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Suspect Survival:
Matrophobia in Postmemory Generational Writing

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Abstract

Family and kinship carry special significance to Holocaust survivors and their descendants. In autobiographies and family memoirs, writers of what Marianne Hirsch terms the postmemory generation employ different narrative strategies for coming to terms with the ways in which the Holocaust has marked their identities and family ties. This article focuses on women's writing of the postmemory generation, examining three works in English by daughters of survivors in the UK, the US, and Canada, written during the 1990s. It investigates the narrative strategies used by Anne Karpf, Helen Fremont, and Lisa Appignanesi to represent maternal sexual agency and vulnerability in a survival context. It suggests that these representations are strongly influenced by matrophobia and matrophilia, defined as the conflicting dread of becoming and desire to be one's mother, which are themselves strongly conditioned by Holocaust history, particularly the gendered history of vulnerability among women in open hiding during the war.¹

Keywords: postmemory, second generation, memoir, autobiography, mother-daughter relations, Lisa Appignanesi, Helen Fremont, Anne Karpf, Holocaust, sexuality

Among Holocaust survivors and their descendants, family and kinship frequently carry special significance. As Anne Karpf, daughter of an Auschwitz survivor, notes, "Most survivor families are highly sensitive to the rupture of the family line and find different ways of trying to come to terms with it" ("Chain" 96). Karpf primarily refers to psychological and social mechanisms for coping, but it is also possible to observe that writers of what Marianne Hirsch terms the postmemory generation employ different narrative strategies in their efforts to come to terms with

and represent the ways in which the Holocaust has marked their identities and family ties. This article looks closely at narrative strategies in autobiographies and family memoirs written by members of this postmemory generation. It focuses on three works of life-writing by daughters of survivors raised in three different English-speaking countries. Each work interweaves or alternates the author's autobiography with the war-time experiences of her parents; this pattern of interweaving or alternation constitutes one clearly recognizable narrative strategy for giving voice to a typically painful and frequently ambiguous family history.

Though the daughters of survivors account for family relations in their depictions of the histories of both their parents and sometimes of their siblings, the focus of this article is on post-Holocaust mother-daughter relations. Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* (1999) concerns the author's Canadian childhood, her later move to the UK, and her return trips to Poland, as well as her efforts to elicit from her mother a coherent account of family history and war-time experience. Helen Fremont's *After Long Silence* (1999) has a strong foothold in her midwestern American home, but it also involves journeys to Ukraine and Italy to (at least partially) uncover a deeply buried family secret of grave import to her mother and her mother's sister. Anne Karpf's *The War After* (1996) deals with her upbringing and adult life in the UK, including her struggles with insecurity, anxiety, and intense identification with her mother, which she traces to a family background profoundly marked by the fact of both vulnerability and survival. In this article, I suggest that these textual representations of maternal histories, as well as of mother-daughter relations, can be viewed through the lens of the concept of matrophobia – a strong dread of becoming one's mother. Seeking to understand matrophobia in socio-historical terms, I propose that the life-writing of Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi reveals their struggles with a historically inflected matrophobia affected by the daughterly inference or knowledge of the gendered consequences of Holocaust survival, including what I cautiously refer to as the "suspect sexuality" of mothers and other female survivors of Nazi persecution. These key theoretical terms are presented in the section below, before the narrative strategies of silence

and fragmentation displayed in all three texts are situated within the frame of scholarship on gendered experiences of the Holocaust. I then examine key scenes in each of the texts in turn, in order to analyze how the narrative strategies of each author can be understood in terms of her efforts to negotiate the matrophobic ambivalence arising from a confrontation with maternal sexuality, suffering, and survival.

Matrophobia, Postmemory, and Suspect Survival

Coined by Lynn Sukenick, the term “matrophobia” was elaborated by Adrienne Rich in her 1976 study of motherhood as a social institution, *Of Woman Born*.² A fear of becoming one’s mother (235), Rich theorized, is part of the psychology of mother-daughter relations, but just as the biology of motherhood is socially conditioned, so the psychology of mother-daughter relations is affected by historically specific social practices and power dynamics. Matrophobia, Rich suggests, is grounded in a daughterly perception of the powerlessness of the mother, and sometimes in the perceived complicity of the mother with a patriarchal system that denies both mother and daughter freedom. The fear of becoming one’s mother is thus a fear of female powerlessness and/or of female power (corrupted) under patriarchy and the patriarchal organization of motherhood. But the potency of that fear depends upon a prior or accompanying sense of likeness and affiliation with the mother, “a deep underlying pull toward [the mother], a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely” (235). A notion of matrophilia is implicit in mother-daughter bonds, but Rich explicitly theorizes matrophobia by focusing on the historically imposed limitations of motherhood.³

Although Rich’s Jewish background has tended to be overlooked in later discussions of matrophobia, it is prominent in her discussion. Born the same year as Anne Frank, Rich was the daughter of a staunchly assimilated Jewish father and a gentile mother, and her childhood home was secular. In her essay “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity,” first published 6 years after *Of Woman Born*, Rich observes that, under Nazism, her ancestry would have made her “a *Mischling, first-degree*”

(103) and thus subject to extermination. She describes her despair at viewing, alone, the films of the Allied liberation of concentration camps, at taking on board the hatred of a group to which she in some sense belonged. She details her parents' disapproval of her viewing this footage, their strong desire to assimilate, and their initial disapproval of her marriage to a Jew, with whom she had three sons, who were raised Jewish.⁴ Rich thus experienced the institution of motherhood, she writes, "in a Jewish cultural version" (117), and sought to distinguish this from a potentially more empowering experience of motherhood, "courageous mothering" (*Of Woman Born* 246).

In *Of Woman Born*, her extended definition of matrophobia uses the development of the stereotype of the "Jewish mother" to demonstrate its historical underpinnings; she asserts that the stereotype emerges as immigrant Jewish women in the US experience restrictions in their previously significant roles outside the home, resulting in an unhealthy emotional investment in the domestic realm and in the lives of their children.⁵ Immigrant Jewish motherhood thus forms the ground for Rich's understanding of matrophobia as a wider phenomenon: constraints on immigrant Jewish women lead to exaggerated mothering, which in turn threatens their children's development and ultimately engenders the resistance of the children to maternal control. In keeping with her basic distinction between motherhood as experience and as institution, Rich presents matrophobia as a tool for the patriarchal containment of women. In an ideal feminist world, matrophobia would not exist.

Rich thus views matrophobia as "a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr" (236).⁶ Writing about "compulsory enmity" (14) between Holocaust mothers and daughters, Frederica K. Clementi emphasizes the psychological imperative for daughters to resist identification with their mothers and to commit "matricide" in order to achieve autonomy.⁷ Whether external or internalized, the splitting that characterizes matrophobia means that daughters struggle with contradictory affective positions vis à vis their own mothers and their own maternity, actual or projected. As one theorist

of matrophobia puts it: “Ambivalence necessarily resides in the matrophobic equation” (Rogers 7).

For daughters of Holocaust survivors, the ambivalence associated with matrophobia is potentially shaped and amplified by an understanding of the historical forms of female persecution under Nazism. On the one hand, women survivors experienced abject powerlessness and victimization. On the other hand, they did survive inhuman and difficult conditions. In their autobiographies and memoirs, daughters of survivors attest to matrophilia – close identification with and intense feelings of love and empathy for their mothers – throughout their childhoods. At the same time, they eventually suffer from matrophobia, a need to resist the maternal bond, to split from the mother, and, above all, to avoid *becoming* the mother, in both her powerlessness and sometimes, I would suggest, in her power.

Psychoanalysis has viewed the female struggle for autonomy from the mother in a variety of ways, but the literature and criticism dealing with the postmemory generation has frequently represented this struggle as disproportionate, again due to the specific conditions of Holocaust survival and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Margarete Myers Feinstein, for example, writes: “Haunted by images of mothers murdered with their children, Jewish women survivors were aware of the vulnerability of mothers Maternal concerns became heightened, and sometimes obsessive, under these circumstances” (173). The theme of maternal over-protectiveness is indeed firmly established in postmemory writing. Karpf attests to her mother’s over-protectiveness and approves the belated development of psychological research on survivor family dynamics, but she is also critical of “the profoundly pathologizing and stigmatizing tendencies of the less sensitive work in the field” (*War* 234). Such tendencies can serve to reinforce preconceptions of the manipulative, over-protective Jewish mother to produce an image of survivor mothers as pathologically invested in their children in a conscious or unconscious effort to compensate for family loss and Nazi genocide.

Survivors who experienced wartime trauma are frequently thought to pass on to their children the insecurities, anxieties, and terrors of

persecution with which they continue to live. Indeed, Hirsch's term "postmemory" is designed to account for precisely this transmission; it describes "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (5). For the second generation, Holocaust experiences are "transmitted ... so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 5). This is again a firmly established theme of second-generation narratives. Both tacit and explicit knowledge of the Holocaust and parental suffering is seen to contribute to strong, even debilitating, feelings of guilt about asserting independence, as well as strong feelings of protectiveness and empathy among children of survivors.

In the readings below, I suggest that identification with and/or empathy for maternal suffering may nonetheless be rendered complex and difficult by the very survival of the mother. How did mothers survive within (camps) or adjacent to (in hiding; through passing) a genocidal system that targeted the reproduction of particular ethnic and religious groups? What type of agency, if any, did they exercise? What type of power? Daughterly concerns about these issues are sometimes explicit in postmemory texts, but may also be indirectly communicated through narrative silences, breaks, and parallel plot or character development.

Concerns about Holocaust experiences specific to women have been somewhat downplayed in scholarship, evolving slowly from the 1980s and focusing on survivor accounts of primarily camp experiences. Early work examines the relation between sex, domination, and food, the frequency of sexual abuse of women in concentration camps (Heinemann 15-16), and women's coping strategies in concentration camps, including the strategy of splitting off certain types of Holocaust memory (Ringelheim). Though sporadic, scholarship on gender and the Holocaust was, indeed, emerging around the time that Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi were being published, and gradually the writing of female survivors was showcased (Kremer, *Women's*). Later studies examine images of fatherhood and motherhood in a variety of sources on Holocaust experience (Feinstein), as well as the persecution of Jewish,

Roma, and Sinti women under Nazi rule, chronicling forced abortion and sterilization policies, infanticide, matricide, prostitution, and rape (Hedgepeth and Saidel). An article by Kremer (“Sexual Abuse”) on gender and the Holocaust has tellingly named sections such as “Sexual Violence by Guards and *Kapos*,” “Camp Brothels,” and “Trading Sexual Favors for Survival.” On the heels of these studies of the gendered forms of persecution and violence inflicted on European Jewish women, many specifically targeting reproduction and motherhood, the study of “sexual exchange as a strategy for survival among women during the Holocaust” (34) has emerged, writes Janet Jacobs. Jacobs’s work concerns oral testimony and interviews with several generations, and it shows that descendants tend to adopt an open view of actions taken for survival.

In works by descendants of survivors, the question of what they might have done had they been in their parents’ shoes is often posed with anguish and urgency. Karpf, for instance, continually wonders if she would have survived the war, and she suggests that unconsciously her entire life “was organized around this speculation” (*War* 136). Primo Levi famously states that only the worst survived the Holocaust,⁸ and Appignanesi observes: “The degradation parents suffered, the blanket guilt they carry at having survived the dead, can also turn children into suspicious persecutors: if they survived or escaped, was it the result of treachery, some perfidious act at another’s expense?” (241). Such questions reverberate through the writing of the postmemory generation.

This article focuses, then, not on survivors, but on their descendants, looking at how daughters represent suspicions or concerns about the terms of maternal survival. I use the term “suspect survival” with some trepidation, but find its multiple functions as adjective, verb, and noun to be suggestive of the ambivalence and emotional contradictions that arise in these texts. Looking specifically at how daughters portray their mothers’ accounts of survival, I focus on the role that sexuality, sexual assault, and sexual bartering plays in these representations. I suggest that the characteristic features of the texts by Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi are in part determined by the authors’ handling of matrophobia and suspect maternal sexuality. All three authors struggle with narrative form in their efforts to recount their struggle to

achieve an acceptance of uncertainty and/or a non-judgmental understanding of women who survived the Holocaust.

Silence, Fragmentation, and the Narration of Mothers in Hiding

Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi are all born to survivors after the war, Karpf in the UK, Fremont in the US, and Appignanesi in Łódź. Of these three, only Appignanesi's mother actually had a child during the Holocaust – Lisa's older brother. All three women survived wholly or in part by hiding and/or passing as non-Jewish. Karpf's mother, Natalia, a concert pianist born in Krakow, moved constantly, seeking places of relative safety, and she survived part of the war with false papers, passing as a non-Jewish Pole, before being sent to Auschwitz. Fremont's mother, Batya/ Maria, passed as a Catholic Pole in what was then Poland, and later in Italy, assisted by her sister Zosia, who had married an Italian count. Appignanesi's mother, Hena Borensztejn, was a blond beauty, whom her friends in Canada compared to Marlene Dietrich. She had several non-Jewish identities, and hid in plain sight, most of the time with her husband, even when their marriage had to be disguised.

Jewish persons who hid or passed as gentiles during the war were long considered *not* to be survivors, in spite of their suffering and vulnerability. Zoë Waxman writes: "Although ignored by most historians, the situation of Jewish women in hiding or open hiding during the Holocaust was strikingly precarious – they were surviving on the margins of society, and this made them extremely vulnerable" (124). Their extra-legal status made them vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse, "not only by Nazis, but also by their collaborators and by Jewish men in positions of power" (Waxman 125). Waxman additionally notes that descendants of survivors might be hesitant about knowing if their close relatives had been raped or had bartered sex as part of a survival strategy. And those relatives may be loath to pass on such information. Kremer's comparison of male and female survivors shows that, unlike male writers, "women's Holocaust testimony and women's Holocaust fiction rarely include explicit discussion of sexuality and eroticism" ("Sexual Abuse" 193). In

the three texts examined here, not a single one of the daughters recounts that her mother explicitly told her about being raped or engaging in sexual exchange for the purpose of survival. Yet, the possibility of such acts appears to be everywhere intuited by the author/daughter, and communicated to readers by way of narrative breaks, silences, and sometimes obliquely, through parallel plots and characterizations of maternal proxies.

Silences in second-generation narratives are frequently associated with the psychological and emotional repercussions of family secrets and the repression of knowledge about the Holocaust, or of the effects of the exact opposite – compulsive parental narration of war-time traumas.⁹ The narratives under consideration here attest to the extremes of parental silence or articulation. Though Fremont's parents spoke about the war, they completely denied their Jewish heritage; when Helen was just 8, her family went to family therapy, and her parents never said a word – to their children or the therapist – about their experiences in Auschwitz or the Gulag (158). Karpf is unsure about when she and her sister heard about the war, but she was “told stories about the war, and saw the number inked into my mother's arm” (5). Her mother reflects that she waited until the girls were 5 or 6 before telling them (*War* 158). Karpf relates the barrage of anxieties and psychosomatic illnesses she attributes to the transmission of her parents' war trauma, including outbreaks of eczema localized at the site of her mother's tattoo (106), leading to self-harm. Appignanesi, whose father said little and whose mother said much about the Holocaust, advances the idea of a “ghost language” to describe the unspoken language of war-time experience which “passes between the generations” (241).¹⁰

A common narrative strategy for these carefully researched and complexly organized texts is to draw attention to the incomplete, fragmentary or reconstructed nature of their mothers' stories of survival. In *The War After*, Karpf alternates between telling the stories she remembers hearing and how they affected her, and transcribing her parents' separate retrospective accounts of their survival. Karpf understands the stories of survival as incomplete: “My family's working version of my mother's war was partial” (*War* 95). Moreover, she views

her mother's story as one co-fabricated by both generations, in conformity with a normalizing script: "We'd vacuumed everything intolerable from it (all sense of vulnerability and uncontrollable grief), we'd sheared it of helplessness and sorrow" (*War* 95). In Fremont's case, as noted, there was complete denial of any Jewish identity; only as adults do Helen and her sister learn they are not Roman Catholic, as they have been raised, but Jewish. To reconstruct her parents' histories, as well as that of her aunt, Fremont must repeatedly confront and try to overcome denial, forgetfulness, and uncertainty – a process resonating with her coming out to her parents as lesbian. In the end, she must admit that she "will never know exactly what happened to [her parents] or why they made the choices they did" (243); no one in her family is even certain of her mother's original given name. Appignanesi's effort to understand her parents' war experiences comes belatedly, after her father's death and as her mother's memory is destroyed by the onset of Alzheimer's. She repeatedly complains of the fragmentary character of her mother's narrative, seeing it as unreliable, "devoid of history" (92). Moreover, it conflicts with her brother's account of the war years. Even when she travels to Poland, she can verify little: there is not even a record of her own birth in Łódź.

For Appignanesi and Karpf, who heard their mother's stories as they grew up, survivorship necessitated a certain type of narrative. Appignanesi's mother's stories are, as she puts it, "always success stories" (18), and they prominently feature her mother as a hero: "In her narrative, she is always the decision-taker and her decisions are always taken on instinct and always right" (16). Appignanesi implicitly and explicitly questions this narrative, but in an afterword written years after original publication, and after the death of her mother in 2002, Appignanesi is "pleased to find" that in the pages of *Losing the Dead* her mother is a "remarkable heroine" (259).

Like Appignanesi's mother, Karpf's "never depicted herself as abject (perhaps she never allowed herself to be), and admirably refused to be a victim" (*War* 95). She stresses that her parents "seemed to derive from the fact of their survival not a sense of powerlessness, victimhood, or even luck, but of the possibility of control" (*War* 14), and she admits, "My

mother's story as told by us was triumphal; its organizing principles were heroism and survival" (*War* 96).

These two texts add a dimension to Feinstein's comparison of male- and female-authored survivor accounts, in which gender is seen to influence the writers' choice of genre, with men tending to choose heroic characterization and storylines and women choosing domestic tales focusing on motherhood and interpersonal relations. This pattern does not hold for the maternal stories of Karpf and Appignanesi, though the heroic slant is in keeping with a critical tendency to emphasize resistance and agency and to downplay other survival strategies. Fremont's parents also transform their Holocaust experiences into a love story about separation during the war and reunion and marriage after it (8). The books by these three daughters of survivors reproduce these narratives, but they frame them in a way that opens their parental and especially their maternal histories to thoughtful questioning, particularly about sexual assault and suspect maternal sexuality.

The War After: Suspending Judgment

The first and third parts of Karpf's memoir, *The War After*, relate her autobiographical experiences of growing up in a survivor family, going into therapy, building a career, finding a partner and having a child of her own. These stories alternate with the life stories of both parents, including what are presented as transcriptions of interviews with them from 1983 and 1984. The second part places her and her parents' lives in relation to Holocaust history, post-war Jewish immigration, and psychoanalysis's treatment of survivors and their offspring. Karpf's emotional and psychological struggles with the anxieties and dilemmas associated with being the descendent of survivors are central to the work, which has been viewed as an almost paradigmatic illustration of the intergenerational transmission of trauma.¹¹

Karpf's memoir recounts both parents' histories, and describes conflicts with each, but her relationship with her mother is particularly close and fraught with the ambivalence characteristic of matrophobia. In a later article on researching the Holocaust, Karpf states that her mother

“occupied a central, incontestable place in my life” (“Chain” 96). As a child, Karpf feels total identification with her mother (*War* 16), whom she portrays as overprotective and anxious about Anne and her sister. Aware from an early age of her mother’s persecution, Karpf develops a strong sense of anxiety for both herself and her mother, expressed as an early obsession with death (5). As a teenager, she feels that her feelings are unimportant: “If you weren’t in a concentration camp, life must be a carousel. There was a hierarchy of suffering and normal, common-or-garden depression, teenage disaffection, or the faint bothersome feeling that all wasn’t well with your world came incontestably bottom” (10). As a result, she learns to repress almost all other feelings than happiness in an effort to keep her parents “buoyant” (126). She resents her mother’s hold on her, but long feels only resentment, guilt, and the futility of opposition. In addition to developing an eating disorder and habits of self-harm, the adult Karpf has difficulties leaving home (53), and she and her mother have hateful conflicts over her choice of a gentile partner, with her mother initially commenting that Anne “was doing what Hitler hadn’t managed to – finishing off the Jewish race” (97). Karpf undergoes psychotherapy in an effort to come to terms with her matrophobia, her self-hatred and her extraordinarily conflicted feelings of maternal dread and desire.

Karpf views narration as a coping strategy for children of survivors. Asking, “How does a child cope with information about the past brutalization of its parents? What does it do with such knowledge? How does she process it, render it halfway tolerable?,” she also proposes an answer: “Perhaps it becomes another story. You mythicise it, structure it round the rhetorical devices and narrative features of the other fables you know” (*War* 94). References to fables are common in survivor and postmemory literature, notes Phyllis Lassner, signaling a cultural form in which evil can be confronted and, usually, vanquished. Yet, Karpf’s narrative, like those of Fremont and Appignanesi, does not exhibit the structural, rhetorical, and narrative features of a fable. Confessing to having previously used rhetorical strategies to turn her mother’s story into a tale she could share with others to her own advantage, she notes that doing so left her feeling bad. Implicit in this confession is her struggle to tell her mother’s story in a *different* way in the memoir. One way to do

this is to grant her mother a measure of narrative autonomy by embedding her story, by allowing her mother to say just as much or as little as she wants about her specifically female experiences of the Holocaust.

One such experience occurs in the context of the Red Army's horrendous rapes of women after the German surrender. Karpf's mother describes leaving the camp Lichtewerden for the nearby town of Jägerndorf, where she finds a piano to play. When Russian soldiers overhear her playing, they invite Natalia and her friend to a party. Natalia and her friend emerge from this story as both wise and fortunate, unlike other women. At the party, they are careful not to eat too much, after having starved in Auschwitz and then Lichtewerden, and they throw out the alcoholic drinks they are offered. They are importuned to stay late, and since a curfew is in force, they have little choice but to sleep where the Russian soldiers tell them. The two friends remove the key from the door to avoid getting locked in, but the text obliquely suggests that the two officers remain in the room with them, keeping watch while the women sleep. Karpf's mother tells her, "We heard some screams from other women in other rooms, but these two young officers were very decent" (113). Later, she recounts, "we were told we were lucky because it had been terrible: the ordinary Russian soldiers had come and were drunk and tried their luck with the girls, chasing them and jumping over the bunks. Recia told us that there were screams and horrible scenes" (113). Here, the Russians "try their luck" and the young women who escape being raped are "lucky." This attribution of "luck" to both parties might be read as subtly suggesting its opposite in this passage, though the danger of rape for Karpf's mother is never spelled out in the mother's account, nor in Karpf's. My point is not to suggest one sequence of events or another, but to draw attention to the way that the text, as Karpf has formed it, keeps silent, but also speaks the possibility of rape. A similar strategy, we will see, is employed by Fremont. The fate of other women contrasts with that of Natalia, and a silence emerges from this juxtaposition. It poses the question not only of what might have happened, but of what the mother might have felt able to tell her daughter, and what the daughter might have wondered, and what she might have felt able to relate in her memoir.

Karpf here preserves her mother's testimony about this event, which concludes in a slightly more explicit fashion:

we were terrified at night of the Russian soldiers: they were wild people – they hadn't had women for God knows how long, and here were nice young women. So again one of us had to keep watch every few hours and, because there were no keys, we pushed a cupboard against the door so that nobody could come in. (114)

At the same time, as the silences in this testimony resonate with the threat of maternal sexual assault, they also preserve a space for the painful, unspoken imaginings of the daughterly writer, communicated to and shared by readers.

In this use of resonant silence – both her mother's and her own – Karpf, I suggest, is replicating her mother's explicitly non-judgmental view of survival strategies available to women. In an earlier passage, Natalia describes a Krakow friend who dressed beautifully and warmly in Auschwitz. She states: "We didn't know where she got [her clothes] from, we don't know what she did to get them. But she behaved well towards me I don't judge her: I wouldn't do things to gain privileges, at any price, but if as a result maybe she could help somebody She did help me [when Natalia was sick]" (88). Karpf's struggle with matrophobia does not prevent her from acknowledging the possibility of sexual assault and of sexual exchange for survival in a non-judgmental way.

After Long Silence: Suspect Sexuality and Sexual Trauma?

After Long Silence is a woman-centered text, in part due to Fremont's lesbian identity and above all due to the importance of sisters. Fremont and her older sister Lara are important to the narrative present; as adults, they uncover their Jewish roots, visit Galicia, and unite with lost family members. Their mother and her sister Zosia are important to the narrative past, and their relationship continues into the narrative present. As Fremont puts it, "Sisters are big in our family. Marriage is not. The most passionate couple in the family has always been my mother and Zosia" (107).¹² The narrative coordinates two generations of sisters.

Though, as previously noted, Fremont's parents narrated their war-time experiences as a love story, the daughters' late discovery that their parents are Jewish cause Fremont to see them differently: "My parents were transformed from unfortunate bystanders, swept up in the horror of war, to targeted victims, specifically hunted for annihilation" (31). The exposure of the secret also causes Fremont to reevaluate her childhood, and, with the benefit of hindsight, to reinterpret family dynamics. Both girls display at least some of the characteristics associated with the second generation, including something of the intense and anxious identification with the mother which Karpf also recounted. Lara is especially anxious, suffering night fears that could only be assuaged if her mother slept in the same room (158). When Lara goes to college, she comes home nearly every weekend, for years (70), and she is steadily solicitous of her parents' well-being. Helen is, at age 8, an unwilling participant in family therapy in which "my parents and sister fought and cried, raved and sobbed" (159). Fremont represents her younger self as rebellious, and not as closely bonded to family as her mother would have liked her to be (177). Moreover, after an early and unpleasant date she senses that her "romantic life would be completely different" (92) from her mother's. In short, Fremont's sister appears to have a stronger sense of matrophobia than Fremont. Fremont's conflicts with her mother primarily occur later, as she pushes her to remember her life before and during the war.

Fremont represents her mother's "slippery" (8) identity as irrevocably shaped by her experience of open hiding in Italy during the war years, of daily having to transform herself from Batya, the despised Jew, to Maria, the privileged Catholic: "every day she slipped between two personalities, two identities, with the flick of a wrist. The armband came on, and she was her parents' daughter, stepping over skeletons in the street. The armband came off, and she was her sister's sister, shopping in exclusive stores" (180). She stresses the performative aspects of passing: "Zosia and my mother molded themselves like clay. Their survival would depend on the creative shapes they could twist into, the speed with which they shifted, and how well they played their roles. Hollywood had nothing on them. They were acting for their lives" (179).¹³ Fremont connects maternal survival with performance, and portrays an air of sexual

confidence as part of that performance: “She strutted back across the city, head high, a confident young woman feeling proud of the gazes of young soldiers on the street” (180). However, Fremont also suggests that the “armor” her mother develops for this performance hollows her out and finally dominates her personality. Imagining her mother on a dangerous tightrope, Fremont stresses the fear underlying her courage: “My mother soared through the air with the greatest of ease, her heart in her throat” (184).

By contrast, Fremont represents her aunt Zosia as fearless, and as a stronger performer who uses her expertise in languages and her sexual attractiveness to the advantage of herself and her family. For example, during the 1939 Russian occupation of Lvov, soldiers raid the apartment and threaten to imprison Zosia’s father. Zosia, hearing the altercation from the next room, pockets her wedding band and “put on lipstick and a pair of high heels. She tucked her blouse in and straightened her skirt, brushed her hair and puckered her lips” (115). She then smiles at the NKVD officer, “calculating her chances. His eyes grazed over her, her hips, her breasts, her legs. The soldiers stood rooted to the spot like mannequins, mesmerized” (115). Fremont’s text emphasizes how Zosia adorns herself for her subsequent “dates” with the NKVD officer, until he withdraws the report against her family. She plays “the coquette” for months until he tires of “wrestling” with her: “In this way she engineered the end of the affair: she succeeded in getting him to dump her” (127). Success marks Zosia’s trickster-like exercise of agency just as, as we will see, it does Appignanesi’s survivor mother.

Fremont constructs some parallels between the sisters, but she emphasizes the vulnerability of the younger sister, and the audacity of the older. There is a tone of admiration in calling Zosia “an operator” (172) or “the magician, the tightrope walker” (184). But in drawing attention to what is not known about Zosia’s life, such as how she was finally able to get to Italy on an expired passport, without a visa (196), Fremont’s texts imply concern about Zosia’s suspect sexuality. As in Karpf’s work, urgent questions lie in silences and narrative gaps.

The parallels between the sisters, moreover, allow Fremont to both speak and quiet the possibility that her mother or her aunt may have

survived sexual assault. Structuring *After Long Silence* is her mother's account of the pogrom known as Petlura Day, which occurred in Lvov in June 1941. More than 2000 people were rounded up and brutally murdered in a pogrom that was one of several that took place in Lvov. Fremont hears about this event at different times in her life, and she in turn recounts the story at different junctures in the text, though the mother's telling to her adult daughters is presaged early in the text, as Helen and Lara confront her about her denial of her past: "What she told us that day would eventually help me piece together the story of her life. But it would take me several more years before I could begin to understand it, to arrange it into a narrative that led from her to me. Telling her story, I discovered, is not a simple act" (50). The mother's experience of what is at first an unnamed event is established as key to her life story, but the actual telling is deferred until much later in the text, when Fremont recognizes having heard it before.

Her mother first tells the story when Helen is 6 or 7. Fremont describes a domestic scene of intimate, yet incomplete, transmission of traumatic memory. She is "curled up" in front of the fireplace, her head in her mother's lap, her sister sitting in a chair. They are warming themselves after having played in the Michigan snow. Her mother describes playing in the snow as a young girl, but then "her voice drifted off and her eyes grew vague, and we knew she had left us and disappeared back to a time before we were born" (144). Fremont observes: "The past was always like this, an empty space in our lives, a gap in our conversations, into which our mother tumbled from time to time, quietly, without warning" (145). The mother describes her square-toed ski boots, though her story breaks into silence: "My mother went quiet again. A warning. There was something about those ski boots, I knew, that was dangerous" (145). But the mother puts an end to the story by saying matter-of-factly that after the Russians left and before the Germans came, "bandits" broke into people's homes and took what they wanted. This scene is primarily notable for portraying the young girls' sensitivity to their mother's state of mind, for the low-key but affect-laden transmission of memory from the first to the second generation within the context of everyday home life. As Hirsch observes, "nonverbal and precognitive acts

of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space” (34). Though this language, which Appignanesi calls a ghost language, does have a verbal component, fearfulness is transmitted through silence and the maternal body.

The second version of this story comes when Fremont is a college freshman. Her mother suggests she write about her and her sister Zosia’s different reactions to a traumatic event. In Fremont’s rendition, her mother frames the event with the idea of Ukrainians looting and raping women between the two occupations (147). The mother describes her father taking her and Zosia into a big courtyard, and her father “taking my head and putting it in his lap, covering my face with his hands, so that I wouldn’t be seen” (147). The sentence and the logic of the event require, of course, that the mother not *see*, that her father covers her eyes as well as her face, to spare her the sight of the atrocities playing out in the courtyard. Fremont’s mother tells her daughter, “I was a young girl of twenty; they would have raped me too. But Father hid my head” (147). Fremont remembers that when asked about her sister, the mother “paused, just a split second, and then scoffed at the idea” (147). Though the idea she scoffs at is not explicitly articulated here, it is implicit in the frame, as well as in the mother’s pause and her response, that Zosia was fine, and no one would touch her because she was married and wore a wedding band. Fremont’s explicit marking of this hesitation before speech creates a resonant silence, not dissimilar to that used by Karpf, which creates a space for imagination and meaning-making. Zosia remembers nothing of that day, while Fremont’s mother claims to remember everything. Her mother also confides that she stopped menstruating after that day, and did so for 9 months. Fremont writes: “I didn’t dare ask my mother any more questions, but I wondered about those nine months. Had my mother been raped? Did I have a brother or sister somewhere? My mother’s stories always left holes that I couldn’t fill” (148). Like other daughters of survivors, Fremont is explicit about how maternal tales, punctuated by telling silences, generate “suspicions” connected to taboo areas such as maternal sexuality and violence.

The third time Fremont hears the story from her mother is in 1992, nearly 20 years later. This is the telling that is alluded to early in the text,

as Fremont and her sister listen to her mother speak for four hours. Again, in the mother's telling, as the Germans look on, the Ukrainians are raping women "right and left" (162), and at this juncture her father "took my head in his hands and hid me in his lap," again, so "they wouldn't see me" (163). She emphasizes the violence and the screams. This time, however, Zosia rushes to a German SS officer and, in perfect German, complains she is Aryan and Italian, and she demands to be released. She produces her Italian documents, is released, goes home to clean up, and comes back for her little sister, Fremont's mother. She calls for her in Italian, "Cucca," and their father pushes her away, "as if he didn't know me As if we were strangers" (162). At the end of Fremont's text, Zosia confesses that she remembers nothing after the massacre in Lvov – not even the name of her sister, who she only calls Cucca (324). This key event in the mother's life is one that quite literally erases her previous identity; Fremont is forced to conclude that no one, not even her mother, knows her mother's original given name.

The story of the Petlura Day massacre at Lvov is a subtle organizing structure for Fremont's narrative. At its center is a story of rape and sexual violence. The different versions of the massacre emphasize the mother's control over her story, apportioning details in accordance with her daughters' ages. The story of rape and sexual violence averted is subtly brought into question, however, precisely by the different versions and the mother's history of protective deception, and the issue remains unresolved for both Fremont and her readers, who are placed in the same position, with holes that cannot be filled. Was Fremont's mother raped? Was her sister raped? Did their father cover her face to protect her from being seen, or from seeing? Why has Zosia lost all memory? Has Fremont's mother really the total recall she claims? Again, the point is to show how this text, like Karpf's, raises the specter of rape, and, obliquely, of sexual exchange as well, at the same time as it disavows it. Early in *After Long Silence* Fremont wonders, "What had kept [her parents] in hiding all these years? What had made them hide from me?" (32). Later, like Karpf, she explicitly wonders about whether she could have survived her parents' experiences: "Could I have survived what they had been through? Exactly what *had* they been through?" (129).

Though these questions are posed with urgency, Fremont uses a kind of double-voicing to respect her mother's and aunt's exercise of agency, including that exercised in silence, as well as to raise disturbing possibilities of suspect sexuality and sexual assault.

Losing the Dead: Suspect Sexuality and Origins

I have elsewhere written about Appignanesi's text as one that works toward a sense of equanimity and closure, of coming to terms with the past, even as the past is understood in a postmodern sense as never finished, as always open to revisions in the present (Kella). Here I focus not on Appignanesi's conscious working through of her family history but on the textual traces of matrophobia derived from her mother's suspect survival. *Losing the Dead* is the text that most explicitly raises the question of sexual bartering and maternal sexuality.

The ambivalence about one's mother which marks matrophobia is clear in *Losing the Dead*. It surfaces not only in the characterization of her mother, to which I soon turn, but in the irony she directs toward herself, calling herself a "bad daughter" (8) because of her critical thoughts about her mother, whose descent into dementia prompts Appignanesi's research and arguably complicates her matrophobia.¹⁴ On the one hand, she describes her mother quite bluntly, in unflattering terms, and on the other, she undertakes the family memoir project as an "act of reparation" (8), restoring her mother's incoherent past, "intact, clear, with all its births and deaths and missing persons in place" (8).

The strongest criticisms in Appignanesi's portrayal of her mother concern two related attributes: her mother's deceit, and her femininity and sexuality. Appignanesi bluntly states early on, "In [my family], my mother was the liar, my father the silent, inscrutable one, while I was the truth-teller" (35). Indeed, one entire chapter is entitled "Lying," and it describes life in Montreal in the 1950s, Canadian anti-Semitism, and her parents' efforts to disguise their Jewishness, beginning with the name-change (from Borenstein to Borens) that continued the practice of "double identity" perfected during the war. She refers to her mother as "a fantastic spinner of intricate webs," a teller of "confabulations" and "elaborate

fictions” (35) which encompass everything from lying about Lisa having married a gentile, and later about her divorcing him, to lying about Lisa’s country of birth – not Poland, her mother claimed to others, but France. These lies have negative effects on the young, narrated I, teaching her shame about her Jewish background and “tainted origins” (40).

The adult narrator, however, also connects her mother’s habit of deception to her survival of the war. Her parents “lived under a succession of ‘Aryan’ aliases” (33), and “by the age of twenty-seven (if that was her age), Hena or Hania or Henriette had been through at least three different personae, none of them Jewish” (38). Appignanesi appears ambivalent about the idea of passing as a survival strategy, portraying it in terms of fearlessness, but also associating it with deceit and the sexualized body. The mother’s “blond beauty” makes her “the belle of the community, a flirt and a tease, the object of every boy’s eye” (48), and her blondness makes it easy for her to assimilate in a way her father, who Lisa resembles, could not: “She could simply pass – pass as a *shiksa*, a Gentile woman” (13). The “simplicity” of this act implicitly detracts from the mother’s courage.

Appignanesi ascribes a form of eroticism to her mother’s storytelling. She emphasizes that her stories attempt “to seduce” her listener, and she concludes: “My mother’s ideal interlocutor is always and ever the Gestapo officer” (39). She jarringly juxtaposes seduction and Nazi interrogators, echoing the opening scene where Appignanesi’s dying father believes he is in a concentration camp and his wife is “a whore servicing the ranks” (3) and foreshadowing Appignanesi’s anxiety about her mother’s sexuality and fidelity during the war.

Anxiety is recognizable in the extreme factuality of Appignanesi’s remarks about her mother’s femininity and sexuality. According to Appignanesi, “Faced by an official, my mother moved into flirtation mode. She could count on her beauty, her femininity, to achieve her ends” (58). Her mother, indeed, bears some resemblance to Zosia, Fremont’s aunt, in her fearless bravado and ability to charm her way through life-threatening situations. Yet, while Fremont’s portrayal is colored by her admiration for her aunt, Appignanesi’s tone is another. The story of how her mother gets false papers for herself and later for her husband and her

own mother from Pan Oselinski, an official at the Warsaw Town Hall, concludes with a passage, key to the entire narrative. Appignanesi muses: "The exact nature of my mother's relations with Oselinski remains mysterious. Were his brave and generous acts a form of inducement or payment for sexual favours? Was he, in other words, a lover, as my brother has always suspected, perhaps picking up clues from the atmosphere of the time?" (178). Here, Appignanesi rather surprisingly equates the possibility of sexual exchange in wartime conditions with having a lover, thus denying or reducing the vulnerability of women in open hiding that Kremer, Jacobs, and others have documented. Given the relatively explicit treatment of maternal sexuality throughout this family memoir, this formulation appears to be shaped less by reticence and more by matrophobia and at least incompletely resolved suspicions about maternal sexuality.

Her older brother, a child during the war, harbors even stronger suspicions. Immediately after the war, when being Jewish is still a liability, her mother gains a new admirer, a NKVD colonel known as Sacha, who wants to marry her and take her and Lisa's brother to the USSR. Though her father ("who always sat a little more stiffly than usual during the recounting of this ... episode" (211)) solves the situation by moving everyone to Łódź, Appignanesi's brother continues to maintain that Sacha is Lisa's father. Appignanesi quarantines these ideas by attributing them to "Oedipal resentment" and the "rich terrain" of family romance (212). This explanation, understandable for a writer who has written on Freud and directed the Freud Museum in London, nevertheless uncannily overlaps, in part, with a situation recounted by Joan Ringelheim – the "immediate and resounding disregard" (24) among psychoanalysts of any factual basis for fears among children of survivors that their mothers had been raped during the Holocaust. Instead, such concerns were attributed to Freudian fantasies.

Appignanesi confronts not the question of rape, but instead the question of suspect maternal sexuality and her own "doubtful paternity" (249). Her reasoning vacillates. She records her brother's suspicions about Oselinski, but also her mother's denial and assertion that "Oselinski was [simply] a fine and honourable man" (178). She comments on her own

thought processes: “Cynicism about wartime relations coupled with her persistent aura of sexual adventure is what induces the speculation. Most days, I take her at her word. My sense of her is that she far prefers to flirt and seduce than to be free with her favours. But then, I am a daughter” (178). Appignanesi struggles to understand her mother’s wartime sexuality, but never entertains the idea that her mother may have been vulnerable to sexual coercion or may have chosen to exercise agency under compromised conditions. Instead, her explicit and implicit speculations revolve around “affairs” and the loosening of sexual morality in wartime (249). These struggles continue to the end of the memoir, when she decides “to believe her, rather than my brother” (249). Because of her mother’s dementia, however, she can never really know; “Whatever the reality of her love life, it is no longer verifiable” (249). What remains is Appignanesi’s ambivalent characterization of her mother, including criticism of her “controlling maternal fictions” (37) which she nevertheless recounts in her own text.

Despite her desire to distinguish her stories from her mother’s, in an afterword for a new edition published after her mother’s death, Appignanesi, as I noted before, is pleased that on re-reading, her mother comes across as a heroine. In other words, in spite of her doubts and suspicions, she concludes that *Losing the Dead* validates the image her mother chose to project throughout her life. Whether or not a reader concurs with the author’s later assessment, this afterward demonstrates an important point also made by Jacobs: that family relations and attitudes of descendants of survivors change over time. They are subject to dynamic processes of “integration, reidentification, and reattachment” (151), as later generations negotiate their changing family relations and understandings of their pasts.

Conclusions

Testimony about the traumas of the Holocaust has been theorized in ways that call attention to the failures of language or inadequacies of representation. For decades after the end of WW II, sexual violence and sexual exchange for survival during the war have, as Waxman puts it,

“implications of ‘the unsaid’ and ‘the unspeakable,’ in making sense of narratives of lived experience” (132). Ringelheim, too, emphasized the silence around histories of gendered violence and survival, including dismissals of the fears of children of survivors that their mothers had been raped, as well as her own reluctance as a researcher to pose questions to survivors about sexual abuse (25). Gender and genocide implied a split in memory, which scholars have since attempted to fuse, as have women writers such as Anne Karpf, Helen Fremont, and Lisa Appignanesi. In this article, I have tried to attend to the way that daughters of survivors struggle with strong emotions connected to maternal sexuality and suspect Holocaust survival, which appear to have contributed to the matrophobia evident, to different degrees, in these accounts. The writers both respect and question their maternal histories, by developing in their memoirs narrative strategies that allow them to raise unspeakable questions about how their mothers survived, but also to respect their mothers’ actions and choices about what to tell and what not to.

The three texts by Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi have in common a strategy of interweaving or alternating parental and maternal histories with autobiographical narratives of their own upbringings, a widespread pattern among writers of the second generation. Additionally, as I hope to have shown, the texts call attention to and partially replicate the silences within narratives which tend toward fragmentation. For instance, Appignanesi describes the stories she heard growing up among Jewish immigrants to Canada thus:

The worst stories are told obliquely, in hushed voices, usually when their principal subject has left the room. ‘They operated on her, you know. One of their crazy experiments. She can’t now. No children.’ But when the woman with the blue jottings on her arm comes back into the room, she is smiling. And everyone else smiles too. (24)

It is hardly co-incidental that her example of almost unspeakable history references a specific form of Nazi violence directed toward women and female reproduction. Much like Karpf and Fremont, Appignanesi does struggle to fill the silences and interruptions in her family narrative, especially that pertaining to her mother’s war-time experiences in open hiding, by conducting historical research and returning to the Poland of

her birth. Ultimately, however, *Losing the Dead* replicates the resonant silence around her mother's sexual agency and her own paternity, and she embraces fragmentation as a narrative strategy for drawing attention to aspects of family and Holocaust history that, at the time of publication, had not yet been commonly or freely articulated.

Published in the 1990s, the accounts by Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi emerge precisely at the time when gendered experiences of the Holocaust and WWII began to receive scholarly attention, including investigations into rape and sexual exchange as a survival strategy. Though the three texts foreground mother-daughter relations and present stories of their mothers' sexual vulnerability and agency in different ways, they also exhibit a certain reticence about the stories they tell. The authors' articulations of resonant silence may also be seen to resist a writerly temptation – one faced by any memoirist or family biographer or autobiographer – to fill in the gaps in knowledge, to smooth over or resolve inconsistencies, to create a smooth narrative arc. These authors do this even when strong reasons compel toward breaking the silence. Karpf, for example, is critical of post-war Britain imposing stark limits on the number of Jewish refugees taken in after the war and denying a voice to Jews in Britain. She states: “Again and again, the stereotype of the survivor who didn't want to talk about his or her experiences was (and still is) invoked as a justification for the silence greeting Holocaust survivors in Britain” (200). Such a conviction might well compel her to break the silences contained in her parents' stories, but instead, she, too, replicates these silences in her transcriptions of their words and in her accounts of hearing her mother's repeated tale of surviving liberation in the company of Russian soldiers. For Appignanesi, the discovery that there are no records to rely on, not of the fates of relatives nor even of her own birth, allows her to conclude that “Official history refuses to coincide with family memory. Everything is open to invention” (252). In spite of the openings available to invention, imagination, or fiction, and in spite of her frustration over what she perceives as her mother's incoherence and tendency to lie, Appignanesi, too, largely refrains from filling in the blanks in, especially, her mother's narrative. Finally, although Fremont ends her memoir with the feeling that she and her sister can start living

their own lives (in spite of “the family [being] the smallest unit of identity” (345)), she is unable to resolve the issues of remembering and forgetting surrounding her mother’s and her aunt’s experiences of the pogroms in Lvov. Moreover, in the afterword, added after the first publication of the book, Fremont describes a family reunion with lost cousins and relatives who reconnect precisely because of her memoir. Her parents and her aunt Zosia choose not to attend, however. Their choice is to forget the past, and *After Long Silence* allows this, so to speak, validating their decision as well as Fremont’s opposite one.

It might here be instructive to return to Jacobs’s work with survivors and their descendants. While most investigations into gendered Holocaust experiences to date concern accounts of survivors, Jacobs’s interviews with both generations show that descendants of survivors tend to adopt a very non-judgmental view toward the survival strategies of family members, seeing “survivorship itself as a form of agency” and even “acknowledging the strong possibility that sexual bartering may have been key to their mothers’ and grandmothers’ ability to support themselves and others” (38). Notably, those she interviews primarily discuss their conjectures, rather than explicit information they may have received. In a similar fashion, the postmemory writing of Karpf, Fremont, and Appignanesi demonstrates the authors’ struggles to attain understanding and to suspend moral judgement of their parents, especially their mothers. The texts stage to varying degrees the struggle between historically conditioned matrophilia and matrophobia experienced by daughters of survivors, but in the treatment of maternal sexual vulnerability and agency, I have argued, they are more circumspect. Though the most explicit in its treatment of suspect sexuality, *Losing the Dead* preserves much of maternal silence, but might also be seen to falter in its effort to remain non-judgmental, vacillating between a critical response to her mother, in all probability heightened by Lisa’s position as a caretaker, and the response in the afterword, validating her mother’s heroic stature after her death. Karpf tells a story of stronger reconciliation, but one which comes after greater enmity, and which is dependent on maintaining the integrity of her story and that of her mother, learning to attend to her mother’s repetitions, her words as well as her silences.

Fremont's narrative frames the silences at the heart of the stories of her mother's and Zosia's survival, and it finds in her characterizations of the sisters a way to approach the sexual vulnerabilities and agencies of both women. The narrative strategies they develop, I would finally suggest, elicit in readers a greater openness to hearing the experiences of women during the Holocaust – even when they must be heard in silence.

Notes:

¹ The author is grateful to The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies for its generous support.

² Sukenick writes about Doris Lessing's protagonists and how they embrace a cold rationalism in an effort to distance themselves from the sentimentality and emotionality expected of them as women.

³ For more on Rich, feminism, and motherhood, see D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein's "The Intriguing History and Silences of *Of Woman Born*: Rereading Adrienne Rich Rhetorically to Better Understand the Contemporary Context" and "Matrophobic Sisters and Daughters: The Rhetorical Consequences of Matrophobia in Contemporary White Feminist Analyses of Maternity."

⁴ After her divorce, Rich falls in love with a Jewish woman. Throughout this autobiographical essay, Rich's lesbian desire complicates other aspects of her identity in ways she finds unresolvable.

⁵ Judith Antler writes about the themes that guide changes in the Jewish mother image from the 1920s on, including "parent-child struggles over autonomy, and gender role imbalances" (9). She notes that the Jewish Mother image is an "expression of the power and limitations of motherhood," and "a warning against the usurpation of patriarchal authority" (9).

⁶ Hallstein emphasizes that matrophobia is "fundamentally built on splitting" ("Intriguing" 24). Like Hirsch, herself a daughter of Holocaust survivors as well as a prominent theorist of both mother-daughter relations and of postmemory, Hallstein finds Rich's formulations essential to understanding second-wave white feminism as essentially but problematically matrophobic (32).

⁷ Clementi argues that the relational dynamics between Holocaust mothers and their daughters follow the normal path of development, generally ending in conflict, even though her work emphasizes the *pathologies* of survivor mothers. In her one chapter dealing with second-generation daughters, she writes that their acknowledgement of their matricidal drives and their chronicles of development underscore the denigrated position of the mother in cultural discourse.

⁸ In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi wrote: "The 'saved' of the Lager were not the best, those predestined to do good The worst survived – that is, the fittest; the best all died" (69). Karpf's mother also states that "mostly those who were pushy without any consideration of others survived" the camps (*War* 153).

⁹ Lassner states that "Regardless of whether survivor parents told their stories or kept silent, their children report that their own sense of self developed as

identified with their Holocaust heritage” (103). Postmemory accounts emphasize that parental stories often result in the establishment of a hierarchy of suffering, in which children’s sometimes painful experiences of growing up never “match” the suffering of their parents. Another outcome cited by Karpf (*War* 231) is the memorial candle syndrome – the idea that one child in a survivor family tends to be selected to bear the responsibility of furthering the story, so that siblings can lead a life less burdened by the past.

¹⁰ Indeed, Appignanesi’s formulation dovetails with Hirsch’s understanding of the intergenerational transfer of trauma as being in the “language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive” (34).

¹¹ Hirsch, for example, uses Karpf’s evolving relationship to her mother to distinguish between a debilitating rememory, based on unhealthy incorporation of maternal trauma, and a healthier postmemory, “based on a more consciously and necessarily mediated form of identification” (85), and Lassner focuses on Karpf’s (and Appignanesi’s) identity formation in relation to survivor parents (106).

¹² Her parents’ love story, which Helen and Lara grew up hearing, is also prominent: “I knew that they had fallen in love before the war, and they had been separated for six years without knowing if the other was alive; my mother escaped Poland dressed as an Italian soldier, and my father walked across Europe after the war, found my mother in Rome, and married her ten years to the day after they had first met” (8). This fairy tale elides Jewish persecution and is narrated but also displaced by Fremont’s complex narrative.

¹³ Waxman notes that the inferior education of Jewish girls in local schools in pre-war Poland gave them linguistic abilities, social networks, and knowledge of secular culture that could help them blend in with non-Jewish Poles, as Batya does prior to moving to Italy.

¹⁴ Appignanesi has a litany of what she “cannot bear” about her mother’s forgetfulness and confusion (88-89), and near the end of *Losing the Dead*, it becomes clear that she fears becoming old and unattractive like her mother (250).

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