

TRANSLATED TRAUMA, TRANSLATED LIVES: HUNGARIAN WOMEN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN EMIGRATION

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Abstract: This study is part of a larger project to integrate into Holocaust discourses the voices of women survivors, which can provide valuable insights both for Holocaust studies and gender studies. I first briefly review some of the main issues relating to the need to study female Holocaust (life) writing, in order to offer a theoretical frame for the main focus of my study: a historical introduction to “literaried” testimonies of some two dozen Hungarian emigrant women, written over a span of over half a century. I will be highlighting translation and gender issues, as well as the variety of narrative techniques the authors utilize. None of the women I study published in Hungarian, even as in some cases they had original contemporary diaries or earlier drafts in that language. Hence, the first part of my title means to focus on the additional complicating issues of self translation of traumatic events by survivors who live in emigration.

Keywords: Hungarian Holocaust survivors, gender and Holocaust, life writing and Holocaust, translated trauma

This study is part of a larger project to integrate into Holocaust discourses the voices of women survivors, which can provide valuable insights both for Holocaust studies and gender studies. In a companion study, “Women’s Holocaust Memories: Trauma, Testimony and the Gendered Imagination” I reviewed earlier feminist scholarship, primarily by historians and sociologists, regarding the need to pay attention to the specific Holocaust experiences of females, arguments which involve primarily biological and sociological considerations. In the second part of “Women’s Holocaust Memo-

ries” I considered another gender-related question: whether there can be claimed a specifically female style of remembering and of testifying about these experiences. I did not, however, have the opportunity to undertake analysis of individual examples women’s life writing from this gendered perspective, as I hope to do here.

Translated trauma

Although from right after the war there has been writing by female Holocaust survivors, little has remained in print or been translated, nor received adequate scholarly attention. Here I will briefly review some of the main issues relating to the need to study female Holocaust writing, in order to offer a theoretical frame for the main focus of my study: a historical introduction to “literaried” testimonies of Hungarian emigrant women, written over a span of over half a century. I will be highlighting translation and gender issues, as well as the variety of narrative techniques the authors make use of, some of which overlap with those of oral testimony. I follow some of the useful categorization by Rosen (2004b) who collected oral testimonies of Hungarian women formerly from Carpatho-Russia living in Israel.

None of the women I study published in Hungarian, even as in some cases they had original contemporary diaries or earlier drafts in that language. Hence, the first part of my title, “Translated Trauma,” means to focus on the additional complicating issues of self-translation that adult survivors who live in emigration face in writing about the already self altering, even self-shattering experience that is trauma. They must bear witness in an incompletely mastered foreign language, or sometimes what is far worse—a space between two languages. The second group, on the other hand, who were children or even adolescents during the time of trauma, may no longer speak that language or speak it only at a child’s level. Among the works I discuss are also a few where the survivors themselves could only give oral accounts—sometimes in Hungarian, sometimes in a foreign language, but mostly in that space between—and it was a second-generation daughter who [re]membered the “inherited” stories. Only a few, most notably Edith Bruck, Hélène Stark, and Evie Blaikie, thematize the linguistic dimension of cultural passage of self translation, although for some it does seem to give a necessary distance, helping them break with the past and affirm a new identity.

Although writers of the testimonies I study are all native-speaking Hungarian women they do represent various social classes, ages, religious back-

grounds, and a variety of Holocaust survival strategies, ranging from the better-known stories of camp survivors to the experiences of hidden children. Most write in English for the simple reason that more Holocaust survivors of any nationality, even if sometimes by way of multiple emigrations and multiple languages, ultimately ended up in English-speaking countries. English has thus acquired a paradoxical role in relation to Holocaust narrative, as, on one hand, it has become *the* primary language of survivors' testimony and of scholarly writing, ironically a language both fit and unfit to recount the Holocaust precisely because of its foreign, outsider status with respect to the events of the Holocaust. At the same time, broken English, as for example in the case of the survivor father Vladeck in *Maus*, can also stand for the inability to express the inexpressible of Holocaust experience.

Elizabeth Trahan, in a somewhat misleadingly titled article "Writing a Holocaust Memoir in Two Languages: a Balancing Act", addresses the enormous linguistic and identity issues involved in writing about traumatic events of one's past in another language. She actually wrote her own 1998 memoir, *Walking with Ghosts: A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Vienna* in English, the language she by her own admission commands far better than her native German. However, she describes having to deal with events and conversations that had taken place in German, using German sources, like her own diaries of the time and newspaper clippings, and eventually even having to deal with someone else's subsequent German translation of her memoir. Reflecting on Trahan's discussion, we can ask: if writing autobiographical work is not simply recovery of lost content but of personal restoration and of "getting a life" (Eakin 1985 : 5; Smith & Watson 2001 : 80; see also Suleiman 1998), then what are the additional challenges, as I put it in the second part of my title, of "[re]writing" the traumatic memory of one's life in a new language? As far as I am aware, Ruth Klüger, who although she waited almost fifty years to write her memoir, is the only author who faced this dilemma by actually [re]writing—not simply translating—her Holocaust childhood in Vienna twice, first in German and a decade later in English. A professor of German in Princeton University she was uniquely qualified for this linguistic tour-de-force of double [re]writing, which Caroline Schaumann called a "cultural translation" of her German book for an American audience. She has also written what I would propose is the single best female *and* feminist Holocaust memoir. Interestingly, in the German title Klüger writes of her *Jugend* "childhood", while the later English *A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* she foregrounds the gendered nature of her writing. In her German version she directly addresses her Ger-

man audience to help construct her testimony, but interestingly she assumes that most will be female: “Leserinnen. . . und vielleicht sogar ein paar Lesern dazu” (79) ‘female readers. . . with perhaps also a few male readers’.

Translated lives

Olga Lengyel’s *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor’s True Story of Auschwitz*, one of the first Holocaust memoirs published, has a complicated publication history and three different titles. The date given in most sources is a 1947 London edition, but actually the first edition was a 1946 French translation. Lengyel wrote in Hungarian, and in that first edition a translator is indicated. However, although there is no indication that she could possibly have written herself in English, in subsequent English editions no translator is given, only acknowledgment in the preface to three different people for “translation” work (see also Suleiman 1998 on the difficulty of piecing together the publication history of this and other early memoirs). The work initially received some attention, with even Einstein supposedly having written Lengyel a letter of appreciation in 1947. Nevertheless, she died in obscurity in New York in 2001 at the age of ninety-two with only a brief paid obituary in the *New York Times*.

It has been claimed that the novel by William Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, with its controversial choice of a Christian heroine and exploitation of eroticism in Auschwitz may have been partially based on Lengyel’s memoir (Mathé 2004). Lengyel’s assiduous avoidance of her own Jewish origin, misled several scholars who believed she was gentile. lived a privileged life as a Jewish doctor’s wife in Cluj, Transylvania. As is common in the earlier memoirs, she devotes relatively little space to the life before, with most of the book about the some seven months she spent in Auschwitz. Because she had attended medical school and was qualified as a surgical assistant, her chances of survival were greatly increased by being able to work in the clinic of Gisella Perl, the head obstetrician in Auschwitz, whose own memoir is discussed below. Lengyel’s recruitment into the underground resistance in the camp and the need to tell her story is what she claims gave her courage to keep fighting, since she had lost her family, including two young sons. She confesses her guilt that in Birkenau she had unwittingly sent her younger son of twelve, who could have passed for older, to the line for gas to accompany his grandmother, thinking she was saving him. “How could I have known,” she asked.

One unusual aspect of Lengyel’s book is its very frank, detailed discus-

sion of sexual activity in the camp. She tells of a Polish prisoner who would have given her food for sex but she refused while later another woman who accepted got syphilis. She recounts stories of the horrible competition among women to barter sex for food. One particularly chilling anecdote is her description of the demand for condoms, which were made from baby pacifiers, which, as she interjected, were not much in demand in Auschwitz.

Lengyel also details at some length and with much distaste numerous cases of lesbianism in the camp, including about a cross-dressing lesbian whom the Nazis had wanted to put among the men and whom she depicts as aggressively courting her. Lengyel is one of the first to describe Dr. Mengele and Irma Grese, the sadistic “blond angel” who was head of camp. According to Lengyel, Grese was bisexual and sent some of her lovers to the gas, and she also recounts that her good friend, Gisella Perl (who is, however not named), did an abortion on Grese. She also relates how in the infirmary she and four others kill infants born to make it seem they were stillborn, as otherwise both mother and babies would have been gassed. Lengyel is probably the first to describe in detail the extermination in the gypsy camps, from which no one survived to testify.

Gisella Perl published *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* in 1948, one year after Olga Lengyel, her fellow Transylvanian Hungarian. In her hometown of Sziget, Perl initially faced both gender and religious barriers to become a physician, as her father forbade her to study pediatrics, fearing that she would stray from Judaism. In Auschwitz she vowed to remain alive in order to save the life of pregnant women by aborting their fetuses. She performed abortions with her bare hands to save the lives of some 1500 women. Neither her husband nor son survived and she emigrated to the U.S. in 1947. It is implausible that she wrote in English, but, as in Lengyel’s book, there are no translators credited. In America Perl was soon to suffer the further indignity of being attacked by a Catholic prelate, who equated her humanitarian acts with Nazi crimes. She and Lengyel, because their memoirs do not match in every detail, have also been attacked by a Holocaust denier as liars who fabricated not only their memoirs but their very identity (<http://cwporter.com/jtrinity.htm>). In New York Perl continued to practice gynecology, delivering some one thousand living babies. She died in 1988 in Israel.

Not surprisingly, most Holocaust memoir writers like Lengyel and Perl—and even teenage diarists like Anna Frank—came from privileged backgrounds. The memories of some uneducated and provincial survivors have most often only been saved thanks to efforts of collectors of oral testi-

monies (Rosen 2004c; 2008a,b). **Edith Bruck**, born in Tiszakarád, a small Hungarian village between the Ukraine and Slovakia in 1932, is the great exception in multiple respects. Bruck specifically contrasts herself with Anne Frank, saying she came from the Jewish poverty of *shtetl* life, more like Chagall and Wiesel, with a father who drank and a primitively pious mother whose last unwanted child she was. Coming from such an impoverished background and with virtually no education, writing in a non-literary Italian she became a unlikely best-selling author.

Bruck's most important books are her first, *Chi ti ama così*, in 1959, and *Lettera alla madre* in 1988, the latter in the form of a dialogue with her dead mother, whose voice she constantly ventriloquizes. *Chi così ti ama* was translated to five language including Hungarian, as early as 1965, and some of her subsequent works have also been translated to Hungarian, making her the only Hungarian Jewish *émigrée* with some name recognition. Her total oeuvre, all of which describes her survivor's search for self-identity, consists of more than a dozen volumes of prose and poetry, creating what might be called a postmodern mosaic of an interface between orality and literacy in the form of testimonial narratives, in a fusion of memoir and fiction.

Nelo Risi, Bruck's Italian husband when she was writing her first book, said in his prologue that as she wrote "many pages sported goulash grease spots or red paprika fingerprints," and that she wrote with an ear for oral history and a sententious and folksy flavor, with roots in a now-vanished peasant civilization which today finds its greatest representatives in the US among the writers of the Eastern Jewish tradition. She had to "invent" a new language, both because her Italian was more than imperfect but also because with a rudimentary education she knew nothing about literary style. But what was Bruck's native language? Risi claimed that she was not a product of the Magyar culture but of Eastern Jewish Yiddish, in a village that served as a divide among three frontiers, Hungarian, Slovak and Ukrainian.

Originally Bruck had begun to write her memoir at the end of 1945 in Hungarian, but lost her notebook, along with poems written in childhood, dedicated to her mother. Only in Rome, in her early twenties and married to Risi, her fourth husband, did she finally manage to write it through, "in a language that was not my own". Italian, she says, is an accidental choice and had she emigrated to America she would have written in English. Italo Calvino even said to her that she should live in America because her audience is American. She also claims that the choice to use Italian was a conscious strategy, to create a certain detachment from the object of her

descriptions and a narrative voice that would enable her to endure the emotional distress caused by painful memories (ix).

The introduction to the 2006 Modern Language Association edition of *Letters To My Mother*, which now signals Bruck's acceptance into the American feminist canon, attempts to relate her sparse non-literary style also to the influence of post-war cinematic neo-realism, with which it has at best only glancing contact. It can much better be read as a post-modern lament, ironically echoing aspects from Jewish Passover Haggadah, since Bruck is not passing on patrilineal tradition but attempting to connect herself to her matrilineal genealogy, at the same time that she constantly contrasts her female subjectivity to that of her mother. An additional irony is that she can only be an undutiful daughter and never herself a mother, because she is not only unreligious but has to admit to her dead mother that she aborted all her fetuses (see Rosen 2004b : 27 on the Jewish lament tradition in testimonies).

For Bruck writing is a highly successful experiment in forging a new literary language precisely in that space between language in which many survivors must exist, a disturbed and impoverished language (speaking strictly in linguistic terms) which comes to be particularly effective to textualize trauma, but a language nevertheless limited to express nothing else.

Ana Novak (né Zimra Harsányi; Ann Novac), sometimes dubbed the “Romanian Anne Frank,” who was born as a Hungarian Jew in Transylvania, although today it is only Romanian literature that unjustly claims her as its own. Like Bruck, she was born into a multilingual milieu, as she says, a poor woman born in Transylvania, a region where the inhabitants — Rumanians, Hungarians, and Germans — spoke a mixture of three languages. That is why she says that she has had the greatest difficulty in trying to establish her nationality and native language. Born in 1929, at 11 she found herself a Hungarian citizen at 15 she was deported to Auschwitz, and on release in 1945 she was once again Romanian. In Auschwitz on scraps of German propaganda posters she kept a diary and wrote poetry in Hungarian, which she hid in her shoes and then memorized before she had to get rid of the scraps; some of her work was smuggled out of Auschwitz and some she was able to rewrite on liberation. She wrote about many women-centered issues, such as about the “angel-makers,” women who aborted the fetuses of pregnant women to save them from the gas. After the war Novak became a playwright in Rumania but fled to Germany in the fifties, and then she emigrated to France, where she began a prolific writing career in that language and where her memoir achieved fame in her French translation in 1968. When it was subsequently published in English as *The Beautiful Days of*

My Youth: My Six Months in Auschwitz and Plaszow (1997), Novac, now unsatisfied with her earlier French translation, retranslated the original Hungarian to French and it was on this new version that the English is based. Novac is a multilingual literary phenomenon, whose voice is special also because she describes not only weakness and hunger but also raucous, grotesque laughter, something often missing from Holocaust narratives.

Isabella Leitner's *Fragments of Isabella* (1978), like Novac's memoir, also grew out of real fragments, or scraps of paper on which she wrote, in Hungarian, whatever images and memories forced themselves into her mind, shortly after she arrived in the United States in 1945. As she says in *Isabella* (227): "[Hungarian] is the one language even God cannot understand". The sequel to *Isabella*, *Saving the Fragments: From Auschwitz to New York*, appeared in 1985, as did two later rewritings, one tailored for young adults. All seem to have been composed in collaboration with her American husband.

Although thematically Leitner might be compared to Bruck in that all her work obsessively represents, in the words of one scholar "a daughter's endless mourning" (Kertzer 2002 : 77), her tone is totally different, with her memoir belonging to that subcategory that is shaped for the supposed narrative requirements of children, in her case actually rewritten in a special version as *The Big Lie* (1992), specifically tailored for young readers, where she tells a very different story, with a significant muting of the dead mother's voice, and erasing the voice of anger and grief (Kertzer 2002 : 83–85).

Hélène Stark's *Memoires d'une juive hongroise* appeared in 1981, forty-one years after she found herself with her husband in Brussels, having sent her three-year old son back to Hungary with his grandmother, where she thought they would be safer. The couple were evacuated to rural France, where they survive the war in the care of a wonderful peasant family, all of which she describes forty years later in the most unusual Holocaust memoir I have read, an idyllic pastoral of rural life, punctuated almost in cinematic fashion with several episodes of high terror. The book is a veritable folkloric description of village life, where Stark, speaking no French, much less the local patois, ends up teaching the locals how to do everything from making cheese from their excess milk, to making croissants and other baked goods by making flour with an old rusted hand mill, and even how she taught her landlady, who only used small cornichons, to pickle big ones and to make Hungarian cucumber salad.

One chapter is actually called "Des recettes" where Stark describes how she made soup and *scipetke* [sic] and *gomboc* in *Nagyvarod* (spelled this way).

In the midst of it all she also gives birth to a child after being talked out of an abortion by the local doctor and her host. She calls the baby Madelaine, after the name of the village. Stark expert at absolutely every rural task but never explains to us why she knows all this. Since she claims that she came from a from well-to-do family in Mármaros it is also unclear why she was only semi-literate in her native Hungarian, as shown by her misspellings of Hungarian terms, only some of which, like *cholette* for *solent*, could be attempts at phonetic French renderings.

Only when the war is over does Stark find out details of what had happened to her family in Hungary, including that her child in Hungary had been given in safekeeping to some Christians, who disappeared with him. Only as an adult does he by chance find his real identity but is reluctant to reconnect with Stark and her husband, feeling that he owes much to adoptive parents. Stark's telling is an extreme case of a good but with the author being unable to attempt to understand herself or to construct any meaning from her story, which has coded in it the horror of maternal failure with her first-born as well as with her two other children born in France. Although Stark constantly talks about her faulty French as well as her insufficient narrative authority, she actually subverts her surface story of idyllic nature with extreme manipulation of gaps and secrets. Her memoir belongs to the type that maintains an ongoing tension between the concealed and the revealed, the guilt of the mother who feels she has abandoned her child and to preserve her defenses she has created a tellable tale that she needed to reconstruct her identity. In the same year as Stark, Isabelle Vital-Tihanyi also wrote in French *La vie sauve* about how she survived in Budapest in 1944–1945.

Aranka Siegal was born in Beregszász. Her memoir, *Upon the Head of a Goat: A Childhood in Holocaust, 1939–1944*, like those of Stark and Vital-Tihanyi, was also published in 1981, and was followed four years later by *Grace in the Wilderness: After Liberation, 1945–1948*, like Leitner, has also achieved fame as an author suitable for young readers, receiving a several book awards. In *Goat* she writes with the voice of a nine-year old, detailing with pervasive nostalgia provincial family life in a world similar to one that Bruck critiques for its cultural tensions of gender, including women burdened with too many children. Siegal was herself the fifth of her mother's seven children, two by a second marriage to a much younger man, but she develops no details that would disturb the idyllic picture of pre-war life. The subtitles of the two volumes are deceptive, as they appear to cover a nine year period, but they omit the time between June 1944, when the door shuts

on the cattle car at the end of the first volume, and spring 1945, the moment of liberation, thus leaving a gap of the camp experience.

Like Bruck's *Lettere alla madre* and Leitner's work, **Livia Bitton-Jackson's** *Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust* (1980) is also centered on the mother-daughter relationship. Like Leitner's and Siegal's memoir, it has become well known by having won book awards and been adapted in a version for younger readers as *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*. In sequels *Bridges of Hope* and *Hello, America: a Refugee's Journey from Auschwitz to the New World* she describes emigration to New York City, where she experiences difficulties like suffering panic attacks on the subway, which reminded her of cattle cars.

Bitton-Jackson, born into a lower-middle class religious household in Pozsony (Bratislava) was deported to Auschwitz at thirteen. Just as on his arrival the fourteen and a half year old narrator in Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* took the striped prisoners meeting the cars to be inmates, similarly Bitton-Jackson seeing the "sexless" and "deranged" seeming inmates she took them to be inmates of a mental asylum. She is spared by passing for sixteen and by Mengele himself being taken by her blond hair. For those who had not been sent directly to the crematorium, passing through the "sauna" in Auschwitz was the first stage of the de-humanization process, where they were stripped of their clothes all their body hair shaved, and tattooed, thus making them into a "number" instead of human. The process was far more humiliating for women because they were forced to undress in front of male guards and exposed to verbal and physical sexual abuse. Yet, Bitton-Jackson felt that this process, which some women described as depriving them of their femaleness as well as their humanity, for her lifted the burden of identity. Nevertheless, she survives precisely by human contacts, helping to save her mother's life and by her own life being saved by a friend of her mother's who had a daughter her own age. In 1951 Bitton-Jackson emigrated to America, where she eventually became a professor of Jewish Studies. Today she lives in Israel.

Rivka Leah Klein's whole extended family of eleven survived in Budapest because a gentile couple who were strangers, Károly and Magda Bitter, rented for them an apartment. Bitter also rescued two members of the family from the ghetto. Klein's *The Scent of Snowflakes: A Chronicle of Faith, Hope and Survival in Budapest* (1989), which includes segments from her diary of May, July, August and December 1944, tells of daily life in Budapest,

including how women had to take responsibility when Jewish men had to report to work brigades.

Judith Magyar Isaacson begins her memoir with 1938, when she is thirteen in Kaposvár and dreaming of studying at the Sorbonne and becoming a professor of comparative literature. The self-conscious literary polish of her work is evident throughout, symbolized by her use of the poet Endre Ady's line "All who live rejoice, rejoice," both as her epigraph and in several references, all this in sharp contrast to the letters written in English (provided in the Appendix) in 1946 to her American future in-laws.

Isaacson was deported in 1944 and liberated near Leipzig by the U.S. army in April 1945 and while in a DP camp immediately meets an American intelligence officer, Irving Isaacson, whom she weds by December of that year and with whom she still lives in his native Maine. In America, escaping as far as possible from her former interests, Magyar Isaacson become a mathematics teacher and eventually a dean at Bates College in Maine and a human rights advocate, but in 1976 after being invited to speak about her experiences she again began to write and eventually published, in which her literary talent, suffocated by the war, is evident. The book is also suffused with women's experiences, where, for example, in contrast to Leitner, she mentions how traumatic head shaving was for women and how she didn't even recognize her own mother, shunning her when she came forward to embrace her.

Although most of the book is devoted to her camp survival with her mother and aunt, Magyar-Isaacson also gives a fascinating accounting in a style that has been called "parahistorical life history" (Rosen 2004b: 43) from a teenager's standpoint life before the war for a family that was both Jewish and very Hungarian. She attempts to show what it meant to be a Hungarian Jewish girl nicknamed Jutka who lived a secure middle class life that fell apart, piece by piece. Many years later Magyar Isaacson visited Kaposvár to find she was only one of 250, or five percent, of the 5,000 Jews to have survived. In a final chapter tellingly entitled "A Time to Forgive" she returns with some of her camp sisters to one of the camps in which she had worked in slave labor. It is one of these women, Eva Baik, who features in the memoir, who translated her book to Hungarian in 1991, where, however, copies languishes in obscurity in the basement of the Holocaust museum. This translation has just been republished in Budapest, with a new introduction by Katalin Pécsi.

The next group of memoirists, because they were infants or children, would have by definition perished had they been deported. As virtually all

children who survived, they did so in hiding. Bella Brodski, in her introduction to Evie Blaikie's memoir, catalogues that of approximately 1.7 million European Jewish children only 11% survived and these had to be almost by definition hidden children. As Jean Marcus shows, the hiding was full of constant fear and menace; the children also often emerged from the war more damaged than their elders because they had no nostalgic memories of a "normal" existence to fall back, and because they still had an undeveloped sense of identity (complicated by having to hide under false identities they had to memorize at the cost of their and their family's lives). By definition, more memoirs by hidden children are by females because, as many sources mention, the majority of hidden children were girls because little boys were too dangerous to hide, both because of their behavior and because they were circumcised (Kessel 2000: 43 noticed that in a *Hidden Children* conference she attended 90% were women). Some children, especially girls, hidden with strangers were abused, as in the story of Aniko Berger (Stein), who at five got raped when hiding in village, and when she tells the local priest she is sent to a peasant prostitute who almost starves her and she has to hide under the bed when the woman has customers. On liberation Aniko's mother comes back alone broken and the child takes on the caretaker function, while other kids on the street call her Jew. In 1956, with one male surviving cousin she flees to the U.S., where they both become doctors and she joins a medical collective for the poor, but she is never able to fall in love or to feel trust. Susan Suleiman coined the term "1.5 generation" for such children, some of whom were too young to remember and all were too young to fully understand, and all of whom if they emigrated became dominant in the host language, since unlike in some emigrant gentile families, their parents virtually never formally instructed them.

Susan Varga's *Heddy and Me* (1994) is a cross-cultural and cross-historical double-voiced collaborative autobiography, based in part on a series of tape-recorded conversations with her mother, from which Varga quotes, but she also describes the process of recording and the change in relationship between her mother and herself during the process. She intersperses her mother's testimony with her own recollections of their life in Australia after their emigration in 1948, when she was five, and before which, she confesses, that she had virtually no memories. Although Varga starts her memoir as a search to know more about her father, who perished in a labor brigade, it ends up being a matrilineal narrative, but unlike Bruck's, it is not about an irretrievably lost and hence mourned mother, but it is much more in the line of stories of emigrant daughters, such as, say, Maxine Hong

Kingston or Audrey Lorde, in conflict with their mothers from another culture and another language. Varga tells her mother at the beginning that: “it won’t be her life story, not properly. It will be filtered through my reactions, through my second generation eyes” (5). She tells us that although “of course” they love each other, her mother finds her “evasive and disappointing” while she finds her mother’s “intensity both invasive and disconcerting.”

The mother, Magda’s, story of how she survived in hiding with infant Susan, her two-year old sister, and an aunt and a grandmother, is fascinating, as is her apparent honesty in describing scenes like how the three women were all simultaneously raped in one room but also how later she had a six-month affair with a Russian officer. As Ronin Lentin (2000: 697) points out, sex, rape, abortion, and sexual abuse have tended to be skirted in memoirs. Varga, for her part, is open about her own lesbianism, about which she talks about in more detail in her *Happy Families* (1999), in part a fictionalized sequel to both the daughter’s life and the story of the mother’s youth in *Heddy*, both psychologically oriented around deep secrets, with the secrets of family violence of incest and the violence of the Holocaust compared, where Sylvia, the strong mother figure, has totally repressed the personal family abuse suffered from her father, while the violence of the Holocaust she has she just had tried not to deal with.

Susan Suleiman’s *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook* (1996) has possibly the best title for a memoir dealing with translated trauma. Suleiman, who survived the Holocaust in Budapest and escaped in 1949 at the age of nine, returned for the first time briefly in 1984. When in 1993 she returned for a semester’s scholarly visit she began to keep a diary, which formed the basis of the book and the first part of the title. She undertakes to re-discover her Hungarian background and family history, searching for traces of her family by hunting for copies of official documents such as birth and marriage certificates in Hungary and in Poland, and hence the second part of the title, *Motherbook*, which sounds vaguely feminist and exotic in English but is merely a literal translation of *anyakönyv*, the registry of such documents. (on Suleiman and on Denes, whom I discuss below, see also Totosy). As Suleiman says in *Motherbook*, as a mother herself, she seeks to establish her identity by reference to her own mother, although struggling with an earlier dislike of her but realizing that resolving the conflict with mother is resolving history. If Judith Magyar Isaacson posed the question of what it meant to be a Jew in Hungary just before the Holocaust, and then what it means to forgive half a century later, in her Prologue Suleiman

poses the another question that is central for all the texts discussed here: “What does it mean to be a Jewish Hungarian born around WWII, at a moment when being Jewish meant for many the opposite of being Hungarian? Furthermore, what does it mean to be a Jewish Hungarian immigrant to America.”

The structural focus of **Magda Denes’s** *Castles Burning: A Child’s Life in War* (1997) is on her absent and despised father, who, when she is five in 1939 and he abandons the family to flee to New York with forty-five custom-made shirts and twelve suits but leaving his wife and two children destitute. At the end of the memoir she is 13 and briefly meets her father in New York before embarking for Cuba with her mother and aunt, and the two take an intense dislike to each other. In the intervening time we learn how the not very likeable child Denes — “I was impossibly sarcastic, big-mouthed, insolent, and far too smart for my own good” — survives in hiding, with the help of a series of gentiles, starting with superintendent of their building who hid the family in the washroom and gentile friends of the mother. Later they are repeatedly saved through her teenage brother and cousin’s connection as Zionist activists. There are many interesting details in the book, such as how her blond brother who looked Aryan passed as a Nazi in rescue efforts, and how both he and their cousin at fourteen in wartime led adult sexual lives. Both eventually disappear in the course of the war. Over half the book is dedicated to the family’s difficulties in postwar Budapest until they manage to escape in 1948, once again with Zionist help from her brother’s former comrades.

While some reviewers have praised the depiction of the integrity of a child’s voice of willful and sarcastic child protagonist, without a mediating adult voice (Hampl 1997: 13), the technique has also been criticized for the implausibility of the perfectly extended recall, raising the question of how much is fantasy and how much testimony. Denes’s memoir exemplifies two more literary categories posited by Rosen (2004b: 43), that so much is told in direct form that it would tend to be seen as too literary even if narrated by adults, and that it tells much more about her family and family relations in shadow of war than about the events themselves. Denes’s hard-edged child’s voice, without a trace of sentimentality is somewhat akin to Bruck’s protagonist, but in sharp contrast to Siegal’s nostalgic child’s voice (see Reiter 2000 on the literary advantages of the “child’s gaze” in Holocaust literature).

On one hand, Denes’s memoir is as much about her obsession with the missing father as about all the wartime suffering, but on the other, it is curious that yet she evinced no curiosity about what made him what he was,

not one word about his family, or how he became so successful, or how he had come to marry her uneducated provincial mother., in fact not even much about his womanizing beyond a few veiled quotes from the grandmother. On one hand, the child seems to know far more than any child could understand, and, on the other, the adult author seems not interested in filling in certain gaps. Tragically, Denes died suddenly 62, very shortly before her book was published, still survived by her mother, Margit, who was instrumental in saving her, her aunt, and her grandmother. Denes has been quoted as saying that she had long struggled to break her silence. “The hidden children are in a curious position,” she said. “They were not deported and they were not killed. So they never felt entitled to talk about their own experiences. Holocaust survivors tend to be totally absorbed with that experience, while hidden children have tried to forget what happened to them.” (Blumenthal 1996).

Evi Blaikie's *Magda's Daughter: A Hidden Child's Journey Home* (2003) has the most literally inexact but symbolically significant title, because it is, appropriately, much less about her life during the Holocaust as a hidden child than about its aftermath, with only one eighth devoted to the war. As she says: “a war does not end till the last survivor has died.” (270). Although a continuing thread is Evi's primal connection with her mother, it is about recurrent separations, beginning when Evi was 26 months old and was left in Hungary with relatives, and was repeatedly disrupted both during hiding and after the war in France and England and until the mother's early death at 52. Like Denes's memoir, Blaikie's is really a family saga of exile, displacement, and wrecked lives due to the the war on all the members of her large and close-knit family, beginning with her mother and her two sisters, who served her as interchangeable mothers and enterprising uncle Denes and beloved cousin Peter, and Evi, who by her own account has waged a lifelong existential struggle. Her book begins with her birth in 1939 in Paris, return to Budapest during the war and ends over fifty years later, in 1991, when she first began to consider herself a survivor when she attended the 1991 *Memorial Day Conference of Hidden Children* (from where Marks 1993 records twenty two stories of surviving children). In between she describes her life as what she calls a perpetual refugee, what Smith & Watson (2001 : 90) have called a “migratory subject” who has lived in different languages, social classes, with different names, different class codes. As Blaikie testifies the book is on many levels an act of translation and transmission, enacting the painful passage from the repressed nightmare to the articulated text.

Miriam Katin's *We Are On Our Own* (2006) is not only a double autobiography of her survival with her mother in hiding when she was three, but composed as a graphic memoir or "comix," created by Art Spiegelman in *Maus*, a multi-tiered metanarrative, co-mingling of words and image. While Spiegelman, born after the war, cannot draw himself into his father's Holocaust story, in Katin's frames mother and child appear in constant interaction because she was there, although, being too young to have memories, she has had as much as Spiegelman to rely on her mother's story. Like Varga's mother, Katin's is amazingly forthcoming about the sexual abuse she suffered while hiding with her as a peasant woman in the countryside, such as a pregnancy by a German officer who guessed her identity, and the later looting and raping by the Russians. Katin juxtaposes such scenes in black and white with a sudden change to color frames and herself as she is now, playing with her own two-year old child in American autumn leaves setting. She does this for one frame and reverts to bleak drawings of the two of them fleeing in the snow. Then again one page of the present, with the mother telephoning her daughter to say it is snowing, obvious flashback to the horrible snow then and the good snow now.

At the end Katin says: "I could somehow imagine the places and the people my mother told me about, but a real sense of myself as a small child and the reality of the fear and confusion of those times I could understand only be reading the last few letters and postcards my mother had written to my father. They survived the war with him."

On the one hand, new memoirs by Hungarian women are still appearing, as Erzsébet Fuchs' fascinating 2006 recounting of how she met a French doctor, an escaped prisoner, in Hungary, and survived the war with him and is today still his wife. See also Erika Gottlieb's memoir, *Becoming My Mother's Daughter*, published this year, several months after the author's death. On the other hand, there are many more testimonials that we will never hear because the survivors were only able to reconstruct an identity after the war by building a wall of secrecy around their experiences and about their Jewishness. Occasionally, as Margaret Foster discusses in *Hidden Lives*, daughters nevertheless struggle to reconstruct the lives of mothers and grandmothers. See, for example, Irene Reti's, *The Keeper of Memory* (2001) about how her Hungarian Jewish family kept their identity a secret from her and she found out the truth only when she was 17. Viviane Chocas recounts in her fictionalized *Magyar bazár* (2006) her heroine's Hungarian parents' silence about their past and refusal to speak Hungarian, after they emigrated to France in 1956. She needed obsessively to explore the void thus created,

by studying Hungarian in secret, by traveling to Hungary and even conducting a brief affair with a Hungarian there, and, most of all, through savoring Hungarian dishes (each chapter is called after a Hungarian dish, such as *töltött káposzta* ‘stuffed cabbage’). Eventually she finds out that her mother and maternal grandmother are Jews who survived the war in Budapest but that her grandmother had sworn the whole family to secrecy.

* * *

The cumulative testimony of the prewar lives of the women whose memoirs I have discussed, their wartime experiences, as well as of their subsequent lives in emigration, “belong not only to the history of the Holocaust but to the history of Hungary,” to quote words expressed by Mária Ember on the cover page of her 1975 *Hajtűkanyar* [*Hairpin Bend*], in words printed to mimic her written hand, as if in dedication to the reader. Ember’s autobiographical novel is arguably the most important female writing on the Hungarian Holocaust, appearing at about the same time as Imre Kertész’s *Sorstalanság* [*Fatelessness*]. Yet, it was long out of print until its reprinting in 2007 and has never been translated to English. The works I have studied, on the other hand—with the exception of Bruck’s work—are almost uniformly not available in Hungarian, nor are they, except those that have been adapted as texts for young people, often much better known in the languages in which they were published. It may be a literary irony that by far the best seller of all time by a Hungarian female *émigrée* about her World War II experience is by the gentile Christine Arnothy, her 1955 *J’ai quinze ans et je ne veux pas mourir* (translated into English in 1972). The current best-known work in the genre in Hungarian is again by a gentile, Alaine Polcz’s 1991 memoir of 1944–1945, translated into English as *One Woman in the War: Hungary, 1944–1945* (2002).

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