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'Memory is a polluted stream'
Julia O'Faolain, *No Country for Young Men*

Commemoration of fallen soldiers is, as one might expect, a salient feature in the life of the beleaguered State of Israel. While it follows the modern cult of young heroes,[1] the Israeli case has its own characteristics, the most prominent of which is the 'literature of commemoration' (Hebrew, *sifrut ha-hantzaha*). The term refers to the books and booklets, for the most part privately published and distributed by the families and/or friends of the dead soldiers. This form of spontaneous commemoration — that is, that produced by cells of civil society rather than by the state — is even more popular than monuments; approximately one dead soldier in three figures in a 'book of commemoration'. The booklets still occupy pride of place in the library of many an Israeli home. It is often through them that the children born after a war (or too young when it takes place) are exposed to its experience. Moreover, this folk literature constitutes a unique attempt to catch and preserve the individuality of the fallen, going beyond the mere mention of their name (and circumstances of death). Each soldier or group of soldiers (members of the same kibbutz or moshav, graduates of the same high school, members of the same platoon, etc.), have many pages consecrated to them; the biography of each and every one is composed by family, friends, teachers or comrades-in-arms, often illustrated with photos; parts of diaries or letters are published; other creative mementoes, such as drawings, add their own singular touch.

These books, or more frequently, booklets, appeared in large numbers in Israel during the years immediately following the 1948 War of Independence (more than five hundred booklets in all). This

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was hardly surprising. The 1948 war was the bloodiest and longest of Israel's wars. Its 5,800 dead represented virtually one per cent of the Jewish population of Palestine (the *Yishuv*); in the most heavily hit age-group (19–21-year-olds), more than eight per cent of males were killed. Furthermore, the overall figure showed a quantum leap in the number of losses suffered by the *Yishuv* during the seventy years preceding the war. Even if one adds to those killed in violent conflicts with Arabs (ca. 800 up until 1947) the *Yishuv* volunteers killed in the ranks of the British army during the second world war, the total is only a quarter of those lost in the War of Independence. Future Israeli wars would be more intensive, but none would be as costly. The 1948 war — whose veterans are now reaching retirement age and whose dead represent one in three of all Israel's fallen — still casts a heavy shadow over the life of the nation, especially in the realm of collective memory and social imagination.

The emergence of the 'booklets of commemoration' thus contributes to the understanding of the Israeli cult of the fallen and the centrality of the 1948 experience within this framework. Patterns of this cult were shaped in the years just after the War of Independence and spread throughout society, helped by the impact of such books which became best-sellers. While the genre underwent various changes, especially from the late 1960s, most characteristics of this 'literature of commemoration' have remained the same. It is still the most authentic expression of the way civil society deals with the human losses resulting from the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Reaction to the death of a soldier is one of shock, a sense of loss and grief, among his relatives and friends. That is to say, it is an individual, intimate feeling. How does it coalesce with commemoration as a social act, celebrated in public? (For we are not referring here to those patterns of commemoration which remain in the private domain, such as hanging a picture of the dead son on the wall of the parental home, keeping his room as it was.)

The psychological study of mourning[2] locates this linkage of the private and the public, of intimate feeling and public behaviour, in the third stage of the grieving process (the first being a stage of initial shock and denial and the second a stage of disorientation and self-imposed isolation). During the third stage the bereaved recuperate, learn to distance themselves slowly from the dead, reactivate (or relearn) social norms of behaviour. Commemoration serves the bereaved in two senses: first, as a social activity which requires co-operation with others, including those who share, in differing degrees,

their sense of grief, providing them with social backing predicated upon affective empathy. Second, commemoration represents the objectification of the dead — in a monument or a booklet — thus helping the mourners to distance themselves from them and to form new relationships, while neither repressing their love for the dead or denying the very fact of their demise.

If commemorating is part and parcel of the rehabilitation of the bereaved, it is a rehabilitation of a special kind, in that it intends to contribute to society at large while at the same time endowing the death in question with meaning. It does not seek to divert one's mind from the dear departed or to provide substitutes for them (in activities, new relationships, etc.). It rather endeavours, by objectifying their individuality, to transfer their memory to a wider social circle. What they have represented for their intimates is sought to be transmitted to others. A personal-familial memory is integrated into collective memory.

It is no coincidence that most 'booklets of commemoration' appear on the first anniversary of the soldier's death. The Jewish traditional calendar of bereavement — followed *grosso modo* even by many secularized Israelis — dovetails with the insights of psychology, with the week after death, the rest of the first month, then the following eleven months, corresponding roughly to the three stages of the grieving period during which there is a lessening in the rigour of ritual obligations and a growing integration into the normal life of the community. The first anniversary is the ideal point for the completion of this rite of passage — or rather near-completion — for future anniversaries should enable the bereaved to deal with the lingering sense of loss. (Two-fifths of the booklets on the 1948 war appeared on the second to fifth anniversaries, and some continue to be published even today, usually by younger brothers and sisters.)

In order to objectify the private memories of the bereaved, and thus contribute to collective memory, a vast amount of social activity is called for: preparatory conversations, the establishment of an informal committee, fund-raising (rather limited in scale in the case of most booklets), the collection of documents, the soliciting of articles, the writing down of oral testimonials (sometimes at a special gathering — a typically Israeli ritual which even created a popular sub-genre of this literature, the so-called 'Comrades Talking about X'), some of which have become best sellers.[3] If one counts copy-editing, typing, production and distribution (usually to a privately drawn-up list of addresses), each booklet involves the help of at least a

dozen, but usually many more individuals, all associated in some way with the fallen soldier, shocked by his sudden violent and untimely death and trying, according to their varying degrees of intimacy with the departed, to cope with their sense of loss, while attempting — through this very social activity of writing and publishing — to enlarge the social circle for which his death may have a meaning. The dynamics of the support group and of group therapy are quite evident in these booklets, especially the reliance of parents on the help of comrades-in-arms (or friends) of their sons, and the collaboration between parents whose sons fell in the same battle.

Interviews conducted forty years later with editors of commemorative books, as well as remarks interspersed in the booklets themselves, indicate that the idea of commemoration was usually broached during the first month after death (sometimes during the first week), that is, prior to the ritual visitation of the tomb which in the Jewish bereavement process marks the end of the second stage. The decision to edit and to publish was taken either at that stage or during the months immediately after. The book form was, more often than not, the only or, if there were later moves to have a multiple commemoration, the first option discussed. The idea was usually first discussed at the moment when the definitiveness of the soldier's death pervaded the mind: the traumatic moment of viewing his body or — more typically — when the parent or friend stopped writing in their diary, 'I still cannot believe he is dead' — that is, when the first stage of the grieving process was unmistakably over.

The search for some commemorative activity took place in the early years of the State of Israel — as far as one can gather from the booklets — in association with those syndromes familiar to us from a study of first world war experiences: guilt feelings at the fact of one's survival, anger and hatred towards the enemy, thirst for vengeance. In the case of comrades-in-arms, who may have been suffering from cumulative fatigue, stupour and dullness of feeling due to the long months of war, the sudden and violent disappearance of someone close shattered all this and created a gaping wound. Alternatively, the first comrades killed — particularly in a tightly-knit unit like those coming out of youth movements and preparing for kibbutz life (hachshara) — could have been a terrible shock for seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, 'barely out of our parents' home and school, still immersed in the joyful spirit of the movement, and now facing those two inanimate, cold bodies of our friends', as one booklet put it.[4]

The guilt feeling among comrades-in-arms born out of their

survival due to sheer chance, is present in a different guise in the parents' generation. (Very few grandparents were involved, for they were not numerous in *Yishuv* families, founded for the most part by people who had immigrated young and without their own parents.) As one might perhaps expect, in a highly ideologized society, parents — but also teachers who are frequent contributors to booklets — evince a deep sense of responsibility for the soldier's death — an event viewed in a way as the end-result of having brought their children up to serve the nation. In a broader context, death is seen as the upshot of their very immigration into Palestine and the conflict with the Arabs engendered by the Zionist endeavour in which they have taken part. (When parents recount their own life-story in a booklet, they begin, as a rule, with their immigration; life in the Diaspora is, typically, disregarded.) In what was then a strongly conformist society, and in the context of a war deemed a 'good war', fought in self-defence and for the undisputed ideal of national independence, none of this gives rise to doubts, but it does provoke a sense of deep personal responsibility that needs to be resolved, made sense of and endowed with meaning, in order to mitigate grief. An appeal to history and reference to a historical context could be a means to that end, hence the urgency of contributing to history-writing through the activity of commemoration.

Underlying and intensifying all these feelings is a nagging fear, running through all the generations participating in the production of this folk historiography — namely, the fear that memory, personal, familial and particularly social, is fallible, that the fallen may very easily be forgotten, unless some rearguard battle against forgetfulness is fought. 'Why write about him? For whom? For what?' notes one bereaved father in his diary.

> I do not want this figure to sink like a stone in the Sea of Galilee, leaving a few momentary ripples and that's all. He was my son and thus, thanks to kinship, I may have understood this unique human being better than others. I've learnt from experience that one cannot sketch out an authentic description of a great figure without an intimate affinity. This affinity suggests, nay even commands me, to try to do just that for my son.[5]

At times editors and writers (especially of the parents' generation), however conformist, attest to their own anxieties that the Zionist dream may be turning sour — given certain Israeli realities of the 1950s (the decline of the pioneering ethos, party squabbles, corruption). They see the activity of commemoration, therefore, as a

response to the social ills which have developed: social amnesia of the values on which the state was established — values for the sake of which their sons have fallen. This complex of feelings is summed up by a telling term — the 'sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham', a term coined in 1930 by the poet Yitzhak Lamdan to describe the pioneering effort which was adopted by bereaved parents during the 1948 war and through them passed into current usage through the *Yizkor* books. In the Biblical story, let us remember, both father and son agree to obey the order; and even in the Midrash only the father has some doubts (which he overcomes). Indeed, the 1948 war was not a controversial war as the Yom Kippur and Lebanon wars would be. Death in 1948 is justified post factum. But gnawing doubts and anxieties remain; and certainly grief never disappears, as all booklets testify. Commemoration, it was hoped, might help to resolve this predicament within the context of the support group (family, friends, youth group, kibbutz, moshav, neighbours) which organized the commemoration and in a way stood for society at large. 'Resolve somewhat', we wrote, but never completely, particularly as far as parents were concerned.

Here is the testimony of a mother.

> It is difficult to acquiesce with this loss. Why is it that this being, so full of life and animation, lies still, his glowing eyes dimmed, his fresh body turning into earth. Why is it that there will be no more joy at my home, no worry for his future any more. I'll never hear his pals whistling for him. But why do I say this, I who have educated him to be a dedicated patriot, and even fight if necessary? Why do I say this, I who at your open grave declared that I am proud you fell for our homeland? Why?[6]

All this does not explain why Israelis chose the publishing of booklets as a preferred method of commemoration. Booklets were obviously much less costly than monuments — their closest competitor. Many were published with the aid of a stencilling machine and required a shorter preparation time. There was no need to call upon a sculptor or ask for permission from the land-surveyors or zoning authorities. Monuments, on the contrary, had to be left to the initiative of the state, large army units, towns or municipalities. What is more, as against the mere mention of a name engraved upon a slate, the booklet could present some of the individual traits of the departed — a need felt perhaps with particular intensity in a small, intimate society like that of *Yishuv* (barely more than 600,000). Other available alternatives (which account for about three hundred commemoration cases of the 1948 war) did express this individuality, usually in a

cultural project such as a library, community centre or scholarship. Yet these were often more costly than a booklet. A fourth alternative, the planting of a grove of trees or a special garden, had the advantage of fitting in with the future-oriented pioneering ethos (leaving one's mark upon the landscape, etc.). Yet, here again, all that could be left was a mere name, with no individual message for posterity, no hallmark of who was the name's carrier, or what his life was like.

Traditional religious forms of commemoration — for instance, the introduction to a synagogue of a Torah scroll named in honour of the dead — did not appeal to what was then an overwhelmingly secularized society, and account for barely half a dozen cases. In fact, even monuments and memorial plaques are rarely to be found in synagogues or their precincts or cemeteries (except in religious kibbutzim). In the eyes of *Yishuv* society, monuments make the soil on which they are built hallowed, and not the other way around.

The respect for learning, long cherished among the Jews as 'people of the book', no less than considerations of cost and individuality, most probably contributed to that predilection for books as artifacts of commemoration (and most of the 'special commemoration projects', such as libraries, were likewise related to books and book-learning).

Yet the phenomenon goes deeper than what is covered by the bland formula of 'people of the book'. It has deep roots in the Jewish tradition of commemoration, a tradition recently transformed and reinvented in the *Yishuv*, which offered ready-made outlets for the community badly hit by the 1948 bloodletting.

These roots are to be found in the *Yizkor* (remembrance) books which appeared in thirteenth-century Germany and later spread to Central and Eastern Europe. These were chronicles of specific communities, updated from time to time by their notables, which depicted the history of the community: its major rabbis and prominent individuals, the persecutions it had suffered (especially since the First Crusade, that watershed of Jewish life in Christian Europe) and, most particularly, its list of martyrs, a list recited in synagogue four times a year within the framework of the special *Yizkor* prayer instituted in the early twelfth century. This prayer and the martyrs' names were the major motivation for the persistence of the literary genre and its conscientious updating. Historiography here was a sort of ancillary to ritual — that is, a way of conserving the collective memory by means of the perennial 'chain of martyrology' — perceived as the Jewish people's lot in Exile, the martyrs sacrificing

themselves in obedience to the just demands of the Lord. Memory was thus conveyed in a religious interpretive mode, especially through sacred liturgical texts. Each new wave of persecutions was taken to be a re-enactment of former ones.

The growing secularization of the Jewish people in the nineteenth century filtered down in the early twentieth century from élite historiography to the level of collective memory, and reshaped the martyrology. It is not fortuitous that this happened primarily in the two most lively centres of Jewish collective activity — Eastern Europe and Palestine.

In Eastern Europe the recasting of the tradition took place in the folk historical literature written in the 1920s under the impact of the riots which had taken place during the Russian civil war and the Russian–Polish war. The typical artifact is the community notebook (*pinqas*) which contains a description of the riots in a specific locality (Vilno, Pinsk, etc.), a list of the dead, the fluctuations of community life during the first world war, as well as a sketch of its life prior to 1914. These very sketches, sometimes quite long, evinced the change in outlook as compared to traditional *Yizkor* literature: in describing the community they did not limit themselves to rabbis and notables but depicted all avenues of social and economic activity and dwelt upon the emigration to the New World. Demographic transformations as well as the riots are explained by this — worldly factors and not a medieval-type theodicy.[7] This new, or rather reinvented framework for collective memory created a new form of *Yizkor* book, in which European Jews, during the second world war and much more intensively after it, would register their collective response to the Holocaust. Its artifacts constituted that spontaneous literature of *Yizkor* books and *pinkasim* commemorating those communities which had been obliterated, and published by *Landsmannschaften* of the survivors in Europe, but above all in North and South America as well as in Israel. Here the aim of the survivors, or of relatives from amongst earlier immigrants, is to cope with their grief and make it into a tool for crystallizing a *historical* consciousness. There is very little theodicy, because of the secularized character of most *Landsmannschaften*. The emphasis is upon the detailed description of the prewar community and the horrors of its extermination, so that both will leave their indelible mark on the collective memory. The identity offered to the survivors does not refer to the deity but to the dead — a historical relationship predicated upon the continuity of an ethnic, secular affiliation. The centrepiece is the local community, and the

individual is measured by his contribution to the latter. There is little trace of the ritualistic-liturgical context.

An analogous secularization of the *Yizkor* literature took place in the Palestine *Yishuv*, starting with the *Yizkor* book to the memory of Second Aliyah members killed by Arabs (published in Jaffa in 1911), which produced numerous offshoots over the subsequent thirty-odd years.[8] As in Eastern Europe, the thematic framework is that of a profane grief, bereavement integrated into a consciousness of historical continuity, but lacking a transcendental, out-of-this-world presence. The entity overarching the individuals is that of the nation, not the local *shtetl*. The individual 'martyrs', who are accorded in Palestine, from the very beginning, much more detailed attention than in the East European books (perhaps because of the smaller numbers involved), are measured by their contribution to the pioneering undertaking of the nation.

Still, it bears stressing that these booklets were self-consciously given the title of *Yizkor* books and that they made ample usage of the traditional martyrological discourse, reinterpreted and transcended, of course, according to the needs of the new ethos. As Jay M. Winter argues,[9] even modern societies, when facing war and the existential challenge of mass violent death, do need some anchoring in tradition. That this happened even in a revolutionary, future-oriented society such as the *Yishuv* only underscores his argument; all the more so as the 'commemoration literature' is suffused not just with secularism but also with agnosticism and atheism. God is absent from the great majority of these books (except for some three dozen produced by the national-religious and Haredi milieux). Emblematic of this profane state of mind is the poem written by a father addressing his dead son:

> Standing before your closed book shelves
> As before the Ark of the Law [in synagogue];
> Ark with no curtain.
> Dad and Mum shed tears there.
> Tears with no prayers.[10]

The encounter with death presents the true mirror of a society. And here we have one which even in an existential crisis makes no appeal to religious transcendence; it does, however, feel an urge for tradition.

The new martyrological ethos subsumed by the *Yizkor* literature of the *Yishuv* puts its subjects, those who died a violent death (usually at the hands of Arabs), in a special, higher category among those who

lost their lives for the sake of the Zionist endeavour (more 'sacred' than those who died of malaria, for instance).

The historical framework which endows their sacrifice with meaning is that of those who fell fighting for Jewish sovereignty, beginning with the Hashmoneans (second century BC), and those who rose in revolt against the Romans (first and second century AD), a tradition renewed, after a hiatus of nineteen centuries, with the First Aliyah. Jewish martyrology in the Diaspora is rarely, and at best erratically, mentioned. Unlike the traditional martyrology which cherished passivity, accepting the fate laid down by the Lord, the *Yishuv* martyrology had a distinct activist edge. Even when celebrating the dead of the Arab attack upon Tel Hai (1920) — an event transformed into a General Custer-type 'epic of defeat' — the emphasis was on the 'last stand' as an incitement to continue the struggle, take the initiative, imitate the model of a heroism which does not resign itself to Fate (whether imposed by Providence or the nation's enemies). Heroism consisted of revolting against Fate and trying to take charge.[11]

As mentioned above, this secular, collectivist and activist ethos was also geared to express the individuality of the fallen. In pre-twentieth century *Yizkor bücher*, only rabbis, notables or particularly heroic martyrs received such attention. In the secular *Yizkor* and *pinkasim* literature of the 1920s or the post-Holocaust era, the projectors concentrated on a wider gamut of prominent individuals (in culture, economics, social life) of an increasingly secularized *shtetl*. In Palestine, even when the numbers of dead during periods of riot were in the hundreds (1929, 1936–39), the 1911 formula was adhered to: a biography (usually accompanied with a photo) of each of the dead, followed by testimonials, evaluations, memoirs, documents, literary or artistic bequests etc.

While the first initiatives were entirely due to the leadership of the labour movement and, above all, to its mentor Berl Katznelson, the genre soon spawned a more spontaneous literature produced primarily in the kibbutzim, which possessed an institutional infrastructure, such as a 'culture committee' and a stencilling machine. From the late 1930s on, the genre began to spread little by little beyond even the confines of the so-called 'labour (or pioneering) sector' into long-established right-of-centre colonies or groups of friends in towns. Some semi-commercial publications followed suit. Other forms of commemoration (monuments, groves) did not proliferate to the same extent.

The post-1948 literature represents not merely a quantitative leap (almost ten times as many booklets were published in the 1950s as in all the pre-state days). What was still in *Yishuv* days to a large extent a semi-institutional literature, mostly beholden to the labour movement, now became a widespread social phenomenon, the product of a plethora of private initiatives (although the Ministry of Defence in 1955 published its own official *Yizkor* book, with quarter-page biographies of all the fallen, as it continued to do for subsequent wars). Parents, friends, comrades-in-arms, neighbours, fellow residents and professionals created ad hoc grassroot associations for publishing such books and booklets, side by side with kibbutzim, moshavim, schools, etc.

The spread of the *Yizkor* literature as a socio-cultural mode of action had a direct impact upon what Roger Bastide calls the 'organization of memory'.[12] People remember as a part of a social group. Personal memories exist in relationship to the memories of other people who are relevant for the individual. Personal memories intermingle, influence each other and thus create a collective memory, feed it and maintain its continuity. A collective memory enables human groups to attain a consciousness of their identity through the dimension of the past. The human group, therefore, is made up of individuals who enter into an exchange relationship at the level of consciousness based upon a sort of 'network of complementarity'. Collective memory is, hence, not an abstract entity over and above individuals. It is the product of these exchange relationships to which each group member contributes his or her own memories. Obviously the weight of the various memories is not equal. The group's organizational structure moulds the organization of its memory. The contribution of élites carries more weight (priests in a history-suffused ritual, a tribe's elders recounting its history). Whoever articulates his or her memories in public leaves a deeper imprint than one who does it merely in private or not at all.[13]

If we apply these analytical tools to the Israeli case, we perceive immediately that the 'organization of memory' gave a distinct advantage to certain social groups. For instance, a comparison of the breakdown of the fallen with the breakdown of soldiers commemorated in booklets shows that sabras are overrepresented among the commemorated (four out of ten as against three out of ten among the bulk of fallen soldiers). The longer an immigrant was in Palestine the greater his chances of being commemorated: soldiers who came before the second world war are overrepresented; those who came

after 1940 are underrepresented by half; those who arrived during 1948 barely figure at all. This applies even more acutely to those who are given what one may dub 'intensive' commemoration — i.e. in a booklet as well as in a scholarship, grove, youth group, etc. or who are the subject of an individual booklet rather than part of one consecrated to a whole group. Sabras and veteran immigrants enjoy an even greater advantage. This inequitable commemoration is all the more noteworthy as in fact the burden, and the human losses resultant from the war effort, were evenly spread among all social categories, due to the draft instituted by the Zionist authorities from the early months of the hostilities.[14] What accounts for this imbalance?

Social integration is crucial here. Commemoration is carried out above all by familial, ad hoc (friends, fellow soldiers) or formal (hachshara, sports club, youth group, high school graduates) associations. Given that the median age of the fallen soldiers was twenty-two, if they had arrived in Palestine before the second world war, they would have passed at least half their life there, or at least had part of their elementary and all their post-elementary schooling there. Moreover, those who immigrated after 1940, and a fortiori after 1945, were Holocaust victims, and hence much more likely to arrive as orphans, without any other immediate relatives (siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins) in Palestine. Due to their short sojourn in the country, immigrants who arrived in 1946–47 (more than a quarter of the fallen) were less likely to be members of youth movements or other voluntary associations, so vocal in what one may call the choir of collective memory. Those who came in 1948 — usually from Deported Persons' camps in Europe or Cyprus — a few months or weeks prior to their death, were totally uprooted, hence rarely commemorated.

As one poet, a veteran of the war, was to put it years later, writing about new immigrant soldiers (somewhat disparagingly nicknamed *gahaletz*):

> We should try, for once, to remember them. But this is not easy. First, many of them were not recorded in the newspapers, and also had lost all their old friends. What can one put on the grave of such a *gahaletz* who has neither name nor family? Can we chisel there the number the SS engraved on his arm?
> Second, in whose memory will he live? He has no parents to visit his grave along the seasons, to water his roots. He has no room to fit his photo, no friends to tell stories about him, no widow to bestow his name upon her son.[15]

While integration is indeed the major factor in what was then an immigrant society, it is not the sole one determining the 'organization

of memory'. It operates in tandem with the location of the individual on the gamut of articulation and social activism. The more educated the soldier, the greater the chances that his family, friends or fellow voluntary group members might have access to commemorative modes: e.g. a knowledge of Hebrew (there are virtually no booklets in other languages); a newspaper (likelier in a kibbutz, a youth group, or a well-established neighbourhood), contacts with printers. No less crucial was the sheer fact of having relatives, friends or associates who could invest the time and who possessed the editorial capacity to collect (or write down) testimonials and memoirs. It is hardly surprising that the higher the educational standard of the fallen, the more they featured as subjects of booklets. They were also more likely to be awarded 'intensive commemoration'. Being an officer was an extra advantage, as it presupposed a high level of education (the same is true of the sabras and veterans). The collective profile of the commemorated thus tends to be somewhat slanted in favour of élite groups.

Moreover, the better organized a social sector and the higher its collective consciousness (and sense of history), the more likely it is to devote effort and resources to commemoration. This gave a distinct advantage to the kibbutzim (most of which had weekly or monthly newspapers, not to speak of the publishing facilities of their four major movements). The upshot was that three out of five kibbutz members were commemorated (as against one in three of all fallen soldiers).

So strongly did integration combine with articulation to determine the organization of the spontaneous activity of commemoration that the collective profile of those who are the subject of books is dominated by sabras and those who migrated in early childhood, officers and NCOs, the better-educated, kibbutz or hachshara members, and members of youth movements in Palestine rather than members of such movements abroad. This pattern is repeated even more strongly with regard to soldiers commemorated both in a booklet and in another mode.

Who, then, are the forgotten? Primarily 1948 immigrants and those with less than full primary schooling (who received a third of the share of the commemoration to which they were 'entitled'), followed by other new immigrants and lower socio-educational groups (especially of Old [pre-Zionist] *Yishuv* or Sephardi origin), who received half their share. New immigrants were obviously at a double disadvantage: they were less integrated socially and had a significantly

lower level of education as a result of lack of schooling during the Holocaust (the vast majority came from Central and Eastern Europe).

And indeed to this very day Israeli society tends to remember the '1948 generation' as one made up of sabras (or virtual sabras, Palestine-educated veterans), articulate young males, preferably kibbutz (or labour-movement) affiliated — a sort of Israeli variant of the image of a lost, élite generation. It disregards the sizeable share of uprooted, barely educated, isolated and perhaps alienated Holocaust victims who make up almost one third of the fallen soldiers, that is more or less the equivalent of their share among those drafted or among young males of the *Yishuv*.

This is not to say that this folk literature (and other spontaneous modes) was the only factor shaping this memory. No less important was the role played by the poetry and fiction consecrated to the 1948 war experience. This creative effort was dominated by writers in their twenties and thirties, for members of the older generation, standing in awe of the sacrifice, felt themselves, on the whole, disqualified from dealing with it. The young writers (the so-called 'Palmach generation') were, with a few exceptions, sabras or old-timers, preferring to write about those they knew best — friends, comrades or relatives of their own ilk: veterans, *Yishuv*-formed, kibbutz or hachshara-affiliated, high-school graduates. In a manner rather typical of those times, these writers were oblivious of the newcomers, insensitive to their past and present predicament, if not downright arrogant towards them.

Official commemoration, carried out through the Ministry of Defence, tended to be egalitarian in principle (viz. the format of the official *Yizkor* book, see page 351). Yet one of its major products, arguably the most popular and most widely-read, contributed to the tendencies depicted above. This is *Scrolls of Fire*,[16] two bulky volumes of the literary and artistic bequest of some four hundred of the fallen. The better-educated tended, naturally, to be heavily overrepresented, and were more likely to be sabras, veterans and of European origin.

The up-and-coming novelists and poets of the 'Palmach generation' (with its offshoots in the theatre and the media) were arguably the most powerful of the social actors shaping the 1948 memory. (Historians, for one, were almost totally absent from this arena.) Yet how could this be without any protest from a civil society which had just undergone the war experience? This is to be accounted for by the fact that the spontaneous production of memory in civil society itself

produced an analogous image: that of a war the burden of which was carried by sabras and old-timers, a war where a huge educated élite was sacrificed, thereby creating a sense of qualitative social loss. This sense of loss was authentic but exaggerated, as was the role attributed to sabras, though in qualitative terms (e.g. through their large representation in the officers' ranks) they did make a unique contribution.

That the sabras' and oldtimers' claim to hegemony in Israeli society was thereby legitimated, was an unintended consequence. One finds no trace of deliberate manipulation by the élite. This does not mean that those active in the field of memory-shaping, who tended — by virtue of integration and articulation — to come from these very social groups, were not comforted by this extra dose of legitimacy. For it did fit in with their own (rather exalted) self-image; an image shaped by, among other things, the way they remembered the war experience, fixated as it was upon those close to them who had fallen. The social and political rewards of their dominance of collective memory would certainly not be refused by people so sure of their superiority as members (or descendants) of the 'pioneer generation', and at the same time so bruised personally by the sacrifices made by their social milieu in the 1948 war.

The direct impact of the political élite on the memory of the war can be detected in another aspect. We referred in the preceding pages to fallen soldiers, yet one out of five of the war's Jewish victims were civilians (ca. 1,200), virtually half of whom were killed during the bombing and siege of Jerusalem and the rest in roadside ambushes in the early months of the war or by snipers' bullets in other mixed towns. Since they were older (average age thirty-five), they left twice as many orphans as the soldiers, and as many widows. But nothing like the 'Blitz myth' of civilian heroism developed in Israel (though the proportion of British civilian dead in the second world war was similar to that in Israel in 1948). For one thing, Jewish civil society was reeling under the shock of the violent death of so many young men. This 'active' sacrifice — a loss all the more shocking because of their age — was felt more acutely, and was somehow placed at a higher level of bereavement.

No less important, however, were a series of decisions taken by the *Yishuv* authorities in and around February 1948, the third month of hostilities, when the number of losses topped those of all previous riots (1929, 1936–39) combined, and when leaders and media began to speak of the 1948 events as a 'war' rather than 'riots'. A new

awareness of the nature of the experience was setting in. From that month, it was resolved that enlisted *Yishuv* members were to be buried in separate plots in the major Jewish urban cemeteries. The measure was given the imprint of the state with the founding of the IDF in June 1948 and later (1950) the force of law. Memorial Day, instituted in 1950, and fixed for the day preceding Independence Day, was consecrated to fallen soldiers alone, and only their relatives were granted pensions under a law passed by the Knesset that year. The official *Yizkor* book (1955) and its subsequent volumes cover the enlisted, not civilian war victims.

This was a new departure. Commemoration, according to the pattern laid down in the 1911 *Yizkor* book, had never distinguished in principle between Jews killed in the course of duty and passive, sometimes accidental, victims of Arab hostility. (In the rhetoric, it is true, some distinction may have been drawn in the late 1930s with the creation of Haganah semi-regular forces to cope with the Arab Rebellion. Yet institutional commemoration, which still represented the bulk of the effort in that field, covered all victims.)

Given the pivotal role played by the Memorial-Independence Day rituals in Israeli civil religion, this elevation, one may say sanctification of the soldiers, made a strong impression on collective memory. School curricula likewise barely mention civilian victims. It is no wonder that as the years passed their memory tended to become increasingly blurred. Today they are completely forgotten. This was not necessarily the conscious intent of the political élite, motivated as it was by the shock referred to earlier, by a sense of gratitude-cum-guilt towards the thousands of young males killed (including a substantial share of its own sons) as well as by the search for an elaboration of mythology and ritual to hold together a new state, fragile and heterogeneous in ethnic make-up. The pressures of the lobby of parents of fallen soldiers — well organized and enjoying high social prestige — were not alien to these decisions (especially with regard to compensation and Memorial Day).

How did civil society react to this new distinction introduced among the dead and particularly to the resulting distortion of historical reality? When one surveys the post-1948 spontaneous commemoration, one discovers that only one in twelve of civilian victims is the object of such an effort (usually in booklet form), compared to one in three soldiers. It seems that the families of the civilian dead themselves internalized the distinction between so-called active and passive victims of the Israeli–Arab conflict and felt a

lesser justification (or urge?) to work out their grief through commemoration. Did they feel that their own bereavement had a less important message to pass into the realm of collective memory?[17]

It is evident that if that was the case with regard to the hundreds of bereaved parents, spouses and orphans of civilian victims, it was so much the more for society at large, shaken by the losses of enlisted youth, which had hit all strata and whose numbers had mounted throughout the fifteen months of the war.

Different dynamics seem to operate with regard to a last, albeit minor, distortion of the memory of war victims. Israel still tends to cherish the role of women in 1948; the photo of the girl with the Sten sub-machine gun is taken to be emblematic of a whole generation. Reality bears little resemblance to this image. Women were called up from a smaller number of cohorts than males, and even among these, most selectively. All in all, only one in ten of IDF soldiers in 1948 was female. Moreover, by virtue of a decision taken during the first month of war, women were removed from all combatant units. Some female participation in forces in the line of fire did continue for a while (in frontline kibbutzim, convoys to Jerusalem), but soon virtually ceased. The upshot was that only slightly more than a hundred women soldiers were killed in the war. Most female war victims (about four hundred) were civilians of all ages, especially from mixed towns which were a 'population at risk'. And yet the memory of the girl with the Sten lingers on, despite the attempts by a popular woman novelist who served in the war to set the record straight in a series of memoirs-as-fiction, protesting against the degrading of women's role by their banishment from combatant units. Her books were published, however, only from 1980 on, and by that time it may have been too late — the image was too firmly ensconced.[18]

Here it was not the urge of shock and bereavement but rather the need of society to feel good about itself, to see itself as progressive, still conforming to an ethos of female equality, even as social realities were moving in the opposite direction (among other reasons, due to rabbinical personal status laws and to an unegalitarian gender-based division of labour already set during the years young people serve as draftees). It may well have been that Israeli society used the image of the 1948 girl-soldier as a sop to allay bad conscience (and a rather cheap sop at that, for real losses among women were low); a mechanism to restore equilibrium in a situation of cognitive dissonance. Much the same can be said, of course, of the Israeli folk image of the drafting of women as 'proof' of gender equality, an

image which disregards the women's subaltern, nay even ancillary, role in the ranks.

The need to feel good about the collectivity is, however, rarely to be detected elsewhere in the memory of the 1948 generation. What holds centre stage is the challenge of living with grief and bereavement without falling into the pathological state of perpetual mourning. It is social activity to that end, carried out by those survivors most directly hit — or rather those among them who were both socially integrated and articulate — which helps mould the collective memory of 1948.

Notes

1. See, in particular, G.L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* (New York 1990).
2. See G. Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning* (New York 1967); G. Bowlby, 'Processes of Mourning', *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 23 (1961).
3. Esp. *Haverim Mesaprim 'al Jimmy* (Tel Aviv 1955, in Hebrew).
4. *Shmulik: Shmuel Kori* (Kibbutz Misgav 'Am 1948, in Hebrew), 16.
5. S. Avigur, *'Im Gur* (Tel Aviv 1981), 124. It was decided to publish the diary, which is devoted in its entirety to the son's death, only after the father's demise.
6. Micah Fisher, *'Alim le-Zichro* (Tel Aviv 1952), 46.
7. See A. Wieviorka and I. Niborski, *Les Livres du souvenir* (Paris 1983).
8. J. Fraenkel, 'The 1911 Yizkor Book' (in Hebrew), *Shnaton ha-Machon le-Yahadut Zemanenu*, 4 (1988).
9. Communication at the colloquium on 'Memory of War', Ministère des Anciens Combatants and the Research Center on World War I (Paris, September 1991).
10. E. Kalir, *Mikerev* (Tel Aviv 1950), 37.
11. Y. Zerubavel, *The Last Stand: On the Transformation of Symbols in Israeli Culture* (University of Pennsylvania PhD dissertation 1980).
12. R. Bastide, 'Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage', *L'Année Sociologique* (1970), esp. 76–96.
13. The group, according to Bastide, also endows the network of personal memories with a 'thematic structure', i.e. a sort of interpretive code which attributes meaning to memories according to the living tradition of that society. This topic is beyond the scope of the present article.
14. For detailed statistical data on the commemorative literature and the war losses, and for the relevant analysis, see my *The 1948 Generation* (Tel Aviv 1991, in Hebrew), chap. 9 and tables 20–3 in the appendix.
15. Aryeh Sivan, 'On the Gahal Soldiers Killed in the Fields of Latrun', *Ma'ariv*, 8 May 1981. This poem is part of the struggle for the reinstatement of the memory of immigrant soldiers waged by a number of writers and publicists in the 1980s. It concentrated, however, on the numerically least important group, those who arrived during 1948.
16. R. Avino'am (ed.), *Gvilei Esh* (Tel Aviv 1952).

17. Oral history interviews among relatives of these civilian victims are being carried out now and may help elucidate the question.

18. N. Ben-Yehudah, *1948-Beyn ha-Sfirot* (Jerusalem 1980); *Miba'd la-'Avotot* (Jerusalem 1985); *Keshe-Partza ha-Medina* (Jerusalem 1991).

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