

Recreating Postmemory? Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Journey to Auschwitz

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For those whose access to the Holocaust is purely through its post-factum representations, visiting associated sites in Europe is a way of bridging this postmemory with reality. The contemporary experience of Holocaust sites by post-Holocaust generations provides a practical dimension to their perception of the Holocaust, sometimes even evoking a sense of witnessing the Holocaust itself. Consequently, for children of Holocaust survivors, these trips can provide a tool for bypassing the process of secondary witnessing and attempting to become a primary witness of the Holocaust: "She felt annoyed to have been bitten by a fly, in Auschwitz. Still, to come out of Auschwitz with only a bite was something other inmates would have prayed for. She stopped herself. It was not other inmates. It was just inmates. She was not an inmate. Others, clearly distinct from her, were there. She was not there."¹ Visiting Auschwitz allows Ruth, protagonist of Lily Brett's *Too Many Men*, to classify herself as an inmate.

By assuming this identity of a Holocaust victim, she attempts to become a primary witness. Yet this process is essentially futile – how can someone become a witness to something they did not actually live through?

Holocaust memoirs, including those by children of survivors, are a type of indirect Holocaust testimony. Based around a family connection to the Holocaust, they usually tell the story of family members who experienced the Holocaust as well as documenting the author's visit to Holocaust sites. Thus they bear witness both to the events of the Holocaust and the ways in which later generations have been affected. Such memoirs are instances of secondary witnessing, because they re-tell the Holocaust story of family members connected to the author. However, the entwinement of the author's journey to Holocaust sites complicates this issue, because the protagonist fashions their own memory of the places where the Holocaust occurred, which undoubtedly shapes their representation of their family's experiences. In order to illustrate the various ways in which this process occurs, three contrasting texts by children of Holocaust survivors will be considered: *The Fiftieth Gate* by Australian historian Mark Raphael Baker,² *Too Many Men* by fellow Australian writer Lily Brett, and *Lektionen des Verborgenen* or "Lessons of the Hidden" by German author Helena Janeczek.³ Each work describes a journey to Poland undertaken by children together with their parents, to seek out the sites of the parents' lives both before and during the Holocaust. *The Fiftieth Gate* and *Lektionen des Verborgenen* are both memoirs, while *Too Many Men* is a lengthy novel which takes corresponding fictional liberties in its portrayal of what is probably based on an actual trip. Although Brett's protagonist Ruth is a fictional character, which means that *Too Many Men* cannot be considered a memoir, the many autobiographical elements and countless similarities with Brett's own life demonstrate that Ruth largely mirrors Brett herself. Baker and Brett are both Australian, though Brett resides in New York, while Janeczek is German born, but has lived in Italy most of her adult life. Consequently, she wrote *Lektionen des Verborgenen* in her adopted language of Italian, rather than German, her mother-tongue. While it is the German version that has been considered for this article, it should be noted that it has not been translated by Janeczek herself, and hence this text contains a further layer of interpretation and representation. Published around the turn of the twenty-first century, these texts epitomise the trend of fashionable genealogy, where tracing one's family history purports to strengthen one's own sense of identity. The ensuing investigation will demonstrate the ways in which these writers attempt to bypass the process of secondary witnessing, by considering whether they are actually trying to become primary witnesses of the Holocaust.

Children of Holocaust survivors form a distinct identity based on their common experiences, despite their myriad differences in nationality, religious background and walk of life. After the Holocaust, most survivors did not return to their country of birth, but instead emigrated to various places including Israel, North America and Australia. As a result, their children grew up in a country foreign to their parents, generally with no grandparents or extended family. The fact that many survivors married fellow survivors and had children immediately – perhaps as an attempt to replace their murdered relatives – exacerbated the less than ideal milieu for raising children. Therefore, these children, the so-called *second generation*, were in many cases adversely affected by their parents' Holocaust experiences. The consequences can manifest themselves as a psychological condition such as *trans-generational trauma*, which occurs when the effects of the parents' trauma are evident in the children, who in turn may even display trauma symptoms, despite the fact that they did not actually undergo the traumatic experience.⁴ They may also experience more abstract forms of loss, such as the particular forms of "memory" articulated by many second generation Holocaust survivors as their chief connection to their non-experience of the Holocaust.

Writing by children of Holocaust survivors forms a tangible record of their quest for an identity entwined with the Holocaust. It is a literature of displacement, dominated by an event which occurred before their birth yet which continues to exert influence over their lives. The multi-national, literary second generation began to emerge as a distinct group in the 1970s. The publication in 1979 of Helen Epstein's account of her experience, interwoven with interviews of other second generation survivors from all over the world, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* set the precedent for the influx of memoirs which followed in the ensuing decades.⁵ The English-speaking canon, which stretches from Australia to North America and Great Britain, includes such pioneering works as *Jewels and Ashes* by Australian Arnold Zable⁶ and *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* by English child of survivors Anne Karpf.⁷ *Jewels and Ashes* depicts Zable's trip to Poland in the late 1980s interspersed with his re-telling of his parents' stories. Karpf's memoir tells essentially the same story but in a different way – it is moulded by her journalistic credentials, in contrast to Zable's more literary approach. Both works were instrumental in bringing the second generation experience to the attention of the wider population in their respective countries. While these books share a common thread of second generation experience, their differences lie not only in the varying experiences of the authors and their families, but in their contextualisation within different national narratives of

collective Holocaust memory.

The parallel growth of secondary literature in the field, from clinical studies to literary criticism and cultural studies, includes works which straddle the boundary between primary and secondary sources. Many commentators use their position as children of Holocaust survivors to embellish or even validate their expertise in their research, even when the relevance of this connection to their chosen subject is not immediately apparent. One example where the use of this connection is absolutely justified is *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* by Marianne Hirsch, because Hirsch emphasises that her position as a child of Holocaust survivors provides the catalyst for her theory of *postmemory*, which addresses the relationship people have to significant events which occurred before their birth.⁸ In a similar vein, Aaron Hass' psychological study on children of Holocaust survivors, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation*, integrates his personal story into the narrative, exhibiting his dual perspective of clinical psychologist performing the study as well as his common experience to those he is studying. Moreover, he explicitly states that this personal connection is the very reason behind this study: "I was interested in discovering the extent to which other children of survivors had experiences similar to my own."⁹ The explicit statement of the author's position as a child of Holocaust survivors does not only occur in books that deal directly with the Holocaust, however. In the Preface to his volume entitled *The Ethics of Memory*, philosopher Avishai Margalit describes his parents' perpetual discussion about the memory of European Jews murdered in the Holocaust, including their own "huge families."¹⁰ He mentions this because "philosophy, some philosophy, starts at home. And my parents' debate hovers above the abyss of my concern with memory and the obligations – if there are any – to remember; or, for that matter, to forget and forgive."¹¹ Margalit's familial connection to the Holocaust thereby informs his study, even though his research is not concerned with the Holocaust itself. Thus, second generation commentators use their identity to validate a wide range of research areas and expertise, reflecting both the interdisciplinary nature of Holocaust Studies and the diversity of second generation experience.

Although second generation memoirs are a form of autobiography, they differ from most autobiographies in that they are anchored in an event which occurred before the author's birth. Written around middle age, they are often evoked by the author's parents reaching old age and death, which suggests that the impetus for children of Holocaust survivors to explore their heritage becomes more pressing when their link to it is threatened. Furthermore, the centrality of the Holocaust to contemporary Jewish identity, as argued by Peter Novick in relation to American Jewish identity,

means that second generation memoirs are perhaps unquestionably accepted as normative examples of being Jewish in the late twentieth century.¹² The widespread publication of these memoirs suggests a rather sympathetic and therefore lucrative market for them, which reflects Norman Finkelstein's analysis of how the Holocaust has been manipulated for financial gain.¹³ Interestingly, Finkelstein, himself a child of survivors, deplores the exploitation of the Holocaust, yet by asserting his identity as a child of survivors in his critical text on the Holocaust industry, he may, in fact, be interpreted as taking advantage of the very industry he criticises.

As Finkelstein shows, by articulating their closeness to the Holocaust as being a result of their parents' experiences, children of Holocaust survivors claim their identity as second generation. By using the concept of memory to describe their relationship to the Holocaust, while defining it in terms of their displacement from the events themselves, the second generation constructs parameters for their unique position as survivors once removed. While it may appear impossible to have a memory of an experience one has not personally lived through, it seems that this is, in fact, the case for many second generation Holocaust survivors. As trans-generational trauma entails the presence of trauma symptoms in an individual who has not lived through a traumatic experience, the concept of inherited memory operates in a similar manner. Furthermore, the emergence of terms such as Hirsch's postmemory¹⁴ and Ellen Fine's *absent memory*¹⁵ in the late 1990s to describe the relationship children of survivors have to the Holocaust itself deftly categorises this connection as a form of memory, even though the very definition of memory contradicts this interpretation.

Hirsch's definition of postmemory declares that it "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection."¹⁶ It therefore appears to fall somewhere between the two: postmemory is both a memory removed from the source, and a personal interpretation of history. Hirsch explicates further: "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."¹⁷ Thus for children of Holocaust survivors, the narrative of their parents' experiences overrides their own life experiences, even though they are unable to fully understand, or even know, what actually happened to their parents. It is this concept of missing which is incorporated into Fine's definition of absent memory: she writes that second generation Holocaust survivors "continue to 'remember' an event not lived through."¹⁸ The representation of the verb in inverted commas serves to illustrate the inherent paradox: that the sensation experienced as a memory

is not in actual fact a memory. In her view, “this nonmemory or lack of memory comes from the feeling of exclusion both from the experience and from knowledge about the experience.”¹⁹ Thus both terms address the particular relationship children of Holocaust survivors have to the Holocaust, taking into account the closeness they feel to it as well as their distance from it. While the element of memory in both terms encapsulates the particular qualities of the sensations described, the concept of postmemory is a useful tool for describing how children of Holocaust survivors relate to the Holocaust, as it allows for the range of perceptions held, as well as representations created, by this generation.

In *Too Many Men* and *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, the portrayal of memory – inherited or otherwise – is markedly different. Janeczek explicitly rejects the notion that she has inherited any of her parents’ memories, while *Too Many Men*’s protagonist, Ruth, has unconsciously absorbed the experiences of her parents to the extent that she forgets that she did not actually live through them. The description cited earlier about being “bitten by a fly, in Auschwitz” demonstrates that Ruth, at least on an unconscious level, does not differentiate between her own experiences and those of her parents. What happened to her parents in Auschwitz is so deeply ingrained in her psyche that she honestly forgets that she was not actually there. This is a pertinent example of postmemory – Ruth has not actually recalled the incident from personal experience but has instead created a fantasy that corresponds to the Holocaust story of her parents. The presence of this phenomenon in children of Holocaust survivors is noted by Hass, who explains that they “may assume the identity of survivors as though they themselves had been persecuted by the Nazis.”²⁰ This is a direct result of their reaction not only to the remarkable survival of their parents, but also to an increased comprehension of the scale of loss incurred by their family during the Holocaust. Ultimately, this reaction creates an intrinsic need to feel directly associated with the Holocaust.

In sharp contrast to the character of Ruth, Janeczek dissociates herself from her parents’ memories: “Ich bin meinen Eltern dankbar, daß sie mich mit ihren Erinnerungen verschont haben, ich glaube, sie haben es richtig gemacht.”²¹ *I am thankful to my parents for sparing me from their memories. I believe they did the right thing.* By distancing herself from their memories, she also distances herself from their effect on her life. Whilst visiting the Polish village that her parents originate from, Janeczek comments: “Ich habe nie an Zawiercie ... als Shtetl gedacht, fast nie.”²² *I have never thought of Zawiercie as a shtetl, almost never.* The apparent lack of consideration Janeczek gives to her parents’ home town differs strikingly from that of Hirsch, whose detailed knowledge of Czernowitz is

the catalyst for her postmemory theory and who writes: "My parents' Czer-nowitz, my cultural home, is the space of my postmemory."²³ Janeczek's ambivalence toward her parents' Holocaust past is a different form of postmemory. Her dissociation from this aspect of her heritage is no less an authentic reaction than Ruth's or Hirsch's appropriation of theirs.

In *The Fiftieth Gate*, memory is also an important theme, due to the fact that Baker's quest for the past is, above all, a search for the memories of his parents. Baker explicitly acknowledges the extent to which he is shaped by his father's memories: "He remembers, therefore I am."²⁴ In his attempt to recreate the past through historical research and the journey to the sites of his parents' past, the memories of his parents are of utmost importance. As Baker reminisces about his life, he writes: "Perhaps it all ends when I return memory to them."²⁵ This suggests that although the discovery of his parents' memories plays an imperative role in his search for the past, Baker is able to concede that they are not actually his memories. This feeling is also evident at a memorial service which Baker attends, accompanied by his father: "And I was his memory ... privately I mourned the things I had stolen from my father – first, two years of his life, and now his memory."²⁶ His position in regards to his mother's memories is similar: "For me, it is a search that had begun one year earlier. No, not a search, an obsession, a raid on my mother's memory, a son's theft of her past."²⁷ As the discovery of his parents' memories forms an essential part of Baker's search for the past, he is caught between satisfying his needs and feeling guilty for taking possession of their memories.

A conflict between memory and history becomes apparent in *The Fiftieth Gate*, as Baker finds it difficult to confirm the memories of his mother without historical proof. He therefore feels incredibly guilty: "Why do I crave the contents of this single lone sentence I discovered on a reel of microfilm, when all it says is what she has repeated throughout her life?"²⁸ As a historian, he finds it easier to believe historical proof than personal memory, even when his entire search is based on memory. This becomes increasingly evident in his attempt to uncover the name of the village where his mother was hidden during the Holocaust. When she is unable to recall the name, he compiles a list of villages in the area and asks his mother one by one: "So when I exhausted memory I turned to history."²⁹ Although history provides the impetus for the discovery of this information, he still relies on his mother's powers of recollection, which demonstrates how Baker is eventually able to reconcile memory with history. This episode shows that for Baker, the postmemory he gleans from his parents is not absolute truth. In other words, his emphasis on uncovering the facts relating to their memories shows that verifiable events are of primary concern to him.

Each text contains several examples of how being together in Poland enforces the children's relationship to the Holocaust through their parents. The different ways in which each work strives for authenticity demonstrates how the children validate their connection to this past. Both *The Fiftieth Gate* and *Lektionen des Verborgenen* fall within the genre of autobiography – they are first person narratives describing the author's life. As a novel, *Too Many Men* is, of course, a fictional representation, which provides its author with an elaborate capacity to both conceal and reveal what may have really happened. By presenting her story through fictional characters, Brett has justifiable means of presenting the truth as she chooses: while one can assume similarities between her principal characters and her own life, the use of fiction as a barrier means that one cannot know for sure. Poetic licence perhaps means that the impossibility of having a memory of something not personally experienced can be presented as if it had been. For instance, Ruth describes why she does not eat meat: “‘Meat being grilled or fried or seared reminds me of burning flesh,’ Ruth said. How could she be reminded of something she'd never seen, never witnessed, never smelled? she thought.”³⁰ In this passage, two sensations, one experienced and one not, are linked. Ruth's association of “burning flesh,” something she has never personally come across, with meat being cooked, something she has witnessed, demonstrates the manifestation of postmemory. By linking known experience with unknown experience that explicitly recalls the Holocaust, Brett encapsulates how the second generation can formulate their relationship to the events of the Holocaust.

The Fiftieth Gate emerges as grounded in thorough historical research, due to Baker's profession as a historian. As stated earlier, the tension in the book arises between memory and history: it seems that as a historian, Baker must force himself to trust personal memory above historical fact. For him, authenticity lies in facts submerged in archives and documents, rather than in the memory of his parents and other people he interviews. Baker is nevertheless aware of his explicit role in creating a purported historical record. He admits how much he is appropriating: “How easy it is to get things wrong, to forget this school or that confectionery shop, to size up a personality in the wrong way, to miss a communal conflict, to set your narrative in a tissue of unintended lies, to forget to read between the lines. And worse – to reduce survivors to supporting actors in their own tragedy.”³¹ Such misgivings do not stop him doing just this throughout the book, however. His intricate portrayal of his family history, created through extrapolation from archival research and interviews, is a striking creation. He concedes that: “Sometimes I think that if I were granted the time before I die, I would burn all my private papers. I would

prefer to leave the idea of me, rather than bits and pieces. What would my descendants make of all those scribbles and doodles?"³² Yet this is exactly what he is making of his ancestors in this book. In this text, authenticity lies with the historian's research. By presenting it in the context of his family's story, Baker is consolidating his personal connection to the Holocaust.

Authenticity operates on a very different level in *Lektionen des Verborgenen*. In sharp contrast to Baker, Janeczek refrains from asking her parents anything: "Meinen Vater kann ich nicht mehr fragen, meiner Mutter habe ich nie Fragen gestellt. Ich kann sie nicht über die anderen befragen, wenn sie mir nicht zu verstehen gibt, daß sie mir etwas sagen will."³³ *I cannot ask my father anymore, I have never questioned my mother. I cannot question her about the rest when she does not give me the impression that she wants to tell me something.* Janeczek's emphasis on recounting only what she knows, without contextualisation in a wider field, displays an acute difference with *The Fiftieth Gate*. By presenting her parents' memories as such, without further analysis or explanation, Janeczek emits an underlying uncertainty, which can be construed as excusing any misleading statements. This emphasis on uncertainty emerges in the following passage: "In der Nacht vom 25. auf den 26. August 1943 ist meine Mutter aus dem Ghetto von Zawiercie mit zehn Zloti in der Tasche weggelaufen. Auch möglich, daß es fünf oder sieben oder zwanzig waren, an Zahlen erinnere ich mich nie und noch viel weniger dann, wenn es sich um mir unbekannte Währungen handelt."³⁴ *In the night of 25th and 26th of August 1943 my mother ran away from the Zawiercie Ghetto with ten zloty in her pocket. It is also possible that it was five or seven or twenty, I never remember numbers and even less, when they are in currencies unfamiliar to me.* Janeczek's statement that her memory does not work for unfamiliar currencies is perhaps a metaphor for writing about her parents' experiences. By admitting that her memory is fallible when it comes to things she is not familiar with, she is also stating that she is not familiar enough with her parents' memories to present them correctly. In highlighting her lack of certainty about the details, Janeczek is deftly categorising her mother's memories as a form of postmemory, while simultaneously bearing witness to the after-shocks of the Holocaust.

For many members of the second generation, including the protagonists of *The Fiftieth Gate*, *Too Many Men* and *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, visiting Holocaust sites is a pivotal part of building their identification with the Holocaust. In order to explore this further, the function of Holocaust sites as loci for memory will now be considered. Holocaust sites include those which explicitly denote the destruction of European Jewry, such as concentration camps, death camps and mass killing sites; as well as those

which show this more implicitly, such as unused synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Both kinds of sites are located in various countries of central and Eastern Europe, and are particularly concentrated in Germany and Poland. The conditions of the sites vary, as does accessibility, authenticity and attempts at memorialisation extraneous to the site itself. Each site also embodies the physical existence of Holocaust related events, and by extension, purports to offer contemporary visitors a link to this through their presence. Holocaust sites can be regarded as partial representations of the Holocaust, but unlike representations such as books and artwork, they entail a tangible link with events. Whether they are presented today as museums or memorials or simply as unadorned sites, the meaning they communicate to those who visit them is dependent on their actual connection with what happened there. The role of the visitor in shaping the meaning of such sites is key. Jochen Spielmann asserts that memorials are dependent on visitors for becoming meaningful. He writes:

Without visitors, believers, wreath layers, and ceremonies, these places would themselves become mere historical sites and works of art. Only in their connection to visits, excursions, guided tours, observances, worship, recitations, and rituals can memories be passed on over time and become part of society's understanding of itself. Monuments without visitors have lost their function.³⁵

Thus, human acts of remembrance are crucial to perpetuating the meaning of memorials. James E. Young echoes this argument, writing that "memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce."³⁶ As lumps of stone, their meaning is moulded by those who visit them.

But is this also true for Holocaust sites? Certainly, the significance of visiting such sites makes it meaningful. Yet whether they are visited or not does not change their significance to the events of the Holocaust themselves. As "Poland's major tourist attraction,"³⁷ Auschwitz is also practically synonymous with the Holocaust. While the streams of visitors ensure that it is not forgotten, it is impossible to know whether Auschwitz would retain this significance if no one visited. It is clear that Holocaust sites are meaningful in different ways, for different people. As Lawrence Langer argues in relation to Anne Frank, "many of us seek and find the Holocaust we need."³⁸ This applies to visiting Holocaust sites, too. For example, a child of Holocaust survivors may seek a reason for psychological problems which they attribute to their parents' Holocaust experiences while a young Israeli may gain confirmation of their need to serve in their country's armed forces.³⁹ In other words, Holocaust sites are imbued with subjective mean-

ing, dependent on identity.

Thus, for many Jews, a visit to Poland is no ordinary tourist trip: very often, it becomes an emotionally-invested pilgrimage in which personally experiencing sites of Jewish life and death is equated with a greater understanding of both the Holocaust and pre-war Jewish life in Poland. Many journeys are structured so as to communicate the narrative which begins with vibrant Jewish life and ends in the obliteration of not only these Jews, but their synagogues, institutions and cemeteries. Witnessing traces of all these things is what gives these trips purpose, and allows participants to fashion their own “memory” of events, since they have seen the places with their own eyes. As Young writes: “Forty-five years after the Shoah, a new generation comes to know a millennium of Jewish civilization in Poland by its absence and the rubble of its destruction: dilapidated synagogues, uprooted and plowed-under cemeteries, warehouses piled high with religious artefacts.”⁴⁰ By discovering Jewish Poland through the tangible traces of its obliteration, visitors are able to contextualise their knowledge of the Holocaust within the frame of what they experience in Poland. This focus on the damaged traces of Jewish existence in contemporary Poland means that many Jewish visitors are primarily focussed on the missing, rather than the present, and therefore show limited interest in other aspects of the country, including contemporary Jewish communities. As Jack Kugelmass explains: “Jewish tourists see nothing quaint about the local culture, either Jewish or non-Jewish; their interest is the dead rather than the living.”⁴¹ This emphasis on the dead, the past and the absent nature of Jewish life in Poland highlights the centrality of the Holocaust to these modern-day trips.

It is therefore clear why personal experience of the sites of both the Holocaust and pre-war Jewish life in Poland is regarded as a powerful tool in increasing comprehension of what was lost. The fact that travelling back to the time of the events is impossible means that visiting the places is possibly the closest post-Holocaust generations can get to the Holocaust itself. This sentiment is voiced by Kugelmass, who writes: “Most American Jews are of Eastern European descent: their sentiments about their ancestral homes, if a sense of these places is conveyed at all to them through the narratives of their parents and grandparents, lack the clarity of place that only direct experience can provide.”⁴² The phrase “clarity of place” testifies to the significance of visiting the sites of eastern European Jewish history, and to the powerful nature inherent in a visit to these places.

While the relationship between postmemory and place is key to understanding the role of the journey to Auschwitz undertaken by members of the second generation, of course not all children of Holocaust survivors choose to embark on such a journey. Interestingly, Hirsch devotes the clos-

ing paragraphs of her book to why she has never visited her parents' home town of Czernowitz. She writes that after the fall of communism in the early 1990s, she proposed to her parents and husband that they travel there together. For Hirsch, the idea of visiting Czernowitz along with her parents was the central element of the journey, as it would enable her to recreate the past: "Together, we would try to make the place come alive, investing it with memories of old, and memories created in the present, memories transmitted across generations."⁴³ The centrality of her parents to this trip is evident when Hirsch explains that it did not happen because her parents decided not to go. Without them to aid her in reconstructing memory, she was unable to undertake this journey. Rather, she resigns herself to experiencing this past purely as postmemory, through the representations available to her: "Instead I will have to search for other, less direct means of access to this lost world, means that inscribe its unbridgeable distance as well as my own curiosity and desire."⁴⁴ It appears that Hirsch is afraid that visiting Czernowitz would change her relationship to the place: it would become a real memory as well as a postmemory. Since she posits postmemory as a central component of the experience of children of Holocaust survivors, it seems that by attempting to change it through something as symbolic as actually visiting the places would threaten her second generation identity.

Yet for other children of Holocaust survivors the journey to Holocaust sites plays a vital role in consolidating their identification with the Holocaust. The supposition for many adult children of Holocaust survivors is that experiencing the places so important to both their parents' happy past and unpleasant suffering will bring a deeper understanding and perhaps even closure to the traumatic effects absorbed by the second generation. That Hirsch chose not to undertake such a journey indicates differing interpretations of the connection between place and postmemory.

The fact that the trips in each of the texts under discussion consist of the children travelling together with their parents concretises the family connection to the Holocaust: the fact that the parents were there, in Auschwitz, gives legitimacy to the children's claim for an identity entwined with the Holocaust. In the opening pages of *Too Many Men*, Brett explains why the main character Ruth is with her father in Poland:

This was the third trip Ruth had made to Poland. She really didn't know why she was here. And she didn't know why she wanted her father to join her. Her first trip to Poland was just to see that her mother and father came from somewhere. To see their past as more than an abstract stretch of horror. To see the bricks and the mortar. The second time was an attempt to be less overwhelmed than she

was the first time. To try and not cry all day and night. And she had cried less on that second visit. Now, she was here to stand on this piece of earth with her father.⁴⁵

Evident in this quote – and compounded by the emotional investment demonstrated by her feelings of crying throughout her previous two trips – is the need for Ruth to witness tangible evidence of her parents' past. These elements combine in regards to the significance she attaches to "stand[ing] on this piece of earth with her father." But what does this mean in practice? Being with him means that he converses freely in Polish with locals, such as taxi drivers, showing Ruth another side to him lost in his heavily accented English. In addition, he gorges himself on Polish food, showing that his roots do indeed lie in this land completely foreign to his own daughter. However, these factors do not in themselves necessarily aid Ruth's search for identity. It is more the notion that she *wants* them to aid this search, which confounds their meaning in the text.

Like Brett's character Ruth, Baker has also visited Poland multiple times, but it is the trip he made with his parents and brother which features most prominently in *The Fiftieth Gate*. Baker illustrates the effect of being with his parents in Auschwitz and their home towns by highlighting how it changes his opinion of their experiences. He cannot quite believe his mother's family's erstwhile wealth until he observes her dancing on the fields that once belonged to her family, exclaiming "Mine. They're all mine."⁴⁶ Observing this spectacle, Baker concedes: "We had never believed her when she told us that she was once rich, very rich, tremendously rich."⁴⁷ It is Baker's presence at the actual site accompanied by his mother which causes his change of opinion: to him, her reaction embodies confirmation of her perpetual claim. The fact that Baker did not come to this realisation until he personally witnessed her there demonstrates the significance of this particular journey.

In *Lektionen des Verborgenen* it is author Janeczek's first trip to Poland, an organised tour for Holocaust survivors and their descendants, which she participates in along with her mother. Auschwitz is on the itinerary, which means that the entire group visits, regardless of whether they possess a personal or familial connection. In this case, it is perhaps what Auschwitz stands for which is important, rather than retracing family steps. This is further evident in that Janeczek and her mother leave the group to visit her parents' hometown. However it is during the visit to Auschwitz, rather than visiting places of her childhood, that Janeczek's mother breaks out into a panic. Upon seeing canisters of Zyklon B on display, she reacts: "schreit sie »meine Mama, meine Mama« ... [und] begleitet ihre Schreie mit einer Vor- und Rückwärtsbewegung des Kopfes und des Körpers."⁴⁸ *She*

screams “my mother, my mother,” and accompanies her screams with a forwards and backwards movement of the head and body. Though she was herself in Auschwitz, it seems unlikely that this reaction stems from her personal experience there. Rather, it is Auschwitz’s functionality as a symbol of the Holocaust which provokes this reaction – it is not known knowledge, but assumed knowledge – Janeczek’s mother’s assumption that her mother was murdered in the gas chambers is the reason behind her hysteria. It is this function of place in the relationship between collective Holocaust narrative and personal experience which is key to exploring the significance of post-Holocaust trips to Poland.

The difference this journey holds for those with a personal connection can be partially explained in terms of Freud’s theory in *Mourning and Melancholia*. As explained by Eva Hoffman: “In his essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia,’ Freud makes the suggestive observation that in order to accomplish the natural process of mourning – to grieve and then move on – you have to know what you have lost. If you do not know what the lost object is, then mourning can turn into a permanent melancholia, or depression, as we would call it today.”⁴⁹ Consequently, for children of Holocaust survivors, the trip to Auschwitz can be read as an attempt to identify the lost object that has caused their mourning. In a sense, this journey allows the children to create their own picture of the events of the past, as they have seen the places with their own eyes. However, even when they visit the actual locations of the Holocaust they cannot relive the events that occurred there. The past cannot be relived, particularly when one has not lived it oneself. Hence perhaps the journey of the second generation is not so much about finding a lost object, as creating an object to fill the gap.

The paradox of the second generation therefore lies in witnessing. Because they did not personally witness the Holocaust itself, they can be classified as secondary witnesses: they are witnesses to the Holocaust through their parents’ anguish, loss and stories. The journey to Auschwitz could thus be interpreted as an attempt to enhance the process of secondary witnessing and even to become a primary witness of the Holocaust. However, the parents’ presence in Poland with their children illustrates the futility of this quest: because the children were not actually there at the time of the Holocaust, they can only create a connection to it by proxy, which occurs in a combination of place and family. Therefore, by visiting the sites of memory with their parents, these members of the second generation concretise their link to this past.

In conclusion, the journey to Auschwitz with their parents forms a vital component of the second generation’s connection to the Holocaust in each of the texts discussed. By experiencing sites of memory in Poland with par-

ents who experienced the Holocaust, these children of survivors are creating a multi-faceted link to this past, through the twin elements of place and family. The varying shades of authenticity prevalent in these three texts illustrate how they are attempting to bear witness to the Holocaust. Even though they are not survivor testimonies, they utilise various measures to consolidate their relationship to the events of the Holocaust. Whether the emphasis is on historical accuracy, as in *The Fiftieth Gate*, or on the vagueness of memory, such as in *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, both books emerge as compelling testimonies of children of Holocaust survivors. As a novel, *Too Many Men* contains the barrier of fiction in the presentation of its story, which nevertheless portrays a believable experience of second generation. The presentation of the journey to Auschwitz as an essential element of the second generation experience in each of these texts posits the relationship between place and identity as key. By visiting the sites of memory together with their parents, these second generation authors are attempting to augment their perspective of the Holocaust. By entwining an authentic sense of place with their representation of an inherited past, they are demanding authenticity for an identity which might otherwise be categorised as unauthentic.

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NOTES

- ¹ Lily Brett, *Too Many Men* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1999), p. 576.
- ² Mark Raphael Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate* (Sydney: Flamingo, HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).
- ³ Helena Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, trans. Moshe Kahn (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001). All translations are the author's own.
- ⁴ For a study of trans-generational trauma in children of Holocaust survivors, see Dani Rowland-Klein and Rosemary Dunlop, "The Transmission of Trauma across Generations: Identification with Parental Trauma in Children of Holocaust Survivors", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 31 (1997), pp. 358-69.
- ⁵ Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).
- ⁶ Arnold Zable, *Jewels and Ashes* (Newham, Victoria, Australia: Scribe Publications, 1991).
- ⁷ Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (London: Minerva, 1997).
- ⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- ⁹ Aaron Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991), p. 2.
- ¹⁰ Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. VIII.
- ¹¹ Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. ix.
- ¹² Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).
- ¹³ Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London & New York: Verso, 2000).
- ¹⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.
- ¹⁵ Ellen Fine, "Transmission of Memory: The Post-Holocaust Generation in the Diaspora", ed. Efraim Sicher, in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 185-200, p. 187.
- ¹⁶ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.
- ¹⁷ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.
- ¹⁸ Fine, "Transmission of Memory," p. 187.
- ¹⁹ Fine, "Transmission of Memory," p. 187.
- ²⁰ Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, p. 30.
- ²¹ Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, p. 93.

- ²² Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, p. 166.
- ²³ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 226.
- ²⁴ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 128.
- ²⁵ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 100.
- ²⁶ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 130.
- ²⁷ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 211.
- ²⁸ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 138.
- ²⁹ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 213.
- ³⁰ Brett, *Too Many Men*, p. 628.
- ³¹ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 290.
- ³² Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 304.
- ³³ Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, p. 14.
- ³⁴ Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, p. 14.
- ³⁵ Jochen Spielmann, "Auschwitz is Debated in Oświęcim: The Topography of Remembrance", ed. James E. Young, in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (New York & Munich: Prestel, 1994), pp. 169-73, p. 171-2.
- ³⁶ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. xiii.
- ³⁷ Jack Kugelmass, "Why We Go to Poland: Holocaust Tourism as Secular Ritual", ed. James E. Young, in *The Art of Memory*, pp. 175-83, p. 178.
- ³⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 29.
- ³⁹ For a discussion of trips organised by the Israeli Ministry of Education for Israeli teenagers, see Jackie Feldman, "Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective through the Poland 'Experience'", *Israel Studies*, 7 (2002), pp. 84-114. Feldman argues convincingly that the underlying purpose of these trips is to indoctrinate the youngsters "that the Holocaust never really ended, and that, but for the State and its defense forces, the Jews in Israel would today be on their way to the gas chambers." (Feldman, "Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave," p. 84). She concludes that the reason behind this philosophy is to enforce this view before the participants commence their compulsory military service.
- ⁴⁰ James E. Young, "Jewish Memory in Poland", ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman, in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 215-31, p. 215.
- ⁴¹ Jack Kugelmass, "The Rites of the Tribe: American Jewish Tourism in Poland", eds. Ivan Karp, Christine M. Kreamer, Steven D. Lavine, in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 382-427, p. 396.
- ⁴² Kugelmass, "The Rites of the Tribe", p. 400.
- ⁴³ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 268.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 268.

⁴⁵ Brett, *Too Many Men*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Baker, *The Fiftieth Gate*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Janeczek, *Lektionen des Verborgenen*, p. 143.

⁴⁹ Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 72.

Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Journey to Auschwitz. Esther Jilovsky. Colloquy 15:145-162 (2008). Abstract. For those whose access to the Holocaust is purely through its postfactum representations, visiting associated sites in Europe is a way of bridging this postmemory with reality. The contemporary experience of Holocaust sites by post-Holocaust generations provides a practical dimension to their perception of the Holocaust, sometimes even evoking a sense of witnessing the Holocaust itself. Consequently, for children of Holocaust survivors, these trips can provide a tool for bypassing the

Download the new Independent Premium app. Sharing the full story, not just the headlines. Download now. Typically, people would have been loaded onto the trucks with around three days food supply. The journey to Auschwitz could sometimes take three weeks. Hannah Bills. At one point while touring the camp, dozens of those in the 62-strong Muslim delegation from 28 countries bowed their heads to the floor and prayed. The visit came just days before international commemorations to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet Red Army on 27 January 1945. Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Journey to Auschwitz. 2017-05-22T02:15:36Z (GMT) by Esther Jilovsky. For those whose access to the Holocaust is purely through its post-factum representations, visiting associated sites in Europe is a way of bridging this postmemory with reality. The contemporary experience of Holocaust sites by post-Holocaust generations provides a practical dimension to their perception of the Holocaust, sometimes even evoking a sense of witnessing the Holocaust itself. Consequently, for children of Holocaust survivors, these trips can provide a tool for bypassing the