Listening to the Other
Always Bears Fruit

—

A field study on how and what Jews and Armenians
can learn from each other.

Acknowledgement

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Abstrakt

Denna etnografiska fältstudie från Jerusalem ger en fördjupad kunskap i vad armeniska och judiska ungdomar lär av varandra och vidare hur de lär av varandra i möten organiserade av organisationen Jerusalem Centre of Jewish and Christian Relations (JCJCR). Studien identifierar även etnocentrism och fördomar tillsammans med en ovilja att mötas som hinder för lärande mellan dessa etniska grupper. Observationer, uppbackade av intervjuer, fokusgrupper och fältnoteringar visar att JCJCR:s organiserade möten leder till ökad kunskap om respektive historia, religion och traditioner. Även en ökad förståelse för varandra som individer kan konstateras. Lärandet sker genom att föra en äkta dialog; lyssna, dela med sig, reflektera och ställa uppriktiga frågor. Studien väcker slutligen frågor om ungdomarnas möjlighet att dela med sig av nyvunna insikter från dessa interkulturella möten till övriga familjemedlemmar.

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Abstract

In this field study I explore how Armenian and Jewish youths learn from each other in meetings organised by the Jerusalem Centre of Jewish and Christian Relations (JCJCR). I also identify threats to the chances of two ethnic groups learning about each other. Direct observations complement in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. My field notes show that participants in pre-organized meetings strive towards an understanding between the Armenian and Jewish youths. They learn through genuine dialogue, listening, telling, reflecting and asking pertinent questions regarding history, religion and cultural traditions. They also learn about each other on a personal level during meetings. However, prejudice, ethnocentrism and lack of opportunity to participate in meetings prevent genuine learning between the groups. Future research should focus on the youths' opportunities to share with their families insights gathered from intercultural meetings.

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Introduction

Awareness of the situation in Israel/Palestine shaped by a complex mixture of historical, political, social, cultural and religious factors has been dealt with in many studies and from various perspectives. My interest in this field regards the work of a specific peace organisation that focuses on finding ways in which shared cultural and religious values can provide a platform for learning from each other. Respect and cooperation are key factors in such meetings and according to many scholars (Marquardt, 2004) these are vital for achieving peace in this area. A better understanding about each other's situation is a prerequisite for reconciliation (Abu-Nimer, Khoury and Welty, 2007). Various meetings are organised in order to enable this to happen and in this study I try to show what actually happens in such meetings with respect to learning about others.

Background

My eagerness to increase the understanding of how learning and what kind of learning may occur through intercultural dialogue stems from a five-week stay in a Christian Palestinian family in Bethlehem in 2008. Sharing their Christian life in a society with a Muslim majority, while surrounded by Jewish people, yet divided by the separation wall, made me realise what an extraordinary opportunity it was to study different outlooks on life. From a socio-cultural approach to learning, supported by Bakhtin's understanding of our very existence, the characteristics of human beings and the importance of language, it becomes clear that the role of dialogue in the learning process is crucial. My study aims to examine whether genuine dialogue takes place at all and if so, what it achieves in terms of learning. Marquardt (2004) has written an inspiring article emphasising the importance of dialogue and the opportunities it can create in the specific situation in the Middle East.

> Our three monotheistic religions have arisen out of conflicts, with conflicts and through the settlement of conflicts. With so much conflict orientation and practice, every conflict should really be a fountain of youth for us that inspire dialogue towards reducing dissonance. This is why we should not understand conflicts as problems but as opportunities. (Marquardt, 2004)

This extract illustrates the potential of genuine dialogue as a powerful tool when it comes to understanding and learning from each other. It also highlights the potential for conflict resolution if we are prepared to recognise opportunities.

At the time I had not many opportunities to participate in such complex intercultural meetings where all four ethnic groups were represented (I considered myself as being the

fourth party, bringing a Western experience of life). Yet, I was an eager participant observer whenever representatives from only Christian Palestinians met with Muslims. Only on one occasion did I have an opportunity to meet with Jewish people. At the end of my stay I was invited to a Jewish family in Jerusalem to celebrate Shabbat. Apart from four other Swedish guests, and myself, all the people sat round the dinner table were Jews from the Jerusalem area. By listening to them, I soon realised that their daily life was completely devoid of any interaction with Palestinians. The lack of interest and also a great deal of ignorance about Palestinians made me believe there were no readiness or willingness to meet with Palestinians, never mind enter into dialogue with them. The Palestinians I met in the Bethlehem area displayed a similar attitude towards Jewish people. Abu-Nimer et al. (2007) examine a growing number of reconciliation activities and conclude that attitudes change when people meet face to face in order to learn from each other. In my study, I have chosen to focus on one such reconciliation programme set up by the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish and Christian Relations (JCJCR) to gain a deeper understanding, not of the conflict per se, but of exactly what happens in these meetings. My interest is in how and what the participants actually learn from each other.

A brief outline of the Middle East situation

The Biblical text describing social life, customs, and agriculture traditions is a description of the Middle Eastern culture. Jerusalem, as part of the Middle East context with its complicated and painful history holds the distinction of being a holy centre of all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Jewish, Christians and Muslims with their common roots live segregated in their respective communities which are defined by their religious and ethnic identity (Abu-Nimer, 2007). Although many similarities in terms of history and religious roots seem to be apparent, the political agenda seems to be stranded on differences.

Confronting Settlement Expansion in East Jerusalem

The neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, a 20-minute walk up the hill from the Damascus Gate to the Old City of Jerusalem, has become the focal point of the struggle over the expanding project of Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In the first week of February a settler in Sheikh Jarrah attacked a young boy from an Arab family evicted so that Jewish activists could move in. The al-Ghawis were displaced in August 2009, and since then they have been living in front of their former home in a tent, refusing to move in protest of the eviction. Settlers have gone after them more than once. On this occasion, an older al-Ghawi, Nasir, was

beaten and menaced with an M-16 by a settler when he attempted to protect the young boy. Police arrived on the scene and disarmed the settler. But they also served Nasir with a restraining order forbidding him to enter Sheikh Jarrah for 15 days. Then the police destroyed the al-Ghawis' tent. The makeshift abode was rebuilt, but the next day police and municipal officials came to the site and threatened to dismantle it a second time. (Beinin, In *Middle East Report*, February 15, 2010)

This extract from a news article written by Joel Beinin, Professor of History at Stanford University and a contributing editor of *Middle East Report* (Accessed 2010-02-15 from http://www.merip.org/mero/mero021410.html) illustrates the ongoing daily conflict in the Jerusalem area today. New Israeli settlers are building up their new settlements convinced the land belongs to them. The Palestinians, in this case refugees since 1948, were allowed to settle in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem after an UN agreement with Jordan in 1956, which then ruled the area. Palestinian demonstrations are frequently held to protest against what they call "Jewish colonisations" (Beinin, 2010).

The urge to secure exclusive rights to Jerusalem is one of three major issues debated amongst the Palestinians and the Israelis. Palestine was a British mandate from 1920. In 1947 the UN decided to divide Palestine into a Jewish and an Arabic part. Straight after the declaration of Israel as an independent state, several Arabic countries attacked Israel, and until today only Egypt and Jordan have made peace with Israel (Furubrant, 2009). The West Bank including East Jerusalem is regarded by Palestinians, supported by the UN, as Israeli-occupied land. Conflicts, wars, intifadas and terror attacks have marked the history of this area and still do so to this day.

The second major issue of the conflict concerns the borders between Israel and Palestine. In the Oslo resolution of 1993, the Palestinian National Authority includes the West Bank and Gaza. The Israelis control the borders and the Palestinians hold varying degrees of autonomy in these areas, though not full autonomy (Furubrant, 2009).

The third part of the Middle East conflict is referred to as the refugee problem. Some 60 years after the war in 1948, about four million Palestinian are living as refugees waiting to return to their villages, which are now part of Israeli-occupied territory (Pappe, 2004).

Jews in the Holy Land

Before the foundation of the state of Israel, the people who inhabited Palestine (today's Israel, West Bank and Gaza strip) were all called Palestinians. At that time Christians, Jews and Muslims, were all Palestinians. Today, the Jewish people consider themselves Israelis (Melson, 1992).

Jews are the majority ethnic group in Israel and the official schedule of living follows their religious traditions. Hebrew is the official language of the country (the only place where Hebrew is used as an official language today). Ultra-Orthodox Jews and the secularists are the two poles of Judaism. The majority of the Israelis are to be found somewhere in between (Pappe, 2004).

Armenians – a minority among minorities

For most Western Christians a separation of church and state is taken for granted. This is not the case for Armenians. Being an Armenian includes belonging to a Christian community (Bailey & Bailey, 2003). Armenia became Christian when their leader, King Tiridates lll, converted to Christianity in 303. The very first state church is believed to been founded in Armenia soon after.

An Armenian residence was established in the Old City of Jerusalem as early as the fifth century to host pilgrims coming to visit the Holy Land and to safeguard the Christian holy places. After the Armenian genocide in 1920, some twenty thousand refugees arrived in Palestine. Since the founding of the Israeli state in 1948 the Armenian population has gradually been declining (Hintlian, 1989).

Armenians in Palestine and Israel represent a "double minority" existing in varying degrees of hardship, alongside two much larger religious communities: Jews and Muslims (Bailey & Bailey, 2003). Armenians also represent a minority group among other Christian communities.

The status of ethnic minorities varies from society to society. Most democratic countries tend to implement a policy somewhere between assimilation and full integration. Assimilation refers to a policy where the minority group is expected to leave their cultural identity behind and to adopt the values of the majority in the country as soon as possible. Integration, on the other hand, encourages the minorities to preserve their cultural identities (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007).

When the Jews celebrate Independence Day on May 8, the Armenians join the Arabs in remembering that day as "the Nakba" – the catastrophe (Pappe, 2004). Although the Armenians in Jerusalem are not associated with Arab nationalism, they do belong to the groups of Christians living in the Arab world. The sense of "Arabness" in this part of the world is not limited to Muslims only. It also includes Christians. Living as an Armenian in Jerusalem today entails being part of the Arab culture while following the Christian faith (Bailey & Bailey, 2003).

Most Armenians in Jerusalem speak Arabic, and Armenian, as well as Hebrew. Also English and French are taught in schools (Hintlian, 1989).

The Armenian quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem is an enclosed area that houses most of the local Armenians along with pilgrims. The Armenian community provides an Armenian school where most of the local Armenians choose to send their children. The Armenian congregation is known for their commitment to children and to education in particular (Bailey & Bailey, 2003).

The Holocaust

Holocaust is a term that origins from the Greek word "holocauston" meaning "sacrifice by fire". During WW II, the Nazis in Germany referred to their plans to murder the Jewish people as "the final solution". About six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust (Melson, 1992). Although 60 years have passed, the Holocaust remains real and many schools devote Remembrance Day in May every year to teach and inform about the horrors of the Holocaust.

The Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide is a hotly debated issue. The persecution of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923 is not recognized as genocide by all nations. In April every year, the Armenians in Jerusalem commemorate their deportation to remember the suffering when 1.5 million Armenians were killed. (Melson, 1992).

The Jerusalem Centre of Jewish and Christian Relations (JCJCR)

The JCJCR is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) working with programmes whose goal is to create better understanding between the different ethnic groups (they include Muslims in their programme even though the name might not suggest it). JCJCR with its head office at Tantour, an ecumenical centre, situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, caught my interest because of its approach of parties learning about each other from each other. I learned about their specialised encounter groups for young Palestinians (Muslims and Christians, including Armenians) and Jews who meet regularly over a period of time. Focussing on young people in a school environment opens up the possibility of reaching a lot of other people. Parents, sisters, brothers, other schoolmates and teachers all get involved to some extent. The long-term aim is to contribute to a better understanding of each other which could eventually lead to less tension in daily life in Israel and Palestine.

The activities at JCJCR are designed to overcome ignorance and negative stereotyping and to foster understanding between Jews, Muslims and indigenous Christians in the Middle East. In order to bring these three ethnic groups together JCJCR organizes a number of activities. One of these is the so-called specialised encounter group meeting between Jewish and Armenian teenagers who are the focal point of my study.

Previous Research

Although the situation in Israel/Palestine with its complex mixture of ethnic groups has been dealt with in many studies, I have only found a few that focus on how Jews and Palestinians in Israel learning about each other. Amir and Ben-Ari (1985) conclude that the segregation among adults in the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in Israel is accentuated among the young. The Jews are in general oblivious to the realities of the Arabs and do not show a lot of interest in their culture. To be able to succeed in cross-cultural training the process needs to start with an "unlearning" to free both parties from any negative attitudes. There seems to be a general consensus among researchers that the way forward is to relate to the cognitive aspects of the problem of segregation.

Tannenbaun and Tahart (2007) examine willingness to communicate in the language of the other in the context of the conflict. Their study indicates that Arab children in general have a more positive attitude compared to Jewish children.

Amir and Ben-Ari (1985) argue that intergroup contact during school years is of particular importance in reducing the likelihood that children will grow up with negative attitudes to each other. The interaction approach might be a necessary prerequisite for reaching intergroup understanding but it doesn't seem to be sufficient, conclude Amir and Ben-Ari (1985). The will of the policy makers to provide platforms where intergroup relations may prosper is yet to be seen.

Focus and aim

Several different ethnic, linguistic or religious groups living side by side in the same country is by no means a unique occurrence. However, the way a specific country or organisation deals with a conflict situation related to cultural differences does give some indication of its epistemological beliefs.

The way the peace organisation JCJCR deals with the particular situation in Israel/ Palestine adheres to a socio-cultural perspective on learning where learning is viewed as the product of sharing opinions and experiences with other people (Dysthe, 2003). From a socio-

cultural point of view, intercultural competence cannot be the result of a monologue, only dialogue. From this perspective, learning happens in a historical and cultural context and is referred to as situated learning (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

From a socio-cultural perspective, meetings between people from different cultural backgrounds offer outstanding learning opportunities (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). However, bringing together people from three different ethnic groups seems to be a somewhat daunting project. I have delimited my study to focus on two of these ethnic groups. The JCJCR has a lot of practical experience and a thorough knowledge of the specific cultural values of each ethnic group, but in spite of this they are still aware that the individuality of each group might significantly affect the course of each meeting.

Listening to other people's views and thoughts on topics such as the ongoing conflict, its effect on the daily lives and their hopes for the future, provides unique opportunities to increase understanding of other cultures. To make learning happen in this context, just as in any other context, there has to be a willingness to share and an openness to reconsider perspectives (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Buber (1970) states that only then can a genuine dialogue take place, which can provide a way to achieve a successful meeting where parties can learn from each other.

JCJCR defines its main goal as providing a platform for the groups to learn about each other's culture in order to build relationships across the divide. Face to face meetings and genuine dialogue, as described by Buber (1970), are expected to be the key tools in this process.

The fact that the encounter groups invited by JCJCR are composed of parties who are in the middle of a sixty-year-old conflict, indicates that there are deep-seated differences. Many Israelis view Israel as the Jewish national homeland formed in response to anti-Semitic aggression, whereas many Palestinians see the conflict as the threat of extermination (Gren, 2008). Against this backdrop, I will be focusing on the interaction between Jewish and Armenian youths and their leaders. There is obviously some willingness to meet, and the aim of this field study is to ascertain exactly what and how they learn from each other during these specific meetings.

The study also aims to identify potential obstacles that could prevent Armenians and Jews from learning from each other. In order to achieve this I have tried to answer the following questions:

1. What do Armenians and Jews learn from each other?

2. How do Armenians and Jews learn from each other?

3. What obstacles can be indentified that could prevent Armenians and Jews from learning from each other?

Theoretical background

Learning

All kinds of learning include certain element of either a deeper insight, knowledge, abilities, understanding, views or further qualifications. But learning can also be seen as experiencing a new culture (Illeris, 2007). Säljö (2007) argues that all learning is context dependent and how we learn is a result of our cultural experiences. How to learn and how to behave when interacting with other people is, according to Vygotskij (in Säljö, 2007), something that has been learnt.

Learning from a socio-cultural perspective

The socio-cultural perspective on learning is to be regarded as a course rather than a theory. Such a course defines knowledge as a situated phenomenon i.e. interwoven in a historic and cultural context (Dysthe, 2003). Learning, from this view, is borne out of participating in a social practice. Bakhtin (1981) who represents the socio-cultural course of learning, emphasizes the importance of allowing for dialogue and doubt. Without enough space for dialogue and doubt, interaction will be prevented and monologism will prevail (Dysthe, 2003). Michael Cole (in Dysthe, 2003) argues that it is vital to consider the historic as well as the cultural context in order to understand any learning process.

As in the behavouristic and the cognitivistic perspectives of learning, the socio-cultural view affirms motivation and commitments as significant elements in learning (Säljö, 2007). Reflection is also to be regarded as an important part of the learning process (Illeris (2007).

Dialogue

In order to define the mystery of a socio-cultural interaction I turn to Bakhtin's main interest – relations, where dialogue seems to be the key word. Dialogue (from Greek dialogos which means conversation) allows an interaction of two different voices, within one person or between people. Although a dialogue can take place within one person according to Bakhtin, a dialogue, as we know it, requires two voices. Bakhtin as well as Rogers and Buber

(Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2006) define the goal of dialogue as to avoid monologue. A dialogue according to Cederwald (2006) can happen only on the assumption that an authentic meeting takes place. An authentic meeting is a meeting characterized by respect and interest in the other party (Roy, Oludaja, 2006). Where there are more than two voices involved in a communication, the Bakhtinian term *polyphony* is a more proper term than dialogue. Since the Specialized Encounter groups at JCJCR consist of more than two people, polyphony would therefore be the proper term to describe some of the interaction in this context. However, since there is no significant importance of differentiating between the two terms in this particular study, dialogue will be used in all definitions of communication between two or more voices.

Whereas Socrates, Plato and Aristotle consider dialogue as a persuading tool, Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue stresses mutual development, and the creation of ideas. *Genuine dialogue, even in times of conflict permits issues and ideas to unfold rather than imposing or pushing one's ideas or perspective on the other* (Samovar et al., 2006, p. 379).

In fact, Bakhtin describes the entire human existence as a dialogue in itself. He proclaims every human life to be an ever-lasting dialogue. There is a relationship between "I" and "You" within every person as well as between people. Bakhtin contends that *the very being of man is a profound communication. To be means to communicate.* (in Dysthe, 2003, p. 97).

Verbal language is one of many ways that dialogue can express its inner meaning. Verbal (by word of mouth) manifestations can consist of contradictions, confirmations, complementary information or an extension of former manifestations. These manifestations are not always of an explicit nature. In a verbal communication the intonation is part of the dialogue. How the person who speaks behaves, depends on the person who listens. The speaker takes it for granted that he or she has at least some values and knowledge in common with the listener (Dysthe, 2003).

Buber (in Roy & Oludaja, 2006) claims that dialogue calls for genuine acceptance and confirmation of the other party. During such a meeting the parties do not aim to influence each other but to see each other's perspective. Gadamer (in Roy & Oludaja, 2006) stresses the importance of using proper questions rather than rhetorical ones, as a way to invite the other party to search for deeper understanding. A proper question requires a person to acknowledge her or his ignorance and a willingness to explore the issues under consideration together.

A contextual definition of Dialogue

The definition of dialogue in this field study is a means of communication where both parties regard the opportunity to meet as an opportunity to learn. To use proper questions and to be willing to listen to the other party is regarded as the very core of dialogue and is referred to as an authentic dialogue in the context of this study.

Cultural Language Codes

The conflict situation in the Middle East centres, as we have seen, on who has legitimate rights to land with strong historical, emotional and religious significance. However, it is also a cultural conflict. The culture differences between Jews and Palestinians have resulted in a severe breakdown in communication (Ellis & Maoz, 2006). People who live together have certain behaviours in common. A common principle of language use and interpretation is one example. The communication codes characterizing Israeli Jews and Arabs are identified by several researchers as Dugri and Musayra (Samovar et al., 2006). These are two contrasting codes reflecting two different cultures.

The Arab communication code, Musayra, means "accommodate" or "go along with" and thus reflects the core values in the Arab culture. To be polite, indirect, courteous and non-confrontational is to use the Arab Musayra speech code. Ellis and Maoz (2006) identify four main features in the Musayra code: repetition, indirectness, elaboration and affectiveness. Repetition is mainly used to praise others. Indirectness is a way to be interpersonally cautious and responsive to context. Elaboration refers to its expressive and encompassing style. Eventually, affectiveness refers to its intuitive and emotional style. The overall aim of the Musayra code is to maintain an engaged relationship with the other party (Ellis & Maoz, 2006).

The Dugri code used by the Israeli Jews is in sharp contrast to the Musayra one. Directness, pragmatism and an assertive style characterize the Dugri speech code (Ellis & Maoz, 2006). Understanding and information have top priority in such a communication style. Niceties and maintaining a positive image of the other party are of secondary importance (Albrecht, Philipsen, 1997).

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism (from Greek ethnos which means people) is a concept referring to a strong sense of group identity. Ethnocentric people tend to put their own culture and values at the

centre of universe. This phenomenon when applied to a group of people can be compared to that of an egocentric individual. I believe it is important to have a clear understanding about ethnocentrism when analysing the communication between representatives from different ethnic religious groups, and to bear in mind the importance of religion which constitutes a deep structure of culture and has proven to be resistant to major changes. Ethnocentrism is therefore a significant factor which must be taken into consideration when trying to understanding intercultural communication. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Ethnocentrism is usually an unconscious phenomenon and is to be seen as a result of socialisation (Stier, 2004). Davey (in Stier, 2004) argues that an ethnocentric standpoint is transferred onto children from their parents, the media, literature and at school. Ethnocentrism is not only a way to behave and respond to otherness but also a way to perceive one's culture as the most positive and the most civilized one. This explains why ethnocentrism also has a cohesive power on an ethnic group.

Prejudices

Attitudes can in a simplified way be described as "like" or "not like" a person or a subject. Kaufmann and Kaufmann (2005) present a more overall view in describing attitudes according to the three-dimensional ABC-model – Affect (sympathy or antipathy), Behaviour (acting) and finally Cognition (expectations, views).

To describe a generalising view of a certain ethnic group, e.g. "Arabs are terrorists", we generally use the word prejudice. In this context prejudice reveals a negative attitude toward people based on their cultural identity. Prejudice derives thus from the affective side of the ABC model of attitudes and is a result of a negative attitude.

Gadamer (In Samovar et al., 2006) adds another perspective to prejudice. He puts the same meaning to prejudice as to prejudgement and views prejudice as a subjective basis for all understanding. Following his thoughts, it would not be possible to judge all prejudices as negative. Prejudices are instead to be divided into productive, unproductive and counterproductive ones according to Gadamer. In a true dialogue prejudices are to be presented and communicated openly and used in a productive way.

Method

Methodological concerns

Methodologically this thesis adopts an ethnographic approach. The choice of approach

reveals its subjective epistemological view, which has a significant impact on the choice of data collection methods. An ethnographic study aims to reflect the informants' views and experiences in relation to a given phenomenon (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Informal and formal interviews, observations and field notes from the Jerusalem area have been used to collect the data. This comprehensive set of methods enables a triangulation analysis technique. The technique provides a result based on different views from different perspectives. Triangulation has proven to be a useful technique in ethnographic studies where the aim is to get a deep insight in the informants' world of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

I have myself, assisted by one of the informants, a Jewish JCJCR member of staff, carried out the data collection. Having two observers not only enabled a broader and deeper study than one person would have managed in a limited time, but also an altogether more open-minded approach to culture-specific behaviour. Cohen et al. (2007) argue that to reach a deep understanding of others we need to treat them as capable of monitoring and arranging their own actions. Furthermore, choosing to include data collected from one of the informants illustrates the fact that human beings are subjects as well as objects within a social science study. This is also a reliability issue that helps to prevent a highly subjective selection of data (Cohen et al., 2007). The scientific assumptions are thereby based on the view that human beings are creative and able to affect their own behaviour. Seeking insight into the learning process through the eyes of the informants and understanding social accomplishment in the informants' own terms puts the study in the ethnomethodology category of science (Cohen et al., 2007).

Informants

Ethnography is very much about learning from people rather than studying them. This is why informant is a better term than subject or respondent (Cousin, 2009). The study has been feasible thanks to JCJCR who agreed to allow me access to one of their Encounter Groups as an observer and also acted as gate opener when it came to the interviews with Armenian and Jewish representatives outwith the JCJCR activities. JCJCR runs several groups that would have been suitable for this study. A group of 27 13-14 year-old youths from the Armenian School in the Armenian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and from the Keshet School in West Jerusalem was selected for practical reasons. The Jewish school is one of very few schools in Israel where Orthodox and secular youths study together. This means that there are both secular and Orthodox Jewish youths included in the observation group along with the

Armenians.

One teacher from the respective schools, the Armenian and the Jewish, coordinate and facilitate the meetings, supported by JCJCR staff. The group alters their meeting place between the Jewish and the Armenian communities and had met seven times when the data was collected. The full programme includes nine meetings during one year.

Besides the Encounter Group members three informants were available for individual interviews. The Armenian informant is a Jerusalem citizen in his fifties. He was born in Jerusalem and has been living in the Armenian quarter of the Old City all his life except for four years of university studies in Europe.

The second interviewed informant is a retired Palestinian (Arab) lady from East Jerusalem. She is a Muslim and has been living in this area all her life.

The third interview was held with one of the JCJCR member of staff, an Israeli citizen.

The informants are listed below;
- Two JCJCR encounter group leaders for observation
  - One Jewish leader
  - One Armenian leader
- 27 teenagers from one of JCJCR's Encounter Groups for observation
  - Twelve Armenians
  - Fifteen Jews
  - Four Armenians and four Jews from the JCJCR Encounter group have been chosen on a voluntary basis to also take part in a focus group discussion.
- One Armenian Jerusalem citizen for interview
- One Arab Jerusalem citizen for interview
- One JCJCR member of staff for interview

Data collection methods

Ethnographic studies has a tendency to work with unstructured data, that is, data that has not been pre-coded into analytic categories at the point of data collection (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Field notes, local newspaper articles on the current situation in Jerusalem and recorded meetings with citizens representing the Arab, Armenian and the Jewish ethnic groups have been collected prior to the Encounter group observation. This phase of the study

has provided a familiarity with the social life of Jerusalem and a pre-understanding about their specific cultural characteristics.

Field notes

The ethnographic approach affirms the perspectives of the informants (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Cohen et al. (2007) argue the importance of sharing the informants' frames of reference in order to understand their interpretations of the world from the inside. Efforts have been made to view the interaction between Jews and Armenians from their own perspectives of their daily life. Hence, I have spent four weeks in the Jerusalem area, listening and talking to local people, reading local newspapers and observing the daily life.

To document this part of the study, field notes have been taken continuously.

Example of field note:

> *West Jerusalem 25/2/2010, a.m.*
>
> *Today when I was buying bread from an Arab boy, I was warned by two young Jewish men not to do business with Arabs. – Never ever trust an Arab, they shouted.*
>
> *East Jerusalem 26/2/2010 p.m.*
>
> *I spent the afternoon with a Palestinian family, a member of the family was accused of being too friendly with "The enemy", when she told us about her participating in a women's group including both Arabs and Jewish women. – This Jewish lady I talked to, was most understanding, she did not approve of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, answered the Palestinian lady in protest. – You see, there are descent people on both sides, she argued.*

Observation

The observation took place at Keshet School – a Jewish school in West Jerusalem. The topic of the day's meeting was to learn about the significance of the respective Memorial Days – the Jewish Memorial Day (in memory of the Holocaust) and the Armenian Memorial Day (in memory of the Armenian Genocide). The session lasted for two hours.

The youths were divided into two mixed groups based on a division that had been organized at a previous meeting. After the assembly the two groups went into two separate classrooms to continue their respective meetings. The observation continued in only one of

these groups and was carried out as an overt observation. The youths and the group leaders were sitting in a circle in the middle of the room. Although the youths were told to mix most of them were sticking together with friends from their own school i.e. Armenians with Armenians and Jews with Jews.

As an overt non-participating observer one has access to observe the informants and their activities as a temporary guest (Cousin, 2009). Cousin (2009) argues that an ethnographer is never able to fully detach him/her self from the studied group and is thus to be considered as participating to a certain degree. In my case there were several occasions where I was treated as a participating member of the group rather than an observer. This happened particularly during discussions about traditions and religions. I was asked about my faith and about Swedish traditions when it comes to allowing Jews and Muslims into our churches. To meet their expectations and also to not offend them I shared my experiences with them. This was actually obstructive to the observation. I was also addressed on a few occasions when the leaders and as well as the youths wanted me to confirm that I was aware about the issues under consideration. This proves that I was never fully detached from the studied group. The fact that the members were aware about my presence and about my focal point (learning) can indeed have affected their behaviour during the meeting.

During the last part of the session the group was divided into small mixed subgroups with three to four youths in each group. Each group were told to go and look at an exhibition about the Holocaust that was set up at the school. Only one of the groups of four youths was observed during this part.

The leaders were informed about the research observation in advance by a JCJCR member of staff and then also introduced in person to the observer prior to the observation session. The teenagers at the Encounter Group were informed about the study and introduced to the observer at the beginning of the actual observation session.

As well as recording the observed session, short notes were taken to document non-verbal interactions and also to accentuate specific situations.

Armenian and Hebrew were the main languages used within the separate ethnic groups whereas Hebrew and English were used when communicating between the groups as well as when the leaders addressed the entire Encounter group. The JCJCR staff explained that most Armenians master Arabic and Hebrew as well as Armenian. During the meetings the Armenians used Armenian and the Jews used Hebrew among themselves.

Observation support

1. General data; location, group members, leaders, language
2. Main activity/programme
3. What do I see?
4. What do I hear?
5. Who interacts?
6. How are they interacting

For practical reasons and also to get an even deeper insight into the learning process when the Armenian and Jewish youths interact, a JCJCR member of staff - an Israeli citizen, fluent in English and Hebrew, assisted in the observation. This assistance adds another voice to the study and provides a means of challenging my own observations and thus the study's process of analysis. Ethnographic research aims to get below the surface and look for deeper, hidden patterns (Cohen et al., 2008). To avoid including second hand information, the data from this observation has been retrieved in an interview with the observer via Skype and is referred to as the third interview.

The ethnographic approach has encouraged close observations of people interacting both spontaneously and in a formal way on issues regarding intercultural interaction and the way Jews and Armenians are able to learn from each other when meeting. Part of the Encounter Group observation is carried out prior to the formal focus group meetings.

Interviews

The interviews with the JCJCR member of staff as well as the interviews with the Armenian and Arab Jerusalem citizens enabled a deeper understanding of the social life and cultural differences.

Two of the interviews have been carried out in person prior to the observations (with the Arab and the Armenian informants). One interview with the JCJCR member of staff was carried out several weeks after the observation session. All the interviews have been conducted in English.

The interview with the Armenian informant was held as an informal discussion at an office at the Armenian library in the Old City of Jerusalem. The interview with the Arab informant was held in the informant's kitchen in East Jerusalem. Eventually the interview with the JCJCR member of staff was performed via Skype, ten weeks after leaving the field and based on the questions listed below.

Formal interview questions with JCJCR member of staff

1. What are your expectations on the JCJCR work with the Encounter Group?
2. What are your general experiences so far?
3. What is the most (if any) significant improvement in terms of reaching a better understanding between the two groups so far?
4. How would you describe the communication between the two groups?
5. What significance do you think these meetings might have in a broader perspective?
6. Other comments?

Focus groups

Focus group meetings have been performed twice, with four of the teenagers at a time (four Armenians and four Jews) assisted by a JCJCR member of staff.

The focus group meetings were held in conjunction with the observations of the Encounter group meeting, during a break from the classroom and they lasted for approximately 10 minutes each. The topics discussed in the focus groups were on issues related to the observations. Focus groups can be used to further enhance the informants' contribution to the study and also to obtain an instant and direct insight into their experience of specific phenomena (Wibeck, 2000).

Example of Focus group topics

1. What did you like about the session today?
2. What did you not like about the session today?
3. What did you learn from the activity you just did?
4. Did anything in particular help you to understand more about the topic?
5. How did you contribute?

Data collection

The data used in this study comprises:

- Observations from one Encounter Group meeting
  - o Including observation notes and transcriptions from the two-hour sound recording of the Encounter Group meeting with additional comments and notes from my assistant observer and translator.
- Field notes from Jerusalem

- o Including diary notes from four weeks in the Jerusalem area
- Two focus group discussions
  - o Including notes from two 10 minute discussions with four Armenian and four Jewish youths as part of their Encounter group meeting.
- Three interviews
  - o Including two informal interviews with an Armenian and a Palestinian Jerusalem citizen. It also includes one formal interview with a JCJCR representative.

Analysis

Using two or more methods of data collection may be defined as triangulation (Cohen et el., 2007). The methodological triangulation that has been used in this study, using observations, interviews, field notes and focus groups, embraces the notion of convergence between independent evaluations of the same phenomena. The analysis of the collected data is an explicit interpretation of the observations made during the JCJCR Encounter group meeting with Armenian and Jewish youths and their leaders in Jerusalem.

The interviews and the field notes played a significant role as they allowed me access to the informants' social world – to understand specific cultural differences and similarities, and to become familiar with their general views about themselves and about the other party. The field notes and two of the interviews were performed prior to the observation specifically for this reason. The third interview was carried out after leaving the field in order to get some complementary information.

Re-reading the field notes and the transcriptions of the interviews has not only enlightened the actual field observations and the interviews but also to a large extent facilitated a more holistic view of the entire empiric study. Cohen et al. (2007) stress the benefit of going beyond the actual observation object to be able to compare and suggest explanations for specific phenomena.

Cousin (2009) points out that a qualitative data analysis also needs to include reflections in addition to the "raw" material. Experience gained from sharing the everyday life in Jerusalem and the factual knowledge gathered from the field are read and re-read during the analysis phase in order to pick up any nuances, which contributes to a holistic view of the observed phenomena.

The research questions, how they learn, what they learn and what prevents learning, were initially set up to help me to focus on the central aim of the study. When analysing the raw

material, the three research questions also provided a useful way of organising all the relevant data. Having used several different data collecting methods this way of categorising the data allowed me to collate the data from the different sources and to present a collective answer to each research question. Organising the analysing process according to the research questions has enabled me to gather all significant data and to preserve the coherence of the total raw material.

Ethical concerns

Honest accounts of the observations are crucial when evaluating ethnographic interpretations, contends Kullberg (2008). Although I am interested in the "Palestinian issue" my intention with this study is to maintain a narrow focus on learning between only two ethnic groups. Gren (2009) observes that doing research in a hotly disputed and violent field often forces the "neutral observer" to choose sides. To openly present the purpose of my study to the informants was very important, not only due to ethical concerns but also to establish trust among my informants. However, to describe a field study as neutral is to mislead the reader about the very nature of the ethnographic approach where the researcher's own imagination is very much part of the interpretation (Berglund, 1985).

Access is a key issue in this study. It is crucial to find a "gatekeeper" that is respected among the informants and is positive to the study (Cohen et al., 2008). I have relied on the fact that JCJCR, who made contact with my informants possible, is an organisation that is respected on all sides of the conflict.

The Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2005) for Social Science has given support when it comes to ethical concerns on all issues regarding data protection requirements. The names of informants have not been revealed to ensure their anonymity. Also, data protection regulations have been followed when informing the informants about the purpose of the study.

Initial background information about the study was given by JCJCR, who contacted the leaders well in advance and got their verbal approval. Meetings were then arranged for me to give a thorough presentation of the aims of the study. Eventually the teachers agreed to have one or more of their sessions observed and also to give interviews. Whether any further action was required regarding background information to the study, such as approaching the parents of the teenagers and the teenagers themselves, was discussed with JCJCR. Their recommendation was not to seek their approval but to rely on the information they would get via the Encounter Group leaders. The youths were informed at the beginning of the observed

session. It was also pointed out that participation was on a voluntary basis in accordance with consent requirements.

Finally, the ethical code regarding any commercial use of the collected data has been respected.

Reliability and Validity

Using a wide triangulated database as well as the assistance of an external observer prevents the so-called halo effect (Cohen et al., 2007). The halo effect can be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cohen et al., 2007). Cousin (2009) advises ethnographic researchers to stay reflexive about the observations they are making and to be aware of the fact that their own positioning influences their claims.

Cohen et al. (2007) also raise the question about how far out of the micro-situation a researcher should go to be able to understand the actual micro-situation. I have chosen to include observations documented as field notes and recorded meetings with Arabs, Armenians and Jews living in the Jerusalem area. This is to ensure a better understanding of what is going on in the observed Encounter Group meeting with the Armenians and the Jewish youths.

The fact that I was not able to follow the discussions held in Hebrew and Armenian might be seen as a weakness and a reliability issue. However, the need for translation was part of the initial plans of the study and was thus prepared for in advance.

Methodological triangulation is a way to eliminate invalidity and to maintain confidence in the empirical data.

Results

In this section there is a summary of the empirical data covering Jewish and Arabic voices in Jerusalem. The data is divided into three main categories based on the research questions.

1. How do Armenian and Jewish youth learn?
2. What do they learn when meeting?
3. What can prevent Armenians and Jews from learning from each other?

The data is collected from interviews, observations and from field notes collated in order to give a collective answer to the research questions.

1. How Armenians and Jews learn from each other

Listening

The Holocaust and the Armenian genocide are set up as themes of the actual Encounter Group meeting. The Armenian leader tells the group about the Armenian genocide and gives her view on how the hardship had started already in 1895 when the persecution of the Armenians escalated in Turkey. The leader shares her understanding about what had happened back in 1920 and the background to the Armenian genocide. The youths listen attentively and their comments prove that they are learning. *Did you have family who died in the desert!? [...]*

Asking

Several questions are asked on the topic, mainly by the Jewish youths directed to the leader. *[...] Did you ever try to revolt? [...] Why didn't you leave the country earlier?*

The Armenian leader uses Jewish terminology when describing the Armenian tragedy to the Jewish youths. *[...] the Syrian desert is the Armenian* equivalent *to Auschwitz. The desert was their huge camp and that is where many of them died.*

The Jewish leader takes over and gives a lecture about the Holocaust. She mentions the Ghettos, the persecution and the death camps. Hardly any questions are asked on this part. The Jewish youths fill in with some more information. *[...] we have no survivors from the Holocaust in our family.*

Reflecting

The interaction between the Armenians and the Jews shows that reflection is part of the learning process. To be able to refer new discoveries about the other party (the Armenian genocide) and to add this to the knowledge about their own past (the Holocaust) is an example of how they reflect and indeed acquire new knowledge about each other.

Telling

The Holocaust is also presented as an exhibition set up by the school in the school hall. Pictures of Jews being transported to the German camps, starving and sick people supervised by Gestapo staff are depicted along with brief texts.

The Encounter Group members visit the exhibition walking together in small mixed groups. They chat in Armenian, Hebrew and English, commenting on various parts of the display. Here, the Armenians look more relaxed and turn to the Jewish youths for more

specific information. *[....] do you have any survivors in your family? [....] the ones who were captured they all died [....].* The Armenian girl goes on to tell the others about her grandfather who survived the persecution in Turkey and managed to make it all the way to Jerusalem. Another group compares the cruelties of the Nazis in Germany and the Ottoman Turks.

Interpretation of "How they learn"

The result of this category shows how learning can derive from curiosity and interest. To spend time talking about Armenian history and their culture is a way to recognize the Armenians from a Jewish point of view. The way the Jews ask some of the questions confirms a genuine interest and also a growing respect for each other. Gadamer (Roy & Oludaja, 2006) describes in his article that there is a distinction between rhetorical questions and proper ones. To ask a proper question is to be willing to reveal ignorance and also to openly show the desire to know more about the issues under consideration. Furthermore, a proper question also shows a willingness to listen to the other party. Gadamer argues that to be willing to listen to another person is a significant way to show respect. Learning is achieved in the tense field between the different voices where respect and security prevail (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

According to Bakhtin the members need to play an active role and to have a responsive attitude towards each other in a fruitful dialogue. In the Encounter Group meeting there are several examples of the members playing such a role when asking and listening to each other. By listening to the information on the Armenian genocide and looking at the exhibition on the Holocaust seemed to catch the interest of many of the Armenian and Jewish youths. New facts are revealed to both parties that encourage them to ask further questions. Motivation and commitment are significant elements in any learning (Säljö, 2007). The answers, and the fact that they are listening, seem to encourage the eagerness to learn even more.

The result also includes examples of mistrust; *did you ever try to revolt?* From a socio-cultural perspective on learning, Bakhtin (1981) argues that it is important to allow space for doubt in a true dialogue. The questions about the Armenians' persecution prove that there is a certain allowance for doubt. Without enough space for doubt, the dialogue will not survive (Dysthe, 2003). The doubts about the Armenian genocide are brought forward and accepted as proper questions. The answers eventually generate a deeper understanding about the Armenian veiw of their history.

When visiting the Holocaust exhibition some of the youths seem to open up for each other

and demonstrate a willingness to share thoughts and views on the Holocaust. Gadamer (Roy & Oludaja, 2006) argues that a relationship based on open-mindedness is an important factor in any dialogue. This open-mindedness should not only exist on the part of the person speaking, but also on that of the one who is listening.

Reflecting is also identified as a way to learn. To be able to refer to new discoveries about the other party (the Armenian genocide) and to add this to the knowledge about their own past (the Holocaust) is an example of how they reflect and actually acquire new knowledge about each other. This way of reflecting can also be referred to as mirroring (Illeris, 2007). Other people's experience is then reflected in their own experience and valued by their own cultural values.

Listening, asking, reflecting and telling appear to provide a means of learning only when true dialogue frames the meetings between the Armenians and the Jews. To be part of a true dialogue is to mutually meet; sharing perspectives and to mutually shape a new understanding of the issues under consideration (Gustavsson, 2003).

2. What the Armenian and Jewish youth learn when meeting

About history

The history of the Armenians and their way to becoming established Israeli citizens in Jerusalem is discussed during the Encounter Group meeting. *[...] Most of this is new to the Jewish youths [...] and their questions show that they learnt a lot about Armenian history [...]* (Jewish leader). *[...] I learnt that the Armenians are not really Arabs. [...] They are Christians* (Jewish youth).

The main theme of the Encounter Group meeting is the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. Both Armenian and Jewish youths make comparisons with their own ancestors' struggle for life. The Jewish youths are the ones who ask most of the questions. The leaders encourage the Armenians to answer. The Armenian youths answer some questions and the Armenian and the Jewish leaders elaborate on some of their answers.

Why didn't your people revolt? (Jewish youth). *[...] We did [try to do revolt]* (Armenian youth). *[...] It is not easy to revolt when belonging to a minority group [...]* (Jewish leader). *[...] you have your own "Holocaust"?* (Jewish youth). *[...] what do you call your "Holocaust"?* (Jewish youth). They explicitly show an interest to learn about the other party's past. *[...] they were pushed into the desert of Syria [...]* (Armenian youth). *[...] so your people died in the desert [...]?* (Jewish youth). The leader concluded; *[...] similar to the*

Jewish camps. [...] cause the Holocaust and the Genocide are the same?! (Jewish youth). The proper questions invite the Armenians to collaborate in the search for truth regarding the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide.

About religion and tradition

Some of the meetings take place in their respective houses of worship, i.e. in a church and in a synagogue. [...] *I told them about Judaism and about our main traditions.* (Jewish leader). The Armenians recognize similarities with the Christian faith; [...] *we also celebrate Easter.* By recognizing similarities they also to some extent recognize the other party as an equal. [...] *The Armenians seem to know quite a lot of the Jewish traditions whereas the Jewish kids do not know very much about the Armenians'* (Armenian leader). The meeting provides an opportunity for the Jews to learn about the Armenian Christian faith and their traditions.

   [...] I know about the Hanukah, it's a Jewish holiday (Armenian youth). *[...] some of them are very religious [...]they follow the Law. [...] their religion doesn't allow them to enter our church* (Armenian Youth). The way the Armenians acknowledge the fact that it is the Jewish tradition that prevents Jews from entering the church shows that they are willing to see the other's perspective.

About each other

When spending time during the meetings they discover things about each other. *[...] the Armenian kids speak good Hebrew and English* (Jewish youth). *[...]but they are very shy. They don't talk a lot during the assembly [...]* (Jewish youth). By spending time together, the Encounter group meeting gives the members an opportunity to present who they really are, as opposed to who they seem to be.

   [...] the Armenian kids will not join the army except from one of them (Jewish youth). The Jewish leader explains to the Jewish youths; *[...] non-Jews are not expected to serve in the army, most of the Armenians don't have full citizenship but east Jerusalem residency and therefore they don't have to serve.* Being given an explanation to this apparently infectious issue opens up for a dialogue that was not even considered previously. A deeper understanding for each other's conditions is achieved. *[...] for young Israelis the positive attitude to the army and the willingness to serve is a way to express loyalty. The compulsory service includes Jews and Druze, others can volunteer* (Jewish leader).

   Music as well as films are discussed during a break. *[...] We like the same music and I have seen all the films he mentioned* (Armenian youth). The Armenians achieve a genuine

knowledge about the Jewish music preferences in this group. The fear and shyness that the Armenians showed at the beginning of the meeting seem to have diminished after spending some time together with the Jewish youths.

Interpretation of "What they learn"

This category reveals that the learning process in meetings between Armenians and Jews includes their history, religion and traditions as well as personal things about each other. To get to know another person with a different ethnic background also involves learning about different cultural values. The main cultural differences between two ethnic groups are to be found in their values (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The Jewish leader points out the differences in the way the Jewish and the Armenian children interact during the meeting. One Jewish youth comes to the conclusion that Armenians are shy people.

The Israeli language code appears as a contrast to the Armenian one. The members at the Encounter group meeting experience the difference when describing Armenians as quiet and shy when they talk compared to the Jewish members.

3. What prevents learning?

Prejudices

Both the Jewish and Armenian youths wear strict uniforms for school. As the Encounter group meetings are not part of the curriculum they are, on these occasions, allowed to deviate from their respective dress codes (Jewish leader). The Armenians seem to be more dressed up than the Jewish youths. This is commented on by the Jewish youths. *[...] They are snobbish. [...] why do you dress up for coming to school?* (Jewish youth).

[...] Dialogues organised by peace organisations, often run by people not from here, are just artificial dialogues that do not lead anywhere. The Armenian informant says this in a strong voice, looking straight into my eyes. *[...]We neither are Arabs or Jews you see. We are nothing in this country in the eyes of the Jews. They spit on our church. How can we ever even think of interacting with them? And you Swedish people, like in most western countries, are too weak. You will soon vanish. The Muslims will take over your country. I hear that young girls and boys do not even believe in God. You are Americanised.*

During an Encounter group meeting when an Armenian priest is invited to talk about Christianity the Armenians don't think that the Jewish youths show enough respect. *[...] they were laughing and talking during the presentation. [...] They do not respect us.*

When the Rabbi is invited to one of the Encounter group meetings to talk about Judaism

the Armenians notice that the Jewish youths are a lot more polite and listening with interest. *[...] The Jews are not honest. [...] they want us to respect them but they do not respect us. [...] they laughed when our priest was talking [...]* (Armenian youth).

Ethnocentrism

The Jewish leader explains *[...] according to the Jewish law it is not permitted for a Jew to enter a church, but today even religious Jews enter churches for the sake of learning. [...] Still many traditional Jews from our school would not enter and therefore we consult their parents before visiting the church in the quarter. There are always a few kids that decide not to enter.* The teacher explains that it all depends on how they cho**o**se to interpret the law. *[...] They are not allowed to enter our church!* concludes an Armenian youth.

On one occasion the Encounter group is visiting a synagogue. *[...]* Part of the program was an introduction game with a ball. The Jewish kids *[...]* protested that it is disrespectful by Christians to play basketball in the synagogue. *[...]* It is not a religious problem to do so and the school uses the synagogue for different purposes all the time (Jewish leader). One Jewish boy insisted; *[...] it is not respectful, to let Christians with crosses enter the synagogue. [...]. They slander our synagogue [...]. They do not respect our traditions.*

One Jewish youth expresses his dislike for Christians. *[...] I don't like people who believe in three Gods* (Jewish youth). *[...] He is referring to the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit in the Christian faith* (Jewish leader).

In East Jerusalem the Israeli police threaten to demolish a Palestinian Family's tent a second time. The family have raised their tent in front of their former house – now taken over by Jews. This is done in protest. – *Jews steal our land,* claims the Palestinian family and their friends.

No opportunities to meet

[...] There is no coexistence here, there is nothing left to celebrate and there are no opportunities to dialogue. These are the words coming back over and over when talking to the Armenian intellectual in the Armenian quarter of the old city of Jerusalem. Most Armenians in Jerusalem live together in the Armenian compound in the Old City. *[...] What can we do, we are not welcome anywhere, there are no meetings between us whatsoever,* argues the Armenian informant.

[...] It is very important for them that the Jews learn about the Armenians because there is a lot of ignorance about them, [...] most of the Jews don't have a clue because the Armenians

are closed in the monastery (Jewish leader). *[...] Armenians just stay there in their Armenian quarter; they never meet with other kids* (Jewish youth).

The Jewish leader explains that the Israeli kids are encouraged to ask question, to share and talk while the Armenian education system puts less emphasis on that. *[...] Our youths are more open than the Armenian youths*.

Interpretation of "What prevents learning"

The last category identifies three main features that seem to prevent learning between Armenians and Jews**:** prejudice, ethnocentrism and no opportunities to meet.

Some comments about the Armenians as well as about the Jewish people fit well with Kaufmann's and Kaufmann's (2005) definition of prejudice which regards it in a cultural context as a negative attitude toward people based on their cultural identity. To believe that Armenians are snobbish because they dress up before coming to the Encounter group meeting and to regard Jews as dishonest when they listen attentively to the Rabbi but not to the Priest does obstruct the meeting – a meeting that would otherwise have been a learning opportunity.

Just as a proper question provides a remedy for ignorance, a non-admitting approach seems to prevent learning. This can be a sign of ethnocentrism where the truth is believed to already be embedded in their culture and therefore there is nothing to be learnt from another culture. Samovar et al. (2006) argue that ethnocentrism can be a product of being told that one's own culture is in a superior position relative to other cultures.

So far we have seen that learning takes place where people meet each other. The Armenian informant claims that there is no meeting whatsoever between the Armenians and the Jews. This statement is a generalisation of course, and for that matter even a false statement. However the aim in this study is to reveal the experience and the understanding from the informants' point**s** of view. The Armenian statement expresses a disillusioned picture of the future with no will or ability to learn anything from the Jews. The inability to learn about other cultures and the inability to accept other customs can lead to ethnocentrism (Samovar et al, 2006). The Jews describe the Armenians as confining themselves to the Armenian compound in the Old City of Jerusalem without showing any interest in understanding why they don't interact with Jews. Armenians are Christians and as such are seen with dislike. Johnson (2006) argues that dominant groups (e.g. the Jews in Israel) have the power to define what is considered to be normal.

It is worth mentioning that there are no obvious signs that poor language skills obstruct the learning process in the meetings. The fact that the Jewish youths do not speak Armenian

might limit the opportunity to learn about the Armenian cultural values. Hofstede & Hofstede (2005, pp 341) argue that the ability to use the language opens the doors for a deeper understanding of its cultural values.

Conclusion of findings

From an ethnographic point of view, people learn in order to create meaningfulness in life (Kullberg, 2004, p. 62). The eagerness to know more about Armenian history generates proper questions leading to a deeper understanding about Armenians in general.

The results show that learning does occur during the Encounter group meetings. It also reveals that willingness to meet is a main prerequisite for any learning between the two groups. Ethnocentrism and prejudices are recognized as impediments to learning as well as impediments to the actual meeting.

Dialogue is the means of learning. History, traditions, religion and a deeper understanding about each other are the main learning fields. Moreover the findings provide a deeper understanding about the significance of aiming for genuine dialogue when meeting in order to achieve learning.

Discussion

The ethnography presented indicates that learning occurs between the Armenians and the Jews wherever dialogue takes place. This might not come as a surprise having considered Buber's outline of a true dialogue. However, the fact that the willingness to meet is low or sometimes non-existant despite considerable knowledge about the power of dialogue is very discouraging. An approach coloured by ethnocentrism provides little or no interest in getting to know more about the other party.

The fact that JCJCR actually manage to bring together the two groups despite several signs of ethnocentrism shows that ethnocentrism doesn't necessarily prevent a meeting. Moreover, the fact that learning is achieved proves that ethnocentrism can be replaced by polycentrism.

The willingness to understand the other cultural group and the ability to reflect on common experiences provide a learning situation for the Jews as well as for the Armenians. Proper questions stemming from a genuine interest are opening up the way for this kind of learning. The leaders seem to play a significant role in this context. JCJCR confirms that a considerable amount of effort is spent on finding leaders, willing to invest time and energy in Encounter group meetings.

The dialogue at the Encounter group meeting dealing with the Armenian genocide is

indeed to be considered genuine. Buber (2007) argues that dialogue with a "stranger" can only be achieved when accepting the otherness of the other party. I can only concur with Buber's statement having witnessed a few glimpses of true dialogue during the Encounter group meeting. In this case learning seems to derive from interest and curiosity in the other's past. As much as ethnocentrism is an unconscious behaviour, interest and curiosity seem to be an unconscious way out of it.

Furthermore, Habermas (in Samovar et al., 2006) emphasizes the importance of affirming the other party in a dialogue. The way the youths ask proper questions and listen when trying to understand the other party's perspective is a way of recognising the other party as an equal.

The major stumbling block to learning is the lack of contact between the ethnic groups rather than any inability to actually learn from each other. The findings of this study indicate disillusionment as one reason the groups have no contact with each other. Although the specific reasons behind the absence of contact are not the main focus of this study, this is ultimately what is preventing learning between Jews and Armenians.

The study suggests that meetings between Armenians and Jews in Jerusalem are scarce but crucial when it comes to achieving a deeper understanding between the two groups. The Armenians in Jerusalem are indeed a minority group and as such the cultural values of the society they live in are not set by them but by the Jews. They struggle to survive confined within the limits of the Armenian quarter. The findings of this study show that the main reason for not learning from each other is that there are hardly any informal opportunities and no willingness to meet. Moreover the study provides a deeper understanding about the significance of aiming for dialogue when a meeting actually does take place. Listening to the voice of the other proves to be a learning opportunity that is always rewarding in many different ways.

I am aware that this study leaves several questions unanswered. One such question is whether or not the youths are able to influence their families after having taken part in an Encounter group program, and, if so, to what extent. Amir and Ben-Ari (1985) touch on this issue in their study when concluding that the segregation that exists between the Arab and the Jewish adults is accentuated among their children.

Final reflections

This ethnographic field study has been an explorative journey in many ways. Having been able to observe as well as to share experiences and different views on topics such as faith, traditions and living conditions have brought me new insights. All through, my research

questions have served as guidance as well as an official excuse for taking a close look into other people's thoughts and experiences. I can be nothing but humbled by the willingness and ability of human beings to share their experiences once they get the opportunity. The study has made me a part of several genuine dialogues and also allowed me to witness the same as an observer. This kind of dialogue has taken place in authentic meetings – meetings where both parties have shown an interest in each other. Wherever different worldviews have been reflected on in these meetings, learning has always been achieved.

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