

**Biography**

Andreas Losch, student of Protestant theology since 1993, studied in Bochum, Wuppertal (both Germany), Jerusalem/Israel and is preparing exams in Heidelberg/Germany now. After continuous preoccupation with questions surrounding the Holocaust, this paper came into being as seminary paper at the end of his one-year-scholarship at the Hebrew University Jerusalem. Sociology is an additional subject within his studies, and he was employed for designing and carrying out the evaluation of a youth project sponsored by the German government (Losch/Sawatzki, Kassel 1996).

Andreas Losch

**Remembering the Holocaust**

The Perception of the Holocaust in Israeli Society from the Establishment of the State until today

**Abstract**

In a sociological view of it’s history, two extreme concepts determined Israel’s perception of the Holocaust. After the war, in the days of undoubted Zionist ideology, Holocaust could only be faced paired with Heroism and Ghetto Rebellion. Most survivors but haven’t been heroes. So the great silence was born.

Only the Eichmann trial made it possible to speak out and lead to a normalization. This liminal period soon turned into another extreme: with Begin, the Holocaust itself became Israel’s new leading ideology and center of identification. The validity of this long prevailing myth can be doubted only in these last days.

The sociological approach on the topic has to be compared with a psychological perspective. Working through the Holocaust, viz. finding a differentiated relation towards the Holocaust’s past, is staying a task for Israel’s families, even after three generations. From this point of view, similar ambiguities within remembering the Holocaust are found as in the sociological approach. The shadows of the past have to be remembered, but there has to be left space for future and hope, too.

This Paper is the call for a functionalistic account of the Holocaust, taking the intentionalistic myth period in Israel’s perception of it as a necessary step towards that goal.
Introduction

The Holocaust is more than fifty years away now. The generation of the survivors of this catastrophe has born children, that have been grown up and themselves gave birth to children: the third generation. One could think, that because of all the changes, that occurred in Israel and Europe since that time, because of all the political and mental processes that took place, this theme would be already anachronistic to deal with. And indeed youngsters in Germany feel difficulties to relate themselves to the debts of their ancestors. „What do you want from us?“ I hear the youngsters say. It’s over now. Fifty years ago.

The gap of years nevertheless starts to close, when we realize, how much time it needed, to face the brutal facts and the pain and guilt, that remained. In Germany, it took already fifteen years for the discussion about what happened, to get started at all. The very first way of dealing with the Holocaust in Israel was silence, too. „It is significant, that only in 1991 the first comprehensive approach to the theme ‘Israeli society and reception of the Holocaust’ was published“. Tom Segev’s „The seventh million“ that’s meant here will also widely be used in this paper.

The fact is that in Israel, shelter of the persecuted, the Holocaust never has been as present as in the last two decades.

The first part of this paper will try to explain this development in Israel, examining the changing reception and use of the Holocaust throughout the years. This socio-historical approach will be accomplished by a psychological point of view in the second part. How did the changes in Israeli society influence on the generation of survivors, their children and grandchildren? Special emphasis will be given on the situation today. Could young Israel accept the rejection of a personal connection to the past, as Germans youngsters claim?

Part I: A history of remembrance

After all the years, it should be possible, to have a critical view on the past. Although more and more facts have been revealed and scientific research is advancing, the Holocaust but was not viewed more objective in Israeli society. Instead, it underwent the process of mythologization, as Moshe Zimmermann (1994) claims. The distance in time that ought to be helpful in dealing with the facts gave birth to a myth, because it brought with it a loss of immediacy. Another reason for this development is the
social fixation of the ‘meaning’ of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was „re-historized“: not the facts of the past themselves stayed important, but the way of understanding them in the present.

This way of dealing with the past is a quite common phenomenon. In her book „Recovered roots – Collective memory and the making of Israeli national Tradition“ (1995), Yael Zerubavel pointed out, how Zionism used and uses the long time passed period of Jewish independence at the time of the temples, to create an aim and a claim for present politics in Palestine/Israel. From her given example we can learn, that the past is never objective, but always used. So the Holocaust. Just the way it was exploited differed throughout the history of Zionism that became manifested in the State of Israel.

1. First agreements

The Holocaust was from the very beginning of its coming to knowledge an element in the construction of the Zionist narrative. The declaration of independence relates to it as one reason for the need of a State of Israel: „The Holocaust committed against the People of Israel in recent times, during which millions of Jews were slaughtered in Europe, again proved manifestly the necessity of a solution to the problem of the Jewish people, who lack homeland and independence. The solution is the renewal of the Jewish state in Israel, which will open wide the gates of the homeland to every Jew and which will grant every Jew the status of a people with equal rights among the family of nations.“ The pathos of these words may not irritate us. For the protagonists of Zionism the Holocaust was nothing but one additional reason for the need of the establishment of a Jewish state, although the most actual one. This is the point, where Saul Friedländer later formulated his critics on Ben Gurion’s strategy in those days: „I claim that the yishuv leadership and the public as a whole did not give enough thought to the matter. The rescue of the Jews in Europe was not at the top of yishuv leaders’ list of priorities. For them, the most important thing was the effort to establish the state.“ With other words we could say, that the political leaders in this time did not really understand the nature of the Holocaust and hence did not really face this problem. Instead, we find the first way to exploit it for the own goals. In Yael Zerubavel's description of ‘traditional’ Zionist narrative, we find the ideological realization of this perception. The Holocaust is located as the end marker
of a long period of Jewish exile in the Diaspora. In Zionist view, this exile is highly negative portrayed, leading not only to the denial of this state of living, but also to rejection of the lifestyle and ‘Jewishness’ people developed in that time. Martyrdom (termed Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of god’s holy name) represents the Jew’s failure to offer armed resistance to their persecutors and actively defend themselves. Some people asked: Isn’t that, what once more happened during the Holocaust? The behavior of the Jews involved and crushed by the Holocaust was –even officially–connected to the biblical image of „sheep, lead to the slaughter“. Of course without the positive meaning the image had in terms of martyrdom. Later that image has become a very strong anti-pattern for behavior in Israeli society. Even today the rejection to become ‘sheep once again’ stays a dominant motif for action between Israeli soldiers, although with different conclusions than 1948 and thereafter. In that time, in the days of undoubted Zionist ideology, the conclusion was just negation of this ‘typical Jewish’ fate – and the wish to be different. The new Jew (Sabra) was born in Israel, the history of sorrows and pain taken from his shoulders. He walks upright, caring and fighting for the country he belonged too all the ages – directly relating his existence to the period of the great Jewish commonwealths in antiquity. In this way, a relation to the recent painful history was avoided. Looking at this kind of narrative, I do not wonder that the attitude of the „Sabra“ generation towards Holocaust survivors that came to Israel often was arrogant ignorance.

The Holocaust was of course officially scored in a different way. It was tried to give the survivors more honors by emphasizing on those that resisted – as it became manifested in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. As the Knesset decided in April 1951 the establishment of a Holocaust Memorial Day, it was called ‘Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Memorial Day’. The name changed sometimes when additional laws have been passed that fixed how to memorize this day, but always the remembrance of the Holocaust has been linked to heroism. Together with the couple of days following one week later – the remembrance day for the soldiers fallen in Israel’s wars and the Day of Independence–, an annual repeated week of celebrating Israel’s fundamental social consensus was created. The fact, that the schedule of Holocaust Day shows strong similarities to that on the ‘Day of Remembrance for the fallen Soldiers of the
IDF’, expresses once more the Holocaust’s absorption into Zionist ideology. In this framework, it becomes the dark background for the brilliant triumphs in the struggle for independence.

A similar triad in space accompanies the described combination in time. Yad Vashem, once envisioned as a phanteon tower on the top of a hill, found its place just on the slopes of Mt.Herzl, the national Zionist sanctuary with the bones of Theodor Herzl buried there. On the way of ascension, one passes the military cemetery, a remembrance of the fallen soldiers, before one reaches Herzl’s tomb on top of the hill. As the Day of Independence is the threefold’s ritual week ending point and climax, so we find the tomb of the prophet of the new Israel on top of the mountain. Time and space are witnesses that the founding of the state of Israel is the Zionist ideology’s mythological peak. ‘Rank two’ is for the War(s) of Independence: still the fallen soldiers of Israel get two siren calls to be remembered, while the victims of the Holocaust are just remembered with one call on their day.

Let us summarize the perception of the Holocaust in this first period. Four basic assumptions characterize the agreement that has been worked out between Israeli ‘establishment’ and the survivors, how to relate to the Holocaust:

1. The Holocaust had proven once again that the only solution to the Jewish problem was an independent state of Israel.
2. The rest of the world, viz. every nation, was hostile and had done nothing to save the Jews during the Holocaust.
3. Holocaust and Heroism are of equal moment (compare the description of the memorial culture above).
4. The less everybody talked about the Holocaust, the better.
   And „thus the great silence was born“.

**2. The Eichmann trial - launching the transitory process**

With the realization –or better to say: staging?– of the Eichman trial, a new period in the perception of the Holocaust began. The repression of the Holocaust out of Israel’s collective memory because of its contradiction to the myth of the new Israeli, and its suppression under Zionist ideology normalized to a more self-assured working with
it. As the state of Israel was more settled and strengthened, so its citizens became able to face the facts, including confronting this part of history in the educational system.

The Eichman trial became the turning point, because it made the people ‘talk about it’. It was more than just another criminal case: a historical trial. General attorney Gideon Hausner specially designed it for this purpose in agreement with Ben-Gurion. „We need a massive living re-creation of this national and human disaster“, Hausner realized. He wanted to bridge the gap between Israel’s youth and the nation’s past, and he succeeded. The trial became the „central event in the living of many Israelis“. In encouraging the survivors to unlock what had been sealed within their memories, Hausner redeemed with this kind of ‘national group therapy’ an entire generation.

Although Zimmermann describes the normalization that developed after the Eichman trial as an episode of its own, it is in my eyes nothing but a liminal period, leading to another placement of the Holocaust in Zionist narrative. Because of the liminal character of this phase, there is not a sharp turning point like the Eichmann trial to be mentioned at the end of it. Different accumulating reasons prepared the ground for a change.

At the end of 1966, the prevailing public feeling in Israel was depression: frustration about the small man that tried to follow the big Ben-Gurion as Prime Minister. Levi Eshkol, „the man without charisma“ did not succeed in giving his people a new vision. After all the troubles of previous years, the general feeling about the Zionist goals was „mission accomplished“. Something new was needed, but the old Zionist conceptions still seemed to be valid.

Although the Six-Day War 1967 helped to step out of this crisis and brought Zionism to a new emotional peak, the military earthquake following with the Yom-Kippur War 1973 finally shake the believe in the invulnerability of Israel and, together with that, the Zionist narrative – where it was thought as a shelter for all Jews. Wouldn’t be the United States at the end be a safer place to live as a Jew than Israel with all its wars? „Until then we believed in the pairing of the words Holocaust and heroism and identified ourselves with the heroism. The war made us realize the meaning of the
Holocaust and the limitations of heroism. “The frightening reality of the Holocaust remained, while the ideology, thought to control it, vanished.

Oz Almog (1997) mentions the Yom Kippur war as the final cause for the decline of ‘Zionist theology’, as he terms it. Since then, the once sacrosanct institutions in Israel became subject to critics. The Kibbutzim, pioneers in realizing the Zionist dream, lost members and some got into heavy economical problems. The enormous expenses, the army always have had, it now had to justify. Individualization, pluralization and growing hedonism reached the Israeli culture as well.

Almog describes this process in Max Weber’s terminology as routinization of the social revolution that Zionism once performed when it succeeded to establish the state. This routinization took place because of two reasons. On the one side, its primary mission is indeed accomplished. On the other side, its envisioned utopical dimensions never have been reached. Therefore, desillusionation lead to less and less willingness to risk or even to sacrifice one’s life for fighting this ideology out of fashion. Additionally, the natural need for variety included the wish for something different.

So, what will be next? “When will Weber’s sine curve emerge from the nether regions of the routine and rise to the heights of a new charisma? What will be the new Israeli secular religion, and when will it surface?”

It looks as if the political earthquake in 1977 already has been the labor pains of the new myth, procreated in the wars. Perhaps it is possible to view the mentioned normalization of the Holocaust perception then as part of the routinization of Zionist myth. A different perception of it would be logical to conclude when the new myth will develop. It will be proofed that this is the case, because the new myth is the Holocaust itself.

3. Birth of the myth

Begin was the first Holocaust survivor that became Prime Minister. „The Holocaust shaped his entire political career“. As it did before his success in the elections, so it did thereafter. His politics were dominated by a simple clue, drawn from the Holocaust: never again!
On 11 March 1978, almost 40 people have been killed after PLO terrorists hijacked two buses in Tel Aviv. Dramatic scenes happened, when mothers tried to rescue their children by throwing them out of the windows. Begin answered with lines, originally written after a pogrom in Russia 1904: „The spilling of the blood of a child the devil has yet not invented“ – with this quote, he explained the following retaliatory attack on PLO bases in Lebanon.

As in this case, he justified his politics in many other cases. The demolition of an Iraq nuclear facility in 1981 is just another example. Comparing Arafat with Hitler made clear, how he viewed the political present: with the patterns of this past. Before invading Lebanon, he instructed his cabinet with conjuring the trauma again: „There is no way other than to fight selflessly. Believe me, the alternative is Treblinka, and we have decided that there will be no more Treblinkas.“

With the help of the upcoming media – that in Israel developed rather late, TV was set up just at the end of the Sixties –, Begin shaped the Holocaust experience into Israel’s „central collective myth“. He made it a common heritage for all of Israel’s Jews, that means, also for the immigrated oriental Jews, that didn’t stem from Europe. This re-shaping of the Holocaust experience was possible, because the Labor party dominated Zionist establishment had together with its power also its monopoly an interpretation of the Holocaust definitely lost. In that way, the perception of this event was set free from the existing ideological framework, ready to be built into a new one. There it was placed in the very center.

Charles Liebman stated already 1978 the very central role that the Holocaust has become in the new „civil religion“ of Israel. Since then, the significance of the Holocaust has further increased, as studies, that have been conducted in 1965, 1974, 1985 and 1990 show. Meanwhile we may not forget that although the Holocaust has become the core of the new civil religion, there are other components built around. The shift back from Israeli to Jewish identity that took place over the years is a very central issue, too – as viewing the State of Israel once again in it’s religious conception as ‘Eretz Israel’. I believe, this did not happen by chance. Begin, the Holocaust survivor, made it social possible, to be Jewish again.
As Kimmerling (1986) pointed out, historical reasons for the mental changes that took place in this time, have been:
1. The demographic fluctuations caused by the oriental immigrations,
2. an increasing importance of religion,
3. the control of the core territory of „Zion“ after 1967 and
4. the rise of Begin’s national party 1977.
This has to count for a perspective of the society in its whole. But if individuals wanted to follow this social changes, it is the Holocaust myth that gave them the reason and key for access to their Jewish identity: „Emotional and historical awareness of the Holocaust provides a much easier way back to the mainstream of Jewish history, without necessarily imposing any real personal moral obligations“

4. Disturbances and fluctuations in meaning
In a way, Begin’s heritage continues. Since the iron curtain falling down in 1990, every year groups of pupils have been lead on trips to the death camps in Poland – an idea, that already has been developed in 1966, but had to be stopped because the outbreak of the Six-Day War and Poland’s opposition to it. To understand the meaning of these trips, we have to look at what the Ministry of Education’s booklet wants the pupils to conclude from them, and that’s: stay in Israel! Poland is portrayed correspondingly negative as supporter of the Palestinian nation’s wish for self-determination, what looks in that booklet quite the same as supporting Palestinian terror organizations.

The strengthened remembrance, Begin evoke, also had a rather unexpected outcome. The lines Begin quoted to explain the retaliatory attack in 1978, Peace Now activists used ten years later to protest the intolerable actions the soldiers are forced to take in the territories. The unusual tasks, the Israeli army had to perform there, frequently evoke questions on the soldier’s role towards the local population. Fighting with children and watching camps, they did not feel very comfortable. „The slightest deviation from the pure notion of self-defense, seems to become an existential threat to the individual soldier’s moral identity. He fears that he is heading toward a
position where he might call himself a Nazi, and become a ‘cog in the military machine’. “– the image Eichmann used to defend his innocence.

Begins intentionalistic interpretation of the Holocaust had to compete with a different, functionalistic perception. This other way of interpretation, emphasizing less the Holocaust uniqueness but the more taking in account its general humanitarian lessons, needs according to Segev still a certain amount of optimism to be realized. Without that, there only can be the wish to forget:

Shortly after the outbreak of the Intifada, in the wake of an increasing number of excesses committed in the territories, Haarez launched a public debate by printing an essay by Yehuda Elkana, named „For Forgetting“. Elkana expressed his believe, that these deeds stem from a deep existential fear nourished by a specific interpretation of the Holocaust and the willingness to believe, that the entire world was against Jewish people, the eternal victim. These convictions that we have rooted back up to the first social agreement about the Holocaust’s interpretation have been furthermore strengthened in the Yom Kippur War. Elkana totally broke with this traditional perception, calling conclusions like this ‘Hitler’s paradoxical and tragic victory’. „For the first time I understand the seriousness of what we have done, when for decades we have sent every child in Israel to visit Yad Vashem over and over again. What did we expect tender children to do with this experience? Our minds, even hearts, closed; without interpretation we have proclaimed ‘Remember!’ What for? What is a child supposed to do with these memories? For a great many of them, the horror pictures were likely to be interpreted as a call for hatred.“

If Elkana is right? The demand always to remember can indeed be a serious obstacle in the process of reconciliation. In a video report made about an Israeli-German youth exchange program, already going on for years, it is stated, that many Israeli youngsters oppose this kind of program. „If we become friends, in the end we will forgive them. And if our generation will forgive them, the next will forget the Holocaust all together.“

5. Summary and outlook
We have realized in our historical review two extreme concepts of perceiving the Holocaust. After the war, the condescending view on the survivors and the shame
one felt to think about it at all gave rise to the great silence. The remembrance of the Holocaust was repressed and regulated by a very fixed pattern of thinking. The period of normalization, that followed after the Eichmann trial was limited. Although it gave start to a scientific research of the Holocaust, that lasted on and advanced up to today, the broader society nevertheless was drawn into another extreme of Holocaust perception. Everybody, not depending on his origin, ‘remembered’ and started to relate his and the nations fate to it. This Holocaust myth became the center of Israel’s civil religion. It played and plays an enormous role in the ongoing debate over what fundamental values ought to guide Israeli society. In this social discourse, some of the patterns fixed in the first years after the war still count for validity, some – as Holocaust and Heroism – don’t.

The call for breaking with the remembrance should not be counted as sign for just another extreme approach. Instead, it has to be identified as a call for a change of the myth’s interpretation, emphasizing the more its functional perception. Why else would Elkana still feel the need to use the image of ‘Hitler’s late victory’ to express his sorrows?

Segev concludes in his epilogue: „It does not follow from the risk inherent in Israeli memorial culture, that Israelis would do best to forget the Holocaust. Indeed, they cannot and should not forget. They need rather to draw different conclusions.“

How these diverging developments in ‘using the myth’ have to be interpreted? The Holocaust myth surely lost its unifying power it had in the Begin era. Does this mean that this myth left it’s peak and starts to become shattered into different opinions, different perceptions of the past – rather becoming part of another ‘civil religion’ than being a conception of it’s own? If this is the case, we find ourselves back in another liminal period.

With the victory of Netanyahu’s „Security“ campaign over the vision for peace in the elections 1996, one could state, that Begin’s creed lasted on for some more time – but if, only for exactly half of Israel’s population. The official ideology of Holocaust and heroism lost its unquestioned validity with the threat of the wars, as we have stated. The fair and the wish to avoid it remained. We could call this new pairing Holocaust and prevention, or using an Israeli term: Bitachon (Security). Is it still this fear of the
past that makes a hopeful future for Israel and the Middle East difficult to get realized?
Part II: Three generations

While Part I focussed on the overall social and political agreements, that determined the perception of the Holocaust in Israeli society, in Part II we will try to find back this results in the lives of individuals, shifting to a more psychological perspective. How do Holocaust survivors and their descendents – the third generation – in special and Israeli youth in general deal with the past? How does it influence their cultural and political attitudes? Dan Bar-On recently conducted the research work that is considered the basis for this part; it also included the examination of the attitudes of young Germans to the topics mentioned.

1. Field research: the third generation in two countries

The purpose of this quantitative research work, conducted 1989, was to figure out, if youngsters in Israel and Germany succeeded, to ‘work through’ the Holocaust. On the Israeli side it was expected to find oversimplifications and exaggeration of its relevance – relating every current social or political issue to ‘what happened during the Holocaust’. The research team believed that a successive working through process would lead to the development of a more differentiated approach to the relevance of the Holocaust to their current social and political attitudes. The same would have to be said from the German case, just, that their way of approach was assumed to begin with the other extreme: perceiving the Holocaust as totally irrelevant – as I have illustrated in the introduction. The outcome of the study for both sides was negative. „For most of the students there appeared to be a ‘vicious circle’ linking social and political attitudes with attitudes toward the Holocaust, rather than a whole working through process“.

1.1 Israeli results: knowledge or believe?

It became clear, that Israeli youngsters – compared to the Germans – know more about the Holocaust and also understand it’s meaning more in deep. They also show stronger emotional reactions. Concerning personal biographies, the knowledge is nevertheless still limited. The descendents of families, that originate in Europe and suffered from Holocaust and World War II, still tend to underestimate their grandparent’s faith.
Although knowledge, understanding and emotional attachment are supposed to support a possible working through process, the Israeli youngsters – as the German ones – tend to give normative positive answers concerning their interest in the Holocaust. This does not look like a differentiated dealing with this past, but the more like confirming articles of faith, believe in the Holocaust myth. Not any more surprisingly the severity of the family World War II and Holocaust background added very little to explain the cultural and political attitudes.

What’s about ‘learning’ from the Holocaust, about Segev’s call for a more functionalistic reception? The general social and political attitudes that are represented in the Israeli sample consist of a significantly more ‘right wing’ orientation, stronger authoritarian thinking and even higher nationalist identity, combined with much more negative attitudes to ethnic minorities. Within the sample, pupils were politically less polarized than students, but were rated lower on democratic thinking.

Bar-On explains these rather negative attitudes of the Israeli youth with the ongoing conflicts with the Arabs, Israel had to face 1989 and the lack of a solution to this conflict; he contrasts these problems with the relative prosperity and peace West Germany enjoyed in that time. Nevertheless, Segev related these attitudes to the educational indoctrination that for instance took place on the mentioned trips to Poland, viz. Begin’s intentionalistic version of the myth. However, this cannot be said for the educational system (and not for the Poland trips) in general.

Zimmermann emphasizes in his article, that in contrast to the time up to 1967, the history books from the beginning of the eighties on contain differentiated material about the Holocaust and are free from affective stereotypes. Instead, he charges media, politics and the ‘general atmosphere’ in society for the attitudes of Israeli youth. We could suppose that the prevailing Holocaust myth is the reason, why these school lessons do not bear fruits.

The Poland trips are nevertheless mentioned as one sensitive point, in accordance with Bar-On, who carefully formulated: „Our impression is, that sometimes a part of the trips is organized only to make the youngsters conclude the ‘right’ answers – that will lead them just more deep into the vicious circle.“
The term ‘vicious circle’ Bar-On uses to illustrate and summarize the negative results of his research. There is a clear interdependence of attitudes towards the Holocaust past and towards the present rather than a working through process. When there have been youngsters with a more leftist socio-political background, the Holocaust caused them correspondingly to be more politically alerted, less negative to minorities, less nationalistic and so on. It has to be concluded that the polarized political contemporary situation in Israel caused both sides to ‘mobilize’ the Holocaust to reinforce their ‘left’ or ‘right’ social and political perspectives.

„The present perspective stimulates certain attitudes towards the Holocaust which generate more of the same present perspective.“ This description of the vicious circle fits very well to Moshe Zimmermann’s description of mythologization: “The process of mythologization shows, that not the past itself (how it really has been), but the course of the past in the prism of the present convictions and values is decisive.“ Israeli youth did not succeed to relate to the Holocaust in a more moderate, balanced way, what Bar-On expected to be ‘work through the Holocaust’. The mythologization of the Holocaust is one of the reasons that prevent it.

1.2 German results and the meaning of feelings

The situation within the German youth is significantly different but also somewhere similar. The third generation in Germany suffered from ongoing public and private silence concerning the Holocaust. As one consequence, the German youngsters perceive their grandparents the role of victims and of heroes against the Nazi regime – and that clearly above and beyond the historical evidence. They also try more to relieve themselves of responsibility; according to my experiences, it includes pointing on Israel’s present conflicts, to avoid facing the own past. Hence German youngsters understand the Holocaust (and their grandparent’s role in it) to a lesser degree and indicate lower emotional reaction on it. „In Germany, in the history lessons, we only hear facts“, one German schoolgirl tries to excuse this reality. Emotional confrontation with the cruelty of the deeds is an important part in the working through process, although a difficult one. In the Israeli sample, higher emotional engagement accounts for less democratic thinking. As it is avoided in Germany, we do not know what its lesson could be. For grandchildren of the perpetrators probably a different one.
The German youngsters do not only still reflect the collective silence of the past. More than that we find the same interdependence between view of the present and view of the past as in Israel. For both sides, these oversimplifications serve to establish the necessary self-distance from this „man-made calamity“ – necessary, if one is still not able to face the past.

2. Interviews between fear and hope

In continuity of his field research, Bar-On settled interviews, to explore the qualitative process, that made youngsters reach a more differentiated attitude towards past and present – or to find out, why it did not take place. The interviews, that he documented in his book „Fear and Hope“ (1995), have been proceeded with whole families, with three generations of Holocaust survivors. His assumption was that the more progress the older generation had made in their own working through process, the less their children’s patterns of thinking would be affected by the vicious circle mentioned in the last chapter. The survivor’s wish to forget and make others forget, too, was opposing this process. When parents tried to hide their difficult memories and to save their children from facing them, the children’s nevertheless got it and ‘inherited’ these problems. The third generation had difficulties to talk about themselves and to find their place in society, when their parent’s did not manage to make their way between the difficult memories of the grandparents and the needs of their children.

2.1 Different histories

Bar-On ascertains that the situation of the Holocaust survivors improved since beginning of the eighties, because Israeli society became much less judgmental to them. Realizing his interview partners speaking much more openly over the years, he states that „ten or fifteen years ago, we wouldn’t have received such varied, detailed testimonies.“

The timing, Bar-On mentions, is but in contrast to our assumption that the perception of the Holocaust normalized already in the period after the Eichmann trial 1961. How can we understand this difference? I do see two possibilities of explanation, but they should not be taken as a final answer:
First, it has to be remembered that we qualified the phase of normalization as a transitory period without clear ending. From there, we could conclude that it took some time for this change of mind to prevail upon the society in its whole. We could assume that the point of time, when this status was reached, was at the peak of the Holocaust’s mythologization. Only then everybody accepted the Holocaust as if it was his own fate, and consequently stopped judging the survivors for having behaved ‘like sheep’. The Holocaust myth emerged according to our periodization with the end of the seventies, and that period of time would fit well to Bar-On’s chronological description.

Secondary, it is probable to suppose that the increasing social openness after the trial took a long time to be realized within the families. In the sixties, it had perhaps become social possible to speak out, but that did not mean, that this was already the case for each and every individual survivor. Indeed Israeli society in that time didn’t thought very much of the individual, its personal burden, emotion and fate. „Not until the seventies and eighties was there any acknowledgment of complex emotional processes, of the need for self-actualization, or of differences between individuals and generations.“ Perhaps the Eichmann trial indeed 'redeemed' a whole generation, as it was stated – but not the individual survivors, at least not all of them. The ‘parade of the Holocaust witnesses’ at the trial was just the beginning of the 'redemption'.

The necessary changes, Bar-On describes, can be identified with some of the general developments Almog charges for being responsible for the end of the Sabra myth and the decline of Zionist theology, e.g. individualization and hedonism. Consequently, the decline of Zionism seems to have been another precondition to enable the survivors to work through the Holocaust. This fits well to Bar-On’s negative evaluation of the Sabra model.

2.2 The life of survivors

From a psychological point of view, the decline of the traditional Zionist myth was necessary to ‘redeem’ the survivors. The Holocaust myth that emerged instead seems to have had a twofold outcome. It helped the survivors and their stories to get social accepted, without having to be ‘heroes’. In that way it reduced their emotional burden that made working through the Holocaust difficult. On the other side, it simplified the patterns of thinking about the Holocaust. These oversimplifications caused the
vicious circle that prevented youngsters of the third generation from ‘working through the Holocaust’ and facing it as their personal history. Instead, it became a tool in political discussion and exploited anew on expenses of those that suffered or ‘herited’ this suffering.

The survivor finds himself back in the tension between remembering and forgetting, fear of the past and hope for a different future. The contradiction between these responsibilities is hard to solve. ‘To remember’ means to remember both the cruelties and the ‘normal life’ before the Holocaust. Only together, it is the survivor’s contradictory past. ‘To live’ includes living with these difficult memories and nevertheless developing a perspective for life. Thus it requires an act of forgetting and repressing memory, especially the inhumane memory that was internalized. „The Holocaust charged survivors with two basic responsibilities: the first, explicitly expressed as an obligatory act, to remember, to preserve, and transmit this terrible experience from one generation to the next; the second, to overcome what happened and serve as living evidence that the Nazi attempt at annihilation had ultimately failed.“

3. Conclusion

When we look at the individual situation of Holocaust survivors, we find back in a very interesting way the social discussion about remembering and forgetting that we have recognized as the current state of mind. As the individuals have to overcome this vicious circle of an exploited remembrance, society needs to overcome the myth to be ready to deal with the future. That does not mean to forget totally, but partially – just not to relate everything back to it. However, as long as the Holocaust keeps its mythical dimension, it cannot be expected that society will ‘work through’ the Holocaust.

The positive effect the mythologization once had upon the survivors, causing their social acceptance, already lost its validity. Now it prevents the necessary confrontation with the past that’s needed to work through it. Because the Holocaust's mythologization caused the whole society to relate themselves to it, in a way perhaps everybody now has to go through this process and find a more moderate and balanced attitude to the past – and present.
For the families of survivors, interfamilial processes are probably the most important to deal with, although they surely depend on the outer circumstances. The way the survivors and their children confronted or did not confront the past is strongly influencing the grandchildren of the third generation. Every new generation but bears in it the hope that the working through process once will take place.

„We have discovered, that the old solution, based on the tension between fear and hope, can be transformed through open dialogue“, Bar-On states. Necessary on that way is the acceptance of both, fear and hope, as legitimize feelings. Could this account for society, too? Is there a place for hope besides all the business about remembrance?

With the clear win of Ehud Barak’s „One Israel“ in the 1999 elections it looks as if the hope for a different future would become able to overcome the view back in fear, the simple and only stressing of security need. One could agree on that peace is the best warranty for a safe future.

**Epilogue**

Back in Germany I’m thinking how and if my people ‘worked through’ the Holocaust. Inside the families it doesn’t look like as if much would have been revealed. As Bar-On states, within Germanys population therefore unsureness and a mixture of feelings can be found: on the one side deep commitment for the Jews’ safety, but also a feeling like relief realizing that ‘the Israelis do to the Palestinians what the Nazis did to the Jews’. Does the call for remembering the Holocaust for Germans perhaps bear similar ambiguities as in Israel? Which kind of identification with the past Germans would have to go through? Is it time to apply the „lessons“ in a more functionalistic way or will it for the children of the perpetrators always and ever stay a necessity to remember?
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