

Danna Bader

The process the group I facilitated had gone through last summer.

In the group, took part 18 participants, 9 Israelis and 9 Palestinians. The participant's ages are 18-31. All of them had never met the other side before coming to Germany. Those who did met as soldier or as Palestinians dealing with soldiers.

In this report, I will write mostly about the Israeli group, as I am an Israeli, and there for facilitated the Israeli group also in the national meeting.

I am writing this report almost 7 months after the meeting. This perspective shows that more than 50% of the Israeli participants tended in the group I facilitated became activist for peace, as a result of the meeting itself.

In general, the group had gone threw an extremely unique experience. It was the first time for the participants to deal with very hard questions related to their daily life in Israel and to their identity as Israelis. Threw the meeting, they were able to get their own perspectives about the Israeli Palestinian conflict, to learn what exactly is the Israeli occupation and to question them selves how to deal with it as Israelis.

In the first days of the meeting, we gave the participants a chance to know each other better. In those days, the participants dealt with many stereotypes they had about the Palestinians before they came to Germany. One of them even thought to cancel her participation because she was afraid for her own secure. The Israeli participants also dealt with hearing the Arabic language, a language that if they heard before the meeting, in the street in Israeli, they would get scared and cross the road to the other side. Many of the participants were surprised to meet the Palestinians as persons. Although it may sound as a cliché, their imaginations of Palestinians before the meeting were different.

After those two days, we started dealing with the personal narrative each one of the participants has related to the conflict. We asked from each one of the participants to share with the group a few stories related to their lives in a conflict area.

I would like to give an example of two stories that had a lot of impact about the group. One of them is of an Israeli, named yaki. Yaki told the group about his experience as soldier in the Israeli army. He told the group that during the army invasion in Jenin camp he was a fighter. While he was in a tank, a few Palestinian kids threw a bomb toward the tank. He didn't see any thing for a few seconds and wad extremely scared. He was 19 when it happened. A friend of him got heart. He was shocked and completely scared. Some one else in the group, Palestinian, is a psychology in Jenin area. He told the group how hard was it for him to see what the Israeli army did in Jenin. He told the group what he saw and heard and how brutal and violent were the soldiers.

A Palestinian girl, told us that she used to work in the radio. There was a girl that really liked her show and used to send her flowers and many letters. That girl also used to call the show and talked to her for years. One day, that girl was in her house with her brother and the Israelis army bombed the house. She died.

During this day, the group started dealing with many hard questions related to the way they saw the reality before and after hearing the story's. One guy, yaki, the one that I wrote about before, told me that before he joined the Israeli army, none of his relatives believed he will be able to be a fighter. They thought that the army will not accept him as a fighter. The only thing he was ever proud of, was his army service, and during this day, he started questioning the thing he did as a soldier.

After that, the group dealt with the historical narrative. Each one of the national groups, had a long and deep discussion about its own historical narrative and prepared presentation about it to the other national group. The Israelis questioned and discussed about many historical events. And

after that, prepared the presentation. During that time, they started criticize the historical narrative that they been taught. The day after, each group presented the presentation. It was extremely interesting seeing the differences between the groups. After that, they discussed the differences and the sources of those differences.

From that point, we opened the subject of 1948, and discussed about it through two films. One Israeli and one Palestinian.

During the last day, we opened a very interesting discussion which related to conflict resolution methods, the group had to find the roots and sources of the conflict, and also to analyze the needs of each side.

In general, as a facilitator, which had facilitated many seminars, I think that this was a very unique seminar. The atmosphere was very special. The fact that the seminar took place over seas gave the participants the chance to open up to each other and to become real friends. The free days, were very important for the process. During those days the participants had time to think about what they had gone threw during the work shops and to discuss freely about it with the other participants.

Today, most of the participants are still in touch with the group members. They are even continue meeting here as friends. When ever there's an action in the Palestinian territories the Israelis calling to the Palestinians to find out that they are o.k and to find out what really happened. The same is happening when ever there is a terror attack or drop of missal in the south of Israel, the Palestinian participants do the same.

The seminar brought together Israelis from different social grounds and also opened dissections about the problems inside Israel. The gender issue, for example, was discussed all the time in the group.

During the final day, in the evaluation we did, the participants were grateful for the opportunity. They all said that it changed the way they thought of the conflict. They had some criticize about the schedule, some said it was too tight, some said the opposite. They said that the process was great, and gave a few suggestions for work shops for the next seminars.