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# Jewish Children Hidden in France Between 1940 and 1944: An Analysis of Their Narratives Today

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The psychology literature concerning Jewish children hidden during World War II appeared in 1991 and was predominantly American and Israeli. Nevertheless, few studies consider the specific and complex situation of the "hidden children." The present study broaches this theme. The aim of this research is to show the consequences of the cumulate trauma in adults whose trauma occurred when they were children; it also aims to show how the subjects cope with the trauma. This research used a qualitative methodology. A series of semistructured interviews on personal and psychological history was conducted with 35 Jewish people (21 women, 14 men; mean age = 74.9 years; range = 65–82 years) living in France and who had been hidden between 1940 and 1944 during the Occupation in France (except for 2 hidden in Belgium and the Netherlands). The current research identified specific traumas, intra- and intergenerational family disorders, and affiliation disturbances, as well as protective factors and ways of coping with the trauma. This research shows the impact of collective history on individual history, the experience of Jewish children who were hidden in France and who stayed in France following the Liberation presents specific features.

The experience of child survivors of the Holocaust has been taken into account only since the 1980s (Gampel, 1988; Hogman, 1985; Kestenberg, 1985; Krell, 1985; Moskovitz, 1985), long after the trauma of adult survivors had been recognized and studied. Even though the literature is mainly American and Israeli, the first studies published were European (Freud, 1954/1986; Keilson, 1979/1998; Vegh, 1979). The psychology literature about the experience of Jewish children hidden during the Occupation is recent and mainly American and Israeli (Dwork, 1991; Fogelman, 1993; Tec, 1993). Most articles were written after 1991 when the first international meeting of "hidden children" occurred in New York. This took place 47 years after the Liberation. About 2000 former hidden children, most of them now grandparents, gathered on this occasion. European psychology literature on the subject of hidden children is sparse, and most is the work of Dutch authors (Evers-Emden, 2007; Groen-Prakken, 1995; Halberstadt-Freud, 1995; Reijser, 1995; Van Gelder, 1992). Unlike American and Israeli publications, the Dutch literature explores the theme of the hidden children in relation to their lives within the context of Dutch history before, during, and after the war. The Israeli and American literature focuses more on the identification of specific symptoms and clinical features that these children might have in common (Amir & Lev-Wiesel, 2001; Breiner, 1996; Lev-Wiesel, 2000; Lev-Wiesel & Amir, 2005; Schwartz, 2006; Valent, 1994, 1998; Yehuda, Schmeidler, Siever, Binder-Brynes, & Elkin, 1997). There has been no study of the experience of Jewish children hidden in France, which is surprising since it was in France that the largest numbers of Jewish children were saved. More than 80% of the Jewish children under 17 in 1940 survived the Shoah; on the scale of Europe less than 10% of the Jewish children survived (Klarsfeld, 1994/2001, p.9) .

For the present research, the viewpoint adopted was the psychology and psychopathology of the child. The focus was the specific experience of Jewish children hidden in France during the Occupation who had stayed in the country since the Liberation. The aim was to try to determine how they had constructed themselves (Feldman, 2009).

## The Main Hypothesis

Our main hypothesis was as follows: The Jewish children hidden in France experienced a series of traumatic events that altered the process of their development and there are traces of this 60 years later. Their experience differs from that of the children who survived the Shoah and experienced the concentration camps. For the definition of trauma, we referred to the definition by Terr (1991) who refers to Type II trauma. This author distinguishes the effects of a single traumatic event, which she terms Type I trauma, from the effects of a traumatic event that lasts over time and may be repeated (Type II). Our objective was to gather material about the different problems specific

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to the unique situation of hidden children, and to analyze the logic and solutions for responding to each of these problems. This provided us with life itineraries.

## Method

### Participant Selection

We sought to interview individuals born in France to migrant parents (one or both), that is, considered as foreign Jews as early as 1940 by the Vichy regime. A law passed on October 4, 1940, by the Vichy government authorized the internment of immigrant Jews. Our inclusion criteria were as follows: subjects born between 1929 and 1944 (the period determined by Krell, 1985) in France to foreign parents, hidden in France, and having remained in France after the Liberation. Subjects considered to be hidden children for the present study were thus subjects who had not experienced internment camps; they were concealed with or without their parents so as to escape arrest. They were either visible or invisible (Dwork, 1991), that is, hidden in a closed space and not visible, or, like the majority of cases in France, hidden under a false identity, and hence visible. We conducted 35 research interviews with hidden children: 10 of the children were contacted through the French association Enfants cachés: 1940–1944[1]; we contacted the rest through a more informal network (people we know addressed the latter to us, or we met them in the context of our work). Out of these 35 people, 29 exactly matched the criteria for the study population: Seventeen women and 12 men were born in France between 1929 and 1941, were hidden in this country, and were still living there at the time of the study. Of the remaining 6, 2 were not born in France but came to France after the war; one was born in Belgium, the other in the Netherlands. Since the Belgian and Dutch policies toward the Nazi regime between 1940 and 1944 were similar to the French policy, we decided to include these 2 individuals in our cohort. Three children were born before 1929 (in 1924, 1926 and 1928), and 1 was born in Poland in 1924 and only came to France in 1934. The narratives of these people, who were in their teens during the war, cast a different light on what these children experienced. At the time of the interviews, conducted in 2006 and 2007, the youngest respondent was 65 and the oldest 82. All were retired. The mean age of respondents was 74.9. All had children except for one who had remained single.

**Table 1.** *Participants' places of birth*

| | Subjects' place of birth | Fathers' place of birth | Mothers' place of birth |
|---|---|---|---|
| France | 32 | 1 | 2 |
| Holland | 1 | | |
| Belgium | 1 | | |
| Poland | 1 | 25 | 24 |
| Salonica | | 2 | 2 |
| Turkey | | 1 | 1 |
| Russia | | 1 | 2 |
| Bulgaria | | 1 | 1 |
| Romania | | 2 | 2 |
| Austria-Hungaria | | 2 | 1 |

[1]Created in 1992.

**Table 2.** *Participants' dates of birth*

| Subjects' dates of birth : | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1924 | 2 | 1934 | 2 |
| 1926 | 1 | 1935 | 3 |
| 1928 | 1 | 1936 | 4 |
| 1929 | 1 | 1937 | 2 |
| 1930 | 4 | 1938 | 2 |
| 1931 | 2 | 1939 | 3 |
| 1932 | 1 | 1940 | 1 |
| 1933 | 4 | 1941 | 2 |

### Data Collection Method

The decision was made to conduct a single interview. The mean duration of interviews was 3 hr. The shortest lasted 45 min, the longest 6 hr. A single investigator (M. Feldman) conducted the interviews. Using a semidirective interview design, we asked each person to recount the events they had been through. The questions concerned family history and aimed to go as far back as possible into the past. We especially tried to establish the way people lived in their families before, during, and after the Holocaust, but we also attempted to obtain whatever information people might have had about their own family history. We thought it was important to see the different worlds people had lived through and to try to trace back the family history (whether they lived in cities or in the countryside). We also inquired about the difficulties relating to changes in family, language, religion, and rites, and about having to hide or live under a borrowed identity. Our idea was to highlight their links to other people and objects, as well as to learn about the personal itinerary of each person within their family and their collective history. We asked them to name places, communities, the rituals carried out, and the objects they used. The interview layout used the following chronology. First came prewar life—links with the Jewish community and the Jewish religion, parents' profession, the immigration period, reasons why the parents came to France, languages spoken, and so on. Next came the war period—the changes in daily life as a result of the anti-Jewish laws and the persecutions, the living conditions during the persecution, the circumstances of the separation, the hiding place or places, separation from one or both parents and/or from siblings. The aim was also to explore living conditions in the war (mistreatment or kind treatment, being hidden in an enclosed space or in a "normal" living environment), the type of religious practice during the war, relationships with peers, relationships with adults, relationships with parents. On the subject of the immediate postwar period, the investigator questioned interviewees on the events of the Liberation, the conditions in which they were reunited (or not) with their parents, how the separation with their "foster family" occurred, details on any placement in a children's home after the war, continuation or breaking off with Jewish tradition (during and after the war), and so forth. We sought to identify the nature of links with persons in the wartime "foster family" or families, the nature of links with the parents, the choice of the spouse (Ashkenazim Jew, Sepharadic Jew, non-Jewish) and the issues generated by this alliance, the choice to have a family,

in the postwar period and after the Liberation. In our interviews with women, we looked for representations of motherhood; we also questioned about particular acts—circumcision or not of sons, bar-mitsvah, observance of Jewish religious feasts or not, type of education given to the children, the place of Judaism and religion generally in the family, as well as the nature of relationships with children and grandchildren today. Finally, we sought to identify the relationship that subjects entertained with their own histories. What solutions were implemented by them to ensure their own well-being, their place in relation to the community, and what was their position in relation to the recognition of their experience as hidden children? We concluded the interview by asking the interviewee his or her thoughts, feelings, and experiences of being a Jew in France today. The purpose of this question was to close the interview with a question opening up the field for thought, while at the same time enabling the subject to consider his or her relationship toward Judaism and toward his or her personal history.

We transcribed the interviews in full. The 35 subjects gave their consent to participate in this research and to tape-record their narratives. All data were rendered anonymous.[2]

The method of analysis used Devereux (1967/1980) complementarist approach to obtain the dual perspective—psychopathological and anthropological. The analysis of the results followed the interview schedule, and also included a content analysis to look for recurrent themes that had not been thought of prior to the study.

## Results

Across the 35 narratives we identified three recurrent themes. The first axis is made up of vulnerability factors: damage to filiation and affiliation links, loss, silence, fright, mockery, humiliation, and mistreatment. The second axis concerns the consequences of the accumulation of trauma: affiliation, identity, and family disorders. The third axis groups competence factors: protection factors and coping. Protection factors depend on the child's personality and on the circumstances of his or her life before, during, and after the persecutions. The notion of coping covers life choices. The constraints linked to new affiliations that were numerous, and sometimes contradictory.

### Vulnerability Factors

**Damage to filiation and affiliation links.** This population was vulnerable even before the persecutions started in France because of their Jewish migrant status. The respondents, with the exception of one, were all sons or daughters of migrants. For their parents, coming to France was a way of fleeing the pogroms, anti-Semitic persecutions that occurred in Eastern Europe and Poland in particular. But fleeing also meant leaving their family and familiar surroundings. Given the context, this departure was, for some, colored with anxiety because any return to the home country was uncertain. Emigrating meant leaving behind family members that were under threat and worrying about them. But coming to France meant settling in the "country of human rights," in reference to the fact that France was the first country to declare the emancipation of the Jews (in 1791).

For these children, home became a dual place. There was the inside world, that of the parents, and the outside world, which was represented by school. The inside world was that of the Yiddish language, sometimes mixed with other languages—French, Polish, Russian, and Jewish-Spanish. Sometimes this inside world was also a world of strong political stances—of fathers belonging to the Bund,[3] fathers who had broken with religion, those who supported Zionism (nevertheless fairly rare among those who came to France) or who continued to celebrate certain rites and feasts in a traditional way. The inside world was also that of culinary habits.

***The start of the persecutions.*** Because threats to Jews were gradually building (the interviewees talked about anti-Semite insults), some respondents (the older ones) described a living space that was reducing day by day. These early threats were, in most of the families, denied or minimized. All felt protected by the French political establishment. For many families, no likelihood of persecution was envisaged, or even imaginable. Maurice, born in 1934, remembered that he was called a "filthy Yid." Yvette, born in 1928, remembered perfectly the discriminatory measures against the Jews. She could only use the last carriage on the underground. Her best friend, who was Catholic, suddenly started to refuse to be with her. And in 1942, Yvette had to wear the yellow star (made compulsory by legislation on June 6, 1942). It was her first major humiliation. Paulette (born in 1936) experienced this when she was in the last year of infant school or 1st year of primary school. Prizes were given at the end of the school year; she should have received the Prix d'Excellence because she was top of her class. The other prizes were called out, but not hers. "Did they forget me? Did I do something wrong? I did not understand, but something broke inside me." Once the ceremony was over "my mother and I walked home in silence." Once home, her mother gave her a present, telling her that she should have received the Prix d'Excellence. Paulette told of how she did not understand her mother's gesture. "It was completely incoherent to me." The book, given at that particular time, outside the ceremony, no longer rewarded any excellence. Paulette encountered a new form of incoherence later when she had to wear the yellow star and refused; her mother told her "Yes, you must, it will look very pretty."

Then came the disappearance of the fathers—some left to enlist in the army, but the majority were arrested. Thus, the first damage to the filiation link took the form of the arrest of the foreign Jewish fathers when summoned to the police commissariat on receiving the green paper.[4] The arrest of the fathers in 1941 rendered filial inscription vulnerable. Maurice had very precise memories of this; the disappearance upset the

[2]The French verbatim has been freely translated to provide information on content and style.

[3]In Yiddish, the Jewish General Union of Workers, a socialist organization founded in Vilna in 1897.

[4]Summons issued May 14, 1941 to foreign Jews notifying that they were to go to the local police *commissariat* for their situation "to be examined." This summons was followed by internment.

family balance. There was similar destabilization in the families of Solange or Adèle, even if they were too young to remember it since they were born in 1941. The mothers remained on their own, and they had to take charge of their families alone.

Further damage to the filiation link occurred in 1942, the year when the "final solution" was decided upon, with the arrest of families, mothers, and children. This process reached a peak with the infamous Vel d'Hiv roundup on July 16–17, 1942. Odile remembered her grandparents' arrest. Fright took possession of her and changed her completely. Madeleine told how, when the Gestapo arrived, the neighbors with whom she was living hid her in a rabbit hutch. On September 26, 1942, during the roundup of Romanian Jews, Gilberte was coming downstairs with her little brother in her arms when they met the Gestapo coming to arrest her mother and grandmother, who were still up in the flat. In these moments, the filiation and affiliation and their interactions were again damaged; separation was the only possible choice for survival. From then on, to be protected, the children could no longer be Jewish (damage to affiliation links) and thus could no longer be their parents' children (damage to filiation links). The changes in family name, first name, and religion were part of this metamorphosis.

**Loss.** Loss derived mainly from separations, discontinuities, privations, and disappearances. The separations were often abrupt, both from the parents and from the familiar environment, from landmarks, and from the cultural belonging group. Nicole, born in 1941, stayed with her family throughout the war, but her experience was characterized by, among other things, constant displacement and change in geographical setting. The same was true for Madeleine who did not leave her parents. Separation, for the 33 other interviewees, was separation from the parents and from their familiar environment (family, language, religion, ways of doing things). Age is a determining factor in the experience of each (Durst, 2003). Bela was 12 when she was separated from her mother. Solange was only 1. Separations were difficult, but so were the reunions. Dominique was 5 years old when his mother came to fetch him in 1944; Dominique did not recognize her. Nor did René, born in 1936, recognize his mother when she came for him at the Liberation. "It was a dormitory and I was asleep. A little boy was awake and he said to me, 'your Mum came in the night and she kissed you'. Well, I was asleep, wasn't I? And then in the morning when my mother and the headmistress came, like that—I knew she was going to come—when my mother came with the headmistress she stooped to my level and kissed me. 'René, I'm your Mum, you know' and I looked at her and I said 'yes ma'am'. And that 'yes ma'am' lasted a whole month. Because I don't fall for things, I need them to be proved."

**Humiliation, mistreatment.** During the persecutions, children were exposed to discontinuity, deprivation, humiliation, and sometimes mistreatment. During the time when they were hidden, in addition to being removed from their familiar backgrounds, these children had to remain silent and pretend that whatever life they had before never existed, no matter how old they were. Among the interviewees, only 5 of the 35 talked of kindly host families. Roseline (born in 1935) was separated from her mother and placed with two women who mistreated her; she was poorly fed, punished, beaten "with bunches of sticks." Adèle, born in 1940, learned from her sister that she had been mistreated. Régine, born in 1936, remembered nothing initially, but the memory of sexual abuse returned in the course of a psychiatric hospitalization at the age of 20. Odile, born in 1938, was the object of mockery from the boys in the "foster family." Hélène, born in 1935, left Paris and from July 1942 until the end of the war lived in a farm. "We were not unhappy; we were brought up like farming children .... Even so I don't have bad memories. For example, when we did something naughty, by the stove there was a big slate with the names of all the children, and according to the naughty things we did there were marks, and that meant strokes of the cane we would have on Sunday morning before church; but that's how they brought children up. Anyway, the farmer's wife was not at all mean and nasty, she had to settle the account before church, if you like, she didn't enjoy having to do it." Paulette, born in 1936, when she arrived in the Sarthe (rural northwest France) told us in the interview "I had disappeared, I was missing." She stayed on a farm for some time, and then, without knowing how it occurred, found herself on a different farm. There were a couple and two children on this farm, and the man was the woman's second husband and the children's stepfather. He was an alcoholic "He was drunk, violent, and he yelled. He beat the two girls." Paulette told how she helped to clear the table and never sat down to eat. She remembered eating crumbs but did not remember feeling hungry. "I used to pick up bits." She remembered having had scabies and lice. She slept in the barn in the hay.

**Disappearances.** The *disappearances* came to light after the war. There had been no talking about these disappearances, and there was no trace of the people concerned. The word was disappearance until 1978, when Klarsfeld published his book. But when the *Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France* was published, these hidden children were already adults. Thus, as children, they had to find their self-construction on these disappearances. After the persecutions, at the Liberation, on top of having been hidden and thus being miraculously alive, they became orphans, or else the children of survivors of the Holocaust. They were then exposed to trauma once more, this time to nonresolved mourning of the adults they were living with and to the nonrecognition of this experience by French society at large. Nicole felt humiliated because she was 4 years old at the Liberation and she did not understand her parents' difficulties in retrieving their flat; when they were back in it, they found it empty, but when they had left a few years before they had taken only a few things, leaving the furniture. "My mother said to me—and it really scared me dreadfully—she said they had seen the sideboard in the caretaker's place, the wardrobe in a neighbor's house, and some other things with the caretaker for the next block. And I was thinking, why doesn't she ask for it, why doesn't she say something—that's ours! But they said nothing, they were glad, that's all. They were back home and they were glad." Nicole and Solange, both born in 1941, did not want to know. Dominique, born in 1939, said "For my parents I was like a suitcase in left luggage." Paulette, born in 1936, said, "The war is over, but mine isn't. My war isn't over." Yvette, born in 1928, said, "The Liberation was the start of Hell."

**Fright.** Periods of fright were detectable in most of the narratives. They frequently corresponded to particular dates or even precise moments. For Odile it was July 16, 1942, early in the morning, with the arrest of her maternal grandparents. For Dominique it was the day he was separated from his parents. For Régine it was a German soldier stopping her to ask for her parents' address. For Adèle it was the attempt to arrest her, her sister, and her mother on July 16, 1942. For Roseline it was the fact that her mother left her alone 1 day in 1942 while the family was under threat and also all the other fears she experienced when she was taken in by a rural family in Sarthe. For Simone, it was on the day she was reunited with her family in 1947 when her father tore up the family photo. Fears were thus numerous and multiform. And there were also the fears linked to being fostered by families that mistreated them: Odile, Adèle, Régine and Roseline recounted those experiences.

**Silences.** Silences were pregnant with meaning at different periods—during the persecutions, after the Liberation, and still today. During the persecutions, the issue was to remain silent and keep secrets. The danger was great, and the trauma of shifting to another identity and separation from the family was compounded by the need to keep silent. In some cases, silence was associated with the shame of physical or sexual abuse, as described by Odile and Roseline. These children had integrated the fact that to talk meant the threat of denunciation and therefore death. The children also had to deal with the silence concerning what had become of the other members of their families. They were there on their own with no news of siblings or parents. They were also without information on the exterminations carried out by the Nazis during the period. There was also silence concerning the other children in the same family, Christian institution, or village. They did not know the other children's identities since silence was essential for their survival. Many of the respondents had discovered years later that several Jewish children were hidden in the same village as they were and at the same time. After the war, there was the silence of the families. The youngest did not want to hear the stories that the adults had to tell. The adults, who had lost children or members of their families in the camps, were reluctant to listen to their surviving children's accounts of their experiences; this silence was true for all the families of our interviewees.

We can also note the silence of the Catholic Church and the sometimes ambiguous part it played toward Jewish children. In hiding children, certain Christians had intentions of proselytizing and conversion to Catholicism. It was in 1945 that the people in charge of Roseline decided they wanted her and her sister to convert. It is also the way in which we can interpret the attitude of the family that adopted Régine, an orphan; the purpose was to turn a Jewish girl into a Catholic.

## Consequences of Trauma

Through these narratives, we can detect identity and affiliation disruption on a considerable scale. Thus, hidden children present specific symptoms related to psychological breakdown, to the fact of being survivors, to the damage to affiliation links, and to losses and impossible mourning. These symptoms are reinforced by silence. Certain disturbances are probably linked to a psychic breach. Bernadette, born in 1937, and Roseline, born in 1936, remembered nothing before 1947. Gisèle, born in 1938, said she was often confused about time and space. We also observed hypervigilance, sleep disorders, repression of emotions, splitting, and hyperactivity. Those symptoms are aggravated by loss, impossible mourning, and mutism reflecting their mental distress. Another impression that emerged was that of never feeling in their right place. In addition to isolation, there was the feeling of never being understood, of always lacking something. These pathological signs can be linked to damaged filiation and affiliation. Loss, impossible mourning, and mutism reflecting their mental distress have aggravated filiation and affiliation.

**Intra- and intergenerational family disorders.** Reunions with parents after the war were difficult, sometimes impossible. Children and parents had hoped they would see each other again; idealization on both sides led to disappointment. Thirteen were reunited with both parents, 8 were orphaned, and for the 14 remaining, one parent had survived. Some parents were concentration camp survivors; others had lived underground and had been humiliated. The reunion proved impossible in some cases, sometimes going as far as physical and/or psychological violence. The children's trauma, and, even more so, the silence that isolated them, were denied. In some cases this resulted in mistreatment because the parents could not bear their children's urge to live. After the war, these hidden children became the children of survivors. They then cumulated their own trauma with that of their parents. Simone's father survived Auschwitz; it became known that he had been subjected to medical experiments there. After experiencing the absurd and the inhuman conditions of internment with selections, death, mistreatment, violence and torture, Simone's father returned "metamorphosed." The war was still going on for him, and the first targets were his daughters. Roseline's father also returned from the camps. Unlike Simone's father, the violence was not direct but was enacted in a new family configuration; he remarried to a woman who had lost her husband in deportation, and he did not appear to be mentally available for his children. This new family environment led to serious neglect of his daughter's needs because he gave his new wife a maternal role that she did not take on. Maurice's mother also returned from the camps in 1945. He was very affected by the physical changes in his mother. He described feeling ashamed of his mother, her behavior, and her ways with people. The parents of Dominique, Adèle, and Odile had not been deported, but the psychological violence was present in the way in which the parents coped in the postwar period and the task of forgetting what had happened. This forgetting, indeed this denial, meant that the parents were unable to respond to the needs of their children.

We identified a breakdown of the family subsystem concerning siblings. Brothers and sisters had often been hidden separately, because it was safer. Some, however, stayed with the same family. They experienced events differently, depending on their age and on circumstances. The symptoms of some amplified those of others. Conflicts between siblings still existed; each had his or her own version of the story, which depended on the defense mechanisms of each. Josiane put her story to paper following a family quarrel; her twin sister had reinvented

the narrative, saying that she was not Jewish. Adèle had not told her sister that she had applied for an allowance as a hidden child. Odette said she was in conflict with her brother and did not want to talk about him. Odette's elder brother, in contrast, appeared not to have taken much notice of her, and it was she who, although younger, played a protective role toward him. In two other instances, the siblings were with the same family, but the role of the elder child was different. At the same time, the consequences of these intersibling relationships are similar: The two elder children had refused to talk about their past.

Communication problems of hidden children with their own children are important. Among the 35 respondents, 34 said their own children did not understand them. Josiane's two daughters had no contact with their mother. Maurice's three children were refusing to see him. One of Adèle's daughters became an Orthodox Jew, and her other daughter claimed to be nonreligious and wanted nothing to do with her mother's experiences. Solange's children kept their distance and found their mother sad.

**Protective factors.** One of the first protection factors is the security of the early relationship. For example Irène and Danièle, born in 1935 and 1932, said they lived in a closely knit family before the war. A second protective factor is the encounter with a caregiver, a kindly attachment figure who took care of the child and ensured emotional continuity after the parents. The caregiver, acting as a mother, serves as a type of protective filter; the person who took in Gérard in the Sarthe was like a mother to him. A third protective factor is protection via the siblings. Roseline owed her protection to the presence of her sisters in the face of the humiliation inflicted by the "foster family," and later in the face of her mother-in-law. Adèle owed her protection to her older sister whom she called mother, although she was only 6 years her senior. The continuity of care and the continuity of the language are important protection factors for children, especially for toddlers. Nature, the countryside, plants, and animals also acted as resilience tutors for some children. Finally, a last protective factor is a reassuring environment, which can be the community. The children's homes, in some cases, allowed the children to develop a narcissistic basis that helped them construct and see themselves as beings with a future. Children's homes also enabled the creation of a sound network of friendships, similar to sibling relationships within a family. This was true for Maurice, born in 1934; Gilberte, born in 1932; and Louis, born in 1930. Through their children's home, they reconstructed genuine friendly bonds that still hold today.

**Multiple affiliations.** A creative force derives from a dynamic process of affiliations—plans to emigrate to Israel, the search for solutions via psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, or via membership of groups. The ever-present need to belong to a group is shared by all the people we interviewed. Five associated with Freemasonry. Two joined the Evangelist Church; however, one of these two finally left the group after embezzlement by the leader. Three others found their attachment fulfilment through Buddhism. One found the relief she was looking for by joining a prayer group at the dojo. One person became Protestant. Six remained attached to Catholicism, although they still thought of themselves as Jewish.

**Emigration to Israel and Judaism.** Régine and four others had tried a kibbutz, possibly to find there what she had experienced in the rural environment of the Sarthe. They stayed in Israel for periods ranging from a few months to 2 years. One of the respondents had made return journeys for several years, undecided where to set up and start a family. All the interviewees said they returned disappointed, not having found anchorage in this new country. It can be noted that among their children, eight accomplished their Alyah,[5] thus "achieving what [their] parents had not achieved."

Among the 35 people, 12 had asserted their Jewish identity through different actions. For some it was a choice they made, but others were forced to do so, for instance by a Sephardim spouse from North Africa. The integration of these Jewish rites is a real life force. Certain respondents, while married to a Sephardim Jew, accepted these rites regardless of the tensions they might generate within the marriage. Although we did not ask every person interviewed, some of them expressed the wish to be buried in the Jewish part of a cemetery. Many were not regularly practicing Jews; however, they were Jewish and felt they belonged to the group.

**Psychoanalysis and psychiatry.** Twenty-two of the people we met had undergone therapy. Although some of them had tried it and given up fairly quickly, others remained engaged in the process for several years. With regard to psychiatry, all of them had taken medication, tranquilizers or antidepressants, either over a long period or occasionally. But psychoanalysis and psychiatry are both affiliations because they are theories governed by laws, rules and precise mechanisms. Some people adapt to psychiatry but cannot undergo psychotherapy successfully.

**Creation: Testifying, writing, support groups.** The act of creating, through testimony and, in a more elaborate way, through writing, is a way of metabolizing the elements of the trauma. A large number of the interviewees had agreed to testify and to take part in support groups set up by the Enfants cachés: 1940–1944 association. Régine had participated regularly in commemorations. Fifteen interviewees had been members of support groups, and four had written their family histories.

## Discussion

### Exposed Children (Moro, 1989)

The hidden children were exposed to a process in which they lost their cultural identity (Feldman & Moro, 2008). There are two shifts in this phenomenon. The first shift took the children from their familiar first universe into a strange, often terrifying (Feldman, 2006); the second one occurred when they went into hiding. The second shift (when the persecutions were over and the children no longer needed to hide) took them away from the second universe to which they had grown accustomed, back into their first universe, now strange to them. When their

[5] In Hebrew, Alyah means "going up," that is, emigrating to Israel. A Jew who emigrates to Israel "goes up" to the country, just like his ancestors used to go up to the temple of Jerusalem in pilgrimage.

parents came to collect them, these hidden children did not recognize their parents, some spoke French dialects, they had a different first name, sometimes a different last name, and in some cases a new religion. The loss of the cultural identity is in fact a failed, unfinished acculturation experience (acculturation being an encounter between two worlds). It causes major narcissistic damage. The process through which these children progressed between 1942 and 1945 has to do with defiliation in order to reaffiliate, but the reaffiliation is not complete and thus the person remains ''open.'' At the time of the Liberation, they were once again rendered vulnerable because they then experienced the trauma and the impossible mourning processes of the adults in their surrounding world. The common denominator of all these situations shows up in the reunion with the parents, always difficult, sometimes even impossible. The separation was long and seemed even longer for children who do not have the same perception of time. The youngest had sometimes forgotten their parents, while the older ones had hoped fervently for their return. From their perspective, the parents had experienced the frustration of not being with their children as they grew up; the children, too, had changed. The violence, or the extreme tensions of the aftermath of the war, were linked to the foregoing experience of permanent threat of death, the conditions of their survival, separation, and hopes on either side that were not met by reality. In these postwar reunions, the children discovered that they were not the only ones who had suffered. The children discovered what had happened to their close family and what they had experienced, they were shocked to learn of the existence of the death camps, and they were upset by the brutality of the details of the deaths of family members. The stories were so dramatic that it seemed that their own experience as hidden children paled into insignificance. Thus, their own stories were silenced. And from this silence arose guilt.

These Jewish children were hidden to escape the threat of death. They were exposed to and confronted with the unknown, privations, sometimes mistreatment, humiliation, and silences. Because of their status as Jewish migrants and hidden children, they were exposed threefold: They were vulnerable even before persecutions started in France, vulnerable on account of the privations, and vulnerable because their suffering was not taken into account.

Several studies have shown that migrants' children are vulnerable and belong to a high-risk group. Moro (2003) calls these children born in France *métisse* (meaning cross-bred or half-blood), as their cultural and psychological structure is grounded in splitting and conflict, in a context that is both unstable and multiform. Their *métissage* is the product of a dual transmission, from parents and from society, a sometimes violent transmission, with discontinuities and conflicts (Moro, 2007). At the same time, the onset of the persecutions was accompanied by a belief on the part of the Jewish families who had fled the pogroms in Eastern Europe that France was bound to be protective.

Hidden children were also exposed to considerable disturbances in the family and repercussions in the following generation. All the subjects interviewed expressed relational difficulties with their own children. Numerous psychology articles have been published on this subject, highlighting communication problems between the two generations. Gampel (2003) invented the concept of radioactive transmission, Faimberg (2003) wrote about a generational pile-up (by analogy with a motorway collision) and the borrowing of unconscious alienating identifications.

## A Singular Situation and the Miracle of Having Survived

In French, the term *famille d'accueil* (literally a family that ''welcomes'' or takes a child in, the equivalent of ''foster family'') has been used by the authors of this article in quotation marks to reflect a situation that is similar to that occurring in the context of child protection measures. The terms *famille d'accueil* and *foster family* both refer, despite the slight difference in meaning between welcome and foster, to the family to which a child is entrusted when the parents are unable to care for him or her. However the non-Jewish ''foster families'' of the hidden children were the family, or families, to whom a child under the threat of death was entrusted because he or she was Jewish. Another specific feature of the hidden children is that they were not survivors of the Shoah who had gone through the ordeal of the concentration camps. These were the hidden children, and once in hiding were no longer denounced as being Jewish. Their survival was considered miraculous. How is the miraculous viewed in psychology? The ordeal that the hidden children lived through forces us to see the miraculous element as an organizer of their psyche. During the interviews, this topic kept coming back like a leitmotiv: ''I was lucky'' to be alive, ''Why me? How could this miracle happen to me?'' It is a question that they had all tried to answer in their own ways. The admirable, extraordinary fact was actually being alive, when so many others were dead. This miracle is identifiable in two ways in the narratives. It can often be spotted through a precise element: a date, a time, and a particular circumstance; it can also be identified by the circumstances occurring simultaneously with fright or great fear. But the miracle can also be more diffuse, having been hidden and having concealed the children's identity.

## Competence of These Children and Adults

Our results show the competence that the children possessed in finding resources liable to protect them—the presence of a brother or sister, the kindliness of a caregiver, or the presence of an animal. Solutions and coping skills are evidenced by the fact that these children grew up and are alive today. Their traumatic childhood led them to develop coping skills, but it also forced them to make life choices that would enable life impulses, meaning impulses for self-preservation (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967/1998, p. 378), to take over from death impulses, meaning impulses for aggression and destruction. Some of the children became members of groups. In choosing affiliations with Freemasonry, the Evangelist Church, Buddhism or prayer groups, these former hidden children are attempting to reconstruct themselves. These choices are an attempt to rebuild or self-beget one's own person. Because hidden children had lost their cultural identity and therefore experienced a group initiation that was not completed, they joined these different groups to attempt

to complete the process of these initiation rites. For example, joining the Evangelist Church could be understood as an attempt to appropriate the *métissage* and to render multiple elements compatible; however, the attempt sometimes fails.

The Israel experience is also an attempt to reaffiliate. Living in a kibbutz was an attempt to return to the rural environment they had known during the war. But this experience did not succeed because of the gap between Israeli ideology and the expectations of these hidden children as Holocaust survivors. In the 1950s, the young Israeli state was expected to build a new, positive identity, strengthened by the kibbutz community that did not single out the newcomers from Europe as survivors but as children to be integrated within the Zionist ideology (Cohen, 2005). Indeed, Jews arriving in Israel were regarded as members of the scattered chosen people (the Jewish diaspora) returning to their homeland after 2,000 years of exile. The new immigrants thus benefited from the return law, which had been continuously applied for several thousand years and only interrupted by misadventures in history (Waintrater, 2001). In the *Alyah,* the new immigrant can substitute his or her real filiation for an ideal one, in a sort of metamorphosis. One of the rites of this metamorphosis was precisely to be given a new, Israeli first name. The previous first name then ceased to exist. For hidden children, this transformed identity was similar to the transformation they had already been through a few years earlier when they had to change their first and/or last name(s). In the Israel experience, this meant another erasing of name, a new deprivation and a new affiliation.

Being Jewish (or belonging to any other religion) automatically implies a group: "You can't be Jewish on your own." As with any other cultural definition of mankind, being Jewish implies the reference to a group. The first, cultural, ancestral dimension of every individual is by essence collective. This collective part is also the most intimate. Thus, when addressing an individual, one actually addresses the entire group to which he or she belongs. The will to be buried in a Jewish cemetery is meaningful with regard to who these people are and how they are evolving. In Hebrew, the word for cemetery is *Beyt 'hayim*, which means the house of lives. The reading of the Kaddish, which has to be performed by the group, marks the passage through the house of lives, and the prayer is said by a *Minyan*.[6] While four of the persons interviewed were against this ancestral ritual (they want to be cremated), others tried to find a compromise. For example, some women wish to be buried next to their Christian husbands, their own coffin bearing a star of David and that of their husband's a cross. Most of the interviewees had the experience of participation in a support group set up by the association Enfants cachés: 1940–1944. When we asked them whether these groups had helped them, they mentioned relief based on the feeling of belonging to a group. One of the women in charge of leading these groups told us about a specific request from the participants. From the very first session, they wanted to wear a badge with the words hidden child. Many of these people had been very lonely for over 50 years, and now they were no longer alone. It seems that belonging to a peer group is a fundamental active element within these different support group structures. Some of them accomplished fundamental actions during or after this group therapy work, which they might never have done without the association or at least without the feeling of finally belonging to a group. Some wrote down their story, took part in commemorations, or gave talks in schools; another had a commemorative plate affixed in the village where his and other Jewish families were arrested.

Belonging is part of identity. Children belong to their mothers, their fathers, their siblings, and to their broader family. Their name belongs to them, and they belong to their name. As they grow up, children develop a sense of belonging, not only to their family, but also to their community, their nation, and their cultural group. This is revealed through the practice of a language, customs, a religion and traditions. Interestingly, a number of surviving children said they felt that they did not belong anywhere, to any country, social group or age group. They did not feel they had been understood by their parents, nor by society. They never had a sense of belonging to the group of survivors or of survivors' children. Yet hidden children are indeed surviving children. To be finally recognized as such, however, they had to wait until the New York meeting of 1991. Between 1945 and 1991, there was a latent period during which they were waiting for recognition. Coping strategies appear to target their exposure, and also the process of deculturation that they experienced. The step to join the community (in the form of groups and associations) is the sign of an attempt to reunite two split parts: the dual inside and outside.

The limitations of this research reside mainly in the methodological choices. We chose to conduct a qualitative analysis that involved 35 subjects. To generalize results, the number of subjects interviewed would need to be larger and the exploration completed by the use of evaluation scales. In addition, this research is not positioned in a standardized diagnostic approach based on structured diagnostic interviews and symptom evaluation scales. Finally, the interview schedule was designed for a single encounter with the subject, while two or three interviews would have been more appropriate in some cases. Had this been possible, certain data could have been explored in more depth.

## Conclusion

The exploration of the singular experience of Jewish children hidden during World War II in France shows the impact of collective history on the construction of the individual. Many of the hidden children are still in the grips of the trauma endured, and some seem to have handed it on to the next generation. France was indeed a safe country, but at the same time, it held a threat. Because of the shifts between protection and threat, the hidden Jewish children constructed themselves in an ambivalent mode that had an effect on their modes of attachment. Although most of them wondered about leaving the country—mostly to Israel—few actually left after the Liberation because of the risk to their feeling of security. In addition, France was not a comfortable refuge for their surviving parents, nor did it assist in the mourning for lost parents. This attitude on the part of France did not enable these children to construct stable bonds to ensure inner security and enable (re)construction in the best possible way. This absence of inner security leads to a

[6]Means « numbers » in Hebrew. A quorum of 10 adult men (i.e., over 13 years) without whom no public prayers can be said nor the *Sefer Tora* read aloud.

lack of mental propping (anaclisis) once the child becomes an adult, compounded by the lack of any security-generating environment. The specific psychopathology of this population lies mainly in narcissistic failure and in a lack of self-esteem, which is partly the result of this relational mode. The paradox of having been lucky enough to survive and not to have experienced the concentration camps explains this ambivalent relationship among these children turned adults and parents, who constructed themselves according to this mode of attachment.

In this study, the clinical aspect focuses on the social, political and historical side of things. Yet the problem is still present today; in France, there is still silence and, in a way, everyone sustains it. The *double silencié* (twice silenced; Cherki, 2006) has left marks on an individual level, but above all on a collective level. Even though an organized group now exists, and a number of provisions have been set up, one cannot help noticing that the silence endures.

With regard to perspectives for clinical research, this subject opens up to other hidden children experiencing similar situations today. In 1994, the Tutsi children had to hide to escape extermination in Rwanda. In present-day conflicts, humanitarian measures also need to take account the needs of the children under the threat of death. Thus, being exposed and being living miracles, hidden children carry deep wounds. To inscribe the miracle of their survival in their personal history is vital and to transmit this experience is essential, because otherwise, time comes to a standstill and the child remains suspended.

**Keywords**: children; Jewish culture; hidden children; immigrants; France; Holocaust; trauma; identity; development; parents; reunion; silence; belonging; protective factors; narrative

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