INTERVIEW

Dilemas of Postmemory Interview with *Marianne Hirsch*

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Marianne Hirsch is William Peterfield Trent Professor Emerita of English and Comparative Literature the Institute for on the Study if Sexuality and Gender at Columbia University. Hirsch was born in Romania in 1949, she immigrated to the United States in 1962 and studied at Brown University. She combines feminist theory and memory studies, particularly the transmission of memories of violence across generations. She is a leading scholar in her field and best known for coining the term postmemory in 1990, when writing about Art Spiegelman.

Some of her important writings include the article "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" (2001), the books *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012) and *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997). She has also written books in collaboration with Leo Spitzer, such as *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (2010) and *School Photos in Liquid Time: Reframing Difference* (2019).

The concept of postmemory, as articulated by Marianne Hirsch (1992, 2008, 2012), explores the intergenerational transmission of trauma, particularly focusing on the relationship between second- or third-generation descendants of traumatic historical events that predate their birth. These traumatic events are conveyed to subsequent generations through familial and cultural channels. The opacity of deep memory—resistant to resolution through conventional historical narratives or representational forms—underscores trauma's enduring intellectual and emotional complexity. Eva Hoffman (2004, 10-13), herself a daughter of Holocaust survivors, reflects on how her engagement with writing brought the Holocaust from a latent, nebulous presence to a defining theme and undeniable influence on her life. Through this process, personal

memories became interwoven with historical understanding, underscoring their value as a source for examining catastrophic events' profound and lasting societal impacts. Consequently, the implications of such histories transcend the private realm, influencing broader cultural and academic discourses.

Hirsch (2012, 1-6) emphasizes the critical importance of safeguarding the personal and generational connections to a traumatic past, which some individuals experience as a "living connection". This process involves navigating the transformation of these memories into collective history or myth. The notion of postmemory rests on the idea that the descendants of survivors maintain an intimate connection to the memories of trauma, experiencing them, albeit in a mediated and altered form. Postmemory concerns the dynamic relationship between subsequent generations and the personal as well as collective traumas of their forebears. It reflects a process where transmitted experiences, deeply internalized, behave analogously to direct memories, yet are distinctly mediated through imagination. Hirsch employs the metaphor of a "post-it" to elucidate the "post" in postmemory: it adheres to the surface of texts and narratives, augmenting them, but remains capable of being displaced or recontextualized. This framing positions postmemory as a transgenerational structure of traumatic memory, one that, even in its "post" articulation, continues to challenge narrative reconstruction and risks displacing an individual's life story with that of their predecessors.

While Hirsch acknowledges that postmemory extends beyond familial relationships, she underscores the intensity of this transmission within familial contexts. The process often results in the internalization of past events without full comprehension, a characteristic feature of trauma that distinguishes postmemory from other forms of historical engagement.

Recent events have brought to attention a discussion of the concept of postmemory. Marianne Hirsch (2024), in her essay on Holocaust memory after the events of October 7, 2023 explores the complexities of postmemory. She emphasizes that while descendants of survivors deeply identify with the experiences of their ancestors, this connection is vicarious, mediated by imagination and cultural artifacts rather than direct memory. Hirsch cautions against the uncritical reenactment of inherited trauma, which can lead to a fixation on victimhood that obscures the broader contexts of historical and ongoing injustices, such as the plight of Palestinians. She advocates for a relational approach to memory that fosters solidarity and justice, acknowledging shared vulnerabilities across groups and challenging cycles of defensiveness and exclusionary narratives. The interview was organized by the two interviewers and conducted in person by Fernando Gomes Garcia[1] in October 2024 in New York City. We wish you all a great reading!

[1] This interview was made possible with funding from Capes in the PDSE modality. Fernando Gomes Garcia completed part of his doctoral research at CCNY under the supervision of Professor Dirk Moses.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

First of all, we would like to thank you for your time and disposition for this conversation. The main theme of our dialogue will be the term of your coinage, postmemory, and its implications for academics and interpretations of reality – especially those concerned with Holocaust memory. In your book *The generation of postmemory*, you introduce how you became interested in Holocaust studies and the idea of postmemory itself. Could you tell us more about that? You are a child of the Holocaust, since your parents are emigres from a conflated Europe. How has that affected your life? As an adult researcher, how did the theme of the representation of the Holocaust become a problem for you?

Marianne Hirsch

I grew up, as I think you know, in Romania and my parents were survivors of the Second World War and the Holocaust in the city once called Czernowitz [now Chernivtsi in Ukraine] in a region that was administered by Romania but was collaborationist with the Nazis. They were not survivors of concentration or death camps, but they were in a ghetto, they were married in the ghetto, and they were under the threat of deportation always and just barely evaded it. I was born after the war when they themselves were refugees from this region that had become part of Soviet Union. They fled to Romania, and, yes, all of this very much determined my childhood and later life. My parents were not the kind of survivors who never talked about the war – they talked about it almost every single day and it was very much part of their identity and their Jewish identity. I grew up in Romania with the idea that we would eventually leave because it was very repressive under Communism, as well as deeply antisemitic. I grew up in a bilingual (German/Romanian) community of survivors and refugees from Czernowitz. This history was determinative but, you know, when I came to the United States and went to high school and college, I was not concerned with it at all because I was interested in the new and in the future. I became fascinated with the New Novel, the French New Wave, and feminism, really, very much looking to the future, not to history or the past. My academic interest in this history came much later. I did not want to study my parents' world that I had heard so much about. When I was in high school, I lived in Providence, Rhode Island, and there was an assistant professor at Brown who was very interested in the literary culture of Czernowitz and he said to me: "one day somebody is going to write the literary history of Czernowitz, and it's going to be you." I thought, oh no, this is the last thing I want, just to think about and work on my parents' world…

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

You highlight the importance of feminist struggle in both your personal and academic life. Can you tell us more about how feminist studies and their ambiance and influences molded your trajectory? What is the relationship between gender and the transgenerational transmission of trauma? How does gender traverse postmemory?

Marianne Hirsch

I was very lucky to have gone to college in the late 1960s which was a tremendously generative time in terms of rethinking everything. We were rethinking gender relations, we were rethinking academic fields, we were involved in the anti-Vietnam war struggle, and civil rights in the United States. I graduated from college in 1970, the year of the bombing of Cambodia and the student killings at Kent State University, and it was not possible to go on with business as usual. We needed to mark this moment and work to change everything. So feminism became my cause and I realized how important solidarity with other women could be, and how much gender and patriarchy shaped everything that I knew. I had only one woman Professor in all of college and, along with others, I began to understand how power worked to subjugate half of humanity and more. Feminism was thus also a movement of solidarity with all people who had been oppressed, not just women. It shaped an ethos of liberatory struggles across many kinds of subjugation in the United States and the world. We wanted to imagine a different kind of world. But in the US, feminism was a white movement in the beginning, and it really took until the early 1980s to have a consciousness of intersectionality – of how race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect and how they all need to be challenged for change to be possible. When I first started teaching in the mid-1970s and had a community of other women colleagues, we started studying women writers and bringing voices that had been forgotten into an expanded canon. We needed to understand the canon and why they had been excluded and we became conscious of how certain voices can just be suppressed.

And that's really how I came to memory, trying to think about how history is told, how it works as a field, and how it can reimagined so as to create spaces for voices that had been excluded. It was very interesting to me that in the feminist communities and conferences and workshops and working groups that I was in, during the 1980s, we discovered that a lot of us had a common history that emerged from being children of Holocaust survivors or, for our African American colleagues, descendants of enslavement, and how our feminism was shaped by and related to these other, though related, histories of persecution. So the question of postmemory really emerged from this idea of a struggle for a more inclusive memory, and for a more expanded kind of history that would include voices that had been lost.

So it's not so much only about gender, it's a question of inclusivity and solidarity.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

In both of your books, *Family Frames* and *The generation of postmemory* you dialogue with the work of Ewa Hoffman, who has a similar trajectory as a Jewish immigrant in America as you. In Family Frames you point out the similarities and differences of you both as young girls moving to another country. Ewa Hoffman, in her book *Lost in Translation*, highlights her perpetual social displacement, and you, in *Family Frames*, point out that this displacement is not completely due to the emigrant status, but is part of a girl's maturing. Here we would like to ask you to comment on the characteristics of the second generation as immigrants in another country. Some scholars pointed to the communal features that the second generation of Holocaust survivors and other immigrants have. To what extent these belated trauma features we see in both of them is

related to the experience of Holocaust by their parents or to the status of being an immigrant?

Marianne Hirsch

Well, there is a difference, I think, between migrants, immigrants, and refugees, right? And I think that's important to keep in mind. The life trajectory of a family that had to leave the place where they lived and felt at home, or the place where they were persecuted and needed to find another home, that interruption, I think, is really important in terms of the kinds of memory structures that I have been trying to work out. This displacement and interruption creates stress on a life history. I have been influenced by the work of Jan and Aleida Assman, who talk about three generations of memory. In a more ordinary or traditional life cycle, you inherit memories from your parents and grandparents, to form three generations of what the Assmanns call communicative memory. You sit on your grandfather's lap and your grandfather tells you stories about the past, or your grandmother? And those are communicated in a very embodied way, and also through performing everyday tasks, and the home that your grandparents have is different from your parents, but the objects that are inherited, the photo albums that are inherited, the stories that are inherited shape a way of life that is communicated in embodied ways. But when that cycle is interrupted, that communicative memory is broken. What the Assmans argue is that communicative memory gives way to what they call cultural memory – memory becomes institutionalized. It's in books, it's in museums, it's in memorials, it's in history classes. The communicative part is supplanted by institutionalized memory and is no longer available as touch. But when you interrupt memory through refugeehood or immigration or persecution or genocide, then that communicative transmission is halted. People and objects are no longer there to be touched, and memory is transformed. Many people emigrate without objects or albums. So, I think the structure of postmemory that I have been trying to work out is based on these shards and these interruptions that lead to a much more fragmentary memory than in more traditional life stories.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Now, we would like to talk more directly about the concept of postmemory. It is a very successful concept in the sense that it is used by a lot of researchers of the Holocaust. Even so, we still have some questions for you about points you address yourself in your books and articles concerning it. The first question is about the difference between memory and postmemory and the difference between memory and history. You define postmemory as a kind of belated memory, like those powerful images of someone's past that are as strong as if they were one own. It feels as if is one's memory, but it is not. At the same time, it is too intimate to be called History, right? So, could you say more about this definition of postmemory that is not exactly a memory but it is not history?

Marianne Hirsch

Well, you know, one of my questions has been why, in the 1980s, did the notion of memory became necessary and urgent. Why do we need it? Cultural memory, not personal or familial memory. Why is history not enough? And I think it's because of the kind of intimacy in the way that the past is passed down across generations, not only through reading or going to museums or school pedagogy. There is something more that gets transmitted that is a little bit less intangible and that has the intimacy of touch, the sense of performance, the embodied action, and other kinds of things that are difficult to explain, like ways of living, how you people dress, how they have their food, how they are with each other, how they socialize with each other. And for those forms of transmission of everyday lives, I think the term memory is more accurate than history. I mean, the academic field of history has expanded to include the history of the everyday life and even the history of emotions. But even that is studied from a little bit more of a distance. What about our own personal connection to the past and the way the past shapes our lives? So there, I think, the term memory works to express that. And not so much in the Pierre Nora way of having national anniversaries, dates, and spaces of remembrance, but in familial and communal and cultural life. For me, feminism was also important in developing my thoughts on cultural memory because it encouraged us to look at small details of everyday life and not only at the larger stories. The difference between memory and postmemory is that, you know, my parents' story feels very present, but it didn't happen to me. It came through their stories, the stories they told, but also in many other ways, the way that they lived their lives in their own communities that are imprinted on me and shaped me. But it is vicarious. I am using myself here not because I want to tell my autobiography, but as a case study in the ways that I think memory works. Of course, memory is not in any way more immediate, or less constructed than postmemory, but there is a difference in presence and experience. I think that the lines between history and memory and between memory and postmemory are fluid.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Here, we can mention the commentary of Beatriz Sarlo. Sarlo treated postmemory as a category whose utility still needed to be proven. The author understands that, if the difference in postmemory lies in the mediated nature of memories, in the capture of a story, and in the construction of a discourse that relies on secondary sources, then it would be enough to call it memory. After all, for her, the construction of a past through stories and representations would be a modality of history called memory for its subjective involvement. From this perspective, the use of the prefix "post" would be dispensable. Could you comment on this as well? Do you think that the discourse provoked by the memory of a witness in a descendant is more fragmentary or vicarious than the reconstruction carried out by a third party, a historian, for example?

Marianne Hirsch

Well, as I understood her, you're right. That she says the "post" is not necessary. But I think she also sees the idea of the subjective part of memory and postmemory as a way of arguing for a kind of victimization that she thinks is a disservice in the political realm. I read her as saying that in the Latin

American context, the descendants present themselves as victims, and therefore they are doing a disservice to the historical past.

Fernando Gomes Garcia

She says that and that every memory is mediated. So the postmemory is mediated as any memory.

Marianne Hirsch

I agree. But arguing for a difference between generations is not the same as saying that memory is mediated or immediate. Right? So I think that if it's something that you yourself have experienced, of course how you recall it or how you tell the story is already mediated. That's a given, but it's still different from the next generation or somebody who's more distant. I have also thought that the structure of postmemory, that distance, is not only temporal, but it can also be spatial. So, the hurricane that just happened in Florida. You and I weren't there, but some, you know, my sister-in-law was there, so she told me about it.

I was very worried about her. I am closer to it than you are, who doesn't have a relative there, right? I'm closer to it, so I feel much more engaged in it. In some ways it's similar to that structure of postmemory to be witnessing from a distance but with personal investment. And when it's a very big event, like a hurricane or an earthquake or October 7th in Israel, when you have a personal link at stake in it or are interpellated by it as a witness, then it resembles the identification that characterizes postmemory – an identification that is always modulated by distance.

But for me also this idea of postmemory is not just a familial story, but as I told you, it's a way of being involved in a past and understanding the stakes of that involvement. It's also political – a desire to repair an injustice that happened. It's not a dispassionate academic notion. And I think that's what Sarlo doesn't see, but she worries that it could be misused politically. It's something I've also worried about more recently.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Although the concept is very often used, some authors, as you know, have a lot of resistance to it, as is the case of Gary Weissman and Ernst van Alphen. Weissman points out that the concept inherits a kind of fantasy of experience, of witness. As if the second generation has lived the Holocaust – or any other traumatic event – and not their parents or grandparents. As if the second generation was a survival itself. And there are ethical and representational implications for these fantasies, like the commodification of the Holocaust, and its transformation into a pop culture item, or a sacred one. You call attention to the fact that postmemory is not a complete identification with the past that is not oneself, but a bridge between what is absent and what is present. In a recent intervention of yours, *Rethinking Holocaust Memory after October 7*, you seem more preoccupied with a kind of "over-identification" between second and subsequent generations with the event in terms of "it could be me" instead of the "it was not me the victim". Could you please talk a bit more about this dialectical essence of postmemory?

Marianne Hirsch

Gary Weissman actually picked up on something that I've also become very concerned with recently, which is this idea that people would misuse the status of being the descendant of survivors of the Holocaust and feel as though, like you used the term, "second generation survivors". No, they're not second-generation survivors. They're descendants of survivors. I have always insisted on that difference. I think that I have been writing against that danger. Along with writers like [Patrick] Modiano and [Bernhard] Schlink and [Uwe] Tim and [Art] Spiegelman, I insist on the fragmentary, the unknowing, the absence, the gaps. There are other second and third generation writers who do fall into that trap of wanting to own the story themselves. I think we are seeing the dangers of that over-identification, especially among Jews and Israelis after October 7th. So, now, I do want to clarify something from your earlier question, the notion that postmemory only applies to the Holocaust. It's been useful to describe and theorize the memories of descendants of other catastrophes, and I think it's worked well for in those contexts.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Van Alphen, in his more elaborated criticism of your concept, talks about a continuity of generations instead of a rupture and of a culture of victims in which the second generation would be drawn. The concept of postmemory seems to consider a dramatic rupture between generations more than continuity between them. At the same time, postmemory is a way of telling about the transmissivity of a traumatic past to present generations, like the metaphor of the Post-it, a supplementary memory. Is it really possible to talk about the transmissivity of trauma between generations? Can the concept of postmemory be used only in situations where there is a rupture? How about when tradition no longer transmits the memory in its normal way?

Marianne Hirsch

The way I read Von Alphen is that he's basically saying postmemory is not memory. Memory has a certain semiotic system, and if you were not there, you don't remember. And I am saying, yes, trauma or very strong and powerful experiences can be transmitted so as to generate a kind of memory, a different kind of memory. He disputes that, and he said in some of the novels that he discusses, the reason the children are traumatized is because they have bad parents who have suffered a lot and thus they have a bad childhood, not because they remember the Holocaust, but because the parents were wounded by these experiences and unable to parent. That may be true. I don't know how we can know whether it's one or the other. I think it's probably some of both. But I do believe that very powerful experiences can be transmitted to people who weren't there. That's what literature can do. It makes you feel like you were there. Otherwise, why would we be reading all these novels, right? When a writer like Charlotte Delbo tells you about what it feels like to be thirsty, you can feel it in your body. And that's why she's a particularly fantastic communicator of what that felt like. And when Modiano is doing his searches, you search with his protagonist. You feel like you really need to know very strongly.

Now, does postmemory depend on trauma? Are there other experiences that are communicated as powerfully? I thought maybe revolutions – moments of revolutionary change. May 68, movements like the student movement now, maybe. You know, I was part of the student movement in 1968-70. I think you can transmit some of that power of believing that the world can be a different place. The civil rights movement or the Algerian revolution. These are not necessarily trauma. They're another form of collective, powerful historical change. But collective, not only individual. And mediated, multiply mediated, of course, as well. So I guess the question is, does this memory structure only apply to rupture? I wouldn't say rupture is the dominant term. I think it's more, a powerful moment of historical change that is a kind of rupture. But not everybody experiences that kind of moment of rupture the same way.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Different authors propose similar concepts of postmemory. We mention Ellen Fine's "absent memory" and James Young's "received history", but there are others. What is the difference between "postmemory" and these other concepts? Could they be different strategies to encompass the same matter?

Marianne Hirsch

I think a lot of us have been thinking about a similar phenomenon. I think that James Young's "received history" is so useful – it's both what happened and how it's been passed down to us. These are interconnected. I think we're all working around the same phenomenon and we have come up with slightly different terms to describe it; each has it's own logic. I think Froma Zeitlin used the term "vicarious witness." Geoffrey Hartman coined "witnesses by adoption." I think it's very much the same syndrome that we have all trying to find language for. I think all of us have an investment in trying to figure something out and find a language for it because we have experienced it not only academically or intellectually, but also through a kind of personal commitment.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

We would like to better address an already mentioned matter. How do you think the recent events, primarily the October 7 but also the subsequent Israeli invasion of Gaza, influence your concept of postmemory? After all, these events show a prevalence of the idea that "I could be the victim of the Holocaust" instead of "I was not the real victim" feeding a sentiment of being a victim that is close to a need for revenge. We are not saying necessarily that the concept itself has the power to influence the conscience of the people, but the question is if you think it has been misused as a descriptive tool. In the face of these horrific events, would you change something in your concept? Also, how has your view of postmemory reacted to its recent uses?

Marianne Hirsch

As you know, I have been very involved in this very question. I think the events of October 7th were horrible. But I feel that they have caused a kind of reversion to a view of memory and memory studies that's already been

surpassed. The view of the Holocaust as a trauma that's incurable and irreparable and absolutely unique and extreme has been qualified over the last years. I think the field and my own work has begun to shift from trauma to focus on healing, on repair, and also it's become more comparative and connective. I've insisted on the term connective rather than comparative, or what Michael Rothberg calls multidirectional concept of memory to signal that although different histories are not necessarily comparable, they are connected through structures of persecution and othering. Over the last decade or more, we've been trying to find what we can learn from each other in these different catastrophic histories of colonialism, enslavement, persecution and injustice. October 7th has shifted us back to seeing the Holocaust as a primary, exclusionary history that's different from everything else and a trauma that's indeed transmissible across generations and that has defined the history of Israel. Actually, ironically, what's happened in Israel is that October 7th now is being compared to the Holocaust. So it's both unique and never happened before or again to anyone, and now it's happening again. There is a kind of contagion of Jewish vulnerability and fear and of Israeli vulnerability that I think the study of the Holocaust through the lens of irreparable trauma has in some ways made possible. In the 1980's and 1990's, the notion of irreparability, the notion that the wounds will always remain open was an operative concept because justice had not been done. We had perpetrators who were walking free. We had the trial of Klaus Barbie. A lot of former Nazis who were living credible lives. I was at a conference in Ravensbrück in the 1990s. It was held inside the former concentration and death camp. And some of the guards were still living in town. And at that conference, some of the historians were saying "wait a minute, how can we be discussing this academically when the guards are living here and they have not been brought to justice?". So this idea that the wounds are still open was a political idea, not just an idea that the suffering will be eternal over generations. It was a political idea of saying we need accountability and justice. And justice doesn't mean revenge or retaliation. Justice means a national or an international legal system that can be brought to bear. Now, I think we need accountability, but we also need healing and the two are related. We need to be able to live together. And we have learned that from the South African post-Apartheid regime, we have learned it in Rwanda, we have learned it in Cambodia, we have learned it from some of these other genocides where people are living side by side with each other and trying to come to terms with the past. That did not happen after the Holocaust because survivors did not return to their former homes. They were not welcome there. Those places were ruled by communist regimes that didn't want them, didn't accept them. So it wasn't living next to each other and finding a way to survive being neighbors. That challenge came for those who went to Palestine to live with different neighbors, who in some ways are paying the price for crimes that they did nto commit. I think that we've learned a lot about the Holocaust from some of these subsequent genocides. And from forms of justice that have been found like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or the Gacaca Boards in Rwanda that have been formulated to find a different kind of resolution to these wounds. These comparative frameworks can be illuminating. But after October 7th in Israel a different kind of discourse has taken hold. It has been a contagion of fear that the Holocaust has returned and annihilation is always possible and always around the corner. I worry that the way that we've been teaching and thinking about the Holocaust as an unending, irreparable trauma has potentially done some harm, if inadvertently.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Still on the subject of the uses of the past and recent events, do you think that the concept of postmemory, or how it is used to categorize facts, fails to consider memory conflicts and the politics of erasure and silencing of certain traumatic pasts? Is there an economy of memory in the sense of competing memories? Or do you believe that we can think in terms of a multidirectional memory, as Michel Rothberg proposed? We know that the concept of postmemory is used to encompass forms of, for example, autofiction that revisits the colonial past and its legacies. But how do you see the relationship between Postcolonial Studies and the concept of postmemory? Especially concerning these policies of silencing and erasing certain memories. How is it possible that a postmemory develops where trauma is not socially recognized?

Marianne Hirsch

This is a very pertinent question – how the lack of acknowledgment can re-traumatize and produce a postmemory that's even more troubled. I have done a lot of work on the legacies of the Armenian genocide over three and four generations, maybe even five generations now. The notion of postmemory has been useful to writers and artists about the Armenian genocide because it is precisely the lack of acknowledgment by Turkey of the genocide that's produced re-injury over and over again. The lack of recognition makes it more urgent and I think makes the notion even more useful. I mean, responsibility for the Holocaust was certainly recognized by Germany and is shaping Germany's very identity, but Eastern Europe, Poland, Hungary, the lack of recognition and accountability is still operative there. Why do we have Holocaust museums in Romania or Bulgaria or some of these countries? Because they want to join the European Union. And to join the European Union, they have to recognize their own complicity in the Holocaust. Otherwise it would never have happened. So lack of acknowledgment is rampant everywhere. And certainly rampant now in terms of Israel's actions against Palestinians. I think multidirectionality is crucial. We can learn from each other.

Fernando Gomes Garcia

In sum, the postmemory operates without the official recognition of the atrocities committed.

Marianne Hirsch

Well, so you have the experience of victims and survivors and their descendants, and then you have official history, that is often monumental and heroic. You have the history of the perpetrators, often a justificatory history, or one that monumentalizes evil, as in Germany today. In Morocco, for example, there was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the victims. "Tell us your stories". "Tell us how you have suffered". Perpetrators need not be put to justice for victims to tell their stories. But where does that lead? It doesn't produce healing. That doesn't produce reparation, right? It's only when the two work together that you can have some hope of recognition and repair.

Fernando Gomes Garcia
Sabrina Costa Braga

Finally, some more broad questions. The second and third generation of children of Holocaust survivors molded, for themselves and the public, a notion of the Holocaust as a unique trauma. This has political consequences, as we see it today. So, we would like to ask: how postmemory work in the frontier of the private and the public? Can the work of the historian, the literary critic, or whoever decides to dive into Trauma Studies (not just of the Holocaust) contribute to an effective change in helping solve the problems that the conceptual framework they use clarifies?

Marianne Hirsch

I would say that the second and third generation of children of Holocaust survivors did not all produce a notion of the Holocaust as a unique trauma. I mean, some did and others have used that memory in the interest of social justice, social change and solidarity with other groups. The tragedy of what is happening today is that some of these descendants use their postmemory as an alibi for the violence perpetrated in the Middle East, and others are using it precisely in the opposite way to fight that violence. Unfortunately, there is this division, and we are not even able to talk to each other. But some of us have refused to use the suffering of our parents or grandparents as an alibi for violence, war, and genocide. It's not inherent in the notion of postmemory that trauma is inherited to be used as a weapon of war or of protection in the interest of security. That's a misuse, I would say. I think that out of that same history, out of any painful history, you could say this shouldn't happen. I mean, it's never again, right? This shouldn't happen again. And not just to my group, but for everyone. Our vulnerability is shared in a world in which we see ourselves as interconnected.

Since last October I've been fighting against the misuse of the memory of the Holocaust as an alibi for war.

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Entrevista recebida em 05/11/24 • Aceito em 10/12/24
Revista de Teoria da História | issn 2175-5892