

## **Ancestral Bonding: Autoethnography of a Holocaust Granddaughter**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The severity of historical trauma (HT) endured by Jews is central in the historiography of the Holocaust and affects survivors, descendants, and the Jewish people. Studies of transgenerational trauma transmission in descendants portray both psychopathological and positive outcomes, yet trauma trends understood from research of the second generation must be reexamined in Holocaust grandchildren. Despite quantitative findings of dissipated trauma symptoms in grandchildren, few studies examine their lived HT experiences and connections to ancestry. In this autoethnography, I describe cultivating a relationship with my deceased great-grandmother and reflect upon her legacy within my HT response. The educational purpose of this paper is to extend cultural understanding of ancestral bonding in marginalized descendants of HT through a Holocaust granddaughter's example. I integrate the six HT informed principles of the *Black Perspective Instructional Model* into the autoethnography to highlight marginalized HT experiences relevant to counselor education and supervision and evidence-based trauma practices.

**Keywords:** Historical Trauma, Transgenerational Trauma, Ancestral Bonding, Sacred Stories, Autoethnography, *Black Perspective Instructional Model*

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The severity of historical trauma (HT) endured by Jews is central in the historiography of the Holocaust and affects survivors, descendants, and the Jewish people (Nir, 2018). Research on transgenerational trauma transmission to the second generation indicates that a combination of psychopathological and positive outcomes exists for children of Holocaust survivors. Though quantitative studies reveal a dissipation of trauma symptoms in the third generation, little exploration of the lived experiences of grandchildren related to transgenerational trauma, HT, and

historical trauma response (HTR) has been completed to date (Cohn & Morrison, 2018).

Jewish third generation descendants relate to ancestral trauma in unique ways that differ from the second generation (Cohn & Morrison, 2018), such as reduced preoccupation with the conspiracy of silence (Danieli, 1998) or “aura of death” (Nir, 2018, p. 3) and expression of open reverence for Holocaust narratives (Cohn & Morrison, 2018; Moskowitz, 2015). As societal and cultural attitudes associated with historical memory in collective trauma shift, trends of HT and transgenerational trauma previously understood from study of the second generation must be reexamined in grandchildren (Cohn & Morrison, 2018).

In my quest to better understand the relationship that Holocaust grandchildren form with predecessors, I consider the connections of other marginalized third generation descendants to ancestral trauma. Several global examples of descendant bonding to HT lineage include evocation of alternative resilience memories in new age Uitoto women, use of artifacts and basket-weaving to safeguard memories (Santamaría, 2017), and an African great-granddaughter’s poem to a deceased matriarch on the legacy of resistance associated with slavery (Henderson, 2021). Another example of connection is the transfer of heritage documentation in Aboriginal people from government authorities to descendant communities in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand to transform colonized records into healing narratives (Greenwood, 2018). One more relational example is use of time-image episodes in young Cambodian Americans. This contemporary theory explains how grandchildren construct meaning from, and respect generational silence and fragmented memories of predecessors, but also how lost history is re-authored by the third generation through imagination of “what could have been” (Kwan, 2020, p. 44).

Within these examples, I find a compelling and universal yearning for connection with ancestors. The yearning manifests for grandchildren in multi-faceted ways, such as the wish to break generational silence (Henderson, 2021), clinging to “guard memories” (Pineda Camacho, 2014; Echeverri, 2012, as cited in Santamaría, 2017, p. 317) of indigenous rituals, visualizations of HT (Kwan, 2020), and appreciation for resistance-based narratives (Greenwood, 2018). Younger descendants cannot fully grasp the horror of genocide endured by elders, and therefore shift HT response to a state of “not knowing” that creates space for imagination, humility, and empathy for predecessors’ trauma (Kwan, 2020). I refer to the third generation’s yearning for connection as *ancestral bonding* in this paper, or the desire to become acquainted with the past, present, and perceived future of ancestors’ legacies, which I later name the *whole Self*. These terms provide a smooth segue for the reader into my statement of positionality.

### **STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY**

The evolving perspective of grandchildren, coupled with a troubling phenomenon of little-to-no education of HT (Henderson et al., 2016) in counseling programs prompted me to write this article. It is clear that the counseling profession does not acknowledge well nor address collective trauma (Abrams, 2019a; Abrams, 2019b).

This limitation is based on individualistic origins of psychoanalytic tradition (Walker, 1995) in psychotherapy that live on today. As a counselor educator and practicing clinician, I consider this gap in knowledge a cultural deficit in counselor education and supervision and in evidence-based trauma treatment. I note three additional problems of (1) a one-dimensional association of melancholy (Ehrlich, 2020, p. 87) attached to HT, (2) a shortage of qualitative studies pertaining to the lived experiences of third generation descendants in academic literature (Cohn & Morrison, 2018) and (3) scarcity of HT informed educational models and research pedagogy within the helping professions (Henderson et al., 2016). The educational purpose of this paper is to address these concerns and extend cultural understanding of ancestral bonding to Jewish and other marginalized HT experiences through use of autoethnography. I integrate the six principles of the Black Perspective Instructional Model into the autoethnography as a model HT informed theory in counselor education with implications for inclusion of minority narratives when teaching about collective trauma (Howard University School of Social Work, 2014).

I invite the reader to walk beside me in an evocative autoethnography as I describe cultivating a relationship with my great-grandmother Chaja Adler in Tarnogród, Poland. I am the only grandchild that carries her name yet knew little of her legacy due to generational silence. I have always connected to my namesake, however, and embarked upon a journey to Poland in 2020 to uncover familial roots. Announcement of my visit to Tarnogród was met by family members with concerns of anti-Semitism, yet also with ambivalence for encountering the “presence of absence” (Kidron, 2009, p. 6), or raw historical loss. The depth of this fear was not verbally articulated, though its strength was startling.

I was unprepared for the shortage of Holocaust literature of Lublin Province I encountered. My commitment to literature review led to rich conversations with librarians, genocide researchers, family members, and social media groups of descendants. The gap in research, coupled with a “cryptophoric” (Milner, p. 125, as cited in Ehrlich, 2020), or secretive component of withheld information, only intensified my desire to learn more about Jewish Tarnogród. This autoethnography is also influenced by previous studies I completed on connection to sacred stories in HTR (Abrams, 2019a; Abrams, 2019b). From relevant findings, I infer that forming a relationship with the whole Self, or totality of the deceased’s experiences (in life, death, and perceived future) becomes a sacred story. This inference guided me as I initiated contact with Chaja for the first time. Before discussing Tarnogród’s Jewish history and Chaja’s case study, I introduce the six principles of the Black Perspective Instructional Model to the reader that are integrated into the autoethnography.

### **THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE**

Despite a need for cultural responsiveness in helping professions, educational research does not explicitly implement HT informed instructional models and research pedagogy (Henderson et al., 2016). Black colleges and universities have historically offered guiding social research and educational philosophies since the 1900s (Gary & Gary, 1994; Henderson et al., 2016), and encourage development of

antiracist curricula for professionals (Henderson et al., 2016). The chosen teaching philosophy at Howard University School of Social Work (HUSSW) is the *Black Perspective* (Howard University School of Social Work, 2014). The Black Perspective is a philosophical orientation for social work education and practice (Gourdine & Brown, 2016) that is sensitive to oppressed lived experiences, but is equally responsive to the sources of oppression. Clinicians and educators who utilize the *Black Perspective* in teaching and practice aim to challenge systemic inequity for the oppressed, as well as for oppressors. While designed initially to highlight Black experiences, HUSSW's Black Perspective is also relevant to other marginalized encounters (Howard, 2020).

In clinical and educational settings, the Black Perspective provides an ethnocentric lens that is particularly helpful in recognition of interconnectedness and interdependence within cultural systems. This perspective facilitates deeper understanding in students and practitioners of how macro and mezzo systems impact micro level experiences (Howard, 2020). The Black Perspective exceeds models of cultural competence (Berry-Edwards, 2016) and multicultural counseling (Ratts et al., 2016) as it seeks to eradicate all types of oppression and extends the focus on individual group identification to recognition of social group interplay (Howard, 2020).

The six principles of the Black Perspective are affirmation, strengths, diversity, vivification, social justice, and internationalization. The principle of affirmation celebrates the richness of Black culture in community. The strengths principle showcases strengths of marginalized communities in their own advancement. The principles of diversity and internationalization emphasize the magnitude of diversity within, and among communities of color globally and prepare culturally responsive clinicians (Berry-Edwards, 2016). Vivification promotes global research, practice, and education informed by the unique needs of Black people, and social justice prepares professionals to advocate on behalf of marginalized people (Howard, 2020). Educational activities encouraged within the Black Perspective include viewing historical documentaries, discussion, mentorship, lectures, and sharing narratives of minorities (Henderson et al., 2016). Use of autoethnography could be considered a form of extending marginalized stories to the dominant culture, and thus addressing oppressed and oppressing participants. I weave the six principles into my autoethnography and into the discussion and conclusion of this paper.

## **JEWISH HISTORY OF TARNOGRÓD**

The city of Tarnogród is located 105 kilometers south of Lublin in the Kingdom of Poland. In 1939, the city's Jewish population was 2,515 out of a total of 5,016 occupants. On 15 September 1939, the Wehrmacht unit seized Tarnogród. German soldiers transferred Tarnogród to Soviet leadership, only to resume its occupation following German-Soviet border negotiations. In 1939, Jews were required to wear Star of David armbands and the Judenrat was established. In 1940, Jewish men were forced to repave the road from Tarnogród to Rózaniec utilizing gravestones from the Jewish cemetery. Until 1941, Jews worked in agriculture, forestry, harvest, and farming (Crago, 2012).

Circumstances worsened for Jews when a German Gendarmerie was based in Tarnogród. Following a 1941 epidemic, 57 Biłgoraj families relocated to Tarnogród in a forced journey. One morning in 1942, the Gendarmes shot 40 Jewish men into pits located in the Roman Catholic cemetery (Crago, 2012). By August of 1942, the Judenrat listed Jews destined for deportation to the Belzec extermination camp. The Tarnogród ghetto was then constructed to house Jews from up to 50 cities assigned to the Gendarmerie jurisdiction. The ghetto population mounted, and Jews suffered overcrowding, hunger, terrorization, and death. In November of 1942, the Tarnogród ghetto was liquidated. Hundreds of Jews were killed, and survivors ordered on a death march toward Biłgoraj. All told, between 500 and 1,000 Jews perished (Crago, 2012). Archeological sources show that most Tarnogród Jews were murdered near the swamp on Stroma Street in a mass killing (M. Chojak, personal communication, 22 April 2020). Tarnogród history is central to Chaja's story as she lived and died in Tarnogród during that time.

### **Case of Chaja Adler**

Chaja Adler was born in Tarnogród in the 1890s. Though Chaja was married twice, both of her husbands died before 1928. From two marriages, Chaja had five children: Shulem Shea, Yaakov Leib, Yitta, Esther Ruchel, and Marjem. In 1940, Chaja prepared to leave Tarnogród after the German invasion and move to Ukraine. Yaakov Leib drove the family wagon and headed east when, at the last moment, Chaja had a change of heart. She could not bear to leave her parents' home and exited the wagon with young Marjem. Yaakov Leib later noted that his deepest life regret was allowing his mother's departure. Chaja remained in Tarnogród with Marjem until 1942. While three children escaped to Ukraine, Yitta died in Zamość in 1940. Her photo (see Figure 5) is the only one of Adler females that still exists. When the Tarnogród ghetto was liquidated, Chaja perished with other Jews. A death certificate confirmed Chaja's death in 1942 (see Figure 6) and it is assumed Marjem died alongside her mother. Chaja was remembered as a kind woman who harbored refugees and cared for neighbors (D.A. Adler, personal communication, 28 April, 2020). Yaakov Leib held a quote voiced by Chaja dear, "Once words leave your mouth, you can no longer retrieve them" (Y.M. Stern, personal communication, 05 May, 2020). Looking back on how Chaja's strength was revered in community, I integrate the principles of affirmation and strengths (Howard University School of Social Work, 2014) in recognizing her cultural virtue of selflessness during times of Jewish persecution.

Esther Ruchel, my paternal grandmother, revered her mother Chaja. Because I was named after Chaja, she grappled with complex feelings related to my existence that I could not understand as a child. My grandmother called me Mameh, the Yiddish word for mother. This term of endearment emerged when we stood side-by-side in the kitchen as she demonstrated traditional cooking tips. Esther Ruchel embodied deep sadness, yet when she voiced the word Mameh, her eyes softened. I realize my connection to Chaja began during those stolen moments and ultimately led me to Tarnogród. My determination to promote research and practice responsive to the strengths of Holocaust survival is consistent with the principle of vivification

(Howard University School of Social Work, 2014). Through evocative description, I provide a mere glimpse of my journey for the reader.

### **EVOCATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

Evocative autoethnography often begins with the researcher's lived experiences and then utilizes sociological introspection and emotional recall to contextualize the author's story. Evocative autoethnographers move back and forth between exploring societal phenomena and comparing them with individual encounters (Spinazola et al., 2021). Autoethnography extends beyond personal narrative to produce new data and knowledge for the reader (Andrew & Le Rossignol, 2017) and is an ever evolving and progressive research method (Winkler, 2018). A new generation of qualitative researchers eager to move beyond conventional academic scholarship began to "write texts that make hearts skip a beat" (Bochner, 2012; Hyde, 2010, as cited in Spinazola et al., 2021, p. 36). The design evokes the reader's associations and allows for comparison with the researcher's story (Ellis et al., 2011). Stories that transcend societal discourse are silenced in academic literature (Simons, 2014), so I present my bonding experience with Chaja—a voice typically unheard in the public discourse.

The self of the researcher is too often seen as a "contaminant" (Wall, 2006, p. 147) in traditional scientific methodology. This socialized way of being in scholarship not only limits expansion of knowledge, but "slams the door shut" (McCorkel & Myers, 2003, p. 200) for rich expression. Educational connoisseurship, or "the art of appreciation" (Eisner, 2002, as cited in Southcott & Crawford, 2018, p. 97) propels the author to make personal judgments and appreciation known to the reader through critical disclosure. Effective critics are well-informed and state discerning judgments based on professional experiences (Conrad & Wilson, 1985; Eisner, 1985; as cited in Southcott & Crawford, 2018). Educational connoisseurship and criticism promote reflectivity in higher education (Southcott & Crawford, 2018). Use of autoethnography in education has increased recently as researchers of minority status are driven by provocative moments in teaching and leadership that challenge "the complacent self within dominant culture" (Hughes, 2019, p. 6). Autoethnography brings voice to marginalized experiences (Hughes, 2019) and accommodates many ways of knowing. Its central goal is not to remove scientific methodology, but to question its dominance in the prevailing academic literature (Wall, 2006).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began with photos and observations captured during my journey to Poland in March of 2020. Since I could not complete an oral history, I relied on two phases of data accumulation: pre- and post-journey collection. After returning home, I communicated with relatives and genocide scholars. These conversations led to the receipt of documents produced between 1939 and 1942 in Tarnogród and Israel. I then reviewed all historical data through the Institutional

Review Board at the university where I am employed and received approval to feature all sources in the manuscript.

To demonstrate trustworthiness, I completed Creswell's (2013) strategies of peer review, triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, and providing rich and thick descriptions for the purpose of transferability. I paid careful attention to emotions that arose within communications and was transparent about my positions of great granddaughter and wounded researcher (Romanyshyn, 2010). I wrote detailed notes during meetings and agonized over the thought of misrepresenting Chaja's story. I met with consultants, sent the article to peer reviewers, and implemented reviewers' feedback. Triangulation occurred through recognition of meaningful themes that emerged during my journey. I integrate the Black Perspective principles of diversity, internationalization, and social justice into trustworthiness in scholarship and the desire to maintain integrity of Chaja's experiences by demonstrating importance of advocating on behalf of marginalized people and cultural responsiveness in academic writing (Howard, 2020). I elaborate on the themes of (1) a haunted Poland, (2) home, (3) spectral time versus Soul Space, (4) impossibility of closure, and (5) relationship with the whole Self below to awaken the reader's related experiences.

### **A Haunted Poland**

Prior to traveling, I learned that transportation to Tarnogród from central Poland was difficult, so I hired a driver who drove me to Biłgoraj, the closest city to Tarnogród. The late afternoon was chilly, and I shivered in anticipation of heading southward. I wondered if the fear was symbolic of uncovering my roots and considered journaling but could not form words to express my emotions. Instead, I snapped photos of small towns, muddy roads, and endless rows of dark forests. My immediate association with the forests (see Figure 1) was an image of Jews running from oppressors, trembling in the cold. I could not shake this picture as my driver drove past countless clusters of forested land. I relate this visualization of ancestral persecution on Polish soil to land-based HT that American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AINA) experience through persistent and embodied adverse physical and psychological symptoms (Walters et al., 2011). It also relates to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) crisis that inflicts body and land-based trauma onto indigenous people through deprivation of natural water sources (Harrison, 2019).



**Figure 1:** Forest in Lublin Province

In those moments of haunted imagery, I recalled my grandmother's resolve to never set foot in Poland again (Y.M. Stern, personal communication, 05 May 2020) and so I had also held this conviction within me. As a Holocaust grandchild, I wished to transform this fear, to no longer contain it inside. Thoughts of transformation led to further musings about my associations of home. Indeed, I had arrived in Chaja's homeland and home of my ancestors yet was unsure of what that meant. The uncertainty compelled me to question my multifaceted concept of home.

## **Home**

As we neared Biłgoraj, I noticed signs for the neighboring cities Zamość, Chełm, and Przemysł among other landmarks. My surprise upon recognition of the names was uncanny, as I had seen the cities on maps before my journey. The sign below (see Figure 2) is symbolic of my then-unknown relationship with lost Holocaust predecessors. A feeling of uneasiness engulfed me as I anticipated an arrival that I could not yet construct meaning of at the time.



**Figure 2:** Sign of cities in South Poland, Biłgoraj, Poland

When one's association to home is ungrounded (Milner as cited in Ehrlich, 2020, p. 93), it becomes menacing or unhomely (Freud, 1953). My trepidation upon visiting Chaja's homeland was understandable: it was mysterious and removed from my existence until then, and thus prompted fear. Added to my fear emerged a lack of safety which I noted was perhaps a form of self-protection from HT exposure (Cohn & Morrison, 2018). My associations of Chaja's home were familiar, uncertain, fearful, and hopeful for homely (Freud, 1953) relationships all at once.

The marginalized autoethnographer is tasked with the challenge of writing a story that both resists and embodies stereotypes and represents many ways of being. Boylorn (2017) stated in *BitterSweet* (Water),

I wrestled, for the first time publicly, with what it means to write an autoethnography about black women that exposes them and me as equally stereotypical and extraordinary. I reckon with ways that they are implicated by my telling of a story that is ours, not just mine (Boylorn, 2017, as cited in Adams et al., 2017, pp. 7-17).

Similar to Boylorn's responsibility of speaking on behalf of black women, I hesitated to externalize my conceptualizations of home within this autoethnography. The lack of safety I experienced in Poland, however, helped me link those feelings to the essence of time in HTR that I discuss in the next section. The Black Perspective principles of diversity and internationalization are applied to home associations in highlighting global diversity within and among minority communities (Howard, 2020). My associations of Poland are multi-dimensional, though other descendants may vary in their responses to visiting the homeland of ancestors. I promote vivification in honoring uniqueness of lived experiences when inviting narratives of oppression into counselor education, research, and practice (Howard, 2020).

### **Spectral Time versus Soul Space**

Time passes in slow motion in trauma response (Herman, 2015). Ben-Naftali's (2013) concept of spectral time in melancholic journeys is a "disruption of linear time" (Ehrlich, 2020, p. 87). Time stood still for me while in Lublin Province. At first, I attributed this feeling to disorientation, damp weather, Polish stoicism, and a foreign language. However, my visits to Jewish sites reinforced a sense of timelessness in reconnection to the past. I realized that spectral time is aligned with paradoxical dynamics of traumatic memory. The survivor experiences vivid traumatic memories, yet the memories are removed from the present reality (Bal, 1999). Fabian's (1983) related term of anthropological time occurs when indigenous people align only with their history of occupation and persecution. This alignment both complicates and sustains discourse, though a "primitive persona" (Kowal, 2015, p. 2) and inhibits present and future transformation from occurring (Kowal, 2015, as cited in Greenwood, 2018).

When I visited the Tarnogród memorial, however, timelessness morphed into an internal expansion. I suddenly had endless time to relate to my ancestry. I leaned into the felt sense of this expansion and entitled it Merchav BaNefesh, or Soul Space. Creation of Soul Space allows for transformation of mere death recognition into renewed relationship with the whole Self of the deceased. Merchav BaNefesh underlines a profound contrast between the second-generation's perpetuation of trauma and grandchildren's broadening of historical memory. This contrast is also consistent with the time-image episodes theory applied to third-generation Cambodian Americans' HT wherein a combination of respect for generational silence, fragmented memories, and images of ancestral experiences allow for re-authorship of the present and future (Kawan, 2020).

### **Impossibility of Closure**

I grew up surrounded by constant re-telling of Holocaust atrocities. These open-ended testimonies reminded me of Polish-Israeli author Hendel's incorporation of Holocaust *infinite mourning* (Ehrlich, 2020, p. 87), or the survivor's duty to carry on melancholic story- a form of transgenerational trauma- into her novels. The difference between mourning and melancholia is discussed by Freud in his writings. Mourners and melancholics begin a shared journey of loss denial, yet the mourner ultimately makes the loss conscious through the call of reality, while the melancholic sinks into unconscious isolation, unable to cling to conscious connections (Freud, 1953). While mourning is a conscious act, I believe that infinite mourning in HT is the refusal to fully accept and move on from the atrocities committed against ancestors and resolve to honor HT through keeping melancholic story alive.

I discussed this concept in a conversation with Chaja's granddaughter, P. Though her father Yaakov Leib had barely spoken of Tarnogród, she reiterated his anguish related to having no remaining photographs of Chaja. P. shared a poem that she wrote after a heartbreaking conversation with her father as he lamented this void. The poem is a living example of the infinite mourning transmitted to Holocaust descendants, and of the connection to HT through shared mourning.

His eyes look directly into mine.  
Not playful this time –  
More like pleading.  
'I don't even have a picture  
of my mother,' he says,  
and walks out –  
leaving me bewildered,  
pensive, and apologetic.

~ Poem 'The Moment,' by P. Saban, 1986, *with permission*.

Transmission of melancholic story and infinite mourning is also found in race and discrimination-based HT that is unique to African Americans (Williams-Washington & Mills, 2018) and Japanese Americans (Nagata & Patel, 2021). A

component of healing may occur for grandchildren through infinite mourning. I apply the Black Perspective principles of strengths, diversity, and internationalization to infinite mourning and melancholic story by accentuating the strengths of marginalized communities in remembering HT and honoring diversity of global experiences (Howard, 2020).

I am troubled, however, by the heaviness of melancholic story and its unconscious integration of traumatic silence that is symbolic of deep oppression (Abrams, 2019b). I am concerned that melancholy and infinite mourning do not focus sufficiently on renewal or hope for third generation descendants who take pride in transforming HT into a state of “becoming” (Kawan, 2020, p. 34). The “forever loose, impossible, empty” (Ehrlich, 2020, p. 99) nature of melancholic journeys harbored by previous generations may be inadequate in healing third-generational trauma and cultivation of a wholehearted relationship with the deceased as it lacks present and future oriented implications other than connection to the unconscious. I found a contrasting process of relating to the whole Self when connecting to my great grandmother.

### **CULTIVATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED**

Deep sadness and eventual despair engulfed me at the Biłgoraj and Tarnogród cemeteries. I was shocked to discover that Jewish gravestones were used during Nazi occupation to pave the streets of Tarnogród, and the fragments mounted on makeshift “walls” after the war. Jewish sites were neglected, and I noticed swastikas, discarded beer cans, weeds, and thick mud at all locations. An overall sense of doom hung in the air as I stood before the blackened graves, unable to express the intensity of such moments in either sentiment or tears.

My reaction shifted, however, when visiting the memorial of Tarnogród Jews. My sense upon arrival was one of reverence in meeting Chaja for the first time. Though uncomfortable that my driver witnessed this sacred encounter, I closed my eyes and laid my head on top of the memorial. I circled my arms around its width and waited for Chaja’s presence. In those moments, a breeze caressed my face and then I sensed her nearby. Warm eyes joined me, and I detected a stoic, yet kind smile. I felt her reach, and then wrap me in a gentle embrace. For what seemed like an eternity, I held onto Chaja’s touch, the security in her knowing of me. When I finally disentangled from her place of rest, I looked up in wonder as the site had transformed into a place of beauty.



**Figure 3:** Tarnogród Memorial. Tarnogród, Poland

*Sense of presence experiences* occur without warning for living descendants of trauma, characterized by the sensing of non-living ancestors (Kidron, 2014). Most describe these experiences as comforting and note that basking in the deceased’s company is meaningful in connecting to transgenerational trauma. Since grandchildren seek connection with Holocaust ancestors in areas of identity formation, life transitions, and meaning making (Kidron, 2014), sense of presence may offer clinical benefit in reconciliation of HTR (Steffen & Coyle, 2011). A related sense of presence ritual for Uitoto women is basket-weaving that includes “two baskets of memory” (Echeverri, 2012, as cited in Santamaría, 2017, p. 317), or the presence of historical consciousness and female resistance (Santamaría, 2017). Another touching moment of presence is the fluid dialogue and poem of an African great granddaughter, wherein she senses her great grandmother near and converses with her through poetry (Henderson, 2021).

Similarly, I read Joseph Schorer’s (1989) memoir *A dream fulfilled: Return to Tarnogród* and learned more about the author’s sense of presence encounters. After the war, Schorer returned to Tarnogród to arrange proper Jewish burial for Tarnogród Jews. In doing so, he endured impassions and painful memories, yet was propelled by the echoes of ancestral presence throughout. The words he uttered when standing upon the final burial plot of the Tarnogród memorial are reminiscent of my own feelings when meeting Chaja there:

...I walked to the top of the grave and looked down...I heard birds chirping in the trees, giving the shaded grave a quiet and peaceful feeling...so different from the violent way in which the grave first received its occupants...I paused for the first time that day. I stood motionless before the stone. I felt utter and complete peace inside me for the first time (Schorer, 1989, pp. 64-65).

Related to the embodiment and internalization of ancestral presence I wondered how Chaja’s parts of Self might live on through nurture of her legacy. As I read

historical evidence of Chaja’s past Self, and Self at death, I cherish the totality of her whole Self and hold the possibility of preserving her future Self through descendants’ recreation of coveted intergenerational rituals and imagination of her “becoming” (Kawan, 2020, p. 34).

### Past Self

I received documentation of a signature request in response to Chaja’s application for reinforcements during World War II. The document was marked for signature but remained unsigned by Chaja. It was unclear whether the lack of signature was due to Chaja’s illiteracy or other cultural dynamics. The mystery of this document increased my wonder of the hardships Chaja endured and her commitment to Marjem’s health at the time.

Kamplatai tebebebe daitelk		Kawanska		Anis		Polhemius	
№	Item Name	№	Item Name	№	Item Name	№	Item Name
1.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
2.	Morhonia Miruda	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
3.	Byer Chaja	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
4.	Lipina Gola	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
5.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
6.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
7.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
8.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
9.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
10.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
11.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
12.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
13.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
14.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian
15.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian	1.	Byer Lian

  

Kamplatai tebebebe daitelk		Kawanska		Anis	
№	Item Name	№	Item Name	№	Item Name
1.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
2.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
3.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
4.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
5.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
6.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
7.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
8.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
9.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
10.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
11.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
12.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
13.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
14.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian
15.	Byer Lian	1.	Monzon	1.	Byer Lian

Figure 4: Request for reinforcements. Tarnogród, Poland

In addition to the request, I received a photo of Yitta, Chaja’s daughter who died in Zamość prior to the ghetto liquidation. The photograph was created, as if folded and unfolded many times. Chaja’s granddaughter was unsure whether her father had carried the photo with him, or if it had been in possession of others. I was overjoyed to receive the photograph as it provided a frame of reference for Chaja’s maternal identity and the magnitude of her losses.



**Figure 5:** Yitta Adler. Zamość, Poland

A personification of past Self in Aboriginal people is unshackling of elders' narratives through transfer of heritage documents from government ownership to descendant communities. In doing so, strength-based ancestral stories are returned to the third generation as a form of cultural property transmitted from the past (Greenwood, 2018). In similar fashion, Boylorn (2017) referred to her work as "black girl" autoethnography, for the word "black girl" represents the past Self of her raced and gendered identity that is present in her existence. She was influenced by Hill L. Waters' SOLHOT (Saving our lives, hearing our truths) workshops for black girls on celebrating black girlhood. The Black Perspective principle of affirmation is also related to the past Self in accentuating richness of marginalized culture in community (Howard, 2020).

### **Self at Death**

The final artifact that I acquired was Chaja's death certificate. The document originated from Yad Vashem and confirmed her death in November of 1942. As I held it near, I realized the honor of carrying Chaja's name, yet also the tragedy of her brutal death. I wondered about Chaja's approach to death, whether she fought her oppressors, and how she tended to Marjem. Though I'll never know what occurred before their passing, an image of Chaja singing to Marjem filled me. I heard her melodious voice as she embraced Marjem and prepared to die. Chaja's perceived melody is reminiscent of my own love for song, and integral to my identity (Kidron, 2014). I noted a related attachment to the Self at death in Henderson's (2021) poem *Dear Ancestors* embedded within the words and imagery

of a great granddaughter's perception of perished predecessors and the resistance that accompanied their death.

Chaja Adler

הרשמה למוות ולגובה ירושלים  
 23.1.1942  
 הרשמה למוות ולגובה ירושלים

אם נפטרה על בנה יחידי 41.56.1942

שם המנוחה: Adler  
 שם הולדת: Adler  
 שם נשוא: Chaja  
 תאריך הולדת: 23.1.1905  
 מקום הולדת: Parnassia, Poland  
 תאריך מות: 24.1.1942  
 מקום מות: ירושלים  
 סיבת המוות: רעב / מחלת הייסורים

שם הוריה: אברהם אדלר, רחל אדלר  
 מקום קבורה: בית הקברות החדש, ירושלים

הרשמה: 23.1.1942

Figure 6: Death certificate of Chaja Adler, Israel

Future Self

Though I was comforted by Chaja's song, acknowledgement of her extinguished future was unbearable. I hoped Chaja would have restored some contentment had she survived the war. Chaja's future Self can be actualized through honoring her character and retelling her story to descendants. One way of honoring the future Self is preservation of her noted nourishment of others through food. Esther Ruchel was amazed by Chaja's capacity to produce a salad made of the one ingredient she had at hand—a head of lettuce (Y.M. Stern, personal communication, 05 May, 2020). I was struck by the significance of comfort food for Holocaust offspring and remember a childhood favorite of honig milch (hot milk and honey) prepared by my grandmother on cold mornings. Recreation of traditions held dear by the non-living becomes a shared legacy of future Self for generations, one that lives on.

Recognition of future Self is noted in other marginalized communities as a means of connection to HT and predecessors. Through use of time-image episodes, third generation Cambodian Americans re-author stories of “what could have been” (Kawan, 2020, p. 44). Similarly, contemporary Uitoto leaders make the voices of female ancestors visible and tangible for Amazonian women through extension of

artistic artifacts and passing down stories to future generations (Santamaría, 2017). The strengths principle of the Black Perspective applies to future Self in transmission of ancestral strength to descendants. Principles of diversity and internationalization remind counselor educators and clinicians to practice cultural responsiveness and to honor transgenerational legacy (Howard, 2020).

## DISCUSSION

This evocative autoethnography addressed four problems in counselor education and supervision and evidence-based trauma practices. Due to evolving societal attitudes associated with historical memory, findings of transgenerational transmission in second generation survivors must be reexamined in Holocaust grandchildren, yet (1) there are few qualitative studies that feature the lived experiences of third generation descendants and their connection to ancestry (Cohn & Morrison, 2018). A (2) one-dimensional association of melancholy attached to HT, (3) little to no education of HT in counseling programs (Abrams, 2019a), and (4) scarcity of HT informed educational models and research pedagogy (Henderson et al., 2016) in counselor education and supervision are additional areas of concern.

I chose an evocative autoethnographic design for this study because it invites the reader to connect with the author's journey and extend it to other contexts (Spinazola et al., 2021). The greatest advantage of this design is its transferability to the reader's cultural experiences. Transferability in autoethnography "moves from respondents to readers and is always being tested by readers" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7). Spinazola demonstrated the power of drawing the reader into a compelling narrative through an introductory excerpt of her own grief called, *an invitation to sit with me* (2021). Similarly, I began contributing to the lack of qualitative HT studies with my own lived experience. I am aware that featuring an autoethnography could be considered paradoxical after noting the lack of collective trauma education in counselor education and supervision and address this concern below.

I could have conducted a multiple-case study of collective third generation HT experiences for the purpose of robust transferability (Yin, 2018). I have, indeed, recommended doing so in the conclusion of this paper as a future area of study. As an autoethnographer, however, I moved between multiple levels of consciousness, and between personal and communal realms (Spinazola et al., 2021). My position as a marginalized researcher compelled me to write first about my own provocative and challenging moments within dominant culture (Hughes, 2019). After visiting Poland, I could not capture other collective voices without simultaneously declaring my own.

Boylorn described the felt sense of speaking out on two levels in the following words: "...I reckon with ways that they are implicated by my telling of a story that is ours, not just mine" (Boylorn, 2017, as cited in Adams et al., 2017, pp. 7-17). I undertook the responsibility of externalizing Chaja's story, one that she could not tell herself. Boylorn's words convey my associated humility here: "I stand on the shoulders of giants and my work follows a legacy of folk who didn't have the platform, or the education, or the opportunity, or the microphone to do so (Boylorn, 2017, as cited in Adams et al., 2017, pp. 7-17).

I appealed to the need to increase collective trauma education and HT informed educational models in counselor education by integrating the Black Perspective's six principles throughout this autoethnography and added implications for counselor education and trauma focused research and practice. The ethnocentric lens of the Black Perspective is relevant to both individual and communal experiences of HT and recognizes correlations between micro, mezzo, and macro levels of functioning (Howard, 2020).

I addressed the one-dimensional association of melancholy in HT through introducing concepts of the whole Self and ancestral bonding, which are active forms of connection that satisfy the third generation's yearning to become acquainted with the past, present, and perceived future of ancestors. I differentiate between ancestral bonding and traumatic bonding (Dutton & Painter, 1993) or Trauma Coerced Attachment (TCA) here as well. In ancestral bonding, the relationship with traumatized predecessors is not coerced, abusive, or inclusive of a power imbalance. In contrast, nearly all researchers of traumatic bonding agree that an important related condition is control or abuse (Doychak & Raghavan, 2020). Creation of Soul Space allows for an expansion of mere death recognition (the one-dimensional aspect of HT) into renewal of relationship with the whole Self.

I noted several general limitations of this autoethnography here. The first limitation was reliance on historical artifacts rather than oral history. Second, data collection occurred during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when exclusive use of electronic forums for personal communications was cumbersome. Had I met the contributors in person, the personal communications may have been richer. Additionally, the case of Chaja is an unusual case (Yin, 2018, p. 50) in that it deviates from case studies of living participants. A central limitation of single-case studies is the challenge of transferability than that of multiple-case studies (Yin, 2018). The final challenge of this study was representation of Holocaust trauma in literature due to the inability of art, words, or artifacts to fully contain its depth of sorrow (Ben-Dat, 2015; Nir, 2018). Ancestral bonding through shared narratives, images, and connections, however, becomes "the collective unconscious of subsequent generations" (Henderson et al., 2016, p. 72). My relationship with Chaja is an embodied example of sacred ancestral bonding.

## **CONCLUSION**

A global increase in hate crimes, systemic racism, and bigotry highlights the need for collective trauma resources. The brutal homicide of George Floyd, a Black American man, occurred on 25 May 2020. Floyd's killing triggered protests against systemic racism, police brutality, and lack of police accountability. Despite subsequent legislative measures for social justice, oppression still exists. Additionally, the Coronavirus pandemic continues to devastate the world and adds a complex layer of collective grief to the lives of all people. The virus has taken a harsh toll on marginalized communities, further complicating HT devastation.

In light of these events and others of similar nature, understanding the intricacy of HT and transgenerational trauma is crucial. As noted within the discussion, survivors of collective hate crimes and systemic racism are often treated by

clinicians and educated in institutions that do not well understand collective experiences (Abrams, 2019a). Survivors also engage in traumatic bonding with lost community members that is frequently characterized by power imbalances and is often an unstable form of attachment (Doychak & Raghavan, 2020). Recognition of Soul Space, or the rite of passage to bond with ancestors who suffered similar tragedies, yet also embodied resistance and resilience in their past, present, and perceived futures could be helpful for younger generations (Greenwood, 2018). Use of autoethnography informed by HT informed models is effective in bridging an ancestral bond among generations of survivors. Understanding the experiences of both the oppressed and sources of oppression is helpful here as well (Howard, 2020).

Future directions in research of third generation descendants include, but are not limited to, (1) exploration of psychotherapeutic connections to ancestral narratives and bonding in the third generation, (2) conduction of multiple case studies that investigate the third generation's lived experiences of HT and ancestral bonding and (3) examining the clinical and educational impacts of implementing HT informed instructional models in counselor education curricula.

## **Personal Conclusion**

It is difficult to express the plethora of personal insights that arose throughout the study. I was humbled to visit the homeland of my ancestry and warmed by cultivation of a relationship with Chaja. As her great granddaughter, I am honored to carry Chaja's name and to integrate her whole Self into my being and becoming. I now hold Chaja's image, embrace, and song in my heart, for in her presence I have found a home. Connection to Chaja's legacy prompts internalization of home, as described in Schorer's (1989) words "...Home moved from a place in Poland to a place in my heart and it has stayed there always" (p. 13).

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