

2013 Resilience Conference  
**Individual, Community and National  
Resilience and their inter-relations**

Tel Hai College, Upper Galilee, Israel  
January 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, 2013



# Culture as a Stabilising Factor for Trauma Victims

Arnold Groh, Technical University of Berlin

# Individual, Community and National Resilience and their inter-relations

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Tel Hai College, Upper Galilee, Israel, 6-7 Jan. 2013

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[Centre for the Treatment of Torture victims, Berlin]

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26 June - United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture  
26 juin - Journée Internationale des Nations Unies pour le soutien aux victimes de la torture  
26 de junio - Día Internacional de las Naciones Unidas en Apoyo de las Víctimas de la Tortura  
26 июня - Международный день Организации Объединённых Наций в поддержку жертв пыток  
يوم ٢٦ حزيران / يونية يوما دوليا للأمم المتحدة لمساندة ضحايا التعذيب  
6月26日-联合国支持酷刑受害者国际日

**Roundtable  
with  
Holocaust  
Survivors**

Structural  
Analysis of  
Cultural  
Systems



Technische Universität Berlin

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## “Yiddish Conversation”

- Bypassing the blockade
- Typical time course
- Cathartic effect



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## Example cases

### 1. Mrs. K.

- brought to the roundtable by other participants
- very reserved and let quietly flow her tears during songs
- after months told her story very resolute and energetic
- survived with a false Polish passport bearing a name
- slave labourer at farm in Northern Germany
- hard conditions, isolation, not able to communicate
- only way to channel her anger was to pour away cow milk and fill up with water - feeling of revenge
- lived in Poland after the war came to Berlin in 1990s





## Example cases

### 2. Mr. E.

- in Berlin since end of war, shammes in synagogue
- came to Yiddish Circle through invitation leaflets
- participated friendly and rather reserved for about a year
- then gave impressive account, like snap-shots of the horrors
- in Estonia driven through the town's alleyways
- saw local German woman rescuing Jewish child that was given to her by the moribund Jewish mother
- several thousand driven to forest to be shot at the rim of mass graves
- succeeded to flee through the woods to Russia, rescued by Red Army
- attended the Circle only occasionally after that testimonial

## Example cases

### 3. Mr. W.

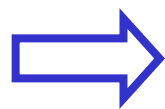
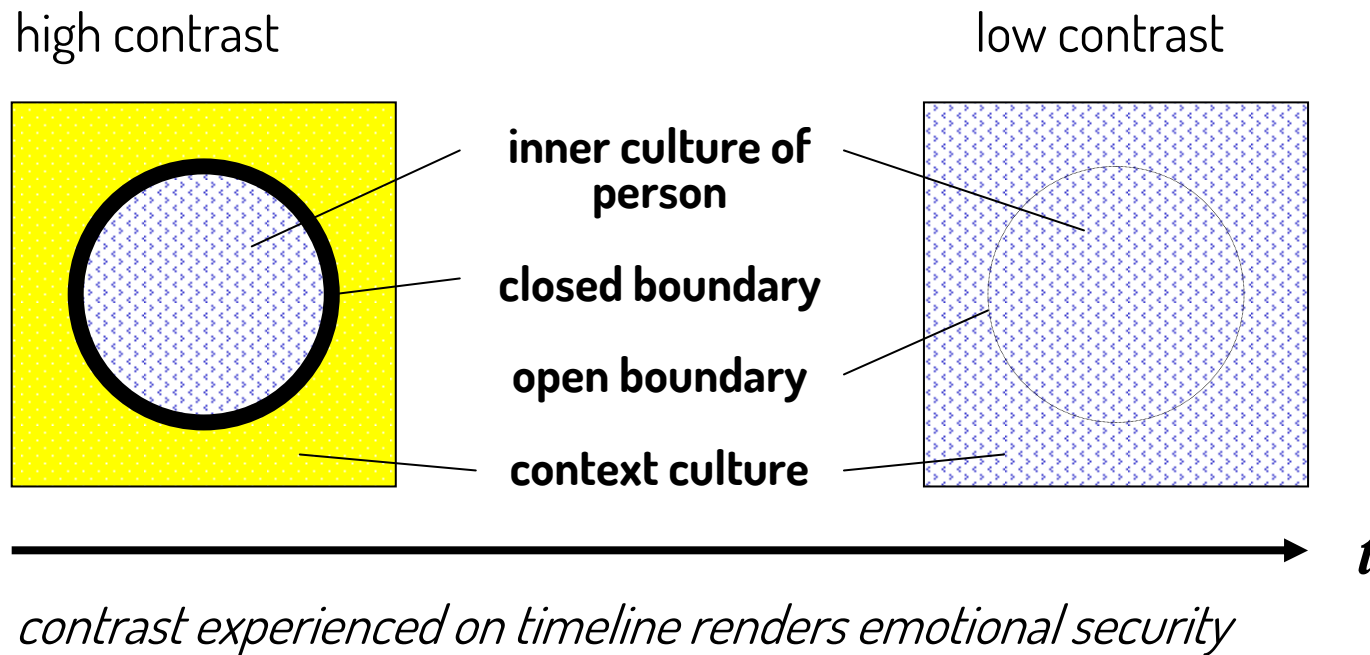
- former resistance member, keeps past constantly alive
- strong non-orthodox Jewish identity, likes to sing and give speeches
- commemoration ceremonies, persuades others to join
- “Forgiveness? Never!”; complex phrases like mantras
- after Shoah detained with wife on Cyprus, then went to Israel
- passports confiscated in Eastern Germany, had to stay
- fatalism, e.g. “Zi zenen arop mitn roich”
- harsh remarks about others, e.g. “A shvacher mentsh”
- chronic sleeping problems, ritual writing
- most active and engaged Holocaust survivor at roundtable

## Example cases

### 4. Mr. K.

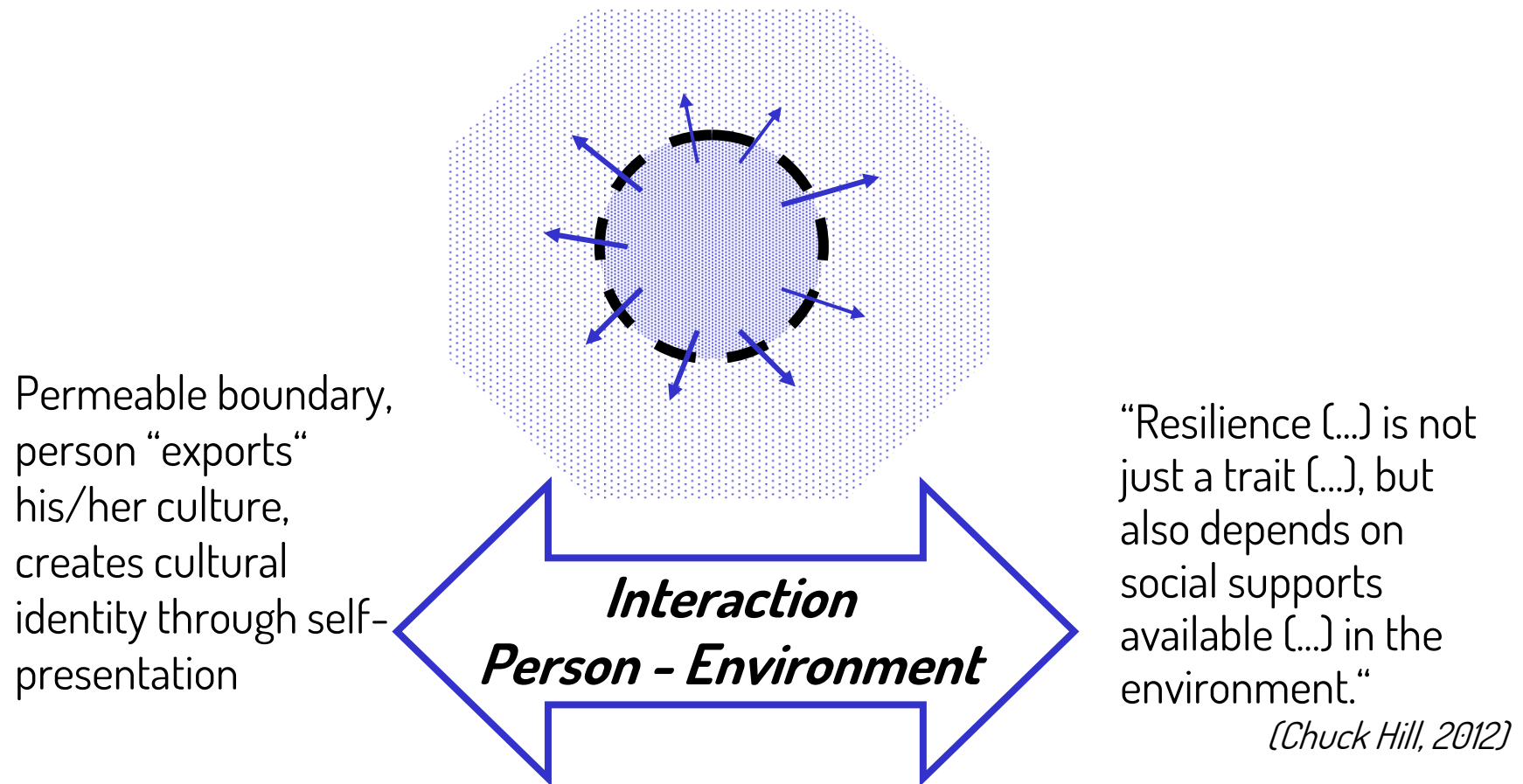
- Yiddish singer, constant behaviour
- raised in Polish town with the typical pre-WWII constellation of Poles, Jews and Germans
- assembled V-1 in subterranean Dora concentration camp rescued by British in Bergen-Belsen
- described happiness about bed with woollen blanket
- Jews were in mortal danger in Poland after the war
- went back to Germany, married a German, became shammes in good terms with former SS neighbour - conflicts with Mr. W.
- dominant at the Yiddish Circle, scared others away, cut them short, demanded to change subject when they were critical
- pessimistic, but kept attending sessions

## Lessons learned



cultural context gives access to trauma victims, when the trauma is associated with their specific cultural background

## Cultural aspect of resilience

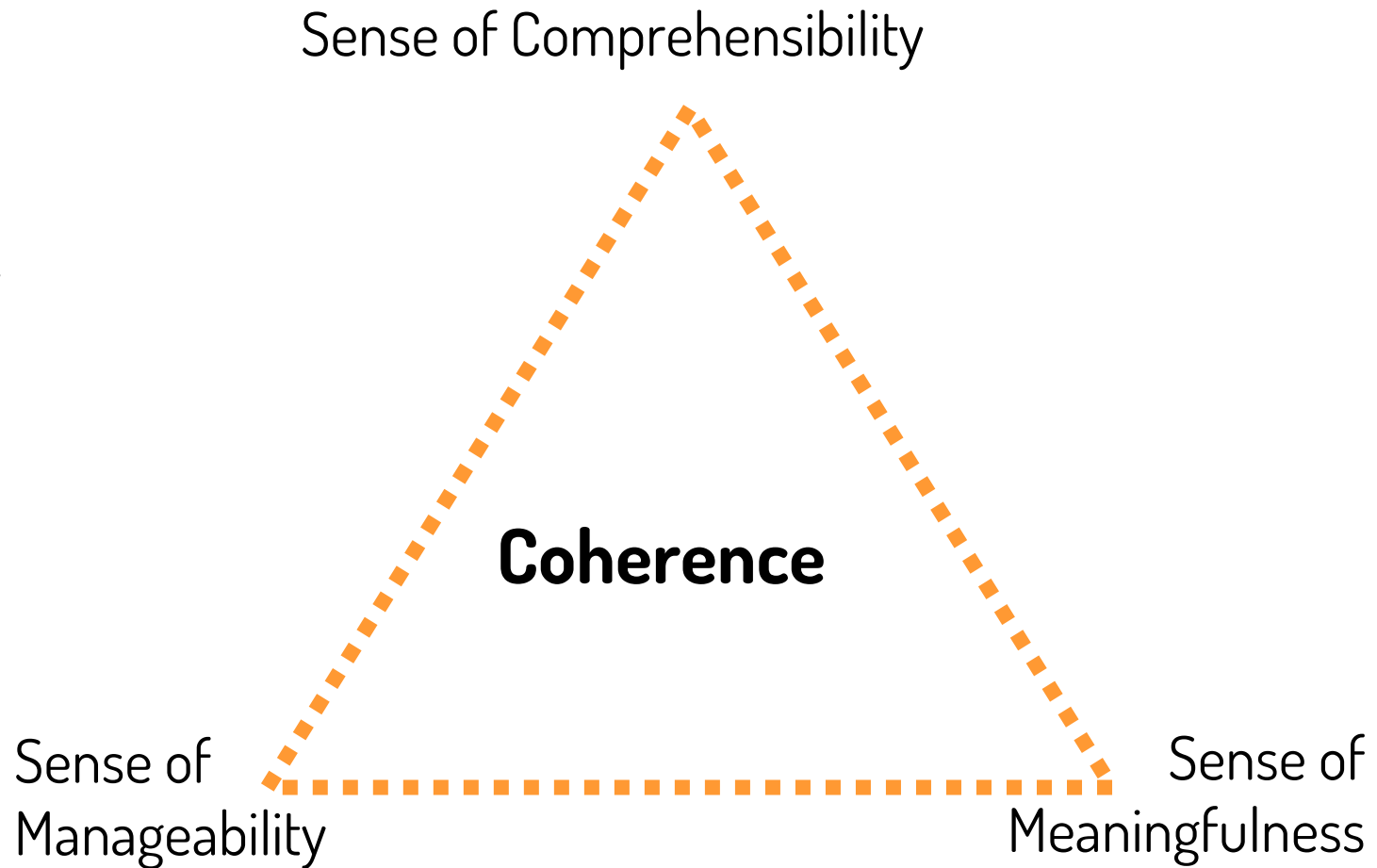


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Aaron Antonovsky  
(1923-1994)



**Conclusion:**

**The experiences from the Yiddish roundtable with Holocaust survivors should be generally applicable to transcultural trauma therapy.**

# Rwanda Genocide



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**Thank you!**

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**Structural  
Analysis of  
Cultural  
Systems**

**<http://s-a-c-s.net>**