

Double Pact Of Silence? Holocaust Offspring Eastern Europeans¹

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Mass violence frequently defies articulation; trauma brings a rupture with culture and it is difficult to find the appropriate words. This kind of knowledge is often forbidden knowledge, akin to primal scene fantasies. It is secret knowledge, accompanied by a compulsion to know and a defence against knowing. As the nature of the knowledge is often secret it may therefore be linked to other secrets.

Common ground

The atrocities of Shoah were of human design and not acts of God. The silence which followed was not meant to indicate siding with the perpetrator but being an “innocent” bystander. Bearing witness meant sharing the shame, the guilt, the suffering and the horror of the victim (Herman, 1992). Latency denotes a normal developmental phase in childhood. Yet in the so-called latency period (Williams and Kestenberg, 1974), in the silence which followed the Holocaust, there were rationalisations, dissociations, denials and repression, both from the survivors and from the world around them. The world was attempting to deny the Holocaust while the survivors were trying to forget. The Holocaust was not to be dealt with; in some way it was a dormant secret.

Volkan (1999) defines chosen trauma as a large group marker which a group transmits from generation to generation denoting an event which brought about narcissistic injury, humiliation and loss. It is a powerful marker which reawakens whenever the large group is in crisis. Its strength comes from the changeable tasks delegated by each generation to the next. Volkan's concept may perhaps be expanded with the possibility that a large group may have several chosen traumas, and that chosen traumas do not belong only to history but can also be formed in contemporary times. It may be that one of the reasons for the silence after the Holocaust was that a new chosen trauma was being formed, integrating with and triggering former chosen traumas: the enslavement in Egypt, the Babylon Diaspora, Haman's plot and the fall of the Second Temple.

In the early fifties, the FGR offered indemnity to victims. The first, scant data from psychiatric treatments and the first articles in psychiatric journals appeared. The topic was addressed at the IPA congress in 1967 and, a year later, a book was published under the title “Psychic Traumatization Through Social Catastrophe”. The landmark was Niederland's (1968) survivors' syndrome. It soon became quite evident that there was no uniform syndrome. Postulated as it was, it did not take sufficiently into account the individual differences among the survivors: those who were in the death camps were lumped together with those who had been resistance fighters, or in hiding; age at the outbreak of the Holocaust and the vast differences in social, economic, educational and religious backgrounds were not given adequate consideration. Pretty much the same may be said of the so-called child of the survivor complex. A universally transmitted complex simply does not exist. The complex rather denotes a spectrum of potential developmental outcomes ranging

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from relatively intact neurotic levels of functioning to features similar to those of patients with borderline or narcissistic disorders, existing as the narcissistic extension of a parent is the core of the conflict.

This is not a paper on the second generation or a paper on trauma. However, in order to make what I wish to say about secrets more understandable, I shall attempt as briefly as I can to summarise what makes up our common knowledge about the second generation. Much of the literature is coloured by a quote from Barocas, C. & Barocas, H. (1973) which begins: "The children of survivors show symptoms which would be expected if they had actually lived through the Holocaust...". Barocas is describing a mode of parenting in which the child is a transference object of a transference function. Through identification the child acts out the roles of the parents' original family, the end results often being death anxiety and death guilt. In attempting unsuccessfully to compensate for the sense of worthlessness in the parent, the child becomes the recipient of the unconscious rage. The offspring often faced similar problems, but many, as Kestenberg (1992) pointed out, showed "unusual adaptive strength in the face of adversity," and found a way out through creativity and sublimation. The basic concepts for understanding the psychic reality of the offspring are over narcissistic investment of the child (an overprotective and over controlling bereaved parent with an impaired empathic capacity provoking the child to rage and identification of the bad Self as Nazi), the conspiracy of silence (to know or not to know, sometimes in the archaic Biblical sense, thus colouring the phallic and oedipal fantasies), the survivor's guilt (pathological mourning, an attempt to resolve the existential helplessness experienced during the Holocaust).

What has happened to the parents and their children is often explained by the concept of trauma. By the IPA Congress in 1967 it had already become clear that there was a need for revision of trauma theories. Yet the concept remains tricky to the present day, merging, as it frequently does, the external event with the intrapsychic repercussions. Numerous terms can be found in the literature: shock, strain, cumulative and so on. Trauma is an individual experience, even when it is a mass one. Parents had to reintegrate their lives through traumas. The impact of phantasy life is powerful in development, yet there is a difference between surviving a death camp and imagining a death camp, between an overwhelming trauma and traumata. Some of the children, in other words, lived traumas borrowed from their parents. Instead of the repression the parents often wished for, an archaic global identification with the parent took place. The child acted out in his own life the borrowed trauma of the parent. The parent's traumatic past led some of the children to resort to concretism and concretisation, impairment of metaphor and fantasy life, so that the imposed fantasies linked the child to the past of its parents.

Transgenerational secrets

Secrets deal with knowledge which is too much or too little, the sharing of information which is of necessity not transmitted verbally and is not necessarily conscious. The secret always has a bearer of the secret, the one who knows. There may often be an accomplice to the secret, the one who shares. Secrets may disrupt basic trust, bring about mutual blame and erect barriers against intimacy. When what is known as a secret is transmitted through words the secret is told, so it becomes less a secret and

more a narrative. When a secret is connected with trauma and when it is a child's secret about the parents' trauma, it is displaced knowledge, often with a hole in its centre (Fresco, 1984). This is an absence which, in the case of the Holocaust, relates to the world of absent objects. "The black hole of the Holocaust has swallowed the memories of my parents". The secrets of the children are secrets of the unmourned dead who could not rest in their graves. The ghost haunted the living, both the parents and their offspring.

There is a broad spectrum of possibilities for knowledge of trauma: flashbacks, intrusive isolated images, nightmares, neurotic and psychotic symptomatology, transference repetitions, character styles, pervasive lifestyles and familial political and social images. This spectrum denotes differences in psychological distance to trauma, encapsulation versus integration and ownership of the memory-level of the experiencing I. (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993). According to these authors, life themes as unitary organising principles of the personality are specific to the second generation. Life themes "colour relationships, aspirations are built around them, they shape and limit interpersonal and intrapsychic life". According to Laub and Auerhahn they present "unique personality configurations dependent on the way that traumatic legacy was perceived and processed. Narratives and events that were the starting point of life themes must be reconstructed, joined to the memory, to the story that is not the child's alone". In the case of the second generation, the authors offer two types of life themes, the adaptive and the negative. The first describes offspring who have an interest in secrets, in the decoding of them and a wish to help those suffering from them, often becoming mental health workers. The negative lifestyle colours the lives of those children who have no hope for intimacy, no trust in verbal communication and an overall feeling of the meaninglessness of human relations. The Holocaust was, and never will be, fully shared or articulated.

Evidently, one of the main issues is how the trauma and the secret it carries are transferred from the parent to the child. There are quite a number of theories dealing with the transmission of transgenerational trauma. According to Jucovy, transmission is the result of parenting in which the child identifies with or rebels against character traits of the parent connected with the Holocaust, elaborating the knowledge of the parental experience in accordance with developmental phases. Kestenberg speaks of phenomena of transposition typical of replacement children. Through the "time tunnel" they transpose themselves into the past searching for remedies for the parents' trauma in the present. The time of their lives is yesterday and today, the fate of the parents becomes the secret of the child, a transgenerational secret. Another possible model which teaches us how transgenerational secrets are formed comes from developmental studies. These were inspired by Bowlby's (1958) idea that, for infants' survival, clinging, seeking and following is as vital as sucking. The research was initiated by Ainsworth's (1978, 1979) collection of anthropological data in Uganda. For our topic, some of the relevant findings concerning attachment theories are the following:

- "The working model of attachment of the primary caregiver (including the father) is of major significance for the attachment to that caregiver" (Brazelton)
- The high predictive power of the mother's initial fantasy of the worth of their infants (Broussard)

- Crucial to transgenerational transmission of attachment are the attitudes and behaviour of the mother independent of the infant, especially her capacity to reflect on her own and the baby's state (Fonagy, Hobson).
- Whether or not the mother was deprived or abused, that is traumatised, is not decisive. What is decisive is whether in her narrative dealing with her childhood there is evidence of self-reflective capacity. Daughters are less vulnerable to perceptions of their mothers than sons. (Broussard, Appelbaum).

These transgenerational secrets are evidently connected with the sharing of information between the parents and the child. The Study Group established in the mid-seventies on the effects of the Holocaust on the second generation warned against labelling in the sense of a specific illness, yet it did pick out some characteristic conflicts and the current patterns of behaviour of these children. Most of them were overvalued and overprotected. As adults, they needed to be redeemers. This ranged from choosing helping professions and solving the secrets of people to messianic aspirants with impaired ego functions. The Study Group also showed that the sharing of information was coloured by polarisation: from a detailed account of the Holocaust experience characteristic of partisans and ghetto fighters to complete silence in cases where the surviving parent had been in a death camp. Of course there were a number of reasons why the parents remained silent, ranging from a need to protect the child to the fact that telling and knowing would have been possible only after recovery.

Evidently, the secrets of the second generation are transgenerational family secrets. The empty spaces, both the intentional and the non-intentional ones are filled in by the child with variations on the family romance. A secret is formed by dynamic interchange between the child's need to remember and the parents' need to forget. In cases where the withholding of information was predominant, the variations on the family romance acquire a pathological content: the child was fathered by a Nazi, the mother survived by having homosexual relations with a guard, the mother was a prostitute in the camp and so on.

Even where there is no direct communication, the child picks up hints, which are stored. The child's development is in close relation with the function of memory and with the child's basic fears of loss of love and loss of object. Universal developmental conflicts carry the potential for all sorts of secrets to be interwoven with those dealing with Shoah which becomes the organiser. Secrets are always a burden and one is either excluded by a secret or made a partner to a secret. Secrets can be exciting but they are also often connected with shame and contempt, fear, rage, humiliation and profound despair.

According to Kestenberg, the transgenerational secrets could have influenced the ego ideal of the child to redeem the dead, to bring all Jews back to life. It is characteristic of the second generation, both those who are relatively intact and those who live their lives in the shadow of the Holocaust, that a universal wish exists to undo the Holocaust. *"Often I wonder how come I am alive with so many dead... sometimes I feel shame. Why are they dead and why am I alive instead? If I was alive then could I have done something, if I am alive now, how to undo it?"* (part of the speech of a 47-year-old at a Jom Ha Shoa commemoration).

The message of the first generation to the second is “Do not forget!” The second generation in its message has added to “Not to be forgotten” with “Not to be repeated”. As for the third generation, which is not the topic of this paper, it seems there are displaced cries for vengeance. The effects of development on ego ideal have interacted with the superego. Jucovey speaks of a punitive superego, sometimes prone to fragmentation with a Nazi-like penal code. In the overt behaviour there is an id-like “all or nothing” principle of functioning, increased tolerance for deceit and self-destruction.

The analytic literature dealing with the Holocaust is very rich. In the beginning of the nineties, when I began to search for references to second generation EE, I found almost none, to be more precise I found one in which EE was mentioned. The survivors or their children lived in North and South America, Israel and Western Europe. The explanation I offered to myself partly satisfied me: the reason was that there were only a few analysts at the time and almost no Jewish organisations. I repeated the search this year. A few papers have appeared from EE itself dealing with the second generation in the country of origin of the author. In the articles from the West after 1993, quite a number of case illustrations were of patients with EE roots, a situation which had probably been similar since the end of World War Two. Among those who pioneered work with survivors and later their children there was quite a number of survivors, Jews and children of resistance fighters. Perhaps the answer to the “secret” of the analytic silence lies in counter transference, in survivor’s guilt and the warding off of feelings of helplessness at what may be happening in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe was and is an abstraction. The term was previously used to designate the countries which belonged to the Warsaw Pact, which were under totalitarian regimes, behind the Iron Curtain. Today the term is used for countries with poor economies, for societies in transition. The first definition did not take into account the dramatic variation in the impact of the totalitarian regime among different states. The economic situation today ranges from countries staggering through poverty with an income of about \$150 per month to those with a standard of living much closer to that of the West. Societies in transition encompass societies with no democratic tradition as well as some which had rather developed democratic institutions prior to the outbreak of World War Two.

Secrets in Eastern Europe

Everything said about the secrets of the second generation applies equally to the offspring of Eastern Europe. Along with the similarities, there are some specific differences. In Eastern Europe, for generations on and off, Jews have been forbidden to live with Gentiles, to live as Jews or to live at all. To be born as a Jew after World War Two meant to be born into a world of absent objects. To establish safety, to reconstruct the trauma, to restore the connection between the survivor and the community (Herman, 1992) was almost impossible. There were no kindergartens, nor schools, nor hospitals nor summer resorts. Religion was discouraged and, in some countries, forbidden. There were few left to pass on the tradition.

In some parts of Eastern Europe, survivors returning to their homelands faced new pogroms. Sometimes Jews were encouraged to leave, but the necessary papers were not issued. In some countries there were anti-Semitic trials after World War Two. In other places, Jews found communism appealing, an ideology which promised a just and equal society without discrimination, so communism meant a solution to the Jewish question. Some parts of Eastern Europe were notoriously anti-Semitic, in others anti-Semitism was in bad taste politically, but Jewish identity was discouraged everywhere. Paradoxically, and sadly enough, the one country in which Jewish life flourished after World War Two was the former Yugoslavia.

Decades after the war there are still no reliable registers on the number of survivors, even less on the second generation. The data from Russia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and so on speak of the reintroduction of Jewish traditions: the celebration of holidays, the reopening of schools, kindergartens, synagogues and hospitals and the organising of mental care for Holocaust survivors. Still, the percentage of the second generation involved represents a minority of the estimated remnants of Eastern European Jewry. In the summer of 2001, the Goethe Institute in Belgrade organised a photographic exhibition under the title "The Revival of East European Jewry". Most of the photographs showed the faces of either very young or very old people.

Of course the second generation had developmental secrets as do many children. What was specific to Eastern Europe was that for many, development was in secrecy.

Faith sought therapeutic assistance two years after the death of her parents; first her mother died and then, half a year later, her father. Both deaths were unexpected. Faith was restless, ate too much, slept poorly and was getting into conflict with everyone around her, obsessed with the idea that her child must have a Jewish identity so that the bloodline of the family would survive. She had grown up as a child of a mixed marriage, her mother was a non-Jew, her father a survivor. The marriage was unhappy and when she was 19 her parents divorced. She had an older brother named after his uncle who had perished in the Holocaust. Faith married three times, the first husband was Jewish, the other two were not. As a child she ate too little, wet the bed and was a poor achiever at school. She led a rather successful professional life. She remembered a fragment of a dream brought in the Holocaust story "A yellow chicken running around a roulette wheel". The day before she had returned home from the cosmetician with a friend. While watering flowers, she heard the friend shout "They are wearing yellow bands". First she didn't react, then retorted flippantly "Stop being so paranoid, you're not even Jewish". Finally she turned and, in shock, saw on the state television a human rights protest with the participants wearing yellow bands. Her eight-year-old daughter was standing on the doorstep in utter dismay. Yellow was the colour of the ribbon worn by Jews, yellow was also the hair colour of her Jewish friend whose mother told such horrifying stories from the Camp, "illogical, nightmarish". To live on earth was a gamble, living on a roulette wheel. Who knows what may happen to her or her analyst in these unpredictable times, just as for members of her family, decades before? Her father told rather cheerful stories about the camp: "Starvation was healthy as it cured ulcers; isolation made alcoholics abstain from drinking so it made sense; there was plenty of free time, one could learn a lot. Everyone was equal, doctors and workers. It was

only bad for smokers, they were lost causes". The mother never commented on the stories. She seemed detached and uninterested and when Faith insisted she slapped her. Faith was upset, occasionally furious, "as though the camp was a hospital, a school, a fraternity, a far better place than home. He made camp sound like a kind mother". Faith and her brother agreed "that there was definitely something fishy about the camp". The father was not religious; still he attempted to revive the practice of religion in a society which discouraged it. He often went off to meetings, disappeared during trips to Israel, never taking the children with him, asking them to keep it secret. The father had a sister who went West after the war and converted to Catholicism. The sister married and had four children. During the summers the six children played together. Faith tried to work out how she and her brother were Jews while her younger cousins were not. She discovered that, when they were eighteen years old, her aunt would share "a significant truth" with them. Faith was pledged to keep quiet. Growing up, the brother became a successful and celebrated artist, like the father "doing his best in life to prove that he is not in the camp". He drank too much, smoked too much, refused to observe a diet for a stomach ulcer, instead devouring all that was forbidden. By the age of 35 he was seriously ill. Faith chose boyfriends who all drank heavily, belonged to another world "coloured by the exciting shadow of the underworld". She was a heavy smoker, fearing and convinced that she had lung cancer. Yet most of her fights with her female friends arose because she could not stand the smell of cigarettes. Faith enjoyed abusing the trust of her friends and then felt worthless and guilty.

When, as an adult, she discovered that her father had stood naked in the snow for a day and a night, waiting to be shot, she had the feeling of "having known it all along". Faith felt that she did not belong anywhere.

Faith's story is in some aspects typical of some of the children of the second generation, the negative adaptive lifestyle of futility, living in the double world of yesterday and today, the elements of borrowed trauma, the lack of basic trust, the attachment anxiety, the identity conflicts, the desire to undo the Holocaust, the pathology of the superego.

In Faith's life story there are also some elements frequently encountered in the biographies of the second generation in Eastern Europe.

1. While in the West, survivors usually married survivors and child survivors Jews, in the East there was a high rate of intermarriage.
2. In Eastern Europe there was a specific sequence of traumatisation from generations of pogrom survivors, to Holocaust survivors to traumatisation brought about by state terrorism under communism.
3. Second generation children in Eastern Europe were often faced with a double pact of silence. The pact of silence did not relate only to the Holocaust experience of the parents. Many learned of their Jewish origin as young adolescents.

One of the obvious reasons for the high rate of intermarriage was that there were not many Jews still around and available. There was, however, another powerful motive: to ensure the survival of the child in a none-too-friendly environment. Couples with one non-Jewish spouse often had an inner circle of friends: Jews from their childhood. For the child it was often a situation of knowing and not knowing: a lot of

whispering, interrupted phone calls with unknown key words like "Palestine". There will be a separate paper dealing with political secrets. As already noted, the unifying factor of the totalitarian regimes across Eastern Europe was their discouragement of Jewish identity. Wanting to ensure the survival of a child meant, among other things, adapting to new political circumstances. Often, as a solution, parents chose not to tell the child of his Jewish origin. The child was faced with the double pact of silence. The two examples which follow are rather typical. The child of a mixed marriage grew up as a Greek Orthodox, attached to her father who told her stories of bygone days. When she reached the age of sixteen, the father revealed that the mother was Jewish and asked the daughter not to discard her origin. The young man had two analyses. During the first he was not Jewish. After his father's death he learnt that he was adopted. His biological father knew nothing of his existence as he had left for Israel prior to the birth, living somewhere under a rather common Jewish name. The chance of the son ever meeting him was almost nil. The man asked for a second analysis.

These kinds of revelation of identity were quite common. In the literature which has recently begun to emerge from Eastern Europe, one comes across various rather dramatic disclosures on "How I learnt that I was Jewish" The JDC, in the mid-nineties, published a book entitled "Global Perspective on Working with Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation". Identity problems are the common denominator in articles dealing with the former Eastern Europe. Most of the second generation do not feel they belong to their country of origin, they do not think of themselves as Jewish, nor do they feel cosmopolitan. The double pact of silence has had various variations on the personality structure. In some cases, to learn of one's origin was to be an adopted child, to experience something very akin to a shock trauma. In others it could trigger all sorts of variations on the family romance, the concealed origin of the parent as something shameful, devouring, or the impetus to become the protector of the parent, of the people. It could mean for a child that one or both parents are impotent, helpless, martyrs making the child insecure or stricken with anxiety, or that the parent was special, a hero, giving rise to feelings of grandeur. These are only some of the possibilities depending on previous development, the age of the child and the gender of the parent.

The circumstances mentioned above could result in the formation of secrets which I have arbitrarily named deadly secrets. One's origin was too dangerous. To be Jewish simply meant that you were destined to die as had your forefathers. The repercussions included shame, guilt, fear, chronic anxiety, rage, rebellion, sublimation and messianism. The other type of secret is confined to a relatively small group of the second generation, the children of Jewish activists who fought for the revival of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. These secrets, the chosen secrets (chosen people) often did not include the double pact of silence. Often the child did not, as in the previous examples, know too little, but instead knew too much. Rather than a pact of silence, there was a pact of conspiracy within the family against the world outside. The experience of the parent during the Holocaust was of lesser importance. More important was what would happen in the future. The oft-repeated slogan was "We will not permit ourselves to be the last generation of Jews in this country". Obviously, the outcome varied, the feelings of the children ranging from fear for the safety of their parents and themselves to pride in being trusted and

involved in something meaningful. These children often had a double loyalty to their parents, peers and country.

Not all secrets are pathogenic. Some secrets may create feelings of fraternity, may be useful in offering a sense of security in dangerous situations. What details were revealed is far less important than how they were revealed. The effect of a secret probably depends very much on whether it can be shared and worked through, either in everyday life or in therapy, or whether the secret leads a life of its own, that of a foreign body which induces guilt.

A few remarks concerning therapy

Grubrich-Simitis (1984) writes that “the joint acceptance of the Holocaust” with the exploration of the “real mad world of the past” in the transference-counter transference dialogue is a way of overcoming concretism by metaphors, a restoration of ego boundaries. However, with the second generation, the difficulties a patient has may or may not be related to the Holocaust. It is an issue of balance between traumatophilic and traumatophobic in the analyst’s counter transference. Bergmann (1982) wrote about some counterproductive attitudes of analysts in facing the Holocaust. Some label the material from it as a defence from the present day, some avoid the material for fear of traumatising the patient.

Secrets may appear as derivatives in dreams, as acting out.

In analysis, children who have learned not to talk about the Holocaust may tend to be the same with the therapist. The analysand is the bearer of the secret and a conflict of loyalties may ensue. When the secret is shared, the analyst becomes an accomplice, ties to primary objects may be intruded upon and severed.

Another relevant issue is that of the anonymity of the analyst. This is evidently connected with the current discussions on intersubjectivity, disclosure and so on. In the case of the second generation, Kestenberg warns that, for a child who could not know his parent’s story, the absolute anonymity of the analyst may be an unwelcome repetition, intruding into the therapeutic process.

Specific counter transference issues may occur in the case of the wounded healer, akin to vicarious traumatisation, but different. The wounded healer is a therapist who has suffered a trauma or a therapist working in societies under threat. Irony, cynicism, discomfort, helplessness and hopelessness are professional hazards. The issue is how the therapist faces the negative effects of the trauma. Possible counter transference reactions of the wounded healer, some of which I have witnessed in myself and my colleagues over the years, are: a “bond of commitment” is formed between the patient and therapist. The issues of “ethical neutrality” come into the foreground. There are risks of over-identification, mutual idealisation and seduction, omnipotent perception of self as the rescuer. Difficulties in handling aggression are present, negative feelings being repressed and denied.

Instead of a conclusion

“If we had keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heartbeat, and we should die of the roar which lies on the other side of silence.” (George Elliot)

What has been said and what left unsaid are of equal importance.

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