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An Austrian Roma Family Remembers: Trauma and Gender in Autobiographies by Ceija, Karl, and Mongo Stojka

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Over 80 percent of Austrian Roma perished under Nazi persecution. Of the few survivors who have published on their experiences, the most prolific family has been the Stojkas. But the autobiographies by three of the siblings, when read as a collective, are not without complexities. Two stories about shared tragedies stand out for their discrepancies. Trauma and gender socialization in the family members' lives divulge reasons behind what scholars observe as the “fragile power” of memory to select, revise, and recount lived events. Readers must be careful, however, not to valorize one sex over the other when analyzing victims' accounts of traumatic events.

In the over eight decades since Maurice Halbwachs developed the concept of “collective memory” in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, scholars in a wide variety of academic disciplines have explored the intersection between collective and individual memory. Those following in Halbwachs’ footsteps have expanded on his observations and developed new classifications and definitions, one of the most notable being Aleida and Jan Assmann’s differentiation between “communicative memory” and “cultural memory.” As the categories for memory processes become more refined, so too, do investigations into the concrete impact of historical events and social norms on the individual psyche and memory. Harold Welzer, in his *Das soziale Gedächtnis*, points to the need to demonstrate how notions of collective, cultural, and communicative memory play themselves out in life situations. Welzer asks scholars to “do history” (Welzer 19), that is, apply theoretical concerns to everyday cultural practices.

The plea to combine theory with praxis opens up a venue to explore the ways in which three major areas of inquiry in memory studies—namely, family, trauma, and gender—intersect in autobiographies by siblings who survived Nazi persecution. As Halbwachs emphasized, every family group feels the urge to tell its story to ensure its perpetuity (75). In this regard, Angela Keppler’s essay in Welzer’s study is insightful for demonstrating how the everyday process of memory building, or the “communicative memory” that occurs in the transmission of family stories, often spills over into institutionalized memory constructs, or the “cultural memory.” As private processes of memory building come to

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involve public forms of media, public forms of media in turn enter into private households, thus blurring distinctions in memory formation and recall. When confronted with testimonies by trauma survivors, scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Johnathan Friedman, and Lawrence Langer have investigated further what psychologist Daniel Schacter calls the “fragile power” of individual memory to recall, revise, distort, and forget. Moreover, many researchers recognize that a study of the family must account for gender socialization and relationships between its members. In psychology, Penelope Davis, Robyn Fivus, and Janine Buckner have drawn on the different events that males and females remember and the diverse ways in which they recount their memories. In Holocaust research, Judith Tydor Baumel, Barbara Distel, Marlene Heinemann, Ronit Lentin, and Joan Ringelheim, among others, have analyzed gender and trauma in historical context.

The published autobiographies of Ceija, Karl, and Mongo Stojka, three Roma siblings whose roots in Austria go back at least 200 years, are treasure troves for further investigations into the relationship between individual and collective (in this case, the familial collective) memories and the impact that trauma and gender have exerted on those memories. Ceija Stojka, the fifth of the total six children, and the youngest of the three sibling writers, published *Wir leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* in 1988, followed by *Reisende auf dieser Welt: Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin* in 1992, and then *Träume ich, dass ich lebe?* in 2005. In 1994, Karl Stojka, the fourth child in the family and the next to youngest of the three writers, released his *Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause*. In 2000, Mongo Stojka, the oldest of the three writers and the oldest male in the family, came out with *Papierene Kinder: Glück, Zerstörung und Neubeginn einer Roma-Familie in Österreich*. As members of the same family who experienced persecution under the Nazis, including being interned in Auschwitz together, their testimonies depict their separate and collective experiences of a major historical traumatic event. Given the devastation of so many families during the Holocaust, there are scant opportunities to study the memories of family members as a group or even in pairs. Accounts from individual survivors often stress how many family members perished under Nazi persecution. Five of the six Stojka siblings and their mother, Maria “Sidi” Rigo Stojka, survived concentration camps, that is, 75 percent of the family. This survival rate is phenomenal in light of historical evidence that places the number of Austrian Roma killed during the Nazi times at 9,000 out of some 11,000, that is, about 18 percent survivors.

While the three Stojka siblings’ autobiographies are clearly written and readily accessible, they do not always present the same account of shared family stories. In fact, they are very different in the process whereby they were written, in their contents, and in their structures. Yet they recall several shared events. They thus offer excellent opportunities to delve into complex questions about
the possible links between individual family memories and those of the collective. What impact might trauma and gender have on the shared and separate experiences that each sibling relates in his or her autobiography? How might trauma and gender help clarify concerns about silence, truth, and veracity when there is dissonance between family members’ accounts of supposedly shared situations? Ultimately, what does each individual story contribute to the collective history of the family and to the collective memories of the plight of the Roma under Nazi persecution? Analyzing the intersections between the individual memory, the family collective, trauma, and gender in these autobiographies will enrich our understanding of a cultural group whose lives and works have received sparse scholarly attention. Examining these works will provide in praxis critical insights into existing theoretical inquiries on memory.

The Stojka Family: Lives and Works
There were six children in the family of Karl “Wackar” Horvath and Maria “Sidi” Rigo Stojka:10 Maria, or “Mitzi,” born March 8, 1926; Katharina or “Kathi,” born February 1, 1927; Johann, or “Mongo,” born May 20, 1929; Karl, or “Karli,” born April, 1931; Ceija, born in March 1934; and Josef or “Ossi,” born October 16, 1935.11 They belong to a long line of traveling Lovara Roma, in the clan of the Bagareschtschi on their father’s side and Giletschi on their mother’s side; their births thus occurred all over Austria—Karl in the Burgenland, Ceija in Styria, Mongo close to Vienna—and approximately all two years apart. The Lovara are one of the five main Roma groups in Austria, and were known for their expertise in horse-trading.12 The Stojkas trace their heritage in Austria back over 200 years. In 1938 the family had to rebuild the wagon in which they had been traveling into a small wooden house in order to become sedentary as mandated by Nazi laws. In the early 1940s their father was taken custody and then sent to concentration camps in Dachau, Mauthausen, and then Hartheim, where he was eventually killed.13 Shortly thereafter, Kathi, the siblings’ older sister, was brought to the concentration camp in Lackenbach in the Burgenland.14 On March 3, 1943 the rest of the family was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, when they met Kathi as they were loading into the train. In Auschwitz-Birkenau they all stayed together in the so-called “Zigeunerfamilienlager.” The youngest child Ossi died there in 1943.

When the “Zigeunerfamilienlager” was liquidated on August 2 and 3, 1944, the males were separated from the females. Ceija stayed with her mother and sisters in Birkenau, where they were eventually transported through Auschwitz to the women’s concentration camp at Ravensbrück, then to Bergen-Belsen. They were freed by the British and returned to Vienna, where Ceija began school as a 12-year-old in the second grade. Karl and Mongo went into the main camp in Auschwitz after the separation, and then in September to Buchenwald. In February 1945 they were sent to Flossenbürg. From there they went on
the “Todesmarsch,” until freed by the American army on April 27, 1945. The brothers stayed in the area of Flossenbürg until 1946, when they made their way to Vienna and found their mother and three sisters.

After the war, the family received an apartment from Nazis who had confiscated it during the war and then had fled after the war. The previous owners eventually returned to reclaim the apartment, and the Stojka family began a nomadic life again. In 1949, Ceija bore her first child, a son; two years later she bore a daughter. Ceija earned her livelihood from selling fabric door-to-door and rugs at markets. In 1979, her son Jano, a jazz musician, died from drugs. Mongo and Karl first sold horses to earn a living, then fabric and rugs door-to-door and at markets. In 1968 Karl immigrated to the United States, but returned to Austria in 1973. He began painting in 1980, and in 1999 he received the honorary title of “Professor.” He was well known as a painter and an educator until his death in March 2003. Mongo still lives in Vienna and sings, writes, and gives readings. Ceija, too, lives in Vienna as a writer, painter, singer, and public lecturer.

Whereas the Stojkas’ poetry, artwork, and music have increased awareness and knowledge about Roma culture and peoples as a collective, their separate autobiographies represent their need to express their own individual and family stories. Ceija Stojka depicts her sense of urgency to have the Roma’s story told when she states in an interview: “Aber wir müssen hinausgehen, wir müssen uns öffnen, sonst kommt es noch so weit, daß irgendwann alle Romani in ein Loch hineinkippen” (“Du darfst keine Andere sein,” 154). The collective “wir” in her statement implies both the Roma people and her own family, given their prominence in Austrian culture. Wolfgang Paterno’s cover story for the Austrian newsmagazine Falter in May 2004 testifies to the presence that the Stojkas as a family has had and continues to have in Vienna. The article proves the family’s status as creators of another side to Austrian culture not encountered in the canonical works of literature and classical music. While the story focuses on the designated “Patriarch” Mongo, and his immediate family, his siblings Ceija and Karl receive mention for their contributions to the artistic and literary communities and their importance within the family nexus.

Readers might note that Ceija and Mongo Stojka are first and foremost singers and musicians, that Karl Stojka is a visual artist, and that all three are not necessarily professional writers making a living from their books alone. Indeed, Ceija Stojka’s works were written with the help of Karin Berger, who recorded conversations and storytelling sessions with Ceija, helped to formulate her oral words into written form, and received full credit as editor of the published books. Karl Stojka’s autobiography has both his name and Reinhard Pohanka’s on the cover, thus suggesting co-authorship, although there is no foreword that elaborates on Pohanka’s exact role in the creation of the book. Mongo Stojka had assistance from his editor, Ernst Molden, in
rewriting journals for publication as his autobiography, and Molden readily admits his assistance in the foreword to Mongo Stojka’s *Legenden der Lowara*, which Molden also helped edit. Still, to deny any of the three the designation of “writer” or to deem their autobiographies not valuable for cultural and literary studies would be a grave error. Following the oral tradition in which they grew up, all three siblings carry forth the values of storytelling into an era and social context dependent on print media. As research by Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann shows, oral culture has played no less a role than the print media in the formation of cultural memory. In addition, each of the Stojkas refers in interviews, in forewords to their books, and in their books, to the continuing act of writing stories down and to their private collection of journals that they have written over the years. These references point to their perpetual need to write, a process perhaps denied to them in their younger years when they lacked a formal education.\(^{16}\) The initial difficulties of all three siblings to write down their experiences mirror the hesitations of many Holocaust survivors who remain silent out of shame, fear of further persecution, or a need to repress the horrors in order to continue to live. The literary talents of all three have become manifested in the poems and song lyrics they write, testifying to their abilities as writers in the broadest sense of the term.

In the Stojkas’ autobiographies, two stories stand out in particular for their varying renditions. The first concerns the deportation, murder, and mourning ritual connected to the death of their father; the second involves renditions about the selection process of the siblings in Auschwitz. A detailed examination of the stories will reveal interesting effects of trauma and gender on memory.

**The Story of the Bone Sachet**

Initially, most striking about the autobiographies is that in relating so-deemed facts about their father’s deportation, the siblings cite different dates. In Ceija’s account we learn that the father Wacker was picked up by the Gestapo in 1941 (*Wir leben im Verborgenen* 16). Karl, in contrast, places the date at the beginning of 1942 (*Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause* 35). Mongo supplies yet another date, namely 1940 (*Papierene Kinder* 78). While just one such discrepancy may not seem too important, it leads to others that then muddy the chronology of events and occurrences. In all accounts, the date of the entire family’s deportation relies on the date and events surrounding the father’s deportation. Ceija, for example, claims in the first edition of *Wir leben im Verborgenen*, that the Gestapo picked up the family in 1941 in the Paletzgasse in Vienna on the day of their father’s funeral; in the fourth edition, she claims that date was 1943.\(^{17}\) Both Karl and Mongo claim that the family was picked up in March 1943, when Karl was in school and Mongo on his way to school. A historian insisting on total accuracy might question this date and the circumstance that the boys were in school, for Roma in Vienna were forbidden to attend school in 1938 and afterwards
(Zimmermann 105). In any case, the differences in dates also cause variances in the length of time of the internment in the concentration camps, from up to four years, according to Ceija’s first account, or two and a half years, according to Karl and Mongo and Ceija’s revised edition of the autobiography.

On the one hand, as researchers on memory such as Daniel Schacter have stressed, the study of memory is just as much a study of forgetting as of remembering. In the field of literary studies, James Olney’s impressive book Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing elaborates on the complexities of both processes when studying autobiography, or life-writing, or “periautography,” which is the term Olney himself prefers, meaning “writing about or around the self” (Olney xv). Can the self be remembered accurately, Olney ultimately asks, and, just as important, can the self be narrated accurately?

On the other hand, in relation to the tension between truth and history, the trauma of the Holocaust often exceeds our frame of reference in these contexts. “History is what hurts,” Frederick Jameson asserted in his 1982 work, an observation that suggests the omnipresence of trauma in public events.18 Cathy Caruth points to the way in which responses to trauma are often delayed, returning to “haunt the survivor later on” in ways that might appear to distort the original nature of the event (Caruth 4). Jonathan Friedman observes how the overarching essence of a traumatic experience is almost always well-remembered, whereas any recorded lapses occur mostly in the recounting of specific details (Friedman 97). Lawrence Langer talks about distortions of time in narratives of traumatized victims. Survivors’ memories are working on at least two planes of chronology, according to Langer: that of the “experienced time” of the original trauma and that of the “re-experienced time” in the narration. This may create a feeling on the part of the survivors of being “out of time,” which in turn may cause leaps, gaps, and falsities in chronology (Langer 15). Still, these distortions should not make one deny that the event occurred.

These observations apply not only to dates, but also to major discrepancies that occur in the Stojka autobiographies after their father dies. According to all three accounts, after learning that Wackar had been killed in a concentration camp, the mother asked for his bones back. Ceija writes:


Later in Auschwitz, an SS-Mann tore this sachet from the mother’s neck, according to Ceija, a traumatic event whose tragic ramifications are reflected in
the mother's subsequent dream of the death of her children:


Although both Karl and Mongo talk of the father’s bones being sent back to the family upon the mother’s request, neither mentions the sachet that the mother makes from the bones and then carries around her neck until it is torn from her (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 35; Papierne Kinder 84). A first possible reason for this discrepancy might be that Ceija knew more about the neck sachet, and especially about the SS guard’s brutality in the concentration camp, because Ceija was interned with her mother, whereas the boys were separated from her. That does not seem to be entirely the case, however. Until the liquidation of the “Zigeunerfamilienlager,” the family lived, slept, and ate together in this area. There was a division of labor based on sex during daily activities, but even if the ripping of the sachet occurred when the boys were working somewhere else, they most certainly would have had opportunities to hear about the incident at other times when they were with the family.

A second reason involves the complex role that gender plays in memory formation. Here, Penelope Davis’ and Robyn Fivush’s and Janine Buckner’s observations on the way in which gender influences the recalling of emotions become relevant. When showing the degree to which gender-differentiated socialization processes influence how men and women value emotions in their lives, Davis discerns a socialization that emphasizes “such qualities as independence, assertion, activity, self-confidence, and dominance” (Davis 499). Females, in contrast, “are socialized into expressive roles, and are expected to be emotional, warm, nurturant, altruistic, and interpersonally sensitive” (Davis 499). When delineating how these processes manifest themselves in memory recall and narratives, Davis notes that “[...] females consistently recalled more childhood memories than males did and were generally faster in accessing the memories recalled” (Davis 498). Fivush’s studies provide a possible reason for that difference, namely that “[...] parents are more likely to use an elaborative narrative style when conversing about past events with their young daughters than with their sons” (Davis 508). In light of these findings, the very emotional content of the story of the bone sachet could cause a different reaction for Ceija than for Mongo or Karl.

In relation to the Holocaust, several scholars have examined possible links between gender and trauma in a historical context. On the one side, research-
ers have pointed to differing circumstances of persecution that women and men had to endure in the concentration camps. These studies focus on the ways in which women had to deal with different kinds of hardships related to biological factors—menstruation, pregnancy, the ability to bear children, their sexuality—than men did. Those hardships may have led not only to different kinds of treatments and traumas for women than for men, but also to different strategies for survival. On the other side, scholars ask whether gender ultimately does matter in the face of the horrors that befell both men and women. As Ruth Bondy writes about women in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau: “Zykon B machte keinen Unterschied zwischen Männern und Frauen; derselbe Tod raffte alle dahin” (Bondy 117).

Still, without denying that all the Stojkas, male and female, faced grave danger, gender does seem to be a factor in what the three Stojkas chose or did not choose, inadvertently or not, to relate in their autobiographies. First, the circumstances under which the three siblings lived, wrote, and then published their works reveal the influence of gendered socialization on their writing practices. The barriers that Ceija Stojka encountered as a woman when she decided to publish her autobiography, for example, distinguish her process of writing from that of her brothers. In her interview with Karin Berger, Ceija Stojka talks about her need to tell her experiences, but also describes her frustration at lacking an audience, and thus her eventual turn to writing (“Du darfst keine Andere sein” 97). When she began to write at odd hours, mostly between household chores of cooking and cleaning, she found “mein Partner hat kein richtiges Verständnis dafür gehabt” (“Du darfst keine Andere sein” 97). In another interview she emphasizes the lack of support from her family: “Ich hatte weder von meinen Geschwistern noch von meinem Mann eine Unterstützung. Der hat diese Seiten immer genommen, hat sie in den Abfallkübel geschmissen” (Prüger 105).

The fact that Ceija Stojka is a woman is not necessarily the sole reason why her family objected to her publishing her autobiography. Her story is also their story, and over and over we hear from Holocaust survivors about the initial shame and the desire to forget and “go on with their lives” rather than to retell their horrendous stories from the concentration camps. Also, given the precarious position of Roma in Austria after the war, continuing into recent history with four Roma murdered in 1995 in the Burgenland, many saw explicit danger in relating their stories and thus in calling attention to their plights and minority status. There is certainly some of this collective family will and fear in the Stojkas’ lack of support for Ceija’s endeavors.

Scholars, however, remarked on the patriarchal structure intrinsic to the Austrian Lovara. With their highest values placed on family, each family member has his or her role in that unit, and each family usually has its patriarch. The previously referenced article in Falter carries forth the strong image of the
patriarch Mongo. In the face of that image, the gender roles under which the siblings grew up become very clear in the autobiographies, especially those of the brothers. Mongo and Karl Stojka remark several times about the gender expectations they observed in their own family and in the Lovara culture in which they were raised, especially in regards to the division of labor by sex. Karl talks about the women earning money through selling fabric, lace, rugs, and pots and pans door-to-door and through telling fortunes. The men dealt with the horses, trading and caring for them. The woman's earnings were used for the daily existence of the family, whereas the man's earnings were always put aside for future use in his business transactions. Women were responsible for the household chores, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, but men definitely had the final say. Karl writes: “Der Mann hat immer die Hosen angehabt und hatte das Sagen in der Familie” (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 26). Mongo, too, talks about the division of labor by sex, with the women taking care of household chores while the men tended the horses. Although this sharing of tasks would seem as if men and women had equal responsibilities and thus equal worth in the family structure, girls and women were not as valued as boys and men. Mongo writes about his father's disappointment after Maria “Sidi” Rigo Stojka bore him two daughters and his subsequent request to her: “[...] das nächste Mal schenke mir bitte einen Sohn” (Papierene Kinder 33). She did, indeed, bear two sons after that, which was greatly celebrated. Then came Ceija's birth, after which, Mongo writes: “Es wurde auch gefeiert, aber nicht mehr so ausgiebig wie bei der Geburt der Söhne” (Papierene Kinder 39).

This does not mean that women did not often hold a central position within that family structure, no matter how separate the spheres may have been. Indeed, they did, and often continue to do so, but most significantly as mothers and purveyors of the traditional ways in which remembrances carry forth, such as singing and storytelling. As Ursula Hemetek has observed in her extensive study on music, Ceija Stojka heard many of the songs she sings from her grandmother and aunt. Those stories reveal rather ambivalent gender roles, whereby the woman is both object of the man's desire and active subject in choosing her mate. In many of the songs, she deceives the man. In addition, despite the strong patriarchal family structure, in which the family holds the highest worth, the woman assumes a major role as mother and transmitter of culture (Hemetek 321). The main media for that transmission are the Romani language, songs, and storytelling.

Hence, in the story of the bone sachet, as Susan Tebbutt observes, it is noteworthy that Ceija uses the Romani words of her mother at this particularly tense and emotional moment of touching the bones. The use of Romani ties the mother's love, distress, and religious convictions strongly to her daughter through narration (Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-Speaking Society and Literature 138). Also significant is the statement that they only had their clothes,
“unsere Kleider” to dry off the sachet after the Nazi officer had thrown it down (Wir leben im Verborgenen 26). Here, the collective family clothing saves the father’s bones from the Nazi brutality. As the narrator, Ceija inserts herself into the mother’s efforts to preserve the family unit through maintaining the father’s continual presence.

Indeed, like her mother, Ceija Stojka shows in most of her writings an intense interest in keeping alive the memories of those deceased family members through rituals and artifacts. In that regard, a third reason behind Ceija’s inclusion of the bone sachet story and her mother’s observance of her dead husband could be the existence of a particularly gender-related mourning ritual to which Ceija and her mother subscribed.22 “Ich lebe mit meinen Verstorbenen” is the title of a narration that Ceija recorded for the collection of fairytales, stories, and songs of the Lovara entitled Fern von uns im Traum, suggesting a need to maintain a relationship between her and dead family members. In Karin Berger’s documentary film Ceija Stojka: Porträt einer Roma, an image similar to that of her mother’s neck sachet occurs in a scene in which Ceija describes her favorite necklace assembled from family keepsakes. On screen she carefully dons the necklace and then touches each artifact on the chain, recounting its origin and significance. She shows objects from her sisters Kathi and Mitzi, both of whom are now dead; she talks about gifts from her children and grandchildren; and she displays a locket containing her most prized object, a lock of hair snipped from her son Jano on his deathbed. “Die ganze Familie ist dadrauf und das begleitet mich und schützt mich,” she declares. Just as her mother clung to the bone sachet, so Ceija cherishes the presence of the dead in her life. Consequently, Ceija builds her own rituals on ones similar to those she has observed of her mother, thus establishing a strong relationship to a maternal lineage.23 That relationship is most likely based on the time she spent with her mother due to the gender roles that she, Karl, and Mongo observed in their family. I will return to this observation after relating the discrepancy in a second story that all the siblings narrate.

The Story of the Selection at Auschwitz

Besides the story of the father’s deportation and the creation of the bone sachet, another major discrepancy between all three siblings’ autobiographies continues to point to a possible division on gender lines concerning the solidarity that women and men witnessed and experienced in the concentration camps. Differing stories surface when each sibling tells his or her account of the selection process to decide who would survive Auschwitz and who would be gassed. When the “Zigeunerfamilienlager” was liquidated, Karl would have been 13 years old and Ceija 10, too young to live, for, as all three siblings write, most children under 14 were considered too young to work and thus were gassed. Karl writes in his own autobiography that the mother saved the two younger children by
claiming they were dwarves, and thus they looked young for their age. “Ich war damals unter 14 wie auch meine Schwester Ceija. Wie wir selektiert wurden, fiel meiner Mutter in ihrer Verzweiflung nichts anderes ein, als zu sagen, wir seien Zwerge—and so kamen wir durch die Selektion” (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 45). He alludes to the fact that as dwarves they would have at least had the chance to survive as subjects for medical experiments.

Ceija has a different account, one that involves a Polish woman with whom she finds consolation. According to her, her mother saved Ceija alone, for Karl was already in line with the older children:


When Mongo writes about the mother saving Karl and Ceija, he claims to cite from Karl. Whereas Karl had said nothing in his autobiography about the person who let them pass, Mongo states, claiming to cite Karl, that Dr. Mengele was the one who had given them permission to stay with the others:


In all three siblings’ cases, the mother is the agent of survival, despite the varying renditions of how she managed to save them. Unlike in the narratives of her brothers, however, Ceija brings in another female figure to alleviate Ceija’s anxieties. Through that renewed solidarity and calmness, Ceija is able to repeat her mother’s words that she is old enough to work.

The discrepancies in both the stories about the bone satchet and the selection
in Auschwitz raise concerns about what to do with these varying testimonies and whether their differences really matter. In an essay on survivor testimonies, the psychoanalyst Dori Laub talks about the differing reactions of a historian and a psychoanalyst (whom the reader later learns is Laub himself) upon hearing the testimony of an Auschwitz survivor about the Sonderkommando uprising that took place in the camp on October 7, 1944. The historian questions the accuracy of testimony, stating that the woman survivor who says she witnessed “4 chimneys” blowing up that day was wrong. Historians know that there was only one chimney that exploded. Whereas the historian insists on the importance of accuracy, the psychologist disagrees, averring that “the woman was testifying . . . not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence” (Felman and Laub 61–62). In merely talking about the occurrence, the woman survivor was “breaking out of Auschwitz even by her very talking” (Felman and Laub 62). She was testifying to an inconceivable event.

These discrepancies between history and personal recollection, and the reactions from two professionals incite one to revisit the role of gender in the entire autobiographies of all three siblings. Ceija brings up patterns of female solidarity in her autobiography, and the stories of the bone Sachet and the selection process fit those patterns. She talks about the mother’s activities to help the family survive—by saving food, by stealing a turnip from a cart, by going out of her way to find any food or clothing possible. The mother’s will to help extended beyond the family to others in the camp, including dividing up among many women the contents of a care package that Kathi Stojka received from a friend in Vienna; sharing food with Polish women in the camp; and especially cooperating with other mothers in Strategies of survival: “Die Mütter hielten sehr stark zusammen,” observes Ceija (Wir leben im Verborgenen 35). They sang songs together, often ones that expressed resistance through a change in wording. The role of the Polish woman in helping to save Ceija during the selection process, or at least in offering her support in this matter of life and death, coincides with other instances of female solidarity in the camps that Ceija reports. Likewise, the solidarity that Ceija stresses among the women harks back to her mother’s connection with the father’s bones, one in which even the dead and the living remain conjoined in a struggle against the powers of extermination. In portraying the SS guard ripping the Sachet from her mother’s neck, Ceija stands as the witnessing daughter. In conjunction with her mother, she depicts the will of the family and the Roma to stand as a collective against the evil Nazi forces. To Ceija, the mother’s desire to maintain a family collective under duress was the kind of “unimaginable occurrence” to which Laub referred, as was the brutal act of the SS guard in trying to destroy that collective. The former seems unimaginable in its impossibility; the latter in its reality.
Likewise, Karl's stress on the fact that he was in school at the time of his father's arrest underlines a motif that, as Michaela Grobbel points out, runs through many autobiographies by Roma and Sinti, namely, that of education (Grobbel 147). Roma often show pride in having attended school and in being able to read and write in an effort to break down stereotypes of being uneducated and ineducable people. Karl, too, seems determined to show his independence and ability to survive on his own, characteristics that he also attributes to Roma in general. In contrast with Ceija's autobiography, however, Karl's does not focus as much on his mother when he describes his own education and the stories and songs that help Roma generations survive. When relating about his time in Auschwitz, Karl's autobiography portrays in large part a very independent, autonomous existence among the inmates, at least from his male adolescent viewpoint. He writes: “Zusammenhalten unter den Häftlingen hat es nicht gegeben, jeder hat auf sich selber geschaut, höchstens, daß die Familien zusammengehalten haben” (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 38). He relates several stories about stealing bread from other prisoners (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 41); trading stolen goods with other prisoners (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 48); and witnessing the “Kannibalismus unter den Häftlingen” (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 48), that is, prisoners eating other prisoners, all survival tactics that sometimes worked, but mostly did not. He talks about saving his family by performing his kitchen duties and smuggling scraps out for them to eat: “Damals habe ich als Kind meine Familie durchgebracht” (Auf der ganzen Welt zu Hause 43).

Similarly, although Mongo also recounts the story of receiving their father's bones back from Mauthausen, no mention is made of the sachet. Mongo stresses over and over that his survival tactic in Auschwitz was to keep his humor through thick and thin. “Ich glaube, daß diejenigen, die hie und da noch einen Funken Fröhlichkeit aufbringen können, eher Chancen haben, diese Höle zu überleben” (Papierene Kinder 140). Even if the males did know about the bone sachet and the SS man ripping it off the mother's neck, they could have chosen not to relate the story within their scheme of survival tactics, which seem to focus more on the individual than on the solidarity of the group. In the mother's case, the group becomes the family. The different foci in the narratives of the three siblings match the gender-differentiated socialization processes that psychologists Fivush and Davis observe, whereby the emphasis with males is on independence and activity, and that with females on emotions and nurturance.

Analysis of this contrast between women's and men's survival tactics and their reactions to their traumatic experiences in Nazi concentration camps is not new to studies on women and the Holocaust. Scholars who interview women survivors of concentration camps and examine their works often point to women's general desire for solidarity with other women in the camps, their
willingness to help each other, and their transferal of certain “maternal instincts” into building communities under duress. These features are seen as different from men's experiences, which, as already analyzed in Karl and Mongo Stojka's autobiographies, are often portrayed as more solitary and autonomous. One does not, however, want such an analysis to lead to a valorization of one form of gender socialization over another or of women over men in their abilities to survive monstrosities. That valorization becomes chilling in light of the oppression and atrocities that were wrought against all Roma and Sinti. One must be careful not to draw general value judgments on the interaction between gender, autobiography, and traumatic memory when comparing men's and women's works. Joan Ringelheim, in her work on Jewish women and the Holocaust, warns against “valorizing oppression” by implying that suffering makes women better than men in their abilities to devise coping mechanisms (Ringelheim 373–420). She and others interested in the relationship between gender and traumatic violence also ask that “gender pride” not get in the way of truth.

Rather than risk such valorization, a more productive strategy would continue to weave in findings on the “fragile” essence of individual memory, collective memory, and traumatized memory, all often influenced by perspectives and socialization. An essay by Kyo Maclear in the book Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma sheds light on the different “ways of seeing” as manifested in such discrepancies as arise here. In her analysis of Renais' film Hiroshima, mon Amour, Maclear confronts assumptions that history as a life story can be told in one version. To describe the different ways that the main characters see Hiroshima after the dropping of the atomic bomb, Maclear uses the term “transmemoration” (Maclear 235–36) to refer to diverse understandings of “experience, perception and knowledge as historically contingent” (Maclear 245). This concept may prove useful to make sense of the divergent memories that Ceija, Karl, and Mongo display in the two stories analyzed here. The siblings’ related memories come to rely on their own ways of seeing, which, I would contend, are contingent on a socialization process that should take into account gender and trauma.

Those ways of seeing, too, are highly dependent on the family dynamic, as Angela Keppler notes. After examining numerous family conversations within a variety of settings, she found that a family story is rarely narrated all in one sitting or in one piece. In fact, her final thesis is that family stories never exist in a totality. Bits and pieces of stories come together at different times, in different contexts, and from different family members. “Nur eine in der Familie immer wieder erzählte und weitergesponnene Geschichte ist für die Familie als Geschichte ihres gemeinsamen Lebens existent” (Keppler 156). The collective family story is an ongoing, living one that circulates over and over among family members to formulate their identities as individuals and as a group.
Conclusion

The Stojkas’ autobiographies, with all their complexities and discrepancies, call for theoretical models that account for several influential factors. The categories of “individual” and “collective” memory that Halbwachs explained are not always distinguishable within a family whose members publish their life stories individually and as part of an ethnically persecuted group. Likewise, the individual stories of three members of a Roma family interned together in Auschwitz blur the boundaries that Aleida and Jan Assmann establish between the more private “kommunikatives Gedächtnis” and the more public “kollektives Gedächtnis.” In such a context, gender and trauma, as born out in the collective, become variables that influence individual memories. In my analysis of two incidents that differ in the three Stojka’s autobiographies, gender becomes a viable category of investigation into traumatic memories and causes of victimization. For instance, there were definite barriers that Ceija faced as a woman being not only the first, but also the youngest female sibling to tell about a family horror. There are also specific gender roles that all three siblings observe in their own family and upbringing. In addition, studies in gender and memory have shown that parents are more apt to relate more emotional events to their daughters than to their sons, causing females to remember and relate more of such events in their autobiographical narratives than men do. Moreover, the frequent segregation by gender of concentration camp inmates induced conditions that could give rise to varying stories among males and females. These factors may have contributed to Ceija’s rendition of the traumatic story of the bone sachet, and to Karl’s and Mongo’s omission of such in their autobiographies.

In cases of ethnic persecution, however, we must not ignore the possible consequences of such victimization for both genders. We must also not judge whether one rendition is more truthful than the other, or that one method of survival or recounting of that survival is more effective than the other. As psychologists have shown, the relationship between gender and memory becomes situationally determined (Fivush and Buckner 164). It is difficult to assess when trauma may have affected the actions that one person sees and another may not; the emotions that one person experiences and the other does not; and the stories that one person decides to tell and another person does not. With the Stojka siblings we truly do have autobiographical, historical, and narrative treasures whereby members of a family are, as Fivush and Buckner remark, “both constructing their own independent life stories and creating a shared history based on family membership” (155). The individual autobiographies of the Stojkas are remarkable in and of themselves. As a collective, however, they become even stronger. As Ceija Stojka sings: “Amenca ketane taj na korkori/ke feri ketane sam zurale”[Gemeinsam, zusammen und nicht alleine,/denn nur zusammen sind wir stark] (Romane Gila 46). Rather than judge too harshly for truth and
averacity, we should cherish these autobiographies for their independent and shared revelations, for the insights they provide into the power of individual memory within the collective, and for the varying perspectives they disclose while composing a private family story that will live on in public history.

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1 Other important concepts include Marianne Hirsch’s “post-memory” and Pierre Nora’s “realms of memory.” For an excellent introduction to various theories on memory see Fauser. I thank Gerda Lerner at the Universität Klagenfurt for recommending this book.

2 I thank Jacqueline Vansant at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, for references to Schacter’s studies.

3 In addition, volume IV of the International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories is entitled specifically Gender and Memory and includes essays on the relationship between orality, gender, and memory from global perspectives (Leydesdorff, Passerini, and Thompson eds.). I thank Erica Kleinknecht at Pacific University for sharing her own research in psychology and for recommending related readings on the topic.

4 To clarify the use of the term “Roma.” This is a collective name used for all subgroups internationally. Halwachs identifies five such subgroups in Austria and provides a good introduction to their characteristics: Burgenland-Roma, Sinti, Lovara, Vlax-Roma (Kalderas, Gurbet, etc.), and Muslim Roma (Arlije, Bugurdzi, etc.) from the former Yugoslavia. To these five, others have added the Yenish, who were recognized as Roma in 1989 at the Congress of the Romani Union, or the world organization of the Roma, in Geneva (Hemtek 247–58). Regarding the use of the work “Zigeuner/in,” the Stojak seem to prefer this term to “Roma.” They identify themselves as such out of tradition and out of the desire to show their heritage better in the non-Roma, German-speaking world, which might be less familiar with the term “Roma.”

5 The fourth, most recent edition of Wir leben im Verborgenen appeared in 2003 with one significant change in the date of the father’s deportation, which I will discuss subsequently. Reisende auf dieser Welt is mostly about Ceija’s post-war days as a Romni in Austria, and Träume ich, dass ich lebe? describes the days she spent in Bergen-Belsen with her mother during the last few months before the camp was liberated. At the same time, her brothers Karl and Mongo were in Buchenwald and Flossenbürg. Considering that I wish to compare the autobiographies of all three siblings during the time they were together in Auschwitz, the essay will concentrate on Wir leben im Verborgenen.

6 I am using the term “Holocaust” to refer to the persecution of Roma, mostly because that is the most well-known term in English and German for Nazi extermination of any ethnic group. The Roma do have a comparable term in the Romani language, namely “porajmos” (Hilberg 274), or “porraimos,” “the devouring” (Fonseca 253).

7 See Freund, Baumgartner and Greifeneder, who also discuss the difficulties in assessing exactly how many Roma really perished (53).

8 While the focus of my essay is on the writing process and content, a note on the different structures is useful here. I do not attempt to analyze how trauma and gender
may have influenced the differing narrative structures; that would be another essay by itself. Ceija’s autobiography is the most chronologically linear of all three, portraying her experiences between 1939 and the immediate postwar years. The structures in Karl’s and Mongo’s works are more experimental. The chapters in Karl’s autobiography alternate between talking about his years before during, and after the war, and his years in the United States from 1968 to 1973. His chronology is thus more disjointed. Mongo presents various short stories, most no longer than one page long, interspersed with pictures and documents, all recounting his time living in Austria before, during, and after the war. For the most part, he proceeds chronologically, although he interjects comments on Roma traditions and sayings.

9 The only one of the three writers who has received much scholarly attention has been Ceija Stojka, and even then, there has been very little. See Susan Tebbutt’s works (a section in chapter 9 of her book Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-Speaking Society and Literature 137–41, and her essays), Michaela Grobbel’s essay, and Erika Giorgianni’s thesis (102–42). I thank Ms. Giorgianni for sending me a copy of her thesis. Susan Tebbutt’s essay “Disproportional Representation: Romanies and European Art” looks at art by Ceija and Karl Stojka.

10 Because the parents were wed only according to Roma law, the mother and all the children kept her maiden name Rigo Stojka, as is the custom. For the sake of simplicity, in this essay I often refer to the siblings by their first names, which they, too, often use in conversation.

11 I give exact birthdates here for they are very important to the family and have acquired symbolic meaning for the family’s resistance and survival. Birthdays are celebrated as family affairs, such as Mongo’s 75th birthday and Ceija’s 70th birthday.

12 For a more complete account of the Austrian Roma groups see Halwachs’ essay.

13 In a conversation with Ceija Stojka in summer 2004, I learned that she had just discovered that her father had been killed at Hartheim in Austria. Schloss Hartheim was known since the nineteenth century as a home for physically and mentally challenged children. Between 1940 and 1944 it acquired the designation of a “Euthanasianstalt,” and approximately 30,000 people were killed there. See the Web sites “Nationalsozialismus Österreich” and “Schloss Hartheim.” After many years of research, Ceija had received the official documents confirming his death there. I will come back to this fact later in this essay when discussing renditions of the father’s deportation.

14 The only reference to Kathi’s deportation that I have found is in Mongo’s autobiography, Papierene Kinder (95).

15 The bibliographical entries for Ceija, Karl, and Mongo Stojka in my essay here include selective references to their writings, visual art, and music. This is not, however, a complete bibliography of their works in all areas.

16 See, for example, Ceija's interview with Karin Berger in Wir Leben im Verborgenen (97–98), where she talks about first writing down her stories about the concentration camps. When I have visited her, Ceija has always shown me her journals, full of writing and drawings. She and Mongo are also avid correspondents with many people throughout the world. I thank Mongo and Ceija for generously sharing their time and experiences with me.

17 In the case with the two editions of Ceija’s work, the date in the first edition could have been a publisher’s error that was later corrected.

18 I am indebted to Thomas Vogler’s introduction to the book that he and Ana Douglass
edited, *Witness and Memory*, for an understanding of the ways in which historians have looked at the implications of truth and veracity in recollections for history (Douglass and Vogler 3–53). On page 5 he describes Jameson’s reference to the traumatic event as a paradigm for the historical event. For further insightful investigations into the intersections between trauma and history see also the essays in Hodgkin and Radstone.

19 Works by Marlene Heinemann, Barbara Distel, Judith Tydor Baumel, and Jonathan C. Friedman confirm differentiated methods of treatment for men and women in the camps.

20 On February 4, 1995 four Roma were killed in the Burgenland when a bomb detonated under a sign with racial slurs. There are many informative Web sites on the event, including a broadcast by ORF on February 4, 2005, entitled “Vor Zehn Jahren: Das Roma-Attentat von Oberwart”: http://burgenland.orf.at/magazin/land/theta/stories/28712/. For recent research and extensive bibliographical references on *Antiziganismus* in twentieth-century Austria and Germany see Sybil Milton’s article and Gernod Haupt’s book.

21 See Beate Eder-Jordan’s article and Ursula Hemetek’s book. I thank Beate Eder-Jordan for sharing her valuable time and expertise with me.

22 I thank Karen Remmler at Mount Holyoke College for this question, posed in response to an earlier version of this essay.

23 For Ceija Stojka and her family in Austria, many rituals have a basis in Catholicism in which the worship of the Madonna is strong, as is the observance of regular Catholic masses for the dead. In this way, Ceija is, to cite Lévi-Strauss’ assertion in *Tristes Tropes*, embellishing and justifying her own relationship between the living and the dead (246), one that has roots in both her adoption of a Christian belief in eternal life and her desire to connect to her Roma matrilineage. I am indebted here to Cheleen Mahar at Pacific University for references to anthropological studies on funeral, burial, and mourning rites and rituals. Works by Okely, Fonseca, Fraser, and Stewart provide insights specifically into rituals in Roma culture. From their research, however, one must conclude that there is much diversity amongst the Roma themselves regarding such rituals.

24 In her second autobiography, Ceija talks about her sister changing the words to the song “Es wird ein Wunder geschehen” by adding “und dann werden wir nach Hause gehen.” She thereby expressed her hopes to leave Auschwitz (*Reisende auf dieser Welt* 151). See Michaela Grobbel for a discussion of music and performance as resistance in Roma autobiographies.

25 Note that Ceija states that the father was in Dachau, but this discrepancy is due to the lack of complete documentation of the father’s death, which only came out years later. See footnote 13 above.

26 See studies by Freund, Barmgartner, and Greifeneder (114), Luchterhand, Ringelheim, and Zimmermann (123).

27 See the essays in *Different Voices* and in *Gender & Catastrophe*, ed. by Ronit Lentin.
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