

Social interactions after massive traumatization

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Social interactions after massive traumatization

**Was the Holocaust survivors' encounter with the post-war society
conductive for generating private and collective memories?**

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Preface and opening remarks for conference

Majid al-Haj¹

My interest in the conference is part of my interest in studies of the Holocaust. This goes much beyond the fact that I am currently Dean of Research. In the Holocaust we are confronted with an event that defies understanding.

Since we must do everything we can to try and understand the significance it has for all of us, I will try to outline briefly where and how I experience the importance of the Holocaust, and I will do so, first, as a human being, second as an Israeli citizen, and third as Palestinian

As human beings, studying the history of the Holocaust tells us that we should do everything we can to prevent anything like it from happening again, that is: the annihilation by one people of another people for reasons of race, nationality, religion, culture or other affiliation.

As an Israeli citizen, I firmly believe that studying the Holocaust forms a basic element on the road to understanding my Jewish neighbors in the state I belong to. Here too we are confronting a psychologically complex situation. I have often said that one of the major problems for Arabs and Jews living together in Israel is that we live with a Jewish majority whose mentality has remained that of a minority, and an Arab minority with the mentality of a majority. Again, I think, at the heart of how Israeli Jews perceive themselves lies the experience of the Holocaust.

As a Palestinian, I believe that the only alternative to today's reality for our two peoples is peace – and for this to be true peace we have to educate *our younger generations to learn to accept the narrative of the Other* – for young Palestinians to learn about the Holocaust and its place and significance in the construction of the collective memory and the self identity of the Jewish people as a whole, and the Jews in Israel in particular.

1 Prof. Majid al-Haj is Vice President and Dean of Research at the University of Haifa, Israel, which hosted the conference from which this volume originated, entitled "Holocaust Survivor. A Socio-Psychological View on Life during and after Massive Traumatization," 6 May 2007. The above words are taking from his opening address.

At the same time, this means that the younger generations among Jews and Israelis should learn about the Nakba that befall the Palestinian people in 1948 and begin to understand how this has remained a living traumatic experience for us Palestinians until this very day.

I see this as the only way to build bridges between our two peoples and to create mutual trust, as the only hope for our two communities to finally put an end to the suffering and arrive at peace.

Introduction

Miriam Rieck

Much has been said and written about the challenging encounter between Holocaust survivors (HS) and the absorbing society. This conflictual state existed on all societal levels: On the macro-level, the reception of the survivors by institutions' emissaries and functionaries, on the meso-level – encounters between those belonging to the survivors' group with the absorbing group, and last – the personal encounter of individual survivors with members of the absorbing society, be it with professionals like psychologists and psychiatrists, or with laymen. Needless to say that the encounter of the two higher levels materializes on the person to person level, but the problems, though sometimes accumulating over the levels, may differ in their content¹.

The present book deals with the personal level, mainly from the point of view of the survivors. We will touch upon life during persecution and thereafter and also on the second generation. In order to lend the subject more generalizability, a theoretical chapter, analyzing memory as a social process, and a chapter describing crisis and trauma intervention in another society and unrelated to the Holocaust will also be included.

By and large the survivors were detached from the absorbing society, a situation that brought about an uninformed discourse of the latter when speaking about the former, who, because of their isolation, underwent secondary traumatization. This state of affairs prevented the survivors, many of whom had a strong urge to tell their story, from fulfilling this want. In the absorbing society it brought about false views and interpretations as to life during persecution and, in combination with adhering to obsolete psychiatric theories, to false interpretations of the survivors' emotional state.

Concerning life during persecution² – people tended to speak about the inmates' conduct without knowing what this life actually was like, their judgment reflecting more inter-group bias than understanding of the "other"³. The inmates were

1 For an extended account of this subject see Rieck (2006).

2 In this book, when speaking of life during persecution we refer mainly to the camps, though, of course, many other form of persecution existed.

3 The term "other" is used in social psychology when referring to inter-group relations.

judged as though they had possibilities of choosing their conduct, as existing in the free world.

As to the survivors' emotional state, it was usually interpreted by the reigning theories assuming at the outset that psychiatric disorders were hereditary, and acquired damage could occur only in early childhood. It was therefore "common knowledge" that no long lasting emotional problems existed. Later, when clinical publications about work with survivors refuted these theses, and still later on, when in the US the term post traumatic stress disorder dominated the psychiatric and psychological Zeitgeist, new understandings took place, and professionals tended to generalize their findings from small clinical groups to the survivors' population at large.

A somewhat similar trend was observed regarding the survivors' offspring (HSO): In the early publications two opposing trends emerged: While controlled studies usually did not demonstrate psycho-pathology among HSO, clinicians described pathological trends characteristic to this group, and as with their parents, tended to generalize their findings to the group of HSO at large. This discrepancy was hard to understand and it was suggested that while in controlled studies an error of omission was committed (not detecting existing problems) in clinical studies, an error of commission was committed: over-generalizing from a specific sample to the HSO's general population (Rieck, 1991, 1994).

In order to gain insight into these discrepancies, three main themes are presented: First, a theoretical analysis, illuminating memory as a social process and as a basic and crucial component in building identity, will be presented (Wolfgang Frindte). The second theme refers to the survivors' and HSO's own words and compares them to society's and professionals' words. Rather than basing our understanding on theories, we base our knowledge on listening to HS and HOS themselves (Miriam Rieck, Henry Greenspan, Hadas Wiseman and Gideon Greif). Third, in order to gain generalizability of our findings, we will learn about reactions to extreme stress and culture compatible intervention in another society, not exposed to the Holocaust (Barbara Preitler). In the concluding attachment Miriam Rieck presents the Archive for Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors at the University of Haifa, including interviews with child survivors she has lately collected.

The first chapter, by Wolfgang Frindte ("VeHiggadeta LeVinkha. Remembering the Holocaust as a communicative process") focuses on four levels of remembrance and on social configurations necessary for the formation of memory and social identity: On the individual level the survivor reconstructs his personal memories and his identity. Next, in social interactions the construction of a dialogue is materialized. On the third level, in groups, creation of explanations and theories about the Holocaust are made possible and last, in societies and generations, coherent collective memories and myths about the Holocaust are brought about. This pre-

sensation provides a theoretical base for understanding the unfavorable social climate that welcomed the survivors. The encounter did not provide the necessary conditions for remembering and building identity. It prevented the emergence of explanations and individual and collective memories of both parts of the society: the absorbing one and the survivor new comers.

The second chapter, by Gideon Greif ("The 'Sonderkommando men': Their memoirs and testimonies as reflected in the 'Auschwitz scrolls' and their testimonies") deals with life during persecution. The absorbing population spoke about the conduct of camp inmates without knowing what it was like. These unwarranted judgments were most offending for survivors when "they were told how they should have lived in the camp [and after liberation]" (Wiesel 1978). This ignorance, accompanied by arrogance, expressed itself in many ways, one being the fact that many Israelis, though believing that they are well informed, had a quite restricted knowledge about the multitude of fates that befell the persecuted, those who survived and those who did not. These false notions may have biased their view by emphasizing solely stories of bravery and heroism (which fit into the ideal of the new and brave Jew), yet ignoring the destiny of millions who, through courage and selflessness in minute every-day struggles may have saved themselves and their fellow-inmates' lives. By and large, because of the little knowledge people had, life during persecution was more judged than understood. Thus for example, quite a few Israelis don't know even today who the Sonderkommando men were, and if they have some vague idea about it, they may wonder why the Sonderkommando men took part in this horrendous task, as though they had chosen to do it⁴. In his chapter Gideon Greif includes interviews he had conducted with Sonderkommando men, and speaks about the Auschwitz scrolls⁵, disclosing the brutal and cruel methods applied by the Germans and at the same time the behavior of the Sonderkommando men themselves, including their despair and hopes. This chapter thus sheds light on life in the camps with all its ramifications, probably at one of its most horrendous situations.

Barbara Preitler' chapter "Sharing the Rotten Rice". Trauma counseling in Sri Lanka after war and Tsunami" describes her work in the war- and disaster's ridden Sri Lanka, and how post trauma intervention should be culture-compatible. Sri Lanka has suffered from twenty years of civil war. Nearly everybody on the island has had to deal with two major traumatic situations: war and the tsunami. In this paper the author describes how western concepts of healing may be combined with local ones, to help the deeply traumatized population in dealing with their strains.

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- 4 The Sonderkommando men were assigned to treat the dead bodies in the Crematoria, and to deal with their belongings. Knowing what they knew, they were usually killed after a short time, and only very few survived until the liberation.
 - 5 See Ber, Mark (1985) in bibliography.

Miriam Rieck describes in her chapter "Life during persecution and after liberations as viewed by the absorbing society and by the survivors themselves: (mis)conceptions and (mis)understandings" compares early understandings of professionals and non professionals about the survivors, to the survivors' own words. The difficult encounter between the survivors and the absorbing society was amply described by members of both groups. Professionals, who started rather belatedly to write about the psychological state of survivors, tended, when characterizing them, to use concepts and diagnoses formulated elsewhere. On the whole one could say that the HS's state was understood by referring to intra-personal rather than inter-personal processes. Through the professional jargon, which trickled into the laymen's one, psychoanalytic terms were used when describing the survivors' state. Two of these concepts –guilt feelings and conspiracy of silence will be discussed and it will be demonstrated that more often than not these concept were erroneously applied to survivors. Again, instead of listening to survivors, obsolete theories were mistakenly applied to the survivors, to their disappointment and dismay.

Three additional chapters, not included in the conference, which deal with this problem from different points of view, are also included in the book.

Hadas Wiseman's chapter "Intergenerational Echoes of the Story of the Holocaust in Families of Survivors" presents long-term intergenerational effects of the Holocaust on HSO. The literature has either presented quantitative studies of non-clinical HSO, often not touching on their relevant problems⁶, or clinical studies which tended to over-generalize observations from small clinical groups to the population of HSO at large. The present findings are derived from a narrative-qualitative methodology as way to listen to the echoes of the parents' trauma in the stories told by non-clinical adult HSO. It provides a unique combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

In his chapter "Again testimony" Henry Greenspan criticizes the way the word "testimony" has served as the all-inclusive term for survivors' recounting. Based on his own thirty years of interviewing survivors – often the same survivors many times – Henry Greenspan suggests that "testimony" as usually understood does not appropriately represent the process of survivors' retelling. This chapter demonstrates how such survivors' accounts can evolve over multiple retellings and in different settings. It also emphasizes the differences between genuinely "knowing with" survivors – a process of collaborative exploration – and simply knowing *from* or *about* them.

6 See for example Blumenthal's doctoral dissertation. The author submitted his HSO subjects to Baron's Ego Strength Scale and found almost no deviations from the norm. When debriefing his subjects at the end about the investigation's aims some were astonished and said that they do have problems as HSO, but that the questionnaire was irrelevant for them.

The last additional contribution, by Miriam Rieck, presents the collection of Holocaust survivors' testimonies, placed at the Center for Study of Psychological Stress, the University of Haifa. Based on some preliminary testimonies, she will speak of the multi-facets ways by which survivors persecuted during childhood (CS) survived the Holocaust and later reintegrated into society. Again, the findings refute some of our old-seated beliefs as to the impossibility to establish a sound life after a childhood like that of the CS. Fortunately, this was not the case. As with adult survivors, we have thus much to learn from the CS themselves.

We hope that this book, which is based on a broad view of the survivors' reintegration into society, and reflects inter- rather than intra psychic processes, may provide new insights into this old yet somewhat enigmatic subject of life during and after persecution.

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Vehiggadeta Le Vinkha

Remembering the Holocaust as a communicative process

Wolfgang Frindte

"All communication has this aim, which may also be positively construed, of giving the world a sense, of becoming immortal" (Flusser, 1996, p. 260).

The Motto heading my paper follows the Jewish communication scientist Vilém Flusser. The central question that occupied Flusser throughout his life was: Why do people communicate?

Abstract

The following questions stand in centre of the paper: Is it possible to recall a senseless extermination, like the Shoa? Which sense and meaning do the survivors connect with their memories? Which language is adequate to describe the Shoa, the language of the survivors, the language of science, the language of the next generations? Which dialogue is adequate to talk about memories of the Shoa? Are the individual-psychological conceptions qualified to explain the sense of the memories of the survivors and their narrations about the Shoa? What are the meanings of the narrations and what are the reasons to talk about it? Which individual, micro-social, macro-social and historical conditions affect the narrations of the survivors? Which scientific discourses about the Holocaust are established and why? Who is able to talk about the Shoa, the scientists or the survivors? Do fundamental relations between the sciences of the Holocaust, the personal involvement of the scientists and the experience of the survivors exist?

Social psychology provides the basis for finding answers to the questions. The theoretical framework for the explanation is based on the assumption, that remembering and talking are not only individual processes, but social instruments to construct reality. These mechanisms are used by the survivors on the individual level for constructing their personal identities and narratives about the Holocaust. These processes, materializing in various situations (e.g. in interviews) help on the micro-social level constructing different dialogues about the Holocaust, and in dif-

ferent interpretation societies on the macro-social level – to construct explanations, collective memories and theories about the Holocaust. The individual narratives, the different dialogues and the social explanations, collective memories and scientific theories about the Holocaust are usually not comparable. Yet, these different point of views are necessary, if we want to know, what took place in the Shoa, and if we want to look for ways to build a better world. The underlying process, which is necessary, is the tolerance and mutual respect for diversity between survivors and their narratives on one hand and the scientific and nonscientific interpreters of these narratives, on the other.

At the outset

Coming from the land in which, so Paul Celan, the death is a master, what may I possibly say about the Holocaust and its survivors? If, however, I have anything to say, which perspective should I take – the one of scientific distance, or the one of those who have personal recollections?

You may remember Theodor W. Adorno's words from 1951 (Adorno and Celan's were friends), stating that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric (Adorno, 1951). Adorno's words were conceived by many, among them Celan, as a verdict. Nonetheless, Adorno's saying and Celan's poems – and above all the Death Fugue, are, like thesis and anti-thesis, tightly connected. Whoever speaks of Adorno's thesis thinks also of Celan's poetry (see also: <http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2000/11/celan.htm>).

With his poetry after Auschwitz Celan has also testified. His poets belong to the earliest testimonies of a Lyrical argumentation with the Shoah. In 1967, three years before committing suicide in the Seine, denoted Celan the hypothetic – speculative reflections, with which Adorno viewed Auschwitz as a "nightingales or thrush-perspective". Celan sets against this from reality remote perspective, a bird's one of the non-affected observer, the perspective of the affected onlooker. Putting it differently: He, who speaks of the Holocaust, should not restrict his words to scientific observations. He should rather listen to the recollections of the Jewish victims.

This brings me to my subject: who speaks about the Holocaust, in what manner, to whom and why? Who remains silent, and when or for which reason?

Recollections of the Holocaust

The Holocaust is considered a traumatic experience to those who were one of the main targets of this genocide, the Jews. Although the final solution, planned by

the Nazi regime almost reached its goal, many Jews managed to survive the horrible experience of World War II. After the war, many survivors were confronted with the loss of their families, friends and communities. More, they were not always welcomed to share their experiences in the countries where they chose to rebuild their lives. It was also not easy for many survivors to recount their story.

The Holocaust was characterized by Krystal (1968) as massive trauma deriving from the impact of the destructiveness created by persecution, increasing over time, reaching over a long period of time inconceivable levels of degradation, starvation, terrorization, isolation and losses.

Dissimilarity of different fates notwithstanding, the resemblance of the cruel scenes is always in the foreground. Eli Wiesel expressed this idea in his talk presented on the Holocaust Memorial Day (27.1.2000) at the German Bundestag:

"While preparing my encounter with you ... I reread several reports of survivors and witnesses, some of them still alive and some deceased. I was again vehemently faced with the all-present similarity of the cruel scenes. It was as though one and the same German had tortured and killed again and again one and the same Jew, six million times. And yet, each episode is distinctively unique. As is each person, created in God's image" (Wiesel, 2000).

The uniqueness of each cruel episode and each individual trauma is also reflected in the manifoldness of reminiscences of the Holocaust: lately the survivors have preserved their memories of the horrors of the Holocaust in various forms, like narratives, stories, poems, comics, diaries, lectures, video or audio recordings and in psychotherapy. We know Paul Celan's poems, the books of Primo Levi and Jean Amery, Jorge Semprun, Ignatz Bubis, Eli Wiesel or Imre Kertesz, the diaries of Emmanuel Ringelblum, Chaim A. Kaplan, Moshe Flinker or Anna Frank and the memoirs of "Mengele's twins".

Novels and stories written by authors, including not directly affected authors, also belong to the manifold forms of remembering. Poetry and dramas dealing with the Holocaust which were either written in camps and ghettos or after the war, as well as religious Responsa-Literature, which remember the Holocaust in the form of Jewish traditional legends and parables (Young, 2002, p. 58). The "fictitious documentations" of the Holocaust, such as Anatoly Kunznetsov's "Babi Yar", the Wall by John Hersey or the BBC series "Holocaust" (1978), with Meryl Streep in the main role, are also forms of remembrance. After presentation of the "Holocaust" in Germany in 1979 it was, paradoxically, the German general public who discovered and realized emotionally that the Holocaust has really happened (Laub, 2002, p. 261).

Also belonging to the significant modes of remembrance of the Holocaust are the by Steven Spielberg established "Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation" and the "Fortunoff Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonies", co-established at the

Yale University by Dori Laub. The former has collected by now over 50.000 testimonies in 31 languages, from 57 countries, including now 115.000 hours of interviews.

The scientific research of the prematurely deceased Dan Bar-On (e.g. 1992, 1995, 2001) concerning reminiscences and the later effects of the Holocaust on different generations should also be stressed, as well as expanded studies based on interviews with samples of three generations, conducted by Gabriele Rosenthal (1999) and generously supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Relevant is also Miriam Rieck's study (2001) which compared writings about survivors to their own words as expressed in writings or in testimonies.

Above all one should mention the extensive work of psychotherapist with Holocaust survivors. These publications provide an elaborate groundwork of memories of the Holocaust and its sequels (Bower, 1996; Fogelman, 1998 among many others).

For a long time the Israelis did not speak about the Holocaust and its adverse psychic and social sequels. The Israeli society did not want to remember and yet survivors were unable to forget and remained immersed in their grief. They refrained from talking and mourned in silence. During aging, the remembering however returns. Old memories of traumatic experiences reawaken, scarred wounds ache anew and the solitude augments.

Considering the multiplicity of modes of remembering the Holocaust, the question of its function becomes obvious.

The survivors have to translate the iniquity they had suffered into a normal language, which, in turn cannot do justice to their past sufferings. Sometimes they come across formulations or pictures which clarify how remote from their basic understanding the logic and actions of the Nazis have been. At this point the survivors speak of their own loss of human image, or they admit that they are unable to correctly describe the National-Socialist's actions. In his talk at the Holocaust memorial, held in the Bundestag on January 27, 2000 (mentioned above) Eli Wiesel said also:

"I can't grasp this experience. I still try it. Since my liberation on April 11, 1945, I read everything which I was able to get hold of: Historical treatises, psychological analyses, statements and legacies of witnesses, poems and prayers, diaries of murderers and contemplations of the victims, even children's letters addressed to God. Yet even if able to seize the facts, the numbers and technical aspects of the actions, the inexorable meaning permeating and exceeding it all evades my comprehension ... not even God, the God of Israel seemed to be touched by it. His silence was a greater secret than that of the others, and remained for many of us mysterious, depressing us till today."

Can a crime like the Shoah, a crime so absolutely senseless, be at all remembered? And if it can be remembered, which sense, which meaning do these recollection have?

The survivors remember as did Eli Wiesel, that all was German. The gas zyklon B was German, so were those who built the Crematoria and the gas chambers. The orders were transmitted in German. For Paul Celan the reminiscences of the Holocaust were the death who was a master from Germany. Celan had committed suicide, probably because he sensed that nobody in Germany and in Europe wanted to hear about his experience and its truth.

This brings me to the problems and the questions I address in this chapter.

What tell us the stories of the survivors? Do they tell us something about what they have experienced, do the stories refer to those who tell them or do they reflect mainly the social context or the social and historical configurations in which they are told? How are the memories communicated, in the language of the victims, in that of the perpetrator, in the mode of scientific observations or that of the apparently non-involved offspring?

A leading paradigm for dealing with the Holocaust

Susanna Keval (1999) has asked in an impressive study 12 men and women from the German resistance about their conduct vis-à-vis their Jewish fellow-citizens. Five of the subjects were themselves Jews. From the results the author concluded that often stories of helplessness and shame were told. These stories reflected two ambivalent attitudes: one could do nothing, or else, because of lack of moral courage one did nothing for the Jewish fellow-citizens. Susanna Keval, a researcher of the science of culture, belonging to the second generation of Holocaust survivors, thus refers indirectly to scientific patterns applied frequently when interpreting the stories of survivors: guilt, shame, keeping secret and repressing may be the basic mechanisms that serve the survivors in trying to master their past.

One can describe this mode of interpretation, which is coined by psychoanalytic theory, as following aggravated and horrible social and personal events, such as war, persecution rape or child abuse, trigger traumatization, which is at the outset repressed through fear, guilt, shame and helplessness. It is only through professionally-sustained recollections of the releasing situation, that the traumatizing effect may be overcome (see also Brunner, 2005).

This explanatory model thus assumes a general pathological state, brought about by the traumatization of the Holocaust.

Such a mode of interpretation, such a paradigm, may have been useful in the past, mainly for helping those Holocaust survivors and their offspring, who suffered from the survivor syndrome (or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for that matter (Danieli, 1985; Sagi-Schwartz, van Ijzendoorn, Joels & Scarf, 2002).

But also in cases of psychotherapy it was not always adequate: A study conducted by Michal Shamai and Orna Levin-Meged (2006) illuminates this possible inadequacy of the psychoanalytic theory. The authors had interviewed 11 Holocaust survivors, who were 2–10 years old during the Holocaust and had survived either the Ghetto, the concentration camp or in hiding. In order to master their trauma, 11 subjects (2 men and 9 women) participated at the age 60 years in psychotherapy, lasting one to two years. The interviews demonstrated (among others) a need of the survivors to separate the traumatic narrative from the entire life story. This separation allowed them to maintain basic human values while creating a sense of security that does not threaten their existence. Thus, in keeping with the traditional therapeutic approach, integration of the traumatic narrative into the general life story, though an ideal goal of therapy may not be preferred by survivors. They may prefer achieving a sense of well-being by leaving the traumatic events encapsulated from the rest of their life story.

Putting it differently, dealing with the Holocaust traumata may be possible without their remembrance and by letting them separated from other life events, have them suppressed. This would question one of the central assumptions of the psychoanalytic theory. And this raises the question of the adequacy psychoanalysis for explaining the complicated individual and social processes of remembering the Holocaust.

Remembering as a communicative process – A theoretical model

The motto with which I have opened this chapter originated from the Jewish communication researcher Vilém Flusser (1996). Let us stay for while with this influential communication scientist. Flusser occupied himself throughout his life with the question: Why do we communicate?

The general answer to this question is analogous: The human communication is symbolic, unnatural, counter-natural, since the human being is aware of his "natural" death and tries to deny it. One codifies in order to establishing order which, in turn, enables people to communicate with each other, thus denying the futility of the world and the death. Every communication has the purpose, which may also be defined positively as intention, to provide the world with meaning, and thus become immortal (Flusser, 1996, p. 200).

The answers Flusser provides for explaining the reasons for human communication are irritating and at the same time cogent: a. People communicate in order to forget the death; b. they communicate in order to get rid of their loneliness, c. They communicate in order to provide the world with meaning, d. they communicate in order to generating order.

Human communication aims at and is based on conventions, which are traditional, which means "socially inherited". They serve for interpreting the world by the posteriors, as well as for communicating and for interpreting the world, for constructing the reality. Through our communication we establish and pass-on our memories.

Since the writings of Maurice Halbwachs (1939, 1985) we know, that these memories are not only individually accumulated. Halbwachs, who was imprisoned and died in Buchenwald, had distinguished between private and social memory. Remembering is not an entirely individual event; it is rather an event occurring in a social and cultural sphere. Dan Diner (1999, p. 232) speaks therefore about "memory space".

It is the individual memory that makes people to people, even if the individual memories are deceptive, labile, superficial and fragmentary. The individual memory is the dynamic tool of the subjective processing. The social memory points to the fact that the individual one is always connected with the memory of other people. Each person is shaped in his age group by certain historical key events. He shares with his age-group certain convictions, attitudes, world-view, social standards and cultural models.

The differentiation between individual and social memory may further be demonstrated (see also Assmann, 1999), as demonstrated in figure 1 (p. 20).

In this way we may distinguish between the individual and socially interactive memory. The social-interactive memory contains memories which we share on the micro-social level with persons with whom we have direct contact (members of our family, our colleagues at work, our psychoanalyst). On a meso-social level occur the collective memories, including texts, pictures, rite, methods, myths, legends and also theories and monuments, creating social communities to which individuals belong in order to establish their social identity.

On the last, the macro-social level, we find the cultural memory, where the memories and experiences of a certain society and generations are systematically preserved, taken care of and interpreted. These roles are taken up by institutions like libraries, archives, museums, and curricula of educational institutions, theatre and operas, yet also the science as a social system. In the following I will use this model in order to get an understanding of the function these different memories have in remembering the Holocaust.

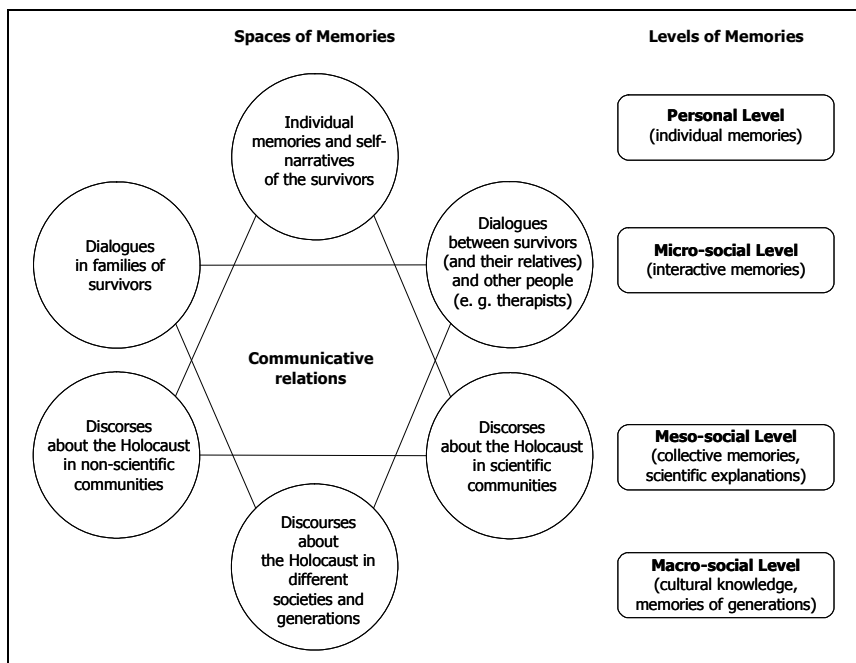


Figure 1: Differentiation between individual and social memories

Individual remembering as self-narrative

The psychoanalytic paradigm considers the individual memory to be the most important prerequisite for overcoming the Holocaust trauma. Thus individual memory becomes a therapeutic tool.

This therapeutic tool is important for survivors suffering from the Survivors' Syndrome. However, attributing this tool a general and universal function stigmatizes as being pathological and ill all those who remember.

The individual remembering has two much more important functions:

1. *Individual remembering in order to bear witness*

"I ask you all to take everything I said, and as I said it, at face value – it is the real truth. I also ask you to do everything possible, so that something like that may never happen again without resistance in this or any other country".

These are Alfred Jachmann's concluding words of a lecture presented on November 2000. Alfred Jachmann died from the later effects of the CC internment in July 2002.

(Jachmann, 2000; Source: <http://www.schoah.org/zeitzeugen/jachmann/htm>). These words reflect a first and important motivation, pushing the survivors of the National-socialist destructive politic, to undergo the painful memories and the burden of public appearance: They want to bear witness in order to prevent those who have not survived and all that had happened from getting lost in oblivion and also in order to prevent through eye-witnessing that Auschwitz or the gas-chambers be denied. Bearing witness in order to plea the younger generation to prevent a reoccurrence of history and to oppose any form of discrimination. It should not be forgotten that by remembering and telling the survivors ensue the Jewish tradition. The Torah requests Jews not only to remember the history, yet also, through memory, to preserve the rituals of the belief.

Remember and tell, bear witness in order to be relieved from speechlessness, this is at stake. It is, however easier said than done. From psychological studies we have learned: Individual memories are always subjective. They are the result of an individual processing. Yet only by telling, through imparting of self-narratives, do the individual memories obtain meaning and structure. Self narrations are always tied-up in a communicative process. Only through telling the memories they become conclusive and consistent. Self narrations may include entire inter-connected life-events, and cover long periods of time (macro-narratives) yet also represent small fragments (micro-narratives) of time or content.

2. Individual remembering in the service of personal Identity.

Self narrative, telling the individual reminisces, are to stabilize the own life. They serve for constructing the personal identity. Bearing witness means also to free oneself, through writing or telling the memories, from the speechlessness.

Whether the survivors talk or write in their narratives about shame, guilt or overcoming the past, their main point is to express their own personal identity and to be acknowledged as a human being. The subject deals always with stories of the self. Because of this reason it is essential to let the survivors be understood. They want to enter a larger context of narration, to be part of history; they do not want to be pathologised.

Remembering as dialogue

Dialogues are direct face-to-face communications. Two modes of dialogue, in which the memories of the horrible experiences are shared and transmitted, constitute the central research of the Holocaust: The intra-familial dialogue between generations and that of the survivors and their counselors, psychotherapists or interviewers. The dominating paradigm of the scientific view concerning both modes of dialogue is meaningfully marked by the following psychoanalytic assumptions:

1. The silence, secrecy, and denial of the painful memory, as well as the Holocaust survivors' irrational guilt feelings may cause an intergenerational transmission of the pathological tendencies to the next generation.
2. A professional therapy is therefore necessary, to enable survivors to talk about their silence, shame and guilt.
3. In the therapeutic dialogue the therapists as experts should motivate the Holocaust survivors to talk about their past sufferance and about their irrational guilt-feelings.

Let us examine these assumptions by having a close look at scientific and psychologists' findings concerning Holocaust survivors' intra-familial dialogue:

First, it is evident that the first assumption was quite well corroborated. For example: Bower (1996) interviewed 80 Jewish adults born to Holocaust survivors, and 20 Jewish adults whose parents had not faced Nazi persecution. All subjects were of comparable age and all had reported experiencing some sort of trauma during their life. At some time during their life, 29% of the offspring of Holocaust survivors had experienced symptoms of depression and of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

4. Therapists, counselors and interviewers are not the experts for remembering. This is the more so when remembering Primo Levi's (1986) warning, that the phenomenon of "inside", in the camp, can never be entirely fathoms from outside. The experts are always the Holocaust survivors. Levi considers as paradox of bearing witness the idea that survivors may remember their problems in their dialogue with professionals. The real witnesses of the Holocaust were almost all killed without having been able to bear witness. The survivor, by contrast, refers to a trauma he has not *entirely* experienced. He authenticates himself for a missing witness. This proxy witness must be taken seriously. The question is, however, if and to what extent the survivors are taken seriously and treated respectfully in the situations of telling their story, or if the listeners hear only what they want to hear. Let us look at an example:

Some of the problems of the Spielberg project were revealed by Gabi Hinderberger, a documentary-film writer (see Kanke, 2004; Internetsource: <http://www.system-familie.de/schuld.htm>), who participated in a training program for the study of interview techniques at the Spielberg Foundation at Frankfurt, September 1996. The interview with Holocaust survivors should generally not take more than two hours, 30 minutes for the pre-war time, 60 minutes for the war period, and 30 minutes for the post-war era. Exceeding these time-limits was possible only if the information from the pre-interview indicated that two hours may not suffice. When asking why survivors, for whom the occurrences from '41 were so pressing, could not start with them and postpone the pre-war

stories to a later stage, answered the trainer that a chronological order is easier to integrate into the index of the project. In one of the interviews of a Czech survivor, when asked about his life before the war, he said that the situation was good since at that time Czechoslovakia was a free and democratic place. The trainer (from the above mentioned training program) answered that this subject should not be elaborated further, since only the direct personal experiences were of significance. And Gabi Hinderberger ends her impressions of her training by asking whether it is permissible to size the sufferings of the survivors according to the mode of collection suitable for the indexing device. Putting it differently, what is at stake when survivors want to remember in a dialogue with counselors or interviewers, the survivors and their memoirs or the laws of archiving?

Conclusions: Remembering in a dialogue with relatives, counselors, therapists or interviewers has always eventually the same aims as self-narration: bearing witness and constructing identity. With their partners they wish to create an interactive memory which may render a future communal remembering possible. Whether such a dialogue works out depends on the witness' ability to make himself understood in the social context, and thus bear witness.

Remembering in a discourse

Discourses are media-mediated communications in social-societies, which create social knowledge, compromises, conventions and traditions, thus establishing collective memory.

When social knowledge or conventions are considered in dealing with Holocaust survivors, we have to distinguish between two main discourses: a. the non-scientific discourses about the Holocaust, e.g. in social communities of survivors and their families, or in their contemporary adherers, and b. the world-wide scientific discourses of Holocaust researchers.

Social discourses are always communications taking place within or between communities. Ludwik Fleck (1980, 1935) the scientist stemming from Prague and who deceased in Israel maintained that through this discourse communities become communities of interpretation (Deutegemeinschaften). The communities of interpretation produce through their discourses collective, community-specific memories.

Discourses may be indirect, media mediated communications in societies, in which social knowledge, understandings, conventions and traditions are created and structured, thus establishing collective memory.

When speaking of Holocaust survivors, we have to distinguish between two main modes of discourse: a. the non-scientific discourse and b. the world-wide discourse of scientists who study the Holocaust. The social discourse takes place within and between communities. Through these discourses the communities become interpretative communities and create their unique memories.

The social theory, as formulated by Henri Tajfel (1978), has taught us that societies delineate themselves from other societies by emphasizing their own world view and collective memory, which in turn enhances in-group favoritism. At the same time they create out-group derogation through disparaging world views and collective memories of the out-groups. These processes of delineation, in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, are not unique to scientific discourse. Rather, they are universal and as such also in the general discourse concerning the Holocaust.

Moshe Zuckermann (2002) maintains that Holocaust remembrance is neither in Israel nor in Germany a monolithic process. In Israel the discourses of different segments of the population, like Europeans versus Orientals, orthodox vs. secular citizens, Israeli born Jews vs. immigrants from Russia and of course Israeli Jews vs. Israeli Palestinians – all differ in their narratives of the Holocaust.

Now I want to turn to the problematic quality of different discourses about the Holocaust, and their possible effect on the individual and collective memory.

Being myself a German, I will not refer to the Israeli scene, but to that observed in Europe and in Germany. As an example I will present the Holocaust discourse in connection with anti-Semitism: In 2005 Iran's president demanded to erase Israel. A few weeks later he suggested a more moderate solution, to transfer Israel to Germany. He also intended to send a group of Iranian experts to the gas chambers in Auschwitz, in order to examine the veracity of the "fairy tale" about the murder of 6 million Jews.

At the same time the Iranian government organized a conference about the Holocaust to estimate its extent and discuss its consequences. The original list of invited persons included the influential German right-wing extremist Horst Mahler, who was, however, prevented from attending the conference since his passport was taken away from him by the German authorities. Mahler protested and said "... that Teheran will speed up the destruction of the BRD since it was established on the lie of the Holocaust, which will be shattered in Teheran".

Such notions are not unique for German right-wing extremists.

In our and our colleagues' opinion polls, the following observations were made:

- About 13% agreed to the statement that the "Jews know well enough to take

advantage of the German's bad conscience".

- More than 60% thought that the Jews take advantage of the Holocaust for their own benefit.
- About 10% blamed the Jews for their sufferings.
- About 18% blamed the state of Israel for the anti-Semitism in Germany.
- In 2005, the Anti Defamation League published a study "Attitudes toward Jews" conducted in 12 European countries. In each country 500 adults stated their agreements to several statements. Among other findings it was observed that over 48% of the German sample agreed with the statement that "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them during the Holocaust." (Frindte, 2006).

We deal here with non scientific discourses about the Holocaust, of a terrible quality.

It is important to remember that discourses questioning the Holocaust and demanding to stop talking about it, affect the collective memory. When Hohmann, CDU Member of Parliament described the Jews as a nation of perpetrators, a controversial discussion about anti-Semitism in Germany broke out. Several scientific studies have demonstrated that Hohmann's opinion reflects Germany's social discourse about the Holocaust. Thus, in one investigation of 3.000 German citizens, 18% maintained that the Jews are partly responsible for their being persecuted.

It is important to remember that when the Holocaust is denied or its occurrences are qualified, the personal memories of survivors are also affected. Such an effect was exemplified in an interview: "I conceive it as an obligation to remember and transmit our memories, since we are the last, a running out generation. We are the youngest, and not many are left, so that we really have to bear witness. After we disappear, only history remains and all will be forgotten as though it never happened, as it actually starts today."

In another interview, a Jew from Germany, 85 years of age stated: "There is no point in recounting our experiences. When I am at schools I get the impression that the young Germans don't believe me."

The scientific discourses concerned with the Holocaust also affect the individual and collective memories of its occurrences. The Historian Nicolas Berg published in 2003 the book "The Holocaust and the West German historian. Investigation and remembrance" (Berg, 2003). Berg deals with the influence of remembrance of the Holocaust on the German research since 1945. He emphasizes particularly the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish scientists. The German historians approached insensitively their Jewish colleagues and reproached them for their ex-

periences in the concentration and death-camps. This experience, so the critique, would impede the objective analysis of the Holocaust. But this conflict is disgraceful since, as we know today, the leading non Jewish former historians had been Nazis. Jewish historians like H. G. Adler and Joseph Wulf were prevented by their German colleagues from occupying important academic positions. The non Jewish historian influenced thus for a long time the scientific discourse about the Holocaust in Germany. Many of those responsible for the Holocaust were thus edged out, and the extremely criminal events undertaken by the Nazi regime were almost not investigated. The scientifically articulated attempts of suppression, which affected also public opinions, were willingly accepted by the German population. And the Holocaust survivors experienced these attempts as a prohibition to remember or to speak.

Remembrance as a generational process

Which discourses about the Holocaust were established, and which not? Who may interpret the Holocaust, the scientists or the survivors? How may specific interests and the struggle about remembrance be combined? Can science and experience be at all separated? We know today that science and experience may not be separated. The self narrative of Holocaust survivors, their attempt to talk with others about their memories on one hand, and the collective scientific and non-scientific discourse on the other, affect each other reciprocally.

Discourses, recollections and collective memory dealing with the Holocaust, held by communities, are (like all recollections and collective memories) not static, they are subject to change. That is why the German historian speaks of generational memory. Different generations remember the Holocaust differently and these differences affect also the individual memory.

As an example, I will concentration on the German and also European case. In Germany, a tendency to blame the displaced persons for their sufferings was observed. Not only were anti-Semitic attitudes expressed, real discrimination was performed. This apparent trend was often attributed to the conflicts between German and Jewish displaced persons.

Many Jewish survivors went to Palestine. Though the victims and survivors aroused sympathy in the Jishuv¹, their individual fate was often not included in the collective memory of the evolving independent nation. It was thus dragged into the remote background of the collective memory.

1 Jishuv were the Jews who came to Palestine before the Jewish state was established.

The Eichmann trial in Israel (1961) and the Auschwitz trials in the BDR (held in 1963–1965; 1965–1966; 1967–1968) had a meaningful effect on *the remembrance as a generational process*. These demarcation points had an entirely different effect in Israel – the land of the victims, and in Germany, the land of the perpetrators. While many anti-Semitic acts occurred, the German authorities tried to work through the past. Both the Eichmann and the Auschwitz trials were intensively treated in the German media. But a real confrontation with the Nazi crimes did not take place in Germany. Nor was a consensus concerning the Wiedergutmachung (indemnification for the persecuted) easily achieved.

Only in the '70s and '80s has the Holocaust become an open and official theme in Germany. At the outset the Holocaust was officially described in the Bundestag, and shortly thereafter the movie "The Holocaust" was acquired (though not without opposition) and shown on television. This event aroused interest and all around the country people started to study their regions conduct during the NS era.

Against these quantitative and textual efforts to remember the past, revisionists' attempts to deny the uniqueness of the Holocaust, also existed.

Outstanding in this regard was the historians' dispute, with Ernst Nolte as its climax. This attempt of denial is a neo-conservative perspective on history, existing in one way or another also today. Lately, a majority of Germans want to cross a line and get done with the history.

Conclusions

The Holocaust has become a part of the World's Heritage, and has been stamped into the collective memory of generations, Jews and Germans carrying its wounds. For the Jews these are the wounds of the victims; for the German it is and remains the stigma of the perpetrator. This situation cannot and may not be changed.

The remembrance of the victims and the perpetrators is important for future generations. Even though the individual narratives and different dialogues, as well as explanations, theories and collective memories about the Holocaust may not be comparable, these different points of view are important for understanding what really occurred in the Shoa.

The underlying process required for this understanding is tolerance and mutual respect for diversity, rendering a dialogue between survivors and their scientific and non-scientific interpreters empathic and humane.

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The memoirs and testimonies of the Sonderkommando Men in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Gideon Greif

Abstract

This article deals with the emotional and notional memory-heritage of the former members of the special Jewish squad in Auschwitz-Birkenau: the *Sonderkommando*. It tries to depict a picture on the issue of self-perception and self-esteem of those Jewish prisoners, who had to do "the most dirty work of the Shoah"; being forcibly involved in the mass- killing- process of Auschwitz- Birkenau, under conditions one can call "hell on earth".

Based on the testimonies of the still living survivors of the *Sonderkommando*, whom the author intensively interviewed, the article tries to answer some of the main questions that emerge, while reading the evidences of these men: How was it possible to get used to that kind of circumstances and to exist under such conditions as a human being, and to be able to function "professionally" for a long period, working daily surrounded by corps, ashes and death? How do the members of the *Sonderkommando* evaluate their moral deterioration, sensitivity towards the arriving Jews and the inner solidarity with their comrades? How do they consider the questions of revolt, resistance and their potential mission as witnesses after the war?

The most disturbing question remains however: how was such a kind of work possible for a Jewish prisoner, who is compelled to be present in a site, where his brethren and sisters, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons are being gassed and cremated? Can a human being under such conditions continue to feel, to think and to behave normally? What are the changes in the behavioral and emotional patterns caused by working intensively at the killing factory like Auschwitz and all others? Do self -perception and self- esteem exist under such conditions?

Beside the exclusive oral testimonies of the survivors, the topic of self-perception is based on the "Auschwitz Scrolls", the hidden secret scripts of the members of the *Sonderkommando*. This authentic documentation of the events, written in the real time in Auschwitz-Birkenau, supplies answers to some of the most disturbing and haunting questions of modern history: how was all this possible at all?

I would like to dedicate this article to the memory of one of the Sonderkommando survivors presented in it: Mr. Abraham Dragon, who passed away on the eve of the Independence Day in Israel, April 23rd 2007. Abraham, whom I knew for many years, was the brother of Shlomo, who died in October 2001. Both were selected to be part of the Sonderkommando in December 1942 and continued to be parts of that squad for two full years. Two years in the Hell called Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Jewish "Sonderkommando" – A historical survey

This article deals with the inner world, thoughts, feelings and emotions of the members of the special Jewish squad in Auschwitz: the *Sonderkommando*. About 3.400 Jews, altogether, were forced to participate in the process of the industrial mass killing in Auschwitz and experienced a human inferno without precedent. Nobody before ever served as a "worker" in a death factory, surrounded by poisonous gas, corpses, ashes and death 24 hours a day. These were experienced only by the members of the Special Squad in Auschwitz-Birkenau – the *Sonderkommando*.

Due to the plan of the "Final Solutions" the Germans started to establish extermination camps in occupied Poland throughout from December 1941 and 1942. The biggest killing center was Auschwitz-Birkenau, where around 1,300 000 Jews were murdered. In those extermination centers the victims were killed through an industrial way, in a process similar to an assembly line. Gas chambers and crematoria were built in order to kill and cremate several thousands of Jews per day. Modern industrial ways were introduced in order to enlarge the quantity of killing: modern crematoria ovens, technologies, manpower, hierarchically organized, and a system of deceit. Deceit was the main principle: the victims should not feel and not suspect anything until the last second before dying.

The workers of those "death factories" were mostly Jews, who had to accomplish several duties in the Assembly line, before and after the Germans executed the gassing in the gas chamber.

The first *Sonderkommando* was established in September 1940¹ as the so called *Krematoriums-Kommando*, to burn the bodies of inmates from the main camp Auschwitz (*Stammlager*). In autumn 1941 the Germans started to build the first gas chamber in the crematorium of the *Stammlager*.² To realize the first mass killings the SS kept three Poles and five Jews in the famous *Block 11*, who had to work in the crematoria whenever they were needed. This squad operated until the new modern gas-chambers and Crematoria in Birkenau were completed in March – June 1943. Another *Kommando* was working at the Bunkers I and II – two old

1 Czech, Kalendarium, 53

2 Długoborski/Piper, Auschwitz 1940-1945 Vol. III. Mass Murder, p. 131.

farmhouses that were altered into gas chambers. From May 1942 Jews were gassed and later burnt in big pits there. For this direful work 200 to 400 prisoners were selected for the *Sonderkommando* – most of which did not survive.

The prisoners were arbitrarily selected to the *Sonderkommando*. They only had to meet two conditions: They had to be young, healthy and in good physical condition. Some were recruited straight after their arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau; others spent some weeks in the *Quarantänelager* or in a different *Arbeitskommando*. The Germans did not tell the designated new members of the *Sonderkommando* for which task they have been chosen – on the contrary, they intentionally mislead the prisoners.³ Most of them were deeply shocked when they started to work in the crematoria – some of them killed themselves during the first days. It happened quite often, that the members of the *Sonderkommando* had to burn their own family members, friends and comrades.

Beside a few Russian and Polish members, the squad consisted of Jews from all over Europe – mostly from Slovakia, Poland and Greece. All countries, wherefrom Jews were deported to Auschwitz, were represented in the *Sonderkommando*. The number of *Sonderkommando* members differed from three in 1940 to 874 in 1944, the year in which the Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz.⁴ From time to time the Germans liquidated members of the *Sonderkommando*, in order to eliminate the "secret bearers" and to destroy any sense of stability. On December 3rd 1942, after the exhumation of the mass graves with over 107 000 bodies were completed, the only total murder of a *Sonderkommando* unit took place: all 300 members were murdered and replaced a few days later by new arrivals from Polish Ghettos.⁵ The prisoners knew that they live on borrowed time, and that they are all condemned to death, sooner or later. Thus it appears that prisoners of the *Sonderkommando* not only had to carry out the most abject and atrocious work – they were also living with the certainty of death.

After bringing the four new crematoria into service, the daily work of the *Sonderkommando* contained five stations: to welcome the Jews selected to death in the undressing hall, to collect all their properties after they had left this hall on their way to the gas chambers, to pull the bodies out of the gas chamber after the death, to remove all valuables and golden teeth and to cut the women's hair, to throw the bodies into the cremation ovens and burn them to ashes, and finally, to crash all remaining parts of the body, especially bones, and carry the pure ashes into the rivers surrounding Auschwitz – the Sola and the Wisla (Vistula). During all those stages the prisoners were given instructions, watched and supervised by

3 See for example: Gideon Greif: *We wept without tears. Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005, p. 93, 131.

4 Czech, *Kalendarium*, p. 865.

5 *Ibid*, p. 349.

a *Vorarbeiter*, a responsible *Kapo* and the *Oberkapo*. Those functionaries of the Sonderkommando received the orders from the SS-men and passed them on to the 'workers'. In the early stages of the Sonderkommando, most of the *Kapos* were German or Polish but from 1943 onwards also Jews were recruited as *Vorarbeiter* and *Kapos*. They were less cruel and tried to alleviate the life of the prisoners. The position of the *Oberkapo* was filled from December 1943 until April 1944 by the Jewish prisoner Jacob Kaminski. On April 1944 he was replaced by Karl Konvoent.

Primo Levi gave the best explanation why the SS picked especially Jews to help them in the process of killing. In his book "The drowned and the saved" he cites a German: "... we, the master race, are your destroyers, but you are not better than we are; if we wish so, and we do wish so, we can destroy not only your bodies but also your souls ...".⁶ And later he writes: "You are like us, you proud people: dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother."⁷

To deal with such inhuman conditions, the prisoners chose different ways of survival – some of them have become apathetical like "robots" or "living machines", while the others – the minority – chose the only existing alternative, namely committing suicide.

Some of the Sonderkommando men decided to leave a documentation of the German crimes in Auschwitz and about themselves; another group preferred the path of underground and resistance. The underground activity, which came to its climax in the revolt of the Sonderkommando on October 7th 1944, was performed to put a stop to the extermination of Jews and to tell the world about the mass killings. The uprising of the *Sonderkommando* is considered one of the bravest acts of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The prisoners managed to destroy one of the four crematoria, to kill three SS-men and wound others and tried to escape from the camp. But all of the 451 participants of the uprising were killed on the same day by the Germans. Only 198 members of the *Sonderkommando* survived temporarily and were kept alive in order to continue the last killings in Auschwitz and to dismantle the crematoria. Until the evacuation of the camp most of them were murdered. The last 80–100 members of the *Sonderkommando* left Auschwitz together with the other thousands of prisoners on January 19th 1945 against the order of the Germans, who planned to kill them all. Thanks to those survivors we know today what happened in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In addition to the interviews, which I have conducted with the Sonderkommando survivors, the 'Scrolls of Auschwitz' are the most important documents about the

6 Primo Levi: The drowned and the saved, New York 1988, p. 53f.

7 Ibid., p. 55.

Sonderkommando. They contain memoirs and diaries written by Zalman Gradowski, Leib Langfuss, Zalman Loewenthal, Haim Hermann, Marcel Nadjari and others. In those writings, buried in the ground next to the crematoria, we can find descriptions of the daily life and work of the *Sonderkommando* as well as records of transports and events and an intensive documentation on the barbarity and cruelty of the Germans towards the Jews.⁸

Their daily work as a professional team in the crematorium buildings should be the ultimate test case for the top of psychologists and psychiatrists in the world. The research of the *Sonderkommando* survivor's mind and soul can, presumably, solve some of the biggest mysteries of our complicated personality and patterns of behavior. Never before were human beings exposed to such extreme traumata and had to live under conditions that can only be defined as Hell on Earth.

Many important questions arise from this very unique situation in which the members of the *Sonderkommando* were forced to live and work. The main questions are how the prisoners dealt with their situations and how they reacted to this daily world characterized by terror, murder and death around them. Furthermore, this article is presenting the self-description in relation to the historical facts. Moreover, it also tries to outline some more historical aspects, especially concerning the heroic uprising of the *Sonderkommando*.

Because of the importance of the subject, and since not much is known about it, I decided to ask the last survivors historical orientated questions about their daily life in the *Sonderkommando*, documenting many aspects on their numerous months in Auschwitz-Birkenau, doing what they themselves defined in the interviews as "the most dirty work of the Shoah".

The main sources for this research are, first, the interviews I have conducted in the last 18 years with the last survivors of the *Sonderkommando*, about 30 men, who live now (2007) in several different countries.⁹ Secondly – the hidden secret scripts of the members of the *Sonderkommando*, an authentic documentation of the events written in real time of the historical happening.¹⁰ Both sources supply answers to many important questions and depict a picture on the issue of self-perception and self-esteem of people who had to do the unthinkable work under conditions which can only be termed as "hell on earth". This is the essence of this article.

In the interviews, the central motive and element which often appears is the process of "robotisation"¹¹ and becoming "human machines". Almost all survivors em-

8 Mark, Ber (ed.): The Scrolls of Auschwitz, Tel Aviv 1985.

9 Many of the interviews were conducted together with my German colleague Andreas Kilian.

10 Mark, Ber (ed.): The Scrolls of Auschwitz, Tel Aviv 1985.

11 Gradowski, Salman, in: *ibid.*, p.220.

phasize that such a change in their personality did happen, and possibly this is the central explanation to the question how the *Sonderkommando* men could continue functioning for a long period in such a work. Josef Sackar, a Greek survivor, living in Israel, says in this context: "We couldn't think at all. We'd become robots, machines."¹²

Shaul Chazan, also a Greek Jew from Saloniki, living in Israel, told me: "As time passed, we got particularly depressed. We didn't feel like thinking people anymore. We just worked, ate, and slept. Like automatons."¹³

Leon Cohen, who was a "dentist", pulling out the golden teeth, and passed away in Israel several years ago, reported: "... we'd become robots by then. We couldn't expose ourselves to the intensity of the emotions that we experienced in the course of the work ... Once we'd repressed the emotions and felt like "normal people", we could treat everything that happened as work that we had to do in accordance with the German order."¹⁴ He added to this explanation that: "We blocked up our hearts, we were dehumanized"¹⁵.

The fact that the survivors gave a consistent description of their lives with what appears in the scrolls which were written at real time, render these testimonies reliable, even though they were given seventy years after what had happened.

Adaption to "work"

This process of becoming living machines was accompanied by a quick period of "getting used" to the new life all members of the *Sonderkommando* have started in the crematorium area. Within a couple of days they had to forget all familiar patterns of thinking and behaving. They adapt themselves to their new cruel reality, in order to remain sane and not to lose "normality". This process is described in the testimonies in a short and dry style, while in the "Scrolls of Auschwitz" a similar awareness is documented, in a literary, sophisticated and more detailed description.

Zalman Loewenthal explains that the process of "getting used" to the work was shared by all kinds of people in the *Sonderkommando*: "...on 25 January 1943 I was taken to this factory. But I was not far behind my friends. And just as people became accustomed, ordinary people with ordinary human being tendencies, not corrupt, not (murderous), but people with hearts and feelings and consciousness

¹² Greif, 2005, p. 103.

¹³ Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

and all those things (became accustomed) to this task, but they were not to blame."¹⁶

Eliezer Eisenschmidt reported in an interview about this quick process of developing a certain fatality:

"For lack of choice, we got used to this routine. It became absolutely normal, as if life were really that. What is more, the SS men didn't leave you any time to think. The work was supervised by the SS. You couldn't even move an inch without the SS watching you."¹⁷

The Germans used the tactic of "shock treatment" to paralyze the *Sonderkommando* men and thus to kill all their inner resistance.

Shock treatment and routine

Later, after some time has passed, the *Sonderkommando* people understood what happened and tried to wake up to the new reality. The question about the self-perception in this situation of getting aware of the forced participation of murder is exposed in the interviews as well as in the Scrolls.

Retrospectively Eliezer Eisenschmidt expressed this: "I'd define our state of mind as "indifference". I agree – it was an "indifference" that you couldn't define, let alone understand, considering what we had to do every day."¹⁸

Following this traumatic event they were forced to deal with after the first days in the *Sonderkommando*, the minds and souls of the *Sonderkommando* people were enslaved to the spirit of the Germans, and the most *Sonderkommando* men knew it. They simply could not resist.

Shlomo Dragon explains that the process was shared by everyone in the *Sonderkommando* as he remembers later: "Almost all of us went into a shock. We stared at each other without uttering a sound and fell silent. We were too terrified to make a sound."¹⁹

Concerning the intended shock treatment of the SS, he told me: "I was beside myself. I was in an absolute shock. I didn't know whether to scream or not. It was the first time in my life that I'd seen a dead body. I didn't know what I was doing there. I looked at the others. They'd all gone out of their minds."²⁰

¹⁶ Loewental, Salman, in: Mark, Ber 1985: p. 218.

¹⁷ Greif 2005, p.232.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

And he added: "On my first day there, when I saw the people together – men, women, and children – I had a bad anxiety attack. I'd never seen such a thing. I was so shocked that I decided that I couldn't go on working here ... I took bits of glass from a broken bottle that was lying there, slashed my arm, and said that I couldn't continue to work."²¹

The transition from a state of mind where the horrifying scenery was not yet realized can be read in Jacob Gabai's statement, a *Sonderkommando* survivor from Greece, who told the following:

"At first, it was very painful to see all this. I couldn't grasp what my eyes were seeing – that all that left of a human being was half a kilogram of ashes, sometimes we reflected about it, but what good would it do us? Did we have any choice at all? Escape was out of the question, since unfortunately we didn't know the language. I worked even though I knew that my parents had been exterminated. There's nothing worse than that. After two or three weeks, I got used to it ... We worked like little robots there."²²

The members of the *Sonderkommando* were aware of the danger to become mad under the constant stress and horrors they witnessed. They made efforts to avoid contact with reality, as proven in the next source, the interview with Josef Sackar: "I was confused. I thought I was going insane."²³

Apprehension of the "Hell on Earth"

The crimes against the Jews were so severe, that even the *Sonderkommando* people, who were eyewitnesses to them each and every day, could not believe what they see with their own eyes.

Morris Venezia, a Greek member of the *Sonderkommando* living in Los Angeles, tells his feelings:

"You recognize the smoke from the ovens? It was kind of a burnt meat, but we still couldn't believe it. It was impossible to believe it. Anyway, no human brain can believe what really happened. Maybe they read from books, maybe they saw pictures. But it is nothing like living over there for two years. Those animals! Those murderers!"²⁴

As mentioned above, a substantial part of the phenomenon of the *Sonderkommando* is a purely psychological one and has to be examined in psychological cri-

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 206.

²³ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁴ Venezia, Morris, Interview with Gideon Greif and Andreas Kilian, private Archive of Gideon Greif, Givatayim, Israel.

teria. The *Sonderkommando* men invented various methods of psychological adaptations, suppressions and repressions, in order to be able to function, survive and not go "crazy".

Emanuel "Manny" Mittelman, a Slovak Jew who worked in the *Sonderkommando* from a very early stage on, describes how he tried to avoid the tragic reality but later had to rediscover it:

"We came to work and noticed a leg, which emerged out, a hand which looked out. And as one of us told his comrade: 'wait a little, these are dead bodies, these are, these are ...' and thus we really found out, what we did there – all of us." ²⁵

Indeed, the place they have been to was very similar to hell, as Shaul Chazan reports:

"It was hell on earth. If there is a hell after death, I think it must look like that. It was hell, real hell." ²⁶

Waking up to reality led the *Sonderkommando* men to several options. First: not to get "crazy". The other one was a life philosophy, which interpreted the borrowed time to survive as an indication to seize as much as possible from the outstanding good conditions, especially the nutrition.

The third option was to remain "normal", and strengthen the will of life even in a place which is remembered as Hell. In opposition to this hell they went through, Salman Loewenthal speaks in the scripts about the same power of life which did not disappear or vanish in the hearts of the *Sonderkommando* men: "The will to live and survive all troubles, in the hope of meeting someone while still alive ... How good it would have been to have died a sweet death with tears on my lips." ²⁷

The will to live was strengthened by the desire to meet relatives or friends who survived. Of course, only a few survivors had the luck to find their relatives after the Holocaust again. In the diary he adds another notion of the will to remain alive:

"And our intelligence is subconsciously influenced by the wonderful will to live, by the impulse to remain alive; you try to convince yourself, as if you do not care about your own live, but only want the general good, ... you find hundreds of excuses, but the truth is that you want to live at any price." ²⁸

²⁵ Mittelman, Emmanuel, Interview with Gideon Greif in Spring 1999 in Michigan, USA, ebd.

²⁶ Greif 2005, p. 266.

²⁷ Loewenthal, Salman, in: *ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Moral Deterioration

The Germans replaced the *Sonderkommando* men from time to time, killing groups of 200 or 300 men, replacing them with new arrivals. The prisoners knew that they are living on a borrowed time. This knowledge created a moral deterioration, a style of living in which the main interest was to supply maximally the physical needs, mainly nutrition. Food and alcoholic drinks became for many members the center of ideals. The religious members of the *Sonderkommando* tried to stop this process and criticized it sharply. This shows that even in this inferno, the self criticism and moral standards did not vanish completely.

After a short time, many of the *Sonderkommando* people developed a life-philosophy of "Live today, since tomorrow you will die", after realizing that each of them was automatically convicted to death sooner or later.

This philosophy led to a sharp moral deterioration of many of the prisoners, as told by the survivors and by the authors of the secret scripts, especially by Salman Loewenthal:

"We completely lost our senses ... (No one) looked at anyone else. I know for a fact that none of us was alive at that time, none of us thought nor contemplated. That is what they did to us – until consciousness began to return."²⁹

Nevertheless in this context, it is important to emphasize that not all members of the *Sonderkommando* underwent the same process. Many of them did not lose the wish to live, remain civilized and survive, despite the collapse of every human value around them, and did all they could to stay decent and human.

Sensitivity towards the suffering Jews

The seldom and absolutely rare reality of permanent death which never stops, together with the cruelty of the German personal, did not eliminate the sensitivity of the *Sonderkommando* people to the suffering and sorrow of the arriving Jews, the majority of whom was going to die within a short period.

Leib Langfuss expresses in the Scrolls of Auschwitz the sensitivity directed towards the Jews on their way to the gas chambers:

"They examined our faces looking for an expression of sympathy. One stood in the corner and looked deep into the depth of these poor souls, helpless souls. He could no longer control himself and burst crying."³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁰ Langfuss, Leib in: Mark 1985, p. 213.

The *Sonderkommando* people were in an impossible situation vis-à-vis the Jews, condemned to death, while still alive. They were fully aware of the psychological suffering of the women, men and children who were humiliated before being gassed, especially by being forced to completely undress. The *Sonderkommando* men decided instinctively to reduce and minimize the embarrassment and shame of the naked Jews and did all they could to avoid the horrible scene. In many cases, inside the undressing room, they tried to look to different directions while the women were undressing, not to embarrass them. Joseph Sackar reports in his testimony about his unpleasant emotions in the undressing room:

"It wasn't a pleasant feeling to be in the middle with them all. But what could I do?"³¹

He told me in an unpublished interview that he used to turn his head aside whenever the Jews undressed in order to spare them the embarrassment and shame. The sensitivity of the *Sonderkommando* people also forced them to adapt a common "policy" of not telling the truth in the undressing rooms. They have decided that it would be wiser and more humane not to tell the full truth, in order to prevent unnecessary suffering. Since nobody could save himself from that hell, concrete information about the forthcoming murder would be of no avail, because of the strict security methods. Only in rare cases did the *Sonderkommando* men tell the other Jews that their fate was doomed, mostly when they met family members or friends. When the corpses were removed from the gas chambers, the *Sonderkommando* tried to honor the dead bodies as much as possible. They carried them with the utmost care, to grant them the minimal human dignity. They write about this with pride, here in the words of Zalman Gradowski:

"You stand there frozen and observe. Now they've placed two of them up here. Two human beings, two worlds, take their places within the framework of humanity. They lived and existed; they did things, created things ... Now, three more laid there. A boy is pressed to his mother's breast. How delighted, how joyous had the mother been, the father been when their son was born ... In a flash, within twenty minutes, not a trace of them will remain."³²

And in a different place he expressed sorrow and respect for the dead:

"... carefully, they, [the *Sonderkommando* men], pick up the crushed women, breathing weakly, out from under the heap, and hastily bring them inside. Many of them are now unable to stand and must be carried in ... nevertheless, they are grateful and nod their heads thankfully ... They are gratified and consoled to see in the eyes of the men guiding them a tear of sympathy, of sorrow."³³

31 Greif 2005, p. 165.

32 Ibid., pp. 32-34.

33 Ibid., pp. 23-24.

To testify and the desire to tell the story to the world – Being witness

The desire to survive was a dominant factor of many members of the *Sonderkommando*. A central motive in this desire was the aspiration to be the voice telling the world about what happened in the gas chambers. The will of life, the inner motivation to stay alive, and not to perish in a place where death was so common and routine, was derived mainly from the desire to bear witness, to testify, to become a voice for the hundreds of thousands of murdered Jews in the gas chambers. The survivors emphasize this aspect and speak about it with enthusiasm and conviction. Josef Sackar expressed the desire to maintain his own morality in order to alert the world about the crimes of the Germans:

"On the one hand, I run away from the need to tell it, but on the other hand, the whole world has to hear the story. Otherwise, they'll think the Holocaust never happened. Look, there are people who deny the Holocaust."³⁴

Sackar's biggest fear was that nobody will be able to believe what happened in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau:

"You can't forget something like that. At certain moments you ask yourself: 'How could I live all day with thousands of bodies in one room? How did I come of it alive?' Sometimes I don't believe that I endured it."³⁵

Shlomo Dragon told in this context: "We always hoped that we could survive in order to describe what happened to us. Giving testimony was immeasurably more important than survival itself."³⁶

And he added: "In fact, it's mainly due to us that people know what happened there, in the inferno of the undressing halls and the gas chambers. Imagine, if none of us had survived, the world wouldn't know how a million and a half Jews were murdered in Birkenau. We hadn't joined the Sonderkommando of our own free will. Fate put us there. There was nothing enviable about it; we had no way out. Believe me, it was the worst job you could wish on anyone."³⁷

The brothers Dragon mentioned the wish to testify as an important factor in their decision not to give up.

The act of writing the scrolls proves that the *Sonderkommando* people were aware of the historical significance of Auschwitz and the crimes being committed there and for the uniqueness of the *Sonderkommando* itself, which is also documented in the "Scrolls of Auschwitz". Ber Mark, the famous Polish-Jewish historian, who was the first to research the *Sonderkommando*-subject, writes about this:

34 Ibid., p. 121.

35 Ibid., p. 120.

36 Ibid., p. 166.

37 Ibid., p. 179.

"The author adopts the form of Dante's "Devil Comedy", directly addressing the reader whom Gradowski leads through the depths of unnatural and inhuman tortures suffered by the Jews during the Nazi occupation."³⁸

Zalman Gradowski also emphasized the importance of leaving testimony and to tell the people, already while writing the hidden scripts of Auschwitz. The feeling, that they are amidst a big real tragedy, was sooner or later coming into the conscience to all members of the *Sonderkommando*. He wrote:

"We, the Sonderkommando, have wanted for a long time to put an end to our terrible labor, forced on us on pain of death ... The future will judge on us of the traces of the basis of these writings. The world will learn from them, though it be only the smallest testimony of the tragic world in which we live."³⁹

And he noted furthermore that: "I wrote these things because I was a Sonderkommando ... These writings and many others want to leave behind an everlasting living testimonial for the days of peace in the future, so that the world may know what is happening here."⁴⁰

Leib Langfuss wrote down his desire to sneak away and not to participate in the crimes, not even indirectly: "I sneak away quickly. I did not see the rest of the events for on principle I was never present when the Jews were being rushed to their death, as it might have come to pass that the SS would force me to carry out their murderous purposes in the crematorium."⁴¹

The Scrolls as a documentation of resistance

The decision to leave testimony, by all means, encouraged a group within the *Sonderkommando* to start the essential project of the "Auschwitz Scrolls", initiated and written mainly by religious members in the *Sonderkommando*. This reflects the deep rooted belief of important eye witnesses, that they owe such a testimony to the world. The scripts are a unique Shoah-Dokumentation, including many aspects on the self-perception and self esteem of the *Sonderkommando* men. It can also be interpreted as a manifest of defiance and resistance. The scripts dedicate much to the subject of underground and uprising. Reading the scripts reveals how well the *Sonderkommando* people knew about the plans to murder all Hungarian Jews, and how resolute they were to try and sabotage this plan, even if they would have to die for this.

38 Mark 1985, p. 158.

39 Gradowski, Zalman, in: *ibid.*, p. 205.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

41 Langfuss, Leib, in : *ibid.*, p. 214.

Shlomo Dragon, a survivor of the *Sonderkommando*, testified about the significance of the Scrolls as a documentation of resistance and its testimonial character, especially about one author, Zalman Gradowski: "Zalman Gradowski of Grodno drew up a list of people who'd been gassed and cremated, on the basis of reports from Sonderkommando prisoners who worked in each of the buildings. He buried the lists in the enclosed compound next to Crematorium II [III]. Just after the camp was liberated, I removed the lists and handed them over to the Soviet investigation commission ... He [Gradowski] told us that the events in the camp had to be documented so that the whole world would know about it."⁴²

Eliezer Eisenschmidt told me about Zalman Gradowski, the main author of the scripts, whom he met day by day: "He ... wrote down everything that happened ... He concealed his writings in bottles that he'd found in the trash. He sealed the bottles with wax so the writings would keep until the Germans were defeated. We knew we had to keep every bit of wax that we found in the trash and bring it to the Maggid or to Gradowski."⁴³

The uprising

Even before the establishment of the underground movement, the *Sonderkommando* people organized an armed resistance together with Jews from the "*Familienlager*", with whom they planned a general uprising in the camp, under the leadership of the legendary educator Freddy Hirsch.⁴⁴ In his formidable testimony of his years in Auschwitz, Filip Müller, interviewed by Lanzmann, gave a quite detailed description⁴⁵ of this unique occurrence and about Freddy Hirsch:

"A young German Jew, who enjoyed the respect and esteem of everyone in the Family Camp because he devoted himself in an exemplary and selfless manner to the education of children and young people."⁴⁶

The brothers Dragon told me something about this event in an interview:

"One of us told them [the Czechs] that they were going to be put to death. Instead of taking it at face value, he ran to the Germans and asked: 'The Sonderkommando prisoners told us that we're going to die. Is it so?' We'd risked our own life to tell the Czech Jews the truth."⁴⁷

42 Greif 2005, p. 165.

43 Ibid., p. 247.

44 See in this context the testimonies of Filip Mueller and Rudolf Vrba, in: Lanzmann, Claude: *Shoah*, New York 1987, pp. 147-154.

45 Mueller, Filip: *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, Chicago 1999, pp. 99-110.

46 Ibid., p. 104.

47 Greif 2005, p. 164.

The awareness of the *Sonderkommando* members of the need to fight against their oppressors leads them to acts of bravery:

"And who can evaluate the bravery and devotion of the individuals among our comrades, three of whom remained in the crematorium to blow it up, sacrificing themselves deliberately."⁴⁸

The next source reflects the huge enthusiasm which filled the hearts of the *Sonderkommando* fighters shortly before the beginning of the uprising in October 1944:

"At two o'clock the last runner had arrived and announced that the action would not be put off. We embraced each other in great happiness that they had been privileged to reach that moment ... to put an end to their state ... But at last minute something happened ... to one of the transports ... delaying the whole action. In truth, our young men wept tears."⁴⁹

We can easily observe, that inside the *Sonderkommando*, there were several degrees of self awareness of the desire to struggle for humanity, to fight against the efforts of the Germans to create de-humanization, of a huge awareness of staying somehow in the framework of humanity and civilization, in a world which lost all its moral values and adores and applauds to the killing of Jews. The *Sonderkommando* men are aware of the fact that other prisoners might interpret their ability to continue their work in the crematoria as a kind of cooperation.

A slight touch of guilt can be seen in their reaction to my questions and also in their scripts – although they never were ready to fully admit it. Jacob Gabai stated in this context strongly and clearly that: "I'm not ashamed, my conscience is clear. It is the Germans who should be ashamed, not me. It hurts, but I'm not ashamed."⁵⁰

In the following words of Shaul Chazan the feeling of self defense is obvious: "A verdict was given against the Jewish people and against the Sonderkommando. None of us committed a crime. None of us ever stole a thing. We were the German's victims and they treated us as they pleased. Our only guilt was that we were Jews."⁵¹

The *Sonderkommando* men were well aware of the boundless cruelty of the Germans to the victims. In the testimonies, Otto Moll, the crematoriums' commander, is widely registered; his unique cruelty is described with a very strong emotional touch, impressively expressed by Leib Langfuss:

48 Loewenthal, Zalman, in: Mark 1985, p. 232.

49 Ibid., p. 227.

50 Greif 2005, p. 213.

51 Ibid., p. 284.

"Hauptscharführer Moll had the custom of standing four of his victims in a row and killing them all in one shot. Whoever moved his head would be pushed by the murderer [Moll, the author], still alive, into the burning pit of bodies. If anyone refused to go to the bunker [pit, the author], Moll would twist his arm, push him down and crush him to death by stamping on him. When a new transport arrived, Moll would stand on a bench, fold his arms and make a short speech to his victims stating that they were to be taken to the baths and then return for labor assignments. But whoever expressed doubt at his words received cruel blows from Moll's whip, while at the same time the Hauptscharführer created a riot designed to cause confusion."⁵²

Self-perception of being Jewish

The self-perception as Jews is a crucial aspect in the field of the inner spiritual world of the *Sonderkommando* people. On one hand, they are exposed permanently to the worst actions against the Jews, to the humiliation, tortures and the de-humanization. Before their eyes the Jewish people is being liquidated. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the *Sonderkommando* people do not lose completely their religious emotions. Furthermore, they try to continue their traditions and to maintain a certain framework of a religious life as described in the scripts by Zalman Gradowski:

"I see the bunker in my mind's eye. One member would stand watch to see whether anyone was approaching, and in the meantime religious Jews would fool their oppressors often they had to take off their Tefillin frantically and rush to work in the middle of the prayer, as if nothing had happened. Often they were caught "red handed". The bestial, cynical Oberscharführer shouted: "Why are they making a 'Bible Commando' here?"⁵³

Shlomo Dragon reports about the baking of Matzos for Passover – in the middle of Hell:

"There were some religious Jews who wanted matzos for Passover. What did we do? When transports that had a little more flour came in, we took the flour to the block ... So I baked a few matzos on the heater in the block. We could do this because we were isolated and so no one saw what we were doing."⁵⁴

Dragon also tells about the effort the religious Jews in the *Sonderkommando* made in order to treat the dead respectfully: "... everyone of us has cremated relatives and acquaintances. We gathered up the ashes of each person separately and bur-

⁵² Langfuss, Leib, in: Mark 1985, p. 209.

⁵³ Greif, Gideon 2005, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

ied it in cans. We recorded the name of the victim, his date of birth, and the date of his murder. We buried the cans and we even said the Kaddish over them."⁵⁵

The existence of a certain kind of religious life is the best proof, that the *Sonderkommando* perceived themselves still as Jews, that the Germans could not kill their pride, and that they have not given up the hope to return to their previous life, they had before the Holocaust.

Solidarity

It is sometimes assumed, that in extreme situations of human conditions people become very much egocentric and egoistic. Among the *Sonderkommando* the situation was generally like that, though not all the *Sonderkommando* prisoners were behaving similarly. Sometimes they were aware of their background as civilized people, who were born in educated families, mostly religious, and tried hard to follow their old traditions, as Zalman Gradowski reports:

"Who can be such a lowly egoist as to desert a wife and children, father, mother, brothers, sisters and look for rescue for himself alone? Even if one knows that one can save oneself, who could desert his own family after having gone through the most terrible hours with them ...? No, all must go together."⁵⁶

The horrifying experience, being daily surrounded by hundreds and thousands of corpses and the ashes of murdered Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the certainty that one day they will themselves be murdered by the Germans and join their brethren who were already dead, evoke solidarity among the members of the *Sonderkommando* and feelings of sorrow and grief, remembering the thousands of murdered Jews, as Zalman Gradowski expresses:

"And so we shall remain until the last minutes of our life. All for one and one for all ... Now we, their brethren who remain alive, whom the plunderers have not yet attacked, may not shake hands, kiss, and part with our brethren at this moment, when we are literally everything to them: father, mother, wife or child."⁵⁷

The citations I have chosen in this article represent a picture, which in no case is colored only in black and white. Many lines are colored differently, because the members of the *Sonderkommando* people come from various backgrounds, social-economic groups and have, of course, different personalities. Nevertheless, there are common denominators in their patterns of behavior, and those aspects enable us to paint a very fascinating portrait of the self perception of the *Sonderkomman-*

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

⁵⁶ Gradowski, Salman, in: Mark 1985, p.181.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

do members, a portrait which includes the positive and less positive sides – the ambiguity of their ways and methods of behavior and emotional reactions.

The question of self-blame which is common to other Jewish functionaries in the Holocaust appears in the interviews and in the scripts. The *Sonderkommando* prisoners did nothing wrong or criminal. The action of murder was executed only and exclusively by the Germans, never by the *Sonderkommando* men. Nevertheless, a slight sense of guilt can be noticed in their testimonies and in the way they describe themselves and answered my questions. The meaning of this indirect need for apology comes, it seems, from the fact that they continued their work on a routine basis, seldom choosing the only alternative possible: suicide. The fact that they had to throw the bodies of the murdered Jews into the oven, to crash their bones, to pull out their gold teeth and to touch and to pull away the dead bodies without being able to pay honor to them, most probably irritated their minds and consciousness. In few cases they had to treat the bodies of their relatives in such a way. The mere fact that they had to be part of that murderous process, even by force, did hurt them and injured their conscience, though they were not the criminals, but rather the victims. The topic of guilt leads to the question of suicide: Relatively few Jews in the *Sonderkommando* killed themselves or even thought about committing suicide. One explanation might be that the special mental conditions in which they were kept made them so apathetic – even to the possibility of self-killing.

The process of becoming like beasts was dominant. This is the essence of the current self perception of the *Sonderkommando* men. Shlomo Venezia speaks of "men who behaved exactly like the animals". He repeats this idea when saying that "we were like human machines".

This honest and quite painful declaration shows that the *Sonderkommando* prisoners had rather good insights into themselves and had the inner power to criticize themselves and to put a realistic mirror before their faces. They did not hide their inner truth, but rather expressed it orally and by their writings. This is for many survivors a possibility to deal with the experiences and to cope with the nightmare they underwent and all they went through in the German concentration and extermination camps.

From the *Sonderkommando* men's words, whether written in real time or expressed orally in testimonies decades later, we learn about their horrendous fate. Yet in spite of their sufferings, they remained humane towards the doomed to immediate death, and always felt obliged to inform the world of what was happening. The at-real-time written texts and the testimonies given decades later coincide in the facts and emotions expressed in them. This correspondence points to the reliability and validity of the late testimonies.

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"Sharing the Rotten Rice"

Trauma counseling in Sri Lanka after war and Tsunami

Barbara Preitler

Abstract

Sri Lanka has suffered from twenty years of civil war. Nearly everybody in the island, especially the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka, has had to deal with two major traumatic situations: war and tsunami. In this paper we will discuss how western concepts can be combined with local concepts of healing to help the deeply traumatized population to deal with their strains.

In the eastern region we have developed an approach of long term training for local counsellors who belong to all three major ethnic groups working together in the multiethnic team. Besides individual psychological counselling are community healing services and peace education the main focus.

Counseling relationship

During a workshop in Northern Sri Lanka in 2005, where I worked with young trainees for psychological counselling, one group member shared with us her working experience with tsunami survivors:

She told about her difficulties in dealing with a widow who has lost her husband and one of her three children in the Tsunami. The house had been destroyed and now she was living a very difficult life in a refugee camp. Other people in the camp had identified her as a person in need of counselling, but when the counsellor introduced herself, the woman refused to speak to her. Only when the counsellor came back twice a week just to say "hello" and offer her assistance, did the widow slowly agree to meet her. She started talking about the difficult life circumstances she had to face in the refugee camp. The widow wanted to show how bad the food for the refugees was and asked the counsellor to share the meal with her. It was old, cooked, already rotten rice. The counsellor accepted the invitation – even though she normally would not even touch rotten food like the one being offered to her. This shared meal was the beginning for the counselling relationship - in

eating this rotten rice together with the refugee woman the counsellor had built the basis for the necessary healing relationship.

Educated in psychoanalysis, I was deeply impressed by this story of the young counsellor: in sharing the food the refugee had to eat, she was showing her willingness to be really on the side of this woman who has suffered so much and had now to live the stressful life as widow in a refugee camp.

Rice is in a Hindu context "pure" food and the preparation and consumption follow specific rules. Only fresh prepared rice will be offered to guests. Now the refugees face their low social status also by being given old rotten rice of low quality, thus hurting their dignity.

What helped most in developing the relationship between the two women was the gesture of the counsellor to share with her even the "bad taste", suggesting the meaning of being a tsunami victim and a refugee.

We were deeply moved by hearing this episode which has become a wonderful symbol for the spirit of offering psychological assistance and training in Sri Lanka for trauma victims.

I think we have to share with the refugees at least a little bit the "rotten rice" and its bad taste, to be able to understand the past and the present situation of our traumatized clients.

Sri Lanka – an overview

Sri Lanka is a tropical island in the Southeast of India. Other names of the island are "Serendip", "Ceylon" (official name before 1972) or "Paradise Island", "Pearl of the Indian Ocean" but also "Tear of the Indian Ocean".

Nearly 20 million people are living in Sri Lanka. The main ethnic group is the Sinhalese (appr. 70%) who live mainly in the Central country and its western and southern parts. Tamils are appr. 17% of the population and live mainly in the North and East. One special group of Tamils are the so called "Indian Tamils" who came as tea workers from the neighbouring India during the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. They mainly live in the huge tea gardens in central Sri Lanka. Moslems are considered as a separate ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Around 10% of the population belong to this minority and live all over the island, mainly in coastal areas. Most Singhalese people are Buddhists, Tamils are mainly Hindus, but in both groups we can find a Christian minority.

The strategic important location of the island for shipping, the good water and the rich vegetation were the main reasons for colonisation. From 1505 onwards the

tropic island was occupied first by the Portuguese, then by Dutch rulers and finally up to 1948 by the British Empire (Ghosh, 2003).

The separation between the two main ethnic groups became virulent especially during the last period of colonisation. Members of the Tamils' minority were supported by the British Empire for key functions in all forms of civil life. The majority of Sinhalese opposed this situation. In 1956, a few years after getting independence, this long lasting unbalance led to a first ethnic violence and a very strict and pro-Sinhalese government. "Sinhala only, Buddhism only" became in the 1950s the main phrases of political life and rendered Tamils (who are mainly Hindus and speak Tamil and English) as political and social outsiders. As Tamils had to leave the political scene, militant elements started to be active. Out of several armed Tamil groups LTTE (Liberation for Tamil Eelam) became the strongest group and is up to today fighting for an independent Tamil State in the North and East of the island. LTTE is banned as Terrorist organisation by US, European Union and others because of the violent way they employ in fighting for their goals.

Ethnic violence was increasing and leads in July 1983 to an outburst against any Tamils and all Tamil property. Houses were burned, people were killed. Around 2000 Tamils lost in a few days their lives, many more were made homeless and left from Colombo and other multiethnic areas to the Tamil dominated areas in the North. Later on it was shown that the so called "mob" was well organized by groups close to politicians. Since then there is no excuse for this barbaric and inhuman massacre. But all reports from these days include also stories of brave Sinhalese who risked their lives to save their Tamil friends and neighbours.

This so called "black July" marks the beginning of civil war (Ghosh, 2003).

Twenty years of civil war and the devastating effects of the Tsunami have forced virtually everyone in the island – especially in the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka – to deal with those two major traumatic situations.

On the 26th of December 2004 Sri Lanka's coastal lines were hit by a Tsunami. The official statistics reported that 31.141 people were killed immediately whereas 4.145 are still missing and nearly 1.000.000 people lost their homes and property (Sri Lankan Government, 2005). Members of all ethnic groups were affected.

Cease fire violations came to a still stand in the first weeks after the Tsunami but already a couple of weeks later political killings started again. Some of the victims were members of Tsunami affected families.

Sri Lanka has been suffering from 20 years of civil war due to the Tamil minority fighting for an independent homeland in the North and East of Sri Lanka. During different periods of this war, the Muslim minority as well as separated militant

groups from the Sinhalese and Tamil side became an additional war factor rendering life for civilians confusing and dangerous (Rupesinghe, 2006).

The situation improved at the beginning of 2002 when a mutual ceasefire was installed and peace talks started. Unfortunately these negotiations were abandoned at the end of 2005 (Pieris, 2006). Ceasefire was cancelled by the Sri Lankan government at the beginning of 2008 and since this time the war is going on mainly in the North of Sri Lanka, but affecting also areas in the East and through bomb blasts and insecurity also the South and West (BBC, 2008).

Dealing with traumatic events in Sri Lanka

The question as to what could be done to help people overcome the experience of traumatic horror and loss became even more important after the Tsunami. International funding was much better available than "only" during the civil war. Very soon however, the different concepts of psychosocial care for the victims of this natural disaster led to disagreements, since the diagnosis and treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), created in a western context do not give an answer to cultural differences:

"One problem that concerned the WHO was programmes focusing solely on PTSD, which the agency believes has been wrongly considered to be the biggest mental disorder after a disaster ... A more complex problem for Western aid agencies was adapting their clinical and psychological support services to the cultural specifics of the tsunami-affected population" (World Health Organisation, 2005).

In January and February 2005 we discussed how we could cooperate in spite of the differences: on one hand psychologists and psychotherapists from Europe - with some experience in Southern Asia -, and the Sri Lankan counsellors and psychologists - with plenty of experience in the field but having had less chance to develop and study theoretical and scientific background, on the other.

Let me share one more personal experience:

In July 2005, I trained 20 young people in the Eastern town of Batticaloa in trauma counselling. All trainees were local Tamil women and men, working as counsellors for different NGOs in the area. Batticaloa had been badly hit by the Tsunami - within the town area alone thousands of people had died; almost everybody had lost relatives, friends or classmates. I was asked to train this group in the basics of traumatology mainly developed in Western countries but I tried to adapt the program to their needs.

On the second day, two of the participants asked if I could see one of their clients. I was only going to stay for one more day, so I couldn't accept, but offered them

a session of supervision about the case of this client. They came up with the story of a young man who had been showing clear symptoms of autism. The two young counsellors had made an excellent intervention for the patient, helping him and his family to survive the chaotic situation after the Tsunami in a relief camp by assisting them and helped them in getting a new house.

What was their request to me, a Western psychologist and psychotherapist? I was very astonishing when I realised what the two counsellors were asking for: could I not "heal" the autistic boy! Their impression was that I could do things like this – heal people with all the Western methods I had been teaching in the workshop.

Analysing my counter transference I realized that on one hand I was proud that the counsellors attributed so much honour and power to me, yet on the other I felt powerless – as I definitely could not heal this boy. I also admired these two young counsellors who were so open-minded and sensitive in assisting this young man. The way they were telling me about their weekly home visits in this family impressed me. They thought that their service had been too limited, not realizing how much they had helped in improving the psychosocial well being of this young autistic boy and his whole family after the chaos of Tsunami. As his mother had reported, he had overcome the stress of the disaster and his symptoms had been reduced to the level of before the Tsunami. The young counsellors had found their own way of providing psychosocial assistance in a nearly perfect way even without much theoretical knowledge.

Mental health service in Sri Lanka

Writing about Sri Lanka also means writing about different cultural backgrounds.

"Although most Sri Lankans would probably agree that Sinhalese and Tamils share cultural practices and beliefs, the widespread assumption, both in the island and abroad, is that they are two separate peoples with different roots in the Indian subcontinent." With these words Arjun Guneratne (2002, p. 20) started his analysis of Sri Lankan identities.

"Over the centuries, as the outcome of various historical processes extending into contemporary times, two (and perhaps three) major forms of social identity have emerged: Sinhala, Tamil and perhaps Muslim" (Guneratne, 2002, p. 21).

The existing mental health legislation prepared in 1873 was last amended in 1956 in an era when people with mental disorders were incarcerated in large institutions which promoted stigmatization, discrimination and isolation. The Ministry of Health (Kahandaliyanage, 2005) promotes a "Strategic Plan for Mental Health Legislation".

Mental health issues became a public focus and there has been a tremendous increase of interest in the last couple of years. Nearly the same number of patients with mental and behavioural diseases was seen as patients with infectious and parasitic diseases.

The Sri Lankan Health Ministry described the situation as follows:

"The current mental health services in Sri Lanka find it difficult to meet the clinical demands placed upon them. Because more than 90% of the mental health services are concentrated in Colombo and a few major urban cities, the majority of people have to travel long distances to obtain basic services. Such inequities in distribution primarily affect the poor. Most psychiatric facilities offer only a limited range of clinical services" (Kahandaliyanage, 2005, p. 2).

With more than 40 suicides per 100.000 inhabitants each year, Sri Lanka has one of the highest suicide rates in the world (Eddeston, Rezvi Shariff a. Hawton, 1998). Additional traumatic events like the Tsunami and the civil war have major influence on the mental health status of the population.

After the Tsunami 130.000 to 220.000 people were affected by acute stress. Among this group about 22.000 to 44.000 people were likely to develop recognizable mental health problems and will need sustained help over a longer period of time (Gerson, 2005).

Religion as a resource

During the civil war and after the Tsunami, religion was an important resource for people to restore orientation in the chaos.-Religion played a decisive role in the cultural processing of traumatic situations. It is not necessarily the active practising, but could be seen as a cultural matrix in which trauma is understood.

"They have helped many Sri Lankan mothers at times of intense stress by creating the necessary motivation to carry on with the business of living...The beliefs beneath these are defined as either personally formed, or culturally shared cognitive configurations" (Perera, 1999, p. 109).

In Jaffna the psychiatric team headed by Prof. Somasundaram and counselling teams headed by Fr. Damian encouraged the use of traditional practices like mourning and funeral rituals for the dead and the use of traditional relaxation like yoga.

Communities in general attempt to view their difficult situation via these traditional belief systems. After the recent natural disaster, many views were expressed, concerning the emergence of different religions explanations of such disasters (Galapatti, 2003, 2005, Somasundaram, 2004).

But also religious teachings were sometimes challenged – perhaps, because of the different ways in which people used their beliefs to cope with difficulties. Over the last few months it became evident that people individually and collectively engaged in different types of religious events to relieve their personal difficulties or grievances. However, the core factor was that people used their traditional belief's systems to explain their personal problems or extra-ordinary events that they could not deal with. They thus formed personal thinking-patterns to view the difficult situation. These coping mechanisms show that people who depend on cultural beliefs perform the rituals and improve their coping mechanisms in a more adaptive way (Preitler, 2005).

Perera (1999) criticized the high expenses for some ceremonies and rituals. People invested a lot of their savings to get answers or relief. "When loneliness and emotional distress remained unchanged, the added financial strain of having to perform various rituals increased their worries" (Perera, 1999, p. 114).

Somasundaram and Jamunantha (2002) described the ordeals of families who try to find their "disappeared" relatives with the help of horoscopes and oracles. The story of one family sounds like an odyssey:

"They went to hear the horoscope from the Sasthirakarran. Three months later they went to hear the Vaku (oracle) at the Sivahamy Amman Kovil, at Mirusuvil. After performing a ritual, she said that he is living in the South. Six months later, they went to Kokuvil, where the oracle worshipped Kannan ..., and said that he was living, pray to Lord Kannan ... Later, they went to another oracle at Alaveddy where also they were told that he was living" (Somasundaram & Jamunanantha, 2002, p. 244).

Keeping the hope alive but finding no evidence about the "disappeared" son, the mother got sick and died one year later. The father of the young man became depressed.

Suffering in the aftermath of torture is a mayor problem in Sri Lanka and can be found in all parts of the state. Doney (1998) interviewed 168 ex-detainees in Northern Sri Lanka and found that all of them had been subject to torture. All groups who took detainees during the civil war used the very same methods of torture, even on their own cadres.

One special problem was addressed by Dr. Somasundaram (2004) a psychiatrist from Jaffna and by the psychologist G. Fernando (2005) in connection with Human Right violations and torture. Besides worldwide known methods of torture like different forms of beating, forms of sexual violation etc., there is one form of torture called "Dharmachakra" (wheel of righteousness). But since "Dharmachakra" is an important form of life of Buddhism, labelling the torture method "Dharmachakra" would be an abused and poisoning of a sacred concept. "The curious use of the

Buddhist spiritual term "Dharmachakra" for this type of torture is psychologically revealing" (Somasundaram, 2004, p. 218).

With confusions such as naming torture in Buddhist terms it became nearly impossible to use Buddhist forms of therapy for survivors of torture. An important cultural healing resource for trauma therapy was lost in these cases.

Communal healing as an interethnic process

We "need to define what is clearly meant by psychosocial and to establish criteria in order to create some common understanding" wrote Ananda Galappatti (2003). A part of this understanding has to respect the cultural background.

"A significant source of psychosocial support in Sri Lanka that was strikingly absent in this directory of formal humanitarian initiatives were traditional healing and cultural practices, which are often central to people's lives in conflict-affected communities" (Galappatti, 2003).

One positive example of dialog was described in the Karuna Centre for Peace Building using the model of the American psychologist Judith Herman. She divides the trauma-healing process into three stages: creating safety, working through the trauma experience and reintegrating (Herman, 1992). This frame can be linked with cultural knowledge and traditional healing practices.

People started talking about their war experience. The presence of the Western facilitators enabled some of the participants to become concerned with the level of emotions in the room. They felt that it was not typical for the Sri Lankan culture and might have been somehow prompted by the presence of people from another cultural background. The analysis of the two authors fitted also our experience of working in Sri Lanka before and after the Tsunami. An experience that led Dreier & Green (2003, p. 5) to recommend: "... to develop a Training of Trainers project so that Sri Lankan NGO leaders and academic activists will establish mixed facilitation teams."

Centre for Psychosocial Care in Eastern Sri Lanka

In developing a curriculum for psychological counselling with special focus on traumatization we need the knowledge developed in the West together with the heritage of knowledge about indigenous healing developed in Sri Lanka during past centuries. We thus were in a process of sharing, discussing and learning from each other. We also needed to know about the political and social circumstances of the area to understand the psychological situation of individuals.

Starting a program for counselling training in the multiethnic area of Ampara with members of all three major groups was a challenge for all of us:

When the participants, selected for the program of CPC (Centre for Psychosocial Care) met the first time in February 2005 many of them didn't feel comfortable. One told us at the end of the first workshop that she had to resist the wish to leave immediately when she realized that members of the two other ethnic groups were there. But she stayed and became one of the leading members of the organization, feeling proud to be a member of the interethnic group.

Six weeks after the Tsunami – when this first workshop took place – questions about acute trauma reaction, shock and grieving were central. But before we started to learn about theories and before we could share case stories we had to provide a "safe place" for our participants. Only when they felt safe and comfortable with us as their trainers and supervisors and among them as a group could we really start to concentrate on our common topics.

It was amazing to see how much these young people from different ethnical and religious background had in common: all of them had gone through twenty years of war experience; all of them had seen neighbours and relatives die in the Tsunami and they all offered their assistance and help to the survivors and refugees. All of them had the wish to learn more about the ways for helping the affected communities.

After this initial workshop we were encouraged to go ahead in planning a long-term program. With the funding from Austrian agencies (Diakonie Austria, Neighbour in Need and Austrian Development Aid) CPC was able to employ the trainees and organize a well planned curriculum.

Three days a week the trainees work in the areas affected by Tsunami or by civil war and offer their social assistance to the communities. The other two days they are in the office in Ampara town where assistance for people in need is also provided. In this office hours the paper work and documentation is done. Two mornings are reserved for team meetings and supervision.

Training programs are offered four times a year. Two of these programs will be conducted with local trainers and for two workshops trainers from Western countries will be invited.

After three years our group members should be confident as counsellors with a wide range of techniques, combining methods created in a Western context but adaptable to the cultural and social background of their own communities.

In March 2008 the three year program was completed and 16 (out of 19) students earned their degree in "Academic Trauma Counselling". In these years they have learned concepts of Basic Psychology, Basic Counselling, developmental Psychol-

ogy etc. But all these concepts were connected with the case stories the young counsellors handled in the camps and villages in Eastern Sri Lanka. This brought a lot of topics for discussion and was a learning process not only for the srilankan trainees but also for as the facilitators from Europe. We had to make always the connection between basic theories and their meanings in a context of an Eastern culture, with special emphasis on a society who suffered from twenty years of civil war and a major natural disaster.

Maybe the most impressive example was the Peace and Mourning Ritual organized by the Counselling team for Gonagola. In 1999 this small Singhalese village was attacked by LTTE. 44 inhabitants were brutally killed. Seven years later the surviving people were still traumatized.

In our training program we were discussing the complicated grief process and the counselling possibilities for such cases. With this background the counsellors started to organize a Buddhist ritual to mark the seventh anniversary of the massacre in September 2006. They started already half a year before talking with the village people and deciding who will work and participate in the two-days-ritual. Finally the whole team of CPC (including our Tamil members) and the whole village were involved in the ritual. It was an important healing ceremony for the frozen grief but also a sign for peace and mutual understanding. Since this ritual took place, the people from the village organize themselves rituals. They are able to go ahead with their grieving.

Similar programs were planned for Tamil and Muslim communities but postponed as the actual political situation didn't allow their realization. Hopefully this can be done soon again.

CPC is now offering counselling and training programs for people in need. The Tsunami victims still come for counselling, but the majority of people seeking help are victims of the increasing Civil war.

Even after ending the program the connection between Ampara and Austria will continue and we will try to stay in contact – learning from each other.

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The Holocaust survivor meets society¹

Miriam Rieck

Abstract

The encounter of Holocaust survivors with the general society was conflictual and ambivalent, be it with Jews or non-Jews, with private people or institutions, with mental health professionals or the population at large – the encounter was difficult and sometimes even traumatic. This intriguing ambivalence is probably not unique for Holocaust survivors; it characterizes encounters with all people who have undergone catastrophes. Such feelings may have deep seated psychological and psycho-social roots and since they interfere with our intuitive wish to help these people, it is important to study them in detail. It is suggested that the study of people who had undergone the Nazi persecution may be paradigmatic for such situations, since the catastrophe they have experienced exceeds all situations humanity has ever known.

Introduction

"I am like a sealed book for my friends and a stranger to them". Within these words Elsa Lasker-Schueler describes herself: not entirely lonely, not without friends, but forever foreign.
Salmon Irit

Much has been said and written about the conflictual and ambiguous meeting of the Holocaust survivors with the post-war society. Whether in Germany, the land of their oppressors, in [Erez]-Israel², the land of their brethren or in free countries like the United States of America – the encounter was difficult and disappointing.

This difficulty exists, albeit in different forms, on all levels of social institutions or groupings and alliances, from big organizations like governments or organizations

- 1 This chapter is an expansion and revision of a lecture presented at the 3rd International Trauma Research Net Conference *Trauma – Stigma and distinction. Social Ambivalence in the Face of Extreme Suffering*. 14–17 September 2006, St. Moritz, Switzerland, and of a lecture presented at the conference *Holocaust survivors encounter post war societies: Past and present perspectives*, Haifa, 6 May 2007.
- 2 The term Erez-Israel was used by the Jews before the state of Israel was established.

within countries (even those established with the purpose of helping the survivors), through social groups such as the survivors vs. the people of the absorbing country, down to a personal level like relatives or friends from the pre-war era or from the absorbing country. The encounters were usually difficult for both sides and disappointing if not traumatic for the survivors.

At first glance this seems astonishing since all, but all – individuals, groups, institutions and countries alike, had expressed their urgent wish to help the survivors, and many had done so, and some institution were even established for this purpose.

In order to obtain some insight into this complex situation, the literature concerned with the macro-level activities and those dealing with groups' encounters in Israel, as well as the content of biographies of survivors will be discussed. I will analyze encounter on these three levels: first, the highest level that of institutions will be presented. Specifically the survivors' encounter with the [Erez] Israeli emissaries to the post-war Europe and with organizations in Poland will be discussed. Second, the encounter of the survivors as a group with groups of the absorbing population in [Erez]-Israel will be put forward, and third, the encounter on an individual level will be taken up. This personal-level will mainly be based on a comparison of psychological writings about the survivors, and the drifting of their conceptions into the terminology of non professionals on one hand, and the survivors' own words, on the other.

In conclusion the validity of two widespread (miss) used concepts: 'conspiracy of silence' and 'guilt-feelings' will be examined. These terms, stemming from psychoanalysis, were indiscriminately applied to survivors by professionals and non-professionals alike. It was assumed by both, that survivors tend to suffer from guilt feelings for having survived while others perished, and that these feelings brought about the conspiracy of silence: they did not want and could not talk about their life during persecution. Careful listening to the survivors' words, whether in their writings or in interviews discloses that many of them wanted to tell their story, but were prevented from doing so.

Two word of caution should be put forward: First, I do not want to fall into the pitfall of generalizations. For some survivors the generalizations used by professionals or the population at large fit, for others not. The fallacy was the unwarranted generalization from some cases to the entire group of survivors.

Secondly, though referring to three levels of encounter, it is important to bear in mind that the encounters were usually affected by more than one of the above mentioned levels. Since, however, each of them has its unique characteristics and contributes its own input to the process; it is illuminating to study them separately.

The level of the institutions

A sincere concern for the Jews in Europe started even before the war and augmented during and after the war, when the catastrophe on all its dimensions became known. After the war some European countries, but mainly Germany, were flooded by refugees that needed a place to stay³. Most helping groups and individuals came from [Erez]-Israel though also in other countries such institutions were established. The complex state gave rise to many efforts for saving and rehabilitating the survivors and led to the establishment of organizations as well as to personal missions to save those who came out of the camps (for an elaborate account see for instance Kenyan, 1996; Lavsky, 2006). Some of those who took this mission by personal initiative were Jewish soldiers from Erez-Israel, who, having served in the British army remained after the war for this purpose in Europe. The official emissaries were sent by Jewish institutions from Erez-Israel. The former had a more personal attitude toward the survivors, thus offering them the sympathetic and personal treatment, which the survivors needed so badly. The aims of the emissaries of the institutions from Erez-Israel did not always coincide with the survivors' needs and expectations, and were thus often disappointing for the survivors. While the survivors yearned for personal and intimate encounters, the delegates of the establishment had their institutions' aims and necessities in mind. This conflict of interests prevented sometimes a close dialog which might have alleviated some of the survivors' loneliness (Keynan 1996) and at the same time help them to recover their trust in humankind, which was shattered during persecution⁴.

Elie Wiesel (1978) expressed his disappointment poignantly. He stated that the camp inmates had been sure that nobody in the world knew anything about their fate, since had anybody known, they would have been saved. He continues by saying that in the past persecuted Jews could count on their brothers when fleeing to other places. But this rule did not hold during and after the Holocaust. As an example he tells that during a lethal epidemic in the displaced persons camp (DP) Bergen-Belsen, no Jewish Doctor came to treat them. The leaders were forced to turn to German doctors who, short of clothing in the destroyed Germany, still wore the feared and hated uniform. In addition, during the High Holidays, no rabbi came to spend the holidays with the survivors. They were swamped with prayer books, but not one volunteer came to accompany and support the survivors. They got materials sent by institutions, but no personal identification, support or contact.

3 Many survivors, from the camps and refugees from the east were located in camps, called displaced persons camps (DP). Some of these camps were located in the former concentration camps.

4 Though many of the survivors suffered from lack of empathy, quite a sizable number of them were eager to realize their Zionist aspirations and had identified with its movements even before they met the emissaries. Yet even those who were enthusiastic to materialize these aspirations were sometimes hurt by the requirement to put aside the past.

We thus learn that the institutions may help on the macro level, which, though important by itself, was not what the survivors needed on a very personal level.

This conflict between the institutions' aims and the survivors' needs was amply described by Keynan (1996). In a detailed account concerned with the Erez-Israeli emissaries' work in Europe between 1945 and 1949 (from shortly after the war till the first year of the existence of the state of Israel) the author describes the complicated encounter between both sides. The author states that omitting the opportunity of treating the survivors as individuals was immanent to the conception of the educational Zionist activity. This tendency, she states, gave rise to conceiving the survivors as a collective, a "political mass" (which the young state needed desperately) yet not as individuals. And she continues by saying that this view of Zionist education eliminated from the outset the possibility of a personal encounter and the fulfillment of the survivors' hopes for closeness and warmth, a desire the survivors had cultivated at liberation.

The author continues by saying that these educational Zionist activities were sometimes conceived as instrumentalizing survivors for the Zionists' aims. At the same time this education gave rise to or stemmed from deep seated beliefs, which maintain that there is a relationship of interdependence between the Zionism's needs and those of the survivors in renewing their lives, thus refuting the conception of instrumentalization.

This analysis provides one example of the problematic coexistence of institutional and individual needs, which both, in spite of their different necessities are forever doomed to coexistence. Or, putting it differently – Zionism needed the survivors for the realization of its aims – the establishment of a home-land for the Jews; and the survivors need Zionism in order to find a homeland and rehabilitate their lives. Yet, even though the author stresses the sometimes contradicting and sometimes complementing aims and needs of both sides, she concludes that the encounter was not a failure, the proof of the success being the fact that the survivors joined the Zionist struggle and viewed it as theirs, and by their volunteering to fight in the '48 war and by their absolute integration in Israel. As already mentioned, many survivors were eager to go to [Erez]-Israel in order to realize their ideology. Many were organized in Jewish youth groups, sometimes missing the opportunity to go to [Erez]-Israel before the war.

A somewhat different, though also conflictual picture emerges when dealing with children who were hidden with gentiles in Poland (Nachmany-Gafny, 2005). During the war, when the chances for survival were meager, many parents placed their children with gentile families or in convents. The number of these children and of the surviving parents is unknown. The fate of these hidden children, of differing ages, varied markedly, from children who suffered severely at their foster parents'

homes or in convents, to those who integrated absolutely into their new families, sometimes unaware of their Jewish origin.

After the war a central organization of the Polish Jews was established, and was active in returning children to their families (parents who survived, or in case they did not survive, to other relatives), or, if no relatives survived, to the Jewish People. Two main points in this endeavor are of importance: First, the question whether and in what cases removing the children from their foster parents was or was not of advantage for the children, was never asked. Secondly, the different institutions fought to get the children because of their own needs, in addition to return them to the Jewish People. As to the children's benefit, needless to say that one cannot generalize about what was good for "the children", since their fates differed markedly. Some remembered their parents, others did not. Some were happy at their foster parents' house; others never stopped missing their parents. Also, while some adhered secretly to their Jewish religion, others grew up as Christians. The children's encounter with their parents or relatives was fraught with difficulties. Some did not recognize their parents; others were frightened of a new abandonment, in some cases the children did not want to desert their rescuers and some also adapted the Christian religion, or if still adhered to Judaism, kept it, as during the war, secretive.

The activity within the organization of Polish Jews was permeated with disagreements and struggles between the Zionists and non-Zionists, and between the religious and non-religious Jews. Also within the Zionist and non-Zionist groups, disagreements as to what is best for the children, were frequent. These struggles concerned the aims and benefits of the institutions, but not necessarily those of the children.

Again, as with the survivors and emissaries in Europe, the incongruity between the institutions and survivors' needs and wants is apparent.

One interpretation could coincide with Bauman's (1989) theorizing about the rationality that robs human life of morality⁵. The author stresses the rationality, which prevents people from acting morally, that "...reason was the enemy of morality" (p. 203). This rationality could also be expressed in institutions' rational aims being given priority over the (morally valid) individual's necessities. It represents the ever present rift between the individual and institutional necessities, aims and aspiration which sometimes coincide, yet sometimes challenge each other.

5 Though Bauman referred to obedience at the expense of moral behavior during the Holocaust, which helped the persecutors to achieve their aims, since, as he states, they could rely on the tendency to obey, his theorizing may be translated to differing objectives of institutions and individuals, where institutions always win.

The second level, the level of groups

When survivors came to Israel or other countries, they were a group meeting other groups. The difficult, conflicting and sometimes emotionally tainted groups' encounters are universal and evolve even when groups are artificially constructed, when people belong to artificially constructed and meaningless group. Thus, when in experiments subjects, who were kept isolated from each other, were assigned to such groups, like for instance the "green" or "red" group, they experienced a sense of belonging to "their" group, even though they had never seen the other members of their group (Tajfel, H., Ed. 1982). This is just one example of the power of group affiliation, of the emergence of in-group favoritism and out-group derogation. These notions of in- and out-group feelings are well known, and Bauman (1991) adds a new dimension to this configuration. He speaks of three possibilities of groupings: of friends, enemies and strangers. While the relationship with enemies is clearly defined as negative, that with strangers is less unequivocal. "The stranger undermines the spatial ordering of the world ... the staying together of friends and the remoteness of enemies. The stranger...is *physically too close* [yet] *spiritually remote*" (p. 60, italics added).

This distinction between the groups was significant for Holocaust survivors, who came to the absorbing country, neither as group members nor as enemies but as strangers. Many survivors gave expression to this distancing, so did the absorbing group.

The ways these feelings affected the Israeli scene were thoroughly described in writings (e.g. Segev, 1994; Yablonka, 1994). To begin with, one should take into account the discrepancy between the Israeli natives or those who had been there for a long period of time, and the Jews living in the Diaspora. Life in [Erez]-Israel was believed to cure all ailments of life in the Diaspora, and the notion of a New Jew, freed from the burden of characteristics of life in the Diaspora (like preferring business to productive work) evoked in those living in [Erez]-Israel feelings of superiority over the Jew of the Diaspora⁶. Significantly, Yablonka, when writing about the reunion between Holocaust survivors and the people living in [Erez]-Israel gave her book the title: Foreign Brethren. She states that when the Holocaust survivors came they did not meet a society that listened to them; they met a heartless society which over time closed itself more and more off. Like Keynan, she maintains that the first volunteers to Europe had a direct, supportive and empathic attitude towards the survivors, which vanished with the arrival of the institutions' emissaries.

6 Feelings of estrangement are universal, their content is however specific to each society. Putting it differently, the elements of social identity as described by Tajfel are neutral; they materialize, however in concrete societies and bear concrete and specific characteristics.

The way in which the survivors were received in [Erez]-Israel was based on two levels of attitudes: the ideological and the personal ones. On the ideological level, survivors' personal wishes, like that of living in towns, and not in agricultural settlements, were rejected. Such life did not contribute to the land's necessities, nor did it correspond to the characteristics of the New Jew. It thus nourished the arrogance of the absorbing group. On the personal level – the newcomers could usually not talk about their devastating experiences since it repelled the listeners⁷. This refusal to listen was very consequential for the survivors since, as Ruth Bondy (cited by Yablonka) said: "But we had to tell [without restriction] yet nobody wanted to hear...who is able to listen to the horrors...the listeners [turned away] as though they were told something too personal, too private, which should not be brought up in public. We soon learned: be an Israeli when going out and a person of the camp at home..."⁸. The survivors were designated names like refugees or "dust of men" which categorized them as a group and revoked the possibility of a personal identity and of establishing personal relationships. On the institutional level – they were more or less neglected and experienced strong disappointment. And Yablonka concludes that though they had been a group with potentials, and not misfits as they were believed to be, they felt isolated and miserable, and many of them left to other countries.

Though probably not applicable to all survivors, these descriptions equal many of the survivors' memoirs, such as the above cited words of Ruth Bondy⁹. The survivors felt rejected by the old residents, whose unwillingness to listen to survivors is repeated in their writings with great reliability. This is probably an extreme example of what may be experienced by immigrants in general. But to undergo such immigration experiences after having been exposed to the Holocaust horrors added a unique dimension and aggravated the survivors' disappointment. They soon learned to remain silent when in the general community and talk about their Holocaust experience only among themselves, as emerges for instance from writings of Appelfeld (e.g. 1999).

The third level, the encounters between individuals

At the outset, a disregard of the survivors' emotional state characterized the opinions of professionals and the general population. This bias may have had several reasons. In the first place, professionals did not have any experience with such

7 The repulsion aroused by the encounter with people who had undergone horrible events is well known, and will be discussed in more detail in the part dealing with the personal level.

8 This is a paraphrase on a well known saying of emancipated Jews, who used the slogan: "be a Jew at home and a person when you go out".

9 It should be emphasized that not all survivors wanted to talk about their experience in the Holocaust and this should also have been respected. The problem is, again, with generalizations which may or may not be valid.

horrendous situations and were completely unprepared for them¹⁰. In addition there may be two, quite different reasons for this disregard. One refers to the state of the art – the Zeitgeist of psychiatry that reigned at that time. The reigning school of psychiatry adhered to the belief (or "knowledge") that neuroses after traumata are of short duration, and psychoses – genetically determined. The second reason concerns the survivors themselves who did not want to admit that they were afflicted by persecution, since it would have diminished their sense of victory over Hitler, brought about by their survival.

When it became evident that many survivors, old theories notwithstanding, are doomed to suffer because of their fate during the Nazi persecution, the views shifted and they were diagnosed and categorized according to the existing psychiatric and psychoanalytic theories. Since writings about the survivors' sufferings had emerged simultaneously and unanimously from many places, these findings were indiscriminately generalized to the survivors' population at large. Somewhat later, controlled studies emerged. Those studies examined the clinical findings in non-clinical groups of survivors, and the clinical generalizations were only partially supported.

The greatest change emerged, however, when survivors started to be heard, when they had a chance to tell their story. (For a more detailed account of these developments see Rieck, 2001).

Elie Wiesel (1978) wrote a chapter in his book *A Jew Today*: "A plea for the survivors". He wonders why after so many years, after the reigning of destruction was abolished, one should plea for the survivor. "And yet [he continues] – they do need to be defended". By this statement Wiesel has pinpointed the problematic encounter of the Holocaust survivors with the post war society. And he continues by saying, that the Holocaust, rather than heightening the awareness to personal suffering, reduced it to the level of anecdotes, and that those who have not been "there" believe, at best mistakenly, that they know what it was like. This level of anecdote is two dimensional: on the macro and meso-level it reflects the conflict between the survivors on one hand, and the institutions and absorbing groups, on the other. It also reflects the anxiety aroused by meetings with people who had undergone catastrophes. We have already learned that many survivors wanted to tell their story but that people whom they met did not want or could not listen to them. People tend to feel revulsion and anxiety when confronted with survivors of horrors and catastrophes (Eissler, 1963, 1967), exhibiting a tendency to deny the horrors and avoid the survivors.

10 It should be noted that some authors, like Eissler (1963, 1967, and or Venzlaff (1958) have realized from an early stage that we are confronted with an entirely new situation.

The same applies, at least partially, to the helping professions, though their attitudes have changed over time. As the experience of the helping professions accumulated, the opinions as to the emotional state of Holocaust survivors have changed. Gradually, more complex theories and understanding replaced the earlier theories.

Writing or talking about life during persecution without really knowing what it was like (Wiesel, 1978) may also be observed in professionals' theorizing, who rely in their theorizing more on their theories than on the survivors' words. As an example let us refer to Rosenman and Handelsman (1990). The authors have analyzed Nomberg-Przytyk's (1966/1985) memoirs, concerned with her life during persecution, mainly in Auschwitz. Her memoirs give a detailed account of the daily life in the camp, of social interactions and support. Her personal and social affiliations in the camp she shared with communists, some of whom she knew before the war. The translator of her memoirs states in his introduction, that she had a strong sense of social justice for which she was discriminated against in the pre-war Poland, and which was also the reason for not being able to stay in Poland after the war. She was a communist before the war and in Auschwitz was strongly connected with the other communists there. Her description exemplifies the importance of social groupings and friendships, for both material and emotional survival.

The editor also emphasizes the importance, almost an urge, the author experienced in her effort to remember all she had experienced. Again, a need she experienced in transmitting documentation, to testifying for the future, lest the world won't know. And again, this urge existed from the outset, before having lost friends (see also Des Press, 1976).

Rosenman and Handelsman (1990) approached these memoirs from a quite different point of view. They maintain that Holocaust memoirs have a formative influence on Jewish identity formation, thus excluding in their analysis Nomberg-Przytyk's strong social values and her having belonged to the communists already before the war. They thus regard her returning to the anti-Semitic Poland as an expression of guilt feelings.

I would like to turn now to two concepts which were frequently applied to Holocaust survivors' emotional state, by professionals and laymen alike (often to the survivors' dismay): conspiracy of silence and guilt feelings. These diagnoses appear repeatedly in the psychological literature and in social discourse, and were extremely painful for the survivors, who actually were prevented by society from commuting their story. These two diagnoses were sometimes creatively combined, maintaining that the survivors don't want to talk about their life during persecution, since they felt guilty because of having survived while their relatives and friends were killed. Or, in cases of survivors who could not stop recounting (the mirror

image of conspiracy of silence), in such cases they were believed not to be able to stop talking, so the theorizing, because of their guilt feelings. Again, with all due caution I want to stress, that the problem is not with the concepts themselves, but with their being indiscriminately applied the survivors' population at large.

The conspiracy of silence: A conspiracy of silence is a secretive agreement between the parties not to talk about something. I want to argue that this silence was in many cases not the survivors' choice, but imposed on them.

As early as 1949 Boder's book *I did not interview the dead* was published. The author went shortly after the war to Europe and interviewed survivors. He did not encounter difficulties expected by the conspiracy of silence theory. Reading the interviews demonstrates that the interviewees spoke openly and fluently about their life during persecution. Also some liberating soldiers were curious, when entering camps, to learn from the survivors what had happened to them. In later interviews¹¹ Greenspan (1998) was told that this post-war openness was, to the survivors' dismay, short lived, and that it had aroused at the time a feeling of warmth. But later the survivors soon felt that they had to suppress their urge to recount and felt as though "there was [again] an invisible barbed wire" (Greenspan, 1998, 43).

Des Pres (1976) has devoted a whole chapter to "The will to bear witness". He argues at length against the view that the urge to bear witness is due to the survivor's guilt feelings. He bases his view on the fact that this will emerged immediately when entering the camp, when witnessing the horrors, before the survivors lost their relatives or friends. It is more like shame in Primo Levi's (1988) terms, and resembling what Jaspers (2006) designated metaphysical guilt. The roots of such a feeling may be deep rooted in human nature, and emerge, out of an innate feeling of responsibility, when a man witnesses crimes that are committed in his presence, though without his participation (Jaspers, 2006).

But was recounting always easy for the survivors?

Appelfeld (1979) e.g. wrote that recounting is for the survivor first and foremost a release of burden even though forgetting was sometimes wonderful.

Semprun (1965/1997), when describing the inhuman situation during the journey to the camp, even before he knew the trip's destinations and what he would encounter there, conversed with his young neighbor whom he did not know beforehand and told him that one of them will have to describe the horror of the drive. This proves that the urge to bear witness emerged also independent of personal losses.

11 The author would have preferred the term "listening".

Yet again, was it always easy for the survivors to talk? Apparently not. Semprun (1994), after liberation, describes at length his necessity and impossibility to write [about his camp experiences]. He cannot but write. At the same time he cannot live when writing. Only very gradually was he able to struggle through both these impossibilities.

This duality was observed by Greenspan (1998) who emphasized that the formulation of "either or" is misleading. The survivors live in the here and now and at the same time "there and then". In the same vein, Rieck (2001) and Rieck et al (1993/1996) were able to show that the question if Holocaust survivors are emotionally scarred or sound copers misses the point. They may be vulnerable and sound copers simultaneously. Similarly, as already stated, many of them need and at the same time can't tell their story.

Thus far for the ambiguity of the "conspiracy of silence".

But was speaking always beneficial for survivors?

Of special interest are the poignant words of Jean Amery (1980/1960) and Primo Levy (1988). Both have written about their difficult experiences in the camps, both have later committed suicide¹². This fact raises the question if, as so often stated, that survivors would have overcome their problems, if they had been able, or given the possibility to talk about their persecution experiences.

Jean Amery (1980/1996) was deeply disappointed by the political situation in the post-war Germany. He had lost his homeland and was unable to write in other languages but German¹³. The people of the left wing, in the past his comrades, attacked Israel severely, which was most disappointing for him. The survivors and the culprits were more or less equated and had both to overcome their past. He was not permitted to wish for revenge, this was construed as psychopathology. But Jean Amery emphasizes that he did not suffer from pathology. It was the world of the perpetrators in which he was persecuted that was pathological. Most illuminating in Amery's writing is the elaborate way in which he describes his disappointment of the post-war society. All the humanistic values that were so important for him in the past had vanished from the post war society.

Primo Levy (1988) tells us that the culprits, and later the survivors knew that nobody would believe their stories. The camp inmates had the premonition that nobody would listen to their stories after liberation, and dreamed about it repeatedly. Levi recounts one of his dreams. He is at home, in a comfortable and clean bed,

12 There is doubt as to Levi's suicide. Many authors do, however think that he has committed suicide. At the same time we know that also other survivors who had written about their war experience, had committed suicide, like Tadeusz Borowski or Beni Wircberg.

13 Paul Celan, who also could write only in German, was also doomed to commit suicide in spite of his fruitful writings.

surrounded by his families. It was warm and felt good. But when he started telling about his life in the camp, his sister vanishes and a sense of loneliness overcame him. And he continues that when liberated by the Russian soldiers, they did not look at the inmates, they turned away with a look of shame.

Summary and conclusions

In analyzing the conflicting encounter between Holocaust survivors and the absorbing society, a picture of complete misunderstanding and estrangement between the parties emerges. The absorbing society, on all its levels, the institutional, the group and the personal, was either preoccupied with its own goals (mainly the institutions), or its sense of belonging (the group) or have experienced a sense of repulsion and fear, aroused in the absorbing people by those who had undergone horrendous experiences.

Moreover – the survivors were analyzed and diagnosed according to psychiatric and psychological theories stemming from entirely different times and situations, the terminology (such as guilt feelings) spilling over to and being used by society at large. That these concepts may have been invalid was documented in the literature and in survivors' writings. Des-Pres (1976) has convincingly argued that life in camps was neither regressive nor pathological, that it had a unique structure. By the same token one may argue that life after liberation is not necessarily permeated by guilt feelings, nor had the conspiracy of silence existed for all or for most survivors. Greenspan (1999) tells us that until the 70s survivors in the United States were not listened to. Later, when bearing witness or listening to testimonies became fashionable, the survivors succumbed to society's expectations and presented themselves as either being damaged or as heroes. No dialogue existed. The survivors were required to represent in these testimonies their group, the group of minorities, as requested by the absorbing society – the group of majorities.

When trying to tell and recount their story, which would have been very important and meaningful for the survivors, they were silenced, and were thus left to commute only among themselves.

The early misconceptions have blinded professionals and laymen alike. They led to a misunderstanding of some of the real needs of the survivors, namely of their need to bear witness and at the same time of regaining faith in society.

This rejection was widespread and professionals who attempted to help the survivors were not exempt of these unfortunate feelings. It may have been latently present in psychiatrists who, as experts, examined Holocaust survivors applying for indemnification because of emotional damage caused by Nazi persecution, and rejected the request Eissler (1963; 1967).

It would take much research to support or reject Eissler's hypothesis, and even more to learn how society can cope with its deep-rooted feelings against out-groups and the Other, and above all with feelings of repulsion against those who had undergone unbelievable sufferings. A better understanding of these mechanisms may help to prevent much unnecessary damage to survivors of catastrophes on their long journey to re-integration into society.

And yet, In spite of the gloomy picture portrayed here, many survivors have built a new life and live constructively amongst us. Their lives are probably a mixture of sound coping and integration on one hand, and unforgettable memories not to be shared with the rest of society, on the other. This situation may remind of Salm-on Irit words about Elsa Lasker Schueler, [being] "not entirely lonely, not without friends, but forever foreign".

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Intergenerational echoes of the story of the Holocaust in families of survivors¹

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Abstract

In this chapter three key aspects of the intergenerational echoes of the Holocaust are elucidated and illustrated based on our study of the relational themes and interpersonal patterns that are manifested in the intergenerational dynamics in families of survivors. To trace the *echoes* of the parents' trauma in the relational stories told by non-clinical adult children of the survivors we have relied on a unique combination of an adaptation of the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT) method (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998) and narrative-qualitative methodology (Wiseman & Barber, 2008). Our choice of the term "*echoes*" represents three key points in our understanding of the relational themes and interpersonal patterns that were identified in our study of recollected relational narratives of the second generation. First, the use of the term "echoes" underscores that we are not dealing with the transmission of the trauma itself (Mikulincer, 2006), but with interpersonal themes and child–parent dynamics in which the echoes of the trauma play out in the recollected relational experiences. Second, the term "echoes" carries with it the aspects of voices and sounds that fit our emphasis on modes of communication about the Holocaust and its ongoing verbal and nonverbal presence. Our analysis of themes of communication in the narratives told by the second generation show that even when the relational space is wordless, "the music of knowing–not knowing" is heard either in the foreground or in the background, and sometimes in both. Third, the pitch and loudness of the echoes that we can hear are highly variant and depend on many variables such as the source that transfers the echoes (the survivor), the individual at the receiving end (the child or grandchild), and the surrounding environment (the socio-cultural context). This speaks to our emphasis on the ways people subjectively construe and deal with their relational and emotional experiences. Moreover, we need to pay attention to interesting changes in

1 Parts of this chapter appeared in: Wiseman, H. & Barber, J. P. (2008). *Echoes of the Trauma: Relationship Themes and Emotions in Children of Holocaust Survivors*. New York: Cambridge University Press. This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Professor Dan Bar-On who passed away on September 2008 and whose impact and leadership in the field have inspired and influenced our work.

the way the Holocaust is remembered in Israeli society and in the world at large as forming a social and historical context in which relational experiences are recollected. As Wolfgang Frindte (this volume) put it: "Remembering is not solely individual. It occurs in social and cultural horizons."

Echoes in the relational experiences of children of survivors

The study of the long-term intergenerational effects of the Holocaust on the offspring of the survivors has been addressed in the clinical and research literature for the last three decades. Much of the debated research has focused on the issue of the prevalence of psychopathology in adult children of survivors (the "second generation"). In the more recent terminology of the trauma-related literature the issue of intergenerational effects is considered with respect to "secondary traumatization" in survivors' children and "tertiary traumatization" in the grandchildren. The most recent meta-analyses of studies have shown no evidence of either secondary traumatization in non-clinical samples in the children of survivors (van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2003), or tertiary traumatization in the grandchildren (Sagi-Schwartz, Van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008). These findings were based on sophisticated meta-analytic methodology that summarizes a large number of quantitative studies. However, these meta-analytic summaries do not include studies which rest upon qualitative-narrative methodology that are also needed to address such a complex phenomenon as intergenerational effects of trauma (Bar-On, 1995; Chaitin, 2003; Rosenthal, 1998).

To study the relational experiences of children of the survivors, we have used a qualitative-narrative approach that is sensitive to context and is especially suitable for studying subjective experiences and the meanings of trauma in the life stories of both the survivors and their descendents (Bar-On, 2008; Lev-Wiesel, 2007; Josselson, Lieblich & McAdams, 2007). Our adaptation of the conceptual and methodological framework of the CCRT enabled us to reveal that even though adult children of survivors have been found to score in the normal range of functioning on standardized questionnaires, they still seem to struggle with important relational issues that may not be captured by more objective measurement tools. The CCRT framework was developed by Lester Luborsky as a means to understand central relationship patterns and issues that are manifested in relational narratives (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998). Relationship narratives refer to recollected stories about meaningful interpersonal interactions that occurred with significant others (e.g., parents, spouse). The narratives have the quality of a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and most often have the form of "this is what happened when I wanted him/her to ... and he/she reacted ... and as a result I felt ...". We applied the Relationship Anecdote Paradigm (RAP) to collect relational narra-

tives in interviews outside of therapy (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998) in order to identify relational issues and sensitivities that are manifested in adult children of survivors (Wiseman & Barber, 2004; Wiseman et al., 2006).

To illustrate the echoes of the parents' Holocaust trauma in the recollected experiences of the sons and the daughters with their parents, three relational narratives that were told in RAP interviews are presented below (for information on the participants and the procedure, see Wiseman et al., 2002). It should be noted that in giving voice to the narrators' authentic subjective experiences and their "narrative truth" (Spence, 1982), we are not necessarily attributing all their experiences to their parents' Holocaust background. Indeed, alternative explanations and insights can be offered and the readers of our narratives may consider other interpretations. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the sons and daughters who related the narratives.

The dog in the elevator story

The story that Gidon recollected from childhood involved his mother's extreme reaction to a dog that they encountered while riding together in an elevator.

Gidon: "My mother and I got into an elevator and then some dog came in and she reacted with total panic. She immediately jumped out of the elevator and made some strange sounds. I had never seen her like that. She then told me the story about the time she was five years old, when they crossed the border and dogs were chasing them. Since then, she has had this trauma about dogs."

When asked how he felt in this situation with mother, Gidon responds that he felt embarrassed.

Gidon: "There were people there, and I didn't understand why she got so scared because of a dog. The dog didn't even look threatening. You don't expect your parent to embarrass you ... all of a sudden she jumps and shouts ..."

This story portrays the child's experience of surprise at his mother's reaction as he is suddenly faced with a fragment of the parent's traumatic past. Gidon's reaction to the unwanted attention he felt his mother caused by her panicky reaction in public (an audience of strangers in the elevator) to an innocent-looking dog appears to elicit feelings of embarrassment. In this kind of recollected relational encounter the cues from the parents' traumatic personal memories of threats to their own and others' lives are echoed in the son's perception of his mother's unexpected behavior and his sense of embarrassment.

The images of fire story

Before beginning to relate a specific encounter with her mother Rachel tells the interviewer that "as a child she did not know any details about what and where her

mother was during the Holocaust, but she only knew that her mother went through the Holocaust. One thing that stood out that her mother did disclose was that she very much disliked 'Lag BaOmer' [a Jewish holiday on which bonfires are lit]."

Rachel: "On 'Lag BaOmer' she had to go out with us children to celebrate around the fire, like all the parents do on this evening, and she could not go out of the house. My father would always go with us on that day...This she did disclose and it was engraved in me...that it was because the fire reminded her of the (concentration) camps."

In response to the interviewer's request that Rachel describe what as a child she felt in that specific situation, she responded:

Rachel: "Her misery, gloom, why does she have to suffer until this very day, why does she have to carry it ... why can't she break away from it ... I really felt sorry for her about the Holocaust, the loneliness ... she lost everything in the Holocaust, literally everything, all her family. As a child I felt pity for her, I never judged her and I justified her. You see, I tied everything to this concept of loneliness and loss."

Rachel's account echoes the mother's traumatic experiences in the concentration camp. Her mother avoids of the images of fires on Lag BaOmer as they are associated with the cues and smells of the traumatic memories. The daughter's account emits a strong sense of loneliness as connected to her mother's immense losses (Wiseman, 2008). She expresses a strong wish that her mother could detach herself from her traumatic past, but indicates how this is impossible. She appears to alternate between her mother's loneliness and her own.

This *blurred feeling* regarding *loneliness and trauma* arises spontaneously in Rachel's narrative when she later mentions in this context a more recent experience of impending disaster in connection with the first Gulf War in 1991. There was fear in Israel of gas attacks from Iraq (they did not materialize, although there were missiles attacks). Rachel refers to that time, when her mother experienced nightmares: "... she kept seeing the gas chambers and the fires in the concentration camps ... it hurt me to see her so helpless. It was also very difficult for me, I could not help her."

In this story we can see how in light of the mother's traumatic memories the daughter expresses strong feelings of helplessness, as she is unable to help her mother escape the recurrent and distressing intrusive memories and distressing dreams, both features of posttraumatic stress disorder (*DSM IV-TR*; APA, 2000).

The explosion Story

Ronit, herself a wife and mother, tells about a specific memorable interaction with her own mother that occurred more recently during adulthood.

Ronit: "I was at my mother's house on Saturday afternoon when we suddenly heard a very serious sound of an explosion. You know, it was during that period (in Israel) when buses exploded due to terrorist attacks. You see the thing is that we all heard the noise (her husband and children who were all visiting at her mother's house). Now what happened to me and to my mother did not happen to any of the others that were there and heard the same noise. I picked up my little one (her own daughter), and I and my mother started screaming and running together in the same direction, without even looking ... Everyone else continued to talk as if nothing happened, my husband and the other children stayed where they were on the porch ... It turned out that it was only the sun powered water heater on the roof of the next-door neighbor, which exploded and caused this noise."

Such exaggerated startle responses that are described in this story regarding the way the mother and daughter reacted to the noise of explosion are common in people who have experienced trauma (APA, 2000). Ronit, however, is troubled by the contrast between the others' (husband and older children) indifference to the noise of explosion and the way she and her mother were alarmed by the noise and their dramatic reactions.

Ronit: "It was only me and my mother that continued to run with my little girl ... even though we saw that it was nothing, we both reacted this way; and afterwards for another 10 minutes the two of us were still shaking like two fish. You should have seen the others, no one came out, no one even looked to see what happened, but the two of us were like two shaking fish, with my little girl half naked on my arms and we were really ready to escape, I don't know where to. I think my eyes came out of their place ... my husband said that I am abnormal, it is the first time that he said that to me. He is very different, he is optimistic, much calmer, and I don't know what I would have done without him. I don't know how I myself looked then and there, but I saw her (mother) and I'm sure that I did not look much better than her ..."

In this recounted relational narrative, Ronit not only identifies with her mother, but she also indicates to the interviewer that she perceives her own anxiety and panic as a direct transmission of her mother's experiences:

Ronit: "I think it is very strong in me and I think I really got it from her ... I always say she came from there, it is not her fault ... I know she went through a lot, so I say she is allowed. But why did I get to be this way? This is what I ask myself ... that she is this way is obvious, but why am I like that? It hurts me because it is something that passes on. It hurts me very much to see that my children are like that already ... when you will conduct a study on the third generation you will also find that it passes on, or at least in our family. I have children that are like my husband (anxiety-free), but I see that my 10-year old daughter that she will

be like me and it hurts me to see that. As much as I try to help her, I can not. In this area, I am not a good role model for her."

Ronit makes the direct connection between her mother's traumatic experiences to her own over-sensitivity and general anxiety. She also insinuates that she is continuing this pattern by transmitting anxiety to the third generation, perhaps only partially (as she sees the effects in only one of her children). She attributes the lack of effects on the other children to her husband's more secure attitude and behavior. Ronit is puzzled why she reacts like her mother who "came from there," even though she herself was born after the war in Israel.

It is interesting that in another relational episode, Ronit mentions that her mother talked very openly with her, with one exception – the Holocaust. She indicates in this respect that she almost knows nothing about her mother's Holocaust experiences, hardly any details, such as how long she was in the concentration camp, or not even the year she came to Israel.

In all of the above stories fragments from the parents' Holocaust story (e.g., dogs, fires, and a threatening noise of an explosion) are echoed in the sons and daughters recollected encounters with their surviving parent. These stories stand out especially in the context of the lack of open familial communication about the parents' traumatic past and massive losses.

Modes of communication about the Holocaust

The patterns of familial communication between the survivors and their children are fundamental to our understanding of the dynamics that are involved in the relational experiences of the children of the survivors. In the last decade, inter-generational communication patterns about the forbearers' traumatic experiences have been explicated in numerous massively traumatized populations around the world (see Danieli, 1998). The pattern referred to as the "conspiracy of silence" (Danieli, 1983, 1998) has been found to be prevalent in the lives of survivors and their offspring. It involves a nonverbal agreement in the family of keeping some traumatic experiences unspoken and detached from everyday life. As Krell (2000) has pointed out, the phrase "conspiracy of silence", meaning the silence in the families of survivors, should not be viewed as a "conspiracy" on the part of the survivor parents because the parents do not necessarily deliberately or consciously hide their Holocaust experiences from the child. The silence between the survivors and their children emanated from the parents' need to forget their traumatic experiences and to adjust to new social contexts (to move on with life), but also from their belief that withholding information about the horrors of the Holocaust was necessary for their children's normal development (Bar-On et al., 1998; Krell, 1979; Krell, Suedfeld, & Soriano, 2004). Their children, in turn, often became sen-

sitive to their parents' need to keep silent about their Holocaust experiences and consequently did not ask questions out of caution not to touch their parents open wounds.

Dan Bar-On (1995) described this mutually maintained silence between both generations with the powerful metaphor of the "double wall" of silence: "Parents do not tell, and children do not ask. And when one side does open a window in this wall, it is usually confronted with the other's wall" (Bar-On, 1996; p. 168). This "double wall" phenomenon (Bar-On, 1995) that often prevailed between survivors and their children prevented open verbalizations and explanations of experiences related to the parents' traumatic past. As we earlier illustrated at times traumatic memories arose in the day-to-day life encounters of the children with their parents. In the following relational narrative the son recounts a memorable encounter with his mother in which his mother's traumatic experiences from the concentration camp are echoed, yet they remain initially unspoken and unarticulated.

The electrical hand drill story

Shaul: "When I was aged 13–13 or 14, something like that...I was...also the one with the best technical skills in the house, to do small repairs, things like that and...the one who was always responsible for the tools in the house, the work tools. That was me, and I wanted to buy – I wanted them to buy me an electrical hand drill...I don't know why I wanted an electrical drill ... And then my mother responded in a way that was very surprising, that is, it seemed to me a very surprising response then. Later she explained to me why, but she didn't want to buy me an electrical drill. The noise – drives her crazy ... She didn't tell me why the noise drives her crazy. Only much later – she said that during the Holocaust she did forced labor. She worked in a factory that built airplanes, or something like that and they drilled, her job was to drill all day long on metal sheets. This noise, she said, 'I can NOT hear.'"

Interviewer: "How much later did she tell you this?"

Shaul: "About a year or 2 years later – no, not immediately. She said that the noise, that she does not want...she bought me the drill in the end, but this was different ... everything I wanted, I got."

Interviewer: "So there was here something different in that at first she refused to get you the drill?"

Shaul: "Yes, because she said "NO, I do NOT want a drill in the house, I do NOT want to hear, I do not want this noise in the house." But I ... I wanted a drill, I need it for my tools, I didn't think about it at the time, I insisted. I understood only later. I didn't really pay attention at that time; I would have done it much more calmly, but as a kid ..."

In this recalled encounter with mother from early adolescence Shaul relates his surprise by his mother's absolute refusal to buy the electrical hand drill, as he was used to getting whatever he requested from her. Most striking is that her statement that she does not want to hear this noise of a drill in the house remained unexplained so that the traumatic memories remain unspoken, while the son does not give up easily his desire. Only two years later, however, she verbalizes to him what lay behind her refusal (i. e., *during the Holocaust she did forced labor ... her job was to drill all day long on metal sheets*). This appears to leave Shaul feeling somewhat guilty over his insistence, as if he should have known that he is touching his mother's traumatic experiences even though he was not told.

This relational narrative illustrates the nonverbal and verbal presence of the Holocaust story that is echoed in the tension between the "noise" of the trauma and the silence about the parents' traumatic experiences, between "knowing" and "not knowing."

In studying trauma-related styles of communication and interpersonal patterns, we distinguished between two major styles of communication in adult children of Holocaust survivors. The first communication style that was characterized by nonverbal knowledge of the parents' Holocaust experiences coupled with little or no verbal knowledge we called "knowing and not knowing" (Jucovy, 1985). The second communication style that was characterized by parents' sharing of factual information and lower reliance on nonverbal communication we called "informative verbal communication" (Wiseman et al., 2002). This classification into two groups was derived from the participants' responses to a self-report questionnaire of parental communication of Holocaust experiences (Lichtman, 1984). Comparing these two groups of adult offspring we found that although they did not differ in current mental health, the "knowing-not knowing" group reported greater interpersonal distress and lower affiliation than did the "informative verbal communication" group, or a comparison group with no Holocaust background and that they also evinced distinct interpersonal patterns in close relationships in adulthood (see Wiseman et al., 2002). We concluded that growing up to the music of knowing-not knowing seemed to leave the sons and daughters of the survivors with a certain degree of unfinished business that was carried into their interpersonal adult life.

Dialectical processes in knowing-not knowing

In our study that employed self-report questionnaires, this distinction between the two major styles of trauma-related communication revealed statistically significant differences between these two styles in the interpersonal patterns in close relationships (Wiseman et al., 2002). Based on our in-depth narrative analysis, however, we have come to realize that even those in the relatively more informative verbal communication style can experience knowing-not knowing like phenomena

(Wiseman & Barber, 2008). Thus, we suggest that we are actually dealing with degrees of knowing-not knowing that lies on a spectrum of communication styles. In other words, in both groups there are situations or aspects of experience in which the "knowing" is at the forefront, along side situations or aspects in which the "not-knowing" is at the forefront. It is also important to note that although excessive parental Holocaust-related verbal communication was relatively rare in our sample it also does not preclude experiences of knowing-not knowing.

In other words, part of the essence of the knowing-not knowing experience is that the "knowing" may co-exist with the "not-knowing". In fact, the hyphen may represent a dialectical relationship between the "knowing" and the "not knowing." There is an inevitable tension between the "knowing" of the parents' traumatic past and the "not knowing" or being unable to think of what the parents' went through. This dialectical stance attempts to hold both sides of this tension between what is known and not known, what one wants to know and does not want to know. The known is at times unconscious because the individual does not know at least consciously that he knows. Going back to the electrical hand drill story, we speculate that the son did not know, at least at an explicit level of knowing, the meaning of "that noise". However, it is possible that there is some kind of implicit knowing that goes on between him and his mother, such that at the same time that there is a "not-knowing" about her past there is also a "knowing." Perhaps we can even argue that he insists not because he does not know but because he does know. This can be referred to as an experience in which one does not know that one knows (Wiseman & Barber, 2008).

The limitation of words in telling the Holocaust story

Although we emphasize the need to know and to make the story known to the next generations, we must consider the limitations of words and of telling the Holocaust story. Unlike an ordinary autobiographical narrative, in trauma survivors the attempt to narrate a coherent account is fraught with difficulties. Greenspan (1998) suggests that in order to deeply analyze the processes involved in survivors recounting their stories, one has to understand these accounts as ways in which survivors "make a story" of what is "not a story" (p. xviii). He quotes Elie Wiesel (1978) on the "unbridgeable gulf" between the survivors' memory and its reflection in words: "They tried to communicate their experience of the Holocaust, but all they communicated was their feeling of helplessness at not being able to communicate the experience." Hence, Greenspan suggests that the task of listening to Holocaust survivors involves the attempt "to enter into survivors' struggle for and against words" (p. 6). He refers to listening to the "silence between the words" in the recounting, the telling and re-telling.

Henry Szor (2007), an Israeli psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, writes about the intricacies of word and silence in therapy of Holocaust survivors. The survivor fears that his words would be met with disbelief and that the listener will not be able to "bear" the hearing of the witness of the atrocity. Szor refers us to Primo Levi (1986) who wrote in his last book "The Drowned and the Saved" about the thought 'even if we were to tell it, we would not be believed' as it was represented in a dream common among the inmates of Auschwitz:

"... they had returned home and with passion and relief were describing their past sufferings, addressing themselves to a loved person, and were not believed, indeed were not even listened to. In the most typical (and most cruel) form, the interlocutor turned and left in silence" [Levi, translation to English 1988; p. 2].

Since the time Primo Levi wrote these thoughts they still hold truth for many. Yet there have also been efforts to listen and believe. The second generation is struggling to work out ways to know their parents' personal story. Interestingly, historians have recognized this need to make these memories as real as possible with an emphasis on the personal story of each survivor.

In Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Museum in Jerusalem) there has been a shift from the historical to the personal and private. Those who were fortunate to have some real object that remained with them have contributed these objects in order to make the stories more real. The doll 'Zozia' that Yael Rozner, a child survivor, received from her mother who hid her in the basement of a deserted house on the border of the ghetto is displayed in an exhibition called "There Are No childish Games" (Perroni, 2002; Rozner, 2002). Most recently, a huge hollow trunk of a tree in which Yakov Zilberstein hid in after he escaped the death march in 1945 was brought to Yad Vashem. After sixty years Zilberstein located the old tree trunk in the field of the village where he hid when the Germans searched the home of the Czech woman who hid him. What is remarkable is that now this tree that represents a story of an individual survivor has been situated in the heart of the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations in Yad Vashem (this beautiful garden at the Jerusalem Holocaust Museum, honors the Non Jews who exemplified high level principles of humanity by endangering their lives to help save Jews during the Holocaust). The introduction of these new museum items is consistent with the shift in the public discourse and commemoration of the Holocaust from the old emphasize on the collective, to the story of the individual survivor (*Haaretz*, October 9, 2007).

These interesting changes in the way the Holocaust is remembered in Israeli society and in the world at large can be understood in relation to the social and historical context in which the personal experiences of the survivors are told and listened to.

The familial-social-cultural context of intergenerational Holocaust-related communication

One of the most striking changes in the familial-social-cultural context of knowing—not knowing processes is the greater freedom of the third generation to be in a position to listen to their grandparents' story, and also to have the liberty to ask questions. The dynamics of the questions that were not asked out loud between the second generation and the survivors is exemplified in the following excerpt from an interview that one of my students, whose grandmother is an Auschwitz survivor, conducted with her mother as part of her university course in spring 2006:

"In 1956 I played with children that were immigrants from North Africa and I came home with lice in my hair. When my mother saw the lice... the whole ordeal of her attempts to get rid of the lice became very traumatic in this respect. From that time on (from age 8) until I went to the army (at age 18) she did not allow me to grow my hair below the neck line. The minute it grew I had to have it cut."

This woman's daughter (the grandchild) asks her mother: "Did you ask her why? Did you try to resist?" Her answer tells us the story of the lack of the child's freedom to ask in the face of traumatized parents.

"You do not ask questions. These are things that you do not decide about. There was no teenage rebellion like today. She said I could get lice and I was also already afraid of this possibility because it meant going through the terrible treatment with kerosene. When I was young I didn't understand where her trauma with the lice came from ... she didn't explain ... We knew she couldn't sleep at night ... we didn't know why – no one told us. We knew we were not supposed to ask her questions about the Holocaust."

The survivor's granddaughter asks her mother: "But I wonder how as children you knew not to ask?" The second generation daughter answers: "Through an innate sense, I think."

Within the Israeli social context, we evidenced a certain degree of change in the atmosphere between the interviews we carried with children of survivors during 1996–1997 (Wiseman & Barber, 2000) and those we carried out during 2002–2004 with the school-based sample of second generation parents and their adolescent children (Wiseman, 2005). In the 2002–2004 study, the second generation seemed more aware of the presence of the Holocaust in their life. In terms of the intergenerational communication, only a few narrators referred to shifts in the communication patterns now as the parents have aged. Opportunities for changes in the communication about the Holocaust in the family may come about through the grandchildren. Trips to Poland that adolescents take through the school system may potentially provide such opportunities.

Grandchildren's trip to Poland

In a small sample study that I supervised, Zussman-Regev (2003) interviewed adolescent grandchildren of survivors about their experience going to Poland to visit the Concentration Camps, when they were usually accompanied by a group from their high school. She also interviewed the second-generation parent of each high school interviewee about their perspective on the impact of the trip on intergenerational communication. The grandchild's trip, including the preparation process, seemed to provide an opportunity for survivors to tell their story to the grandchild and for the grandchild to listen to the personal story. However, it appears that the style of communication between the second generation and the survivors is less amenable to change as a consequence of the event of the grandchild's trip. The discrepancy in the nature of the survivor – grandchild communication and that of the survivor – child communication can be illustrated by the interview with David (second generation) and Danny (third generation).

Danny, the grandchild (aged 17 and a half) who was interviewed after he returned from the youth trip to Poland, describes the process of the opening of lines of communication between his grandfather and him: "Every year grandfather opens up more and more. Up to 5 to 6 years ago, he did not agree to tell at all. All this time I tried to draw out from him gradually, slowly, slowly, and every year I hear more and more. Every time he would say that 'before I go on the trip he will tell me more,' so when the time for the trip came he already had no excuse." Although Danny says his grandfather wanted him very much to take the trip, the decision was clearly his own. Indeed, since he was a young child he said to his grandfather that when he grows up he will go on the trip to Poland, as he wants to see what his grandfather went through and where he was during the war. In response to his expressed "need to know," the interviewer asked him to reflect on why it is important for him to know. He answers: "It is like a mission from grandfather, pass the knowledge on so that the next generations will know, and it is also part of my private history."

The meaning of the trip for the grandfather and the link between the generations became particularly salient during the trip as expressed through the ongoing cellular communication between the grandchild and his grandfather. Danny says that his grandfather does not usually call him, but during the trip he kept calling him for brief 15 minute conversations. He further reported that there were times his grandfather cried. The emotional connection and the meaning of the crying for the grandchild suggest some sense of working through the mourned losses: "... the minute grandfather cried, it gave me the feeling that I am doing something grandfather always dreamt about, something big. But I did not take the trip for him." The theme of the connection to the grandfather's traumatic past through this experience, takes on a real, visceral, and concrete feeling. The grandfather remembered the block ("Lager") number in which he was held, and Danny describes his

feeling when he entered one of those: "it is a different feeling knowing that may be your grandfather was in this block, it is darkness and it is fear from everything, and closure, it is a feeling you can not describe. I personally intend to take the trip again, I hope with my children and then it is another full circle for them and for me to see my next generation there."

In the interview with David (Danny's father), he says he is satisfied seeing what he perceives as Danny's ability to experience the trip deeply while simultaneously maintaining his boundaries. He is also impressed by his resilience. "It is my success and my wife's (success) as well as his own character that we have a child who is built well, he is sensitive enough, but also he does not go into it and gets crushed from it, but he gets up and continues. Experiences it deeply, and comes out of it and continues forward." This may suggest that the father (the son of the survivor) can count on his son to move forward, whereas he himself is perhaps more afraid and vulnerable.

David tells the interviewer that there was never any direct verbal communication about his father's Holocaust experience. However, like many of our interviewees, he too says that from the time he remembers himself he always knew that his father was a Holocaust survivor even though he could not identify a time when such knowledge was first acquired (Prince, 1985). This knowing-not knowing experience was linked in his mind to hearing his father crying and his rage attacks, whose presence "you can not hide." David heard some facts about the past only indirectly, when mother talked about it with other people. Once he was with his mother at the doctor's office when the mother told the doctor that his father was in Auschwitz and that "he saw his brothers burning in front of his eyes." But there was never a time he was told the story. The survivor began opening up to his grandchild who began to ask questions and it is through Danny (his son) that David hears more about his own father's story. It is striking that in adulthood the second generation child still maintains an indirect, echoing mode of communication such that until this very day when the survivor sits to tell his personal story of survival to his grandchild, the son says: "I always sit on the side... I am never in a direct conversation. But I encourage my children to ask and to talk to their grandfather."

From this example we can see how difficult it is to change the modes of trauma-related communication between the children of survivors and their parents. The working through is often left up to the third generation (Bar-On, 2008; Chaitin, 2003).

Written stories of Holocaust survivors: Perspectives of their children and grandchildren

As part of the shift from the collective stories to the personal stories of the individual survivor in the discourse and memory of the Holocaust, there has been a

surge of stories written by survivors. Dina Porat, a prominent Israeli historian, indicates that the number of books that survivors have published in Israel has reached over 5000 (published by publishing companies, and personal or family publishing), and that autobiographical writings of survivors are also found in the USA, Australia, Argentina, Germany, and France (Porat, *Haaretz*, January 24, 2007). She attributes this wave to at least two factors. First, the survivors came of age, and began to feel that they were 'running out of time.' Second, a change in atmosphere began in the 1980s with the study of the Holocaust becoming part of the history classes in school as well as the availability of educational and experiential trips to Poland. In this context, we suggest that the idea of "each man or woman has a name," can be paraphrased as, "each man or woman has a story."

Shlomo Breznitz (2000), an Israeli psychologist and child survivor, who wrote his personal story in a book "Memory Fields" (Breznitz, 1993), uses concepts from the psychology of memory to explain the powerful impact of survivors' autobiographies on those who read them or listen to them. He observes in his writing about the "Holocaust Experience as a State of Mind" that only long after the "big stories" saw the light of day could the "small stories" venture out and take their rightful place (Breznitz, 2000). The "small stories" are based on episodic memory rather than on semantic memory and on implicit knowledge rather than explicit knowledge. He suggests that small stories lend themselves to greater experiences of empathy. For the descendents of survivors the "personal story" and the ability to reach empathy are crucial to understanding and acceptance.

The autobiographical writings of the personal stories of the survivors may also serve potentially as facilitators for opening up lines of communication between the generations. We were interested in how the written stories of the survivors are perceived by the second and third generation and what role (if any) they may play in the intergenerational communication about the survivors' Holocaust story. In a preliminary study, Duchin (2007) studied four families that were chosen on the basis that the survivor has written his or her Holocaust story that came out in a published book available also to the public (accessible through public libraries). She interviewed in each of four families a son or daughter of the survivor and a grandchild (adolescent or late adolescent). The findings pointed to the complexity and diversity of the experiences in these families. In some cases the written story enabled for the first time a more emotional encounter with the survivor's story that was experienced by the second generation as "known" and at the same time "not known." As one second generation interviewee put it: "When the book came out I felt that I know the story, but it was like also that I do not know her (his mother) in this way." Through the story the son learned about the emotional side of his mother's Holocaust story, such as, her pain, yearning and longing to the family that perished. The book is experienced as both telling new aspects of the story and a means of discovering these untold and never experienced aspects the moth-

er's story, as well as telling a "familiar story." This duality is also expressed in the approach-avoidance conflict around the book that was expressed by the interviewees. They both want to get to know the story and yet it is experienced as threatening and dangerous. Although this duality was not as intense it was also expressed by some of the grandchildren. The grandchildren both felt obliged to read the book, and yet had great difficulty reading it and felt overwhelmed by the grandparent's Holocaust story.

These reactions to the written stories, of course, need to be understood in the context of the relationships between the members in each family. In a family that was characterized by tension in the family relations, the survivor's book was interpreted within this atmosphere and was not perceived as healing the strained survivor-child relationship. In a family that was characterized by warmth and openness, even though the reading of the survivor's book evoked a flooding of emotions, these were also accompanied by hugs and closeness without words.

Although obviously there is a need to expand this investigation, the findings suggest that in some cases the written Holocaust story can facilitate a change in the familial patterns of communication and may help make the non-spoken and not known into spoken and known. In other cases, however, there is a need for professional help in order for processes of working-through to take place that will bring about a healing bridge between the generations.

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Against testimony

Henry Greenspan

"If they did listen, it was in a certain pose, an attitude assumed for this special occasion; it was not as partners in a conversation." Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive*

Abstract

This chapter is "against testimony" – not, obviously, in the sense of being against survivors' accounts – but rather against the way "testimony" has served as the all-inclusive term *for* those accounts. I argue it is the wrong word for much of survivors' recounting – both what their retelling concerns and how it takes form. The core arguments are these:

1. There are certainly contexts in which "testimony" is the right word – war crimes depositions, for example, or other contexts in which the goal is to get eyewitness evidence of the who, what, where, when of particular events. The majority of survivor accounts, however – and especially those from more recent years – have little or nothing to do with this sort of documentation, either in intent or content, although they are often celebrated as handmaidens to that purpose. Still, survivors' accounts are as much "oral psychology," "oral philosophy," or "oral theology" as they are "oral history" in the specific documentary sense. As Primo Levi wrote regarding *If This is a Man*, the purpose of his memoir was not to provide "an account of atrocities" but rather "to furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind." Few survivors have had the sensibility of Levi. But, given the opportunity, virtually all go beyond retelling particular events to reflect upon their wider significance and impact – both for themselves and, potentially, for all of us.
2. Viewing accounts as testimonies suggests a one-way transmission. In the conventional imagery, the survivors "bestow" their testimonies which are then gathered up (somewhat like the way chickens bestow eggs, already fabricated products that need only to be sorted and crated). The alternative is to view survivors' accounts as genuinely co-created *between* participants in conversation: what I call "knowing *with*" survivors rather than simply knowing "from them."

3. The process of "knowing with" will be illustrated. Contrary to the usual view, interviews are *not* simply conversations in which interviewers ask questions and interviewees provide answers. Rather, an interview is a conversation in which two people work very hard together to understand the experiences and reflections of one of them, the interviewee. In the course of that hard work, that collaboration, interviewers and interviewees come to ask, in essence, the *same* questions: those that serve best to elucidate what the interviewee has to retell. This also means that the results of the interview reflect the interviewer's and interviewee's different, but equally necessary, contributions. Far from being fixed and finished – "testimonies" waiting only to be "elicited" – these accounts existed *nowhere* until the interview itself. They could not have occurred without that collaborative endeavor. As Agi Rubin, a survivor of Auschwitz, put it: "For remembering, I need your questions, the spark of conversation, fully to bring it out. Then memories take their shape and find their words. They emerge between us."

Partners in a conversation

This short chapter went through a number of titles before arriving at its present one, "Against Testimony." Initially, it was "Let There Be Lunch." As might be imagined, I aimed to discuss the nature of the relationship between those we call "interviewer" and "interviewee," and the multiple impacts of that relationship on what survivors do and do not retell. More specifically, I was pointing toward all the retelling that goes on when the tape is off – sometimes the most important things – and how we understand the connections, and disconnections, between what is said between two people talking across a table and what survivors say "for posterity" and in the context of vast archives and generations yet unborn.

A second title was "Dancing with Survivors." I might have kept it if friends had not wondered if that had something to do with "Dancing with the Stars." Here, too, my aim was evoke an image as different as possible from the conventional ways we view survivor accounts: a fixed and finished "testimonies" that need only to be "elicited" (something like the way an egg is "elicited" from a chicken). The alternative is to view survivors' accounts as irreducibly provisional, co-created *between* participants in conversation. Describing her own experience in our interviews, Agi Rubin (2006, p. 170) reflected:

"One thought sparks another, and then another, that I may not have even known I had. This is the part that is so gratifying. Whatever I imagine I'm teaching, I'm learning at the same moment. We're learning together."

Interviews of the kind I have pursued aim toward "learning together." They are informative, and sometimes transformative, for both partners in the conversation.

Often enough, they lead to insights that neither participant could have predicted beforehand or arrived at alone.

Early on, I described this process as "knowing *witth*" survivors, in contrast with only "knowing from" or "knowing about" them.

"Knowing with' involves participating mutually with another in a common conversation. Most obviously, it stands in contrast to only knowing about, in which one's participation is reduced to developing a theory about the other. Knowing with also contrasts with simply knowing from, in which one's participation is reduced to receiving information from the other, without engagement in a mutual attempt to know. Both knowing about and knowing from lead to monologues: the former, to a monologue of conclusions about the other; the latter, to the other's monologue about something else". (Greenspan, 1985: 87)

There, as many times since, I suggested it has been just such monologues that have characterized our most typical ways of engaging with survivors. On one side, survivors are encouraged to speak about the Holocaust: to tell their "stories" and "bestow their legacies." On our side, we also assert our knowledge – not by engaging what survivors retell, but by talking about survivors themselves. In what I call "celebratory discourse," we honor their spirit or, through them, the human spirit in general. In what I call the "psychiatric discourse," the very same survivors are depicted as guilty, ghostly, and estranged. Either way, the result is monologues rather than dialogues. Survivors provide "testimony" about the Holocaust. We provide testimonials – or psychological observations – about survivors themselves (cf. Greenspan, 1998, p. 48-54)

Collaborative interviews look very differently than our usual images of the interview process. An interview, I have suggested, is two people working together to gain the best possible understanding of the experiences and reflections of *one* of them: the partner we call "the interviewee" (Greenspan, 1998, p. xvii). And when an interview is really "cooking," it is *not* simply a process in which one person asks questions and the other provides answers. Rather, as the conversation deepens, both participants find themselves asking the *same* questions: those that arise from their exploration of the experiences and reflections of the "interviewee" (Greenspan, 2008). Of course, the roles and "expertise" of the survivor and the interviewer are different. But that does not prevent their work from being fully collaborative and mutually clarifying. Indeed, as I will suggest, it may be precisely the tension between the "one who was there" and the "one who was not, but wishes to understand" that often yields the most fruitful interviews of all.

As a final chapter title option, I considered "Wrestling with Survivors": that is, wrestling *together* to comprehend most clearly what that survivor has to recount. The way one "wrestles with a text" is a relevant analogy to which I will return. The

core point, once again, is that this kind of "knowing with" is a very different process that the way we typically imagine, and pursue, "collecting a testimony."

What survivors retell

So I am "against testimony" – not, obviously, in the sense of being against survivors' accounts – but against "testimony" as the all-inclusive term, and "giving testimony" as the all-inclusive model – *for* survivors' retelling. That is why I have preferred words like "recounting" or "retelling," with being a "witness" one particular narrative voice and "giving testimony" one particular narrative genre. (cf. Greenspan, 1998, p. xvii–xviii)

Thus, there are certainly contexts in which testimony is the right word. War crimes depositions, for example, are quintessential testimonies—eyewitness recollections of the who, what, where, when of particular events. Early survivor accounts (like the notes and diaries of many who did not survive) likewise were often associated with anticipated prosecution and were intended as testimony to that end. Survivor accounts gathered for the specific purpose of historical documentation – such as those that supply much of what we know about Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec and certainly the lesser known labor camps – can also rightfully be classed as testimonies (cf. Browning, 2003).

A much larger set of survivor accounts, however – and especially those from more recent years – have little or nothing to do with historical documentation, either in intent or content, although they are often thought of as handmaidens to that purpose. In one version of the history/memory distinction, for example, such accounts are welcomed as ways history becomes "personal" or "real": – just as Ken Burns' use of diaries and letters helps make the American Civil War "real" – as indeed it does. Still, this view of survivors' retelling remains superficial, and it ignores all that those accounts concern that has *nothing* to do with historical documentation. I mean, for example, all that survivors say about struggles with faith or regret or loss or whether it is possible to retell at all. Comment on this level pervades survivors' recounting, which is why I speak of "experiences *and* reflection" as the substance of interviews with survivors. Reflections of this kind may be a version of "oral history," but they are no less "oral theology," "oral psychology," and a great deal more.

Jean Amery's *At the Mind's Limits* or Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* are almost entirely this sort of reflection. Particular episodes are recalled, not to help document them, but to serve moral and psychological inquiry (which, for people like Amery and Levi, were always intertwined). Less often noted is that Levi's first memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, is similar. While Levi was committed to the importance of testimony in the specific sense of providing documentary witness, he de-

scribed *Survival in Auschwitz* as having a different purpose: "to furnish documentation for a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind" (1985, p. 3). For survivors like Levi (and in this way there are many), recounting particular episodes is not the end of what they have to retell, but the barest beginning. And so their accounts become a complex interweave of narrative and non-narrative content.

Unquestionably, thinking of all survivors' accounts as species of "testimony" or "oral history" reflects the fact that history has been the cornerstone discipline in our field. That is sensible, but it may have distracted us from other ways survivors' accounts can uniquely inform us. In my own discipline of psychology, for example, we have barely scratched the surface. When Henry Krystal (1968, p. 95), himself both a survivor and a psychiatrist, wrote many years ago that "it is not rare in the 'survivor syndrome' to see people fully sane during the day, but psychotic every night," he was accurately *describing* what was observed. But there is not a single theory in psychiatry or psychology that could explain such daily oscillations between sanity and madness, and this particular example stands for a universe of others. Thus, we read of "integration" despite persisting "psychological black holes" (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989, p. 391); of shattered "basic trust" alongside islands of surprisingly good functioning"; of "encapsulated normal adjustment together with "encapsulated" disorganizing terror (Davidson, 1992, p. xxi-xxii). Once again, all of these are honest efforts to *describe* contradictions that psychological theory, as it exists, cannot account for (cf. Greenspan, 1999, p. 47-49). To draw again from Levi (1988, p. 85), psychological interpretations of survivors have typically been "approximate and simplified, as if someone wished to apply the theorems of plane geometry to the solution of spheric triangles." Key dimensions are lost or distorted. And because survivors have lived one version of human experience, in failing to wrestle with that, we have failed to wrestle with essential truths about ourselves.

Something similar could be said about the ways contemporary concepts of "trauma" and "post-traumatic stress" have dominated psychological discussion of survivors. Indeed, they are even more encompassing in certain literary and philosophic approaches in which "trauma" has become the all-inclusive term for every agony victims endure – both during and after the destruction. This is conceptual inflation in the extreme. The experience of loss – which is most obviously what being a "survivor" entails – is itself almost lost. So also a great range of experiences – degradation, humiliation, desolation, abandonment, betrayal, shame, despair, and more – which are not illuminated by being subsumed under "trauma." Jean Amery (1980, p. 70) wrote: "The experience of persecution was, at the very bottom, that of an extreme *loneliness*." How impoverishing it would be to reduce such a statement (especially when one knows Amery well) to "Jean Amery's 'trauma'."

One last point before returning to "wrestling." Because testimony concerns documentation, it has also especially concerned *visual* memory – what the eyewitness did or did not see: "What uniform?" "Which ramp?" "How many?" Here, too, it may be at variance with many survivors' actual ways of remembering. Referring to photos of Birkenau collected in *The Auschwitz Album*, including one photo in which she found herself, Agi Rubin (2006, p. 4) reflected:

"Photos are the outsiders' way of remembering Auschwitz, but they are not ours. From the inside, we remember smells – the stench of the camp, the odor of unwashed flesh, the odor of burning flesh. And sounds – screaming, beatings, pleading, the whistle of a whip or of a train. We remember the feelings of exhaustion and hunger and helplessness and cold. And the feeling of having no feeling. But seeing, if we let ourselves see at all, was mostly done through averted eyes. Our memories of Auschwitz do not have the objectivity of photographs. We were rarely so shameless or so bold."

If one insists, one may call accounts of stench or numbness or terror a kind of "testimony." But clearly it is a different sort than whether a survivor did or did not see Mengele on the ramp on a particular day, the kind of detail by which some have assessed the usefulness of survivors' accounts – rightfully narrowed to "testimonies" if one's questions themselves are that narrow.

Knowing together

So what is the alternative? Let me insist that this is not a "how-to" chapter, at least as far as interviewing survivors is concerned. For the most part, it is too late. Still, it is worth thinking about our own history relative to survivors: What we have learned, and what we have not learned, through approaching them as "bearers of testimony." Further, thinking about this may also have practical relevance for the next group of people whose experience we may be tempted to approach – or perhaps avoid – in the same way. There *are* such projects which have followed a profoundly different model, partly in light of the issues discussed here.¹ And even for Holocaust survivors, it is far from finished in a broader sense. We continue to learn profoundly when we wrestle with Levi or Amery or Delbo, even if they are not here to tell us when they think we have missed the boat – and when we have caught it.

1 In a new edition of my *On Listening*, due in 2010, I discuss at length a project in Montreal called "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Abuses." "Life stories," I argue, has accomplished nothing less than "reinventing testimony" relative to the ways we have traditionally gathered and interpreted it. The project is collaboratively and communally organized at every level – from deciding on interview procedures to governance and budget – and stands in stark contrast to projects that involve entering a community to "get a testimony" and then move on.

So how might we have engaged survivors in ways not grounded in the "collecting testimony" model? What does "knowing *with*" look like in practice? Two examples from my own work:

I have often repeated the story of Leon's repeated story – the survivor who recounted the same episode in three separate interviews a few weeks apart. It was clear, in each instance, that Leon did not recall having told it to me before. It was the only episode he repeated in this way. And each retelling was prefaced by Leon's saying that this was the kind of traumatic memory that he tended *not* to recall. So here was a man who kept remembering what he said he almost never remembered, all without remembering that he kept remembering it (cf. Greenspan, 1998, p. 156–61).

Typically, I have discussed what emerged from all this. When I asked Leon what he himself made of the repetition – which I first did, rather impulsively, in the midst of the third iteration – our conversation led eventually to Leon's saying what has become a foundation for much of my work that followed. Speaking of his memory of the Holocaust in general, Leon asserted that "it is *not* a story. It has to be *made* a story. In order to convey it. And with all the frustration that implies. Because, at best, you compromise. You compromise." The repeated story was significant, then, because it was precisely such a "compromise," ultimately far more significant for the "not story" to which it pointed than for the narrative it retold. I was to learn that many survivors repeat such "special stories" – ones that reside precisely on the boundary between memories that *can* be retold as "stories" and those that cannot. Thus, what might have been taken as the core of Leon's "testimony" – this repeated episode – was, in fact, only its tellable beginning.

What I have not emphasized is the process which led to these conclusions; that is, the wrestling between Leon and myself. When he said, for example, "with all the frustration that implies," he was referring, in part, to the frustration he was immediately feeling in our own interview. I had wondered whether he might repeat this episode because, despite what he had said, it was actually *not* as traumatic as others he recalled. At least in the context of the Holocaust, there seemed to be a certain "logic" to the murder he described – there was a single victim, a particular infracton, even a named executioner – in Leon's repeated story. Leon immediately reacted to my suggestion, and he did not hesitate to disagree. "Yeah, yeah, yeah," he responded (in the tone of "blah, blah, blah"). He continued: "*You* see a cause and effect relationship – a crime and a punishment. But see this is a good example of how hard it is to convey. You pose the question. I owe you an explanation. Because there are a few elements you couldn't have known." And so – frustration notwithstanding – he tried to fill me in.

This particular interchange was one of many times Leon and I went back and forth, wrestling toward understanding. And it turns out that my question – "blah, blah,

blah" notwithstanding--did end up clarifying a piece of the issue for him as well. He was learning as I was. That is why I have argued that the results of "knowing with" are genuine co-creations, reflecting the contributions of each participant. It is worth noting that we seem to have difficulty with this notion. Time after time, in responses to my work, the idea of "making a story" of what is "not a story" is attributed to *me*, and me exclusively. Less often, it is described as "what a survivor said." But the fact of our working our way to the concept together – and crediting the co-authorship from which it really came – essentially never happens.

Nevertheless, co-authored is what it was, grounded in an established collaborative relationship. If Leon and I had not already worked hard together, if I did not already know, based on our earlier discussions, that he was as likely to be interested in understanding the repeated story as I was, then I could not have asked him about it. That question followed from all the other questions on which we had worked together. Raising it, therefore, took no special discretion or care. I knew he would be as engaged by the issue as I was, and that is certainly how it turned out.

It is also important to emphasize that "knowing with" has nothing to do with questioning that is "aggressive." On the contrary, it depends on taking time and making room – conceptually and otherwise –for both partners in the conversation. It depends on the kind of attentiveness that all good conversation requires. Agi Rubin (2006, p. 175) contrasted our way of working together with her experience talking with other survivors:

"Talking with Hank, especially as the years went on, helped me to remember more. Strange to say, I think that also happened because of what he did *not* know. When we survivors talk among ourselves, somehow we always come back to it ... Each of our stories tends to block out the others. "Yes, I know." "Yes, I was there." "Yes, I had my own experience." With Hank, it was the opposite. As far as direct experience, there was *everything* to tell, to explain, exactly because he did not know, but he so much wished to. So nothing was presumed. Nothing was taken for granted. And that provided both of us the time and space to learn about it, and reflect upon it, together".

"Knowing with" builds on "knowing with" – with Agi, on lunch and friendship, too. At the same time, the task within each interview is to presume nothing yet remain attentive to everything. That is why I have emphasized that this sort of collaboration is not about being "open," but rather about being "*in*": in the rhythm, the nuance, the particular needs and trajectory of that particular conversation. The best predictor of what will happen in an interview – the context upon which it is most contingent – is what has *already* happened in that interview. Interviews do not simply happen *in* a context. They *are* a context: one that continually evolves and conditions (but does not determine) what will happen next (cf. Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006, p. 430–449).

Inevitably, then, "knowing with" is risky and unpredictable business. It is understandable that we have been drawn to models (and related language) that seem to provide more certainty: "the testimony," "the legacy," "the stories that are passed from generation to generation." To engage survivors simply as "partners in a conversation" does not seem to honor, and acknowledge, all that they have to tell us. Nor does it seem to adequately honor our own expertise as gatherers and interpreters of survivors' accounts. The core of my argument is that it acknowledges both most of all.

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The Archive for Study of the Later Effects of the Holocaust on its Survivors and Their Offspring – Ray D. Wolfe Center for Study of Psychological Stress, the University of Haifa¹

Miriam Rieck

The Archive for Study of the Later Psychological and Medical Effects of the Holocaust on its Survivors and Their Offspring (Archive) was established in 1979 by the late Prof. Eitinger from Oslo, who spent for this purpose his Sabbatical from the Oslo University, at the Ray D. Wolfe Center for Study of Psychological Stress, the University of Haifa. He aimed at establishing a collection of rare materials not easily accessible, lest they be lost.

As early as the second half of the '40s of the last century, sporadic writings dealing with the adverse emotional effects of Holocaust persecution on its survivors started to appear, and some meetings concerned with the subject took place. Most of these very early writings are not easily accessible, yet are, thanks to Prof. Eitinger's initiative, available in the Archive.

Realizing the importance of the quickly accumulating material concerned with the later effects of the Holocaust survivors and their offspring, I established a bibliographical list, placed on a website, which is being constantly updated. In order to make the early and not easily accessible material open to the public, the papers were scanned and are presented on the website.

The work with the bibliography gave rise to some insights, which in turn yielded new theorizing about the later effects of persecution on its survivors, and to their relations with the absorbing society. Most prominent was the finding that much of the hypothesizing about the survivors' state was more theory-related than based on the survivors' own words. This idea, gaining more and more support over the time, encouraged me to listen to survivors, rather than theorizing about them. I was, thus, very fortunate, to be able to house the testimonies from the Fortunoff

1 The Archive was made possible and encouraged by Prof. Shlomo Bezntiz, the establisher and former Center's head, and generously supported by Prof. Reemtsma, head of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research.

Archive at the Yale University, which were collected mainly in Israel and some in Poland and the Ukraine.

The survivors' testimonies gave rise to a revision of the understanding of their lives (during and after persecution) in social- rather than clinical terms. This is in a nutshell the theoretical basis of the conference and its papers included in this book.

The Fortunoff collection includes 290 audio-visual testimonies.

One other question arising from the literature concerns survivors persecuted during childhood (CS). All theories about childhood necessities notwithstanding, CS have been living unnoticeable amongst us². Since the sound coping would not have been predicted by developmental theories, I started to interview CS and listen to the way they describe their horrendous childhood, and their reintegration into a new society thereafter. Though too early to jump to conclusions, some communality arises from the stories. If asked what they thought about the conditions to which they were exposed, some said that as a child one takes life situations for granted. It was not until they grew up that they realized the full meaning of the situation to they had been exposed. One other characteristic mentioned in interviews was that of compliance. Many said (or implied) that during the war they instinctively complied with whatever was expected from them and one wonders if this tendency helped them to integrate into the new (not always friendly) society awaiting them after liberation.

To sum up the main lesson learned from the journey through the professional writings about survivors and by listening to the survivors' own words, whether in interviews or in reading their biographies, is that of modesty. On the basis of previous knowledge, no one could have foreseen the capability of CS after having undergone such horrendous experiences during childhood. It was not until people opened themselves and overcame the shock aroused by the horrible stories that society learned to understand the survivors.

2 Lately it became often published that CS who had been sound copers all their lives, started searching psychological support at senescence, when retiring and probably losing their spouse, and when adult children leave the house.

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Die Gegenwärtigkeit der Vergangenheit Die Funktionen des Erinnerns traumatisierender Erlebnisse

2008. 240 S., broch., 27 Abb. und 37 Tab., € 34,80, ISBN 978-3-936014-13-6.

Die Lebenserfahrungen eines jeden Menschen sind in seinem Gehirn gespeichert, die guten ebenso wie die schlechten. Sie machen dessen Individualität, Charakter und Identität aus. Durch diese Erfahrungen wird der Mensch unverwechselbar zu demjenigen, der er ist. So gesehen, macht sein Gedächtnis ihn erst zum Menschen, und deshalb gehört es zu den schlimmsten Dingen, die einem Menschen passieren können, keinen Zugang mehr zu seinen Erinnerungen zu haben. Es gibt jedoch auch Menschen, die nicht unter dem Verlust ihrer Erinnerungen leiden, sondern darunter, dass sie Geschehnisse nicht vergessen können bzw. ihnen die Erinnerungen daran nicht verloren gehen: So haben Personen mit schweren traumatischen Erlebnissen ein pathologisch gesteigertes Gedächtnis; insbesondere diejenigen, die infolge dessen eine Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung (PTBS) entwickelt haben.

Auf der Basis der Erkenntnisse der modernen neuronalen Netzwerkforschung und der psychologischen Gedächtnisforschung geht der Autor davon aus, dass das Gedächtnis nicht nur abspeichert und wieder aufruft, sondern konstruiert, rekonstruiert, wieder konstruiert etc., und dass diese Prozesse von externen Faktoren beeinflusst werden. Folglich untersucht er den Zusammenhang von Lebenserinnerungen und Zeitgeschichte, und zwar daran, wie Zeitzeugen bzw. Opfer (Soldaten, Zivilisten und Flüchtlinge) ihre traumatisierenden Erlebnisse subjektiv rekonstruieren. Er behandelt thematische und strukturelle Aspekte der Erinnerungen sowie deren aktuelle Bedeutung und Funktion für die Betroffenen und legt eine Analyse vor, die von höchster Relevanz für die Klinische Psychologie, die Psychotherapieforschung und die Psychotraumatologie ist.