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## “Who Am I in Relation to My Past, in Relation to the Other?”

### German and Israeli Students Confront the Holocaust and Each Other

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Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, unconscious to its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. . . . At the heart of history is critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.

NORA (1989, pp. 8–9)

### INTRODUCTION

The young people of today's Germany and Israel did not experience the Holocaust, not even its aftereffects as children of survivors (Bergmann & Jucovy, 1982; Danieli, 1980) or perpetrators (Bar-On, 1989). Though we may still find such aftereffects among the third generation, these are not clear-cut and extensive (Bar-On, 1994; Segev, 1992). The young can try to ignore its effects or to reconstruct it through history books, the media, or public discourse, thereby expressing the collective memory (Friedlander, 1992). They also may try to make sense of it through the memory of their parents and grandparents. This is a painful process because of the dialectical tension within memory and between memory and history, described by Pierre Nora in the opening quotation. We discussed earlier a group process through which we tried to elaborate the issues of different collective reconstruction of the past and their impact on the present social and political perspective among German and Israeli students (Bar-On, 1992; Bar-On, Hare, Brusten, & Beiner, 1993; Brendler, 1994). Since then, many new social and political

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changes have taken place in both countries as part of the global changes between East and West: the peace process in the Middle East, the Russian immigration to Israel, the unification of Germany, and the rise of the extreme right in Germany. We asked ourselves: What effect did these processes have on the identity-reconstruction and -formation of Israeli and German students and on their relationship to each other?

The idea of identity-formation through group processes is not a new one (Lewin, 1948). Within the more secure group context, members of the group can test, construct, and reconstruct various undiscussable aspects of their identity and memory in relation to themselves and their relevant others (Bion, 1961). However, the group modality was not tried for such purpose in the Israeli-German context until the late 1980s, probably because of the burden and the ongoing rage of Jews toward the Germans, owing to the Holocaust (Bar-On, 1992, 1993). Unicultural German groups, trying to acknowledge and work through the burden of silenced atrocities of family members during the Nazi era, and its ongoing impact, were the exception rather than the rule (Bar-On, 1989; Hardtmann, 1991). So were bicultural attempts (Bar-On, 1992; Staffa & Kronendorfer, 1992). Within the Jewish context, groups of second-generation Holocaust survivors who tried to work through the burden of the past became open to the public need in the mid-1970s (Danieli, 1988; Vardi, 1990). Though there were quite a few attempts to bring together German and Jewish or Israeli youth over the years, they more often avoided direct confrontation of the painful past rather than trying to acknowledge and work it through (Segev, 1992).

In our earlier study (Bar-On *et al.*, 1993), we found that German and Israeli students tended to simplify the relevance of past events (especially, the Holocaust) within their present political and social perspectives. While in Germany, students tended to claim that “nothing in the Nazi era was relevant” for their present social perspective, in Israel we found the opposite tendency (“The Holocaust was very relevant for our present social contexts”). We tried to initiate a group process through which we could enhance a more differentiated and meaningful way of acknowledging the Holocaust and relating it to the present social perspective in both groups (“partial relevance”).<sup>1</sup> We did that by working with the two groups separately on these issues, bringing them together twice, once in Israel and the second time in Germany (Bar-On, 1992). When evaluating the processes of change within each group, we found that the group processes and, even more so, the encounters between the groups facilitated acknowledgment of the Holocaust and a more differentiated approach of “partial relevance” (Bar-On, Hare, & Chaitin, *in press*). We saw in this approach a product of the acknowledgment and working-through process.

In parallel, another German-Jewish encounter group was established. First, a self-help group of children of Nazi perpetrators was formed in 1988 as a by-product of the interviews the first author had conducted between 1985 and 1988 (Bar-On, 1989; German edition: Campus Verlag). Then, a group of children of Holocaust survivors from the United States and Israel agreed to meet with the self-help group of the children of Nazi perpetrators. They met four times, starting in June 1992 (Bar-On, 1993). Again, one could observe in this delicate group process in what ways the encounters facilitated individual and collective processes of acknowledgment and working through the aftereffects of the Holocaust, which still had a strong grip on both groups of descendants, 50 years after the events had taken place, when the fathers of one group tried to exterminate the families of the other.

<sup>1</sup>We suggested that the Israeli position was the one of “total relevance of the past for the present,” while the German position was the one of “no relevance.” We were looking for a more differentiated “partial relevance” position in both countries, in which students would say things like “perhaps there is relevance in the Holocaust for what happens here today, but it depends in what respect and how one draws these conclusions.” This position would mean to become better informed, both in respect to what had happened in the Holocaust and what is going on today (Bar-On *et al.*, 1993).

At this state we (Brendler, Bar-On, and Ostrovsky, all of whom participated in the German–Jewish encounter group) decided to set up another seminar, similar to the one conducted in 1990 and 1991. Our emphasis was focused on the acknowledgment and working through of the impact of the Holocaust on both groups through different forms of dialogue within each group and between the groups. We assumed that each group must first get involved in an internal dialogue, including its own foreparents, trying to learn about their past through personal accounts. Second, through a group process in which these interviews were presented and discussed, a peer dialogue would evolve, in which the collective memory and identity would be critically examined. Later, an encounter between the two groups should open up a new quality of the dialogue between young Germans and Israelis, who had acknowledged the Holocaust and its ongoing effect on each group separately. Between two such encounters, in Israel and in Germany, there would be an interval in which each group would have a chance to reframe its own agenda and identity- and memory-related issues, based on their initial experience with each other.

We had several questions in mind at the outset of our joint seminar:

1. Will the three forms of dialogue reinforce or antagonize each other? For example, will the discussions around the interviews of the Israeli students with Holocaust survivors and their descendants make it more difficult for them to engage in an open dialogue with their German peers?
2. Will the first encounter between the groups change the quality of the dialogue in each of the groups separately?
3. Will all members of each group be able to take part in each of these dialogues and the transitions between them?
4. Will our seminar only “convince the ones already convinced,” or will it draw into the dialogue also students who were less interested in dealing with the aftereffects of the Holocaust in the first place?
5. To what extent did the latest development in each country (the unification and the rise of right-wing extremists in Germany, the peace process in Israel) affect the current dialogues in comparison to the seminar of 1990 and 1991?

We now describe in some detail each one of these stages within the perspective of the Israeli group.

## **ISRAELI STUDENTS ENCOUNTER THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS AFTEREFFECTS ON THEM**

### **The Israeli Students Interview Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants**

After the first short round of getting acquainted, we asked our 12<sup>2</sup> students, grouped into pairs, to interview one Holocaust survivor and one of their descendants. They were supposed to ask them to tell their life stories, transcribe the interviews, and discuss them in one of the

<sup>2</sup>We interviewed all students before the seminar started, to describe the design of the seminar. In 1990, we had the experience that in the seminar that include the encounters with the German students, fewer students subscribed than usually (average, 15 students) even though an almost free trip to Germany was included in the program. No similar difficulties were observed on the German side, who had 15 students also in the present seminar. All the Israeli students were from the Department of Behavioral Sciences, in their last undergraduate year (except Manyá, who was an M.A. Anthropology student). Most of these students applied later for graduate studies in psychology.

following sessions. Very few instructions were given as to how to conduct the interviews. We emphasized our interest in the normalization strategies along which the interviewees have constructed their life stories. Interviewers should eliminate leading questions that might impose their own construction on the interviewees (Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992). Our idea was to let the students experience their interviewees not as professional interviewers, but as human beings, with their genuine reactions to the unfolding stories. We tried to prepare them for the possibility, based on our earlier experiences (Bar-On, 1994), that the descendants of survivors usually would say initially that they do not have an interesting life story to tell, and that the students would have to insist that they have interesting stories to tell in their own right.

Orit<sup>3</sup> was the first one to report about the interview she has conducted with her grandmother. She had heard her stories before but as pieces of an unfinished puzzle, never in such detail and wholeness. Orit approached her with the "task to conduct an interview for a course at the University." Her grandmother first described the life of her extended family in a town in Poland where they all lived. Soon, she spoke of the beginning of the war in 1939, the German occupation, and her first experiences with persecution of Jews in their town, where Jews from other parts of Poland and Germany were transferred. She remembered the German commander, who used to walk around with a huge dog, watching and laughing as the dog attacked Jews. She then described in detail how, in 1941, the SS soldiers entered her home, shot her cousin and, when her father ran away, shot her mother twice and killed her in front of her eyes. Later, she was in hiding and experienced how they heard footsteps of the SS, and women choked their babies who started to cry. The third critical event happened during a year she had spent in an underground bunker, outside the town, where she was hiding with her future husband: Her aunt gave birth in the bunker, and they had to kill the baby immediately after the birth as there was "no way to raise a baby under these circumstances."

Orit told these terrifying stories in detail, readings long sections of the transcribed interview. The opening account of the dialogue around the life stories of survivors was an extremely difficult experience for the group. We were amazed in what detail Orit's grandmother told her about her difficult experiences. We were, however, especially taken by the positive atmosphere that radiated from Orit's grandmother, in spite of the terrible events she had experienced and described, a radiance that one could also sense in Orit while sharing her grandmother's narration.<sup>4</sup> In a way, Orit set a standard in the group that others followed: the personal way of reporting, the detailed interviewing and precise transcriptions. A tender conversation usually followed the reports, in which questions were asked ("How could they endure so much pain and survive? Why did they not talk about it before in such detail?"). A personal and group dialogue slowly emerged, in which students tried to imagine themselves in these situations, to

<sup>3</sup>All the students gave their consent for this report. All names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

<sup>4</sup>In the application form, in which the students were asked to write about the connection they saw between the life in Israel today and the Holocaust, Orit wrote:

For me, as a third generation after the Holocaust, this connections has many sides. The closest to me is my connection to my family and especially to my grandma, as a Holocaust survivor, and to her past. The conversations and stories of that period, the comments about the life in the bunker, the discussions between the adults about memories which have faded away and their feelings about their being survivors, even the question if to accept reparations from Germany, all these are part and parcel of my daily life. It seems as if the wish of her generation to maintain the terrible happenings in consciousness, and the idea that they are the last ones to have experienced these events, has penetrated also into my life, perhaps even more than into the life of my parents' generation, who tried to "save" or avoid the ghost-tales. Today, I feel, it is part of my life to know and to feel this chapter of my family's legend, because of the fear that it may happen again.

envision their aftermath with regard to their own families. All these exceeded by far in scope and intensity what has happened in previous seminars.

We tried now to anticipate: What will the life-story of one of the descendants of Orit's grandmother be like? Will she follow her mother's tales in admiration, or will she distance herself emotionally from them (as Orit wrote in her application form)? Orit did not want her mother to be interviewed. Therefore, it was her mother's sister that Orit interviewed and reported about in the group at a later stage in our seminar. As expected by some students, the life story of the aunt was an "Israeli" life story, unrelated to the life story of her mother. She centered the interview around her father (Orit's grandfather), whom she remembered screaming in his dreams at night. She studied nursing "to learn how to help him in his heart condition" and felt guilty for not saving his life when he finally died of another heart attack.

About her mother's stories, she said, "One could not make sense of them. Four women, each with another version. Only father's ingenuity rescued them." At two points in her narration we observed, however, that Orit's aunt was unconsciously following her mother's stories. First, she reported watching, as a child, a bloody scene of a goat being killed by a train on a railway track. It reminded us of her mother's detailed description of the bloody events at her home in Poland in 1941. Then, when her daughter was born, Orit's aunt believed the baby stopped breathing at nights. She, as a nurse, tried to get physicians to recognize her baby's physical problems. However, they wanted to refer her to a psychiatric clinic, as they could not find anything wrong with the baby. Finally, when one of the physicians "found something and gave the baby a satisfactory treatment," she felt relieved. We saw an association between this experience and the description of her mother in hiding, of mothers choking their babies. Orit's aunt, however, never made these connections, though she must have heard stories from her mother, just as Orit had heard them.

The last interview reported in the group was an exception: Eran, unsuccessful with an earlier interview, decided to interview Orit's cousin, her aunt's son. Avner was the only youngster (18) in the third generation of survivors interviewed by our students. He told a very lively life story, in which he related much more openly and extensively (in comparison to his mother) to the experiences of his grandmother during the Holocaust: "Okay, I feel that my whole education, certain parts of it has to do with her experiences during the Holocaust. All this dealing with food, for example, it certainly comes from there. She had suffered from hunger like everyone else then, so—all the time food, the refrigerator always full and you always buy more 'so it will be there. . . .' To spend money, Okay, but never to waste food. Never take food and leave it in your plate. To throw away food is forbidden!"

Avner went on, associating his family's humanistic political standpoint toward the Arabs to his grandparents' experiences of humiliation and suffering as victims of Nazism. We discussed the different "sides" taken by Avner and his mother, in relation to the grandmother and her stories. We learned from Pierre Nora (1989) cited earlier, how memory can be "unconscious to its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived (pp. 8–9)." We experienced how listening to testimonies challenged the listener: being exposed to the experiences and the pain; feeling the different, conflicting feelings of the interviewee and oneself. We also saw how easy it is to ignore the narration of the storyteller, using a "professional jargon," thereby disassociating ourselves from the more difficult experiences of our interviewees and their effects on us.

We will not be able to go into detail in describing all the interviews. However, we wish to give some taste of the variety of experiences our students have encountered, the variety that enriched the perspective and the dialogue evolving in the group after each interview. There were also serious discussions centered around the different approach of Hedva, who

felt antagonized by the way people tried to reflect on the interviews and interviewees. Hedva tended to put herself in the center of the group, leaving aside what the discussion actually tried to clarify or elaborate on. It showed also her difficulty in acknowledging and working through the impact of the Holocaust as a young and proud Israeli woman, who severed herself from that chapter in her own family biography. This occurred, for example, when Yonit told the group about two interviews she had conducted with a survivor and his son. The survivor was a kind of “professional” survivor who used to travel around the country and tell in schools stories of his experiences during the Holocaust. His son (31), experiencing a father who spoke obsessively about the past, told a very sad story: how he tried to construct his independence from the overwhelming presence of his father and did not yet fully succeed in “making it” in life. During the group discussion after Yonit’s presentation, Hedva said that she knew the son personally. She felt that he did not tell his story “the right way,” according to how “she knew him.” This caused a heated discussion: Is there a “right way”? How does Hedva know what he felt about his life, only because she “knew” him in school? Can Hedva’s account help us make sense of Yonit’s interviewee’s self-presentation?

Lena was very quiet during the discussions in the group. She almost had no voice of her own, until she reported on her interview of her uncle, who was a partisan during the war. She actually interviewed him three times, because she felt he had not yet completed his story. The first time he told her “nice” stories about being a soldier in the Polish army during the German invasion, about how he had managed to run away and survive all by himself. During the second interview, she succeeded in getting him to tell of his last minutes with his family, when they were brought to the center of their town and he was excused because he was a good “carpenter,” useful for the German police. His sister, still lying on the ground, begged him in Yiddish to try and rescue their mother, but he was afraid and did not say anything. They were all later murdered. This was the only time he showed how helpless he had been in a critical situation, feeling very guilty for not rescuing his family. During the third interview, he told his more well-known, heroic stories among the partisans. Each interview showed a different side of him, a different chapter of his biography. Lena conducted the interviews in a most delicate manner and her report was outstanding. She found herself suddenly in the center of the group, praised for her attentiveness and persistence, her sensitivity and her clever way of getting around her uncle’s defensive approach to the more delicate parts of his story.

Yadov is a big man, working in the police, a new Russian immigrant. He comes from a family of officers in the Red Army who used to tell their heroic stories but never told the stories of the family members who had perished during and after World War II. He chose to interview a survivor who had a similar background as his father, in order to see if also that person would follow a similar pattern in his storytelling. His interview was the shortest reported in our group. It included very few facts about the war and some personal stories of the fighting in the Red Army. The interviewee did not want to go into detail concerning his parents and the other members of his family, all killed during the war. Yadov’s hypothesis was confirmed. However, members of the group questioned whether he found what he was expecting.

To summarize, the interviewing and reports in the group helped open up undiscussable aspects of personal and family histories. The image, used often, was of a puzzle in which some very important missing parts were found, though perhaps never to be completed. An inner dialogue evolved, of the student interviewers, relating to their interviewees and to themselves, in which they tried to imagine themselves in similar situations. The different ways of remembering the effect on identity were examined. This, in turn, stimulated an examination of personal and collective identity: To what extent is our identity centered around memories of these experiences? Do we still examine current events as if they had happened “then and there” rather than here and now? Do we want them to affect us in this specific way? What other rela-

tionships can evolve between memory and identity, once past traumatic events have been worked through? A more open dialogue followed, in which some members of the group could compare and test their private dialogues. This was done carefully, only when the group became supportive enough to let it happen. This was also where we, as facilitators, tried to intervene and help create such an atmosphere, trying to legitimize different personal strategies and sensitivities on the way to reaching this goal.

### **Through Our Work with the Students, We Developed a Trialogue of Our Own**

The three of us (Bar-On, Ostrovsky, and Fromer) met every week for about an hour prior to the seminar. We had by then read the forthcoming interview and would discuss its specific features. We would try to prepare ourselves for the reactions of the student who conducted the interview while reporting it, and for the reactions of other group members. Each of us would report on our contacts between the sessions with group members. This was especially true for Ostrovsky and Fromer, who were closer to the students by age and rank. We would also share our own reactions of not being able to sleep after reading Orit's interview, or dreaming after an exciting discussion in the group. Ostrovsky would reflect on her own experiences as a student, three years earlier: the similarities and differences she found between the group processes and her own two perspectives. Our preseminar work helped us cope with the tremendous emotional burden and to try to stay one step ahead of the group. It presented a kind of model that suggested that, in some cases, pairing or small group discussions were necessary before encountering the whole group.

We had one mishap during the interviewing phase. While interviewing a son of a Holocaust child-survivor, Manya suddenly felt sexually approached by her interviewee. We had never had such an experience with an interviewee before. There was some initial confusion and even an attempt "to blame the victim" for what she had "done" to invite this behavior (Lerner, 1975). However, others gave Manya strong support and refuted such blame as being "an example of what we are trying to acknowledge and work through here in the group." Manya first considered leaving the seminar, because it seemed too much for her. However, after receiving warm support from members of the group, including the three of us, she decided to go on and slowly found her place back in the group discussions. Without the close coordination of the three of us, Manya could have become a "casualty" of the group process, thereby also severely hampering the future working-through capacity of this group.

By the end of January 1994, we had several unexpected problems to address. We had not finished discussing all the interviews in the group but were already supposed to be preparing ourselves for the forthcoming visit of the German group. In addition, a faculty strike at all universities started, threatening the continuation of our planned seminar.

We decided not to let the strike interfere with our work and to continue the group meetings in private settings, outside the university, so that we would be ready for the first encounter with the German group. Members of the group organized a communication system to meet uncertainties stemming from the strike (closing of the campus, students' demonstrations, etc.).

### **Preparing the First Encounter with the German Students: The Letters, Booklet, and Video**

We corresponded with our German colleague, Dr. Brendler, and heard from him about the parallel group processes in Germany. We found out that only a few of the students had interviewed eyewitnesses of the Nazi era and their descendants, and these interviews had not been reported or discussed in the German group. Instead, they held group discussions, read

material, and saw films, trying to inform themselves about the Holocaust and about Israel in general. Toward the end of the semester, the German group prepared a small booklet in which all members of the group presented themselves in photos and in writing describing who they were and their interests. The aim of this booklet was to help the members of the groups form pairs, as every Israeli was going to host at least one German student at his or her home during the forthcoming encounter.

The Israeli group felt challenged by the booklet and decided to prepare a video, as a reply, in which each member of the group would say something about him- or herself and the group work. The visit was now intensively prepared, including a program for almost every day and evening of the visit. We started our joint meetings the next morning, mixing group sessions with formal and informal receptions. We were invited to the Beer Sheva Municipality<sup>5</sup> for lunch, including a tour of the town and an informal dinner later in the evening. We continued our discussions the next morning. The students were supposed to go for the weekend on their own, in pairs or clusters, as they wished.

## CONSTRUCTING A DIALOGUE WITH THE “RELEVANT OTHER”

### The First Encounter: Obstacles and Accomplishments in Developing a Mutual Dialogue

After a short general session of getting acquainted, two mixed groups were formed. This structure, in different versions, became the main working framework of all the future joint sessions. Students preferred the intimacy of a smaller group, paying the price of being less informed about the second group's processes and its participants. Though groups intermingled during both joint meetings (in Israel and in Germany), there were also competitive feelings of the “better” or the “worse” groups. For example, during the second and the third days, Hedva took a lot of the time of one group, indirectly accusing the German students of their responsibility for lack of interest and involvement in the topic.

Some of the other Israeli students confronted Hedva for being insensitive to the differences among the German students, differences that they could already observe during these first sessions. After a few hours of intensive discussions and emotional outburst, Hedva decided to leave the encounter, and later, also the seminar altogether. She became the first “dropout” of our joint dialogue, though we believe that it had more to do with her conflicts within the Israeli group than with her confrontations with the German students. Still, members of the group in which this conflict has taken place perceived themselves as being the “worse” group, as the other group used this time to get deeper into the process of acknowledgment and working through.

In the “better” group, things took a more personal turn. It started with the open confession of two German students of their efforts to clarify their own family's role during the Nazi era. Mani (G),<sup>6</sup> being an artist himself, had open discussions with his father, whom he appreciated very much. His father had been half a year in jail during the Nazi regime, “accused of being a Communist.” Mani could not, however, make sense of the inconsistencies in his father's discourse: His father despised the Nazis, but also described being present at one of Hitler's famous rallies and being fascinated by him. His father also made some anti-Semitic re-

<sup>5</sup>The towns of Wuppertal and Beer Sheva are “twinned,” as are the local Universities. Therefore, during our joint sessions in one of these places, a formal invitation by the local municipality was received, mostly from the Mayor herself in Wuppertal, and the Mayor or his deputy in Beer Sheva.

<sup>6</sup>German (G) and Israeli (I) students will be identified from now on.



marks, such as: “Jews have been persecuted, but they still control the world,” which would provoke Mani.

SIGNA (G): Are you afraid that this will happen to you too?

MANI (G): I try to argue with him but I never can be sure I could control myself.

ERAN (I) [*joining in*]: Perhaps your father had certain anti-Semitic ideas but he rejected others. I guess he would not be able to build camps and gas Jews. Perhaps he had been brain-washed. What can you do about it?

MANI (G): Perhaps I should try to think of this difference. I could also try not to be influenced by his prejudices.

MANYA (I): Do you confront him?

MANI (G): Yes, it is difficult to explain. When he comes to this topic he becomes irrational and then I lose my temper and become aggressive, and this does not help. It is very frustrating.

MANYA (I): So, invite him to the group. [*laughter*]

MANI (G): Yes, I could do that and he may come.

EDNA (I): [*joins in, very aggravated*]: I feel so helpless. Whatever I do, they will always judge me, hate me. Whoever I am will not change their mind, Why?

ERAN (I): I am more optimistic [*turns to Mani (G)*]: You could suggest that your father visit Israel; at least, he should see for himself. You see, my parents also have prejudices which are not easy to change.

Michael (G) is a historian, interested in the Nazi era. His first encounter with Jews was during a visit in England. When he came back and spoke about it at home, he got no answers. His grandmother wanted to talk before her death. His grandfather was still fascinated by Hitler. As a boy, he had watched a movie about the occupation of Holland and the Jews in Auschwitz. “I felt both hurt and ashamed. I felt hurt as the film referred to ‘the Germans’ and not only to ‘the Nazis.’ I felt ashamed to be a German under these conditions.” Michael found out that his uncle was an SS officer in Norway, became very religious after the war, and never discussed that part of his life. The uncle’s brother fled to Switzerland during the war. There were still many tensions between the two brothers during family gatherings. His religious uncle once said, during such an occasion, “The six million Jews died in the Holocaust because that was ascribed to them in the Bible.” Michael asked, rhetorically, “How can we construct a positive identity when history has such a negative meaning for us?”

Eran (I) tried to comfort him: “But you have also positive chapters in your history to relate to, don’t you?” Michael thoughtfully reacted: “But this would mean denying what I don’t like and relating only to what I can see as positive.” Others joined in. Manya (I) spoke of the “black hole,” which the Holocaust still means for her. Signa (G) described living in a “puzzle” that has so many missing parts in her family and community history: “The Holocaust destroyed our identity. We have to try and reconstruct it, trying to feel what it had been like to live during that era, from both perspectives” (of the victim and the victimizer).

Centering around the self-presentation of Mani (G) and Michael (G), this dialogue introduced a new quality of discourse into the group: not “us” and “them” but a new kind of “we,” searching for answers that will break through old schema. But for Edna’s (I) painful exclamation (“I cannot do anything to change their prejudices”), most group members tried to sort things out, not to give up, and try make sense of the mixture of emotions and statements of their parents’

generation and of their own. While struggling to clarify the “inconsistencies” or “irrationalities” of the concurring prejudices, Jews and the Nazi era, an atmosphere of joint endeavor emerged, to which quite a few members of both groups could contribute.

The next day we asked if it was a new group norm to let the German students present their family biography. This intrigued Malka (I), and she told her family history, which she had not yet shared within the Israeli group context. Her grandfather left Poland as a soldier in Andreas’s army,<sup>7</sup> leaving behind his whole family, who later perished in the Holocaust. Originally from Chentochova, he was rescued because he knew all the Catholic prayers by heart and pretended to be a gentile. He had already agreed to be interviewed by Malka but died shortly before she conducted the interview. Her father (his son) never related to this chapter of the family past. Malka remembered having her own nightmares of a wall around her, searching always for a place to hide (in the ground, in the wall) as a child. Borrowing Signa’s idiom, she said, “For me, the family past is also like a puzzle with too many missing parts.” Signa (G) said, “This hurts. I feel your pain.” Eran (I) (turning to Malka) said, “My grandparents came from Morocco, but interestingly, as a child, I had the same fears and the same search for hiding.”

Manya (I) and Dorit (I) identified with Malka’s fears and fantasies. Two of the German students mentioned that Malka gave them the first opportunity to observe a hidden aspect of Israeli identity that they had never acknowledged before. “We did not know you still have these fears.”

The open dialogue about family secrets and conflicts, initiated by Mani (G) and Michael (G), helped Malka (I) come out with her own. Her narration introduced some of the hidden aspects of Jewish or Israeli identity, usually concealed for their relative “weakness.” However, other members, German and Israeli, could hardly cope with it. One German student said, “Why do you always ask us to relate to our family members when you discuss this era?” An Israeli member felt very uncomfortable with Malka’s opening up “in front of the Germans.” One could sense the different undercurrents within each group and how they were supported or confronted by the mutual encounter with “the other” group. Still, the dialogue emerging in this mixed group touched on personal aspects, thereby creating a new space for members of both groups for acknowledgment and working through the burden of the past.

The focus shifted between the past and the present reality in Israel. Two Bedouin faculty members were invited to talk about the Bedouin community in the vicinity of Beer Sheva. The groups traveled to a new Bedouin town nearby and had a chance to see the problems of a cultural shift, being only a small part of the Arab–Israeli conflict. The next morning, we stopped on our way to Jerusalem at Nveh Shalom (the Oasis of Peace), where Palestinians and Jews try to live together and conduct seminars for Arab and Jewish students and pupils. We felt the maturity of most members of both groups, keeping apart the Holocaust from the tensions between Arabs and Jews today, which enabled them to shift from one context to the other, relating to each in its own separate sense.

On the fourth day of the Israeli encounter, the groups planned a trip to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem. The possibility of not going<sup>8</sup> was unanimously turned down. Expectations, fears, and fantasies were discussed. It seemed as if the forthcoming trip was putting members of both groups back behind a hidden, unbridgeable abyss. We tried to legitimate differences in experiencing and reacting to this place of acknowledgment of the Holocaust. This was what actually happened. The next day, some students went in pairs, others in small, mixed groups, while still others preferred to be there on their own. A few wanted to talk after being in the museum, whereas others preferred to keep silent.

<sup>7</sup>A private army of the Polish Government in exile, established by General Sikorsky in 1942 as part of a Polish–Russian agreement. Many of the Jewish soldiers in this army fled during its stay in Palestine and joined Jewish settlements (as Malka’s grandfather had done), mainly owing to the anti-Semitic atmosphere in this army.

<sup>8</sup>Proposed by the first author, arguing that it might interfere with the group processes.

The next morning, a collage was created, enabling the expression of feelings after the visit to Yad Vashem. Six girls of both groups planned a mask pantomime: They painted their masks in black and white, put them on and tore them off step by step, throwing the pieces into a box called "HISTORY." It was a strong, nonverbal presentation expressing the painful emotions they were trying to handle during the last few days.

### **The Intermeeting Phase: Preparations and Fears**

The first meeting of the Israeli group after the encounter with the German group was emotional and chaotic. On the one hand, students felt how important this encounter was for them in the context of trying to work through the aftereffects of the Holocaust. On the other, many issues had been addressed or dealt with. Students such as Eran, Yonit, and Ofra (I) reported the very intensive dialogue they were involved in throughout the visit. They also could now better understand how difficult it was for some of the German students to make sense or even inquire about their family history during Nazism. They learned to appreciate the open approach of students such as Signa, Mani, and Michael. But others were disappointed: Yadov did not want to continue his pairing with Bettina (G), because she seemed to him totally uninterested in "our topics." She was only asking "about the pubs and the shopping mall." He asked to be paired with someone else during his visit in Germany. Edna felt very hurt by the pressure being put on her by her partner, Bernd (G), whom she seemed to have liked a lot at the outset. She felt he was immature and talked only about their personal relationship, but not about "the subject." They all asked to be informed further about the German context of the Holocaust, as they felt they got to know only "our side" during the seminar (and probably also before it).

Special meetings were set, with Professor Gabriele Rosenthal, who gave a Colloquium at our Department with a German son of a Gestapo commander, who is member of our group of children of Holocaust survivors and perpetrators (Bar-On, 1993). In addition, we showed a film made by the BBC describing the second encounter of this group at Nveh Shalom in April 1993. We asked the group to take part in an evening session of a conference in Jerusalem, where Dr. Brendler, Michael, and Signa of the German group joined in. During this evening, the students described what they had been doing during the seminar and the special role the first encounter of the two groups had for them.

There were many fears and expectations concerning the following encounter. The two groups communicated intensively by mail, phone calls and E-mail. In the Israeli group, we observed an interesting shift of leadership. Orly and Edna, the initial "in-group," were very disturbed by their experiences during the first encounter. It was Ofra who spoke up now, telling the group how much she had learned, how difficult it was for her to maintain boundaries "because you can be easily flooded by this whole matter." She became a kind of a new leader, waiting impatiently for the next encounter to come. Some of it had to do with the German partners. In comparison to Edna's troublesome experience, Ofra felt that she and Michael had found a way to understand each other, both intellectually and emotionally.

### **The Second Encounter in Germany: Searching for a Balance between "the Topic" and Me**

The second encounter started with a long weekend of socializing back in pairs. Most of the couples were very happy, and the Israelis felt the efforts the German students made to reciprocate their own hospitality. However, there were also "casualties." Edna (I) and Bernd (G) did not get along at all. She again felt under a lot of pressure. We decided to break up this couple, and Bernd responded by leaving the group altogether, as he felt he had "no more interest

in our joint group discussions.” It was interesting to note that each group had its dropout (Hedva and Bernd), and it happened in both cases at the outset of the encounter in the country of the person who then dropped out.

After the weekend, we resumed our group discussions. Signa, Sabine, and Monika (G) spoke of their efforts to learn of their own family members’ participation in the Nazi era. They could describe the immense difficulties but also some of their own sophistication: how to approach this delicate subject anew, without letting the topic be turned down and closed up again. They could now report of experiences as bystanders (while Jews had been deported), of songs in the Hitler Youth (with anti-Semitic flavor), of Nazi indoctrination and children’s books with Jewish stereotypes.

SIGNA (G): They tried all the time to belittle the events. It was awful. I know that my children will ask me questions which I would like to be able to answer. It is so frustrating.

MONIKA (G): What is difficult for me is not that my mother was a bystander. It is the fact that she feels no remorse even today.

ERAN (I): But perhaps there is no story. Or perhaps it is difficult for them to admit that they enjoyed what was going on, or even were fascinated by Hitler. Your mother was 16. I know how a youth movement can fascinate you at that age. It is a wonderful experience. Only at an older age one learns to say “No!” under certain circumstances, if at all.

SABINE (G): I feel so helpless, as if I myself am becoming a bystander. I just cannot make my parents talk.

MALKA (I): I can now see why you had a more difficult time conducting your interviews than we had in ours.

DAN (I): I am not sure that there is more or less, better or worse, in these matters. Perhaps these are just very different difficulties which cannot be scaled in any form, just as the experiences of the survivors, their suffering, or that of the perpetrators, cannot be scaled.

ERAN (I): I had difficulties with meeting elder people in the street, here in Wuppertal. I all the time asked myself, where had they been, what had they done?

MICHAEL (G): I have this difficulty too, though I live here. Usually one has respect for older people. But in their case I cannot feel respectful; I try to imagine what they had been involved in.

MALKA (I): I remember as a little girl, listening to the Eichmann trial on TV. I was frightened and asked my Dad to sit near me. I had dreams about skeletons. Now I had fears of your parents, how they would relate to me?

SILKE (G): While you are here, I feel like I walk on thin ice all the time.

OFRA (I): You came to us to be accepted and we feel we have to defend you. There is too much symbolism in all that we look at. I had my own problems defining who I am, but I felt I had the strength to cope with it until I came here. Now I am, first of all, overwhelmed by your nature and architecture. Everything is so total and rich here. I am not used to it.

The encounter turned to its formal part. Professor Dr. Hoedl, the rector of the University of Wuppertal, hosted a reception and lunch for both groups, with the local press attending. Mrs. Ursula Krauss, the Mayor of the town (well experienced with former students’ groups and conferences) held a warm and informal dinner. It helped us take a break we all needed from our very personal and intensive group discussions.

We went to Buchenwald by bus from Wuppertal (a 7 hour trip) and stopped for a short break in Weimar. We walked peacefully in Goethe's and Shiller's hometown, visited Goethe's summer house in the park, enjoying the festive atmosphere of this old and relatively well-preserved East German town. Therefore, reaching Buchenwald was harsh. It took about 8 minutes to reach Buchenwald from Weimar. Michael read to us some facts, and we knew right away that we were approaching another world, the world of persecution and annihilation. To make things worse, upon arrival, we were confronted by a group of German soldiers, who had just finished their visit in the camp, coming out, laughing and shouting. We walked on in silence, looking at the woods, a few birds, some old army barracks used by the local administration, and viewing the original fence, the entrance house, and the gate to the camp, the clock still showing 3:15, the time the camp had been liberated. On the gate, we identified the German words *Jeder in Sein* (meaning "everyone to their own"), to be read from within the camp.

"I never knew how sophisticated they have been, those Nazis," said Eran (I), in Berlin, during the following morning's session. "In Auschwitz they wrote *Arbeit Macht Frei* from the outside, wishing to deceive the newcomers. Here they wrote 'Everyone on Their Own' from within, trying to demoralize those who had already been doomed to become inmates." "One cannot stop wondering what they had known in Weimar, in that wonderful cultured atmosphere, about the planet called Buchenwald. They must have known everything," said Ofra (I), during the same discussion. Utte (G) reacted: "I was shocked by a young woman who came out of the camp in rage and spat on the floor near me. Was she a neo-Nazi or what? Why the hell did she react that way in front of me?"

Michael (G) exclaimed: "I could not stand walking through the museum, reading all these explanations the Communists put there (meaning the old German Democratic Republic (DDR) wording, still present at the museum). They hardly mentioned this camp was full of Jews, only emphasizing resistance fighters all the time. This has been here for years after the war had ended."

Mani (G) said, "And I was put off by this medical device: You entered the physical examination room and they measured your height and then a soldier who was standing in the next room put a bullet in your neck, through a slot, hidden in the measuring scale. They could do it with one bullet by going up and down according to the height of that person. Why did they need this cynical killing method? They could have hanged them or put injections into them. Why were they so creative in their putting people to death methods?" Boaz (I) reacted: "How can I judge them. How can I be sure I would not behave the same way they did, had I been here in their position at that time and context?"

We walked through the open space, almost getting lost in that vastness. A German television company took some "shots" of us walking there. We visited the crematorium and the museum but did not have time for everything, because the local women wanted to close the place and go home. Finally, we gathered around the relatively new Jewish memorial in the middle of the empty space. Some of the Israeli students conducted a short memorial service, in which we all took part: a prayer, a song, a poem written by Orit's grandfather, translated into English; a few memorial candles struggled with the strong wind, a bouquet of flowers was placed, bought an hour earlier in a flower shop in Weimar. The bouquet was bought by both groups together, an act very much appreciated by the German students. They were afraid that the Israelis would not let them participate in the ceremony, or in its expenses. In the previous seminar, 3 years ago, there was a joint bouquet and another Israeli bouquet, and also this, after prolonged discussions (Bar-On, 1992). This time, this was no issue: a tiny symbol of the changing atmosphere?

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We arrived late that evening at the Jewish Community Center *Adat Yisrael* in Berlin, where we spent the last 3 days of our encounter. The first morning was devoted to reflections, in small groups, on the visit in Buchenwald, but other issues also came up. It became apparent that, this time, the reactions were different on a personal basis much more than on the collective identity basis (Israelis vs. German). Bettina (G) spoke up for the first time: "In Buchenwald it was so quiet, so green, the air so clean. I ate two pieces of bread in Weimar, twice as much as the inmates had for a whole day." Manya (I) reacted: "The silence was difficult in such a place." Yonit (I) asked, "I wonder if they could listen to birds like we did yesterday?"

Bettina then elaborated on her difficulties since the visit in Israel. She was sure, before she came, that "you (the Israelis) wanted me to give up my cheerfulness and liveliness because of what had happened during the Holocaust, and I was not ready to do so." However, she found out that there was no such demand, and she came back to Germany quite mixed up. She then went to see *Schindler's List*, which impressed her very much. Bettina said that for days after, she could not eat or take a shower without thinking of dreadful situations in the film. Now, she understood that she herself did not know where to put the boundaries between getting involved in "our topic" and maintaining her own liveliness. Dan (I) reacted by saying that she formulated in a simple and wonderful way the dilemma we are all having but that most of us cannot state openly: To what extent are we allowed to have a life of our own while getting involved in this difficult topic? The fear some Israeli students expressed during the final gathering in Beer Sheva related actually to Bettina's words: Are we now committed to this process for the rest of our lives? How can we deal with it and live our present life, undisturbed?

Lena (I) spoke after Bettina, very excited. She did not initially plan to come to Germany. She felt helpless and was afraid she could not draw the line between the Germany of then and today. However, now she felt that these days were very important for her and she really could open up, together with the German students. For her, the last intervention with Bettina was a crucial one. She suddenly understood something about her own fears, of which she was not aware. Also Monika (G) spoke up for the first time. She explained how stunned she felt after Yad Vashem, being all alone (which she chose to be), unable to utter a word in the group. Now, after Buchenwald, she felt differently. She could share things with Lena, translating for her the German titles in the museum, as there were no English ones. She felt it was difficult to be a German woman and a human being within this context, but now she could at least talk about her burden, and it made it easier.

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The two groups went on a bus ride to get to know Berlin from the Jewish historical and contemporary point of view, with the same excellent guide we had 3 years ago. The ride ended at the Wannsee Villa. Dr. Anagred Ehman, leading the educational program of the center, let us first walk around and get a sense of the place, letting everyone choose their own preferred context. A few of us walked out in the garden, near the lake, and we could sense the calm and wealthy atmosphere of the villa, the garden, and the boats on the lake. No one could imagine that in this pleasant atmosphere, the Wannsee Conference took place more than 50 years ago. Within less than an hour, during dinnertime, the annihilation of European Jewry was decided as a technical procedure, to be carried out efficiently.

We visited the exhibition and met for a short first discussion. In the first round, each person could say one sentence about his or her initial impressions of the Wannsee Villa. A few students critiqued the exhibition: Why do they not tell the story of the perpetrators? Why tell also here, in this house, the story of the victims who had never been here? We suggested that during

the following morning one of the students' working groups try to design a new exhibition as they would like it to be in this context. About eight students of both groups undertook this mission: One group worked with Anagred on the documents of the Wannsee conference, and another developed a psychohistorical profile of Reinhard Heydrich, the architect of the Final Solution.

During the discussion that followed, the first group presented its sketch of the proposed exhibition: a glass-partitioned double track in which one could follow the development of the participants of the Wannsee Conference (on the right track looking out at the lake), whereas the other (no window) track would describe the simultaneous development of several victims. These tracks would merge in the central round room, where the conference would be activated audiovisually. From there, the tracks would again separate, describing the extermination process. As they entered, visitors would be given names of either victims or perpetrators and would follow their track until arriving at the final "reflection room." There, they would have the option of changing roles and going through the whole exhibit from the second perspective. The glass partition would enable each visitor to look into the other track through a glass painting that would emphasize the perspective of the onlooker's assigned role.

One could learn a lot from this sophisticated proposal that was developed by members of both groups. In a way, it actually simulated the development of our seminar: two groups of people growing up in separate contexts, meeting to acknowledge and work through the aftereffects of the Holocaust, turning back into their own context, and meeting again to reflect on what they have done alone and together. From time to time, they could try to look through "the glass partition" onto the other's context, still very much influenced by their own contextual perspective.

On the way back from Wannsee, Yonit (I) asked Dan, Orit, and Utte (G) to join her in searching for the house where her grandfather used to live in Zelendorf before emigrating in 1938. It was quite an experience to follow directions of an 86-year-old man, not really knowing whether this was the house or not. An old and friendly man let us in after being a bit surprised by our request. He showed us around in a beautiful, old, and well-decorated building. Yonit was excited, took pictures, and tried to absorb as much as she could in order to tell the old man at home what she had experienced.

The stay in Berlin ended with a small Shabbat ceremony, which Eran conducted, explaining the prayers and the rituals while performing them. The next evening, a farewell discussion was held. It was difficult to say good-bye. Everyone tried to say a few words, but they all felt unable to conclude their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Michael (G), usually the intellectual person in the German group, said, "This is an important experience for me. I feel I went through things in a way I did not expect. The experience itself caused a change in me." The changes in him were unexpected. His words moved many of us. Mani (G) added, "I was glad for the opportunity to take part in the seminar. There are things which are difficult to be explained. This is not necessarily a language problem; it is just those things."

It took time for an Israeli to speak up. Manya was the first: "It is an unfinished process. It was a good experience but perhaps only an opening for something else." Edna cried and Yonit comforted her without words. They were unable to share their feelings with the group. There was an obvious difference between the German students, who expressed gratitude and satisfaction, and the Israelis, who expressed fear, sadness, even anger. Dorit was angry after her visit at the exhibition of the destroyed church in Berlin: "It showed the suffering of the Germans during the war, but it did not mention what preceded, not a word about the Holocaust."

Was it an opening session or a closing one? The jolly atmosphere during the farewell dinner that followed showed another side of the students: their wish to enjoy themselves as youngsters and to say good-bye personally, even if their mission was not yet completed and the "topic" yet undone.

## Postscript: Formal Papers and Summary

When the students came back, they were welcomed by many questions from other students, both suspicious and curious. Malka was asked to tell her peers in a Personality course about her experiences. Amcha<sup>9</sup> in Beer Sheva asked Orit, Ofra, Edna, and Yonit to tell a group of child survivors about their experiences in the course. But they also met indifference, even animosity. They were reminded that for quite a few Israeli youngsters, especially those who did not go through a similar process of preparation like our seminar, the idea of an encounter with the Germans was viewed negatively.

Students also had missions to fulfill and papers to present. During our last few sessions in Beer Sheva, we returned to some routine work. Each student presented his or her proposed outline for a final paper. Malka planned to interview Israeli survivors who, like her grandfather, took part in the Andreas army. She would try to understand their motives for joining this endeavor. Eran and Yadov, who had interviewed an Israeli couple who were on Schindler's list, wanted to compare these interviews with older testimonies at Yad Vashem in order to find out to what extent the movie affected their original testimony. Orit, Edna, and Yonit tried to compare the experiences of child survivors hidden by families and in monasteries: How did it affect the reconstruction of their life stories? Dorit and Manya followed the artwork of survivors over the years: Did it change, and if so, owing to what external and internal processes? (Manya's mother, an artist, was going to help them to interpret the artwork). Lena and Boaz wanted to understand the mechanism of silence within families of survivors through micro-analysis of family discussions. Ofra was in the process of producing a video reflecting the development of her dialogue with Michael (from the German group).

We met again in August, as there was a strong feeling that we did not finish "our work" at the end of the seminar. We heard also from the German students' group that they had met again, and that some of them decided to go next year, together with their pupils,<sup>10</sup> to Auschwitz, where they would meet with a group of Polish students. Three of them (including Bettina) planned to arrive in October in Israel for a visit. At the beginning of the meeting each of us (Ostrovsky, Fromer, and Bar-On) received a present: a small album with pictures of each of the students and a few words of farewell attached to each picture.

There was not much talking done. There were a few trends of feelings in the room. Some expressed concern about how the Israeli public still reacts to events in Germany. Dorit was still angry: She felt that she was in the middle of something and that, had she had a "better" partner, she would feel more satisfied. Boaz, Lena, Manya, and Edna expressed fears, which Dan interpreted as the fear of being stuck in "a lifelong commitment" that they did not plan to get involved in, especially not in this stage of their lives. They do not know how to continue now that the seminar is over. Ofra, Yonit, Malka, and Eran expressed satisfaction and openness. They were happy with what was achieved, and were also ready to go on dealing with "this subject" in one way or another.

## DISCUSSION: FORMING IDENTITY THROUGH DIALOGUE

In this discussion, we concentrate on some of the questions presented in the introduction. Though there are many other perspectives from which such a complex experience can be examined, we felt that these were for us at this time the most important issues to try and address, even if the answers were partial and inconclusive.

<sup>9</sup>Amcha is the Israeli support system for Holocaust survivors and their family members, similar to the Group Project for Holocaust Survivors and their Children in New York. They have just opened a new branch in Beer Sheva.

<sup>10</sup>As part of their practicum for becoming teachers, they will each have at least one pupil next year.



### Developing Three Forms of Dialogue: Commitment to the Past and the Present

The Israeli students were presented with a dilemma. The early interviewing phase strengthened their commitment to Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Though such commitment was part of the Israeli culture and collective consciousness before the seminar started (“total relevance”), the interviews helped change it from a myth and symbol to concrete and personal experiences. The encounters with the German students demanded from them an openness to “the other,” symbolically representing still the enemy of their recent private heroes. It also demanded a confrontation with the prevalent Israeli norms of prejudice and animosity. How did the members of our group cope with this dilemma? Did one phase help prepare them for the next, or did they interfere with each other?

This dilemma was reinforced by the powerful opening of our seminar. Starting with Orit’s report on interviewing her grandmother, this group worked very hard to acknowledge and work through the Holocaust and its long-term effects. One could sense how each interview broadened the scope of what being a survivor or a descendant of a survivor meant to the members of the group. The quality of the discourse that emerged and accumulated with each additional interview helped deepen the understanding of what had happened *there and then* and how it still affects us *here and now*. Moving from being an attentive and empathic interviewer to such difficult stories and storytellers to being a precise and convincing reporter and discussant in the group demanded considerable intellectual capacities as well as emotional involvement. We felt that this experience gave the students a sense of personal and mutual *being* that could support them in their encounter with the German students, but could also interfere with it.

The dropouts, Hedva (I) and Bernd (G), may have found their place in their home group at a later stage had we not engaged the groups with each other at such an early stage. Also, Orit, though participating in the process all along, expressed verbally and nonverbally that she was too absorbed in the earlier phases of the group and had little energy for the dialogue with the German group. In a way, she felt the need to represent her grandmother rather than develop new relationships of her own. Whenever these two roles conflicted, she would choose the first one, consciously or unconsciously. This became very clear during our visit in Buchenwald. Orit took charge of the ceremony, buying the flower bouquet and translating her grandfather’s poem.

To some extent, this was also true of Edna, Dina, Manya, and Yadov. In their case, the unsuccessful pairing with Bernd, Susan, Monika, and Bettina may have played some role. But what does “unsuccessful pairing” actually mean? It suggests a lack of personal ripening necessary for acknowledging the other, of one still being too absorbed in one’s own earlier phases of the working-through process, feeling committed to the past and its representatives. At least in the case of Yadov and Bettina, one could assume that it was Yadov who contributed more to the “unsuccessful pairing,” especially after we heard what Bettina had to say in Berlin (see p. 110).

We had also examples in which the two forms of dialogue (with the past and with the present) reinforced each other. Eran, the only Israeli student of North African origin, presented a more open and accepting approach toward the German students from the outset. One could sense it in his supportive remarks to Mani during the first encounter and to Signa and Monika in the Wuppertal opening session, as well as in his participative approach while Malka was sharing her fears in the first mixed group. This was his role during the earlier phases of discussing the interviews in the group. Ofra presented another version. She was less active while discussing the interviews in the group. To some extent, she identified herself with Hedva’s role. However, after Hedva had left the encounter, and owing to her “successful pairing” with Michael, Ofra became much more outspoken. She was searching for her own way to describe what she found in Germany, how she felt there.

## The Qualitative Changes between the First and the Second Encounter with the German Group

The groups met twice for an intensive week, 3 months apart, first in Israel and then in Germany. In what aspects did this process “move forward”? In which ways did it not, or even “move backwards”?

There were many external signs for the movement forward. We started with two groups based on strong collective identities, and we ended up by acknowledging the interpersonal differences within each group. Although during the encounter in Israel there were many expressions of “you” or even “they,” in Germany, especially after the visit in Buchenwald and Wannsee, there were more expressions of “us” and “we.” One could not follow who said what while discussing the design of the exhibition in Wannsee or the reactions to the emptiness of the Museum in Buchenwald. Still, it was like “walking on thin ice,” as Signa said in Wuppertal. Whenever a new issue was presented, or a negative reaction was expressed, breaking the “thin ice,” it could easily throw some people back to their own initial state of separateness. We felt that the design of the exhibition in Wannsee expressed better than words the delicate equilibrium that has been achieved: looking onto the other through a glass still painted with one’s own collective, stereotypical representations of “the other.”

The first encounter was also a kind of a mutual test. Bettina expressed it very clearly in Berlin: “I felt that you (the Israelis) wanted me to give up my cheerfulness and liveliness because of what had happened during the Holocaust, and I was not ready to do so.” Only when she found out that her expectation was not confirmed did she delve into “the topic” herself, by watching *Schindler’s List*. The Israelis wanted to know what the German students could tell about their own families during the Nazi era. They were annoyed with German students who did not feel this to be an important issue. They could open up when students like Mani, Signa, and Michael spoke about their own experiences and concerns in this respect.

Although this was a clear difference between the groups, in which the Israelis had to help the Germans to go ahead and try, Bettina’s dilemma, presented in Berlin, was a universal one with which students from both groups (and even we ourselves) could identify as their problem. In this respect, we feel that Bettina was the “hero” of the mutual group process: Michael, Signa, and even Mani, came to the first encounter after achieving a lot in their own personal acknowledgment and working-through process. They could be reinforced to continue by meeting the Israelis, but they could probably achieve it also in other ways. However, Bettina represented for us the typical “uninterested young German girl,” who would have never gotten involved in this topic had she not come to this group. This was still true when she came to Israel and looked for pubs and discotheques (according to Yadov’s complaints). Once feeling released of “our (imagined) pressures,” she looked for her own way into the topic (watching *Schindler’s List*) and could express her dilemma in the group in a way that helped others address it, whether Israeli or German.

## Comparison to the 1990/1991 Seminar: Issues of Identity and an Openness in Dealing with Them

It is always difficult to compare two such seminars, because so many things have happened simultaneously. Germany has changed (the unification, the emergence of the right-wing extremists), Israel has changed (the peace process, the immigration from Russia) and we, the authors, have changed (Ostrovsky was a student and became a facilitator). Our conceptual

framework has changed (from “partial relevance” [Bar-On, 1992] to issues of personal and collective identity, acknowledging and working through the past in relation to the present). Perhaps we also grew older and know better the limited effects of a 1-year seminar in pursuing such complicated and long-standing issues (the aftereffects of the Holocaust on second and third generations) (Bar-On, 1994).

Nonetheless, we did observe some differences. First, it was obvious that the interviews with Holocaust survivors were much more explicit and difficult in their content this time (e.g., see Orit’s interview). The survivors spoke more at length (the average interview was 60 pages long, whereas 3 years ago, they averaged 30 pages) and raised issues that had not been mentioned 3 years ago (though probably they had experienced similar ones). Were the survivors this time more ripe to tell, or were our students more ripe to listen? Probably both were true. There are many other signals in Israeli society that point in the same directions (Bar-On, 1994; Segev, 1992).

Second, there was a strange feeling that the first encounter this time started where the last seminar had ended. This we sensed through the openness of Mani’s, Signa’s, and Michael’s self-presentation during the first mutual session, followed by Malka’s open self-presentation. Such openness happened only during the latter phase of the previous seminar, and only to a limited extent, during the encounter in Germany. Third, we had a “Bettina” also last time: a young, uninterested German participant, who laughed at Orthodox Jews shortly after walking out of Yad Vashem (Bar-On, 1992). However, then it exploded and created a crisis in the groups, which that student did not comprehend, even a long time after the seminar was over. There were probably different personalities involved, but, symbolically, what was a crisis last time, taking its personal toll, became a positive focal event during this seminar. Did we learn to be more patient and open to personal differences?

Finally, there was also the example of the flower bouquet and ceremony in Bergen Belsen (in 1991) and in Buchenwald (this seminar). Although last time this was an important issue that took a lot of time and energy of the groups, with the Germans first feeling left out by the Israelis but then acknowledging their separate needs (see Bar-On, 1992), it was almost not an issue this time. Such differences can be accounted for by the different personal composition of groups. They can, however, also reflect a change in the atmosphere between the groups: where less value is placed on mere symbolism, and more energy is invested in substance. Only when conducting our next seminar, in a few years, we hope, will we perhaps be able to account for these and other differences. The only way to find answers to such complicated issues is to try again (Lewin, 1948).

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