

## **BEFORE HOLOCAUST MEMORY: MAKING SENSE OF TRAUMA BETWEEN POSTMEMORY AND CULTURAL MEMORY**

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My mother has Alzheimer's. She was diagnosed in the early 1990s. Over the years her ability to remember recent events has got steadily worse. In time my phone calls with her—she in Bexhill-on-sea on the south coast of England and I in Perth, Australia—got circular; and the circle became steadily smaller. She had a routine of questions she would ask. As the disease progressed the time it took my mother to forget the answers that I had given to her questions, and then to forget that she had asked the questions, got shorter. She would ask the question again, and again.

Through this period, until his death in February 2002, my father, her husband, remained her principal carer. In 1998 I visited them, a trip I made every three years or so. My father opened the door of their flat and we went into the lounge room where my mother was sitting. After a few moments of small talk my father went to the kitchen to make us all a cup of tea. A very English ritual! As my mother started to ask me questions about my trip and my presence in the flat, a feeling of uneasiness and disorientation crept over me. She began by asking me how the journey had been. Then she started suggesting that I must have had considerable difficulties. She said how pleased she was that I was staying—speaking as if I was a visitor rather than her son. And then she started referring to Germany. I started feeling uncanny. I hadn't been to Germany on this trip. In fact I have only been there twice. By this point I was thoroughly confused. Luckily my father came back into the room. My parents married in October 1940, a year after the outbreak of war. My father recognised the memory my mother was calling up.

As I have discussed elsewhere, my mother is Jewish, a Jew who married out and has spent her life determinedly assimilating; wanting to be a middle-class English woman.<sup>1</sup> Such an ambition was understandable in the context of the time. Ari Sherman reminds us that:

The [pre-war] refugee crisis brought painfully into consciousness the ambiguities of assimilation, especially in a

country as relatively insular and monochromatic culturally as Great Britain in the pre-war period; and the anxiety over the numbers and conspicuousness of the refugees, their sheer foreignness, the likelihood that they would stir not only anti-Semitism but anti-German feeling still latent from the First World War, was shared by government officials as well as Jewish communal leaders (1994: 4).

Louise London has commented on the pressures in England to assimilate which 'made [Anglo-Jewish leaders] distinguish between different groups of refugees' (1990: 184). Victor Jeleniewski Seidler was born in England in 1945, the child of a Polish-Jewish refugee family which, as he puts it, 'had escaped from continental Europe just before the war' (2000: 3). Seidler writes how 'becoming English' was important because:

to be English was to be 'safe'. It was this safety that parents were ready to sacrifice for, and it was part of their deep and unquestioned gratitude to England that they also tried to pass on to their children (2000: 4).

He adds that: 'Our [refugee] parents, scarred by the horrors of Nazi rule looked forward to their children "becoming English"' (2000: 4). My mother was not a refugee but she understood the importance of assimilation as a means to at least provisional safety in England, and wanted it both for herself and her children.

Through the 1930s some German-Jewish refugees managed to leave Germany and made their way to England. London writes that: 'The bulk of the emigration occurred in the nine months preceding World War II, when over 40,000 Jewish refugees entered Britain, only 11,000 or so came before November 1938' (1990: 165).<sup>2</sup> In 1933, Anglo-Jewish leaders 'promised the government that the community would shoulder the burden of this new influx' (London 1990: 170). London writes about the pleas for financial help that appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle*. After *Kristallnacht*, in November 1938, a high ranking deputation from the Council for German Jewry made

representations to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, to facilitate the temporary admission of young people under seventeen for training and education (London 1990: 180–1). The result has become known as the *Kindertransport*, an operation which brought around 10,000 unaccompanied children, almost all Jewish, from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland to Britain. Walter was one of these children. He arrived in England in March 1939, aged eleven and was picked up from the train station by my mother and one of her sisters. Walter came from Berlin. He was seven when the Nazis passed the Nuremberg anti-Jewish racial purity laws and lived through *Kristallnacht*. Up until I came to write this article I knew only that he was a refugee who had stayed with my mother's family.<sup>3</sup> Walter was one of the 'perhaps 40,000 Jewish refugees' that the Home Office grudgingly accepted into the British population after the war (London 1990: 190). Subsequently, he went to the United States. What happened to Walter, though, is not the point of my story.

As the effect of the Alzheimer's deepened, my mother had started mapping events from her past onto the present as a way of making sense of her here and now. For her, this man who had come to visit, this unrecognised stranger, was the Holocaust survivor whom her family had taken in. But it is much more complicated than this. In the late 1930s there was no Holocaust—the Holocaust, as we shall see, was a discursive construction of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, in the late 1930s the crucial, exterminating events of the Judeocide were still yet to happen. For my mother and her family, as for other English Jews, Walter and the rest of the German-Jewish refugees were escapees from the largest pogrom ever conducted against European Jews.

In my mother's mind Walter and I doubled. I, her son born in 1950, became the young refugee who had brought home to her, literally, the horror of what was unfolding across the English Channel. In conversations with my sister, the early child of the marriage, it seems she was treated with similar emotional brutality to me. It was as if our mother was constantly trying to distance herself, as if she was frightened of us, or as if we brought up for her a nameless terror that she could not face—that respectable, middle-class English women did not have—as if, perhaps, in the end, she was frightened for us.

Growing up in a Jewish refugee family, Seidler writes, 'was to grow up in the shadows of the Holocaust—the Shoah' (2000: 3). Seidler tells us that:

in our families we were to be protected from the cruelties of the past. As children we were to represent hope and the future and we were to live without the stains and injuries of the past. This was to protect us as children, but this was also to make things easier for our parents who often found it difficult to speak about what had happened to them (2000: 5–6).

I have already remarked that my mother was not a refugee, nor was her family. However, turning twenty in 1935, she learnt to fear the Nazis as her ancestors in the Pale had feared the Cossacks and, later, the Polish and Russian pogroms. She lived in the certain knowledge that, were circumstances in England to change, she would not be able to protect her children; she would not be able to protect herself. At the same time, after 1945 this was the past, unless, indeed, circumstances changed radically.

My mother's reaction to the Judeocide, as she came to understand what was happening, and what had happened, was her determined, perhaps pathological assimilation. For her, assimilation seems also to have been the best way she could protect her children. She gradually lost touch with her family. I went to my last Jewish familial gathering when I was about eleven. Seidler remarks that: 'As children we learnt about the war and we were told about the Nazis but often this was in generalized terms, sometimes as an early warning against thinking we could marry anyone who was not Jewish' (2000: 10). Implicit here is the demand that Jewish tradition be preserved. My mother would have been pleased for me to marry out, it would increase my assimilation. It would, she would have thought, increase my safety in this threatening world. Similarly, there was no talk in my family about the Nazis, or about the war. For my father, Gentile that he was, there was little to discuss about the war by the 1950s and 1960s. This helped my mother to keep silent about the Judeocide and, indeed, helped to produce an environment inimical to its discussion. Such silence may well have been a part of my mother's protection, keeping her children safe from the knowledge of such awfulness. In the non-logic of everyday life she may well have had some thought that if my sister and I did not know about the Judeocide—and, as I will go on to discuss, in the 1950s

and 1960s this was not accepted public knowledge—then we could more easily assimilate into that dominant culture where it was also not generally known about.

In my mother's mind, Walter and I, two strangers who had come to stay in the family, had merged, conjoined across approximately sixty years by her anxieties in relation to the Judeocide. Sigmund Freud comments on the double that: 'From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death' (1955: 235). In this case the relationship between those doubled was articulated by the death of six million of my mother's, and my people. My unease at being misrecognised as a German-Jewish refugee was compounded by my greater unease founded in my mother's bequeathal to me of her unimaginable terror in the face of the Nazi Judeocide.

In this article I will explore the relationship between personal knowledge and public knowledge, between the constructions of personal knowledge, as mediated by narrative memory and postmemory, and collective memory, which is now usually thought about by way of a distinction between social memory and cultural memory. I want to discuss these intersections with reference to the Holocaust. More specifically, I want to discuss the complexities of growing personal awareness as this took place in conjunction with the historical formation and public acceptance of the discourse of the Holocaust, a discourse the establishment of which coincided with what Saul Friedlander described in his 1982 book *Reflets du Nazisme* (translated as *Reflections of Nazism*) as a 'new discourse' of Nazism. This involved the return of Nazism by way of films, novels and even popular music—before Sid Vicious' 1976 punk song recorded by the Sex Pistols, 'Belsen Was a Gas', Serge Gainsbourg, the notorious French-Jewish *chanteur* released an album in 1975 entitled *Rock Around the Bunker* which included tracks called 'Nazi Rock', 'Yellow Star and 'S.S. in Uruguay'. Friedlander identifies this upsurge, in the words of his book's subtitle, as a preoccupation with 'kitsch and death'. It also involved a more or less pornographic working over of the mechanics of the Judeocide.

My coming to terms with my relation to the Judeocide coincided with, and was inevitably influenced by, these two developments in cultural memory. Indeed, as a secular Jew

with no formal Jewish cultural capital my growing awareness of what it means to be Jewish was inevitably tracked on my increasing understanding of what happened to European Jewry, and this as the Judeocide was getting constructed as genocide, itself a new term, and as the Holocaust. In this article, then, I shall also write about what I shall call, coining a neologism, the *traumascape* of my life. Writing about my own *traumascape* places it within the context of personal myth which Kali Tal defines as 'the particular set of explanations and expectations generated by an individual to account for his or her circumstances and actions' (1996: 116). Here, *traumascape* refers to those events which, in retrospect, I can construct into a personal narrative influenced by transgenerational haunting and postmemory, a narrative about coming to terms with trauma—trauma in this case handed on from my mother as affect.

### **Cultural Memory and the Discourse of the Holocaust**

In his discussion of the generic technique he calls *traumatic realism*, Michael Rothberg remarks that, 'traumatic realism is an attempt to produce the traumatic event as an object of knowledge and to program and thus transform its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to posttraumatic culture' (2000: 103). The traumatic event to which Rothberg is referring is the Holocaust. But when and how did the Judeocide become culturally traumatic, and for whom? Writing about individual experiences, Ernst van Alphen argues that:

experience of an event or history is dependent on the terms the symbolic order offers. It needs these terms to transform living through the event into an experience of the event (1999: 27).

His point is that sometimes, as with Holocaust survivors, it is not necessarily the horror of what has happened which makes it impossible to talk about, to narrativise, but rather that there is no appropriate discourse to transform what has occurred into experience. '[T]he problem for Holocaust survivors', he writes, 'is precisely that the lived events could not be experienced because language did not provide the terms and positions in which to experience them, thus they are defined as *traumatic*' (1999: 27). The sense might be clearer here if we substitute 'traumatising' for 'traumatic'. The

events were not in themselves traumatic but they were traumatising.

When applying the model of trauma to the western experience of the Judeocide it is usual to anthropomorphise and think of the period between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s in terms of Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit*, delayed action, the time between the traumatising event and the person's ability to narrativise that event as experience. The first problem here is whether culture as such can be traumatised. If trauma can be defined as referring to the effect of a shock that breaks through a person's narrativised identity, can this process be applied to a culture, indeed to western culture? If it can, then this would suggest that western culture after the Judeocide could be posttraumatic. However, while those caught up in the Judeocide found the events traumatising, to suggest that western culture was itself traumatised implies a degree of self-consciousness not applicable to culture. Thus, it is not until the Judeocide gets constructed as the Holocaust, with all the absolutist moral freight attached to that term, and with the discursive understanding that the Holocaust was culturally traumatic, that we can think of western culture as posttraumatic. More, it is only when the Judeocide becomes discursively constructed as the Holocaust, and as traumatic, that there is a public space in which the traumas of Holocaust survivors make sense, not just as individual trauma but as experiences within a greater, cultural trauma.<sup>4</sup> Only at this time can the individual narratives of survivors become valued as testimonies in the witnessing to a cultural experience of trauma. One of the implications of this argument is that, for around thirty years, there was no fit between individual trauma related to the Judeocide and cultural understanding. Moreover, thirty years is roughly a generation. It is worth considering whether what we are actually identifying is a generational trauma—that of the first European post-Holocaust generation.

At this point it is useful to begin to think about the concept of cultural memory. The idea derives from Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory. In 'The social frameworks of memory', Halbwachs commented that: 'One is rather astonished when reading psychological treatises that deal with memory to find that people are considered there as isolated beings' (1992: 38). He argues that, to the contrary 'it is in society that people normally acquire their

memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories' (1992: 38).

Individual memory is constructed in a dynamic relation with society. More specifically, individual memory is formed in relation to the society's collective memory. For Halbwachs: 'It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection' (1992: 38). Memory might appear to be a personal matter, born out of one's own individual experience but it is located in the ways the society as a whole remembers, and makes sense of things. This, of course, changes over time and, with it, not only how we, as individuals, make sense of the world but also how we remember our experiences in the world.

Halbwachs had a Catholic background. However, his main influences, first Henri Bergson and then Emile Durkheim, were both Jewish, the one concerned with memory and time, the other with collective representations. This at a time when Jewish identity was under threat from the disintegration of Jewish communal memory—or, as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi puts it, using Halbwachs' own concept:

The collective memories of the Jewish people were a function of the shared faith, cohesiveness, and the will of the group itself, transmitting and recreating its past through an entire complex of interlocking social and religious institutions that functioned organically to achieve this. The decline of Jewish collective memory in modern times is only a symptom of the unravelling of that common network of belief and praxis through whose mechanisms ... the past was once made present (1982: 94).

Omer Bartov argues that Halbwachs' interest in collective memory was not surprising. It grew out of 'a France haunted by the proximity of total war and devastation, and by the abyss that 1914–18 had torn between the present and the pre-war past, transformed in a series of brutal, bloody battles into a dim, far-off, sentimental memory of a lost world' (2000: 76). Bartov goes on: 'Nor is it mere coincidence that both the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who had coined and analysed this concept, and the historian Marc Bloch, who had pioneered the study of collective

mentalities and the role of fraud and error in history, became victims of a historical moment in which a regime determined to “correct” the memory of the past had occupied a nation unable to be reconciled with its own memories of that same event’ (2000: 76). Halbwachs was born in Reims, whence his parents had moved six years before, having left Alsace when it became German after the Franco-Prussian war. That is to say, Halbwachs’ background was a geographical area which had competing national memories attempting to legitimate ownership. Both national and communal memory anxieties, exacerbated by the effects of the devastation of the First World War, influenced Halbwachs. Bloch, a Jew, joined the Resistance and was tortured and shot by the Nazis in 1944. Halbwachs, married to a Jew, was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp where he died, after he travelled to Lyons to complain about the murder of his eighty-year-old in-laws, both killed by either the Vichy militia or the Gestapo.<sup>5</sup>

Where Halbwachs wrote about social memory, emphasising the extent to which individual memory was imbricated with, for example, family memory, since the 1980s there has been a conceptual shift to the idea of cultural memory. In the important *Acts of Memory* collection, Mieke Bal writes on behalf of the contributors that: ‘We ... view cultural memorization as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and re-described even as it continues to shape the future’ (1999: vii). Using the notion of cultural memory is a way of thinking outside of the roles played by particular social institutions in the formation of memory. Cultural memory recognises that cultures reproduce and reform themselves and that, in this process, understandings of the past are transformed. Furthermore, as Bal goes on to write: ‘The interaction between present and past that is the stuff of cultural memory is ... the product of collective agency rather than the result of psychic and historical accident’ (1999: vii). The past makes sense on the terms of the present and, moreover, individual understanding of the present is mediated by cultural memory. The discourse of the Holocaust not only gives us a way of understanding certain past events, it is a means of remembering those events and, more, a way of understanding individual trauma that is removed from those events—trauma, we might say, as transgenerational haunting.

However, before we go there, we must first briefly examine the historicity of the discourse of the Holocaust. In his overview of the evolution of the discourse, Tim Cole asserts that: ‘While the Holocaust was perpetrated in Europe during 1941–45, it was not really until the early 1960s that anything like widespread awareness of the ‘Holocaust’ began to emerge’ (1999: 7). At this time, as Cole indicates, the Judeocide was not yet known as the Holocaust. What is often argued, and Cole repeats the claim, is that it was the Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, in 1961, which brought widespread public knowledge of the Judeocide. As Cole writes: ‘It was a trial concerned with the *Shoah*, and was a self-conscious attempt to bring awareness of the massacre of six million European Jews to both native-born Israeli youth and the wider world’ (1999: 7). Within Israel a divide had evolved between the survivors of the Judeocide and the Israeli-born young people. The survivors were silenced and looked down on by an Israeli generation which had been brought up to fight for its land.

Ben-Gurion’s intention was to use the trial as a way of uniting Israel. For the first time the survivors were able to tell their stories in a public forum. Cole writes:

The speaking out of these survivors in the Jerusalem courthouse became the signal for a more general speaking out of survivors across the country. The silence was broken both within and outside of the courthouse (1999: 64).

Nevertheless, at this time there was still no possibility of understanding what had happened in a unifying form, and understanding it as something either unique or new, or both.

Throughout this period the Judeocide was still thought of within a continuity with previous events. Gerd Korman notes the great Jewish historian Salo Baron talking in 1950 of the need to examine the ‘dissimilarities as well as the similarities between the great tragedy and the many lesser tragedies which preceded it’ (Korman 1972: 255). Korman writes that:

in 1949, there was no ‘Holocaust’ in the English language in the way that the term is used today [1972]. Scholars and writers had used ‘permanent pogrom’. . . or the ‘recent catastrophe’, or ‘disaster’, or ‘the disaster’ (1972: 259).

At the Nuremberg trial of Nazis accused of war crimes, which ran from November 1945 to October 1946: 'On numerous occasions, [Robert H. Jackson, the chief counsel for the United States] and other prosecutors used the term *pogrom* to describe Nazi persecutions [of the Jews]' (Douglas 2001: 286). Generally speaking, the rhetoric of 'concentration camps' was used as the key figure for the events of the Judeocide.

Hannah Arendt, Korman tells us, looked for what was new and unprecedented in the concentration camps in their connection to totalitarianism (Korman 1972: 258). Arendt was certainly arguing strongly for the novelty of what had taken place. In her book on the Eichmann trial published in 1963, but a compilation of reports she had written at the trial itself which had been published in *The New Yorker*, she wrote about:

how little Israel, like the Jewish people in general, was prepared to recognize, in the crimes that Eichmann was accused of, an unprecedented crime, and precisely how difficult such a recognition must have been for the Jewish people. In the eyes of the Jews, thinking exclusively in terms of their own history, the catastrophe that had befallen them under Hitler, in which a third of the people perished, appeared not as the most recent of crimes, the unprecedented crime of genocide, but, on the contrary, as the oldest crime they knew and remembered. ... None of the participants ever arrived at a clear understanding of the actual horror of Auschwitz, which is of a different nature from all the atrocities of the past, because it appeared to prosecution and judges alike as not much more than the most horrible pogrom in Jewish history (1994: 267).

While the Eichmann trial increased awareness of the Judeocide, it did not do so in terms that would make it culturally understandable as a traumatic episode. Rather, what had happened was placed within a normalising historical narrative, and this in both Jewish and dominant western perspectives.

In the United States, Paul Breines argues that it was the 1967 Six Day Arab-Israeli War which marked the turning point in Jewish public awareness of the Judeocide. Breines writes:

It is really only *after* the June 1967 war that we see the proliferation of scholarly studies, films, courses, lectures, conferences, tough Jewish fiction, and

intense popular discussion. Among American Jews, Israel's victory in June 1967 expanded and escalated what had previously been a limited relationship to the Holocaust (1992: 72).

Breines' argument, in his words, is that: 'The Israeli triumph in the Six Day War provided American Jews with the imagery of Jewish toughness and politico-military self-assertion which enabled them to rethink the Holocaust as something more than simply Jewish passivity and victimization' (1992: 72-3).

It needs to be remembered that Breines is writing about Jews, and specifically American Jews. In general, there was an increased awareness among Jews of the circumstances of the Judeocide during the decade of the 1960s. For Jews as a community, there began to be established a cultural memory of the Judeocide which understood it in terms of disaster or catastrophe and placed it within a narrative of such events. The Yiddish term *khurban* carries this kind of understanding. For Jews outside of the community, I think for example of myself here, and for the general population, there was still little cultural knowledge of the Judeocide. It was an event in the Second World War, and a minor one in the context of a narrative about Allied victory over the Axis forces.

When the Judeocide was thought about it was in the particularised, piecemeal terms of concentration camps, and the treatment of inmates within these camps. This was in part a consequence of the screenings of film footage taken by the Allied forces when they liberated the concentration camps. Bergen-Belsen was the first camp entered by British troops and, as Cole writes: 'The harrowing film footage of piles of corpses was shown in British cinemas shortly after liberation on 15 April 1945, and ensured that 'Belsen' became a synonym for Hitlerian atrocities' (1999: 98). By the 1960s this footage was rarely shown. In my own experience, at the age of twelve or thirteen I had much greater access to literature, mostly war novels, about Japanese atrocities on Allied servicemen in prisoner of war camps. At that time I had no clear understanding of the difference between POW camps and concentration camps so it was easy to imagine what I read happening in these POW camps as the horror of concentration camps. This Japanese POW camp literature worked within the dominant narrative of the Second World War. It functioned by way of a

binary of British/European civilisation and Asian savagery. In the process it served to occlude the Judeocide and reinstate the values of colonial modernity.

What transformed knowledge of the Judeocide and established it in cultural memory as a defining moment in modern, western history was the discourse of the Holocaust. It seems that there are rare cases of the use of 'holocaust' to describe the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. However, the Israeli memorial of remembrance, Yad Vashem, founded in 1953, was still translating *shoah* as 'Disaster' in 1955 (Korman 1972: 260). Korman dates the new usage of Holocaust to between 1957 and 1959. It was used at the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem in 1957. After 1959 Yad Vashem gave 'Holocaust' its official imprimatur, switching from translating Shoah as Disaster to Holocaust. We find here also the origin of the capitalisation of Holocaust. This practice, following the capitalisation of Disaster, suggests the special, transcendent, quality of the events being named. Raul Hilberg's magisterial *The Destruction of the European Jews*, published in 1961, still did not use Holocaust. Peter Novick writes that, at the time that Hilberg was writing his doctoral thesis at Columbia:

The Holocaust had not, at this point, become as sacralized as it was subsequently to become. But there was already a great deal of visceral resistance to its being discussed in terms other than the confrontation of pure evil and pure virtue (1999: 141).

The word, and the discourse associated with it, was not yet fully established. However, Breines tells us that: 'By 1967 *Holocaust*, with its immense and eventually mind-numbing resonance, was becoming the central term of Jewish American discussion and identity' (1992: 71). Korman notes that by 1968 there were so many books making use of the term that in that year the Library of Congress' Catalogue Division established a new category for 'Holocaust—Jewish, 1939–1945' (1972: 261).

However, Holocaust was still used more in the United States and still predominantly within the Jewish community. It was, without a doubt, the NBC mini-series *Holocaust*, shown in the United States in 1978 and subsequently around Europe to massive television audiences, that got the word Holocaust general acceptance (Shandler 1999). The point here, though, is

not just about the take up of a word, it is about the discourse expressed through that word. The immense popularity of the mini-series suggests that the Judeocide was already becoming a part of a general, non-Jewish cultural memory. The utility of the discourse of the Holocaust has been that it not only unified the disparate events of the Judeocide such as *Kristellnacht*, the race laws, the concentration camps, the ghettos, and so on, it has also provided the site of meaning for the Judeocide. Lawrence Langer has argued that: 'In one sense, all writing about the Holocaust represents a retrospective effort to give meaningless history a context of meaning' (1982: 185). Identifying the Judeocide as the Holocaust has the same result.

The mini-series helped to establish the Holocaust as having a western universal, that is no longer specifically Jewish, theme. The western world could now think of the events of the Judeocide as the Holocaust, as a morality story about Good and Evil. At the same time, in its new discursive form the Judeocide could be thought of as a total entity rather than in terms of concentration camps, massacres, ghettos and so on. More, the discourse satisfied Arendt's concerns—the Holocaust was thought of as unique and unprecedented—at least in part no doubt a consequence of the championing of the term in the 1960s by writers such as Elie Weisel. The Holocaust also embraced another of Arendt's preoccupations, that the Judeocide be thought of as genocide. Genocide, a neologism coined by Raphael Lemkin in his 1944 book, now became the key for understanding the horror of the Holocaust—that the Nazis had aimed for the destruction of an entire people. However, as I have remarked, the general construction of cultural memory in terms of Holocaust discourse did not take place until the time of the television mini-series. In England in the 1970s people could still remark that an exceptionally thin person 'looked like something out of Belsen' (note the distancing objectification here), and, as I have mentioned, Sid Vicious could write 'Belsen Was a Gas' for his band Flowers of Romance in 1976, a song subsequently recorded by the archetypal punk band the Sex Pistols with Ronnie Biggs, the Great Train Robber, in 1977.<sup>6</sup>

### Trauma and Postmemory

What was it like to grow up in this environment in England in the 1950s and 1960s, the son of a fearful assimilating Jew

who had no way of talking about her own fears brought about by what the Nazis had done and, indeed, no discourse in which to conceptualise what had happened? Most importantly, I think, my mother, like many thousands, possibly tens of thousands, of others, had no way of understanding her relationship to what had taken place as traumatising. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was formally accepted as a medical diagnosis in 1980 in the wake of the Vietnam War when it was included in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Leys 2000: 231–2). Trauma only became a publicly recognised way of thinking about the effects of certain events on individuals in the 1980s. Even then it has only been applied to those directly affected by events happening to them personally, such as sexual abuse, or caught up in events such as the Vietnam War and, retrospectively, the Holocaust. Given her situation in post-Second World War England, my mother's, most probably unconsidered, solution was silence. How could my mother even consider it worth contemplating to talk about, for example, how she felt when Walter came into her apparently safe, middle-class Anglo-Jewish family life with his tales of the persecution of people just like her in Germany? How could she think it important to work through—to use a Freudian term now much in vogue with therapists, but a term, and a way of thinking that would have been completely unknown to her—her reactions to her growing knowledge that the Jews who had at first been persecuted and ill-treated across that short distance of the English Channel were later actually being rounded up for extermination? And this when the Nazis had occupied the Channel Islands in 1940 and looked set to invade England. After the war my mother would have had no language to discuss her reactions to the film footage from the concentration camps and her anxieties for the future that her children were being born into, and in any case, nobody with whom she could talk about these things who could understand what they meant to her. Certainly not my father, the man she had married for, among other things, his Englishness, his situatedness as English within England; his certainty of his place.

Elsewhere I have recounted the only two times during my childhood that I remember my mother acknowledging the events that had not yet come to be thought of as the Holocaust. Once was a disconcertingly light-

hearted reference to 'the Germans killing all our relatives over there'—as close a paraphrase as I can recall. The other was her rage when she discovered that the birthday present I had given her had been made in Germany.<sup>7</sup> I knew, even then, that her anger was disproportionate, indeed inappropriate, to what she saw as the offence I had committed. Looking back I can suggest the connection between her anger and her fear, emotions born of her reactions to events that she had no way of expressing and no context for understanding.

How has all this, my mother's unrecognised trauma, manifested in my life? In 'Notes on the Phantom', Nicolas Abraham writes about transgenerational haunting in terms of a phantom. He argues that 'what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others' (1994: 171). Abraham describes the phantom as:

a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent's unconscious into the child's. Clearly, the phantom has a function different from dynamic repression. The phantom's periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography (173).

Abraham's phantom originates in the parent's unconscious and is handed on to the unconscious of the next generation where it acts as the return of the parent's repression.

We can compliment this idea with Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory which she explicitly ties to trauma. She writes:

I use the term *postmemory* to describe the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. The term is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its belatedness. Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment and creation (1999: 8).

My mother is not a survivor in the conventional sense, a sense by the way which has only become conventional since the establishment of the discourse of the Holocaust. My mother, like so very many others, has no stories and images of rapid evacuations or atrocities that she has handed on. Rather, my mother's trauma was a secondary effect, a trauma brought on by witnessing what others went through, albeit at a mediated remove, and the fear that their fate could become her own, or her children's. What was passed on was a vague focus—beware of Germans, they do awful things; they murdered Jews during the Second World War. This was not a phantom, it was evident in the two stories which I have told and it was a constant presence in my mother's attitude to German people and to, for example, news stories in the paper or on television concerning Germany or Germans; if a German had been killed in an accident she might remark: 'Good riddance'. It is also not strictly postmemory in that it was a *reaction* that was passed on, a reaction expressing an emotional complex made up of fear, anger, perhaps sadness and other emotions. All these passed on without realisation, a legacy composed of affect.

Hirsch identifies well the expression of postmemory. The manifestation of the next generation's inheritance of the trauma in displacement, its belated repetition acted out, as she writes, in projection, investment and creation. It is these phantasmatic repetitions, retrospectively identified and narrativised, that I am describing as a traumascap. For large numbers of the second generation after the Judeocide, this postmemorial acting out coincided with attempts to find out, and understand, what had happened—and in my case, and doubtless that of many others, to situate myself somehow in relation to this knowledge. In 'Projected Memory' Hirsch retells my friend Mitzi Goldman's story, 'her strange memories of the Jewish school she attended, where, on rainy days when they could not go outside at lunchtime, the children were shown films about the Holocaust' (1999: 13). I did not go to a Jewish school and I did not have such questionable assistance in finding out what had taken place. Furthermore, finding out was, in itself, complicated, as I now realise, by the changing cultural memory of the Judeocide.

Let me begin to describe some of my own traumascap with a school story of my own.

To the best of my knowledge I was the only Jew, certainly in my year—there may have been others in the school but I was so totally, if uncomfortably, assimilated that I didn't seek them out—and, with my very English family name, they didn't come looking for me. I do remember a rather overweight younger boy called Schlomo but I never even thought of him as Jewish. My English teacher was a young, Christian, Cambridge-educated man. Thoughtful and kind, he had an ability to enthuse us, me anyway, with the literature he had us read. During a number of classes when I was, I think, fifteen, he worked through an anthology of modern English verse. Two of the poems in that collection were by Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus'. Plath wrote both these poems in 1962. My memory is that our teacher said little or nothing about the Jewish references in the poems. Rather, he concentrated on the suicide theme in 'Lady Lazarus'. What is it, the class wanted to know, that the narrator—and is the narrator here indeed the author?—has done again, and does, it seems every ten years? Even then, before the rise in teenage suicides, discussing this with sixteen-year-olds was not easy. Much of the class time was taken up with teasing out the narrator's emotional state. In 'Daddy' the discussion, in my recall, centred on the female narrator's relationship with her father. My school was single-sex and most of us were boarders. A poem which explored the relationship between father and daughter from the daughter's point of view was fascinating for boys of our age. It seems extraordinary today to think that these poems could have been talked about in a school class without referring to their take-up of the Judeocide but, again, we must remember that this was a class of non-Jews—how could what happened to the Jews be relevant—and, besides, what had taken place in the concentration camps was surely too awful for the impressionable minds of fifteen-year-olds.

I was left to ponder these poems on my own. What had they to do with me, to do with me being a Jew? What is the anguish in 'Lady Lazarus', I wondered. What has suicide got to do with Jews? I understood Plath to be describing the horror of the concentration camps, a term I knew:

'Ash, ash—

You poke and stir.

Flesh, bone, there is nothing there—

A cake of soap.

A wedding ring.

A gold filling.

I connected with the affect though I did not know why. I had heard stories of the skin of victims being turned into lampshades, something to which Plath refers in the poem's second stanza. I knew, what I now understand to have been British propaganda, that Nazis had made soap from the Jewish bodies.<sup>8</sup> I did not know that the Nazis had taken the wedding rings and the gold fillings and made piles of these. The poem wove in and out of my little knowledge. It conjured feelings I had that I could not explain, and that I had no space to talk about and no way to talk about in that classroom with those boys.

'Daddy' was not quite as powerful for me. I related to it more incoherently. The speaker appeared to be the Jewish daughter of a German and a Jew; I was the Jewish son of an Englishman and a Jew. At the same time the poem's attitude to the German father resonated for me with my mother's attitude towards Germans. In particular there was this stanza:

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I think I may well be a Jew.

I knew Belsen had been a concentration camp. I had never heard of Dachau.<sup>9</sup> I identified with the speaker's uncertainty about her Jewishness and empathised with the inevitability, in spite of her uncertainty, of her being sent to a camp. Importantly, the poems spoke to me about this Jewish experience. They broke my mother's silence and I realised that there were people out there who knew and thought and wrote about these things.

What I didn't know then was that Plath was not Jewish, was not herself the daughter of a mixed marriage. I accepted relatively unproblematically that the speaker of 'Daddy' was the speaker of 'Lady Lazarus' and that she was Plath, the author. James Young has written about Plath's use of the image of the 'Holocaust Jew', the victim. He

explains that: 'The Holocaust exists for her not as an experience to be retold or described but as an event available to her (as it was to all who came after) only as a figure, an idea, in whose image she has expressed another brutal reality: that of her own internal pain' (1990: 118).<sup>10</sup> For me at fifteen, the emotional pain in the poems connected with the pain that I had inherited and, expressed through the imagery of Jewish suffering in the camps, and at the hands of the Germans, offered me a way of beginning to think about these things and myself as a Jew. My emotional investment in these poems can, I think, be understood as an example of the work of postmemory. In this sense they mediated for me a knowledge, and an affect, which has been handed on to me in the silence of repression.

For a different purpose I have briefly written about the relationship I had with a Jewish woman while in my twenties.<sup>11</sup> In terms of my traumascapes this needs to be set in a context. During my final year as an undergraduate, a couple of years before I met this woman, I had a shortish relationship with a German exchange student who had come to Bradford University where I was studying. How to make sense of these two relationships symptomatically, closely juxtaposed as they were? My relationships with a German and then a Jewish woman can be read as an acting out of my fraught relationship with my mother and, simultaneously, an attempt to come to terms with my own Jewishness. There was, I think, a certain frisson of transgression for me with my German friend. This was not a relationship I ever told my mother about. There was a sense in which it was a rebellious act, as indeed was my later relationship, for my mother had not formed my identity as an Englishman to have me go out with a Jew. However, while this was also a rebellious act, and one linked by the same context, it was of a different order. What could be constructed as evidence of my failure to assimilate was different from my sleeping with the enemy.

At the time I met my German friend, in the very early 1970s, I still had not thought through what for me was not to become the Holocaust until the late 1970s—though I must say that I felt very relieved when she mentioned (though was this by chance?) that her parents had been in Africa during the war. I had been to Germany once, for a couple of days on a camping holiday with friends when we had driven across Europe

to Italy and back. Being in Germany had disturbed me. Today I would say that I felt uncanny. Seidler tells a story about visiting Poland with his partner. On Warsaw station she left him to go and report a robbery. He writes: 'Waiting in the station for Anna felt fine at the beginning but then I felt uneasy and nervous' (2000: ix). He goes on:

when Anna returned from a different direction about forty minutes later I knew that I just needed to leave. I could not deal with the insecurities that were emerging and I felt terribly unsafe (2000: ix).

I was much younger than Seidler on my first visit to Germany and much less in touch with my feelings. All I knew was that for some reason I was on edge, that being there made me feel uncomfortable. I didn't connect the feelings with my mother's hatred of all things German or with her silenced fears over the Judeocide. There was, it seems, a two-fold process at work here: my feeling of uncanniness which was the result of my transgenerational haunting and my feeling of unease, my anxiety at being in Germany, which was the affect of the phantom that I had inherited.

My German friend went to university in Saarbrücken. I visited her there once. By this time her English had somewhat declined and my German, which I had learnt as a special subject at school—and done worse in than any other subject I had taken—was negligible. My friend took me to meet some friends of hers. This I could understand. Then she took me to meet some more, and more wanted to meet me. I began to think something strange was happening. I tackled my friend about it. She told me that word had got round that I was Jewish. These young people in their early twenties knew that the previous generation, maybe their parents or relatives, had destroyed the Jewish population of Saarbrücken, and of Europe. They themselves had never met a Jew.

I was aghast, not so much at being an exhibit (for me now it has disturbing colonial connotations of being a specimen) as being exhibited as a Jew. Me, totally assimilated, with no knowledge of Judaism, no Jewish cultural knowledge, whatever that might be, was being taken by these people as an example of those no longer present in Germany.<sup>12</sup> The complex, unconscious intertwinings of desire and death which drove my friend's and my relationship—

what, after all, was her stake in this?—had been transformed, for me, into a very confrontational moment. While I had felt safe with my friend, helped no doubt by knowing that the French border was so very close, I was now led in a most confrontational way to the knowledge that my mother had repressed and, seemingly, had wanted me not to know.

Twenty years later Saarbrücken got its own anti-memorial to what, by 1990, was generally known as the Holocaust. Jochen Getz made his first anti-memorial in 1972, the year of my visit. As James Young writes: 'Between 1972 and 1998 [Gerz] has...opened a new generation's eyes to the essential incapacity in conventional public institutions like the museum or the monument to serve as wholly adequate sites for Germany's tortured memory of the Holocaust' (2000:121–2). At Saarbrücken, Gerz's students secretly removed cobblestones from the square leading to the Saarbrücken Schloss, engraved their undersides with the names of disused Jewish cemeteries in Germany and replaced them. The Gestapo had occupied the Schloss during Hitler's Reich. The town's Jews had been brought to the square on *Kristallnacht* in 1938 to be publicly humiliated. The remnants of Saarbrücken's Jewish population had been assembled in the square to be deported to Gurs in southern France on 22 October 1940 (Young 2000: 140). At the time of my visit this kind of information was not public, general knowledge, not a part of local cultural memory.

The autobiographical narrative that I am constructing leads towards a consciousness of the Judeocide, understood in the late 1970s in the terms of the discourse of the Holocaust, and a gradual awareness of my situatedness as a Jew in relation to the Judeocide. Another important moment in this trajectory came around the time I met my Jewish friend, shortly after I had gone to the University of Essex to study for my Masters. Sometime in 1973 or 1974 somebody at the university showed a print of Vittorio De Sica's 1971 film, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. De Sica's reputation was made in the Italian neo-realist movement of the late 1940s and 1950s. After a long, relatively fallow period *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* was highly acclaimed and won De Sica an Oscar for best foreign language film. These were the things I knew about the film when I went to watch it in one of the university's larger

lecture theatres. What I did not know, or chose to ignore, was that this is a film about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. I had never given much thought to what had happened to the Jews in Mussolini's fascist Italy.

The film asks to be read as an elegiac evocation of a lost era of harmonious community relations before fascism transformed Italy.<sup>13</sup> The Finzi-Continis are a very wealthy and assimilated Jewish family who live in palatial circumstances with a large, wonderful, peaceful garden protected from the world outside by a high wall. As fascism takes hold the family retreat behind their wall. The film begins in 1938. Much of its narrative concerns Giorgio's doomed love for his childhood friend, Micòl of the Finzi-Continis. Giorgio comes from a middle-class Jewish family which, in spite of the father's attempts to put a positive light on Italian fascism, is increasingly affected by the new laws restricting the lives of Jews. Micòl retreats into her family's private world. Finally, one day in 1943, the fascist police come to the Finzi-Continis' home, identify them in a roll-call and take them to an assembly point with the other Jews of Ferrara, prefatory to deportation to a concentration camp.

In the film's narrative the menace increases slowly and subtly. As a viewer I became totally involved. When the police came to take the Finzi-Continis away I found myself on my feet shouting at the screen. What was it that I was feeling—anger at the fascist destruction of these Jews; anger at the Finzi-Continis for their passive acceptance of their fate? I don't know. I think probably both. The Finzi-Continis' behaviour must have reminded me of my mother's determined assimilation, and maybe even her apparent refusal to confront what had happened in the Judeocide. Equally, I had, I think, found my anger at what the Nazis had done—an anger which was also my mother's anger transgenerationally haunting me but, as well, a postmemory acted out in a projection onto De Sica's film. I sat down embarrassed and confused. My friends, none of whom was Jewish, didn't mention the incident.

### **Living In Posttraumatic Society**

One marker, at least for me, for the spread of what Friedlander calls the new discourse of Nazism was Liliana Cavani's 1974 film, *The Night Porter*. This film stars Dirk Bogarde as Max, an ex-Nazi officer who

now, in 1957, works as a night porter in a hotel in Vienna. To this hotel comes Lucia, played by Charlotte Rampling, and her husband. It turns out that Lucia was a young prisoner in the concentration camp where Max was stationed. In the camp Max had forced Lucia into a sexual relationship with him. Now, many years on, the two return to that sado-masochistic relationship within the claustrophobic confines of Max's apartment room. Analytically, we could read this as traumatic repetition. I went to see this film with my Jewish friend when it was released in England and found myself speechless and riven with anxiety. I remember us leaving the cinema, silent and awkward with each other.

As Friedlander documents, through the latter part of the 1970s there was an outpouring of literature and film, fiction and non-fiction, about Hitler and Nazism (1993, *passim*). Much of it was taken with the erotic qualities of the Nazis. Cavani's film, with its portrayal of tortured sex intermingling with violence, was the respectable tip of a pornographic iceberg the most notorious filmic example being *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the S.S.*, also released in 1974. *Ilsa* was set in a Nazi slave labour camp—actually the set of the television series *Hogan's Heroes*—in which Ilsa, played by Dyanne Thorne, is the camp commandant. She has two preoccupations, having sex with the male prisoners, castrating those who fail to satisfy her, and experimenting to find out if women can stand more pain than men. A large number of these films are set in concentration camps. These include the Italian-made *Last Orgy of the Third Reich* (1976) and the American *Prisoners of Paradise* (1980). In some, but by no means all of these films, such as *Last Orgy* and *Nazi Love Camp 27* (1977), the women are supposed to be Jewish. My point here is that the concentration camp films were a sub-genre within this new representational concern with Nazism, and that these are not, in the first instance, Holocaust pornography. Lucia, in *The Night Porter*, is described as the daughter of a socialist, she is not identified as Jewish although in the flashback to her round-up there are many in the group wearing yellow stars. These films come out of the post-Second World War narrative in which what happened to the Jews was simply one aspect of the war.

Friedlander argues that the preoccupation with Nazism offers a way of expressing opposing needs to be found in modern civilisation:

*Modern society and the bourgeois order are perceived both as an accomplishment and as an unbearable yoke. Hence this constant coming and going between the need for submission and the reveries of total destruction, between love of harmony and the phantasms of apocalypse, between the enchantment of Good Friday and the twilight of the Gods* (1993: 135, Friedlander's italics).

Embedded in this dichotomy is modernity's preoccupation with sex and male violence as an imbricated unity for which the concentration camp topos became the perfect vehicle. We cannot discuss this in detail here but we can note Slavoj Žižek's comment that concentration camps are 'the "perverse" obverse of twentieth-century civilization' (1989: 50). As I have argued elsewhere, concentration camps can be traced back to the eighteenth century and the rise of the modern state (Stratton 2003). In Freud's modern story of the origin of society he describes the primal horde and tells how the sons banded together to kill the Father so that they could gain access to the women of the horde whom the Father had kept for himself. Here, we find male desire and male violence intimately linked. This fantastic story is recapitulated in the familial Oedipus complex where the young son's desire for the mother, to be satisfied by killing the father and taking his place, is thwarted by the son's fear of castration. Freud comments that: 'A considerable amount of aggressiveness must be developed in the child against the authority which prevents him from having his first, but none the less his most important, satisfactions' (1961: 129). This characterisation of the male child's sexual life in the modern, nuclear, privatised family, with its freight of aggression, returns us to the idea of concentration camps by way of the German author Dieter Duhm who, in *Angst im Kapitalismus (Fear in Capitalism)*, published in 1972, described families as 'this massive number of private concentration camps' (cited in Herzog 2000: 130). However, this is a recapitulation of a more profound modern structure. Concentration camps provide a patrolled space for the extreme violence that had been acted out previously—and continued to be acted out—by the Europeans on the Others identified on the colonial periphery. What the Nazis imported into the concentration and death camps, and into the space of Europe, was the modern, historical production of Same and Other, a production expressed in the distinction between 'European' and 'non-European' and, by the

nineteenth century, 'white' and 'coloured'.<sup>14</sup> This historical construction of Difference was a founding moment of narcissistic trauma which gets acted out as excessive, sexualised violence on those constructed as Other.

Andrea Dworkin, in her account of pornography as the expression of male sexual violence against women, *Pornography*, argues that the Nazis:

created a kind of sexual degradation that was—and remains—unspeakable. Even Sade did not dare to imagine what the Nazis created and neither did the Cossacks. And so the sexualization of the Jewish woman took on a new dimension. She became the carrier of a new sexual memory, one so brutal and sadistic that its very existence changed the character of the mainstream sexual imagination. The concentration camp woman, a Jew—emaciated with bulging eyes and sagging breasts and bones sticking out all over and shaved head and covered in her own filth and cut up and whipped and stomped on and punched out and starved—became the hidden sexual secret of our time. The barely faded, easily accessible memory of her sexual degradation is at the heart of sadism against all women that is now promoted in mainstream sexual propaganda (1981: 144–5).

I am arguing that, rather than being a new figure, the Jewish concentration camp woman is the expression of what has always been repressed and marginalized—literally, to the colonial periphery—in modernity. From this point of view, the Sadean expression of power through sexual violence is normative rather than deviant. She is, then, not a new sexual memory but an unrepressed one. One element of our posttraumatic society is that the image of the Jewish concentration camp woman has become normalized. Joan Smith has written about William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* (published in 1979) that 'the secret of the novel's popularity [is that] the juxtaposition of sex and the Holocaust has been dressed up as art, thus sanctioning its passage from the back rooms to the shelves reserved for the literary' (1993: 127).<sup>15</sup> In this book the concentration camp survivor is not Jewish, allowing for a more general identification. Given the normalisation of the concentration camp woman as the legitimised expression of male sexual violence against women, it is not surprising that motifs that appear in the concentration camp film genre, such as women being fed to dogs in *Last Orgy*, repeat documented actions carried out with regularity on the colonial frontier.

The corollary is that descriptions of what took place in concentration and death camps and, indeed, the actual images photographed at the time, became pornographic opportunities for sexual arousal—even, perhaps especially, for Jews. Thus, for example, in his autobiography, Alan Kaufman, born in the Bronx to a French survivor and an American-Jewish father, tells how, one day going through the books in the children's section of the public library on Grand Concourse, he found a misshelved book with photos taken in the camps:

There followed photograph after photograph of naked corpses piled up in pits and on wagons and arranged on the ground.

In one such picture I caught the curve of a beautiful breast, looked more closely. There was a matching breast visible, equally voluptuous, the pair belonging to a shapely body spread pinwheeled on the ground, head flung back and mouth agape. The soft, pretty face was not skeletal like the others. I could imagine the woman alive, developed an erection. Eyes closed, envisioned my fingers cupping her breasts, penis grazing her lips ... When I opened my eyes, saw that she was dead among others, anonymously, her teeth jutting from her limp jaw, her legs twisted unbecomingly in the open pit, my erection shriveled instantly (Kaufman 2000: 49).

Kaufman associates the dead woman with his mother, whose behaviour betrays her traumatised connection with her past and with whom he has a relationship of intermingled love and fear. This gives a reason for his particular reading of these images. However, Kaufman's interaction with these images is much more common.<sup>16</sup> As is indicated in the quotation from Dworkin, these images of naked women, and men, and the narratives about what was done to them, can all too easily be appropriated as pornography—which I am defining very briefly here as culturally transgressive images that a reader appropriates voyeuristically as sexualised. With these images and descriptions the modern discourses of history and pornography commingle.

This commingling is even more fraught when it comes to reenactments. Discussing *Schindler's List*, Alan Mintz writes that:

Among the Hollywood conventions that Spielberg is least willing to part with, according to his detractors, is the intimate

connection between violence and sexuality. Despite the high calling and supreme sensitivity supposedly embodied in the making of the film, *Schindler's List* carries over the same eroticization of female victimhood found in many lesser, exploitative films on the Holocaust and in the general run of Hollywood entertainment (2001: 143).

The most egregious example is usually taken to be the Auschwitz shower scene where the naked women wait fearfully, to be relieved to discover that that the jets deliver water not gas. Placing the scene within what I have called the concentration camp genre, Omer Bartov comments that it 'would be more appropriate to a soft-porn sadomasochistic film than to its context (and here Spielberg comes dangerously close to such films as Cavani's *The Night Porter* and Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties*)' (Bartov 1997: 49; see also Horowitz 1997). The debate over whether there is gratuitous nudity in the shower scene—which has a history in a Hollywood soft-porn genre, that of male coming-of-age films such as *Porky's* (1982)—or a legitimate portrayal of what went on in the camps is, ultimately, impossible to resolve because what happened in the camps was, itself, an expression of the extreme sexual violence that haunts modernity.

Bartov writes about a form of literature available to adolescents in pre-1967 Israel. This was:

passed secretly from one youth to another, read at night under a street lamp far from the eyes of adults, hidden under stones in the backyards of tenements, never brought home, hardly ever discussed, a source of illicit excitement and shameful pleasure. These were the so-called Stalags, a type of pornographic literature that circulated in Israel of the time, written by anonymous (but most probably Israeli) writers, replete with perverse sex and sadistic violence. The excitement evoked in young readers by such pulp fiction stemmed both from the encounter with forms of human activity kept tightly sealed from them by the puritanical nature of pre-1967 Israeli society and from the fact that the central sites for these actions were the concentration camps. Nothing could be a greater taboo than deriving sexual pleasure from pornography in the context of the Holocaust; hence nothing could be as exciting (2000: 192–3).

Whilst the specificity is particularly worrying here, that young Israeli Jews—

predominantly male, one would think—should learn about sex and sexual relationships by way of Holocaust pornography, such pornography utilising concentration camps became relatively common in the west, as the concentration camp film genre makes clear. What the topos of the camp has offered has been the opportunity to portray the most extreme forms of sexual violence available to the modern imagination within a historically validated legitimating context.

Where Žižek implies that the concentration camp remains distinct from post-Holocaust society, Ka-Tzetnik, the concentration camp survivor and author of the Salamandra sextet about life in Auschwitz in which he novelised the fate of his family and himself, argues that, 'if Auschwitz is another planet, then we are still living on that planet today' (Bartov 2000: 207).<sup>17</sup> In this post-Holocaust society, the excessive aggression and sexual violence that underlies modern society, and which was brought home to Europe and played out in the concentration and death camps, has been accepted into the everyday where it is traumatically repeated in representations and acted out in everyday life.

The new discourse of Nazism, really a newly overt preoccupation, coming in the 1970s, roughly thirty years after the end of the Second World War, was a product, more or less, of that generation that came of age after the war, the post-war generations. This discourse was an appropriation and working over in many forms of the Nazi legacy. When English punks used the swastika as a part of their fashion bricolage, it was from within this new awareness of, and coming-to-terms with, Nazism by the following generations.<sup>18</sup> In 1978, when the punk band Joy Division named themselves after slang for a concentration camp barracks where forced prostitutes were kept—taken, indeed, from the second of Ka-Tzetnik's sextet, *The House of Dolls*, the fictionalised account published in 1956 of what had happened to his sister, and a book that Bartov describes as sharing some of the characteristics of Stalag pulp fiction (Bartov 2000: 194)—the transgression was in response to the terms of the discourse of Nazism not of the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup>

However, the discourse of the Holocaust was becoming established and the two discourses were beginning to overlap, especially after the watershed of the British showing of *Holocaust* in 1978. These two

discourses, individually and in complex combination, reconstituted cultural memory in Britain and in the west generally. The discourse of Nazism opened a space in which the war and the Nazi Reich could be discussed and worked over in popular culture. The discourse of the Holocaust, as I have already explained, enabled the various events of the Judeocide to be understood as a totality and for there to be debates about its unprecedentedness, its uniqueness, and its unrepresentability. The discourse also enabled the Judeocide to be understood as a cultural trauma.

Hirsh writes that:

postmemory is not an identity position, but a space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification, and projection. It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as one's own, or, more precisely, as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life-story (1999: 8–9).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there developed a space in which the inherited trauma of the Holocaust could be publicly understood and legitimised, where personal trauma could be made sense of in relation to a cultural memory of the Judeocide as the culturally traumatising event of the Holocaust. At this point my own knowledge of what had transpired coupled with my traumascapes, my repeated acting out of my inherited fears and confusions related to the Judeocide, meshed with the new cultural memory of the Holocaust in what now could be identified as posttraumatic society. This was the time that I could begin my own journey to understand the impact on me of my mother's traumatic relation to the Judeocide and its haunting of my psyche.

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#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to Jon Stratton (2000) *Coming Out Jewish*.

<sup>2</sup> For a more political history see Sherman (1994) *passim*.

- <sup>3</sup> Since my father's death and my mother's institutionalisation it has become easier for my sister and I to reconnect with our Jewish relatives. As a part of this process I am now in email contact with Walter who has kindly provided me with details about his life.
- <sup>4</sup> In *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Ron Eyerman has defined cultural trauma as 'a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all' (2001: 2). In the collection *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004) edited by Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil Smelser and Piotr Sztompka, Alexander has a chapter on the Holocaust as a cultural trauma entitled 'On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The "Holocaust" from War Crime to Trauma Drama'.
- <sup>5</sup> This biographical information on Halbwachs comes from Lewis Coser's Introduction to Maurice Halbwachs *On Collective Memory* (1992).
- <sup>6</sup> On the history of 'Belsen Was a Gas' see Jon Savage (1992).
- <sup>7</sup> I discuss these stories in 'Ghetto Thinking and Everyday Life' in *Coming Out Jewish* (2000).
- <sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this myth see Douglas (2001: 289–91).
- <sup>9</sup> Twenty or so years later a friend and colleague at an Australian university, forgetting I was Jewish as she later told me apologetically, sent me a postcard from Dachau showing the camp gates with 'Arbeit Macht Frei' over them. Quite something to find unexpectedly in one's letterbox.
- <sup>10</sup> For a more positive view of Plath's Holocaust poetry see Susan Gubar 'Prosopoeia and Holocaust poetry in English: the case of Sylvia Plath' (2002).
- <sup>11</sup> See 'Ghetto Thinking and Everyday Life' in Stratton (2000).
- <sup>12</sup> History is more complex. In *The Imaginary Jew* Alain Finkielkraut tells how, in May 1968, when news got out that the German-Jewish activist Daniel Cohn-Bendit had been refused permission to re-enter France: 'Thousands of people gathered spontaneously in the streets, and began to chant: "We are all German Jews!"' (1994: 17–8) Finkielkraut recounts his mixed emotions at this appropriation of his heritage.
- <sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the film, and the novel on which it is based, see Millicent Marcus, 'De Sica's *Garden of the Finzi-Continis*: An Escapist Paradise Lost' (2000).
- <sup>14</sup> On the historical production of European dichotomous thinking in relation to the 'discovery' of the New World see most relevantly Enrique Dussel *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (1995). I would argue that the evolution of this binary thinking in what was becoming known as Europe began before the Columbus' voyages and, indeed, one place it can be identified is in the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, also in 1492.
- <sup>15</sup> As its title suggests, the entirety of Smith's essay 'Holocaust Girls' is relevant to my argument. Smith also writes about D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* and argues that, in these portrayals, 'sex-as-death [is] the one thing that women really desire, and Lisa [in *The White Hotel*], like Sophie [in *Sophie's Choice*], is fortunate enough to have men on hand who are ready to give it to her' (1993: 137).
- <sup>16</sup> What I am describing is the 'unacceptable,' taboo encounter with Holocaust imagery. This is not a reading mentioned, for example, by Marianne Hirsch in her very fine 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory' in Barbie Zelizer ed. *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (2001). Hirsch begins her piece with

two quotations that narrate Susan Sontag's and Alice Kaplan's first encounters with images taken in the camps. Sontag offers the conventional reaction: 'One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany' (cited in Hirsch 2001: 215). Sontag writes that she came across the images in a Santa Monica bookstore when she was twelve. That Hirsch, Sontag and Kaplan are all women may be a clue to the lack of attention Hirsch pays to the pornographic possibilities of these images. Similarly, Barbie Zelizer in 'Gender and Atrocity: Women in Holocaust Photographs,' also in Zelizer ed. *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, does not write about the pornographic possibilities of these images.

- <sup>17</sup> Bartov discusses Ka-Tzetnik, his life and work, in detail in his chapter entitled 'Apocalyptic Visions.' Ka-Tzetnik moved to Tel Aviv after the war and was called to give evidence about life in Auschwitz at the Eichmann trial.
- <sup>18</sup> On English punk style see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979).
- <sup>19</sup> This can be seen in the name of the band formed out of Joy Division after the death of Ian Curtis. New Order was taken from Hitler's description of the new racial order in Europe that the Nazis were trying to create.

