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Received: 19 December 2023 | Accepted: 14 August 2024

DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.3108

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Never again: Lessons of genocide in survivor testimonies from the Holocaust, Nanjing massacre and Rwandan genocide

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Abstract

In the aftermath of traumatic events, individuals and groups seek to make sense of these experiences. 'Never again' is often considered the primary lesson of genocide. Yet, people may understand this lesson in different ways, and other lessons may also be relevant. The present paper reports a qualitative content analysis of publicly available testimonies from survivors of the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide and the Nanjing Massacre (*N* = 200), examining the lessons of genocide that these survivors shared publicly. We identified six broad categories of lessons that were represented across contexts and extended the lessons commonly considered: Lessons on the individual and interpersonal level, on the ingroup level, the (inclusive) intergroup level, the universal level, and concerning both collective memories and the future. These lessons go beyond 'never again' and show different individual and societal obligations and insights that survivors sharing their testimony deem most important to learn from their experience of genocide.

KEYWORDS
collective victimization, genocide, Holocaust, meaning-making, Nanjing massacre, oral history, Rwandan genocide, survivors, trauma

1 | INTRODUCTION

'Never again' is perhaps the most common lesson of genocide in its aftermath. The lesson to learn from the past to prevent future violence has been articulated in the context of the Holocaust (Gubkin, 2007; Klar et al., 2013), the Rwandan Genocide (Murigande, 2008), the Bosnian Genocide (Alkalaj, 1999), and other mass atrocities worldwide. However, 'never again' can be interpreted in different ways: The most common distinction is between universal lessons for genocide prevention or violence prevention more broadly across the globe, versus more particularistic lessons of violence prevention for a specific group (Klar et al., 2013; Levy & Sznaider, 2006; Marrus, 2016). However, other research among survivors and their descendants suggests that people may make sense of their own or their ingroup's experiences of collective violence and existential threats and address other pertinent needs in the aftermath of violence in several other ways as well, such as through an increased focus on a good life and family (Uy & Okubo, 2018) or activities that strengthen the ingroup's culture and identity (Wohl et al., 2010). Lessons of genocide thus may go beyond one or two dominant narratives and be much broader and more pluralistic than the seemingly binary, group-focused universal versus particularistic lessons of genocide.

Therefore, it is important to extend and systematically examine the broad range of lessons of genocide that people draw, beyond universal versus particularistic lessons. This should include lessons expressed by genocide survivors themselves, as survivors have become powerful

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moral voices in society (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). As the scarce empirical studies on this topic suggest, lessons of genocide can be important predictors of political attitudes and behaviours (Rosler & Branscombe, 2020). Archival analyses of political speeches and protests also suggest that these lessons are sometimes used to mobilize political actions (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Marrus, 2016; Vollhardt, 2012). Lessons of genocide, and trauma more generally, are therefore an important area of study for social and political psychology (see also Muldoon et al., 2021).

Drawing on publicly available survivor testimonies from the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the present study examined the breadth and diversity of lessons that genocide survivors draw from their personal experiences of living through mass atrocities. By systematically examining a larger number of oral histories from survivors through qualitative content analysis, our goal was to map out the scope and theoretical dimensions of lessons that survivors report. Building on previous research in social and political psychology that has mostly focused on lessons of the Holocaust among generations that did not experience the genocide directly, the current study examines testimonies of survivors in three contexts: mostly Holocaust survivors and a smaller set of survivor testimonies from the Nanjing Massacre and the Rwandan Genocide.

1.1 | Social psychological research on societal lessons of genocide

Historian Michael Marrus (2016) finds in his archival analyses of lessons of the Holocaust over the last decades that these lessons are varied and multifaceted, differ between survivors and organizations and are shaped by the political context and needs – like collective memories more generally (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Lessons of genocide change over time and may be contested, with sometimes vehement disagreements over which lessons should be drawn from the experience of collective trauma. Marrus' (2016) analysis converges with initial research in social and political psychology on the range of different lessons of the Holocaust, finding that they convey distinct and potentially even opposite messages. Most of this work has focused on two general types of lessons that are both on the group level and have been referred to as particularistic versus universal (Levy & Snzaider, 2006): whether the lessons refer to protecting the ingroup from revictimization through other groups' hostilities or extend to preventing outgroups from being victimized in this way.

Drawing on archival materials, societal discourse, and work by historian Yehuda Bauer (2002), Klar and colleagues (Klar et al., 2013; Klar, 2016) distinguished four lessons of the Holocaust in Jewish Israeli society. Two focus on the ingroup, involving to 'never be a passive victim' and 'never forsake your brethren', while two extend to outgroups and involve to 'never be passive bystander' and 'never be a perpetrator'. Klar (2016) argues that the ingroup-focused lessons – especially protecting oneself from future victimization – are more common, and the outgroup-focused lessons – particularly those involving the ingroup's own harmdoing – are less common. Hirschberger (2018) posits similarly that historical victim groups' primary motive is ingroup protection – resulting in vigilance and heightened sensitivity to ingroup threats that are adaptive and ensure group survival. These motivations underlying the lesson to 'never be a passive victim again' can explain support for violent self-defence when reminded of historical ingroup victimization (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). However, they also explain prosocial actions that benefit the ingroup without harming outgroups: for instance, helping ingroup members in need, as captured in the lesson to 'never forsake your brethren' or symbolic actions that strengthen the ingroup's culture and identity (Wohl et al., 2010). Thus, more conceptual differentiation of the various ingroup-focused lessons of genocide is needed, also to understand different potential outcomes.

There are numerous examples of how outgroup-focused, universal lessons of the Holocaust have guided various actions and political campaigns led by Jewish organizations. For example, the Save Darfur campaign or Jewish organizations protesting for immigrant rights have explicitly communicated the perceived lesson of the Holocaust to 'never be a passive bystander' (Klar et al., 2013, 2016; Vollhardt, 2012, 2015). In some cases, this lesson extends to solidarity with Palestinians (e.g., Jewish Voice for Peace, 2024), exemplifying the lesson to 'never be a perpetrator'. However, Klar (2016) notes that the latter lesson may be less common than the perceived obligation to help unrelated outgroups or third parties, which does not necessarily extend to perceived adversaries – as an experimental study among Jewish Canadian students shows (Warner et al., 2014). An empirical question is therefore which (additional) variations of inclusive lessons of genocide exist, on different levels of expansiveness, and how common they are.

The distinct lessons of the Holocaust (and other mass atrocities) have also been characterized as rights versus duties (Vollhardt, 2012), or moral entitlement versus moral obligations (Rosler & Branscombe, 2020), and linked to support for different policies related to intergroup violence. In a representative sample of Jewish Israelis, the ingroup's perceived moral entitlement as a lesson of the Holocaust (e.g., 'A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Israeli Jews have to protect themselves, even at the cost of harming other groups that threaten them') predicted support for military violence against Palestinians, while perceived moral obligations as a lesson of the Holocaust (e.g., 'A central lesson from the Holocaust is that Israeli Jews are morally obligated not to inflict suffering upon other groups') predicted support for humanitarian responses towards Palestinians in need of medical care (Rosler & Branscombe, 2020). Overall, a few initial studies lend support to the idea that different people endorse distinct lessons of the Holocaust to varying degrees and that distinct lessons have important societal and political implications because they predict support for different intergroup policies.

In sum, initial research on lessons of genocide and other collective trauma has mostly examined two broad categories of lessons, ingroup-focused and inclusive (also referred to as particularistic vs. universal), both of which relate to intergroup and societal-level outcomes. More research on lessons *beyond* these two categories, as well as more research on the nuances and differentiations *within* these categories, is needed to examine whether these are indeed the dominant master narratives concerning lessons of genocide or if there is more

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variation entailing multiple perspectives on these lessons (for a related discussion, see Elcheroth et al., 2019). Additionally, because lessons of genocide may be shaped by context, proximity to the event and experience, more research on this topic in different contexts and among different populations is needed to uncover a broader scope of potential lessons. This also involves including lessons that genocide survivors themselves draw.

1.2 | The significance of studying survivors' meaning-making after collective trauma

The scarce research on lessons of genocide has been conducted in the aftermath of genocide, among people who did not live through the genocide themselves. These lessons may differ from those that genocide survivors draw from their own, direct experiences and the needs they have while rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of collective violence. For example, multilevel analyses of the large-scale 'People on War' dataset from many different contexts demonstrated that people who were directly impacted by war and other mass atrocities responded differently to these events and their implications for justice than the general community did (Elcheroth, 2006). Therefore, research on lessons of genocide among survivors can extend and contribute important insights to the literature.

From a clinical perspective, making sense of traumatic experiences and finding meaning in them is central to coping with and healing from trauma, including the collective trauma of genocide and other forms of political violence (Frankl et al., 2006; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Muldoon et al., 2021). Lessons of genocide are presumably a central part of this meaning-making process and help us better understand the aftermath of genocide from survivors' perspectives (Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). While they are not the only way in which people make sense of their experiences, lessons of ingroup victimization (including genocide) can be conceptualized more broadly as one of several domains of 'collective victim beliefs' (Noor et al., 2017; Vollhardt et al., 2021). From a societal perspective, survivors' lessons of genocide are important to understand because although survivors are often stigmatized and marginalized in the immediate aftermath of genocide and other human rights abuses (e.g., Ibrahim et al., 2018; Stein, 2009; Varshney, 2023), they have also come to be seen as carrying particular moral weight in society (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). For example, genocide survivors are often invited to speak at schools or public events, so that the general public can learn from their experience and receive moral lessons for the present and future (e.g., Bosnian Genocide Educational Trust, 2023; Holocaust Documentation and Education Center, 2023; Ishami Foundation, n.d.). At the same time, the discourse around collective victimhood changes over time (e.g., Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Marrus, 2016; Stein, 2014) and survivors' lessons are also likely influenced by this discourse. Therefore, transgenerational and bidirectional transmission (within families of survivors, e.g., Wohl & van Bavel, 2011; and in society, e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Klar et al., 2013) shape societal narratives of the ingroup's victimization, and these narratives are important in society.

Research among genocide survivors is scarce in social psychology, for obvious ethical and practical reasons, and we are not aware of any studies explicitly investigating the lessons that survivors draw from their experience. However, a few studies on coping and posttraumatic growth among genocide survivors provide relevant insights. These studies suggest that beyond the more commonly studied group- and intergroup-lessons that most literature on societal lessons of genocide focuses on, for survivors individual and interpersonal lessons, in addition to some communal lessons, are central as well.

For example, most participants in a study among Armenian Genocide survivors in the United States emphasized the importance of preserving their cultural and religious identity, and some also emphasized survival or rebuilding their lives and being successful after the genocide (Kalayjian et al., 1996). Similarly, Aboriginal elders in Australia who had lived through children's forced removal from their families by the state stressed the importance of not just narrating their trauma but also their survival, continuing their culture and their connection to the land and kinship (Quayle & Sonn, 2019). This emphasis on more positive and future-oriented lessons was also central to the 'Messages of Hope' project, which documented Rwandan survivors' stories of 'recovery and growth' to balance the focus on trauma in the Rwandan Genocide commemorations (Lala et al., 2014). Similarly, a study among Cambodian genocide survivors in the United States examined posttraumatic growth outcomes that could be understood as individual and interpersonal lessons of the survivors' experience (Uy & Okubo, 2018): for example, having a greater appreciation of life, the importance of education and a career, family and interpersonal relationships and wanting to live one's life in a way that gave their survival meaning or honoured those who did not survive.

Overall, while these studies among survivors did not explicitly inquire about 'lessons' of genocide, the findings show that in addition to the intergroup-focused (universal vs. particularistic) lessons examined among more general populations, lessons on the individual and interpersonal level, as well as hopes for future society, are also relevant. This may reflect, in part, the different needs among people who lived through the violence and are focused on rebuilding their lives and communities compared to ingroup members who were exposed to it vicariously and are making sense of this history through the lens of current political events and societal needs (see also Marrus, 2016; Stein, 2014; Vollhardt & Nair, 2018). Thus, lessons of genocide may be more multifaceted and pluralistic than what research on this topic has focused on so far. To avoid incorrect assumptions about the prevalence of certain lessons or a dominant narrative, it is therefore important to systematically examine the broad range of possible lessons of genocide and their overarching theoretical dimensions, including lessons survivors themselves express.

1.3 | Research questions and overview of the current study

The present paper aimed to map out the scope and theoretical dimensions of lessons of genocide that survivors reported in testimonies

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for public oral history initiatives. While the study is qualitative and mostly inductive, we explored whether the lessons of genocide documented in the literature (from studies among ingroup members who did not personally experience the genocide, and primarily addressing intergroup-focused, universal vs. particularistic lessons) correspond to survivors' lessons – or if these lessons were broader and would reflect some of the findings from the scarce studies on coping and posttraumatic growth among genocide survivors. Furthermore, we examined the lessons' frequencies to determine if there was a clear preference for certain types of lessons or if the range of commonly expressed lessons was broader – in other words, if there were master narratives regarding the lessons of genocide (Hammack, 2010) or if they revealed multiple perspectives (Elcheroth et al., 2019). We therefore employed a mixed, inductive and deductive approach, conducting qualitative content analysis of survivors' testimonies available through the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (USC Shoah Foundation, 2022). While most testimonies in this archive are from the Holocaust, we also added available testimonies from the Nanjing Massacre and the Rwandan Genocide[1] to expand the range of contexts in our analysis. The smaller number of testimonies (see the Method section) from these two additional contexts means that a meaningful comparison between contexts is not possible. However, by including testimonies from other sociopolitical, cultural and historical contexts with different discourses around the ingroup's victimization as well as different degrees of temporal distance to the events, we hoped to identify a wider scope of lessons of genocide.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Sample

To include a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives in our analysis and increase our ability to identify a range of different lessons of genocide while considering the feasibility of the analysis, we sampled testimonies from 200 genocide survivors. Specifically, we analysed testimonies of survivors who had agreed to have their oral testimony video-recorded and made public through the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive. The vast majority of testimonies in this database are from Holocaust survivors, who accordingly made up the majority of our sample ($n = 170$), in addition to the testimonies that were available at the time from the Rwandan Genocide ($n = 13$) and the Nanjing Massacre ($n = 17$).

The sample included 90 men and 110 women. The Holocaust survivors were born between 1911 and 1941 in 14 different European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia). Their testimonies were recorded in English between 1994 and 1998 (with four exceptions recorded in 2001 and 2017, respectively). Nanjing Massacre survivors were mostly born in Nanjing, China, between 1923 and 1938. Their testimonies were recorded in 2012 and 2014, in Mandarin, and translated into English with subtitles for the video recordings provided by the Shoah Foundation. The Rwandan genocide survivors were born between 1957 and 1985, in different Rwandan provinces (and one in Burundi). Their testimonies were recorded from 2007 to 2011, in Kinyarwanda, and translations were provided in subtitles. The demographic information for each survivor in this study is presented in Supporting Information Appendix A.

2.2 | Inclusion criteria and selection of testimonies

We sampled 200 testimonies to include a broad range of experiences and allow for meaningful interpretation of quantitative analyses (frequencies) of qualitatively coded data (Schreier, 2012). We first selected all testimonies that were available at the time in the smaller databases of survivors of the Rwandan genocide and Nanjing massacre that included a question about lessons they drew from their experiences (not all testimonies included this question). The remaining testimonies were then selected from the larger database of English language testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust survivor testimonies were chosen randomly, but based on two additional criteria: First, we aimed to include an equal number of women and men in our sample. Second, we included different countries of origin, with more survivors from countries with the largest Jewish populations before the Holocaust (particularly Poland).

2.3 | Data access and materials

All testimonies analysed for this study were taken from the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, a digital, oral history repository with more than 55,000 video testimonies from several genocides and current instances of mass violence. The Holocaust survivor testimonies were the initial focus of the database and therefore constitute the vast majority of testimonies in this archive (around 52,000). The testimonies are publicly available (some online and some only through participating institutions, see https://vha.usc.edu/home).

The Shoah Foundation testimonies are audio-visual recordings of oral histories. They follow a semi-structured interview protocol that elicits survivors' life stories, including information about their lives before the genocide, their experiences during and in the aftermath of the genocide. The methodology for these interviews, including the recruitment procedure, interview topics and ethical considerations are described in detail on the USC Shoah Foundation's website (USC Shoah Foundation, 2023). The question we analysed for the current study is asked towards the end of some interviews and is described in the interviewer guidelines as 'a message for future generations'. The question was not always phrased in the same way. For example, interviewers asked: 'Now, based on your very extensive experiences

[1] While the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive includes testimonies from several other contexts, we were not able to include them because they were either recorded with a different set of interview questions prior to the creation of the Shoah Foundation interview protocol and do not include a question about lessons (the Armenian Genocide testimonies), were not in English and could not be understood by our research team (e.g., testimonies from the Guatemalan genocide), or were too few (e.g., only around five from the Cambodian genocide at the time of coding).

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during WWII and the Holocaust, what would be your message for today's and the next generation, not only to Jews, to everybody?' (from Michael Jourdan-Liechtenstein's interview) or 'Would you like to speak something to the young people? To the next generation, generation in my age or younger than me?' (from Lanying Yi's interview). Content coding of the interview question preceding survivors' expressed lessons of the genocide revealed that 62% in our sample asked about the 'message', 7.3% about 'lessons' and 57.3% about what participants would say to future generations (these categories were not mutually exclusive, and some interview questions included a combination). Despite these variations, the questions all elicit the lessons the survivors wish to share with the public about their experience of genocide. We report exploratory analyses of the effects of different question framings on the findings (including whether they prompted concepts captured in our codes) at the end of the Results section.

2.4 | Ethical considerations and positionality

While the data used in this project are archival and publicly available, and therefore exempt from IRB review, we took several ethical considerations into account (Einwohner, 2011). For example, while ethics review boards often stress anonymity of the data as a safeguard for participants, in the case of survivor testimonies provided for public databases such as the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive the opposite is true (Einwohner, 2011): The testimonies are not anonymous and participants in the oral history project not only consent to this (optional) condition but also often explicitly state that they want their story, name and the stories and names of their loved ones who were killed in the genocide to be known. For this reason, we use full names rather than pseudonyms. Additionally, our analysis and interpretation stayed close to the survivors' words and semantic meaning, and we did not interpret the latent meaning that may have differed from what the survivors wished to express (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Finally, we considered the researchers' positionality. While we did not have Rwandan or Chinese researchers on the team and were aware of the possible limitations of our understanding of these particular contexts and the survivor experience in general, our team was multinational, multicultural and multiracial, with researchers from various different backgrounds – including a descendant of Polish Jews who lived through the Holocaust, researchers with family and direct experience of war in former Yugoslavia, and other experiences of racial or ethnic discrimination. Additionally, all researchers had a background in studying intergroup violence and collective trauma in various contexts and were familiar with other narratives of this kind. These personal experiences and connections informed the analysis, which the researchers approached with respect for and empathy with the survivors' narratives.

2.5 | Analytic procedure

We transcribed the answer to the question about messages for future generations and used qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) to analyse the data. This analytic procedure was chosen because it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches that were well suited for answering our research questions, allowing us to address the breadth and content of the responses as well as how they were distributed. Qualitative content analysis uses inductive procedures to develop a coding manual that is flexible and incorporates context-specific features of the data, in addition to theoretically driven (deductive) categories for coding. These codes are then used to determine interrater reliability and reduce larger amounts of complex data into more concise categories that can be compared quantitatively, for example, to determine the frequency of codes (Schreier, 2012). This allowed us to address our empirical question concerning whether there was a clear master narrative and preferred lesson of genocide or if multiple lessons were prevalent across the sample.

Accordingly, we first developed the coding manual based on an initial reading of half of the data to ensure the codes sufficiently represented the data. The initial coding manual included 48 different lessons, which were grouped into overarching categories. The coding manual includes a definition of each code with example quotes and in some cases negative examples (cases that would not be coded in that category) that are similar but distinct from the given code and could be easily mistaken (Schreier, 2012). Next, two authors conducted a trial coding of 10% of the material to test and further refine the coding manual, adding as well as collapsing some codes (Schreier, 2012). This trial coding included examples from each of the three contexts. The final version of the coding manual (see Appendix B in the Supporting Information) included 36 codes. The main coding was conducted by the second and third authors, who met with the first author to discuss and resolve discrepancies in the coding. Coders were instructed to segment the data into separate units whenever there was a change in the lesson, such that 'each segment/unit fits into one category of the coding frame' (Schreier, 2012, p. 127). This means that some survivors had several different codes. The interrater reliability for the codes presented in the article was, on average, a kappa of .60 (for kappas for each code, see Appendix C in Supporting Information, data files with the individual codes for interrater reliability are also provided in the Supporting Information), which is 'moderate' agreement (Cohen, 1960). However, given the complexity and length of the coding manual and material and because each disagreement was discussed among three authors, this was deemed sufficient based on methodological guidelines on interrater reliability (Belur et al., 2021; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

3 | RESULTS

All codes' frequencies, along with sample quotes, are reported in Appendix C in the Supporting Information. The raw data file with resolved codes is provided in the Supporting Information. Due to space constraints, and because we were most interested in the more common lessons that survivors share, we only discuss categories that at least 5% of the sample (i.e., ten survivors) mentioned (see Table 1). Overall, we identified six overarching categories of codes (see Figure 1). Four represented different levels of concern: group-based lessons

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TABLE 1 Overview of different lessons of genocide expressed by survivors (codes mentioned by at least 5% of the sample).

1 Ingroup-focused lessons: Ingroup protection and strength	
1.1 Never again be a victim	19.5%
1.2 Warning about ingroup's present or future risk of discrimination and victimization	5%
1.3 Vigilance	13%
1.4 Resistance and self-defence	14%
1.5 Bravery and physical strength	9.5%
1.6 Ingroup pride	9%
1.7a Ingroup-strengthening attitudes and behaviours: National aspirations	13%
1.7b Ingroup-strengthening attitudes and behaviours: Cultural strength	8%
2 Inclusive lessons: Violence prevention and peace	
2.1 Never again – anywhere in the world	12.5%
2.2 Tolerance and harmony	20%
2.3 Inclusive identities and universal concern for outgroups	15%
2.4 Never be a passive bystander	12.5%
2.5 Never be a perpetrator	10.5%
3 Universal lessons: The nature of humanity and society	
3.1 The nature of conflict and violence	15.5%
3.2 Human potential for cruelty and violence	7.5%
3.3 History repeats itself	8.5%
3.4 Importance of democracy and freedom	5%
4 Individual and interpersonal lessons	
4.1 Morality and prosocial values	18%
4.2 Live without resentment and hatred	6.5%
4.3 Live a happy and good life	8%
4.4 Valuing family	5%
4.5 Work hard and succeed	5%
4.6 Importance of education	6.5%
5 Collective memory and acknowledgement	
5.1a Never forget	18.5%
5.1b Transmission to future generations	9%
5.2 Importance of education about the ingroup's genocide	16%
5.3 Never forget where you came from	6.5%
6 Future orientation	
6.1 Desire for a better future	5%

Note: Codes have been reorganized within each category and do not correspond to the numbers used in the full list of all codes from the coding manual (see Supporting Information Appendix A).

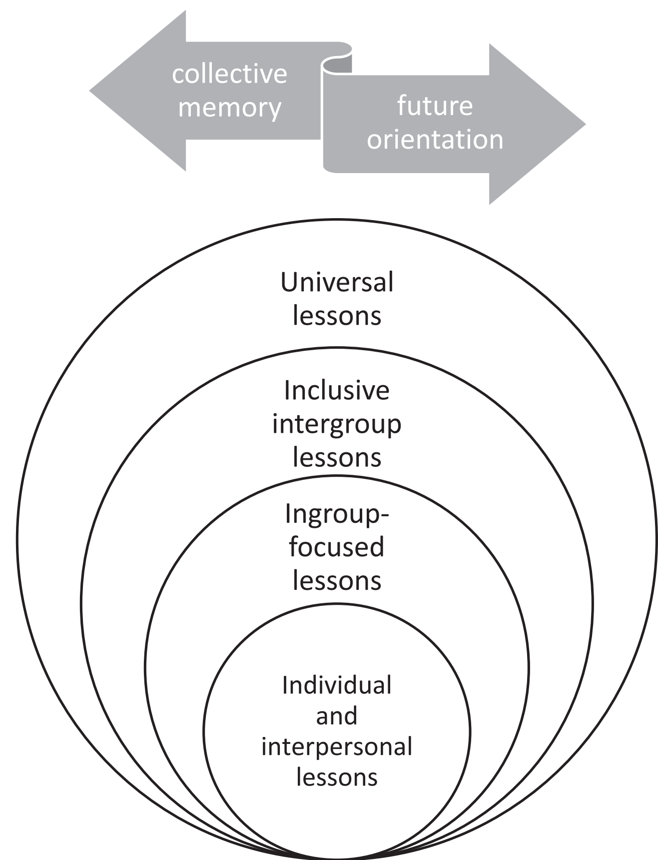

FIGURE 1 Schematic overview of different dimensions of survivors' lessons of genocide.

(ingroup-focused or inclusive of outgroups), universal lessons about human nature and society, and lessons on the individual or interpersonal level. Two additional categories of codes addressed different temporal orientations: collective memories of the past genocide and a code focused on the future. In the following, we describe each category of lessons, highlighting important theoretical emphases within each, and providing quotes to illustrate selected codes (see Appendices B and C in the Supporting Information for sample quotes for each category).

3.1 | Ingroup-focused lessons: Ingroup protection and strength

In line with observations in the context of Jewish Israeli society's lessons of the Holocaust (Klar et al., 2013, 2016), one of the most common lessons survivors in this sample expressed was that the ingroup should *never again be a victim* of violence (1.1.). For example, Nanjing Massacre survivor, Zhaozeng Fu, said:

> We can't be bullied again by foreign powers. The modern history of China was beset with sufferings, China had gone through trials and tribulations before the liberation. We had all along been bullied by the foreign powers.

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Related to this sentiment of preventing future violence in one's country or against other ingroups, two codes warned about *ongoing violence and discrimination* against the ingroup (1.2) and urged the ingroup to be *vigilant* (1.3). For example, Holocaust survivor Joseph Riwash noted: 'Jewish [people] should be prepared and equipped that they should not be pushed around in case there is antisemitism'. Thus, these three codes focus on the need for ingroup protection as a lesson of the experience of genocide and urge the ingroup to be cautious to prevent future revictimization (Hirschberger, 2018).

Relatedly, two other relatively common codes focus on the ingroup's physical strength, including the *importance of resistance and self-defence* (1.4) to prevent being victims again and the general importance of *bravery and ingroup strength* (1.5). Speaking to both lessons, Holocaust survivor Michael Okunieff explained:

> You have to prepare yourself and when you see that you have the evil take over the good, maybe to find a way to just quench it, to destroy the evil before it became powerful. The second thing is evil should be fought with evil. And that… in a world where you feel that you are the victim. Arm yourself, protect yourself, and try to be strong, and face the challenge. (…) The second thing is in time of disaster, to learn to unite yourself and to be able to fight back, the enemy or the sinister forces.

Some survivors also expressed the importance of preserving *ingroup pride* (1.6), not just despite but precisely because of what the ingroup endured. In work on collective victim beliefs, this has been referred to as 'pride born of suffering' (Szabó, 2020).

Finally, two codes captured *making the ingroup stronger*. Some survivors discussed *national aspirations* (1.7a) and the importance of strengthening the ingroup's nation materially and politically to prevent being targeted again in the future. For example, Nanjing Massacre survivor Fubao Cheng noted: 'So I think our people should lodge in mind the national humiliation and strive to build up our country and live in peace with the people in other countries. The enemies dare not invade us when we grow stronger'. Others focused on symbolic dimensions of ingroup strength through preserving the *ingroup's culture* (1.7b), such as Holocaust survivor Bluma Doman who said: 'A message I can give to all Jewish people: don't turn away from your religion. Be a good Jew. (…) Give tzedakah [charity]. Make mitzvah [good deeds] and hope to God that something like this will never happen again'. Both strategies can be understood as responses to existential threats to the ingroup such as through genocide (Wohl et al., 2010), and they aim to rebuild the ingroup and protect them against future victimization.

In sum, ingroup-focused lessons include at least three distinct ways in which 'never again' for the ingroup may translate into different coping strategies and ideas how this goal may be achieved: while some involve outgroup distrust and self-defence that can justify intergroup violence, this is not inevitable and instead some emphasize strengthening the ingroup either physically (including nationally) or culturally and based on identity (including fostering a sense of ingroup pride) – which should result in different behaviours and support for distinct policies that might not necessarily involve outgroup hostility or interactions with outgroups in general (e.g., Roccas et al., 2006). This conceptual differentiation counters the idea that remembering the ingroup's victimization makes groups prone to intergroup conflict (Vollhardt, 2012), even when they draw ingroup-focused lessons. The relations between these different types of ingroup-focused lessons and their effects on different outcomes among the general population need to be tested systematically in future research.

3.2 | Inclusive lessons: Violence prevention and peace

As observed in work on societal lessons of the Holocaust (Klar et al., 2013; Marrus, 2016), another set of lessons that survivors drew from their experience of living through a genocide was more inclusive. Specifically, some extended '*never again*' to *other groups worldwide* (2.1.), wishing to ensure that genocide did not happen again anywhere and to anyone. For example, Holocaust survivor Adolf Deutsch noted:

> Nobody should know… I don't wish it upon the worst enemy… anybody, any human being to know what this was all about. How hard it is for a person to be able to survive, what a person can endure, how strong a human being is, that you can survive without food one week, another day, another day but for months. And people did survive to tell the world what was this horrible thing that happened and it should not happen again because after all we are living in the 20th century.

Two other lessons were closely related to this goal of genocide prevention, though more general in nature. Specifically, the most frequent code in this study focused on the need for *tolerance and harmony* between groups and individuals in society (2.2) and another commonly mentioned code expressed *inclusive identities and concern for outgroups* (2.3). These two lessons were on a higher level of abstraction and usually did not name specific contexts or groups but instead humanity as a reference group, expressing these ideas as general principles that should apply universally. For example, conveying both lessons simultaneously, Holocaust survivor Samuel Bradin noted:

> Once and for all we have to learn tolerance. One person has to tolerate each other. From whatever walk of life, creed, creed to race, it shouldn't matter. We're all God's children. We're brought here for a purpose and there's no reason one human being should be cruel to another.

Two other lessons in this category were more specific to the ingroup's perceived moral obligations to prevent violence against outgroups because of their own experience of victimization (Vollhardt, 2012; Warner et al., 2014). As proposed by Klar and colleagues (2013, 2016), perceived moral obligations that focus on outgroups can take two forms, which we also identified in the present data: *never be a passive*

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bystander (2.4) and *never be a perpetrator* (2.5). Also in line with Klar and colleagues' observations, these charges to the ingroup to prevent violence against other groups were somewhat less frequently expressed than the lesson to prevent the ingroup from being victimized again; and the lesson to never be a perpetrator was least frequent (though not discussed much less than the lesson to never be a passive bystander). Both lessons were sometimes expressed as a personal responsibility and sometimes directed to the ingroup. Additionally, survivors sometimes mentioned specific intergroup contexts, such as relations with the perpetrator group and refraining from revenge, but sometimes simply stated this lesson as a general principle the ingroup should follow, such as Nanjing massacre survivor Guixiang Liu who said: 'Sometimes I feel even if people are tied in brotherhood, one could turn against another. (…) Never should we follow others' malignancies of plundering, killing, or weapon-brandishing'.

In sum, these findings suggest that inclusive lessons of genocide vary in their level of abstractness versus concreteness, such as whether they express general principles (as in the first two codes in this category) or focus on specific groups (as in the last three codes). The group-specific lessons vary in their expansiveness and whether outgroups are included selectively or universally. Selective inclusion could involve groups with a similar history or conflict position (see Cohrs et al., 2015) or conversely groups the ingroup is perpetrating violence against or perceives as an adversary. In future research and theorizing, these different degrees of inclusiveness in lessons of genocide should be distinguished conceptually, beyond mere distinctions related to one's role as a bystander or perpetrator (Klar et al., 2013).

3.3 | Universal lessons: The nature of humanity and society

Going beyond the group-focused lessons of the first two categories that resonate with previous research, the third category included less commonly discussed universal lessons of genocide about human nature or how society is or should be organized. These lessons were somewhat less common than the group-focused lessons. The most frequently mentioned one addressed what survivors learned from their experience about *the nature of conflict and violence* (3.1). This included several different ideas such as the role of dehumanization or how violence evolves gradually. For instance, Holocaust survivor Esther Gever explained:

> We have to see the evil before it grows into something so tremendous that it's too late. Because if we overlook it, it will eat us, it will eat up our children, it will engulf us. Therefore, sitting idle and saying it's nothing or it will never happen, that's what happened to us.

Relatedly, some survivors stressed that their experience taught them about the *human potential for cruelty and violence* (3.2) or cautioned that *history repeats itself* (3.3) and this kind of violence therefore could happen again elsewhere in the world because humans do not learn from their mistakes. For example, Holocaust survivor Leon Berk stated:

> The only conclusion that I would say for my life is about menacing humanity to men because what I saw is really indescribable. And I never, even in my wildest dreams, thought before the war that I will see anything of that kind and Arthur Koestler said that 'beneath the neocortex, which makes us human, is the old reptilian brain, which given the circumstances makes us beasts'. And war (…) creates the best circumstances for the beast and that's what I saw.

Accordingly, another lesson that some survivors drew from their experience considering this potential for human violence is the *importance of preserving democracy and freedom* (3.4) as an antidote to the risk of genocide.

In sum, this category of lessons goes beyond the group level that is prevalent in most work on lessons of the Holocaust, which has tended to focus on ingroup-focused versus inclusive lessons about violence prevention (e.g., Klar et al., 2013; Levy & Sznaider, 2006). Instead, the present category of lessons about the nature of society and humanity is linked to more general worldviews. These findings therefore conceptually extend the literature on lessons of genocide. Lessons about human nature and society should be examined more in future research – including their relation to other categories of lessons, and which outcomes they predict among the general population. For example, the most frequent lesson in this category (understanding the nature of violence) could be linked to different policy preferences depending on which lessons on the group level are endorsed, and they could result in cynicism or hopelessness unless lessons about the potential for prosocial human tendencies are also endorsed, as discussed in the next category.

3.4 | Individual and interpersonal lessons

While work on lessons of genocide often focuses on the intergroup and political realm, our analysis revealed that survivors also drew lessons for their individual lives, including general lessons about how to live life that were also passed on to others. These lessons mostly expressed values. While overall the lessons in this category were less commonly mentioned than those on the group level, one of the most frequent lessons was in the individual and interpersonal realm, namely being a *moral and prosocial* person (4.1). For example, describing the 'little pockets of morality' she had witnessed during the Holocaust such as through rescuers and other acts of helping, Holocaust survivor Marie Kaufman noted that it was important to

> …create tolerance and that kind of morality that showed up in these little pockets that they should see to it that their children and their grandchildren can create the bigger pockets with ethics and morality in the world

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> for people to learn about each other with differences. That's really what I would like for my children to pass on along with the stories.

Two related, less commonly mentioned lessons described some survivors' resolve to *live without resentment and hatred* (4.2) towards the perpetrators or in some cases as a general principle, and to *live a happy and good life* (4.3). In contrast to these rather abstract lessons, three other, less frequently mentioned lessons in this category were more concrete and involved aspects of peoples' personal lives: the *value of family* (4.3) considering the survivors' losses of many relatives; and the importance of *working hard and succeeding* (4.4), for which *education* (4.5) was seen as instrumental. Sometimes, these lessons were articulated as general life advice to others. For example, Holocaust survivor Barbara Fischman Traub noted: 'What I would like the grandchildren to know is that knowledge is something that nobody can take away from you'. In other cases, these lessons focused on survivors' own lives or were directed at other survivors, such as Rwandan genocide survivor Emmanuel Muhinda who said:

> The thing that should make us work harder is, we must work to prove that there is a reason for our survival. To prove what our parents had or were planning to achieve, can be achieved by us. (…) I would like to give counsel to the youth not to lose hope. They must believe that everything is possible and that they can transform their lives. (…) They can achieve anything if they work hard enough. The successful ones should try and help those below them to succeed too. That is my message to them in these times.

Overall, the lessons in this category extend previous work on societal lessons of genocide by adding the interpersonal and individual level as well as a focus on values. Several of the lessons correspond to findings on coping and posttraumatic growth among survivors, suggesting the importance of integrating these different bodies of literature to expand its conceptual scope. While the individual and interpersonal lessons might be specific to survivors who themselves lived through genocides, we believe that through family and societal transmission they may be found among a more general population as well – especially those who have been exposed to survivors' stories, whether through personal contacts, fiction, commemoration sites or media. However, this is an empirical question for future research among general population samples, along with examining whether these lessons predict outcomes on a broader societal level or only on the individual and interpersonal levels.

3.5 | Collective memory and acknowledgement

Finally, two sets of lessons focused on time: either oriented towards memories of the past or the future. Unsurprisingly, given that the survivors in this sample had agreed to share their testimony for an oral history archive, many focused on the importance of preserving collective memories of the genocide they lived through. The most common lesson in this category was '*never forget*' (5.1a). Survivors talked about the urgency of remembering the genocide in general, along with specific stories of what happened to them or their relatives, friends, and others who were killed. Often survivors mentioned that they wanted their children and grandchildren to know this history so it would be *passed down to future generations* (5.1b), while in other cases it was directed at society at large. Several survivors noted that the lesson of 'never forget' had motivated their participation in the Shoah Foundation's oral history project. For instance, Holocaust survivor Rita Hilton explained: 'That's the reason I'm doing the (…) testimony. (…) as we are dying off, as this generation is dying off, I think that record should be forever. For everyone to have that record of what has happened (…)'. Some survivors who expressed this lesson also talked about their perceived obligation to share what they had witnessed, and some expressed a moral obligation towards those who did not survive, like Holocaust survivor Henia Bryer who explained:

> I felt I owed it to… not so much to my children (…). But I thought I had to do it for my brother who was killed, for my sister, for my father, and for all the people who can't talk today and never will be able to tell their story. That is why.

Closely related, another commonly expressed lesson focused on *educating others about the genocide* (5.2). This lesson was more concrete than the previous lesson to never forget and usually addressed specific ways in which society, including students in history classes, should be taught about the genocide. Some survivors focused on preserving knowledge about the ingroup's fate during the genocide, while others implied the link between genocide education and genocide prevention. For example, Rwandan survivor Kizito Kalima's lessons of the genocide included the desire

> … to make sure that people are educated enough (…) [that] they know exactly the cause, and the consequences of genocide and that's what I want everybody to know and to learn because the way the whole world acted during the genocide it kind of bothers me, until now, because (…) people could have stopped it, easily, simply, easily – but (…) it seems like nobody cared.

Finally, a smaller number of survivors also mentioned as a lesson, mostly to their children and grandchildren, that they should *never forget where they came from* (5.3). This focus on the ingroup's heritage was often connected to a sense of pride and expressed the importance of remembering the ingroup's rich culture and history, not just the destruction through the genocide that targeted them. The focus on ancestral pride in addition to memories of oppression is also part of the radical hope model proposed by Mosley and colleagues (2020).

Overall, while the literature on lessons of genocide often focuses on the varied interpretations of 'never again', the present category of

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lessons suggests that 'never forget', or the desire for remembrance and commemoration, is equally important to many survivors: this lesson was among the most commonly discussed ones. This may be a selection bias because these survivors chose to participate in preserving and sharing testimonies of the genocide. Other research shows that some survivors want to forget and avoid talking about the violence they lived through (e.g., Vollhardt & Nair, 2018). However, this category of lessons also corresponds to findings on the desire for acknowledgement of the ingroup's victimization that is shared by many survivors (e.g., Kalajian et al., 1996) and group members who did not experience it personally (Vollhardt et al., 2014). Resonating with our findings, desired forms of acknowledgement include more education about the ingroup's genocide (Twali et al., 2020), which suggests that this finding was not merely prompted by the wording of the interview question that often entailed lessons for 'future generations' (see the Method section).

3.6 | Future orientation

Seemingly in contrast to the focus on remembering the past, a few survivors expressed as a lesson of past genocide that it is important to focus on and build a better future. Survivors expressing this lesson often talked about the role of youth and the features of a better future society, such as peace and prosperity, which again may have been prompted by the specific wording of some interview questions that mentioned future generations. This lesson also conveys optimism and hope (Lala et al., 2014; Mosley et al., 2020). For example, Rwandan genocide survivor Rose Buriziha described her vision for the country's future and for the younger generations as follows:

> The message I can give is, just like how I always tell survivors of Mukara I represent. I always tell them not to lose hope, they shouldn't be victims of pain. They should believe that they have to live and live for our children. We live a good life and we strive for it, like the ones who were killed in the genocide had lived well, we should follow the footsteps in their work. (…) I feel like the message I can give is, we can develop ourselves and be strong. We can study and pass since no one can discriminate against us. No one can say that the Tutsi can't study only a Hutu can study, today we all study. Schools are there and we teach our children culture and we let them know that going to school is of value, and they fight for a good future. That is what I wish for them.

While lessons about the future may seem opposite to lessons about commemorating the past, the radical hope model (Mosely et al., 2020) posits that these two dimensions of time are both fundamental to how groups understand their history of oppression and struggles for healing from violence and working towards liberation. A focus on the past is therefore not mutually exclusive from a focus on the future, and historical closure may not be the same as 'moving on' as some work on collective victimization beliefs suggests (Vollhardt et al., 2021). Notably, while this category was the least frequent one, several lessons in other categories also imply how future society should look like (e.g., principles of tolerance, the various lessons about preventing future violence). Therefore, the temporal dimension, including the past, future and present, should be included in any conceptualization of lessons of genocide.

3.7 | Additional exploratory analysis

It is beyond the scope of the paper, and not possible due to small counts in several categories and small sample sizes of two of the included contexts, to statistically analyse the relations between the lessons or examine group differences. The interpretation of these differences would also be unclear due to several other features that varied between the interviews (e.g., language, how the question was asked). However, we note several descriptive observations about the lesson categories' distribution.

First, the six most frequently expressed lessons (each mentioned by 15–20% of the sample; see Table 1) were from five of the six different overarching categories, showing that they were not limited to one type of lesson but instead fairly evenly distributed. Specifically, the most common lesson was the inclusive lesson of tolerance and harmony (20%), very closely followed by the ingroup-focused lesson to never again be a victim (19.5%), the importance of collective memory of and education about the ingroup's genocide (18.5% and 16%, respectively) and the interpersonal lesson of being a moral and prosocial person (18%), and finally universal lessons about the nature of human conflict and violence (15.5%). When interpreting these frequencies, some caution is needed regarding their generalizability, given the variation in the interview questions that elicited participants' responses. Specifically, some interview questions may have prompted ideas that were captured in our codes (e.g., questions that asked about future generations, or when the interviewer specified that the lessons were for their ingroup or the world, see the Method section). To explore this question, we coded whether the interview questions contained wording related to any of our six main coding categories (e.g., if the victim and perpetrator group were named as the audience of the message, it was coded as 'inclusive', if 'world' was mentioned, as universal, etc., see coding manual in Table 1 in Supporting Information Appendix D). Next, we conducted logistic regression analyses to test if the interview question focus (including whether it mentioned 'lesson', 'message' or 'saying something to future generations' in addition to priming code-related content) predicted a higher likelihood of specific overarching codes. The results of this analysis are reported in Supporting Information Appendix D (Tables 2 and 3). Participants who were asked about their 'message' (compared to 'lesson' or what they would say to future generations) were significantly more likely to express an inclusive lesson and significantly less likely to express a lesson about collective memory (see Table 2 in Supporting Information Appendix D). Participants whose interview question mentioned both the ingroup and outgroups (usually the perpetrator group) were more likely to express an ingroup-focused lesson, while participants responding to an interview question

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with a universal reference were more likely to express inclusive lessons (see Table 3 in Supporting Information Appendix D). There were no other significant effects of the interview question's variation on the likelihood of mentioning lessons in specific categories, such that overall this influence was limited and the focus of the question was not linked to a corresponding lesson: The use of the wording 'future generation' in the question did not result in a significantly different frequency of lessons about collective memory or the future generation (see Table 2 in Supporting Information Appendix D), and there was no significant link between coded content in the interview question related to the ingroup and ingroup-focused lessons, inclusive content in the interview questions and inclusive lessons, universal interview question content and universal lessons, individual and interpersonal content in the interview questions and individual/interpersonal lessons, or a focus on the future in the interview question and future lessons (see Table 3 in Supporting Information Appendix D).

Second, these lessons were not mutually exclusive and survivors often did not limit themselves to one particular lesson: On average, survivors expressed 3.33 ($SD = 2.01$), and up to 11, different lessons in two ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.06$; mode = 2) different overarching categories and 70% of the sample expressed lessons in multiple (2–5) categories, while only 29.5% shared lessons in just one of the overarching categories. Additionally, the number of lessons mentioned by survivors was not related to the focus of the interview question (message focus: $r = .03$, $p = .67$, lesson focus: $r = .02$, $p = .76$, future generation focus: $r = .05$, $p = .53$). Of particular interest is whether the two group-based lessons that are often presented as a binary (ingroup-focused vs. inclusive or universal vs. particularistic) were mutually exclusive. We found to the contrary that of the 102 survivors who expressed ingroup-focused lessons, 40 also expressed inclusive lessons. Similarly, over one third ($n = 36$) of those who discussed ingroup-focused lessons also discussed individual and interpersonal lessons; and nearly half ($n = 44$) of those who discussed inclusive lessons also discussed lessons on the individual or interpersonal level; thus, while some focus on one level or category of lessons this is not true for all and these categories are not mutually exclusive.

Third, despite the small number of survivors represented from two of the contexts (Nanjing Massacre and Rwandan Genocide), all overarching categories of lessons were represented and therefore relevant in all three contexts. Moreover, except for the category of lessons about the future, which was least common across all three contexts (7.6%, 5.9% and 7.7% among Holocaust survivors, Nanjing Massacre survivors and Rwandan Genocide survivors, respectively), each category of lessons was represented by at least 23% (and up to 70%) of all survivors in each context's sample, indicating their shared nature across and within contexts.

4 | DISCUSSION

This study analysed oral testimonies from survivors of the Holocaust, Nanjing Massacre and Rwandan Genocide to examine genocide survivors' lessons of genocide. Using qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) that enabled us to condense and synthesize information from 200 survivor testimonies while also allowing for inductive, flexible and context-specific analysis, we identified many different lessons across contexts (see Table 1). They fell into six overarching categories, addressing different levels (see Figure 1). These findings have several theoretical implications for understanding the nature and scope of lessons of genocide in society, expanding the literature in several ways.

First, we found that the lessons of genocide that survivors conveyed go beyond the group-focused lessons most of the literature on this topic has discussed – specifically, the 'never again' lesson that emphasizes the importance of protecting and preventing violence against the ingroup (particularistic lessons) or also outgroups (universal lessons). While these lessons were also present and among the most common ones in this sample, we identified four additional categories of lessons that are less commonly or not at all discussed in the literature on lessons of genocide so far: Specifically, survivors also expressed lessons on the individual and interpersonal level about values and how one should live life as well as on a more general and universal level related to worldviews about human nature and society. Additionally, the temporal dimension was relevant, with some lessons addressing the past and preserving collective memories and others oriented towards a better future. These underexamined dimensions should be integrated into future theorizing and research on lessons of genocide, as discussed in more detail below. Extending the scope of lessons that are considered by adding these dimensions (the individual and interpersonal, universal societal and temporal dimensions) and domains (e.g., values and worldviews) will help avoid a too narrow view of the implications of collective violence and trauma and how people make sense of it. The social psychological literature on how people make sense of collective violence (Vollhardt, 2020) and the interdisciplinary literature on lessons of genocide (e.g., Marrus, 2016) has tended to focus on the group- and intergroup level, often implying that cycles of violence are an inevitable outcome of collective experiences and memories of ingroup victimization (Vollhardt, 2012) or that intergroup relations are peoples' primary concern regarding their group's victimization. The present findings urge us to expand our conceptualization of how people make sense of ingroup victimization in its aftermath and that neither lessons contributing to sustaining intergroup violence nor a focus on the intergroup and political level more generally are inevitable. Lessons of genocide (and presumably also other forms of collective violence) are more pluralistic and varied: Some people may focus their attention on implications for the ingroup and decentre intergroup relations altogether (Vollhardt & Nair, 2018) or focus instead on more general worldviews or more concrete consequences for individual lives and interpersonal relations (Muldoon et al., 2021). The notion of time also seems important for how people think about genocide, which is a rupture in societies. Conceptualizing lessons of genocide more holistically by taking these various relevant dimensions into account (see Figure 1) can help avoid false assumptions about peoples' meaning-making in the aftermath of collective violence and point us to new and important directions for understanding how this meaning-making may impact various individual and collective outcomes, beyond intergroup attitudes. For example, interpersonal and individual-level lessons are

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presumably linked to coping and psychological well-being that are studied in the clinical literature (Uy & Okobu, 2018), lessons about worldviews concerning human nature and society may be related to political and civic participation as well as preferred resistance strategies, and lessons related to the temporal dimension might predict preferred forms of redress, such as how much commemoration and memorials are emphasized as compared to redress focusing on the group's present-day material conditions.

Second, in addition to extending the scope and dimensions of lessons that are considered, our findings suggest variety and nuances within the more commonly studied 'never again' lessons. For example, our findings on the lessons that were broadly categorized as protecting the ingroup from being a victim suggest three distinct foci: a focus on risk and vigilance, which both convey a sense of threat (see also Hirschberger, 2018), a material and physical focus on resistance and strength as well as nation building, and a symbolic focus on preserving the ingroup's culture and identity (see also Wohl et al., 2010). Notably, while ingroup-focused lessons of violence are often considered risk factors for negative intergroup relations and support for intergroup violence (e.g., Klar et al., 2013; Rosler & Branscombe, 2020), the latter category does not have this focus and instead has prosocial outcomes that do not imply intergroup interaction. Avoiding the deterministic view of ingroup-focused lessons of collective ingroup victimization as contributing to cycles of violence, and better understanding when which type of ingroup-focused lessons are endorsed and which outcomes they predict, is an important future research question. Likewise, our findings suggested the need to theoretically differentiate inclusive lessons of genocide along varying levels of abstraction and selectivity: while some lessons are more general in nature (e.g., tolerance, universal concern for outgroups), they could extend to groups that otherwise might be perceived as enemies or adversaries or exclude these groups and be limited to outgroups perceived as neutral, as allies, or as sharing a similar conflict position (see Cohrs et al., 2015). More research is therefore needed to understand the predictors of the varying degrees of inclusiveness in these lessons, and under what circumstances they extend to recognizing the ingroup's capacity for perpetrating violence in addition to being a victim and bystander. Likewise, our findings on the different kinds of lessons that survivors drew on the individual and interpersonal level correspond to findings from scarce studies in clinical and counselling psychology among survivors: for example, the focus on hard work and career or education was also present in studies among Armenian and Cambodian genocide survivors (Kalayjian et al., 1996; Uy & Okobu, 2018); likewise, the focus on a good and happy life and the importance of family was found among Cambodian genocide survivors (Uy & Okobu, 2018), and the frequently discussed category of morality and prosocial values resonates with the notion of altruism born of suffering (Vollhardt, 2009). However, the lessons in this category imply different foci; and individual versus prosocial, interpersonal lessons may have different predictors and outcomes as well as interact differently with lessons from other categories, thereby giving rise to distinct research questions.

A third theoretical implication of the present findings that builds on the previous two is that there does not appear to be a clear master narrative related to the lessons of genocide. Instead, these lessons are pluralistic and heterogeneous. This is apparent both in the range of different categories of lessons the findings revealed and the variation within each of these categories. Moreover, it is evident in the frequencies of these lessons and how the categories are distributed: none of the lessons were endorsed by more than 20% of the sample (i.e., there was no single lesson that was dominant), and the most commonly endorsed lessons (between 15% and 20% of the sample) spanned across the different categories, with representation from all categories except for the less discussed future orientation. This finding is important because lessons of genocide, like beliefs about intergroup conflict and violence more generally, are often assumed to entail shared societal beliefs and master narratives (Bar-Tal, 2000; Hammack, 2010). While this may be the case on the official, political level, it is also crucial to understand the heterogeneity in these narratives and lessons that circulate in society, may co-exist in parallel, be contested, and undergo normative shifts over time (Elcheroth et al., 2019; Klar et al., 2013).

Our findings also showed that this heterogeneity in lessons existed not just between different people but also within survivors, who often endorsed multiple lessons. Additional analysis suggests that the categories are not always mutually exclusive. For example, some survivors endorsed both ingroup-focused and inclusive lessons; and some endorsed lessons both on the individual or interpersonal and on the intergroup level. While the unstandardized nature of the data and the small counts in several cases did not allow for examining how these categories of lessons relate to each other, future research could use more standardized interview questions (or surveys, if deemed ethical and feasible) assessing each of the categories of lessons identified here to answer questions about their prevalence and relationships. For example, do certain types of interpersonal lessons go along with corresponding lessons on the intergroup or ingroup level (e.g., morality and tolerance or hard work and nation building)? Additionally, how do different types of lessons interact to predict different effects on individual well-being and coping (Uy & Okubo, 2018) as well as divergent policy attitudes (Rosler & Branscombe, 2020)?

4.1 | Strengths, limitations and future research directions

The present study has several strengths, including the larger number of survivor testimonies from three different contexts we analysed, which was possible by using publicly available archival data. This kind of data is underutilized in psychology but can help us answer questions that otherwise may not be ethical or feasible to study, such as many questions concerning the psychology of genocide and its aftermath (Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). Research among survivors of genocide, war and political persecution is scarce in social and political psychology, and the present study therefore contributes to this small but important body of work (e.g., Kellezi et al., 2009, 2021; Paluck, 2009; Penić et al., 2021; Suedfeld & de Best, 2008).

The scarce research on lessons of genocides mostly has been conducted among ingroup members who did not directly experience the

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genocide and are often generations removed from the event. Including survivors' own lessons of genocide can therefore not only expand the generalizability and scope of lessons of genocide we study and theorize, but also help us better understand the impact of personal versus transmitted experiences of ingroup victimization and how lessons may differ between ingroup members with different levels of proximity to the event (including the passing of time for direct survivors, which ranged in the present study from one decade to over 50 years). These differences in time and proximity to the events may make different needs relevant that likely shape the lessons people focus on. Nevertheless, we found that some of the most frequently expressed lessons among survivors correspond to the particularistic versus universal lessons examined among the broader population (e.g., of Jewish Israelis; Rosler & Branscombe, 2020). This speaks to the bidirectional societal influences of these lessons, where survivors presumably shape the lessons through their narratives and advocacy (e.g., Marrus, 2016; Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Wohl & van Bavel,2011) but are also in turn shaped by the societal discourse. Additionally, while the individual and interpersonal levels may seem more relevant to direct survivors than to other group members, research on the effects of transmitted, vicarious trauma on psychological well-being (e.g., Wohl & van Bavel, 2011; Vollhardt et al., 2014) suggests that these lessons could be relevant more broadly as well. Future research on the transmission of these lessons between generations, the role of personal meaning-making versus the influence of public discourse and master narratives, and a systematic comparison of lessons of genocide between survivors, descendants of survivors and ingroup members without a personal connection to the genocide would be an important contribution to the growing body of research on transgenerational transmission of trauma and collective memory among victimized groups (Danieli, 1998; Kellezi et al., 2021; Vollhardt, 2020; Wohl & Van Bavel, 2011).

While the use of archival data from survivors is an important strength of this study, secondary data analysis also comes with several limitations. One major limitation is that because we did not conduct the interviews ourselves, the interview questions were not always the same and we could not ask follow-up questions. For example, as we describe in the Method section and our additional exploratory analysis, some questions were about 'messages' whereas others asked what survivors would say to future generations, and some interviewers included the ingroup or outgroups, which relates to the content we coded for and analysed. Our analysis revealed that these variations in the question had some effects on the likelihood of participants expressing certain codes, suggesting that the question may have prompted certain ideas. However, these effects were very few and, above all, not systematic. Specifically, participants who were asked about 'messages' rather than 'lessons' and what they would say to future generations were more likely to discuss inclusive lessons and less likely to discuss lessons focused on collective memory; and when the interviewer mentioned the ingroup and outgroup or the world as an audience for the lessons, survivors were more likely to discuss ingroup-focused or universal lessons (but not inclusive lessons), respectively. However, the coded interview question content that was most directly relevant to one of the respective lessons did not have any significant effects on their corresponding lessons. We therefore conclude that the framing of the question does not explain the focus of the lessons or their diversity. Nevertheless, future research should conduct studies with standardized questions that rule out this source of variance and allow for systematic comparison, including whether people report different lessons for their ingroup members, society more generally, or their own life and relatives.

The nature of the data – oral testimonies that were video-recorded and archived for public use and education – also creates selection biases and might explain why certain lessons such as the importance of collective memory and education were commonly expressed. It is also possible that survivors who were able and willing to give their testimony differ systematically in terms of their resilience, well-being or other individual differences from survivors who declined sharing their testimony. Findings among a more general sample of survivors or using anonymous data collection procedures therefore could have yielded different findings; likewise, lessons expressed to one's family members or close friends in private may differ from the lessons expressed for the public. All these questions should be explored in future research, keeping in mind that research among survivors needs to be conducted with particular ethical care and not all steps that would make sense methodologically may be feasible.

Finally, while another strength of the present study is its diversity of the included countries, cultural contexts and genocides as well as the number of survivors from different backgrounds and age groups (see Appendix A in the Supporting Information), this diversity is also limited. For example, we were only able to analyse Holocaust survivors' testimonies in English, and only few testimonies from the Rwandan Genocide and Nanjing Massacre were available when we conducted the analysis. Therefore, we were not able to compare the lessons across contexts. Likewise, because of the much larger number of Holocaust testimonies in the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the findings overrepresent lessons from Holocaust survivors compared to the Rwandan Genocide and Nanjing Massacre. The findings may have differed had more survivors from these two contexts been part of our sample (see Supporting Information Appendices B and C for lessons that were not discussed in the present paper due to low frequencies). The generalizability of these findings should therefore be considered with caution until it is possible to conduct similar analyses with larger samples from contexts outside of the Holocaust (and Holocaust survivors outside of English-speaking countries). Future studies that do provide the statistical power and methodological features allowing for comparison should examine whether different aspects of this context – such as whether the ingroup was or is also involved in outgroup harmdoing in addition to being a victim group, whether or not the perpetrator group and global society has acknowledged the ingroup's victimization and the group's present-day power shape which lessons of genocide are emphasized (see also Vollhardt, 2020).

5 | CONCLUSION

Marrus (2016) noted in his book on lessons of the Holocaust: 'My principal lesson of the Holocaust is, therefore, beware of lessons' (p. 160). Similar to his conclusion that the lessons of genocide are too varied

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and dynamic to determine which specific ones are central, our findings also suggest that the lessons of genocide that survivors draw from their experience are not homogeneous and simple but instead pluralistic and complex: spanning over four different levels of analysis to include lessons on the individual, intragroup, intergroup and universal level (and not just on the group level) and from a temporal focus on the past to the future. Some of the lessons are seemingly contradictory, although our findings also show that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Moreover, these lessons are presumably linked to different views on distinct societal and political outcomes as well as coping strategies and potentially also different effects on psychological well-being, which should be investigated more systematically in future research, utilizing the broader range of lessons of genocide we identified in the present analysis. Survivors are often an important moral voice in their communities, and the lessons from their experiences and survival can be a powerful societal influence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the help of Maxine Harvey, Thekia Jackson, Sarah Margolin and Jenna Walmer in identifying and transcribing portions of the data as well as providing initial coding that was used to prepare the coding manual.

This research was conducted while Trina Konushevci, Amer Macedonci and Hyomin Lee were students at Clark University. They have since graduated. Hyomin Lee is now at Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

While the data used in this project is archival and publicly available, and therefore exempt from IRB review, we took several ethical considerations into account (Einwohner, 2011). For example, while ethics review boards often stress anonymity of the data as a safeguard for participants, in the case of survivor testimonies provided for public databases such as the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive the opposite is true (Einwohner, 2011): The testimonies are not anonymous and participants in the oral history project not only consent to this (optional) condition but also often explicitly state that they want their story, name, and the stories and names of their loved ones who were killed in the genocide to be known. For this reason, we use full names rather than pseudonyms. Additionally, our analysis and interpretation stayed close to the survivors' words and semantic meaning, and we did not interpret the latent meaning that may have differed from what the survivors wished to express (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The testimonies analysed in this study are publicly available through the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive and information can be accessed here: https://sfi.usc.edu/vha/access. The coding manual and data files with the authors' coding and interrater reliability data are available in the Online Supplementary Materials.

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How to cite this article: Vollhardt, J. R., Konushevci, T., Macedonci, A., & Lee, H. (2024). Never again: Lessons of genocide in survivor testimonies from the Holocaust, Nanjing massacre and Rwandan genocide. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.3108

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