

**“DORA BRUDER” AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING OF PATRICK
MODIANO**

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Abstract

Trauma become a part of memory in human's life in regard with past. The form of trauma as an emotional scar inside an individual can follow the heirs, reflected in the life of later generations. It also happens in literature, as a way to unconsciously share the traumatic events, as the result of author's memories. Dora Bruder is a novel by Patrick Modiano which is written as the way to release the experience of difficulties in the past that likely become his trauma. This research will describe the condition of Dora Bruder as an autobiographical novel of Modiano because it is happened to share the same difficulties, such as a bad-term relationship with family and lost family members. The research is based on theory of Memory by Anne Whitehead and Postmemory by Marianne Hirsch.

Keyword : *Trauma, Memory, Postmemory, inheritance, Holocaust, past experience, autobiographical novel, Dora Bruder, Patrick Modiano.*

Introduction

Trauma and memory are part of each individual past and life. As what Barbara Danneels quoted in her thesis, trauma is an emotional injury due to a deeply distressing experience which then come as a theory called Trauma Theory (2013). She stated that experiencing trauma can happen biologically or evolutionally as well, so that inspecting the history of family and ancestors is needed as the way to find the cause. The trauma itself is experienced by an individual, caused by something related to familial reasons such as violence, drug abuse, child abuse, slavery, so-on. For example a child with violent behavior probably passed through parental violence, or mental illness from abusing experience which created a lone-wolf, psychopath introvert that likely will cause problems.

The trauma which is experienced by an individual then either going to influence the memory or being influenced by memory, recollections of past contain sweet and bitter experience that at last become one of the factor of personality forming. Memory itself is explained as events that personally experienced in the past, or rather by learning of something from other's past through reading, listening, or attending a commemoration and the like events (Coser, 1992: 24).

Psychologically, an individual with traumatic and terrible experience will likely to try finding all kind of mode to release the anger and bitterness, or even as resentment. After all, those way of releasing also can be as forgetting, forgiving, or perpetuating the memories

they had kept, even as a mode of defense mechanism or consciously treat the memories as the source of power to move on and build a better life. It means that memories can be impacted either in positive or negative way.

But that is not just the case, because an experience can be passed through generations, when the memory of a traumatic event become a familiar situation for an individual without even experience it themselves. The memory of someone also could be a way for the next generation to picture, to depict, representing the wholeness, as a part of them all as the way to keep the memory not just for their prior generation which go through the experience but also for them as inheritance to share, to pass on to the generation after, or to shout it out to the world. The term postmemory then become the way to wrap the activity of tracing the past in the need to remember and store the particular traumatic event happened to the family or ancestors.

Literature is one of so many modes to store memory, either the writer's own experience or other people's. A lot of study have been conducted to make memory as the subject. In literature itself, memory is believed as something which can stir writers to build a story based on it. The memory could be anything happened in writer's life or prior generations, triggering problems which then built up and shared.

Dora Bruder is a so-called semi-autobiographical of Patrick Modiano published in 1997. Sources have stated that *Dora Bruder* was born from a missing-person advertisement corner. Quoted from UC Press, Modiano accidentally found the ad column of looking a missing girl in an old copy of Paris Soir newspaper published in 1941. Modiano who read the advertisement in 1988 was triggered to try looking up for anything related to Dora Bruder, the 15 years old missing girl who ran away from her sanctuary, a Catholic boarding school called Saint-Coeur-de-Marie, run by Sisters of The Christian Schools of Divine Mercy. Dora herself later known as the only kid of a Jewish family. She was the daughter of Ernest and Cecile Bruder who spent their live in a hotel room which was usual in Paris at that time. Dora was described as a 15 years old girl with 1.55 meters height, had oval-shaped face and gray-browed eyes, and used gray sports jacket, maroon pullover, navy blue skirt, hat, and brown gym shoes when missing. From that reading, Modiano started his searching about Dora Bruder which then become a mixed-up novel where he put his personal experience with his father. Modiano found out that Dora was on the list of Jewish children who was sent to Auswitch in 1942.

The novel depicts Modiano's searching about the young girl based on his curiosity, and the story of Holocaust which haunted him as Jewish. Modiano himself had the experience of being born as a Jew in the last moments of France Occupation era by Germany

which was the ignition of World War II. He stated that the Occupation of France was the soil where he grew up, and it influenced his writing.

Nobel Prize said that Modiano was worthy for the annual honor of Nobel for his art of memory. Modiano being detailed in capturing the lives of people in the era of German rule from 1940 to 1944. He was reckoned as the moniker of literary archeologist as his detail works in describing the street names, cafes, metro station and real-life events of Paris during that time. Modiano did not experience Holocaust, but his father was fortunately escaped the horror of Nazi occupation. He also known as a writer who tend to write autobiographical novel, such as *Pedigree* in 2005 (www.thelocal.fr). His relationship with his father was not so good, and because of that, love-hate relationship built in his heart which then poured into novels such as *Missing Person* and *Dora Bruder*. So that, this research will find out of how *Dora Bruder* had been claimed as a postmemory novel regarding Modiano's relationship with his father. The condition of *Dora Bruder* as an autobiographical novel of Modiano will be discussed by using descriptive method, based on critical theories by Anne Whitehead and Marianne Hirsch.

Discussion

Greenberg in her essay had looked up the missing elements in Bruder's story depicted by Modiano, as the missing details of author's relationship with his father, regarding the understanding of trauma, particularly the Holocaust itself. The narrator, or in this case the author itself represented the inheritance of trauma he got from the family as "the next generation", which then said as "postmemory". The image of Bruder reflected the difficulties of being possessed by the responsibility to remember other people's pain without knowing what was exactly happened in that past (2007).

The concept of trauma have been related with the theories of memory and postmemory, as the way of people to live by inheriting the past of their older generations, whether it's a bittersweet or painstakingly difficult.

1. Memory

In *Memory*, Whitehead (2009) quoted Tardiman's point of view that memory is a reproduction model. So did Frow's idea regarding *retrieval* which is presupposing the ideal of memory as simple as reproducing various contents that already kept in someone's mind as what it is (p. 50). The term of representation then used, making memory as an accurate version of something happened in the past, not just as a replica. From the understanding,

when someone try to remember or dig their memory, the process is not just about reproducing the images of the past, but also adapt them (p. 51).

The adaptation of memory in Dora Bruder was how Modiano reflected himself as he traced the news and stories about Dora's past before she lost in 1941. Along the novel, Modiano (1997) described the way he searched any information about Dora, started from recalling his memories the area where Bruder's family lived which was familiar for young Modiano, as stated in his thought when reading the advertisement of Dora's missing; "*I had long familiar with that area of the Boulevard Ornano. As a child, I would accompany my mother to the Saint-Ouen flea markets*" (p. 9). These lines were the starting point where Modiano curiosity lead him into his searching about Dora. The sense of familiarity kept him tracing for Dora while attached his own memory to every clues he got, such as these lines hereafter;

"One Friday afternoon in February 1996 I went to the 12th arrondissement Register office (1997, p. 14) ... "He advised me to go to the Palais of Justice, 2 Boulevard du Palais, and apply for a special exemption from the Superintendent Registrar ... I searched every corner of this room without finding Staircase 5. I was seized with panic, ... 20 years before, I had had a similar experience. I had learned that my father was in a hospital, ... I had not seen him since the end of my adolescent years. I therefore decided to pay him an impromptu visit. I remember wandering for hours through the astness of that hospital in search of him ... I tramped the paved courtyards till dusk. It was impossible to find my father. I never saw him again" (1997, p. 14-15)

These lines were when Modiano looked up for Dora's information from a kind of registry office in Paris, but then the exhausting searching evoked his memory of being in the same feeling when tried to meet his father, as clearly stated before.

Then when Modiano got some informations about Dora's father, Ernest Bruder, he found out that they ever been living in the same place,

"Ernest Bruder, born Vienna, Austria, 21 May 1899 ... I had turned twenty in Vienna, in 1965, also the year when I was frequenting the Clignancourt districts ... I have memories of summer evenings spent in Sievering and Grinzing, and of parks where bands were playing" (1997, p. 18).

The attaching of his memories in every trace he got was how Modiano adapted his life into Dora's life who was a total stranger, but the traces generated his own memories that traumatized him in several ways. How Modiano lost contact with his father, how the existence of his father as a Jew brought him a not so moderate life as a kid but actually didn't affect his affection of his father, like what he was stated in the novel when he want to meet his father in hospital. The affection must be because the lack of filial relationship in his family, where he never grew up with his parents, instead of living with his maternal grandparents and continued to lived under government care (www.nobelprize.org). There, Modiano also stated that he ran away from school for several times. Started from 1960 until

1962, he ran away from 3 schools until he entered Lycée Henri-IV in Paris and got his degree in 1964. This experience of him should be reconsidered as how he attached his memory to Dora's escape from her boarding school which lead her into German's capture.

2. Postmemory

In family frames, Hirsch (1997) quoted a statement that suggested a picture as the affirmation of purity, the vulnerability of life that goes to its own destruction, becomes the link to death, whose existence becomes a scourge. Hirsch also stated how photographs become the most influential objects in postmemory theory. Pictures become a marker for the owner to tell a past event when they can not share about the event right at the time the photo was taken, or because the absence of a listener (p. 19).

This is reinforced by the example presented by Hirsch from Art Spiegelman's cartoons. A controversial cartoon consisting of two volumes entitled *Maus* is inserted with photos of Art family that pictured his father, mother and a brother who has died, named Richieu. From these photographs, Hirsch found the oscillations between life and death, because the family photos are the documentation that link the image objects as memory, and the generation after the photo object as a postmemory. That way, *Maus* which is inserted with family photos of Art Spiegelman is a container of memory, like the quote below:

“Invested with ‘a symbolic aura,’ lieux de mémoire can function to ‘block the work of forgetting’... usefully describe the status with which Holocaust photograph are often invested. The spatiality of memory mapped onto its temporality, its visual combined with its verbal dimension, makes memory, as W.J.T. Mitchell suggest, in itself as “image text, a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval ... Photographs, ghostly revenants, are very particular instruments of remembrance, since they are perched at the edge between memory and postmemory, and also, though differently, between memory and forgetting.” (1997, p. 21-22).

Hirsch (1997) added, postmemory shows the dominance preceding narration of the previous generation's towards the next generation, describing a traumatic event that can not be understood or recreated by later generations because the narrative removes their own narrative.

Dora Bruder itself contains some photographs of Bruders's family, minus Ernest Bruder. There are a picture of Dora with Cecile, and the other one is older Dora with her mother and grandmother. But Modiano also described pictures which contain Ernest :

A few photographs from this period. The earliest, their wedding day. They are seated, their elbow resting on a sort of pedestal ... A photograph with their daughter, Dora. They are seated, Dora standing between them: she cant be more that two years old. A photo of Dora, Surely taken after a special school assembly. She is aged twelve or thereabouts ... Another photograph, taken in the same place at the same period, perhaps on the same day: the floor tiles are recognizeable., as is the big white cube with black geometric motifs on which

Cecile Bruder is perched. Dora stands on her left, ... In another photograph with her mother; ... her hair is shorter than the previous picture (p. 24)
“An oval shaped of photographs in which Dora is slightly older ... their face turned toward the camera: first Dora and her mother, both in white blouses, then Ernest Bruder, in jacket and tie. A photograph of Cecile in front of what appears to be a suburban house ... In the background the silhouette of a child with her back to the camera, her leg and arms bare, ... Dora? ... where could this be? ... An earlier photograph of Dora alone aged nine or ten. Caught in a ray of sunshine, entirely surrounded by shadow, ... (p. 25)

The existence of Bruder's family picture which founded by Modiano in the course of his search about Dora is the point of why *Dora Bruder* become a postmemory novel. How detail he described the photographs he was collected, supported with stories from Dora's niece who once lived near them in Boulevard Ornano, as stated in the novel page 21.

Modiano further described about Bruders family. They once reunited with Dora and Ernest were met in Drancy Camp and Cecile was arrested and also taken to Drancy where she reunited with her husband, but then separated with their child because Dora had been taken to Tourelles. Long story short, five months after Ernest and Dora, Cecile then was sent to Auschwitz as well. That closed the story of Bruder's family, with an empty feelings poured down by Modiano when imagining Paris without Dora which was deserted, as stated in page 98.

Conclusion

The story of Dora Bruder certainly just a trigger of how Modiano looked at himself as someone who ever lost, like what he stated in page 9, “*I merged into that twilight, into those streets, I was nonexistent*”.

“*The city was deserted, as if to mark Dora's absence*” in page 98 is how Modiano reflect his lost of father with almost the same way. The emptiness showed in page 98; “*For me, they are always empty, even at dusk, during the rush hour ... I think of her in spite of myself, sensing an echo of her presence in this neighborhood or that*” seems so deep that we know how he felt about lost his brother Rudy as his closest family, the lost of his father who separated with them in his early age, the careless mother, and the haunting story of Holocaust which practically being the master behind of his family breakdown. Afterall, Modiano survived and live to put up his memory about his family and identity as a Jewish who survived from Holocaust, and as his filial piety towards his father, most likely because the horror which he also faced as an Italian Jewish. All the memory that inherited through generations, from stranger stories and relatives stories that build Modiano up to write them down.

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