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The Work of Memory in Female Writings of Romani Holocaust Survivors: Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka

Abstract

The chapter discusses the work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka, who were the first survivors of Sinti and Romani descent to publish their memoirs about the events of Romani Holocaust (Porrajmos) in Germany and in Austria respectively. It argues that for these authors writing provides an important vehicle for individual agency and enables them, while working through their traumatic memories, to express their unique individual perspective. Whilst dealing with their individual issues and life stories, however, Franz and Stojka continue to draw inspiration from their cultural heritage and remain painfully aware of the wider problems faced by their group. Their struggle for autonomy and self-expression is therefore coupled with their people's struggle for recognition. By proudly claiming their cultural heritage alongside their status as survivors, these authors were able to break some of the most persistent "Gypsy" stereotypes and became eminent representatives of their communities

1. Voicing the Memories of a Silenced Community

The fate of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust has only belatedly received attention in the academic and public arena (Kenrick/Puxon 1972 and 1995; Hancock 1996; Milton 1991 and 1998; Zimmermann 1996; Lewy 2000; Margalit 2002; Joskowicz 2016 and 2020). Despite suffering terrible losses under the Nazis and their allies in the period between 1933 and 1945,[1] having been singled out, together with the Jews, as an "alien

[1] Although the exact number of Roma and Sinti victims remains unknown, it is estimated that 500,000 Roma and Sinti have perished during WWII (see Kenrick/Puxon 1995, 150). Some estimates place the number even higher (Vossen 1983, 85–86; Hancock 2007, 405).

race" (*Fremdrasse*) and therefore a danger to the purity of the "Aryan" race, the Roma's case was not heard at Nuremberg nor at other post-war trials. The Roma's "invisibility" as Holocaust victims has also meant that their first-hand accounts and testimonies were ignored. As a result, the Romani *Porrajmos*[2] (unlike the *Shoah*) "has become an almost forgotten footnote to the history of Nazi genocide" (Tyrnauer 1998 [1982], 97). It took until the 1980s for German authorities to recognise that Roma and Sinti had been persecuted by the Nazi regime for racial and ethnic reasons. The official recognition of the Romani genocide came as a result of the political mobilisation of Roma and Sinti, which led to the creation of a number of committees and pan-Gypsy organisations, especially the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (*Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma*) (Fraser 1992, 316–318; Milton 2002, 180–202). In Austria Roma and Sinti have been fully recognised as victims of the Nazi regime only since 1988, after years of mobilisation from independent researchers, activists, and artists (Thurner 2007, 64).

The lack of public recognition of the Romani Holocaust was the outcome of a process of marginalisation and exclusion of Romani groups from mainstream European society, which long predates the events of WWII (Fraser 1995). It is part of the erasure of the "Gypsy" presence from "official" European history and culture (McLaughlin 1999; Toninato 2019) and the result of misleading stereotypes, for example, the portrayal of Roma and Sinti as living in an eternal present and having *no sense of historical memory*, which has left a lasting impression in the collective memory worldwide (Trumpener 1992).

The repercussions of the silencing and "institutional forgetting" of the Romani Holocaust are severe. However, the lack of recognition of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims has been fundamentally challenged by a growing body of research, political campaigns, and importantly, by the existence of oral narratives about the Holocaust among the Roma (Pahor 1980; Stojka 1992; Kenrick/Puxon 1995; Sonneman 2002; Bársony/Daróczi 2008). Roma's *Porrajmos* narratives and highly traumatic memories circulated mainly within the protective family and group boundaries, but this phenomenon applies to Holocaust survivors in general (Langer 1991; LaCapra 2001). Roma and Sinti testimonies fell on

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[2] *Porrajmos* is the term used by the Roma to refer to the Romani Holocaust. It literally means "devouring". Other expressions used to define it are *Baro Porrajmos* ("great devouring") (Hancock 2002, 34) and *samudaripen* ("mass killing").

deaf ears and were effaced by official Holocaust renditions where they simply had “no place”. While memories of Jewish suffering during the Nazi regime are officially commemorated, in both United States and Europe, the memory of Roma persecution is not yet part of a widely shared cultural memory.

From the 1980s onwards autobiographical accounts and memoirs of Roma and Sinti Holocaust survivors began to be published, breaking the silence maintained by institutions and public authorities on the subject. During this time, and in the following decade, a growing number of Romani authors from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland began to publish their work in an effort to counter persistent discriminatory attitudes and violence toward their people. In Germany and Austria, the events of the Holocaust have indelibly marked a generation of Romani authors, which includes Philomena Franz, Ceija Stojka, Otto Rosenberg,[3] Walter Winter[4] and Alfred Lessing.[5]

In this chapter I will focus on the work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka, who were the first survivors of Sinti and Romani descent to publish their memoirs about the events of Holocaust in Germany and in Austria respectively. Philomena Franz was born in Germany in 1922 to a Sinti family of musicians who had lived in the country for centuries. In 1943 she was deported first to Auschwitz and later transferred to the Ravensbrück and Wittenberg camps. She managed to escape, but lost most of her family. Her autobiography *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* (Between Love and Hate), originally published in 1985 and reprinted in 2001, is an account of her imprisonment in the concentration camps. The first

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[3] Otto Rosenberg, a Sinto from Berlin, published his autobiography *Das Brennglas* in 1998. The book was published in English the following year as *A Gypsy in Auschwitz*. Rosenberg’s work is discussed by Grobbel (2003) and Rosenhaft (2004).

[4] Walter Winter’s memoirs, *Winter Zeit: Erinnerungen eines deutschen Sinto, der Auschwitz überlebt hat* (1999), were based on four recorded interviews carried out by historians Thomas Neumann and Michael Zimmermann. They were published in 1999 and translated into English in 2004, published by the University of Hertfordshire Press.

[5] Alfred Lessing is author of the memoir *Mein Leben im Versteck: Wie ein deutscher Sinti den Holocaust überlebte* (My Life in Hiding: How a German Sinto Survived the Holocaust, 1993). Other Romani writers who published autobiographical texts include Dido Ernst and Lolo Reinhardt, author of the memoir *Überwintern: Jugenderinnerungen eines schwäbischen Zigeuners* (1999).

part of the book is devoted to describing the author's happy childhood, which contrasts dramatically with the atrocities of Auschwitz. Franz has also published a book of poetry (*Stichworte*, Franz 2016) and a collection of fairy tales (*Zigeunermärchen*, Franz 2001). In 1995 she was conferred the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), and in 2001 she was named 'Woman of Europe 2001' for her contribution to European integration and intercultural understanding.

Three years after the publication of Franz's autobiography, Ceija Stojka, a Romani poet and artist born in 1933 in Austria to a family of Lovara Roma, published her memoir *Wir leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (We Live in Hiding: Memories of a Roma-Gypsy, Stojka 1988), which raised public awareness of the persecutions suffered by the Austrian Roma. As a child, she and her family were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and then Bergen-Belsen. She managed to survive, together with her mother and four of her five brothers, but she lost her father and her seven-year-old brother Ossi. In 1992 she published a second autobiography, *Reisende auf dieser Welt* (Travellers in This World) (Stojka 1992), in which she described her life in postwar Austria, while *Träume ich, dass ich lebe? Befreit aus Bergen-Belsen*, (Am I Dreaming That I Am Living? Freed from Bergen-Belsen), published in 2005 (Stojka 2005), recounts her experiences as a prisoner in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her book *Meine Wahl zu schreiben—ich kann es nicht* (My Choice to Write—I Have None), published in 2003 (Stojka 2003), is a bilingual collection of poems in German and Romani.

Franz and Stojka devoted their lives to promoting awareness of Romani suffering during the Holocaust and fostering intercultural dialogue. By proudly claiming their cultural heritage alongside their status as survivors, these authors were able to break some of the most persistent "Gypsy" stereotypes mentioned above: first, that Roma and Sinti are frozen in a purely oral, "illiterate" culture,[6] and, second, that they have no sense of historical memory. Stojka and Franz became eminent representatives of their communities, and their example of testimony was fol-

[6] Research has in fact shown that a body of Romani written literature began to emerge in Europe since the early 20th century (Eder 1993 and Eder-Jordan 1997; Toninato 1999 and 2014; French 2015; Kovacshazy 2009; Zahova/French/Hertrampf (2020); Roman/Zahova/Marinov 2021).

lowed by many other Romani Holocaust survivors who decided to voice their accounts of survival.[7]

In the following I will discuss Franz's and Stojka's important contribution[8] to the growing body of Romani literature as female authors who use writing as a powerful tool for self-expression, but I will also dwell on their role as mediators between cultures and as moral witnesses who have been able to work through their painful memories and re-articulate them in the form of "dialogic" memories (Assmann 2015). The main questions I shall address are: What is the specific function of Romani women writing? What lies behind their decision to publish their life narratives? Is there something specific about Romani women's Holocaust accounts?

2. Romani Women Re-writing Their Traumatised Selves

The female approach to writing among the Roma and Sinti is a complex phenomenon. It has been suggested that, at least within some Romani groups, that writing was limited to marginal, instrumental uses mainly performed by their female members in interactions with the *Gadje* (non-Roma).[9] Romani female writers, however, have been able to redirect this instrumental use of writing towards literary purposes and more in general for purposes of self-expression, thus circumventing the severe limitations imposed on them by their group (Toninato 1999). Despite their ability to negotiate and reconcile their literary activities with the demands of their group, the publication of Romani women's writings is not a straightforward event, and has often very serious consequences, as in the case of Bronislawa Wajs (known as Papusza). Papusza, who learnt to read and write without any formal schooling, endured the painful experience of the Nazi occupation of her country and after the war devoted herself to literary work. Shortly after the publication of her poetry collection under the title *Songs of Papusza* by *Gadjo* poet Jerzy Ficowski, she was excluded from her group, the Polska Roma, who considered her association with Ficowski a form of betrayal (Papusza's poems were used

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[7] See in particular the authors quoted in footnote 3, 4 and 5.

[8] In the following, unless otherwise stated, translations from German are mine.

[9] See for example the Slovenian-Croatian Roma and the Sinti in northern Italy (Toninato 1997 and 2014).

to justify the policy of forced sedentarization of the Roma implemented by Polish authorities at the time). Papusza's poetic talent and her legacy continue to inspire the following generation of Romani writers, many of whom now regard her as the "mother" of Romani literature. Having her work published and read by the non-Roma, however, came with a painful cost: Papusza's fate was to spend the rest of her life in solitude, suffering mental breakdown and eventually abandoning poetry altogether.

While purely instrumental uses of writing by Romani women are tolerated, the publication of written texts, especially when concerning sensitive aspects of Romani life and culture, is regarded with suspicion and perceived as a threat potentially leading to assimilation (Toninato 2006). By devoting themselves to writing and cultural communication, Romani women openly defy patriarchal authorities because they do not conform to their traditional roles. When family and societal pressure is particularly strong, as seen above, the writing process becomes "complicated", fragmented; it turns into an activity that is best to keep hidden, away from the hostile gaze of the other group members.

In the case of Ceija Stojka, the publication of her memoir *Wir leben im Verborgenen* was initiated by author and film director Karin Berger, as Ceija Stojka herself reveals: "She [Karin] was the one who ran around to publishers" (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).[10] Within her family, however, Ceija Stojka encountered strong disapproval: "Often writing was complicated", she reports, "because my partner did not really understand the purpose of it" (Stojka 1988, 97). Disapproval turned into outright rejection when Ceija Stojka decided to let her brother Karl Stojka, also a Holocaust survivor, read her manuscript; he told her to destroy it (Stojka 1988, 98). After that, she decided to hide the manuscript in the kitchen, which she perceived as a safe place. In addition to the opposition of her family members, she had to face the indifference of mainstream pub-

[10] The collaboration between Romani authors and non-Romani scholars is indeed a recurrent pattern in Romani literature, and led to the publication of a number of autobiographical and biographical texts, either self-authored or co-authored (see the case of Ilona Lacková's autobiography *A False Dawn: My Life as a Gypsy Woman in Slovakia*, translated and edited by Milena Hübschmannová and published in Czech in 1997 under the title *Narodila jsem se pod šťastnou hvězdou*, and Giuseppe Levakovich's autobiographical account *Tzigari* published in 1975 (Levakovich/Ausenda 1975); see also *Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman* (Gmelch 1986 [1991]).

lishers, who did not consider the publication relevant. In an interview Ceija Stojka revealed: "A German [publisher] rejected it, saying, 'Who will want to read this now, after fifty years?' But then Picus in Vienna accepted it. We were very lucky" (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).

Despite the obstacles and difficulties encountered in their path, both Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka were able to accomplish their writing projects.[11] Their determination shows that for them writing fulfils a vital need that is greater than the fear of negative reactions from family and group members and that, at a certain stage in their lives, becomes too powerful to be suppressed.[12] As for many other Holocaust survivors, the need to tell her story became for Stojka an absolute obligation, taking over her life. Compared to this "moral imperative", ordinary life tasks seem trivial and meaningless. This confirms what psychiatrist Dori Laub, himself a Holocaust survivor, remarked after having interviewed hundreds of survivors at the Yale Video Archive: "[S]urvivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed 'external evil', which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion" (Felman/Laub 1992, 79). Franz and Stojka decided to fight that struggle to try and achieve some control over their Holocaust traumas and to reclaim some agency over their lives.

There is a sense of urgency in their work, as well as a certain awareness of the healing power of writing. Having experienced the struggle entailed in "working through"[13] their recollections—Franz reveals that she wrote her memoir "in tears and on the knees" (Franz 2001, 101)—both authors confirm that this helped them to find release from the traumatic memories of the camps. In this regard, Stojka states that, after she started writing, her memories came *pouring out* (Stojka 1988, 97; my emphasis). She also says that she felt the need to talk to somebody, but that no one who would listen to her (Stojka 1988, 97). These words hint at the sense

[11] Although Philomena Franz did not encounter resistance from family members as Ceija Stojka did, she mentions facing poverty and discrimination in the post-WWII period, and, like Ceija Stojka, she struggled to secure compensation for Holocaust survivors.

[12] "Finally, I did not let myself be deterred anymore. Even when they said I should go into the kitchen I did not obey anymore. Too much was coming my way; I had experienced too much and had to struggle for too long" (Stojka 1988, 98; trans. Riegler 2007, 275).

[13] LaCapra 2001.

of isolation and lack of understanding experienced by many Holocaust survivors, unable to find a sympathetic audience and struggling to attain validation from those around them.

This sense of isolation results from the nature of the Holocaust, which in the Nazi system was meant to remain "an event without a witness" (Laub 1992, 75). In the Holocaust's world, Laub explains, "the very imagination of the *Other* was no longer possible. There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered" (Felman/Laub 1992, 81–82). To this we can add that in a traumatic situation in general the individual sense of self is compromised, because trauma itself "destroys the belief that one *can be oneself* in relation to others' (Herman 1992, 53; emphasis in original). By contrast, the act of writing as form of communication, even self-communication, breaks the sense of isolation felt by the survivors. As argued by Langer, "writing invites reflection, commentary, interpretation, by the author as well as the reader" (Langer 1991, 57). Moreover, the writing process contributes to "consciousness-raising" and intensifies the individual's "sense of self" (Ong 1982, 174). In particular, autobiographical writing enables the female writing subject to go a step forward. As Smith and Watson emphasise, autobiography entails the creation of a discursive space through which women can "redefine themselves" as autonomous subjects able to express their individual voice (Smith/Watson 2002). Through their life writing, Romani women have the opportunity to carve out for themselves a space for individual agency, resisting traditional female roles.

How do Romani women express their individual worldviews? In the cases of Franz and Stojka, writing provides an important vehicle for individual agency. This is confirmed by the way in which they portray themselves in their texts. Their memoirs, like Holocaust testimonies in general, "are not spontaneous outbursts of information" as Zoë Waxman clarifies, "but come from the careful representation of experience" (Waxman 2006, 128). This is particularly evident in Philomena Franz's autobiography. In the section devoted to her experiences in the concentration camps, significantly entitled "My Holocaust", the reader encounters a strong-willed young Sinti woman who does not conform to the image of the helpless victim. Upon arrival to Auschwitz on 21 April 1943, at 4 o'clock in the morning, she describes in a dry, factual style the initial encounter with the infernal world of the Holocaust: the sorting out in ranks according to age and gender, the "peculiar" smell, the deeply shocking

view of trucks filled with dead bodies, a complete silence suddenly interrupted by the frightening orders of the SS. Then, the relentless sequence of dehumanising procedures to which the prisoners are subjected:

> "Line up! Undress!" […] Everyone undresses slowly. It is very cold. I have goose bumps. Contemptuous, curious, professional looks sweep over my body. The dress I was wearing a few moments earlier is replaced by a striped one, made from coarse fabric. My feet are now inside large wooden clogs. In two minutes, a civilian is turned into a prisoner of a concentration camp. (Franz 2001, 61)

The narrator observes with disconcerting realism the initiation rituals to life in the concentration camp, the progressive degradation imposed on the prisoners, but she describes this from her own point of view, highlighting her feelings and reactions, and framing the whole scene with a laconic comment—which signals to the reader the agency achieved over these traumatic memories—her dizzying and sudden descent into the world of the damned of Auschwitz. Franz describes how, shortly after her arrival, despite the initial shock and disorientation, she rebels against the idea of becoming a prostitute for the SS: "No, no, I cry, I want to die like the members of my family, like my brothers and sisters whom you have killed here. I don't want to become your whore. Kill me!" (Franz 2001, 63). By refusing to be subjected to the SS's sexual exploitation, she remains truthful to her family and to herself, resisting their attempt at destroying her identity and humanity. Her countenance stands out in stark opposition to traditional stereotypes about exotic and promiscuous "Gypsy" women. Moreover, her behaviour contrasts sharply with the portrayal of a co-prisoner, a girl with "lifeless eyes" who is walking as being "in a dream" (Franz 2001, 62), and displays some of the features of the *Muselmänner*, the "living-dead" described by Primo Levi, those who "march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead in them, already too empty to really suffer" (Levi 1986, 90). The young Philomena, by contrast, despite being filled with feelings of despair, is never completely resigned to her destiny. She deliberately attempts to take advantage of the situations she faces, trying to gain some food, often with the collaboration of other women (included her sister, who is tortured for having helped her in her failed escape attempt), and although she fails to escape from Ravensbrück, she succeeds in running away from a forced labour camp near Wittenberg, hiding until the end of the war.

Ceija Stojka's memoir "*Träume ich, dass ich lebe?*" (Am I Dreaming I'm Alive? Stojka 2005) describes her struggle for survival at the concen-

tration camp of Bergen-Belsen. She was eleven when she was sent there, together with her mother and her sister, after having endured internment in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. The memoir adopts the perspective of a child, tempered by an adult narrator, and this enables her to present the events from a unique viewpoint. In her simple, unadorned style, she conveys a more "choral" image of the women and the children in Auschwitz, and creates the image of a very strong and resourceful woman: her mother. She collaborated with other women in the camp in order for them and their children to survive: "These women—Tschiwe, Mimi, and Mama—have stuck closely together. They were three Austrian women who, from Roßauer Lände (in Vienna) passing through Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen, had always been together" (Stojka 2005, 38). Women and children in Stojka's group showed a remarkable spirit of adaptation: "We survived by eating everything. Pieces of wood, grass, we were chewing everything" (Stojka 2005, 41). The role of Stojka's mother in her survival is crucial not just in the physical sense (that is, by providing food and shelter): she constantly provides her with emotional support and reassurance. Ceija reports "talking a lot" with her (Stojka 2005, 35), thus gaining life-saving advice on how to survive in a deadly environment and, most importantly, sharing stories and narratives.

Scholars have pointed out that Roma and Sinti have a well-established storytelling tradition that has played a crucial role in preserving their group identity and has insured intergenerational transmission of culture (Dick-Zatta 1986, Heinz/Hübschmannová 1983, Hübschmannová 1985 and 1987, Tong 1989). Indeed, the Romani oral tradition had a vital function in preserving cultural memory and sustaining the sense of ethnic continuity between the prisoners and their communities that was so dramatically disrupted by the events of the Holocaust. Through the narration of family history, the individual is reminded that, even in the isolation of the concentration camps, s/he is not alone and s/he is able to symbolically reconnect with family members and, by extension, with the wider group—comprising of both the living and the dead.

Another way in which Franz and Stojka express their unique individual perspective is evident in their writing style. A growing number of scholars has recently commented on the literary merit of the texts of these two authors;[14] in particular, analyses have noted the use of meta-

[14] See, among others, Eder 1993 and Eder-Jordan 2010, Zwicker 2010 and 2011, Auraix-Jonchière 2020, and Bauer 2020.

phors from the natural world, which reflects its crucial role in the Romani *Weltanschauung* and culture. For Roma and Sinti, nature is not only a repository of romantic stereotypes, but it was an integral part of the itinerant tradition they were forced to abandon during the Nazi regime. In their prose and poetry, both Franz and Stojka represent the bare, lifeless space of the concentration camp, in opposition to the natural world, which they regard as the main source of life and an emblem of their past freedom (Franz 2001, 65; Stojka 2005, 21–22, 27). For them, Nature is thus the embodiment of what is good and benign and is opposed to human barbarity:

Nature is our original maternal ancestor
The wind is the Roma's brother
The rain is the Romnja's sister
And all the rest is part of it

(Stojka 2003, 37)

As a painter, Ceija Stojka devoted her work to reproduce not only images of her ordeal in the concentration camps, but also images of her childhood, when her Lovara family was still travelling: these are paintings mostly characterised by brightly-coloured images depicting horses, caravans, and countryside landscapes. By contrast, her black-and-white paintings and pen-and-ink drawings most often depict life in the concentration camps.

In Philomena Franz's prose and poetry, readers equally find an abundance of metaphors from the natural world. To express her feelings of loneliness and isolation while being detained in prison, she uses the metaphor of the bird unable to fly: "I am a bird, I can't fly. My wings have been clipped" (Franz 2001, 56), and in her poems the natural and the human world merge into each other as if they coexisted in perfect harmony:

> I name the trees, the leaves in autumn, how they dance—like children, in a merry-go-round.
>
> (Franz 2016, 13)

> *If you lie down in the tall grass and a thunderstorm is coming, then you hear the rustling of the stems and it sounds like music. When the wind brushes the grass, it's the same as though it spoke a language.*
>
> (Franz 2016, 35; emphasis in original)

Franz's and Stojka's longing for nature during their imprisonment in the concentration camps signifies their longing for freedom and for life as it was before the events that led to the *Porrajmos*, which coincided with forced sedentarization and, at the same time, with the violent interruption of their childhood. When anguish and desperation become too intense to bear, their intimacy with nature provides them with a symbolic language through which they can articulate their emotions and sufferings. It also enables them to keep a connection to their individual life story and to what it meant for them to grow up as Roma and Sinti, reminding them of the key components of Romani identity and enabling them to resist the dehumanization process encountered in the concentration camps.

3. Romani Authors as Witnesses

In the preface to *Zwischen Liebe und Hass*, Philomena Franz points out: "I wrote this book as a Gypsy. A Gypsy from the Sinti tribe. As a woman who grew up within this tribe" (Franz 2001, 10). We find a similar claim in Ceija Stojka's memoir *Wir leben in Verborgenen* and in later interviews, where she revealed that the book was a gift to her mother: "I always stood for what she believed in. I am proud to be a gypsy (sic), as she was." (Rosenberg/Stojka 1995, 18).

The fact that for both authors the decision to publish their books coincided with the proud affirmation of their ethnic identity seems to confirm that in Romani women's writing collective and individual claims are closely interconnected (Toninato 2014, 168–170). Whilst dealing with their individual issues and life stories, they continue to draw inspiration from their cultural heritage and remain painfully aware of the wider problems faced by their group. Their struggle for autonomy and self-expression is therefore coupled with their people's struggle for recognition. This explains why Franz and Stojka started writing around the same period, the 1980s, when revisionist attempts arose in European society, and they had to deal with episodes of anti-Gypsyism against members of their family. In this hostile social climate, exposing oneself in public was a danger, but they could no longer keep silent: "[…] if I present myself to the Austrian public as a Romni from Vienna, then for me it is a big gamble, a risk", recognises Stojka, "but we have to open ourselves up,

otherwise things will go so far that at some point all Roma will fall into a hole" (Stojka 1988, 154).

Stojka emphasises the invisibility of Roma Holocaust survivors in postwar Austria and the refusal of recognition as Holocaust victims: "Nobody cared about us at all […]. The Gypsies hardly came up, they were not there, they did not exist. But we were there just like the poor Jews, we suffered just as much" (Stojka 1988, 137). As mentioned above, this apparent "invisibility" of the survivors explained why, until the 1980s, there was no public commemoration of the Gypsy *Porrajmos* and no official recognition of the Roma as Holocaust victims.

Acknowledging the full extent of the Romani Holocaust is a priority not only to do justice to the victims, but to address the present situation of the Roma and Sinti in Europe. The risk is that, if the Romani Holocaust is not properly recognised and processed in the collective memory of the non-Roma, current anti-Roma attitudes will not change. If the *Porrajmos*, like the Jewish Holocaust, has to become a watershed in the history of mankind, its memory must include the voice of survivors like Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka. Their work plays a vital role in reinstating the truth of the *Porrajmos* against Holocaust deniers. A further, equally crucial aspect of their endeavour is reaching out to future generations, educating them so that they may learn from the past and be warned about the risk that similar atrocities may happen again. This didactic-ethical function of Holocaust memory is precisely what prompted Philomena Franz's engagement with the public, especially with students and teachers, and is typical of what Steffi De Jong called "the primary function of the witness to history" (De Jong 2018, 37).[15]

Holocaust survivors can influence and help to rewrite history at different levels: acting as "moral witnesses", as Avishai Margalit called them, that is, as people who witnessed *and* suffered the consequences of radi-

[15] "The primary function of the witness to history is education… The educative role of witnesses to history can thereby serve different ends: it can be cognitive, providing the audience with information that they did not have before the encounter; it can be affective, making them respond emotionally in a way in which they have not responded before; it can be an end in itself, making the audience discover historical details that it did not know before; and it can be a means to an end, for example, when this historical knowledge is used in peace and human rights education. Most often, we find a combination of those four functions" (De Jong 2018, 37).

cal evil (Margalit 2002, 147). Moral witnesses draw their authority from having experienced directly the Holocaust; their mere survival is an act of defiance, and stands as a testament to human dignity in the face of extreme acts of inhumanity. They can also become "creators of memories", giving voice, as in the case of the Romani writers here discussed, to "subaltern subjects" of history, such as women and children. Incorporating the perspective of the subaltern enables these survivors to highlight less-known aspects of Holocaust memory that would otherwise remain invisible. Their focus is not on the persecutors, who are only briefly sketched in their narratives, but on the voiceless *victims*. In Ceija Stojka's narrative, the silent presence of the dead surprisingly offers "comfort" and reassurance to the surviving Roma prisoners: after being reassured by her mother, Ceija finds refuge among them: "If the dead hadn't been there, we would have frozen to death" (Stojka 2005, 26); "We were not alone also because we were surrounded by the buzzing of so many souls" Stojka 2005, 40). The dead are not scary to the child because they are recognised as members of the same ethnic group: "They were our protection and they were human beings. Human beings we used to know …" (Stojka 2005, 39–40). The strong link between victims and survivors is at the origins of feelings of guilt and shame due to the fact of having survived when so many others died (Bettelheim 1979, 297), but, on the one hand, from the Romani child's perspective, the dead become protectors and symbolise the continuity between generations that enable the Roma to exist. On the other hand, the survivor provides their silenced memories with a voice, thereby giving meaning to their atrocious death.

Doing justice to the dead is certainly a crucial function in Franz's and Stojka's testimonies; however, they refuse to join the traditional power struggle opposing victims and persecutors: Franz's often quoted statement—"When we hate, we lose. When we love, we become rich" (Franz 2001, 10)—is a pivotal example of this refusal to perpetuate the cycle of hatred, echoed by Stojka who stated:

> You can't counter hatred with hatred. I got rid of all that, the evil, and then chose the path of goodness … I'm not even angry with the people who did evil things to us … when all's said and done, they are human beings, and that's just what human beings are like (quoted in Tebbutt 2005, 47).

It is as if, by undergoing extreme suffering, and witnessing man's inhumanity to "the Other", these *Porrajmos* survivors developed a more acute awareness and a wider understanding of what it means being "human".

Instead of serving the instrumental purposes of the "official" political Holocaust discourse, their memories facilitate the establishment of an alternative discourse that includes *both* victims and victimizers, Roma and non-Roma. Their memoirs encourage the active participation of the reader: both authors use the present tense in order to break down the chronological barrier and involve him/her more directly in the narration. Rhetorical questions are scattered throughout the texts, making the reader stop and meditated upon the relevance of the *Porrajmos* to the present relationship between Roma and non-Roma. In other words, their texts are purposely dialogic.

4. Conclusion: Towards a Dialogic Memory of the Porrajmos

Historically, the Roma's presence has been removed from collective memory through an "institutional forgetting" that reflects the tendency to exclude them from mainstream society. This has led to erasure of the Romani Holocaust from history and lack of recognition of Romani memories about the *Porrajmos*. From the 1980s onwards, Roma Holocaust testimonies have begun to emerge in the public sphere of a number of European countries, breaking the silence that was maintained for too long on Roma sufferings. In this regard, Romani women survivors like Franz and Stojka have contributed to bringing the *Porrajmos* to the centre of the public debate, regaining agency over Romani representations of this event up to the present.

Romani women survivors show us that it is not only important to remember, but to move away from forms of memory that homogenise the past and adopt a binary oppositional logic. This is akin to what Aleida Assmann calls "dialogic memory", that is, a form of a memory that includes the point of view of oppressed minorities hitherto silenced and ignored, mirrors the complexity of contemporary societies, and contributes to reconfiguring historically divided memories into a shared, more self-reflexive memory (Assmann 2015).

Romani women's written memories, forged by past sufferings but firmly engaged with the present, are the result of an important critical practice that contributes to filling persisting voids and silences within European memory while interrogating the present. The work of Philomena Franz and Ceija Stojka is an invaluable example of the emancipatory

and healing potential of dialogic memories. Their legacy as moral witnesses who experienced the most extreme attempt at dehumanization and yet worked tirelessly to foster dialogue and mutual understanding is bound to continue to inspire future generations to come.

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