

Chapter 4

Post-Holocaust Heritage of Trauma: The Identity Crisis of Jewish Immigrants From Germany to Eretz-Israel in the 1930s, and the Transgenerational Transfer of the Trauma in the Israeli Documentary Film *The Flat*

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ABSTRACT

*In the 1930s, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, tens of thousands of Jews immigrated to Eretz-Israel. Many of them kept on missing their former homeland and culture, while simultaneously despising Germany. This chapter analyzes the complex identity of these Jews, who had to leave Germany, but could not really detach themselves from the homeland that betrayed them, as reflected in the film *The Flat* (2011). In the film, Director Arnon Goldfinger reveals a family secret: his grandparents, Kurt and Gerda Tuchler, maintained close contacts with a Nazi couple, the Von Mildensteins, before and after the Holocaust. In a world of post-Holocaust, the analysis of the film tells the story of a transgenerational transfer of the trauma, and its different effect on three generations.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, tens of thousands of Jews immigrated to the Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine (pre-state Israel). The hybrid identity, which is an integral part of many immigrants' life, was much more tangled for them: many of them kept on missing their former homeland and culture, while simultaneously despising Germany, the country that murdered six million Jews all over Europe. This study will analyze the complex identity of these Jews, who had to emigrate from Germany, but could not really detach themselves from the homeland that betrayed them, as reflected in the film *The Flat* (2011).

In the film, Director Arnon Goldfinger reveals a family secret: his grandparents, Kurt and Gerda Tuchler, maintained close contacts with a Nazi couple, the Von Mildensteins, before and after the Holocaust. The Tuchlers immigrated to Palestine in 1936 and moved into an apartment on Gordon Street in Tel Aviv, where they lived for the rest of their lives. *The Flat* begins after they passed away, and the family needs to empty their apartment. The plot of *The Flat* is like a detective narrative in which various items that are found in the apartment gradually reveal the hidden truth. Goldfinger travels to Germany to better understand the taboos surrounding the relationship between his grandparents and the Nazi couple. His exploration of the events sheds new light on the complex identity of Jews who fled Germany after the Nazis came to power. In the post-Holocaust world, the analysis of the film tells the story of a transgenerational transfer of the trauma, and its different effect on three generations.

The film came about unexpectedly. As a boy, the vanished German world of his grandparents fascinated Goldfinger. When he grew up, he wanted to make a film about the European codes of the Jewish immigrants from Germany: "the very cultured and very narrow world in which I had been living all my life in a game of longing and revulsion" (Shavit, 2011). After his grandparents passed away, he and photographers Talia (Tulic) Galon and Philip Belish shot the clearing out of the apartment but did not know what direction the film would take. In Goldfinger's own words:

One day, Tulic said to me: "Listen, this is a film about nothing. This is Seinfeld; that is what is happening here." We did not understand whether we were advancing anywhere. I remember telling her that I felt like a fisherman, waiting and waiting with my fishing pole for something to happen. We just waited. (Anderman, 2011)

Like in any other good detective film, the discovery finally took place. Among the artefacts found in the apartment were stacks of the old German newspaper *Der Angriff*. Hannah, Goldfinger's mother began to translate for him. They discovered

a series of articles describing the Nazi von Mildenstein's visit to Palestine and the couple that accompanied them – Goldfinger's grandparents. "It took me a while to realize that this was the turning point in the film," Goldfinger says. "Only then, I started to ask, read, explore and get involved, and suddenly everything became very interesting." (Anderman, 2011).

A GERMAN BUBBLE IN TEL-AVIV

Jews began to leave Germany in the 1920s, primarily because of the economic crisis in Germany that occurred after World War I. Another factor was the rising anti-Semitism. In the 1920s, most Jewish-Germans emigrated to the United States, and only a few thousand settled in *Eretz-Israel*. Following Hitler's rise to power, emigration rose dramatically. This time most of the Jews headed towards Israel. Immigration to the United States was restricted as of 1924. In contrast, Palestine under the British Mandate prospered in the first half of the 1930s and became a desirable destination for Jewish immigrants. Israel as a desirable destination also benefited from the "Transfer Agreement" between the Jewish Agency and the Nazi government that enabled immigrants to transfer their capital from Germany (Lavsky, 2017).

From 1933 to 1939, roughly fifty to sixty thousand Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. They accounted for about a quarter of the immigrants of the "Fifth Aliyah" (the fifth period of mass immigration to *Eretz-Israel*) or the "German Aliyah" as it is traditionally called because of the mark these immigrants left on the *Yishuv*'s economy, trade, industry, higher education, architecture, law, banking, culture and cultural activities. These immigrants settled mostly in urban areas like Tel Aviv and Haifa, but also founded towns and cities (such as Nahariya, Shaveh Zion, Kfar Shmaryahu and Kiryat Bialik). Some five thousand adolescents came from Germany to *Eretz-Israel* within the framework of "Youth Aliyah" that took place from the Nazi rise to power until the outbreak of World War II. They were absorbed primarily on kibbutzim and moshavim (collective settlements) (Ramon 1998; Zimmerman & Hotam, 2005; Hallamish, 2006). Many adults came with their own capital and set up factories such as Teva, Osem, Ata, Prigat, Strauss, and others. They modified the urban landscape in the sense that they developed the hotel industry and introduced the café culture to Israel.

The Jewish-German encounter with the *Yishuv* was not easy: differences in mentality between the local *Eretz-Israelis* and more restrained German-Jews often ended in discord; the Nazis' intensifying brutality led many Jews in the *Yishuv* to misunderstand and challenge the immigrants' wish to preserve German culture in *Eretz-Israel*. There were protests against the continued use of the German language (for

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example, in German-language newspapers), and there were even cases of harassment. The overt expressions by German immigrants as to the superiority of their culture did nothing to facilitate their relationships with the Jewish community in the Land of Israel (Neumann, Hirsch-Ratzkovsky and Galili, 2012; Zimmerman and Hotam, 2005). The derogatory term *Yekke* to describe the habits and mentality of German Jews dates back to the 1930s. It was a code name for a polite, tie-wearing, punctual, intelligent, stiff, nurdy and humorless individual, the antithesis of the “new Jew,” the model of the Zionist in *Eretz-Israel* who was described as blunt, free-spirited, and even a bit rude.

Many of the Jewish-German immigrants turned their homes in *Eretz-Israel* into a replica of their homes in Germany in the 1930s. In their private spaces, the interior design tried to duplicate what they had left behind: grand pianos, dark and heavy armchairs and sofas, dressers proudly bearing porcelain, bookshelves filled with the works of Schiller, Goethe, Heine, and others. German food was cooked in many of these homes, and the afternoon *shlafishtunde* nap between two and four was a fixture.

Arnon Goldfinger’s voice-over at the beginning of the film reflects these themes:

The flat, on the third floor of a Bauhaus building on Gordon Street, in Tel Aviv, is where my grandparents, Kurt and Gerda Tuchler lived since they immigrated to Palestine. Apart from the view of Tel Aviv from the windows, you might have thought that this apartment was located in the heart of Berlin. The apartment just stood there, furnished in heavy European style, loaded with German literature, and drenched in layers of dust and history.

Early in the film, Goldfinger tells about his childhood memories:

When I was a child, I loved to come here. Once a week. I would cross the center of Tel Aviv, go up three flights of stairs and go to Berlin. My grandmother, Gerda, lived there for seventy years, as though she had never left Germany. Despite living in Israel for so many years, she did not speak Hebrew well, and I did not want to learn German, so we sat and chatted in English as if we were in a café in Europe, with apple strudel and Swiss chocolate.

The Tuchlers’ preservation of German culture is revealed in the objects that the family finds in the closets in the apartment that are unrelated to the Middle East and represent an attempt to perpetuate the world they were forced to leave behind: fancy dresses, elegant gloves, fur coats, and a huge collection of wallets and handbags.

Through his grandmother’s fashion items, Goldfinger manages to portray the hybrid world of a generation. The books on his grandparents’ shelves also testify to the importation of German culture to Tel-Aviv. While emptying the apartment, the

family asks Micha, an expert collector of German books to assess their collection. He also confirms their hybrid identity: “They have lived here for at least fifty years, but their hearts remained in their first twenty years of life in Germany. [...] I am sure they suffered greatly.”

Historian Ofer Ashkenazi suggests that *The Flat* pushes the boundaries of Zionist identity. The film’s uses of place and transitional areas as an indication of identity crisis appropriates familiar Zionist clichés and undermines the ideological premises they propagate. By showing that his family’s secrets cannot be integrated into the national ethos of identity formation, Goldfinger hints that the way identities were constructed in Israel was much more complicated and deviate from the national narrative (Ashkenazi, 2014).

Researcher Na’ama Sheffi writes that the essential problem of Jews who immigrated from Germany was the sense of their resounding failure when attempting to assimilate into German culture and the German sphere. Throughout their lifetime in Israel, German-speaking Jews not only mourned their foreignness in the country, but also mourned having been forcibly removed from their ideal cultural environment. In fact, they mourned a country that had ceased to exist for them (Sheffi, 2006). “My feeling is that although most of the immigrants had actually arrived, the ships are still on their way,” writes historian Joachim Schlor, thus highlighting that many of them never detached themselves from their German homeland, despite the Holocaust, and never fully integrated into Israeli culture (Schlor, 2007). This crisis is reflected not only in the artifacts, but also in the Tuchlers’ choices of friends and acquaintances.

The first scene of the film ends with a close-up on a shutter that opens and closes. This motif appears several times in the film and symbolizes the silenced memory that is locked inside the apartment and the reopening of past secrets (Shternshus, 2013). The film also repeatedly returns to the high stairwell with a hollow core outside the Tuchler’s apartment that is suggestive of the hole into which the past has vanished. Unless Goldfinger casts light into the space, he may never find out about the past (Prager 2015).

From the *Der Angriff* newspapers hidden among the artefacts, Goldfinger discovered that in the 1930s, a Nazi officer called Leopold von Mildenstein, who supported the emigration of Jews to Eretz-Israel as a solution to the Jewish problem, toured Palestine for about six months. His wife and the Tuchlers joined him on this visit. The photographs that Goldfinger found reinforced the discovery that a close relationship existed between the two couples. But this was only the beginning of the revelations. Goldfinger, who dug deeper, discovered that the relationship between his grandparents and the Nazi couple did not end there. Different pieces of information, such as letters from his great-grandmother, details collected about von Mildenstein from archives and conversations with people who have researched von Mildenstein’s history, slowly showed that the friendship between the two couples had resumed in

secret after World War II. This included visits by the Tuchler couple to Germany and the exchange of family photos and gifts. His astonishment intensified when he discovered that Von-Mildenstein was a very high-ranking officer in the Nazi regime—first in the SD, and then as the head of a department in Goebbels’ ministry of propaganda. Eichmann referred to him as “my mentor”, claiming von-Mildenstein knew more than anyone else about the Jews because of his journey in *Eretz-Israel*.

In a final attempt to understand the relationship, Goldfinger turned to a German expert on mental denial. The expert reinforced the complicated relationship of Jewish immigrants from Germany and claimed that through their actions, the Tuchler couple sought recognition of their legitimacy as Germans. “Even a persecuted Jew who grew up in Germany, and saw in it his homeland, wants to believe that there must be at least one good German who accepts you as a human being.” However, Goldfinger still cannot understand nor accept it.

Goldfinger and his mother’s lack of ability to come to terms with this relationship is also reflected in their attitude to the objects found in the apartment. Many scenes show the family members putting objects in huge plastic bags and throwing them away. Goldfinger shoots the way the family packs up the remains of his heritage and disposes of them. These scenes are repeated several times. This detachment from the objects explains why the family members cannot understand the relationship that the grandparents had with their former compatriots.

THRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF SILENCE

Research shows that there are Holocaust survivors who rarely talked about the trauma they or their families experienced. For some survivors, the need to repress the past was generated by a constant feeling of helplessness. For some, repression was necessary to their mental survival after World War II (Vardi, 1990). Some survivors did not talk with their new families about the past, in order to protect their children and spare them feelings of fear. Avoiding the past was meant to distance their children from the trauma (Hess, 1990). The children who felt a “wall of silence” tended to construct a wall in response, to protect themselves from their parents’ wall, thus creating a “double wall” of silence (Bar On, 1994). *The Flat* reveals that Hannah, Goldfinger’s mother and the Tuchlers’ daughter, was born in Berlin and raised in Israel. Her parents never talked about the past. They never told her basic parts of the family’s history such as the fact that her grandmother, Susanna, was murdered in the Holocaust. Hannah, on her part, never asked.

In the film, the act of emptying of the apartment, the sorting of the pictures, documents, books, and clothes opens the door to the past. In these scenes Hannah tells Arnon about the way she was brought up. She says that in her youth there were

clear dividing lines between what she could ask about, and what she could not ask. “They did not tell us anything, and I did not ask.” This unspoken “agreement” did not disappear with their death. When Hannah clears her parents’ apartment, she feels no need to rummage, to look at family pictures, or to try to discover hidden clues. When Hannah and Goldfinger find an old photo album, she admits that she had seen it before but did not bother to ask her mother about the content. “I was not interested in it” she confesses. As far as Hannah is concerned, once the apartment is empty, the past is gone. Her imposed discoveries in the apartment completely contradict her attitude toward her parents’ past throughout her entire life.

Cinema researcher Odeya Kohen-Raz notes that one of Goldfinger’s attempts to persuade his mother to reconnect with the past occurs when he makes her read the end of her grandmother’s letter. The letter contains her last words before she was murdered and her final request: “do not forget me.” Goldfinger begins to read the letter in his voice (the film’s voice-over) and then the sound changes to his mother’s voice over in German. That way he makes her reconnect not only with the family’s past she did not want to know about, but also with her mother tongue, a symbol of the culture she has alienated herself from (Kohen-Raz, 2012). However, Hannah’s reluctance to participate in the journey to the past continues until the end of the film. At the end of the film, before Goldfinger and Hannah leave Berlin, they try to find Hannah’s great grandfather’s grave. In heavy rain, they walk through the cemetery but are not able to locate it. Goldfinger confronts Hannah: “What would your mother have said if she could see you now”? Upon this, Hanna’s answer is: “She would have said that I was rude [...] It was none of my business [...]”.

THIRD GENERATION: OPENING THE DOORS TO THE PAST

The conflict between the *Yekkes* and Israeli society often caused their children to be ashamed of their parents’ inclination to preserve their tradition. Many tried to detach themselves from it (Neumann, Hirsch-Ratzkovsky & Galili, 2012; Lavski, 2010; Zimmerman & Hotam, 2005). However, this attitude began to change in the 1980s as the image of the “new Jew” was challenged in turn. The rise of post-modern and post-Zionism refuted attempts to forge one history and one homogeneous mindset. The melting pot had turned into perceptions of multiculturalism and was gradually replaced by the popularization of ethnic roots (Shapira, 2004). The mosaic of memories and identities was slowly becoming the norm; the histories of Europe, Asia, and North Africa became a source of longing, a basis for identity, and an integral part of the Israeli identity. In this cultural environment, many second-generation immigrants from central Europe sought to restore the role of their lost past which

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was no longer a source of embarrassment. The third generation grew up in a world in which the connection to the past was practically a given factor (Steir-Livny, 2013).

In the last decades, second- and third generation immigrants from Germany in particular and Central Europe in general are highly involved in the preservation, documentation, and commemoration that define them as a separate group. They run organizations (such as the *Association of Israelis of Central European Origin*) and websites; they initiate and organize conferences and seminars. Third generation of German immigrants started a Facebook group to work towards preserving and documenting the *Yekke* heritage. In the words of the website heads, “If your memories of your grandmother include nursery rhymes in German or radio silence between two and four – you are in the right place.” The website includes links to the culture of Central European Jews, personal stories, events and sites associated with the history of the generation of grandparents (Hoppe, No date).

This environment did not change Hannah’ detachment from the past. It enabled third generation Arnon Goldfinger, unlike his mother, to reach out to the past his mother refused to acknowledge. He talks openly about the stereotypical cultural codes that have been passed down to him. He is tied to his grandparents not only by blood but also through culture. His behavior reflects the stereotypes that were connected with the *Yekim*. He claims that he is a *Yekke Potz*. The word *Potz* means, literally, in Yidish or in Russian slang, male genitals, but stands for someone who is foolish. The full expression, *Yekke Potz*, stands for the completely stereotypic version of the *Yekke* in Israeli culture. When Goldfinger asserts that he is a *Yekke Potz* he adds how natural sympathy towards Germany was handed down to him since childhood:

The best example of taking Germany for granted happened in 1974 while everyone was cheering for Holland in the soccer world cup final; I was the only one in the neighborhood who was cheering for Germany, and this was after the Munich massacre. My friends at the time wanted to kill me, but, for me, sympathy for Germany was something uncontrollable that had been passed down genetically, and I did not even think twice about it. (Shavit, 2011)

Psychologist Dan Bar-On suggests that in some families, third generation Holocaust survivors have a chance to open the cracks in the double wall of silence. They do not feel obliged to maintain the silence or the repression and therefore can bring up subjects that in the past were forbidden to talk about (Bar-On, 1994). In *The Flat*, Goldfinger voices the family silence; in this process he not only reveals secrets but also redefines his identity and forces his mother to disclose things she preferred to avoid.

Goldfinger is the protagonist. He appears in the vast majority of the scenes, he converses with the family members (who are not interested in exploring the topic);

he motivates the search, travels to Germany and meets with Von-Middlestein's daughter. Goldfinger accompanies the film with his voice-over, sharing with the audience every stage of his journey, of his dilemmas and difficulties. The central topic in the narrative is not only the discovery itself but rather the way he, as a third generation Holocaust survivor, handles this discovery. Many scenes are devoted to his soul-searching on the subject, his inability to understand, and his great consternation.

Goldfinger is the one who starts reading, checking and digging through papers (Shavit, 2012). He is the one that decides to stop living with the feeling that "we are a family without any past" (Anderman, 2011), and to bring the stories that had never been told to the surface. The film shows that it is much easier for the third generation Holocaust survivors to dare, to ask and to explore, whereas their parents, the second-generation Holocaust survivors have chosen silence. Goldfinger confronts his mother, who unlike him, does not have a deep interest in the family's past (Prager, 2015). Alas, he is unable to change her mind.

In his quest, he approaches Edda, the daughter of Leopold Von Mildenstein. In these scenes, her initial depiction as a sweet "auntie", is represented in a complex way as she who refuses to acknowledge her father's past and proclaims "my father did not do it." She refuses to acknowledge his role in the Nazi regime and holds on to the perception that her father was a journalist, who left for the USA during World War II. Even when Goldfinger presents her with the facts, she maintains her denial. For example, Goldfinger discovers a newspaper article entitled "Goebbels' People Help Nasser," which shows that Von-Mildenstein served as Head of the Middle East Department in the Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. He was a member of a group of former Nazis who helped produce a series of violent stories against Jews on Nasser's radio station "Voice of the Arabs." Edda does not accept the content of the article and shows Goldfinger court documents from the successful libel suit filed against the journalist by her father.

Thus, Goldfinger tries to open the cracks in the wall of silence also in Germany. His encounters with Edda echo the Germans' problems in dealing with their past. Studies have documented the narrative of silence, repression, denial, and self-victimization as well as the attempts to deal with blame within the German nation. These works suggest that repression, denial, and relativism were the most common way of dealing with the past in Germany until the 1960s. Rarely was the Holocaust mentioned in public addresses. Those who were adults during World War II remained silent because they were part of the Nazi regime or backed it with their silence. Younger people who made up the *Hitlerjugend* generation remained silent because their world had collapsed (Giesen, 2009). Alongside this silence, a discourse of victimization emerged. In this narrative, most Germans saw the Nazi leaders as the guilty ones, who enabled them to portray the Germans as victims of the Nazis. They cite the four million Germans who were killed in World War II, the millions

who were expelled or uprooted from their homes in the east, the approximately 400,000 who were killed in the Allied bombings and those killed and raped by the Red Army (Gan, 2014; Margalit, 2007). The German public is represented as being helpless in the grips of a terrorist regime. By claiming that only a small group of criminals (the Nazis) were responsible for the Holocaust. The victimization approach constructed a difference between “us” and “them” (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975; Lidtka, 1997). From the 1950s until 1989 when Germany was reunified, the discourse of victimization existed in both East and West Germany, but the identity of the victimizer was different. In East Germany Hitler and his cohorts were described as imperialists whereas in the West they were considered Stalin’s henchmen (Lidtka, 1997; Heilbruner & Zimmerman, 1997; Margalit, 2005).

The 1960s forced West Germans to deal with their past not only because of the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961 and the Auschwitz trials (1963-1965) in Germany. In the sixties, a new generation took to the political and cultural stage. This generation was born after World War II and had no personal memories of Nazism. Many broke the coalition of silence and hammered their parents with inconvenient questions. The new approach allowed for ritual admittance of guilt by those who were innocent as individuals. Collective guilt was symbolized when it became fashionable to give children Jewish names or volunteer on Israeli kibbutzim. One of the best-known enactments of this ritual guilt was when Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt before the monument to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1970 (Giesen, 2009).

However, this change in mentality was neither rapid nor absolute and the denial and the perception of the suffering of “innocent Germans” during World War II did not disappear (Harel, 2004). The American mini-series *Holocaust* (Marvi J. Chomsky, 1978), which was broadcast in Germany in 1979, is considered to be another turning point (Lidtka, 1997). After the 1989 unification of Germany, alongside commemorating the Holocaust and the extensive debate on the actions of the Nazis, there was, nevertheless, also a continuity of denial and a growing to accentuate the suffering of German civilians as victims of Nazism and then as the victims of the liberating armies (Margalit, 2005; Jordens, 2013; Lory, 2007).

In a highly charged scene, Goldfinger, who shares his dilemmas with the audience in his voice-over, decides to confront Edda with the details he reveals later during his investigations. He shows her Von Mildenstein’s curriculum vitae written in his own handwriting stating that he served for seven years in the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), the security service of the SS, in Section II/112, in charge of the Jewish Desk, with the title of *Judenreferent* (Jewish Affairs Officer). She refuses to accept this. Goldfinger, who claims this is one of the most important scenes of the film, is aware of the fact that this confrontation is controversial and says that it was resented by both German and Israeli audiences: “I felt that I should do it,” he says (Shavit, 2011). The scene highlights the power of repression and denial, since even after Goldfinger’s clear

revelations, Edda refuses to face reality. Her husband, Harold, supports her and tries to undermine the historical facts from a different angle and explain to Goldfinger that not all Nazis were “bad” and many belonged to the party because they had to, and they did nothing “except wearing a pin showing their party membership”.

Edda and Harold are not alone in their denial. From 1997 to 2000, German Social Psychologist Harald Walzer surveyed forty first, second and third generation German families and showed how family members in 26 of these cases altered the history of their families during the Nazi period. Walzer called it “cumulative heroism”. Even though they had heard about the atrocities from their grandparents and parents, they only remember stories that are not related to the atrocities. The children and grandchildren cling on to every clue, even the most negligible one, in order to invent their own versions to the past in which the family members who lived in the Nazi era are good and innocent (Walzer, 2015). As opposed to Walzer’s notions, there are German historians who claim that the process of transgenerational transfer is more complicated. For example, Norbert Frei claims that many of the second-generation to the perpetrators were those who turned against their parents’ generation silence of the Holocaust and demanded to change Germany’s collective memory of the Holocaust (Frei, 2005). Historian Alexander von Plato claims that one can find in the transgenerational discourse much more indifference, suspicion and disbelief (von Plato, 2005).

Goldfinger takes familiar dichotomic divisions in Israeli culture between Israelis and Germans, the Old Jew and the New Jew, good and evil, them and us, and deconstructs them through his grandparents’ relationship choices and the lack of ability to judge Edda. But even though he discovered the hidden relationship, the film does not end with a closure.

CONCLUSION

The documentary *The Flat* highlights the complex hybrid identity of Jews who emigrated from Germany in the 1930s and kept on loving and missing the homeland that betrayed them. The film represents the way in which the German culture was handed down to the offspring, who on the one hand accept it and on the other rebel against it. The transgenerational transfer of practices does not enable the second and third generation to comprehend the Tuchler’s life choices. Their ability to begin relationship with the Nazi couple and resume it after the Holocaust remains a mystery.

Goldfinger begins the film as a puzzled Israeli who was influenced by the German culture from his youth, and now feels the need to examine its more hidden facets, and he ends the film even more confused. Although Goldfinger goes on a detective journey, what Aarons and Berger (2017) refer to as a mystery narrative

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with the director as a “dogged sleuth” to comprehend his grandparents’ choices of relationships, at the end of the journey he fails because he still cannot fathom it. The mystery is not solved. Another question which is not resolved by the end of the film is the ethical choice of the survivors’ descendants to dig into the survivor’s past and publish it worldwide. Does this search invade their privacy? Goldfinger’s answer is given in the film:

This is a question I’m constantly wrestling with. On the one hand, I say to myself – if she did not want us to discover what happened, why didn’t she throw those things out? She had plenty of time to get rid of them. Possibly in her subconscious, she wanted us to discover this one day. On the other hand, I guess that if she had wanted to us discover it, she would have just told me, so she may have kept all these papers simply out of weariness, forgetfulness, and habit, and not because of any conscious or unconscious decision. We will never know. Maybe she could not cope with it; maybe she did not think it right to involve us. Anything is possible. (Shavit, 2011)

Goldfinger leaves the questions open, so the end of the film does not provide the long-awaited catharsis.

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