

Teaching Holocaust Memory Literature in Higher Education: An Autoethnographic View

Ilana Elkad-Lehman

Key words:

autoethnography;
culture of memory;
Holocaust;
teaching
Holocaust memory
literature; dialogue
between Israelis
and Germans;
transgenerational
transfer

Abstract: In this article, I present my personal story as a teacher-educator who participated in a binational (Israeli-German) teaching project that investigated the reading processes of students belonging to the second and third post-Holocaust generations. The students read literary works in Hebrew, German, and other languages written by members of the second and third post-Holocaust generations. My involvement in the project triggered the question of how to represent their experience of reading the literary works, of the teaching processes, and of what I learned from the process. This led to the writing of an autoethnography that accompanied my work as a teacher-educator in this project.

The autoethnographic writing process was significant for my comprehension of the issue of Holocaust memory due to the fact that I am a second-generation Holocaust survivor. While the experience described is important in understanding the processes that are probably undergone by teachers who are second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors, the manner in which the Holocaust ethos is perceived in Israel precludes discussing them.

Table of Contents

- [1. Prologue](#)
 - [2. Home](#)
 - [3. Teaching Literature](#)
 - [4. Writing My Father's Life Story, 2002](#)
 - [5. Hildesheim, Germany](#)
 - [6. Holocaust or Memory?](#)
 - [7. Visitation by Jenny ERPENBECK](#)
 - [8. Visitation by Jenny ERPENBECK](#)
 - [9. Autoethnography of Teaching](#)
 - [10. Epilogue](#)
- [Acknowledgments](#)
- [References](#)
- [Author](#)
- [Citation](#)

1. Prologue

"I wasn't one of the six million who died in the Shoah,
I wasn't even among the survivors.
And I wasn't one of the six hundred thousand who went out of Egypt.
I came to the Promised Land by sea.
No, I was not in that number, though I still have the fire and the smoke
within me, pillars of fire and pillars of smoke that guide me
by night and by day. I still have inside me the mad search
for emergency exits" (AMICHAÏ, 1998, p.126).

In November 2014, I was invited to participate as a guest lecturer in a seminar on canonization in literature at Hildesheim University in Germany. On the bookshelf of my host, Prof. Irene PIEPER, I saw the book "Two Lives" by Vikram SETH (2005), the biography of the author's uncle, an Indian who studied dentistry in Berlin in the 1930s, rented a room in the apartment of a Jewish family with whose daughters he became friendly, and, upon concluding his studies, moved to London. The Jewish girl in whose home he had lived fled from Berlin to London in 1939 and eventually married him. Her mother and sister were sent to the extermination camps. Seth, the Indian writer, traces her story and that of her family. Both Irene and I liked the writing style, the literary use of the point of view of the young nephew who was studying in London under the protection of his aunt and uncle and the special ties he created with them, the intelligent treatment of the question of the wife's complex identity, and the manner in which documents were included in the book. We also discussed the Syrian refugee camp that had been established near Hildesheim where students from the university were involved in practice teaching. [1]

Thus, by means of the Indian writer and the attitude toward the refugees from Syria, we embarked on a personal conversation about the charged topic that stands between Israelis and Germans: the Holocaust, from our personal viewpoints. Irene told me about her father, whose origins lay in the Berlin region, her mother, who was born in the Baltic region near Poland, her aunt (her mother's twin sister), and her beloved uncle, who was of Jewish origin and whose father had barely survived the death camps. I do not remember exactly what Irene recounted; I was obviously very moved by the conversation. I remember her saying that her father was conscripted to the Nazi army as a young boy and was sent to the East as a soldier. I felt that she wanted to tell and to hear. I told her about my father, a Jew from Poland who fled to the East at the beginning of the war and fought in the Red Army for the liberation of Berlin. His entire family perished. We listened to each other. According to Dan BAR-ON (2006) in his research on encounters with the offspring of Holocaust perpetrators—the TRT (To Reflect and Trust) group—listening to the story told by the other is of tremendous importance. For the first time, I, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, was participating in a frank conversation about the Holocaust with a woman of German origins, or at least, as I with my "Israeli ears," heard it. [2]

Following our conversation, we surmised that Holocaust memory literature might constitute a platform for collaboration and dialogue between teaching students from Israel and Germany concerning the significance of the Holocaust for their identities. Dealing with the Holocaust through literature is particularly powerful owing to the latter's ability to compress an entire world into a text that conveys information to the reader alongside descriptions of life, moral issues, and emotional intensity (ERLL, 2011). Literature enables us to touch upon a traumatic space that cannot be touched with tools that are not artistic (FELMAN & LAUB, 1992). [3]

We jointly devised two courses with identical syllabi dealing with memory and identity in the literature of the second and third post-Holocaust generations (DARR, 2010), also termed post-generation (HIRSCH, 2008), written in Hebrew, German, and English, and a system for accompanying research. We taught the courses in parallel in Israel and Germany¹. Reciprocal visits enabled us to teach both groups of students. The course was fascinating—both for the students and for us. At the end of it, when I wrote my conclusions concerning the project, I could not help thinking about the question regarding my place in the story as a researcher who is emotionally involved in the research field. Later on, I was bothered by the question of whether it was important, and if so, to whom and why? Tackling these questions led to the writing of this article. In a world afflicted with traumas (and that is the world in which we live today), a personal story about teaching is meaningful, particularly when it refers to the teaching of trauma-linked memory by means of literature; the personal story is meaningful for readers who find the universal in the personal. The story is important for understanding the teaching processes of teachers who have a "memory" concerning what is being learned. [4]

I elected to write a reflective autoethnography (ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2011). The choice of autoethnography stems from a desire to encompass the investigation of what happened to me in the process of teaching the course as well as the interaction with the literary works and with my colleague from Germany. The experiences I underwent as a teacher are not separate from my story, as the daughter of Holocaust survivors. Autoethnography as a qualitative research genre is supported by autobiographical narrative writing in which the researcher shares his/her personal experience and story with the readers. In parallel, he/she relates to socio-cultural processes while perceiving autoethnographical writing to be a social-ethical act. According to ROTH (2005), autoethnography enables the "self" to be presented by striking a balance between hyper-subjectivity and objectivity and by allotting intersubjectivity a worthy place. Autoethnography is always ethnography, the revelation of a culture—the other's and your own. From the epistemological point of view, it is assumed that knowledge is constructed subjectively. It is impossible to separate the observer of the world from his/her object of observation, and in order to know something about the latter, we have to

1 Following the research (BAR-ON, 2006; ERLL & RIGNEY, 2006; HIRSCH, 2008), this study relates to the offspring of the survivors and to the members of the generation who are not offspring of the survivors as well as to the offspring of the Holocaust perpetrators.

know and understand the observer and be acquainted with his/her story (ROTH, 2005). That is what I will attempt to do here. [5]

In the past, autoethnography as a genre was also used for writing about the Holocaust—for instance, Carolyn ELLIS's writing with Holocaust survivor Jerry RAWICKI in which she served as a witness-narrator of his testimony (ELLIS & RAWICKI, 2013). Another example is the autoethnography of David HANAUER (2012), a survivor's son whose father was rescued in the child transports. The author traces his own poetic writing and his preoccupation with language, as well as his experiences as the son of a Holocaust survivor who remained silent and did not talk about the trauma. [6]

In this article, I will attempt to recount and describe what happened to me as a researcher and lecturer during and following the teaching of the course. Alongside the documentation that was performed during the course, I commenced the autobiographical writing while teaching. I located "milestones" in my life that were relevant to the teaching, positioned them on a time-line, and subsequently wrote a vignette for each one (JOSSELSO, 2013). The writing was random and the vignettes were ordered chronologically afterwards. This is where selected extracts from the autobiographical writing—concerning the teaching and research that accompanied it—would be placed: Holocaust, memory, and literature. The writing was interspersed with references to literary works as well as to the research literature on the course topic. My teaching was accompanied by a reflexive diary, extracts from which have been included here, as have diary extracts from the past. [7]

In the writing, I endeavored to adhere to the accepted ethical norms of qualitative research (JOSSELSO, 2007). Autoethnographical writing triggers various ethical issues (ELLIS, 2007; LAPADAT, 2017; ROTH, 2009) despite the fact that the person who constitutes the focus of the writing and the exposure is the researcher. I shared the written product with my research partner in Germany, who read what I had written and reacted to it. I asked her whether she wanted me to mention her name and her academic affiliation, and whether she was interested in participating as an additional voice in the autoethnography (LAPADAT, 2017). Her response to the first question was positive. To the second, she responded:

"The genre differs a lot from the academic work I usually do, but first and foremost I find it difficult to find time for the writing given my tight schedule. However, I feel that this shouldn't stop you from going ahead." [8]

Thus, the writing is mine alone. This research genre is liable to a complicated situation for researchers from an academic point of view (LAPADAT, 2017). For ethical reasons, the students will not be mentioned or quoted. The family member who is mentioned in my writing is my father, who gave his permission to publish his life story during his lifetime. [9]

2. Home

I am the daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel from Poland in 1957, during Gomułka's reforms, that opened Poland's gates and allowed Jewish people leave (ELKAD & ELKAD-LEHMAN, 2008). I was seven years old and my brother David was four. My father was born in Krzeszowice, a village near Krakow, and was the only survivor in his family. He survived because he fled to the East, to the Chinese border. There he joined the Red Army and fought the Germans in the battle to conquer Warsaw and Berlin. My mother, a native of Lemberg/Levov, was deported to Kazakhstan with her brother, her sister, and her mother to endure years of famine and slave labor. Her father was ordered to report to the Soviet police at the beginning of the war and disappeared forever. My parents met after the war when they served in the Polish army, and married in Warsaw in 1950. My grandmother raised my brother and me, and was the grandmother of all our friends since she was the only grandmother in a neighborhood that was populated mainly by Holocaust survivors. In our youth, we refrained from speaking about this; sometimes we had no idea about our friends' parents' past. Today, we are in "The generation of postmemory" (HIRSCH, 2008, p.103), which speaks about what we kept silent about then. [10]

My childhood home in south Tel Aviv was simple: two bedrooms, a living-room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The furniture was basic: iron beds with seaweed-filled mattresses ("Sochnut beds," which were distributed to immigrants by the Jewish Agency), and a couch for the parents. In the living-room, there were two armchairs, a sofa, and a table, simple but aesthetic. The signs of the past came from the near past, from Warsaw, before their migration to Israel: a Polish carpet, bedspreads, cutlery and crockery, and numerous books in Polish. There was one photo of my mother's father and several photos of my father's family members and childhood friends. None of them is still alive. Photos were memory agents in our home. When I was about 40, I rented an apartment in Italy. In such houses, I saw furniture and dishes that are passed down from generation to generation, and I realized that in my parents' home, there were no artifacts that represented the past (FISCHER, 2015). My parents worked hard to build a future for their children, succeeded nicely, and lived in constant anxiety about the next disaster, which would undoubtedly occur (KELLERMANN, 2001). Their anxiety stifled me. When I rebuked them harshly, they said, "It's because of our past," but I was neither prepared to understand nor able to do so. David and I were supposed to take care of them, shield them from sorrow, bring them joy. We were suffused with the values of hard work and achievement, in line with what is described in studies on the children of Holocaust survivors (FELMAN & LAUB, 1992; KELLERMANN, 2001)—I in my studies and David in sport. When he was injured in the army and died, I felt that we had failed. We had not succeeded in preventing the disaster. [11]

3. Teaching Literature

My lecturer in literature teaching at the university had specialized in the study and teaching of Holocaust literature. I could not understand how she was able to devote her entire being to the Holocaust and build her career on the trauma. Along my entire path as a student of advanced degrees and as a teacher, I related to Holocaust literature when it was necessary to do so. I dealt with works on the Holocaust as part of the monographic research on which I was doing my doctorate, and when I taught in a high school, I prepared for Holocaust Memorial Day² by teaching works that were listed in the Ministry of Education's curriculum. During my years of teaching in academia, I did not propose teaching a course on Holocaust literature even though it was always a section of the children's literature course and of the literature teaching courses. In those courses, I particularly loved teaching "About the Whales" (KOVNER, 1989), an allegorical and fantastic story for children. Today I understand that the allegory afforded both me and the students a safe space for teaching and learning. As opposed to this safe space, we (the students and I) underwent an upsetting experience in another course in which I taught about the integration of music into literature: we were listening to Maria FARANTOURI singing the song written by Iakovos KAMBANELIS and Mikis THEODORAKIS, "The Song of Songs," from The "Ballad of Mauthausen."³ The music, the words (we followed / according to the Hebrew translation), the emotional power evoked in the classroom, constituted an exceptional event in my teaching. [12]

In most cases, when I taught Holocaust literature, I preferred restrained, symbolic works that mitigated the trauma, and I eschewed expressionistic works or works containing explicit descriptions of suffering. Despite the fact that in my approach to teaching literature, I maintain that it is impossible to read without taking a risk, in my teaching I chose a literary corpus that protected me. It was only as a result of teaching the joint course with Irene that I began to question the motive underlying my conduct as a literature teacher: Did my actions contain a desire to protect my students or myself, a fear of dealing with the Holocaust as a painful topic, or perhaps even "opposition" to the traumatic and depressing manner in which the home of my youth was run (FELMAN & LAUB, 1992)? One explanation may be based on the research of Dan BAR-ON, a psychologist who worked with Holocaust survivors and their children (2006). In his studies, he described the silencing of those individuals not only externally, but also internally. He speaks about the denial of the victims' condition and emotional distancing from everything that appears weak and cowardly (BAR-ON, 1998). Like many members of the first and second post-Holocaust generations, I refrained from

2 Holocaust Memorial Day is the first of three cultural "holidays" in Israel: *yom ha'shoah* (Holocaust memorial), *yom ha'zikaron* (Remembrance day), *yom ha'atzmaut* (Independence day). They have a special place in school curriculum and in ceremonies in the Israeli education system (BEN-AMOS, BET-EL & TALMIN, 1999)

3 ³Written and orchestrated in 1965. The song, sung by Maria FARANTOURI, can be seen and heard on the Internet at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7wuRxbLbKE&list=RD17wuRxbLbKE&t=17> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvNm0F8L96Q> [Accessed: October 10, 2017].

touching upon the topic, totally unaware of the fact that I was activating defense mechanisms. [13]

4. Writing My Father's Life Story, 2002

In 2002, I took a sabbatical year. My father was 82, and I suddenly had free time. I suggested that he write his life story and I would type it. He requested that we write together: he would recount and I would write. So we sat for three or four hours once a week for a year until September 2003. Since Hebrew was the language we communicated in, the life story was told and written in Hebrew. And he recounted. For the first time in our lives, two adults conducted a conversation about what had been and what was lost: his childhood landscapes, his home, his family, his youthful love, the flight, the terror, what he had missed out on because of the war; about the Poles, the Germans, and the Russians he had encountered during his life. As the title, he said, he was thinking of "A Story of Fear." I saw my father's fears every evening when he checked whether "the house was locked," and I failed to understand. Recently, reading the articles of LAUB (FELMAN & LAUB, 1992), a psychiatrist who treated Holocaust survivors, I realized that this was how thousands of trauma victims lived. The fear that fate would strike again is a central characteristic of Holocaust memory, and trauma victims do not live with memories but rather with a never-ending event (ibid.). For my parents, my brother David's injury and death were a continuation of the trauma. [14]

5. Hildesheim, Germany

"Would Israelis agree to attend a conference in Germany?" This was the discreet question I was asked by members of the International association for the improvement of Mother Tongue education. "I'll be there," I replied, "and it seems to me that my colleagues will do the same." The conference was held in 2011 at the University of Hildesheim, which was founded after the war in 1978. The campus in which the conference was held was completely new. [15]

Hildesheim is a small town that was almost totally annihilated during the Allied bombing raids in 1945. In the 1980s, the town center was rebuilt and its medieval buildings were reconstructed. Strangely enough, I felt comfortable strolling through the picturesque town center, which is a replica: it's not the original town, but rather a town that was built as a copy that is in fact reminiscent of the events of the world war. Crime, punishment, and the continuation of life. Wandering around the town, I happened upon a site commemorating the Jewish community that had perished. No more Jews. Although the old Tudor houses where the monument to the Jewish Synagogue stands are actually original, they no longer fulfill their original purpose. Since then, I have been in the town several times as a guest of the university. [16]

Dan BAR-ON (1989) speaks about the fact that among the offspring of Holocaust perpetrators, there are some who are eager to process the narrative and tackle it and to understand the "dark" part of their family biographies; and there are others who belong to the legacy of silence—just as there are survivors who are keen to

speak to Germans or wish to silence the dialogue (BAR-ON, 2006). The first joint groups (offspring of survivors and offspring of Holocaust perpetrators) that BAR-ON moderated began to operate only after 1992. Many members of the second generation "are in a state of a lack of expressing emotions" (p.54) and have not yet rehabilitated their emotional abilities. I feel that I am one of them. ELLIS et al. (2011) point out that in writing an autoethnography, the researcher is likely to experience emotions of "epiphany"—some kind of personal, moving, and surprising revelation. This is how I felt when I read and understood that the "state of a lack of expressing emotions" explained the way I conducted myself in the world: barriers and remoteness in everyday life that crumble when I encounter art. I live in art and literature: weep, laugh, feel, and express emotions. What a miracle it is that I opted for literature as my field of study and as my profession. [17]

6. Holocaust or Memory?

I began an intensive reading of Hebrew and German (in Hebrew translation) literature on the subject of the Holocaust. In June 2015, Irene and I met and sketched the outlines of the course, whose literary corpus would be based mainly on Hebrew and German literature written by writers who belonged to the second and third post-Holocaust generations—in other words, people of our age and people of our students' age. We decided that the theoretical focus of the course would be memory (ERLL, 2011) and its manifestation in literature (ASSMANN, 2013; ERLL & RIGNEY, 2006). In light of this decision, the concept that guided the course was a universal approach to the trauma of World War II (FIDELMAN, 2009; KEREN, 1998; SOEN & DAVIDOWITZ, 2011) and their significance for our students today. We titled the course "Memory and Identity." That said, it is interesting to mention that in everyday life and in the Israeli education system, neither "memory" nor "memory literature" is spoken about, but rather "Holocaust" and "Holocaust literature," due to a particular view of the past—the one that concerns the Jews. As the course progressed, I comprehended the extent to which the decision to opt for the concept "memory" was critical in building the corpus of texts that would permit an ethical view of the issue of Holocaust memory, and in enabling a dialogue between the two groups—the Israelis and the Germans. [18]

7. Visitation by Jenny ERPENBECK

From among the books comprising contemporary German literature, Irene suggested that I read Jenny ERPENBECK's book "Heimsuchung" (2010). I was captivated by the book owing to its complexity: sophisticated writing and bricolage that requires decoding; from the moment the decoding is performed, the reader is exposed to emotional power, which is concealed in most of the chapters with the exception of the chapter titled "The Girl," which will be discussed later on. The encounter with the book was critical for me when planning the course. It seems to me that as a result of that encounter, I could sense the complexity of Holocaust memory. The German word *Heimsuchung* consists of two words: *Heim* [home] and *-suchung*, a word that means searching. The expression also refers to a haunted house. According to the Grimm Brothers' Dictionary (GRIMM & GRIMM,

2015 [1854-1971]), as well as in German-speakers' consciousness, the connotations of the word link it to the Bible insofar as God searches for, finds, and punishes man, as in the book of Hosea: "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come," or in the book of Jeremiah: "the year of their visitation." Even the home is not safe, nor, perhaps, are the human beings who reside in it; the threat of "the days of visitation" that are about to come relates to the whole of humanity⁴. Thus, the book links the home to severe calamity as retribution for human beings' misdeeds. [19]

The word *Heimsuchung* illuminates the book with a concrete and a symbolic light simultaneously: It is the story of a house that was built not far from Berlin, on the banks of a lake, and passed from one owner to the next. The house is a symbol of protection, security, belonging; it is the person's private space but exists in a necessary and constant co-existence with the public and political spaces. By means of the history of the house, ERPENBECK presents the stories of those who dwelled in it as well as the stories of the changes in regime: the advent of Nazism, World War II, the division of Germany, and the unification. The house becomes a symbol of a national homeland, giving rise to the question: Who belongs to the German nation? The book traces the precarious fate of human beings as well as human wickedness and evil.

"5/8/15

Yesterday, I checked on Jenny Erpenbeck, 'Heimsuchung,' in English: *Visitation*. It is a small novel and has a chapter included that reads a bit like a short story, the one on the girl Doris who hides in a camp but gets caught. A brilliant book and also very readable. We could just include the chapter on the girl which is very moving though told in a very sober way, strangely enough." [20]

In our conversations, I preferred the chapter titled "The Cloth Manufacturer" to the chapter "The Girl." The chapter about the girl, Doris, which was heart-rending, seemed to me to be loaded with pathos, and thus exaggerated for teaching. And that is what we agreed on. However, just before the class activity on the chapter, "The Cloth Manufacturer," I realized that the complexity of the text would oblige the students to focus on decoding and comprehension, and the emotional space was liable to remain not only restrained, but also perhaps inaccessible. The chapter, "The Cloth Manufacturer," focuses on the loss of those who failed to flee from Germany in time and on the incessant memory borne by those who remained alive. The courage of Jewish youngsters to leave Germany, their motherland, as well as the contrasting procrastination of their parents, who perished as a result of it, are presented in the chapter as an out-of-time stream of consciousness; and while the emotional dimension increases in intensity, it is hidden, and is revealed only after effort has been expended. I feared that the lesson would not achieve its goals. At this point, I had an insight that surprised me: I find it difficult to cope with teaching Holocaust literature, and I attempt to

4 In the English translation, the word "visitation" reinforces the link to the Bible. I wish to thank my research partner, Irene, for this interpretation.

avoid coping with emotional burdens during the teaching process. On November 20, 2015, I wrote to Irene:

"Regarding *Visitation*, I think that you were right when you suggested including the chapter about Doris, "The Girl," in our teaching. I think that my suggestion to choose the chapter "The Cloth Manufacturer" was an emotional reaction to my fear of dealing with a text that is so powerful emotionally. If our goal is to cope with memories and trauma, I think that the chapter about Doris is a chapter that will do the job correctly, while the chapter "The Cloth Manufacturer" is a literary escape from the very core of the problem. What do you think?" [21]

And so we taught both chapters. The second part of teaching the work took place in Tel Aviv in May 2016, during Irene's lecture about the memory presented in the book, from a German point of view. The book is a mixture of fiction and history: the events and characters encompass the 20th century in Europe and in most of the world. It begins in the Ice Age, during which the lake on whose banks the story unfolds is located, progresses via the story of the place and the village (probably Scharmützelsee, which is in the Mark Brandenburg region southeast of Berlin) in 1650, continues at the end of the 19th century and in the 1930s, and concludes at the present time. The monumental story features nameless, mythical characters (for instance, a gardener) and historical characters who can be traced in the writing process (the girl Doris is Doris Kaplan from the village of Guben in the Brandenburg region, deported from Berlin to the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942, all traces of her lost—in other words, she was sent to be exterminated; and so on). For me, Irene's historical and trans-historical view of the work was an eye-opener: She focused on the question of what one remembers and why. Her lecture reinforced in me the need to go into the ethical questions posed by the book in greater depth. [22]

In the following months, I explored how memory is represented in every chapter of the work from an artistic point of view, and what ethical claims the book presents to me as a reader. As far as I was concerned, this was an additional epiphany that introduced me to a kaleidoscope of perspectives from which World War II was examined in the work. During my third or fourth reading of the book, I identified voices that I had not heard during my previous readings: the architect who conceals his Jewish origins, works for the German Reich, and buys his Jewish neighbor's property for half-price; the female Jewish communist writer who flees from Berlin and returns after the war; the peasant who loses her home, her land, and her daughter but saves her grandchildren; the girl who grew up in Germany without knowing that she is actually an orphaned refugee from Czechoslovakia; teenage boys and girls who grow up during and after the war. I saw how Erpenbeck conducts a reckoning with the Germans, the Russians, and the Poles. Pre-war Germany and post-war Germany. East and West. I read the story of human evil that harms people all over Europe and causes unending refugeeism, Nazism that divides families, the German communists who returned to Germany and would not shake hands with other Germans because they did not know what those hands had done (ERPENBECK, 2010, p.130), nor did they reestablish contact with family members with a Nazi past—individuals who

expropriated the property of those who returned, and who did not repudiate their past deeds. During my repeated readings, I found in ERPENBECK's writing a conflict with man's innate evil that is expressed in full force in an apparently marginal story about the rape of a girl and the disappearing act of the children who witnessed it, failed to come to her assistance, and did not prevent the crime (p.178). In my opinion, the children's wicked deed is a metaphor of the collaborative silence of the Germans during the years of Nazi rule or of the silent majority in some other totalitarian regime today. [23]

8. On the Way to Germany by Amos OZ

From the first stages of planning the course, I thought about Amos OZ's essay, "On the Way to Germany" (2006), based on a speech he gave in honor of the 50 years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany. It was translated into German in 2005 and titled "Israel und Deutschland. Vierzig Jahre nach Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen." Shortly before I met with the students in Hildesheim, I thought that the essay would help the German students learn about the complexity of the relations between the two nations from an Israeli viewpoint. [24]

An essay is a genre of personal writing, but without a narrative structure or a poetic purpose. The aim of writing an essay is to present a standpoint or a claim whose basis is personal experience rather than academic with footnotes. When authors write an essay, it reflects mainly their unique literary abilities. Hence, OZ built his essay by means of the biographical indication of stations in his life. At age six, in Jerusalem, his family members provided him with an explanation concerning the relatives who had perished in Europe. At age 10, at school, he learned about the Inquisition and about the Jews' boycott of Spain; from here, the path to boycotting Germany, as a social and not merely an individual phenomenon, was short. In 1952, when he was 13, the reparations agreement between Israel and Germany was signed; this agreement sparked dissent in Israel. At age 15-16, the young Amos traveled in a German-manufactured train and could not help thinking about Jews being transported by train to their death. [25]

In the essay, OZ describes the stages of the turning-point in his attitude toward Germany: first, the reparations agreement in 1952; then in 1961, the Eichmann trial, which engendered a transition from silence pertaining to the Holocaust to speaking about it openly in Israel; in 1965, the establishment of diplomatic relations; later, he began to read books by German writers from the post-war era. The *volte-face* in his attitude toward Germany and the Germans occurred when he read Siegfried LENZ's book, "The German Lesson" (1968), an indictment of an entire generation of Germans who collaborated with the Nazi regime. After reading the book, OZ wondered: "What would I have done had I also been there?" (2006, p.20), "How would I have behaved if I had been born in Germany?" (p.26). His friendship with LENZ prompted OZ to visit Germany. [26]

In my lecture on Amos OZ in Hildesheim, I initiated a classroom dialogue that does not customarily occur to me as lecturer with students: the personal story of my family. The literature teacher brings herself and her personality to the

classroom (SHOWALTER, 2003), but in this case the issue of memory and identity demanded a public declaration: Who am I? What is my story? Where do I stand in relation to the works I teach? Never in the course of my teaching career do I recall experiencing the need, indeed the obligation, in the face of what I was teaching, to offer a reckoning such as this to myself to my students. No forecasting, our literature class became an arena for a testimonial act, and I had to be the testifier / witness. It was a deeply moving act for me and made me understand the influence of testimony on both the testifier and listeners (BEN-PAZI, 2014). [27]

My decision to teach OZ's essay in Germany was an attempt to give a reckoning, both to myself and to the listeners, of where Israelis stand vis-à-vis Germans today. I presented OZ and his essay to the students. In parallel, I read an extract from his novel, "A Tale of Love and Darkness," in which he recounts, from the point of view of a child, how his family in Jerusalem received the news of the loss of their family in Europe and how they reacted. In order to stimulate a discussion, I posed the same questions as the ones OZ asked himself pertaining to the responsibility and the ability to oppose the regime. [28]

When I taught the essay in Israel, my students sought to focus on the question of German responsibility and forgiveness. Is it possible to explain what happened? OZ says, quoting his mother: "If they don't forgive themselves, perhaps one day we'll forgive them a little. But if they forgive themselves, we will not forgive them" (2006, p.8). OZ declares: "Germany of today is not guilty." "Guilt is laid upon her" (p.32). Crimes were committed by the German people. They have to teach and instill the past. Israel's actions are deserving of criticism—it is no different from any other nation. However: "In the case of danger of destruction and genocide hovering over Israel... Germany has the moral obligation to come to Israel's aid" (p.42) "The grandchildren of the murders do not bear the mark of Cain. The grandchildren of the murder victims are soul-damaged people" (ibid.). [29]

9. Autoethnography of Teaching

I chose to write an autoethnography after discovering my difficulties concerning teaching Holocaust literature. I posited that writing my story and a little of my family's story would help me cope with those difficulties. In Israeli culture, which sanctifies Holocaust commemoration, it is difficult (and also inappropriate) to view the difficulties of teaching Holocaust literature with a critical eye. I hoped that the exposition of my difficulties and insights would help me understand what happens to the teachers and pupils in Israeli schools during the process of teaching Holocaust literature: fear and repugnance with regard to the topic; impatient reactions such as "The Holocaust *again!*," or conversely, an obsession with teaching the Holocaust; the tension between teaching the Holocaust as a universal or a particular message that is expressed in teaching as well as in the field trips to Poland (SOEN & DAVIDOVITZ, 2011); and the failure of the perception of ethical education for remembrance along the lines of "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt" (EZUZ, 2016). [30]

The collaborative teaching with a researcher from Germany enabled me to view my teaching through the lens of *defamiliarization*. Sometimes defamiliarization—that is, the presentation of the familiar in a new and different light (CUDDON, 1999)—is necessary in order to get to the bottom of things and understand them (ROTH, 2005). Teaching the course and writing the autoethnography exposed me, provoked an emotional storm within me, and positioned me in a state of crisis. [31]

During the writing of the autoethnography, my complex attitude toward the question of Holocaust memory became clear to me: even though the Holocaust is a core and inseparable part of my identity, I required the concentrated observation afforded by writing in order to understand that I was experiencing difficulty in teaching the topic as a literary, educational, and cultural one that contains an ethical dialogue among human beings. Extensive theoretical reading helped me understand the sources of the difficulty: by means of interaction with others and the exposure of my dialogue with the literary works, transgenerational transfer of trauma (KELLERMANN, 2001) transforms the literary encounter in the classroom into something revealing, difficult, and emotionally demanding. However, as I realized while teaching the course, among students and teachers alike, the situation is similar, whether they are the offspring of survivors who carry memories, or if the memory is the "prosthetic" memory (LANDSBERG, 2004) or *post-memory* (HIRSCH, 2008) of individuals who are not directly involved in the trauma. LANDSBERG claims that mass culture is so powerful that it allows us to take others people's memory "like an artificial limb" (2004, p.20). It might happen following watching a movie, a book, or a museum (as is the case in Etgar KERRETT's story, "Shoes" [1994]). Thus, more than once during the lesson, we found ourselves in a state of emotional turmoil, but not in a FELMAN-type "crisis" (FELMAN & LAUB, 1992). [32]

I realized that the difficulty in teaching Holocaust literature is not contained within the emotional space but rather overflows into the cognitive and functional space. The complexity of my emotions undermines the conceptions of literature teaching that I had crystallized over the years—as a reader, as a researcher, and as a teacher educator. In an article I wrote approximately a decade ago, during my struggle with the crisis resulting from the loss of my brother, following ideas by Jacques DERRIDA (1968), I suggested reading literature in a manner that contained willingness to be hurt (ELKAD-LEHMAN, 2006), for the purpose of accomplishing meaningful reading. Observing my practice as a teacher, I identified my own difficulty in applying my perceptions regarding the reading process to my teaching practice. I identified behaviors that attest to fears, and defense mechanisms that I employed intellectually as a barrier against emotions due to my fear that the emotion in a charged work would be overwhelming for me as a teacher. Teaching literature that is based on defenses is liable to distance the student and the pupil from reading rather than drawing them closer to it—the opposite of everything I wished for. That being the case, is literature's potential to trigger emotion and identification actually the factor that distances people who are afraid of emotional exposure and fear being hurt? [33]

While I was writing the article, I honed my awareness of the need for memory studies as a human and ethical value that sees the individual and requires the reader to be responsible, to show agency and act for a better world, and to make his reading a part of perspective-taking (THEIN & SLOAN, 2012). I also honed my understanding of where my aspiration for a dialogue with Irene and with the German students originated from. These things are linked to my father's life story and to the messages of human decency and respect for mankind that he conveyed to me throughout his life. [34]

I open my father's book. Our 33rd meeting dealt with advice for life for the grandchildren.

"Don't do anything bad to anyone, try to do only good. When I studied in the *Cheder* [traditional Jewish school in the Diaspora], when Tish'a be'Av approached, the *melamed* [teacher] told us about Yochanan Ben-Zakai and Titus the Wicked, that Titus had a terrible headache because a fly had gotten into his ear. And when Yochanan Ben-Zakai came and cured him, he gave him Yavneh as a reward⁵. What did the story mean? Doing good isn't easy. Doing evil? Even a little fly can.

[...] Study [...] excel [...] help the weak. My father was a refugee and I was a refugee [...] Reading good literature in order to learn from other people's lives—things in the world don't change but rather repeat themselves" (ELKAD & ELKAD-LEHMAN, 2008, p.259). [35]

I hope that this article affords an understanding of the complexity of the teaching and learning of Holocaust literature in Israel by the children and grandchildren of the survivors. Knowledge of this type is important since it is created in order for the lecturers and the students to gain an understanding of themselves as well as to understand the importance of a joint dialogue in an educational environment via literature, in regions and spaces in which there is a charged memory due to a past conflict. I consider this to be particularly important in light of the issue of Israeli-Palestinian relations, and in light of the universal issue of the Western (essentially the Judeo-Christian) world's manner of coping with the refugee problem and Islam. In my case, the research grounded the awareness that literature teaching has to be linked to society and to mankind. We have to teach literature while assuming an ethical stance vis-à-vis the human being within us, the person who is learning with us, and the person who is embodied in the literary work. [36]

5 My father combined two Talmudic legends: the first one concerns the destruction of the Temple on Tish'a Be'Av and the fact that Titus Vespasianus gave Yavneh to Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai. The significance of Rabbi Ben Zakai's receiving Yavneh resides in the fact that it ensured the continued existence of Jewish culture despite the destruction of Jerusalem. The second one deals with the mosquito that entered Titus's ear.

10. Epilogue

During the course of the writing, there was "a chain of dialogues," to quote BAKHTIN (2008, p.58): a dialogue with the literary texts, with students, with my research colleague, and with myself. Very intimate, revealing, moving, and also frightening. The dialogue continued after the teaching had ended—in the writing of these words. [37]

In the essay we studied, Amos OZ questioned himself about his personal responsibility had he lived in that place, at that time. Jenny ERPENBECK placed her characters in a situation in which they failed to go and defend the girl who was being raped, while other characters simply observed the heinous deed from the sidelines. How would I have behaved if ...? Would I have had the courage to come out against the regime? Would I have had the courage to help someone who had been hurt? Today, would I go out to help someone who was being harmed by acts of injustice? [38]

In the reality of our lives, today no less than yesterday and the day before, questions beginning with "What would I do" constitute a never-ending ethical demand directed at us in the present tense precisely as a result both of the political changes that are occurring in the world and of ignoring the injustices that are occurring in our immediate environment. The role of education is to generate questions, and hopefully our students on both sides will ask many. [39]

From my point of view, writing this autoethnography is an act of educating for the ethics of memory and responsibility (ROTH, 2009). It is a demand that dares us to speak out about what is not mentioned—in the Israeli political context in which we live today as well. For it is here that our responsibility is needed. [40]

Acknowledgments

This research was conducted with the support of the Intercollegiate Research Committee at The MOFET Institute and Levinsky College of Education.

References

- Amichai, Yehuda (1998). *Open, closed, open*. Jerusalem: Schocken. [Hebrew, English translation], <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/i-was-n-t-one-of-the-six-million-and-what-is-my-life-span-open-closed-open/translator-unknown> [Accessed: November, 2, 2017].
- Assmann, Aleida (2013). *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention*. München: Beck.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail (2008). *Late essays and notes: Philosophy, language, culture* [transl. by S. Sandler]. Tel Aviv: Resling. [Hebrew]
- Bar-On, Dan (1989). *Legacy of silence: Encounters with children of the Third Reich*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bar-On, Dan (1998). The Israeli society between the culture of death and the culture of life. *Israel Studies*, 2(2), 88-112.
- Bar-On, Dan (2006). *Tell your story, creating dialogue between Jews and Germans, Palestinian and Israelis*. Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. [Hebrew]

- Ben-Amos, Avner; Bet-El, Ilana & Talmin, Moshe (1999). Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli schools: Ceremonies, education and history. *Israel Studies*, 4(1), 258-284.
- Ben-Pazi, Hanoach (2014). Bearing witness and responsibility in education. In Esther Yogev (Ed.), *Politics now* (pp.49-66). New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Cuddon, John Anthony (1999). *The penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (revised by C E Preston) (4th ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Darr, Yael (2010). The childlike voice as a means for a therapeutic narrative of Holocaust survivors: A new wave of Holocaust literature for children in Israel. In Lucy Hopkins, Mark Macleod & Wendy C. Turgeon (Eds.), *Negotiating childhoods* (pp.221-229). Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (1968). *La pharmacie de Platon* [Plato's pharmacy]. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- [Ellis, Carolyn](#) (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 3-29.
- Ellis, Carolyn & Rawicki, Jerry (2013). Collaborative witnessing of survival during the Holocaust: An exemplar of relational autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(5), 366-380.
- Ellis, Carolyn; Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur, P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589> [Accessed: November, 6, 2017].
- Elkad-Lehman, Ilana (2006). Let your fingers be entangled in the weaving loom: Reading Chingiz Aitmatov's "The day lasts more than a hundred years". *Dapim Journal for Studies and Research in Education*, 42, 62-87. [Hebrew]
- Elkad, Kalman & Elkad-Lehman, Ilana (2008). *Life story: Kalman Elkad/Grossmann/Weiss*. Rishon LeZion: Self publication. [Hebrew]
- Erl, Astrid (2011). *Memory in culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erl, Astrid & Rigney, Ann (2006). Literature and the production of cultural memory: Introduction. *European Journal of English Studies*, 10(2), 111-115.
- Erpenbeck, Jenny (2010). *Visitation* (transl. by S. Bernofsky). London: Portobello.
- Ezuz, Ytzhak (2016). The fear of the death of memory: Between living memory and dead memory. *Mizkar*, 51, 18-21, 41-43. [Hebrew]
- Felman, Shoshana & Laub, Dori (1992). *Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. New York: Routledge.
- Fidelman, Itay (2009). Teaching the Holocaust in the Jewish sector and in the Arab sector. *Report submitted to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee*, Center for Research and Information, The Knesset. [Hebrew]
- Fischer, Nina (2015). *Memory work: The second generation*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grimm, Jacob & Grimm, Wilhelm (2015 [1854-1971]). *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, <http://dwb.uni-trier.de/de/> [Accessed: April 30, 2018].
- Hanauer, David I. (2012). Growing up in the unseen shadow of the Kindertransport: A poetic-narrative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(10), 845-851.
- Hirsch, Marianne (2008). The generation of postmemory. *Poetics Today*, 29(1), 103-128.
- Josselson, Ruthellen (2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research. In D. Jean Calandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry* (pp.537-566). London: Sage.
- Josselson, Ruthellen (2013). *Interviewing for qualitative inquiry: A relational approach*. New York: Guilford.
- Kellermann, Natan Peter Felix (2001). Transmission of Holocaust trauma—An integrative view. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 64(3), 256-267.
- Keren, Nili (1998). "Preserving the memory within the oblivion": The struggle for Holocaust studies in Israel. *Zmanim, Riv'on LeHistoria*, 64, 56-64. [Hebrew]
- Kerrett, Etgar (1994). *Missing Kissinger*. Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan. [Hebrew]
- Kovner Abba (1989). *About the Whales*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim. [Hebrew]
- Landsberg, Alison (2004). *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lapadat, Judith C. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(8), 589-603.

Lenz, Siegfried (1968). *Deutschstunde*. Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe Verlag.

Oz, Amos (2006). On the way to Germany. In Amos Oz, *The slopes of the volcano* (pp.7-44). Jerusalem: Keter. [Hebrew]

Roth, Wolff Michael (2005). *Auto/biography and auto/ethnography: Praxis of research method*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Roth, Wolff Michael (2009). Auto/ethnography and the question of ethics. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1), Art. 38, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.1.1213> [Accessed: November, 6, 2017].

Seth, Vikram (2005). *Two lives: A memoir*. New York: HarperCollins.

Showalter, Elaine (2003). *Teaching literature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Soen, Dan & Davidowitz, Nitza (2011). Holocaust and experience: Can the two go together?. In Nitza Davidowitz & Dan Soen (Eds.), *Holocaust memory—Issues and challenges* (pp.216-334). Ariel: Ariel University. [Hebrew]

Thein, Amanda Haertling & Sloan, Deann Long (2012). Towards an ethical approach to perspective-taking and the teaching of multicultural texts: Getting beyond persuasion, politeness and political correctness. *Changing English*, 19(3), 313-324.

Author

Ilana ELKAD-LEHMAN is a professor in the Multi-Disciplinary Faculty at Levinsky College of Education in Israel, and a researcher at The MOFET Institute. She has published extensively, including two single-authored and three co-authored books (in Hebrew), contributed to numerous scholarly journals (in both Hebrew and English). Her scholarly focus includes qualitative research methods, Hebrew literature and children literature, and the study and instruction of literature. Her current research focuses on reading processes, identities and reading, book clubs, reading and the development of thinking, and the contribution of literary research to qualitative research.

Contact:

Ilana Elkad-Lehman

Language Education & Literature
Levinsky College of Education
Shoshna Persitz 15 St. Tel Aviv, Israel

Tel.: 972-523533118

Fax: 972-39696821

E-mail: ilanaelkad@gmail.com

Citation

Elkad-Lehman, Ilana (2018). Teaching Holocaust Memory Literature in Higher Education: An Autoethnographic View [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(2), Art. 18, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.2.2973>.