

## Memory, Postmemory, Prosthetic Memory: Reflections on the Holocaust and the Dirty War in Argentine Narrative

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For many of Argentina's Jews, especially those who were directly affected by the state terror associated with the military junta of 1976–83, or who look back on that era now in the light of subsequent revelations, the Nazi Holocaust resonates deeply with their own nation's Dirty War. Poet and essayist Liliana Lukin, for example, tells how hours of reading novels, autobiographies, memoirs, documents, diaries, and letters about and from the Holocaust has shaped her body, the body of the reader, as has reading the literature, *testimonios*, and documents written during and after the dictatorship in Argentina. Perhaps most startling, even shocking, is her assertion that the state terror practiced in Argentina during the dictatorship represents the perfecting of the Nazis' Final Solution (Lukin 31–32). Similarly, when José Pablo Feinmann's narrator, Pablo, argues in *La crítica de las armas* that geriatric facilities are a kind of concentration camp, he uses as points of comparison both the Nazi and the Argentine camps, making explicit the connection and similarity between the two. All three are places where a certain kind of people are held in one space, a space in which the majority of those people will die. Insofar as the overt brutality of the German and Argentine camps is absent in nursing homes, the former are even more closely aligned:

Un geriátrico tiene algo—mucho o poco no sé—de campo de concentración. . . . No hay, en un geriátrico, sádicos SS que disfrutaban con el sufrimiento de sus sometidos. No hay oficiales o suboficiales del Ejército Argentino, o de su Marina, o su Aeronáutica. Los viejitos de los

**Layers of Memory and the Discourse of Human Rights:  
Artistic and Testimonial Practices in Latin America and  
Iberia** *Hispanic Issues On Line* (2014)

geriátricos no son obligados a trabajar. No son torturados. No van a la cámara de gas ni les dan pentonaval antes de meterlos en un avión y tirarlos al Río de la Plata. (200)

(A geriatric home is something [a lot or a little—I don't know] like a concentration camp. . . . In a geriatric home there are no SS sadists who enjoy making their captives suffer. There are no officers of the Argentine Army, or Navy, or Air Force. The old people in a geriatric home aren't forced to work. They aren't tortured. They don't go to the gas chamber and they aren't given sodium pentathol before being stuffed into airplanes and thrown into the Rio de la Plata.) (my translation)

The rhythm of these sentences and the counterpoint between the two varieties of camps establish the connection between them. The difference here is not between Argentina and Germany but between these two iterations of the death camp and the apparently more benign nursing home. For those outside Argentina, the comparison may at first seem unacceptable. The Holocaust is unique, we are told, and to enlist it to describe another set of circumstances is to diminish its horror. The purpose of the Nazi camps was genocide, and as brutal and deadly and even anti-Semitic as the Argentine prisons were, they did not have as their aim the eradication of a people. Nevertheless, the DAIA (Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations), easily the most mainstream of Jewish organizations in Argentina and one that hoped to appease the junta during its time in power, now calls its actions “genocide.” As the writers of the DAIA report argue, genocide, which they define as a “practice that proceeds to define a social subject as a ‘negative other,’ to its harassment and isolation within the social structure and to the setting of a whole group of actions destined to abduct him from the natural environment of his social existence and to annihilate him,” should be understood in terms of its perpetrators, not of its victims (Braylan, Feierstein, Galante, and Jmelniczky 7–8).

Like the Nazis, the dictatorial Argentine state used metaphors of contagion to justify the removal of those they considered dangerous and undesirable, likening the body politic to the human body, riddled with disease that required extirpation, reducing the internal enemy to the level of the subhuman. It coerced the complicity of the rest of society by demonstrating that anyone who seemed sympathetic to the marked group would also suffer their fate. The term “concentration camp” describes the Argentine detention centers created to isolate a perceived threat to the authoritarian state’s notion of the proper citizen, with the express purpose of eliminating them. In short, the junta adopted a variety of techniques of state terror perfected by the Nazis, deliberately and consciously evoking Nazi practices, albeit using somewhat different technologies of death.

Tapping into an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Argentina's national culture, the junta brought to the prosecution of the Dirty War a military ethos indebted to and admiring of Nazi practice. It did so in a manner that was more pronounced when its victims were Jewish, a fact that was not necessarily visible to non-Jews. Not surprisingly, then, it is Jewish writers and artists who depict the ways that the campaign against so-called subversives during the Dirty War incorporated Nazi techniques and practice. For Jewish Argentine writers such as Manuela Fingueret, the Holocaust serves as a template for understanding the state terror of the Dirty War. Testimonial writing by Jews such as Alicia Partnoy, Nora Strejilevich, and Jacobo Timmermann, as well as the testimony of Jews collected in documents such as *Nunca Más* and the collection of remembrances of the Jews who were disappeared in a single Buenos Aires neighborhood, attest to the anti-Semitic slurs and Nazi symbols, techniques, and language that accompanied their abduction, imprisonment, and torture. According to the DAIA report, Jews were disappeared in numbers representing at least five times their proportion of the population, and likely higher (19), and they were also targeted for special treatment, which the DAIA report breaks down into the following categories:

- a) Anti-Semitic actions at the moment of abduction or detention;
- b) Specific types of torture and humiliation inflicted on Jews during their stay in the concentration camps;
- c) Usage of Nazi language, terminology or symbols;
- d) "Special" interrogations for the Jews;
- e) Illegal appropriation of assets and extortion. (12)

Most practices were limited to Jews, but one of the results of the differential treatment of Jewish prisoners was the reinforcement for them of the links between their experience and the Holocaust, even as such a connection might not exist for gentile prisoners. The Dirty War was more like the Holocaust for Jewish victims because the victimizers made sure it would be, but as a result Jewish accounts of the torture and clandestine prisons do not quite jibe with accounts of non-Jews, perhaps seeming exaggerated and in any case different. These narratives, then, exacerbate Jewish difference and even threaten to reinforce the current anti-Semitic narrative that holds that Jews are overly invested in the Holocaust (Brahm).

The testimony of Jewish survivors of the Dirty War demonstrates that the connection between the Holocaust and the dictatorship originated with the junta itself. Nevertheless, Jewish writers and artists have subsequently revisited the relationship between the two from the point of view of their victims and with the express purpose of maintaining the memory of both events, enlisting what Amalia Ran calls the universal trope of the Holocaust (17, 19).

My interest here in looking at the connection between the Holocaust and the Dirty War is to tease out the kind of memory available to those of us lucky enough not to have experienced either of them directly, and to reflect on the ways that literary texts and other creative representations or evocations participate in nurturing what I am calling secondary memory of state terror. I am using the lens of Manuela Fingueret's novel, *Daughter of Silence*, in which the narrator tells her story of militancy, capture, and imprisonment in the Argentina of the 1970s and tries to reconstruct her mother's experience in the Minsk ghetto, in Terezin, and during transport to Auschwitz. This double narrative engages secondary memory in two ways, as postmemory and as what I have called prosthetic memory.

The novel's structure establishes the interrelationship of the two devastating historical events: chapters in the first person are the contemporary story, told by Rita, in the ESMA, trying to piece together her mother's story in relation to her own. Interspersed among them is the story, presented in italics and told in the third person, of Rita's maternal line, which soon enough becomes the story of her mother, Tinkeleh, a visual artist who is sent to Terezin. Fingueret represents postmemory in her depiction of Rita; she enacts prosthetic memory in relation to her reader.

Postmemory is one form of secondary memory, produced because "the break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and reembody an intergenerational memorial fabric that has been severed by catastrophe" (Hirsch 110). As Hirsch perceptively notes, postmemory emerges in the face of silence. Stories are partial, suppressed, overheard in snatches, sometimes in a half-understood language. Silence is the operative term in the novel, captured in its title. Tinkeleh's silence did not mask or hide the reality of the Holocaust for her child; the effects of her trauma re-emerge in Rita. Her trauma is transmitted extralinguistically; knowledge of the details of the camps comes from other sources: histories, other people's writing; the emotional fallout is visited on the children.

Rita struggles to reconstruct the history of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, precisely because the Holocaust was the great silencer. Tinkeleh withheld the details, and even the broad outlines of her suffering in Terezin, and also the disturbing knowledge that she found a kind of happiness there, a closeness to her friend Leie, the intellectual stimulation of classes with brilliant teachers, the poetry of others and her own drawing, and the music. Tinkeleh survives by a combination of determination, good luck, and the intellectual and aesthetic nourishment made available by the clandestine study groups, music, art, and writing that the prisoners in that concentration camp managed to organize. Like many real-life survivors, Tinkeleh could not or would not tell her story to her child.

Rita's dilemma is the dilemma of postmemory—the effect on the children of Holocaust survivors of their parents' tormented years in the

concentration camps. Marianne Hirsch has described postmemory as “a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.”<sup>1</sup> She continues, “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch 106–7).

Eva Hoffman understands the phenomenon of postmemory as not exactly memories but “emanations,” “flashes of imagery” in “a chaos of emotion” (9), which Aleida Assmann locates transgenerationally within the family. In *Daughter of Silence*, Rita is wrested from the family group; part of her strategy of survival is therefore to sort out the chaos of emotion of postmemory and tell herself her mother’s story. She is unable to create a coherent narrative of her own torture, isolation, and sensory deprivation, which are happening in the present of the novel. Her own story comes to her, and to us, in waves: recollections of friends, reflections on her past, brief references to her current circumstances. The set phrases that run through Rita’s head—childhood rhymes (“pisa pisuela, color de ciruela”), political slogans (“Si Evita viviera, sería montonera), fragments of prayers (“Adonai Eloeinu, Adoni Ejad”)—are symptoms of her trauma. Isolated, tortured—your mind throws up this stuff.<sup>2</sup>

Diana Wang understands the silence of collective trauma, particularly of the Holocaust, as a survival mechanism. Wang, a psychologist and a child of survivors herself, argues that victims of collective trauma are likely to have better outcomes if they do not immediately speak about their experience. Because collective trauma is an outcome of state terrorism, the state cannot be relied on for protection if the trauma is spoken about. Unlike individual trauma, in which the perpetrator is abhorred by the state, under conditions of collective trauma and state violence, it is the victims who are anathema to the state, which organizes to harm or exterminate them. Not until the basic structures of society can once again be trusted might the victim of collective trauma safely speak.

The refusal to speak makes it impossible to know which of the intertwined reasons for post-traumatic silence most accounts for any one person’s silence. On the other hand, as Wang points out, postwar society did not want to listen, either. Wang argues that silence itself is a structuring device that can provide the scaffolding for recovery.<sup>3</sup>

That silence is broken by the imagination—and the research—of the novel’s author. Fingueret narrates Tinkeleh’s story of Terezin precisely to

break that silence. The novel is presented as the first piece of fiction (in Argentina, presumably) to discuss Terezin. Notes at the end tell us that the details of at least one chapter are derived from a historical account of the camp, and that the poetry cited in the text was written by inmates of Terezin who appear in the text as minor characters. In other words, at the same time that the Holocaust gives shape and resonance to the state terror of the Dirty War, the latter provides an entryway to the preservation of the memory of the Shoah. Rita is the daughter of silence; Fingueret, her creator, breaks that silence.

The book's title comes into the text as Rita speaks directly to the absent Tinkeleh, saying, "Soy hija de tu silencio" (*Hija* 68) (I am the daughter of your silence) (*Daughter* 46). Rita's life is an outcome of Tinkeleh's—and is also determined in part by the other women in her real and political family (Jasia, Leie, Eva)—but she cannot have full knowledge of her mother's story. That very secretiveness is part of the story, the silence against which Rita strains. The title tells it: she is as much the daughter of that silence as she is the daughter of Tinkeleh. The tragic irony of the narrative is that despite Tinkeleh's silence (which may in part derive from an effort to protect her daughter: we cannot know, since it is one of the things about which Tinkeleh remains silent) Rita will come to experience a variation on her mother's suffering. Moreover, Rita is similarly silent. She cannot tell her mother that she became a militant in part for her mother, nor would Tinkeleh understand that connection:

Dejé de estudiar. Seguía trabajando en los cursos y militaba, aunque la militancia significaba el núcleo, la médula de mi quehacer y el espacio de discusión permanente con mi madre. No podía entender que lo que yo intento la incluye, no se lo dije y no lo hubiese aceptado; es más, nunca va a saber que ella, sin proponérselo, empujó mi decisión. Tínkele, con su oculo padecimiento, produjo en mí una herida que ampolló. (*Hija* 92–93)

(I gave up my studies. I kept giving my classes and I was an activist, even though my activism comprised the core of my daily life, it was also the forum for constant arguments with my mother. She couldn't understand that what I was trying to do was for her benefit also. I didn't tell her that and she wouldn't have believed it anyway. She'll never know that it was she who unwittingly forced my decision. Tinkeleh, with her veiled suffering, created a festering wound in me.) (*Daughter* 64)

Crucial in this passage is the tension between silence and speech. Rita's political activity is "the space of permanent discussion with [her] mother," but she never tells Tinkeleh the key fact of that militancy, the fact that her

mother is the source of what she is doing and is included in her actions. The nonverbal mother-to-daughter transmission (the hidden suffering of the former produces a festering, eventually blistering wound in the latter) trumps speech.

Tinkeleh's silence is the source of Rita's. When, as a child, Rita discovers the faded yellow star her mother was forced to wear, she keeps that knowledge secret:

Ella vive en un mundo de misterios. Una especie de arcón oculto que guarda bajo varios candados, y al que nadie accede del todo. Esa tarde, la de la revolución [de 1955], trepada en el estante de las cajas donde se guardan los documentos, descubrí una estrella amarilla descolorida entre dibujos de distintos tamaños. Quedé petrificada. No sé si entendí entonces lo que allí oculta, pero algo me sobresaltó, un secreto que no debía vulnerar pero del que supe formaba parte. Dejé con impaciencia la estrella en su lugar con la sensación de cometer un sacrilegio que Tinkele no me perdonaría. Me fui a lavar las manos con jabón, como si temiera el contagio. Nunca lo pude hablar con ella. (*Hija* 112–13)

(She lives in a type of chest, hidden away under lock and key to which no one has access.

The afternoon of the revolution, I'd climbed the shelves where she kept boxes of old documents and discovered a faded yellow star among drawings of different sizes. [I was stunned.]

I don't know if I understood then just what she was hiding there, but something startled me, a secret that I shouldn't violate but that I knew I was part of. I impatiently left the star in its place with the feeling that I was committing a sacrilege that Tinkeleh wouldn't forgive.

I went and washed my hands with soap and water, as if I were afraid of catching something. I never could speak to her about it.) (*Daughter* 77)

The power of silence is such that the mother's compels the daughter's. Rita's discovery is an unpardonable sacrilege; she cannot ask her mother about the star and all it signifies. The transfer of knowledge is indirect, through an object dense with meaning, and the effect of learning is visceral. The child Rita is immobilized by her discovery ("I was stunned"); she feels contaminated by it and washes its residue from her hands. The memory imparted by the star is somewhere between the intellect and the emotions: not "I did not understand" but "I do not know if I understood." Rita *is* able to aver in recollection that "something came over her." She was incorporated into a secret that she was not intended to penetrate, but that she was part of. The child accidentally discovers the star, but after that she is the object, not the subject, of the transfer of its meaning. She cannot choose not to know,

nor can she turn the knowledge into speech. Moreover, the silence that surrounds the discovery ensures that she will always crave the understanding that only language, which is prohibited, can provide.

The link between word and body, both fundamental, is what's left after everything else is stripped away, as Rita describes her being reduced to these two elements:

En este lugar de crueldad, este lugar informe, sin árboles, ni mariposas, ni nadie que dirija una mirada humana, un golpe de sensualidad en ciertos momentos me sacude el alma. Atada a la cama de hierro, mojada, sedienta, dolorida, soy toda cuerpo y palabra. (*Hija* 67)

(In this place of cruelty, this shapeless place, without trees or butterflies or anyone to direct a human gaze toward, a sensual blow at moments shakes my very soul. Strapped to the iron table, wet, thirsty, and sore, I am entirely body and words.) (*Daughter* 44)

The wound of discovery is destined to fester; it cannot be lanced and healed by contact with air. Rita's memory is not the same as Tinkeleh's, but it is also an embodied memory. Tinkeleh wore the star in the ghetto, in Terezin, and in Auschwitz; Rita's discovery serves both to evoke that experience and to suppress it. Rita describes postmemory thus: "La estrella sigue cosida a mi corazón" (*Hija* 113) (That star is still sewn to my heart) (*Daughter* 77).

As Hirsch notes, to satisfy her craving for knowledge, the subject of postmemory looks to outside sources, "photos, stories and documents about the Holocaust," which are the basis of her commitment to social justice (78). In Rita's case, postmemory leads to political engagement and consolidates the three key elements of her identity: woman, Jew, and Peronist (78). Rita's struggle is specifically Argentine even though it has its roots in the Europe of her maternal line:

El pueblo era protagonista y yo necesité ser protagonista junto al pueblo, este pueblo, más allá de la aldea de Rivke, de Jasia, de Leie, de Tinkele, de quien creí heredar la capacidad para resistir. (*Hija* 114)

The people of this nation were the protagonist, and I needed to be a protagonist along with these people, not just those of the village of Rivke, Jasia, Leie, and Tinkeleh, from whom I believe I had inherited the capacity to resist. (my translation)

Tinkeleh's story, implicitly reconstructed by Rita in her cell, is more coherently told than Rita's, perhaps because Rita needs to create order out of the chaos she is in, needs to make sense. It recalls Borges's "El milagro

secreto,” in which the condemned writer, a Jew about to be executed by the Nazis, is given a year, which transpires in a split second, to complete his work. There is no secret miracle here, but Rita does reconstruct Tinkeleh’s story and comes to understand it, including the terrible truth that some good came out of Terezin, that it was a place of learning and creativity as well as a place of humiliation, suffering, and death. But Rita struggles to figure out just what it is that she has inherited from her mother and her mother’s female line: creativity, a desire for social justice, her strong will.

One crucial difference between postmemory and prosthetic memory is that, unlike postmemory, prosthetic memory does not imply a generational difference. Moreover, it is not transmitted via family or other close personal ties. Postmemory and prosthetic memory are, by definition, transferred from one subject to another. They are forms of secondary memory. The impact of postmemory is intergenerational. But whereas postmemory is diachronic, prosthetic memory is synchronic.

Postmemory is, often as not, inadvertent. The silence about the Holocaust that is at the core of *Daughter of Silence*, for example, does not keep the child from imbibing the mother’s experience, desiring the story, even postulating the story in order to make sense of her own life. Postmemory emerges from within the rememberer; it is produced in interaction with family, not always through language, often through what remains unspoken. What parent wants to traumatize her child with descriptions of unspeakable horror? Postmemory may be characterized by an absence of full explanation, by a dearth of facts and an abundance of emotional resonances and behaviors that transmit memory in a variety of extralinguistic ways. Information that comes from external sources—photographs, documents, reports, histories, poetry, novels, film—fills in the gaps. It seems reasonable to suggest that the emotional, interpersonal, familial resonances, especially when/because they are incomplete, pull these external sources into the orbit of memory. Their knowledge fills up the spaces produced by the silence intrinsic to the transmission of trauma between generations, fusing with the emotional memory and becoming an inherent part of postmemory.

Prosthetic memory, on the contrary, is deliberate. Fingueret’s novel is part of the archive of reconstructed narratives of both the Holocaust (Argentina’s “first novel about Terezin,” lest that nation forget) and the state terror perpetrated by the Argentine dictatorship. Prosthetic memory is a call to others to take on a memory that was never fully developed, or that was cut off from consciousness by official silence during the time of state terror and unfounded fears of increased instability afterwards.<sup>4</sup>

Because there are no photographs of the Argentine torture camps in the way that there are of the concentration camps, visual artists have had to imagine them, and photographers such as Marcelo Brodsky have manipulated other photographs to suggest their full story. Hirsch writes

about three kinds of photographs, among them those that show life before the Shoah, which we now see as depictions of the precariousness of the ordinary. Brodsky's *Buena Memoria* does that even more overtly, with his annotations that disfigure the photographic image—the banal class photos that the artist marks up by circling faces and writing marginal notes, turning them into the story of the dictatorship, in which some of the faces were disappeared and some left the country, while others led ordinary lives.

The uncircled faces, those not taken away and tortured or sent into exile, represent the addressees of prosthetic memory. The official narrative of the dictatorship depended on the pretense of normality, the idea that only radical elements were being disposed of in order to preserve Argentina; and those uncircled faces stand in for those who remained unaffected. The faces in this as in all school photos look straight ahead, masking friendships, romantic entanglements, rivalries, political differences or allegiances. As viewers we look at these individualized faces, and Brodsky's annotations compel us to remember the stories of those who fell victim to the dictatorship.

In films, directors often provide us with a viewer within the film whose gaze we can then follow. That figure may be a witness to an event or the perpetrator of an action, but either way the relationship between the viewer and the viewed is intrinsic to the visual experience. In the case of the Dirty War, in which the state actively discouraged such witnessing, or in which witnessing was encouraged only in the service of the state terror apparatus, the compulsory eyes-forward pose of the students takes on a disturbing air. Instead of looking at each other, these figures look out at us, challenging us to gaze back at them and make the connections they are denied. Brodsky's bold, color annotations, circles and arrows leading to marginal comments, tell us just how we are being called to witness, to take responsibility for thwarted memory.

Prosthetic memory addresses the deliberate suppression of memory: the legal decision of the *Ley de Punto Final* (Full Stop Law), which functioned as a statute of limitations for those implicated in state terror, and the wish to let sleeping dogs lie. The prosthetic memory of *Daughter of Silence* is an intervention meant to keep this recent past alive in the endless present of narrative. Prosthetic memory is a manufactured memory that can be strapped on by those who lived through the era without acknowledging what was going on around them and therefore avoided making any conscious memory of their own, or for those who knew what was going on but who, with no personal experience, formed no primary memory of detention, torture, disappearance, exile, or loss. The manufacturers of these memory prostheses do not simply create memory for a new generation but also, more critically, expose the nation's common past to the light of day for those who were there but who lived in the sunny world outside the torture centers.

Rita wonders whether her mother would have told her her story if she'd known that Rita would become a militant and wind up in a clandestine

prison (43). In other words, did Tinkeleh think she was protecting Rita by being silent?

Si Tínkele supiera la ira que provocó en mí su modo callado de ocultar el pasado. . . . Ella no se lo imagina y quizá saberlo ahora, en estas condiciones en que estoy, le resultaría insoportable.

¿Me habría revelado sus secretos si hubiese previsto mis elecciones? Entreteno estas largas horas, estas interminables noches armando mi propio rompecabezas entre gritos, olores, recuerdos, silencios y miradas. Tínkele y Rita. Las figuras centrales de este cuadro, pero en el fondo, entre la tela, se vislumbran las sombras de esas otras mujeres. Mujeres, voces, paisajes van poblando este hueco fantasmal. (*Hija* 64)

(If Tinkeleh only knew the anger she provoked in me with her habit of hiding the past. . . . She couldn't imagine it, and perhaps knowing it now, under these circumstances, would be unbearable for her.

Would she have broken the silence if she could have foreseen my choices? I spend these long hours, these unending nights piecing together my own puzzle, among screams, odors, memories, silences, and stares. Tinkeleh and Rita. The central figures in this painting, but in the background, deep into the canvas, one can catch a glimpse of the shadows of those other women. This ghostly, empty space is populated by women.) (*Daughter* 43)

Although the primary relationship in the novel is that between mother and daughter, Rita finds her way into the public sphere of political action through a complex weave of the women in her life. The warp of this weave is diachronic, represented by Rita's maternal line, as well as by quasi-mythical heroines: Eva Perón and Camila O'Gorman on the one hand, and the biblical figures of Judith and Lot's wife on the other. The woof is both synchronic, represented by her friends Haydee and Elena, and aesthetic/philosophical, consisting of the somewhat startling juxtaposition of romance novelist Corín Tellado, poets Alejandra Pizarnik and Sylvia Plath, and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. The novel can be read as the genealogy of women in the life of the narrator, whose mother's internment in Terezin and transport to Auschwitz are echoed in her own imprisonment in the Naval Mechanics School. This genealogy also includes Rita's grandmother (traces of whom were lost early) and her great grandmother, both independent thinkers within the confines of Orthodox Judaism—whose boundaries they pushed but did not transgress. The female genealogy is completed by her mother's best friend, Leie, a writer, who does not survive the transport to Auschwitz. It extends out to two women friends, both of whom risk opprobrium by their sexual behavior, a kind of feminist defiance concerning their erotic power, that Rita finds appealing but insufficient. She

chafes against the narrowness of her co-revolutionaries' vision of what deep change will entail, and notes that being called a feminist is as bad as being called a *gorila* (i.e., a member of the military).

Hirsch examines “the trope of maternal abandonment and the fantasy of maternal recognition which is pervasive in Holocaust remembrance . . . to show how postmemory risks falling back on familiar, and unexamined, cultural images that facilitate its generation” (108). In *Daughter of Silence*, the trope of maternal loss that troubles Hirsch is both reconfigured and inverted. On the one hand, it is not the mother herself who is lost. Tinkeleh is a continuing presence in her daughter's life and memory, and it is the reconstruction of Tinkeleh's story that animates Rita. Rita's desire for the full maternal story is precisely the desire to know what there is in her mother that exceeds the purely maternal. It is Tinkeleh as artist, friend, daughter, and most of all concentration camp survivor that Rita needs. Moreover, Rita's desire for her mother's story is necessary for her own individuation. The crucial question that she needs to answer is the question of separation, which in the novel is presented with a Jewish reference: the Passover question that asks, “How is this night different from all others?” This question of differentiation, of separation, is fundamental in Judaism, from Genesis (in which creation is understood as differentiation: day from night, heavens from earth, Sabbath from the rest of the week) on. For Rita, in a clandestine prison, hooded, sleep deprived, and in pain as a result of torture, this remembered phrase triggers another: How am I different from you? The preformed notion of maternal loss, grounded in the (usually male) infant's point of view that reduces the woman to her function as his link to survival, metamorphoses here into a different question, one that posits the mother as more than her maternal function. The mother/daughter relationship that Rita desires is one in which she can meet her mother as an equal, a woman against whose life she can build and understand her own.

The resignification of the maternal, in which the daughter takes it upon herself to save the mother, and the maternal itself goes beyond the familial relation of dependency and nurture to take on social, aesthetic, philosophical, and political meaning and breaks open the traditional notions of gender that, as Hirsch and Claire Kahane rightly have noted, have enlisted gender, and specifically maternal femininity, as “a pre-formed image” that, like the body's protective response to trauma itself, functions as a protective shield that absorbs the shock, filters and diffuses the impact of trauma, diminishes harm (125). As I have suggested, though, in *Daughter of Silence* the trope of maternal loss is not just reconfigured; it is also ironically inverted. In this novel, it is the daughter who will be lost, not the mother. All her efforts to reconstruct not only her mother but a whole maternal line that is familial, political, artistic, literary, feminist, to incorporate them into herself, is insufficient in the face of the brutality of the dictatorship. The novel ends inconclusively, but the implication is that Rita does not survive.

Her first-person narrative simply stops, as does the story she has been reconstructing of her mother.

This startling ending implies the traumatic interpellation of the reader into the demands of prosthetic memory. Rita's story stops abruptly; the reader is enjoined to make sense of it, to complete it by taking on the responsibility of a memory that was proscribed by the dictatorship but that is now presented as a moral imperative.

## Notes

1. Marianne Hirsch writes, "Postmemory shares the layering of these other 'posts' [e.g., postmodern, postcolonial] and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" (106). Hirsch cites Aleida Assmann on types of memory: "Aleida Assmann (2006) extends this bimodal distinction into four memory 'formats': the first two, individual memory and family/group memory, correspond to Jan Assmann's 'communicative' remembrance, while national/political memory and cultural/ archival memory form part of his 'cultural' memory. A fundamental assumption driving this schema is, indeed, that 'memories are linked between individuals.' 'Once verbalized,' she insists, 'the individual's memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property. . . . [T]hey can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed—and, last not least, written down.' . . . And even individual memory 'include[s] much more than we, as individuals, have ourselves experienced.' . . . Individuals are part of social groups with shared belief systems that frame memories and shape them into narratives and scenarios" (qtd. in Hirsch 110).
2. "Pisa pisuela . . ." is a traditional children's chanting game along the lines of, but not equivalent to, "eeny meeny miney mo." The translation is, more or less, "step, step color of plum." The other two phrases translate as "if Evita were alive she'd be a guerrilla fighter," and the end of the Hebrew prayer declaring the unity of God, "the Lord our God, the Lord is One."
3. For further analysis of the silence following the Holocaust see Wang, "Hablar o callar: Traumas individuales y traumas colectivos."
4. For a discussion of a similar and related phenomenon, see Katherine Sikkink's *The Justice Cascade*, which gives evidence that nations that bring human rights abusers to justice have better human rights subsequently.

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