

Article

Transmission of Collective Memory and Jewish Identity in Post-War Jewish Generations through War Souvenirs

Jakub Bronec

C²DH—Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History, University of Luxembourg,
Maison des Sciences Humaines 11, Porte des Sciences, L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg;
jakub.bronec@uni.lu

Received: 14 May 2019; Accepted: 30 June 2019; Published: 2 July 2019



Abstract: The article includes a sample of testimonies and the results of sociological research on the life stories of Jews born in the aftermath of World War II in two countries, Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg. At that time, Czechoslovak Jews were living through the era of de-Stalinization and their narratives offer new insights into this segment of Jewish post-war history that differ from those of Jews living in liberal, democratic European states. The interviews explore how personal documents, photos, letters and souvenirs can help maintain personal memories in Jewish families and show how this varies from one generation to the next. My paper illustrates the importance of these small artifacts for the transmission of Jewish collective memory in post-war Jewish generations. The case study aims to answer the following research questions: What is the relationship between the Jewish post-war generation and its heirlooms? Who is in charge of maintaining Jewish family heirlooms within the family? Are there any intergenerational differences when it comes to keeping and maintaining family history? The study also aims to find out whether the political regime influences how Jewish objects are kept by Jewish families.

Keywords: Jewish family heirlooms; Jewish material culture; ritual items

1. Introduction

In recent years, the systematic decentering of discourse has given rise to discussions on how the interactions between humans and non-human items (places, objects) influence and shape our thinking, our feeling and our approach to the framing and writing up of research [1].

This article considers the relationship between particular objects and their owners, and explores how these objects can represent invaluable tools for keeping family memories alive. The case study is based on interviews recorded with the owners of family objects in which they share the importance of the experiences embodied in the selected artifacts. The relationship between the people and the items is considered as an interactive space in which objects (various relics, souvenirs and day-to-day items) maintain a physical and mental continuity of commemoration. Taking this statement as a starting point, the case study aims to answer the following research questions: What is the relationship between the Jewish post-war generation and their family heirlooms? Who is in charge of maintaining Jewish family heirlooms within the family? Are there any intergenerational and international differences when it comes to keeping and maintaining family history? When it comes to these questions, there has been little scholarly effort to explore the country-specific characteristics of Jewish heirlooms across the post-war generations. No scholarly account has thus far satisfactorily investigated the ways in which contemporary Jews in the diaspora actually feel about their ancestors and the world that surrounds them. In view of the lack of research, my study seeks to partly cover this rarely explored topic in order to provide a concise comparative analysis.

In Czechoslovakia, a large number of parents failed to keep religious practices alive. There was a tendency to break all ties with Jewish religious traditions, Yiddish (as a spoken language) and Jewish education. Secular Jewish culture was first Sovietized and then entirely excluded from the public sphere. The little that remained became subject to severe political censorship [2]. Some Czechoslovak Jews and families with Jewish roots lost their shared view of Jewishness, which had been considered fundamental to the family just a few generations earlier [3]. However, thanks to well-guarded family artifacts, they were at least able to retain childhood memories of their parents and grandparents.

Jews in Luxembourg were confronted with strict citizenship requirements if they wished to return after World War II. Returnees were largely Ashkenazi and, as before the war, the community pushed for integration and assimilation. However, they were soon faced with a new wave of Sephardic immigrants, who came to Luxembourg because of the civil war in French colonies (Morocco, Algeria) in the 1960s [4]. They brought new religious traditions and different perceptions of Holocaust history to Luxembourg. Their family heirlooms were generally not tinged with memories of the Holocaust, unlike those of many Ashkenazi descendants. The Sephardi Jews living in Luxembourg were spared the mass deportation and mass murder that afflicted other Jewish communities, which is why their family history is different.

In my case study, family heirlooms are objects associated with Jewish cultural heritage that have been passed down through a family over several generations. They do not have to be objects that are strictly connected with the Shoah or religious matters. They also include day-to-day objects that remind them of the origins and fate of their ancestors. The significance of physical artifacts can be interpreted against the backdrop of the socioeconomic, political, ethnic, religious and philosophical values of a particular group of people. Jewish religious objects embody institutional complexes and practices, while also carrying a powerful emotional charge and value structure emanating from the idea of shared cultural intergenerational meanings [5].

Over recent decades, recollections of historical trauma have become increasingly important for the formation of collective memories, and questions of political power, voice and representation also have a significant impact [6]. These material-based memories can represent a powerful way of enacting and sharing the meanings of lost worlds between survivors and their descendants. The overarching argument followed in my paper is that memories are more likely to be stored in tales, photos, letters and objects than in texts [7].

2. Methodology

The datasets used in this article contain qualitative and quantitative data from autobiographical interviews and anonymous questionnaires composed of 32 questions about a variety of topics, 6 of which are dedicated to family heirlooms and ritual objects. Respondents are divided into categories according to their generation and where they live. The sample comprises people born between 1945 and 1980 who live or previously lived in the former Czechoslovakia or Luxembourg. All respondents are involved in either Jewish municipalities or consistories associated with Liberal, Reform or Orthodox Judaism. Most of the questions were multiple choice, but respondents were given the option to supplement their answers with lengthier comments. There were also questions with a scale from 1 to 5 where participants were asked to indicate their preferences. The datasets gathered from additional comments are more extensive than the information collected through the limited number of questions.

Given the considerable geographical distances among the analytical samples of respondents, I had to rely on a sociological method called snowballing and the pyramid method of sampling [8]. I used Jewish youth organizations and their current and former members as a starting point for the sampling. I sent them copies of the questionnaire with a cover letter explaining my study. In general, the sampling

of Luxembourgish and Czechoslovak Jews¹ was dependent on Jewish communal opinion-makers. The sample includes respondents from all kinds of Jewish currents and movements, as well as those who emigrated and those who remained in Luxembourg or in the former Czechoslovakia. I also included those who are now living elsewhere but maintain ties to these countries by visiting friends and relatives.

The quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the autobiographical questionnaire provided me with a complex view of the opinions of post-war Jewish generations. Respondents were asked to identify themselves in terms of the following criteria: Vital statistics (including spouse's nationality and Jewish descent) and parental background (mixed parentage). The contemporary Jewish community cannot be taken as the unified and homogeneous group of people. Nowadays, both of the Jewish societies considered in the study (Luxembourg and the former Czechoslovakia) are composed of Jews with different ethnic and national backgrounds affected by various currents, movements and initiatives. My research could therefore not focus solely on Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews who perfectly met halachic criteria.

According to Jewish religious (halachic) law, a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother, but this definition is too restrictive to satisfy contemporary social realities. I also involved those who meet the conditions of the Law of Return², and my sample therefore involves secular and religious Jews, converts, and halachic and non-halachic Jews.

In addition, I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with Jews³ in order to refine and clarify the answers contained in the questionnaire. The age of the interviewees ranged from 38 to 83, with equal gender representation. None of the interviews exceeded 60 minutes.

3. Do Material Elements Shape Memories

Members of Jewish post-war society did not only remember the destiny of their nation and families through the memorial plaques and monuments erected mainly in Jewish institutions, cemeteries and former Jewish quarters. Sometimes much less formal family artifacts can shape and preserve memories more strongly than a lavish official commemoration arranged by the state government [9]. Creating new forms of heritage brings new kinds of entities into an intergenerational dialogue. The material environment provides post-war Jews with tangible expressions of the long history of families in the diaspora. Family artifacts are presumed to embody cultural roots and they become "facts on the ground" for today's Jews. They represent a tangible material legacy and remind their keepers of family history whenever they catch sight of them in their households [10]. Family artifacts are unique because of their constant presence in the lives of family members.

The graph below (Figure 1) clearly shows that family heirlooms are important for post-war generations, regardless of their origin or age. The survey also revealed that the second generation appreciates family objects slightly more than their descendants do, but it is evident that all generations value their relationship with inherited family items. These data suggest that the third generation does not significantly lose interest in the family's tangible heritage. On the contrary, sometimes members of the third generation store family objects more carefully than their predecessors. The striking point is that each respondent provided a clear answer; that is, nobody selected the answer "No opinion".

¹ I worked with three nationalities: Czech, Slovak and Luxembourgish. Czechoslovakia was divided into two independent states on January 1, 1993.

² The Law of Return is an Israeli law, passed on July 5, 1950, which gives Jews the right to come and live in Israel and gain Israeli citizenship. The law also enabled those with Jewish ancestry (a Jewish father or grandfather) to convert to Judaism. See the Report on Citizenship Law: Israel; Herzog, Ben; Harpaz, Yossi (2018).

³ I asked the same sample of people who completed the questionnaire. They also come from various ethnic and national backgrounds affected by various currents, movements and initiatives.

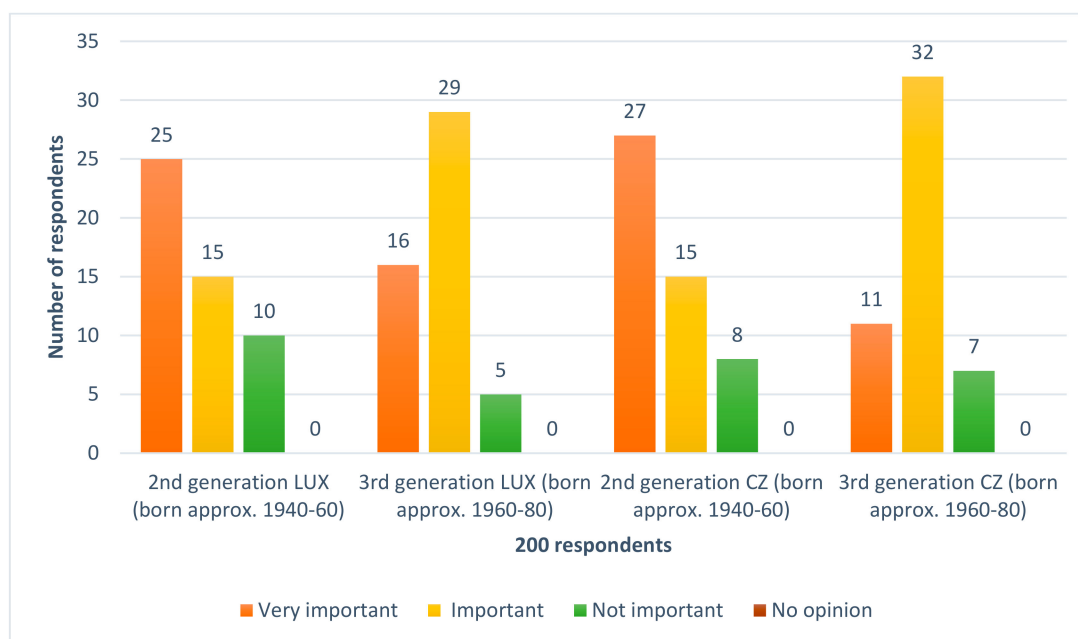


Figure 1. How important are family memories for you (photographs, letters, genealogy, ritual items, etc.)?

The collected data drawn on interviews and questionnaires clearly show that material elements play an important role in the process of remembering and shaping memories. When considering the historical intersections between family and mobility, it is important to contextualize different cultural practices of family and family life, which shape engagements with place and the retelling of these experiences across time [11]. If an individual memory is to be incorporated into the broader collective memory, there has to be a link to a specific event (e.g., a birth), religious holiday (e.g., a Bar or Bat Mitzvah), person (e.g., a Holocaust survivor), space (e.g., dining room) or subject (e.g., an image or a candelabra) [12]. This incorporation of individual memory into a wider scope of collective memory is significant in that it shows how Jewish individuals deal with particular family artifacts. Tangible objects come in many guises—some draw their value from subjective associations alone. Daily items become precious when they are endowed with personal meaning by their keepers. A letter or photograph, a wedding ring, a child’s tooth or even a seaside souvenir can revive memories and inspire joy or grief.

For every family heirloom, it is important to establish the level of significance for both its guardian and the family as a whole. It is understandable that the owners of family heirlooms assume personal responsibility for keeping them safe and acquire the right to represent their personal notions about the family’s past as real stories [13]. Holders consider heirlooms to be more than genealogical souvenirs. They are tangible reminders of loved ones, good times and long-dead ancestors. They often find more meaningful connections to the past through smaller, everyday objects such as a pie-crust rolling pin, military documents or a needlework sampler [14]. One respondent in Luxembourg said that he had found a ceramic owl bank with Jewish symbols. His father used to put change in that bank every day when he came home from work.⁴ He realized that this was a family heirloom with memories tied up in it.

Most of the respondents assigned individual objects to a specific place according to their own hierarchical system. For instance, the third generation seems to prefer to display little silver goblets,

⁴ Interview with J.H. Luxembourg, June 15, 2018.

photos in gold frames and family jewelry in glass-fronted vitrines or cabinets, whereas representatives of the second generation mostly keep their family heritage hidden away, for example in cellars or attics.

Many Czechoslovak Jews maintain their heirlooms carefully as a way of remembering important moments related to their childhood or adulthood. Saved artifacts serve as a mediator of family history, but each generation gives preference to different objects. Individual preferences result in an active intergenerational dialogue about the past based on the maintained artifacts. The objects give parents and children an opportunity to engage in a dialog about the family's past in which both generations can easily complete missing memory fragments. For instance, according to the information gleaned from the interviews, the second post-war generation puts greater emphasis on objects such as clocks, prayer books, eyeglasses, painted portraits, tableware, etc., despite the fact that they are often unable to provide comprehensive details about the stored items. They often barely remember their parents handling sacred relics (e.g., a mezuzah or tefillin) or using a letter knife engraved with the Star of David (Magen). By contrast, the third generation gives preference to photos, letters and diaries that remind them of the distant family past in a way that is more complex. In many cases, the second generation only remembers the presence of these objects at home during their childhood, when they formed strong emotional bonds with them. However, when both generations put their memories and knowledge together it often results in interesting narrative stories that can be valuable for further detailed research. This behavior implies that there is a great deal of respect for those who went through the ordeal of the Holocaust, and a deep sense of responsibility to keep the stories of deported people alive.

4. Jewish Ritual Items

Nearly all respondents across all generations, regardless of whether or not they considered themselves to be observant Jews, demonstrated a special relationship with Jewish ritual items belonging to members of previous generations. The only slight difference is that members of the second generation seem to be more attached to ritual artefacts belonging to their ancestors who died in the Holocaust. The third generation is interested in ritual and religious items in a more complex, less emotional and contextualized way. The second generation is also more suspicious of the origin of valuable items. Indeed, while they are willing to tell family stories, they are also silent and cagey about how the objects came into their possession. Most of them are reluctant to share this information in order to protect their former owners. The interviewees often changed the subject in order to avoid describing the origin of a given item. They did so for a variety of reasons, and it is difficult to generalize their motives, but in some cases there might be a fear that some long-held items came into their possession illegally, and they do not want to risk losing them. During my research, I also encountered family items that were the subject of family disputes and quarrels.

While conducting the interviews, I also noticed that both Jewish groups placed more value on family ritual items than any other possessions. This is understandable because these artifacts can be directly identified with their past ritual function, which thus forms the basis for a sacralization of these objects within the family. For example, Jewish Bar Mitzvah is a religious ritual, but it is not a habit. It is an important occasion but it occurs only once in a lifetime. By contrast, eating with cutlery belonging to grandparents may be a morning habit but it does not represent ritualized consumption. The term ritual refers to a type of expressive, symbolic activity composed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence and tend to be repeated over time. Ritual object sacralization is dramatically scripted and performed with formality, seriousness and inner intensity [15].

Many Luxembourgish and former Czechoslovak Jews have converted these ritual items into a *lieux de mémoire* and placed them in a broader context [16]. These "places of memory" can take many forms—they may be a monument, a photo, a historical site or a day of remembrance. They can be tangible physical places as well as objects, places of memory or acts of memory. Hence, places of memory are not defined by what they are but by the purpose they fulfil [17]. Historian Pierre Nora states that the Jews of the diaspora are bound to the rituals of tradition and consider themselves as "peoples of memory". According to Nora, Jewish memory has recently been revived among many

non-practicing Jews via material ritual objects. He sees *lieux de mémoire* as virtual sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory [18].

One of my interviewees remembered a painting of a flat French landscape by an unknown author that hung above the kitchen table in her house. This picture held the memory of childhood in a post-war Jewish family. She told me that for her, the picture calls to mind the Shabbat dinner with her family, and went on to remark that although the painting is not actually related to the religious ritual, it is more significant for her than for example her mum's prayer book, which she has opened only twice.

The relationship with an inherited family ritual heirloom often forms gradually and imperceptibly. One of my interviewees told me a story about the mezuzah and two inherited prayer books: *"Grandpa taught us a few Jewish prayers. Once our parents found out, they strictly forbade such activity. He then tried to do it in secret. We just tried to repeat unknown words after his, and it was very funny and amusing. We did not understand anything at all. I keep two prayer books and a mezuzah left by my grandpa. I often recall how he raised his hand to touch it on the doorframe. Once he passed away, I asked my aunt to teach me a little prayer. Every time I say it, I remember my grandpa with love."*⁵

These two examples illustrate two trends in the relationship with family heirlooms. In the first case, the lack of interest in the origin of all family heirlooms was striking, though the narrator insisted on drawing my attention to the most appropriate age for collecting these objects. The second case demonstrates an emotional way of keeping the Jewish relic principally associated not with its ritual usage but with the memory of a loved one. The second narrator emphasizes the human dimension of the kept object.

Members of the third generation do not miss the tactile contact with the objects belonging to their ancestors, unlike their parents. They prefer to display them in a prominent place in their households. Dana K. explained this approach to the interviewer: *"I feel emotionally affected and I have a feeling of being observed and controlled by my ancestors to keep their legacy alive. It does not matter that I never saw them in my life."*⁶ I would argue that piety in relation to Jewish ritual items indicates that their owners consider them to be objects of Jewish cultural heritage, but I am not quite sure whether they are aware of the religious context of the displayed items.

5. Jewish Relatives in Old Photographs

Some project participants explained that photographs of their parents and grandparents were missing from their collection since they refused to be photographed in later life unless strictly necessary. This is often the case for people who suffered considerably during the Holocaust. Their psyche is sometimes too fragile to see themselves standing next to their relatives; it reminds them of the loss of their friends and other family members [19]. Jean Baudrillard argues that the oldest thing in the home is always a family portrait, in the broadest sense of the word [20]. He also says that it is impossible not to draw a comparison between the interest in old photos and the passion for collecting. There are deep affinities between the two, and in both we can observe the same narcissistic regression. People often ignore and suppress time and concentrate only on two distinctive features: Nostalgia for origins and an obsession with authenticity. Baudrillard argues that both arise from the mythical evocation of birth. The demand for authenticity reflects an obsession with certainty, more specifically, certainty as to the origin, date, author and signature of an image. It can be generalized to all forms of antiques. The mere fact that a particular object has belonged to a famous or powerful individual may confer value on it [21].

The content of the photographs themselves was not the only significant aspect discussed during the interviews; the condition of the paper and the frame was also important. The study undertaken at Ohio

⁵ Lída B. Interview, Prague, June 18, 2017.

⁶ Dana K. Interview, Prague, June 16, 2018.

State University in 1956 implies that Jews from different areas and movements are able to recognize other Jews in unlabeled images. They had an even greater tendency to label more photographs as Jewish ones than non-Jewish research participants did [22]. This might imply the strong bonds that enable Jews to subconsciously identify other Jews in unknown images. The Jewish narrators cherished a faded and shabby photo that vividly reflected its former owners more than a photo that did not bear the scars of time. It might date back to the era before the Holocaust that resulted in the absence of their elderly relatives. This violent interruption of intergenerational continuity is one of the specific characteristics of present-day Jewish families. Children who grew up shortly after the war never met their grandparents. There was no one to provide information about Jewish customs, ancestors, values or traditions. They did not experience the gradual aging and dying of loved ones. Therefore, even collected items such as poor-quality photos from the days before the Holocaust represent a rare connection to a lost world. These items are often the only form of contact with the family's past.

One notable feature of family photos was the depiction of at least one family member who had a characteristic Jewish appearance. For men, it was a characteristic beard, hat and side locks, and for women usually a long multilayered skirt together with a wig popping out beneath a hat. What is remarkable is the fact that owners often recalled how as children they looked through albums and discussed the old bindings as much as the photographs themselves. According to Julia Hirsh, all photos suggest bonds enduring through time because our relatives live forever as long as our eyes see them [23]. The owners usually took care to identify the people depicted in photos as family members or friends.

Based on the interviews, the second generation in both regions prefers to keep photos in hard cover albums and regards digital images more skeptically than the third generation. Some consider family photos as sacred objects that should not be exposed publicly via online social platforms. In several cases, the interviews prompted the narrators to write down brief notes on the photos themselves in case they forget the names of the people depicted. It also became clear that the third generation knows less about the people depicted on the pictures, despite the fact that they were presumably family or friends. They know much less about what happened to them than their parents, who know many details about their long-deceased ancestors. In some cases, photos became part of another object (e.g., a medallion with a miniature on its cover or a pocket watch). Inscriptions in Hebrew or Yiddish on a photo recognized as a Jewish family heirloom endow those items with respected status—even if they display unknown people. Indeed, my grandma has a few portraits in hand-decorated frames of people who are completely unknown, but in typical Jewish fashion, she is convinced they are distant relatives.⁷ Regardless of their real value, these old images allow the owners to present their families as well-connected and numerous.

In the same way as family photos, Hebrew and Yiddish letters on old yellowed paper also show that Jews attribute great significance to old family items. At an exhibition on Jewish Slovak history in Bratislava, one object in particular reflected family history from a different angle: A tapestry depicting important milestones in the history of the family, society and Jewish culture. According to the narrator, the process of creating this work was a kind of meditation, and it reflects a certain sadness about a lost era. An artisan decided to use family photos and enlarge a portrait of two close relatives, whom she never knew in person. The entire piece absorbed the image and only a few torn threads demonstrate a symbol of a harsh fate. The narrator said that these faces from the past observe vibrant family life in her household and she repeatedly asks herself whether they suspected what awaited them. Both died at Auschwitz in 1944 [24].

⁷ Interview with Eva.H., Prague, May 15, 2018.

6. Jewishness Associated with Material Culture

Jewishness is not exclusive, but it is naturally multidimensional and constitutes one of the components of a person's overall identity [25]. Material artifacts therefore help to consolidate a fundamental social identity and indicate conformity with a particular society and its artifacts [26]. The link between family Jewish identity, material objects and collective memory is a social process influenced by the age, memories and experiences of individuals within the community. For many people, family is a private space that forms us and affects us through our entire life. The quality of relationships and interactions among family members is a part of every person's socialization. It is part of our individual potential, our inner identity, our awareness of who we are, and our continuation in time and space. Members of the same family make up a specific social group, defined by feelings of belonging, blood ties and/or other types of relatedness, as well as an awareness of shared objects. Family constitutes an interactive space, raising the question of how members of a social group formulate their image of the past through interactions, and how they transfer and reformulate such knowledge [27].

Respondents differ in their opinion of the ideal age to begin looking after family heritage. Most of them said that their children will be ready to take over the baton once they accept their Jewish origin and recognize their commitments to their ancestors. *"I do not think it is important, but I presume that every generation has an ideal age for dealing with family heritage. When you are young you want to build up your career and provide for yourself and your children. Then, of course, you have leisure time hobbies. At that time you do not pay much attention to family history; your interest begins to develop when your relatives start disappearing with time. That is when you turn your attention to your ancestors. You realize a little late how many photos have to be described and identified for your descendants; otherwise younger generations will not know who is who."*⁸ Material culture (photos) carries information that is easily lost if it is not treated carefully. It might seem idealistic in this context, but in reality, the material culture of loss begins with the moment of dispossession. Some Jews are afraid of passing material culture on to their descendants until they have analyzed, scanned or copied all the documents they own. Their approach implies that the objects do not necessarily have to hold a special meaning in the memories of western and eastern European Jewry; the meaning only assumes significance for those who appropriated them [28].

7. Virtual Jewishness and Material Culture

In the recent decades, Jewish culture has become a part of the public sphere, despite the fact that the Jewish communities in these countries are not numerous. The Jewish environment in Europe is strongly characterized by a virtual Jewish culture. In post-Holocaust and post-communist countries, Gruber comes up with the idea of a "virtual Jewish world" filled with "virtual" Jews, who are engaged in creating, developing and demonstrating their allegiance to Jewishness. Despite being very active in organizing cultural events and educational programs, they are regarded as outsiders, since they are not official members of the community. In some cases, they demonstrate their allegiance to Jewish society by wearing visible adornments with Jewish symbols. This is often the case for Jews who do not meet the criteria of Halacha.⁹ It is a phenomenon that occurs in Czech and Luxembourgish Jewish society and significantly affects both Jewish self-perception and the treatment of Jewish material culture. Historian Ruth Gruber is careful neither to celebrate nor to condemn these phenomena but strives instead to analyze fully the discomfort of the "virtual" Jews. She views the various practices of Europe's virtual Jewish culture demonstrated through visible "Jewish things". She gives one example in the form of an elegant, stylishly dressed widow who became immersed in the city's Jewish history by chance. Frau Blume volunteered to clean up and document dozens of historic Jewish cemeteries in

⁸ Interview with Laurent M., Luxembourg, June 10, 2018.

⁹ According to the Halacha, a Jew is anyone who was either born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism in accordance with Jewish Law. Reconstructionist Judaism and the larger denominations of worldwide Progressive Judaism (also known as Liberal or Reform Judaism) accept children as Jewish if one of the parents is Jewish, as long as the parents raise the child with a Jewish identity.

1990. At the time, only a few Jewish families lived in her city, and she sought to methodically map, clean and photograph the 6500 tombstones. In this context, it is clear that Jewish virtual identity is driven by an intellectual, spiritual and socio-political agenda rather than by religious needs [29].

Those who participate and play in very popular Klezmer groups are often not Jews, but they know that Jewish family roots can make their performance even more authentic. These conjectures with Jewish symbols can be partly confirmed by my statistics depicted below. These figures show that young men and women in both Luxembourg and the Czech Republic often wear accessories—rings, necklaces, earrings or bracelets. Based on the analyzed replies, they often choose various Jewish religious symbols or symbols associated with Israel or the Middle East. However, it is very difficult to classify and enumerate their occurrence since they often intersect with each other. The most frequent symbols represented in objects include the Star of David, the symbolic representation of Chanukah, quotations from the Torah, the Hebrew word “Chai” (life) and many forms of the *hamsa* hand. Such accessories are not exclusively worn by women; a large number of men wear them too. The research did not reveal whether there are any gender preferences in terms of wearing particular accessories with Jewish symbols, but these artifacts suggests that the practice is a way for people to discover their own past and explore their own sense of self [30]. In recent years, a number of American Jewish celebrities have caused controversy by wearing the yellow Star of David on their clothes.

The survey (Figure 2) also revealed those who refuse to wear any accessories or jewels for personal reasons. “I do not wear distinctive signs of origin or religion but I also refuse to wear a wedding ring. I do not like to wear any outward signs of anything.”¹⁰ This statement shows the unwillingness of some Jews to publicly wear any outward signs, but with respect to the sample it is difficult to make an overall judgment as to whether this is a significant phenomenon.

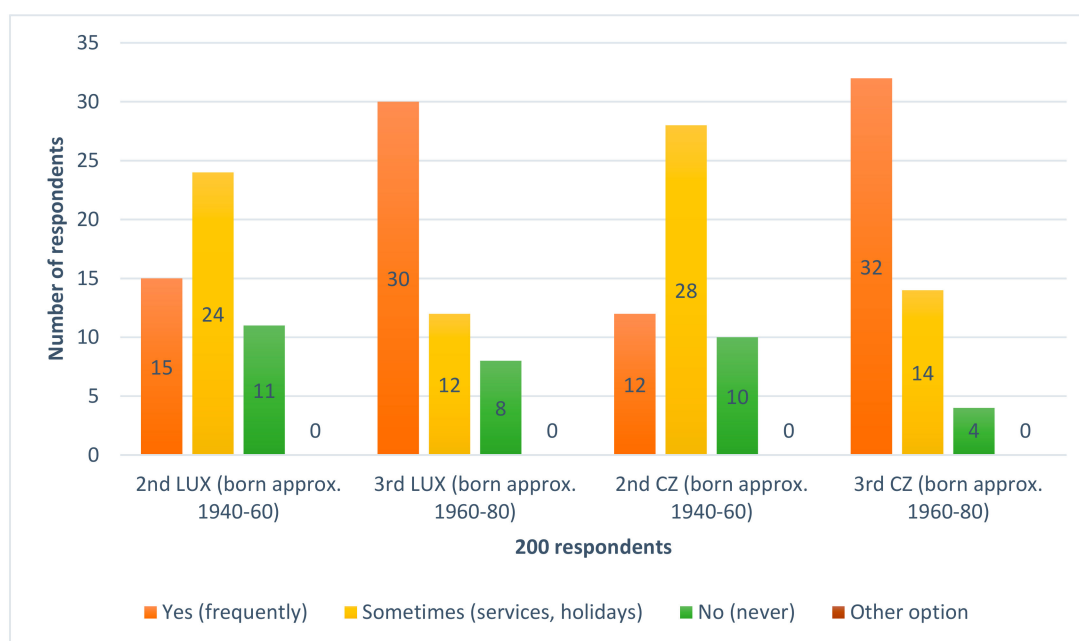


Figure 2. Do you wear any visible Jewish symbols or symbols associated with the Middle East (rings, bracelets, etc.).

¹⁰ Interview Michaela V., Prague, June 18, 2018.

8. Perception of Selected Jewish Objects in Second and Third Generation Jews

According to Baudrillard, the model of the distribution of objects does not apply evenly to all categories. The family antique value of an object reflects its value within a *system* of objects. A particular object with no added functional benefit may signify prestige in relation to another same object with the same function. A diamond ring with Jewish symbols may have no function at all but may suggest particular social values, such as the class or social origin of its keeper [31] (pp. 135–136). The symbolic value of an object means a value assigned to an object in relation to another subject (i.e., between a giver and a receiver). A ring with Jewish symbols might symbolize either marital status, love or religious beliefs.

A third-generation interviewee considered her *mezuzah*¹¹ to be her most valuable family heirloom. She was convinced that her family had owned this religious artifact since her birth. Although she had only a vague idea about its true function, she repeatedly drew the interviewer's attention to its uniqueness, recognizing it as a cultural indicator with a connection to her Jewish past. According to the maker's mark, the *mezuzah* dates to 1880. Even though the narrator had several ancient Jewish objects in her home, she considered them less interesting since she used them for everyday purposes and associated them with contemporary culture. In this respect, it is evident that she does not collect heirlooms from everyday family items but gives preference to ritual items that are recognized as important components of the family's past.

The interviews and archival research carried out among members of the second generation revealed that the context of individual items is more significant than the real value of the items. People often prioritize the complexity of the stories related to the family objects above their factual reliability. This applies to Jewish post-war generations in both Luxembourg and the Czech Republic. Jewish families had to deal with several crucial moments of difficulty, in particular the loss of close relatives during the Holocaust. Some survivors chose to marry someone who had no connection to their past. In families where children had died, there was the option of adopting Jewish orphans. Other widows and widowers chose to marry relatives of the deceased spouse and take on their children. All these choices had a fundamental, often negative effect on keeping and preserving material Jewish culture; that is, people wanted to forget and dispose of material memories with links to relatives who had lost their lives in such a brutal way.

It often occurs that a member of the third generation is the only one who is still alive and able to maintain the family heirlooms. As one participant explained: *"I keep my precious family memories—photos and old documents. I am the oldest member of my family and that is why I safely keep all things that belonged to my ancestors. I am also completing my family tree, not only for my daughters but also for myself. I want to know my place within my extended family. At the moment, my daughters are hardly interested in our family history, but I have been working on a document which allows them to know more."*¹² Most of the interviews also revealed that for those owners who wanted to view the family past as Jewish, nearly all stored objects were regarded as being Jewish. During the interview process, I met a woman who collects little china mice, but she prefers those made in Israel. She considers them a part of her Jewish personality. Since physical objects (e.g., photos and letters) allow their owners to act as the successor to the previous generations, this may explain why so many people have not yet passed this family heritage on to their descendants. Interviews show that members of the second generation are not readily able to identify the age of the collected heirlooms, but they do confer specific value on them. Keys which open the door of their family house, for example, have greater personal value than an ancient wooden inlaid wall clock. The third generation sees family heirlooms from a different perspective. They are inclined

¹¹ A *mezuzah* comprises a piece of parchment called a *klaf* contained in a decorative case and inscribed with specific Hebrew verses from the Torah.

¹² Interview with a Czech emigrant, Charles W., Geneva, July 19, 2018.

to show and present valuable items regardless of their origin and age; all that matters is whether the objects are linked to the family's past.

The last part of the case study (Figure 3) looks at the relationship with and perception towards selected Jewish ritual items (*mezuzah*¹³, *kippa*¹⁴, *tallit*¹⁵, *arava*¹⁶). The graph below shows that the chosen items are seen as either symbolic designations or religious regulations rather than simple symbolic amulets. All these objects serve as indispensable spiritual objects, or at least as symbols encouraging Jewish self-awareness. To consider the *arava* mostly as a symbolic item might show that many respondents do not celebrate Sukkot regularly since it is not one of the high Jewish holidays. A *kippa* is not just a religious sign; for many Jews, it is a symbolic designation of their identity. Nowadays, many non-Orthodox Jews usually wear a crocheted smaller *kippa* in various colors and patterns, ranging from traditional to modern styles. The interviews showed that there are now also some humorous patterns (e.g., smiley faces for children). Nevertheless, it is still not possible to classify and cast Jews according to the type of headgear they choose. The look of the *kippa* depends on its owner and his taste. The research also shows a few cases in which girls embroider their names on the partner's headgear as a sign of their relationship.¹⁷ Historian Maroš Borský states that the third post-Holocaust generation often uses traditional Jewish symbols because in his opinion Jewish adherence is no longer formed by transmitted religious values but is the result of a dissimilation process of socializing with young Jews abroad and subsequently gradually resuming contact with formal Jewish life [32].

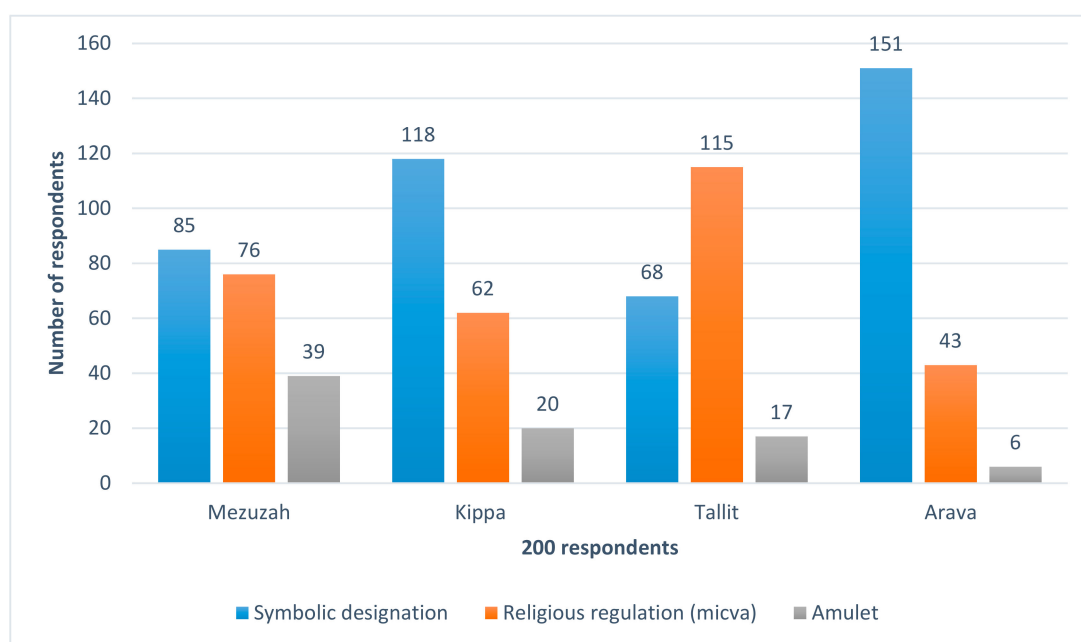


Figure 3. Perception of selected Jewish objects in second and third generation Jews (Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg (LUX+CZ)).

The *mezuzah* is the only object perceived as an amulet which, in some cases, was passed on from one generation to the next. If parents pass on their apartment or house, their children often keep a *mezuzah* on a doorframe. In the context of the interviews, the hierarchical order of these things

¹³ This is affixed to the doorpost of Jewish homes to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

¹⁴ A brimless cap, usually made of cloth, worn by Jews to fulfill the customary requirement that the head must be covered.

¹⁵ A fringed garment traditionally worn by religious Jews. The *tallit* has special twined and knotted fringes known as *tzitzit*.

¹⁶ A leafy branch of the willow tree used in a special waving ceremony during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

¹⁷ Interview with the Czech Jew Samuel, Prague, November 15, 2018.

appears convincing, but it should be borne in mind that the research encompassed individuals from primarily liberal Jewish communities; that is, Jews belonging to the Orthodox branch of Judaism were rarely represented.

9. Conclusions

Although this case study is part of my broader PhD research, it also provides another way of interpreting the results of the field survey. The aim of conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires was to give voice to the Jewish keepers who had been delegated the right to “speak” in the private space of their home about their family history. I sought to combine the information obtained through the interviews with statistics gathered from the questionnaire. All participants in the project can be considered representative of the intelligentsia, which may explain their close relationship with family heritage. In most cases they have university degrees, and some are graduates of prestigious universities. Recent sociological research suggests that higher education generates a greater level of interest in family history [33].

Family heirlooms offer their guardians an opportunity to share their knowledge of their ancestors. The study shows that all items considered as Jewish family heirlooms have a particular value for all Jews across the generations. It is hard to find any specific patterns that apply to all cases, but the study shows some interesting patterns emerging among the Jewish post-war generations. All respondents recognized these items as important components of the useful family past; in other words, of a past that contributes to the construction of Jewish identity. The Holocaust and the trauma of survivors and their descendants created a unique relationship with Jewish material heritage associated with the (destroyed) past. Directly after the war, a gap emerged between traditional manifestations of Judaism and real-life stories of Jewish families, and that gap further changed but did not totally disappear during the post-war decades. Paul Connerton refers to this behavior as “forgetting humiliated silence”. It is manifest in a widespread pattern of behavior in afflicted postwar Jewish societies and it is rather astonishing because acts of humiliation are very difficult to forget. Postwar Jewish generations faced the collusive silence brought on by a particular kind of collective shame. What is ironic is that Germans were confronted with similar conditions once Nazi Germany was defeated after the war. Millions of homeless and utterly lethargic people were wandering about amidst the ruins. Like the Jews, they had a great desire both to forget and to keep memories alive [34].

The research provided no evidence of any significant differences in the treatment of family heirlooms by Jews in the former Czechoslovakia and those in Luxembourg. After the liberation, survivors made a choice between Judaism, assimilation and emigration. Their decision influenced the way in which they transferred Jewish awareness to subsequent generations (if at all), their relationship with the community, and last but not least their relationship with inherited family memories. The tragedy of the Holocaust led to fundamental differences in the approach to Judaism, its traditions and its presence. Only the third and the fourth post-Holocaust generations grew up in complete families that were similar to those of the majority population.

Participants may have had different views as to the value of family heirlooms, but all of them understood that they represent family history and are socially significant for preserving Jewish cultural heritage. With regard to the research question, the data reliably affirm that there has been no decrease in the interest in Jewish heirlooms. Younger generations merely conceive of these inherited objects in their own way. Based on the survey, it seems that the third generation is preoccupied with work and family obligations and so does not dedicate a great amount of time to either religious or family matters. Members of this generation associate individual objects with an overall religious or national identity rather than with specific family members. They simply rely on their parents and older relatives to care about the heritage of their ancestors.

The aforementioned attitude might have been instigated by societal developments in recent decades. The traditional unity of Judaism was interrupted and replaced by diversity and multiplicity [35].

The preoccupation with work does not only result in less time being dedicated to Jewish family heritage, it also suggests that most of the respondents see their Jewishness as secular. In these conditions, Jewish religious authorities encourage its members to adopt more religious and cultural traditions because according to them only religiosity and the relationship with Jewish culture will preserve Jewish material family heritage for future generations [36]. The manifestation of deep Jewish faith is very rare in the researched areas, and it cannot be taken as the cornerstone for maintaining material family heritage. On the other hand, the acceptance of Jewish traditions is often accompanied by a certain amount of rationalization that may help maintain traditional customs or patterns of behavior associated with particular Jewish religious symbols and objects [37]. In both Luxembourg and the Czech Republic, elements of selective religiosity can be observed. People visit the synagogue only during the high holidays, and light up Shabbat and Hanukkach candles. From time to time, they observe a semi-kosher diet and prepare the Seder dinner with their relatives [38]. This lukewarm secular attitude corresponds with a slowly growing trend of wearing accessories with Jewish symbols that tends to replace deeper religious awareness.

Finally, yet importantly, the third generation has a greater tendency to display and wear Jewish objects more visibly than previous generations, who tend to hide them from potential visitors. It is also important to note that the different political regimes in the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia) and Luxembourg do not significantly affect the way in which Jewish family souvenirs are kept, and they do not influence the importance of these items for cultivating a Jewish collective memory. A key challenge facing Jews today is how to interact with the Jewish space and values associated with tangible and intangible heritage. This argument is also supported by Jonathan Weber, who emphasizes the great distinctions between the ethnic origins of former Soviet Jews and Jews living in Western Europe. Only shared objects embodying the collective memory of this religious and ethnic group can bridge the intergenerational chasm [39].

Funding: This research was funded by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) [10929115].

Acknowledgments: I have benefited tremendously from the wisdom, friendship, and support of my colleague Anastasia Badder.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. De Nardi, S. An Embodied Approach to Second World War Storytelling Mementoes: Probing Beyond the Archival into the Corporeality of Memories of the Resistance: Probing Beyond the Archival into the Corporeality of Memories of the Resistance. *J. Mater. Cult.* **2014**, *19*, 443–464. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Soukupová, B. *Židé v Českých Zemích po Šoa: Identita Poraněné Paměti*; Marenčin PT: Bratislava, Slovakia, 2016; pp. 69–70.
3. Heitlinger, A. Jewish Youth Activism and Institutional Response in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. *East Eur. Jew. Aff.* **2002**, *32*, 25–42. [[CrossRef](#)]
4. Moyse, L. *Du Rejet à L'intégration: Histoire des Juifs du Luxembourg des Origines à nos Jours*; Éditions Saint-Paul: Luxembourg, 2011; p. 251.
5. Falser, M. *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: From Decay to Recovery*; Springer International Publishing: Basel, Switzerland, 2015; pp. 2–3.
6. Hepworth, A. Preservation or Destruction of lieux de mémoire: Contested Spaces in the Realm of Memory. *J. Iber.* **2015**, *21*, 283–294.
7. Stoller, P. *Sensual Scholarship*; University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, USA, 1997; pp. 59–60.
8. Heitlinger, A. *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews Since 1945*; Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, QC, Canada, 2006; pp. 5–6.
9. Láníček, J.; Hana, K. *Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust: History and Memory*; Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: London, UK, 2018; p. 166.
10. Geismar, H. Anthropology and Heritage Regimes. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* **2015**, *44*, 71–85. [[CrossRef](#)]
11. Dellios, A. Memory and Family in Australian Refugee Histories. *Immigr. Minor.* **2018**, *36*, 79–86. [[CrossRef](#)]

12. Kreisslová, S. *Konstrukce Etnické Identity a Kolektivní Paměti v Biografických Vyprávěních Českých Němců: Na Příkladu Vzpomínek Němců Na Chomutovsku*; Humanitas: Praha, Czech Republic, 2013; p. 43.
13. Kidron, C.A. Breaching the wall of traumatic silence: Holocaust survivor and descendant person–object relations and the material transmission of the genocidal past. *J. Mater. Cult.* **2012**, *17*, 3–21. [[CrossRef](#)]
14. Morton, S.-J. Hunting for Family Heirlooms. *Fam. Tree* **2012**, *6*, 1.
15. Dennis, W.R. The Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior. *J. Consum. Res.* **1985**, *12*, 251–264.
16. Halbwachs, M.; Lewis, A.C. *On Collective Memory*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1992; pp. 52–53.
17. Wæhrens, A. *Shared Memories? Politics of Memory and Holocaust Remembrance in the European Parliament 1989–2009*; DIIS Working Paper; DIIS and the SAXO Institute: Copenhagen, Denmark, 2011; p. 11.
18. Nora, P. Between Memory And History: Les Lieux De Mémoire: Les Lieux De Mémoire. *Representations* **1989**, *26*, 7–24. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Sokolova, A. Jewish memory and family heirlooms (based on materials from field studies in St Petersburg, 2010–2011). *East Eur. Jew. Aff.* **2013**, *43*, 3–30. [[CrossRef](#)]
20. Baudrillard, J. *The System of Objects*; Verso: New York, NY, USA, 1996; pp. 36–37.
21. Baudrillard, J. *The system of Objects*; Verso: New York, NY, USA, 1996; p. 76.
22. Alvin, S. The perception of Jewish photographs by non-Jews and Jews. *J. Abnorm. Psychol.* **1957**, *54*, 278–280.
23. Hirsch, J. *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 1981; p. 131.
24. Borský, M. *Každá Rodina Má Svoj Príbeh = Each Family Has Its Story*; Neinvestičný fond židovského kultúrneho dedičstva, Menorah: Bratislava, Slovakia, 2017; p. 52.
25. Tartakowsky, E.; Marcelo, D. *Juifs d'Europe: Identités plurielles et Mixité*; Francois-Rabelais: Tours, France, 2017; p. 221.
26. Wasserstein, B. *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1996; pp. 227–228.
27. Kiliánová, G.; Eva, K.; Eva, K. *My A Tí Druhí V Modernej Spoločnosti: Konštrukcie a Transformácie Kolektívnych Identít*; Veda: Bratislava, Slovakia, 2009; pp. 13–30.
28. Gerlach, D. Toward a material culture of Jewish loss. *Jew. Cult. Hist.* **2017**, *18*, 17–33. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Gruber, R.E. *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, 1st ed.; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2002; pp. 43–44.
30. Shandler, J. Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish culture in Europe. *Jew. Q. Rev.* **2004**, *94*, 238–240. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Baudrillard, J. *The System of Objects*; Verso: New York, NY, USA, 1996; pp. 135–136.
32. Borský, M. Bratislavská židovská komunita dnes. In *Židia Dnes*; Inštitút judaistiky UK: Bratislava, Slovakia, 2003; pp. 109–116.
33. Šubrt, J.; Jiří, V. *Historické Vědomí Obyvatel České Republiky Perspektivou Sociologického Výzkumu*; Karolinum: Praha, Czech Republic, 2013; p. 164.
34. Connerton, P. Seven Types of Forgetting. *Mem. Stud.* **2008**, *1*, 59–71. [[CrossRef](#)]
35. Pešťanská, Z. Židovstvo V Asimilovanej Nukleárnej Rodine Tretej Pohlodaustovej Generácie / Jewishness in a Present-Day Nuclear Family of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation. *Slov. Národopis Slovak Ethnol.* **2014**, *62*, 30–44.
36. Alexander, S. *Obnovovanie Kontinuity? Židia v interakcii II*; Inštitút judaistiky Univerzity Komenského: Bratislava, Slovakia, 1999; pp. 29–34.
37. Gyarfášová, T. Faktory intergeneračného prenosu židovskej identity na Slovensku. *Postpone Soc. Stud.* **2008**, *5*, 179–192.
38. Gudonis, M. Constructing Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Poland Part 2 Symbolic Jewishness or Cosmopolitan Polishness? *East Eur. Jew. Aff.* **2001**, *31*, 42–54. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Webber, J. *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*; Littman Library of Jewish Civilization: Washington, DC, USA, 1994; pp. 136–137.

