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Bereavement and Commemoration as a building block in Israel's collective Identity

Abstract. *In October 2023, Hamas carried out a terrorist attack on Israel, resulting in many casualties among the Israeli population, followed by 1300 funerals. This was a horrifying event in the history of the State of Israel, but not the only one, and it appears that cumulative impact of wars, conflicts, and losses over several decades has profoundly shaped Israelis' collective identity. These events have left a lasting imprint on the nation's socio-cultural landscape. This article explores the complex relationship between individual experiences of loss and the formation of collective identity in contemporary Israeli society, with a particular focus on the roles of bereavement and commemoration.*

A semi-structured interview was conducted with 30 participants who had not lost first-degree relatives, they had experienced the deaths of friends, neighbors, military colleagues, or classmates. Additionally, an online survey with open-ended questions was administered to 132 individuals who had lost first-degree kin over the past 50 years. The article traces the evolution of bereavement practices, highlighting the influence of collective memory and trauma on Israeli identity. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the analysis examines how individuals categorize themselves based on shared experiences of bereavement, incorporating concepts of social categorization, comparison, and group membership. Insights from Cultural Trauma Theory (Alexander, 2004) further illuminate the lasting effects of war and loss on Israeli identity. Collective Memory, as examined by Halbwachs (1992), Olick (1998), and Schwartz (1992), emerges as a key factor in fostering resilience and a shared national identity. The conclusion enhances understanding of how historical traumas shape cultural narratives, influencing both individual perceptions and societal ethos. The article discusses the implications for Israeli collective

identity and offers recommendations for future research. It provides valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and others interested in the intricate interplay between bereavement, commemoration, and collective identity in contemporary Israeli society.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Bereavement is a painful subject on the agenda in the State of Israel. Due to ongoing terrorist attacks within its borders and efforts to protect its borders, Israel experiences many casualties, primarily among young people under 40 who serve in the military by law or civilians caught in terrorist attacks through no fault of their own. As a result, the abnormal act of parents having to accompany their child's burial has become a realistic and available occurrence in Israel's tragic reality.

Given that one of the most unifying values in Israeli society is the sanctity of those who have fallen and the memory of the fallen, as part of the collective identity, memorial ceremonies and commemorative events are held every year. However, these acts have become not only ways to memorialize lost loved ones, but also necessary acts rooted in comparison and distinction within the bereaved group and a transition from private mourning to a public loss. The high frequency of Israeli casualties has meant that bereavement has permeated Israeli culture and identity. Though unfortunate, bereavement has unified Israeli society in honoring those who lost their life prematurely while defending the nation. The significance of collective identity within Israeli society is deeply embedded in the historical and social fabric of the nation. As scholars have noted,[1] understanding this collective identity requires an examination of the historical context, including periods of conflict, resilience, and nation-building.

1.2. Aim and Method

The existing body of literature provides a foundation for comprehending collective identity, yet a noticeable gap exists in understanding how bereavement and commemoration contribute to its formation. This paper aims to bridge this gap by investigating the intricate relationship between individual experiences of loss and the broader construction of collective identity.

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[1] A.D. Smith, *National Identity*, University of Nevada Press, 1991; D. Bar-Tal, *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social Psychological Analysis*, Sage, 2000.

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the relationship between bereavement, commemoration, and collective identity in contemporary Israeli society. A qualitative survey was used as the primary data collection method, allowing for an in-depth examination of subjective experiences and perceptions of those who lost their first-of-kin.[2] The survey was administered online in Hebrew. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 30 interviewees examining the same topics. These interviewees did not experience a loss of first kin, however, over the years they experienced losses in wider circles.

The survey (n=132) and the interviews (n=30) consisted of open-ended questions addressing key themes: personal experiences of loss, participation in commemorative practices, sense of collective identity, sense of belonging, perceptions of cultural trauma, and their views on ethnic and religious diversity in shaping their mourning practices. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. This nonprobability approach is suitable for in-depth qualitative research often focuses on understanding a complex social phenomenon. Within the sampling group representation from diverse segments, different age groups, different eras of loss, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and geographical regions were taken into consideration.

Limitations include the self-selected nature of the sample and potential response bias due to the sensitive topic. Reflexive practices, including maintaining a research journal and peer debriefing, were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

The State of Israel throughout its 77 years of independence has known existential wars since its foundation. Frequent terror attacks and security threats were experienced by the state of Israel and its people, resulting in a significant loss of life, including those of boys, soldiers, mothers, dads, commanders, and common residents. Israeli bereavement maintains an intergenerational relationship between the fallen and those who survived, and this relationship is present in Israeli culture.[3] This developed a narrative that emphasizes sacrifice and shared commitment to the nation's security.

As a means of commemoration and remembrance, rituals were created around bereavement and serve as inseparable elements in shaping the collective identity of Israelis. Bereavement is expressed through various mechanisms and social rituals.

[2] J.W. Creswell & C.N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, Sage, 2016.

[3] G. Glasner-Heled, *Pursuing memory and elusive memory: A brief look at Israeli bereavement*, "Social Issues in Israel" 2018, no. 25, pp. 28–63 (Hebrew), http://www.jstor.org/stable/27058882 [accesses date: 20.10.2024].

National Memorial Day, National Monuments and private Memorials, Public Ceremonies, Commemoration, and more. The following aspects emphasize how collective identity is expressed in Israel in the process of mourning and commemoration.

National Memorial Day: Israel observes solemn national memorial days by law since 1963, named Yom HaZikaron[4] (Rememberance Day). This day is dedicated to honoring fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism and is marked by ceremonies, public events, and a two-minute nationwide siren, unifying the entire nation in a collective act of remembrance. This ritualistic observance reinforces a shared identity rooted in sacrifice and collective memory.

Military Service and Sacrifice: The compulsory military service in Israel fosters a collective bond among citizens. Bereavement within military service is considered a shared responsibility and is commemorated collectively. The narratives of heroism and sacrifice contribute to the construction of a collective identity that emphasizes the nation's resilience and commitment to its defense.

Public Grieving Rituals: Public grieving rituals, such as funerals for fallen soldiers and victims of terror, are highly visible expressions of collective mourning. These ceremonies often attract large crowds (who do not necessarily know the grieving family), reflecting a collective commitment to honoring the sacrifices made for the nation. The public nature of these rituals reinforces a sense of shared grief and national unity.

National Memorials and Monuments: Israel features significant national memorials and monuments, such as Yad Vashem for the Holocaust, National Hall For the Fallen Soldiers, military cemeteries, and Corps monuments which serve as physical symbols of collective memory. These sites become centers of community reflection and remembrance and strengthen a common historical narrative and a collective identity rooted in the nation's struggles and loss.[5]

Cultural Narratives: The cultural narrative surrounding bereavement in Israel often portrays fallen soldiers as national heroes who have contributed to the country's survival and security. This narrative is transmitted through educational systems, media, and commemorative events, shaping a collective identity that honors sacrifice and resilience in the face of adversity.

Inclusive Commemoration: While the dominant narrative emphasizes a Jewish perspective, efforts are made to include diverse voices within Israeli society. Recognizing ethnic and religious diversity, commemorative events aim to encompass narratives from various communities, resulting in a more inclusive collective identity that reflects the nation's diversity.

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[4] The Knesset website (n.d.), *Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers*, https://main.knesset. gov.il/en/about/lexicon/pages/memorialday.aspx [access date: 20.04.2024].

[5] Ministry of Environmental Protection, *National Parks, Nature Reserves, National Sites and Memorial Sites Law*, 1998, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/national_parks_nature_reserves_law [access date: 20.04.2024].

Continuous Commemoration: The cyclical nature of memorial events, annually revisited on Memorial Day and other occasions, establishes a continuous thread of remembrance. This recurrence reinforces the collective identity, ensuring that the memory of sacrifices remains embedded in the national consciousness and shapes the identity of successive generations.

In summary, through bereavement and a narrative that emphasizes sacrifice, resilience, and a shared commitment to the nation's security the collective identity in Israel is expressed. The rituals, memorials, and cultural narratives surrounding bereavement serve as integral components in shaping and reinforcing the collective identity of contemporary Israeli.

2.1. Social Identity Theory

This subchapter examines the foundational principles of Social Identity Theory, drawing on scholarly works such as Tajfel and Turner[6] and Hogg and Abrams,[7] to elucidate how collective identity is formed within a societal context.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner,[8] is pertinent to understanding how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups and derive their identity from these group memberships.[9] In the Israeli context, where societal divisions and group affiliations are often rooted in historical, cultural, and political dimensions, SIT can provide insights into the formation of collective identities.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers a valuable lens through which we can delve into how individuals in Israeli society identify with and distinguish themselves through shared experiences related to bereavement and commemoration. Within the context of mourning and remembrance, SIT provides insights into the role of social categorization, social comparison, and group membership in shaping collective identity.

Social Categorization: Social categorization is a fundamental aspect of SIT, emphasizing how individuals classify themselves and others into distinct social groups based on shared characteristics. This categorization is not limited to observable traits but extends to perceived similarities, such as values, beliefs, or common experiences. Tajfel and Turner[10] highlight that categorization lays the groundwork

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[6] H. Tajfel *et al.*, *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*, "Organizational identity: A reader" 1979, no. 56(65).

[7] M.A. Hogg & D. Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. Routledge, 1988.

[8] H. Tajfel *et al.*, *An integrative theory…*

[9] *Ibidem.*

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 16.

for social identity, as individuals define themselves in terms of the social groups to which they belong.

In the realm of bereavement and commemoration, social categorization becomes a pivotal mechanism in shaping collective identity. SIT posits that individuals categorize themselves and others based on shared characteristics, such as the experience of loss and participation in communal mourning rituals. Within Israeli society, the categories may extend beyond individual grief to encompass broader groupings, such as families of fallen soldiers, war veterans, or those who actively participate in commemorative events. These shared categories form the basis for a collective identity, as individuals identify with and differentiate themselves based on their roles within the broader narrative of bereavement.

Social Comparison: Social comparison, another central concept in SIT, involves individuals evaluating their group with others from the wider community. This process helps individuals establish a positive social identity by emphasizing the favorable aspects of their ingroup compared to outgroups. By engaging in social comparison, individuals bolster their self-esteem and reinforce a positive image of their group. Their group (e.g., families of fallen soldiers) with other relevant groups (e.g., loss due to terror attacks on civilians. or those who may not have experienced similar losses). This process influences perceptions of collective identity and contributes to a sense of distinctiveness even in such painful events. For instance, a comparison between the nature of the incident or a comparison between groups actively involved in commemoration to those less engaged may influence the dynamics of grief and the significance attached to communal rituals.

Group Membership: Group membership, the third key element of SIT, focuses on the psychological and emotional attachment individuals feel toward their social groups. Turner *et al.*[11] argue that individuals derive a sense of belonging, pride, and self-worth from their group memberships. The significance of group membership is particularly evident in the emotional and behavioral investment individuals make in promoting the welfare of their ingroup.

The concept of group membership is evident in the way individuals align themselves with specific bereavement-related groups within Israeli society.[12] Whether it be through participation in support groups, involvement in memorial events, or affiliation with organizations dedicated to commemorating the fallen, individuals find a sense of belonging and shared identity within these groups. Group membership contributes to the construction of a collective identity that is deeply rooted in the experience of bereavement. The rituals and practices associated with group membership become symbols of shared grief and resilience, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

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[11] H. Tajfel *et al.*, *An integrative theory…*

[12] H. Tajfel & J.C. Turner, *The social identity theory of intergroup behavior*, in *Political psychology: Key readings*, eds. J.T. Jost & J. Sidanius, Psychology Press 2004.

2.2. Collective Memory

This subchapter explores the concept of collective memory and its relevance to the Israeli experience, to establish a theoretical foundation, by referring to Halbach,[13] Olick and Robbins,[14] and Schwartz, Fukuoka, & Takita-Ishii.[15]

In contemporary Israeli society, the exploration of collective identity is intricately intertwined with the processes of bereavement and commemoration. To elucidate this complex phenomenon, it is essential to explore the field of Collective Memory, based on the seminal works of Maurice Halbwachs, as well as the subsequent developments by scholars such as Jeffrey Olick and Barry Schwartz. Maurice Halbwachs laid the foundation for the concept of Collective Memory in his seminal work *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (The Social Frameworks of Memory).[16] Halbachs posited that memory is not an individualistic endeavor but is deeply embedded within social frameworks. He argued that individuals derive their memories from collective experiences and shared social contexts, thereby emphasizing the inherently social nature of memory.

Building upon Halbwachs' framework, scholars such as Jeffrey Olick and Barry Schwartz have expanded the understanding of Collective Memory. Olick in his work *Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practice*, emphasized the dynamic and contested nature of collective remembering. He argued that collective memories are not static but are subject to negotiation, contestation, and reinterpretation over time.[17]

Barry Schwartz[18] in his exploration of commemoration in *Memory, Identity, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers, and Philosophers*, highlighted the role of commemorative practices in shaping collective memory. Commemoration, whether through rituals, monuments, art or public ceremonies, becomes a vehicle through which societies express their shared narratives and reinforce a sense of collective identity.

Situated within the framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT), which posits that individuals derive a significant part of their identity from their group memberships, the integration of Collective Memory becomes pivotal. SIT, developed by Henri

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[13] M. Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, University of Chicago Press 2020.

[14] J.K. Olick & J. Robbins, *Social memory studies: From "collective memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices*, "Annual Review of sociology" 1998, no. 24(1), pp. 105–140.

[15] B. Schwartz, K. Fukuoka & S. Takita-Ishii, *Collective memory: Why culture matters*, *The Blackwell companion to the sociology of culture*, Blackwell Publishing 2005.

[16] M. Halbwachs, *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, transl. L A. Coser, University of Chicago Press 1992.

[17] J.K. Olick & J. Robbins, *Social memory studies*, pp. 126–127.

[18] B. Schwartz, *Memory, Identity, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers, and Philosophers*, University of Delaware Press 1992.

Tajfel and John Turner, elucidates how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. The incorporation of Collective Memory within SIT underscores how the shared recollections of a group contribute to the construction and reinforcement of collective identity.[19]

Analyzing the Israeli context, the experience of bereavement and commemoration becomes a focal point for the construction of collective memory. The commemoration of significant events, such as military conflicts and national tragedies, serves as a mechanism through which the Israeli society collectively remembers and interprets its past. Moreover, the act of mourning and commemorating fallen soldiers fosters a shared sense of sacrifice and national unity.

The following table presents key elements of the conceptualization of Collective Memory from which I draw the context of Israeli society.

Elements of Collective Memory	Description
Social Frameworks	Derived from Halbwachs, emphasizes the communal nature of memory.
Dynamic Nature	Influenced by Olick's perspective, highlights the fluid and contested nature of collective remembering.
Commemorative Practices	Drawing from Schwartz underscores the role of rituals, monuments, and ceremonies in shaping collective memory.
Social Identity Theory (SIT)	Integration with Tajfel and Turner's theory emphasizes how collective memory contributes to the formation of social identity.

To conclude this chapter, the exploration of collective identity in contemporary Israeli society necessitates a nuanced understanding of Collective Memory. By integrating Halbwachs' foundational ideas with the insights of scholars like Olick and Schwartz, we can comprehend how groups construct and maintain a shared understanding of their past through the processes of bereavement and commemoration. This analytical framework provides a robust foundation for examining the intricate interplay between individual and collective memory within the socio-cultural context of Israel.

Chapter 3. Bereavement in Israeli Society

The evolution of bereavement in Israeli society is inseparable from the nation's conflicts, ranging from the War of Independence, 1948, to a recent Hamas terror attack in October 2023. Wars and conflicts have left an indelible mark on the

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[19] H. Tajfel & J.C. Turner, *The social identity…*, p. 283.

collective consciousness, shaping the rituals and practices surrounding grief. In subsequent sections, I will delve deeper into Understanding Cultural Trauma, coping mechanism and resilience examining how it has left a lasting imprint on bereavement practices within Israeli society.

3.1. Understanding Collective Identity and Cultural Trauma

The nexus between collective identity and cultural trauma stands as a cornerstone in the complexity of societal dynamics, particularly within the context of Israeli society marked by recurrent experiences of wars and bereavement. Trauma Studies, informed by seminal works such as those by Herman[20] and Van der Kolk,[21] which examines psychological trauma in a social context, drawing parallels between private and public horrors, had recognized that the effects of traumatic events extend beyond the immediate aftermath, influencing individuals and societies in profound ways in the long run. In addition to these studies is the insightful framework of cultural trauma, as Alexander and colleague[22] expounded. Alexander and colleagues explained that cultural trauma manifests when a community undergoes a profound threat to its core values, leaving an enduring imprint on its collective identity, (as s slavery significantly shaped African American identity). In the case of Israel, the profound and recurring experiences of conflict and loss have etched a narrative of cultural trauma into the national consciousness.[23]

The recurrent trauma from wars and bereavement in Israeli society has not only challenged the very essence of the nation's core values but has also become a formative force in shaping its collective identity. The enduring impact of these traumatic events reverberates through generations, influencing the nation's ethos, self-perception, and shared narratives. The scars of historical conflicts become embedded in the collective memory, contributing to the construction of a distinctive Israeli identity that bears the weight of both resilience and trauma. Understanding this intersection allows a deep dive into how shared experiences of loss become foundational elements in constructing a collective identity. Traumas of the past, woven into the Israeli society, influence how individuals within the community perceive the collective memory of wars and bereavement. You always know a neighbor, a friend, or someone's brother who fell in battle for the country's defense or during military service. These situations oblige the individual to take part in the personal memorial ceremonies and the annual state memorial ceremonies and, by

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[20] J.L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, Basic Books, 1992.

[21] B.A. van der Kolk, *The body keeps the score: Memory and the evolving psychobiology of posttraumatic stress*, "Harvard Review of Psychiatry" 1994, no. 1(5).

[22] J.C. Alexander *et al.*, *Cultural trauma and collective identity*, Universytet of California Press, 2004.

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

that, becomes a binding agent, fostering a sense of shared history, resilience, and unique national identity.

3.1.1. Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Israeli society has endured significant cultural trauma stemming from widespread bereavement, especially due to ongoing violent conflict. According to research, cultural trauma occurs when members of a society "feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks" (Alexander, 2004 p.1). Lebel's[24] research underscores the significant impact of institutional and structural contexts on the experience of bereavement. Political and social institutions can shape and mobilize grief as a form of social capital to enhance national loyalty and political support. Moreover, he mentioned that intimate and private responses to loss are influenced by the expectations and dominance of institutional frameworks, particularly in the context of battlefield deaths. In the Israeli case, frequent terrorist attacks and wars have resulted in many tragic deaths, rupturing societal meaning and identity. However, Israeli society has developed ways to cope with this trauma, including public grieving rituals, national remembrance days, and commemorative narratives that give meaning to victims' deaths[25]. For instance, Israel's official Memorial Day involves solemn ceremonies, moments of silence, and visits to military cemeteries across the country to honor fallen soldiers and the victims of terrorism attract. These rituals allow Israeli society to publicly express its grief, promoting solidarity and collective healing, and foster resilience.

Southwick *et al.*[26] discusses the social ecology of resilience, which examines how various social, economic, cultural, and political factors interact to influence resilience at the individual and family levels. This perspective suggests that resilience is not solely an individual trait but is also shaped by the broader societal context. For example, access to social resources, social support, and belonging significantly impact an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity. Community belonging fosters resilience by enhancing self-esteem and motivation to cope. Reciprocal relationships where individuals support one another build collective strength, which are crucial for overcoming challenges. This social support network, particularly valuable during crises, enables resource pooling contributing to individual and community well-being.

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[24] U. Lebel, *Panopticon of death: Institutional design of bereavement*, "Acta Sociologica" 2011, no. 54(4).

[25] D. Handelman & E. Katz, *State ceremonies of Israel: Remembrance Day and Independence Day*, "Israeli Judaism: The sociology of religion in Israel" 1995, no. 7.

[26] S.M. Southwick Bonanno *et al.*, *Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives*, "European Journal of Psychotraumatology" 2014, no. 5(1).

3.1.2. Commemoration as a Cultural Response

Commemoration, as a cultural response to loss, plays a pivotal role in this interplay. Rituals, memorials, and public commemorations become mechanisms through which collective identity is reaffirmed, and cultural trauma is addressed. By examining commemorative practices within Israeli society, we gain insights into how the community copes with loss, perpetuates narratives of resilience, and reinforces a shared sense of identity. The commemorative process becomes a collective endeavor that serves as a testament to the community's commitment to honoring its past while actively shaping its future.[27] Israel's national identity incorporates the cultural narrative that these tragic deaths were not in vain but instead contributed to the larger goal of securing the Jewish people's independence and safety in their ancestral homeland. This narrative allows Israelis to assign significance to senseless, violent loss. Ultimately, these methods enable Israeli society's ongoing functioning and resilience despite the continuance loss.

In synthesizing these elements, the interplay between collective identity, societal resilience, cultural trauma, and commemoration emerges as a dynamic process that defines the soul of a community. This exploration contributes to a nuanced understanding of how historical traumas become embedded in the cultural narrative, influencing the way a society perceives itself and navigates the complexities of its identity in the face of adversity.

Chapter 4. Commemoration Practices

4.1. National Memorials and Monuments

National memorials and monuments play a role in shaping collective memory and national identity. As Winter[28] discusses, these sites of memory affirm particular narratives about the past and what events are worth commemorating. The research finds that memorials can create a shared sense of trauma and enable societies to emotionally process large-scale losses. Similarly, Winter[29] examines various forms of commemoration, including war memorials, spiritualism, and apocalyptic imagery in art and literature in Europe. He argues that these monuments guide which versions of history are collectively remembered. Overall, national memorials and

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[27] V. Vinitzky-Seroussi, *Commemorating a Difficult Past: Yitzhak Rabin's Memorials*, "American Sociological Review" 2002, no. 67.

[28] J. Winter, *Memory in Mind and Culture: Historians and Sites of Memory*, Washington University, St. Louis 2009.

[29] J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

monuments act as symbolic sites where political narratives are anchored for future generations. The impact extends beyond memorializing past deaths to shaping current national identities and attitudes. This demonstrates the power of memorials to define cultural legacy and collective memory around traumatic events.

The societal impact of memorial sites also profoundly shapes Israeli cultural legacy and bereavement rituals. As Winter[30] (1995) highlights, commemoration spaces often embody a nation's sense of collective victimhood, which has deeply defined Israel's national psyche due to a history of conflict and terrorism targeting civilians. Examples such as the imposing Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum or the tombs of political leaders like Yitzhak Rabin shape Israeli memories around trauma and loss. This allows societies to practice grief publicly through memorial symbols and rituals like moments of silence, candle lighting, and flower-laying ceremonies.[24] The Israeli national calendar incorporates these practices heavily through annual events marking Holocaust Remembrance Day and Memorial Day for the fallen soldiers and for victims of terror attacks (which is attached to Independence Day). Just as Winter[31] describes the European war monuments, these commemoration spaces and bereavement rituals reinforce an Israeli identity rooted in memories of both grief and resilience as a people. This exemplifies their cultural influence in constructing collective memory.

4.2. Rituals and Ceremonies

Commemorative rituals and ceremonies hold profound significance for collective identity, as explored by scholars like Walter[32] and Gillis.[33] These grieving rituals allow groups to make sense of loss, formally express communal bonds, assign meaning to deaths, and shape shared understandings of the past. As Walter (1998) analyzes, the standardized performances of funerals or memorial events facilitate group solidarity and catharsis while providing continuity of identity before and after loss. Gillis (1994) introduce broad overview of the development of public memory in relation to the history of the nation-state, examining how commemorative ceremonies allow societies to construct an official shared narrative about major events and appoint the dead symbolic roles as cultural heroes. Both authors find that formal collective grieving shapes common memories and enables the deceased to remain members of the community. Ultimately, it demonstrates how commemorative rituals facilitate continuity and collective coherence while defining group history and character in the face of loss. Hence, ceremonies provide a forum for establishing official cultural meanings and membership after death.

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[30] J. Winter, *Memory in Mind and Culture…*

[31] J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning…*

[32] T. Walter, *The mourning after Hillsborough*, "Bereavement Care" 1998, no. 17(1).

[33] *Memory and identity: The history of a relationship*, in *Commemorations: The politics of national identity*, ed. J.R. Gillis, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1994.

The significance of grieving rituals for Israeli identity is profoundly exemplified in national practices like Yom HaZikaron (Memorial Day). Walter[34] describes that the annual ceremony shapes cultural meanings around loss on both individual and collective levels through personalized bereavement practices layered into a shared day of national mourning. The two-minute siren stopping all activities countrywide promotes an intensely communal experience, as Gillis'[35] theories suggest. Furthermore, the narrative focus on fallen soldiers as heroic martyrs defending the Jewish homeland constructs an Israeli identity centered on memories of both profound grief and shared resilience. According to Gillis[36], ceremonies allow the deceased symbolic membership in the community's ongoing national project. In these rituals, Israeli identity continuity relies partly upon keeping alive memories of the dead as an essential piece of the living group. Hence, days like Yom HaZikaron showcase how commemorative ceremonies promote continuity and reinforce collective character for Israeli society specifically, as loss becomes integral to their cultural story.

4.3. Uniformity in the face of ethnic and religious diversity

The intersectionality of bereavement and commemoration within the multifaceted of ethnic and religious diversity presents a complex scene, particularly in the context of Israeli society. For a soldier who falls in war or during military service, Israel holds an army burial ceremony accompanied by military and state symbols, emphasizing nationalism, unity, and uniformity – These ceremonies, though personal and private, have no place for individual expression (The General Staff Order 1968). However, in light of the demographic and social changes that Israel has undergone in the last 15 years, a change was imposed and now it is possible to hold a non-religious ceremony or to add individual expressions on small scales.[37]

To unravel the intricate dynamics that influence the collective identity construction process within bereavement and commemoration, I draw attention to Kimmerling's[38] exploration of the social construction of collective memory, which provides a foundational understanding of how ethnic and religious diversity becomes entwined in the Israeli experience of bereavement. The diverse ethno-religious composition of Israeli society, encompassing Jewish, and other communities, introduces a multitude of narratives, perspectives, and mourning rituals. Bereavement, marked by the loss of lives in conflicts, unfolds against a backdrop of varying historical narratives, each contributing to the complexity of collective memory.

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[34] T. Walter, *The mourning after Hillsborough.*

[35] *Memory and identity…*

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] A. Rabinowitz, *The IDF will allow secular and reform ceremonies to be held at military funerals* (Hebrew), "Haaretz News Paper" 2019, July 4, https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/law/2019-07-04/ty- article/.premium/0000017f-e80a-dc7e-adff-f8afe9cc0000 [access date: 20.04.2024].

[38] B. Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military*, University of California Press, 2001.

Smooha's[39] comprehensive study on the complexities of ethnic and religious diversity in Israel further illuminates the nuances of collective identity construction. The divergent experiences and historical trajectories of Jewish and Arab communities within Israel engender distinct modes of bereavement and commemoration. The narratives of loss, rituals, and memorialization practices within each ethno-religious group reflect not only individual grief but also the broader socio-cultural context that shapes the collective identity of each community.

In the Israeli perspective, the interplay between ethnic and religious diversity and the collective identity construction process becomes particularly pronounced during commemorative events. Memorial ceremonies, monuments, and national days of remembrance serve as arenas where the diverse narratives converge and, at times, diverge. The intricate negotiation of collective identity is palpable as Jewish and Arab communities navigate the challenges of commemorating shared losses while grappling with the historical complexities that underpin their distinct experiences.

The intersectionality of bereavement and commemoration in the Israeli context thus becomes a dynamic process where the mosaic of ethnic and religious diversity both enriches and complicates the construction of collective identity. The collective memory is not is not a single, cohesive entity, but rather is made of diverse threads of mourning, influenced by the multifaceted identities within Israeli society.

Chapter 5. Preliminary Findings

Analysis of the interview and survey data revealed five primary themes. Each theme provides unique insights into how individuals navigate the complexity of loss and remembrance:

(1) Transition from Private to Public Mourning, (2) The Role of Rituals in Shaping their Collective Identity, (3) Negotiating Diversity in Commemoration, (4) Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Resilience, (5) Evolution of Commemorative Practices.

1) Transition from Private to Public Mourning (85.2%)

This theme emerged as the most prevalent, highlighting the shift from personal grief to a shared, national experience of loss. Participants frequently described how their individual experiences of bereavement became intertwined with broader societal narratives.

2) The Role of National Rituals in Shaping Collective Identity (79.6%)

Participants consistently emphasized the significance of commemorative rituals in fostering a sense of collective identity. These rituals serve as powerful mechanisms for uniting individuals through shared experiences of remembrance. Such rituals create a temporal, emotional space where individual identities become

[39] S. Smooha, *Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2003*, The Jewish-Arab Center, University of Haifa, Haifa 2004.
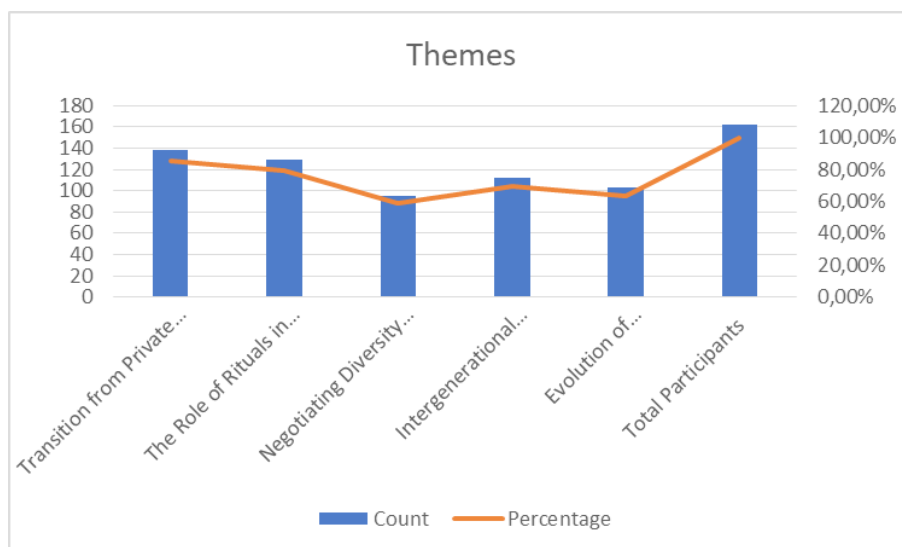
a collective whole, reinforcing a shared sense of national identity rooted in communal loss and resilience.

3) Negotiating Diversity in Commemoration (58.6%)

While less prevalent than the first two themes, this theme highlights the complexities of maintaining unified commemorative practices in a diverse society. Up to 20–15 years ago it was not common to argue the need of personal commemoration. However, in the past decade families are looking to stand out in their private remembrance. Participants from various backgrounds often described the challenges and opportunities in integrating their specific mourning traditions and needs with national practices. This theme underscores the ongoing negotiation between maintaining cultural distinctiveness and participating in a shared national narrative of loss and remembrance.

4) Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Resilience (69.1%)

Many participants reflected on how experiences of loss and commemoration are passed down through generations, shaping the collective memory and identity of younger Israelis who may not have direct experience of certain conflicts. This intergenerational aspect of bereavement and commemoration plays a crucial role in maintaining a sense of historical continuity and shared identity across generations.

5) Evolution of Commemorative Practices (63.6%)

Participants from different age groups often mentioned how commemoration practices have changed over time, reflecting the shifts in societal values and norms. This theme highlights the dynamic nature of collective identity, showing how commemorative practices adapt to changing societal needs while maintaining their role in reinforcing a shared sense of national identity.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This article, aiming to investigate the intricate relationship between individual experiences of loss and the broader construct of collective identity in contemporary Israeli society, has yielded several key findings that contribute significantly to the understanding of collective identity dynamics in the context of bereavement and commemoration. The State of Israel has experienced recurring conflicts and acts of terrorism and has forged a unique collective identity deeply embedded in the experiences of loss, sacrifice, and resilience. This article sheds light on a complex picture constructed from historical perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and cultural responses.

The historical evolution of bereavement practices unveils the profound impact of conflicts on the shaping of rituals and cultural narratives, as well as Interactions between collective identity and cultural trauma, as articulated in Trauma Studies, which elucidates how shared experiences of grief become integral elements in the construction of a resilient national identity. Alexander's Cultural Trauma Theory adds another layer, explaining how traumatic events affect collective identity over time. In the Israeli context, this is reflected in the ongoing impact of wars and terrorism on the national consciousness.

Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides the basis for understanding how individuals identify themselves with social groups. In the Israeli context, this can be expressed in identification with the group of bereaved families or with the broader national identity. Drawing upon Social Identity Theory this study delved into how individuals categorize themselves within societal groups based on shared experiences of loss. Social categorization, social comparison, and group membership were identified as pivotal components shaping the collective identity within the context of mourning and commemoration.

Halbwachs' Collective Memory Theory complements this by explaining how shared memories, especially those related to loss and bereavement, shape group identity. In Israel, this is manifested in national commemoration ceremonies and shared narratives of sacrifice.

The integration of these three theories allows us to understand how personal experiences of loss (as explained by SIT) are translated into collective memory, and how this memory, in turn, shapes national identity in the shadow of ongoing trauma. For example, national ceremonies in Israel (explained by Collective Memory Theory) not only strengthen group identity (SIT) but also serve as a mechanism for coping with cultural trauma as a nation.

In conclusion, the process of transitioning from private mourning to public loss in Israel is not merely a ritualistic progression; it is a dynamic and integral aspect of the nation's collective identity. Bereavement and commemoration practices serve

as threads that weave together diverse experiences, narratives, and histories within Israeli society, creating a mosaic of shared grief, resilience, and national purpose. The intersectionality of ethnic and religious diversity adds layers of complexity to this process, emphasizing the need for inclusive and nuanced approaches to collective identity construction.

As Israel continues to grapple with the ongoing challenges of conflict and loss, this study provides valuable insights into the resilience, unity, and shared commitment that define the nation's character.

Acknowledgments

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