

Light in my Life by Juliet Scott.



Tel Aviv seafront view South towards Jaffa

My interest in this paper is in the language of Group Relations and its translation into another world, the real world.

The starting point for my writing is the dilemma of creating an account that does justice my experience of the conference. In February of this year I attended the OFEK Group Relations conference in Israel as a member who worked for the Tavistock Institute, in other words, someone who knew something about the methodology and affects of these events from my everyday working life and experience and who had listened to accounts from colleagues returning from their Group Relations conferences with the kind of radiant glow that only emanates from truly meaningful life experiences. However I had noticed there was a tendency for these accounts to suggest not just a life-changing experience but also attainment of a form of enlightenment, and that was something that I was sceptical of and resisted. It was as if Group Relations was an exclusive members' club to which attendance was the only route to understanding and enlightenment. Language and account were inadequate in their ability to describe the event,

When I did get the opportunity to attend, I discovered that this experience, this exclusive ‘club’ called Group Relations, was very much centred on language -- its articulation and expression, and the development of a sensitivity as to the how, why, when and when not to use it that seemed to be in conflict with the glibness and egotism of the view of enlightenment and more to do with difficulty, subjectivity and change. This challenge was an emerging anxiety among many of the participants as they neared the end of the conference: how to use a new learned language without alienating people in their ordinary lives. This is the challenge of my story. What is the point of a new language if it means nothing to those with whom we interact? And it is a common feeling among those that attend Group Relations conferences. Eva Mack who attended a Nazareth conference aimed at understanding and reconciliation between Germans and Israelis expresses her difficulty as part of a chapter that deals with member narratives in the book about these conferences *Fed with Tears-Poisoned with Milk*:

“...What shall I write, what do I *want* to report? My first idea is that it is impossible to describe my experiences. It is like after psychoanalysis: an intense feeling, the heart full of it, but how to speak about it to someone who did not have this experience?¹

This feeling manifested itself as confusion while the learning of the conference continued. One fellow member emphatically resisted the psychological language of Group Relations, always questioning what sense he would make of it when he returned to his technological organisation. He accused the members of having fallen into a world where it was comfortable to wallow in new words, experience and learning; that we had become a clique built upon this shared experience.

So for me this account is an attempt to capture my own experience and learning and I do not try to represent the view of the group although at times I might presumptuously veer towards narration on behalf of the group if it felt that way at the time. It is my own narrative tool to make sense of a happening, a view point, a positioning of the camera, a style of drawing. Since returning from Israel and preoccupied with understanding the place and the people, I have seen the animated film *Waltz with Bashir*. Ari Folman, the director and the protagonist of the film, in an interview talks about the difficulty of telling the troubled story about regaining his memory

and his version of events from his time as a young soldier fighting in Beirut in 1982.

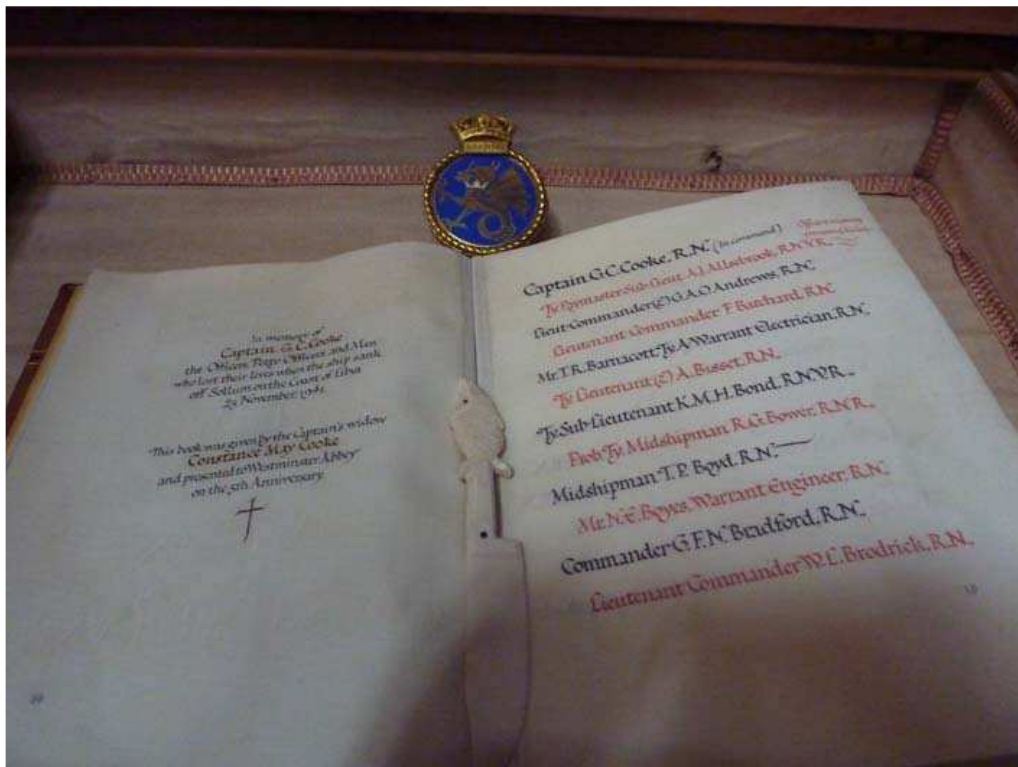
“Being in a film, any kind of film is a very subjective matter and you can pretend that you have made the most objective kind of film and that your truth is the total truth, but there is nothing objective in filmmaking whatsoever. But if I am going to direct our discussion (he is referring to his being interviewed) right now and I am going to put the camera in a very high angle and show you and me in a very low angle then I am going to be huge on the screen and you’ll be small and this is a decision I took as a director and equally it could be the other way round”²

This account then is my cartoon, my sketch and the words and descriptions the camera magnifying or distancing different elements of the experience (and being in the experience). In making my interpretations and observations, I draw firstly upon my background as an artist whose practice and life has revolved around creativity, and I can’t help but be influenced by my workplace the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations though it is important to stress that I am neither a Group Relations practitioner nor a social scientist.

The conference took place in Israel on the north eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Kinneret, close to the borders with the Arab nations of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The conference was managed and staffed by 15 people with about 40 attendees/members. The staffing of the conference was mostly Israeli (11 Israeli Jews, one Israeli Christian Arab, an American, an Irish woman and a German of Turkish origin); it was directed by, Ilana Litvin, who is an Israeli Jew. The majority of members were Israeli Jewish with a small international contingent - British, German, Chilean and two Germans originating from the Ukraine. The diversity of the conference was of course a factor and the terms used to address this diversity (or perhaps lack of it) muddled around gender, religion, country of origin, country of residence, ethnicity and identity. One of the international members was a female rabbinical student attending the conference as part of her studies. I was fascinated and intrigued by her throughout the conference, and she was an important figure in my experience. The stated aim of the conference was to explore *Authority, Partnership and Trust in Groups and Organisations in a Fast Changing World*. It took place a few weeks after elections in Israel, which saw Tzipi Livni win the majority of votes, but unable to form a coalition; this left Benjamin Netanyahu with the advantage, but at the time

of the conference the parliament was hung. The election had followed New Year attacks/retaliations on the Gaza strip.

In visiting Israel I was nervous about stepping into this difficult and confusing present and history. My understanding of Middle Eastern politics was very naïve, and what I did know was swayed by left wing opinion in the UK, which is negative in its feeling towards Israel and at the same time muddled by its fears of appearing anti-Semitic. This leads to an ambiguous presentation by the media that makes it difficult to make sense of what is happening in the Middle East. In addition I worried that my own history and ancestors - aristocratic and military – would further muddy the waters. Another strange connection was that my grandfather died in the Second World War on the battleship HMS Barham torpedoed by the Germans on 25th November 1941 in the Eastern Mediterranean, north of Sidi Barrani, Egypt. How would this well-brought up and naïve English girl fare in such a context? What happened was that the conference, its location, its people and its history presented to her the most privileged way of learning about this enriching, fascinating and complex place.



HMS Barham memorial book in Westminster Abbey

From here my account describes how this learning and revelation took place. And by revelation I am resistant to any claim of sudden transformation. It

was more that through the conference, patterns and behaviour, both my own and others, were momentarily revealed as glimpses that in time led to a better or deeper understanding. My journey of learning was through others and with others, it was defined by a framework/structure/timetable of group events. It was a path that enabled me to explore how I behaved in each of the different groups and the dynamics and forces that played a part in defining my role: it was a snowball-type learning experience.

There were three different membership groups of the conference: 'A' members attending a Group Relations conference for the first time and the largest group; 'B' members, who had attended a conference before and a smaller group of about seven members; and 'T' members who were training to be organisational consultants, about six members.

The first session of the conference was the *Opening plenary*: here the members were introduced to the staff and the language of the conference and learnt quickly and dramatically by example and behaviour that the consultants were rigid timekeepers and that they would challenge the direction and language of the group. We learnt that consultants do not answer questions and that they will always challenge members to use their *authority* and to act.



The view from the resort over the Sea of Galilee or Kinneret

There was a *Large Study Group* session on every day of the conference held in a self-contained building on the edge of the hosting Ramot resort complex with views to the Sea of Galilee. The room had a less than well functioning air conditioning unit, which offered a Hobson's choice to the group of either working in a cold climate or struggling to hear each other in the loud hum of the air conditioning unit warming the room. The person who held the portable remote control to the air conditioning was master of our environment, and argument and power struggle on this subject were frequent. Nothing can prepare you for the experience of sitting in a spiral of chairs for 75 minutes at the same time each day over five days with the same group of people. The shy novice takes time to find his/her voice (I did not find mine until Day 4 and after the *Intergroup Event*), and I sat each day in a different place listening to the play of voices, listening to my own internal dialogue, amazed that when I found some words how quickly they would become lost or lose their relevance, amazed at how I seemed to be able to will certain people to speak, to say their words to bring their voice to the gathering.

In this experience images abounded and pictures came to mind: Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ*, which evokes the stony warm green landscape of Israel; Francis Bacon's claustrophobic and dark evocations of human depravity and darkness; and unexpectedly I was taken back to school and an art teacher with an inspirational approach who taught drawing as a means to seeing, describing and understanding and who on this path taught us to master the Renaissance skill of sculptural drawing. His teaching focussed on the understanding of light -- imagine a Renaissance study of a classical image, a body draped in folded material. Light coming from a constant source will shine upon one side of the fold brightly, known as direct light and as the form turns away from the light it becomes darkness, described as turn of form dark, and then after the shadow comes reflected light, a softer, gentler light reflected from the direct light that throws itself on to the following fold. This explanation works quite well with the simple undulations of the classical garment, but when applied to the face (and we spent hours studying and drawing ourselves with small mirrors) it was a lot more difficult to understand.



Christ on the Cross, Michelangelo Buonarroti 16th Century

It wasn't until years later at an exhibition of late drawings by Michelangelo at the British Museum that I fully understood this teaching. I noticed that Michelangelo's late drawings, many of religious subjects such as the crucifixion, followed this pattern exactly, but I also saw that this discipline of drawing was a metaphor for our own lives, which themselves are a cycle of light, dark and reflected light. We are lit up, then we fall into darkness and then from that darkness comes reflection and learning. To me this is a way of making sense of the Christian proposition of resurrection – a metaphor for those moments in life when we are able to make sense, when life shines back on us.

This technique and the Michelangelo drawings represent the continual cycle of human creation, dissatisfaction, destruction and recreation. Significantly within these works Jesus' mother Mary is always present representing the journey from birth to death.³

I think these thoughts emerged because of the similarity in experience of the *Large Study Group* a magnifying glass on life where at times light would fall upon one or some or all of the members; sometimes that light would throw them into darkness and other times there would be moments of comfort and learning like the reflected light in the Renaissance drawing.

So an oscillatory experience, it was the moving from one thing to another that preoccupied me as I attended the *Large Study Group* each day. Through moments of illumination and darkness strengths and weaknesses emerged and so did the shape and the character of the group.



Sculpture by Zadok Ben David outside the Museum of Modern Art, Tel Aviv

Each day I moved within the conference from the *Large Study Group* to the *Small Study Group*. It was in the *Small Study Group* that I was most aware of my Englishness, the only non-Israeli and the only non-Hebrew speaker other than an American born Israeli. The opening moments of the first session focussed on this; there was a discomfort in the other members and the consultant in expressing themselves in English. This moment was quickly overcome by a very polite and respectful agreement to speak in English (sadly for me it could be no other way, as I had not a word in Hebrew at that moment to my name though that night I learnt *leilatov* and *bokertov*). This politeness became the dominant mood of the group,

something that our consultant questioned daily and became a worry for me. Was I behaving according to typical national and very English characteristics and inhibiting the effectiveness of the group and the Israeli tendency towards frankness and rudeness especially as this theme seemed a preoccupation of the consultant? It was a relief for me when later in the week the group began to rudely crack this shell of prevailing politeness and confront some of its differences.

What often happened was that the *Small Study Group* became a place to which people brought the difficulties they had experienced in the *Large Group*. They seemed to forget the focus of thinking in the *Here and Now* and so evaded the issues in the room by concentrating on things that had happened in the *Large Study Group*, such as bringing the description of powerlessness experienced after a tussle over the air conditioning remote control with a consultant. Each meeting seemed to uncover something about either one of its members or about the way the members worked or didn't work together and gradually we moved towards a shared understanding of how to create the trust needed for learning and development. Then slowly the roles of each member started to be drawn out. There was the person who through her revelations and her honesty encouraged others to confront themselves; there was the person who brought out our understanding of our relationship with our family through problems she had with her own; the person who through his new experience of fatherhood was beginning to value his own parents; and the person who was honest about his own fallibility and softness coming as he did from a macho culture. Something strange was happening to me in this group: I felt protection by the male members in contrast to my more adversarial nature in other aspects of the conference.

The progression of events and learning developed with the *Inter-Group* event, which was introduced on the second day and spanned four sessions. Against the continuous background of the *Small and Large Study Groups*, the *Inter-Group Event* was a more dynamic setting where doing, taking part and acting formed a major part of the exploration. The task was set by the conference director and for the first time the members were left to their own devices to form their own groups. I watched as total panic ensued, described variously as the mob, the big bang moment. Anxiety among members set in: will I be followed if I lead? Will I be chosen if I don't lead? Some groups formed quickly amidst this panic. Then there were the more recalcitrant and questioning those, who risked not being chosen who remained in the room. Underlying all of this was fear posing as questions: does it really matter if I

end up on my own? And if I do for how long will I be on my own? Once the groups formed they began an exciting exploration of their roles, of what was happening among the other groups, of understanding what factors affected their forming.

The group that I formed into was made up of two pairs: one female, one male; each pair shared a bedroom; each pair was made up of an older and a younger member; one pair was the first to form, and one pair the last. Our consultant declared that *subconsciously* we had come together as a *mirror* version of each other in what was a moment of great delight and humour for me. As we formed in groups we had a learning process, a period of interest, which then subsided and from there came the need to explore the possibility of partnership with other groups. To do this we had to be brave, take risks, understand how to make approaches that would be accepted by others - more often than not it was the indirect proposition that worked. Over four sessions groups formed and dissolved; some groups retained their identity even as they merged into others.

This was where the energy in the conference emerged for me. I enjoyed the excitement and the anticipation of the unknown and of exploring what would happen if I went forth, and I enjoyed learning how to contain the anxiety and trepidation of the others. I didn't mind what happened so long as it remained dynamic and very much enjoyed the forming, breaking, reemerging, realigning of the groups.

The *Organisational event* continued and built on the learning from the *Inter-group event* and began just before the half way point of the conference. There were five sessions. In this event conference staff were the management of the organisation; other staff were the consultants whose role was to consult to the different groups that formed in the event, including the management as a group. The members became the staff of the organisation. This event was more formal. The management and staff had their own physical spaces in which to operate. The members as staff were given a structure for interaction: roles of *plenipotentiary* (full power), *delegate* (with powers to represent) and observer. The task was to explore the *fabric of the ties* that make up the organisation.

This event began with chaos similar to that of the *Inter-Group Event*, but as part of the snowball effect of learning the members had from the previous experience about the forming of groups. So, in an attempt to give some purpose to the act of forming groups, a first real struggle and exploration of

leadership was acted out, and a battle ensued as to whether there would be a leader of the whole membership group. This battle took place among the men who showed little interest in the voices and suggestions emerging among the female members. But in working out their own power struggle they were failing to engage any followers. Eventually a group did form in reaction to all this and a female voice (mine) in her struggle to be heard and to break the male narrative somehow found the language and the tone to suggest the formation of a group to explore why women were not taking up roles of leadership in this organisation. A group quickly formed around this cause, but procrastinated about leaving the room. It eventually did, however, and from there the others formed in similar ways.

Some form of an organisation had emerged, and in the following three sessions the task was for each strata of the organisation -- management, consultants and members -- to explore the *fabric of the ties* within the organisation: how the groups related to one another, how each strata saw itself and others, and how the things that we observed affected the way that we interacted. In this exploration, we learnt the role of our imagination in shaping and swaying opinion (*fantasy*) and how these *fantasies* prevented us from interacting with other groups or with *authority* -- the management. We discovered that in the course of our learning we also needed to be able to articulate our experience in order to persuade others to interact with us. In my group, which explored women taking up leadership, we conducted some mini research exercises among the other groups which enabled us to begin to form some theories about the nature of female leadership, equality and diversity within the organisation, and this gave us good material to take to the management for consideration. These were the questions (as written at the conference) we took to the management group for discussion and exploration:

- What is the policy of the organisation towards women?
- Does the management see inequality in the organisation and if it does see inequality what actions and policies does the management implement?
- How does the director (Ilana) characterise her style of leadership and communication?
- What is the organisational culture as it relates to women?

- If and where does the management see the glass ceiling in terms of progression for women?

Our visit to the management group to pose these questions was fascinating. I and another member of the group went with fear and trepidation to arrange an appointment, only to discover a Wizard of Ozesque scenario, in which the wizard a booming, crackling and terrifying force quizzes Dorothy and her friends as if they have to pass a test before he will bestow upon them their journey's wishes: a brain, courage, a heart and a return to home. The administrator waited with a clipboard, and we had to pass a test ourselves in order to get a meeting with the management team. However, once our persuasive powers had prevailed and we were allowed in, all we could see was disorganisation and wrangling. As the sham reality of the workings of the Emerald City is exposed by Toto the dog with a pull of a curtain in the Wizard of Oz we could see the very issues that we had experienced in our own groups were being played out in this team. This was a revelation for me. What we discovered was that the answer lay with ourselves to go back and explore and discover what was going on in the organisation. I learned that I had the resource, the knowledge and the articulation within me to deal with this intimidating situation and to represent the views of the group.

I learnt about our role in the groups and about what gives me energy. Some people interact with other groups, some people are the voice of the group, some become the critic and others keep the group to the *primary task*.

The *Organisational Event* closed with a plenary session made up of its different groups. This comprised the management; the consultant group to this temporary organisation; and its staff membership now made up of different groups representing different issues and concerns, including mine on the female voice. There was a lot of concern leading up to this event as it was very difficult to see what shape it would take: the organisation which had established itself seemed chaotic, its management appeared autocratic but ineffectual, the consultants disorganised, and its staff was in eight disparate groups. Towards the end of the penultimate session a movement among the staff membership to have some impact over the plenary session emerged. I became concerned with whether I would be able to represent the concerns and the work of my group in this session; would they feel that my voice was speaking for them and for the issues that we had uncovered? It was my concern that the female narrative should be considered. Somehow I did succeed in conveying this, and the members of the organisation nominated me as the female spokesperson; and while the attempt to impose

structure on the session itself failed, the issues that had emerged in our group were definitely voiced as part of the organisational and experiential learning discussion that ensued. For what I ultimately learnt in all of this was that I could cope with the unknown amidst chaos and that it was not as bad as my anxieties had driven me believe.

The *Review and Application Group* sessions began just over half way through the conference and one or two sessions into the *Organisational Event*. My group was facilitated by a consultant and a co-consultant (in training). In contrast to the *Small Study Group* I found this an uncomfortable setting. In my group there were some strong characters - all four of us ended up taking up leadership roles in the *Organisational Event* and the group was divided exactly (as were the consultants) by gender. I read both men to be alpha males; they had an air of lion kings about them, strutting their stuff, playfully displaying their balls, but also firmly indicating that should the situation arise they would lash out to defend their tribe and their territory. One of them described his difficulty with hearing the quiet people in an organisation, and internally I counted myself one of the quiet voices. It certainly felt as if he wasn't interested in anything I had to say, but in my case it was not a quiet voice but the female voice that he was disparaging because I was a female who was not interested in following him. My experience of the conference was that many of the men took up leadership by engaging followership from the women.

The women in this group were affected by the behaviour of the men – one collusive and competitive in seeking approval from the alpha males; another (me) fighting them aggressively; and the other (the consultant) an umpire to the combatants offering the odd wink of conciliatory understanding. I felt excluded by the members of this group and uncomfortable that my relationship with these alpha male men seemed to be conditional upon my submission to them as my protectors. This setting evoked a physical reaction in me: in the first session I found myself sitting between the two men, burning with heat, longing to get out, and in the second session I directly attacked the two of them and the male consultant. Was what I was experiencing here a very different role from my own upbringing, a different hierarchy of the family where the male is not just the protector, but the fighter and the woman stays at home? As in Sylvie Fogiel Bijaoui's essay *Familism, Postmodernism and the State: the case of Israel*:

“Familism is a “national asset” in another way as well. In the perpetual state of war in Israel, familism reinforces and justifies as

self-evident a clear and rigid unequal gender division between the “fighting man” in the public-national sphere and the “protected woman and her children” in the private personal sphere. This gendered division acts as an organizing principal that is interwoven, both overtly and covertly in all areas of life: in the language, in images and myths, in norms and customs and in the legal system.”⁴

I am not sure what the outcome of this setting was. For me, this group exaggerated my experience of the conference, and I was forced to address my position as a woman coming from a peaceful, diverse society. My emerging concerns in the conference were for the female voice to be expressed more strongly and independently without waiting for approval from the men. What I had to settle for in this group was that the men were not going to listen to me, but that I had to find the strength to speak my own words and concerns despite this.

The *Closing plenary* took the *members* from the experiential learning of the conference to reflect upon their journey and to begin to look outward and away.

The *Closing Plenaries* were dominated by a concern about language among the members, who were afraid that this new language they had learnt would be frowned upon within their everyday lives. How could we talk about these things among people who have not experienced them? Would the new words that have entered into my vocabulary -- *anxiety, fantasy, boundaries, projection, transference, the Here and Now and the like* -- make sense and how we could we find a way to translate them?

Above and beyond these concerns there was a strong sense of well being and cohesion felt by a group of people who had learnt together painfully and with difficulty. However it would be trite to say that everyone felt good. Difficulties were acknowledged too and relief was also present. During the *Closing Plenary* one of the conference members spoke for perhaps her second time in a large group and found an expression that was so strong that we continued to listen to her in silence as she was constricted by tears. Her comments related to the rain that is so needed in Israel, especially on the Sea of Galilee, and just as her words were finally expressed, a rain storm appeared, as if from nowhere. It was so loud, so powerful and so windy that the group could no longer hear itself speak. In our heightened sensitivity to the role of the *unconscious* in our lives, all we could really conclude as we shouted above the storm was that somehow these people, this group and all

that had happened in our work by the Sea of Galilee, had in its collective thoughts and actions, brought on this rain storm of biblical proportions. And whether you believe it or not, therein lies the beginning of stories and meaning.



Fellow conference member and trainee rabbi – Alina Treiger

At the end of *Waltz With Bashir*, at the point at which the protagonist realizes that he had been a bystander to the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut, Folman changes the narration tool from drawn (cartoon) to filmed (camera). Our immediate association with this is a switch to reality, though what I think he is really trying to depict here is his own moment of realization. We see the wailing Palestinian women not through drawings but through real news reels and this makes us shudder, even though this method of storytelling is no more “real” than the cartoon.

In the final plenary, the preoccupation among the members was how to tell the story, the translation of the experience to the outside world and with this came the language of film, of the Bible, of storytelling.

Alastair Reid, the Scottish poet and translator of the South American poet Jorge Luis Borges, in his prose piece *Fictions*⁵ writes:

“Language is itself an irony – while we use it to create systems and formulations that are intelligible, coherent, and permanent, the reality they purport to put in order remains shifting, changeable, and chaotic, making it necessary for us all the time to revise our fictions, to dissolve and reform them” (p312).

The Group Relations conference is a creative and chaotic event of many histories, the Large Study Group, especially, providing a heightened sense of narration and happening. For each person a different thing could be going on, in each person’s head a different dialogue continuing, decisions to talk and not to talk constantly being made, contributions not made quickly losing their meaning as other words and meanings are constructed about what is happening to or within the group. So, to continue with Alastair Reid:

“...it is through our fictions, private and public that we make sense of our world, and find some equilibrium in it, it is through our fictions that we create ourselves.(p313)”

In saying goodbye to our colleagues and conference staff, my exchange with Ilana was a tacit agreement around our fight for the feminine, and she offered:

“Yes, we worked together and at times even crossed the boundary between staff and member.”

The conference ended on Friday, *erev* (on the eve of) *shabbat*, and a group of us travelled from Ramot in Galilee to Jerusalem. We were travelling with a conference member who was a practising Jew, so it was important to get to Jerusalem well before the beginning of *shabbat* so that he could make all the necessary preparations for the following hours. He invited us to the synagogue for the evening service, which I felt as a great privilege, an opportunity and an act of generosity. His was a progressive synagogue in Jerusalem called *A New Song* and so named to imply its forward thinking nature and interpretation of Jewish tradition. The name touched me. I had developed a romantic attachment to the poetic language of Hebrew during the conference as many times my colleagues had translated phrases and meaning to help me understand some of the nuances of dialogue.

The service was in Hebrew so I understood very little of what was happening, though I could see the involvement of women in the service reading alongside the men, leading some of the song. But it was still an odd experience for me to be separated by a net curtain from the men, and I couldn't help but make connections with some of my struggles and feelings at the conference. As the beautiful incantation went on and as I watched some of the members of the congregation moving their bodies backward and forwards as if to assist the movement and the meaning of the words, my thoughts meandered to my femininity and the freedom I have in my own society, and beyond to associations that came from these words, movement and ceremony of creation, the home, washing and ablution, light and story telling.

We arrived at the synagogue in pouring rain, and when we left it was still raining, and as there could be no travel by car because of *shabbat*, we walked through rushing streams to share *shabbat* supper in a hotel, where we washed our hands and listened to our colleague as he said the benediction over the wine, broke the bread and said the grace before the meal. This ceremony and sharing was an intimate portrait of Judaism, continuing my formation of a picture of Israel which became more confusing and complex over the next couple of days as we explored Jerusalem for ourselves: a Chilean (Catholic), a Britain (Protestant) and a German (Protestant).

My religious upbringing was Christian. I live in a multi-cultural city: my neighbours are of Pakistani, Chinese and African origin, and my faith is questioning. Here in Jerusalem I was struggling again to understand Israel, and simultaneously was confronted with the confusions of my own religion, when we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, said to be on the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. This church, the head office so to speak of Christianity, is squeezed into a tiny corner of Jerusalem and it is unassuming to the touristic approach. Yet you enter in to find chaos, rivalry and territorial contest and everywhere queues as people scrabble to kiss slabs of stone of that hold significance for them. What was going on here with this religion that takes third place after Judaism and Islam in the monotheistic capital of the world? Faith so bound to place that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is squashed into a corner of Jerusalem. David Hare, the British playwright born in 1947 the same year as the state of Israel, expresses this frustration at the strife caused by physical places and monuments in his monologue *Via Dolorosa: "Stones or Ideas?"* He repeats over and over again as if it will help solve the disputes over territory, "Stones or Ideas?.....Stones or Ideas?"⁶



Personal carvings on a column outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

And then in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre we bumped into Ilana Litvin with two of the consultants from the conference, and once again, as in the *Final Plenary* at Ramot, we found ourselves in another moment of ridiculous meaning and significance. Here we were in the place where allegedly Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected, and here was our real life and very recent power and *Authority*. In this moment of meeting we all recognised the irony of our encounter with delight, disbelief and excitement, greeting each other with enormous smiles and enthusiasm, but saying little.



The Western Wall, Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque



Jerusalem wall, fence, envelope

That day we also visited the Western Wall. Momentarily I was unaware of the male-female segregation and nearly entered the male enclosure. When I walked to the female area of worship (a smaller section of the Wall) I wasn't planning to do anything, but I ended up by saying a personal prayer for change. In leaving I was unable to turn my back on the Wall -- it had something to do with its divisional force, which commands such respect. Later as we walked back to our hotel we noticed another wall – the dividing or segregating wall which divides Jerusalem and the West Bank. On our walk into Jerusalem we hadn't noticed it, but suddenly it was there clear and winding like Hadrian's Wall or the Great Wall of China across the high point of the landscape. It cast a chill, I am afraid, a nasty chill on my relationship with Israel, yet I am still unable to cast judgement. The next day we visited the Holocaust museum - Yad Vashem, which is more than a museum. It is a place that through its architecture is integral to the landscape and through its message integral to the Israeli constitution, a learning experience that takes place as a journey through a cut in the hillside. The rain was pouring as we entered, and we emerged to steamy clouds rising from the hills not enlightened but depressed not just for the past but also for the future. I returned to Tel Aviv on the most beautiful train journey in the world, a Piero della Francesca painting, and in Tel Aviv I went back to the seafront to the waves crashing in from the Mediterranean where I looked out to my grandfather.

So what did I take home? Immediately following the conference I experienced a heightened awareness and sensitivity of what was happening among groups of people; of what people were saying and of what I wanted to articulate; a sense of timing and relevance in my use of language; a method of understanding the political and the complex; a way to see what happens and what needs to happen in partnership-forming and why partnerships fail. At the time this felt good; I felt sharp and in control and extremely energised, but I imagine this could have been interpreted as those very things I had hoped to resist – evangelising and sudden transformation.

There then followed a period of frustration – as if I had myself fallen prey to a promise of transformation by Group Relations and a feeling that I had failed in making a significant change in my own life.

Now nearly six months on and partly through the creation of my own Fiction I am beginning to see it as an experience that nourished me, if nothing else giving me the freeing perspective that the story is the natural consequence of

the event and something to enjoy and indulge. And from the story-telling comes the personal understanding and the reflected light.



Sunset Tel Aviv seafront

¹ Erlich, Shmuel H, Erlich;Ginor, M, and Beland, H., (2009). *Fed with Tears-Poisoned with Milk*. Germany: Psychosozial-Verlag.

² Folman, Ari (2008), *Waltz with Bashir*. Israel: Artificial Eye.

³ Liebert, Robert S., (1983). *Michelangelo: A psychoanalytical study of his life and his images*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

⁴ Fogiel-Bijaoui, Sylvie (2003). Familism, Postmodernity and the State: The Case of Israel. Naveh, Hannah ed, *Israeli Family and Community Women's Time*. London: Valentine Mitchell, p38-62.

⁵ Reid, Alastair., (2008). *Outside In: Selected Prose*. Edinburgh: Polygon

⁶ Hare, David (1998), *Via Dolorosa*, London, Faber and Faber.

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Michelangelo Crucifixion from <http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/20efe919.html>