-defense and territory acquisitions. At the March 1979 signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Begin made the following statement:

I have come from the land of Israel, the land of Zion and Jerusalem, and here I am in humility and with pride as a son of the Jewish people, as one of the generation of the Holocaust and redemption. The ancient Jewish people gave the world a vision of eternal peace, of universal disarmament,

⁶⁶ Cited in Joseph V. Montville, “Justice and the Burdens of History,” 121.

⁶⁷ Bole, et al. *Forgiveness in International Politics*, 53.

of abolishing the teaching and the learning of war...“And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Despite the tragedies and disappointments of the past, we must never forsake that vision, that human dream, that unshakable faith...No more war, no more bereavement. Peace unto you, shalom, salaam— forever.⁶⁸

This speech confirmed his public identity as the leader of a persecuted people, whose right to their land is eternal and God-given and whose tradition of peace was set aside only when made necessary by outside circumstances. Now circumstances allowed the peaceful traditions to return. This rhetoric, which at first had been offensive to his rivals, such as Sadat, in the end made accessible a history that the two could share and face together. A new collective memory could be created by shaping the context in which Israel was viewed and approached by its neighbor Egypt.

Transformation at Camp David: What Made it Possible?

Transformation occurred at Camp David in 1978. Three leaders entered the summit with divergent goals, and they emerged after thirteen days one step closer to a peace treaty. The progress was made as a result of a change in perspective that allowed the collective memory of each nation to remain intact, being revised “just enough to accommodate the identity of the other.”⁶⁹ An important factor increasing the possibility of a transformation in collective memory was the degree to which the new perspective was compatible with the underlying narrative of Begin’s identity. According to Kelman, changes in identity are made possible when “the new identity is actually more consistent

⁶⁸ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1979 Book 1, 520-521.

⁶⁹ Kelman, “Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective,” 111-124.

with the person's own, pre-existing value system.”⁷⁰ For Begin, the revision in his identity required him to incorporate the more peaceful aspects of his tradition, as well as the pieces of memory that Jews can share with their neighbors—those predating the exile. The ability to continue to rely on religious tradition made the transformation possible. Begin's resistance to peace with neighbors was rooted (at least rhetorically) in biblical narrative, and it was biblical narrative that provided a way out. President Carter notes in his memoirs that he packed his Bible with him for the stay at Camp David, and that it came in handy in his discussions with Begin.⁷¹ Carter calls Begin “religious” and remarks that he seemed to view himself as a leader of an ancient people, one man in a long dynasty, with significant authority and responsibility.⁷² He writes that Begin acted not as an individual, but as a descendant of Abraham, Moses, and survivors of the Holocaust.⁷³ In this broader capacity, he acted on behalf of his people, with a sense that the results of the meeting would have a great impact on a history that originated in the ancient past and would continue far into the future. The vision of a peaceful future that was formed at the meeting was in line with a long history of relationships between their peoples, a history that existed before the Zionist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Aside from the ease of transition that was provided by keeping the biblical narrative at the forefront, all three leaders benefited from being able to identify with and rely upon the faith of his constituents. The strength of the collective narrative made it useful as a tool for reconciliation. Each man felt comfortable calling upon the religious identities of the people he served. Leading up to and during the Camp David summit,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 111-124.

⁷¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 329.

⁷² Ibid., 335,337.

⁷³ Ibid., 335.

both public statements and private interactions consistently acknowledged the religious identities of the three leaders and of the nations they represented. On September 6, 1978, a joint statement was issued by Carter, Begin, and Sadat at the inception of the meeting:

After four wars, despite vast human efforts, the Holy Land does not yet enjoy the blessings of peace. Conscious of the grave issues which face us, we place our trust in the God of our fathers, from whom we seek wisdom and guidance. As we meet here at Camp David we ask people of all faiths to pray with us that peace and justice may result from these deliberations.⁷⁴

At least twice before this statement was made, Carter publicly spoke of the high priority that this agreement was for all three leaders and all three nations, and on both occasions he asked for prayers that the negotiations would succeed.⁷⁵ At the close of the meeting, Carter's first action was to call the minds of his listeners back to prayer:

When we first arrived at Camp David, the first thing upon which we agreed was to ask the people of the world to pray that our negotiations would be successful. Those prayers have been answered far beyond any expectations....Let us join in a prayer to God Almighty to guide our path. Let us pledge to make the spirit of Camp David a new chapter in the history of our nations.⁷⁶

The meeting, then, was framed by a request for prayers and a statement that those prayers had been answered. The fact that the initial statement was the first thing the leaders agreed upon as they came together indicates the importance of this call for prayers in the leaders' minds. The fact that three leaders felt comfortable making such public statements is an indication of the degree to which each felt a sense of religious unity with their nations; the religious collective memory was strong enough to withstand revision and to be used for transformation. The priority placed on the incorporation of faith and the

⁷⁴ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1978 Book 2, 1501.

⁷⁵ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1978 Book 2, 1440-1441, 1496-1497. August 17, 1978 in a news conference about his veto of the Defense Department Authorization Bill, and again on September 4, 1978, as he departed the White House for Camp David.

⁷⁶ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1978 Book 2, 1519-1521.

implied sense that the inclusion of religion in international politics would be accepted by their publics comprise the first key factor in the success of this process in transforming memory. The second key factor is the faith of the leaders themselves.

While Sadat had been frustrated by Begin's preference for ancient history over the realities of the present and the future, it was in fact this reversion to a common origin that led to an ability to forge peace between two nations that, in preceding decades, seemed to have nothing in common. Since the beginning of the Zionist movement and the creation of the State of Israel, along with the subsequent wars, Egypt had been an enemy of Israel. The polemic centered on Israel's occupation of the Sinai, and the resistance of Begin and other Israelis to acknowledge the complaint was a source of great frustration to Sadat.⁷⁷ Instead of recognizing the view that Israel had taken lands that had legitimately belonged to others at one time, Begin's rhetoric focused on the Israeli nation's ancient claim to the land. Sadat's eventual willingness to acknowledge and accept Begin's memory of Israeli history led to a new understanding between the two nations. References to religious identities gave a new way of remembering, one that focused on common ground and relationships.

For his part, Carter made known his concern and support for Israeli security, and his intention to uphold his nation's commitment to Israel, even from his first speeches as a candidate for the presidency. In some ways, the transformation in collective memory began with the change in his own perspective. Raised in the Christian South, he was well-versed in biblical history and was sympathetic to the Jewish people. He writes in his memoirs that his long-held sympathy for Israelis was based on compassion for the horrors suffered during the Holocaust, on his interpretation of biblical passages, and on

⁷⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 346.

the fact that Israel was a democracy. Once in office, however, he realized that he “needed a broader perspective.”⁷⁸ Carter developed the broader perspective he sought by meeting with leaders of Arab countries. When he first met Sadat in Washington, he immediately noticed a calloused spot at the center of Sadat’s forehead from his lifelong practice of touching his head to the floor in prayer.⁷⁹ After spending the afternoon and evening discussing politics and other matters with the Egyptian President, Carter felt that there was a possibility of peace. As Carter told a joint session of Congress after returning from Camp David, “the Middle East had been a textbook for pessimism, a demonstration that diplomatic ingenuity was no match for intractable human conflicts,” but that the current hope for peace was possible “because these two brave leaders found within themselves the willingness to work together to seek these lasting prospects for peace, which we all want so badly.”⁸⁰ The willingness to work together allowed the success of the transformation of collective memory. Endurance and faith led the men to work toward peace, even in the face of incredible challenge. One such challenge was Begin’s insistent focus on ancient history over recent history, which frustrated Sadat. In the end, however, this insistence was the key to the transformation in collective memory. By reverting to ancient history, the men were able to see each other in a new way, as humans, as brothers. Menachem Begin, in a speech in November 1977, had used the biblical narrative of the eternal bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel to justify the state’s actions against Egypt.⁸¹ Just over a year later, he used the same biblical narrative to reconcile with Egypt, calling on the biblical idea of beating swords into

⁷⁸ Ibid., 281-282.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 289.

⁸⁰ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1978 Book 2, 1357.

⁸¹ Begin, “Text of Address,” 5.

plowshares.⁸² While he had previously used the biblical history to justify the use of violence against Israel's enemies, he later used the same biblical narrative to make reconciliation with Egypt.

Collective memory, in the form of biblical narrative, provided a foundation for the rhetoric of Menachem Begin, even while his rhetoric also revised the collective memory. His interactions with Sadat and Carter and his participation in the Camp David meeting allowed him to revise his view of history enough to allow for the identity of his enemy. The exchange that began with Sadat's visit in November 1977 eventually led to a mutual revision of identity. Israelis were able to lessen their sense of victimhood and acknowledge the humanity of their enemy. Religion as collective memory gave the leaders much of their identities, their motivation, and their language for forming a common ground. In addition, each of the three was able to call upon the religious identities of their constituents. At some point leading up to, during, or after the meetings, all three leaders called on the biblical and Qur'anic links between Jews and Muslims, even calling the two groups cousins.⁸³

From the statements made after the conclusion of the meeting, and after the signing of the treaty a few months later, it is clear that collective memory had been revised by this meeting. The work was obviously far from complete. The complicated issues of claims to the Holy Land, and the status of the Palestinian people were not solved in this document. Continued strife in the region may have undone some of the accomplishments of these three men, as violence makes it more difficult for Israelis and their neighbors to see each other as cousins or brothers. The issue of collective memory is

⁸² *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1979 Book 1, 520-521.

⁸³ Sadat, in his toast to Carter and Begin at the state dinner on March 26, 1979, after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty.

particularly complicated in this conflict, because there are so many interlinking stories. While Egypt and Sadat were extending an olive branch to Israel in 1977, and Israel was in turn cautiously welcoming the gesture, the rest of the Arab world was confused. Why did their brother, Egypt, betray them to make friends with Israel without regard to the needs of other Arab groups, most importantly the Palestinians?⁸⁴ This question alludes to the primary weakness in relying on political leaders to transform memory and enact reconciliation: they are often limited by political agendas and by their inaccessibility to the common citizen. While both Begin and Sadat acted in good faith to attain a goal of their people, and both bore the burden of a long dynasty, neither could address the pain of each of their constituents. Progress was limited to what could be negotiated on paper in a concise and legal manner. This weakness will be overcome in the following chapters as we hear the voices of writers, soldiers, and citizens. The transformation in collective memory may not be as neatly visible as the number of voices increases, but its reach is extended to include many. The next chapter begins with Amos Oz explaining how the work of a writer in seeking peace differs from the work of a politician, in that the writer has more freedom and a greater responsibility to address the past in all of its painful details.

⁸⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*. p. 305.

CHAPTER 3

AMOS OZ: USING REMEMORY IN ISRAEL

*There is one task which the politicians cannot perform and which they are under no obligation to attempt, and that is to scrutinize the past, the sources of hatred and the wellspring of suspicion, with the aim of clearing away the stereotypes and understanding the soul of the other side. This task falls to the lot of the poets and thinkers, the writers and intellectuals. The politicians must not be allowed to touch the past, in case they make of it an explosive which is liable to endanger both the present and the future. Politicians are under an obligation to erase the past. But intellectuals can not erase it. Poets have to reopen the old wounds and squeeze out the pus.*⁸⁵

Israeli author Amos Oz uses a technique similar to Toni Morrison's rememory in creating his fictional accounts, which reveal truths about life in Israel and the plight of the Israeli and Palestinian people. He writes that when he wants to say something clearly and explicitly about the Israeli government or a current event, he will write an article or speak out in some other way, but that "when the question is less simple—when within me I hear several points of view—then, perhaps, I write a novel."⁸⁶ Acknowledging the mutual fears and suspicions of Israelis and Palestinians—the imbalance in the collective memories of the two groups—Oz takes responsibility as a writer to change them. In the spirit of Thich Nhat Hanh, Oz writes that "It is the propagandists on both sides who are responsible for this idiocy. But blame also attaches to the poets, the writers, and the intellectuals who do not attempt to break down the barriers of the stereotypes created by the propaganda."⁸⁷ He acknowledges the success of Anwar Sadat's visit and proceeding

⁸⁵ Amos Oz, "From Jerusalem to Cairo: Escaping the Shadow of the Past," translated Nicholas de Lange in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 34.

⁸⁶ Amos Oz, "Between Europe and the Negev Desert," translated Jenny Chapman in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace*, 58.

⁸⁷ Oz, "From Jerusalem to Cairo," 44.

negotiation with Menahem Begin in changing attitudes and making reconciliation possible, and he works with the hope that such progressive acts will be repeated.⁸⁸ He is aware, however, that more than political symposiums will be needed if peace is to become a possibility in the Holy Land. His political articles and speeches, along with his novels, are actively engaging the collective memory of Israelis: “Above all, we are all now in need of a measure of mutual sensitivity and creative imagination, so that agreement between politicians can open the door to reconciliation between peoples.”⁸⁹ This chapter will introduce Amos Oz and will continue with an analysis of his fourth novel, *A Perfect Peace*, which was published in 1982 and which is an example of his ability to present many sides of a complex issue to increase understanding.

Amos Oz

Oz was born Amos Klausner in Jerusalem on May 4, 1939. His parents had immigrated several years prior from Poland; Oz says that they were “virtually kicked out of Europe,” along with many other Jews he calls fortunate.⁹⁰ They were intellectuals, loving the arts, speaking many languages, and reading avidly. Oz’s father was a librarian who wrote at night and “dreamed of becoming a writer.” His mother felt that life in Israel was like exile, far from many loved ones and loved places in Europe. She committed suicide at the age of 38, when Amos was twelve and half years old. Three years later, Amos left home and moved to a kibbutz, much against his father’s will. Oz now says that he left to be reborn into a more “physical” Jew, driving tractors and being

⁸⁸ Amos Oz, “Has Israel Altered Its Visions?” translated Maggie Goldberg-Bartura and Amos Oz in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace*, 17.

⁸⁹ Oz, “From Jerusalem to Cairo,” 44.

⁹⁰ Amos Oz, interview by Terry Gross, “Growing up with Israel: Writer Amos Oz,” *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, December 1, 2004.

suntanned, rebelling against the “bookish” nature of his upbringing.⁹¹ His father feared that Amos would become “average,” doing only manual labor and neglecting his mind. At this point, Amos changed his name too, leaving behind his family name of Klausner in favor of Oz, which means strength. He stayed on Kibbutz Hulda, which is between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, until 1986, when he moved to Arad with his wife, two sons and a daughter. His writing developed during his time on the kibbutz. He credits the intimacy of the community, and the presence of several generations for teaching him much about human nature.⁹²

Soldier and Peace Activist

During Oz’s childhood, Jerusalem was a divided city. He remembers the “burst of public euphoria... combined with a fear of the future” on Israel’s Independence Day in 1948.⁹³ Even then, surrounded by the excitement of his parents and neighbors, Oz remembers thinking of the “fear and trembling” of the Arabs in the other side of the city, knowing that there was a corresponding “darkness, silence, and sadness” among the Palestinians.⁹⁴ Even while he felt compassion for the Palestinians, Oz served in the Israeli military in the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973; he states that those wars, along with the war for independence in 1948, were critical for Israel’s survival. He reiterates often that he is not a pacifist. He is, however, opposed to what he calls “optional wars,” such as the Lebanon War. In 1977, Oz cofounded an organization called Peace Now, which he describes as a “think-tank which unites left-wing radicals,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

liberals from the center, conventional Zionists, religious people, and everyone else of the view that Israel should never attempt to annex the Occupied Territories.”⁹⁵ He opposes the occupation, not because he believes that Palestinians have a more valid claim to that land, but because the land is “densely inhabited by people who do not want to be Israelis,”⁹⁶ and there is no point in forcing them. Oz views the conflict as a tragic clash between

two victims of the same perpetrator. The Arabs and the Israelis are two nations who have suffered anguish and humiliation at the hands of Europe. It is tragic that each looks at the other and sees only the face of the common enemy.⁹⁷

Given that the conflict is, in his view, an instance of “Right vs. Right,” he believes that only a two-state solution is a possibility. For this to become a reality, Oz believes that new leaders are needed on both sides, but that the “vast majority of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs know now that there will be a two-state solution in the end—the house will have to be divided into two smaller apartments—it is the only pragmatic solution.”⁹⁸ In the meantime, Oz uses both his nonfiction and fiction works to, as quoted above, “break down the stereotypes.” To reveal the truth, Oz relies, like Morrison, on a breakdown of the distinction between fact and fiction. He creates a story that is true, although it may include more than fact.

⁹⁵ Oz, “Between Europe and the Negev Desert,” 46.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁷ Oz, “From Jerusalem to Cairo,” 43.

⁹⁸ Oz, “Growing up with Israel: Writer Amos Oz”.

Oz on Fact and Fiction

In a 2004 radio interview, Oz said “I reject the very distinction between fact and fiction; I think everything we know about each other is partly fact and partly wishful thinking, fantasy, or nightmare.”⁹⁹ He elaborates on this in an essay:

Facts, I say, are often the worst enemies of truth, and in any case, at the heart of our matter lies the complicated relationship between metaphor and image, fact and truth...truth is that which we accept as being truth; unlike fact, which must pass an empiric test...¹⁰⁰

Instead of relating only the facts of a situation, Oz uses the power of truth, conveyed in the images and the conflicted characters in his novels. He uses fiction to explore issues that are complex in a way that would not be suited to nonfiction presentations.¹⁰¹ He acknowledges that “images, even false, distorted ones, can indeed kill people...Images such as the ‘promised land’ or ‘the land of milk and honey’ could and did make many people get up and go and change their lives.”¹⁰² This power is the tool of fiction in peace making. By writing a story about characters whose lives may not be factual, but whose experiences are true to life in Israel, Oz is empowered to change the collective memory of Israelis. He adds stories to the public realm, revealing the secrets that may have otherwise been buried as well as the possibilities for reconciliation. Avraham Balaban says this about how Oz’s visions become apparent: “The world is depicted in his work as a volatile, complex existence, in which contradictory forces metamorphosize into each other and coexist with each other through struggle and reconciliation.”¹⁰³ Struggle and

⁹⁹ Amos Oz, interview by Michelle Norris, “A Memoir of Amos Oz and Israel: All Things Considered,” National Public Radio, December 5, 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Amos Oz, “The Real Cause of My Grandmother’s Death,” translated Ora Cummings in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace*, 22, 24.

¹⁰¹ Oz, “Between Europe and the Negev Dessert,” 58-59.

¹⁰² Oz, “The Real Cause of My Grandmother’s Death,” 23.

¹⁰³ Avraham Balaban, “Language and Reality in the Prose of Amos Oz,” in *Modern Language Studies* 20: no. 2 (Spring 1990), 79.

reconciliation are obvious themes for any work about Israel, a country whose second generation of leaders is faced with a landscape not predicted by its predecessor, a landscape that is complex, both vulnerable and fierce. Oz takes on the complexity with an acute sense of the power that words have to transform, to motivate, to kill, or to save.

The Power of Words

Oz often compares Modern Hebrew to Elizabethan English—changing quickly and allowing for rich creativity. A story he often proudly relates is one in which a taxi driver used a word that Oz had invented himself years before. He writes exclusively in Hebrew, using the language as an instrument in the way that a musician would use a flute or a piano.¹⁰⁴ This reverence for language gives weight to his word choices. He has written that the term “liberated territories,” used often by Begin and other militaristic Israelis for the West Bank and Gaza, is a misuse of words. According to Oz, only people can be liberated, not land.¹⁰⁵ He warns of the violence that words can do and shares his hope of the healing that words might provide:

As I have remarked elsewhere tainted language often heralds the worst atrocities. Wherever particular groups of human beings are called “negative elements” or “parasites” or “undesirable aliens,” for example, sooner or later they will be treated as less than human.... Words can kill: this we know only too well. But words can, in small measure, also heal sometimes.¹⁰⁶

The potential healing from words is what drives Oz to write, “not as someone who is struggling for peace, but as someone who begets peace and feels eager to share it with the readers; writing with a simple ethical imperative: “Try to understand everything. Forgive

¹⁰⁴ Oz, “A Memoir of Amos Oz and Israel.”

¹⁰⁵ Amos Oz, “Integrity,” translated Amos Oz and Maggie Goldberg-Batura in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Amos Oz, “Peace and Love and Compromise,” in *Israel, Palestine, and Peace*, 73.

some. And forget nothing.”¹⁰⁷ This power of naming as it relates to human interaction will be addressed again by the soldiers in the next chapter. With this perspective on the importance of words used to describe the parties in a conflict, Oz divides Israelis into two categories: the hawks and the doves. The difference lies in the way each group views the significance of Jewish history. Hawks believe that there is a mysterious curse upon the Jews and that they will be “isolated, hated and persecuted regardless of the way they act”; doves reject the notion of a curse in favor of the view that “there is a correlation between Israel’s actions and the Arab and world response.”¹⁰⁸ These doves are not pacifists, but are supporters of a more complex and thoughtful foreign policy, one that promotes reconciliation without sacrificing self-defense and survival. This distinction is important to Oz’s work of challenging the metanarrative espoused by the hawks, who in his view began winning the propaganda war during the Begin era. His motivation is to transform that view into the more empowered approach of the doves.

Addressing the Metanarrative: A Perfect Peace

Oz’s stories and articles challenge the Israeli metanarrative of the hawks, which puts true power in the hands of Israel’s enemies and which justifies Israeli actions with the claims of vulnerability and survival. Oz creates stories in which opposing forces struggle to coexist and in which he revises known stories (such as from the Bible). He works to remove the association of “good” with the Jews and “bad” with the Arabs, forcing a more honest account of the pain and suffering each group has both experienced and caused:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰⁸ Oz, “Has Israel Altered Its Visions?” 5.

What does the Israeli see when he looks at the Arab? Frequently he sees the shadow of his persecutors and oppressors in the grim past....What does the Arab see when he looks at the Israelis? Frequently he sees in them the shadow of his former persecutors and oppressors. Not persecuted Jews trying to be a nation like all the rest, but a continuation of the wily, arrogant, European colonist and imperialist, come to enslave the East and exploit its wealth by means of technological superiority....The Arabs and the Israelis are two nations who have suffered anguish and humiliation at the hands of Europe. It is tragic that each looks at that other and sees only the face of their common enemy.”¹⁰⁹

This phenomenon was introduced by Montville in the introduction of this paper.

Collective memory of past pain endured by a social group can solidify the identity of victimhood and the dehumanization of the enemy. In long conflicts, the collective memory encompasses pain experienced by a previous generation as well as that which was felt yesterday. *A Perfect Peace* takes on the changing views evident in the new generation of adults in 1965 when the novel is set. Oz uses the characters to voice the complex opinions of the first and second generation of Israelis. His fiction attempts to bring opposites together into a sort of balance. Mazor Yair writes “In *A Perfect Peace*, as in other Oz stories, there is a gradual progression from a bitter enmity between warring forces toward a hesitant truce, perhaps even a reconciliation.”¹¹⁰ Avraham Balaban refers to this movement as a “unity of opposites” and claims that it “finds its most complex and well-elaborated expression” in *A Perfect Peace*.¹¹¹ Nehama Aschkenasy reads Oz’s works as an “Evolving Discourse with the Bible,” and *A Perfect Peace* as a rewriting of the story of Saul, Jonathan, and David.¹¹² The passing of power from one generation to the next and the change in views that results from the transition are key themes in the

¹⁰⁹ Oz, “From Jerusalem to Cairo,” 43.

¹¹⁰ Yair Mazor, *Somber Lust: The Art of Amos Oz*, translated Marganit Weinberger-Rotman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 148.

¹¹¹ Avraham Balaban, *Between God and Beast: An Examination of Amos Oz’s Prose* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 211.

¹¹² Nehama Aschkenasy, “Deconstructing the Metanarrative: Amos Oz’s Evolving Discourse with the Bible,” *Symposium* 55: 3 (Fall 2001), 123-39.

novel. Yonatan is the son of Yolek, who is secretary of the kibbutz where the story takes place. Yonatan dreams of leaving the kibbutz and seeing the rest of the world, much to his father's disappointment. Azariah, a stranger, enters the story and takes Yonatan's place on the kibbutz—working at his job, being a son to Yolek and a husband to Rimona, Yonatan's wife. Oz uses these three men, as well as Srulik (who becomes secretary after Yolek), to convey the diverse views within each generation and the tension of the transition from one generation to the next. In the end, there seems to be a degree of synthesis, a sense that despite the disagreements, each character has the same basic desire to be good and to not cause pain. There is understanding between characters and the hope of peace despite differences.

Yonatan and Azariah: A Synthesis of Opposites

The novel opens with Yonatan thinking of leaving the kibbutz and imagining that someone somewhere is waiting for him (possibly Benya Trotsky, who may be his biological father). He gives up many responsibilities on the kibbutz and plans to tell Rimona that he is leaving because “I don't have a choice, and my back's against the wall,”¹¹³ although his only reason for feeling this compulsion is the mysterious calling by a voice only he hears. Soon after, a young man appears on the kibbutz during the night and tells the first person he meets, “I'd like to stay here. I mean live here. The only justice left today is on the kibbutz. You won't find it anywhere else. I'd like to live here.”¹¹⁴ The reason he gives for wanting to live there is that the kibbutzim “still relate to each other... and in relating to others, I believe, one relates better to one's own inner

¹¹³ Amos Oz, *A Perfect Peace* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1985), 14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

self.”¹¹⁵ His statement is realized in the relationship that develops between him and Yontan. Each, by relating to the other, transforms from an uneasy and lonely man into a self-actualized member of community. The first person to accept Azariah and to want him to stay on the kibbutz is Yolek, Yonatan’s father. He is the secretary of the kibbutz and his approval is required for Azariah to stay. After almost turning him away because it is winter and there is no work, Yolek realizes that Azariah may have experience that would qualify him to work in the tractor shed, the job that Yonatan had agreed only recently to take and at which he was not very good. It is agreed that Azariah will stay and join Yonatan for work the next morning. This begins the synthesis of their characters.

The contrast between Yonatan and Azariah is evident from the beginning. Their differences of opinion result from the differences in their background. While Yonatan was reared on the kibbutz and had a clear identity as an Israeli, Azariah claims to be from “the Diaspora”¹¹⁶ and wants badly to have the identity of a kibbutznik. Yonatan, in contrast, is tired of hearing the opinions and teachings of the adults on the kibbutz, “For years on end he had been told what was right and what was wrong. He could barely grasp what those words meant,”¹¹⁷ Azariah had devoted himself to learning Jewish philosophy, studying Spinoza diligently. He respects the opinion of the older generation, while Yonatan is annoyed with them:

Incidentally, it was his opinion that the old folks Yoni was so annoyed with had more brains in their pinkies than all the brash young big shots had in their heads. They had suffered in the lands of Exile, rather than being born with silver spoons in their mouths like his and Yoni’s generation, which at the worst had to endure smoke from Arab villages

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 81.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 174.

and kill a stray Arab now and then. No wonder the younger generation was so closed-minded and always whining.¹¹⁸

The respect that Azariah has for the elders is a result of his gratitude for being able to find safety and community in Israel. Yonatan, having grown up there, takes it for granted and resents that “he had been hemmed in by a tight little circle of men and women who had been interfering every step of the way.”¹¹⁹ He suspects that the stories he was told as a child by these men and women were “the most colossal fraud there ever was.”¹²⁰ He suspects that the outside world has more to offer than is available in Israel.

Yonatan’s experiences in the army challenged his ability to make sense of things. He asks Azariah how he can believe in the order of things when everything is a mess. He tells Azariah about a time in battle when he and his fellow soldiers put a dead Syrian in the driver’s seat of a jeep with a lighted cigarette in his mouth as a joke, and he asks where the sense is in that situation. Azariah answers that Spinoza would say that both Yonatan and the Syrians had done the only thing they could do, there was no other way. Exasperated, Yoni replies:

“Of course he would. What else would you expect? That’s exactly what the whole world has been giving us from the day before we were born, our parents and our housemothers, and our teachers, and the kibbutz, and the army, and the government, and the newspapers, and Bialik, and Herzl—the whole lot of them. All they’ve ever done is scream at us that we have no choice but to work and fight for our country because our backs are to the wall....See, I think there *is* a choice. And that I’m not up against that goddamn wall. Spinoza can go fuck himself!”¹²¹

His anger is from feeling like he was not given a choice or a voice, but he, nevertheless, is expected to participate fully in the state of Israel and its wars. He was born into a

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹²¹ Ibid., 200-201.

situation that required him to see terrible things happen, and he feels that his parents' generation is to blame. Because of their decision to inhabit the land of Israel, he had to fight in wars and kill people. As he escapes from the kibbutz, he silently says to those whom he is leaving behind, "Your souls are seared onto me like branding iron, but I am not one of you. You gave me everything and took back twice as much, like loan sharks....From your loving son who can't go on anymore, farewell."¹²² He wants to die so that he can live, leave so that he can "be good," forgive and not forget. He leaves with no idea as to where he must go to accomplish this.¹²³

Later, Yonatan realizes that he must go to the desert, the place that his father Yolek always hated as a mark of shame or an enemy that must be overcome with tractors, irrigation, and fertilizer. Yonatan, in defiance and desperation, wants to know the desert.¹²⁴ In the desert, he comes back to life. There, faced with the reality of unfamiliar landscapes and faces, he realizes that Yolek and Srulik were right too:

These old men suddenly figured out fifty years ago that the end was in sight and the Jews were up against a wall, and so they took their lives in their hands and ran with them together straight at that wall, do or die, and came busting out the other side and made us a country, for which I take off my hat to them. And cheer at the top of my voice.

Outside of the kibbutz, Yonatan thinks that Azariah and other innocent people like him would have been killed by the world if not for the men like Yolek. The state of Israel *is*, after all, important and good. It might be worth the effort. He knows, however, that he can not take his father's place. He does not want to and can not. Like Jonathan, son of Saul, he will die and let Azariah, like David, assume his father's legacy and be "the

¹²² Ibid., 210.

¹²³ Ibid., 216.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 265.

savior of Israel.”¹²⁵ He stays in the desert until someone comes to get him and instructs him to come home; then he does so with no argument. The day after he returns, he is back at work, as if nothing had changed.¹²⁶ No one makes him talk about his time away or explain himself. There is simply an unspoken acceptance of the changes he has undergone and a welcoming of him back into his (revised) identity.

Meanwhile, Azariah is also coming to understand Yonatan in his absence. Having taken over his job, his responsibilities with Yolek, and indeed his marriage bed with Rimona, Azariah has virtually assumed Yonatan’s identity. Having come to understand Yonatan’s feelings about the kibbutz, the state of Israel, and his life within it, Azariah speaks in his defense to Yolek and to Prime Minister Eshkol. He explains that Yonatan left to find the purpose in his life, because ““every last one of us is born free. Not one of us is public property... The fact is that an individual belongs only to himself, if even that. That’s what Jewish ethics have to say about the matter, and we Jews, sir, have made that principle into a universal rule.””¹²⁷ His understanding of Yonatan has developed concurrently with a less naïve understanding of the kibbutz, in particular, and the state of Israel in general than he had when he first arrived. In contrast to his position on his arrival, when he said that people on the kibbutz “still relate to each other,” he now warns the prime minister that no one else on the kibbutz even “knows the meaning of compassion”:¹²⁸

“Quite simply, sir, you’ll need all the pity you can get, because this country is surrounded on all sides by such bottomless pits of hatred. And has such bottomless pits of loneliness, because no one can stand anyone else. And this, if you ask me—I mean all the loneliness, the backbiting,

¹²⁵ Ibid., 267.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 369.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 286.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 289.

and the hatred, is not only the very opposite of Zionism, it's a sure prescription for disaster. No one loves anymore. No one even loves you, sir...If we Jews hate each other so much, why be surprised that the Gentiles hate us? Or the Arabs?...And then there's Udi and Etan and your son Amos, who do nothing all day but talk of killing the Arabs. This is a snake pit, not a country. A jungle, not a commune. Death, not Zionism."¹²⁹

Thus, Azariah has become less idealistic while on the kibbutz, and Yonatan has become more understanding while in the desert. They trade lives for a while, with Azariah settling down and Yonatan on the run. Then, Yonatan returns and they share a life. They are each a son to Yolek and a husband to Rimona. It is unclear which is the father of Rimona's child. They have come into fulfillment though relating to one another, seeing through the other's eyes, and living in community. Their opposing views of the inheritance left by the first generation of Israelis balance into a qualified acceptance and appreciation. While this balance is occurring among these younger men, there is also a transition among the older men, Yolek and Srulik. Oz uses letters and diary entries to give the reader insight into the private thoughts of these two. He has written that Srulik is the character most like himself that he has ever created.¹³⁰ In the transition from Yolek's leadership to Srulik's, Oz seems to portray a movement to a more compassionate philosophy. Like the synthesis of the two younger characters, the succession of the two older characters achieves a balancing of extremes.

Yolek and Srulik: Oz's Own Personality Comes Through

Yolek has dedicated his life to Zionism, the kibbutz movement, and his particular kibbutz. He is secretary of the kibbutz, is involved in state politics, and has personal relationships with the prime minister and other important leaders. He is an idealist

¹²⁹ Ibid., 288.

¹³⁰ Oz, "Between Europe and the Negev Desert," 63.

coming to terms with the shortcomings of the Israeli state. He thinks that all their goals have been accomplished—the land is settled and cultivated, and Israel is a home for Jews now; it should be a time for celebration—but wonders “why, then, this chill in an old heart?”¹³¹ He thinks of the current period, winter 1965, as a “winter between wars.”¹³² In Tel Aviv for government meetings, someone asks if he is worried about the precarious situation of Israel, and he replies ““And when did Jews ever have it better?””¹³³

Considering the green park benches that could make one think one was in Europe, he still is aware of a chill in his own heart. The heart has such a chill because, despite the good life here, there are threats—the founding generation is going to die soon and their dreams are unfulfilled.¹³⁴ He fears that all has been in vain. Oz develops this sentiment in more detail in a letter Yolek writes to Prime Minister Eshkol and never sends:

In vain, my friend, was all our devotion, in vain all our dreams, in vain all the years we plotted with subtle cunning to save the Jewish people—*na*, these Yids of ours—from their own hands and those of the Gentiles. An ill wind is tearing it all up now. Pulling it up by the roots. I tell you, it’s the end of everything. The cities. The towns. The kibbutzim. And worst of all, of course, the youth. The Devil has had the last laugh. We simply carried the virus of Jewish exile with us to this country, and now we see a new exile sprouting right under our nose. We’ve gone from the frying pan to the fire, I tell you.¹³⁵

The primary reason he feels their work was in vain is that the new generation does not want to carry it on. The ideal that motivated Yolek’s generation to pioneer the land for Jews has been lost in the face of violent aggression and territorial competition. It is no wonder, then, that the younger generation is less enthusiastic or idealistic about making Israel work. Yolek writes of his frustration with Yonatan’s feelings that “his own life

¹³¹ Oz, *A Perfect Peace*, 106.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

belongs to him—not to his people, not to his kibbutz, not to the movement, and not even to his parents.”¹³⁶ Yolek then claims responsibility for Yonatan’s seemingly selfish attitude, stating that his own dedication to the movement, to his kibbutz, and to his people kept him from raising his sons with the attention they required. They were exposed to the culture of the “hawk” Zionists, as Oz calls them, instead of the idealistic Zionism of Yolek. He writes, in pain:

The one real culprit is none other than Ben-Gurion. He and his lunatic Canaanite theories about the new generation of biblical Gideons and Nimrods that we were going to raise here, a pack of wild prairie wolves instead of little rabbis. No more Marxes, Freuds, and Einsteins... no, from now on nothing but sunburned, ignorant, illiterate warriors, Joabs and Abners and Ehuds.¹³⁷

The threats of the surrounding world led to the empowerment of those who espoused a more pragmatic leadership style—one that centered on defense and expansion of territory instead of the ideals of wisdom, love, and community. But Yolek does not only blame Ben-Gurion—he also blames those of his own generation who have not helped to establish the state of Israel. In a letter to Benyamin Trotsky (who lived on the kibbutz earlier and may have been Yonatan’s biological father), Yolek writes that because of Trotsky’s lack of commitment to Zionism and the kibbutz movement, he would be responsible for its failure: “It’s not Hitler or Nasser but you and the likes of you who will be responsible, I repeat, *responsible*, for the destruction of the Third Temple.”¹³⁸ It is not only Benyamin’s lack of commitment, but also his influence and that of others like him on the younger generation. He is in America, financially successful and free from the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 154.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 155.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 191.

threat of war and the duty to serve in Israel; his happiness gives young people a reason to be less committed to Israel. Yolek continues his letter:

My Yoni, in whom I hoped to see our dreams come true, the first of a new line of Jews whose children and children's children would grow up in this land to put an end to the malignancy of the Exile. And now the Exile is back again, masquerading as a rich uncle.¹³⁹

Yolek never questions the rightness of Zionism or the necessity of the state of Israel. He recognizes that the experiment of Israel and the kibbutz may not work, and it breaks his heart. He attaches blame to those Jews who have not advanced the cause, or who have allowed the cause to be manipulated into a territorial or colonial one. He leaves his post as secretary “entirely drained of the old passions and principles that had guided him all his life.”¹⁴⁰ Srulik takes his place as secretary with a less passionate and more rational view of the situation in Israel and on the kibbutz.

One of the first glimpses the reader has of Srulik is when another older gentleman complains to him that ““Everything in sight is falling apart. The kibbutz. The country. The youth.””¹⁴¹ The man asks Srulik whether he believes that the foundations of Israel were faulty or if only the changing external landscape caused the breakdown in ideals. Srulik's reply is ““There's no reason to despair. We've been through worse times, and thank God we're still here. There've always been crises and always will be, but don't think for a minute we've reached the end of the road.””¹⁴² His view of Israel's future is more open than that of Yolek. He has no sons of his own, which may make him less eager to see the next generation carry on exactly as he and his peers had hoped long before. He is empathetic to the unique experiences of the younger generation and its

¹³⁹ Ibid., 192.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 194.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 177.

¹⁴² Ibid., 178.

unique problems. After Yonatan has left the kibbutz, Srulik writes in his journal with wonder that the younger generation can accomplish so efficiently what he and his peers had to struggle to do. They are able to farm well and fight well, but “always with an air of melancholy” and as if they are “another race.”¹⁴³ The experiences of the younger generation are nothing like those of their fathers.

What can their lives mean to them, raised in this whirlwind of history, this place-in-progress, this experiment-under-construction, this merest blueprint of a country, with no grandparents, no ancestral homes, no religion, no rebellion, no *Wanderjahre* of their own?¹⁴⁴

Without the common identity of a European birthplace and childhood, the adventure of pioneering Palestine, and the unrealized dreams of creating a new state, it is naturally difficult for the younger generation to espouse the same feelings as the parents. Oz writes that “every fulfillment of a dream is a flawed fulfillment”;¹⁴⁵ the second generation of Israelis knows only the flawed realization of the dream, not the idealized version that led their parents to make it happen in the first place. Srulik has an appreciation for this and is willing to accept the new direction that Israelis might take in the next generation. Unlike Yolek, he has let go of the old passions not out of despair, but out of a realization that other possibilities might be good too. He writes in his diary:

Of all the commandments in the Bible, of all our latter-day commandments—kibbutz-movement, national, socialist—the only one that still matters to me is the one against pain. No rubbing salt into wounds. *Thou shalt not cause pain.* Not to oneself either.¹⁴⁶

Srulik’s motivations have changed from a passion like Yolek’s (to create an idealistic society at all costs) to a desire to make life as pain-free as possible for everyone. He is

¹⁴³ Ibid., 225.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Oz, “Between Europe and the Negev Desert,” 59.

¹⁴⁶ Oz, *A Perfect Peace*, 227.

moved to comfort people in spite of the challenges and disappointments of life. Recognizing the impossibility of a perfect fulfillment of the dream that had led to the creation of Israel to begin with, he does not despair, but hopes for the best possible version of the dream. As I mentioned earlier, Oz feels that Srulik is more autobiographical than any other character he has created. He says that Srulik was able to change his perspective and value other points of view:

In some respects, he is my mouthpiece. He wants to protect people from pain or at least teach them how to accept and live with pain. How to avoid fanaticism. How to realize that everything is relative. But one can only realize this if one changes one's perspective. I use the musical term "polyphony" to illustrate the fact that I have always tried to tell stories from several points of view.¹⁴⁷

Srulik, then, is the ideal. He is passionate and has worked for his passions, but when the time comes, he understands opposing points of view and he values them. He is flexible enough to accept other people's identities and is rational enough to make choices that respect those identities and lead to the best possible situation given the circumstances. While Yonatan and Azariah had to reach a more understanding philosophy by colliding with one another, Srulik grows into wisdom simply by being observant, understanding, rational, and loving. This is the ideal that Oz presents in the novel. He "wants to protect people from pain" by helping readers to visualize other possibilities for the future of Israel—ones that may not depend on a perfect realization of the Zionist dreams. Oz writes, "I do not believe in the possibility of a perfect peace," because he believes humanity is cut from "a crooked timber."¹⁴⁸ The solution, for him, is to try to understand each other and the many sides of the story. In this way he answers the call of Thich Nhat Hanh, using his work to "make the truth available," the truth that may not be reflected

¹⁴⁷ Oz, "Between Europe and the Negev Desert," 63-64.

¹⁴⁸ Oz, "Peace and Love and Compromise," 77.

simply in facts. In *A Perfect Peace*, Oz presents multiple sides of the same story. He portrays the complexity of Israeli identity in a way that makes it possible to visualize a productive way for the story to continue. As someone with a voice, he is telling the story in a way that includes those who may have no voice. He is imagining grace for his readers in the spirit of Toni Morrison. He recognizes that his voice does not have the immediate impact that the voices of politicians have, but he is able to do what they can not do in “scrutinizing the past.” While his words might reach fewer people than those of political leaders, the impact of his words may be more deeply felt. This phenomenon continues into the next chapter, which examines the efforts of soldiers and citizens to transform collective memory by telling their own stories.

CHAPTER 4

TRUMPING THE NARRATIVE OF VICTIMHOOD

We understood that what we had displayed at the exhibition about our Hebron experience was only the tip of the iceberg most of which is still hidden from view. We understood that an opportunity has fallen into our laps: the right to break a small tip of that iceberg, to break the silence.... We understood that we had opened a crack in the door; we understood that our role was not over, we understood that we had to continue, to listen and record what these soldiers have to say, and put all this together and expose it to our fellow Israeli citizens.... It is our intention to open the crack of the door wider, through which the Israeli public will receive information about what their sons and daughters do during their military service in the Occupied Territories.¹⁴⁹

Amos Oz's work clearly has had an impact on the Israeli collective memory, in that his books are widely read. Many Israelis know his stories. When he first began to write, though, he was unknown. His first political piece was written shortly after the 1967 war, when he was an obscure kibbutznik who sent an article against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to a Labor party newspaper. His career developed over many years, after many publications. His influence grew to be significant, though it began as just one voice among many. Now, late in his career, he tells his own personal story. He adds his own personal narrative to the collective memory, in addition to the many he has created in his fiction. In *Tale of Love and Darkness*, he puts forth his own experiences as a child, teenager, and adult in Israel. According to his daughter, the memoir

portrays Zionism and the creation of Israel as a historical necessity for a people faced with the threat of extinction. It acknowledges the original sin of Israel—the displacement and suffering of the Palestinians—but, at the same time, defends Zionism against some on the European left and among

¹⁴⁹ Yehuda Shaul, "Breaking the Silence: The Next Phase," July 2004. <<http://www.refusingtokill.net/Israel/breakingthesilence.htm>> (March 21, 2005).

the Israeli New Historians who challenge the state's claim to legitimacy even now, almost six decades after its founding.¹⁵⁰

The memoir tells how, for years, in Europe, Oz's father had seen graffiti in German and Russian and Ukrainian: "Jews Go Home to Palestine." Then, years later, as a citizen of Israel, he saw new signs: "Jews Out of Palestine." In this way, Oz conveys the paradoxical nature of the State of Israel along with very personal pain of his father, among the first generation of Israelis, and thus justifies his support of Zionism's ideals. Even while he insists on the humanity of all people, including Palestinians, he prioritizes Israeli security, supporting a two-state solution to the land problem and believing that the separation wall is necessary.¹⁵¹ His memoir will be published in Arabic, only the third of Oz's works to be available in Arabic. This will be done not because Oz or his financial supporters expect the personal narrative to "convert" Arab readers into Zionists, but because they hope that the exchange will have value as, in Oz's words "a peek through the window, a chance to see the lives of other people."¹⁵² The memoir extensively covers many aspects of Oz's life, but is noticeably lacking in details about his military experiences. Although he served in the 1967 war and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he says:

It is difficult for me, either in an interview or in a book, to talk about the experience of fighting. I have never written about the battlefield, because I don't think I could convey the experience of fighting to people who have not been on the battlefield....A description of the battlefield that does not contain the stench and the fear is not sufficient....I tried writing about it a couple of times a long time ago. I destroyed the drafts when I realized that the language, at least mine, could not contain this experience.¹⁵³

While Oz does not recount battlefield experiences in his nonfiction, he does discuss some military-related experiences. He tells of the reversal of identity that occurred between his

¹⁵⁰ David Remnick, "The Spirit Level: Amos Oz Writes the Story of Israel," *The New Yorker*, November 11, 2004 <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?041108fa_fact> (March 21, 2005).

¹⁵¹ Remnick, "The Spirit Level."

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

boyhood, during which he had nightmares about the uniformed British occupiers in Israel and Arab enemies, and his adulthood, in which found he himself a uniformed occupier with a machine gun in the West Bank.¹⁵⁴ Oz's military experiences also surface in his fiction. In *A Perfect Peace*, Yonatan is haunted by his memory of a time during war when he and his peers put a dead Syrian in the driver's seat of a tank and put a lit cigarette in his mouth. The act shows that the young soldiers hardly thought of their opponents as human. Later, the memory haunts him and he wonders what "Spinoza would say about that? That we were animals? Murderers? The dregs of humanity?"¹⁵⁵ Earlier he mentions the same memory to his friend Udi and tells him that the stories they were told as a child were "the most colossal fraud there ever was."¹⁵⁶ These stories include some about the neighboring Arab village of Sheikh Dahr, which was destroyed by the Israelis. His skepticism of the narrative is evident in the way he relays it to Rimona:

"A nest of killers, they told us in our childhood. A den of bloody bandits. And once it was leveled, they told us we could sleep in peace at night. The minaret from which they sniped right into the kibbutz had been sliced in two halfway up by a direct mortar hit, a hit, so they say, that was aimed by the commander in chief of the Jewish forces himself."¹⁵⁷

It seems that Yonatan's experiences in the army reflected his upbringing, in that he was always taught to view Arabs as an enemy rather than as a human. At some point, he came to realize this about himself, and he was haunted by his own actions. Perhaps this fictional account was crafted to express what Oz writes in an essay, that "It's not the army which shapes the nation but rather the nation which shapes the army."¹⁵⁸ This is exactly the point that some Israeli soldiers have tried to make in their museum exhibit,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Oz, *A Perfect Peace*, 200.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵⁸ Oz, "Between Europe and the Negev Desert," 53.

Breaking the Silence. These soldiers pick up where Oz leaves off in the sharing of narratives for the purpose of healing, in much the same way that Oz and other writers continue when politicians cannot. While Oz anguishes over the fact that his words cannot convey the horrors of war, no matter how carefully crafted, some soldiers have decided simply to tell their stories in whatever words and pictures they can.

Breaking the Silence: Soldiers Speak Out

Yehuda Shaul and his peers served as Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers in the West Bank town of Hebron, and in the summer of 2004 their photographs and testimonies about the occupation were the subject of an exhibit at a Tel Aviv museum. The exhibit was called *Breaking the Silence*, and its purposes, according to Shaul, were twofold: “for the Israeli public to know what we’re really doing in Hebron and what its doing to us.”¹⁵⁹ Hebron, which is a town in the occupied West Bank, is home to more than 150,000 Palestinians and about 500 Israeli settlers.¹⁶⁰ Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have militants in Hebron, and the Israeli settlers are viewed as some of the “most extreme in Israel,” making for a volatile and hostile situation.¹⁶¹ The soldiers who organized the exhibition wanted their families to gain a better understanding of their military experience, and they wanted the Israeli public to know that military service is demoralizing to their young men and women. One soldier relays the following testimony:

They used to send us to do guard-duty near the battalion headquarters, in Harsina. It was Friday night, and the auxiliary company came up against a

¹⁵⁹ CPTnet, “‘Breaking the silence’ about Israeli soldier’s experiences in Hebron,” June 25, 2004. <<http://www.cpt.org/archives/2004/jun04/0033.html>> (March 21, 2005).

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Bio Data – Hebron” November 25, 2004. <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/OCHA_Body-ASP_Files/Coordination_Sec/OCHA-oPt_FCU_BIOs_PDFs/OCHA-oPt_Hebron-FCU_Bio_Data-25Nov04.pdf> (March 21, 2005).

¹⁶¹ Amos Oz, interview by Julie McCarthy, “All Things Considered: Israeli Soldiers’ Photos Illuminate Occupation,” National Public Radio, June 23, 2004.

terrorist cell, the auxiliary company was also stationed in Harsina, they eliminated two terrorists, killed two terrorists. Friday night dinner was, of course, a very happy affair, two terrorists exterminated, it was on the news, well-publicized in the media, the whole base was jumping. As I was leaving dinner, an armored ambulance arrived with the terrorists' corpses, and the sight which was revealed to me just after this delicious meal, was of two terrorists' corpses being held up in a standing position by three people who were posing for photographs. Even I was shocked by this sight, I closed my eyes so as not to see and walked away, I really didn't feel like looking at terrorists' corpses. I think your judgment gets a little impaired when everyday...when your enemy is an Arab or somebody else who in your eyes...like, you don't look at him as a person standing in front of you, but as the enemy, and this is the word for him: enemy. He is not a dog, he is not some animal, you don't think of him as inferior, he simply doesn't count. Period. He is not...he is your enemy, and if he's the enemy, you kill him. And if it's him that you kill, once you've killed him, then it seems that there's nothing worse you can do to him, but apparently there is.¹⁶²

This story is similar to that experienced by Yonatan in *A Perfect Peace*. The gathering of these stories by these soldiers is a reflection of their growing sense that "these memories are common to all the guys who served alongside us," and that people in Tel Aviv, only an hour away, were unaware of what was going on in Hebron:

We decided to speak out. We decided to tell our stories. Hebron is not on another planet; it's an hour's drive from Jerusalem. But Hebron is light years away from Tel Aviv. So we decided to bring Hebron to Tel Aviv. Now, it's up to you to come, look, and listen.¹⁶³

Six thousand people came, looked, and listened, before the Israeli Military Police raided the exhibit on June 22, confiscating video clips and a folder of information. The police held three of the organizers for over six hours of questioning that day.¹⁶⁴ The charges were presumably the very actions that the soldiers were there confessing. Such treatment is not uncommon for soldiers who speak out and urge others to refuse to serve. Unlike

¹⁶² Oznik.com. "Occupying Hebron." June 30, 2004. <http://oznik.com/words/040630_b.html> (March 21, 2005).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ CPTnet, "Breaking the silence."

those efforts, however, these soldiers did not ask others to refuse to serve. This distinction between *Breaking The Silence* and the “Refusenik” or “Refuser” movements is important.

The term “refuseniks” was used in Israel to describe the Jews of the Soviet Union who were not permitted to emigrate to Israel during the 1967 war, but the term has resurfaced in recent years as the number of people avoiding service in the IDF has risen since the inception of the second intifada in 2000. Alisa Solomon reported in 2001 that since the intifada began, 200 soldiers had refused to serve on the grounds that Israel’s treatment of Palestinians amounts to “war crimes” and that many more “found a way to dodge the draft” or “a reason for early discharge.”¹⁶⁵ Few had spoken publicly about their dissent and disapproval of the government’s policies in the Occupied Territories. The “Refuser” Movement, which officially began in October 2003 when Jonathan Shapira issued the “Pilots’ Letter,” gives a louder voice to the protest by soldiers of IDF policies. The letter, in which 28 pilots state that they will refuse to participate in attacks on Palestinian territory, calls on one of the three “basic values” of the Israeli Defense Force, that of

Human Dignity - The IDF and its soldiers are obligated to protect human dignity. Every human being is of value regardless of his or her origin, religion, nationality, gender, status or position.¹⁶⁶

Because of the abuses they had witnessed and in which they had sometimes participated (wittingly or otherwise), these soldiers have felt compelled to call for a return to an ideal that is “actually more consistent with the person’s own, pre-existing value system.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Alisa Solomon, “Refuseniks: Draft Resistance Grows in Israel,” *The Village Voice*. August 22-28, 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Israeli Defense Force Ethics. <www.idf.il> The other two “basic values” are defense of state, citizens, and residents; and love of the homeland and loyalty to the country.

¹⁶⁷ Kelman, “Reconciliation as Identity Change,” 111-124.

They have recognized that the current actions, which rely on a narrative of victimhood and dehumanization of the enemy, are not consistent with the higher ideals of their nation and their organization. These soldiers encourage others to refuse to serve in the military until changes are made in the policies pertaining to Palestinians and the Occupied Territories. The soldiers in the *Breaking the Silence* exhibit, however, have not made such a request. Instead, they are trying to change the situation by asking their country to take an honest look at what service means and to alter the narrative of victimhood.

The reception of this exhibit, however, was not meaningfully warmer than that of the Refuser Movement. Taking such an honest inventory of the situation, without the possibility of discounting the exhibitors based on an abandonment of duty (since they completed their service and did not attempt to encourage others to refuse) forced those who visited the exhibit to consider difficult questions. A report aired on National Public Radio described a debate between two visitors of the exhibit about whether 18 year-olds could be held responsible for their conduct in a combat zone. Yehuda Shaul answered: “I take responsibility for my actions, but I am telling you, as the Israeli society who sent me there, to take responsibility as well.”¹⁶⁸ Others oppose the way that the information is presented. Some have complained that the exhibit focuses only on the wrongs committed by Israeli soldiers and settlers without mention of the violence by Palestinians in the area. These challenges, however, are part of any effort to change collective memory. The exhibit and its challengers demonstrate that there is a plurality of stories. Both Israelis and Palestinians have been victimized by violence in the Occupied Territories. The exhibitors are making an effort to bring balance to what they feel is a one-sided narrative: that of Israeli vulnerability, righteousness, and victimhood. The opposition to the exhibit

¹⁶⁸ Oz, “All Things Considered: Israeli Soldiers’ Photos Illuminate Occupation”

feeds the discussion. In fact, the raid by Israeli police is the event that caused the media in the United States to cover the exhibit, thus showing that the controversy was beneficial for publicity. Some doubt the potential of the *Breaking the Silence* message and the refusers to influence Israeli leadership. Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, dismissed the movement as “a handful of people asking Israelis to commit an illegal act.”¹⁶⁹ Oz, however, writes about the power that young soldiers have to change the way the military operates: “Even today, this army frequently operates as a youth movement, dependent far more on argument and debate than on carrying out orders.”¹⁷⁰ If true, the stories of these soldiers could have a deep impact on the future of the occupation. Even if the testimonies do not have an immediate impact on the day-to-day operations of the IDF in the Occupied Territories, they will add to, and therefore transform, Israeli collective narrative. In addition to the refusers and the *Breaking the Silence* soldiers, others are sharing their personal testimonies to diffuse the notion that all Israelis and all Jews agree with the actions of Israel.

Wrestling With Zion: Reflecting the Heterogeneity of Jewish Thought

Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon collected and published essays by people they call “progressive” American Jews in a book called *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.¹⁷¹ Their introduction states the purpose of the compilation, which is to correct

a widespread but relatively recent conflation of Judaism and Jewish identity with Israel and Israeli nationalist identity [which] has done a

¹⁶⁹ Beth Alexander, “Israeli ‘Refuser’ Speaks Out in Washington,” *Washington Times*, July 14, 2004.

¹⁷⁰ Oz, “Between Europe and the Negev Desert,” 53.

¹⁷¹ Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, eds. *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

grave disservice to the heterogeneity of Jewish thought, to the centuries-old Jewish traditions of lively dispute and rigueur, unapologetic skeptical inquiry.

While the essays do not offer solutions to the problems of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or to the problems that arise from the diversity of thought among Jews, they do offer an alternative to the mainstream American media's pro-Israel proclivities. Erin Scharff, who reviewed the book for the *Yale Israel Journal*, writes that while "few, if any, of the essays will be of lasting importance," the work is still significant because it is one step toward "a more heterodox understanding of the Jewish relationship to Zionism."¹⁷²

Judith Butler's essay "The Charge of Anti-Semitism" is featured in *Wrestling With Zion* (as well as in her own book, *Precarious Life*). She is a professor of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, and she is Jewish. Butler writes in response to Harvard President Larry Summer's statement that criticisms of Israel are anti-Semitic in their effect if not in their intent, "stoking the fear that to criticize Israel during this time is to expose oneself to the charge of anti-Semitism."¹⁷³ She points out that this correlation between Jews and the state of Israel is exactly the type of reductionism that makes anti-Semitism so painfully offensive. There is in fact a diverse range of opinions among Jews regarding the appropriateness of Israeli actions, and opposition to Israeli occupation is not the same as denial of the right of Israel to exist. While expressing her "profound revulsion at anti-Semitism," Butler calls for a critical evaluation of the practice of the state of Israel:

It seems, though, that historically we are now in the position in which Jews cannot be understood always and only as presumptive victims. Sometimes we surely are, but sometimes we surely are not. No political ethics can start with the assumption that Jews monopolize the position of

¹⁷² Erin Scharff, "Wrestling with Zion's Critics," *Yale Israel Journal* (Winter 2004).

¹⁷³ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 102.

victim. The “victim” is a quickly transposable term, and it can shift from minute to minute from the Jew atrociously killed by suicide bombers on a bus to the Palestinian child atrociously killed by Israeli gunfire. The public sphere needs to be one in which *both* kinds of violence are challenged instantly and in the name of justice.¹⁷⁴

Butler calls for an abandonment of binaries in politics, in Israel as well as in the United States. She challenges her readers to “change the conditions of reception so that the public might begin to learn a crucial distinction between a criticism of Israel, on the one hand, and hatred of Jews, on the other.”¹⁷⁵ Her distinction is key to opening the discourse and allowing the truths of the Israeli collective narrative—with its beauty and its flaws—to emerge and be examined. By separating Jewishness from Israeli nationalism, a clearer story can take shape, one that adheres to the higher ideals of Jewish identity. Butler, Solomon, Kushner, Shaul, Shapira, Oz, and all of those who offer personal stories to the public domain are transforming collective memory. By adding to the narrative of Israel, these stories broaden the collective identity of Israelis and Jews, making room for plurality, understanding, and reconciliation. These personal stories go ever further than the rhetoric of politicians and the eloquence of professional writers to disseminate understanding. While each story may reach fewer people, the effect can be enormous, as one person’s courage to break the silence will aid another in taking the same step.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 106.

CHAPTER 5

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND POSSIBLE FUTURE STUDY

Contrary to many Western societies, Israel, very much like societies in the Balkans, is still very torn by ideology. The state itself is a powerful apparatus of indoctrination and those challenging it are principally motivated by what can only be called an ideological outlook—a future vision based on a particular interpretation of the past in order either to alter or preserve the present.¹⁷⁶

The Israeli past and collective interpretations of its history will guide its future. Memory is in this way connected with reality and vision. In order to establish a policy that will honor the higher ideals of the nations, such as respect for human dignity, there must be an honest look at the past and the present. In order for such an honest examination to occur, the diverse plurality of stories must be told and received with an open mind. This paper has considered three vehicles for the transmission of a national story: political rhetoric, fiction, and personal testimony. Each has unique capabilities and limitations. Menachem Begin's rhetoric illustrates the flexibility of the narrative and the possibility for changing the direction of the story without changing its raw material. He successfully transformed his public interpretation of the story of Israel while holding fast to its biblical roots. Never abandoning the notion that his people were chosen to occupy the Holy Land, Begin moved from using the chosen status to justify displacement of non-Israelis to a perspective in which there is a possibility of seeing non-Israelis as brothers.

¹⁷⁶ Ilan Pappé, "The Square Circle: The Struggle for Survival of Traditional Zionism," in *The Challenge of Post Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, ed. Ephraim Nimni (London: Zed Books, 2003), 43.

Begin's ability to transform memory was limited, as Amos Oz points out, by the natural order of politics, which requires a degree of erasing the past, to reduce tensions. Writers, on the other hand, have an ability and a duty to "open the old wounds," subjecting the narrative to a harsher analysis, instead of smoothly transforming it through public speeches that are intended to increase goodwill and make everyone feel good.¹⁷⁷ Writers such as Oz can present the full complexity of the narrative, using fiction to reveal truths that may be missed in the heat of an extended conflict. In *A Perfect Peace*, Oz makes clear the diversity of memory among kibbutzniks, within each generation and between the two. His presentation of the inner and spoken thoughts of the characters in the novel expresses the plurality of views that are present in Israel. He uses the novel to explore the depth and complexity of the situation in a way that he could not have done with nonfiction writing.

This technique of fictional rememory also has its limitations. Fewer people read his works than heard Begin's speeches. Readers may discount the fictional characters in a way that they would not discount the personal testimony of their neighbors, whom they can see, touch, and address directly. Oz, perhaps because of these limitations, added his own personal testimony to the collective narrative with his memoir *Tale of Love and Darkness*. In this work, he can be specific about why his views are what they are. He tells of the pain his father experiences as a European Jew and a first generation Israeli. Oz also refers to his own identity challenge when, after growing up, he became an occupying soldier like those he feared during his childhood. His testimony, however is silent about battlefield experiences, which he feels are too difficult to translate into words on a page.

¹⁷⁷ Oz, "From Jerusalem to Cairo," 34.

His work is then taken up by non-writers, soldiers and citizens. The *Breaking the Silence* exhibit and speeches and publications by “refusers” add to the collective memory certain truths about the occupation that may not otherwise be known by Israelis who do not have to serve in the Occupied Territories. The organizers of the *Breaking the Silence* exhibit are motivated by the need to “open the crack of the door wider, though which Israelis receive information about what their sons and daughters do during military service in the Occupied Territories.”¹⁷⁸ Their message reached more than six thousand visitors while on display in Tel Aviv. Its reach was limited by a raid of the IDF, by the difficulty that the visitors had in accepting the truth that these soldiers revealed, and by the lack of media coverage. Still, even as fewer people are reached, as this paper moved from politicians to writers to soldiers, the stories have a deeper impact. Many of the visitors to the exhibit were family members of the soldiers, their neighbors, and acquaintances. These visitors will not discount so easily the testimonies of people they know so well. Their stories, along with those of Oz and Begin, will have an impact on collective memory by broadening the collective narrative. There are limitations to the effectiveness of such transformations in collective memory, however, and those must be addressed here.

The first limitation of efforts to alter the collective memory of a group in conflict by including opposing stories is that there are risks involved in doing so. These grand narratives serve a purpose, after all. Without the sense of connectedness fostered by the grand narrative, groups would not have the cohesiveness necessary to function as a unified society. The state of Israel could not have formed or survived to this point without a collective identity, which has often relied upon a sense of victimhood. Transformations

¹⁷⁸ Shaul, “Breaking the Silence: The Next Phase.”

in collective memory will have a disastrous effect if they lead to utter fragmentation of the society. There must be enough cohesiveness for the group to survive as a group. This risk is mitigated when the changes made to the group identity are “actually more consistent with the person’s own, pre-existing value system.”¹⁷⁹ In each case I studied here, from Begin, to Oz, to the soldiers speaking out about the occupation, the story is being altered in a way that makes it more consistent with the ideals of Judaism, the state of Israel, and the military itself. Even with this requirement being met, there are still more limitations on the effect of this type of discourse. One is that it is useless if not accompanied by some change in policy.

As is evident in the diverse reactions to the refuser movement and the *Breaking the Silence* exhibit, the sharing of these stories may not lead to an immediate change in the hearts of the listeners, or in the policies of the state or the military. Unless the testimonies result in a change in the way Israel behaves with respect to the Palestinians, it is difficult to argue that they have accomplished anything. Similarly, Begin’s change of tune is only significant because it accompanied an agreement relinquishing the Sinai to Egypt. The internal identity change that may be accomplished by adding to collective memory must naturally bring a corresponding external change. The external changes, however, may follow the internal transformation. It is possible that a critical mass of opposing stories is needed before radical policy changes are possible. In that case, one should not discount the efforts of some to share testimonies and change opinions simply because they do not lead immediately to the end of the occupation.

A third limitation of the ability of narrative to change collective memory in this way is that, as Scharff comments on the *Wrestling with Zion* volume, “there are only so

¹⁷⁹ Kelman, “Reconciliation as Identity Change,” 111-124.

many versions of the ‘I discovered Palestinian suffering’ story to be told.”¹⁸⁰ The idea, then, is not to inundate each listener with a multitude of testimonies, but to see that these testimonies reach as many people as possible. This is the benefit of using so many media to reach people, making even truer the statement by Thich Nhat Hanh that the work of “making the truth available” is the responsibility of “writers, preachers, and the media, and also [religious] practitioners.”¹⁸¹ This list is not complete. Surely it is the work of each person, and as more people learn the stories, the change in collective memory will have to have an impact. The South African experience is evidence for that: international pressure, which was developed as people around the world learned the stories of apartheid, is what ultimately led to the end of apartheid. Such international pressure is not a factor in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, largely due to the protection of the United States and the ability of Israel to control the media. Each testimony is valuable when it reaches a fresh set of ears or tells the story in a way it has not been told before. The cumulative effect will make the status quo impossible.

A limitation of this paper in particular could be that it was able only to explore Israeli narratives. Clearly, the Palestinian stories must be also given a louder voice. Those who do not have a way to make themselves heard often resort to violence and terrorism. Even Nelson Mandela, Nobel Peace Prize winner, writes honestly about the decision of the African National Congress to establish a paramilitary organization. In the process of developing the idea, Mandela and other leaders considered terrorism.¹⁸² Luckily, the group did not have to resort to such tactics, since their other efforts, coupled with

¹⁸⁰ Scharff, “Wrestling with Zion’s Critics.”

¹⁸¹ Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 82.

¹⁸² Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1995), 282.

international pressure, led to the end of apartheid without terrorist acts on the part of the paramilitary group (other types of violence, such as sabotage, were in fact used). The point is that both sides need a voice. The cases presented here demonstrate the flexibility of collective memory, its ability to transform and incorporate new stories, as well as the plurality of stories that are becoming a part of the collective memory in Israel. In order for a peaceful future to be possible, Israel must also develop a collective narrative that reflects the diversity of opinion among its citizens and allows for an acknowledgment of the humanity of Palestinians. The relationship of Palestinians with Israel, as with the rest of the world, would likely improve through an exchange of stories. Oz's personal memoir will be translated into Arabic. Perhaps more Palestinian stories will be available in Hebrew. This would be the direction of the current project were it to continue.

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Collective memory refers to the shared pool of memories, knowledge and information of a social group that is significantly associated with the group's identity. The English phrase "collective memory" and the equivalent French phrase "la m moire collective" appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. The philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs analyzed and advanced the concept of the collective memory in the book "Les cadres sociaux de la m moire" (1925). Collective memory can be