**Holocaust Reparations: A Reflection on Repair**

[00:00:14] The Germans called it restitution, making good again. It was supposed to be give you back what you had.

[00:00:26] Nothing gave you back what you had.

[00:00:30] This is Henry Leopold, a 93 year old resident of Detroit. By most definitions, Henry receives reparations. A few years after the end of World War Two, Germany agreed to pay the allied powers and the victims of the Holocaust.

[00:00:44] Roughly three hundred billion dollars. Although it has many names from restitution, reparations to reconciliation, victims of the Holocaust continued to be confronted with a complicated web of programs and cash payments.

[00:01:03] I did not live in a family that hushed, hushed our background. I was raised with my German grandparents. Despite the pain it must have caused her father,

[00:01:14] Ronni Docoff remembers learning about Nazi Germany as a kid.

[00:01:18] If a show came on TV that was showing footage of Nazi atrocities, my father would watch it.

[00:01:28] It was amazing. And I remember him saying when I was young, he said you should see this.

[00:01:35] It was not shied away from. Now he's not a survivor of a camp. He doesn't have marks on his arm. We didn't hear stories about life in captivity, but we heard stories about what it was like outside of captivity when they were starting to get nervous about what was going on in Germany at the time.

[00:01:52] Henry was six years old when Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor.

[00:02:01] I started my first day of school, which was April 1st, which was the date of the

[00:02:09] Boycott, where they boycotted all the Jewish owned stores, all over the country. They went around and just broke all the windows, and stole everything out of the store windows, out of the displays.

[00:02:24] Didn't happen in the same place, didn't happen everywhere. Some places it was worse than others. You more or less felt it was time to get out of there.

[00:02:38] And they ultimately through a lot of effort, found their way to the United States via Detroit after first looking at Israel as an option.

[00:02:49] And then I understand my grandfather rejected Israel. He wasn't ready for a more agricultural beginning.

[00:03:02] My mother was a refugee as a result of the Holocaust, my mother and her family immediate family. My mother was born in 1924 in Berlin to a pretty affluent and large family. In nineteen thirty three, the writing was on the wall. It wasn’t even so subtle. There was very explicit anti-Semitism.

[00:03:26] This is David Dunn. Just like Henry, David's grandparents saw the writing on the wall in 1933, found a job in Tehran and moved the first opportunity they got.

[00:03:37] So my mother, for the most part, never wanted to set foot in Germany ever again.

[00:03:43] Never had any real interest in pursuing reparations. The family business, I guess it was quite a large flour mill in Berlin. I guess my mother was not able to put together the necessary claim.

[00:03:58] Tamara Duneitz has been married to David for over 30 years. She says her family also had to forfeit the family business.

[00:04:05] I mean, my mother side, her mother’s family had industry. So they were wealthy people. So I would look for reparations from Poland. I don't know if they didn't apply, but they didn’t receive.

[00:04:21] Although David's family was unable to be compensated for the loss of their family business. David's mom has been receiving elderly care paid for by German reparations.

[00:04:33] I guess when my mother was in her 80s. There was a program that was financed by the German government for a part time caregiver.

[00:04:41] That was very helpful. Clearly it wasn't compensation for what her family suffered.

[00:04:47] The JSSA, the Jewish social service agency, paid money directly to a registered caregiving agency, enabling David's mom to have a caregiver for 24 hours a week at an estimated cost of 400 dollars per week. His siblings, however, have recently pursued a different form of reparations, German citizenship. Since nineteen forty nine, Victims of the Holocaust have been able to apply for the reinstatement of their German citizenship, according to Article 116 of Basic Law, former German citizens who between January 30th, 1933 and May 8th, 1945, were deprived of their citizenship on political, racial or religious grounds and their descendants on application shall have their citizenship restored.

[00:05:42] I haven't been interested in that myself. Partly, in I guess solidarity with my mother's views, but the trauma that my mother.

[00:05:56] Experienced and felt towards Germany. I mean, again, she she talks about the one time she was back in Germany passing through the Frankfurt Airport. She always talks about how that was a frightening experience for her.

[00:06:14] Henry Leopold, Ronni’s father, said it's not that straightforward.

[00:06:20] It's different you know, you’re born, you go to school, you live in a German society.

[00:06:28] All our friends are Germans. You feel German as far as the languages is concerned you felt.

[00:06:36] German. But for the most part, it was American. I went, all my school was here from the sixth grade on.

[00:06:48] You know in the 6th grade we came to Detroit, we lived in a Gentile neighborhood, a gentile school.

[00:06:54] You know it’s different.

[00:07:00] Nonetheless, Henry went back to visit Germany decades later. I wanted to see it again.

[00:07:08] I remember all the bad times, the good times.

[00:07:11] We had good times, also because I had a lot of friends there, kids I went to school with. But it just wasn’t the same.

[00:07:21] It was not a pleasant experience, although Henry didn't necessarily feel German or even recognize Germany anymore. He applied and got his citizenship reinstated.

[00:07:34] Why did I want it? I think its the fact that the fact that somebody took it away and that I felt that I was entitled to it. Some years later.

[00:07:42] Ronni Ducoff, Henry’s daughter, was confronted with the same dilemma.

[00:07:49] My father is much more forgiving than me. If someone said to me, do I want to go to Germany? I'd say it wasn’t on my list to visit. I ended doing a visit there after college or something.

[00:08:03] But it wasn't anything on the bucket list.

[00:08:07] Of course, things change over time. So when the opportunity came to become a citizen, dad had already done it.

[00:08:13] Some cousins had done it. I thought all right, I'll get our citizenship back.

[00:08:25] Ronni then flew to the German consulate in Boston, taking her three kids, Sam, Jeremy and Ben.

[00:08:31] My name is Samuel Ducoff and Henry Leopold is my grandfather. The passport, I didn’t really know anything about that until it actually started happening when my mom broached the subject with me and my brothers, about the chance to regain German citizenship. That's when I was 16.

[00:08:56] My name is Jeremy Ducoff and Henry is my grandfather. It wasn't a quick process by any means.

[00:09:03] So, you know, it it definitely took some time, but I remember my mom bringing it up and then she mentioned a few of the obvious benefits. Just having that flexibility as well as reclaiming something that our family had lost.

[00:09:18] Flexibility, as Jeremy mentioned, came up time and time again. I kind of felt a little bit like James Bond. It obviously gives you access to other countries in a lot easier fashion. In terms of just being an additional passport with with access to other countries. In that sense, it's it's it's it's a nice resource for sure to have, beyond that in terms of like a strong connection to Germany or anything like that, I don't think that's necessarily the case and it's affected my life in that sense. Despite the new passports, their relationship to Germany didn’t change.

[00:10:01] Which is why it's ironic to have the passport and the citizenship. But I feel maybe part of that would just be the lack of knowing cultural norms, actually visiting the country, spending time with other fellow Germans. I never really felt a part of that particular culture. Although Ronnie, Sam and Jeremy all spoke to the power of getting their citizenship reinstated,

[00:10:28] No one mentioned anything restorative. Instead, Ronnie adds that her passport may just be another way out. One many jews before her didn’t have.

[00:10:37] The irony now is I think the way my country's going. What if I end up having to leave to go to Germany, that's what I have a passport for. And that is one weird thought to wrap your head around, that it might be safer in Germany after all these years.

[00:11:05] Withstanding, the current political climate Holocaust victims continue to have a complicated relationship with Germany and thus the reparations they receive.

[00:11:18] We had a lot of friends that refused

[00:11:24] Completely to search for anything, it would mean, they didn't want it. They didn’t consider it the right thing. And you had some that went completely the other way. They wanted to get as much as they possibly could.

[00:11:47] I mean, personally, I think it's impossible to compensate for for, you know, having your family slaughtered. I mean, I've heard some views that make sense to me that there should be as much punishment on Nazi Germany or I guess a post Nazi Germany. I mean, in terms of it being any kind of satisfying compensation. I don't think it even, I don't think it serves that purpose.