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**Interviews:**

Ayelet Golan, Interview with the author creator, May 20 2022, Online. The interview was conducted and recorded via Zoom.

Ronit Kano and Naomi Yoeli, Interview with the author creator, 2 April 2020, Tel-Aviv. The interview was conducted in person and recorded via voice recording device.



## **Continuity by Change: Intergenerational Memory Transmission in Contemporary Israeli Theater**

### **ABSTRACT**

Shared stories passed down through time have a profound influence on how community members perceive and interpret the world around them. The process of stories' transmission is complex, as the stories are subject to interpretations and changes. This paper examines the transformations that occur in stories as they are transmitted from generation to generation, focusing on stories related to the Shoah, which holds great significance in the identity of the Jewish people and has a central role in the West social and political spheres.

One of the primary means of transmitting the memory of the Shoah are testimonies given by Shoah survivors. As we approach the second quarter of the twentieth-first century, fewer and fewer of the original witnesses are present, and the knowledge of the past is being exponentially carried forward by generations who did not directly experience the Shoah. This intergenerational transition provides a timely vantage point to study how stories evolve and negotiate when transmitted across generations.

This paper provides an analysis of two contemporary Israeli theater spectacles, *My Mother's Courage* (2012) and *My Hugo* (2020), which depict the relationships between different generations as they retell the survivor's story, often presenting conflicting perspectives. The paper focuses on intimate intergenerational interactions transmitted in a domestic setting and how they allow for expressing nuanced and complex memories. It examines how memories evolve and change through retelling, suggesting that these changes and conflicts are crucial in the process of negotiating memory and becoming a memory carrier. These spectacles invite us to consider Shoah memory as an integral part of a communal tradition, underscoring that its continuity allows for change.

**KEYWORDS:** memory, transmission, Shoah, Israel, trauma, theater, Holocaust

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\*This paper is part of my doctoral project entitled: "Theatrical Representations of Shoah Memory in the Early twentieth-first century Century Israel (Advisors: Dr. Yair Lipshitz, Prof. Iris Milner). Theatre Arts Dept, Tel-Aviv University, Israel.



## RÉSUMÉ

Les histoires partagées ayant traversé le temps exercent une influence importante sur la manière dont les membres d'une communauté perçoivent et interprètent le monde environnant. Le processus de transmission de la mémoire est complexe, puisque les histoires sont sujettes à interprétations et changements. Cet article explore les transformations subies par les histoires dans leur passage d'une génération à une autre, avec une focalisation sur la mémoire de la Shoah. La Shoah témoigne des significations profondes pour ce qui est de l'identité du peuple juif, et son rôle dans la sphère politique et sociale est crucial.

Le principal moyen pour la transmission de la mémoire de la Shoah est le témoignage des survivants. Historiquement parlant, lorsque nous nous approchons de la première partie du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les témoins « originaires » ne sont plus présents, et la mémoire est portée par les générations n'ayant pas vécu directement l'expérience de la Shoah, ce processus de transmission se faisant souvent avec de manière exponentielle. Cette transition intergénérationnelle se constitue comme une opportunité unique d'investiguer la manière dont les histoires ont évolué parmi les générations, et comment ces dernières assument leur rôle de « porteuses de mémoire » au sein de la communauté mnémonique.

Cet article est basé sur l'analyse de deux spectacles de théâtre israéliens contemporains, *My Mother's Courage* (2012) et *My Hugo* (2020), les deux mettant en avant la transmission intergénérationnelle de la mémoire. Ces spectacles explorent la relation entre des générations différentes en reracontant l'histoire du survivant, souvent illustrant des perspectives conflictuelles. Il y est examiné la manière dont ces changements et conflits contribuent à la formation de l'identité des porteurs de mémoire. L'article souligne l'importance des interactions intimes dans l'espace domestique, lequel se configure comme une plateforme d'expression de mémoire nuancée et complexe, transmettant ainsi les divers thématiques partagés au sein de la mémoire publique. L'article examine également la manière dont ces spectacles théâtraux mettent en lumière la dynamique-même de la mémoire, en montrant comment celle-ci évolue et se transforme à la mesure du processus de narration. Mon postulat est fondé sur l'idée que ces spectacles nous invitent à considérer la mémoire de la Shoah comme une partie intégrale d'une tradition communale soulignant le fait que la perpétuité de cette mémoire permet le changement.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** mémoire, transmission, Shoah, Israël, trauma, théâtre, Holocaust



## **Continuity by Change: Intergenerational Memory Transmission** **in Contemporary Israeli Theater**

The beliefs, behaviors and knowledge transmitted from generation to generation within a particular society or group, play a central role in shaping the identity of the group as a community. Conveyed from generation to generation, the shared stories influence the way in which community members perceive and understand the world and their place within it. The telling and retelling of the stories over the generations is a complex process, as the stories are constantly open to interpretations and change.<sup>1</sup> How much can a story change while still maintaining its significant essence? In this paper, I examine the changes that occur in stories, as they are transmitted from generation to generation, focusing on a memory that holds a significant role in the identity of Jewish people and a great importance in social and political spheres - the memory of the Shoah.

The Shoah (Holocaust) was the genocide of European Jews during World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, Nazi Germany and their collaborators systematically murdered millions of Jews across German-occupied territories.<sup>2</sup> The memory of the Shoah is transmitted through various means, with one of the most central and significant being the Shoah survivors' testimonies.<sup>3</sup> By the middle of the twentieth-first century, the original witnesses will no longer be present, and the memory will be solely transmitted by generations who did not directly experience the Shoah. This current intergenerational transition necessitates a paradigm shift in the way that memory is transmitted from actual witnesses to the carriers of the memory. Hence, examining the transmission of Shoah memory in the twentieth-first century provides a timely case study on how stories evolve when they are transmitted across generations, and how ensuing generations step into their roles as memory carriers and take their place in being members of the mnemonic community.

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<sup>1</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81-99 ; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1- 40.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Michal Givoni, בעיה של בניה – היסטוריה של העדות – אתיקת העדות [The Ethics of Testimony - A History of a Problem] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, Van Leer Publications, 2015), 1-91.



In response to the social transition, in the early twenty-first century Israeli theater, I noted a growing number of spectacles that offer a reflective perspective on memory itself. The reflective aesthetic emphasizes the distinction between the experience and its memory, highlighting the gap between the past and how it is remembered. In my research, I examine various theatrical techniques used to achieve the reflective approach, with one genuine method being the staging of the very act of intergenerational memory transmission.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the exploration of Shoah memory transmission through a collective-national perspective and its portrayal in public spaces,<sup>5</sup> these spectacles delve into the transmission of private memory within families. Private memory transmission in a domestic setting is an intricate subject for discussion, as it extends beyond a specific time frame and is experienced in daily life and within different contexts. The arts, including literature and film, often look at exactly this type of memory. The arts allow us to explore society's most complex questions, by looking at the lives of families and individuals. Within the arts, theater as a dialogical, dynamic and interpretative medium, offers a unique vantage point to intergenerational memory transmission.

This paper analyzes two contemporary Israeli theater spectacles that present intergenerational memory transmission: a mother/son and a father/daughter/granddaughter, who join in retelling first-generation survival stories. The first spectacle is *My Mother's Courage* by George Tabori and was adapted directed by Ayelet Golan (2012),<sup>6</sup> The second spectacle is *My Hugo* by Ronit Kano and Shacher Sitner and was directed by Naomi Yoeli (2020).<sup>7</sup> The discussion is divided into three parts. Firstly, the introduction provides context on memory transmission in society, with a specific focus on Jewish tradition. It highlights the challenges arising from the current intergenerational transition in Shoah memory. The second part analyzes the spectacles, specifically examining the changes and conflicts that arise during the intergenerational transmission of memory. The conclusion discusses the insights gained from staging the act of

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<sup>4</sup> This paper is part of my doctoral project entitled: 'An Audience for the Memory: Theatrical Representations of Shoah Memory in Early Twentieth-First Century Israel' (Advisors: Dr. Yair Lipshitz, Prof. Iris Milner). Theatre Arts Dept, Tel-Aviv University, Israel.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Stephanie Shosh Rotem, *Constructing Memory: Architectural Narratives of Holocaust Museums* (New York: P. Lang, 2013) ; Liat Steir-Livny, הר הזיכרון יזכור במקומי: הזיכרון החדש של השואה בתרבות בישראל [Let the Memorial Hill Remember: Holocaust Representation in Israeli Popular Culture] (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> George Tabori, *My Mother's Courage*, adapted and directed by: Ayelet Golan. Premiered in 2012 at the School of Performing Arts in Hakibbutzim College, Tel Aviv, Israel. The spectacle continued to run in various theaters, including 'Tmuna' Theatre in Tel Aviv and 'The Train' Theatre in Jerusalem. The production was awarded the Israeli 2013 Kipod HaZahav Prize for adaptation.

<sup>7</sup> Ronit Kano and Shacher Sitner, *My Hugo*, directed by: Naomi Yoeli. Premiered in 2020 at the Children's Theater Festival in Haifa and received three awards: Best Production, Music, and Lighting.



intergenerational memory transmission. It emphasizes the significance of intimate interactions within the domestic space, which provides an environment for the expression of nuanced and complex memories. It highlights the dynamic nature of memory and prompts us to distinguish between the task of preserving the historical facts of the Shoah and the significance of Shoah memory as a social memory that plays a role in the identity of individuals within a specific mnemonic community. By recognizing Shoah memory as part of our tradition, we can illuminate the notion that preserving memory ties to its renovation.

## 1. Part I - Introduction

Memory is one of the foundations of society.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Jewish people, memory, or more precisely, remembrance and memory transmission, has become a defining aspect of Jewish tradition.<sup>9</sup> The act of memory transmission is featured in many verses, with perhaps the most famous being: “והגדת לבנך” (*and you shall tell your child*) (Exodus 13:8). This verse and one of the ensuing verses, “והיה כי ישאלך בנך” (*and if your child will ask you*) (Exodus 13:14), prompts us to focus attention not only to the content of the story, but moreover on the importance of the dialog, the methodology on how the story is transmitted. The focus is on both the performative action of — telling, and on the specific audience — the child, who may also have their own questions and insights.

These verses hold the notion that memory is not only the detailed knowledge that must be kept in a book, but also as a *communicative transaction*, which Dorothy Noyes marks as a vital element of tradition.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in Hebrew, these two words come from the same grammatical root מ.ס.ר: while transmission is מסירה (*Mesirah*), tradition is מסורת (*Masoret*).<sup>11</sup> The notion of memory transmission becomes very relevant and complex, given the current generational change in Shoah memory, and the important place of the testimonies of the actual survivors in conveying the memory of the Shoah.

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<sup>8</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2003), 1-10.

<sup>9</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 46-51 ; Pier Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: On the Problem of Place,’ trans. Rebecca Spivak, *Zmanim - A Quarterly for History* 45 (1993): 4-19 ; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 1982) 1-27.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Noyes, ‘Tradition: Three Traditions,’ *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 3 (2009): 233-268.

<sup>11</sup> ‘About the word tradition’, The Academy of the Hebrew Language, accessed 11 July 2023, <https://hebrew-academy.org.il/keyword/מסורת/>.



The significance of the testimonies has been influenced by various political, social, historical, and philosophical factors. From the early days of the war, the concept of bearing witness to and enduring the atrocities became a personal motivation for survival, serving as both a political and moral response to the efforts aimed at erasing evidence of the Nazi regime's crimes.<sup>12</sup> Testimonies played a central role in post-war trials, most notably in the influential Eichmann trial, which was designed to provide a platform for survivors to share their stories and have a stage where their voices could be heard.<sup>13</sup>

While first-hand testimonies hold great significance in providing an authentic experience, the philosophical discourse in the 1960s raised epistemological questions regarding the existence of unified truth. Consequently, a notable number of Shoah deniers emerged, challenging the reliability of testimonies as a basis for historical judgment. This skepticism has shaped the understanding of testimony within psychological, philosophical, and ethical discussions, highlighting the subjective nature of the survivor's experience and emphasizing testimony as a performative act that conveys the profound impact of trauma.<sup>14</sup> This perspective has also led to the understanding of testimony as an artistic-ethical practice, exemplified in Claude Lanzmann's influential 1985 French documentary film, "Shoah," where testimony takes center stage.<sup>15</sup>

Acknowledging the centrality of the firsthand testimony, Diana Popescu, in her study on Shoah Memory, refers to the twentieth-first century as the *Post-Witness Era*.<sup>16</sup> In this intergenerational transition, without witnesses who can testify on their own actual experiences, the memory shifts from *living memory* — "first-hand" oral testimony — to *mediated memory* — a "second-hand" form of representation. One of the challenges of this inevitable transition is that while the story's details are preserved, the embodied action of telling will presumably be eradicated along with the actual original teller of the story. Therefore, in the

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<sup>12</sup> see for example: Boaz Cohen, *The Next Generations: How Did They Know? The Birth and Development of Israeli Holocaust Research* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publishing, 2010) ; This motivation has been described in: Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger-Padovan (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), 23-29.

<sup>13</sup> Ora Herman, מאחורי הקלעים של משפט אייכמן [The Furnace and the Reactor: Behind the Scenes at the Eichmann Trial] (Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Givoni, היסטוריה של בעיה, אתיקת העדות – [The Ethics of Testimony - A History of a Problem], 52-91

<sup>15</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 204 -255.

<sup>16</sup> Diana I. Popescu, 'Introduction: Memory and Imagination in the Post-Witness Era,' in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, ed. Tanja Schult and Diana I. Popescu (New-York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-7.



*Post-Witness Era*, the loss is not of knowledge — written or recorded—but more of a physical presence, a live performative act.

As such it is important to explore the performative act of *communication transaction* that is done not by survivors themselves—the witnesses—but rather by their children, the following generations. In the context of the Shoah, the transmission of highly traumatic memories is complex and challenging, as the narrative of the parents who survived was often shrouded in silence. The heavy burden of trauma created a desire to pass on the memory without necessarily transferring the trauma itself, rendering it a highly delicate process. Discussions about the transmission of trauma often focus on the physiological aspects within the framework of transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience,<sup>17</sup> This paper will not delve into that aspect. Instead, the emphasis will be on the intentional decision to share the story.

## **2. Part II - Inquiry**

In my analysis, I will examine each spectacle separately, starting with a brief overview of the authors of each play before delving into a discussion of the work itself. The spectacles utilize puppetry and/or object theater techniques, resulting in rich and complex artistic imagery. While the artistic language holds great significance and encompasses multiple layers, I will not elaborate on these aspects in this paper. My primary focus will be on examining the intergenerational relationships conveyed through the textual elements.

### **2.1 My Mother's Courage: Eat in the Kitchen**

The play *My Mother's Courage* was written by George Tabori in 1979. Tabori was an influential playwright and director in the US and Germany in the late 20th century. Born in Hungary in 1914, George immigrated to London in 1935. Although he left Hungary before the Nazi occupation, his parents were deported to Auschwitz, where his father Kornél (Cornelius) was killed, and his mother, Elsa, managed to escape and spent the rest of the war in hiding. After the war, Elsa joined her son in London. In a letter, George recounted the profound impact of the war on her, expressing the difficulty of comprehending the magnitude of her loss—a

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<sup>17</sup> See for example: Jill Salberg and Sue Grand, *Wounds of History : Repair and Resilience in the Trans-Generational Transmission of Trauma* (London : Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).





sorrow that is beyond any ordinary mourning. He wrote that what the survivors experienced and witnessed was so degrading, unimaginable, and absurd that there is no language to express it. Therefore, he decided to write a play to express through the artistic realm of the theater the inexpressibility of his mother's experiences.<sup>18</sup>

In the play, a character portraying a Son narrates the story of his Mother, depicting a day in her life in Budapest during the summer of 1944. On that day, Elsa, the mother of George, who was on her way to play cards at her sister's house, was arrested and sent along with thousands of other Jews to Auschwitz. On their way, in one of the stations where the train stopped, Elsa complained to the Nazi officer in charge, that her arrest was illegal because she had a "Protection Certificate" issued by the Swedish Red Cross, which she had forgotten at home, and therefore she should be released. To her surprise, the officer believed her and sent her back to Budapest on the first-class carriage of the returning train, where, according to the play, she arrived at her sister's house, apologized for the delay, joined the card game, and even won some money, "so she had every reason to be satisfied."<sup>19</sup>

The structure of the play oscillates between truth and fiction, combining elements of both epic and dramatic styles. The son serves as the epic storyteller, narrating the story in the present time, while the mother and other characters experience the events in the dramatic past, highlighting the disparity between the actual events and their retelling. This interplay of time, irony, and conflicts between the son and the mother, creates an aesthetic that seeks not to represent history directly, but to confront the memory of history. The play was first produced in Munich in 1979 and subsequently had worldwide stages, including in Israel in 1989 and once again in 2012.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Anat Feinberg, *Embodied Memory: The Theatre of George Tabori* (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 1999), 221-235. In her book, Feinberg also mentions that like many other survivors, Elsa refrained from speaking about the war. Tabori urged his mother to write her memoirs, eventually she agreed but the handwritten document was lost. Elsa passed away in 1958 and Tabori reconstructed the story from his memory.

<sup>19</sup> George Tabori, 'My Mother's Courage,' trans. Rivkah Meshulach in *מחזורי, ג'ורג' טבורי* [*George Tabori: plays*] ed. Shimon Levi and Gad Kinar (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2004). All the play quotes included in this paper are English translations I provided. These translations are based on Ayelet Golan's Hebrew adaptation of the play, which itself is derived from Rivkah Meshulach's Hebrew translation.

<sup>20</sup> Tabori initially directed the play as a radio play for RIAS in Berlin in 1979, and later that year in a theater in Munich. (see: Feinberg, *Embodied Memory: The Theatre of George Tabori*, 221-235). The play performed on stages worldwide and was adapted into a film in which Tabori himself portrays the character of the son (*My Mother's Courage*, 1995, director: Michael Verhoeven). In Israel, the 1987 stage production was directed by Jack Messinger and premiered at The Cameri Theater of Tel Aviv under the title 'The Journey of Mama Tabori.' More on the Cameri Theater production: The Israeli Center for the Documentation of the Performing Arts, Tel Aviv University, Performances Collection Archive, 29.3.3.



In the 2012 production, the director Ayelet Golan decided to emphasize the intergenerational relationship in telling the story, rather than the story itself.<sup>21</sup> She adapted the play to have only two actors: the Mother and the Son, instead of the original five actors in the script. She set the play in a domestic setting, on a theater stage designed as a kitchen from the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> To increase the tension between the mother and the son, Golan used the effectiveness of the live-performative event by involving the presence of the audience. She added an opening scene where the mother and son warmly welcome the audience, explaining that this evening the mother's story will be told for the first time. For this special event, they will tell the story while baking the family's famous recipe for a traditional Hungarian pastry.

After the opening scene, the son, standing at the front left of the stage, begins narrating his mother's story, while she is baking the pastry. The son's narration is far from straightforward; he adds his own interpretation, poetic descriptions, and comic commentary. His mother, true to her story, constantly interrupts him, correcting the details of the story, often objecting to his vivid imaginative modifications. (See FIGURE 1, Annex) In the beginning, the conflict between the mother and son revolves around seemingly insignificant details. They debate the decoration of the hat that she wore (wax flowers or silk ribbon?) or the type of fruit that she had in her bag on the day of her arrest (an apple or a pear?). With each passing moment, the confrontation develops, delving into a broader discussion about the necessity and the proper approach to recounting these complex events.<sup>23</sup>

I will specifically focus on two scenes from the play that vividly capture different aspects of the confrontation between the mother and son. The first scene revolves around the use of imagination in the narration. The second scene depicts the need to confront the silence and to give an expression to the complex moments.

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<sup>21</sup> The analysis of the spectacles is based on my impression of being an active spectator at two live spectacles, as well as analyzing a private recording of the spectacles.

<sup>22</sup> Ayelet Golan, Interview with the author, 20 May 2022.

<sup>23</sup> In the play, Tabori doesn't attempt to extract moral lessons or blame the Germans; he simply aims to describe: this is what happened, or this is what could have happened. The plot of the story, which appears fictional and exaggerated, is true, but Tabori made changes, additions, and blurred the line between truth and fiction. It is unknown how closely the play's plot aligns with reality. Tabori intentionally exaggerated and obscured the events. Nevertheless, parts of the story are indeed rooted in reality, see: Leah Hadomi, 'The Historical and the Mythical in Tabori's Plays,' *Forum Modernes Theater* 8, no. 1 (1993): 3.



### 2.1.1 Imagination - *Postmemory*

One compelling example that highlights the confrontation between the mother and son regarding the telling of the memory is a scene describing the "Aktion" - the mass deportations of Budapest Jews at the train station. The son takes the lead in telling the story, while the mother adds nuanced descriptions and additional details about the characters and events. The son passionately recounts the chaos and violence as he imagined it to be. As he continues his excitement grows, and he becomes fully immersed in portraying the events "as if" he personally experienced them. His speech becomes rapid, and he symbolically throws kitchen utensils into the sink, representing the people being forced onto the train. In contrast to the son, the mother's facial expression clearly shows her discomfort by the way he is telling his version of the story. She tries to "save" the utensils by gently catching them and placing them back before they reach the sink. When her discomfort significantly increases, she begins making her way out of the room. Meanwhile, the son, completely immersed in the intensity of the story, is unaware of his mother's actions and continues to vividly describe the chaotic scene. Just as the mother is about to leave the room, the son notices her, their eyes meet and lock in an intense gaze. The mother returns to the kitchen and begins to tidy up the mess, using small gestures to restore order, and confronts her son on the way he has turned her traumatic memory into an imaginative story:

Mother (sarcastically): A truly unique artistic observation. (silence. she collects the utensils to the sink)

Son (hurt): Are you laughing at me?

Mother: No. I just told you a story, and now you're telling a "story" (cleaning the glass with a cloth). How can two stories be the same?

(Silence fills the air as both of them clean and tidy up the kitchen.)

Son: Why don't you tell it yourself? (pauses, looks at her) Give it a try!

Mother: When you were a child, you used to turn life into stories. I really appreciated that about you. I can't tell you my story now, what I remembered I have remembered for you, and now I've forgotten so much already. I can only correct you from time to time. Oh, you have a tendency to exaggerate and beautify things, but they weren't as pretty as they sound from your perspective. At the Western Railway Station, I have nothing to say about "Crossed Sunbeams." I stood there quietly, looking for companions, and friends, focusing on my own affairs, hoping



that someone would see my dignified behavior and maybe, just maybe,  
save me. A foolish hope.  
(She falls silent, continues organizing the kitchen, settles down, and rolls  
the dough.)

This scene emphasizes the changes in how memory is being narrated by someone who did not personally experience it.<sup>24</sup> The mother's sarcastic comment expresses her discomfort with how her son transforms her private and delicate story into a spectacle. The son is deeply hurt by her remark as it challenges his identity as a playwright, a "storyteller" whose role is to artistically share stories, making them accessible and engaging for others.

The juxtaposition between the "original source" mother and the "second-hand interpreter" son can be further understood through Marianne Hirsch's notion of *Postmemory*. This term suggests that the second generation remembers and relates to their parents' experiences as if they have lived through them themselves. This type of memory is based on imagination, and according to Hirsch, this form of memory is powerful because it does not rely on the gaps of the traumatic memory but rather complements them through imagination, creating a vivid sense of real memory.<sup>25</sup> The confrontation between the mother's original memory and the son's imaginative *Postmemory* highlights the dual nature of imagination and its role in the *Post-Witness Era*. On one hand, imagination serves as a vivid way of relating the story, while on the other hand, it becomes a subject of criticism due to its deviation from actual events. The emphasis on imagination in this case also prompts self-reflection on the artistic medium of the theater, through which this memory is being performed—a medium that blends truth and fiction, and entails actors who embody someone else's story in the first person. This act transforms the memory into a representation that is different from the actual event, but serves to keep the event story alive and relevant.

### **2.1.2 Expression - *Memory Carrier***

Alongside the conflict regarding the differences in versions and use of imagination, the play also emphasizes the clashes over which details of the story should be included in the story.

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<sup>24</sup> In a letter to his ex-wife Viveca Lindfors, 10 April 1979, Tabori suggested the impossibility of having two identical versions of a specific story and mentions in relation to the play 'My Mother's Courage', which he was directing at the time. See in: Feinberg, *Embodied Memory: The Theatre of George Tabori*, 225- 235.

<sup>25</sup> Marianna Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).



One significant example is a bitter conflict between the son and the mother regarding the telling of an inconclusive physical interaction that occurred between the mother and an anonymous stranger inside a cattle car on their way to Auschwitz: (See FIGURE 2, Annex)

Son: "If you were a good child, everything would be fine," that was the golden rule that guided her life, and then in a single moment, she found herself inside a cattle car [...]

Mother: (whispering) It was dark in the cattle car.

Son: (softly and slowly) It was dark in the cattle car [...] (Pause, breathe heavily)  
Slowly mother began to calm down, but then she felt a hand climbing up her black dress, her good black dress...

Mother (jumps up, shouting at him): Now comes what you call the "love affair"?!

Son (angrily): Yes, now comes what I call the "love affair"!

Mother (stuttering, approaching him): Aren't you ashamed to tell it?!

Son: Yes! I'm ashamed! And that's why I'm telling it!

Mother: But I'm your mother!!! [...] (She pushes him away) How can you speak like that in front of people?!

Son: (intensively) True or false, in the darkness of the cattle car (his voice breaks), a hand climbed up the hem of the black dress, the good one you wear?  
(The mother remains silent. Her face is limp. She gazes at him uncomfortably and then says quietly)

Mother: Do you mind if I step out of the room for a moment?

The mother lowers her eyes, turns to the audience, bows, whispers an apology, and exits the room. The son remains silent for a few minutes. Then he begins to tell the story, pauses, takes a deep breath, and with a trembling voice continues to depict the questionable physical interaction between his mother and the stranger. When he finishes telling the story, he remains silent and embarrassed. Only then does the mother quietly return to the room and resume her pastry baking. She nods to the son, inviting him to join her, and they continue to bake together in silence.

This example emphasizes the confrontation around the silence and the need of members of the second generation to confront the complex moments, the unspoken ones,



and to break the wall of silence.<sup>26</sup> In her adaptation, as previously mentioned, Golan stages the play as an event where the mother's story is being recounted for the first time. She explains that in reading the play, she sensed that the focus of the story is the sons' need to tell the story in the presence of the mother, to confront both the mother and her repressed version of the story:

To know once and for all what happened, to give space to the event that occurred, to speak it! To speak of the trauma is to forgive yourself for the way you grew up under denial, concealment, or an attempt to lighten everything. Here [in the spectacle], it is to say - no! Nothing is okay! It [telling the story] allows for emotional repair.<sup>27</sup>

Golan points out the line "True or false, in the darkness of the cattle car (his voice breaks), a hand climbed up the hem of the black dress, the good one you wear?" and how even here, when the son confronts his mother directly, the mother keeps silent and elegantly leaves the room.<sup>28</sup>

After the son finishes telling his version of what happened on the train, the mother returns and they continue to bake together in silence. After a couple of minutes of silence, the mother becomes anxious about the silence and tries to encourage her son to continue the story, but he, emotionally overwhelmed by the story he told, ignores her attempts and continues immersing himself in shaping the pastries. Uncomfortable by the waiting audience, the mother tries to continue telling the story herself. She describes how suddenly the train stopped in an open field, and everyone got off and was instructed to line up. She shares her memories of a person who broke the line, and then she suddenly stops. Struggling to speak, her son joins in and gently completes her words, helping her to bridge the gaps in her memory while providing space for her to express herself and process the experience:

Mother: Nothing happened. No one spoke. Until... until... a young man... (she falls silent again, the son looks at her gently) a man....

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<sup>26</sup> Carol Kidron, 'Toward an Ethnography of Silence: The Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel,' *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 1 (2009): 5–27, <https://doi.org/10.1086/595623>.

<sup>27</sup> Ayelet Golan, Interview with the author, 20 May 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ayelet Golan, Interview with the author, 20 May 2022.



Son: Until a young man took a few steps to pick up flowers. But then a gunshot was heard. He fell and died quickly, only his fingers still moved. The message was clear.

(The mother looks at him with an appreciative look, nodding with agreement).

In this challenging moment, the relationship between the son and the mother which was previously characterized by conflict, now portrays understanding and support.

Psychologist Dina Vardi explores the lasting impacts on the second generation who grew up with their parent's trauma. She explains that within many families, there is a child who unknowingly bears the emotional burden and responsibility of being the carrier of the memories, filling the void and sense of loss, and bridging the gap between their parents' traumatic past and the future. Vardi argues that a crucial aspect of successfully fulfilling the role of a memory carrier for these children involves separation and individuation, which becomes possible through confrontation with the memory. By staging the shared retelling and confrontation of the story, rather than focusing solely on the memory itself, we gain insight to the processing of traumatic memories and the negotiation of their place within one's identity as a memory carrier.<sup>29</sup>

In Golan's adaptation of *My Mother's Courage*, the processing and negotiation of memory occur not only through verbal conversation but also through the shared baking of a family recipe. In Tabori's original play, the mother was arrested on the way to play cards with her sister. However, in this adaptation, Golan adapted the storyline so that the mother goes to her sister to bake together the same recipe that the mother and son are now baking on stage. This adaptation draws parallels between the process of co-reminiscing and the act of shared baking. While the mother holds the memory of the original story, she also possesses the knowledge of the original recipe and practically leads the act of baking. In contrast, the son takes a more creative approach, both in his storytelling and baking. As he creatively tells the story, he also playfully experiments with the recipe ingredients and kitchen utensils, enlivens characters and transforms the original recipe into a non-practical act that involves

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<sup>29</sup> Dina Vardi, 'Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust,' *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 19, no. 1 (1993): 118–20. Vardi focuses particularly on those who were born shortly after the war, identifying them as a subgroup within the second generation referred to as 'Memorial Candles.'



imagination.<sup>30</sup> Through this process, the ingredients that symbolize the memory event undergo a transformation, enabling them to transcend from the second generation forward, to the present audience.

In the play's final scene, after the story has been recounted and the pastries have been prepared, the mother and son share the pastries with the audience, inviting them to partake in the literal consumption of the memories that have been transformed into tangible food (See FIGURE 3, Annex). This act allows the memories to extend beyond the second generation and tangibly resonate with the present audience. This transformation adds a distinct dimension to the narrative. While the memories themselves may be bitter, the pastries that carry them are quite sweet. This striking contrast does not attempt to resolve the complexity of the traumatic memory. Instead, it serves as a symbol that connects the audience to a broader part of the mother's story and her culture, which was largely lost during the war. Moreover, the act of shared eating creates a platform for active engagement with the memory and like a ceremonial gesture, framing the participants as members of the same mnemonic community.

The staging of intergenerational transmission of memory in this spectacle emphasizes the complex moments and mixed emotions that are integral components of memory transmission. The decision to emphasize the joint retelling of the story by both the mother and son, serves to highlight the conflicts and confrontations that arise. These conflicts manifest through the son's *Postmemory*, where he adds or slightly modifies details, as well as through his role as a memory carrier where he confronts his mother's silence and dares to give voice to the unspoken, previously censored experiences. This spectacle showcases the expansion of the narrative as it is passed on from the first generation mother to the second generation son and eventually to the audience.

## 2.2 My Hugo: Sing in the Living Room

The play *My Hugo* was written by Ronit Kano and Shachar Stiner, directed by Naomi Yoeli, and premiered in Israel in 2020. Kano is an Israeli musician and theater performer who shares in this play the story of her father, Jacques Kano. Jacques was born in Belgium and survived the Shoah as a child hidden in the home of a Christian family, separated from his biological parents. Years after the war, Jacques wrote his life story in the book *Journey*

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<sup>30</sup> Ayelet Golan, email correspondence with the creator, 12 July 2023





*Towards the Crucified*, which he described as a “fantastical autobiography.”<sup>31</sup> In the book, he recounts the complex moment when his biological parents, Miriam and Aaron Kano, who managed to survive the war, returned to retrieve him from his adoptive parents, Maria (Muki) and Francois Knops. Over the course of five years of the war, Jacques, who was a little boy when the war began, became deeply attached to his adoptive parents and their devout Christian faith. After the war, Jacques returned to live with his biological Jewish parents but struggled to detach from his adoptive parents and embrace his new-old parents' identity. At first, he maintained contact with his adoptive parents, keeping ties to his former identity and continued to practice Christianity in secret including attending church. However, when he relocated to Brazil with his biological parents, the pain of separation caused him to discontinue correspondence with his adoptive parents and gradually relinquish all his Christian beliefs. Jacques immigrated to Israel alone, settled in a kibbutz, and built his life detached from his past. Thirty years later, his past resurfaces, and he begins to explore the tension between his two identities: being both the Jewish Joseph and the devout Catholic Jacques.

After completing his book, Jacques adapted the book into a play.<sup>32</sup> In the play, Jacques takes on the role of both his adult self writing his childhood memories, and his younger self experiencing the memories in the past. Additionally, four other actors portray the two sets of parents: his biological parents and his adoptive parents. The play employs a theatrical technique of time jumps, shifting between the past and the present, as Jacques explores his personal journey of confronting his past. Ronit Kano, Jacques' daughter, took a different approach in the play *My Hugo* that she wrote about her father's story. She decided to place herself as the central narrator telling the audience her father's story. This shift in perspective is similar to *My Mother's Courage*, however in Ronit's play, she adds another generation to the interaction: a fictional twelve-year-old third-generation granddaughter named Noa. The play unfolds during an afternoon when Noa interviews her grandfather about his life. This play is also set on a stage designed to resemble a domestic, intimate space—a living room, where the focus is on the intergenerational transmission of memory, shedding light on the interrelationships between different generations and their connections to the story.

The spectacle begins with Ronit sitting on a high stool on the left front-stage, holding

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques Kano, *Journey Towards the Crucified: Historical Novel* (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan press, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> The play was also named *Journey Towards the Crucified*, Premiered in 2010.



a guitar. She tunes the guitar and simply introduces herself to the audience: "Hello, I'm Ronit. [...] This story is my story. I mean, it's my father's story. But it's his real story, not just in the spectacle, but in real life. And that is my story too."<sup>33</sup> After the introduction, an actress playing Ronit's fictional daughter Noa and an actor playing the character of her father Jacques, who in the play is called Grandpa Hugo, enter the stage.<sup>34</sup> Noa, the granddaughter, interviews her grandfather about his life for a school assignment, while Ronit, as the narrator, remains seated on a stool, playing the guitar. Ronit participates in the dialogue between her grandfather and granddaughter as well as directly addresses the audience, mediating parts of the story and expanding certain moments through speech or singing. The presence of the three generations in the act of transgenerational transmission illuminates the different relationships of the generations to the story.

I will focus on three different aspects of the relationships between the three generations. The first centers around the interactions between the first and second generations. The second depicts the confrontation between the first and third generations, and the third delves into the interplay of all three generations.

### ***2.2.1 1st-2nd Generations***

The relationship between Ronit and Grandpa Hugo, emphasizes Ronit's need to demonstrate that although she hasn't experienced the actual story herself, the story is also hers. This need is apparent in her constant interference with her father's recollection. When Grandpa Hugo begins to describe the frightening moments of bombings that he experienced during the war, Ronit hurries to complete his sentences, telling how Muki, his adoptive mother, covered his ears so he wouldn't be scared. Grandpa Hugo continues explaining that despite Muki's efforts, he was afraid, and Ronit immediately interrupts saying, "But Muki wasn't afraid at all!" Ronit encourages Grandpa Hugo to share with her daughter Noa the stories that he told her as a child ("Tell her, tell her the story about the soldier!" or "Tell her, tell her the story about the chicken!") and when Grandpa Hugo begins, Ronit interrupts him and tells the story herself.

The co-reminiscing of the story resembles a "tug of war" as Ronit attempts to assert

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<sup>33</sup> The analysis of the spectacles is based on my impression of being an active spectator at live spectacles, as well as on a private recording and a written draft shared with me by the creators. All the quotes provided are my own translations.

<sup>34</sup> Ronit chose to refer to the character of her father in the play as 'Hugo' in order to distance the story from her personal narrative. The name 'Hugo' was chosen as a generic European name. Ronit Kano, Emails correspondence with the author, February 21, 2023



control over her father's experiences. This dynamic highlights the concept of *Postmemory*, illustrating Ronit's connection as a second generation to her father's personal story. Furthermore, it showcases her desire for her own daughter to become familiar with these stories, as they become an integral part of the family's "repertoire."

The family "repertoire" includes stories that evoke mainly good memories and have been repeated. For example, when Grandpa tells "the story about the chicken" but forgot the name of the chicken, Ronit completes her name ("Marikot") and is able to elaborate with more details. Grandpa continues to tell how Muki divided the egg into three equal parts, Ronit completes the sentence in a way that resembles that this story was told many times in the words: "She put salt and pepper on the egg," and Grandpa concludes that he "ate all three pieces," and then they both laugh. When Noa complains and says, "That's not nice!," Ronit and Grandpa respond in unison "That's how it is in war, only the children got to eat eggs!" like it is a well-known mantric chant in the family.

In addition to the stories that evoke positive memories and laughter, the second generation is also acutely aware that these repetitive stories are often used to cover-up the unspoken traumatic experiences and that they have the capacity to recount them when necessary. This play also depicts the role of the second generation in providing assistance in sharing complicated moments. In this play, the assistance involves Ronit mediating between her father and her daughter: explaining terms that due to the transgenerational gap, may be unfamiliar to her young daughter and the audience. (See FIGURE 4, Annex) This is evident, for example, in the scene where the grandfather's parents make the difficult decision to send him away to live with another family to protect him:

Noa: Wait, Grandpa, why was it so dangerous? Why did they say that it was impossible to keep you? Who is this person who they talked to? Grandpa, who is Jan?

Grandpa: (remains silent, sighing): Jan is the one who...

Ronit: (to the audience): Jan was a priest in the church, and he saved children. He saved many children, he passed them from their parents to other parents, to other families.

Grandpa: (completing Ronit's sentence): To keep them safe.

Ronit: (to the audience): Do you understand?

Noa: (to Grandpa): No, wait, I don't understand. Did they give him? I mean, You? How did your parents agree to give you away?



Grandpa: They wanted to keep me in a safe place.

Noa: (angry) But, what, to whom did they give you?

### ***2.2.2 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Generations***

While the first and second generations are familiar with the story and clash over how and by whom the story should be shared, Noa the third generation granddaughter confronts the story for the first time. Her confrontation with the story arises right from the beginning with her difficulty in accepting her grandfather's story as a "Shoah" story, as it is different from what she learned about the Shoah in school. Noa, as mentioned, interviews her grandfather for her school project about her family heritage. As part of her assignment, she presents him with a list of questions that she received from the school. (See FIGURE 5, Annex) These questions are general and based on a very specific collective memory of the nation-building and the Shoah, for example:

Noa (showing the grandfather the list of questions): Look, there are only a few questions you need to answer. This - is - it! Here it is: (reading from the page) "Did you participate in historical events related to the Jewish people's re-re (struggles in reading the word she is not familiar with) revival?"

Grandfather (turning to Ronit in the question, not understanding the word): Uh...

Ronit (explaining): revival of the Jewish people...revival...

Grandfather: Um. No.

Noa: Were you a pioneer?

Grandfather (laughs): No.

(Ronit smiling the audience, marking with her finger indicating "no")

Noa: Did you take part in drying swamps, the "blooming of the desert" or anything else?

Grandfather and Ronit together: Something else!

Noa (looking at the list in despair): Ah! Maybe Aliyah?! - Maybe you were a Maapil? you know... there are the people who sneaked on ships at night to Israel... Were you? Were you?

Grandfather (apologizing): I didn't make it, no...

Disappointed that her grandfather doesn't fit into any of these categories, Noa tries a different approach and asks: "Let's see.. What do I have here?...How about the Shoah?" In response to this question, the grandfather jumps up with excitement and responds: "Yes! oh!



This one, yes!” Noa, excited as well, gives him a high five, and then pauses, looks at him sadly and asks: “Wait, what? Were you in the Shoah? Were you in the camps and all of that?” Then, she continues to present another set of questions related to the Shoah story that she remembers from school, and once again her grandmother does not fit into any category: “Where were you, like in a ghetto? No? a concentration camp? No?! mmm...So what else is possible? maybe... were you Partisan?!” After the grandfather emphatically responds "No" to all of these questions, Noa hesitates, unsure how to continue, and asks: “Grandfather, do you know what ‘The Shoah’ is? Are you sure that you were in ‘The Shoah’?” Grandpa finally concludes: “Noa, I want to tell you my story, for your heritage paper - if you are willing to listen.”

Noa struggles to listen to a story that was remarkably different from the collective memory she was familiar with from school. Going beyond what she "knows" requires her to acknowledge her grandfather's pain and step into an "uncommon" narrative that isn't part of the prevalent stories that she learned in school, but rather part of her own personal heritage. Throughout the play, Noa grows to listen. She listens to the way her grandfather’s parents, devastated, made the dreadful decision to send their child for adoption. She listens to the strong connection formed between the grandfather and his adoptive parents which included adopting their Christian faith. She also listens to the painful fact that during the war her own grandfather forgot his own biological parents and when the war ended he experienced a challenging time in returning to them.<sup>35</sup>

Noa listens, but her listening is not passive. She intervenes and asks a series of probing questions. This time the questions are not general questions from the list given by school, but new questions of her own. Some of her questions are designed for learning and further understanding the story, while others are intended to confront some of her grandfather's actions and inactions. In one of the scenes where the grandfather uses the word “mother” to describe his adoptive mother, Noa asks:

Noa: Why do you call her Mom? She isn't the real mother! Did you go to church? Did you forget that you were Jewish? Did you ask God to bring back your parents? Did you think about them? About your real parents?

Grandfather (apologizing): I thought... I felt... that Muki and Franz were also my real parents...

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<sup>35</sup> Ronit Kano and Naomi Yoeli, Interview with the author creator, 2 April 2020



Noa (becomes agitated, moves away from him, sits on the floor, and throws a fit): You forgot them! You forgot your real parents, Miriam and Aaron! How can anyone forget their parents?

The questions reflect the process that Noa is going through in relation to the story, expressing her strong position towards the narrative which reflects her deep involvement with the story.<sup>36</sup> In response to these questions, the grandfather feels uneasy and opens Noa's notebook, returning to the list of questions from the school that are more straightforward and therefore, ironically, can be perceived as more "reasonable":

Grandfather: Wait, Noa, maybe we should go back to the questions in your notebook? (He sits down and flips through the notebook)

Noa (sadly): How can anyone forget their parents?

(Silence)

Grandfather: (closes the notebook in pain) It's possible.

At that moment, when Noa delves into the profound pain of her grandfather's story, his struggle with belonging and identity, she truly becomes a full partner in the story. Her partnership emerges from her ability to express her perspective of the story and to position herself in relation to it, a response that emanates from her recognition of her grandfather's complex past. Thus, from this moment in the play, the three generations come together to tell the continuation of the complex story.

### ***2.2.3 Co-reminiscing***

The co-reminiscing of this complex moment is conveyed, not only verbally, but also through artistic expressions: Ronit's music, and Grandpa Hugo and Noa playing with small wooden puppets that represent Hugo as a child and his two sets of parents.

Ronit tells the audience that after the war, Miriam and Aaron, the grandfather's biological parents, came to retrieve him from the adoptive parents Francois (Franz) and Maria (Muki). In her sharing of the story, she doesn't stick to the facts but adds her own imagination of how this

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<sup>36</sup> Nili Keren describes how the dialogue between Holocaust survivors and their descendants began with the 'silence breakers' of the second generation, but it was the third and fourth generations that severed it. Nili Keren and Nava Semel, 'First Generation-Third Generation: A Bridge Over the Abyss,' *Education and its Surroundings: Seminar Yearbook of the Kibbutzim College*, Tel-Aviv 36 (2014): 181-196.



complex moment might have looked like. She shared how:

For years I have imagined this moment when all his parents are standing on both sides of the door: Miriam and Aaron on one side. And Franz and Muki on the other. Since I was little, I've imagined this moment. I think about Miriam, my grandmother.

Ronit begins to sing a song expressing in the first person the possible feelings and emotions of Grandma Miriam who doesn't know if the little boy she left five years ago is still alive, and of Muki who was so connected to the child that she provided shelter and love for five long years. While Ronit is singing, the grandfather places the puppets at the door of a miniature wooden living room. He placed his biological parents, Miriam and Aharon on one side, and Muki and Franz - his adoptive parents on the other side. Then, Noa picks up the puppet of Hugo the child, looks at him, and like a pawn in a game of chess, moves him towards the door, towards his biological parents. In response Grandpa moves his own puppet backward Noa places Franz's puppet to stand behind Muki. Grandpa moves Miriam's puppet to stand next to Aaron. Noa, insisting, places Hugo to stand closer to Miriam and Aaron.

In this tense moment, Grandpa Hugo, struggling to bear the painful memory, tries to find ways to stop the memory. He steps back from the miniature model representing his past and tries to convince Noa to let it go:

Grandpa: Alright, we've been talking for a long time... Maybe you're thirsty, I'll go make something for us.

Noa (absorbed in the model with the puppets): No, no, no, I'm really not thirsty.

Grandpa: Maybe you're hungry? There are great apricots this year!

Noa: No, Grandpa, I'm really not hungry at all (she keeps looking at the miniature living room) Wait, he opened the door, I mean, you opened the door, right? And then?

Grandpa: Chocolate?

Noa: (without even looking at him) No, Grandpa, what, what happened after he - you - opened the door?

Grandpa: (sitting down) Alright, maybe now I need a little break.

Noa (standing behind him, placing her hands on his shoulder): It's okay, Grandpa.

Grandpa: I'm sorry, Noa, but it's not easy for me.

Noa: That's okay, that's okay. If you don't want to tell, you don't have to.

Grandpa: I want to continue the story, I just... maybe we can skip ahead a bit...?



Noa: Sure! sure! (trying) but...what should we skip?

Grandpa: (sighs) The parts that are difficult for me to tell.

Noa (disappointed): Of course, of course, you really don't have to tell... But what?

Is this something that's difficult for you to tell?

Grandpa: (silence)

Noa is insisting on hearing the rest of the story. Ronit looks at her father and then quietly turns to the audience and explains:

Ronit: He didn't recognize them. His parents, Miriam and Aaron. They were so thin and so different, and so much time had passed, five years is a long time for a child.

Grandpa: (looking at his own puppet as a child, says quietly): My mother Miriam, reached out with her hands, and I ran away from her... She sat next to my mother Muki, and mother Muki held my mother Miriam's hands. I still remember this image of my two mothers sitting on the couch, holding hands.

The father and daughter keep telling the story together. At one point, Noa asks her grandfather if he misses his adoptive parents. He says he does, and Noa surprises herself by saying that she misses them too, even though she never met them. This revelation comes as a change from her previous feelings of resentment towards the adoptive parents. She looked at her grandfather and concluded "This story is both sad and happy." The ending of the spectacle is not a "happy ending" but rather an echo of the fact that the story does not have a clear conclusion or resolution. Instead, it reflects a complex reality. The sharing of this complexity allows the granddaughter to find her place within the full expression of the story.

Like in *My Mother Courage*, the memory develops through the generations and then to the audience. The spectacle concludes as the three generations sing together, with lyrics describing how the story has materialized over the generations and is now also part of the story of the current audience:

Ronit (sings): Story within a story within a story intertwined

Maybe this is the end of the spectacle, maybe this is the end of the play

Hugo and Noa, me, and also all of you, have been assigned a role





Because now my story will go on and on  
(Grandpa pauses, looks at her, and joins in)

Ronit and Grandpa: All my roots, all the people from the album  
suddenly came out, shook off the dust  
All the strength, all the beauty, all the love, all the distant lights,  
are now ablaze, ablaze, ablaze, ablaze, ablaze...

Ronit: Story within a story within a story - the story of my life

Grandpa: The story of my life

Noa: So what? Is it also my story now?

Grandpa and Ronit: Absolutely!

(Noa takes a ukulele and joins in the song - everyone sings together):

Grandpa and Ronit and Noa: All my roots, all the people from the album  
suddenly came out, shook off the dust  
All the strength, all the beauty, all the love, all the distant lights,  
are now ablaze, ablaze, ablaze, ablaze, ablaze

The convergence of three generations in the storytelling process depicts the intricate layers of interpretation and involvement that evolve as the narrative progresses across different generations. It provides a vivid portrayal of how the story is passed down, transmitted, and negotiated over time. While Hirsch utilizes the concept of *Postmemory* to characterize the transition of memory from the firsthand experience to the second generation, the transition of memory from the second to the third generation entails not only a change in the memory itself but also in the meanings that the memory communicates. Gerard Bayer characterizes the memory of the third generation as *After Postmemory*, highlighting its emphasis on the moral lessons of the Shoah rather than on specific historical details.<sup>37</sup> This form of memory is based on the understanding that the public already possesses a basic knowledge of the Shoah, enabling a deeper exploration of how trauma impacts future generations, their coping strategies, and the role of memory in their identity. In the context of this spectacle, the concept of *After Postmemory* elucidates the process of examining how the memory is shaped, shedding light on the interplay between public and private memory as well as the process of embracing memory as part of one's identity.

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<sup>37</sup> Gerd Bayer, 'After Postmemory: Holocaust Cinema and the Third Generation,' *Holocaust and Genocide Cinema* 28:4 (2010): 116-132.



### 3. Part III - Insights

In this paper I have analyzed two contemporary Israeli spectacles that portray inter- and transgenerational transmission of Shoah memory. Both spectacles include two generations: a mother and a son or a father and a daughter, and one includes the third generation, who join together in retelling first-generation survival stories. Both spectacles stage interactive, intergenerational memory transmission that takes place, not in public space, but rather in a theater set designed as a domestic place; a kitchen and a living room. Staging intimate communicative transactions on a public theater stage, which is a very public space, allows us to observe the non-formal and non-frontal memory. In the staging of this intimate *communicative transaction*, three significant qualities emerged: complexity, symbolism, and dialogue.

#### 3.1 Intimacy: *Complexity*

Presented in an intimate setting—a domestic place—and designed as a live interaction with the audience, these spectacles offer a platform to share memories that are more sensitive and frequently divergent from prevalent collective memory. In *My Mother's Courage*, for instance, the son bravely discloses his mother's experience of sexual abuse, a topic that is rarely discussed or openly acknowledged in relation to public memory of the Shoah. It is not uncommon for survivors to keep silent on this aspect of their time in the Shoah, even when sharing some other parts with their families or in formal testimonies.<sup>38</sup> The social stigma surrounding sexual encounters of survivors of the Shoah, particularly the early days after the war, was that women survivors may have utilized their sexuality for survival.<sup>39</sup> Discussing this matter on the theater stage has a significant meaning in relation to the public memory. Giving voice to an important, complex topic that currently does not have a place within the public realm in official public remembrance events. Only within an intimate environment of a home that doesn't hold a direct national or social role, can such memories find a place in the narrative, enabling both recognition and negotiation.

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<sup>38</sup> Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Sidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Liat Steir-Livny, "'Women with a Past': Representation of Female Holocaust Survivors in Theater during Israel's First Decade," in השואה ואנחנו בתיאטרון הישראלי [*The Holocaust and Us in the Israeli Theater*], ed. David Guedj and Ofer Shiff (Ben Gurion University, 2022), 217-234.



In *My Hugo*, the father is able to express his conflicting emotions about the different aspects of his identity which includes his connection to his Christian identity. This perspective diverges from the dominant Jewish-focused public memory in Israel. The spectacle delves deeper into the complexities that go beyond the simplistic dichotomy of "good" and "bad." The granddaughter's response reflects a notion that is challenging to bear and encompasses a more nuanced understanding of the memory and its implications.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to dealing with this complex topic, both spectacles incorporate moments of joy, laughter, and humor. In Tabori's play, humor is employed as a bitter tool to underscore the cruelty and absurdity of the story, while also serving as a means of a healthy interaction between the mother and son. In *My Hugo*, humor is intertwined with war experiences, shedding light on amusing moments that were also part of the overall war experience, serving as a precious coping machine, enabling healthy interactions between people.<sup>41</sup> The stage provides an intimate setting for the facilitating of complex, nuanced stories, and furthering expansive expression within the collective memory. Engaging with these intricate topics is crucial in the ongoing process of memory and remembrance.

### 3.2 Objects: *Symbolism*

The ability to discuss complex moments in the theater is done also through the artistic use of non-verbal language to convey the complexities contained in the story. Both spectacles utilize puppetry and object theater techniques to narrate the story.

In *My Mother Courage*, the mother and son transform the recipe ingredients and kitchen utensils to depict the characters and locations of the story. The potatoes used in the recipes are used to portray the Gestapo, and the boiling water in the whistling kettle signifies the train to Auschwitz. The use of objects requires minimal words to describe what occurred, as the artistic image conveys complex memories through delicate, yet powerful, symbolism. The questionable physical interaction between the mother and a stranger on the train is represented by the action of kneading dough. It is precisely through the use of material and

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<sup>40</sup> Recently, there has been an increasing recognition of the stories of hidden children, granting them a more prominent voice. The experience of child survivors was clinically characterized by 'silence', see: Charlotte Schwartz, 'The Meaning of Silence for the Holocaust Child Survivor: The Role of Family Romance and Rescue Fantasies,' *The Psychoanalytic Review* 93, no. 6 (2006): 903–22, <https://doi.org/10.1521/prev.2006.93.6.903>.

<sup>41</sup> Liat Stier-Livny, *Is it OK to Laugh About it? Holocaust Humour, Satire and Parody in Israeli Culture* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017) ; Chaya Ostrower, ללא הומור היינו מתאבדים [It Kept Us Alive: Humor in the Holocaust] (Jerusalem: Yad VaShem, 2009).



movement symbols, particularly the increasing intensity of the kneading, that the significance of the forced physical encounter and the horrifying emotions are conveyed. In *My Hugo*, Grandpa Hugo tells his story using puppets. In a particular scene, puppets portray complex moments, like the return of his parents after the war. The granddaughter and grandfather express this memory by moving the puppets as chess pieces on a chessboard. While the image is delicately symbolized, it expresses the experience beyond what words alone can impart, capturing the depth and the complicatedness of the traumatic event.

The story that transforms the experienced body that holds the trauma into an external, physical object allows for the next generation to take part in telling the story, negotiating complex moments in it, and carrying it onward. In both spectacles, the act of carrying the memory forward is realized in its literal sense. In the finale of *My Mother's Courage*, the bowl of pastries is passed among the audience, and in *My Hugo*, Noa asks to take the puppets with her and to keep them. The symbolic food and objects act as a kind of tangible "transitional object" that helps shape identity and bridge the gap between generations, a way to pass on the story.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3 Multiple Generations: *Dialogue*

These spectacles focus on transformations that occur when a story is told by someone who did not directly experience it. The main dramatic tension lies not in the plot of the parent's survival story but in the interplay between the parents and their offspring, highlighting the conflict between the "first-hand" origin and the "second-hand" interpretations. Both spectacles involve joint storytelling by the first and second generations. In both spectacles, the narrators are from the second generation. By staging someone else to tell the story, it goes beyond mere testimony and adds a unique dimension to the narrative.

In *My Mother's Courage*, the son serves as the main narrator, deciding what to tell and how to connect the story's meanings to different moments in his life. As I have demonstrated, the son's need and ability to express, interpret, and give meaning to what his mother has kept silent, is at the core of carrying and transmitting the memory. In *My Hugo*, the narrator is the daughter who marks her father's story as "hers," and witnesses her own daughter becoming a

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<sup>42</sup> Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980); Smadar Cooper-Caesari, 'Zoom into Puppet – The three-dimensional model of the puppet: Therapeutic aspects,' *Academic Journal of Creative Art Therapies*, 4 no.1 (June 2014): 407-415.



part of the family story, confronting the public memory with the family's private memory. The granddaughter's challenging questions play a crucial role in the transmission of memory. These questions signify her deep connection to her grandfather's story and shifting the focus from the firsthand knowledge of the first generation—the storytellers—to the second and third generations—the listeners.<sup>43</sup>

The intimate interaction, the non-verbal objects and the dialogue that includes multiple narrators are expanding the notion of Shoah memory from the format of survivors' testimonies into an intergenerational sphere, spotlighting the dialogue. This transition arises a need for a paradigm shift in concert of Shoah memory from first hand witness testimony to memory carriers participating in intergenerational dialogue.

By staging the very act of memory transmission these spectacles reveal the form of what Diana Taylor coined *Repertoire Memory* - a memory that is transmitted not through history books, but through the body, voice and interaction.<sup>44</sup> Looking at the act of transmission reveals the dynamic mechanism of memory and the changes that occur as it develops from generation to generation. In this process, food and objects transform the story into tangible symbols, involving different generations, giving interpretations and proposing questions that provide relevant meanings. All of these components - along with other important components like humor, and music carry the memory by transforming it. These complex, somewhat contradictory actions contain the core tension that sustains tradition, namely, the tension between preservation and renovation.

### **3.4 Transmission, Transmission-- *Tradition!***

The understanding of memory transmission as a *commemorative transaction* sheds light on shaping societal memory. These spectacles offer valuable insights that can be applied to the discussion on Shoah memory in relation to Jewish tradition in the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

We live in a world where advanced technologies and digital platforms affect memory in different ways. One main implication is the ability to preserve history in a vivid manner

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<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, in the past year, Yad Vashem has expanded beyond the well-known video survivor testimony format and incorporated a film featuring intergenerational conversations that tell the story. See: "Conversation Between Generations" - Holocaust Survivors in dialogue with the Second and Third Generation about Life in the Shadow of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem, accessed 11 July 2023, <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/education/videos/siach-ben-dori.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003), 16-26.



while making it accessible to all.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to this “archival memory” that is occupied with preserving the past’s details and materials, these spectacles illuminate the need to render respect to the role of dynamic memory transmission, as a component of tradition.

Thinking of Shoah memory in terms of tradition proposes to differentiate between promoting the history of the Shoah, as an act of knowing the past, and the memory of the Shoah as an act of belonging to a specific tradition.<sup>46</sup> Pierre Nora’s analysis suggests that history, the factual knowledge of the past, is universal and therefore belongs to everyone and to no one.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, memory, the ever-changing meanings of the past, is an expression of belonging to a specific collective. Yosef Chaim Yerushalmi describes Jewish memory as opposing history and observes that it is realized by traditional performative practices within the community.<sup>48</sup>

Paul Correnton discusses the role of communication in social memory, and cites Maurice Halbwachs who argues that memory is predominantly triggered in response to communication with other individuals, either through direct interaction or through imaginative projection - imagining how one would respond in a given situation. Even personal memory, no matter how individual it may seem, exists within a system of relationships with people, places, dates, words, and linguistic patterns that serve as the material and cultural tools of society. In relation to Halbwachs, Correnton emphasizes the importance of the connection between adults and young people in transmitting the past, emphasizing the communication between the most stable factor (the grandparents) and the most flexible and receptive factor (the grandchildren). He describes how in traditional societies, the education of children was entrusted to the elders, as parents worked to sustain their livelihoods. Based on this background, which stems from economic motivations, the transmission of traditional memory from grandparent to child is a reality that still exists in traditional societies but loses its place in modern societies. Correnton further emphasizes that commemorative rituals and embodied practices serve as a means to transmit knowledge from the past.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For example see: ‘Dimensions in Testimony,’ Dimensions in Testimony project, The USC Shoah Foundation, accessed 11 July 2023, <https://sfi.usc.edu/dit> ; Read more about the preservation of testimonies through advanced technologies in: Amit Pinchevski, *Transmitted Wounds: Media and the Mediation of Trauma* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2019) ; Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors’ Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Read more: Achinoam Aldouby, ‘החול יזכור? זיכרון השואה באמצעות פרקטיקות זיכרון שהתעצבו במסורת היהודית’ [“Extra-Ritual Remembrance - Remembering the Shoah through Traditional Jewish Rituals”] in *The Fruit of Revelry* (Jerusalem: Argaman Institute, 2022), 153-184.

<sup>47</sup> Pier, ‘Between Memory and History,’ 4-19.

<sup>48</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1-27

<sup>49</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 36.



Some of these commemorative rituals and embodied practices that are evidenced in the spectacles are an essential dynamic. Food is an essential medium of social memory when the stories of a particular historical event are coded into an edible symbolic “object.” In Jewish tradition, in the Passover Seder the memory of the Egypt slavery becomes “Charoset” a sweet, dark-colored fruit and nut paste that is meant to recall the memory of the mortar. The memory of Haman, the villain in the Purim story who threatened death to the Jews in the biblical book of Esther, is transformed into a “Hamantash” (triangular filled-pocket pastry) or “Orejas de Haman” (fried twisted or rolled strips of dough). *My Mother's Courage* presents the process of symbolism that transforms an experience into an “object” that others can engage with. Referring to the saying “you are what you eat,” by eating the pastry, the memory that it symbolizes literally becomes part of those who consume it.

Another example of the dynamic nature of memory is its inherent role in Jewish culture, evident in the central act of learning within the community. The interpretation of texts and stories serves as a unifying method to bridge gaps and derive meaning. The son's interpretations of the mother's stories align with this cultural tradition, where the canonical text itself, the Talmud, provides methods for interpretation and encourages critical explanations, stories and fables. The existence of various interpretations, often contradictory, fosters *Machloket* (debate) and ensures the continued relevance of texts and stories in our contemporary world.<sup>50</sup> The granddaughter's questions can echo the inquiries asked during the Passover Haggadah, specifically the four prominent questions *Mah Nishtanah* (what is different?), which reflect on the act of collective ritual remembrance, as well as the subsequent four sons' questions, representing a kaleidoscope of ways to engage with the story.

When it comes to Shoah memory, advocating the idea that the story can be argued, interpreted, transformed, and changed into something else is highly problematic, as it risks diluting its political and social implications. However, when we shift our focus to memory transmission as a means to connect with the story and foster a sense of belonging to a community, the theater reflects that continuity is maintained through change. Only through the process of negotiation can the next generations embrace their role as “memory carriers” and find their place as members of the mnemonic community.

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<sup>50</sup> Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 1-9.



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## ANNEX

\*All the photos are screenshots taken from the private recordings of the spectacles.

**FIGURE1:** The mother and the son are in the kitchen, narrating the story while contradicting one another.



**FIGURE 2:** The mother confronts the son who wishes to share her complex story.



**FIGURE 3:** The mother and son give the parasites to the audience.



**FIGURE 4:** Noa listened to her grandfather's memories, while Ronit, as the narrator, mediated the story to the audience.



**FIGURE 5:** Noa interviews the grandfather, presenting a list of questions she got from school.

