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This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Feliu i Samuel-Lajeunesse, Joel. «The Possibility of being a Jew : an autoethnographic journey from shattered memory to the memorial body». Memory Studies, 2025. 15 pàg. SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI 10.1177/17506980241312338

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## TITLE

The Possibility of Being a Jew: An Autoethnographic Journey from Shattered Memory to the Memorial Body.

## Author

Joel Feliu i Samuel-Lajeunesse

## Author contact details

Dr. Joel Feliu i Samuel-Lajeunesse

Professor Titular d'Universitat

Departament de Psicologia Social

Facultat de Psicologia. Edifici B. Despatx B5-054

Campus de la UAB · 08193 Bellaterra

(Cerdanyola del Vallès) · Barcelona · Catalunya

Email: joel.feliu@uab.cat

Tel: +34 935 814 502

## Abstract

Through the story of my relationship with Jewishness, I propose a journey that begins with internalised stigma, moves through the recognition of the trauma of the Holocaust within me and ends with the reconstitution of an anguished body as a living memory of the Holocaust. The construction of this text is a performative exercise in constituting a new inscription in the cultural narrative of the transmission of trauma. Autoethnographic writing forces me to remember, to interpret my body and to dig through my deceased mother's belongings in order to constitute a new memory. In this text, I propose to think of the traumatised body as a living memorial. I suggest that it is the body in the materiality of its existence that constitutes itself as a memory of trauma through the suffering or discomfort of successive generations. In this sense, the traumatised body is a memorial body that needs to be preserved.

**Keywords:** *Intergenerational Trauma Transmission, Memorial Body, Living Memorial, Holocaust, Autoethnography.*

"... une eau froide et opaque comme notre mauvaise mémoire" (Jean Cayrol, *Nuit et Brouillard*, 1956).

"... only that which never ceases hurting, stays in the memory" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1887)

My maternal grandparents, René Samuel and Jacqueline Weyl<sup>1</sup>, were married on a Tuesday in October 1933 in the synagogue on the rue de la Victoire in Paris. Their first son, my uncle Bertrand, was born on 31 January 1935, and my mother, Françoise, on 2 January 1939. When she was three years old, they tried to kill them for being Jews. To survive, they stopped being Jews. They went into hiding, fled their city, and survived the war by living in different towns in France thanks to false papers provided by a network of communist friends (although they were not communists themselves). When the war ended and they were able to return to Paris, they were no longer Jews and never became so again.

Despite this, I was born in Israel, in the Hadasah Hospital in Jerusalem. Being born in Israel is the result of a strange coincidence. On the one hand, my mother's Jewish origins, then a fervent Christian, led her to leave

France for Israel in 1967, when she thought the young state was about to disappear. On the other hand, my father, a Christian, a Catalan nationalist, a young admirer of the State of Israel in the 1960s, like so many other Catalans of his generation, wanted to work on a kibbutz, looking for an experience of communal life other than the monastery of Montserrat, where he had been a novice for some time and where he had learnt Biblical Hebrew. He and my mother met on the *Moledet*, the ship that at the time regularly sailed from Marseilles to Haifa. Coincidentally, they both went to the same kibbutz, to Ein Gev, on the shores of Lake Galilee. It was there that they cemented their relationship and a year later they moved to Jerusalem, where I was born on 31 January 1969. To forge a future in the field of Hebrew-Catalan translation, my father began to study modern Hebrew at the University of Jerusalem and devoted himself to translating contemporary Israeli authors into Catalan. Their extremely precarious economic situation led them to return to Barcelona in 1971, where he ended up working as a technical translator in a chemical factory until his retirement. Despite all these personal difficulties, over the years he specialised as an independent researcher in the life of medieval Catalan Jews and in 2007, shortly before his death, the University of Barcelona awarded him an honorary doctorate in semitic philology. My younger sister Elisenda was born in Barcelona, my mother found a new family, became Catalan and eventually found a job as a school librarian after trying unsuccessfully to get her French studies in social work and library science recognised. As for me, I am a social psychologist who, when asked how I was born in Israel, lies and explains that it was “by chance”.

In this text I explore autoethnographically how it is that eighty years after the Holocaust, I still publicly claim to have been born in Jerusalem 'by chance' and how this public declaration might relate to the extermination of the Jews of Europe between 1941 and 1945 (Hillberg, 1985). I did not inherit Judaism, but I did inherit the persistent idea that one should not say that one is a Jew (or that one might be or might have been). I have inherited the caution not to say so. Just in case. But four facts draw me inexorably to Judaism: my maternal ancestry, my birth in Israel, my father's translations and historical studies, and the memory of the Holocaust. Although only the first of these could “really” make me a Jew and the others are “incidents”, the only one that makes me feel “truly” Jewish is the fourth, the memory of the Holocaust.

As Ewa Sidorenko (2022) beautifully describes, the waves of war trauma move along the different routes of survival: there are the survivors of the labour camps (not necessarily Jewish, like Sidorenko's grandmother in Ravensbrück); there are the Jewish survivors of the extermination camps; and, there are those, like my grandmother and mother, successively Jewish and Christian, who fled, changed their names, and hid in an effort to survive that, in their case, worked (Weinberg and Cummins, 2013). After my mother's death, among the boxes of her belongings, I discovered an old French ration card dated 1942. A piece of material memory on which the surname is not my mother's, her name is Françoise Lejeune. Although she had explained it to me, I had never seen it written in any document. The wave of persecution hit me hard. There is also a date of birth, which is correct, and a fictitious place of birth: Algiers. As with other French Jews who went into hiding (e.g., Joseph Joffo, 1973), giving the then French department of Algiers as their place of birth complicated the documentary research of the French and German authorities and allowed some of them to survive.

It is this awareness of belonging to a second generation of survivors, which emerges from some of the material remains and the readings on the transmission of intergenerational trauma that I am doing to write this text, that makes me feel Jewish. Indeed, the memory of extermination is a constitutive element of contemporary Judaism (Ofer, 2009). As Kidron et al. (2019) describe, the 'srita' or small wound of the Holocaust is “a transmitted mode of being” (p. 6), a mode of self-understanding that functionally reclaims the past according to certain local values and interests related to Jewish politics and memory paradigms.

I wonder if I fear being read as a Jew because I somehow know that without the Jewish community and its policies for dealing with traumatic memories, I am vulnerable. As Kidron et al. (2019) note, isolation from the Jewish community is an additional risk factor because while the community transmits trauma, it also transmits resilience factors. According to Kidron et al. (2019) the transmission of resilience can be uncovered through the analysis of culturally situated experiences of well-being and distress, such as socialisation into the contemporary politics of memory in the State of Israel. However, in my mother's case, once she left Israel, this context

disappeared and the fear of the return of the extreme right in Europe became a strong justification for the transmission of an enormous caution in the narrative of family origins.

In my case, having no contact with the Jewish community, I reflect in this paper on what the function of my memory might be, and whether the duty to remember has somehow materialised in my body. The 'srita' is a metaphor, but it could also be seen as a more literal wound in the body. The nibbled nails and skins that characterise my body in discomfort are but a signal of a body that does not fit when, as Sara Ahmed puts it, "spaces we occupy do not 'extend' the surfaces of our bodies" (Ahmed, 2007: p. 163). In this sense, following a phenomenological standpoint (Csordas, 1999; Kidron, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1945), we can say that the body is a site of memory, or more precisely that the body remembers because it does not fit into a world that is not made for it (Ahmed, 2007).

Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body schema (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) contributes to an understanding of embodied memory as a complex interplay between individual experiences and broader historical or cultural contexts. Embodied memory encompasses non-verbal, corporeal experiences and expressions of trauma, including habitual behaviours, physical responses, and sensory memories (Bloch, 2022; Kidron, 2011; Park, 2020). For descendants, this means that our understanding and experience of past trauma is not only mediated through stories or psychological inheritance but is also deeply woven into our bodily experiences and expressions (Kidron, 2009, 2010). The embodiment of trauma in the second generation therefore doesn't necessarily stem from direct physical experience, but from a close relational and emotional connection with those who experienced it. Kidron notes that "corporeal sensibilities may have been transmitted intergenerationally from survivors to their descendants" (Kidron 2011: p. 452), implying that the traumatic experiences of survivors are not only transmitted through stories or explicit memories, but are also embedded in the body and manifest in physical and emotional patterns in descendants.

My sister and I were abused children, treated coldly, witnesses to our parents' bitter arguments, and slapped more often than we would have liked. And while there is a risk of over-interpretation (my father, who was not a Holocaust survivor, also participated in the abuse), in many research studies this would add to the thickness of children of survivors with complicated attachments (Barel, et al., 2010; Van Ijzendoorn et al., 2003). Attempts have been made to explain the weight of this legacy on our bodies through epigenetic mechanisms (Bowers and Yehuda, 2016; Conching and Thayer, 2019) or, more commonly, through the difficulty parents have in forming adequate emotional bonds with their children (Amos et al., 2011; Kellerman, 2001; Scharf, 2007), which would explain the transmission of post-traumatic stress effects. However, this way of conceptualising the traces of trauma is politically problematic because the traumatised end up being responsible for resolving their own bonding issues. Therefore, I prefer to approach the transmission of trauma in terms of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992), because imagining it as such can provide tools for the injured community to build resilience (Hartmann, et al., 2019) and for researchers to interpret microanalysis of family transmission, as I intend to do.

Yet, describing it as a collective memory might also seem to be problematic, as it might be argued that it minimises the individual traumatic experience, both psychological and physical, that is necessary for the recognition of the aggression suffered. But this is only the case if we have a disembodied and immaterial notion of memory, if we happen to understand it as a purely cognitive process. Nevertheless, memory is also a bodily process (Iani, 2019; Narváez, 2006; Stevenson, 2014). If we agree with Park that "the body becomes a primary channel for preserving social memories and suffering" (Park, 2020: p. 480), then memories can be painful, and not just in the figurative sense. The line between trauma and memory does not exist: to transmit trauma is to transmit memory, and to transmit memory is to transmit trauma.

This paper presents a case of intergenerational transmission of genocidal legacies (Kidron, 2011) by a person who has the memory and bodily traces of the second generation of survivors but lacks some community-dependent tools for mourning or resilience, namely, beliefs, environmental perceptions, community healing rituals, narratives, cosmologies, memory –and forgetting– (Danieli et al., 2016; Solomon, 1998; Van

Ijzendoorn, et al., 2003). As I will show, my tools for resilience were only my parents' fascination with Israel and the availability of Holocaust literature in my family home. These provided an important context for potential meaning making, as did the scholarly narratives of transmitted trauma that I found in my research for this paper.

For all the above, I propose in this paper to combine bodily experience and inherited memory: the memories as a commotion of the body, and the traumatised body as a commemoration of the Holocaust. Combining Arendt's (1958) concept of body labour and Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional work, I recognise that writing this text has been a body work (Gimlin, 2007). A work of constituting my body into a memory of the persistence of trauma. By exposing myself to the memory of the Holocaust, and through the emotion I let flow through my body, I am constituting it as a space of memory, a particular kind of living memorial (Allen and Brown, 2011): a memorial body.

Following Csordas's call to acknowledge the multiple modes of embodiment and modes of bodily objectification that are critical to understanding culture, I approach memory as a mode of being-in-the-world from the paradigm of embodiment, where the body is both the object of research and the tool of research (Csordas, 1999): "a methodological perspective organically incorporating the corporeal into ethnographic modes" (Geurts, 2003: p. 365). Moreover, since the ethnographer is ultimately a creation of ethnography (Paju, 2022), a new body of the ethnographer will also emerge, performed by the research.

## INSCRIPTION

The confirmation that I could call myself and claim to be recognised as a second-generation survivor came at two points in the writing of this text. Firstly, more coldly, by discovering the typologies of survivors discussed by Weinberg and Cummins (2013); and secondly, by reading a statement made by a participant interviewed by Kidron et al. (2019: p. 6), when she said: *'Second generation are always prepared for disaster and death. (...) We have scenarios running in our head'*. Reading this sentence was for me a corporeal epiphany (Denzin, 1989), a startling moment of recognition where I discovered that this is what I have been doing all my life through multiple fantasies of persecution: preparing myself. That is the moment I say to myself: I am that person; I am a Jew and a second-generation Holocaust survivor.

In this sense, the writing of this text is a performative exercise (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005), a constitution of a new inscription in the cultural narrative of the transmission of trauma, rather than a transcription or representation of a trauma clearly recognised and felt beforehand. The latter would not be possible because this memory has been reconstructed in the process of writing the text. It is the reading and then the writing that forces me to remember, to interpret my body, to go through my mother's belongings, to continue documenting, to constitute a memory that will make me a different person, a different body, from the one who begins the text a few months earlier.

The effects of trauma transmission vary depending on the community studied and can hardly be attributed to a universal mechanism (Kirmayer et al., 2014; Mohatt et al., 2014). It is therefore essential to study them in a highly localised manner. Each experience needs to be studied in detail to understand the particular mechanisms of transmission, including the type of society in which the offspring are located. As Kirmayer et al. (2014) state, 'specific historical wrongs require their own modes of understanding and have their own moral imperatives' (p. 313). In response to this call, in this article I present an autoethnography (Holman, 2005; Ellis et al., 2011; Hughes and Pennington, 2017) in which I attempt to make visible my trauma, the context in which I inherit it, and to contribute to the collective memory of trauma.

This text is in the tradition of critical autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 2017), a research process that insists on reflexivity for social transformation. As Reed-Danahay points out, one must look critically at one's position in the world in order not to take for granted the present self as a reflection of the state of the world. Although contemporary literature on embodied memory (e.g., Argenti and Schramm, 2009; Park, 2020) does not always empirically represent the lived experience of embodying potentially traumatizing pasts as discomforting, I confront the opacity of my self (Welz and Rosfort, 2018) by attempting to understand the origins of my

discomfort and anxiety in positioning myself within a traumatic collective memory. As Ahmed puts it phenomenologically: “Discomfort (...) allows things to move by bringing what is in the background, what gets over-looked as furniture, back to life” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 163). The process of autoethnographic research is, therefore, a process of politicisation that reinterprets my body as another body that supports a particular memory.

This research on memory and the body builds on the idea that to remember we engage in activities or actions that can become living memorials (Allen and Brown, 2011). In this text, I propose to think of the traumatised body as a kind of living memorial, a memorial body that participates in a particular economy of affects (of relationships, care, and transformation) and is constituted as a symbolic space of representation that explains a past and a meaningful history. It is this body, in the materiality of its existence, that constitutes the memory of trauma through the suffering or discomfort of successive generations. We are memorial bodies that commemorate the fact that we continue to exist despite everything.

## COMMOTION

*Joel, il me semble que tu t'es étonné du fait que je te demande si Marie savait qu'elle avait des ancêtres juifs. Alors, voilà, j'ai pensé que tu voudrais peut-être leur épargner cet attribut<sup>2</sup>.*

I was a fearful child, without much confidence in other children, whom I always saw as possible enemies rather than possible companions. The teachers' skirts were my refuge. I cried a lot, of course, and I was afraid of everything: wolves, the night, the wind, thunder, assassins, and nuclear bombs. If none of these things frighten me now, my body lives in a state of permanent agitation: in the form of recurring shingles, in the form of small skin wounds that never heal because I keep scratching them, in the form of nibbled nails and skins, in the form of a quasi-permanent knot in my stomach, in the form of an inability to concentrate... I am a wrung-out body. I have no doubt that the reason I don't have an officially diagnosed anxiety is that I enjoy a privileged employment situation: a permanent contract, a decent salary and social security that dwarfs any problems next to the catastrophe that the absence of all this would be. Before I had this safety net, years ago, my family doctor prescribed a box of antianxiety drugs, which I dutifully bought and carefully stored in my medicine cabinet at home. I never took them, but I was so reassured by their presence that I kept them for years, even after they had expired. I would look at them from time to time. But my mother, with her own fears and pains, took them daily for more than forty years, until she died. I think that she and I share the same body to a large extent.

The memory of the Holocaust was part of the history of my childhood and adolescence, but in a way that might seem unimportant: like many others, I read Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole the Pink Rabbit*, Hans Peter Richter's *My Friend Friedrich* or Anne Frank's famous diary; I was taken to see Otto Preminger's *Exodus* and Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* at a commemorative event at the French Institute in Barcelona. The deported and exterminated in the family were distant cousins, for example the parents of my great-uncle Jean's wife, and although she herself survived Auschwitz, she was not introduced to me as such at the time and I only learned about it as an adult. There were no stories of direct family members being murdered, but there were stories of escape, conversion, falsification of documents, change of name and place of residence. Of course, I can neither confirm nor deny that my anxiety symptoms are due to the transmission of an intergenerational trauma that began with the Second World War. There is no proof, no evidence, and there never will be. All this may be a fantasy that I am constructing as I write this text, but whimsical as it may be, I am still this body and I still have the memory that I have.

While for the first generation the direct experience of the traumatic event is generally not questioned, the possibility that the second generation can be described as traumatised has generated an enormous amount of literature (Barel et al., 2010; Lev-Wiesel, 2007; Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1998; Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2008). The concepts of intergenerational or transgenerational transmission of trauma have been subject to three criticisms. First, there are not statistically sufficient differences between the children or grandchildren of survivors and the rest of the non-clinical population of the same generation to detect PTSD symptoms (Van Ijzendoorn et al., 2003; but see Weinberg and Cummins, 2013, for a contrary view). Second, the work is biased

by a psychological gaze that actively seeks out the disorder and thus generally does not rely on random samples (Barel et al., 2010). Third, the specific mechanism of transmission of trauma between generations is unclear (Kellerman, 2001). In addition to the difficulty of imagining a body traumatised by events it has not directly experienced; it is also difficult to determine the nature of the mechanism that would allow such transmission. Some members of the second and third generations, like me, did not fear for their lives, did not starve, did not flee, were not tortured and did not see the people around them die, we only heard these stories. But how can we not think that hearing these stories from an early age has no effect? Moreover, how can we not think that our copresence as sensorial bodies has not captured any of the possible effects through habitus or empathy (Kidron, 2011)? When we ask whether second-generation trauma is really trauma, we enter a debate that is less psychological than ethical and political. What the psychological and psychiatric debate hides when it comes to discussing whether a symptomatology is real or not is a debate about the right to remember and the 'right' way to remember (Wolf, 2019). What I will try to show below is that these stories triggered painful fantasies, fantasies about which I can claim certainty, and which had the aforementioned bodily correlates.

Mind-body suffering is a reservoir of trauma that also comes from the world of fantasies. Fantasies can be pathological, but they are also a habitual thought process that guides our emotions (Bacon and Charlesford, 2018; Mason et al., 2007). Fantasies are not only psychic, they are also part of the discourses that circulate, they are part of the collective imaginary (Treacher, 2007). Many of my recurring fantasies are related to what can be described as internalised stigma (Goffman, 1963). Throughout my childhood I was taught that being Jewish was a problem. This learning had an impact on the fantasies that occupied my mind throughout my life, not only about how to deal with a possible interaction with Nazis, imaginary or real, but also about how to deal with anyone who would see Jewishness in me. So, over the years, I mentally worked out a series of answers to these questions.

Living in Catalonia, where the use of the second surname, that of the mother, is common and explicit, my Jewish surname, Samuel, becomes visible. Fearing to “become a stranger, made strange by the name I have been given” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 162), in my fantasy of concealment, I always thought I could argue that Samuel is a very common name in the Catalan population today (name, not surname, my inner voice tells me when it tries to undo the fantasy). And that not everyone would be able to easily refute my denial of being Jewish if I stated it with sufficient certainty.

When the subject comes up (because it does), I have explained that my nose is first and foremost a Mediterranean nose and that, in fact, my father, with his deep Catalan Christian roots, also had a large nose. However, I cannot help but notice with concern that my nose is much more like my mother's and grandmother's than my father's and his family's. A large nose curved downwards, which a friend of mine once described as “the death of the parrot<sup>3</sup>”. A nose that is both a shocking caricature and a confirmation of a stereotype. As Gilman (1991) points out, I suffer from a Jewish nose. A nose that is a metonymy for an entire Jewish body and “makes the ‘body’ itself the ‘site’ of social stress” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 159).

A final fantasy I have developed over the years to prove that my body is not Jewish is that I am not circumcised. I often tell myself that if things were to go wrong for Jews again, I would always have the alternative of showing my penis to anyone who wanted proof of my non-Jewishness and then easily fade back into the background (Ahmed, 2007). Weak evidence, to be sure, because it implies that my imaginary Jew-hunter would be considerate enough to think that this element would define me more than my maternal, and genetic, family tree.

As Ahmed shows us, “the moments when the body appears ‘out of place’ are moments of political and personal trouble” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 162), and, perhaps, the ultimate sabotage of my personal image as a non-Jew is the fact that I was born in Jerusalem. In 1969, my parents lived in a housing development in Sheikh Jarrah, in the Arab part of the city, and stayed there for another two years before deciding to move to Barcelona. Whenever someone mentions my birthplace in conversation, often in response to a request for administrative information, even when no one asks me, I feel obliged to say that it is a simple coincidence. But it is not a

coincidence. I have already explained my father's relationship with Judaism and the reasons that led him to move to Israel. On my mother's side, my mother had a hard time with the fact that she was born a Jew but was not a Jew anymore. It was not her choice to stop being Jewish, it was her mother who forced it on her. It was my grandmother Jacqueline who converted and had her children converted to Christianity to escape the danger of the German occupation of France. But, much to the disappointment of her extended family, she did not return to Judaism at the end of the war. She was convinced that the danger had not passed and that they would never be French if they were not Christians. Her husband, my grandfather René, who never converted, to the great consternation of my young Christian mother, combined her paternal and maternal surnames to obtain a more French-sounding surname (Samuel-Lajeunesse.), and during the war they changed this surname to a neutral, French Lejeune, which would be easy for the children to remember and would avoid fatal mistakes. At the end of the war, my grandmother, a Weyl by birth, adopted her husband's middle name and called herself Jacqueline Lajeunesse for the rest of her life, thus eliminating forever all visible traces of Jewishness.

My grandmother sacrificed her origins, her identity, her history, and her community to avoid danger, but in doing so she paradoxically endangered (bodily and psychically, if you like) my mother, who spent her life trying to understand this Jewish identity that was no longer hers. There is another trauma in this story, that of uprooting, of being expelled from a community and not being able to return, or not knowing how. My mother was deeply Christian and never tried to become a Jew again as an adult. And yet, although she was baptised at the young age of three, went to Christian religious schools, had a very real Christian faith and her relationships and friendships were within a Christian framework, she knew she was Jewish. She followed the news about Israel with interest and spent several holidays there in her youth. Shortly after the Six Day War, convinced that Israel was about to disappear, she decided to move there and a year later married a Christian from Catalonia. They had a son who was baptised Catholic, in Ein Karem, under the name of Joel. A son who explains to anyone who will listen that he was born in Israel because his parents were there “by chance”.

In each of the responses to the threat of being identified as a Jew, there is a trace of the presence of a discrediting stigma that I am trying to mask (Goffman, 1963). The mental effort I put into it is for me evidence of an intergenerational transmission of something that looks suspiciously like trauma. The recurrent mental work of imagining dangerous situations and ways of escaping them is a considerable effort, because I am not confronted with a dystopian fantasy that is purely a product of my imagination, but with a real, covert and latent anti-Semitism that is always on the verge of resurfacing, and with a body that, in all its materiality, does not fail to show the evidence of my Jewishness to anyone who wants to see it. As Kidron (2011) argues, the descendants of survivors carry sensorial memories and embodied experiences of the Holocaust, historical traces present in the mundane aspects of their everyday lives. This transmission is not just about inherited narratives, but involves a deeper, somatic and phenomenological connection, where both witnessed and imagined sensations and emotions related to the Holocaust continue to shape the bodily and emotional experiences of the children of survivors (Kidron, 2011).

## COMMEMORATION

Durmenach, a village in the Sundgau region of Alsace, very close to the Swiss border and quite a long way from Catalonia, my country, is reached by following a narrow road that passes through villages strung by houses between fields, so that you don't really know where one village ends and the next begins. It is a small village of just over 800 inhabitants, where it looks as if all the shops have closed for good. To our surprise, when we arrive in the middle of the morning, the only store open is a shoe shop. Next to the town hall, a square building with a pink facade and a black slate roof, there is a tourist map showing, among other things, the Jewish cemetery. Allen and Brown (2011) point out that the activities we do to remember make us living memories, and this journey places us at the heart of a familiar memory action.

I come to Durmenach at the age of 52, accompanied by my wife, 54, and two children, aged 19 and 22. We go there because of the Jewish cemetery where the remains of some of our ancestors are believed to be buried. According to the information I can gather from the website of a genetic testing company, there may be traces



of my mother's paternal ancestors in Durmenach and Hagenthal-le-bas, while in Benfeld, in the Grand Ried region, there are the graves of my mother's maternal family. A few years ago, my sister and I gave my mother this genetic information test as a birthday present. Not surprisingly, she was listed as 99.9% Jewish. A result we expected, and which made our bodies physical evidence of what was "only" a family story. However, being registered as Jewish in some database, even one with Israeli parentage, did not please her at all and made our gift a poisoned one.

We misread the tourist map and wander around the village, only to discover, in a leaflet posted in the closed "Maison du Patrimoine", that Durmenach was one of the few villages in the region where, at some point in the 19th century, up to 60% of the population was Jewish. The brochure also mentions some buildings, such as Jewish family homes, meeting places, schools, and an old synagogue, of which only a stone remains above the door lintel of a newer building. But we do not find the cemetery. In our historical ignorance, we look for it in the centre. Eventually, we look at the map application on our mobile phone and realising our mistake, we take the path that looks the prettiest, which winds through fields and woods to end up back on the edge of a settlement. At the top of the settlement is the cemetery, surrounded by a stone wall and closed by a metal gate. If, as Allen and Brown (2011) argue, the material commemorative world is constituted by interactions that affect its meaning, between the time we find the cemetery and the time we leave it, an hour later, neither we nor the cemetery are the same.

I am afraid that the gate is locked, and my son insists that after all the way we have come, we must enter by any means, even if it means jumping over the wall. He says this cheerfully, not yet knowing that the street where the cemetery is located, which used to be called Rue des Juifs, is now Rue de la Gendarmerie, as their barracks are only a few metres away. But the gate is open, and we don't have to stress about it. It's a rectangular plot, with two rows of scattered graves at the beginning and five or six rows of tightly packed graves at the end. No one has cut the grass this season and we walk among the knee-high grass covered headstones. According to the brochure, the last Jewish person in the village died in 1987. Fortunately for us, someone has done a very good job in previous years and the headstones all have a piece of paper in a plastic sleeve on top, or next to them, with some details about the deceased and the translation of the Hebrew words written on each one. We divide up the rows and start walking between the graves looking for someone with the name Samuel. We spend about three-quarters of an hour but find nothing. I take a few photos of the graves with surnames that I think are indirectly related to my maternal family, according to the genealogical tree on the website, but it's discouraging and we're tired, so we decide to leave. But first, I want to have at least one last look. I look at the outline of the cemetery, and suddenly, on the ground, half hidden amongst the leaves and twigs touching the wall that separates the cemetery from the fields on the left, I see one of those papers that has flown away and that someone has nailed to a half-rotten piece of wood. The family name is Samuel. It comes from the grave of my mother's great-great-grandfather Solomon, born in 1821 and died in 1909. It is right in front of me and for some mysterious reason none of us have been able to see it before.

On the slab, according to the paper, it is written in Hebrew:

*Here lies Solomon, son of Isaac. His works were complete and good. He did not stumble on the way. He was a guide and a leader to his community. His soul has returned to the Eternal after a good old age. You are holy, O Eternal One, our Lord. He died at the age of 88, on the 21st of Tamuz 669 according to the abridged account and was buried on the 22nd of the same month. May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life!*

On the sheet there are more dates and more information: that his mother's name was Ester Blum, and his wife's Judit Brunschwig, that he had 5 children with her, one of whom was Albert, my mother's great-grandfather, and that Solomon was the grandson of Solomon Samuel, the rabbi of Durmenach, and the great-grandson of Natan Blum, the Jewish school teacher and cantor of the religious community.

I keep thinking that I'm also a teacher and that it's been maybe two centuries since anyone in the family has returned to teaching. I take several photos of the grave and send the one with my children next to it to my

mother in Barcelona via WhatsApp. My mother replies with a few terse *thanks* and *ok* which reminds me of her lack of enthusiasm for this activity that puts us all to shame.

I am also thinking of the bodies undone by time that are mixed with the materiality of the stone that hides them and signals them at the same time. Without the body of the deceased and without our gaze, this stone would mean little. It is the assemblage (Bennett, 2010) of our bodies, dead and alive, with the inscribed stone that constitutes what we call memory. A semiotic, material, and bodily assemblage (Piper-Shafir, et al., 2017).

From the dead to my children, six generations and two world wars have passed, the second of which led the family to abandon Judaism forever. On the way back to the car, next to the town hall, we find a plaque with the names of 19 villagers, children, teenagers, adults and elderly, who were exterminated in Auschwitz between 1943 and 1944. My immediate family had left the village many years ago, but I find an Adriana Blum, murdered at the age of 53, almost my age, who could have been my cousin. In any case, the name that strikes me most, outside my family, is that of Claude Levy, murdered at the age of 10. Perhaps, in the face of barbarity, one must hold on to something more tangible than a list, and I hold on to little Claude to feel all the pain that is mine, and I begin to cry.

Studies that try to explain the transmission of trauma, whether they are studies of epigenetic changes or studies of the modification or alteration of parenting styles for traumatic reasons, overlook two things. First, anti-Semitism survives, the trauma is not past, it is still present (Cerdeña et al., 2021), and second, they omit the willingness to remember, the willingness to incorporate the trauma (Kidron et al., 2019). The assumption that my anxiety is part of the inherited trauma paradoxically forces me to desire not its healing but its maintenance. The individual need to get rid of the discomfort is incompatible with the collective need to preserve the memory. To eliminate the anxiety would also stop the transmission of the story. Trauma resolution is said to be the acceptance of past events and their impact on the present (Isobel et al., 2018), but trauma resolution is also the removal of the body from the equation. Because bodies are the repositories of the collective memory of the Holocaust (Kidron, 2009, 2010 2011), trauma cannot be resolved without eliminating the remembrance. Painfully, the memory of the Holocaust requires the reproduction and maintenance of a moved body. A body in ruins, shattered and agitated.

If trauma can be transmitted, it is primarily because of its status as memory in the body, as we carry within our body schema not only our own past experiences but also the sediments of our cultural history (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). In the first generation, the memory of trauma is the memory of experienced fear and pain that can trigger the bodily responses described in the symptomatology of PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 Task Force, 2013). But in the second (and subsequent) generation, the transmission of a shared memory — necessarily fragmented and fantasised, as it concerns un-lived events — constitutes anxious bodies that know that history can repeat itself. The new bodies are also a materialised memory of the trauma of the previous generation.

The concept of *embodied memory* or *embodied practices of memory* (Allen and Brown, 2011, Zicari, 2021), which generally refers to the actions we perform with the body in order to remember, needs to be expanded. For it is not only the actions, but the whole body in its materiality that is constituted in the memory of the trauma through the discomfort it feels. Ahmed (2007) states that “to be orientated, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 158), and suggests that “we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it, when we become uncomfortable” (Ahmed, 2007: p. 158). Therefore, we can think of the uncomfortable bodies of the survivors and the subsequent generations as living monuments, spaces of commemoration (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1984), that is, memorial bodies. The memorial body is an actor who weighs in the process of reconstituting the traumatic past. The intergenerational trauma as body is a piece of information transmitted from generation to generation to warn the descendants.

To inherit intergenerational trauma is to become part of the threatened community, the “we” that makes us survivors (Sidorenko, 2021). The transmission of transgenerational trauma is ultimately an ethical obligation that should not be avoided (Isobel, et al. 2018) but reinterpreted. In the words of Kidron et al. (2019: p. 5), *a*

*desirable burden of memory*. As Kidron (2011) suggests, the transmission of embodied memory encompasses both semiotic understanding and the lived, sensorial, and emotional experiences, positing a process by which descendants not only convey but also shape a corporeal legacy of the Holocaust. Now that I am the heir of a trauma that came to me through the legacy of an anxious body, what I want is to participate in a collective memory and to feel that I have the right to speak as part of that memory. I claim trauma as an act of remembering (Bartlett, 1932). And in that action, I offer my body as a living memorial.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the literature shows that trauma transmission is usually detected in clinical samples, but not in non-clinical populations or control groups, I have described in this text a possible transmission in a non-clinical or subclinical sample. Autoethnography is a methodological approach that allows us to identify the more subtle ways in which trauma can be transmitted, without abandoning the political nature of memory. In my case, there was no wall of silence, I knew that my mother, like so many others, was a French Jew who had to hide (see Feldman et al., 2010). My transmission of the Shoah was due to my parents' ethical and political will to ensure that the subject was present in the home. However, my father and mother did not start from the same position on this issue. My mother grew up with the Judaism that was not possible, and the stories of the Holocaust followed her throughout her life. She read everything that was published, as many books as possible. She didn't ask us to read them, just the children's and young people's books, the rest were just there, I knew it, and I read some more. My father used to say that my mother was obsessed, and he said it with a sardonic chuckle. It's true, I had a double experience of reception, on the one hand this story was important, very important, on the other hand it was a subject to overcome. My father didn't despise this story, but it wasn't his story, or ours according to him.

My family and upbringing are of Christian culture, and I have declared myself a staunch atheist since the age of twenty. My father, a follower of the work of the theologian Teilhard de Chardin, understood Christianity in such an ecumenical way that he considered, and convinced me in my teens, that Judaism and Christianity are one and the same religion. But of all the possible reasons for me not returning to Judaism, the one that seems most important to me is respect for my grandmother's decision. If everything were to start all over again, returning to Judaism would not only be a betrayal of her heritage, but also a terrible mistake. My mother's story contains many clues to this fear: the incessant reading on the subject, perhaps more to understand than to relive; the acceptance, even the willingness, to live away from her family and thus from any transparent connection to Jewishness; and the fear of being labelled by her DNA in the worst gift we could give her as her children. How could she justify herself to her mother and children if the assault on Jewish communities were to be repeated?

Conceiving of transmitted trauma as a psychological problem, rather than a memory, is problematic because it creates a demand for healing. Interventions to prevent the transmission of trauma attempt to resolve it by working on connections with the next generation (Isobel et al., 2018). But resolving trauma requires a separation of memory and body and inevitably involves forgetting the traumatic events. As Kidron mentions, "the accounts of the permanence of an emotional wound, and the disinterest in coping skills or 'healing', may actually be conceptualised as a form of descendent commemoration" (Kidron, 2009: p. 207). The abandonment of the traumatised body is the erasure of all that is meaningful in remembrance, and thus the disconnection of succeeding generations from a history to which they are entitled.

The narrated self is as vulnerable and fragile as the memory that constitutes it. Therefore, to combat the provisional nature of memory requires inscribing it in body and text to give it a material constitution. Embodiment is an existential condition and a methodological field (Csordas, 1999) that produces the body as it produces the ethnographic text. Just as the text is a product of textuality, the body is a product of embodied memory. This relationship highlights that just as textuality cannot exist outside of the actual text (Csordas,

1999), memory is inherently tied to the physicality of the body; it cannot exist in the absence of the corporeal form that carries and expresses it.

By renouncing her roots, identity, and community to escape danger, my grandmother had paradoxically exposed my mother, my sister and me to the trauma of struggling with a lost Jewish identity, the separation from our heritage and the pain of being cut off from a community with which we couldn't reconnect. However, conceptualising historical trauma (Kirmayer et al., 2014) as embodied memory implies the appropriation of pain by subsequent generations and therefore political empowerment (Park, 2020). Conversely, conceptualising trauma as an ailment or disorder to be cured may be an unfortunate continuation of ethnocide, erasing a memory fundamental to contemporary Jewish identity (Ofer, 2019). The price to be paid for reducing discomfort cannot be silence. It cannot be to cut off the transmission of narratives about past harms, present threats, and future risks. In other words, it cannot be the continuation and completion of the ethnocide of European Jewry. To try to resolve a trauma is to accept defeat, to renounce recognition and to disappear forever.

Now, the debate can no longer be about whether second-generation trauma and beyond is real or not, or whether the concept itself is useful for thinking about PTSD (McNally, 2010), or whether we need a unified language of trauma (Isobel et al., 2018), but it must be about whether we have the right to remember and speak, and what vocabulary will help us to convey that collective memory. I have a memory that condemns me to suffering but adds me to a collective history. While the concept of traumatic transmission puts you in the position of a victim, remembering can make you a protagonist of political action.

I would never have written this text or undertaken this quest without anxiety, and although I have avoided making healing the goal, the journey of thought from a shattered memory to the memorial body may have ended up being more therapeutic than I would have liked. Sceptically, not without a touch of sarcasm and derision towards myself, I end by mentioning that I have not been able to avoid beginning to accept my nervous and crushed body. I only hope that by capturing it in this text we will move much more slowly towards the abyss of inexorable oblivion.

## NOTES

1. All persons mentioned in this text have given their consent to the final written version or are deceased.
2. In 2011, my mother sent me this email, following a comment about my eldest, who was twelve years old at the time. The message said, among other things: "Joel it seems to me that you were surprised that I asked you if Marie knew that she had Jewish ancestors. I thought maybe it was because you wanted to spare them this attribute."
3. The "death of the parrot" refers to the image that if you sneeze too hard, your nose can get stuck in your chest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Even an intimate work such as this is a collective endeavour, and I would like to thank Huitzilín Feliu i Gil for her guidance in exploring new theoretical avenues. I would also like to thank Gabriel Feliu i Gil, Elisenda Feliu i Samuel-Lajeunesse, Maria Verdaguer i Mata, Félix Vázquez Sixto and Yael A. Moreno Davis for their kind readings and suggestions. I'm also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers, who made this a denser version of a somewhat imprecise initial story.

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### Author biography

**Joel Feliu i Samuel-Lajeunesse** is a senior lecturer in social psychology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. He has used qualitative methods to explore the experiences, attitudes and practices of social actors involved in the relationship between gender and technology. He is interested in deepening the analysis of the ethical, political and epistemological dimensions of technoscience and in developing psychosocial research-action projects that contribute to social transformation. He promotes the use of new literary forms in the social sciences, especially the use of autoethnographies and life stories.