



Article

AN INHERITANCE OF TERROR: POSTMEMORY AND TRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA IN SECOND GENERATION JEWS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

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Postmemory, as Hirsch (1997) has defined it, describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births, but that were nevertheless transmitted as to seem to constitute memories of their own. Although subsequent research has created a more complete picture of the interactions between parents and children, Hirsch's definition has clear bearing on how descendants have attempted to commemorate the prior generation's ordeals through various means, some narrative, some visual, while still qualifying those modes as acts of transfer or the resonant after-effects of trauma. Focusing on the Holocaust, this article examines certain lines of communication between survivors and their children as mediums of transgenerational transmission of trauma through both theoretical and experiential models of identification. It also attempts to signify how parenting styles contribute to children's maladaptive behaviors if no intervention is staged. Additionally, I conclude that while second generation Jews may suffer negatively from intrapsychic and interpersonal problems observable by clinicians, they can also learn to integrate and understand their heritage through personal and therapeutic expression linked to the larger cultural context.

KEY WORDS: postmemory; transgenerational transmission of trauma; conspiracies of silence; metonymic displacement; posttrauma adaptational styles; reparative impact; narrative construction; Holocaust

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Postmemory, as Hirsch (1997) has defined it, describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births, but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories of their own (p. 4). Although

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subsequent research has created a more complete picture of the interactions between parents and children, Hirsch's definition has clear bearing on how descendants have attempted to commemorate the prior generation's ordeals through various means, some narrative, some visual, while still qualifying those means as acts of transfer or the resonant after-effects of trauma, since they themselves were not direct participants or observers. Postmemory suggests a platform upon which the second generation can imaginatively and empathetically assume the tragic circumstances of those who lived through them (also see Frosh, 2019).

Focusing on the Holocaust, this essay examines certain lines of communication between survivors and their children as mediums of transgenerational transmission of trauma. Additionally, this essay draws a connection between second-generation Jews growing up in families impacted by the Holocaust and postmemory; one is a predictor of intrapsychic and interpersonal problems observable by clinicians, and the other is a means of understanding one's heritage in the larger cultural context. Clearly, parental traumas, often resulting from political conflicts such as war, persecution, or even genocide, are passed on to children, but the Holocaust is uniquely situated as being so massive, organized, and repugnant in scale that its aftermath has left an imprint on Jewish identity and psychology from within.

Epstein's (1979) *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* provides a foundation for examining the relationship between survivors and their children through interviews that corroborate many of the subsequent clinical findings regarding maladaptive behaviors in the second generation. The daughter of survivors, Epstein traveled from America to Europe to Israel, searching out people with one vital thing in common: their parents' persecution by the Nazis. While interviewing these men and women coping with a troubled past, she found shades (or aspects) of herself.

In her interviews, Epstein found among these children of survivors tendencies towards isolation, persistent feelings of responsibility for parents' happiness and for what is owed to them given their enormous suffering, a silent pact with parents to either keep the past a secret or to avenge parents' victimization, over-identification with martyrdom, and bottled up anger and aggression.² The most salient disorder arose from a sense of impending danger that might explain their parents' overprotectiveness; concurrently, children sought to protect their parents who survived the Holocaust and take special care of them. Overall, Epstein's work provides a framework for understanding the enmeshment of survivor parents with their children; while these parents endeavor to shield their children from the truth of the

past, they simultaneously look to their children to embody new versions of relatives lost in the Holocaust.

From within this framework of enmeshment described by Epstein, I use both clinical and personal perspectives to suggest that in survivor families, and even in Jewish families indirectly impacted by the Holocaust through relatives, a route exists by which children unconsciously absorb traumatic experiences that subsequently influence their processes of individuation. Broadly conceived, the psychological effects of the Holocaust can be traced from parents to offspring, both explicitly through narratives and implicitly through near-silent patterns of behavior symptomatic of individuals who have undergone traumatic upheavals (see Prince, 2009; Grünberg and Markert, 2012; Grünberg, 2013). This fact is supported by clinical findings when following family members who have such a burden to bear.³ Although the memory of the Holocaust may seem to overshadow all other kinds of loss for American Jews, it can also open possibilities for engaging those more personal and everyday intimacies by bringing generations closer together.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust occupies a unique space in examining the transmission of intergenerational trauma, due to the inconceivability that a civilized nation could perpetrate such atrocities. As Wiesel (1967) commented on the difficulty of coming to terms not with the Holocaust—one never comes to terms with that—but with the almost impossible task of collecting all the details to create a cohesive truth:

The full story of the Holocaust has not yet been told. All that we know is fragmentary, perhaps even untrue. Perhaps what we tell about what happened and what really happened has nothing to do with one another. (p. 284).

Wiesel asks how the event can be communicated sufficiently given memory's fragmentation. While the guardianship of the Holocaust is to be passed on to subsequent generations, Wiesel wonders aloud whether what one sees through the lens of history is ever accurate. Felman and Laub (1992) also point out that the truth of the event could have been recorded, ostensibly, from outside or within, by a number of witnesses (p. 81). However, as the events of the genocide unfolded, the potentiality for witnesses diminished. No prisoner or murderer could stay sufficiently detached as to be entirely outside a role, either as victim or as executioner.

The perpetrators, in their attempt to rationalize the scope of their destructiveness, imposed upon their victims a delusional ideology that eliminated even the possibility of bearing witness and assigning blame where it belonged. Inevitably, the perpetrators' contemptuous hatred and assault would be to some extent internalized by their victims, skewing the truth and even turning victims against one another. Hence the need to repress the horror of the event became immediate if not desperate, and would have its only outlet in subsequent relationships or through parenting styles adopted after the liberation of the camps.

Both American and Israeli clinicians have launched studies into the transmission of intergenerational trauma, proactively identifying dysfunction within the family and offering various modes of intervention, confirming and documenting the pervasiveness of these issues. From the purview of the survivor, the past is seemingly never past, but cohabits with the present and determines the future.⁴ Specific mechanisms for psychological damage will be discussed further in this article, but studies consistently point to the parents' "posttrauma adaptational styles" (Danieli, 1998, p. 104) as the most prominent factor influencing the reparative impact on children (also see Grünberg, 2007; Grünberg and Markert, 2017).

As the Holocaust itself moves further into history, it remains a present fact for many children of survivors still mediating their own families' relationships and psychological postures. As a global issue, the near-destruction of European Jewry is a stain on the history of humanity that can never be erased. It has widened our understanding of traumatic experiences and sensitized us to the ubiquitousness of trauma all over the world—as well as to how we are scarred by it. Both Hirsch (1997) and Levitt (2007) view the topic of loss and memorialization through the projected identifications members of the second generation make with their ancestors. However, as these authors make clear, investigation into such cultural claims remains a personal endeavor.

This article aims to extend Levitt's (2007) impressive undertaking in *American Jewish Loss After the Holocaust* by exploring how similar processes, such as artifact mining and the piecing together of more complete stories, can help individuals begin to address the silence that is often at the core of intergenerational trauma. Levitt's efforts to revive the past or to "find a home in the textual legacies of [her] various peoples" was in support of her desire to stake out her roots in Jewish identity in the present (p. 35). Within the dominance of the Holocaust as a defining event in Jewish history, Levitt seeks to bring her ancestors closer to her in time and space through the bits and pieces of familiar photographs, documents, and artifacts that provide clues to a story inherently shrouded in mystery.

While Levitt's work focuses on a much broader cultural question of how American Jews not directly affected by the Holocaust can integrate this history into their own identities without taking on the trauma as their own, I am interested in how many of the same practices that incorporate personal narratives can have therapeutic benefits for individuals with a lineage to these traumas. As several scholars have argued before, perhaps most directly in Wiseman & Barber's (2008) seminal *Echoes of the Trauma: Relational Themes and Emotions in Children of Holocaust Survivors*, intergenerational trauma often transmits through silences or gaps which spur curiosity (also see Grünberg, 2013). Wiseman describes the dialectical tension that emerges in a particular intergenerational communication style he calls "knowing-not knowing," in which these very echoes become the source through which succeeding generations either carry on or seek to moderate their parents' trauma (p. 58).

TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND WORKING THROUGH

While a great deal of literature now exists to aid understanding of the various mechanisms and import of intergenerational trauma, fewer articles explore how to assist individuals and families still suffering from its effects. Epstein (1979) found therapeutic relief in empathizing with the people she interviewed and in sharing with them her own experiences. Mucci (2019) offers the concept of "embodied witnessing", when all mind-body-brain systems become activated in the therapist who is especially committed to listening and trained to use their own emotional experience, their own embodied empathy, and unconscious experience. Such a therapist works as a "witness to the truth of the other", a truth that the traumatized person might be able to reconstruct and undo the veil of dissociation that survivors might have become accustomed to, in adapting to the distress engendered by the trauma (Mucci, 2019, p. 544).

As the immediacy of the Holocaust fades further into both cultural and personal memory, and an aging generation of Jewish witnesses recedes from public consciousness, such an exploration may be more warranted than ever before. While these echoes still mark often-invisible imprints on the descendants of Holocaust survivors, individuals filled with curiosity and dread about the past need methods to locate the muted voices at the center of these traumatic histories and to re-integrate these stories into their present-day experiences. Narrative reconstruction of the type that Hirsch (1997) calls for in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, or those recorded by Epstein can be an effective tool for individuals to speak the silences at the core of their inherited trauma.

Among survivors and those related to survivors, it has been observed that certain parenting styles prevail, particularly “conspiracies of silence” within the family and interlocking anxieties of parents and their children. To grow up with overwhelming and inherited memories of the Holocaust is, for the second generation, to combine them with their own life stories, as I do here. Coming to terms with past trauma often means having to confront generational losses and compensate for disparities, along with the fact that something has happened that cannot be undone.

One of the meanings of the Holocaust is literally *from the ashes*, suggesting something already destroyed but which can be retrieved in perhaps a different form. It is the descendants’ task to salvage some of these fragments of historical events and to keep them in memory, lest they happen again. Words alone cannot replicate the anguish that only victims seem to know; and yet words create a path towards easing psychic pain. But how are unspeakable traumas ever communicated when language seems insufficient to express the horror of what one has endured?

Psychological researchers, notably Carruth (1996), have shown that spatial and temporal gaps overdetermine memories of trauma. Unlike other memories, traumatic memories are not transformed over time, but rather are preserved in great detail. These precise details leave a sensory signature and reactivate sensory experience, bringing memory into feeling states or symptoms originating in the body. In this way, nonverbal images are stored and speak through various containers, including recollections (p. 111).

While their memories are often specific and rich in sensory detail, survivors of the concentration camps offer testimonies that may be fragmentary and provide only partial re-enactments of incidents (see Prince, 2009). If trauma is a world to which language has no access, then thinking or speaking about it cannot be easily assimilated into the ordinary world. It must be understood on its own terms first. Children or grandchildren of survivors cross over into self-enclosed, self-referential trauma worlds that are sometimes so inaccessible that they have to use their imaginations to find ways to address what may never be fully understood. The question is: what fuels this appropriation—what do descendants hope to learn that will assist them in their own lives?

In “Holocaust Trauma Reconstructed: Individual, Familial, and Social Trauma,” Blum (2007) argues that when the memories and effects of the traumatic events could not be recaptured, the traumatic experience could nevertheless be reconstructed by others close to or related to the person who experienced the trauma. Reconstruction was necessary to confront and assimilate the past trauma of the parents, who defensively withhold answers that children seek in order to bridge the chasm between them or to master the lacuna of trauma, piecemeal, as patients do in the therapeutic process (p. 63–64).

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS

As information through documents and official papers became more available, more American Jews, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, were left to make sense of what seemed unfathomable (Prince, 2015). They had not only to identify with their European counterparts, but also to atone for their own survival (ushering in “survivor’s guilt”). Their children, some first-generation Americans, were gradually initiated into the secrecy and horror of what had occurred as well as to the revelation that the Final Solution was an existential threat to all Jews everywhere. However, when the parent chose to keep the trauma a secret, this initiation might well have been only a nebulous intuition that something so terrible and ineffable had occurred.

In the 1980’s, researchers began studying how children of Holocaust survivors absorb the psychological burdens of their parents, pointing to affective mood disorders like generalized anxiety and depression. Kellerman’s earlier study republished in 2008, “The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Curse or Legacy” assessed some of these sequelae, including the risk that children would not easily adapt to their parents’ traumatic behaviors and would have trouble individuating and/or creating adequate boundaries between themselves and their elders. According to Kellerman, debate remains over whether parental trauma leads directly to the same specific syndrome in the child or only indirectly to a general sense of heightened anxiety and depression. Regardless, all theories point to the conduct of children as a direct function of, or chain reaction to, the parents’ child-rearing style. The variability of effects in children may be rooted in factors that are mediated through social class, culture, heritage, and immigrant status.

Kellerman also suggests that psychodynamic (interpersonal) relations, which include unconscious displaced emotion and socialization practices transmitted through enmeshment, significantly influence how psychic development occurs (p. 265). More recent scholarship focuses mainly on parenting styles. For example, in “A Question of Who, Not If: Psychological Disorders in Holocaust Survivors,” Danieli *et al.* (2017) suggest that parents who were directly traumatized by their Holocaust experiences convey a subliminal message to their children that the world is a dangerous place and that the children must be on guard from threats, big or small. When parents have reacted to their own traumas with intense victim styles, the children were at risk for severe “reparative impact,” (i.e., they had internalized the posttraumatic effects of their parents’ ordeals, had trouble extricating themselves from their parents’ original crises, and had trouble adapting to situations that might prove unpredictable).

When compared to other people with emotional disturbances, this clinical population of children of Holocaust survivors also reported on difficulties coping with stress and a higher vulnerability to PTSD. These difficulties usually centered around impaired self-esteem with persistent identity problems and a need to be super-achievers in order to compensate for parents' losses. Children were named after lost parents, siblings, or even dead children or parents last seen when they were being separated for transportation to camps from which they never emerged. Feeling forced to represent even one dead, let alone six million, can be a terrible burden for a child to carry. Even parents who had not been direct victims of the Nazis but whose extended family members were developed a set of issues in child rearing due to persecution fears. Again, as Felman and Laub (1992) have argued, being compelled to feel sub-human made it almost impossible to step out outside of it. For example, the yellow star that identified a Jew was intended to bring shame on the one forced to wear it.

In my own experience, the traumatic events that haunted my grandparents became palpable in ways that were as disturbing to me as surfacing them was cathartic for them, giving me only one half of the story. As Wiseman (2008) suggests, I had a "knowing-not knowing" relationship with the truth. Nevertheless, I felt an obligation to compensate for the ones who had "gone through the chimneys" and could not be rescued by the end of the war or the passage of time.

1970. New York City. Rockaway Beach. The city housing projects. I am in my European grandmother's apartment, sent there for the week of Passover, which felt to me like a week of daily plagues visited on Pharaoh. No one spoke English, and there were tortured cries from the night-lighted bedroom. I was overwhelmed by the strange objects and ambiance: a cloying collection of my grandmother's lilac sachets, cabinets of filmy glass cups, paint peeling off the ceilings, rattling locks and jimmies, the dark shroud of unfixable grief that settled in the yellow crochet yarn, plastic slipcovers, and doomed lampshades. One time in particular, my grandmother, with chipped polished nails, opened the album of sepia stained photographs. One after another, she pointed and fired off in English: "Gone, gone, gone." All gone through the chimneys. The child of the parent deprived of a past grows severe. My mother never felt close to her mother who bottled up her anger like vinegar and favored her sons, sending them to college while my mother was left to fend for herself, working as a cashier in a cafeteria.

The war took something away from my mother because she couldn't touch the core of what her parents had suffered especially as they shuttled back and forth to Europe. She tried to no avail to offer herself as remedy to their pain. She grew up without ever knowing why her mother clung to her

only to turn ice-cold in the next moment. She became her mother's mother. Did I know as a child that my grandmother's unclaimed fury had made its way into my mother's psyche too? Where love is unavailable, there is nothing left to lose.

REPARATION IN SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS: MEMORY AND MEANING

As the second generation of Jews came to terms with the facts of the Holocaust, projected identification with the persecuted group could have a direct impact on self-image and self-esteem. All of Epstein's interviews with adult children of survivors were suggestive of individuals who in one way or another devalued themselves. Part of the reparative work of the second generation involves restituting the trauma in ways that would allow it to be transformed without re-experiencing it. As Hirsch (1997) and Levitt (2007) point out, memory does not simply live in individuals or in institutions like museums or archives, but in the imaginative identifications parents and children make with one another. In such conditions, the child senses the insufficiently-worked-through experiences of his or her parents, as parents project their own hopes and fears onto their children, sometimes asking them to compensate for deficits in their own lives.

As Volkan (1997) explains in *Bloodlines*, "transgenerational transmission is when an older person unconsciously externalizes his traumatized self onto a developing child's personality" (p. 23). A child then becomes a reservoir for the unwanted, troublesome parts of the parent or grandparent. Because the elders have influence on a child, the child absorbs their wishes and is driven to act on them. It becomes the child's task to mourn, to reverse the humiliation and feelings of helplessness pertaining to the trauma of his or her forebears.

Psychoanalytic theory has also stressed that traumatic ideation can be transmitted through an unconscious process of identification and a failure to achieve self-object differentiation. Here, the child takes in feelings of his or her parent and experiences these feelings in the form of "problems" (Volkan, 1997, p. 264). Such children are susceptible to over-worrying, and their self-concepts are shaped by internal representations of reality without sufficient benefit from current reality-testing to balance and bind the trauma-driven anxieties. Although children may feel a need to separate themselves from the persecuted group, they may also feel overly obliged to maintain ties in order to meet the unconscious needs of their parents, who fear repetitions of abandonment and separations. As a result, repetitive patterns of interpersonal behavior can continue to control the children's lives in detrimental ways.

In fact, anxiety about preserving personal safety need not ever have been overtly communicated to leave a psychic stamp on a child. Kellerman's pioneering research tells us that a child, in sensing his or her own affiliation with the victims, may attempt to dis-identify him or herself from the group in an effort to find a means of escape from the persecutor's hatred and perhaps more dangerously, from the sense that this hatred was deserved. I recall my discovery of the Holocaust at age ten:

I opened the thick, grimy book I found on my father's shelf along with his crusty old atlases. There were photographs of the huge pits of piled up corpses, naked bodies, mountains of Jewish hair to be stuffed into mattresses, gold teeth, eyeglasses, bald women, plank beds, gallows, and instruments of torture. The baldness struck me as the deepest kind of moral outrage, when the scalp is naked to everything barbarian. I glimpsed over the people—Jewish people, like me—and could not find one among them who wasn't so ravaged, or so monstrously vacant. I am ashamed to admit I was looking for a youthful face, or lovely face, for someone not beset with the ugly blue tattoo the Germans branded on him or her, as if they were cattle. It was as if I wanted to disown the legacy that I'd been bequeathed—that we were always less than, or in some way inferior—whether in stature or head shape. As if we deserved this treatment that went against everything civilized, an abomination of what was once human.

Given the historic proportions of the Holocaust, and the migration of Jews from places where they were being persecuted, as well as the forcible separation of parents from their children during the Holocaust, Jewish parents were inevitably taxed by conflicts surrounding detachment and attachment. Countless studies of child-rearing practices and behavioral traits of children show that patterns of parental rejection and harsh, inconsistent discipline have grave consequences for children striving to individuate and take control of their own destinies (Cassidy, 1994).

Through mutual, often unhealthy identifications, children live vicariously through their parents, as parents live vicariously through their children. The boundaries become more porous, as if to dissolve altogether. Moreover, studies of "intersubjectivity" between survivor parents and their offspring conclude that children are apt to feel more remote and lonely when parents are self-absorbed in their own worlds of trauma and pain (see, for example, Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1998; Weiss and Weiss, 2000). Intent as I was to understand the secrets locked up in my parents' past, the reasons behind their detachment, I eventually pieced together an absent memory by tracing my late mother's past:

What is the memory of memory? I am obsessed with my mother's family album, her secret papers which she filed away in the tin box. I pile up the shoeboxes in order to climb up to get it and open the lock with a paper clip.

In her closet, I see the foxes with their real teeth, the hats she wore with the little veils for elegance or mourning, her stored away wedding dress, the old paper hats and streamers from New Year's Eve. I keep thumbing through the papers in order to fit together her life—to give her the past she deprived me of—and to breathe myself into it. I find her certificates, the declarations of her good conduct, good citizenship, her excellent penmanship, all in a foreign language. I find the transport papers, the burial plans; I see the photos of backyard trees scarred with autumnal blood, as if the sky, that invisible claw of death, had torn them apart. I think of her quiet deductions: her double bed, her half of the china, her soap, her calendar, one missing day from the rest. I felt moored in my own life, unable to move on.

TRAUMA AND ABSENT MEMORY: HAUNTING AND FORECLOSURE

It is significant that Kellerman (2008) finds that systems in Holocaust survivor families have been observed as “overly tight little islands,” in which children came into contact only with their own parents and siblings (p. 265). In such closed systems, parents are fully committed to their children, but the sense of parental deprivation is so great that children feel an all-encompassing debt to their parents. Children grow up feeling as if it is their duty to fill all the voids. This kind of role reversal with the traumatized parent may be conceptualized as “defensive caretaking,” or narcissistic parenting, or parent-child role diffusion, in which children adopt the role of the parentified child, and thus sadly become orphans themselves with unfulfilled dependency needs. Because children represent new versions of parents, or lost relatives, any threat to the well-being of the child results in a revival of psychological disturbances.

Perhaps more important is the way trauma transmission may be explained as occurring through non-verbal, ambiguous, yet guilt-inducing communication, as well as through the previously discussed “conspiracy of silence.” The subliminal mediating influence of parental over-silence or over-preoccupation with danger may be one of the reasons second-generation children struggle to connect their moods with actual experiences of growing up with their parents. Wiseman (2008) has argued that trauma-specific interpersonal exchanges between parents and children play a role in the emotional experiences of the children, and that withholding, in the form of silence, can lead to children’s anger and guilt. The over-silencing of a parental past only serves to raise more questions in a child’s mind, which serves as a catalyst for imagination as well as for negative feelings.

No one wanted to talk about the past. About what happened. When I asked my parents about their pasts, a somber cloud overtook them. They

said they grew up poor, that life was hard. My father said his father had a cattail for whipping his four sons and was both a rabbi and a dreamer. That is all he ever said. Yet, something festered within like a smallpox before it strikes. My father was intensely stern. If he said it was raining, and it was sunny outside, we stayed in the house. But whatever secrets he desired to keep within the house, I carried outside. Beliefs he found unacceptable, I cultivated, but never outgrew the shame that walked the halls of that house, dim and featureless. Years later, I began to understand my father's pain was neither remediable nor due to any cause; it was inborn, a genetic marker. It was the weight of knowing that he had survived when all of his cousins and only brother had been wiped out. Silence is the only word the dead will know. My father always encouraged me to have a passport, given that no place was safe from deportation; after all, we were Jews. Still, he never put that reasoning into words. Expressions of love were held in.

Overly deprived parents may want to give their children everything they were denied, and at the same time these parents may resent the children for having it. Facing a contradiction between their parents' words and actions, children may not know how to react. For example, a parent may encourage success in school, but interfere with the child's ability to study or concentrate at home, confusing the signals and making a child uncertain about how to respond. Emotional pressure and tension brought on by such familial dysfunction may catalyze the outbreak of symptoms and even the diagnosis of mental disorder.

Moreover, for a generation of Jews still dominated by the Holocaust, the idea of the family was not only something internalized through parental behavior, but through media representations of "American life" that ran counter to true experience, often resulting in yet another dimension of harsh self-judgement about the family's failures to fit in or succeed. Given the evidence that traumatized parents cannot avoid transmitting their anxieties to their children, protective interventions can prove helpful in countering the consequences. As Kellerman (2008) finds, parents who were able to use an open, fluid, and non-threatening communication style had better success despite their traumatized histories (p. 270). Extended family and social support systems were also useful, as was support given to children within a sympathetic community free from any renewed anti-Semitism.

CONCLUSION

Connections to the past through family and through postmemory help to assimilate the burden of historical events, such as exile, diaspora, or massive persecution. Subsequently, seeing ourselves through others enables

us to better conceive of ourselves as being linked with them, crossing the threshold of years. As Hirsch (1997) demonstrates through her analysis of family photographs, by allowing the conception of oneself as a composite of multiple layers of the same, previous, and subsequent generations, postmemory can serve as a model of remembering and possible intervention (p. 10). These lines of identification need to be theorized more closely. In learning about those who perished at the hands of the Nazis in the camps, one might think, "It could have been me among them. But it was *not me*." On one hand, imagining what it would be like to actually be in their places can be retraumatizing, and on the other hand, such imagining might allow for a truer understanding of forebears who confronted what can only be called evil, or beyond any moral equivalent of human decency.

Psychology and psychoanalysis shed light on how personal identity is rooted in the shared experience of the collective, and more inwardly in the family. Memories of traumatic events live on to mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them. Children of survivors and their contemporaries can inherit catastrophic histories, not through direct recollection, but through projection and through affects passed down within the family and within culture at large. Claiming them as our own and transforming them into art and narrative forms helps descendants take control over painful interchanges.

When trauma is transmitted, the individual may encounter difficulties in maturation or irrational feelings of shame and denigration, and have trouble forming social relationships. Nevertheless, we have not fully investigated the ways that first and second-generation Jews, whether directly caught in circumstances of the Holocaust or only tangentially related, have been affected by complexes that resulted from sustained oppression, stigmatization, and persecution. These kinds of issues inevitably bring some people to therapy in order to make sense of their pain, particularly when there is a sense of deprivation, affliction, and loss. Those individuals potentially serve the process of working through more generally, through their integration of cut-off fragments of traumatic memory. The traces of an irrecoverable past derive their power and their cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of culture and family life. Let us hope and grieve simultaneously, never forgetting to remember and acknowledge the past, or we are certainly doomed to repeat it.

NOTES

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2. Epstein found these children also suffered from loneliness and guilt over their own good fortune contrasted to their parents' anguished ordeals. Epstein further noted that children of survivors had greater feelings of alienation than other children. They were more dependent on their parents, and they were also apt to act out aggressive behavior that parents might unconsciously encourage given their own histories of being defenseless.
3. For psychoanalytic interviews about descendants who did not endure the horrors of the Holocaust directly but absorbed the experiences of their parents and grandparents, see *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation* (Haas, 1990) or *Granddaughters of the Holocaust: Never Forgetting What They Didn't Experience* (Pisano, 2012).
4. Articles such as "Trauma Transmission through Perceived Parental Burden among Holocaust Survivors' Offspring and Grandchildren" (Letzter-Pouw *et al.*, 2014), "Anger, Guilt, and Intergenerational Communication of Trauma in the Interpersonal Narratives of Second Generation Holocaust Survivors" (Wiseman *et al.*, 2006), and "A Question of Who, Not If: Psychological Disorders in Holocaust Survivors' Children" (Danieli *et al.*, 2017), all support the idea of a prevalence of emotional distress, and even clinical disorders, in succeeding generations of the families of survivors, as well as the prominence of "embitterment" (Lehner and Yehuda, 2018) and loneliness (Wiseman, 2008). Felsen's (2018) "Parental Trauma and Adult Sibling Relationships in Holocaust-Survivor Families" explores the impact this trauma can have on the adult siblings within survivor families as the children assume different roles in relation to the parents and in negotiating their own identities outside of the vortex of trauma.

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