

Trauma and Telling:
Examining the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Through Silence

by
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Abstract

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In recent decades there has been a great deal of scholarly and scientific work examining both the impact and the transmission of trauma. The focus of this thesis is the transmission of the trauma of genocide and large-scale historical traumas, specifically that seen in the Holocaust and the missionization of the California Indians in the 18th century. Through the analysis of the autobiographical narratives composed by three generations of Holocaust survivors, as well as one composed by a later generation descendant of the California Mission Indians, I argue that silence is not only a manifestation of trauma but also a tool of its transmission. I further argue that when this silence is broken and the stories are told we begin to see a shift in the traumatic memory away from re-traumatizing the later generations and toward preserving an accurate historical memory without the significant psychological cost to the later generations.

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Forward

In recent decades there has been a great deal of scholarly and scientific work examining both the impact and the transmission of trauma. The focus of this thesis is the transmission of the trauma of genocide and large-scale historical traumas, such as that seen in the Holocaust and the missionization of the California Indians by the Spanish in the 18th century. Through the analysis of the autobiographical narratives composed by three generations of those impacted by the Holocaust, as well as one composed by a later generation descendant of the California Mission Indians, I argue that silence is not only a manifestation of trauma but also a tool of its transmission. I further argue that when this silence is broken and the stories are told we begin to see a shift in the traumatic memory away from re-traumatizing the later generations and toward preserving an accurate historical memory without the significant psychological cost to the later generations.

While evidence and history have shown that survivors of genocide experience significant trauma, this trauma is not manifested in the act of survival itself. In actuality, trauma most often manifests later, when the reality of the event has passed. The trauma can then persist, even being transmitted to survivors' children and grandchildren, with or without their conscious knowledge of the initial traumatizing event, and thereby creating subsequent generations of trauma survivors. These later generations, who have no personal knowledge of the initial trauma, often experience a different trauma all of their own by virtue of their relationship with the survivor. Trauma is by no means restricted to genocide; however, for purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the large-scale historical or

cultural trauma of genocide and the ways it is transmitted. For subsequent generations, it is possible, even likely, that the initial trauma was never discussed in their presence, and yet it profoundly affects their identity. These subsequent generations of survivors often begin to recognize the manifestations of trauma in their own lives only once they have begun the process of reconstructing the lost histories of the victims. Because genocides involve the destruction of both people and property, examination of the historical public archives is required for much of this reconstruction work; however, finding the answers within the primary documents of the archive is not always a simple matter.

In examining the stories preserved by history, writers rely on primary documents to express historical truth. Which primary documents are preserved for later examination, however, is a question not of truth but of power. The overwhelming reality is that the archives of history have consistently privileged the powerful and marginalized all others. Women and people of color—and perhaps women of color most of all—have been among the most severely marginalized. Diaries and memoirs, among other types of autobiographical writing, not only reveal the omissions found in the public archives but also help to recreate the dominant narrative and allow more women's voices to be heard. I have chosen to focus on the autobiographical writings of women for this project for this reason.

Through not only the research process but also the act of writing itself scholars and survivors are excavating hidden truths in situations of trauma. Traumatic experiences can profoundly alter the ability to construct an autobiographical narrative. When such narratives are constructed, the works that emerge have certain hallmarks of traumatic memory. I will look to the work of Robin Fivush for clinical examples of this effect. I

will extend her discussion of the impact of trauma on the construction of autobiographical narrative to apply the research to the autobiographical writings of survivors of genocide. For example, the theme of silence is pervasive in Holocaust survivor literature and, I will argue, in the broader traumatic experience of genocides and cultural trauma. The silence leads to gaps in the autobiographical narrative for not only the survivor herself but for the generations that follow. In this way, silence becomes both a manifestation of trauma experienced and a tool of intergenerational transmission of that trauma to later generations. Second generation Holocaust survivors like Helen Epstein commonly credit writing their family history with providing a better sense of understanding themselves in the process. Some scholars consider this evidence of a transmission of trauma; however, this scholarly work is not restricted to the Holocaust.

Contemporary scholars such as Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Eduardo and Bonnie Duran, among others, have studied the trauma response in Native Americans. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart has specifically studied the intergenerational transmission of trauma in the Lakota nation. Like Fivush, her work is largely clinical in nature and her focus is on healing the wounds left by trauma. To that end, she has found healing effects in telling the stories of traumatic experiences. Brave Heart et al have made clear the ameliorative effects of storytelling. I will apply the psychological perspectives gleaned from Fivush, Brave Heart, and others in an attempt to reveal the manifestations of trauma found in the survivor memoirs, as well as the evidence of intergenerational transmission of trauma in later generation survivor memoirs. I will examine silence as a manifestation—perhaps even a tool of transmission—of trauma, as well as the transition to healing that can be seen when that silence is broken.

After a brief discussion of theory, which includes the basis for psychoanalytic theory found in the work of Sigmund Freud and an introduction to the trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth, my first chapter will center on survivors of the Holocaust. A specific focal point of this chapter is silence as a representation of trauma in three different autobiographical works. These works span not only the survivor generation, but their children and grandchildren, the second and third generation, as well. In this chapter I examine the manifestations of trauma and how this trauma can be transmitted between generations. After providing the basis for my discussion, I begin my textual analysis with *Dry Tears*, the memoir of Holocaust survivor Nechama Tec. Tec was a hidden child during the Holocaust, and her wartime experience, as well as her experiences after the war, is defined by silence. I argue that the silence that defines the survivor experience carries over into the second generation. Of note is the work of second-generation writer Helen Epstein. Epstein first identified the existence of a second-generation—children of Holocaust survivors—and has discussed the concepts of transmission of traumatic memory and its impact on self-concept formation and construction of autobiographical narrative for those who did not actually experience the trauma themselves at length. In *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History*, Epstein reveals the process by which she fills the gaps left by silence and recreates her family history through archival research. In addition to the traumatic legacy of silence, the research and re-creation process Epstein identifies continues to be seen in the third generation with, among others, Johanna Adorjan's memoir, *An Exclusive Love*. The works of each generation differ, sometimes dramatically, but each shows evidence of silence as a manifestation of trauma that continues throughout the generations. I have specifically

chosen these three memoirs for the unique perspectives each contain. Much of the survivor memoir—also termed testimonial literature—of the Holocaust that immediately springs to mind was written by men and, as I mentioned above, women’s voices don’t often receive the same attention. In addition, Tec’s experience as a hidden child is a different experience than is commonly expected of a Holocaust “survivor.” For the later generations, Epstein’s work identifying the second generation makes her memoir a clear choice, and she has focused on tracing her family history through the women in her family. Adorjan’s text details her research process in re-creating both the death and lives of her grandparents, and also reflects the growing awareness and identity struggles that are clear in the third generation.

While intergenerational transmission of trauma is most often—arguably, most clearly—noted in Holocaust literature, there is a significant amount of research that demonstrates the influence of intergenerational trauma in Native American communities as well. In my second chapter I will examine *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* by Deborah Miranda and will evaluate the distinctions between the continuation of trauma through silence and the amelioration of trauma through telling. Miranda’s memoir is at once a historical examination of the nineteenth century experiences of the California Mission Indians, and a creative and personal examination of her own life, including the manifestations of trauma many generations removed from the days of the missionization of the California Indians from whom she descends. In this chapter, I turn to the body of research on the traumatic impact on tribal communities resulting from the genocides perpetrated against Native Americans. The focus of this chapter is more directed to later generations, rather than survivor literature. Very little testimonial literature exists from

the initial trauma addressed here. Miranda represents the 7th generation since the missionization of the California Indians. The silence of the trauma is profound and protracted. Like the second and third generations of Holocaust literature, Miranda uses archival and familial research to reassemble the fragmented pieces of her personal identity as well as the collective identity of the several Nations defined in history as the California Mission Indians in her memoir. Miranda evaluates both the collective and personal traumas (and the resulting traumatic memory) of missionization in order to attempt to answer these questions of identity. In addition, this chapter will evaluate the ameliorative effect of breaking the silence of trauma and the resulting mitigation of traumatic memory for later generations.

I will not make comparisons or stratify the severity of the various genocides that I ultimately discuss; rather, I will make the argument that surviving genocide leaves a psychic injury that is reflected in the autobiographical narratives of survivors. I will further argue that trauma is indeed transmitted to later generations through silence and may ultimately be somewhat mitigated by the act of telling the stories of trauma.

Introduction: Trauma and Psychoanalytic Theory from Freud to Caruth

In order to properly evaluate the effects of trauma on the construction of autobiographical narrative and the transmission of trauma between generations, an understanding of the current work in trauma theory is required. Trauma theory relies heavily on psychoanalytic theory, and this reliance necessarily requires a discussion of Sigmund Freud. Though not without significant opposition, Freud's body of work provides the foundation for very nearly all psychoanalytic theory, therapy, and criticism at work today. Freud's 1908 work, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," sets the stage for applying psychology and his principles of psychoanalysis to literature. Although Freud speaks of creative works in terms of fiction and poetry, not historical or autobiographical writing, he clearly applies his formula for fantasy to the creation of imaginative work. This can arguably apply to the creation of autobiographical writing since such a narrative does, in fact, rely on the imagination. As Freud notes, most often autobiographical writing is clearly the result of

[a] strong experience in the present [that] awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory" (*Reader* 442).

I argue that memoirs written by survivors of traumatic events most clearly reflect Freud's assertion that the autobiographical writings provide an outlet for strong experiences;

however, I further argue that not only wishes, as Freud suggests, but also psychic traumas find outlets in these creative works.

While Freud himself applied the principles of psychoanalysis to biographical writing with his biography of Leonardo Da Vinci, memoir is a distinct form of autobiographical writing. Where biography may encompass the story of the entirety of a person's life, a memoir's focus is more narrow, often treating a single moment or experience in greater detail. Although his perspective was biographical—relying on the relationship between analyst to subject—instead of autobiographical, Freud believed that “psychoanalytic biography [...] would humanize the writing of lives” (*Reader* 443). In his examination of Da Vinci, Freud also makes clear his opinion of the imaginative content of historical writing. The writing of history, he says, came in an “age of reflection [...where] men felt themselves to be rich and powerful, and now felt a need to learn where they had come from and how they had developed” (Freud *Reader* 455). In the retrospective recreation, “this early history [was] an expression of present beliefs and wishes rather than a true picture of the past” (Freud *Reader* 455). Both the humanization and imaginative recreation of the past Freud describes can be applied to autobiographical narratives where the memoirist is both subject and analyst, using the reflection of historical writing to reveal, as Freud indicated, both how they became who they are and where they came from.

Contemporary trauma theory is a natural outgrowth of psychoanalytic theory. In order to properly understand and practice any type of psychological criticism, including trauma theory, one must first understand Freud and his conception of the unconscious mind. Freud asserted that the things we do are based on hidden motivations which he

termed “the unconscious.” According to Freud, “at any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable periods of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of being psychically unconscious” (574). *The Interpretation of Dreams* assumes that the unconscious is inherently sexual; however, Freud’s idea of sexuality includes the entire drive toward physical pleasure or the reduction of displeasure (the “pleasure principle”) which he saw as being constantly in conflict with the “reality principle,” the ego’s drive for self-preservation (596). In his later work Freud shifted from an evaluation of pleasure principle versus reality principle to consider the influence of the death drive. He indicates that “[t]he pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts [...], especially on guard against increases of stimulation from within, which would make the task of living more difficult” (626). He offers no answers for the new questions such a shift would raise, instead suggesting that “[w]e must be patient and await fresh methods and occasions of research. We must be ready, too, to abandon a path that we have followed for a time, if it seems to be leading to no good end” (626). Instead of completely abandoning all paths, Freud offers a new idea for consideration. It was in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in fact, that Freud first described the repetitive and intrusive dream manifestation of the traumas of war that would nearly a century later become known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of Trauma Theory.

Freud’s own early work in trauma, specifically his “traumatic theory of hysteria,” centers on the “momentous discovery” of the emergence of symptoms of hysteria as a result of traumatic experiences later “reproduced in [the] psychological life in the form of

mnemic symbols,” and represents the beginning of a discussion on the workings of trauma on the psyche (*History 6, Reader 98*). Freud indicates in a letter to Wilhelm Fleis that “[t]raumatic hysteria was well known; what we [Freud and Breuer] asserted beyond this was that every hysteria that is not hereditary is traumatic” (Reader 56).

Cathy Caruth and the Emergence of Trauma Theory

Modern theorists and psychological scholars have taken the groundwork that Freud laid in new directions. Cathy Caruth, the preeminent scholar in Trauma Studies, has taken the work that Freud started with the psychic manifestations of trauma and used them to develop a theory that establishes the impact and manifestation of trauma in literature and history. Caruth explains Freud’s traumatic neurosis and compulsory repetition as “the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind” (*Unclaimed 2*). She states that it is “at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (*Unclaimed 3*). She uses Freud’s work to define trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind, [...] not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (*Unclaimed 3-4*). She reevaluates such critical texts as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism* and builds her conception of trauma theory upon the new set of themes she finds therein. Caruth identifies “the crisis at the core of many traumatic narratives [...] that emerges] as an urgent question: Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?”

(*Unclaimed* 7). Through the examination of survivor memoir it would seem clear that it is in both.

Caruth offers a “most general” definition of trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (*Unclaimed* 11). Caruth notes that modern trauma theory tends to focus on the destructive repetition of the trauma, specifically explained through the existence of flashbacks, and notes that experiencing the repetition is in itself retraumatizing (*Unclaimed* 63). Where Freud focuses on the unconscious more broadly, Caruth, with her attention on the residual effect of violence, focuses on the unspeakable. She suggests a “new mode of reading and of listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand” (*Unclaimed* 9). The unspeakable nature of trauma and the resulting traumatic memory translates to the profound silence in the autobiographical narrative of survivors, both written and unwritten. According to Joshua Pederson, “the suggestion that one may forget—or fail to accurately describe—trauma is also a foundational insight for the first wave of literary trauma theorists” (334). Pederson notes,

[f]or Caruth, trauma is an experience so intensely painful that the mind is unable to process it normally. In the immediate aftermath, the victim may totally forget the event. And if memories of the trauma return, they are often nonverbal, and the victim may be unable to describe them with words. Yet Caruth maintains that imaginative literature—or figural, rather than literal language—can “speak” trauma when normal, discursive

language cannot, and fiction helps give a voice to traumatized individuals and populations. Hence, her theory of trauma is a ringing endorsement of the testimonial power of literature (334).

Caruth focuses widely on historical trauma, and more particularly on the profoundly traumatic Holocaust in her analysis. Although approaching the concept from different perspectives, Caruth agrees with Freud in questioning history, saying “we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential”; she acknowledges “the difficulties of writing a history from within” a catastrophic era without trying to eliminate it, instead seeking to use the notion of trauma to help “resituate” history and “permitting [it] to arise where immediate understanding may not” (*Unclaimed* 11-12). According to Caruth, “a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (*Unclaimed* 18). This inaccessibility, and the failure of literal language to express the images, emotions, and intrusive thoughts of traumatic memory, must necessarily result in silence. The power of literature rests in the ability of figurative language of imaginative writing to begin to express the unspeakable.

By the time of Caruth’s writing, the post-traumatic stress disorder that Freud was just beginning to conceptualize had grown into a well-articulated—if not fully understood—description of psychic and physical manifestation of trauma. She argues that trauma results not just from the destruction of external violence but also as “an enigma of survival” (*Unclaimed* 58). She draws on Freud’s discussion of fright to argue that the manifestation of trauma is not in the “literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*” (*Unclaimed* 62). Once this recognition has occurred, Caruth argues, the consciousness has no other option but to

“repeat the destructive event over and over again” (*Unclaimed* 63). This is, of course, consistent with Freud’s repetition compulsion as is noted by Caruth in her analysis. Caruth also credits Freud with understanding both personal and “collective history in the face of war,” although his understanding is not fully realized and is, in fact, only noted in passing on the way back to his more controversial discussions (*Literature* 5). Caruth not only elaborates on both the personal and the collective history in her articulation of trauma theory, but also includes the repetition compulsion that Freud identified as a crucial component of the study of trauma. Even in telling the stories of historical trauma, when silence persists there is a perpetuation of that trauma to later generations. Breaking though that silence may lead to an ameliorative effect allowing for these cultural traumas to be remembered and recounted but perhaps no longer be re-traumatizing for the later generations.

Chapter One: Things Left Unsaid: Silence as a Representation of Trauma and Traumatic Memory in Three Generations of Holocaust Memoir

According to Richard Rubenstein and John K. Roth, “artistic and literary responses [have] done much to keep memory of the Holocaust alive” (Rubenstein 291-2). The growing body of Holocaust literature is one example of such a response. “Holocaust literature at its best,” continues Rubenstein and Roth, “underscores especially well the major implications and lingering questions that are fundamental for anyone who studies the Holocaust with the respect and concern that its history deserves” (304). In addition to the urgent task of maintaining Holocaust memory and preserving survivor testimony—and quickly, because survivors are dying and we will lose the opportunity forever if we wait—one lingering question for scholars is the question of the significance of trauma and traumatic memory: A substantial amount of research is now focusing on the interplay of trauma and memory, as well as whether and how trauma and traumatic memory can influence not only the generation of survivors, but subsequent generations as well. This chapter will consider trauma and traumatic memory in terms of Holocaust memoir, with a focus on silence as a representation of trauma in the writings.

Writing is an art, and Theodor Adorno claimed that “Artworks may be all the more truly experienced the more their historical substance is that of the one who experiences it” (250). If Adorno’s assertion is true, this would indicate that autobiographical works, those works that contain a personal reflection of a specific moment in history written by the one who experienced it, are the most powerful aesthetic

links to the Holocaust. Holocaust memoir is but one small section of the ever-changing landscape of Holocaust literature; however, I assert that autobiographical writing is not only an important method for maintaining memory, but also a powerful tool for evaluating the existence of traumatic memory in the children and grandchildren of survivors.

Memoir as a Genre of Testimonial Literature

In examining testimonial literature of the Holocaust, strong examples of witness by male writers abound. Those written by women are not as prevalent, but they are just as relevant. Indeed, Jeanne Braham notes that “women’s personal narratives are essential primary documents... [some of which] reveal what their authors believe they are supposed to feel” (1). When considered in a framework so profoundly altering as the Holocaust, it is hard to describe what is actually felt, let alone what one is “supposed to feel.” And yet, especially in the realm of Holocaust memoir, it is important to understand that memoir and autobiographical writing involve “reflexive strategies of metaphor, memory, and a sense of place (geographical, emotional, cultural), which are used to construct a crafted reality” (Braham 2). Holocaust memoir offers a unique look into the lives and minds of survivors in all three generations, and affords an examination of the symptoms of trauma that can be found there. The writers of survivor memoirs have experienced a reality so jarring that it is inconceivable, if not utterly impossible, to put into words. Elie Wiesel maintains language often fails. In an interview, he elaborated this point by saying that “the enemy” uses all sources to deprive the victim of the language and words to use, *and yet*, they [the survivors] must use them (Wiesel). Through the use of literary metaphor and the combination of words that reaches nearest the emotional

impact of the memory, survivors strive to be a witness to what they have experienced. They must; to do otherwise is to prevent the memory from carrying on. Nechama Tec, who survived by passing as a Christian child, is just one example of a survivor who is using the memory of her experiences, through memoir, to help maintain the collective memory of the Holocaust. Helen Epstein and Johanna Adorján, members of the second and third generations, respectively, have each stepped up to continue the work of supporting the Holocaust memory. For the later generations, however, the work is different. These distinctions will be considered later. For now, understanding the format of memoir is important.

While the writer is significant in this memoir process, the reader is equally involved in the process. Brahm advises that when reading memoir the reader “becomes a part of the discourse,” must understand the role of metaphor in “truth-telling,” and often performs in the role of “validator” (2, 4). Brahm stresses the concept that “autobiographical truth revealed through memory and metaphor is not the same as historical truth; the autobiographical act is simultaneously invention and a discovery” (42). All memoir contains a contemporaneous and fluid act of invention and discovery, but is particularly visible in second- and third-generation Holocaust memoir. As the second- and third-generation authors discover and compile the historical facts and details of their family legacy, certain others must necessarily be invented or omitted. The memoirist becomes the archivist and the reader the validator. Susan Rubin Suleiman posits the very simple explanation that “Memoirs, in their own way, make truth claims: ‘This is what happened, to the best of my recollection,’” while, at the same time, warning “individual memories may merge with family mythologies, eventually taking on the feel

of lived recollection” (31, 22). Thus, the memoirist, through the process of indexing those memories that she holds within her awareness—while at the same time, for the later generations at least, performing extensive research for the details that elude her— begins to reveal parts of her identity that she may not have once recognized.

Memoir, as a genre, does not have strictly defined parameters. Suleiman attests that “although memoirs have no specific formal characteristics (other than autobiographical writing in general, which comes in many varieties), they all have at least one thing in common: a memoir gives ‘an account of the personal experiences of an author’” (22). While all memoir contains within it the story of lived experiences and memory, there are significant differences in personality, representation, and even intent of the three generations of Holocaust literature/memoir. It should be noted, of course, that even isolated within the first generation alone there are significant differences. The experiences of Holocaust survivors is far from uniform. The experiences of those who survived the camps is not going to be the same as the experiences of those who spent the war in hiding, and neither of these experiences will be the same as that of the Jewish Partisans who rebelled and fought the regime and survived. Thus, the experiences of the continuing generations, whose experiences are strongly influenced by the individual survivor experience in their family history, will vary as well. The second and third generations cannot possibly write about the wartime experiences they did not personally live through, particularly since the survivors themselves struggle so profoundly with putting words to the experience. Instead, the later generations follow a trajectory of their own, easily distinguishable from works written by survivors. All of these different

writings, however, still contain some evidence of traumatic memory, and still qualify as memoir.

Psychological Study of Trauma

Scientific studies have shown that major trauma experienced even prior to conception can be genetically transmitted to the offspring of victims of trauma and the offspring can show manifestations of trauma even several generations beyond the original victim (Gaisler-salomon, np). Scientifically this is quite significant and genetic transmission can open the door to a great deal of research in the future. For purposes of this chapter, this genetic transmission begs the question whether trauma and traumatic memory define identity and self-concept or merely influence it, and this is not an easy question to answer. Neither are the questions of how this trauma and identity will be represented in literature, or how the initial trauma affects the later generations. Notwithstanding the genetic component, James Berger posits that “the contemporary writer is affected by the trauma transmitted through the testimonial text, but in his own place and manner” (79). He further asserts that the contemporary writer “is less traumatized than the original witness” (J. Berger 79). Berger’s assertion is clearly true, however I expand his explanation to include that the later generations are both *less traumatized* and *traumatized in a different way* than the survivor generation. The trauma is different, but still there.

Many scholars, even those working outside of the field of Holocaust studies, are contemplating the existence and impact of trauma and how it can be conveyed. In fact, much of the psychological study of trauma and memory deal with situations outside of the Holocaust. Robyn Fivush, director of the Family Narratives Lab at Emory University,

discusses the influence of trauma on autobiographical memory, and, in turn, the influence of traumatic memory on identity and self-concept formation, quite extensively. That determining whether an identity reveals the after-effects of a survived trauma or whether the trauma itself created a wholly new identity may differ from person to person and, especially in the case of the Holocaust, generation to generation, is indisputable; but, generally speaking, Fivush's discussion of this interplay between trauma and identity formation can be applied to all three generations of Holocaust writers. Fivush states that "autobiographical memory is the story of our life... [and is] at least partly, socially constructed" (75). Fivush asserts that the experiences we talk about with others shape our identities (75). "Adults in Western cultures," explains Fivush, "talk more about their past experiences, claim to have more memories and earlier memories ...and focus more on the self when narrating the past" (Fivush 76). This may be true in the majority of Western society, however, Holocaust survivors seem to be the exception to this rule. Most survivors have shown a broad tendency toward silencing the memory of trauma. This exception is not especially surprising to Fivush, who notes "autobiographical memory is always selective. We do not recall everything that happens to us, nor do we choose to report everything we recall... [Additionally,] listeners can influence speakers' stories" (Fivush 81). I suggest that this listener influence is reflected in the willingness of survivors to talk about their experience with other survivors exclusively, retaining a culture of silence with everyone else, including their nuclear family. The reticence on the part of the survivors to express any memory of their wartime experiences, particularly to persons who cannot personally relate, could be considered problematic in a study such as this—that is, if they are unwilling to speak openly, how can the impact of their

experiences on their socially-constructed identities be measured? According to Braham, the silence is just as significant: "What is left repressed, or what cannot be uttered, is often as significant to the whole shape of the life as what is said"(37). In terms of Holocaust survivors, I agree with Braham's assertion that this silence is significant; however, I argue the survivors have neither forgotten nor repressed their experiences, but rather choose, as Fivush suggested, not to "report everything [they] recall." This silence, in fact, is shown to be characteristic of many Holocaust survivors.

It should be reiterated that silence may be self-imposed, a personal choice made consciously or unconsciously by the survivors themselves, or come about as a result of outside influences, for example, an unwilling or hesitant listener. Fivush states that traumatic memory "may be silenced both by others and by the self as too dangerous to even think about" (83). The children of the second generation often participated, even unknowingly, in the silence of their parents. This participation could be active, out of fear of causing their parents pain, or passive, because of the family dynamic that forbade questioning. Fivush discusses studies that have shown trauma's impact on a person's ability to adequately parent and, in this way, allows for transmission of at least a portion of the traumatic memory and resulting pathology to their children through non-genetic means. According to Fivush, "early in development, children need help from adults to create coherent narratives of past events. In the absence of adult-guided reminiscing, young children may have difficulty creating and maintaining coherent memories"(Fivush 89). Applied to Holocaust survivors, the stilted interactions between generations through bouts of silence clearly illustrates this absence of adult-guided reminiscing. Silence—which makes adult-guided reminiscing highly unlikely— and a lack of recalling the past

is transferred to the second generation, resulting in a generalized trepidation of seeking information about the survivor's early life experiences. The transfer of silence, in effect, creates a disability in the second generation to construct a coherent autobiographical narrative of their own which hinders their ability to understand their own experiences. Fivush continues, when the adult is unwilling or unable to provide a model for the children, and "in the absence of a meaningful organization through which to understand our experiences, we may not be able to integrate those experiences into our self-understanding. This, in turn, may lead to a fragmented sense of self...especially if the trauma occurs early in development before children have a stable self-concept or are able to construct a coherent narrative of a past event without adult guidance"(Fivush 89). This stifling of the self-concept in the second generation creates additional gaps in the familial memory which some second generation writers have sought to fill later in life. Sometimes, however, the second generation simply becomes comfortable with the silence and thus the third generation is left filling in the gaps for both preceding generations. The third generation, according to Alan Berger, "reveals a truth that memory and trauma, even in the face of silence, form an ineluctable part of the human experience, and that the attempt to transform the legacy of Holocaust trauma into history will, no matter the format, continue into the future" (A. Berger 2010, 158) While there is a growing body of third-generation Holocaust fiction, this essay focuses on the memoir format because of its unique viewpoint into the psyche of the author. The indicators of trauma, even in the carefully "crafted reality" of Holocaust memoir, can be found in each of the three representative texts. Silence is widely recognized as a primary indicator of trauma in the survivor generation but, as we have seen, the impact of silence is carried through the later

generations, too.

How do these indicators of trauma relate to identity and composition of memoir? Fivush conducted psychological studies of what she called a "severely abused population," comprised of victims of sexual abuse, to determine the effect of trauma and traumatic memory on the ability to construct a coherent autobiographical narrative (Fivush 84). Sexual abuse is only a portion of the myriad atrocities experienced by Holocaust survivors. Whether they experienced sexual abuse or not, survivors are undeniably a severely abused population and thus survivor narratives can be correlated to the results of Fivush's study. In her study, Fivush classified the victims' narratives as either coherent or incoherent and related this to whether they had an integrated self-concept (one clearly defined by their experience) or a dissociated self-concept (one that excluded or is merely tangentially influenced by the experience), and states "there seems to be a relation between having an integrated sense of self and continuous memories of abuse" (Fivush 86-7). Although the correlation is merely anecdotal, these classifications would seem to indicate that, based on the continuity of memory, many, if not most, survivors would be considered to have an integrated self-concept that is significantly altered and shaped by their experience. I am not aware of any first generation Holocaust narratives that claim a period of forgetfulness of the experience. Following Fivush's reasoning, this forgetfulness would be necessary to implicate a dissociated self-concept. I would argue that the vast majority of first-generation Holocaust survivors would be classified as having an integrated self-concept, that is, their identity is clearly defined by their experience.

The later generations, however, have no continuous memory of the Holocaust;

indeed, no personal memory at all. So what does that mean for their autobiographical narratives and their experience with the pervasive Holocaust memory? In addition to the examples of integrated self-concept Fivush found, there were also varying experiences for women experiencing “horrendous abuse,” some of whom coped by dissociating the memories, often resulting in a “sense of forgetting” and a “more dissociated sense of self” (Fivush 88). These women had a self-concept based on periods of forgetfulness or gaps in memory. Fivush relays this as “traumatic experiences [that] are silenced by being forced out of consciousness,” and indicates that while it is “unclear how to account for these individual differences in coping,” all of this affects the ability to construct a coherent narrative (88). Admittedly, the later generations unequivocally did not experience the horrors that the first generation endured; however, this discussion of the dissociated self-concept and the memories “forced out of consciousness” seem to draw a parallel with the feeling of the later generations of a missing memory that has shaped their lives. This concept is addressed at length by Henry Raczymow who terms it a “memory shot through with holes” (103). Could the tendency toward dissociation have an impact on the rate that women survivors composed memoirs? Or is the male to female survivor ratio such that the numbers alone explain the disparity? Survivor memoirs are much more often written by men so either possibility is conceivable; however, I maintain that Holocaust survivors are not repressing or “forgetting” their experiences so much as they are actively refusing to speak of them either publicly or privately. Still, they have identities that are defined by the memories even in their silence. The dissociative effect of traumatic memory, in my opinion, is much more readily supported in the later generations, where the memory of the Holocaust affects the lives and identities of those

who were not alive to experience it themselves. These missing memories have a significant influence on their fragmented identities but does not clearly define them.

Amid all of the descriptors available in scholarship and writings of the second generation for this influencing factor that isn't quite memory, Marianne Hirsch has determined "postmemory" to be the most appropriate. She describes postmemory as the "particular relation to a parental past described, evoked, and analyzed in these works" (105). She clarifies the term by saying "The 'post' in 'postmemory' signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. [...] Rather, [it creates] a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience" (106). She states explicitly that "postmemory is not identical to memory: it is 'post,' but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force" (109). This makes an important distinction. Postmemory is not memory, per se, but it still seems to support the parallels I have drawn between the second and third generations and the dissociated self-concept of the victim-survivors that Fivush mentioned. Again, it is "not identical to memory," but it "approximates memory in its affective force." I suggest that this approximation is strong enough to allow classification of the later generations as dissociated identities and that through the process of researching and writing memoir, in part, the fragmented sense of self begins to be repaired. Hirsch further claims that members of the later generations "'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (105). These memories, Hirsch explains, "were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (106) However, the memories themselves are blurred, faded, and, indeed, not actually there.

The memories are not there, but the traumatic impact is. “The challenge for us in the next generations” says Hirsch,

is precisely to acknowledge and to signal our own distance from the traumatic events that preceded us and not to appropriate them for ourselves. Of course, our own investment can be great, and trauma cannot so easily be contained, it seeps out of its bounds, connecting disparate subjectivities. Inherited trauma transmitted familiarly – or even culturally – can have significant effects on our lives, but it is not we who have suffered persecution or deportation” (“Interview with Marianne Hirsch”).

The later generations must try to grapple with understanding what their traumatic memory actually is without appropriating experiences that are not their own. Gaining understanding while maintaining appropriate distance is difficult enough without deflecting suppositions from others. Hirsch recalls her surprise at the assumptions made to her claim of being “a ‘child of survivors’,” noting, “it never occurred to me that my readers would assume...they were Auschwitz survivors,” when, in fact, Hirsch’s parents were two of “at least 20,000” Jews in Czernowitz, Romania who survived in no small part thanks to the “courageous intervention of the city’s mayor, a remarkable man by the name of Traian Popovici” (Hirsch 114; Hirsh and Spitzer, np). These varied experiences add another layer of difficulty in examining the traumatic impact of Holocaust memories on all generations.

The Survivor Generation: Nechama Tec

It is sometimes easy to forget not all survivors were imprisoned in camps during the war. While the third generation is most closely associated with the search for identity,

the survivor generation was also burdened with such a search after the end of the war. David Patterson discusses this first-generation search for identity in depth in *Sun Turned to Darkness: Memory and Recovery in the Holocaust Memoir*. “Jewish identity,” Patterson asserts “cannot be broken unless the Jewish soul is broken. Thus, in the Holocaust memoir the memory that arises from the soul seeks a recovery of identity through the recovery of the soul” (173). The simple retrieval of a pre-war identity is simply not possible. Those who survived the horrors of the camps had had their identity systematically stripped away and destroyed along with their very humanity. Those who spent the war in hiding, however, were forced to trade their identity for another in the hopes that this would be enough to preserve their lives. For many, “the Jewish soul” is not broken but it is no longer easily recognizable. Survivors must discern for themselves their new identity, often through reflection and introspection. Nechama Tec is an example of a survivor who spent her pre-teenage years hiding in plain sight—discarding her identity as a Jewish child, Nechama Bawnik, and taking on the identity of Pelagia Pawlowska, and later Christina Bloch—where she endured the war in the precarious position of attempting to pass as a Polish Christian child.

Even having expressed the story of her time in hiding, Tec is not an exception to the pervasive silence that is so common in survivors of the Holocaust. The primary characteristic of silence is plainly illustrated throughout the text. Very early on, Tec describes her Uncle Josef’s experiences as an example of silence: The war was not yet over—indeed, it had scarcely begun—and already he had endured deportation, jumping from a cattle car “to die breathing air,” being shot at and left for dead, and making his way back home, only to be recaptured by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp

(Tec 13-15). By the efforts of Tec's father, "a miracle was performed" and Uncle Josef was released from his imprisonment in Majdanek, a concentration camp not far from Lublin, but he was drastically changed: "More than ever he behaved as if he cared little about life. He avoided people, remained almost totally silent, and only with great reluctance and very superficially did he describe life in the concentration camp" (Tec 16). During this time Tec was a young girl, not much past eight years old, living and observing things she couldn't fully comprehend. "Without sparing...the details of Nazi atrocities," she was told by her parents that she must "grow up fast" if she was to survive (Tec 8). When she took on her new identity, silence was imposed on her by the Nazi regime, and by her father's desperate orders: "Never tell anyone where we went. And never, never, admit to anyone that you are Jewish" (Tec 93). During times of joy and times of anguish "an unguarded remark might arouse suspicion," so silence became the norm (Tec 113). Even down to the last moment, as they stepped out of hiding and "into a free world. All was silent" (Tec 211).

In the epilogue to her memoir, Tec addresses' questions of why she chose to end *Dry Tears* the way she did. Her response to the question was usually "evasive" (217). The truth, she confesses, is

I ended the story where I did because at that time I could go no further. With liberation, my struggle for survival ended only to be replaced by other, less concrete, less tangible kinds of struggle that had to do with personal losses, Jewish identity, and the seeming indifference of others to our survival. To delve into these complex issues would have required a

new a prolonged effort, one that emotionally I am not yet prepared to undertake (Tec 217).

In what she calls “a compromise between a new intellectual willingness to recall what happened after liberation and a continued emotional reluctance to face it,” Tec recounts some of her post-war experiences (219). At the age of thirteen, when the family came out of hiding Tec recalls the uncomfortable feeling of sitting around a table covered with their linens and set with their silver, but now “belonging” to someone else (and being “ordered...to silence” by “one of [her father’s] steel-like looks”); lying awake, in silence, knowing the rest of the “family was awake. Yet we did not communicate”; feeling as though “[her] old self had belonged here,” and yet she did not (Tec 219-20). Tec returned to her hometown with her family, one of only three intact families that returned, reconciling with acquaintances and distant relatives (Tec 223). Discussion of wartime experiences with other survivors was limited to brief statements of how one managed to survive; Tec noted that no one seemed capable of sharing details, and no one asked for elaboration—only if “one of us felt like saying more...such information had to be volunteered by the speaker. It was never requested by the listener” (Tec 225). In this way, the actions and post-war experiences, those that begin to shape the survivor identity, comport with the assertions made by Robyn Fivush regarding listener influenced storytelling. The speaker does not share and the listener does not ask; this results in a profound silence. But Tec supports my earlier conclusion that the silences is not a matter of forgetting or even dissociating the memories. Rather, it occurs because “stirring up memories of what happened during the war can hurt too much, and we must each choose our own time to endure this necessary pain” (Tec 225).

The Second Generation: Helen Epstein

As previously mentioned, the later generations cannot give voice to the pain and experiences of the survivors since they did not, in fact, survive them. Therefore, unlike the writings of the survivor generation, the second generation is looking toward the familial relationship and the details of life in their childhood homes. Alan L. Berger addresses this topic and specifies that the literature produced by second-generation writers “concerns itself largely with inter-psychic issues and with theological questions...Second generation writers speak not of the Shoah directly; rather, they reflect on the impact of the trauma on their parent’s child-rearing practices” (A. Berger 2010, 150, 158). Arguably the greatest impact on survivors’ child-rearing practices is the culture of silence within the homes. As previously established, the silence within which many of the survivor families were entombed contributes to the later generation’s lack of knowledge of the personal history of their elders. It also creates an insecurity in the second generation and a difficulty in re-creating the life stories of the survivors. Toni Morrison discusses this process of re-creating the story of an “interior life” for those who “didn’t write it (which doesn’t mean they didn’t have it)” by using “recollection that moves from the image to the text...the image comes first and tells me what the ‘memory’ is about” (113-14). This is a process that is often shared by second and third generation writers who are attempting to fill in the gaps in their own memory and identity. Where survivor memoirs are often introspective, the later generations cannot look inside to find the answers that they need. The later generations must necessarily look outside of themselves, sometimes deep into the family history, to fill in the missing pieces of their own identity.

What is it exactly that drives the later generations to continue digging deeper? According to James Berger, as the survivor generation disappears, “the urge, the need, to testify to the events of the Shoah remains, but these events now exist not even in personal memory but only through the encounter with texts, particularly the texts of testimony” (78). Such is the difficulty for the second, and especially the third, generation of writers: they are compelled to examine the memory but, as survivors die the personal memory of the events die with them. Alan L. Berger acknowledges the second generation’s “double burden of mourning a past that they never knew but which shapes their lives while, at the same time, seeking to shape this elusive memory for their own children and future generations” (A. Berger 2002, 343) In order to preserve the memory, and perhaps even find a hint to their own identity, it becomes necessary to turn to other methods to answer their questions: some make pilgrimages to places of familial significance but all involve some type of research.

Helen Epstein is a second generation writer who meticulously researches and traces her identity back through the women in her family in her memoir, *Where She Came From*. Working through the traumatic memory seems to take as many forms as there are theorists discussing it. For Epstein’s part, according to Alan L. Berger, working through “involves a process of ‘repair or mending’ (*tikkun atzmi*) of the post-Auschwitz self” (A. Berger 2002, 345). Epstein was forty-two years old when her mother, Franci, died and she began her repair, not only of her knowledge of Franci’s post-Auschwitz self, but also of her own. She recalls her mother’s death left her with a feeling that she “had been left in the world alone” (Epstein 10). She describes a relationship with her mother that was “intense,” defined by an unusual closeness throughout her childhood and

adolescence followed by a deep rift that was finally beginning to heal (Epstein 10). Franci was an accomplished dressmaker but, even as a child, it was her mother's stories—disjointed and incomplete—that Helen was most drawn to, far more so than learning the craft that Franci spent her life honing. There was, Epstein writes, “some disturbance in her telling that prevented them from making a whole” (Epstein 13). Epstein determined that “making and repairing clothes was a form of narrative” and she set out to mend those pieces of narrative into a whole (Epstein 14). In order to understand her mother's “post-Auschwitz self,” however, she first had to understand Franci's pre-Auschwitz self. In the process she learned a lot about her own identity as well.

Epstein began her search in the library reading about the “the world [her] mother came from,” a world “buried by a series of political and military upheavals,” and began to consider herself “an archeologist...picking up pieces of narrative” (Epstein 15, 16). It soon became clear that in order to fill in those missing details and mend the narrative, it was necessary to travel to the places where Franci lived before Epstein was born. Scholars such as Alan L. Berger consider this journey a pilgrimage, “because it is undertaken with ritual intensity... [and] evokes a change in the individual” (A. Berger 2002, 355). This pilgrimage is a defining characteristic of the second generation and offers the “sense of place” to the “crafted reality” of Epstein's memoir. Epstein's pilgrimage to the sacred places of her mother's history was an important step to repair the damage in her own psyche. For the second generation, the holes left in the stories relayed by the survivor generations can only be filled by carefully, gently pulling on each tiny thread of information until, with a lot of emotional and sometimes physical effort and a

little bit of luck, it all, or at least a major part, comes together as a comprehensible, coherent narrative.

For Epstein, re-creating her mother's history—not only her wartime experiences and after, but also well before, digging deep into the family lineage and reaching back to Franci's grandmother, Therese—that Epstein is able to begin to pick up those threads and begin pull together the missing pieces. It should be noted that Epstein was not left without any insight into her mother's memories after Franci's death. Franci had penned a memoir of her own some years earlier, along with a 12 page recitation of family history. The memoir that her mother wrote was of little help while Franci was alive; but, after Franci's death, re-reading the memoir gave Epstein an opportunity to really study it, an act that she asserts would have felt “disloyal” while her mother was alive (Epstein 234). In it, Franci writes of her desire to allow her children a glimpse into her own personal life, one she recognizes as being inaccessible to them before. “I grew up thinking that ordinary life stopped during the war,” Epstein writes, but her mother's memoir along with Epstein's extensive travel, research, and contact with the few relatives and friends she was able to uncover, illuminated an incredible normality of life punctuated by the abject horror and terror of the Holocaust. Of the process of researching and writing her own memoir Epstein explains:

I would research a topic until I felt surfeited with information. Sometimes there is a limited amount of information—so you never feel surfeited... I thought of it more as laying down tracks, like in making a recording of music. I only worked on one track at a time...The last part I focused on was my personal experience—the travelogue and my story of writing this

book. That really was what transformed the narrative. I put myself in wherever things got boring. The result is a very textured, very rich kind of writing...What it requires is an enormous amount of faith that it will all come together (Yelin, np).

Epstein draws parallels between memoir-writing and psychology, in that both “explore the meaning of experience” (Yelin, np). I agree. I also suggest that it allows for imaginative conversations with documentary history through research to fill the void left by the missing conversations of personal history—it fills in some of the blanks left by the silence.

The Third Generation: Johanna Adorjan

Even as the voices of the survivor generation are being forever silenced by death, members of the second generation are beginning to take a step back from scholarship. Hirsch recognizes this, and it causes her to question how Holocaust memory will continue. “How will the story survive without their acts of witness” Hirsch asks; “The second generation has acted as a gate-keeper but we now have to realize that we are ourselves handing the story on to the third, and making it available for others to connect their own very different histories” (“Interview with Marianne Hirsch”) Just as the second generation was different than the survivor generation, the third generation differs from all who came before. Despite the differences, though, there are some similarities. Like the second generation, the writings produced by the third generation often require extensive research since the authors can’t speak about experiences they didn’t personally have and, as we have seen, the second generation may or may not have access to additional details the third generations writers seek. Third generation writers “typically address a concern

to discover details of the victims'/survivors' life and death;" they are "seeking to transform trauma into history" and seeking out the building blocks of their own identity in the process (A. Berger 2010, 151). With the growing availability of material online, information is becoming increasingly more accessible; however, a significant portion of the writing will still involve travels to Europe, to the places that hold familial significance to the writer and the family. Similar to the work performed by Epstein, Johanna Adorjàn's memoir, *An Exclusive Love*, painstakingly compiles documentary evidence. Moreover, the author sought out personal witnesses in effort to reconstruct the lives of her grandparents.

Like Epstein, Adorjàn begins her search after the death of the survivors, her grandparents. Early in the text, Adorjàn acknowledges that the family "[doesn't] know much about the time [her] grandfather spent in the concentration camp" (17). It was a topic that was off limits and if anyone ever asked the response was always "We don't talk about that," which leads her to question how the family really "knows" anything about the unique skills he learned there (17). Adorjàn begins to recognize the gaps in her familial identity and in her personal identity during the process of going through a lifetime of documents, trinkets, and, yes, memories, her grandparents left behind. Not only does her search reveal silence, it also reveals a tiny glimpse of her grandparents' adoption of their post-war identities. What is unique to Adorjàn's memoir is that this will not be the only identity they must adopt: "life began in 1945. And another life...began in Denmark [in 1956]" (123).

While researching her family's history, Adorjàn learned of her grandparents' younger years, after the war but well before her birth, when the "typical we-don't-talk-

about-that attitude” (the silence so prevalent in the survivor generation) pertains to more than just the Holocaust itself. As Adorjàn was learning, this silence also pertains to the Jewish tradition in her family. Adorjàn’s grandfather, at the behest of her father, had attempted to write his memoirs for the sake of family memory; however, he “did not get very far” (72-3). By reading what little her grandfather had written, Adorjàn learned that he had been a secular Jew, both before and after the war. His limited memoir, however, leads Adorjàn to believe that the tradition meant more to him than the family knew. In her own memoir, Adorjàn reveals the depth of her emotional response to this knowledge:

If I am to be perfectly honest, that makes me not only sad but even a little angry. For he stole a part of my identity as well, deprived me of an essential part of my sense of self, bequeathed me a gap in my identity that seems like a mystery. I lack a piece of myself. Something is missing, and I don’t even know exactly what (75).

That "something missing" becomes clearer with every step of her research as Adorjàn begins to question what it means to be “typically Jewish” and learns more about herself the more she learns about her grandparents (85). Adorjàn’s memoir searches deep into the history of her grandparents. The facts that she finds hidden there not only give her a glimpse into her grandparents’ final days, but also begins to answer the questions that she has about herself. What is unique about Adorjàn’s third generation memoir is that the traumatic memory is more focused on the *pattern of trauma* in her grandparents’ lives rather than *the traumatic experience of the Holocaust* alone. The holes in her identity relate back to the Holocaust, but it is a long and circuitous route. The weight of the Holocaust has shifted for the third generation, and authors like Adorjàn are looking to

include it in their search for identity but not necessarily to make it the primary, or solitary, factor. Harkening back to Fivush's discussion of associative and dissociative identities, the third generation is the clearest example of an identity influenced, not defined, by the trauma of the Holocaust.

David Patterson emphasizes that "the significance of memory derives neither from the one who remembers nor from those remembered. Rather, it arises from a third position, from a third presence, between the two" (198). I assert that this presence for the third generation is the call to protect Holocaust memory, to identify its place in history, and to understand its influence on the lives of the writers in the present. Alan L. Berger sums it up, "While treating deeply personal and individualized experiences, these authors also transmit communal trauma...Their respective works provide important clues to how representation of Holocaust memory itself has a history and a future" (A. Berger 2010, 158). The Holocaust, to borrow Marianne Hirsch's phrasing, "still def[ies] narrative reconstruction and exceed[s] comprehension," but we are learning more and more about the inter-generational transmission of the trauma, and the memories associated with it, through recent psychological studies (106). Through the perspective of Holocaust memoir we can continue to identify the indicators of trauma as they appear in the later generations and watch as the memory remains while the impact of the trauma begins to fade, if even just a little.

Chapter Two: Breaking the Silence: Working Through Historical Trauma Native American Memoir

It is inarguable that survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides experience significant trauma. In the complex case of Native America, however, what remains arguable is if, when, and how genocide actually occurred. Alex Alvarez provides a comprehensive examination of the varied angles from which scholars approach this question in *Native America and the Question of Genocide*. Alvarez does not argue that there is no such thing as Native American genocide, but rather that “care needs to be taken when applying this label to specific historical events. These assertions are all too often made with sweeping generalizations that seem to suggest the Native experience, and by inference Native peoples, were all the same” (4). This undue conflation of distinct bands and tribes is among the larger concerns of today’s Native American scholars. Still, honoring and respecting the unique experiences of the different tribal communities does not obviate the necessity of considering the genocidal impact against Native America, nor does it support the claim that there is no such thing as a Native American genocide when, in fact, there have been many. There can be no doubt that the experience of the many nations was nuanced and varied, resisting the assumptions many in the West still hold today about the homogeneity of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. However, “a great deal of recent research indicates that for many, if not most Native peoples, fighting and war were a constant reality and much of this fighting was quite destructive and deadly” (Alvarez 22). Alvarez undertakes a detailed discussion of a variety of

circumstances where the genocide designation can, or cannot, be easily applied. And yet, Alvarez acknowledges that his work is not exhaustive, noting: “There is simply too much material to review with any level of detail and accuracy. Much has also been lost so that what remains is incomplete and sometimes speculative” (Alvarez 5). This incomplete and sometimes speculative body of work influences not only the construction of the public narrative but also the construction of personal narratives as well.

Silencing the Traumas of the California Natives

Alvarez deems what he calls the “massacres of the Natives of California,” which took place well after the so-called first contact of the West with the California Indians, as “perhaps more explicitly genocidal in nature” than other potential examples of genocide of Native peoples (106). Clearly genocidal and inarguably a dramatic—and traumatic—impact on the indigenous population, these massacres during the Gold Rush period were not the first nor the only wave of murders the California Natives endured. Alvarez details the decimation of the indigenous population to approximately 10% of the original numbers of tribal members during this period of massacres perpetuated during in the Gold Rush period. The numbers, however, had already been dramatically reduced. A century earlier the California Indians had been pressed into service by the Spanish building the mission system in California. This mission system was designed to serve as a method of conversion—civilizing the savages and saving their souls in the name of Christianity. Alvarez asserts that “the ulterior motive was often more about creating a docile and obedient labor force that it was about anything else” (107). Alvarez notes that during the period of missionization the indigenous population “had decreased by about a third to 200,000,” a passive construction that Deborah Miranda often takes issue with in

her memoir, *Bad Indians* (106). I argue alongside Miranda that by simply indicating that the population “had decreased by about a third,” and not explicitly stating that two-thirds of the California Indians were murdered, by not acknowledging the torturous experiences and traumatic impact of the missions system, we perpetuate a denial of the egregious devastation perpetrated on the California Indians and, I further argue, impose a silence in the public narrative that extends the traumatic impact of this devastation.

Miranda contends with this silence in the public narrative as she relies, at least in part, on research restricted by that same public archive to create her memoir. The memoir moves beyond simply conveying her own personal narrative and seeks to reconstruct the often overlooked—or intentionally concealed—true historical narrative of the California Mission Indians. Miranda relies on ethnographic evidence, letters, and recorded oral testimony to revive the lost voices of those oppressed during missionization and to help conceptualize the experiences of her ancestors who felt the echoes of that oppression generations later. In doing so, Miranda reveals a small portion of the traumas experienced by the victims of missionization, both those who survived and those who died. Miranda acknowledges contemporary scholars Eduardo and Bonnie Duran, whose work, not unlike the research applied to Holocaust literature, “suggests the survivors of genocide manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder many generations past the original violence” (*Bad Indians* 77). This assertion resonates with Miranda, who notes “this seems so useful in understanding the dynamics and dysfunctions of my own family!” (*Bad Indians* 77). How we talk about the cultural and historical traumas of genocide, indeed if we even talk about them at all, shapes the public narrative and influences the impact of the trauma on later generations. While denial is an absolute component of all genocides,

Miranda points out that all historical traumas are not treated equally in the public narrative.

In her introduction to *Bad Indians*, Miranda asks:

Can you imagine teaching about slavery in the South while simultaneously requiring each child to lovingly construct a plantation model, complete with happy darkies in the fields, white masters, overseers with whips, and human auctions? Or asking fourth graders to study the Holocaust by carefully designing detailed concentration camps, complete with gas chambers, heroic Nazi guards, crematoriums? (xvii).

In this pointed series of questions, Miranda reveals a not often considered perspective of the Native experience. In drawing parallels to such well known—and indisputably acknowledged—genocides, Miranda is quickly and effectively announcing her intention to pierce the veil of the existing historical narrative. The genocides effected upon American Indian nations are not often recognized as crimes, let alone as genocides. For Miranda, the dominant narrative that glosses over the abuse and torture of the Mission Indians will not go unchallenged. As she details the codified story of the California Missions, she takes care to painstakingly point out each omission, each smoothed over detail of the calculated cruelty endured by her ancestors, each gap in the historical narrative left by the silences. In discussing the missionization of the California Indians, Miranda notes that the “individual missions were successful only for the missionaries, who spent their lives secure in the belief that they served their Supreme Deity faithfully and had done no wrong” (*Bad Indians* 17). Similarly, the institutionalized silence of the official historical record reveals little to nothing of the violence and repeated traumas

experienced by the California Indians during the time that “80 percent [of the] California Indians [ended up] dead in a sixty-year period”—a fact that Miranda clarifies by noting that “from a pre-missionization population estimated as high as one million, California Indians now numbered about twenty thousand” (*Bad Indians* 17, 74). Very few, if any, of the atrocities committed against Native Women and children are contained within the stories of how the missions came to be. In terms of the history of sexual violence against Native women, Miranda notes, “Now it’s all legitimate research, figuring out how women survived the missions,[...] sexual violence against colonized women is [...] suddenly outrageous, a weapon of colonization, not a shameful wound.” (*Bad Indians* 23). The accepted public narrative of the California Indians has been white-washed and large portions of the realities of the period are lost in gaps of silence, which is not uncommon in situations of historical trauma. Whether we call it a genocide or not such large scale abuse and decimation of a targeted population is going to have an inherent traumatic effect. Silencing this trauma is not uncommon in situations of such large scale traumas. In fact, the literatures of the Holocaust are noted for the role of silence in the construction of survivor identity. Miranda is certainly aware of these silences created and supported by the incomplete archive but she is not satisfied with allowing the public narrative of the California Mission Indians to remain unchallenged

Alvarez argues that despite the incomplete archive, the California Indians represent a relatively clear case of genocide. I don’t disagree, however, I would caution that it could be as problematic to conflate the range of experiences of the California Indians into one as it is to conflate the entire Native experience as a whole. Before the arrival of the Spanish in 1769, the tribal nations in California had long established and

maintained “extensive trading networks that linked many of the groups together in an intricate web of affiliation and commerce, culture and conflict” (Alvarez 107). Eighty percent of the Native population was murdered during the period of missionization and thereafter. Alvarez suggests that by the end of the Gold Rush period perhaps only 10 percent of the California Indians had actually survived. In any case, I argue that missionization clearly qualifies as a genocide in its own right.

Although Alvarez’s inquiry focuses on the question of genocide itself and not on the trauma experienced and transmitted therefrom, he devotes a significant portion of his final chapter to this traumatic impact. He begins by noting the “significant social problems” experienced in many Native communities (Alvarez 159). He surveys the unusually high rates of occurrence of various social concerns as: violent crimes, such as rape, domestic and child abuse, and homicide; alcohol and substance abuse; suicide; and high rates of unemployment (Alvarez 160). He points to PTSD as at least a partial explanation of the result seen in Native communities, noting: “While we usually think of PTSD in terms of how it impacts individuals, it’s important to understand that it can also harm communities” (Alvarez 161). Such large scale cultural traumas as those which occurred during missionization will doubtless hold wide reaching impact. This has been widely studied and reflected in the world’s best known body of survivors of genocide, Holocaust survivors. While there are absolute and distinct differences between the two populations, there are certain incidents of missionization that bear a striking similarity to the Holocaust: namely, coerced removal from their homes to the missions, separation of families, forced labor, and persistent rape and murder (Alvarez 107-08). Alvarez reminds us that Spanish rule officially ended with the Mexican War of 1846-1848, where many

Natives sided with the Americans to help overthrow their oppressors, ultimately exchanging one oppressor for another; the cruel reality, they soon learned, was that they had fought against the oppressor who “sought to establish a society in which Natives belonged” for another who “wanted the Native peoples completely gone” (Alvarez 108). This new oppressor, the Americans, repaid the Native support during the Gold Rush era by propagandizing the Indigenous people in popular images as “less than human,” which allowed the settlers of California to carry out the genocide of the California Indians without interference of conscience (Alvarez 111). The war of extermination continued at the state level as “several California governors endorsed extermination against the Natives”; Alvarez takes care to note, however, that the arguably more humane “alternative to annihilation,” the reservation system, which played a key role in these genocidal acts, was implemented at the federal level (112).

Despite the clearly genocidal acts and the arguable similarities that can be found, the body of Native American survivor literature is not as distinct and well established as that of Holocaust survivor literature. Perhaps this is because of the lack of testimonial literature from the survivor generation. Even still, it must be acknowledged that for Native Americans, too, trauma is not manifested in the simple act of survival, briefly experienced, and ultimately forgotten. Trauma that is not recorded in an archive can still persist and be transmitted among generations of survivors until the manifestations are revealed much later. Here, as in Holocaust literature, subsequent generations of survivors can begin to truly recognize the manifestations of trauma in their own lives by reconstructing the lost histories of their victim-ancestors. This is particularly true for Deborah Miranda. Much like the literature created by the later generations of Holocaust

survivors, silence is pervasive in Miranda's family history, leaving large gaps in the construction of her autobiographical narrative. In addition, as previously established, the stories often told in the public sphere don't necessarily reflect with any accuracy the actual lived experiences of Miranda's ancestors.

Miranda takes care to point out the flaws as they exist in the public archive of the California Mission System. She shines a light on the discrepancies in the way the traumas of her ancestors have been taught and preserved with the ways that those of other large-scale cultural traumas such as the Holocaust and slavery have been addressed. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook suggest that "views heard in archives and through records are not just the dominant, privileged views of the powerful, for the very same 'mainstream' records, created by the privileged, can be deconstructed by new thinkers 'against the grain' to bring out voices which speak in opposition to power, or that insert irony or sarcasm or doubt" (15). Reclaiming the voices who go "against the grain" is not a simple task. Schwartz and Cook acknowledge this in stating "The gendered nature of the archival enterprise over time is a stark example that archives are not (and, indeed, never have been) neutral, objective institutions in society" (16). In recent years, however, scholars have attempted to give voice to those silenced by the annals of history. Despite the fact that "the story-telling, the ghostly and psychic, the spiritual and the feminine" were "squeezed out...in favor of men," some female voices still emerge (Schwartz and Cook 16). Miranda's efforts to challenge the archive in her memoir unearth the prejudices in the public narrative as they reveal the hidden pieces of her own life.

According to Jeanne Braham, "Women's autobiography has always understood the need to compose a life from bits and pieces of the past marinated in memory,

resurrected by the imagination and imbued with meaning” (2). This is precisely the process undertaken by Miranda’s memoir. The most personal truth is revealed not only through the research process but also through the act of writing itself, especially in situations of trauma. Composing the story of a life is complicated and the introspection required in recreating a personal history is often an arduous one that, when looking back at our lived experiences through the veil of memory, can often result in a change of perspective and even a rewriting of the truths as we once accepted them. For her part, Miranda plaits together the profound historical trauma of missionization with the repeated personal traumas of her life to reveal the truth of trauma, persistent and transmitted from generation to generation.

Psychological Work on Trauma in Tribal Nations

In a 1998 article, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn suggest that there are “far reaching implications” of trauma and that “wherever people are being decimated and destroyed, subsequent generations will suffer” (71). The missionization of the California Indians clearly resulted in their destruction. There is no question that the death of so many California Indians should have an impact on the future. In an attempt to quantify the extent of the impact, Brave Heart and DeBruyn continue, “We need only heed the traditional American Indian wisdom that, in decisions made today, we must consider the impact upon the next seven generations” (71). Almost two decades after Brave Heart and DeBruyn’s assertion, as if in direct response, Miranda offers the following confirmation:

The original acts of colonization and violence broke the world,
broke our hearts, broke the connections between soul and flesh. For many

of us, this trauma happens again in each generation, to children too young and too untrained to try to cope with dysfunction that ravages even adults...

I am the seventh generation since my great- great- great- great- great- great-grandparents Fructuoso Cholom and Yginia Yunisyunis emerged from Mission San Carlos de Borromeo in Carmel, California in the mid-1830s. I am half white, half Indian, mixed with Mexican and Jewish tribes. When I look at all that has passed since Fructuoso Cholom and Yginia Yunisyunis were emancipated, I wonder if they dreamed that their descendants would still be struggling to free ourselves seven generations later.

Miranda's statements confirm and underscore Brave Heart and DeBruyn's assertion. The stories contained within her memoir reflect and support their claims, and hers is only one of many whose stories could still be told. Miranda references this research, speaks to it directly in her memoir, but stops short of pointing out the places in her own text that are reflective of these issues. Instead, she focuses on collecting the fractured pieces of her own identity and reassembling them into an autobiographical narrative that reflects both the historical trauma of her ancestors and the personal experiences that define her, no matter if the form feels disjointed, jarring, and incomplete to its potential readers.

Miranda's narrative is an example of the dissociative effect of traumatic memory. Her earliest memories are memories of trauma infused with fear, which she describes from the childhood perspective in which they are held. Her childhood was peppered with fear, anxiety, bullying, sexual abuse, family violence and instability, substance abuse, and

pervasive—albeit unexplainable—anger (Miranda, *Bad Indians* 108-112). Brave Heart and DeBruyn have noted that:

Present generations of American Indians face repeated traumatic losses of relatives and community members through alcohol-related accidents, homicide, and suicide. Domestic violence and child abuse are major concerns among American Indian communities throughout the country. Many times deaths occur frequently, leaving people numb from the last loss as they face the most recent one. (64)

Many of these traumatic losses and experiences can be found in Miranda's past. Certainly she is no stranger to domestic violence and child abuse. She describes her parents' toxic relationship as "a history so scarring it was never spoken, never mentioned, by anyone...a spiritual obsession, a physical compulsion, a wicked sweet spell impossible to resist" (*Bad Indians* 152). Her parents' relationship was one clearly defined by not only domestic violence, but also silence. They catapulted between obsessive adoration and incredible rage, ultimately disappearing, one or the other, for weeks, months, even years at a time. In addition to the violence between her parents, Miranda recounts her experiences with bullying, exclusion, and even sexual abuse that defined her childhood.

Miranda recalls a childhood consumed with the fear of loss: "I knew my presence here on earth was so tentative that I was in constant danger of being devoured, absorbed, vanished...Everyone I loved had disappeared. I knew I was next" (*Bad Indians* 119). Historically, the cultural traumas experienced by Native Americans resulted in the "disappearance" of tribal members and the silencing of their voices. Miranda found her voice through writing; she thought "if I could keep telling the story, if I could keep

making words on the page tell the story, then maybe I could hang on” (*Bad Indians* 119). As I have shown, often the response to trauma is a profound silence. This time, however, the power of writing was, to Miranda, the power to survive. As an adult, Miranda again turned to writing as a defense against the effects of long-term trauma manifesting in her life, but it wasn’t instantly helpful or positive. She recalls, “the writing seems to help at first;...[but] the deeper I go, the less patience I have. My life...is no longer moving forward in time. The more I write, the further backward my words take me. I don’t go easily or willingly. But I need to write too much to let it take the blame for my mood swings. It’s easier to blame the kids” (Miranda, *Bad Indians* 114). In a sense, Miranda’s compulsion to write is indicative of the repetition compulsion Freud relates to trauma. Despite increasing difficulties within her family, Miranda retreated into her writing, both therapeutic and destructive, continuing to “write these words down with the tip of a pen forged out of grief and violence” (118). This impulse is seen in the later generations of Holocaust survivors and, I argue, is complicated by the sense of the unspeakable that Cathy Caruth uses to define her trauma theory. The drive to speak the unspeakable creates the disjointed narrative in *Bad Indians* and makes Miranda’s memoir a clear trauma narrative. Child of Holocaust survivors, Helen Epstein was drawn to the disjointed and incomplete stories of her mother and turned to them in composing her memoir. Miranda, on the other hand, is telling her own story, disjointed and incomplete, patched together with information she gleans from her research. Just as the process of research and writing allowed the fragmented sense of self to begin to be repaired for later generations of children of Holocaust survivors, the act of telling – the storytelling and the composing of her memoir, complete with the process of research and writing therein -

allows Miranda to begin to integrate the facets of her identity and move toward self-healing.

Excavating History

As she continues to write, Miranda includes her own memories woven in with the archival research in her memoir to reconstruct the story of the California Indians as well as the story of her own life. She finds these voices in photos, letters, and the careful ethnography created before she was born—but still a hundred years after missionization. This is reminiscent of Braham’s caution to remember necessary components of invention and imagination when considering the role of memory and the retelling of history (Braham 42). In this case, the version of historical truth that has been veiled in the archive is carefully excavated by Miranda and laid bare for all to see. And in the truth, the echoes of trauma are also revealed. It is important to remember, however, that, not unlike that of later generations of children of Holocaust survivors, Miranda's memoir is not exclusively centered on the traumas of missionization. What is found here instead are the effects of a trauma that occurred well before she was born that still hold influence over her life in a sometimes complicated and often hard to recognize ways. The historical trauma of missionization--perhaps through the silences of the public narrative--continues to affect her life, but doesn't necessarily become the all-consuming presence that defines her life, as it did for those who lived through the experience. Miranda's memoir addresses this historical trauma alongside others in her life and it becomes part of her identity, but not all of it.

Although the many traumas Miranda experienced throughout her own life were not directly at the hands of the colonizing forces of the nineteenth century, there are many

examples of transmitted trauma revealed in her memoir. Miranda is able to expose and acknowledge the sources of her own trauma and how they have shaped her life experiences. Even as she comes to terms with what it means for her to be a Native woman stepping out of the margins, she is clearly noting that that she is not only writing for herself. She recognizes the ongoing trauma for Native women, stating, “Women of color still need to talk about what it’s like to be an Indigenous person alive in her still-colonized homeland; someone who, when she looks at that homeland, sees few traces of an Indigenous presence, or none that are recognizable—and yet, *knows that Indigenous presence is there because she is it*” (Miranda, "What's Wrong with a Little Fantasy" 335). In addition, she is not afraid to admonish others: “If you do not examine Native experiences and voices, you agree to live in, and help construct, a culture of erasure, invisibility, lies, disguise” (Miranda, "What's Wrong with a Little Fantasy" 334). Clearly, Miranda is writing to tell the history of herself and her family, but she is also writing to tell the history of the Native experience during and after missionization, to fight against that “culture of erasure, invisibility, lies, and disguise.” Through her writing Miranda is using storytelling as a healing process, the experience itself empowering an improvement of condition.

Miranda speaks of the experience of writing in “‘Like Melody or Witchcraft’: Empowerment through Literature,” saying:

Writing, the art of literature, is like tuning a drum: a whole body experience. I cannot leave my body behind when I read and write; not the flesh-and-blood body I really have, nor that body’s “Indian” identity to which my audience and I have been culturally trained to “see” and respond

to. So I work with what I bring. When I write about being a child of color in a white world, when I write about sexual abuse, the intergenerational violence that a Native American father passes on to his children, or what it is like to fall madly in love with another Indian woman, I cannot simply insert information and understanding into my reader's minds. But I can, I hope, evoke a resonance within them (105).

Here Miranda describes the complementary—and sometimes competing—facets of her own identity. Miranda's reflection on the connection between them does evoke a resonance, not least of which is that of a shared cultural memory of violence. Marianne Hirsch discusses the idea of a shared cultural memory in terms of the Holocaust in a term she coins “post-memory”. Hirsch posits that, at least in terms of Holocaust memory, members of the later generations “‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (105). These memories, Hirsch explains, “were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (106). I argue that this is a memorial process not unlike that seen in *Bad Indians*. There is a historical trauma still at work many generations removed from the initial trauma. So how do we come to understanding the physical and emotional impact of a genocidal trauma when even the existence of the genocide is in dispute?

A great deal of psychological research in recent years has focused on the physical and emotional health of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIANs). Many of these studies rely on the link between “the body and social inequities,” which:

first gained attention in the 1840s when social scientists found that the impact of abhorrent working conditions, poor access to food, and

inadequate health care in childhood led to premature mortality. However, it was not until the Depression Era that American researchers began to move away from “faulty gene” research to explore how social, economic, and political forces were expressed in bodies. (Walters, et al. 183)

Researchers are consistently showing that,

although classic social determinants of health (e.g., low socioeconomic status) contribute to poor health,...these factors do not sufficiently explain the high rates of poor health and mental health, particularly with respect to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, diabetes, cardiovascular disease (CVD), and pain reactions. (Walters, et al. 180)

In addition, it is not only the known stressors and traumas that are a concern. Research points to the idea that the embodiment of trauma “reveal[s] stories that are also not conscious, hidden, forbidden, or even denied by individuals or groups” (184). This inherited trauma continues to impact the lives and interactions of the current generation. However, the reasons and realities of this impact can be difficult to ascertain since “survivors and descendant offspring of [historical trauma] experiences tend not to want to ‘talk’ about the event, thus the respondent may not have specific knowledge of the event from their family of origin” (Walters, et al. 187). As we can clearly see, this culture of silence is one that continues to damage not only the survivors of the trauma but many generations thereafter. Miranda seems to be taking the first step in moving away from the continued trauma of silence.

Telling as Cure

Not unlike Patricia Hampl, who “suggests that the memoirist writes not out of the

impulse to relay to the reader what she already knows but, *in the act of telling*, to discover what she has come to know,” Miranda seems compelled to write and, even more so, fixated on the power of telling (Braham 47). In “Dear Vincenta,” a section of *Bad Indians* giving the account of a young native girl who dared to talk about the abuse she has endured and name her abuser, Miranda addresses telling as an act of bravery:

Vincenta, I keep thinking of how you ran home, telling everyone what had happened...one hundred years after the padres raped you in the church, Isabel told your story to Harrington. She told it like it happened yesterday. And she was *mad*...She told that story like she could bring down the wrath of God by just finding the right words.

Maybe she did, Vincenta. By not following the rules, the rules that said we don't talk about this stuff, we don't name names, we don't tell outsiders (24).

Miranda's inclusion of Vincenta's story from the archive in her own text reflects the power of telling. Here again, the act of telling the story of her own sexual abuse appears to be the beginning of Miranda's personal healing. Miranda didn't have anyone in her family telling these stories. It seems clear that Miranda recognizes that speaking about traumatic experiences can lead to healing, especially since she takes care to note in her memoir some of the research being done in the field. Along with the personal details of her family history, through research and reflection Miranda began to piece together the stories of historical trauma. In beginning to tell her story, she is not only relying on the traditional storytelling of the past, she also is able to begin to work through at least a portion of her personal trauma.

Miranda refers to the birth of her ancestors as a victory from the ruins of the California Missions. Still, she acknowledges the duality of such a victory through the words of another: “I am the result of the love of thousands,’ Linda Hogan, herself a survivor of genocide, wrote. And sometimes we are the result of the bitter survival of thousands, as well. Sometimes we get here any way we can” (Miranda, *Bad Indians* 74). By grappling with history and her own personal traumas, Miranda has, through what could be considered a grueling process of self-realization, emerged from her personal darkness and admits, “I thought perhaps the cure was telling. Then I thought the cure was telling the truth. Now in the cool of dawn, I think to myself, maybe it’s each woman telling her truth in a language forced from every knife ever held to her throat, or wielded in self-defense. It’s not about destruction or forgetting, but transformation” (Miranda, *Bad Indians* 118). The move from silence to telling provides a “cure” to the continued transmission of trauma. By acknowledging the traumas that occurred both in her own life and well before she was born, Miranda has effectively begun the process of transforming the traumatic memory into a memory of trauma—one that remembers the trauma and the damage that is cause but can no longer continue to harm the generations that follow.

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