**The *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*:**

**Memory Actors’ perceptions of the role of media and memory**

Memory and questions about its formation occupies both socio-political and scholarly attention (Olick et al, 2011). Yet, those actors devoting their lives to the dissemination of narratives about the past in the veins of the collective historical conciseness are often sidelined and ignored (Gutman, 2017; Holc, 2011). Indeed, while memory is an abstract idea, real and “concrete” actors are involved in the process of shaping what we consider as our shared past (Gutman, 2017; Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2009; Lee & Cahn, 2016; Kubic & Bernhard, 2014). However, even in studies that have attempted to theorize these actors’ work, questions regarding the relationships between memory actors and available media and communication technologies are almost completely overlooked. This is even more striking as media are the most important realms of memory in contemporary times (Hoskins, 2018; Neiger et al., 2011; Olick et al., 2011). This study attempts to fill this theoretical gap by analyzing a unique case-study from Israel. More specifically, it aims to explain how a specific group of memory actors perceive the role of media and memory as part of their unique attempt to change how the Israeli society remembers.

The case-study under scrutiny here is the work of memory actors as part of the ‘Biton Committee’ (2016): an Israeli committee whose aim was to empower communities of *Mizrahi* Jews,i.e.,Israeli Jews originating from the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle-East. Indeed, ethnic tensions between Jews of different origins have caused divisions within Israeli society (Peled, 2014; Smooha, 1993). These tensions are the result of deep-seated differences between *Ashkenazi* Jews (Jews of Western/European origin) and *Mizrahi* Jews and of the claims of the latter of an institutionalized discrimination by the former. In an attempt to ease these tensions, the Israel government announced in February 2016 the establishment of a committee to be chaired by Israel Prize laureate, the *Mizrahi* poet Erez Biton. The newly formed Committee raised various recommendations that aim to empower the marginalized *Mizrahi* communities in Israel, including issues related to media and memory. Most noted was the recommendation to produce a new documentary series: the *Mizrahi* *Pillar of Fire-* asa follow-up to a documentary series from the 1980s. The original series (*The Pillar of Fire*) presented the history of Zionism while ignoring the role of *Mizrahi* Jewsas part of the Jewish national renaissance (Schejter, 2007). The new series, it was hoped, will counter the ongoing marginalization of the Mizrahi narrative in the Israeli public sphere. This recommendation is an invitation to further analyze how committee members perceive the role of different media as part of their memory work.

Below, I begin with a brief exploration of the relationships between memory actors and media. Then I highlight the work of the Biton Committee and connects it to the on-going marginalization of *Mizrahi* Jews in Israel. After presenting the methodology used in this study - that includes both in depth interviews with committee members and a close analysis of the final committee report and related official documents - I will demonstrate how actors’ perceptions about media and memory influenced their work and shaped the recommendation to produce a new documentary series. Such an analysis serve scholars interested in understanding the relationship between memory actors media and the processes of constructing the memory of society.

**Memory Actors and Media**

Memory is a highly sensitive construction of a “sense of the past” (Confino, 1997) within the present, and it is considerably influenced by political and cultural processes (Olick & Robbins, 1998). In this study I use the accepted framework of “cultural memory” to describe an institutionalized, formalized, objectified, and crystallized form of society’s past (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995). Indeed, in order to shape the agreed-upon version of a shared past, struggles over narratives about the past and their mediation to society are taking place (Olick & Robbins, 1998; Rowe et al., 2002). These struggles are led by actors who seek to promote their preferred narratives but only limited scholarship systematically analyzes these actors (Holc 2011; Gutman, 2017).

Memory actors may be devoted individuals, ad-hoc groups, or formal organizations, that share the desire to “produce cultural memory and to steer future remembrance” (Rigney, 2018: 372). However, the work of memory actors is always constrained by the “political field in which they act” (Kubik & Bernhard, 2014: 12), and what society remembers is largely influenced by the relative power of competing actors. Indeed, the power effectively wielded by a specific memory agent “determine[s] to a significant degree the way in which (and if at all) the past will be represented” (Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2009: 30). Consequently, when unequal memory agents debate the adoption and recognition of different narratives about the past, “the prevailing asymmetries in power ultimately determine the debate’s conclusion” (Gutman, 2017: 13).

Among varied elements of influential mnemonic capital, such as the ability to publish official textbooks or the opportunity to build monuments and designate them as important cultural sites, an element of paramount importance is memory actors’ access to media and the ability to capitalize on its unique mnemonic capabilities. Indeed, as society’s memory is a mediated phenomenon (Hoskins, 2011), cultural memory and the practices involved in its construction, rely on communications and discursive practices and require the involvement of communication technologies (Pentzold et al., 2016; Pogacar, 2009). The media create a tangible record of society’s cultural memory (Edy, 1999). Nevertheless, the mediated version of a society’s past is always a constructed, even instrumental version of the past, which serves the needs of specific groups (Edy, 2014; Kansteiner, 2002). When memory actors seek to transmit a coherent, transgenerational narrative to society they capitalize on a variety of media available to them. Weaker memory actors representing marginalized groups, which typically suffer from the marginalization of their memories among numerous other injustices, may have little influence on the media establishment as they enjoy varying levels of access and differ in their capabilities to capitalize on them (Tirosh, 2017; Tirosh, 2018a; Tirosh, 2018b).

In addition, while access to media and capabilities to use them are indeed important when realizing memory actors' power to shape narratives about the past, we should also consider how memory actors perceive media and their role in memory debates. Memory actors' technological imaginary (Ferrari, 2020) is shaping their perceptions of technology and its role "in social life and change" (ibid, p.121). Similarly, Nagy and Neff (2015) suggested the term "imagined affordances" to discuss how different actors perceive their "communication technologies, data, and media that, in effect and practice, shape how they approach them and what actions they think are suggested" (ibid, p.5). A detailed discussion about media affordances is indeed out of the scope of this study, yet it is important to note that scholars usually describe media affordances as a set of limited functions that enable (or disable) users' pre-determined power to engage with media. However, this approach of affordances often ignores "users' perceptions, expectations or misperceptions" that shape how they actually engage with media (Nagy and Neff, 2015, p.3). Indeed, these imaginaries shape also how memory actors choose their media strategies during a memory debate. As such, these imaginaries also influence memory actors' relative power to construct agreed upon narratives of the past.

Yet, despite the importance of media, and media perceptions, on the activities of memory actors current literature mostly overlooks questions in this regard. This study will explore the relationship between memory actors and media by analyzing how a specific group of actors– those who worked as part of the “Biton Committee” – perceive the own role as memory actors and the role of media as part of their memory-related activities.

**The Biton Committee and the Mizrahi Struggle in Israel**

Early in 2016, the Israel Minister of Education ordered the establishment of a new public committee: The Biton Committee. Headed by Erez Biton, a distinguished *Mizrahi* poet and Israel Prize laureate, the Committee’s mandate was to empower the identity of *Mizrahi* communities in the Israeli education system (Skop, 2016). While the literal meaning of the term *Mizrahi (*plural, *Mizrahim*) is Oriental, the term *Mizrahi Jews* refers to a distinct group of Jews who originate from the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle-East. Yet, more than a geographical orientation, the term *Mizrahim* reflects the identity of Jews of non-*Ashkenazi* (non-European) origin who immigrated to Israel after its establishment (Khazzoom, 1999; Kimmerling, 2001).

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the pre-state institutions were transformed overnight into Israeli government agencies. As the vast majority of Jews in this pre-state *Yishuv* (i.e., the Jewish community in the British colony of Palestine) were of Western origins, it was the *Ashkenazi* Jews who became the political and bureaucratic elites of the new State. This group also managed the absorption of the masses of *Mizrahi* Jews who immigrated to Israel throughout the 1950s. Led by orientalist perspectives, the elites of the newly established State assumed that *Mizrahi* immigrants would be satisfied with only minimal resources (Khazzoom, 1999); at the same time, they also pressed *Mizrahi* immigrants to become “Israelis” through rapid modernization and enculturation, which forced the *Mizrahi* Jews to shed their original ethnic identities and adopt the values and customs of their new “civilized western society” (Karniel & Lavie-Dinur, 2016: 2). This assimilation process, however, failed miserably and most *Mizrahi* Jews “stayed in between: stripped off of their identity and rejected by the *Ashkenazi* hegemony” (Shalom-Chetrit, 2004: 47).

The *Mizrahi* experience of “becoming Israelis” materialized as a systematic and long-lasting marginalization (Biton, 2011). *Mizrahi* Jews were directed to downgraded and less valuable education tracks, housing opportunities, and vocations (Kimmerling, 2001). This marginalization has been confirmed by many studies. A study conducted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics claims that Jews of “Asian-African” background are less likely than Israelis of European origin to earn an academic degree (Dobrin, 2015: 37); Other examples showed that *Mizrahi* Jews are those populating Israel’s development towns, located at the geographical and social periphery (Schejter, 2007); and that *Mizrahi* Jews earn less than their *Ashkenazi* counterparts (Swirski et al., 2015).

A less explored realm of *Mizrahi* marginalization is the Israeli media environment. The Israeli media has always served the national Zionist narrative (Schejter, 2009), and the *Ashkenazi* elites who constructed this narrative have mostly ignored the internal-Jewish ethnic conflict (Kimmerling, 2001; Shalom-Chetrit, 2004). *Mizrahi* activists who protested their conditions were repeatedly framed by the media as “criminal elements” (Shalom-Chetrit, 2004), whereas, to this day, the most represented group in the Israeli media is the dominant “male, Jewish, *Ashkenazi* group in current affairs, investigative programs, and entertainment news; talk, lifestyle, and entertainment shows; dramas and soap operas; and game and reality shows” (First, 2016, p. 539). In addition, even if narrowing, there is still a “digital gap” (Hargittai, 2002) in computer and internet use between low- and high-income Jews and between individuals from Western and non-Western origins in Israel (Schejter et al., 2018). A recent study indicates that Internet use dropped significantly when comparisons are made between users whose parents’ birth place differs. Indeed, more then 70% of users of Western origin used the Internet while only 60% of Mizrahi Jews used it as an integral part of their daily lives (Schejter et al., 2018). This demonstrates that even in the “new media” environment, Mizrahi Jews suffer more from the consequences of Israel’s digital divide than their Ashkenazi counterparts.

The persisting marginalization of *Mizrahi* Jews in Israel catalyzed the emergence of a *Mizrahi* struggle movement soon after the foundation of the State in 1948 (Shalom-Chetrit, 2004). Scholars even date the emergence of such movement to the 19th century, before the establishment of the Israeli state (Poran Zion, 2019). Indeed, until recently, the “movement” could have been revealed in only a few scattered events (such as the 1950 “Vadi-Salib riots” in which the police clashed with *Mizrahi* residents of the northern city of Haifa (see: Smooha, 2008) or two decades later when *Mizrahi* activists formed the Israeli *Black Panthers* movement, which tackled inequalities between *Mizrahi* and *Ashkenazi* Jews (see: Lubin, 2016), and in 1977 when *Mizrahi* support of the opposing party led to the election loss of Israel's ruling party for the first time (Filc, 2006). The contemporary *Mizrahi* struggle, by creating a new “*Mizrahi* language” (Alush Levron, 2020), focuses primarily on cultural aspects of inequality, which has led to the call for more equal education and (public) media system (Kizel, 2014). This cultural turn of the *Mizrahi* struggle has led the movement to demand equal recognition of the Mizrahi narrative and its inclusion in the hegemonic Israeli collective story. This demand, I contend, stands at the heart of the Biton Committee work.

The committee attempted to tackle the long-lasting memory deprivation of *Mizrahi* communities in Israel (Shohat, 1999, Tal, 2019). It has been claimed that the “Zionist historiography pays little attention to the history of the Jews in the Muslim world” (Shohat, 1999: 6); ignorance that goes in line with the attempt to de-Arabize *Mizrahi* immigrants (Shenhav, 2002). Indeed, the Arab past of some of the *Mizrahi* Jews “threatened to affect the coherence of the homogeneous Israeli nation and to blur the boundary between Jews and Arabs” (Shenhav, 2002: 28). Therefore, *Mizrahi* Jewswere asked to abandon that past, now deemed illegitimate, in order to join a non-Arab Israeli collectivity in their new homeland (Dahan Kalev, 1999).

Despite this active process of marginalizing the *Mizrahi* memory and denying the right of *Mizrahi* communities to take part in the formation of the new identity (Dahan Kalev, 1999; Poran Zion, 2019), the *Mizrahi* cultural memory was fertile ground for communal activity (Shalom-Chetrit, 2004). Memories of the past influenced the contemporary Mizrahi identity (Alush Levron, 2020). The *Mizrahi* family, writes Kimmerling (2001), served as a social unit that “maintained, nourished and constructed its own collective memory” (Kimmerling, 2001: 56-57). The familial form of the *Mizrahi* remembrance includes, for example, the recollection of memories from the country of origin. Not less important, the *Mizrahi* family was a sphere in which memories of humiliation, discrimination, and deprivation in Israel were transmitted and shared with others (Kimmerling, 2001). Using the family as a “memory framework” in the Halbwachsian sense (Halbwachs, 1992), individual and family memories were cemented into shared collective memories that, in turn, served as the basis of the *Mizrahi* identity and protests (Shalom-Chetrit, 2004); a mobilizing force that capitalized on available memories to empower the community.

If we consider at least part of the contemporary *Mizrahi* struggle as a memory contestation, one should explore the role of memory as an integral part of the *Mizrahi* movement’s actions. The Biton Committee members, and the final report of the committee, that stand at the heart of this study, are an important components of a unique moment in the life-span of the *Mizrahi* movement; a refined moment of memory work in which the demands of a once-marginalized group are being slowly accepted and approved by the government. The committee recommended that a total of 1.25 billion NIS (approximately $350 million) be spent over five years for different endeavors, alongside other structural changes, such as equal representation of *Mizrahim* in official institutions. This study focuses on committee members perceptions about memory and media and how these perceptions materialize in the official recommendations suggested by the memory actors.

**Methodology**

To answer the questions at the heart of this study, I interviewed Biton committee members and systematically analyzed the Biton Committee final report and supporting documents. The Committee was comprised of a twelve-member advisory board that participated and supervised ten subcommittees of eighty scholars, public figures, and activists. The advisory board and subcommittees convened weekly. In addition, the Committee invited interested individuals to contribute to the work processes in four seminars, which attracted 120 participants.

          A research assistant contacted all members of the Committee via email. Then, to understand how committee members perceive media and memory and how these perceptions influenced their work, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews with the Committee members who agreed to participate in the study. These interviews aim to elaborate data concerning "respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences and feeling" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 139). The interviews took place via Zoom during May and June 2020and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Committee members participating in the interviews served in different subcommittees and some in the advisory board. Biographical information will remain non-disclosed to prevent the identification of the interviewees. We recorded the interviews and then transcribed them for analysis. The interviews were analyzed using a categorization technique (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) that revealed common themes between different members.

           Also, the study analyzes the Biton Committee final report and supporting documents. The final report includes Erez Biton's general introduction; the subcommittee submitted reports and contributions made by the public. This study refers to the Biton Committee report, the post-report supplementary text for implementing the recommendations, and the mediated public discourse that followed the Committee's establishment and the report's publication as a single unit of analysis. The data that comprised this single unit were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Kondracki et al., 2002). First, I scrutinized the final published report to identify all the references about memory, media, and communication, which led me to the supplementary texts described above. Then, applying thematic categorization (Strauss & Corbin, 2014), I contextualized the data through systematic multiple readings, followed by the creation of themes. This process was informed by Marshall and Rossman's (2011) four stages for thematic inquiry: (a) organizing data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) testing any emergent hypotheses, and (d) searching for alternative explanations. The combination of interviews and a close analysis of the report and supplemental texts enabled me to articulate the actors' perceptions about memory and media. This analysis revealed that committee members perceive themselves as memory actors that promotes what I will define as the “Mizrahi Right to memory” in Israel. In addition, the analysis highlights what committee members perceive of media and its power. Lastly, the analysis presents the underlying logic behind the recommendation to produce the new documentary series: *the Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*.

**Findings**

The Biton Committee recommended the inclusion of the *Mizrahi* narrative within the Israeli cultural memory by updating schools’ curricula, building a *Mizrahi* Jewish heritage museum, declaring November 30 as the official day of commemoration of the expulsion of the Jews of Arab and Islamic countries, naming streets and public institutions after renowned *Mizrahi* figures, and encouraging Israeli youth to visit the Balkans, Spain, and Morocco to deepen their affinity to their ancestry if their families originated from these areas. In addition, the Committee explicitly addressed the media, and the relationship between media and memory, when recommending the production of the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*. In depth interviews with committee members and a close analysis of the committee final report reveal what were the committee members perceptions of memory, media and the new suggested documentary series.

***Committee Members as Memory Actors promoting the ‘Mizrahi Right to Memory’***

The Biton Committee members perceived themselves as being on a mission of historic proportions. The Committee chair, Erez Biton, wrote in the introduction to the final report that he perceived the establishment of the committee as a “unique historic moment with far-reaching meanings” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 5). One interviewee claimed that “there was a sense of mission and we felt that we are doing something big and important […] the atmosphere in the meetings was really as if we were in an historic mission” (T. committee member). According to committee members, the essence of such an historic mission is to re-shape the Israeli cultural memory by telling the “complete Israeli story” that is not only a Western (Ashkenazi) story. “It really bothered me that we are actually telling a partial story to the Israeli society,” said one committee members (A. committee member). Other member claimed that one cannot teach “the history of the People of Israel when focusing [only] on the history of 50% of the population. In other words, exactly as it is important to write the history of minorities and the history of woman, it is important to write the *Mizrahi* history” (D. committee member). Indeed, when perceiving their role, or historic mission, as re-writing the Israeli history in a more complete form, Biton committee members are actually recognizing their role as memory actors aiming to reshape the narratives of the Israeli past.

Interestingly, interviewees with committee members reveal that as part of their role as memory actors, they were actually promoting what we can define as the *Mizrahi Right to Memory* in Israel. According to Kook (2020)*,* the right to memory is the “idea that remembrance should be made accessible and available to everyone” (p.9). For Biton committee members, the right to memory is about creating “historical justice” (M. committee member) that will “change the direction of the boat” (A. committee member). Realizing the *Mizrahi Right to Memory* will tackle the long-lasting silencing of the *Mizrahi* voice (O. committee member). When discussing the *Mizrahi Right to Memory,* committee members imagined the now-empowered *Mizrahi* student that, following the committee work, will “know that he has history and roots” (A. committee member). This imagined student will also now have the ability to “listen to his friends’ stories [about the past]” (O. committee member). Lastly, committee members realized their role as enabling the *Mizrahi Right to Memory* also by claiming that they are trying to “institutionalize forms of memory construction” (K. committee member), to create the infrastructure of memory, what Halbwachs (1992) defined as the frameworks of memory, that will enable future remembering.

***Media and its Power***

The Biton committee final report, while recommending mnemonic activities related to media (such as the production of a new documentary series), ignores questions on media, its role and perceived power. However, committee members that were interviewed for this study were fully aware of such issues. The interviewees mentioned, for example, how Israeli media systematically misrepresented *Mizrahi* communities and contributed to their stigmatization in the Israeli society. The Israeli media, according to one committee members, created the character “of a grotesque Jew who came from Islamic countries” (S. committee member). Other member claimed that this grotesque character is “shaping the *Mizrahi* stereotype until this very day.” (O. committee member). Others highlighted that the problem of the Israeli media is not only a stereotypic representation of *Mizrahi* figures but also the lack of diversity among Israeli media professionals. “People working in the Israeli media […] clearly people working in the media before a decade or two, were part of the small but very dominant group of [Ashkenazi] people” (M. committee member). The lack of diversity, according to the interviewees is partly to blame in the mal-representation of Mizrahi Jews in the Israeli media.

At the same time, while acknowledging the problems of representation and diversity in the Israeli media, committee members are aware of the power of media. The media are “shaping the consciousness” (H. Committee member) of large audience. In part, the media serve as a popular history teacher. “As a kid,” one committee member claimed, “I learned history in the best possible way from the Television” (O. committee member). By enabling memory professionals, such as official historians, “to be hard outside their limited crowed” (K. committee member), the media are a “central vehicle through which the Israeli public is exposed [to narratives about the past], remembers and learn” (M. committee member). When perceiving media as a popular history teacher, committee members are turning media as a tool in their attempt to realize the *Mizrahi Right to Memory*. In many ways, this perception is the context thorough which we should understand the most prominent recommendation of the committee – the production of a highly acclaimed documentary series to be broadcast in an official television channel during primetime: *The Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*

***The Mizrahi Pillar of Fire***

The Biton Committee’s most-celebrated recommendation was to produce a new documentary series: *The Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*. The original *Pillar of Fire,* initiated by the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) during the early 1980s, is a well-known documentary series of 19 episodes, which portrays the history of Zionism but omits the *Mizrahi* narrative (Schejter, 2007). This oversight has been an open wound for the *Mizrahi* community ever since, in particular after the Supreme Court, in 1981, rejected their petition to block the broadcasting of the series until it was amended to truly reflect a “balanced” version of history (Ibid). It is important to note that, at the time of the broadcast of the original series, the IBA was the only television channel available in Israel, enjoying a massive viewership. Thus, ignoring the *Mizrahi* narrative in such a television series meant a complete omission of that unique story in the Israeli (mediated) cultural memory.

According to Committee’s recommendation, the new *Mizrahi* *Pillar of Fire*, should be produced by the Israeli Educational Television (IETV), back then a branch of the Ministry of Education, so as to detail the *Mizrahi* story in an official channel (like the original series). The new series, committee members believed, will restore the missing layer to what has been regarded since the 1980s as the official audiovisual archive of the history of Zionism. “Culture is more important then politics […] it can change the perception of people” (Z. committee member). Creating a new mile-stone of the Israeli culture, committee members hoped, will be “a game changer” (K. committee member). Importantly, committee members were aware of the fact that the “meaning of the committee will materialize in this series,” (k. committee member) and that as long as the series will be successful, the committee work will be considered successful as well.

The final committee’s report highlights the belief that an official, traditional television series resembling the original *Pillar of Fire* will bring to light the “contribution of Oriental Jews to Zionism, to the establishment of the State, and the inhabitation of the land” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 208). In a news article about this Committee’s establishment, Erez Biton himself claims that the original *Pillar of Fire* “was lacking” and that the new series will “add what was lacking and will discuss the [*Mizrahi*] contribution” (Trabelsi-Hadad, 2017). The committee expressed its enthusiasm for the government’s will to “create a prestigious and well-invested television series about the Jews of Muslim countries” and perceived the situation as an “irrevocable opportunity” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 208) to create a “flagship” series that will enjoy a “long and significant shelf life” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 213). According to the committee members, a new television series is keenly desired because:

*We lack a ‘classic,’ ‘heavy,’ serious series, which is based on hard facts, that could follow us for many years and ‘replace’ the grand chronicle that was never written. It seems that the public is yearning for knowledge comprised of visual affluence* (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 213).

A combined analysis of the report and the perceptions of memory actors as they were expressed in the interviews conducted for this study enables us to assess what were the “imagined affordances” (Nagy & Neff, 2015) of the documentary series that were hoped to realize the *Mizrahi Right to Memory.* Committee members perceived a television series as a polished, well organized and planned attempt to re shape how the Israeli society comes to terms with the *Mizrahi* narrative. In contrast to new digital media projects that aim to tell the *Mizrahi* narrative, a well-established television series will provide “much less weapons for those rejecting the series’ message” (N. committee member). This is interesting as it is already a common-knowledge in the field of memory studies to perceive new media, and not a traditional medium such as television, to be a powerful tool overcoming memory marginalization and forced forgetting (Erll, 2011; Høg Hansen et al., 2014). Other interviewees praised the power of visualization, that is a fundamental aspect of such a series, to infuse a “soul into the scripts […] and [can] catch the attention span of the audience” (H. committee member).

A few weeks after the report was published, the IETV published a tender (no. 5618) that officially called for proposals to produce “a documentary series about Sephardic and *Mizrahi* Jews.” Although it was not written by the Committee, its text is important because it translates the committee’s perceptions about the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire* into a set of operational guidelines. According to the tender, the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire* should be well funded “documentary series with high production value” (Tender no. 5618, 2016: 2). The series was to include twelve HD-quality episodes of 35–45 minutes each and be produced by an experienced producer.When analyzed together, the subcommittee’s report and the IETV tender reveal what *Mizrahi* activists imagined when advocating for a “classic”, “heavy”, and “serious” television series.

Most importantly, members of the Biton committee preferred a televised documentary series, because television, as a medium, has a coercive power over the audience. “When you open channel 12, for example, that’s it. You are in their captivity. You watch what every they show you” (Maman, committee member). This, according to the interviewee, is different then the “free choice available in the internet” (ibid). Indeed, some committee members were unsure of whether a new television series, based on the qualities of the traditional television model, would answer contemporary society’s memory-needs. “The media world has changed,” writes the report “and television is no longer its center” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 213). The main concern was that “the televised model of the *Pillar of Fire* will not necessarily engage the public of our time, especially the younger generations” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 213). Committee members were hesitant regarding the suggested series, as it is to be based on a “model that today may look dull” (Biton Committee Report, 2016: 213). However, despite these hesitations, there is an overall enthusiasm from the opportunity to produce a revised *Pillar of Fire*. Television is for passive viewers, claimed one interviewee. “it is important that people who dont know what to expect after the 20:00 news, will encounter the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*. If it will be a good series, they will stay to watch it. If not, they will choose another channel” (Maman, committee member).

**Discussion**

Indeed the Biton Committee’s work explored the *Mizrahi* narrative, meticulously chronicled *Mizrahi* marginalization in Israel and in the Israeli educational system, and recommended sweeping changes likely to impact much more than education policies. While some scholars criticized the work of the committee as being too “friendly” to the Israeli hegemonic narrative (Tal, 2019), I perceive the establishment of the Biton Committee and the publication of its report as milestones in the conflicted relationship among Jews of different ethnicities in Israel. This study used the centrality of the Biton Committee’s work in Israel report to reflect on memory actors’ perceptions of memory and media, and as such it promotes the ongoing academic discourse about the human actors behind memory work and the different ways in which media are crucial to their work (Kubic & Bernhard, 2014; Ferrari, 2020).

As demonstrated above, Biton committee members perceived themselves as memory actors in an historic mission to create “Memory Justice”. This can be further contextualized, as claimed, by showing how memory actors involved in the committee’s work actually promoted what we can define as the *Mizrahi Right to Memory* in Israel. While the discussion about memory in relation to rights is relatively marginalized in the field of memory studies (see Tirosh, 2017), it is clear that for memory actors that are active in an on-going memory debate the notion of memory in relation to rights and justice is an important aspect of their work. As such, a major conclusion of this study is to further develop our understanding of memory rights, their definitions and how to promote and protect them in both the national and international sphere. Memory rights as tools in memory actors attempt to create “memory justice” can serve the memory needs of the most marginalized and needy and promote memory ethics (Margalit, 2002).

Indeed, memory actors involved in the work of Biton Committee are fully aware of the power of media and their role in creating the marginalization of the Mizrahi Community in Israel and their potential to promote the Mizrahi Right to Memory by the production of a new documentary series that will detail the Mizrahi narrative in Israel. These perceptions of the role of media in mnemonic activities are indeed contextualized using the notion of technological imaginary (Ferrari, 2020) and Imagined affordances (Nagy & Neff, 2015). The memory actors addressed in this study “imagine” media as tools that may shape the consciousness of large segments in the society. As such, they are perceived as prominent history teachers of our time. This may explain why a new documentary series: *The Mizrahi Pillar of Fire*, and the imagined affordances of such series – among them the ability to mediate the narrative almost “coercively” on the more passive audience - are believed to be a “game changer” in the attempt to realize the Mizrahi Right to Memory in Israel.

The study also highlights that, according to our memory actors’ perceptions, traditional media, in particular television better answers their need to have their once marginalized narrative recognized and collectivized then new digital media – such as social networks. Indeed, the tension between “old” and “new” media vis-à-vis the question of memory and its dissemination in society occupies recent scholarly discussions about media and memory (Pentzold et al., 2016).

Yet, the findings regarding the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire* further complicate scholarly discourse on television (perhaps the most important medium of the “old media” environment), new media, and memory. Many works share the premise that via new media devices “silenced or overwritten memories can also make their sudden return” (Hansen et al., 2015: 4). Yet, this sudden return, as is detailed in relation to the *Mizrahi Pillar of Fire,* may not satisfy the needs and wants of contemporary memory actors.

In this case, memory actors wished to have a traditionally televised Magnus Opus of the *Mizrahi* story. They underscored the need to rectify what they perceived as past injustices and an inadequate representation of their version of the national memory at the “scene of the crime”: nationally broadcast television. According to the actors perceptions and their “technological imaginary” (Ferrari, 2020), a high-value production of a documentary series carries with it an *aura of legitimation -* a sense of importance and public recognition that answers the very basic memory-need at the heart of the *Mizrahi* struggle: the need to obtain official recognition of their historically marginalized and forgotten narrative. The series’ narrative is meant to reshape society’s narrative in a way that would correct past injustices and the mere broadcasting of a highly acclaimed series will become a ‘media event’ (Dayan & Katz, 1994) that carry the potential to shape what society will remember from now on (Zelizer, 2018). Interestingly, Erll (2020) recently suggested that memory studies scholars should refocus their attention to mass media. According to her, throughout the COVID-19 epidemic mass media became ever more important as users tend to reassess their relations with such media as they were perceived as more reliable and trusted source of information during a once-in-a-lifetime crisis. Yet, this study highlights that for memory actors trying to promote “memory justice,” traditional mass media were always considered as important, even crucial, aspect of their activity.

The findings of this study, as such, call for a more nuanced discussion of media (and ‘new media’) in relation to memory. Moreover, this study calls for a better incorporation of memory actors’ perceptions about memory and media in studies about society’s memory. Indeed, a more detailed exploration of the human agency behind memory work and the media perceptions of such agents is needed if we seek to better understand how memory is debated and constructed.

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