

Undecided Past – National Identities and Politics of Diversity: The Mount Eytan Commemoration Site

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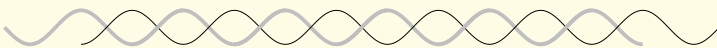
IN 1982 THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT launched a proposal to establish a national commemoration site on Mount Eytan. Despite intensive activity, the project was shelved in 2002. The article presents official discourses regarding memory, commemoration, and setting collective boundaries. It presents the theoretical arguments as well as conflicting processes in politics of memory in Israel, which occurred along a different axis and regarding different variables. Finally we discuss the social and political significance arising from the project's management and in terms of creating consensus in an age of privatization, to the extent that projections can be made from an event of this nature.

The museum is a cultural agent acting within national politics to manufacture representation of (subjects of) the past and 'graft' them as objects (Katriel 1997b, 147). Museums are sites where links between memory and history are created, in such a way that the sub-group which initiates the memory aspires, using a unique narrative, for its past to be transformed into the individual memory of each visitor (Katriel 1994, 1). Narratives of the past thus become relevant both for understanding the present and for internalizing recommended ways of coping with it (Katriel 1993, 69). If the process unfolds in a manner approved by the establishment, this sites will become state-supported museums that the public is encouraged to visit (Barena 1989, 118).

Economic considerations, among others, propel many museums into the heart of consensus. For example, South Africa's Apartheid

[216] Museum, engaging with a charged issue, takes tremendous pains to avoid diverging from the social consensus. Efforts are made to avoid conflict-generating narratives or exhibitions. In fact, managing the museum means ‘managing consensus,’ stressing disengagement from the past and ‘legitimizing the present.’ Accordingly, the museum has no content addressing apartheid and the contemporary reality in South Africa (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007, 57). Israeli museums dealing with Judaism avoid emphasizing the different streams of the Judaism they memorialize; instead, projecting the message of ‘one people,’ they underscore religious-national unity. Differences and distinctions that once characterized varying streams, and still do, are unmentioned (Fenichel 2005). Museums that are opened to support a dominant narrative, with an element of ‘rewriting history’ to favour the dominant ideological agenda, are often located beyond the circle of public support. They cannot collaborate with counterpart institutions, due to their competing values and messages (Katriel 1997a, 56). For instance, museums aimed at empowering women within the national narrative are autonomous, since in their state counterparts, women’s place does not subvert their marginal status as related in state historiography (Israeli 1993, 515). The ‘most sacred’ museums – that attract societal approval but also total alertness to their contents – are those dealing with national commemoration of death in the given society (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1997, 85). The dead are exploited there for the needs of the living, with attempts to attribute to their lives the legacy, and prescriptions allegedly written or spoken in their lifetime by the dead, and rendering them normatively binding on society (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1991, 3). The sanctity of national death means placing it above political disputes – which simply enhances societal delegitimization for presenting subversive and extra-consensual narratives in museums engaging with national death (Luke 2002).

Drawing on Weber’s concept of ‘social closure’ – a process through which social groups seek to increase their advantages by restricting access to political resources and economic opportunities to a limited circle of entitled people – those understandings were adopted within the cultural arena. The arena of memory and museums become instru-



ments of the state to design an ‘exclusionary closure’ with restricted access rights. Museums thus become a ‘symbolic border’ of political power. Actors and perspectives deemed undesirable by the political elite are unwelcome in state-budgeted museums (Erikson 1964, 9–21). A museum’s contents, including people commemorated there, are revised at different periods – when the ruling party steps down, or when changes occur in the zeitgeist which influence national memory (Duverger 1972, 308). All these impact on what is then perceived as the consensual state narrative (Shari 1996), spurring the research community to assess the close ties between type of government, political culture, and changes occurring in national museums in different countries (Bennett 2001, 89).

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ISRAELI COMMEMORATION:
THE NATIONAL-BUILDING ERA

Most museums in Israel are run and funded by the state, which sees them as a pivotal force for educating the young in Zionism, and a cultural agent for foreign tourism (Carmeli and Vezbit 2004). Commemorative sites for Israel’s fallen appeared following canonized events: pre-statehood clashes with the Arabs, Israel’s wars, and small-scale military clashes. Many organizations participated in these commemorations, where spontaneity predominated. In that dynamic, groups with stronger public standing have better access to government funding and land allocated for commemoration (Azaryahu and Kellerman 2004, 109; Shamir 1988, 13).

Commemoration initiatives were financed by the state or private donations, and maintained by various organizations. Monuments and sites were generally designed by associates and relatives involved in the commemorative process. Shamir notes that the state normally recognized spontaneous commemorative acts, marked sites on official routes of school field-trips, and permitted political participation at ceremonies there. Private and spontaneous commemorations thus became part of the landscape and the Israeli calendar (Shamir 1988, 15).

In 1949, the Ministry of Defence established the Department for Soldier Commemoration. Its brief was to coordinate all commemorative activities and supervise the establishment of monuments. In 1959

[218] Defence Minister David Ben-Gurion appointed the Public Council for Soldier Commemoration, some of whose members were bereaved parents, in order to advise the officials on commemoration policy. Though the state tried to become actively involved via the council, the 'democratic commemoration' pattern of spontaneous memorials persisted. The state established only a few monuments by means of the unit (Shamir 1988, 158).

Commemorating the 1948 War of Independence – the institutionalized ambiguous interrelations among the many actors in the commemorative arena: the Defence Ministry, the Israel Defence Force (IDF), families of the fallen, soldiers' units, and other security organizations that lost members in conflicts (Azaryahu 2000, 89–116). In Shamir's words, the state adopted 'a non-intervention policy,' granting families of the fallen strongest influence over the establishing of monuments (Shamir 1988, 16).

Throughout Israel, commemorative sites originally dedicated to the war of independence eventually became general remembrance sites. In schools, remembrance walls for graduates killed in the War of Independence became monuments for all the school's fallen. Commemorative sites were visited in daily life, not only during state ceremonies. From the war of independence – Everyone involved contributed different ritual contents and forms of preserving memory, reflected particularly in inscriptions on the monuments: texts derived from Biblical sources, Hebrew literature, or from army and personal parlance. Almost all, however, are couched in mythic/heroic terms, recognizing the contribution of the fallen and acknowledging the parents' and relatives' profound loss: but beyond this, the languages of commemoration – its voices, symbols and ceremonies – are diverse (Azaryahu 1996, 67; Shamir 1988).

Notably, many private commemoration initiatives and private museums were launched during the 1980s by the Israeli right-wing, known as the 'Revisionist camp.' Previously, in the pre-statehood period known as the 'Yishuv,' Zionist institutions were led by the socialist Mapai party. Founded in 1930, Mapai was the dominant force in Israeli politics for close to 40 years. Using Eastern European strategies, the party's heads worked to marginalize opposing political discourses



(principally those of Revisionism with its anti-socialist ideology) from power and public legitimation. “The opinion of political minorities was a priori unacceptable, even when professional considerations justified it [...] the words “statist” and “national” became synonymous with the majority opinion, “political” – a minority opinion not taken into account (Kanari 1988).’ The situation was exacerbated because Mapai controlled the main underground organization then operating – the ‘Haganah’ (a Jewish paramilitary organisation founded in 1920, during the British Mandate of Palestine; part of the Mapai Party establishment. In 1948 it provided the foundation of the IDF) – versus rival organizations (the Revisionist-controlled Etzel and Lehi) – pre-state organizations which became later the Israeli Defence Force. Mapai described its rivals as ‘alien and degenerate,’ exercising ‘a poisonous influence.’ Claiming the state’s interest, political violence was justifiable when dealing with them (Ben-Eliezer 1995, 166). Once a democratic state was founded (1948) and physically eliminating opponents became out of the question, Mapai worked to delegitimize the Revisionist opposition by trying to diminish or eradicate their contribution to the state’s establishment. Ben-Gurion ‘created the association between statism and Mapaism,’ generating a situation where Mapai’s partisanship was considered less partisan than its rivals’ (Shapira 1985, 60). Mapai thus became an Orwellian Ministry of Truth (Orwell 1971). The public was supposed to consider all rival parties anti-statist, and less legitimate for taking office (Rousseau 1990, 273). Mapai was hailed as responsible for the national renaissance project. At that period of cultural nationalization, the names of Revisionist dead and heroes were absent from street-names, state museums, and history-books. The Haganah Museum became a state museum (1956), with school-visits made possible by state budgets. The Lehi and Etzel museums were funded by the rival Herut party, but visits by soldiers, schoolchildren and organized groups of civil servants were banned. This changed following the political turnabout (1977) when Menachem Begin, head of the Likud (Revisionist) party, gained power (Lebel 2005, 104). Over time, various entrepreneurs and organizations, mostly non-profits founded by IDF veterans, launched museums and commemorative sites. Once founded, they were budgeted by the Defence Ministry.

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ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL MEMORIAL SITE

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While many aspects of life were nationalized in the state's first years, informed by socialist and collectivist ideology, remembrance sites were more democratically established. Their content and symbols matched state-approved, hegemonic memory themes. Differences were visible only in their interpretations of the historical-military narrative, related through the commemorated battles, and the emphasis on brigades or units that fought them. With the onset of 'state privatization' (Wistrich and Ohana 1988), the state decided to establish a nationalized memorial site to expound the official version of Israeli military history. Traditionally, the state intervened regarding the public memory of the fallen of dissident underground organizations. Usually encouraging spontaneous initiatives, it was more vigilant with those commemorating the dead of the Etzel and Lehi, hoping to prevent the formative public memory from acknowledging their contribution.

The state chose to recognize only the dead of the War of Independence, and exclude battles in which Etzel and Lehi fought, and distance their fallen soldiers from state history books and official discourses. Ben-Gurion decided that official recognition would be granted only to those killed between 30 November 1947 and 1 March 1949. The fallen of Etzel and Lehi operations before November 30 were denied recognition. As for Haganah soldiers killed before then, an addendum to the Law authorized the Defence Minister to declare that if 'the fallen were Haganah members when they died [...] they would be included among the fallen of our war.'

This double standard was visible in the commemoration of those killed in the 'Night of the Bridges' operation, a sabotage action during 'The Revolt' when three underground factions – Haganah, Etzel and Lehi – briefly collaborated from October 1945 until Etzel bombed the King David Hotel on 22 July 1946. The combined organizations aimed to disrupt British transportation lines. On 16–17 June 1946, fourteen Palmach fighters were killed blowing up the Achziv bridge. Because of the above-mentioned law, the Soldier's Commemoration Unit could not memorialize the soldiers of this operation, but using his lawful prerogative, the defence minister included them among the official war-dead. In 1955, a monument to the fallen was erected, and in 1968 the



Defence Ministry reinterred the fallen soldiers' remains, from a mass grave in Haifa to the monument site.

The day after the Achziv operation, eleven Lehi combatants fell while bombing the Haifa Railway workshop, but it took until 1966 for the Association for the Commemoration of the Fallen in Lehi to finally commemorate them. No state or IDF insignia were placed on the Lehi monument, unlike Haganah counterparts. In fact, Etzel and Lehi commemorative activities were performed covertly, assisted by the Herut movement which funded a memorial to them in Jerusalem. This and other initiatives, undertaken without state support or funding, provoked official bodies. The Jerusalem district commander wrote a confidential letter to the central district commander warning that 'Etzel's Freedom Fighter Fund builds memorials [...] that may [create] the impression those places were conquered by the group which the memorial honours [...] we must prevent historical falsification' (Lebel 2009).

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Herut's newspaper noted that 'Should the government take the underground's casualties under its patronage, it would indicate recognition of Etzel's war against the oppressor – against its will and contrary to official decisions' (Lebel 2009). In 1978, Menachem Begin, the premier of the first right-wing government after thirty years of the Labour party's hegemony, aspired to rehabilitate Etzel's historical role in the War of Independence. His aim is partly reflected in the events of Israel's Remembrance Day and Independence Day that year. Recalling the first Independence Day military parade in 1949, when Ben-Gurion banned the underground organizations' participation, Begin exploited the state's thirtieth anniversary for a parade in Jerusalem of underground combatants from Haganah, Etzel, and Lehi. The parity between Haganah veterans and those of Etzel and Lehi angered the Labour faction (the historical left-wing Mapai), whose members warned in parliament against 'attempts to reconstruct the period's history' (*Davar*, 18 October 1977) Haganah and Palmach veterans from the socialist kibbutzim called on their comrades to boycott the parade (*Davar*, 20 October 1977), though the government went ahead with it (Government session 152, 13 October 1977). In the parliamentary arena, a coalition was created around Mount Eytan that united

Zionist forces against postnationalist tendencies. Mount Eytan supporters were marked as a community seeking to preserve its power and dominant ethical status.

[222] Unsurprisingly, Begin endorsed the Mount Eytan project in 1981 identifying an opportunity to establish a national remembrance site to officially present the role of dissident organizations and their successors in the Israeli narrative. Israel now had a series of Revisionist prime ministers: Begin, the Etzel's commander; Yitzhak Shamir, a commander of Lehi; and Benjamin Netanyahu whose father was an intellectual leader of Etzel, Betar and Herut. During their terms in office, the project advanced significantly.

Begin launched several strategies to improve the underground organizations' status in Israeli historiography and memory. In 1974, when the Public Council for Soldiers Commemoration presented the project to Defence Minister Shimon Peres (Labour), he responded positively to the proposal whose stated aim 'would express Israeli heroism [...] (and be) a frequently visited site for our youth' (ibid). Two years later, the public council's efforts remained no more than a project on paper and Peres did nothing to advance the project (ibid).

Under Begin's government, the Inter-ministerial Committee for Symbols and Ceremonies announced on 29 December 1982 'the establishment on Mount Eytan of a National Centre for Heroism and Memorialization.' This decision was meant to implement the government's declaration of 18 May 1980 (Mount Eytan file 1982b).

In 1991, PM Yitzhak Shamir tabled the Mount Eytan Bill, which obligated PM Yitzhak Rabin to implement the project and include it in the defence ministry budget in 1993. Half of the cost would be state-funded, with the rest from donations. In 1995, the Peres government reiterated its support for the project, while in 1998 the Netanyahu government founded a special ministerial committee to advance it. On 27 January 1998, Israel's parliament announced 'The Knesset reaffirms decisions by the last four Israeli governments [...] to build a commemorative centre on Mount Eytan,' (Knesset, 27 November 1998) though there was no allocation for the project in the budget. Only in 2001 was the board of directors of Mount Eytan asked to submit a plan: it came with a \$20 million budget, and the government undertook to provide



50 percent of the amount (Mount Eytan file 1994c). In 2002, PM Ariel Sharon laid the cornerstone, but without a budget the event was purely symbolic.

Considerable tensions arose among members of the project's board of directors. Haganah veterans on the board adhered to the official version, the 'historical truth' of events relating to the War of Independence, which had dominated until 1977. Etzel and Lehi board-members requested parity with the Haganah in relating wartime history, plus removal of the tag 'dissident organizations,' arguments stemming directly from the symbolic and historiographic wrangling that has reflected the sensitivities of Israel's two chief political camps since statehood.

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Haganah members sought to emphasize the motif of 'authority.' In that way, Lehi and Etzel fallen would be represented as deviants and dissidents opposed to the new state. Etzel and Lehi representatives sought to establish the 'revival' of the state 'but *not* [emphasis in the original] the various forces and organizations' as the museum's central thrust; 'it must be noted that [...] the home front, including much of the Haganah constituency, supported Etzel and Lehi.' Etzel and Lehi veterans wanted the project to show the public that 'Etzel was a national liberation movement,' Their preference was for a display showing that 'Etzel conducted hundreds of important operations, [...] hundreds of Etzel comrades fell, many heroic acts were performed' (Avinoam 1994, 34). In contrast, the Haganah veterans requested that Mount Eytan maintain the dissident theme, portraying the right-wing underground movements as lawbreakers.

The board also disputed the date when the War of Independence erupted. Etzel and Lehi veterans refused to accept 29 November 1947, the date when the United Nation approved the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, as the official date marking the war's start. Ben-Gurion chose this date after the war, attempting to disconnect 'pre-war' Etzel and Lehi actions against the British, from the Jewish struggle for independence. Mapai viewed military actions to expel the British as terrorist acts detached from the struggle for independence. The Etzel and Lehi veterans again contended that 'Etzel's struggle against the British was a war of liberation against a foreign regime, but not [...] the continuation of terror against the British af-

ter the period of joint revolt' (Avinoam 1994, 34). Presentation of the battles, and Etzel's role in them, caused further discord: Haganah proponents stressed their numerical strength which dwarfed Etzel's and Lehi's combined forces.

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The Mount Eytan committees argued about the size of the exhibits that would represent each group. An Etzel committee-member requested: "The Haganah organization was the largest and most important group among the defence organizations and revolt movements [...] I suggest we avoid adjectives [...] and suffice with the term "a large body" – without employing the definite article [...] and omitting the ranking, "important" (Frank 1994) The argument became heated, and the sides became convinced that their status in the national memory would be directly related to the amount of floor space allocated to each organization in the museum. Haganah veterans wished to preserve their monopolistic status, or at least their seniority, in founding the Jewish state. Etzel and Lehi sought 'insider' inclusion in the collective memory, equivalent to the Haganah's. They supported the project on the understanding that 'this place has importance because all underground organizations are represented: Haganah, Etzel, Lehi, and Palmach – all the underground in one building,' said מ כ Gideon Ezra (Likud) (Knesset, 27 February 1998). In fact, the various motivations made it impossible to draft a joint proposal for the Independence Pavilion in the new museum. Trying to find middle ground in the polarized debate, the curators consulted historians and suggested changes to the museum's design, then presented their compromises to the board, which ignored them. Preparatory work on the pavilion now halted.

In 1994, against the backdrop of the Oslo Accords (Israeli–Palestinian peace agreement led by Itzhak Rabin, 1993–1994) the Mount Eytan board – influenced by the new political atmosphere – resolved to reinvigorate the project's conception. After joint discussions with the board, the museum staff – civilians and army personnel who were strongly identified with פ מ Yitzhak Rabin's new minority government and who supported the Oslo peace process – decided to alter the original goals which pertained to the Israeli army's battle traditions, military history, and remembrance of the fallen. The new goals would



engage with basic human, educational, and social values appropriate for an era of peace (Mount Eytan file 1994c). The curators emphasized that the museum would 'present peace as a central goal of the Israeli people and the IDF,' a goal apparently reflecting Israeli public opinion toward peace agreements and territorial compromise.

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Physically, that perception meant that visitors to the museum would see from every exhibition pavilion, what was termed 'the Peace Pavilion;' it would display peace agreements and cease-fires that Israel signed with its neighbours. Equally, the concept was to convince observers that a strong army was justified and all military activity since the state's founding had sought peace and security. This was undertaken as a response to an intellectual circle closely connected to the government which, after the Oslo Accords were signed, sought to influence Israelis. A military museum would doubly impair the peace process, they held, by transmitting an aggressive message to the world that Israel elevates militarism over values of peace; it might also be an 'educational obstacle' to the public's enthusiasm, especially among youth visiting the museum to support peace, while forgetting the enmity of Israel's neighbours over many years.

The museum's central theme, the 'narrative of Israel's military campaigns from the Biblical period until now' (Zilber 1992, 7) threatened postnational Zionism. From its beginning, Zionism's basic assumption was that the Jewish people in the modern era strived for independence and sovereignty. The Oslo Accords appeared to espouse values that sought to dismantle nationalist symbols and institutions. The Israeli left adopted the new European left's ideology. This postnational/Zionist position embraced the sociological trend maintaining that peoples and nations are products of social and political manipulation (Anderson 1983).

Ben-Gurion held that Israel's struggle was a direct continuation of the Jewish people's struggle since antiquity (Keren 1988). The term 'people' allowed the Mount Eytan committee to decide in March 1982 that 'the period addressed in the National Centre will be Israel's military campaigns [...] from Joshua Bin-Nun [...] to modern times' (Mount Eytan file 1982a). However, the new staff formed in November 1993 overruled the emphasis on war, and the continuity thesis. They

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maintained rather that continuity existed in the realm of consciousness, in the Jewish people's recognition that this was the land of the Jewish people. That consciousness must be educated toward independence and national freedom. The new staff convinced the board that the museum should remind visitors of the Biblical story in passing, stressing that the Land of Israel is the Jewish homeland. In effect, this would address a direct continuation of Zionism's basic outlook maintaining that Israel is the realization of the vision of generations and that Jewish sovereignty and independence constitute the nation's basic values and historical continuity, but is not, as postnational scholars maintain, just a virtual community produced by manipulative political engineering.

THE MOUNT EYTAN PROJECT

The Mount Eytan project was meant to complete a trio of Israeli remembrance sites: the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, demonstrating the price paid without Jewish independence; the Mount Herzl National Cemetery, reflecting the cost of attaining sovereignty and continuing struggle thereafter; and the Mount Eytan Museum, exhibiting the continuing narrative of the Jews' efforts for survival. The 'new' historians and sociologists, as well as some voices in the media, undermined this approach: Yoed Malchin claimed it was 'a political manifestation [...] containing outdated rhetoric and historical fabrication [...] there is no historical presence, no historical continuity of battles [...]' (Mount Eytan file 1993). Asa Kasher maintained that 'the connection of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel could not be a guiding element of the museum[, and] it could only be a background factor' (Mount Eytan file 1994b), while the author Amos Oz stated that 'on no account can an entire war be presented as if it were motivated by memory of the Bible or the Holocaust' (Mount Eytan file 1994a). Approximately 50 advisors presented their views.

The 1948 funding generation – those who had fought in the War of Independence – mobilized for action against intellectuals' apparent delegitimization of the myth of war and rituals for the fallen. Members of that generation served on the Mount Eytan board. Despite their divided opinions, most had participated in the struggle for statehood,



and agreed that Mount Eytan should immortalize Israel's rebirth and sovereignty. A 'strange bedfellows' syndrome that emerged among the Mount Eytan pioneers was reflected in the Knesset in 1998, when budget constraints were apparently leading to the project's shutdown. Veteran Revisionist MK Reuven Rivlin (Likud) teamed with General Ori Or (res.) (Labour) to present a joint resolution committing future governments to continue the initiative. The lawmakers who supported the resolution reflected views upholding the traditional Zionist narrative.

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One influence on post-Zionist thinkers was the delegitimization of Zionism's combatant side, thinking that held Zionist aggression responsible for injustices to the Arabs in the name of national ideology. A consensus in the Knesset expressed aversion to these tendencies. Ori Or challenged it: 'For the Jewish people in Israel, it is easier to commemorate Jews as victims [alluding to Yad Vashem]. We have not yet found a way to memorialize Jews who fought for their country's founding [...] and I fear [...] that our conscience [...] has rendered us unable to truly commemorate our national revival in a place deserving of it [...]' Or claimed, 'It is unacceptable that there is a museum memorializing Jews as victims but none commemorating the Jewish people's revival from the beginning of Zionism until now' (Mount Eytan file 1994b).

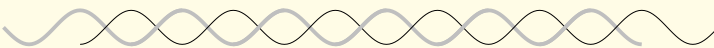
The Rivlin-Or bill was passed thanks to the Knesset's Zionist factions. The bill resolved that 'The National Centre for Israel's Campaigns [...] will be established on Mount Eytan' that 'the Knesset reaffirms the decisions taken by four Israeli governments [...] [and] requests that the government start allocating funds in 1998' and 'that it lay the cornerstone for Project Mount Eytan on Independence Day 1998' (Knesset, 27 January 1998). Netanyahu set the project aside, and government funding remains frozen at the time of writing.

During Mount Eytan's long gestation, the backdrop was gradually changing. The Oslo Accords and post national/Zionist interpretative tendencies, labelled 'historical revisionism' in the academy, were presented as a 'covert narrative' previously hidden from the public: military failures (Nachon 2001), corruption, maltreatment of POWs (Golani 2002), and plans to expel Arabs (Morris 1987). Research pre-

sented Israel as observing its surroundings from a purely 'military perspective' (Ben-Eliezer 1995, 34) that created a heroic heritage, and gave political power to those using military power needlessly.

[228] The IDF seemingly supported Mount Eytan in countering these tendencies. Earlier, the army had used 'combat heritage' as a tool for encouraging youth to enlist. The declared significance of combat heritage was to provide 'narratives of battles stressing values [...] morale [...] esprit de corps [...] loyalty, sacrifice and solidarity [...] a process of selective recollection [which must] include a strict selection of the "memories" supporting the message' (Bar-On 2000). Historical revisionism's impact also affected the Mount Eytan steering committee. Gen. Elad Peled (res.) maintained that 'difficult subjects should not be concealed [...] In another few generations, the truth will be evident and if it becomes apparent that a museum like this was covering up, even the truth won't be believed.' Here, the board's decision to authorize the IDF History Department to arbitrate disputed military topics enraged some researchers, who stood behind what Amos Oz called 'the museum's conversion into a propaganda tool' (Mount Eytan file 1994b).

Various long-standing memorial associations considered Mount Eytan a threat. They competed for minuscule public funding, tourists, state ceremonies, public figures, and media attention, but the proposed national memorial complex aroused joint opposition. To demonstrate the project's superfluity, several strategies were used: discreet meetings with prime ministers, defence ministers, MKs, and media manipulation. Commemorative associations, representing sites that had become state memorials, led the opposition. The boards of these associations comprise senior members, past and present, of the IDF and defence establishment, forming an 'old boys' network.' The corps and brigades they represent receive preferred funding, and raise funds independently. The network enabled directors to obtain preferred land and grants for commemorative sites; many of the leaders were part of the military establishment, belonging simultaneously to security and government establishments, often in active positions. Gen. Rafael Vardi, who chaired the committee responsible for allocating security establishment and finance ministry funds to army corps' non-



profits, was himself was on the Givati Brigade Memorial Association's board.

While associations highlighted their brigades and corps, bereaved families and combatants who had not served in those units became embittered; the collective memory had forgotten them. Mount Eytan was thought to counter that tendency. Knesset Speaker Shevach Weiss claimed that prestigious corps sought to maintain a hierarchy of the fallen. '[C]reating equality among the dead [...] is a central issue,' observed MK Ophir Pines (Labour): '[...] there is no national commemoration site [...] there are some who are not commemorated anywhere' (Knesset, 27 January 1996). [229]

Losing control over the future content and historical nuances governing the new site were feared. Many events in Israeli military history can be presented differently, with each interested party stressing its role in battle, such as the battle for Ammunition Hill in 1967, or trying to whitewash mistakes. To appease the associations, the museum team proposed 'not including topics presented in the corps museums, and to refer visitors to them' (Mount Eytan file 1995). Nevertheless, the museum team explicitly wanted 'to present [information] from a more historical and academic perspective, critical, with question-marks.' Steering-committee members generally saw the museum as 'a site for open dialogue' noting that 'in modern democratic society, there are multiple approaches to representing the past, on whose general interpretation full agreement is unachievable' (Mount Eytan file 1995). Founding Mount Eytan would force the issue of coming to grips with official history.

The arguments against Mount Eytan, representing most commemorative associations, were drafted by Meir Pe'il, a director of the Palmach association; Pe'il thought another facility was pointless: 'We have a real problem over transmitting our military heritage, but a museum won't solve it' (*Yediot Abaronot*, 24 April 1995). Requesting that the Knesset cancel the project, Deputy Defence Minister Silvan Shalom (Likud) claimed that 'the major opponent to Mount Eytan is not the Finance Ministry [...] [but] all the other commemorative sites across the country' (Knesset, 17 January 1998).

The entities supporting Mount Eytan were principally associations

[230] engaged in issues of bereavement, commemoration, and assisting families of the war-dead, among them Yad Labanim, representing bereaved parents of people killed while serving in the IDF; the Organization for IDF Widows and Orphans; the National Organization for Haganah Comrades; the Alliance for Etzel Soldiers, the Society for Commemorating the Lehi Heritage and its Fallen; Organization of IDF Invalids; the Association for IDF Pensioners; the Union for Demobilized Soldiers; and the Public Council for Soldiers' Commemoration. This coalition formally asked the steering committee to address the experience of loss and bereavement. Project supporters saw it as 'a national project in which they, the state, and the government, salute the fallen, [and] honour the bereaved families' (Knesset, 18 March 1996). With the threat of the project's cancellation, Shaul Yahalom (Mafdal) exclaimed that 'Israel must seek the fallen and bereaved families' forgiveness for the government's decision [...] to cancel Project Mount Eytan' (Knesset, 18 March 1998).

Commemoration strategies and styles reflecting various orientations in Israel were on the agenda of all Mount Eytan committees. A fundamental decision was whether the centre should be solely a commemorative site for Israel's fallen, or assume other roles. This debate coalesced in the 1990s. For example, Asa Kasher, an Israeli philosopher and linguist who helped draw up the IDF's Code of Conduct and a bereaved father, opposed Mount Eytan's aggrandizement into a state commemorative project with statist values; instead, he suggested a focus on memorials that commemorate individuals, not the elements cementing them together, emphasizing the individual, not the general level (Knesset, 18 March 1998).

Reuven Rivlin (Likud) concurred, pointing out that 'Today young Israelis are more interested in personal stories [...] Mount Eytan must address the Israelis of the 1990s in their language. The Israeli media already do this well. When disasters occur [...] [t]he entire nation mourns with the families and Mount Eytan's importance stems from this' (Knesset, 18 March 1998). Individually-focused commemoration now clashed with traditional modes of Israeli remembrance.

After many discussions, the committee decided to define the centre as a 'heritage site' presenting Israel's struggle for sovereignty and



security. Commemoration would be closely integrated with the struggle, through architecture, content, the historical narrative of the Israeli people, the state and its military campaigns. The Mount Eytan directorate adopted the position that the proposed museum should be a living institution, combining commemoration with cultural and educational activities. [231]

On 9 September 1997, Netanyahu's government decided to cancel the Mount Eytan project. Finance Minister Ne'eman claimed that 'all the basic work carried out will be preserved in ways enabling its future use.' Nevertheless, the government stipulated that the project's continuation depended on obtaining 'full funding from donations, without a state budget' (Mount Eytan file 1982b). The announcement aroused acrimonious comments from Knesset members, and symbolized the nationalist-Zionist forces' loss of power in setting national values. Others lamented the wasted investment. The cancellation set off debates, some of which are presented here, over lost national values and the government's commitment to commemorate all of the state's fallen.

THE UNDECIDED PAST: NON-DECISION-MAKING
AND MOUNT EYTAN

Many politicians claimed that the Mount Eytan project was cancelled only because of budget constraints. We have presented the splits and disputes surrounding the content and symbols of a national commemorative site, at a time when national privatization and erosion of the social consensus are increasing. Examining the project through the prism of the dominant polarization between right and left amply projects the complexity of a challenge aimed at achieving consensus and solidarity. It is doubtful whether any consensus still exists in Israeli society.

Mount Eytan's goals, phrased by the Begin government, emphasized 'the commemoration of heroism of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel on behalf of the Land of Israel' in the first clause. The second clause stresses the need to memorialize 'heroic acts in the Land of Israel and for the Land of Israel: defence of the Jewish Yishuv in the Land of Israel, the revolt and struggle against a foreign regime,' from the time of Bar-Giora to the IDF. Commemorating all of Israel's fallen

in military campaigns is only mentioned in the fifth clause (Mount Eytan file 1982b). The Begin government sought to find a place in the reformulated national memory for the underground organizations and to present them as integral role-players in Israel's rebirth.

[232] Against the dominant political background that established Mount Eytan's goals, a social movement emerged in the 1990s from the Israeli public, and grew impressively. Organizations representing bereaved parents, widows and orphans influenced changing goals, starting in 1994 when they advocated 'memorializing everyone killed in military campaigns, or during military or national service.' Where political forces under Begin focused on heroism and rebirth, with commemorative activity only in fifth place, bereavement and commemorative organizations sought to rank it first. In 1994, a left-wing government entirely omitted the underground organizations from Mount Eytan's agenda. In this instance, policymakers hoped to avoid any dispute over historical issues.

Heroism again became the leading goal in 1999, while the underground organizations lost their significance in new phraseology stipulating that the site would 'commemorate all the fallen in Israel's campaigns – those who fell in the Land of Israel or for the Land of Israel from the very beginning of Jewish existence in the Land of Israel.' But an additional change to Mount Eytan's agenda for that year was the inclusion of peace, though from its inception the site was conceived as a museum dedicated to the army. The Netanyahu government expunged this same goal of elevating peace as a value among Israeli society and soldiers.

The ever-changing goals and disputes reflected the reluctance of successive Israeli governments to finalize the content of the Mount Eytan site. Choosing the visual and pedagogic concepts also reflected an assortment of values and orientations. The museum staff, aware that its discussions and decisions would require approval from many governments, both right- and left-leaning, concluded by the late 1990s that the facility would comprise four central galleries constituting 'the heart of the museum:' (1) Army and Society gallery: stressing links between the IDF and society, (2) Man in Battle gallery: war from combatants' perspective, (3) Combatant Force gallery: the IDF's structure



and organization, (4) War Exhibition galleries: Israeli war narratives from 1948 onward. Suspended over these four galleries would be the Peace Gallery, symbolizing hopes for peace, making it clear that Israelis want peace, and that whatever war Israel is currently engaged in will be the last.

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The official team that had the role of supervising the planning and construction of Mount Eytan had to constantly reorient its decisions to satisfy the many values and variables in the Israeli arena. As one team-member remarked, they were engaged in an unending balancing act between irreconcilable forces: individuals vs. the collective; inculcating military heritage vs. insistence on ‘the historical truth;’ perspectives from specific points in time vs. *sub specie aeternitatis*; and society’s longing for peace vs. the need to demonstrate Israel’s military capabilities to strike the enemy. The team’s proposals avoided one-sided decisions; they tried to please, reflect, and include the range of voices in the cultural arena. From a management viewpoint, non-decision-making was the result. The final decision was indecisive; no single ideological line was found. The facility would function as a commemorative site, but be individualistic; would serve as a museum for military history but also feature a peace gallery; would showcase the experience of war, but not its warlike aspects – rather focusing on the individual soldier’s dilemmas in battle.

Author Haim Guri, when asked to present his position to the Mount Eytan board, expressed the problematic of creating a site to serve as an agent of memory and culture in an age of shifting values. It was a ‘political and social minefield [...] from the point of view of terminology – “the liberation of Jerusalem,” “the liberation of the territories,” “the Occupied Territories” [...] who has the authority to decide what is right, what is wrong? [...] How [do we] not turn a place which must represent consensus into a place where everything is disputed? [...] The whole nation fights and pays the price of war – everyone is entitled to representation.’

Beyond the inherent problem of deciding about cultural and value content, the project failed because of values connected only indirectly to commemoration. When Netanyahu promoted his privatization ideology, the welfare state ideology went into retreat. Conserving memory

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for the public good was one of many roles simply abandoned by the state. The state showed its citizens its collapse under 'an excessive burden' of tasks and expectations, and the need to curtail its involvement in providing public services, and promoted a political culture of private initiative, which included fundraising for social endeavours once supported by tax shekels. Against this socioeconomic division, the state withdrew from financially underwriting many projects: Mount Eytan was only one of them.

The public arena of memory, certainly the state arena of memory and the contents of statist museums, seem appropriate for examining and identifying what Pizzorno (1987, 23) calls 'absolutist politics:' the kind of politics that dictates the rules of behaviour in sites perceived, incorrectly, as extra-political, designed spontaneously and individually with no political-ideological connection. According to Pizzorno, researchers in all fields must identify the dominant actors, the strategies applied by an all-powerful agent, and the reactions of the cast of actors. Issues of bereavement, commemoration and memory are not apolitical. The state museum embodies social power, the ability to reflect, represent, and shape the past, while creating from it a political agenda for the present. And if, as we have learned in this research, state museums can no longer be opened as a result of the inability to compromise between the struggles, narratives, and perceptions of the whole range of political sub-cultures, it is a case of reflecting society's political culture – disputes, lack of consensus, and unwillingness to reach compromise and a consensual formulation (Urieli 1997, 982). The failure to open the Mount Eytan museum reflects the range of tensions characterizing a society that has shifted from a national to a postnational condition, from the modern to the postmodern, and from the hegemonic to the post-hegemonic (Reiner 1992, 761). Public struggles by political sub-cultures no longer engage with penetrating the public memory, but for creating competing sub-groups of memory-typifying societies in an era when aspirations for distinctiveness supersede aspirations to create a common denominator. It is an era that is no longer characterized by 'managing the consensus' but by 'managing differences' (Ellis and Sonnenfeld 1994, 79; Levy 2004, 29). In such conditions, the past will always remain undecided.



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