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The Absent Parent Figure as a Representation of Post-trauma in Contemporary British-Jewish Novels

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Abstract. A missing parent is an element that is often found in contemporary British-Jewish novels. These are mainly texts written by granddaughters of those who lived through World War II. The novels analyzed herein tend to be very similar in their depiction of parent figures, who appear to represent the remaining presence of post-trauma from the World War II era. The concept of survival during the Shoah may include various experiences but is mostly associated with those who directly experienced the Holocaust. Yet, British Jews are often those who fled the Jewish extermination before it happened and, as a result, are frequently excluded from the discussion of World War II survivorship.

Key words: British Jews, third-generation trauma, stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a fact that is often neglected when discussing the community of British Jews; namely, that British-Jews were psychologically affected by the haunting danger of the Holocaust spreading to Great Britain during World War II. They were also influenced by the knowledge about the extermination of the Jews, their culture being swept away from Eastern Europe, and often the fate of their continental European relatives. With the Nazis gaining power in Germany, many Jews made attempts to emigrate to the United Kingdom but the vast majority of them were not allowed to enter the country (Gilbert 2013, 40). This situation lasted until Kristallnacht, after which the British immigration law was relaxed and approximately 40 000 refugees were admitted (Gilbert 2013, 40). A particular Jewish-British experience from this period was the so-called Kindertransport, a rescue mission that saved nearly 10 000 Jewish children, which was carried out in the years 1938-1939 (Gilbert 2013, 40). The children were transported to the United Kingdom from Nazi Germany and the countries endangered by the Nazi occupation: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Free City of Danzig. The novels discussed in this article point to the meaning that is common in contemporary British-Jewish literature, i.e.

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the void that represents the inability of the third generation of British Jews to reconstruct memories and pass them on to the next generation.

The stereotypical representations of missing mothers and fathers may suggest the continuing preoccupation of contemporary British-Jewish authors with the fact that many histories concerning the perished Jewish people and their material culture that was destroyed during the Shoah are to a great extent unattainable. The stereotypes seem to emphasize the observation that the past cannot be retraced and the attempts to reconstruct it may often lead to unsettling simplifications. The article focuses on three stereotypes about Jews that are described in some of contemporary British-Jewish novels: the stereotype of a Jewish housewife, a beautiful Jewess and the Jewish father. It is striking that the novels seem to focus on these three stereotypes. After all, throughout centuries, there existed many false presumptions about Jews. The purpose of stereotyping has been to justify the acts of scapegoating when facing social hardships such as e.g. economic crises (Foxman 2010, chap.1). Jews have been also considered greedy capitalists, communists, socialists or anarchists (Foxman 2010, chap.2). Additionally, since the nineteenth century and the publication of the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, there has functioned a widespread conspiracy theory that Jews have created a lobby secretly controlling the financial system of the world (Foxman 2010, chap.2). There has also existed a potent association of a Jew with a ridiculous, comic person who is a source for constant laughs (Rosenshield 2008, 1-2). Nonetheless, Natasha Solomons, Eve Harris, Charlotte Mendelson, Linda Grant, and Naomi Alderman have turned only to stereotyping the figures of Jewish parents who are additionally and for varying reasons detached from their children.

These absent parent figures, which are a recurring motif in contemporary British-Jewish novels by women may stand for the inability to reach the histories of the perished ancestors. In some cases, the portrayed parents are no longer alive, in others, they are unreachable either by geographical or emotional distance. The lost parent seems to be an attempt to depict the still present trauma after the Shoah. Novels such as: *Disobedience* by Naomi Alderman, Charlotte Mendelson's *When We Were Bad*, *When I Lived in Modern Times* by Linda Grant, Eve Harris's *The Marrying of Chani Kaufmann*, or Natasha Solmons's *Mr. Rosenblum's List Or Friendly Guidance for the Aspiring Englishman* and *The House of Tyneford* approach the subject of trauma and its possible future consequences in an inventive way, by using the motif of absence and simultaneous drawing from stereotypes about Jewish parents.

2. THE THIRD-GENERATION EXPERIENCE

Nonetheless, before discussing contemporary British-Jewish fiction, the unique experience of the third generation of British Jews should be explained in more detail. Psychoanalysis explains that Jews apart from being a "socio-religious" community are also consolidated by a shared trauma (Bergman and Jucovy as cited in Aarons and Berger 2017, 3). First-generation trauma is mainly associated with the survivors, i.e. those who have lived through the Holocaust in the territories where the Shoah took place (Bar-On 2008, xi). However, when discussing the notion of 'trauma', the legal definition of 'survivor' should not exclude other forms of survivorship during World War II (Jacobs 2016, 4). After all, the term "survivorship" may cover various experiences manifesting "the descendants' varied understanding of what it means for a parent and/or grandparent to have lived through or in some way been directly and personally affected by the Holocaust" (Jacobs 2016, 4). The majority of British Jews should be classified in this category. These are often people who had fled the Holocaust before it happened (Lassner 2008, 3). Bar-On explains that many of their relatives perished in the Holocaust (2008, xi). Consequently, similarly to the survivors, British Jews "go through processes of mourning, of silencing these losses" (Bar-On 2008, xi). Additionally, "as Jewish refugees in a nation desiring unity at the moment of its greatest threat, their experience of a safe haven was often compromised by their being considered enemy aliens or unassimilable" (Lassner 2008, 4).

The Holocaust is incredibly difficult to be represented in literature but writers do not cease to "struggle with this near impossible mission" (Lassner 2008, 1). On the first pages of her book *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust,* Phyllis Lassner quotes W.G. Sebald, who, when recalling the memory of finding the 1939 photo album of the German soldiers in Poland and the war destructions around them, senses "silences and absence of memory around" (as cited in 2008, 2). These silences still manifest themselves in nearly every novel by British-Jewish authors. The descendants of the survivors "are seeking ways to better understand and connect to their families' traumatic past" (Jacobs 2016, 2). As claimed by Jacobs, it is "a growing trend" among the contemporary survivors' descendants to commemorate the Shoah (2016, 2). The currently published memoirs limit themselves primarily to the second generation. There is still a lack of third-generation memoirs. Although not always published by third-generation authors or depicting third-generation characters, I suggest that the discussed novels give voice to the grandchildren of the WWII generation because these texts are being published at the time when the third-generation comes of age.

Eva Hoffman brings attention to the fact that "the grandchildren of survivors are still deeply affected by their elders' experiences, memories, accounts" (as cited in Aarons and Berger 2017, 3). It is observed that the third generation descendants "navigate[s] with an inexact, approximate map, a broken narrative" (Aarons and Berger 2017, 3). The memory of the third generation is a "re-created past", the "filling in gaps", and "putting scraps together" (Aarons and Berger 2017, 4). The whole body of literature by the third generation that depicts the survivors' grandchildren going back to the places where the Shoah took place "attempt[s] to seek out and wrest hold of the events with the hope of some disclosure" (Aarons and Berger 2017, 12). It is "a compulsion to reanimate the fractured family by means of the orderliness of historical reconstruction" (Aarons and Berger 2017, 12). This preoccupation to reconstruct is most specific to those who have already lost their grandparents (Aarons and Berger 2017, 17). These grandchildren retrieve scraps of "information mediated through their parents or other family members" (Aarons and Berger 2017, 17).

In contrast to the second generation, the members of the third generation have "a very different perspective" (Larkey 2017, 223). They seek to learn about the identities and the lives of their great-grandparents as well as about their experiences from the World War II period (Larkey 2017, 223). According to Uta Larkey, in comparison to the second generation, "[t]heir quest, much less burdened with interpersonal and emotional issues…, tries to situate their family's past in a geohistorical context" (2017, 223). It has been observed that the members of the third generation find it easier than the second generation to express and explain emotions to their parents (Bar-On 2008, xii).

Also, the third-generation interviewers, although still feeling the survivor guilt passed on to them by their grandparents, give responses that are “emotionally more balanced” (Larkey 2017, 226). However, as Eva Folgman notes, they are not “engaged in a mourning process along with the survivors” (as cited in Larkey 2017, 227). It appears that “[w]ith the coming of age of the third generation, the shift from trauma to legacy . . . is beginning” (Larkey 2017, 228). Nonetheless, the differences “in the ways the third generation acts as “memory facilitator” not only between the generations, but also in their respective cultures” are not yet understood (Larkey 2017, 228).

All the characters from the novels discussed herein are struggling with the problematic relationship with their parents, which stands in the way of communication. They cannot pass on their parent’s memory because it has not been passed down to them, they have problems with reaching down to their parents. They do not fully know them, and as a result they do not have access to their parents’ past experiences. At the same time, they tend to stereotype them. In the majority of the discussed sources, while the fathers tend to be associated with the figure of a scholar, the mothers, if not with the role of a housewife, are associated with sexuality, the three of them being stereotypes about Jews. It appears that although the novels portray the characters of unavailable parents, they suggest a form of continuity broken by the Holocaust. The impossibility or problems with communicating with one’s parents may stand for the impossibility or huge difficulty that the third generation has with reaching back to the past.

Moreover, according to the opinion of Victoria Arons and Alan L. Berger, “[w]riters of the third generation have either an actual or imagined kinship with those direct witnesses of the Holocaust . . . And it might usefully encompass those writers who are not by date of birth in the third generation themselves, but create characters who are third-generation witnesses to horror” (2017, 14). This analysis encompasses not only the novels that take place in contemporary times but also those in which characters are inscribed in a different time. The discussed characters fail to reach to the past and to reconstruct it. Considering the time of publication, it is probable that these texts communicate the experience of the third generation.

3. THE STEREOTYPE OF A JEWISH HOUSEWIFE

Femaleness in traditional Jewish communities stands for the “duties of a housewife and a mother” (Biale 1995, 13). This is a pattern that has not changed in Orthodox communities. Yet, it is striking that such tendencies are not limited to these communities but are observed in unorthodox ones as well. Moreover, it should be emphasized that Jewish gender relations tend to be different from the European pattern (Boyarin 1997, 9). Many contemporary Central European Jewish women who wanted to “pursue professional careers before their marriage found themselves relegated to becoming housewives and homemakers thereafter” (Freidenreich 2009, 144). Such an attitude is also persistent in Israel, where “the role of women in the country’s defence is less important than their role in the home” (Plaskow 1990, 112). According to Cohen, in the United States, with the second largest Jewish population in the world, “Jewish organisations continue to limit women’s access to power in all areas of Jewish communal life” (as cited in Nadell 2009, 171). However, there seems to be a lack of similar data regarding Great Britain. In the analyzed novels, a mother rarely raises a child intellectually; this is most often considered the role of a father.

Nonetheless, the novels do not only stress such tendencies, but they opt for even more emphatic representation of a Jewish mother as a housewife. There focuses a stereotype of a Jewish mother who is excessively taking care of her children and who is thus associated with domestic sphere[1]. The novels play with this stereotype, creating an image of Jewish mothers who are focused on domestic sphere to such a far-fetched extent, that this preoccupation alienates them from their children.

Mr. Rosenblum's List Or Friendly Guidance for the Aspiring Englishman by Natasha Solomons is a novel that showcases such a depiction. The novel tells a story of a couple, Sadie Rosenblum and Mr. Rosenblum, who left Germany and moved to England with their three-year-old daughter Elizabeth just before the outbreak of the WWII. The rest of their family could not leave because they did not get visas. The recipes from her mother's cookbook is a link that helps Sadie cherish the memory of her: "The kitchen was filling with a peculiar smell, sweet and singed; it was poppy-seed cake . . . Closing her eyes, Sadie took a breath, drawing the sweet scent inside her. She mustn't open them. She must not. She must not. Must not. If she did, Mutti would be gone and there would never be poppy-seed cake again" (Solomons 2010, 7). Sadie never mentions her mother in a different context than cooking, this is a sphere she associated her with.

Cooking seems to be the most important preoccupation of Sadie's mother: "She wasn't worrying about things to come – this was no premonition – she was concerned whether she had picked up enough chicken schmaltz for supper" (Solomons 2010, 60). Needless to say, this preoccupation seems exaggerated if not obsessive. Sadie associates her with cooking even when she thinks of the holidays they used to spend together: "She'd helped Mutti make goulash and vegetable broth . . . Mutti hunched over the stove, Papa sleeping in his chair…in front of the fire" (Solomons 2010, 64). The fragment above associates Sadie's mother with preparing food and contrasts this role with the male lack of interest in this domain. Even more strikingly, when the photograph of the mother is accidentally destroyed and "the scent of her mother's starch and perfume" is gone from the towel that used to belong to her, what remains is only the cookery book (Solomons 2010, 63). With such a symbolic turn of events, Sadie becomes unable to remember her mother any other way than through the cookbook.

Another portrait of a stereotypical and detached Jewish mother appears in *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* by Eve Harris. Chani feels that her mother never pays enough attention to her due to the duties as a housewife but also because she has to take care of too many of her other children. Because of her mother's unavailability, Chani gradually loses the emotional bond with her: "[she] remembered when her parents had time, when her mother had waited at the nursery gates for her. They would walk home together and talk all the way, her mother gripping her hand tightly, listening carefully as she gabbled. She had a faded memory of her mother playing hopscotch with her at the back garden, picking up her skirts and leaping deftly from stone to stone. But then the other babies had followed in quick succession" (Harris 2013, 6). Consequently, as a young woman, Chani already considers her mother someone she feels alienated from. She describes her as “a machine whose parts were grinding and worn. . . . a stranger, an exhausted mountain of dilapidated flesh, endlessly suckling, soothing, patting, or feeding” (Harris 2013, 7). Chani’s mother is so devoted to giving birth to one child after another that quite paradoxically, she becomes a person her daughter no longer perceives as a human being.

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[1] The stereotype of a Jewish mother is discussed in more detail in *You Never Call! You Never Write!* by Joyce Antler (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

Because of her mother’s lack of time, and in order to prepare well for future duties of an Orthodox-Jewish wife, Chani regularly meets the Rebbetzin. She fulfils the role that Chani’s biological mother does not have time for, i.e. she tries to explain to Chani the essentials about being a Jewish-Orthodox woman. The day before Chani’s wedding ceremony, she even accompanies her to the mikveh[2], which is the task of a biological mother of the bride (Harris 2013, 45). However, their relationship does not last long because shortly after the girl’s wedding, the Rebbetzin leaves without any notice. With this event, Chani loses also the Rebbetzin, her symbolic, substitute “second mother”.

Later, just before her wedding ceremony, Chani does not feel at ease in her wedding dress, which makes her think of her imperfect relationship with her parents: “[s]he had never had her own room or an abundance of new clothes. Everything was always second hand. Like the dress. Even the love she received was of the hand-me-down kind” (Harris 2013, 5). The fact that she has lost the Rebbetzin as well, dramatizes the above reflection even more. The effect of the unavailability of any of the two mother figures in her life deepens the effect of the unfulfilled need for motherly love in Chani’s life.

4. THE STEREOTYPE OF A BEAUTIFUL JEWESS

Apart from depicting the mothers as housewives, the contemporary British-Jewish fiction also sometimes describes them as highly sexualized. In this context, it is important to note that in European culture there has long existed a stereotype of a beautiful Jewess, which dates back to Castilian medieval literature (Sicher 2017, 71). As Jean Paul-Sartre put it: “[t]here is in the words “a beautiful Jewess” a very special sexual signification, one quite different from that contained in the words “beautiful Romanian”, “beautiful Greek”, or “beautiful American”, for example. This phrase carries an aura of rape and massacre” (as cited in Valman 2007, 50). Nadia Valman observes that this aura of the expression “naturalises anti-Jewish persecution” (2007, 50). It is thus striking that such a stereotype is often repeated in contemporary novels by Jewish authors. Nevertheless, similarly to the slightly altered stereotype of the overbearing Jewish mother, it appears that using the stereotype of a beautiful Jewess also serves the purpose of suggesting the meaning of the unavailability of the history lost with the past generations of Jews. The mothers who are portrayed as seductresses are detached just as the discussed housewives.

Linda Grant turns to such depiction in *When I Lived in Modern Times,* a novel about a young woman named Evelyn, who after the death of her mother decides to leave England for Israel. The relationship with the mother, Miriam, is described in detail. Evelyn is not only a daughter for her mother, they are also friends who spend a lot of time together, share their secrets and are “inseparable” (Grant 2000, 9). Additionally, Miriam is Evelyn’s mentor because she teaches her the hairdressing profession. Yet, she is considered by her daughter a common, not intellectually accomplished person. Such an opinion is depicted in the short exchange between the two: '"Why can't things be nice?" my mother asked me. "Why does someone have to spoil everything? Why can't we all just live, and be happy?" I thought this was simple-minded but I only said, "Because there are unjust people in the world and they have to be fought"' (Grant 2000, 17). Evelyn's mother is portrayed as slow-witted person. In fact, more than once in the novel Evelyn compares herself to a parent and Miriam to a child. In addition, prior to her death, the mother becomes increasingly childish and intellectually unavailable. She starts to forget that Evelyn is her daughter, takes her only for a friend, and eventually for a sister (Grant 2000, 20).

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[2] ‘Mikweh’ is a pool in which religious Jewish people immerse themselves as a form of a spiritual purification.

Attention is persistently drawn to Miriam's looks throughout the novel. She is depicted as a sexual object, who, being a hairdresser, teaches her daughter how to take care of her looks. Evelyn comments that her mother "understood the mysterious power of allure" and that she "was fascinated and appalled by the secret arts she practised" (Grant 2000, 9). She is rendered as constantly wearing make-up, and it does not escape Evelyn's attention that Miriam mesmerizes men. Evelyn is also aware that her mother's beauty and being a kept woman allows them to live more comfortably.

In another novel, *When We Were Bad* by Charlotte Mendelson, Frances, the adult daughter of a female rabbi named Claudia, also sees her mother as emanating sexual energy: "[she] had sat up, slick dark hair like an otter, breasts and shoulders shining: too monumental to be beautiful but beautiful all the same" (Mendelson 2007, 7). It is significant that though Claudia has achieved success as a widely respected Rabbi, it is her alluring physicality that her daughter focuses on when she describes her at the very beginning of the book. Also, Frances draws attention to her mother's many "sexy dresses" and her unhappiness with Frances's looks (Mendelson 2007, 56). Due to her function as a Rabbi, Claudia is an authority for the community she lives in. Nonetheless, the awareness of this authority turns her into a controlling mother and alienates her from her daughter.

The sexualization of a mother figure is also apparent in *The House at Tyneford* by Natasha Solomons. Just before the WWII, the novel's focaliser, Elise, leaves Austria for England to work there as a maid. Her mother and father stay in Vienna and do not survive the war. It is significant that Elise's mother, Anna, is remembered by her daughter as a strikingly delicate, ethereal opera star: "Her eyes were huge against her pale skin, so that she looked more than ever like the operatic heroines she plays. . . . Anna, "with her fragile blond loveliness" was . . . a star – a blackeyed beauty with a voice like cherries and chocolate" (Solomons 2012; 9, 6). The comparison of Anna's voice to sweet cherries and chocolate emphasizes even more the description of her attractiveness. It is also interesting to point out the central image that Elise has of Anna: "[w]hen I think of … [her] I see her lying naked in the bathtub, singing" (Solomons 2012, 20). In Elise's memoirs, she is depicted as an enchantress in the parlour. Finally, what should be addressed as well is that when Elise leaves Vienna, she takes with her two reminders of Anna: a pearl necklace and a pink ball dress. Needless to say, they essentialize Anna into a beauty, a classification that her daughter is reminded of each time she sets eyes on these two items during her stay in England.

5. THE STEREOTYPE OF A JEWISH FATHER AS A RELIGIOUS INTELLECTUAL

While the women in the discussed novels tend to be reduced to an altered stereotype of a housewife or a beautiful Jewess, Jewish fathers are essentialized into a figure of a Jewish intellectual. It has been the exclusion of women from the study of religious texts in Orthodox Jewish communities throughout the centuries that with much probability resulted in a widespread association of Jewish male religiosity with knowledgeability, studying as the major male activity. This image of a Jewish scholar has its origin in an Orthodox-Jewish definition of a model Jew as someone who “participates in the activity of learning and interpreting Scripture” (Eilberg-Schwartz 1992, 1). As already mentioned earlier in this article, in orthodox communities fathers were responsible for the education of boys; girls on the other hand were not allowed to study and were not enrolled in religious institutions (Larkey 2017, 5). It is striking that in contemporary British-Jewish literature fathers are still the educators. In fact, the data gathered in the USA has shown that the Jewish community is becoming increasingly secular and in result, “the historically unique role of the Jewish father has disappeared” (Chaim I. Waxman as cited in de Andrade Tosta 2016, 172). The same phenomenon has been observed in Great Britain. The census from 2001 showed that Jewish men are more likely than women to abandon Judaism and intermarry (Graham et al. 2007, 4). Nonetheless, in 2013 there has been published a snapshot from a more recent census that was conducted two years earlier in England and Wales. The snapshot has been given a very telling subtitle: *A Tale of Two Jewish Populations*. It reveals that the Jewish population in England and Wales is not unified but, in fact, there is a secular population and an Orthodox one that is growing very dynamically (Graham 2013, 9). Interestingly, the fathers who are portrayed as detached in the novels are never secular but always religious. Their daughters perceive their preoccupation with religious study as an obstacle in mutual communication. As this article suggests, similarly to the portrayed mothers, the fathers may to be described as detached from their children because they are associated with past that is no longer available.

In *Mr. Rosenblum’s List Or Friendly Guidance for the Aspiring Englishman,* a story of two Jewish immigrants, Mr Rosenblum and his wife, Sadie; whenever the memory of her father appears, he is associated primarily with a religious sphere. Such association is rendered in the following fragment: “Sadie could almost make out the off-key intonations of Papa as he mumbled his way through the service” (Solomons 2010, 4). Still another time, she associates her father with the ram’s horn used in Jewish religious rituals: “[s]he rubbed Jack’s knuckle with trembling fingers, whispering Papa’s old words, “The sound of the ram’s horn is sharp. It is like no other sound. It pierces the armour of the heart”” (Solomons 2010, 53). Throughout the story, Sadie always remembers her father as someone associated with religion and intellectual work. However, she never recalls herself praying with him, it was her mother that was the parent she spent more time with. Yet, he fades in her memory as does his photograph: “this was the only picture she had of him and, as her memory began to wear and fade, the face in the photograph seemed to loom where once her father had been” (Solomons 2010, 60). She begins to forget her father, and with this loss she regrets that she never had any photograph of him as a child, an even more unreachable past (Solomons 2010, 56).

The figure of a detached and pious father emerges also in *Disobedience* by Naomi Alderman. Ronit, the novel’s protagonist, constantly associates her father with the “the oppressiveness of [her] . . . father's house . . . the rows of disapproving books" (Alderman 2007, 115). She observes that "[i]t wasn't [her] . . . father who . . . made the food or laid out [her]. . . clothes; he had his studies" (Alderman 2007, 242). The father is essentialized in the eyes of Ronit into books and words: "I knew him by his words. I dreamed about a huge room filled with books, floor to ceiling the shelves stretching on and on further and further out, so that the harder I looked, the more became visible at the limits of my sight . . . And on the table was a book. And the book was him. I knew him by his words. . . . appropriately enough, he was a book" (Alderman 2007, 11). In the quoted fragment, the repetition of "I knew him by his words" emphasizes the fact that the books he authored constitute for Ronit a filter she sees her father through. Also, the fragment discloses that Ronit used to perceive him as a figure of a scholarly writer, a Rabbi who educated rather than provided her with a sufficient amount of fatherly love. It appears that the scholarly words of Rabbinic wisdom stood between the two, were an obstacle in their communication. He is portrayed as someone who could never find a common language with his daughter but preferred to engage in the study of religious books instead. This refusal to talk makes him emotionally unavailable for Ronit (Alderman 2007, 222-223). The same fragment reveals that Ronit feels obliged to open the book she dreamed about. She compares this action to the feeling of a dictionary falling on her head. Needless to say, dictionaries are typically associated with heavy books, and the experence of one dropping on one's head is rather painful. The father of Ronit is not only absent but even when no longer living, he punishes her in her dreams with his words that seem like a heavy book smashing her head (Alderman 2007, 11).

Still another figure of an emotionally distant father is depicted in *The Marrying of Chani Kaufmann*. He is described as "a respected rabbi of a small shtiebel in Hendon with a modest following. . . . a gentle, slight, quiet man, absorbed in his spiritual world, more there in spirit than in body" (Harris 2013, 6). However, this spirituality and his role of a teacher for the local Jewish community stands between him and his daughter. Chani perceives her father as an educator who gives advice to everyone but her: "The community had stolen him from her . . . In the neglected semi that was her home, the doorbell rang incessantly. A stream of unhappy wives, confused fathers and eager scholars trooped through the hall, needy for her father's advice. He squirreled them away to his study where his door remained shut for hours. As a child Chani would play outside it, just to hear the rumble of his voice. Her patience would be rewarded by a pat on the head upon his exit" (Harris 2013, 7). The passage reflects Chani's longing for her father's company. Unfortunately, this need is never fulfilled. Even when she grows up, her father always remains distant. He cannot cope both with the role of a parent and a Rabbi. When Chani is still a child, he decides to prioritize his rabbinic duties over the ones of a father. The impression of his detachment as a parent is heightened even more by his physical shrinking observed by Chani: "Her mother always bought him trousers that were slightly too large, perhaps imagining he would grow into them. Yet, her father had seemed to shrink as her mother expanded" (Harris 2013, 6). Thinking about him, Chani automatically projects an image of her father eluding her: "When she shut her eyes she would see the shape of his hunched shoulders, his black velvet skullcap sliding from his bald spot as he had disappeared downstairs" (Harris 2013, 6-7). Not only thus Chani fails at building a satisfying relationship with her mother, the same happens in the case of her bond with the father.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The stereotyping of the Jewish mothers and fathers in contemporary British-Jewish novels does not seem to stem from the most common source of stereotypes, which is identified as a popular argument for scapegoating. Neither are other stereotypes about Jews present in the mentioned novels. The Jews portrayed are never greedy or ridiculous. However, quite strikingly, some contemporary British-Jewish authors do create in their books stereotyped characters of detached Jewish parents. The attention thus focuses on the sphere of Jewish family life. Combining these two elements: the stereotyping of the Jewish parents and portraying them as unavailable for their children appears to serve an untypical purpose. As this article argues, the novels discussed provide a meaning common to contemporary British-Jewish literature, i.e. the void that, as I suggest, represents the third generation's inability to recreate the past and pass it on to the next generation. The representation of Jewish parents as unavailable for different reasons points to the fact that the memories of the Jewish past are, to a great extent, unattainable. In the eyes of the focalisers in the novels, the mothers are depicted as housewives and reduced to sexual objects. At the same time, the absent fathers represent the stereotypical model of a Jewish religious educator. The parents appear to stand for the memories of the forgotten past, people whose histories cannot be ever retraced, an incessant need of the third generation to try to reach to them, to reconstruct them, and a failure to do so. Such apparent (and for many, offensive) turning to Jewish stereotypes may suggest that this drive to do so is doomed to fail. The history of the people who perished during World War II cannot be retraced. Trying to recreate it on the basis of much limited available information may lead to potentially dangerous simplifications that the stereotypical representations of Jewish parents seem to stand for.

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