A Working to Make a Difference: The Personal and Pedagogical Stories of Holocaust Educators across the Globe

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Crossing Borders: Holocaust Education, Dialogue and (Self-) Reflection

by Daniel Gaede

Early Impressions, Early Influences

Born in 1956 in a small city north of Frankfurt/Main, I wasn't at first confronted with the Holocaust, but rather the "the war" and its aftermath. There were my mother's childhood memories of Berlin, her description of people who escaped burning Dresden, her inability to listen to sirens (which were tested every month all over the country during the post-war years) or to watch tanks passing by (we were living beside an American and German army base). Her father was born in St, Petersburg, and sent to Siberia during World War I because he was German. Later, in Berlin, he joined the SA (or the Sturmabteilungen or stormtroopers) and the Nazi party. This was prior to 1933 or the takeover of the Nazis. His reason: to fight the Bolsheviks. Or, at least, this was the reason given to me by others, but not himself for by this time he was dead. From the beginning of the Second World War he served in the German Army in the East, also serving as an interpreter interrogating Soviet POWs. After the war, he kept silent about his exact role and responsibilities in the war. When he did speak about the past, it was always in reference to Russia -- with sympathy for the people and in opposition to the communist system. He even accepted my conscientious objection (CO) to joining the military, which was unusual for a former soldier. I do not remember any racist comments or stereotypes made by him about foreigners or Jews, so I didn't draw connections between him and the Holocaust. Nevertheless, I don't know what his involvement was exactly. After 1945 it became difficult for him to continue his career as a construction engineer in the city administration, and he went to court in an effort to obtain his pre-war position. He was rejected first -- not because he had been suspected of having committed war crimes, but because it was suspected that he had reached his old position through political connections.
My father wouldn't talk much, but step-by-step we three children learned that his family lived under quite different conditions from my mother's: His father read Mein Kampf before 1933 and was sure that giving power to Hitler would end in war. According to Nazi laws, my grandmother was "half-Jewish," because her father had been a Jew who had converted to Christianity in Riga. It was suggested to my grandfather that he divorce his wife, but he didn't. I mention this because these and other memories embodied in the family probably were the roots of my search for ways out of violence.
In addition to my family background, tanks across the street from my home, "starfighter" military jets above us, and teachers in school, who had been soldiers and were still fighting against their memories, gave me a sense, even in the 60s and 70s, of living in a very prosperous country that was surrounded by dark, foggy clouds of the past. Frequently published photographs of the Birkenau main gate as a symbol for the mass murder of the Jews, and a constant flow of articles, books and films about Hitler and the Nazi crimes added to that picture.

In high school we saw films and talked about the rise and fall of the Weimar Republic, Hitler's rise to power, the Nuremberg laws, Reichskristallnacht, the Wannsee Conference, the

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its total destruction, and Auschwitz. We were provided with accurate information, but it was not linked to persons or places in the reachable surrounding.
The older teachers sometimes told us of their individual experiences as soldiers in Eastern Europe, occupied France or Africa, fragmented stories without direct connections and with the short message "Never again." The younger ones were eager to inform us about the whole history but in a very abstract manner -- far removed from the daily life of ordinary people and without any relation to the personal stories of our older teachers. Those, who could tell us about their victimization under the Nazi system, about mistrust, control and denunciation from neighbours, even relatives and friends, were not present. Instead, German refugees from the East had doubled the population in our home-town Wetzlar from 30,000 to 60,000, more than 5,000 American and German soldiers lived there with their families, and some ruins of houses destroyed during allied air raids were still visible -- but there were no hints to the fate of the small Jewish community which existed before the war. None of our teachers would talk about them, no one went with us to a memorial like Dachau or Bergen-Belsen; instead, those of us who were interested in finding out more were using contacts through city partnerships to visit France or to participate in international youth sport competitions which were arranged between West European cities to build a better understanding across borders within the European Union.

So, as one can ascertain, there was not really a lack of information, but what we learned was kept isolated, linkages to our personal surroundings were not established, and survivors were not invited to speak to us in school.
Because of the Cold War confrontation between East and West and the "iron curtain," which divided the whole of Europe and especially Germany and the city of Berlin into two parts, it was impossible to visit the countries in the East: East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. So, places like Auschwitz, Majdanek or Stutthof (even though they were maintained as places of remembrance in Poland from 1945 onward) couldn't easily be visited -- and if one managed to do so, it was more often done under the topic of East-West-tensions than to deal with the fate of the Jews under German occupation during the Second World War. Also, within "the West" there were still the fascist dictatorship of Franco in Spain, a military junta in Greece, a dictatorship in Portugal, and the war in Vietnam, which was described by the U.S. government as well as West German officials as a necessary fight against communism.

Within this setting, the majority of us youngsters in West Germany would wear parkas, jeans and long hair and talk about music -- like elsewhere in Great Britain or the United States. Only a minority was deeply interested in politics and would discuss the Vietnam war, the process of decolonization in the "Third World" or were shocked by the end of "moderate socialism" in Czechoslovakia (overrun by Soviet tanks in August 1968) or Allende's overthrow in Chile in 1973 by a military coup d'Etat under Pinochet (with support of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency). In a way, it was easier to identify with the leftist political refugees from Chile and to express "international solidarity" against the capitalist system than to find a common ground with the Jewish community in West Germany that was dealing with a totally different issue -- defending themselves against critics from Israel who were asking "How they could dare to live in the Diaspora and especially in "the country of the perpetrators." To defend their position, many Jews described West Germany as a well functioning democracy -- which was not the position of leftist youth protesting against former Nazis in high-ranking positions and so-called "emergency laws" which allowed the government to suspend basic democratic rights in self-defined situations of social turmoil.
To summarize, then, it was not really a lack of information about the Holocaust we faced, but rather its history was kept isolated. Linkages to our personal surroundings were not established. And over and above that, many of the youth were consumed with contemporary issues that faced us, our society and the world.
The first time I heard somebody talking personally about his imprisonment in a concentration camp I was seventeen years old. He was one of those who had been arrested, again, in the 50s in West Germany -- for still being a communist. He spoke at Giessen, a neighbouring city of my hometown, Wetzlar, in a meeting of the oldest pacifist organization in Germany

"Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft" (the German Peace Society, founded in 1892) about his time in the concentration camps. Communists and Social Democrats, he said, met each other as prisoners in the Nazi camps, after they had failed to fight effectively together against the Nazi rise to power in the 20s and early 30s. He alluded to the tortures he went through without going into detailed descriptions. His key point was not suffering, but the necessity to unite against militarism and racism in our own time. Consequently, he pleaded to us to stand up against the cold war arms race and to refuse to enter military service. Upon the completion of his talk, the audience sat in silence. I remember well my reaction: If he was able to oppose all these threats in the name of a more human world, why shouldn't I engage myself, under much less dangerous circumstances, too?
Conscientious objection (CO) as a basic right was incorporated in the West German constitution (Grundgesetz) even before a new army existed -- a result of the fact that military personnel and Nazi perpetrators said so often that they only acted on given orders ("His conscience was clean. He never used it," Stanislav Lec, a Polish author once wrote). With the clear perspective that we were going to be drafted after our schooling, many of us discussed, intensely, whether or not we should serve in the army. The majority decided to go without arguing, but for a minority it was clear that we couldn't blame Germans during the Nazi period for having been passive and supportive of the system if we were to act in the same manner. Conscientious objection was seen as a political act by us and the state authorities. The state forced those of us who wanted CO status to go through a series of proceedings, which not everyone passed -- and those who did not pass were denied CO status.

Dealing with the Nazi period, examining the cold war confrontation, along with the nuclear arms race, and theory and practice of non-violence became the subject of a long, intensive debate among many of us. Already in high school, two questions kept reappearing in my mind: First, "How is it possible to deal with 'the past' (up to this time, that phrase was always used as a synonym for the Nazi period and its crimes) in a constructive way; that is, what could this term 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung,' in its most positive connotation, come to mean?" Second, "Is non-violence a reliable way out of these ongoing circles of discrimination, abuse of power, violence, war?" Throughout this period, I continued to explore both of these concerns. Looking back, then, it's no surprise that my main thesis in high school involved research on the question as to how individuals from the Nazi period deal with personal responsibility, guilt and (acceptable?) attempts to establish a new life beyond the shadows of the past. So I chose one area of public life in Nazi Germany -- the arts -- to learn more about general aspirations of the Nazi policy, about the way how modern art and artists were thrown out of museums and positions and how three men reacted personally to the changes, from the 20s through the aftermath of 1945. One was Albert Speer, an architect who, ultimately, became responsible for the arms industry during the war and who confessed to being guilty at the Nuremberg trial. The second was the expressionist painter Emil Nolde, who was fond of Nazi positions and didn't speak up as Jewish colleagues were driven out their positions. He, himself, was eventually isolated by the Nazis, and banned from painting. After 1945 Nolde didn't reflect publicly about his own early relations with the Nazis or the subsequent terror, but rather focused solely on painting. The third person was Arno Breker, a sculptor, who worked many times for Hitler and supported the ideals of the new system. Later, in his autobiography, he insisted that he never was "political" and the fact that Hitler gave him so much work to do was "incidental," and was based on the fact that Hitler simply liked his style. After 1945 a long controversy ensued in regard to whether he should be presented in galleries again.

Working through art politics from the 20s to the 40s and reading through the biographies of these artists brought me to the conclusion that dealing with the past has to be done in a specific, personal way -- that an examination of the theoretical descriptions of the functioning of the system and its institutions would not be enough. This interest to reflect on the past in terms of personal responsibility versus a more theoretical approach greatly influenced my reading: Categorizations like Nazism as the culmination of capitalism or totalitarianism seemed to me like attempts to use one exclusive explanation to explain that period of history,

when, obviously, it consisted of all sorts of contradictions, including destructive and self-destructive aspirations.

Along with the study of literature, viewing films like "Holocaust" (which was shown on German television in winter 1979) or "Shoa" (a nine hour documentary presented in the 80's, mainly based on interviews and produced by Claude Lanzmann), and the stage play "Ghetto" by the Israeli author Joshua Sobol helped me greatly to realize the complex and desperate situation of Jews under the terror of the SS. As for "Ghetto," which was based on the testimonies of survivors and a diary of a librarian in the ghetto that was discovered, Sobol describes the different reactions of Jews facing the deadly threat of mass executions in the nearby forest of Ponar. While the "Judenrat" (the Jewish council installed by the SS to run the ghetto) tries to save the lives of Jewish actors and musicians by opening a theatre in the ghetto, young Jews try to escape from the ghetto in order to join Jewish partisans in the forests. In the play doctors desperately debate which of their diabetes patients shall be supported with their limited portions of insulin and who should be given up as lost, and the Jewish ghetto policemen even guard crews on their way to mass executions. This play caused very emotional controversies in Israel and Germany -- and without presenting clear-cut conclusions, it helped many to deeply reflect on the long-term consequences of a desperate Jewish community caught between annihilation, resistance and collaboration.
Parallel to this, I began reading about nonviolence and other related issues: Gandhi's life and actions in India and South Africa; the resistance in Prague in 1968; the Civil Rights movement in the United States (including Martin Luther King's beliefs and actions in fighting for racial justice as well as his voicing opposition against the Vietnam War); literature on the causes of war; documents such as the Pentagon Papers; and why the nuclear arms race produces in its own logical instability, including a growing risk that the whole planet might be blown up in nuclear warfare.

In the mid-1970's I needed to prepare myself for the procedure I had to win in order to be accepted as a conscientious objector. At the trial I was asked whether I also would refuse military service in Israel? I said that any answer would be pure speculation, so I returned the question and asked, "Why, after all that happened in the name of the German people should I not use the legal opportunity to pursue alternative service in the country where I was raised?" I was accepted, but it's quite an irony that the threatened position of the Jewish state after the Yom Kippur war 1973 was used by German authorities in these proceedings to attempt to prevent pacifism taking hold in West Germany, while the postwar armed forces in our country had great difficulties maintaining a clear distance from old militaristic and even Nazi traditions (to put it in a friendly way).
So questions concerning the practicability of nonviolence as a way to establish peace and justice, along with questions concerning German-Jewish relations, were growing like seeds on the described grounds and culminated in my decision to go to Israel in 1977. Up until that time I hadn't met Jews (at least none who would identify themselves as Jews).
In March 1977, I joined a volunteers group of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP). As part of the preparatory program for the planned 18-month service at different social projects in Israel, we went for ten days to Poland and spent a week at Auschwitz to gain at least some orientation as to what sort of images and memories this term might conjure up in survivors who mention Auschwitz and the other death camps. We arrived in darkness and after we had settled ourselves in the hotel (installed within the former SS main building beside the main gate of Auschwitz 1), I went out, alone, to discover for myself where we were. It was cold, wet, foggy and dark, no light, no sounds, no signs of modern life such as passing cars or street signs or billboards. All of a sudden, out of the dusk, appeared a watch tower and pillars with intact barbed wire. It was eerie and unnerving.
The next morning we visited former Auschwitz 1, the following day Birkenau. This endless land-scape of fences and chimneys, the ruins of blown up gas chambers and the crematorium, the little lake with black ashes and parts of white human bones in it silenced us.

It was Tadeusz Szymanski, a former prisoner of Auschwitz, who broke the silence by urging us to ask about everything we might be insecure about. "Because," he said "Back home you will face deniers of the mass killing and then you will have to speak up, and you need to be prepared for such discussions." In fact, that is exactly what happened just after we returned to Hanover at a gathering of the right wing "National Democratic Party," where pamphlets entitled ´The Lie of Auschwitz´ were on sale. But Tadeusz Szymanski had another request as well: "I know," he said, "that in Israel many Jews believe that there's no memorial stone at Birkenau written in Yiddish or Hebrew," and then he showed us the stones. "Please inform the Israelis that we do commemorate the Jewish victims." At that time there were no diplomatic connections between Poland and Israel; what an irony, it was us, with West German passports, who could easily travel to both countries and function as ambassadors between these victims of the German perpetrators.
Later, at Yad Vashem, Israel's main memorial and research center on the Holocaust, I mentioned these memorial stones. "Yes, we know about it," said one staff member. "But did this man also mention that beside the main entrance to Auschwitz 1 a memorial plaque defines Auschwitz as 'the place of martyrdom of the Polish people?'" He hadn't, and thus I understood that we were in the midst of a highly sensitive controversy, where aside from compassion, precise information was direly needed.
With that experience in mind I started to read and absorb as much information as possible about Auschwitz, the Holocaust and related issues as I possibly could -- so that I would be better prepared for discussions with survivors, and, even more, with those who would try to deny the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes.

Israel

I had to decide in which project I would prefer to work on while in Israel, and once there I decided to volunteer a half a day at Yad Vashem, and the other half of the time in a house for blind and multiple handicapped children in Jerusalem.

My first task was to sort photographs sent to Yad Vashem: corpses, open mass graves, and copies from copies from photos taken from liberated camps. In many cases, the description of and/or on the photo was unclear or even false, so I had to figure out whether, for example, the photos of the corpses were from Bergen Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau or another camp. After a week I started to see patterns of skulls in anything I looked at, and I found it necessary to change jobs. As a result, I went down to the archives, where I would no longer work alone but with others and with whom I could talk about the testimonies I was reading.
Living also in a surrounding where traumatic memories of the Holocaust had such a great impact on so many discussions about present conflicts strengthened my sense that without a greater knowledge about the past I would never be able "to catch the rope" of understanding and help to bring about a possible reconciliation between Germans and Israelis. As we German volunteers were working mostly in social projects with marginalized people (such as handicapped children or in old peoples' homes), we experienced numerous stories which one would not find in a tourist guide book. Storytelling really became a tool of transmission, in the most authentic and personal of ways, of even the most complicated issues, and they often countered and contradicted the initial prejudices and judgments we were confronted with about Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, Germans etc. This was especially important for me because my interest in the fate of Jews in Europe and in the Shoa was predicated on getting to know people and learning about and from their experiences in a face-to-face manner.

In 1977, Yad Vashem didn't have resources for restoration work with testimonies that were written on fragile papers, thus the volunteer work of Käthe Wiener, a retired bookbinder with a German-Jewish background, resulted in the effort to save these important documents. As I began to work with Ms Wiener in support of her effort, I had the impression that we needed to rush through this vast collection of reports as fast as possible so that historians could use it for their research. But Ms Wiener stopped me, and said: "We will never succeed within our limited capacities to restore all these papers, so you better read instead of binding these

papers only." And so I did, reading the reports of numerous survivors. One in particular keeps reappearing in my mind -- it was by a woman who described the mass killing in several camps and how she slipped through and survived, and how, in early summer 1945, she travelled by train through Germany with other liberated camp inmates. Quite often the train had to halt, once just beside another train overcrowded with wounded German soldiers. It was obvious to her that they were terribly hungry, and so, this woman decided, spontaneously, to pass some bread of her own to them. Others in her compartment were shocked: "How can you do that?" they asked. She replied, "They are hungry." I don't remember whether I spoke with Ms Wiener about this incident or not. Both of us carefully chose our words in order not to harm the other with superficial judgments, and silence was part of that intensive dialogue. I never asked her about her fate during the Nazi years, even though I was very curious about it. But she chose not talk about it and I didn't want to push her into memories not knowing where they would lead her. Our common and voluntary effort to preserve the testimonies became a passable bridge for us and the foundation of deep respect. The constant work at Yad Vashem for that half year, the contents of the documents, the way in which we dealt with them and one another, and the opportunity to observe visitors and to reflect how people deal with the past in Israel, Germany and Poland all combined to a form a strand in my thinking about the active role of the past in our current thinking, conflicts and relationships.

Between spring 1977 and summer 1978, then, I worked in a kibbutz, at Yad Vashem, in a Jewish religious house for multiple handicapped children in Jerusalem, and in a French/Christian-Arabic hospital in Nazareth. It was the time of Menachem Begin's election, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the genesis of Shalom Achshaw (Peace Now) and bloody bombings -- and it all was reflected in highly controversial debates, which (no surprise) included many contradictory lessons of the past, even back to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. As a young German, non-Jewish, non-Palestinian, pacifist, Christian, I had to deal with many and varied reactions to what I was seeing and experiencing. As my ARSP volunteer group studied Hebrew in a kibbutz, we also worked various jobs. As for me, I worked in a little ceramics factory on the kibbutz. One day Mario, who glazed the pottery, told me that he had to leave for three days for military training, and that, in the meantime, I should take over his work. Back home in Germany I was once attacked for my plans to go to Israel: "Your naive voluntary service is simply supporting the Israeli oppression of Palestinians, because, with your work, you are compensating for those who go and serve as soldiers in the occupied territories!" In fact, I didn't refuse the military service in Germany in order to replace soldiers in Israel their civilian jobs, and I mentioned this Mario, leaving the decision about who would do the glazing up to him. We liked each other and so we spent half a night debating perspectives regarding the value of pacifism as it related to the Middle East conflict. During our discussion he related the story about how, during the Yom Kippur War, the commander of his unit, who was driving in front of him, entered into an Egyptian city bareheaded, not wearing his helmet to signal that he would prefer talking to shooting -- and a sniper killed him with a shot into his head. Mario also spoke about his dream to travel around the Middle East through all the neighbouring Arabic countries to find out what the people really think about Israel. And I could tell him at least a little bit about Jordan as I'd lived there for several months in 1975. In the end I was ready to do the work and he was ready to postpone the glazing until his return, but the most important part for us was our intensive dialogue.

At Keren Or, a Jewish religious house for handicapped children, I volunteered together with young orthodox Jewish women who didn't serve in the army, because they would have been unable there to fulfill all the religious laws. So, we had something in common, even though our objection was based on radically different reasons. Over time, our daily routine gave us a good opportunity to discuss many issues and share crucial questions. They told me that their parents had come to Israel from Arabic countries, prodded by Israeli agents who told them that they would not have any future as a Jewish minority in an Arabic country. One of the girls was raised in the orthodox town of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv, and now felt deeply moved

that she was living in Jerusalem and could go to the Western (or Wailing) Wall whenever she wanted.

"See", she said once as we were on the way to Damascus Gate in the Old City, "this is the place of my ancestors, it's really Jewish!" "This is Palestine!" a young Palestinian yelled at her, who had, by chance, overheard us talking. My companion turned silent, and the man disappeared into the crowds.
Some months later I started to work at the French/Arabic Hospital in Nazareth, and the Christian Palestinian I was supposed to work with greeted me right in the beginning with the comment "Ah, you are from Germany? Yes, Hitler, he should have killed all the Jews!" I decided to stay, to support him in his work but to question his position during our breaks. I spoke with him about my work at the Yad Vashem archives, but it was not easy; some of his relatives were killed by Israeli air raids in Southern Lebanon. As an aside, I should note that last year, during a tour for two Israeli school groups, one from Haifa and one from Nazareth that I was giving at Buchenwald, where I now work, was the granddaughter of that man I worked with at the "Hospital François." When we discovered this personal connection it helped a lot to transform the scepticism of the Arabic participants into open-minded sympathy and trust.

Anyhow, these talks were full of emotions and tensions, and this taught me the necessity of careful listening. I discovered that the personal experience of those with whom I spoke were intermingled with the centuries-long history of the people, religions, cultures, ideologies, fanaticism, prejudice -- and surprises. As I left Yad Vashem to do my volunteer service at the "Hospital Français" in Nazareth, I expected that, in reaction to my decision to work there, one of the Yad Vashem staff members I worked with, an Austrian Jew, would throw me out of his office. Instead of accusing me of not having learned my lesson that I as a German have to focus on the Holocaust and German-Jewish themes, he said: "Oh, that's interesting. Have a seat! You should meet the director of the primary school in Nazareth. He and I, for nights back in 1966 in Cyprus, discussed the Israeli-Arab conflict. We've lost contact, but through you it could be established again." This was the last thing I expected to happen.

In April 1978, all the German volunteers of ARSP went with Joseph Abileah, a Jewish pacifist from Haifa, to a meeting with the vice mayor of Nablus on the West Bank, to hear directly how Palestinians would describe life under occupation. An hour after our discussion had concluded Abileah left to return Haifa. Along with my brother and others, I boarded our bus in order to return to Jerusalem. It was then that a young Palestinian threw a self-made bomb into the bus, killing my brother Christoph and Susanne Zahn from my group. Another four volunteers were severely wounded. I lost my eyesight, and was taken to a military hospital in Tel Aviv, where, after two months in the darkness, Israeli specialists saved my right eye. One of the older nurses who helped me a lot to recover had survived Au-schwitz; Simha Holz-berg, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, took care of us like he did all wounded soldiers and civilians alike. As he told me later, it was a serious challenge for him to deal with us as victims -- until that time he tried to avoid contacts with Germans, which normally would represent the perpetrators' side. He also told me that at towards the end of the war he was imprisoned in a small camp in Southern Germany, in fact, beside the little town, where Susanne Zahn came from. He and the other prisoners had to clear up bombed areas in Stuttgart. Due to untreated wounds, he was fighting with blood poisoning. One day, a young woman persuaded one SS-guard to let him step out of the prisoners' lines. She cleaned the wounds, bandaged them and gave him to eat. "She saved my life, and until today I don't know why or who she is," Simha told me. Two days before Nablus, Susanne Zahn had decided to quit the tour; but among others, I convinced her to stay and promised to take her for a falafel back in Jerusalem if she remained with us until the end. It was not to be.

Only a few days later, I was sitting together with other severely hurt victims of various bomb attacks at the Tel Aviv Hilton instead, having been invited by Simha Holzberg. Coincidence? Yes, like so many others at that time; which intermingled times, locations and people. Without searching for a deeper meaning in an attempt to explain the causes and

consequences, I just noticed them, like little footnotes contradicting scientific and religious attempts to explain reality in all its dimensions. During that period, someone gave me the book Rediscovered Light by Jaques Lusseyran. As a schoolboy, Lusseyran lost his eyesight through an accident in pre-war France, later joined the Resistance movement during the German occupation, was denounced, arrested and deported to Buchenwald, where he survived even as a blind prisoner. My friend's intention was to encourage me through this literature to find my way even with blind eyes, so my sister read it to me and it helped a lot. At that time, the concentration camp that was mentioned in the story, Buchenwald, had no landmark on my mind map. Located in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), it was a greater mental distance from West Germany than Israel, and I, of course, had no idea that one day I would work there. I mention these connections because the deepening of understanding permeates all sorts of borderlines, and at the same time those we seem to be close to (relatives, neighbors, old friends) do not necessarily understand us. So, the usual distinction of "us" and "them" needs to be questioned. When we speak of others, do we refer to their culture, nationality, mentality, profession, specific experiences they've had or interests they hold? And within what circumstances? All of us play many different social roles, and they constantly change in relation to the situations in which we find ourselves. It sounds so simple and almost pointless to comment on, but it¥s not always acknowledged that general categories like "victim," "perpetrator," and "bystander" and stereotypes of national or ethnic groups feed a longing for an easy drive through the often irritating landscape of humanity -- and many judgmental road signs within that system are seen as final descriptors and judgments about some of us.

In numerous interviews of Holocaust survivors, the interviewees are often looked at only in terms of their time in concentration camps. Their different ways of life afterwards, more than a half century after the events, is rarely ever mentioned. Without reflection, the survivor-interviewees are again reduced to the role designated to them by the Nazis -- with another connotation, but still isolating them from "normal life," where they should be allowed to fill all sorts of social roles -- which, in fact, constitutes reality.
One example of such complicated situations over fixed roles and people who don't fit in impacted me in 1981. Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP) celebrated its 20th anniversary of voluntary work in Israel. Back in 1961 the Eichmann trial, understandably, evoked many horrific memories, and initially it was unclear whether the first group of volunteers could really start at that time. But then, a kibbutz agreed that these young Germans could stay with them, and the program was under way. Twenty years later the municipality of Jerusalem invited ARSP to organize her ceremony exactly in the same hall which served as Eichmann's courtroom. Along the corridors, an ARSP-exhibit provided information about the volunteers' work over the last two decades, but to my dismay, I couldn't find any hint to the Nablus bombing. I asked the people in charge why they didn't mention a word about this event. They stated that they felt ashamed for not doing so, but then told me that they didn't want the Israeli audience to get the impression that Germans now wanted to be seen as victims ("Look, we have suffered, too!") Therefore, they decided not to provide a single word about the incident at Nablus in April 1978. I was really shocked about this attempt to cover "unfitting" realities with silence, especially because of the nature of the crucial debates we went through at that time. For example, on the one hand, some Jewish Israelis were saying: "We told you before that you shouldn't talk to terrorists, but you preferred not to listen." On the other hand, Palestinians offered regret that we were hit, but told us then: "As long as you provide support, through your volunteer work in Israel, the continuous occupation of Palestinian territory, you are an enemy like the Israeli army itself." One Jewish Israeli journalist asked us whether the Nazis had been ever to Nablus, and if not, why we did we have to go there. In essence he was asking us why we, young Germans committed to the German-Jewish history, had to go to Nablus -- in his perspective young Germans should only be dealing with the Shoah and not interfere in the actual Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In light of such attitudes, we really had to explore with ourselves and others whether -- and if so, why -- we should continue our efforts in Israel.

All these experiences in exploring causes of conflict and how people described their positions in conflicts became essential for me in the coming years of peace and conflict studies at Berlin and Hamburg.

University Years

The driving force throughout my studies at the Free University in Berlin and later at the University of Hamburg were, again, focused on concrete, specific questions: "How can I, through academic study, build upon my personal interests and experiences in the field of peace research, conflict resolution, history and political science?" "How can I best examine and build upon my conclusions in regarding power struggles and nonviolence?" "How can remembrance help to overcome actual conflicts - instead of (ab-)using it as ammunition for own interests?"

In a way, I had a perfect network around me to find some answers to these questions. In addition to being at the university, I kept in contact with Action Reconciliation Service for Peace and that combination resulted, at one and the same time, in dealing with the past as well as contemporary debates of the international peace movement. Among the many other issues and projects I was involved with at that time were the continuous (and in the end successful) attempts to build an international youth meeting center between Auschwitz and Oswiecim; the controversy over the mini-series "Holocaust" that appeared on German television in 1979; the organization of huge demonstrations for nuclear disarmament between 1981 and 1986 (including contacts with the American peace movement in 1982 and participation at the June 10 disarmament rally at Central Park in New York City); a visit to Minsk and the war memorial Chatyn in 1983; the memorial for hundreds of burned villages in White Russia; participation at a two-week seminar in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, in 1983, on the meaning, forms and uses of nonviolence with people who had worked with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and had specially come in from areas of actual conflict like the Middle East and the Philippines in order to attend the meeting; and a tour through Israel, the Gaza strip, the West Bank (including, Nablus, again), Jordan, and Syria with eight participants from Great Britain, the Netherlands and West Germany weeks before the first Intifada started in fall 1987. I've mentioned this list because it includes, again, quite a number of crossed borderlines, geographical and mental ones that I and others have crossed, time and again. After eleven years of studies and engagement inside and out side the university, I tried to answer the initial questions -- all of which were mentioned earlier herein -- in my final thesis at the university: "Chances of International Peacework, Exemplified by the West German Peace Movement and its Connection to the Middle East Conflict 1981 - 1988."

Influential "Teachers" I've Had Along My Journey to Working in the Field of Holocaust Education

I've had innumerable "teachers" and learning experiences that have undoubtedly influenced my work in the field of Holocaust education, especially as it pertains to my work at the Buchenwald Memorial. I will succinctly comment on a few of the more influential "teachers" and experiences herein.

My first questions related to the consequences of total obedience came up in a high school weekend workshop -- I was fifteen at the time -- where we saw and discussed the film "Abraham." It presented the now famous Milgram Experiment in which Stanley Milgram, a professor at Yale University, conducted a series of experiments to test the obedience of people when given directions by a figure of authority. More specifically, the participants, all average citizens, were instructed to deliver a shock to an individual when the latter provided an incorrect answer to a question. Some of the participants actually ended up "administering" shocks (which they thought they were really administering, but in reality the shock mechanism was inoperative) that believed could have resulted in serious bodily injury, and, in certain cases, death. It shocked me deeply to witness that a strong belief in (scientific) authorities was a key reason for the readiness of so many participants in the test to continue to (seemingly) punish others with pain -- and as mentioned, to the point of death. The questions we pondered and wrestled with were: What would enable people to resist, to break the rules for the sake of human respect and dignity?" and "How do you prevent certain behaviors, especially those which seem to be a part of human nature?" We had no answers, which was quite uncomfortable; and it took years, before, for example, Eva Fogelman, (who had worked together with Stanley Milgram) published some answers in Conscience & Courage. Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust. (New York: Anchor, 1994.)

At about the same time, I studied books written by Joseph Wulf about music and art as it related to politics in Nazi Germany, and learned that the first steps of racial and antisemitic segregation had already taken place before 1933. And so that, too, was part of my early education. At Auschwitz and Birkenau I met the formerly mentioned Tadeusz Szymanski, a Polish survivor, who was arrested by the Nazis for being a Boy Scout leader. According to the perspective of the Nazis, such individuals were potential organizers of resistance. His personal and intense relationship with us, all young people from Germany, astounded us for his kindness -- versus a bitter accusation against all Germans -- was not a reaction we at all expected.

As I also mentioned earlier, at the archives of Yad Vashem, Käthe Wiener, originally from Berlin, taught me to read carefully the reports of survivors, and that was vastly important to my education. Also at Yad Vashem, I came in contact with Eva Hermann, a German Quaker woman, as she was planting a tree along the "The Avenue of the Righteous." She and her husband had helped Jews in Mannheim to escape from Germany. At that little ceremony in Yad Vashem she said that she could accept this honor only in the name of all the others, who are forgotten today, but had helped Jews even more courageously than she and her husband had. By chance, a German tourist group had come across this ceremony, totally unprepared for such a speech -- and left in silence, deeply impressed. Eva Hermann and I kept in contact, and during my time in Yad Vashem it was one of my tasks to water her little tree.

Joseph Walk, a German Jewish rabbi from Breslau, confronted us, the German volunteers of Action Reconciliation service for peace, with a question from Simon Wiesenthal's book, The Sunflower: that is, whether forgiving guilt in the name of the victims is acceptable or not and what that means for reconciliation between Jews and Germans. He forced us to come up with our own positions instead of giving us a morally acceptable answer.

Denise Salama, a Coptic midwife from Egypt, running the nursery school at the French hospital in Nazareth, taught me to see mistrust and conflict as something good that can be transformed into its opposite. Reuven Moskovitz, born in Rumania, guided us through Israel and showed us that century old historical and religious issues can be very vital in helping to explain the background of many ongoing conflicts in the country. As a co-founder of the

Jewish-Palestinian settlement Neve Shalom/Wahat as Salaam (Oasis of Peace), he availed us of other positions than just his own. I also learned from him that a good sense of humor is an important "weapon" against fanaticism.

After they had heard on radio news that young Germans had become victims of a bomb attack in Nablus, Gustel and Heinz Moses, who lived in Ramat Gan, came to visit us at the Tel Hashomer Hospital and offered their help. They had originally come to Israel from Germany. Later I learned that they managed to collect the paintings of Gustel's cousin Felix Nussbaum and convinced the city representatives of his place of birth, Osnabr|ck (in north-west Germany), to build a museum with a permanent exhibition of his work. Nussbaum was denounced in 1944 as he tried to hide with his wife in occupied Belgium. Both were killed in Auschwitz. In a unique way, Gustel and Heinz Moses provided me with an example that the consequences of the Holocaust can be delineated in many different ways, including an art museum where such paintings provided a certain access to the life of assimilated Jews in a German city and spoke to how the Jewish people and their cultural setting was destroyed by the Nazis.

From Bruno Bettelheim I learned that people react, after the fact, to extreme situations (e.g., in a concentration camp) in totally different ways: Some try to forget and lead a normal life again, while others never regain trust in other human beings. Only a very few, he argues, are able to force themselves to sift through and deeply reflect upon their traumatic experiences in order to ascertain what happened and why. I would add, that there is also the attempt to deal with such experiences in terms of a self-contained, religious or ideological stance.
Coming from a completely different background, Tsutomu Kijima crossed my way as he was marching for disarmament from Stockholm to Athens in 1986 -- sometimes all alone. He was one of the Buddhist monks from the Japanese order Nipponzan Myohoji, which were present at many anti-nuclear peace rallies across the globe during which they would drum and sing. He encouraged me to be patient, and to do what I see as an obligation without waiting for support from others or resorting to the use of tactics or words to convince others: "Be an example and it will affect the others -- or not." In fact, I'm not in search of the perfect method to teach about the Nazi crimes to a maximum number of visitors in a minimal amount of time; instead, I try to make people aware of themselves and give them space for value-oriented self-reflection.
I should also note that my participation in an "Envisioning the Future" workshop designed by Warren Ziegler from Denver, Colorado, helped me, to a great extent, leave behind vague hopes and to develop concrete, specific pictures of a future society where people would have the skills to deal with conflicts without weapons.
I also need to mention a largely unknown film entitled "People Power" (USA, 1989, 70 minutes), which was produced by the journalist and former Israeli elite soldier Ilan Zvi, who initially -- like others of his generation -- believed that as a consequence of the Holocaust a nation had to be strong and military well equipped. So, Che Guevara was the guiding figure instead of Martin Luther King. That was also the position of Palestinians in the occupied territories, as he noticed. Doubts arose in his mind as he was confronted with the brutal terror of revolutionaries in Latin America against civilians. The film therefore questions the use of violence and then compares civil disobedience in Chile, the Philippines, and the West Bank and Gaza strip at the end of the 1980's. This collection of interviews from across the globe had a profound impact on my thinking in regard to the need to practice nonviolence and protect human rights. Some might argue that this list of "teachers" goes far beyond dealing with the Holocaust and education -- in fact, this broad perspective has provided me with the necessary insights I need today to guide people, with extremely varied backgrounds, during their visits at Buchenwald. Dialogue and (self-)reflection are key instruments of my work. The core of these thoughts appear, in condensed form, in a photo of graffiti on a wall that I discovered in a book on the civil rights movements in the United States:

Reporter: Mr. Gandhi, what do you think about Western Civilization?
Mr. Gandhi: I think it would be a good idea!

Thus, as one can ascertain from the above, unlike many Holocaust educators, I didn't begin by studying Raul Hilberg or Elie Wiesel, and not even Anne Frank¥s diary. As I've attempted to show, I was much more influenced by actual survivors and rescuers I've had contact with, along with my research on personal responsibility (focusing on such individuals of Albert Speer, Emil Nolde and Arno Breker). The greatest influences, by far, have been my many personal discussions in Germany and elsewhere (in most cases outside the university) with individuals who actually experienced the Holocaust. Over and above this, I read a number of small books printed only in German (some of which were published in very small numbers).

My Main Focus in Regard to Holocaust Education

Before I began my work at the Buchenwald Memorial site, I had worked in a small association for peace education in southern Germany and also participated in an Austrian training program for staff members of international peace-keeping missions. To many, I'm sure, such a background possibly suggested that I didn't have the expertise to work in one of the most influential memorial sites in Germany. In fact, I was afraid to be asked for my list of publications dealing with the Holocaust and the history of concentration camps for I didn't have any. But, instead, during the interview I was asked whether I could present any vision for the Buchenwald memorial site as it looked 50 years into the future. By chance, as I previously mentioned, I had participated in "Imaging the Future" workshops and was also trained by Warrren Ziegler to facilitate such week-long workshops, so I offered to use this set of brainstorming, consequence mapping and planning tools to answer such a question. Later, we did just that in the educational department in order to ascertain what we should do to further develop the educative component of the memorial site at Buchenwald.

After talks with different staff members and the director, Dr. Volkhard Knigge, I had the impression that working at the memorial would also give me many opportunities to use my knowledge and skills in a institution which was in the middle of a process of redefining its goals and reorganizing the whole infrastructure. In other words, it was a unique chance to participate in the transformation process in East Germany at a site where former ways of dealing with the past were not simply wiped out but reshaped.
This meant developing a new structure for the educational department and developing new guidelines. Beside incorporating new concepts into our guided tours, which were booked primarily by school classes, and our multi-day programs, we needed to design new one-day programs. We also decided to develop a new range of materials related to themes like "Work," "The SS," "Jews in Buchenwald,", "Children in the Camp," "Relations Between Buchenwald and the City of Weimar," and "Resistance." Furthermore, we chose to develop new ways to present the different layers of history (the concentration camp 1937-1945, the Soviet internment camp, 1945-1950, the establishment of the memorial site 1950-1961) of the camp in an understandable manner.
Since 1996 I have served as the Buchenwald Memorial's Director of Education. In that capacity, I have attempted to discover ways as to how a dialogic form of education can be established versus the more traditional mode where a teacher simply conducts a monologue, or, at best, a simple recitation which involves the teacher positing a question and the "student" giving a short answer. This was done in collaboration with my colleagues, who had worked at the memorial site when it was under the direction of the German Democratic Republik. More specifically, they gave up their former attempt to pass on to all visitors and all generations a "clear-cut history" about the heroic resistance of political prisoners, and the imperialistic, capitalistic background of fascism -- and therefore, the need to constantly fight against the capitalist system in the West. The story they had told was one-sided and not open for critical questions. Any such questioning had been perceived as attacks against the "lessons of the past," and therefore against the GDR itself.

After 1990, programs were established that allowed for individual research and reflection. Some may argue that access to the history of Buchenwald within a short visit of two or three

hours is impossible, but my experience says otherwise: It's less about the time involved, and more about the way in how we address visitors. During my alternative service at the Red Cross we rushed patients to hospitals with a flashing light, and it taught me that beside providing medical assistance, an exchange on existential questions was possible even during the short span of minutes -- and this was especially true, I found, when it was between strangers, who would not necessarily see each other again. My thinking is that the same thing can take place in a location such as the Buchenwald memorial.
The ongoing dialogue, the give and take of historical information and personal experiences by everyone involved (including the visitors themselves) adds up to a constant flow of exchange and transforms the visit to Buchenwald into a vital place for people of all backgrounds. What is required for this, of course, are reliable facts, insight and sensitivity. To insure that these attributes are reflected in our work is one of my duties.
My first attempts to present the complex history of Buchenwald and its relation to the Holocaust in a chronological manner within a guided tour of 90 minutes mostly ended in a total confusion of the visitors. So today I start with the impressions of the visitors, during which they use all of their senses.

At one and the same time, I also talk about memory construction. At Buchenwald it becomes so obvious that memory is a process of selection, composition, neglect, and self definition designed by individuals, groups, societies and states. This is visible, and made concrete, for example, in rituals, such as the use of flowers, stones, texts and flags. Thus, when students from Israel and Germany are on an exchange program to Buchenwald, the Israelis will normally sing its national anthem, but the Germans never do so. So, if remembrance is to support deeper understanding, the dialogue about these differences is absolutely essential; therefore, we don't offer ready-made rituals, instead, we urge the teachers to think about an acceptable framework for their own groups before they arrive. Many teachers and others who accompany groups seem surprised that they are asked about their intentions regarding their visit and/or that their insights are solicited versus simply receiving a menu of ready-made answers for their students. The point is, we want to accommodate the needs of each group, and thus a ready-made tour and talk is not of interest to us.

To assist groups in their visit, we just published a voluminous booklet that deals with the history of the Buchenwald concentration camp. It is specifically for use by teachers to prepare their students for a visit to Buchenwald. It includes excerpts written by survivors, articles, and a description of group work conditions at Buchenwald. These 140 pages were designed in cooperation with the Thueringen teacher training center. Referring to the role of Buchenwald in the Holocaust, the booklet includes, for example, information about the prisoners taken in as Jews. Here, we really want to leave the death determining categories of the SS (red triangle = a political prisoner, green = a criminal, yellow = a Jew), and make people aware of the fact that we really need to ask how somebody called and stamped by the Nazis "a Jew" would have described him/herself: Would it be as: A believing orthodox or reformed Jew? A member of the Protestant Church converted from Judaism? A German/French/Russian patriot and decorated soldier of W W I with a Jewish cultural background? A Bundist? A Zionist? First of all a boxer, musician or another profession? Or someone who was born of a Jewish mother and, thus, how does he/she describe him/herself? What we wish to do is avoid thinking in terms of clichés, which are not at all helpful.

For me, conducting Holocaust education means that it is imperative that one is sincere about intended aims and underlying interests of both the educator and those who wish to learn about the Holocaust, e.g., the sociological roles we all "wear" in terms of culture, politics, experiences and expectations. So, if I have something to contribute to the further development of Holocaust education, it's the reminder that such conditions were unique to each person who experienced this history as well as for those who confront this history today. Each comes with his/her own story, background, influences, interests, and concerns -- and that, of course, is equally true for the student in the classroom as well as those who visit

memorial sites such as Buchenwald. I believe that it is absolutely essential to always keep that in mind.
Some examples shall illustrate the significance of this point, and the complexity of addressing such concerns. What I mean, is that different people come to Buchenwald and at this history with vastly different backgrounds and thus perspectives. For example, a journalist of the number two daily newspaper in China had to write an article about the Holocaust and how Germans deal with guilt and responsibility -- the article was meant to push forward Japanese acknowledgment of war crimes in occupied China.
On a different note, a sixteen year old girl from Frankfurt/Main asked the following question during a seminar: "Why do Germans have to constantly focus on the Holocaust and Jews?" Curious about the nature of her question, we asked her why she was participating in a week-long project at Buchenwald. She replied that she was of Armenian origin and wanted to know how she could talk with Turkish classmates about the Ottoman genocide of the Armenians between 1915 and 1919. So, that was very important for us to know.

In another case, Zubin Mehta, conductor of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, made a visit with all of his musicians, and in my talk I focused primarily on the fate of prisoners labeled as Jews. But then Mehta asked a series of questions about an Italian princess, Mafalda (she was held as a hostage and later killed in Buchenwald), as he had produced operas with her son and knew her sister well. By chance, it was exactly the 55th anniversary of her death.
And finally, a group of German and Israeli students prepared a common visit. During a personal introduction, one of the Israeli interpreters and I learned that our paths had crossed twenty-three years earlier. He was born and raised in West Germany, had left for Israel in the 70s, and was ordered in April 1978 to a military base beside Nablus. His unit was responsible for the round up of Palestinians after the bomb attack against our bus in Nablus which had killed my brother and another volunteer. We both mentioned this background to the group and probably influenced deeply the attitudes of the participants to each other: We were no longer only "the interpreter" and "the representative of Buchenwald," and it made it easier to encourage the participants to question the categories of "Germans," "Israelis," "grandsons/-daughters of the perpetrators or the victims" for the sake of an intensive dialogue and better understanding.

As far as I am concerned, the "personal factor" in Holocaust education is essential for all of us and our efforts, but more often than not, it is often acknowledged only in reference to survivors -- despite the fact that more than half a century has passed since the Holocaust and dramatic changes have taken place worldwide.
On another note, we are also currently preparing a leaflet with a historical abstract and a map of Buchenwald that will be printed in Arabic (actually the ninth language we now have materials available in) in order to make sure that Arabic-speaking youth from Israel, the Gaza strip and West Bank have a chance to receive and use information developed by us. We are also in the process of establishing more teacher training courses, ones where we can introduce our method of presenting our "philosophy of dialogue and (self-)reflection" about the Holocaust. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs is very much interested in this project, and so we are probably going to be asked to fulfill more expectations than we are really capable of.
So, I started to work at the memorial in 1995, in the midst of debates about changes, clashes between old and new intentions. Today the Buchenwald Memorial has a new historical exhibition on the concentration camp (opened in 1995), and an art exhibition on the same theme (opened in 1998). The permanent exhibition on the Buchenwald Memorial itself (opened in 1999) offers the chance to reflect on the history of remembrance. Furthermore, parts of the grounds, which are 3.5 kilometers in total, have also been cleared, dug out, sign-posted and made accessible for the first time.

Obstacles Faced in My Work as a Holocaust Educator

A major problem that we face at the Buchenwald Memorial is that resentment is often voiced by those visitors who come with the expectation that they are going to see shrunken heads of prisoners in the exhibition, rebuilt barracks, or guided tours which simply corroborate their single-minded perspectives. Some reject the distinction and differentiations we make, and denounce them as "too complicated." "'Never again!' This is the message you should spread, instead of minimizing the horrors by leaving out the brutal stories about Ilse Koch, the witch of Buchenwald!" one teacher snapped at me. It happens more and more often, and probably it is due to the fact that violence fascinates. But our position is that presenting horrifying reports or pictures does not necessarily encourage or nurture deeper insight or compassion. But, then again, honestly speaking, not all visitors are looking for that. A question that is constantly raised by students after they are confronted with the cleared camp ground is: Why don't you rebuild the barracks at the former camp site? Today, I tell them that I realize that many students in the group may be disappointed with what they've seen (or not seen), and then I ask them, "How far should we go with a reconstruction? Should there barracks with furniture in it, plates and spoons on the table, and possibly puppets? And what about the stink? And how should we present the constant fear and threatened lives? I conclude with the confession that we will never compete with "Schindler's List" or other films.

When there's time, I won't posit these questions on the empty former mustering ground, but take the students down to the only rebuilt wooden barrack, which has no exhibition or furniture inside and ask them for their suggestions in regard to how we should out-fit the building. No one has ever suggested that we should furnish the whole barrack, but rather simply place beds and tables in one room (without any puppets!). In the next room they suggest that we should place a small exhibition with explanatory texts and documents. Finally, many have suggested that the next room should be kept as it was found: with piles of the remains of leather shoes, with metal pieces like self-made combs -- all the items which belonged to prisoners and were found at the dump site of the camp. No glass window divides the spectator from these relics, and it was not planned as an exhibit. Indeed, everyone has insisted that we keep these piles as they are: a powerful and impressive direct confrontation with hints to the daily routine of the prisoners -- their confrontation with life and death.
So, it is our sense that empty rooms provide space for imagination, and it's my experience that referring directly to questions of representation is more helpful than the attempt to overcome the gap between us and the past with dramatic stories: Buchenwald is not a stage, and we aren't actors.

My Perceptions of the Field of Holocaust Education

When teaching about the Holocaust, I think it is important for teachers and students to realize that Jewish life and history means more than solely a long chain of endless catastrophes (Christian anti-Judaism in the Middle Ages, antisemitism in Europe during the 19th and 20th century, the Holocaust in the mid-20th century, and since then, the Middle East conflict). There was a rich Jewish life before the Holocaust, and a profoundly different one after the Holocaust, and both need to be the focus of study.

Teaching tolerance and human rights may be based on an examination of the Holocaust, but unfortunately this is not the last and only experience where these principles were trampled on. After her visit to Buchenwald, a woman from Zambia told me that she was not totally shocked about 30,000 victims being burnt to ashes in the crematorium, because she had seen mass graves in Rwanda. Nevertheless, she became really angry at Buchenwald, even though she had no personal relation to these perpetrators and victims, because here, again, it was visible "what people do to each other -- and so to me!" she exclaimed.
Educators need to realize that a study of the Holocaust, alone, does not stop antisemitism, right wing protests against "others," or xenophobia. In every society specific conditions need to be taken into account, taught about, and faced up to. Further, teaching about the

Holocaust in Turkish schools, for example, does not necessarily mean that conditions for Kurds, Armenians or other minorities will change for the better.

Personally, I prefer to interweave other human rights violations and situations into Holocaust education -- not to minimize the suffering, but to support its importance for all human beings, not just for Jews and Germans. For majorities and minorities in countries like Russia, Sweden, Austria, Israel, the United States, and Germany, Holocaust education will have a totally different meaning. Educators need to think about this seriously as they develop lessons, units, and curricula on the Holocaust.

Additional Concerns That Merit Attention by Holocaust Educators

I strongly believe that an extensive study of the past does not necessarily point out to us the primary threats faced by those living in the present time or in the future. It doesn't necessarily convey to us which current developments are the most serious or potentially devastating versus those which are the least serious, frightening or dangerous. There were not six billion human beings on this globe in 1945, there were not millions of cars, quickly expanding cities or nearly exploited natural resources. Therefore, I would like to bring together representatives of Holocaust education, human rights activists, ecologists, peace and conflict researchers, experts on questions of traumatized societies and people like me working in memorial sites to discuss the importance of remembrance for a constructive development of our societies. During one of my workshops on the future, a participant provided an example as to how the past could be embodied in the future. She described how August 6 will always be maintained as a remembrance day for the Hiroshima nuclear disaster in 1945. In the middle of a city, people walk around, a sunny sky above all -- and then a siren cuts through the air for five minutes. The people lay down in the streets, not moving. Aside from the siren, no sound is heard. Then, the siren stops, leaving everyone in total silence, as if surrounded by nothing but death. After some time passes, some stand up, then others, and then still others. They look at each other, embrace, even unknown people, rediscover the colours, the fresh air, the deeper sense of being alive -- and this is celebrated the next moment with music in the streets and dancing. It struck me as to how mourning and celebrating life were connected in this image.

So, what will my children tell me in 2020 about my aspirations and the outcome of my work? Will they say that it was helpful to be more aware of growing threats? Or was it misleading, because basic questions were not dealt with, because we overestimated the importance of Holocaust education and remembrance as a guideline to existential needs? I don't know. Maybe I'm too afraid to look for an answer, at the moment.

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