

Viewpoint: Here's why the controversial field of epigenetics is 'so alluring'

I think of stories I've been told about my grandmother in 1945 Japan.

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It feels plausible, and poetic, to think that the horrors she endured, the courage she summoned in the face of these challenges while protecting my aunt and uncle, were passed onto my father when he was born, and then to me, becoming "seared" into my own being at a kind of molecular level, as Carmen Maria Machado alludes to in her haunting short story, "A Brief and Fearful Star." My grit may be linked to my grandmother's experiences, or my angst.

It's this kind of psychoanalytical thinking that makes a nascent, uneven, and controversial scientific field known as epigenetic inheritance so alluring.

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Early research, such as studies suggesting the existence of epigenetic imprints of trauma in the descendants of [Holocaust survivors](#) and [famine victims](#), have already gripped the public with questions and possibilities. Could certain epigenetic "memories" of slavery, genocide, poverty, or abuse be inherited too?

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Machado's story thematically unwinds these ideas in a way that science, so far, cannot. Memories lived by a mother reverberate within her daughter's body, even as they remain unknowable to her. "I know it feels like we are the first people on this land," Machado's protagonist daughter tells the reader, echoing these ideas, "but we have been preceded by monsters and men alike."

Read full, original post: [Could the Experiences of Our Ancestors Be "Seared Into Our Cells"?](#)