

Unwanted Pregnancy of Holocaust Parents – As Reflected on Artist Life and Artwork

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Abstract: A “good-enough mother” (or parent) is one who adapts herself to her baby’s needs and can identify with them in their initial stage of absolute dependence, including pregnancy (Winnicott, 1965). Abortion survivors are people who have experienced the threat of being aborted, either from a direct physical attempt, or from living in an unwelcome prenatal environment in which abortion was consciously or unconsciously contemplated by one or both parents. The current article describes how an artist was torn between the sense of rejection by his mother, who wanted to have an abortion, and his Holocaust-survivor father's determination to protect the pregnancy and be a “good-enough” parent.

Keywords: abortion, Holocaust survivor, artist

In Winnicott’s view, a “good-enough mother” is one who adapts herself to her baby’s needs and can identify with him in his initial stage of absolute dependence (Winnicott, 1965, p. 39). The mother is the first facilitating environment, and the first person responsible for providing the holding, equipping, and enabling of the feeling of self-realization.

Daniel Stern (1995, 1998) regards the woman’s transformation into a mother as a decisive stage in her development, and a new opportunity for her to process her past on behalf of her future and her baby’s future. The

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mother is the child's first object to attach to. After birth, a unique organization takes place in the mother, which builds a new axis in her psyche.

The combination of the physical and mental blurred boundary between the mother and the "other" (her child) forces the mother to deal with a wide range of emotions. The need to process the different experiences sometimes leads to overwhelming anxiety that threatens the feeling of love and attachment. The mother has to relinquish the fantasy of a perfect child—an important and healthy process. An emotional space is created in which the mother can feel love, concern, and compassion towards her child, but also anger, and sometimes disappointment and frustration—all of which create a new, rich, and diverse layer of her selfhood. Maternal ambivalence, underlying her splitting mechanism versus her feelings about the split, enables the mother to develop genuine love for her child. By means of the split, the mother can build within herself a gradual internalization of her child. In coming to terms with the disappointment of her child "not being perfect," the mother can begin to recognize him as a separate subject (Palgi-Heker, 2005, pp. 85-87).

Furthermore, the birth of a child is an exceptional event for the mother because it revives her experiences of being mothered by her own mother, as well as her current relationship with her mother, herself, and her own femininity. It is important to mention that giving birth can at the same time arouse the mother's emotions and previous complexes. Motherhood often creates massive expectations in women for compensation or repair of what is perceived as a defect in their past and their femininity (Perroni, 2009).

True and False Self

The woman who becomes pregnant gradually achieves a high degree of identification with her infant. Because of that identification, she knows how to hold her infant so that the infant starts by existing and not by reacting. The true self then has become a living reality, because of the mother's good enough adaptation to the infant's need, and the ability to comply and not to be exposed.

When the mother's adaptation is not good enough in the beginning, the infant may expect to die physically because cathexis of external objects is not fixed. The infant remains isolated and lives falsely. The protest against being forced into a false existence can be detected from the early stages. The false self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them. This false self belongs to the mother's inability to sense her infant's needs. Through this false self, the infant builds up a false set of relationships. Behind the false self hides the true self by compliance with environmental demands. In extreme examples of false self development, the true self is so well hidden that spontaneity is not a feature in the infant's living experiences. The false self can be seen to be

defiance against the exploitation of the true self, which is unthinkable (Winnicott, 1960).

When the false self hides the true self, poor capacity for using symbols and a poverty of cultural living are found. In such persons, one can observe extreme restlessness, an inability to concentrate, and a need to collect impressions for external reality so that the living-time of the individual can be filled by reactions to those impressions (Winnicott, 1960; Miller, 1992).

Failure of the environmental reliability is an alternative danger where the potential space may become filled with what is injected into it from someone other than the baby. It seems that whatever is in this space that comes from someone else is persecutory material and the baby has no means of rejecting it (Winnicott, 1971).

Thinking of Abortion

Today every third child is born unwanted (Sonne, 2000). The inner reality of those people may be determined by torturing psychic symptoms like fears, depression, and manifold psychosomatic reactions. Researchers show that many of these problems originate from prenatal experiences of lack, suffering, and misery. However, obstetricians and pediatricians still often assume the prenatal and perinatal child has neither thoughts of his own, nor feelings or memories. But if we look closely, as Hidas and Raffai taught (Blazy, 2019), and invest time in mothers and their babies, we can unfold quite a rich realm of many thoughts, feelings, and memories.

The individuation of the pregnant couple to become parents for their baby is very important as well. Without this step, a baby may feel pressured to take over parenting himself for his own parents, which is too hard a burden for such a young human being, and can leave him with no strength left for his own development (Blazy, 2019).

According to Sonne (2002), abortion survivors are physically impacted by an unsuccessful abortion attempt. They may also be impacted by the threat or contemplation of abortion, having lived in an unwelcoming prenatal environment in which abortion was contemplated consciously or unconsciously by one or both parents, or by significant others, even though it did not take place.

Researchers in the field of prenatal psychology have conclusively demonstrated that the unborn are sentient human beings possessing the capacity for mentation, communication, and vulnerability to psychic trauma (Blazy, 2019). They remember their prenatal experience, and that memory lives on, as Bollas (1987) has said, “unsought known” in their unconscious. Postnatally, they react to stimuli that are similar to those they had encountered prenatally, and they also act out their earlier threat of being aborted in compulsive repetition involving identification with the abortion-minded aggressor(s). Practitioners can then connect their

symptoms with their history and make the diagnosis that they are suffering from what might be called an abortion-survivor disorder.

Yehuda Poliker's Family Biography Based on His Book, *My Shadow and I* (2019)

Israeli artist, Yehuda Poliker's life story is connected to parents traumatized by the Holocaust. All the biographical information presented in this article is based on his book and on interviews he has given over the years.

Yehuda's parents were part of the Jewish community of Greece. Most of its members were sent to the concentration camps. For Yehuda's family, World War Two was a monster they were never able to break free from.

The Germans caught the first husband of Yehuda's mother, and she never saw him again. She remained with two children. While in the Auschwitz concentration camp, the man who later became her second husband was hit on his head with an axe and stitched up with a needle and thread used for treating horses. Yehuda's mother and this man later met on a ship to Eretz Israel. This man helped her and they decided to get married while on the ship. The ship was intercepted by the British army and sent back to Cyprus for a few months. They eventually arrived in Israel in its early days, and together had three children of their own, the youngest being Yehuda.

Life in Israel was an ongoing survival struggle for the family. They had no one except for themselves. The parents had to constantly deal with providing basic needs and couldn't attend to Yehuda's trifling problems. The traumatic past and the exhausting present weakened the parents emotionally, and they would frequently argue in front of their kids. They enjoyed listening to melancholic Greek music that brought the past back into their home. Yehuda recorded and kept those songs. His father said he would never enter a place surrounded by fences. He didn't mind dying because fate had already controlled his life. Yehuda constantly protected and kept an eye on his parents.

The Mother

Yehuda Poliker's mother was described as the strongest figure in the family. She was devoted to the family in her own way—hardworking, responsible for the budget, and managing and organizing everything. Her image is deeply ingrained in Yehuda's psyche; her hidden strength encompasses his reality and makes it difficult for him to detach himself from her.

Yehuda's mother told him she didn't want his pregnancy because she was tired and didn't have the strength to raise another child. It was the father who prevented her from having an abortion, and it was he who

devotedly looked after Yehuda. He knew how to embrace and love, and made sure Yehuda knew that, thanks to him, Yehuda exists.

Yehuda's mother gave him all she could, but it seems it wasn't all he needed. He became suspicious and distrustful of her, and felt she had neither the time, willingness, nor ability to take care of him. She didn't embrace him, caress him, or let him cuddle up to her. He said, "The distancing was difficult to me; I grew up like a stem without a bulb" (Poliker, 2019, p. 11).

Yehuda was offended that he wasn't good enough for his mother. The sign of his mother's love was the pot she let him lick. Her mysterious depths were unfamiliar signs for him. She would talk to God, and tell Him she had a long and bitter account to settle with Him. She was extremely superstitious, and knew how to arouse guilty feelings. She was also mystical; once she cursed someone and he broke a leg. She was also familiar with reading coffee grinds.

The Father

Yehuda Poliker's father worked as a barber in an army camp, and afterwards opened a barbershop in the courtyard of their house. Yehuda worked with him and describes him as being intelligent. He was Yehuda's life mentor and would always say things that touched him. To this day, when Yehuda looks at something and doesn't have the words to describe it, he immediately thinks of his father.

The war his father experienced was a monster that never left him. The father's family had lived in poverty in a small village in Greece. But the family was completely wiped out with all other Jews in the community who were sent to the concentration death camps. Only a few survived. Yehuda's father's fears and concerns about the past suffocated the whole family. He would reminisce about the past, and about rural Greece from which he imbibed life. He was angry at the entire world and projected this anger on his surroundings with temper tantrums.

In Yehuda's view, his father's mind stayed in the concentration camps. The sound of barking dogs would bring painful memories of the camps. At home, Yehuda felt as if he was in the death camps with his father. Yehuda's father ceased to believe in God after what had happened to him and his family. He said, "If only I could have been a Gentile! If I were a Gentile none of this would have happened to me..." (Poliker, 2019, p. 144). Yehuda's father lived on the brink of death. Every morning he felt his end had come, and that the Germans were about to take him to the gas chambers. But luck was on his side and he survived. In his father's words, "Everything is ash and dust" (Poliker, 2019, p. 209), which later became the name of one of Yehuda's music albums.

Yehuda would sit next to his father and listen to the stories about his traumatic past. When his father spoke about his parents and his siblings

who were killed, he would start crying. His father would cry and Yehuda would hold him and cry with him until he calmed down.

A past memory returned at the Bar Mitzvah party of one of Yehuda's brothers. Under the influence of alcohol, the father felt as if he were in the concentration camps surrounded by Germans with dogs and an electric fence. The guests, he thought, were Nazis in uniform, the lights were the searchlights of the guard tower, and the songs were the voices telling the prisoners to go out to work (Poliker, 2019).

Yehuda sometimes felt as if he were a garbage bin that everything could be thrown into. "Anxiety, despair, frustration, fear of death—these were the engraved impressions that could never be erased" (Poliker, 2019, p. 196).

Yehuda Poliker

Yehuda was born in 1950 and grew up in an Israeli urban suburb. He is a singer, musician, creator, and composer. He writes that his childhood sometimes feels like an empty book, one that contains only blank, white pages. He was imprisoned by his father's love, and was fearful of growing up. Yehuda played childish games, and was afraid to fight (Poliker, 2019).

Yehuda attended school up to 8th grade. He was an inattentive student who had trouble retaining information. In his view, he acquired most of his education from his parents' life experiences. School didn't interest him and he was far more drawn to the world outside. He enjoyed making up stories and living in his imaginary world. In school he was as silent as a fish; because of his stuttering, he felt miserable, his self-esteem was low, and he was scared to raise his hand in class from the fear of being mocked by other students.

At age 13, Yehuda was sent to the Maritime Officers Boarding School, because his father wanted him to be an officer in the merchant navy. There he learned to play the guitar and immediately realized music was his future; he knew there was no point in pursuing anything else. Music took him to other, safer places. His guitar became an inseparable part of his life. He began playing in clubs and formed a band. At the same time, he completed a hairdressing training in order to help his father in the barbershop he owned at home.

Yehuda describes his special relationship with his father with great sensitivity. He was a big boy who protected his father; he couldn't run away, nor was there anyone who could calm his fears. He experienced his father's suffering as if it was his own and identified with his father in every fiber of his being out of his fear and concern. His father's horrific stories percolated deep inside him. He asks why his father did not break the umbilical cord binding them; his father, too, was unable to do it by himself. He felt stuck, caught on the barbed wire of Auschwitz, of Birkenau. His father stated, "When I get the strength to leave, this sin will hold me in everlasting contempt" (Poliker, 2019, pp. 216-217).

While other children would listen to fairy tales at home, Yehuda and his brothers would hear stories about the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, the Birkenau and Dachau camps, about Germans with guns and black dogs, about electric barbed-wire fences, and about hunger, lice, beatings, diseases, and death. When his father told stories, he would always be on the verge of tears. Sadness would fill the room like melancholic music was passing from his father and becoming embedded in him. Yehuda wished to console his father, and to try to ease that touchable pain he still didn't understand. But rather, Yehuda breathed that pain, took it to his dreams, and absorbed his father's tension.

The stories about his father's life in Greece were so graphic that Yehuda felt as if he were watching a movie. His father always spoke about a lost reality, and a dream that was cut short in a terrible war—a war that caused him to sink to the depths of sorrow and depression. Yehuda was his “Wailing Wall” on which he could load all the world's evils and terrors. That entire burden caused Yehuda to fear going to sleep alone because of the Germans (Poliker, 2019). If he could erase part of his life, he would erase most of his childhood nights.

Yehuda's identification with his parents disrupted his life, like a kind of gravitational pull that drew him into their pain. Maybe by absorbing their pain, he thought he'd be able to make things easier for them. Despite their love for him, they affected his life and caused him to withdraw into a tightly-closed world. Yehuda moved like a pendulum between two poles—inquisitiveness and fear. The fear restricted him, making him perceive anything exceptional as a tragedy, while the inquisitiveness saved him and sent him into the world of games. All Yehuda wanted was to grow up quickly; he had no patience for a long childhood. His parents clung to him like an anchor, which hindered his maturation.

Yehuda recalls his stuttering started one evening age six, when his father swallowed a large piece of bread and began to choke. Yehuda rushed off to call a doctor, fearing that his father was about to die.

He felt his real freedom could only come about by separating from his parents. But he could not be set free, because his only freedom would be his parents' deaths. Guilty feelings drew him into an abyss, as if into a deep well—his body closing itself up and taking revenge, trying to discontinue his existence. He felt as if he was drifting in the secretive world of his mother and great love of his father who couldn't let him go.

Yehuda felt closer to animals because they didn't pretend. They didn't have any aims beyond the need to find food, and most quickly detach themselves from their mothers' grasp.

Yehuda didn't want to have children because of the constant fear that something bad could happen to them. He thought he would be an anxious father and didn't want to make his kids miserable. He also stated openly that he's more interested in men than in women.

Having undergone therapy, Yehuda understands that the child within him is damaged. He said, “The moment I connected with him I talked for ten years to the child who is the self and cured him” (Poliker, 2019, p. 229).

When Yehuda started to live alone, he was better able to live with the memories. Since that time, he has been quieter, more relaxed, and the fear of losing his parents has slowly dissipated. He is capable of coming to terms with his loneliness. His mother’s and father’s voices are still inside him, but they no longer hold him back. The child that was once him has now become a man. Today’s Yehuda is more relaxed with himself and his surroundings. He has won numerous prizes for his writing and composing.

Yehuda Poliker, the Singer, Musician, Instrumentalist and Composer: How His Life Affected His Work

Yehuda’s work deals with personal and family issues as he lived and breathed them, including the memory of the Holocaust throughout his childhood and adolescence. In this section, I have selected two songs, one that deals with a search for the self, and the other that deals with Yehuda’s relationship with a mother figure. In addition, I’ve included a few excerpts from some songs that deal with issues connected to past events.

The song: “My shadow and I”: Music and lyrics by Yehuda Poliker. This song was included in his fourth album, “Less But Still Painful.”

My shadow and I started off
 The sun was just about like this
 Sometimes I lead
 And sometimes there's a shadow on the path
 Clouds gathered in the sky
 Drops of water began to fall
 My shadow gathered itself into me
 I went on alone on my way

The wind shook
 Fear started to drip and soak in
 My shadow inside me made things shiver
 More frightening than ever
 He asked where are you going?
 I answered where are you escaping?
 Why are walls always protecting?
 Why is there a shadow when there is light inside

Let’s fly far away
 You’ll be my wings
 Into an imaginary connection

Which was impossible until now
 Let's jump, take off, fly
 To the connection between shadow and body
 No more running away
 ...Towards what we always tried to forget?"

Yehuda anthropomorphizes his shadow and conducts a dialogue with it, describing Yehuda's relationship with his shadow—a bond that couldn't happen until he felt free from fear. Yehuda was able to finally look at himself and find his "shadow" (his True Self) that was hidden deep within him. Only then could he feel free and released from all fear and from his stutter.

The song: "Do Not Know": Music by Yehuda Poliker. Lyrics by Yehuda Poliker and Yaakov Gilad. It seems this song discusses Yehuda's relationship with a mother figure; it's as if there's a dialogue between them:

I don't know if you know
 How to love me as I am
 I don't know if I know
 How to love you as you are.
 I take back terrible things
 That I told you and you told me too
 Because every word is like a slap
 Like a stab
 Every word that was old.

Maybe I was wrong and I didn't see
 Maybe you loved me in your own way
 If I could only know
 Maybe I would relax and rest.

I take back terrible things
 That I told you and that you told me too
 Because every word is like a slap
 Like a stab
 Every word that was told.

Perhaps because his mother considered having an abortion, Yehuda felt throughout all the years there was something wrong with him. Furthermore, since he blamed her for not loving him, he felt uncomfortable and guilty. In this song, he complains that she doesn't give him what he needs. He starts out suspiciously, feeling he doesn't trust her. He thought she didn't have time to take care of him, didn't want to, or couldn't. She, on her part, wasn't a person who hugged, caressed, or

cuddled. The song expresses sadness about his relationship with his mother and how he wants to give up the terrible things he had said to her.

A few passages from various songs, especially *Ashes and Dust* (1986), mainly deal with traumas from the Holocaust, and the influence on second generation survivors. For example, here is a passage from the song, "Because":

...Because we're not allowed to forget and there's nowhere to run to....
 Because all your life you'll be searching for love
 Of some good mother
for Because all your life you'll look for some father to appease
 Because that search will never end
 Because that's how it was and how it will always be....

A passage from the song, "Ashes and Dust":

 Forever is only dust and ashes...
It's been years and nothing has been erased yet... Who will listen to your
 weeping
 Who will guard your footsteps on your path?

A passage from the song, "The Small Treblinka Station" also describes the Holocaust.

 This is the Treblinka Station....
The trip sometimes lasts your whole life until your death
 You will not get a round trip ticket
 And no-one is waiting for you at the station....

A third passage from the song, "When You Grow Up":

 You didn't even want to be there
 So what? Nobody asked you
 You've stayed a fallen nestling
 When you grow up and see some kid
Tell the nestling you don't have to grow up
 When you grow up and have a kid
Who will come and ask what will happen when he grows up
 Just tell him never mind. Don't ask.

Discussion

An artist's life demonstrates a link between their biography and their works of art. As noted in the introduction, abortion survivors are people who have experienced the threat of being aborted, either from a direct physical attempt, or from living in an unwelcome prenatal environment

in which abortion was contemplated consciously or unconsciously by one or both parents and/or significant others, even if it wasn't acted upon (Sonne, 2002).

A "good-enough mother" (or parent) is one who adapts herself to her baby's needs and can identify with them in their initial stage of absolute dependence (Winnicott, 1965, p. 39). Because of the mother's good enough adaptation to the infant's living need, the true self becomes a living reality, an ability of the infant to comply and not be exposed. The false self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them. The false self is relevant if the mother is unable to sense her infant's needs. Sometimes the false self hides the true self through compliance with environmental demands and can be seen to be a defense against that which is unthinkable, the exploitation of the true self (Winnicott, 1965).

If the parents fail in their task, their babies feel they are forced to take over parenting for their parents, which is too heavy of a burden for someone so young. Then there is no strength left for their own development (Blazy, 2019). Sometimes the artist's creative capacity is driven by compensating for the deficiency in their early life.

The current article describes how Yehuda was torn between the sense of rejection by his mother, who wanted to have an abortion on one hand (*if people don't love me, there must be something wrong with me*), and the father's determination to protect the pregnancy on the other hand. The Holocaust-survivor father was overcome with anxiety due to the trauma he had experienced during the war. Yehuda felt like a prisoner and said, "I grew up in a concentration camp without fences" (Poliker, 2019, p. 122). He lived the life his parents brought with them from their difficult past—especially his father's world—and before they had built their relationship.

His stutter seems to be a secondary one, which may be explained in a number of ways: it may have been a protest between the mother's reluctance to continue the pregnancy and the father, who didn't give up on him and even named him after his brother. It can be assumed that behind the stutter, there was a feeling of ambivalence between being connected to the true self, which was hidden, or living with a false self. In addition, there may be another explanation, such as the existence of an unconscious wish that his father would choke (after eating the bread too quickly) and that Yehuda would then be able to free himself from the heavy burden of protecting his terror-ridden father.

Because he experienced his father's needs within himself, Yehuda was unable to concentrate and cope with age-appropriate demands and thus dropped out of school. When he encountered the guitar, his life changed. He began to create and give expression to the experiences he and his family underwent through his music and songs.

As a result of the psychological treatment he underwent, Yehuda managed to approach his true self, which he expressed in the song, "The

Shadow and I.” He managed to break free from fear and be sad or happy only when something made him sad or happy. He no longer had to be happy, sad, or anxious to suit others. As Miller and Winnicott said, “I can destroy the object and it will survive” (Winnicott, 1960, p. 144; Miller, 1992, p. 145).

The contents of many songs Yehuda wrote are based on individual traumas and deal with the deep scars left by the Holocaust on his parents and family. Only creative activity allowed him to live a truly independent life. It seems creative activity, success, and sympathetic listeners who loved him and accepted his songs and their content, really strengthened him. I hope this article explains some of the effects of the desire to have an abortion in the early prenatal period can have, and the difficulties in living with parents who are Holocaust Survivors.

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