

# Remembrance and Research

The Journal of the Israel Oral History Association

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**Narratives of German-Jewish Immigrants to Palestine-Israel:  
A Source for Oral History and Discourse Analysis**

Anne Betten

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**Telling Stories as Means of Argumentation: Narratives about Youth Experiences  
in Interviews with Second Generation "Yekkes"**

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**Pioneers, Losers, White Collars: Narratives of Masculinity Among German-Speaking  
Jews in Palestine/Israel**

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**Metaphors in the Life Story of a German-Jewish Immigrant to Palestine/ Israel.  
How Metaphorical Constructions and Remembering Process Interweave**

Simona Leonardi

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**"You Have No Right to Remain Silent": The Israel Police Oral History Project**  
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**Book Review**

**Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster**  
by Svetlana Alexievich

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Articles of scholars and experts in the field are welcome to be submitted,  
both in Hebrew and English. Articles should not exceed 4,000 words,  
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Submissions are reviewed by the **Remembrance and Research**  
editors, as well as by external lecturers.

## Introductory Note

We are pleased to present the second issue of *Remembrance and Research* - the journal of the Israel Oral History Association. ILOHA was founded in 2001 and among its objectives were the cultivation of Oral History projects, fostering the preservation of individual and collective memories, strengthening coordination between parties involved in oral documentation, professionalization, and development of standard work procedures. We also strive to cultivate relations with Oral Historians outside Israel, as well as disseminating information and arousing public awareness regarding the importance of Oral History. We believe that the journal *Remembrance and Research*, dedicated exclusively to Oral History, provides a central forum for discussing the professional aspects of Oral History as well as acting as a bridge between researchers and interviewers in Israel and abroad.

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[3]

In honor of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel we published several articles dealing with Oral Histories with and about Israeli Prime Ministers. Two of them raise the argument of oblivion and vagueness that can be best defined as "discriminative collective memory". We also published an article on the history of the Israel police as well as a testimony relating to the early days of Israel's diplomatic service. This issue also includes articles on the preservation of ethnic memories in Israel and abroad and on the reflection of identity in the language of immigrants and their children, based on the study of German spoken by the Yekkes.

### Abstracts: The English Section

The English Section opens with three articles on the Yekkes in Israel, based on interviews conducted by Prof. Anne Betten of the University of Salzburg – a linguist who studied the German spoken by Jewish immigrants and their children from Germany and Austria who settled in the Land of Israel. In addition to linguistic aspects, the interviews

constitute a corpus of life stories that can be analyzed from different perspectives, such as immigration, identity and inter-generational relations. A copy of the interviews was deposited in the Oral History Division, Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Telling Stories as Means of Argumentation: Narratives about Youth Experiences in Interviews with Second Generation “Yekkes”**

Anne Betten

When asked how it was to be a child of Yekkes, the second generation often inserts stories that justify their former behaviors. In order to avoid direct criticism, they nonetheless blame Yekkish attitudes in general and their parents' attitudes in particular. On the other hand, the second generation is nowadays interested in inserting into the cultural memory of Israel the contribution of the Yekkish immigration towards building the country. The many stories in this article illustrate the difficulties the parents of the interviewees had to cope with in Eretz Israel. The article combines discourse-analytical approaches to story-telling in Oral History interviews with research on the selective mechanisms of memory utilized in the process of autobiographical construction.

**Pioneers, Losers, White Collars: Narratives of Masculinity Among German-Speaking Jews in Palestine/Israel**

Patrick Farges

Oral histories reveal less about the events as such than about their meaning (Portelli) and thus invite us to inquire into the socio-cultural interpretations of historical experience – including gender. In the present paper, I wish to analyze how the Yekke-case of forced migration was lived and narrated as a gendered experience, and how, in particular, men (and women) present self-narratives of the changes that occurred, throughout the migration process, as well as in the gendered representations of manliness and masculinity.

While representations of German-Jewish masculinity (e.g. the 'muscle Jew') were brought over from Europe, new representations also emerged in Palestine/Israel: e.g. the Jewish settler, kibbutznik, and 'pioneer.' The oral histories also voice the experiences which were felt regarding downward social mobility, of 'losing' social status, thus re-defining traditional gender frames within families. The oral histories hence become sites of gendered identity work and sites of multiple reconfigurations of masculinity.

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[5]

### **Metaphors in the Life Story of A German- Jewish Immigrant to Palestine/Israel**

Simona Leonardi

Contributions to biography research have stressed the role of metaphors in the process of recollection and (re)construction of a person's life-story. This article aims to show how a close linguistic investigation of the metaphorical formulations used by Hilde Rudberg in her 1991 interview with Anne Betten can prove fruitful in revealing Rudberg's emotional involvement, which is not explicitly verbalized in the course of the interview. A fine-grained linguistic analysis focusing especially on metaphors, but also applying tools from other linguistic frameworks (significantly narrative analysis and perspectives on agency) can thus help to shed light on the ways Hilde Rudberg makes sense of her own past in her interview.

### **"You Have No Right to Remain Silent": The Israel Police Oral History Project**

Shlomi Chetrit

The Israel Police Oral History Project aims to record the memories of veteran police officers in order to create a basis for research on law enforcement and internal security history in Israel, and to document the significant current activities of the Israel Police. This article presents the project's goals and methodology, as well as the special challenges which are inherent to documenting the memories of Israel's law enforcers.

## Book Review

### **Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster**

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[6]

Judy Lev

*Voices from Chernobyl* by Nobel Prize winner, Svetlana Alexievich utilizes interviews to transport the reader to the catastrophic explosion of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in 1986. Alexievich uses the voices of the bystanders, participants and victims to recount the horrific aftermath of Chernobyl as the narrators themselves saw and experienced it. This book, based solely on interviews validates the importance of oral history as a way of understanding historical events and their consequences.

## Abstracts: The Hebrew Section

### **Enthnicity, Transnationalism and Identity: Sephardim in Latin America**

Margalit Bejarano

The article examines the way in which adult Jews and their children who migrated from the Middle East and North Africa to Latin America remember and recount the experience of immigration. Its objective is to analyze the construction of the narrative based on the separation from the old home and the encounter with the host country, as well as the process of creation of transnational diasporas which preserved the sub ethnic identities of the Sephardim (Ladino speakers, Aleppans, Damascene and Moroccans). The interviews reflect the negative image of life in the country of origin, but also the idealized image of life inside the Jewish community that is viewed as the true homeland. The preservation of sub-ethnic identities stems from the aspiration to regenerate in Latin America the life they remembered in their communities of origin.

## **The Significance of Oral History to the Biographies of Prime Ministers in Israel: A symposium**

Judith Reifen Ronen

Writing the biographies of Israel's Prime Ministers would not be possible without utilizing Oral History testimonies. The current edition of *Remembrance and Research* II has included three articles which were presented in 2013 by the authors themselves at a symposium organized by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Oral History Association marking the donation of the Golda Meir Oral History Collection to the Oral History Division, Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Golda Meir corpus consists of 116 interviews. Some of them were conducted with Golda Meir herself, others with high ranking officials who served with Meir when she was an official delegate of the State of Israel to the USSR. Other interviews were conducted when she was Minister of Labor, Foreign Minister and finally as Prime Minister. The corpus also consists of interviews with members of the family and friends.

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## **David Ben Gurion: the Man Behind the Legend**

Michael Bar Zohar

In his article Prof. Michael Bar Zohar presents several concrete examples that emphasize the importance of Oral History such as the fact that he was able to confirm the identity of the man who assassinated Count Folke Bernadotte. Prof. Bar Zohar also relates that Ben Gurion's revelation regarding his only true love and the grief he experienced regarding this relationship presents us with another surprising insight into the human dimension of the legendary Ben Gurion. Prof. Bar Zohar explains the significance of Ben Gurion's avoidance to answer some of his questions, such as in the case of the Saison ("Hunting Season"). Utilizing Oral History it was also revealed that the construction of the Dimona Nuclear Reactor was made possible by the forging of the date on the official agreement between



Shimon Peres and the French Prime Minister Bourgès-Maunoury – a fact that was not previously disclosed by any written documents.

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[8]

**Moshe Sharett: A Connected and Communicated Prime Minister**

Gabriel Sheffer

The article of Prof. Gabriel Sheffer deals with two major topics: the role of Oral History in the writing of his book on the political biography of Moshe Sharett and the impressive ability of Sharett to be connected and to communicate with people, institutions and media. Sheffer briefly describes the political roles that Sharett played since the 1920's, his extensive international connections, his political struggles with Ben Gurion, his eventual exclusion from the government, and finally the oblivion and disregard of his political accomplishments. Sheffer refers to the interviews he conducted with relatives and individuals who worked or collaborated with Sharett. Sheffer analyzes the methodological aspects of evaluating interviews with those who were close to the protagonist of the biography.

**Yitzhak Shamir: Actions Rather Than Words**

Yosef (Yossi) Ahimeir

The article of Yosef Ahimeir is based on his memories from his work as director of Yitzhak Shamir's Bureau. He points out his preoccupation of documenting Shamir's legacy for the sake of history, despite the natural tendency of this Prime Minister - who had spent much of his career in secret activities and avoided talking about himself. Ahimeir describes his initiative to record Shamir's ideology and deeds through the editing of the book "The Prime Minister's Speech" that reflected his uncompromising devotion to the entirety of the Land of Israel. He sheds light on Shamir's functioning as a Prime Minister who placed his national responsibility above anything else, as reflected in his historical speech at the Madrid Conference in 1991. Ahimeir argues that Shamir's great achievements were forgotten from the collective memory, and Ahimeir's memories will contribute to save them from oblivion.

## **A Testimony from the Archive: Yitzhak Navon's Diplomatic Service in Uruguay**

Interviewers: Rosa Perla Raicher and Leonardo Senkman

The document brings several extracts from an interview conducted in 1987 by Dr. Rosa Perla Raicher and Dr. Leonardo Senkman with Yitzhak Navon, who was Second Secretary in the Israeli Legation in Montevideo – the fourth diplomatic mission established after the foundation of the State of Israel. Navon recounts his impressions from Uruguay – a country that taught him that quality is more important than quantity. He describes the enormous excitement of Uruguayan Jews who viewed the foundation of the Jewish State as a miracle and treated its diplomatic representatives with reverence.

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[9]

## **My Story: Children Document Life Stories Following the Recommendations of Biton's Committee**

Sharon Rapaport

The article describes an educational initiative whereby students learn about the history of the Iraqi Jews after being taught the techniques of Oral History and the recording of life histories. The project was implemented by updating the school curriculum following the Biton Report which called on the Education Ministry to readdress the exclusion of the Jewish immigrants from Arab Countries (Mizrachim) from the Zionist narrative. This new curriculum greatly increases the study of the Mizrahi heritage. Throughout the six months course of study, students embarked on a learning process that culminated in a production of a short film which expressed their personal reactions to the narratives discussed. The article concludes with an evaluation of the emotional aspects of the project and the impact it had on the students.

## Book Review

### Roads of History and Memory in Latin America

Margalit Bejarano

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[10]

The review essay summarizes the book: *Caminos de historia y memoria en América Latina*, edited by Gerardo Necochea Gracia and Antonio Torres Montenegro (Buenos Aires 2011). This is a collection of articles which analyze the political and social role played by Oral History in Latin America. It delves into the struggles of left wing organizations against dictatorship and in the struggle of disadvantaged ethnic and social groups against those who possess economic and political hegemony.

Dr. Margalit Bejarano and Dr. Judith Reifen-Ronen

# Narratives of German-Jewish Immigrants to Palestine-Israel:

A Source for Oral History and Discourse Analysis

[11]

Anne Betten / Patrick Farges / Simona Leonardi

## Introduction to the Following Three Articles/Anne Betten

The following three articles are based on two long-term oral history-projects about “Yekkes”<sup>1</sup> in Israel, which started in 1989 and were over the years supplemented with new interviews. They were initiated and directed by Dr. Anne Betten, professor of German Linguistics at the Universities of Eichstaett/Germany and later Salzburg/Austria. In the initial stages of the project she was assisted by Dr. Kristine Hecker (University of Bologna/Italy), and Dr. Miryam Du-nour (Jerusalem and Bar-Ilan University), who also conducted interviews.<sup>2</sup>

The major corpus consists of about 200 interviews with German speaking immigrants, who fled to Palestine/Israel from Central European countries during Nazi persecution (referred to as the first generation). Most of these interviews were held between 1989 and 1998, mainly in the private homes of the interviewees or in retirement homes (“Elternheime”) in various locations in Israel. A smaller corpus containing 62 interviews with the second generation of Yekkes (mainly children of persons who participated in the first project) was collected between 1999 and 2006. Meanwhile, the interviews (90 minutes on average) have all been digitalized, and the corpora are presently stored at the Archive of Spoken German (DGD) at Institut für

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<sup>1</sup> About “Yekke” (germ. *Jecke*) as the (originally derogatory) term for the German speaking Jews and its changes, see e.g. Diner (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Book-publications Betten (1995), Betten/Du-nour (2000) with partial transcriptions and linguistic analyses, and Betten/Du-nour (1995/2004) with text excerpts from all interviewees.

Deutsche Sprache (IDS) Mannheim, and at the Oral History Division (OHD) of the Hebrew University Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>

[12]

All first generation interviewees still spoke fluent German, most of them at a high level as it was spoken by educated classes in the 1920s. One of Betten's professional interests was to explore why the interviewees maintained the German language with such proficiency despite all they had suffered, and whether they had passed their native language on to their children. Furthermore, why and how the second generation had preserved the German language, which was in many cases still used within the family, at least during childhood years. In the interviews with the second generation, both German (ranging from fluent to 'pidgin') and English were used; some interviewees preferred to exclusively speak English, even though they understood German well, while the majority engaged to some extent various forms of code switching between German and English (as the interviewer Betten did not speak Hebrew).

All interviews can be classified as spontaneous narrative autobiographical interviews. The conversations with members of the first generation focus on the ruptures in their lives, their youth in Europe, the circumstances of their emigration and the difficulties of a new beginning, with special regard to the change in language and culture. The interviews with members of the second generation proceeded from questions such as: what was it like to grow up

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<sup>3</sup> See with detailed data-information and additional material the web-presentation of the IDS: <http://dgd.ids-mannheim.de> (corpora IS, ISW, ISZ). The OHD web-presentation provides information about the genesis of both projects and tables of contents in English: [http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/F/?func=file&file\\_name=find-b&local\\_base=hdohd&con\\_lng=eng](http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=hdohd&con_lng=eng) (project no. 234 = 1<sup>st</sup> generation, project no. 266 = 2<sup>nd</sup> generation); since 2016 40 audio-recordings with transcriptions are available on Youtube: <http://multimedia.huji.ac.il/oralhistory/eng/catalog-en.htm>. – For information about the 1<sup>st</sup> generation-project in Hebrew see Betten (2009). For a complete, regularly updated list of publications related to the corpora cf. <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/ger/anne.betten> (> Forschungsgebiete > Link).

between cultures? did they appreciate or dislike their parents' 'German' lifestyle and behaviour? did they change their opinions later in life? and how did they define their current attitudes, both towards their German-Jewish heritage and towards present-day Germany and Austria?

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[13]

Alongside with complex issues of documentation, the first decade of research was committed to studying grammatical language phenomena and sociolinguistic questions, e.g. reasons for language preservation or loss, language attitudes, and multilingualism. During the last 15 years the analysis extended moreover to linguistic aspects of discourse, narration and psychology, memory and remembrance, and the expression of emotion. The interviews can indeed be considered as language biographies, a topic of great concern in the context of migration studies. However, because of the biographical topics and the personal perspective on historical events, the interviews are also important oral history documents. It was therefore the desire of a younger group of researchers looking into the interviews with methods of discourse analysis and oral history<sup>4</sup> to present their individual approaches in a panel at the International Conference on Oral History "Looking at Then, Now", in 2014 in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Three of these papers are being published here, with the aim of showing how oral history and discourse analysis/linguistics may interact and mutually benefit from one other. Two papers (Farges, Leonardi) refer to interviews with the first generation, one (Betten) is concerned with the narratives of the second generation. The latter will be presented first because it provides general information about the (partly stereotypical) image of the Yekkes, which also reveals some of the irritations caused in a different environment by migrants' cultural behaviour; the analysis highlights the narrators' positions "then and now." The paper of Leonardi gives insights into discourse-analytical interpretations of a traumatic story of emigration, while Farges applies

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<sup>4</sup> See the presentation of selected papers from workshops at the universities of Bologna, Rome, Milan, Naples and Paris in Leonardi/Thüne/Betten (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Organized by The Oral History Division, Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 8-10, 2014.

new historical gender interests to male self-narratives under the influence of the migration process.

**Literature:**

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[14]

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# Telling Stories as Means of Argumentation

## Narratives about Youth Experiences in Interviews with Second Generation “Yekkes”

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[15]

**Anne Betten**

### **Introduction: The Project and the Interview Setting**

In 1999, I started with a new series of interviews with children of first generation German-speaking immigrants who I had previously interviewed (referred to as second generation). Their parents had already provided me with some information about their relationship with their children, about the latter's acceptance or rejection of their European cultural heritage, about their maintenance of German as family language or their decision to speak exclusively Hebrew at an earlier or later stage in life. Of particular interest was how their children had responded to the linguistic and cultural setting of their surroundings when realizing the difference to the originally German background of their parental home. This question had triggered my curiosity to engage the children in person, who I felt had been, *no lens-volens*, involved in the cultural clash their parents were exposed to. My focus was on the question of what it was like to be a child of “Yekkes”. This then turned out to be such a major issue for the second generation that everybody seemed eager to comment on it.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. habil. Anne Betten, prof. of German linguistics; publications mainly on oral language, discourse analysis, stylistics, historical syntax, language in literature, language and migration; since 1989 extensive interview projects with German speaking emigrants and second-generation “Yekkes” in Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> For more analyses of these interviews see Betten (2010), (2011a), (2011b), (2013), (2014), (2016).



“Looking at then, now”<sup>2</sup>, however, proved to raise some fundamental difficulties for a clear-cut discussion of this question. The resulting answers were mostly a balancing act between the second generation’s loyalty to their parents and the justification of their own sometimes critical and opposing behaviour towards them which they exhibited in the past and occasionally still in the present. The context and circumstances can be outlined quickly. They are based on the perception of the “Yekkes” living in the Yishuv in the 1930s, which until that time was dominated by Eastern European Jews, causing that the second generation was confronted with their prejudices. The general portrayal of the German-speaking Jews became increasingly stereotyped. The “Yekkes” were characterized as orderly, pedantic, not spontaneous but very planned and organized, stiff, inflexible, lacking humour, obsessed by punctuality and good manners, very strict (e.g., in the upbringing of their children), educated, academic, yet impractical, honest, reliable (often to their own disadvantage), ridiculously polite, awkward, slow on the uptake, etc.<sup>3</sup> The reaction of the second generation was often shame, rebellion against their education and an entirely different socio-cultural re-orientation. Their values and ideals were preferably derived from the pioneers in the kibbutzim and they often deliberately made friends with children of Eastern European or Oriental background, with whom their parents refused to mingle. The examples given in the next chapter provide an illustration of this often-discussed topic.

### **Stories About Typically “Yekkish” Behaviour of the Parents**

Interviewee Irit E. grew up on Mount Carmel in Haifa, which used to be one of the most Yekkish areas of the country.<sup>4</sup> The topic of the following excerpt revolves around her mother’s prejudices representing a typically Yekkish attitude and the disappointment and

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<sup>2</sup> Title of the Oral History Conference Jerusalem 2014, where I first presented the main ideas of this paper; see Introduction, fn. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. later example (4a).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Betten (2016) in a volume on Yekkes in Haifa.

shame of her daughter, who as a consequence started to question the values of her upbringing.<sup>5</sup>

**Irit E. (born 1953 in Haifa), former secretary who as a mature student continued her University studies with an MA and a PhD in Criminology. She then became a lecturer in Criminology at several colleges.**



[17]

Irit E. (Right) and Anne Betten in Nahsholim,  
Interview on September 22, 2005  
(Photo: private)

Example 1: 22m9s–22m56s (full length of the interview: 130m19s.);  
language: German<sup>6</sup>

<p><b>IE:</b> [...] und ich werde nie vergessen, ich habe meine beste Freundin * von der Klasse da in der neue Schule, hab ich nach Hause gebracht, und meine Mutter hat sie gefragt: * „Bist du aus Europa?“ ** Und sie hat gesagt: „Ja.“ * Sagt meine Mutter: „Oh sag mal, * nein, du siehst nicht aus, als wenn du</p>	<p>001 002 003 004 005 006 007 008 009</p>	<p>IE: [...] and I will never forget, I brought my best friend * of my class there in the new school, I brought home, and my mother asked her: * “Are you from Europe?” ** And she said: “Yes.” * My mother said: “Oh tell me, * no, you do not look like being from Europe.” “Well, I</p>
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<sup>5</sup> As linguistic details can offer important cues for the psychological and emotional condition of the speaker and the interpretation of an utterance, in discourse analysis it is common to use specific transcription forms which strive to include as many details as possible of the original utterance, including all sorts of repetitions or abruptions, fillers, simultaneous speech, hesitation markers, pauses, etc. The examples here are presented in a rather simplified transcription, using normal punctuation and indicating only the length of pauses (1\*=1 second), the “ums” (germ. *hm* or *äh*), abruptions (/), and simultaneous speaking (underlined).

<sup>6</sup> Because of the importance of linguistic details (see fn. 5), it is essential for the analysis to present the spoken text in the original language, like here in ex. 1, 3, and 4a (in 4b the German original is omitted, due to lack of space). The same arguments apply to the following articles of Leonardi and Farges.

[18]

aus Europa bist.“ „Also, ich bin aus	010	am from Bulgaria” * And then
Bulgarien.“ * Und da hat sie gesagt,	011	she said: “And my mother told
„Und meine Mutter hat mir gesagt“,	012	me”, this child said: “My mother
sagt dieses Kind: „Meine Mutter hat	013	said, Bulgaria is in Europe.” *
gesagt, Bulgarien ist in Europa.“ *	014	My mother said: “Well, this
Sagt meine Mutter: „Na ja, dieses	015	Europe I know, too.” * Okay,
Europa kenn ich auch.“ * Okay, und	016	and that was the last time, that
das war das letzte Mal, dass dieses	017	this child / that this * friend was
Kind / dass diese * Freundin bei mir	018	at my house of course, * and I
natürlich war, * und ich durfte auch	019	was also not allowed to go to
nicht zu ihr gehen, weil das war ein	020	her, because that was a
ganz anderes * Europa, * die	021	completely different * Europe, *
Bulgarien (???): * „Meine Kinder	022	the Bulgaria (???): * “My
gehen nicht damit“, und da	023	children don’t go with it”, and
irgendwie kam es bei mir, * also	024	then somehow I realised, * well
Jeckes Jeckes, das ist sehr schön,	025	Yekkes Yekkes, that is very
Jeckes bist du, und bist die Cilly,	026	nice, Yekkes that’s you, and
und bist die Oma, * aber ich bin	027	that’s Cilly, and that’s grandma,
eine Sabre [...]	028	* but I am a Sabre [...]



Irit E. (middle with a doll) with her sister Cilly (left) and grandparents and mother (top right) in Haifa 1957  
Photo: courtesy of Cyla Rockman

Irit’s account of the incident includes a re-staging of the communication via direct speech at climactic points in the story. This increases the entertainment value of the story and guarantees the interest of the listener. In the linguistic terms of positioning analysis this kind of performance is called “interactional positioning by narrative design”.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, this technique permits a positioning of the story characters vis-à-vis each other, thus the characters “are strategically designed by the narrator from his/her present point of view” (Deppermann 2013, 7). This approach is also

<sup>7</sup> Deppermann (2013, 7) with reference to Michael Bamberg’s numerous publications on positioning (e.g. Bamberg 1997; 2011).

influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) concept of 'voice' "in order to refer to different positions tellers enact locally".<sup>8</sup>

By her last sentence (024-028)<sup>9</sup> Irit positions herself by means of a meta-narrative, retrospective comment. Evaluating comments are frequently made from the perspective at the time of the interview, but not in this case: here it suggests a development of the speaker, the formation of an insight sometime after the narrated event, but as the complete interview will show, this is not her final evaluation. Irit's relationship with her mother improved in her later years, after she had tried to understand her mother's background.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, her specific way of presenting this subject matter also functions as a self-excuse: Even though she later regretted the conflicts between her mother and herself, Irit is not willing to change her negative evaluation of her mother's behaviour.

[19]

The following examples demonstrate that temporal references open up a very complex system in which the point of view can switch to any point on the time axis. The teller of a story can choose from different perspectives on this axis, from different stages of his/her life, and by doing so display different identities of himself/herself, which may interfere with each other or demonstrate the development of the actual identity of the narrator/interviewee.

Interviewee Naomi Y. addresses the same topic as the speaker of ex. (1), but in a less refined verbal presentation.<sup>11</sup> Naomi, too, depicts her adolescent self as rebellious. She criticizes the behaviour of her father, a lawyer, towards her friends as the typical arrogance of Ashkenazi towards Mizrahi Jews. In ex. (2a) she illustrates this with a quotation of a typical uttering of her father telling her to "bring [...] an Ashkenazi" (009f.) boyfriend. While remembering this request (006) she decides to give first some information about herself and the

<sup>8</sup> Deppermann (2013, 7) quotes here how Bakhtin's concept was used by Wortham (2001).

<sup>9</sup> The line numbers refer to the English translation.

<sup>10</sup> After her mother's death she wrote her master thesis about Jews in East Berlin.

<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons may be the interviewee's lack of proficiency in English.

context in which such a request was uttered. In addition to this characteristic anecdote she later provides an evaluative summary (012).

[20]

**Naomi Y. (born 1957 in Tel Aviv), high school teacher of handicapped and difficult children.**

Example 2a): 66m5s–67m23s (full length of the interview: 167m42s.); language: English

001	AB: [...] or did you / * Did you have your * your friends in completely
002	different * <i>um</i> well, * backgrounds of your friends, families and
003	so, where you <u>felt better</u> ?
004	NY: ..... <u>Completely different</u> . *
005	AB: Yeah.
006	NY: Completely different. I remember once he told me, ** I had a lot
007	of * boyfriends, I was * I was thinner and pretty, ok. * And I was
008	going around. * And <i>um</i> once, I remember my father told me *
009	once, "I want to / * you to * bring you an Ashkenazi", because
010	always I went out with <i>um</i> / * with <i>um</i> * Mizrahi [...]
011	[40s left out]
012	NY: [...] he was always looking down on people.

Naomi's way of speaking in this interview is seldom enhanced by storytelling; it rather consists of reasoning and evaluating, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Example 2b): 71m7s–72m2s

001	NY: Although I didn't get along with him. * I mean, * I always felt
002	that he loves me. * I mean, * he would never he (???) me,
003	that my father doesn't love me. * I
004	AB: (???)
005	NY: always felt that he loves me, and he is / * and he's for me
006	and he wants my best. * But the way he did it was wrong. ***
007	AB: And did / * Did <u>you have</u> the * feeling it is his personal
008	NY: (???)
009	AB: character or did you / * did you think * <i>um</i> * like my friend for
010	example, that these Yekkes, these German Jews all were

011		like that probably, that it must have been * <i>um</i> where they
012		come from. (LAUGHS)
013	NY:	Yes, I did have * this <u>feeling</u> , because * because <i>um</i> I had a
014		good friend, a
015	AB:	(???)
016	NY:	girlfriend, (???), she is still my girlfriend, * I just saw her this
017		week, and <i>um</i> she had <i>um</i> the same * kind of father, * <i>um</i>
018		Yekke, * and <i>um</i> * she had this / * almost the same problem.

[21]

The statement “I didn’t get along with him” (001) refers to the past without a clear indication of the duration. In other parts of the interview Naomi provides information that the relationship between her and her father improved after her elder brother’s tragic death in the army. He had been her father’s favourite, whereas she seemed to be a problematic child. After this event she decided to prove to him that she could be successful as well, and her father started to devote more attention and affection to her. When she utters with several reformulations “I always felt that he loves me” (001f), this does not sound convincing for her feelings in the past, but incorporates obviously later points of view. Unquestionable from her present point of view, however, is the evaluation in her statement: “But the way he did it was wrong” (006). And she explicitly confirms that her father’s behaviour was typically Yekkish (017f): her friend had “the same kind of father, *um* Yekke”, and she had “almost the same problem”.

Example (3) demonstrates how much the second generation criticizes the lack of spontaneity of their Yekkish parents, often resulting in a somehow distanced relationship. After Yael B., who speaks German fluently, had described the atmosphere of her Yekkish parental home as very strict, orderly and, despite her mother’s many social contacts and cultural activities, even stiff and cold, the interviewer asks Yael whether she revised her childhood perception in later life:

[22]



**Yael B. (born 1945 in Jerusalem), worked for a nature conservation organisation for more than 20 years, later as a travel guide in Israel and Germany.**

Yael B. and Anne Betten  
Interview on January 2, 2005  
(Photo: private)

Example 3: 58m40s–60m34s (full length of the interview: 156m42s.);  
language: German

<p><b>AB:</b> Hast du an einem bestimmten Punkt angefangen, deine Mutter dann auch etwas anders zu sehen, also so ähm / und diese Dinge, die als Kind vielleicht etwas lästig waren, <b>YB:</b> Ja und nein. <b>AB:</b> ähm jetzt dann doch zu bewundern, dass sie das in ihrem Leben so weiterverfolgt hat? <b>YB:</b> Ja, sehr viel (???). Ja. Ich bin auch heute / Also, als erwachsene * Person kann ich die Sachen viel besser beurteilen und und verstehen, und auch die Gründe verstehen. * Teilweise wenigstens. * Andererseits muss ich ehrlich sein. * Viele Sachen bis heute stören mich, genau wie sie mich gestört haben * als Kind. Das ist interessant. * Meine Mutter weiß es. Also, sehr * oft kommen wir gar nicht zu einer</p>	<p>001 002 003 004 005 006 007 008 009 010 011 012 013 014 015 016 017 018 019 020 021 022 023</p>	<p><b>AB:</b> Did you at a certain point start to see your mother a bit differently, so <i>um</i> / And these things, which as a child were <u>perhaps a bit annoying</u>, <b>YB:</b> <u>Yes and no</u>. <b>AB:</b> <i>um</i> to admire now to a certain extent, that she pursued this further in her life? <b>YB:</b> Yes, very much (???). Yes. Today I am still / Well, as a grown up * person I can judge things much better and understand, and also understand the reasons. * At least partly. * On the other hand I must be honest. * Many things disturb me till nowadays, exactly as they disturbed me when I was * a child. That's interesting. * My mother knows it. Well, very * often we do not</p>
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Gelegenheit, sich in in Ruhe *	024	get a chance, to enjoy a quiet, *
gemütlich unterhalten, wegen *	025	cosy chat, because of * this
diesen <i>antagonism</i> , die eben /	026	antagonism, which actually /
den ich habe. Also, das hängt	027	which I have. Well, it often
sehr viel ab von von mir. (???)	028	depends on me. (???) For
Zum Beispiel ähm, * ja also, sie	029	example <i>um</i> , * yes well, since
ist seit zwei Jahren oder etwas	030	two years or a bit longer she is
mehr in diesem Altersheim, * hat	031	in this senior home, * but has
aber ein selbstständiges Leben	032	an independent life there, *
dort, * ob sie schon sehr	033	although she is already very
behindert ist. * Und ähm * also,	034	disabled. * And <i>um</i> * well, you
man kann sie immer besuchen,	035	can always visit her, and * so. *
und * so. * Also, ich kann nicht	036	Well, I cannot come
spontan kommen, sie besuchen.	037	spontaneously to visit her. I
Ich muss mich vorher anmelden.	038	have to announce my visit in
(???) Diese kleinen Sachen. Ja,	039	advance. (???) These little
und wenn ich spontan k/ Ich hab	040	things. Yes, and if I come
paar Mal versucht. * Wenn ich	041	spontaneously/ I tried it a
spontan komme: * „Ja! * Ach,	042	couple of times. * If I come
warum hast du nicht früher	043	spontaneously: * "Oh! * Oh,
gesagt? Würde ich wissen, dass	044	why did you not tell me in
du kommst, dann würde, und	045	advance? If I knew that you
dann“, * und so weiter und so	046	come, then I would, and then“,
weiter. Von meinen Kindern	047	* and so on and so on. She
verlangt sie das nicht. *	048	does not expect it from my
<b>AB:</b> Aha.	049	children. *
<b>YB:</b> Das ist interessant, das ist /	050	<b>AB:</b> Aha.
Ja. * Oder ** / Also, sehr viele	051	<b>YB:</b> That's interesting, that's /
Sachen, die mich als Kind gestört	052	Yes. * Or ** / Well, many
haben, existieren noch heute, und	053	things, which disturbed me
die kann ich nicht akzept/ * Und	054	when I was a child, exist till
ich bin (???) sehr oft auch / ähm *	055	today, and I cannot accept
ähm hab ich Schuld/ ähm gefühle,	056	them/ * And I am (???) very
dass ich nicht mehr verstehe und	057	often also / <i>um</i> * <i>um</i> I feel guilty
mehr akzeptiere. * Heutzutage ich	058	/ <i>um</i> / that I do not understand
bin beinahe sechzig, hätte ich	059	better and accept more. * Now I
müssen schon * die Sachen alles	060	am almost sixty, and I should
akzeptieren. Aber es sind	061	already have * accepted all
Sachen, die sich nicht geändert	062	these things. But these are
haben.	063	things, that did not change.



[24]

Yael's response to the question whether she, in her later years, had started to show understanding and even respect for the consistence with which her mother had adhered to principles throughout her life is, at first, agreement: "Yes, very much" (011) and she adds: "as a grown-up person I can judge things much better and understand [...] the reasons" (012ff). Interestingly, however, she qualifies her remark gradually: "at least partly", "on the other hand" (016ff), and finally "I must be honest. Many things disturb me till



Yael B's mother in her senior home with  
Anne Betten  
(Photo: private)

nowadays, exactly as they disturbed me when I was a child" (018ff). She offers an example taken from the present: Even now although her mother lives in a senior residence she does not appreciate Yael's spontaneous visits (028ff). Yael follows this up with a detailed

comment that she often feels guilty (057) about the fact that she "cannot accept" (055) that she and "these things [...] did not change" (062f) throughout the years. This suggests that the positioning of the interacting persons has not changed, mother and daughter still show the same patterns of behaviour: "Looking at then, now" results in a better understanding of the reasons in the present, but can neither prevent the same reactions nor the negative evaluations and perceptions as in the past, i.e. intellectual development could not influence the emotional reactions.<sup>12</sup>

The next interviewee, journalist David W., reports that he had a warm Russian mother and a very strict Yekkish father. So far his story

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<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this interview and comparable argumentations in other interviews see Betten (2007).

does not contradict those of other interviewees; it rather reveals some new facets of the same problem:

**David W. (born 1948 in Petah Tikva, raised in Haifa), studied Music and Political Philosophy, journalist and part-time lecturer of Political Sciences and History.**

[25]

Example 4a): 15m35s–17m8s (full length of the interview: 74m6s); language: German

<b>DW:</b> [...] das war nicht unbedingt, dass er deutsch sprechen sollte. Aber er sollt/ * Er sollte pünktlich sein, * er sollte * bestimmte Normen von Arbeit haben, * er sollte bestimmte ähm ähm ähm Kenntnis haben, * ja, so ein Basis von Ke/ von Kenntnis, von von Wissen. * Ä! (Ähm) er sollte (???) ähm bestimmte Beziehungen mit andere Leute haben, ja, so Respekt vor andere Leute, Respekt vor Hierarchie, * Respekt vor O/ * Obrigkeit, und so weiter und so fort. * Wir kennen das alles natürlich aus Deutschland, ja, * oder aus Europa. * Er sollte Europäer / * Er sollte eigentlich ähm auch auch anständig angezogen werden, er sollte * anständig essen * zuhause, ähm und so weiter. Er sollte gen/ * genau ** das, * sich pass/ * anpassen, ja, an * was * ähm die D/ die Jeckes * damals Kultur nannten.	001 002 003 004 005 006 007 008 009 010 011 012 013 014 015 016 017 018 019 020 021 022 023 024 025 026	<b>DW:</b> [...] it was not necessarily that he had to speak German. But he should/ * He ought to be punctual, * he ought * to have certain working standards, * he ought to have certain <i>um um</i> skills, * yes, certain basic sk/ skills, a a basic knowledge. * <i>Um</i> he should (???) <i>um</i> have certain relationships to other people, yes, a kind of respect for other people, respect for hierarchy, * respect for au/ *authorities, and so on and so on. * We know all this of course from Germany, yes, * or from Europe. * He should [be] European / * He actually <i>um</i> should also be decently dressed, he should * eat decently * at home, <i>um</i> and so on. He should do * exactly ** that, * to ad/ * adapt, yes, to that * what * <i>um</i> the G/ the Yekkes * at that time called culture.	027 028 029 030 031 032 033
[37s left out] <b>DW:</b> Ich glaube, man muss das alles als ein * <i>package</i> nehmen, * oder nichts. * Ja, alles passt zueinander. Ähm das ist so ein ein <i>package</i> , * ein bestimmte <i>package</i> .		[37s left out] <b>DW:</b> I think, one has to take all this [together] as a * <i>package</i> , * or nothing. * Yes, everything fits together. <i>Um</i> this is all a <i>package</i> , * a certain <i>package</i> .	

[26]

When David describes his father, he immediately moves from his personal character traits to his typically Yekkish attributes. In addition to this generalization he constructs a whole theoretical concept regarding Yekkes and their very special characteristics, which he describes as a package (029) of positive and negative qualities having influenced the development of Eretz Israel in many important areas. This attitude reflects current efforts by various members of the second generation to pinpoint the achievements of the Yekkish immigration and its contribution to building the country in the cultural memory of Israel.<sup>13</sup> In David's 'package-theory' "everything fits together" (030f). He does not explicitly say that the good and the bad sides of this norm-orientation belong together like two sides of the same coin, but the following personal report suggests this interpretation:

Example 4b): 21m1s–23m37s

001	<b>DW:</b> [...] I could/ I could see, (???) my/ (???) <i>um</i> * my * <i>um</i> Yekkish
002	<i>um</i> friends, yes, the the the children, yes, * that the children there
003	<i>um</i> as a child <i>um</i> as children [felt] rather miserable <i>um um</i> / It was
004	no fun to be a child, <i>um</i> a Yekkish child. * And in my case, it was of
005	course no fun <i>um</i> to be a child of my father. * But my father had in
006	the OBG, this clothing store / * <i>um</i> in Haifa he had / he was the * /
007	He was the boss * of this whole store, * and there were many
008	people, people from Eastern Europe, <i>um</i> tailors and other rather
009	poor people. * And he was so to say a * a a a father * of these
010	people. Yes? Yes? He was not only a boss. There was * very very *
011	patriarchal <i>um</i> relationships there. * And <i>um</i> * I have seen his his/
012	his generosity [...].
013	<b>[DW gives an example</b> how his father fought against the authorities
014	in order to get a pension insurance for the workers, 1m32s]
015	<b>DW:</b> And he managed to get it through, because he was totally *
016	convinced, * based on his * own values and * his own <i>um</i> norms and
017	so on. * [He] could actually have acted (???) * differently. * One can
018	understand this, yes? * But at home matters are quite different.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. the contributions in Zimmermann/Hotam (2005), among these an article of David W[itzthum].

David's Yekkish friends felt "rather miserable", "it was no fun" to be a Yekkish child (003f), and he adds a personal confession: "it was of course no fun *um* to be a child of my father" (004f). "Of course" indicates that it could never have been different, because his father was a Yekke. But then David describes the other side of the coin (005ff): In his clothing company his father had acted as a very responsible boss, fighting for the best for his employees. David considers this as the better side of the Yekkish norms, although matters were "quite different" at home (018).



David W. and his parents in Haifa 1953  
Photo: Courtesy of David W.

In contrast to the female interviewees in this article, David does not give a really personal insight into his relationship with his father, except the evaluative statement "it was no fun to be a child of my father". Instead of referring to emotional events or providing a psychological analysis, he chooses to develop a general theory based on his personal experiences. With respect to positioning analysis he does not talk about changes of his point of view, then and now – although we may assume that he made the observations of his father's responsible behaviour towards his subordinates later in his adolescence and that he developed his 'package theory' even much later. But David does not talk about any personal development – he rather provides an account of seemingly static-remaining good and bad experiences, which he presents as if they were facts, independent from any point of view.

The previous examples show that the image of the Yekkes in the broader society of the Yishuv even influenced the way how the children interpreted their parents' behaviour. If we had exclusively concentrated on the (at times extremely stereotyped) perception of the

[28]

Yekkes, we could have stopped here. The methodological approach of this paper, however, was supposed to focus not only on the interviewees' personal perspectives, but also on possible changes in the positioning of individuals in relation to others and to themselves, and accordingly in their evaluation of past and present events and attitudes. In order to deepen these aspects, at least one more example should be added.

Interviewee Irit S. – again a woman – interestingly also works in the educational sector, like two of the previous female interviewees (this may be worth a psychological analysis of its own). She provides a very personal account of her relationship to her mother, which is so negative that the interviewer repeatedly asked whether she had not changed her opinion over the years and was quite shocked about the firm rejection. Irit describes herself as an unexpected (i.e., unplanned) child and therefore as not loved by her mother. She considers this tragedy of her childhood to be the result of her mother's Yekkish obsession with planning. She tells how everything in her mother's "unimportant" life as a housewife had been going according to plan and that she herself had always been trying to do the opposite of what she saw her mother doing. In addition to her Yekkish character traits her mother also exhibited some typical behaviour of Holocaust victims "even though she didn't pass the [...] Holocaust" (008f) but had escaped it, as Irit emphasizes. She gives examples of how her mother used to store food and used to be thrifty when it came to spending money:

**Irit S. (born 1951 in Tel Aviv), studied Occupational Therapy and Psychology, teacher of handicapped children.**

Example 5: 51m35s–54m49s (full length of the interview: 126m); language: English

001	IS: [...] I left the house when I was eighteen, * my mother used to
002	<i>um</i> * put * food * in the closet, well, * where she use <i>um</i> * to put
003	the clothes. ** Food <i>um</i> / Sweets, not food, sweets. * And when
004	she left the house, * we used to open * and search for the

005	sweets.
006	[1m8s left out]
007	IS: She always knew when * we searched in the closet. * She
008	always knew. ** And you know when my mother died, * even
009	though she didn't pass the Hol/ Holocaust, ** we find * in the
010	kitchen ** food * from the Fifties. ** You know, in the Fifties,
011	there was a <i>zenna</i> [Hebr.: 'economic hardship'] in Israel. * There
012	was lack of <i>um</i> food in Israel. * And * the family of my * father *
013	used to send food * from the States to Israel. * And we still find
014	sugar from that time, ** and <i>um</i> * we find a <i>um</i> * bread, * not
015	from that time, but a few years old, *
016	AB: Yeah.
017	IS: and all kind of things that * part of them were to throw away, it
018	was impossible to use it. * But she has a / * Even though she
019	didn't pass the Holocaust, * she <i>um</i> * she had a years, that * she
020	had no money, * she can't buy what she want to, * so she had
021	the feeling she / * that she must <i>um</i> * <i>um</i> * have storage * of
022	things. * It was kind of sickness of people who passed the
023	Holocaust. * Even
024	AB: Yeah.
025	IS: though she didn't pass.
026	AB: And how do you see it nowadays? <i>Um</i> when you analyze it now,
027	with a distance being much older and looking back to it, do you
028	understand it better?
029	IS: Being / * No. Being / Look, * I very <i>um</i> * <i>um</i> sad to say that par/
030	(???) of / part of * of it passed to me. * Something is wrong that,
031	what I told you before, that * that I have <i>psychologisch</i> , I see
032	this, that's one part of them. * All my attitude for / * to money * is
033	not good. * Or to food, (???) I can't see people * throw away
034	food. * I can't see it.

When the interviewer asks Irit about her perception of her mother nowadays (026ff), she denies having changed her opinion ("No", 029), yet she confesses to be "very *um* \* *um* sad to say that [...] part of \* of it passed to me" (029f). That means that looking at herself now she recognizes that despite her adolescent opposition, the development of her own identity has been highly influenced by the negative role model of her mother.

### 3. Conclusion

[30]

The aim of my interviews with the second generation was not to collect particular historical data, but rather to listen to and analyse personal stories and argumentations. The research question: “What was it like to be a child of Yekkes?” was predestined to elicit subjective reports. It therefore matches with main issues of oral history, e.g., how far narrations of individuals reflect historical ‘truth’, which versions of the past the memories of interviewees provide, and how (sub-)consciously they try to present an interpretation of their life and convictions.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the interviews provide plenty of insightful information about the Yishuv, mainly from the 1930s to the 1960s, with particular attention to the social changes of the Israeli society, the relationship between different ethnic groups, and the particular problems of German-speaking immigrants and their descendants. As factual information is intertwined with personal experience, emotions, convictions and opinions, which may have changed over the years, the linguistic approach via positioning analysis (which was only rudimentary applied here) proves to be particularly suitable for oral history projects in qualifying personal statements and in exposing socio-psychological determinations.

One last remark: not all reports of the second generation regarding their upbringing were as negative as the given examples may suggest. Most of the interviewees expressed a deep attachment to their parents, mainly in later years. The stories about the “Yekkishness” of parents were themselves acts of positioning, with the apologetic function of justifying *now* a lack of interest and sensitivity to their difficult situation *then*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Among the countless oral history publications about these topics I refer especially to Göpfert (1996) in the anthology edited by Clemens Wischermann, and to Portelli (1997, esp. chapt. 4) and Freund (2009).

<sup>15</sup> I would like to thank Yi-heng Chen for correcting my English and Patrick Farges and especially Simona Leonardi for their comments.

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# **Pioneers, Losers, White Collars: Narratives of Masculinity Among German-Speaking Jews in Palestine/Israel**

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**Patrick Farges**

## **Introduction**

As early as 1999, Anne Betten wrote the following invitation to future scholars working in various fields:

*I hereby want to reiterate my appeal to all those interested in working with this corpus of interviews that have been transcribed and made accessible to all. This corpus of more than 300 hours of recordings constitutes a unique archive of linguistic, historical as well as human experience, the study of which is to this date far from being exhaustive (Betten, Du-nour, Dannerer 2000: IX).*

Betten's appeal still holds true, and the collection of interviews known as the 'Israel Corpus' can indeed be considered an oral history archive. Betten's intuition from the beginning of her research was that soliciting, recording and producing "linguistic biographies" (Sprachbiografien) of German and Austrian Jews who had migrated to Palestine in the 1930s was not just a matter of language retention vs. linguistic adaptation. The Israel Corpus collection is an oral history in that it collects both personal memories of biographical importance as well as personal narratives of historical significance. However, oral histories often reveal less about the actual events than about their meaning (Portelli 1981), and thus invite us to inquire into the socio-

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cultural interpretations of historical experience, which include gender and masculinity. The Yekkes' forced migration to Palestine, also called "Fifth Aliya" in Zionist historiography, was profoundly a gendered experience, and this is often only alluded to. In the present paper, I wish to analyse how the interviewees (men and women) present self-narratives of the changes they experienced throughout the migration and post-migration process and related to the gendered representations of masculinity.

## 1. The Interview as a Site of Gendered Performance

The interview is a standardized mode of eliciting biographical narratives. Hence there are expectations and set plans. And yet the outcome of this dialogical operation is highly uncertain and unpredictable. The oral history interview is characterized by a double asymmetry of information: on the one hand the interviewer holds a scientific agenda towards the interviewee; on the other hand the interviewee holds the information. Hence the interview is a co-constructed space in which the narrative has a social – and at times emotional – function within the relational frame interviewer-interviewee. Oral history narratives are products of both this conversational interaction, and of social, historical as well as cultural frames. Meanings about gender – among other things – and forms of 'gender-camaraderie' are thus constantly being negotiated within the interactive space of the interview (Mailänder, Beer, Düring 2011). I shall focus specifically on constructions and models of masculinity: the oral history interview produces gendered constructions of masculinity 'now,' and it also gives insights into the historical and remembered constructions of masculinity – especially about competing models of masculinity.

Over the past thirty years, a first generation of men's studies has offered numerous insights into the construction and representations of masculinities. One important contribution to the field is Raewyn Connell's definition of (and fieldwork on) "hegemonic masculinities" (Connell 1995), a notion which refers to dynamic forms of negotiating masculine domination in given societal frames. First

understood as men's practices guaranteeing their domination over women, the concept of hegemonic masculinity also encompasses men's practices ensuring domination over alternative and subordinate forms of masculinity. According to Jack Halberstam, hegemonic masculinity "depends absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities" (1998: 1). Socially and historically constructed, masculinity appears contingent and fluid. Masculinities are produced through a complex process of development involving negotiation in multiple social relationships, cultural settings, and specific historical circumstances. Connell points out that "to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, [masculinity] is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (2005: 71). Different forms of masculinity exist in definite relations with each other, but often in relations of hierarchy and exclusion, thus relying on power structures. Hegemonic masculinity as the historically and culturally stable and legitimised form of masculinity is essentially dynamic and contextual, i.e. historically situated. It thus maintains a dialectic link with other regimes, systems, or forms of masculinity. In a later stage, Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt have insisted that hegemonic masculinity be understood as a "pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just as a set of role expectations or an identity)" (2005: 832). Masculinities – like femininities – are being practically performed, they refer to ways of "doing gender" (West, Zimmerman 1987). The oral histories hence become sites of gendered identity work and sites of multiple reconfigurations of masculinity.

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What kinds of narratives of masculinity – situated both in the past and in the present – were elicited in the Israel Corpus? To what extent can the experience of 'being a man' – often experienced as an 'all-male' performance – be told in the context of an oral history interview between the interviewee and a team of exclusively feminine interviewers? Do other dimensions, such as the age difference (as relatively young female interviewers interviewed a majority of older men who tended to 'lecture' them about history), play a role?

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The first example is the interview Anne Betten conducted with Elchanan (Erwin) Scheftelowitz. Born in 1911 in Berlin, Scheftelowitz earned his Ph-D in Law in 1934, before attending the rabbinical seminary, and preparing for emigration. He arrived in Palestine in 1937, and became an attorney and notary. In this interview, I shall argue, gendered roles are being performed, which re-enact a model of traditional bourgeois (and academic) masculinity. The question is: to what purpose? The beginning of the interview is the phase in which the general frame of the narrative interaction is being installed. The interviewee has understood that the interviewer's agenda is to learn more about his language proficiency, and to reconstruct his linguistic biography. Scheftelowitz comments:

**Example 1: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Mr. Elchanan (ES) and Mrs. Sara Ruth Scheftelowitz (SRS), Jerusalem, 27 April 1994**

ES: And now, if I tell you something freely, you have to ask yourself what about? It is not just about the form of the speech, you have to ask yourself about its content. And I want to tell you something about history and our time, e.g. about little things that are, by and large, unknown and that would be told for the first time.

*ES: Ich werd Ihnen jetzt etwas frei berichten. Man muss sich aber auch fragen, worüber man berichtet. Das bedeutet: Nicht nur die Form der Rede, sondern auch der Inhalt der Rede. Und ich habe mir vorgenommen, über etwas Historisches zu reden in unserer Zeit. Zum Beispiel über einzelne Dinge und Ereignisse, die im Großen und Ganzen unbekannt sind und die zum ersten Mal der Öffentlichkeit bekannt sind.*

What follows is a lecture in history, performed by a 'learned' Yekke in front of a female audience: a German woman scholar – who reclaims her status in the course of the interview – and Mrs. Scheftelowitz, who voices no particular claim of being proficient in history or in languages (she even admits to “being somewhat stupid” – “ich bin ganz dumm”). Mr. Scheftelowitz adopts a traditional masculine

bourgeois stance, and regularly interrupts the flow of his wife's dramatic life story, in order to re-establish "the facts" in the eyes of the interviewer. Sara-Ruth Scheftelowitz was born in 1915. A kindergarten teacher, she emigrated to the Netherlands in 1934. In 1943, she was arrested and brought to the concentration camps of Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen. She survived, went back to Holland and finally emigrated to Israel in 1949. Here is one example in which the interviewer, Anne Betten, who has previously heard about that dramatic story, helps Mrs. Scheftelowitz tell her version of her own story:

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AB: Allow me to ask something. During my last visit, I learned about the fact that you, Mrs. Scheftelowitz, had been in Auschwitz...

SRS: Not Auschwitz

ES: Bergen-Belsen

AB: So you went to Bergen-Belsen?

ES: Bergen-Belsen in Holland

AB: I don't know if you are ready to tell the story of how you ended up there, Mrs. Scheftelowitz, if your husband already/

*AB: Erlauben Sie mir, dass ich da mal was dazwischen frage. Ich weiß von unserem ersten Besuch, dass Sie, Frau Scheftelowitz, in Auschwitz gewesen sind...*

*SRS: Nicht in Auschwitz*

*ES: Bergen-Belsen*

*AB: In Bergen-Belsen sind Sie gewesen*

*ES: Bergen-Belsen in Holland*

*AB: Ich weiß nicht, ob Sie bereit sind, wenn Ihr Mann das jetzt schon hier/*

Later in the interview, just when Mrs. Scheftelowitz is telling a particularly intense moment of her story, her husband jumps in to set an exact date:

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SRS (FAST): I really thought I would never see my child again in this life. And then the train started again. A lot more died in this train of typhus. And eventually the train stopped near a forest and a huge grave was carved out to bury all the dead. And then the journey went on and on. All the way, the German guards were present. And then we stopped near a small village called Tröbitz and all of a sudden the Germans were gone.

ES: This was April 23rd, 1943

SRS: No, 1945

ES: 1945, I was wrong

SRS: Yes, and we

ES: They got off the train

AB: Would you please let your wife tell the end of the story?

*SRS (SCHNELL): Ich hab gedacht, jetzt sehe ich das Kind im Leben nicht wieder. Und dann sind wir noch weiter gefahren, viele sind gestorben in dem Zug an Flecktyphus, und dann hat der Zug gehalten und man hat im Wald ein großes Grab gemacht und hat all die Toten da reingelegt. Und dann ist er gefahren und gefahren und immer waren die Deutschen als Bewachung dabei. Und dann hat er gehalten auf einmal in einem kleinen Dorf, das heißt Tröbitz. Und auf einmal waren die Deutschen weg.*

ES: Es war der 23. April 1943

SRS: Nein, 1945

ES: 1945, ich hab mich geirrt

SRS: Ja, und wir

ES: Die Insassen stiegen aus

AB: Lassen Sie doch bitte Ihre Frau das noch zu Ende erzählen

To summarize: Mr. Scheftelowitz plays out a traditional “learned” masculine role and doing so, he gets support from his wife. What is at stake here is the understanding of historical relevance, and the relevance of one’s intimate experience to the writing of history. Mrs. Scheftelowitz retraces and re-enacts her lived experience. She says at one point:

Mrs. Betten, listen: all of us, everyone in my generation could tell you a whole novel.

*Hören Sie, Frau Betten, von uns, von unserer Generation hat jeder einen ganzen Roman zu erzählen.*

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The interview is framed by her as a novel in which biographical experience creates coherence. Mr. Scheftelowitz, on the contrary, relies on chronological coherence (e.g. dates), and lectures the German woman scholar who is interviewing him. The interview is performed by him as an academic scene – from a professor to a student. I shall argue that this stance is particularly important to his distinctive identification as a Yekke.

## **2. Oral History Interviews as Sources for Writing the History of Masculinities**

If we now move from the gendered interactions within the space of the interview to the historical constructs of masculinity expressed in the narratives, it is interesting to look for traces of concurring models of masculinity within the Israel Corpus collection. Although the individual trajectories are unique, the scripts and frames used to tell a coherent life-story share a lot of common features and they refer to a generational and existential post-migratory experience. While representations of Jewish masculinity (e.g. the 'muscle Jew') were brought over from Europe, new representations also emerged in Palestine/Israel: e.g. the Jewish settler, the kibbutznik, the 'pioneer' (chalutz). Moreover, the oral histories of the Israel Corpus also voice experiences of male downward social mobility, of 'losing' one's social and bourgeois status, thus re-defining traditional gender frames within families.



## 2.1. The Sons: Pioneers and New Jews?

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There is an important divide within the Israel Corpus (first generation) – the divide between the parents' and the children's experience. The latter generation can also be called the 'generation 1.5,' as it combines an early socialisation in Germany or Austria with migratory rupture, and re-socialisation in Mandate Palestine/Israel at a relatively young age. Among the members of the 'generation 1.5,' there are numerous members of the 'Youth Aliya' (Aliyat HaNoar). This generation experienced and intensely lived the Zionist ideals of the New Jew (Naor 2011).

Moshe (Max) Ballhorn belongs to exactly that younger generation. He was born in 1913 in Berlin and was 20 years of age when he migrated to Mandate Palestine in 1933. At the time, he was a fit and athletic young man who had already "become a fervent Zionist" prior to leaving Germany. In the interview with Anne Betten, he delivers a narrative reconstruction of his first years in Tel Aviv. This new beginning was clearly marked by the Zionist ideals of construction and collective action:



Moshe Max Ballhorn on the terrace  
of his house in Tiberias,  
July 1, 1990

Photo: By interviewer Anne Betten

### Example 2: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Moshe Max Ballhorn (MB), Tiberias, 1 July 1990

MB: But then you have to find work. After some efforts I was given a temporary job: mixing concrete. You are given one of those small concrete mixers and then you have to carry those buckets to the place where the concrete is being used. This was in July 1933 and after the first day, and I mean, I was no wimp at the age of 19, after

the first day, I said to myself: This is no job for me, this is a job for someone who killed both father and mother. (...) And then I saw a small stand where they sold lemonade. And they were hiring! (...) But this guy said: No, I won't hire you. You got work in the construction business. So I went on. (LAUGHS)

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AB: He was just waiting for someone weaker. How very responsible of him!

MB: He saw who he had in front of him! (...) So then we created a construction co-op – approximately twenty of us, all of us beginners except for one guy who knew how to build. And so we started building. And how do you start a new building? You start digging. And go dig in July on the Tel Aviv coast! But we did it and we made it. We laid the foundations and slowly the house rose above the ground. And we all learned something – all twenty of us. And, strangely enough, the building is still standing. It is still standing!

*MB: Und jetzt muss man aber doch arbeiten. Also nach viel Mühe hat man mir eine Arbeit verschafft, und hat man da Beton gegossen. Mit dieser kleinen Betonmaschine da und dann musste man Betoneimer schleppen, d. h. wenn der Beton rausgegossen wurde, musste man ihn dahin schleppen, wo er verwendet worden ist. Das war im Juli 1933 und da habe ich ein Tag gearbeitet, und ich war nicht schwach als neunzehnjähriger Junge. Und wie ich da fertig war, habe ich gesagt: Das ist keine Arbeit für mich, das ist eine Arbeit für jemand, der Vater und Mutter totgeschlagen hat. (...) Und dann sah ich so eine Bude, da hat man Limonade verkauft. Also da stand eine Tafel dran: Limonadenverkäufer gesucht! (...) Da hat der Typ aber gesagt: Dich nehme ich nicht, du gehst auf den Bau arbeiten. Also bin ich weitergegangen. (LACHT)*  
*AB: Da hat er auf einen Schwächeren gewartet. Sehr verantwortungsbewusst!*

*MB: Er hat gesehen, wen er vor sich hat! (...) Also dann haben wir eine Baukooperative gegründet, ungefähr 20 Leute. Wir hatten uns einen Fachmann genommen, ein Mann, der was von Bauten verstand, denn keiner von den zwanzig hatte jemals was mit dem Bau zu tun gehabt. Und wir haben angefangen zu bauen. Also wie*

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*fängt man einen Neubau an? Mit Graben, man gräbt. Nun graben Sie mal im Juli an der Küste von Tel Aviv! Doch wir haben's gemacht und wir haben's geschafft und wir haben die Löcher gegraben und wir haben die Fundamente gegossen und haben langsam das Haus aus dem Boden aufgehoben. Und wir haben dabei gelernt, alle zwanzig. Und merkwürdigerweise – er steht heute noch, der Bau steht heute noch!*

Ballhorn's narrative is told because it is 'worth telling' in the context of the interview. The narrative perfectly fits the myth of the pioneer and this key anecdote is constructed like an archetypal Zionist heroic narrative: The uprooted hero is tested by hardships (the July heat on the coast of Tel Aviv), he experiences near hopelessness (*This is a job for someone who killed both father and mother*), until he finally collectively triumphs over the ordeals (*We did it and we made it*). The young man's first – egoistic – reaction is to look for an easier work, but the Zionist collective (personified by the owner of the lemonade stand) changes the young man's attitude and at the same time, his life trajectory. The 'New Jew' finally finds an appropriate way of being integrated in the Zionist collective of twenty pioneers, by doing a manly work and by building the land in a long-standing way (*The building is still standing. It is still standing!*). The interviewee's physical fitness and his manliness at the time (*I was no wimp at the age of 19*) are confirmed by the (female) interviewer who thus contributes to co-constructing a gendered narrative of heroic masculinity (*He was just waiting for someone weaker. How very responsible of him!*).



Moshe Max Ballhorn, 1937  
A member of the British  
Palestine Police in  
Zemah/Sea of Galilee

Photo: Courtesy of Esti Haviv

## 2.2. Fathers as Losers. Gender, Downward Social Mobility, and Migration

For the older generation however, the migration to Palestine often meant a traumatic biographical rupture, as it only increased the loss of social and professional status that had started in Europe due to the rise of anti-Semitism. This rupture had important gendered consequences: it modified men's social status as well as their positioning within the families. Their self-representation and self-construction as 'men' were thus profoundly affected by the migration process. Their forced passivity and their helplessness did not correspond to the dominant representations of manliness. This resulted in a near complete loss of control over their lives due to their previously held cultural assumptions linking masculinity with dominance. Everything these men had known and understood about their selves was being questioned. In post-migration, the older men's incapacity to assume their traditional protective role for their families was experienced as a symbolic form of emasculation (Farges 2012). Walter Zadek, who belongs to the 'generation 1.5,' summarizes this social and professional loss of status as follows:

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### Example 3: Israel Corpus, Interview Kristine Hecker with Walter Zadek, Holon, 21 October 1990

And all those people who had been general directors or presidents or high ranking scholars and so on, they had no opportunity to use their competences here. Here you needed muscle and hands, construction workers and farmers, not professors.

*Und all die Leute, die früher in Deutschland Generaldirektoren oder Präsidenten oder Wissenschaftler von Rang waren oder so was, hatten ja hier gar keine Möglichkeit, sich auszuwirken, nicht? Hier brauchte man Hände, hier brauchte man einen Bauarbeiter, einen Landarbeiter und so etwas, aber nicht Professoren.*

Haim Sela, who was born in 1914 (as Karl Stein) and who grew up in Berlin-Schöneberg in a wealthy environment with a "villa, housemaids and a chauffeur," describes how the loss of status

affected the entire family constellation. As a member of the younger generation he adapted culturally and socially to the new kibbutz life in Hazorea. He seemed to be particularly focused on how he perceives his father's loss of status as the family provider as well as his loss of masculine identity.

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**Example 4: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Haim Sela (HS), Kibbutz Hazorea, 30 April 1991**

AB: Were your parents able to adapt?

HS: Well, that was a huge problem, my parents. Of course my father had dreamed about being successful in his business and building something up here. But of course, he failed. In the first



Chaim Sela with his wife  
(right) and Anne Betten in  
Kibbutz Hazorea, Interview on  
April 30, 1991  
(private photo)

weeks and months, my parents were with us on the kibbutz and they lived in very primitive conditions. (...) And we didn't have much to offer them either. That was a huge problem. Anyway, they moved to Tel Aviv and my father started to sell all sorts of brushes. And then they moved to Pardes Chana and my father worked very hard in the citrus farm. My mother didn't work. Neither of them learned Hebrew. (...) After that they came back to the Kibbutz Hazorea and my

father worked as a saddler. (...) And they both died here, my father in 1952 and my mother in 1968. (...) Now I realise that this generation suffered much more than we did. We were able to transform the trauma into something creative, because we were young. We didn't see it that way. (...) But our parents! For this generation it was a deep loss.

*AB: Wie haben sich Ihre Eltern noch eingliedern können?*

*HS: Das ist ein großes Problem gewesen, meine Eltern. Mein Vater hat natürlich davon geträumt, er würde hier weitermachen*

*können in seinem Beruf und würde sich wieder was aufbauen hier. Das ist natürlich alles nicht gelungen. In den ersten Wochen und Monaten waren meine Eltern bei uns im Kibbuz und haben sehr primitiv gelebt. (...) Wir selbst waren so beschränkt in den Möglichkeiten, was den Eltern zu bieten, es war ein großes Problem. Auf jeden Fall sind sie dann nach Tel Aviv und mein Vater hat angefangen, irgendwelche Bürsten zu verkaufen (...). Und nachher sind sie übergesiedelt nach Pardes Chana und dort hat mein Vater schwer gearbeitet in einer Obstplantage und meine Mutter hat nicht gearbeitet. Hebräisch haben sie beide nie gelernt. (...) Nachher sind sie wieder in den Kibbuz gekommen nach Hasorea. (...) Mein Vater hat zum Schluss hier als Sattler gearbeitet und Pferdegeschirre repariert. (...) Und sie sind beide dann hier gestorben. Mein Vater ist 1952 gestorben und meine Mutter ist 1968 gestorben. (...) Heute ist mir vollkommen klar, dass diese Generation viel mehr gelitten hat als wir. Uns ist es gelungen, da wir jung waren, dieses Trauma in eine positive Auswertung zu übersetzen. Wir haben es nicht so empfunden. (...) Aber die Eltern – für diese Generation war es ein schwerer Bruch.*

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### **Conclusion: White Collars with Bildung – a Distinctive Feature of Yekke Masculinity?**

A lot of the linguistic approaches to the Israel Corpus converge when analysing how extraordinary the Yekkes' linguistic (and cultural) retention has been, linking this in particular to emotions and identity work. Even in the remotest places in Israel, you could find a Yekke who would embody the ideal of Bildung. Joseph Amit (born 1923 in Vienna as Heinz Reich) tells the story of a certain "Doktor Warburg" in Kiriati Anavim:

#### **Example 5: Israel Corpus, Auto-interview Joseph Amit, Frankfurt/M., 1996**

In Kiriati Anavim there was this Doktor Warburg, the local doctor, a village doctor, who came from a famous family in the financial sector. (...) He never made really it. And whenever he spoke

Hebrew, he spoke like a young boy or even like a child. But the moment he spoke German, his Kultur would shine bright!

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*Es gab in Kirjat Anavim den Doktor Warburg, der ein kleiner Arzt war, ein Dorfdoktor, von einer berühmten Familie stammend, die in der Finanz war. (...) Aber er hat sich eigentlich nie wieder eingelebt. Immer wenn er Hebräisch sprach, sprach er so wie ein junger Bursche oder ein bisschen kindisch. Und im Augenblick, wo er deutsch sprach, hat seine Kultur geblüht!*

In the post-migration situation, the “Doktor,” who grew up in an upper-class milieu that gave him a social identity as a “man with a position,” is reduced to the status of a boy or child. Overall, the older Yekkes’ self-representation and self-construction as men was deeply affected by the downward social mobility. In the gendered dichotomy of the traditional gender roles, their situation seemed to float between the gender poles. How can we interpret the prevailing figure of the archetypal male Yekke, the “Herr Professor” or the “Herr Doktor,” so prevalent in the historiography and memory? Henry Wassermann – criticizing Joachim Schlör’s idealized vision of the Yekkes’ integration in Israel in his book *Endlich im Gelobten Land* (2003) – refers to them ironically as the “Super-Yekkes” (Wassermann 2004: 583).

There are of course examples of “Super-Yekkes” whose masculine social capital was hardly affected by the migration process. One famous example is given by Emmanuel Strauss (born 1926 in Düsseldorf) when he describes his mother’s father, Martin Buber:

**Example 6: Israel Corpus, Interview Miryam Du-nour (MD) with Emanuel Strauss (ES), Jerusalem, 19 May 1991**

ES: Well, my grandfather was very busy in his academic and Zionist spheres here in Israel and he would sit long hours in his study. (...) I remember the breakfasts and lunches with him. We would talk about various topics – from family matters to political talks and news. My grandfather was very interested in the news and whenever he had not heard them, he would ask us all and then discussions would start, of course. He would give his opinion

and hear about ours. (...) I always wondered how far his understanding of young people's problems would go.

MD: Did you speak German or Hebrew?

ES: That's a good question. (...) They say that he managed quickly to make himself not understood in Hebrew (BOTH LAUGH). But that's a joke of course. (LAUGHS)

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*ES: Also mein Großvater war ja sehr beschäftigt in seinem akademischen und zionistischen Leben und im politischen Leben hier in Israel und er saß immer bis spät in seinem Arbeitszimmer. (...) An was ich mich gut erinnere, das sind an die gemeinsamen Frühstücks- und Mittagessen, an denen man sich*



Emanuel Strauss,  
interviewed by Miryam Du-nour,  
1991  
(private Photo)

*unterhalten hat über ganz Verschiedenes, sowohl über Familiensachen als auch ganz über politische Gespräche, Neuigkeiten. Mein Großvater war immer sehr dran interessiert, die Nachrichten zu hören und wenn er die nicht gehört hatte, dann fragte er uns alle, ob wir was Neues gehört haben. Und dann knüpften sich natürlich Gespräche an, in denen er auch seine Meinungen äußerte und auch uns anhörte. (...) Ich habe mich immer gewundert, wie weit seine Einfühlungskraft in die Probleme von Jugendlichen wie uns, wie groß sie war.*

MD: Habt ihr mit ihm Deutsch oder Hebräisch gesprochen?

ES: Das ist eine gute Frage. (...) Man sagt, es ist ihm sehr schnell gelungen, sich schon in Hebräisch unverständlich zu machen (BEIDE LACHEN). Das ist natürlich ein Spaß. (LACHT)

Yet it is also possible to interpret the figure of the male "Super Yekke" as a memory construction that serves an identity-building



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purpose. As the latest historiography on the Yekkes has shown, the “ethnic” identity that has developed over the years served as a strategic resource within the multicultural framework of Israeli society, despite noticeable initial integration problems. This phenomenon was analyzed by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy who calls it, in Bourdieusian terms, an “integration through distinction” (Sela-Sheffy 2006), relating it to other examples of post-migration ‘ethnic’ integration. Using Herbert Gans’ theory of “symbolic ethnicity” (1979), i.e. a selective adherence to a group’s native culture, which provides immigrants with a symbolic capital in the host society, Sela-Sheffy writes:

*In view of this social context, it is my contention that the Yekkes’ distinctive habitus and ethnic retention tendencies were induced by an on-going distinction process which was instrumental in – and not an obstacle to – their social integration.*

(...)

*It seems to be in much the same vein that, despite their heterogeneity, a Yekke identity unified the German-speaking Jewish immigrants and made them a more cohesive cultural group than they were before immigrating. (Sela-Sheffy 2013: 42-43, 47)*

Despite the hardships of the migration and post-migration process, the performance of a bourgeois and intellectual masculinity is a Yekkish way of reclaiming a manly role and a valorised social position, without adopting a virile (or masculinist) attitude. It is thus a way of remaining true to the Bildungsideal of the German Jewry without adopting a muscular stance, too reminiscent of the brutal nationalistic excesses witnessed in Germany prior to the emigration.

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# **Metaphors in the Life Story of A German- Jewish Immigrant to Palestine/Israel.**

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[51]

**How Metaphorical Constructions and  
Remembering Process Interweave**

**Simona Leonardi**

## **I. Introduction: the methodological approach**

In her quite long narrative-biographical interview with Anne Betten, Hilde Rudberg tells her life story<sup>1</sup>, that is, a narration of events, told at a particular time and from a specific perspective and selected from her 'life history', which corresponds to the experienced facts (Rosenthal 1993).

With regards to 'facts', it has to be stressed that one of the main assumptions of oral history is that sources are not mainly looked at for facts or data, but "rather as complex social constructs that are inherently subjective and thus offer multiple layers of meaning" (Freund 2009, 23). The emphasis is therefore less on providing a factual account and more on how events as well as subjective experiences and emotions are remembered. Stories may not be a factual account of an event; what is relevant is that they are both an individual memory and an interpretation of the event, thus providing an opportunity to capture people's feelings, emotions and expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> For details about the corpus and related bibliography, see Betten in this volume, introduction; see also Betten (1995) and Betten / Du-nour (2000).

German language contributions to biography research have especially stressed the role of metaphors in the process of recollection and (re)construction of the life-story by the individual, since metaphors can express and structure perspectives and evaluations, wishes and emotions; they are thus the perceptual and conceptual structures which we normally impose upon our wordly experiences. (Straub & Sichler 1989, 230). Metaphors are accordingly an important device in organising our experience (see also Schmitt 2000; Schwarz-Friesel 2013 for the role of metaphors in verbalizing emotions).

Following these studies, I use the concept of metaphor as developed within the framework of cognitive linguistics (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, e.g. 1980 and 1999), according to which metaphors, far from being merely an empty rhetorical device, are linguistic manifestations of metaphorically structured concepts, since most of our conceptual system is metaphorically organised. The 'transfer' inherent to metaphors consists of mapping elements from a domain based on familiar and repeated sensory experience (source domain, e.g. journey) to a domain which is more complex and abstract and is therefore more difficult to verbalise (target domain, e.g. life). The result of the mapping is a metaphorical conceptualization, life is a journey, that can be expressed in various ways (see below, ex. 2, for a record of this conceptualization by Hilde Rudberg).

Below I shall try to show how a fine-grained linguistic analysis focussing especially on metaphors, but also applying tools from other linguistic frameworks (significantly narrative analysis<sup>2</sup> and perspectives on agency<sup>3</sup>), can help to shed light on the ways Hilde Rudberg makes sense of her own past in her interview.

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<sup>2</sup> See the seminal works by Labov & Waletzky (1967) and also Labov (1972); for a survey see Labov (in prep.).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Duranti (2001).

## II. Metaphors for dramatic changes in Hilde Rudberg's life story

Hilde Rudberg (née David) was born in 1909 in Breslau/Wrocław (now Poland, at that time part of the German Empire). After she graduated in law and earned her PhD, in 1933 she had to break off her legal clerkship. She became a member of the staff of the Youth Aliyah Office and went to *hachshara* (work preparation program); in 1938 she emigrated to Palestine, where she first lived in a kibbutz. After she left the kibbutz she moved to Jerusalem and did various jobs (among others, shorthand typist and secretary). In 1949 she passed the "foreign advocates examination" and became a legal officer at the Ministry of Communication. The interview with Hilde Rudberg, which was conducted by Anne Betten, took place in Jerusalem on April 28th, 1991.



Dr. Hilde Rudberg at home in Jerusalem, April 28, 1991

Photo: By interviewer Anne Betten

### II.1. "My world has collapsed"

After a brief part where Hilde Rudberg speaks about her relationship to the German and the Hebrew languages since she has lived in Israel/Palestine, Anne Betten poses a rather open question regarding Rudberg's career, its relationship with her life in Breslau and life in Israel, the role of emigration in her life, ending up asking about her childhood. Hilde Rudberg tells about her childhood and youth in Breslau, stressing that she did not grow up in a religious home, that

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she had a mixed circle of friends, Jews and non-Jews, and that during her university years she did not experience any anti-Semitism. She says that she began to experience ‘troubles’ (*Störungen*) during her legal clerkship, which she began in 1932. As a consequence of this, she says, “they threw me out of the court” (*man hat mich rausgeworfen aus=m gericht*), using an image suggesting violent expulsion, where she is the individual object (me) of an external violence. As an illustration for this event she tells a story, which is presented in example (1):

**(1) [Tape 1, Side A – 18m 43s – 22m 09s]** (Full length of the interview: 2h 19m 49s ° Language: German)<sup>4</sup>

<b>HR:</b> <u>ä:m:: das wa:r is vielleicht für</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>uhm, that was is maybe for</u>	001
<u>sie ä: auch ganz interessant HOLT</u>	<u>you also quite interesting IN-</u>	002
<u>LUFT ä: das wa:r wann war das</u>	<u>BREATH uh that was when was</u>	003
<u>doch wann das weihnachtsferien</u>	<u>there were there were</u>	004
<u>oder zu:r ja ich glaube aus=m</u>	<u>Christmas holidays or at, yes, I</u>	005
<u>gericht sind wir rausgeflogen im</u>	<u>think we were forced out<sup>5</sup> of the</u>	006
<u>februar und ich war wohl ä:m:</u>	<u>courts in February and I was</u>	007
<u>über neujahr oder januar</u>	<u>was maybe uhm over the New</u>	008
<u>irgendwann das kann das sein</u>	<u>Year period or sometime in</u>	009
<u>dass dass der dass</u>	<u>January, it can be that</u>	010
<b>AB:</b> yeah		011
<b>HR:</b> <u>uh at that time Hitler had been elected, in January, yes, then I</u>		012
<u>was with a friend in the mountains on holiday, then the courts were</u>		013

<sup>4</sup> The German text is a simplified version of the transcription archived at the DGD of the IDS Mannheim (= IS\_E\_00110) and at the Oral History Division, Jerusalem (Interview no. (234)32); in the present case underlining means that text will be referred to in the analysis that follows (and not that it is simultaneous speech). For this example see also Betten (1995, 77ff.). For space reasons, I present the original German text only for the passages which will be examined in detail.

<sup>5</sup> The German “aus=m gericht sind wir rausgeflogen” is an active predication (in the past tense) with a non-agentive subject (1st personal plural), as the verb *rausfliegen* implies a forced expulsion, without any volition on the part of the subject. An appropriate English equivalent is therefore a passive construction.

for some reason on vacation and I came back and then someone		014
who worked with me CLEARS HER THROAT at the court called me		015
actually he was a Christian and he said uhm "don't come to the court		016
tomorrow" and then I said "What's going on?" and then he said "You'd		017
better not come" and		018
zu diesen tagen war dann die	eh in those days were then there	019
warn dann die <u>aktionen wo man</u>	were then <u>the actions when</u>	020
<u>die die juden aus den aus den</u>	<u>they threw the the Jews out of</u>	021
<u>gerichten rausgeworfen hat</u>	<u>courts -</u>	022
CLEARS HER THROAT and uh then I met this colleague on the street and		023
he said – <u>that is evidence of how naïve we were</u> – "Don't worry, I'm		024
going to open a law firm and you will be my uhm eh my <i>shutafa</i> my		025
AB: yeah, yeah, yeah		026
HR: and you'll be a partner of the the		027
AB: yes, hm		028
HR: law firm", at that time he thought		029
AB: hm, hm; how did it–		030
HR: it could be possible and		031
AB: go further for you at the moment, well, I mean, I don't intend to		032
ask you w/ w/ w/ wa/ what how you perceived the whole thing at that		033
time though it would be interesting, what did you think?		034
HR: hm IN-BREATH uh well		035
AB: <i>ham sie gleich erkannt dass</i>	AB: you realised immediately	036
<i>das jetzt <u>zu ende</u> is oder</i>	that that was <u>the end</u> or	037
HR: <i>nein</i>	HR: no	038
AB: <i>ha:m gedacht das is</i>	AB: you thought that it was	039
<i>vorübergehend</i>	temporary	040
HR: <i>nein ä:: ä:: nein <u>ich hab wohl</u></i>	HR: no, eh, eh no, I think think I	041
<i>wohl gewusst dass es zu ende is</i>	<i><u>knew it's the end but what I was</u></i>	042
<i>aber was was ich mit mir mache</i>	<i><u>going to do with myself that was</u></i>	043
<i>das war mir völich ä völich ä:</i>	<i><u>the question</u> and eh <u>completely</u></i>	044
<i>fraglich und ä: ganz ä:: ä: ohne</i>	eh without that well well <u>my my</u>	045
<i>das also also <u>meine meine welt is</u></i>	<i><u>world has collapsed</u></i>	046
<i><u>zusammengestürzt</u> das is</i>		047
AB: <i>waren ihre</i>	AB: were your	048
HR: <i>ä: ä das jedenfalls das is</i>	HR: eh eh that anyway that was	049
<i>klar</i>	<i>evident</i>	050
AB: parents already affected as regards their profession at that time		051
may I ask what was your		052
HR: eh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes for quite a long time		053
AB: father? yeah, yeah		054
HR: for quite a long time already, yes, quite a long time already he		055
was was... my father had hardly any		056



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<b>AB:</b> was your father self-		057
<b>HR:</b> income, well and		058
<b>AB:</b> employed or yes, yes		059
<b>HR:</b> ja ja ja ja ja und die die ä: hm	<b>HR:</b> yes, yes, yes, yes, and the	060
ä:: <u>ökonomische situation zu</u>	the uh hm eh <u>economic situation</u>	061
<u>haue war kata-</u>	<u>at home was</u>	062
<b>AB:</b> aber da war ja natürlich auch	<b>AB:</b> but this had also been of	063
noch	course preceded by the	064
<b>HR:</b> <u>strophal ja</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>catastrophic</u>	065
<b>AB:</b> inflation, yeah yeah, I know your		066
<b>HR:</b> of course also yes and I		067
<b>AB:</b> father was a businessman well (from whom) did they		068
<b>HR:</b> yes yes yes yes		069
<b>AB:</b> have the business or what hm hm hm hm		070
<b>HR:</b> ja ja↓ ja↓ das war (halt) also	<b>HR:</b> yes yes yes that was (just)	071
es is	well it was	072
<b>AB:</b> hm:	<b>AB:</b> hm	073
<b>HR:</b> <u>alles ä:: alles kaputt</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>everything everything was</u>	074
<u>gewesen↓ alles↓ ja↓ ja↓</u>	<u>shattered everything yes yes</u>	075

Hilde Rudberg frames her narration with a hint to the relevance of the following story for Anne Betten's project (1,1-2) "uhm, that was is maybe for you also quite interesting", i.e. in the actual process of recollection she selects an episode which she thinks could be particularly relevant for her interviewer and she stresses this explicitly, before she begins the actual story. According to the narrative model developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967)<sup>6</sup>, this frame can be regarded as an abstract. In the orientation section of the narrative, which according to the same model contains references to person, place, time and behavioural situation, the statements about time reveal that she is trying to locate the events chronologically (cf. 1,5–10): "Christmas holidays or [...] over the New Year period or sometime in January", helping herself with the recollection of major historical events ("Hitler had been elected, in January") or personal memories

6 According to this model, a narrative is sequentially structured and is comprised of the following parts: Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Resolution, Evaluation and Coda.

(“we were forced out of the courts in February”, “I was with a friend in the mountains on holiday, then the courts were for some reason on vacation”) serving as memory landmarks. It has to be noted that here she varies the image of violent expulsion she used before, because she says “we were forced out” (1,6). This choice still implies an abrupt departure, yet now not only is the focus no longer on her alone, as she is a member of a greater community (*we*), but the whole encoding is different, since in German (see above, footnote 5) the subject of the predication is encoded as an actor, i.e. it has no control over the action, without mentioning an external force which causes the expulsion, as in the previous case (albeit in an impersonal form). In comparison to the former formulation in German, the present one constitutes a mitigation (Duranti 2001).

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The nucleus of the story, the complicating action, is the call from her Christian colleague, thanks to which Hilde Rudberg is prevented from directly experiencing “the actions when they threw the the Jews out of courts”, as she herself reports in the evaluation section (1,20-22). In this case she means the (semi)private, violent actions by Nazi mobs, not the subsequent dismissal of all Jewish civil servants, to which she referred at the beginning of her story. The encoding of this formulation focuses in German on “the Jews”, being grammatically the object, and semantically the patient, of an active impersonal predication, whose subject is the indefinite pronoun *man*. Interestingly, Rudberg adopts in this formulation an external perspective, as she uses the indefinite pronoun as a subject, with “the Jews” as an object, without making herself part of the group. She then tells about the call in reported speech, stressing that she did not imagine “What’s going on?” (1,17). Although all reported speech is actually constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007, 17), direct quotations require deictic and grammatical transformations that represent the words of the narrators through their own deictic centre (they are the ‘I’, their time is ‘now’, their place is ‘here’). Direct quotations are not necessarily accurate representations, nonetheless their deictic and prosodic shifts create a sense of present life that adds a tone of authenticity and veracity (Schiffrin 2003, 549; Tannen 2007). On the contrary, when it comes to explaining the reason for the call, Hilde

Rudberg summarizes it very briefly (“the actions when they threw the Jews out of courts” 1,20-22). She inserts direct speech again when she reports her meeting with the same colleague some days after; in this case the direct speech (only the colleague’s words are being reported) is preceded by an evaluation of the narrated events from a future perspective, “that is evidence of how naïve we were” (1,24), one in which it is well known what will happen in Germany and what will happen to European Jews in particular. Remarkably, in this evaluation the perspective is shared by both her and her colleague, since she says “we were”. As a matter of fact, of these dramatic moments in 1933 she doesn’t report the particularly dramatic details – rather the stress is on her low expectations regarding a dramatic outcome. (“What’s going on?”, 1,17) and on her colleague’s opinion that the difficult days will soon be over.

When this story is concluded, Anne Betten asks Hilde Rudberg whether she “realised immediately that that was the end or [not]” (1,36-37). Rudberg confirms this assumption, adopting the same metaphorical expression used by her interviewer “I knew it’s the end” (i.e. life in Breslau is without any future, a finished story). At this point, she inserts an explicit statement which focuses on her major concern “what I was going to do with myself that was the question” (1,42-44). This situation required a re-orientation of her plans for the future, a question which becomes central in the interview. It follows a further evaluation expressed metaphorically “my my world has collapsed” (1,45-46). By this metaphorical formulation Rudberg reveals her emotions; it is her whole world which has “collapsed” – the verb she uses (*zusammengestürzt*) evokes the image of a building falling down, a catastrophic image. Worth noting is that in this clause she uses the present perfect (*is zusammengestürzt*), i.e. she is back to the time when she experienced this. In the following she resumes the image of the ‘catastrophe’ several times, both lexically and on an iconic basis: when she tells of the “economic situation at home” (i.e. at her parents’, 1,61-62) she says it was “catastrophic” (1,65) and she intensifies this in (1,74-75) “everything was shattered (*kaputt*) everything yes yes”. Her environment resembles an object which is no longer functional. .

As already recalled, in this situation Hilde Rudberg's major concern is, "what I was going to do with myself that was the question" (1,42-44). In example 2, which begins a couple of minutes after ex. 1, she recalls how she tried to come to terms with the new reality she had to face:

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(2) [Tape 1, Side A – 25m 25s – 26m 21s]

<b>HR:</b> <u>nein nein nein</u>	<b>HR:</b> no no, no,	001
as I told you well my my acquaintances eh my near nearest acquaintances were		002
<b>AB:</b> yeah		003
<b>HR:</b> <u>zionisten und ich bin in diesen kreis reingekommen und ä:: hm: geblieben das heißt d/ dass es</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>zionists and I entered into this circle and uh hm stayed there, that is that it</u>	004
<b>AB:</b> and what does it mean now for your activity		005
<b>HR:</b> eh		006
<b>AB:</b> in Germany uh how did you imagine your situation at that time uh what what did you intend to achieve, to do, to organise and how did when when did you think well to draw consequences at that time, because, I ask this now so because you emigrated only in 1938 then, at the end of 1938 hm		007
<b>HR:</b> eh, yes, yes, that is eh, that		008
<b>AB:</b> hm		009
<b>HR:</b> <u>war ganz folgerichtig ich bin ä: ä:m: von von da ab wa:r ä wa der weg eigentlich vorgeschrie-</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>was quite consistent, from that time on I was was uh uhm the path was actually laid down</u>	010
<b>AB:</b> <u>hmhm</u>	<b>AB:</b> hmhm	011
<b>HR:</b> <u>ben das heißt ä das ziel war auswanderung abe:r</u>	<b>HR:</b> I mean eh <u>the goal was emigration</u> but	012
<b>AB:</b> hm:	<b>AB:</b> hm	013
<b>HR:</b> <u>da hat verschiedenes ä: davor gestanden das</u>	<b>HR:</b> <u>various things stood in the way</u>	014
		015
		016
		017
		018
		019
		020
		021
		022
		023
		024
		025
		026

Hilde Rudberg says "I entered into this circle [circle of Zionist friends] and uh hm stayed there" (2,5-7). After she has been expelled from her previous environment ("thrown out"), after her "world collapsed", she looks for a possible new environment, which is why she "enters" the circle of Zionist friends. In what follows she stresses

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the consistency of her decisions (2,17), adding that “the path was actually laid down” (2,19-20). This image suggests the conceptualization of her life as a journey; interestingly, in this formulation there is no trace of an agency<sup>7</sup> on her side, the path is “laid down” (*vorgeschrieben*). Shortly after she expands *the life is a journey* metaphor, as she adds the ‘goal’ of the journey (“the goal was emigration”, 2,22-23) and prefigures in a flash forward the various obstacles which she will have to deal with (“various things stood in the way”, 2,25-26).

When some 15 minutes later Hilde Rudberg comes to speak of her parents, who died in the Shoah, she sheds further light on her feelings and perceptions during those difficult years:

(3) [Tape 1, side A – 42m 34s – 43m 59s]

AB: and your parents	001
HR: IN-BREATH my parents remained there	002
AB: and your parents died after you left	003
HR: yes	004
AB: in 1938 how often did you hear from your parents	005
HR: before I left I was back in Breslau and eh IN-BREATH	006
<u>mein vater hat gesagt was m/</u>	007
<u>was ä:: f/ was mit allen ge-</u>	008
<u>schieht das wird auch mit uns</u>	009
<u>geschehen keiner hat eine eine</u>	010
<u>natürlich im entferntesten ä: jã:</u>	011
<u>ã gedacht ä: was wirklich</u>	012
<u>geschehen is niem/ auch ich</u>	013
<u>nich niemand ich hab bloß ä::</u>	014
<u>mir war bloß klar als ich wegging</u>	015
<u>dass dass krieg sein wird und ä:</u>	016
<u>dass das für die juden ein ä::</u>	017
<u>sozusagen ein todesurteil is</u>	018
my father said “ <u>what happens to</u>	
<u>everybody else will happen with</u>	
<u>us all too” no one could ever</u>	
<u>even faintly imagine uh what</u>	
<u>really happened no o-Not even</u>	
<u>I, no one. I had just eh it was</u>	
<u>just clear to me as I left that</u>	
<u>there will be war and eh that</u>	
<u>that will be for the Jews a sort of</u>	
<u>a sentence of death but I meant</u>	
<u>in war and not otherwise.</u>	

<sup>7</sup> For the linguistic representation of “agency”, cf. Duranti (2001, 268), where it is defined as the “property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation”.

I tried hard from here then to get a certificate for my parents, but I didn't succeed	019 020
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At first, having introduced it by “my father said” (3,7), Hilde Rudberg takes on her father’s voice: “what happens to everybody else will happen to us all too” (3,7-9). In this formulation she inserts her parents’ personal life history and destiny in a broader concept, which encompasses a multiplicity of destinies, but it also erases their personal identities. After that, Hilde Rudberg stresses the incommensurability of what happened, which is beyond any imagination: “no one could ever even faintly imagine uh what really happened [...] Not even I, no one” (3,9-12). As she already said before, it was clear to her (she uses several times expressions such as “that was evident” (e.g. 1,49-50, *das jedenfalls das is klar*) or “I knew” (1,41-42, *ich hab wohl wohl gewusst*) that it was the end (1,37), that her world has collapsed (1,45-46), that the economic situation was “catastrophic” (1,65), that everything was “kaputt” (1,74-75). In other words, she presents herself as a person who could clearly see how difficult the situation was. But in ex. 3 she stresses that “not even I” (3,12) could foresee what actually took place (3,9-11).

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As a corollary to this assumption she recalls that “it was just clear to me [...] that there will be war and eh that that will be for the Jews a sort of a sentence of death but I meant in war and not otherwise” (3,12-17). Thus she maintains that at that time she could already foresee that the situation was highly dramatic, she is sure there would be war “that will be for the Jews a sort of a sentence of death”. The metaphorical expression “sentence of death” reveals her desperate prediction, but also that she is sure that their destiny is no longer in their own hands, they cannot escape the dramatic situation. It is up to an external authority to decide for them, and this decides for their death. From Rudberg’s present recollection, it appears that she thinks of those years as a period where there was no room for autonomous steering of one’s own life. As mentioned above, this view had been already expressed with regard to her own life, as she said “the path was actually laid down” (2,19-20).

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Hilde Rudberg comes back again to those years some thirty minutes later, in a longer passage where she recollects how she, after some time in a kibbutz in Palestine/Israel, came to re join the law practice in Jerusalem, recalling also where she first worked after she left the kibbutz: at “the famous Kallen School”, which was founded by Miss Kallen, “a friend of Miss Szold” (i.e. Deborah Kallen).

As she wants to define the chronological setting for the school establishment, the image of the “catastrophe” returns: *noch [...] viele jahre bevor die [...] deutsche katastrophe war* (“many years before the uh the [...] German catastrophe took place”). This time the word “catastrophe”, which is here preceded by the adjective “German”, doesn’t occur in a part directly reporting events from those dramatic years. Rather, it is mentioned as the most relevant mark on her timeline, according to which she organises events, even those not linked with her personal experience: there is a time before and after “the German catastrophe”<sup>8</sup>. The use of this image with this connotation points again to the deep rift in her life caused by the Shoah

## II.2. “I had the feeling I am withering”

As previously recalled, one of Hilde Rudberg’s concerns as her world collapses was “what I was going to do with myself” (1,42-43). This quest is not over with her immigration in Palestine/Israel, since

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8 “The German Catastrophe” (*Die deutsche Katastrophe*) is also the title of a book written in 1946 by the German historian Friedrich Meinecke, but it is not likely that Hilde Rudberg has this book in mind, given that Meinecke sees the “the German Catastrophe” in the rise of National Socialism, which he sees as an “alien force occupying Germany”, though he continues to express anti-Semitic views. More probable is a hint or a reminiscence of the German edition of the book by the German-born historian Eva Reichmann, *Hostages of Civilisation. A Study of the Social Causes of Antisemitism*. (Association of Jewish Refugees Information 1945. London 1950), *Die Flucht in den Hass. Die Ursachen der deutschen Judenkatastrophe* (Frankfurt 1951), which focuses on anti-Semitism.

after a short time in a kibbutz she left it. In ex. no. 4 she tells about leaving the kibbutz.

(4) [Tape 1, side B – 21m 00s – 22m 56s]

[63]

<b>AB:</b> How long did you remain [in the kibbutz]? you left it then, yeah	001
hm	002
<b>HR:</b> yes, not so long, not so long	003
<b>AB:</b> no	004
<b>HR:</b> no, I've been still still from uh I mean it was already uh the the	005
kibbutz that our group later founded, Elgut [i.e. Gal'ed], uh yes was	006
still was was already planned, <u>but I didn't get there, I was had left</u>	007
<u>Ra'anana</u>	008
<b>AB:</b> Did you leave with your husband, no?	009
<b>HR:</b> no, no eh no, no one could imagine <u>that I would leave it</u> , not	010
even my husband and our our our highest authority there was Georg	011
Josephthal	012
<u>und ä ich hab ihm eines tages</u>	013
<u>gesagt ich: ä ich verlasse</u> und ä:	014
<u>ich: ä ich werd das heute abend ä::</u>	015
<u>in der assefa sagen</u> und da hat er	016
<u>gesagt ä: unter keinen umständen</u>	017
<u>und untersteh dich nich</u> und ä:	018
<u>wenn du wirklich gehen willst dann</u>	019
<u>ä:: dann gehst du auf urlaub</u> und	020
<u>ä das hab ich getan</u>	021
and eh <u>one day</u> I told him "I uh	022
I'm leaving and uh I uh am	023
going to say it this evening at	024
the <u>assefa</u> [assembly]" and	025
then he said uh "under no	026
circumstance and uh don't you	027
dare and uh if you really wish	028
to go then uh then you go on	029
leave" and that was what I	030
did	031
<b>AB:</b> May I ask you about the inner causes	032
<b>HR:</b> without	033
<b>AB:</b> I mean without your husband to leave	034
<b>HR:</b> uh absolutely	035
<b>AB:</b> that must have been quite a decision, well	036
<b>HR:</b> eh, yes	037
<b>AB:</b> tough	
<b>HR:</b> <u>ja</u> ja ja ja: ä ja: ich hab	
<u>ä:: ich hab das gefühl gehabt dass</u>	
<u>ich ä:: dass ich ä: ver-</u>	
<b>AB:</b> hm: ^	
<b>HR:</b> <u>welke</u> dass ich: ä: ä ja: dass	
<u>ich so: in ä: im: ä: alltag untergehe</u>	
<u>ohne: ja: ä ja: ohne: ohne dass ä:</u>	
<u>dass etwas aus mir wird</u>	
<b>HR:</b> yes yes yes eh yes I had	
eh I had the feeling I uh I am	
withering	
<b>AB:</b> hm	
<b>HR:</b> <u>that</u> I uh eh yes that I am	
going under in the daily	
routine without uh yeah	
without my becoming anything	



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As a matter of fact, the story Hilde Rudberg tells is a sort of anti-narrative, since she actually refers how a possibly highly dramatic situation could be prevented or at least mitigated. She reports a conversation with Georg Josephtal, their “highest authority” in the kibbutz, to whom she confessed her decision to leave; this conversation is reported in direct speech (4,13-22), as regards both Georg Josephtal’s and her dialogic turns. As Georg Josephtal learns of her intention to leave and to announce it during the kibbutz assembly that very evening, he prompts her not to reveal it during the assembly. Rudberg reports the dialogue succinctly and from a detached perspective, without adding any details about her state of mind or her emotions at the time. Only the first part of her construction of Georg Josephtal’s turn, which constitutes the climax of the narrative (“under no circumstance and uh don’t you dare”, 4,17-19), suggests that her wish to leave had been perceived as a violation, so that the confrontation must have been dramatic. Yet seamlessly, in the same turn, she let him provide a resolution to that awkward situation (“if you really wish to go then uh then you go on leave”, 4,19-21). In the coda section, where she concludes the story saying, from a later perspective “and that was what I did” (4,21-22) she refers only the last, accommodating words by Josephtal, stressing at the same time her agency (*I did*). It could also be inferred that following this conversation she was spared a dramatic confrontation in the kibbutz assembly – although that may not have been Josephtal’s main concern.

Only after Anne Betten asks about the “inner causes” (4,23) of her intention of leaving the kibbutz does Hilde Rudberg reveal the emotional background of her decision, thus expressing her subjectivity (4,31-37). In her answer she intertwines various metaphorical expressions: at first she says “I had the feeling [...] I am withering” (4,31-32). This implies that she sees her life as an organic growth, which at the time when she decides to leave she perceives as not developing, not ‘flowering out’ – on the contrary she seems to ‘wither’ (4,32 *ich verwelke*), like a sapless plant or flower. It follows a metaphor presupposing an up-down image schema (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 14–21), where ‘down’ is related to negative experiences (more

is up/less is down). Hilde Rudberg uses here the German verb *untergehen* ('go under'), which is used for the sun when it sets, but also for a ship sinking, or something disappearing. As a result of the process expressed by the verb *untergehen* the subject is not visible any longer, so that it can be said that this formulation reveals her fear of disappearing, of not existing as an individual any longer. Finally, she resumes the growth image, in that she denies it again "without my becoming anything" (4,37) – she saw no possibility of development.

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These metaphorical formulations (4,30-37) are introduced by a predication whose subject is encoded as an experiencer, i.e. as engaged in a mental process, in this case an emotive one ("I had the feeling"), thus stressing the fact that she is going to recollect her emotions and feelings at that time. In the following metaphorical predications, the subject *I* is always encoded as a non-agentive subject, as in all these cases it undergoes a change of state which excludes intentionality (withers, goes under, doesn't become anything). All these three metaphorical predications have strong negative connotations: the emotions verbalised by the metaphors reveal that the first answer she gave in Palestine to the question "what I was going to do with myself" (1,42-43), i.e. life in a kibbutz, frustrated her expectations. It is precisely to escape all this that she decides to act, to become an agent and thus leave the kibbutz, as narrated in the previous story which is chronologically subsequent. As a matter of fact, in this section of the interview the self repeatedly occurs as an agentive subject: "but I didn't get there, I was had left Ra'anana" (4,7–8); "no one could imagine that I would leave it, not even my husband and our [...] highest authority there was Georg Josephthal and eh one day I told him 'I am leaving and uh I eh am going to say it this evening at the *assefa*'" (4,10-16); "and that was what I did" (4,21-22).

## Conclusion

The two narratives (according to the structure proposed by Labov & Waletzky) presented and analysed in this paper (scil. ex. 1 and ex. 4) share the same narrative strategy, since in both of them Hilde Rudberg seems to understate the emotional content, rather putting emphasis on how she succeeded in (partly) skirting highly

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dramatic situations. In the actual narrative sections, focusing on facts, Hilde Rudberg's perspective on the narrated events is objective and quite detached, while in more evaluative or argumentative parts, often prompted by questions from her interviewer (see 1,30ff; 4,23ff), she comes to express her emotions and her attitude toward the narrated events. These are often verbalised in metaphorical formulations, which can be repeated and also picked up at a later time (see for example the 'collapsed' image in ex. (1), the 'catastrophe' metaphor in ex. (1) returning in ex. (4), the conceptualisation life is a journey recurring in ex. (2), etc.). Accordingly, it is through these metaphorical formulations that the speaker gives expression to emotions and attitudes which otherwise are not easily verbalised. A close linguistic investigation of these metaphorical formulations, interwoven with an analysis of agency (which in the present paper I could only sketch briefly), can prove very fruitful in revealing aspects of the speaker's subjectivity that are not explicitly presented in the course of the interview. Since "the unique and precious element [...] [of oral history] is the speaker's subjectivity" (Portelli 1981, 99) such a linguistic investigation can provide valuable insights for oral history research as well.

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# **“You Have No Right to Remain Silent”: The Israel Police Oral History Project**

**Shlomi Chetrit**

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## **Why police history?**

The police in Israel is seldom considered to be a subject worthy of historical research. Most historians, it would seem, find no interest in trying to understand what happened behind the “thin blue line” and what part did policemen and policewomen take in the development of Israeli society. Few books dealing with the history of the police have been published, and none of these cover any period later than 1973.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, almost all research done regarding the Israel Police was conducted by researchers from within the organization, usually with the goal of creating an official narrative for it. Independent academic research on the subject is also rare, and tends to be carried out by serving or retired officers, as part of their studies. It had been claimed that this situation might influence the selection of research subjects, and could also cause a bias in the way in which the police is portrayed.

But why should one be interested in police history? In the case of serving officers of the law, there are two obvious reasons: first, specific lessons learned from past operations and investigations might serve as a basis for learning and professional improvement. Although advancements in the fields of technology and science had greatly influenced police work since its beginning during the 19th century,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Eli Hod & Erel Shadmi, *The History of the Israel Police* [in Hebrew], Israel Police: Jerusalem, 2004; Edward Horne, *A Job Well Done: a History of the Palestine Police Force*, Book Guild: Leicester, 2013.

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policing had remained, in its most basic form, an inter-personal and human affair. It can be argued that the basic principles involved in the conduct of police operations and criminal investigations did not change much over time, and therefore past experience can be used, with due care, as a basis for learning. Moreover, in many cases the area in which the police operate remains unchanged throughout the years, with religious rituals, mass protests or state visits taking place at the same localities time after time. For example, in preparation to Pope Francis' visit to Israel in 2014, the police history unit researchers examined the summaries of previous foreign dignitary visits to Israel, beginning with President Nixon's in 1974. This led to a compilation of lessons which were repeated in several visits, in some cases many years apart from each other. That summary served as a guide for the officers planning the deployment during the Pope's visit.

Second, the creation of a historical narrative and its dissemination helps promote esprit de corps within the organization, and contributes to cohesion, morale and overall effectiveness within the service. The heritage of a police service, which is based on its history, can also serve as a means for promoting selected values and ethical behavior within the organization.

But there is another, more profound reason which makes police history an important field of study for historians outside of law-enforcement organizations. In most modern societies, the different roles filled by the police ensure that such organizations deal with nearly every aspect of life: from crime, public order and internal security to politics, religious affairs, economy, immigration, moral issues and almost every other social phenomenon. Moreover, the police is usually employed on the proverbial "fault lines" within a society, and the documentation created by it might shed light on the very processes and conflicts which researchers find so compelling. It could be argued, therefore, that any historical account of a society which fails to include the "policeman's viewpoint", runs the risk of missing out potentially crucial evidence. This applies even more to Israel, where the police has been tasked during its early years with special "nation-building" duties, such as assisting the new immigrants

in the ma'abarot (transit camps), or with political ones, such as the surveillance of opposition parties. Police documentation regarding these tasks, and others like them, gives the researcher a rare look at key processes in the development of Israeli government and society.

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### **The Police Oral History Project**

In 2009, the Israel Police history unit had been reestablished, following five years of inactivity. The unit's mandate was defined as research the history of police and internal-security organizations in the land of Israel, from the late Ottoman period and onward, and to document significant events and processes within the Israel Police.<sup>2</sup> One of the first tasks given to this unit, which at the time included two research officers, was to document the personal service histories of retired police officers. This was the beginning of the police oral history project, which has been ongoing since then.

The overall objective of the police oral history project is to further advance the knowledge regarding the history of law enforcement and internal security in Israel, and to facilitate research on the subjects covered in the interviews. The two main goals of the project are to document the history of policing in Israel, as seen through the eyes of veteran police officers; and to document the part filled by the police in specific events and operations. A secondary goal, unrelated to historical research, is to strengthen the bonds between the police and its retired members and their families.

It should be noted that the idea of documenting police oral history in Israel is not a new one. Following its establishment in 1986, the Israel Police history department (as it was then known) conducted interviews with serving and retired senior officers. These included former inspector-generals, district commanders and other high-ranking police officers, and the sessions dealt mostly with those officers' roles and achievements during their time of service. Another series of interviews was carried out by the history department during the 1991 Gulf War. In these, commanders of police units who served

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<sup>2</sup> *Operational procedure, Israel Police History Unit* (unpublished), 2010, Israel Police Heritage Centre.



in areas which were targeted by Iraqi Scud missile attacks, were interviewed regarding the ongoing operation and their participation in it.

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These early interviews are the only surviving documentation of the memories of the first commanders of the Israel Police, most of whom have passed away since. Amongst the persons interviewed during that period are Yehezkel Sahar, who drafted the plan for the



Yehezkel Sahar, Israel Police's first Inspector-General, being interviewed by the Police History Department, 1988.

Source: Israel Police Heritage Centre

establishment of the Israel Police and served as its first Inspector-General; Yosef Nachmias, who succeeded Sahar in 1958 and who initiated comprehensive reforms in the police; Amos Ben-Gurion, who, as commander of the Tel-Aviv district, established the first policewomen unit and the first central criminal investigation unit in Israel; Pinchas Kopel, the first commander of the Border Police and the third Inspector-General;

and No'ami Shadmi, the first commander of the Tel-Aviv policewomen unit. Therefore, these interviews offer rare insights on the early days of the Israel Police and on its development until the 1970s, and are crucial to the understanding of police history in Israel. However, since most of these interviews were conducted with high-ranking officers, and the questions focused on their actions as such, the point of view presented in them is a limited one. While the dilemmas of command are presented clearly, these interviews lack the voices of "ordinary", low-ranking, policewomen and policemen, who actually patrol the cities, confront criminals and supply police services to the community. This fact constrains the scope of knowledge available in these interviews, and demanded further work, which is being carried out in the current project.

Today, the interviews are conducted by the staff of the Israel Police, which the history unit has become a part of, by volunteers who are retired police officers and by cadets of the National Police Academy. Since the project's start, over 200 interviews have been recorded. Another 50 interviews, conducted between 1986 and 1991, have been converted to a digital format as a part of this project.

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### **Subjects of Interest**

So far, there have been several themes which directed the selection of potential interviewees. Firstly, it has been decided to focus on members of the "founding generation": officers who have been recruited during the first years of the Israel Police. The candidates for interview are selected regardless of their rank, to their specific role, or to the units in which they had served. This is due to the belief that the viewpoint offered by low and middle-ranking policemen and policewomen is as important, if not more so, than that of the chief executives, and is crucial for the understanding of the way in which the police actually operated. This has led to the creation of an eclectic collection, which includes the testimonies of patrolmen, secretaries, radio operators and crime scene investigators, amongst others.

The memories of these policewomen and policemen offer an invaluable insight into the early years of the Israel Police and help forming a "street-level" view of the police and Israeli society in general. For example, the harsh conditions in which the police had to operate during the "Period of Austerity" (Tzena') are mentioned repeatedly. These interviews help illustrate the constraints, in which the Israeli government organizations had to operate at the time.

Another example is the repeated mentions of political profiling, which took place during recruitment. The personal stories of police officers attest to the common use of questions, aimed at discerning the political affiliation of potential candidates. While such measures are usually regarded to have been common practice during Mapai's regime, the police interviews offer a rare testimony to the way in which

they were actually carried out. Former officer Shlomo Haron, for example, recalled his enlistment in 1949:

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Major-General Shlomo Haron during his service (Left) and his interview in 2010 (Right).

Source: Israel Police Heritage Centre

*I met someone who told me: "see, there's a place where you can eat, sleep and earn a little money". I asked him: "Where's that?", and he said: "Be a policeman!" He gave me the address, at Yonah Hanavi street in Tel-Aviv. There was a police station there, I don't know exactly... And there was a "Politruck" there [...] They asked me which newspaper I read. I was a kibbutz and Palmach member, I*

*didn't say "Al Hamishmar" or Achdut Ha'avoda's paper. I said: "Davar" and was immediately accepted.<sup>3</sup>*

A similar story is told by Yosef Sweid, a former policeman and Lehi member:

*...when I finished the examination, I had to return to the recruitment bureau. There was some girl there [...] she asked me: "Are you in Mapai?" I said: "No". "Then you should know that you have a problem!" I went in and Inspector Ben-Eliyahu, the recruiting officer, sat there looking at my papers. [...] he said to me: "Say, what newspaper do you read?" I told him "Yediot Achronot". And then, just as I said the word "Achronot" I knew I've failed. [...] But when I remembered what she told me, I said "but my parents read "Davar"". So he told me: "Good, make sure to read it too". I said "Of course!" [...] He saw that I was playing along, so he shook my hand and said: "OK. You have been accepted to the Israel Police".<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Shlomo Haron, interview, 17.8.2010.

<sup>4</sup> Yosef Sweid, interview, 11.2.2010.

A second theme in the oral history project predates the Israel Police: the collection of testimonies from officers and supernumerary policemen (Notrim) in the British Palestine Police Force. These interviews are the last chance to record the memories of the men who took part in the early phases of policing in the land of Israel, on which the modern police is based.<sup>5</sup>

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An example of new information gathered by these interviews is the description of the arrest of Yitzhak Yezernitsky (later Shamir), who was one of Lehi's commanders and became Israel's seventh prime minister. This narrative, which differs from the one usually cited, was told by former British Constable John Binsley, who participated in the arrest:

*Martin and I and some of the Haifa people were in the gymnasium, the secondary school in north Tel-Aviv, in the hall there [...] Martin*



Former British Constable John Binsley during his interview, 2015.

Source: Israel Police Heritage Centre

*and I were sitting together with our mugshots and seeing all of this crowd of people coming in. [...] It just went on and on all day. Eventually, we had a little "Hassid" [ultra-orthodox Jew] who turned up and Martin and I just looked at each other and... to the disguise! I mean, he was genuinely... the hair and beard were genuine, but the eyebrows*

*gave him away, because they were so bushy! And we just looked at each other, Martin and I, and we said... "Yeah!!" So he was arrested and that night he was flown to... Ethiopia, I think.<sup>6</sup>*

Research projects are another catalyst for interviews. Officers who are known to have taken part in an operation, event or process which is being researched by the Heritage Centre's staff are

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<sup>5</sup> To this day, the legal basis for the Israel Police is the "Police Ordinance", which is based on the one published by the Mandate government in 1926.

<sup>6</sup> John Binsley, interview, 5.7.2015.

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interviewed in order to offer their own viewpoint, shed light on the subject and fill in gaps in the documentation. For example, when researching operation Sha'ar 77, the Police's involvement in president Anwar Al-Sadat's historic visit to Israel in 1977, the written sources did not supply a clear answer regarding the route taken by the visitor's convoy to Jerusalem. An interview with Shmuel Bogler, who was head of the traffic department during the operation and in charge of selecting the route, supplied the answer.

In special cases, the interviewees are not former police officers, but civilians who were either witnesses, victims or even the perpetrators of a case being researched. For example, during a research regarding the police investigation of the assassination of the United Nations mediator, count Folke Bernadotte, in 1948, two eye witnesses were interviewed, as was the last surviving member of the Lehi assassination squad.<sup>7</sup> One of the witnesses, Tamar Gavish, who was fifteen at the time, recounted in her interview:

*I went that day, and I saw the convoy [...] and I looked at the convoy [...] and then the convoy stopped for some reason, I don't know why. Then I saw someone approaching, and starts shooting into one of the cars! And escapes [...] I was the nearest person, I stood there shocked, confused... They all stood and looked around... I didn't know that he [Bernadotte] was in the convoy. They got back into the cars, quickly, and drove away. And I stood there shocked... and then the police came... I was very excited, and I told them what I've seen.<sup>8</sup>*

Comparing this testimony and others like it, with the information gathered by the policemen in 1948 helped constructing the results and achievements of police actions at the time, and contributed to the understanding of the police investigation and its (unsuccessful) outcome.

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<sup>7</sup> See: Shlomi Chetrit, "Case file 148/48: Offender Unknown: Israel Police Investigates the Assassination of Count Bernadotte" [in Hebrew], *Aley Zait Vacherev*, 15, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Tamar Gavish, interview, 31.10.2016.

## Methodology

Following the selection of a candidate, he or she is contacted by the interviewers. A short preliminary interview follows, in which the candidate's consent is asked for, and his capability of being interviewed is assessed. After consenting to the interview, some preliminary research is carried out, in preparation to the actual meeting. Any information available on the interviewee, such as the police service record (in the case of veteran police officers), newspaper articles, an autobiography, etc., is collected and read. A short summary of his or her service is made, and potential questions and points of interest are noted, such as subjects which the officer might have knowledge about, operations in which she or he might have participated, etc.

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The time and place of the interview are chosen by the interviewee, which means that usually it takes place in her or his home. The interview is always recorded, either on a digital audio recorder or on a digital video camera. The interview begins with a short explanation on the procedure, the goals and the possible uses of the interview, and the interviewee's consent is then asked for and recorded.

In many cases, former officers acquire during their service a collection of documents, photographs and other artifacts, such as medals, mementos, etc., which might prove important for the research of police history. With the permission of the interviewee, these are photographed or, in special cases, loaned to the Heritage Centre for scanning.

Usually, the interview follows the life story approach.<sup>9</sup> The interviewee is asked to tell his or her story, beginning in whatever point he or she deems relevant and progressing chronologically. The interviewer will usually refrain from interrupting the narrative, unless a specific clarification is needed. When a definite part of the story is completed (e.g. a certain operation, service in a specific unit, etc.), the interviewer might ask some in-depth questions on the subject before

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<sup>9</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, London: Palgrave, 2010, p. 40.

the narrative progresses. Practice had shown that interviews usually last around two hours, after which most interviewees feel too tired to continue. If the interviewee has not completed his life story by that time, further sessions are arranged.

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The follow-up to the interview includes several steps. First, the interview recordings are edited to a single file, which is then saved in the Heritage Centre archive. Second, a summary of the interview is composed. This is a short Word file, which includes basic information regarding the interview (such as the names of the interviewee and interviewer, date and place, etc.), a short synopsis of the interview and, more importantly, a list of keywords relating to the interview, such as subjects, units, operations and names mentioned in it. The interview summary allows a researcher to easily find interviews relevant to his research, even if no transcripts of them have been made yet. Full transcripts usually take longer to obtain, as they depend on funding which is not always forthcoming.

Lastly, a disk containing a copy of the interview is given to the interviewee. The disk is usually presented by the interviewer in person, alongside with a collection of documents scanned from his personal files and the Heritage Centre's thanks and compliments.



Samples of DVD covers, given to interviewees. On the left: Chief Inspector Talal Sid-Ahmad, who was one of the first Muslim Arab officers in the Israel Police; on the right, Major-General Yossi Zecharia, who commanded the Civil Guard during the 1980s.

Source: Israel Police Heritage Centre

## Challenges

The police oral history project faces almost every challenge common in similar endeavors, from memory problems and private agendas to rehearsed life stories. For example, the fact that personal memories are told almost without any intervention or interpretation by the interviewer can, naturally, lead to cases in which errors or misconceptions are recorded. Therefore, research using these interviews requires cross-reference and wide knowledge regarding the subject.

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Moreover, there are some specific challenges which arise from the nature of this project. One of the major challenges in interviewing members of a security organization is dealing with classified or sensitive information. In some cases, the interviewee might refrain from sharing information which he considers secret, whether out of fear of it leaking out, mistrust of the interviewer or simply force of habit. There are several solutions to this problem: first, some of the interviewers have high-level security clearance, which permits classified information to be passed to them. Second, the interviews themselves are classified according to their contents, and kept in conditions which are meant to prevent any leakage of sensitive information. Both these facts are told to the interviewee at the beginning of the interview, and put on record. Naturally, any request on behalf of the interviewee to pause the recording during the interview is honored.

The interviewer must also make sure that all possible uses for the interview are understood by the interviewee and agreed to. These include research and academic publication, inclusion of clips within presentations and publishing on the police's social-media outlets. These also follow the strict rules for information security.

Another challenge is the potential to meet with an interviewee who suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome or secondary trauma, which unfortunately are all too common in retired police officers. In one case, an interview with a veteran bomb-disposal technician triggered a post-traumatic response, which led the



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interview to an early finish. The problem, of course, is how to prevent such episodes from happening in the first place, and spare the interviewees from anguish. The solution is to try and ascertain the interviewee's state before the interview. This is done both by consulting the officer's service records, and by the preliminary telephone interview. When dealing with officers who served in posts with relatively high risk for trauma, such as bomb-disposal units, border police or crime scene investigators, special care is taken to ensure, as possible, that the person in question is willing to be interviewed. No pressure is put on a reluctant candidate.

The fact that the interviewer is a police officer may also create difficulties, especially when interviewing people who were involved in criminal activity. For example, before interviewing Avraham Steinberg, who participated in the assassination of Count Bernadotte, the interviewer had to check the legal status of the interviewee, lest he'd be forced by law to take actions upon meeting him. In this case, the statute of limitations made it possible for the interview to be concluded.

Another, more trivial, problem arises from the fact that the interviewers are police officers. In several cases, when an interviewer arrived wearing uniform, people living nearby concluded that their neighbor was involved in a police investigation. Following feedback from the interviewees, today all interviews are carried out in civilian clothes.

### **Conclusion and Future Goals**

The Israel Police oral history project aims to help in bringing the story of the police into the wider narratives of Israeli history. It is our firm belief, that the life stories shared by former officers of the law may shed new light on many aspects of the Israeli society, and prove invaluable to researchers interested in gaining a new and more comprehensive view of these subjects. Not less important, is the contribution of this documentation to the understanding of the developments in Israeli policing, a subject regarding which not enough is currently known.

Besides of the important information gained, the project helps improving the connection between retired police officers and the police. The visit by active officers, as well as the manifest interest in the veteran's life story and professional experience, displays a commitment on the side of the Israel Police towards its retired members. In many cases, an interview sparks new interest, as well as pride, in the veteran's family regarding his or her service.

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The next steps to be taken should make the information gathered accessible to researchers, both within the police and outside of it. The interview files, including summaries and transcripts, will be included in a digital database, alongside other archival material regarding police history such as official documents, movies, photographs, etc. This database will be open to visitors through a research facility, which is currently being established in the Israel Police Heritage Centre. Academic interest may also help direct the project, and interviews could be scheduled according to topics suggested by researches. Other future directions include interviews aimed to cover specific units (e.g., the policewomen unit, first SWAT team, etc.), periods and subjects.

It is our hope that the police oral history project will help promote academic research on the history of law-enforcement in Israel, and thus contribute to a better understanding of Israeli history in general. The importance of the subject lead us to claim that a veteran police officer has a duty to share his memories, and thus, in a sense, "no right to remain silent".



# Voices from Chernobyl:

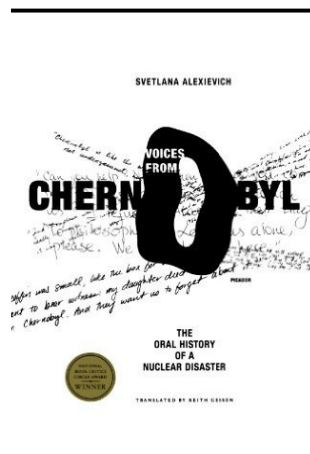
## The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster

by Svetlana Alexievich<sup>1</sup>

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Judy Lev

On April 26, 1986 the staff at the Chernobyl Nuclear Plant in *Chernobyl Belarus committed a fatal sequence of errors which led to a* massive explosion of the nuclear reactor. The residents of Chernobyl and its surroundings were totally unprepared when they were unwillingly thrust into the worst peace time nuclear disaster the world has ever faced. In 1996 Svetlana Alexievich - writer, historian and native of Belarus - published *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. In 2005 this book was translated by Keith Gessen into English and in 2015 Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize for Literature, only the second person after Winston Churchill to win this coveted prize for works of non-fiction. The fact that she won the Nobel Prize for Literature for exclusively using the genre of Oral



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<sup>1</sup> *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, by Svetlana Alexievich, translated by Keith Gessen (Dalkey Archive Press, 2005). original title: Чернобыльская молитва

History as a means to document an event should be of particular interest to Oral Historians throughout the world. This book is one of several she wrote utilizing oral history as a literary method. Her most famous is *The Unwomanly Face of War*, an account of WWII as seen through the eyes of the Soviet women who were witnesses, participants and survivors of the war.<sup>2</sup>

In *Voices from Chernobyl* she interviewed the local residents, employees of the reactor as well as the first responders both civilian and military who were known as “liquidators.” Their only commonality was that they were all victims. By sharing their stories Alexievich is able to weave a narrative of this event unlike any other account of this disaster.

Officially there were 30 deaths attributed to the explosion at the reactor. In reality, millions were affected; it is still unclear how many have died as a direct result. The figures range from tens of thousands, to hundreds of thousands and up to a million. Towns were evacuated, populations displaced and resettled - their residents never to return, and the towns and cities turned into wastelands. Svetlana Alexievich spent ten years documenting those who survived the initial explosion and its devastating aftermath. This book is not meant to be a historical account of the disaster as it does not explore the reasons for the explosion or the official responses. Rather it is a reflection of how those who were affected most remembered the surrounding events.

We know nothing of her methodology, although in an interview given to *The Guardian* (April 5, 2016) she professes to using a Dictaphone and transcribing the interviews herself. The readers have no idea of how she selected her interviewees, where the interviews took place, the dates they took place or any other information regarding methodology. Some of the narrators are identified by name and vocation, others in the context of a group so the reader doesn't

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<sup>2</sup> Alexievich, Svetlana *The Unwomanly Face of War*, Penguin Random House LLC, 2017, Great Britain. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. First published in Russian as *War's Unwomanly Face* by Mastatskaya Literatatura Publishers, Minsk 1985.

always know who the narrator is. Nevertheless, when reading this hard to put down account the reader becomes immersed in this tragedy. Alexievich has succeeded in pulling the reader into the confusion surrounding the events and to the horror felt by the narrators when they were confronted with the enormity of the disaster.

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What is most striking is the fact that for the most part the narrators at first had no idea of the magnitude of the damage. They saw the reactor burning, they saw the first responders but they did not understand the consequences of radiation. Only a select few, namely the scientists understood the significance of the effects of the explosion but did not share their fears or knowledge with the local residents. Marat Kokhanov a former engineer of the Institute of Nuclear Energy in Belarus shares an answer to question posed Alexievich;

*Why did we keep silent knowing what we knew? Why didn't we go out onto the square and yell the truth? We compiled our reports, we put together explanatory notes. But we kept quiet and carried out our orders without a murmur because of Party discipline. I was a Communist" (p.163).*

This same loyalty to the system was expressed by some of the "liquidators" who dared not question what they were asked to do. Their frustration was compounded by the fact that everything still looked "normal" except for the burning reactor. It would take a few months and even years for the first responders, namely the helicopter pilots and firemen to start dying. Yet surprisingly many of them saw this as their unquestionable duty not to question their orders. Says one: *Should I go or not go? Should I fly or not fly? I was a Communist—how could I not go.* (p.50)

It took a few weeks to evacuate many of the residents, until then they were unaware of the dangers, so unaware that many of them left their homes to attend the annual May one parades to celebrate the traditional Soviet May Day. They weren't advised to stay indoors. When the reality finally set in Nikoli says *we didn't just lose a*

*town, we lost our whole lives. (p.32) And: everyone was saying, we're going to die, we're going to die. By the year 2000 there won't be any Belarussians left (p.33). Of course this isn't what happened, there were many survivors, many of whom are still suffering from the effects of radiation.*

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Relocating the residents was a massive undertaking, especially since many did not understand the dangers and were reluctant to leave. There were new rules for the residents who were forced to abandon not only their possessions but the only life they had known. The old women would come and cry: 'Boys let us in. It's our land. Our houses'...they cried over their poisoned land. Their furniture. Their things (p. 36). Farmers were forced to throw out the milk of newly milked cows and to bury newly hatched eggs.

Some of the survivors likened their experiences to those who had survived WWII. They identified with the "bravery" of those before them. Sergei a cameraman who was asked to film the "heroics" of the evacuation:

*And suddenly I catch myself filming everything just the way I saw it filmed in the war movies. And then I notice that people are behaving the same way...We're warriors....they our parents lived through a great catastrophe, and we needed to live through it, too. Otherwise we'd never become real people" (p.109).*

*It (the explosion) was constantly being compared to the war. But this was bigger. War you can understand. But this?" (p.141)*

The confusion permeated the air as Zoya an environmental inspector notes: *The women are standing at their fences and crying—they haven't seen anything like this since the war. They're afraid another war has started (p.168).* One survivor from the village of Bely Bereg who survived World War II, notes that *Chernobyl is like the war of all wars. There's nowhere to hide. Not underground, not underwater, not in the air (p.74).*

One of the most frightening results of the explosion was the poisoning of the food sources. Even though the scientists warned against using food grown in the contaminated areas referred to as the “Zone,” that didn’t stop some of the residents from eating their produce and even selling it. Anatoly a journalist relates a conversation he heard at the market:

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*There are so many mushrooms this year. They’re poisoned. Oh, strange person. No one’s forcing you to eat them. Buy them, dry them up, and take them to the market in Minsk. You’ll become a millionaire” (p.127).*

And Marat relates:

*There was a woman in our group, a radiologist. She became hysterical when she saw that children were sitting in a sandbox and playing. We checked breast milk—it was radioactive... We went into a store... we take the salami, we take an egg—we make a roentgen image — this isn’t food, it’s a radioactive byproduct” (p. 162).*

What emerges from the interviews is how unprepared everyone was, from the population, the local governments, the national government and the world at large. Cleaning up the mess and putting out the fire in the reactor were just some of the challenges. Quick decisions had to be made regarding population transfers, the resettling of residents and whether or not to attempt to rebuild the communities. Perhaps most important were the medical services who had to deal with the new reality of radiation poisoning, birth defects and how to bury the contaminated. Thirty years later the world is still grappling with the problems posed by this disaster and similar disasters to come, whether by peace time accidents or acts of war and the effect it has on people, animals and crops. Svetlana Alexevich has shown us the heart wrenching effects it had on people as they experience and begin to understand the magnitude of what they experienced. She has documented this horrific yet intriguing event



and through the voices of the narrators lets the reader experience this unprecedented catastrophe that no one ever wanted to be a part of.