Collective and Individual Consciousness in Testimonies of Navy Divers

YAIR NEUMAN & SMADAR BEN-ASHER

Sick Israeli navy divers, who were exposed to chemical sewage during their army service, suspected that this exposure was the cause of their cancer. The divers appealed to the courts and demanded the establishment of an independent committee for the investigation of this issue. This step created strong emotional tension between the sick divers and their former brothers-in-arms from the navy. The aim of this paper is to describe the process by which the tension between the divers' individual and collective consciousness is discursively elaborated in their testimony to the committee. This testimony is described by means of a Bakhtinian/Volosinovian semiotic analysis.

Introduction

In June 2000, two Israeli journalists uncovered a story that shocked the Israeli public. The journalists discovered that Israeli divers, mostly from two elite forces of the Israeli Navy, dived for years in an area (The Kishon River near Haifa Bay) that was extremely polluted by sewage from the chemical industry located near the river. Although the river was known to be highly polluted with chemicals, it seems that the authorities either did not realize the danger or did not take any steps in order to prevent naval activity in it. Three divers diagnosed with cancer and the widow of a fourth diver who passed away from cancer triggered the investigation. All of these divers had suspected that exposure to chemical sewage in the Kishon River was the cause of their cancer. Indeed, it was discovered in a later phase of the inquiry that an enormous percentage of divers who had dived in this river had passed away from cancer, or had suffered from malignant tumors and other kinds of health problems.

Since selection criteria for admission to diving units in the Israeli Navy are highly conservative in terms of physical health, the high percentage of sick divers could have not been dismissed in terms of statistical error. After the story was exposed in the press, the Israeli Navy established an internal investigative committee that almost immediately denied any causal relation between the polluted water and the appearance of cancer and other diseases among the divers. The inevitable implication of this conclusion was that the navy denied any responsibility, both moral and financial, for the sick divers and for the families of those divers who had passed away. This controversial conclusion and its implications motivated a group of Israeli divers to appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court to request the establishment of an independent, objective investigative committee. On 24 June, one week after the
appeal was submitted, and as a result of public protest, former Israeli Prime Minister Barak ordered the Israeli Chief of Staff to establish an independent committee. Judge Shamgar, former President of the Israeli Supreme Court and a highly respected figure in the Israeli public domain, was appointed head of the committee. In addition, the committee included two additional members: a chemistry professor and a medical doctor. The committee was appointed to: (1) investigate whether the river contains dangerous sewage; (2) to determine the possible risks for those who have been exposed to the polluted water; and (3) to decide whether a causal relation can be established between exposure to the polluted water and various diseases, specifically cancer. In addition, the committee was commissioned to investigate the responsibility of several authorities and persons in the navy for the fact that divers were training in polluted water. The committee conducted 18 meetings between 1 August 2000 and the middle of January 2001. During those meetings, testimonies were given by commanders of the Israeli Navy, divers, medical doctors, experts, family members of the sick/deceased divers, and others who had been in contact with the polluted area.

The divers’ legal appeal created strong emotional tension between them and their former brothers-in-arms from the navy. In Israel, military service is mandatory for every healthy 18-year-old man or woman (excluding ultra-orthodox Jews and most Arab citizens). However, the navy units discussed here are small and unique elite units of volunteers (similar to the American Navy Seals). They are also highly selective and very appreciated among the Israeli public. Due to Israel’s short history as a country fighting for its survival in a hostile environment, soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces are not considered by the Israeli public as mere civil servants, but as citizens who materialize the Zionist national narrative. This conception holds specifically true for the navy units we discuss here. Members of these units are considered to epitomize the national Zionist narrative by self-sacrificing their individual pleasures for the Zionist collective ideology of establishing a safe home for the Jewish people. These elite navy units are characterized by unique ethical and behavioral codes, such as strong loyalty to the unit and silence in front of outsiders. The divers who appealed to the Supreme Court broke the code of silence and expressed their distrust in their former brothers-in-arm. This step was considered an act of ‘treason’ by the navy units, and formal and informal steps of exclusion were taken against the ‘rebels’ divers.

Beyond the humanitarian, juridical and ecological aspects of this affair, the tension between individuals who decided to testify against their units and their brothers-in-arms is discursively elaborated in the testimonies of the sick divers as tension between parts of their consciousness. As subjects holding a shared ideology and who were parts of a collective, they are also individuals whose individual experience and unique existence contradict their collective experience. The aim of this paper is to describe the process by which the tension between individual and collective ideology-consciousness is rhetorically elaborated in the testimonies of the afflicted divers by continuously referring to the juridical context as a nested context within the wider context of the Israeli-Jewish Zionist society.
The Analysis

The General Theoretical Framework of the Study: Social Semiotics

The general theoretical framework of this study is social semiotics (for example, Hodge & Kress, 1988, Thibault, 1991, Berger, 1995). Social semiotics is a general framework that concerns meaning-making practices of all types. This is a general statement also shared by sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. However, the unique emphasis of social semiotics is on a dialog with a long history of semiotic analysis, and the contextual nature of meaning. Since our analysis uses Bakhtin and Volosinov's semiotic theories, the next section describes the philosophy of Bakhtin, and Valentine Volosinov's unique sociosemiotic theory of meaning.

Bakhtin and the Architectonics of the Mind

The question of how meaning, in the phenomenological sense of a structured form as it appears to the individual, emerges out of fragmented and even chaotic experiences has bothered scholars since antiquity. In his early philosophical writings, Bakhtin's (1990) introduced the term architecture to describe the way in which things are assembled into a unity—for example, in perception, how sensory experience is organized into a gestalt form, or in the social realm, how 'I-Thou' relationships are structured. The term architecture and its theoretical elaboration may be helpful when we try to understand meaning-making practices in different social settings, and its usefulness will be illustrated later in our analysis.

Bakhtin argues that a whole is always wholeness as long as it conceived to be wholeness by a given observer. This idea emphasizes the notion of meaning as a task yet to be accomplished and the unique and concrete point of view embedded in meaning-making practices. This idea is depicted in what Holquist describes as 'the first law of human perception': 'whatever is perceived can be perceived only from a uniquely situated place in the overall structure of possible points of view' (Holquist in Bakhtin, 1990: xiv). That is, every human being has a unique perspective, which we may describe as the 'individual' part of his/her consciousness.

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself... As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes. (23; emphasis added)

This 'general law of uniqueness' stresses the existence of the subject as a unique being and makes the individual a systemically closed unit that is clearly demarcated from its environment. However, this law does not imply a solipsistic stance according to which the self takes precedence over others, both ontologically and epistemologically. On the contrary, Bakhtin transcends the solipsistic and dualistic stance that may be inferred from the uniqueness of the individual. He argues that we realize our
uniqueness only through the existence of others: ‘We are all unique but never alone’ (Holquist in Bakhtin 1990: xxvi).

Where does the other come into this dynamic? Bakhtin begins by assuming that, because of the uniqueness of each person, one’s perspective is always limited. In other words, uniqueness is a source of both strength and weakness: I can see what you cannot see but I cannot see what you, as an outsider, can see. Therefore, we need the other in order to obtain a ‘full’ picture of ourselves from the outside. This idea necessarily implies, as both a social and an epistemological must, a transformation of a human being from his/her unique position to the position of the other:

I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as he sees this world; I must put myself in his place through the excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own place outside him. I must enframe him, create a consummating environment for him out of this excess of my own seeing, knowing, desiring, and feeling. (Bakhtin 1990: 25)

The question is, of course, how we can transcend our unique point of being, our systemic closure, the boundary of our individuality, and project ourselves onto another person’s mind in order to reflect on our unique existence. Bakhtin’s answer is: through language, through the power of signs to carry things over from the realm of the individual mind to the intersubjective territory, to the collective part of our consciousness. In this sense, language as a sign system is what constitutes the bridge between our individual and collective forms of consciousness. This suggestion emphasizes the notion of mind as a semiotic activity. Since all semiotic activity is necessarily social (de Saussure 1983, Volosinov 1986), our ability to reflect on our existence is bounded by ideologies shared by the collective. In this sense, our consciousness not only reflects our individuality and unique position in the world, but also the collective semiotic systems (aesthetic, moral, and scientific) in our minds (Volosinov 1986). Although those systems can be differentiated in theory, they cannot be differentiated in practice. The collective and the individual parts of consciousness are intermingled in the meaning-making practice of each individual. This idea will guide us in analyzing the divers’ testimonies and will show how the individual and the collective parts conflated, struggle with, and complement each other.

The Emergence of Meaning

The Soviet scholar Valentine Volosinov developed a sociosemiotic theory of meaning that bears an amazing resemblance to modern theories of complexity and emergence (Alford 1995, Neuman 2003). Since references to Volosinov’s work are rare, this section presents his theory of meaning concisely.

According to de Saussure (1983), language is a closed system of meaning, and the meaning of a sign is determined by its position in a semiotic network. The idea that semiotic systems are closed raises the question of how language is related to the world. Like de Saussure (and later Wittgenstein), Volosinov suggests that the
process of understanding a sign is determined not by its relation to a material object out there in the external world or to an object in the mind, but through a network of other signs. In this sense, a sign can be understood only within a given system of signs and as part of a social process.

Since the social activity of communication, and not the abstract and static system of language, is the only framework for understanding the use of signs (de Saussure 1983, Velasino 1986), the signs in our language are not stable, static entities, but rather changeable and dynamic ones. According to Velasino, the answer to the question of whether a sign indicates something external or just receives its meaning from its position in a system of signs is that it does neither. Instead, he maintains that the sign is a dynamic process with no fixed meaning (either extrinsic or intrinsic to a system) and that understanding, which is the real purpose of semiotic activity, takes place only in a particular context of communication between interlocutors:

Thus the constituent factor for the linguistic form, as for the sign, is not at all its self-identity as signal but its specific variability; and the constituent factor for understanding the linguistic form is not recognition of the ‘same thing’ but... orientation in the particular, given context and in the particular, given situation—orientation in the dynamic process of becoming... (Velasino 1986: 69)

This excerpt is specifically relevant to our analysis because the particular context of communication between the divers and the committee is a rhetorical one in which the divers are fighting the navy and trying to convince the committee that the navy is responsible for their health problems. While analyzing the testimonies, we should keep in mind that this context of struggle sets the backdrop for the presentation of the divers' collective and individual consciousness. Let us turn to the concept of meaning according to Velasino. What, according to Velasino, are understanding and meaning?

Any act of understanding is a response, i.e., it translates what is being understood into a new context from which a response is made. (1986: 69)

Moreover, what is the most basic unit of understanding? Is it the sign? Here Velasino offers a surprising answer: the sign itself has no intrinsic meaning. To explain this radical idea, let us try to reconstruct Velasino's argument. Velasino suggests that, by definition, meaning is a property of the utterance (the most basic unit of communication) as a whole. He describes this meaning as the theme of the utterance. The theme is not exactly synonymous with the meaning of the utterance and it may be better described as 'a complex, dynamic system of signs that attempts to be adequate to a given instant of generative process'. This should be differentiated from meaning, which is the 'technical apparatus for the implementation of a theme' (Velasino 1980: 100).

It should be noted that the theme is an individual, concrete, context-dependent, and unreproducible act of communication. As an example, Velasino presents the question 'what time is it?'. This question has various meanings (in the sense previously described) depending on the specific context in which it is asked. It follows
that the meaning of the utterance, the theme, is dependent not only on the linguistic forms that constitute it (words, syntax, etc.), but on additional extra-linguistic factors that we may describe as 'context'. In this sense, the fact that the words making up the question 'what time is it?' have a common 'meaning' allows us to generate the theme with all its particularity in a given context. Therefore, the conventional meaning of words can serve only as a technical platform for the generation of meaning (theme) in a concrete context.

In summary, Volosinov presents a sociosemiotic theory of meaning in which the concrete takes precedence over the abstract, and the dynamic over the static. According to this theory, meaning emerges from local and contextual interactions.

Thibault (1989) points to the difference between certain trends in sociolinguistic theory and Volosinov's theory of meaning. He argues that the 'abstract categories of sociolinguistics have little if anything to say about the rhetorical and discursive effects of socially and historically specific uses of language' (Thibault 1989: 183). Although this argument is a little extreme and perhaps should be qualified, it emphasizes meaning not as something that is determined by pre-existent abstract social categories, but as a phenomenon emerging from ad hoc, context-dependent, concrete, and local interactions. If meaning is a response, then one should pay close attention to the intricate social network in which this response takes place.

The Texts

Our analysis is mainly based on the protocols of the investigative committee. These protocols range over more than 1000 transcribed pages of oral testimonies. The testimonies were usually presented as a continuous speech, and the members of the committee rarely interrupted the testimonies with questions. Unfortunately, the testimonies were only transcribed by officers of the committee and not recorded. Therefore, our transcriptions refer only to the content of the testimonies. This kind of data is not the bread and butter of linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists, since it is devoid of many linguistic features (e.g. intonation) that are relevant to linguistic analysis. However, since the second author observed the court hearings at which the testimony was given, participated in meetings of the families involved, and interviewed many of the divers and their family members, we believe that we have a rich enough context to perform a meaningful analysis of the testimony.

The Method

The aim of the following sections is to illustrate the discursive-rhetorical elaboration of individual versus the collective consciousness through the divers' testimonies. The specific method of analysis may be entitled 'Volosinovian/Bakhtinian semiotics' and follows the idea of sociosemiotic conception of meaning previously presented. However, the idea of a Volosinovian/Bakhtinian semiotics should be qualified. Holquist (1990b: 3) argues that 'Bakhtin has not been able to provide, in terms of
methodology, a professional base for scholars’ but notes the ability of Bakhtin’s writings to ‘illuminate and re-illuminate issues that won’t go away’ (Holquist 1990b: 9). In this sense, Bakhtin helps us by suggesting concepts that illuminate basic questions of our existence rather than a specific methodology for analyzing texts. Like Deleuze & Guattari (1996) in their vision of philosophy, Bakhtin gives us a unique arsenal of concepts for re-examining existential questions but with a methodological lacuna embedded in his theory. It should be recalled that, according to Volosinov—and Diltzey (1923/1988) says much the same thing—understanding a discourse is a process of Verstehen, of emphatic participation with the lived discourse as a concrete, dynamic, and contextual event. This position clearly poses a difficulty for the researcher who is looking for a structured manual for analyzing lived discourse.

Beyond the general coordinates of a Bakhtinian semiotic analysis, one needs more specific principles for analyzing a lived discourse. Recently, Neuman & Beker (forthcoming) suggested a semiotic approach to the analysis of rhetoric. This approach is based on a Bakhtinian semiotic analysis and may be relevant to the present study. It should be kept in mind that the divers have a well-defined aim: to convince the committee that the navy is responsible (legally, morally and financially) for their health problems. In this context, their rhetoric has a clear goal of persuasion, with the committee members as their primary audience and the public as their secondary audience. This situation poses a rhetorical difficulty for the divers: people are not passive objects that can be easily manipulated, but active individuals who constitute their identity, and are constituted by their identity, through complementary levels of interpretation and meta-interpretation. It so, then individuals in a rhetorical situation must overcome their audience’s ‘defense mechanisms’; meanwhile, the audience, expecting them to do so, assumes a more critical position. Here we have a ‘battle of minds’ that takes place in the arena of interpretation and meta-interpretation. This process should not be mistaken for a linear one. It may be better to consider it a form of ‘rhetorical coupling’ (Neuman & Beker, forthcoming) in which each party tries to better his/her position in the ongoing process of meaning-making. Neuman and Beker suggest that when analyzing this process we should identify: (1) the discursive trajectories that constitute the rhetorical field and their cultural resources/ideologies; (2) the ways these resources are managed/orchestrated by those involved, who are both constituted by and constitutive of the trajectories; and (3) the potential and co-dependent products arising from this rhetorical coupling. We use a Bakhtinian semiotic analysis and the aforementioned principles to locate the semiotic resources available to the divers and to their audience, and to illustrate how these resources are used in the construction of meaning. As rhetoric is a form of deliberative meaning-making, it is an invitation for a response rather than the terminal point of a communication process. The ways in which the subject connects to the minds of the people in the audience are an invitation to a dialog that constitutes the subject’s identity, the identities of the members of the audience, and the relationship between the subject and the audience. Our analysis will also examine this process of identity construction as an integral part of the discursive event.
Individual and Collective Consciousness in the Testimonies

The first aim of our analysis is to show how collective and individual parts of consciousness intermingle in the divers' testimony as contradictory yet complementary aspects of their consciousness.

The first excerpt is taken from the testimony of Yuval Tamir. Mr Tamir was the leading figure and driving force behind the divers' appeal to the court. He was a navy officer in one of the diving units (HaYatam) and the commander of the diving school that trained the navy divers. Tamir began to suffer from several malignant tumours shortly after he resigned from the navy. He suspected that his cancer was caused by exposure to the polluted water, made the first contact with the press and initiated the inquiry. Before delving into the analysis, we would like to emphasize the fact that the excerpts are translations from Hebrew and in an attempt to preserve the authenticity of the language the translation maintains phrases that may seem awkward in English. This is, of course, an inevitable difficulty of translation that cannot be easily overcome in a cross-cultural dialog.

The testimony opens with formal juridical instructions concerning the personal details of the witness. Then the testimony begins:

Excerpt 1
Mr Tamir: As I stated, my name is Yuval Tamir, I am ...
Judge Shamgar: are you connected to ... [the microphone]
Mr Tamir: It seems so. Do you hear me?

I am 43 years old, I served in the navy during my military service, and in 1975, I joined the Shayetet. In fact, I grew up in a home that was very, very Israeli, very Zionist, near the sea, and very idealistic, in fact, it was clear to me that my options were either to join an elite force of the paratroopers, or the Shayetet, out of my affinity to the sea, I decided to join the navy, the Shayetet, and that's where I went.

This excerpt is the prologue of Tamir's speech. In this prologue, he presents not only formal details such as his name, age, and information concerning his service in the divers' unit, but also a short and condensed description of his identity (who am I). This should not come as a surprise because the positioning of identity and its public, discursive elaboration is an integral part of the rhetorical context (Neuman et al. 2002).

The prologue of a text (whether spoken or written) is the first location in which the author (in this case, the speaker) and the reader or audience encounter one another. Said (1975) emphasizes the importance of the prologue as a distinct unit of analysis by suggesting that the beginning of a text is not only a kind of action, it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness (xi).

The personal consciousness presented by Tamir at the prologue of his testimony is intermingled with the social Zionist narrative—the collective consciousness. Tamir describes his home as 'very, very Israeli, very Zionist'. He emphasizes through rehearsal the degree to which his home was 'Israel' ('very, very Israeli') and equates
the ‘Israeliness’ of his home with Zionism (‘very Zionist’) and ideals (‘very idealistic’). This highly saturated ideological environment in which the collective consciousness is associated with Zionism and ideals is portrayed by Tamir as the determinant, in the most mechanistic sense of the term, of his decision to join an elite force, whether it be an elite force of the navy or another elite force. This deterministic impression is portrayed by the limited courses of choice he describes. For example, the option of doing an ordinary military service in a non-elite unit is not reported at all. Indeed, the intense ideological atmosphere of Tamir’s home is also evident in an interview with his mother, Aliza. In the opening section of the interview, at the prologue, Aliza describes the home in which Yuval Tamir grew up:

Excerpt 2

When Yuval joined the army, he came from a family with enormous, enormous motivation [to serve in the army]. His father [who passed away] was a lieutenant colonel in the armored forces... Yitzchak Sadeh [one of the historical leaders of the Zionist movement] sent him from the Kibbutz—when he [Yuval’s father] was a member of Kedma [an Israeli Kibbutz] to establish the armored forces... and he participated in all of the wars, and finally he was wounded in the Six Day War and lost a leg, and we came through… it was a very difficult period.

As a mirror of her son’s prologue, the mother opens the interview by presenting the collective consciousness of the family and its importance for its members. Following the principles suggested by Neuman & Bekerian (forthcoming), we should acknowledge this move as a convergence of rhetorical trajectories that may teach us an important lesson about the forms of meaning-making within this family. She continues the interview by saying that Yuval’s father placed enormous pressure on him to go into the armored forces like himself and Yuval’s older brother. Tamir was quoted by his mother as saying:

Excerpt 3

I am not going into the armored forces, so it is no—you are not going to influence me, you will not persuade me by no means, I am going into the Shayetet.

This home, in which a personal sacrifice for the benefit of the collective was a leading moral theme through personal example and tales, is described by Tamir as weaving his individuality with the collective through the act of joining an elite force of the Israeli Navy. It must be stressed that the fact that Tamir joined an elite force, with all of the accompanying risks of serving in a combative elite unit, is not rhetorically elaborated by him through personal-individualistic traits, such as a risk-seeker type of personality, but primarily from the social-collective aspect of his consciousness. The reader of this excerpt may question the sources of this rhetorical move, is it a purely ‘rhetorical’ move that aims to emphasize the responsibility of the collective for his military service and his disease, or is it a ‘genuine’ phenomenolog-
tical presentation of his identity? In other words, what is the meaning of this rhetorical move?

Our interpretative framework suggests that the corresponding context includes both the ideological and the individual consciousness as two undifferentiated trajectories of the same person. Therefore, the question of whether Tamir's presentation of his identity is a 'rhetorical' or a 'genuine' move, seems meaningless within our theoretical framework of analysis and the specific empirical context in which the testimonies took place. Following Bakhtin, our interpretation is that 'we evaluate ourselves from the standpoint of others, and through others we try to understand and take into account what is transgressed to our consciousness'. (Bakhtin 1990: 15). Tamir's way of telling us his story (his autobiography) is mediated by the way outsiders see him. It should be recalled that, according to Volosinov (1983: 7), discourse is an expression and 'the product of the social interaction of three components: The speaker (the author), the listener (reader), and the one of whom (or of which) they speak (the hero)'. According to this interpretation, the collective ideology as mediating spectacles makes sense because it is a major cultural rhetorical resource through which the outside Zionist society discusses its military men. In the specific context of the committee, however, the collective ideology is also an important trajectory on which Tamir may better adjust his position in the ongoing process of meaning-making.

Another important point in the previous excerpt is that when Tamir observes his own life and interprets it for the audience, he may be described as being involved in the interpretation of text. Indeed, Volosinov was one of the first to present the idea that psychological phenomena (in our case, the presentation of identity) should be studied in a similar way to hermeneutic process of textual inquiry. It is important to understand that while Tamir reads the text of his life to the audience, he must assume some kind of co-authorship by the audience. This point was one of the Bakhtin/Volosinov main arguments, and it is explained profoundly in an interview with two leading Russian intellectuals: Akhutin and Bider (Alexandrov & Struchkov 1993). According to Bakhtin/Volosinov, it is necessary to take into consideration the particular type of communication between the author and the reader by raising questions such as: 'What is the measure of the reader's co-authorship, collaboration, participation in the specific speech genre of this particular literacy creation?' (Alexandrov & Struchkov 1993: 344). In our case, the testimonies are clearly targeted to a specific sign-community. Only by understanding the audience may the 'half-text' of the author become a whole and meaningful text. That is, Tamir's decision to open with a collective voice is meaningful (is a response) to the unique sign community (i.e. the audience) to which he addresses his testimony. This sign community is not limited to the audience sitting in the courtroom, but includes all members of Zionist society.

In this context of interpretation, Tamir's elaboration of his identity as embedded in a Zionist ideology is an important step. As will be argued, Tamir presents his identity as a multilevel nested system, which is composed from the collective consciousness and the individual consciousness. His painful crisis and his exclusion from the navy may be interpreted as the break in the coherence/architectonics of this
text, the coherence between the individual and the collective that lived in perfect harmony until the crisis took place. It should be noted that the divers' break with the collective voice is a step forced on them by the system. The divers do not actually break away from Zionist ideology; on the contrary, they repeatedly emphasize their strong bond with the collective Zionist voice. Paradoxically, it is the break between the individual and the collective voices that results in the divers' rhetorical commitment to the unitary voice. Indeed, as a Hasidic rabbi once said, 'There is nothing more whole than a broken heart'.

It should be recalled that, for Bakhtin, 'the heart of all human action is the problem of achieving wholeness of one kind or another out of parts of different kinds' (Holquist, in Bakhtin 1990: xxviii). The basic difference is between self-perception and the perception of others, a difference that cannot be totally overcome because of my unique position, but can only be mediated. One of the most powerful symbolic systems for mediating the difference between my self-perception and my perception by others is the national ideology that constitutes shared meaning for its members. In Tamm's autobiography, the Zionist ideology fulfilled the rule of a mediating symbolic system between self-perception and his perception by others. The break between the collective and the individual consciousness caused a painful sense of alienation and differentiation. This idea of a man elaborating his own situation as a break in coherence between two nested levels of his identity will be used as a leading guide throughout the rest of the analysis.

The divers' total devotion to the ideology of collectivity and its break from the individual consciousness are also evident in the testimony of another diver, Uri Zaharoni, in which the collective voice overcomes the individual voice:

Excerpt 7
Judge Shamgar: Did you have any connection with the Ministry of Defense? [The governmental body responsible for supporting soldiers who were wounded during their military service.]

Mr Zaharoni: No.
Judge Shamgar: Why?
Mr Zaharoni: I don't see myself as one that ... will go and ask for mercy.
Judge Shamgar: It is not a matter of mercy. It is your right. Not mercy.
Mr Zaharoni: You are right but ... we were educated to give as much as possible and to ask for nothing ...
Judge Shamgar: To give is like a circle [in the sense of giving and taking].
Mr Zaharoni: That's right, I think that the education I received was maybe even harder, I belong to the kibbutz movement.

Zaharoni totally dismisses his individuality by refusing to receive any support from the government/collective. He interprets a possible request for support as asking for mercy. The judge who seems surprised by this reaction, tries to convince Zaharoni that it is his right to receive support from the collective that sent him to dangerous military service. Zaharoni agrees with the judge. However, he attributes his avoidance of seeking help to his education ('You are right but ... we were educated to give as much as possible and to ask for nothing ...'). The judge then tries again to
rationally explain to him that asking for help does not contradict his education, since the collective should support the individuals who support it ("To give is like a circle"). Again, Zaharoni agrees with the judge. He does not have any rational or theoretical dispute with him. However, he tries to explain, as Tamir did, that rationality and logic are not the appropriate context for dealing with this issue. It is the loaded emotional and collective consciousness that shaped his mind.

The rhetorical dismissal of the individual needs is also evident in the testimonies in which the divers ask the state to take responsibility for the situation. The divers emphasize that they are not looking for support or compensations for themselves, as if this is some kind of sin, but either for their families or for other sick divers. These kinds of statements appear in the testimony of another sick diver, Shimon Sela. Sela passed away a short time after his testimony:

Excerpt 8

What I want from the committee, what I am asking, I, the sand in my hourglass is running down. I will say things that my family that is sitting here, my wife with the kids and my parents, don't like to hear. The sand in my hourglass is running down. I don't know how much time. I need the Ministry of Defense to take care of them, my wife and the three children. Because I don't know if I will be able to take care of them.

**Positioning the Personal Break in a Broader Social Context**

In the previous section, we illustrated how the collective consciousness (i.e., Zionist ideology) is used as an important semiotic-rhetorical resource in the testimony. This section portrays another move in this direction: the positioning of the individual crisis in the broader social crisis of Zionist ideology.

Several minutes after the first excerpt, Tamir describes his visit with one of the journalists to the Kishon River:

Excerpt 5

He asked me [the journalist]—say, if I would have asked you today to return and to dive in the place [the Kishon River] and to redo all ... all this process, would you have done it again? I told him—no problem, but with two constraints. One—I would not have let my soldiers put a foot in the water and second, there is no way I would have let my son touch this water.

The position presented by Tamir sounds irrational to the outside reader. However, it should be closely examined within the specific discursive context of the testimony. It seems reasonable to assume that the journalist asked Tamir many questions. However, Tamir chose to recount this specific piece of discourse with the journalist in his testimony. Why? The rhetorical impact of this piece is evident. A diver who was diagnosed with cancer is ready, at least theoretically, to repeat the same thing that caused him to suffer from several malignant tumors. This position creates a rhetorical tension among the audience because it is clearly an obscure statement,
and there is an expectation that the justification for this obscure position will be presented to the audience. This rhetorical move is meaningful within the dialogical conception of the mind since '[e]very utterance generates a response in the other who receives it, even if that response is only within inner speech. However, the initial utterance already anticipates the active response in the receiving other and so shapes itself to take it into account' (Morris 1994: 5). Tamir’s explanation clearly locates his rhetorical move within the wider context of his testimony, and constructs another layer of meaning of the testimony:

Excerpt 6

But you must understand that, today it may be seem crazy to me, what kind of... what love for this place, what love for... in general, for duty and love for the navy in which I grew up and that I was a part of...

Tamir acknowledges the irrational (‘crazy’) image he rhetorically portrayed to the audience. This craziness is temporarily constrained to the present (‘today’) and it is implied that in the past, this statement of self-sacrifice should not have been considered crazy or meaningless. The ‘crazy’ image of self-sacrifice is therefore viewed as crazy by outsiders, members of the contemporary Israeli society who have lost their affiliation with the Zionist ideology. Tamir’s explanation for his obscure declaration is that his readiness to live his life as a navy diver again is not a decision of a ‘rational agent’ in the classical economical and individualistic sense of the term, but a decision that is motivated by an emotion—love for his country (‘for this place’), for his duty as a diver, and for the collective of military men to which he belonged. That is, through the specific rhetorical move evident in the excerpt, Tamir locates his life story, and his personal crisis, not within the context of individuality and rationality, but within the context of collectivity and emotion-pathos. Indeed, an agent maximizing benefits/pleasure and minimizing loss/pain may epitomize the ethos of the modern/liberal/rational mind. However, within the classical Zionist ideology of collectivity and personal sacrifice this state of mind is unacceptable. In summary, Tamir locates his personal break in a broader social break and in the context in which Zionist ideology has stopped being a leading semiotic system.

The following excerpts further support and elaborate the themes raised in the analysis of the previous excerpts. These excerpts were taken from the testimony given by Mr Yehuda Haber, another veteran of the Yaltam divers’ unit, and one of the most passionate speakers among the divers. The excerpt opens as follows:

Excerpt 9

Judge Shamgar: Mr Haber, please. Mr Haber, is your loud speaker turned on? It should be forward.

Mr Haber: I assume that it is. It is, it is.

Judge Shamgar: Would you like to please tell us your name and profession to the...

Mr Haber: Yes. My name is Yehuda Haber, I am a veteran of the Yaltam... my entire army service was done in the Yaltam, from ’81...

The opening section of Haber’s testimony is similar in many senses to the other
testimonies. By presenting the subjects first with a constant set of formal questions, Judge Shamgar establishes a ritual that makes explicit the juridical context of the testimonies. For example, he asks the witness to provide his name 'for the record' although he has just addressed the witness by name. In this sense, the prologues of the testimonies have a constant structure. This structure allows Judge Shamgar to present his own identity to the divers and to establish the appropriate context for discussion.

After supplying the formal details to the Judge, Haber begins to provide the committee with historical information concerning his service in the diving unit. However, several minutes from the beginning of the testimony, the ideological consciousness bursts into the discussion:

Excerpt 10

When they asked me—why didn’t ... why ... why did you even go into the water, since it was clear to you that something here was wrong ... we did things because ... these words are vulgar nowadays, to say that we were Zionists? To say that we were ... it was clear to us that we were doing it for the country, it was clear that it should be done because ... I assume that if I say such things today, the youth [the Israeli youth] will look at me like a lunatic. But we were Zionists, we were idealists ...

In a similar way to Tamir, Haber presents his autobiography in terms of his collective consciousness. However, in a similar way to Tamir, he is also aware of the irrelevance of this kind of discourse to the post-Zionist Israeli society and even ‘apologizes’ for using ‘inappropriate’ and ‘vulgar’ words such as ‘Zionism’ in the context of the contemporary post-Zionist Israeli society. He is even able to reflect upon the alienation of the ideological Zionist consciousness to the current ideological system.

Haber’s first reference to his collective consciousness constructs another layer of meaning to the divers’ crisis we previously discussed. Not only is the crisis rhetorically portrayed as the break in the architectonics of the individual and collective consciousness (and its paradoxical realignment), but also as the break between the Zionist consciousness and the post-Zionist consciousness of the current generation.

In contemporary Israeli society, the Zionist ideology (and its hegemonic position) has come under increasing scrutiny. The Zionist ideology, which was the hegemonic ideological system of the State of Israel at its beginning, lost its status as hegemonic ideology and as a meaningful symbolic system for many Israelis. The divers experiencing this transformation find themselves in a difficult rhetorical situation since their ideological rhetorical resources no longer seem relevant to this changing context. In this case, the rhetorical strategy actually used by both Tamir and Haber is to locate their personal crisis, the break between themselves and their units and between their individual and collective consciousness, within the wider ideological break. Another diver, Eliezer Pe'er, depicts this strategy in his testimony:
Excerpt 11

In a certain way, the general feeling is that this system, in some way, has lost its sensitivity. The best example of this is that if I once would have seen someone wounded in the area of a car accident, I would have run to take care of him, today I would think twice if he might later want to sue me for moving him ... and that I would be guilty of hurting him. And this is ... this is simply, this spirit is becoming more and more prevalent in this country.

The transformation from a Zionist to a post-Zionist society is clearly and negatively portrayed by Peer as a transformation that involves a loss of sensitivity and mutual collectivity among people. This point is specifically important since, in opposition to the collective spirit of the Zionist ideology, the divers present an alternative ideological system of individuality, which they feel has betrayed them. This process involves an important rhetorical aspect. The divers were excluded and blamed for 'treason' by their brothers-in-arms, who epitomize the Zionist ideological consciousness. In their testimonies, the divers reverse this picture by describing themselves not as individuals who oppose the Zionist collective ideology that (indirectly) hurt them, but as those who are the ultimate representatives of this ideology, who fought and sacrificed themselves for this ideology. This stance places them in opposition to those who blamed them and actually reflects the contradicting ethos of a post-Zionist individualistic man.

Shuffled Identities

Now that we have presented the individual and collective parts of their consciousness as intermingled and located their personal crisis within a general societal crisis, it is interesting to examine the consequences of this analysis as presented by the divers. The consequences are identities shuffled by the break between the individual and collective consciousness. These shuffled identities are presented in this section.

As Bakhtin suggests, consciousness is a dialogical phenomenon that is composed of a center, a non-center and their relation (see Todorov 1984, Bakhtin 1990, Holquist 1989). By locating their consciousness within the Zionist ideology, the divers clearly establish a center, which is meaningful only as opposed to a non-center. The divers' personal crises may be interpreted not only in terms of the break between individual and ideological consciousness, but also in terms of the destruction of the clear boundaries between the center and the non-center. That is, those divers who were the ultimate representatives of the Zionist ideology have been excluded from the center as if they were the enemies (the non-center) against which they were trained to fight, or those Jews who oppose the collective Zionist ideology, which the divers identify with their collective consciousness. This inversion of roles creates a strong emotional tension that was evident in Tamir’s testimony, but more intensively expressed in the testimony of Haber. The following excerpts, taken from Haber’s testimony, illustrate this phenomenon while emphasizing the notions of madness (the break of the boundaries between the center and the non-center), and the inversion rules of the soldier and his enemy:
Say, what, have you completely lost your mind? What is the ... what have we done? We hung out the dirty laundry? Really terrible. It means—as if, what happened? I just don't get this joke ... at the age of 38 I fainted in my home, fuck, in one fall ... from that moment on, it seems, I have become a public enemy. Sorry, a navy enemy. Why? Because I got a tumor in my head? Because of that I am the enemy of the navy?

So because of it we became troublemakers in Israel? They [the navy] explain to us that we are robbing the public's money. Really! Because of what? Because of this? Another absurdity, what am I asking? I am asking to be recognized as a disabled ex-service man. Do you understand the meaning of things? I must to start to realize that I am a cripple ....

Have we completely gone out of our minds? We have simply gone out of our minds. What kind of an attitude is this? Upside down—the system should explain to me why I am sick if it was because of the system. This is the attitude that should be. It means—I gave my soul to this country.

The same theme of replacement of soldier and enemy also appears in Tamir's testimony:

Suddenly you become the enemy of the people. And suddenly your own unit does not speak to you because you are already suddenly from the other side, you are suddenly complaining to the system.

These excerpts clearly illustrate the divers' painful experience and the marginalization of those who used to represent the ideological center. This phenomenological description evident in the testimony may raise the question of where the divers' individuality is positioned in the ideological system. While dealing with individuals who, beyond their positioning in relation to others, have a unique phenomenological perspective on their existence. The answer presented in the next section is that the divers metaphorically position their individuality in their sick bodies.

Talking Bodies

The body is continuously evident in the divers' testimonies through descriptions of the diving experience, symptoms, medical diagnoses, suffering and pain. For example, one of the witnesses, Moshe Algamish, describes the body as the diver's main working tool:

The body that pushes ... that is your main working tool, the head and the
body, that together makes you really go forward, push, progress in life, achieve, it [the body] really fails...

However, the body also appears in a more general and metaphorical sense. For example, the shift to the non-center and the exclusion from the navy unit is rhetorically elaborated by Tamir in another excerpt in which the association between home, body, and the navy unit is portrayed:

Excerpt 17

From the moment you come and say—I am sick now and come and take responsibility for me, then they pass you [from one bureaucrat to another] as if you are from the side of the Syrian army [an enemy]. And this is a horrible feeling, because now you are standing here and fighting your own body that betrayed you, and you must take care of the things, and secondly you are fighting your own home, as if, apparently, your home, which is the navy. And this is one of the things that were the most difficult for me.

The metaphorical equation ‘home = body = navy’ is an important rhetorical move that appears in other testimonies also. In Western liberal society, the body is the ultimate property of the individual. However, Tamir locates his sick biological body within the wider collective discourse. He compares the ‘treason’ of his own biological body [the disease] with the treason of the navy and all the ideological systems that shaped his consciousness as a young man who made a critical decision to join the diving unit. This equation is an important rhetorical move in the testimony because it associates the Zionist consciousness with the personal and individual consciousness through the body. The concrete, sick body is the place where the conflict between the collective sign system and the individual life experience takes place.

Indeed, Bakhtin emphasized the uniqueness of the self as bounded to his spatial-temporal position: ‘...only I—the one-and-only I—occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me’ (Bakhtin 1990: xxv–xxvi). This statement is far more meaningful when it concerns a sick body whose suffering is evident first and foremost from the inside.

In summary, the physical body is what constitutes the ultimate linkage between the abstract ideological consciousness and the concrete body as a unique biological/psychological configuration that served the collective consciousness and now demands its responsibility. According to what we suggested previously, Tamir portrays his own personal crisis as the break of coherence between his collective and individual consciousness. The home, the navy, and the collective consciousness to which he belonged betrayed him. Even the sea he liked so much was found to be polluted, and his fleshly body, which was the unique position of his individual experience and his working tool as a diver, refuses to obey him anymore. The sick body is the stage on which the drama unfolds as the clash between the two nested levels of consciousness.
A Concluding Comment

Western culture has created an individualistic ethos, which seems to frame and mediate major portions of our lives. It is through this individualistic ethos that the break between individuals and collectives has been theoretically and politically established. This break is evident in academic research through the superficial demarcation of academic departments such as those that intend to deal with the individual (psychology) and those that intend to deal with the collective (sociology). The analysis we present in this study illustrates the way the individual consciousness may be regarded as a sociodiscursive and multilevel phenomenon that extends through sign systems from a unique position of existence (the individual) to the consciousness of the collective. Without the theoretical framework presented by Volosinov (a semiotic system/ideology in itself) and Bakhtin, this task would have been impossible.

As researchers who believe that data should ‘speak for itself’ (with the gentle assistance of an interpretative framework!), our main argument already appeared in the body of the text. Therefore, in our concluding comment, we would like to reflect on the multilevelness of language through the Bakhtinian term, ‘heteroglossia’. According to Bakhtin (1981), live discourse (parle) is characterized by the multiplicity of semiotic systems that emerge from decentralizing (centrifugal) forces. In contrast, unitary/monologic language is the product of centralizing (centripetal) forces that aim to mask heteroglossia and to unite the variety of semiotic systems into a single locus of power and knowledge. Thibault suggests that Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia ‘speak[s] of the ways in which meanings are socially constituted by the dynamic, open relations, which are constructed among utterances’ (1991: 196).

Like societies in other nation states, Jewish Zionist society moved consciously and deliberately toward the unification of heteroglossia. The lives of Jews, characterized by enormous diversity of geographical and cultural conditions, were forced into the unitary voice of Zionism in its specific modern national and socialist version. The decay of the Zionist ideology as a leading semiotic system in current Israeli society was accompanied by the emergence of heteroglossia that was marginalized for years by the unitary voice of the hegemonic ideology. This process is evident in the personal crises of those divers who framed their life through the Zionist narrative and acknowledge its lack of relevance as a rhetorical cultural resource in the current Israeli context. This point is specifically important since the shift from unitary language to heteroglossia is usually portrayed as a ‘liberating’ process without acknowledging its painful aspects. In this context, we would like to conclude by suggesting a compassionate perspective for those who lost the warm unitary voice that framed their life.


Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Notes

[1] The two diving units are ‘HaSheyetet’ and ‘HaYaltam’ (in Hebrew). The first unit is a commando unit similar to the American Navy Seals, and the other is a technical unit.

[3] It must be noted that the term ‘ideology’ is not used as a consciously held political belief system, but as a given semiotic system that mediates our experience and as a synonym for consciousness. Ideology in Russian is simply an idea system, which is the meaning used for the term in this paper. 


[5] For the most part, we discuss the writings of Bakhtin and Volosinov without going into the problem of authorship. 

[6] In this study, we use the term consciousness in the sense of a mediating semiotic system. 

[7] The power of signs to convey something is evident in the Mediterranean and the West, where coins are thrown into fountains as ‘carriers of wishes’. 

[8] We conducted two separate searches for the key words ‘Volosinov’ and ‘Bakhtin’. The words could appear anywhere. We found 15 references since 1985 to Volosinov and 294 to Bakhtin in the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts; nine since 1986 to Volosinov and 161 to Bakhtin in the Sociologies; and three since 1988 to Volosinov and 395 to Bakhtin in the Humanities Full Text (Wilson). These findings clearly indicate the marginality of Volosinov’s seminal text Marxism and the Philosophy of Language as compared with the work of Bakhtin. 

[9] The relevance of the prologue to rhetorical analysis was recently demonstrated by Neuman et al. (2001). 

[10] By cultural rhetorical resources, we mean general rhetorical patterns that organize the communication process of a given group through a mediating textual form embedded in the symbolic realm of a given culture (Neuman & Bakhtin 2001). 

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Appendix: The General Socio-Political Context of the Study

The Jewish people were spread all over the world after the destruction of the Second Temple and always longed for a national resurrection in their historical homeland (Zion). However, until the modern era, the Jews did not take any productive steps in order to reconstitute a state. The modern Jewish-Israeli state was established mostly by Jews from Europe and the former Soviet Union (Shimoni 1995). These immigrants sought to materialize this historical-religious longing and considered themselves 'Zionists'. The 'Zionists' were inspired by the rising European nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Ben-Israel 2000), and the idea of a people's right to their own country. However, it should be noted that the Zionist movement was also a response to anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Europe, which reached its peak in the genocide orchestrated by the German Nazi regime. The Zionist movement was not a monologic voice, and the term 'Zionism' covers a variety of ideas from the ultra-orthodox national version of Zionism to the secular socialist stream that was the hegemonic Zionist force in the beginning. The current Labor Party in Israel descends from the socialist political elite that governed the State of Israel at its outset. However, through the years, it has changed profoundly and largely lost its 'exclusive' European character and its strong inclination toward socialist ideology. The Zionist ideology, according to the interpretation of the socialist Labor Party, was the major mediating symbolic system as presented by the elite to the Jewish people in Israel. This process was accompanied by the marginalization of those Jews who did not fit the new image of the modern, secular European Jew, or of Jews that were not ready to fully accept this image. However, in recent years, the 'Zionist' ideology has been under heavy attack by intellectual and political circles that want to undermine its relevance as a mediating symbolic system. These dissenting voices have sometimes been described as 'Post-Zionists'. The basic approach of Post-Zionists is that Israel was born in sin and that everything that followed was sinful (Waxman 1997). This approach has been under heavy attack by major Israeli sociologists such as Lissak (1996) and continues to fuel Israeli intellectual life. Beyond academic dispute, it seems that the 'Zionist' ideology in its 'classical' socialist version, with its keywords of nation and collectivity, lost its power as a major semiotic system to the rising semiotic system of a capitalistic-individualistic society.
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