

L'dor v'dor in Recent Jewish Argentinean Literature: The Role of Narrative in the Transmission of Memory

Daniela Goldfine

“History is never what one wants it to be, dear.”¹
(*The End of the Story*, 234)

“Like a red thread fear has been enclosing us.”²
(*A Red Thread*, 114)

“Writing did not become an obsession but it is turning into a need. To bear testimony. Words that can linger beyond the wall.”³
(*Daughter of Silence*, 173)

Memories—that is, fragments of memories, as memories are never fully kept nor transmitted—are actually residues of the events that created them in the first place. The attempt to trace the continuity from the event to the memory is in itself fraught. The transmission of memories further complicates these notions, as the memories are mediated by experience. The consciousness of this mediation is the basis of the narration in the novels studied in this essay: The awareness of the blurry lines between “reality” and “fiction,” as well as the deliberate objective to utilize this medium to recreate traditional storytelling, produces an alternative way to narrate and, in doing so, the authors undertake the fundamental task of transmitting. This transposing becomes the first step in preserving memory, but it also presents a form of resistance. What the novels analyzed here underscore is the role of future generations not as mere depository of memories, but as generations responsible for integrating those memories and prolonging the resistance created by the authors and their stories. In her book *Haunting Legacies* (2010), Gabriele Schwab states that “People have always silenced violent histories. Some histories, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them. A certain amount of splitting is conducive to survival. Too much silence, however, becomes haunting.”⁴ For several generations of Jewish Argentines the question of how much to tell and how much to silence has been unanswerable: The migration to this South American nation amidst pogroms and the Shoah and the 1970s military

¹ “La historia nunca es lo que uno quiere, hija.” Liliana Heker, *El fin de la historia* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1996), 234. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² “Como un hilo rojo el miedo nos ha ido cercando.” Sara Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo* (Madrid: Espasa, 1998), 114.

³ “Escribir no llegó a ser una obsesión pero se está volviendo una necesidad. Testimoniar. Palabras que puedan permanecer más allá de la pared.” Manuela Fingueret, *Hija del silencio* (Buenos Aires: Booklet, 2006), 173.

⁴ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 46.

dictatorship, has left a thread uniting violence and trauma, survival and memory.⁵ This article delves into the way three Jewish Argentine authors confront the recent past and pour it into their narrative, creating a way for younger generations to start to comprehend the histories that precede them. Liliana Heker's *The End of the Story* (1996), Sara Rosenberg's *A Red Thread* (1998), and Manuela Fingueret's *Daughter of Silence* (2006) are three texts among many that represent the way these authors who lived and survived the Dirty War chose to remember, imagine, and tell their stories.⁶ These writers lived through a dark period in Argentine history where a military government (1976-1983) left 30,000 *disappeared*, of whom an unusually high percentage were Jewish.⁷ Many authors in this community chose fiction as their preferred way to transmit a period too close to the Shoah, both in time and in savagery.⁸ However, their work becomes more than a story: It becomes a way to relay their experiences, history, and memories *l'dor v'dor* ("from generation to generation").

I propose to re-think the role of literature when reflecting on the recent past and fictionalizing events that marked a generation, a community, and a nation. I argue that the approach to these events shapes the way younger generations view the recent past and how this past will be remembered. The force of imagination and narrative within Jewish Argentine literature at the turn of the century beholds the possibility of finding an authoritative voice that (re)shapes the imaginary of this community within the nation. Moreover, the influence of these works of fiction has facilitated the period of recovery of memory which, in post-dictatorship Argentina, entails an ever-evolving undertaking. Given this space, these three authors have chosen unconventional ways of telling their stories: Far from linear, clearly-defined narrations, we find that, as readers, it is our ultimate task to unravel the stories and make them come to life by the simple act of interacting with them, not forgetting, and (hopefully) transmitting them to

⁵ The Jewish German Baron Maurice de Hirsch encouraged Eastern European Jews (through the Jewish Colonization Association) to migrate to the Argentine grasslands, where he had bought land to create a new Palestine. The first immigrants arrived in 1889 to Buenos Aires and moved to the provinces of Santa Fe and Entre Ríos to work the land.

⁶ The focus on these three novels come from the analogous projects presented by the authors: The three of them look for ways to recreate the traditional way of narration and, from that platform, generate a distinctive approach to storytelling, transmitting, and resisting.

⁷ The Jewish population at the time was around 1percent. The percentage of *disappeared* (kidnapped, tortured, murdered) Jews was between 10 percent and 12 percent. The word "disappeared" entails a forced abduction by a state or political organization that usually involves illegal detention, torture and murder. The body is then disposed—it "vanishes"—in an attempt for the abductors to deny the crime committed. It was a dreadfully common practice during the last dictatorship in Argentina, where it worked to instill fear and make the citizens accomplices. The phrase was first utilized during the Dirty War by *de facto* President General Jorge Rafael Videla who said "They are neither dead nor alive, they are *desaparecidos*". The Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (the most visible of the organizations looking for the *disappeared* children and grandchildren, alongside H.I.J.O.S.—an acronym that in Spanish stands for Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence) believe in using the term *disappeared/desaparecidos* (in italics) as a way to confront the notion of the death of their children. This defiance helped bring many perpetrators to court—when the bodies were not found, it meant the deaths could not be confirmed; therefore the crimes did not prescribe.

⁸ Even testimonies were fictionalized, like renowned *The Little School* by Alicia Partnoy and *A Single, Numberless Death* by Nora Strejilevich. The best-known non-fiction account of this period is *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* by Jacobo Timerman.

the next generation. Therefore, the historical responsibility of remembering what lies in the Jewish archive presents itself here as a double obligation towards the Jewish Argentine community and to their newly adopted country. These narratives add a new layer to the act of transmitting the values and history of the Jewish people to the next generation: There is now the need to survive and thrive in an exile that has shown its limitations. As Marianne Hirsch suggests, “It is this presence of embodied and affective experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history”.⁹ And it is the notion and awareness of the utilization of narrative in these processes that incarnates the task of transmitting *l’dor v’dor*.

Telling Context

The three texts analyzed in this essay were written in a difficult post-dictatorship context. Not only was this a society that had to deal with the fact that a military junta ruled the country from 1976 to 1983 and lost a war with Great Britain in 1982 over the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, but the level of dehumanization suffered was brought to a new intensity when the trials against the military began and the search for appropriated children (mostly sons and daughters of the *disappeared*) was in its early stages. Additionally, while the nation watched testimony after distressing testimony of the few who survived, no one could have imagined those same perpetrators would be released from prison under the Full Stop Law and the Law of Full Obedience passed by the National Congress in the 1980s. Even though these two laws were repealed by the National Congress in 2003 and annulled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court Justice in 2005, the damage to the nation’s credibility and integrity had been done.

In the midst of these political struggles, Liliana Heker and Sara Rosenberg published their novels where the protagonists search for the truth in their *disappeared* friends’ absence. This search for the “truth” and the need to tell their friends’ stories speak to the need of a country to recuperate a sense of justice and start recounting the past so that it will not also fade away. While the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo dug deeper into the investigation of their children and grandchildren, there was a conscious need to find a way to transmit the history of these children’s family, community, and nation: Heker and Rosenberg partook in this pursuit with their novels.

When Manuela Fingueret’s second novel, *Daughter of Silence*, came out in the mid-2000s, the political situation was at the same time similar and different. Even though the pardon that President Carlos Menem had given to top military perpetrators in 1989 and 1990, including Generals Videla and Galtieri, was deemed void, opening the way for trials for human rights violations, the society was being compelled to remember—a task many Argentines still do not want to tackle. These three novels emerged as a way to urge the country to confront the past as the only way to move forward and start the healing process. As Irene Wirshing argues:

Literature written both during and after dictatorships is often embedded in trauma. The writing is usually fragmented and nonlinear, which serves as a metaphor for psychological

⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 33.

trauma. Moreover, one cannot discuss postdictatorship literature without mentioning some aspects of mourning, memory, and national trauma. National trauma is the aftermath of totalitarianism; its paralyzing impact prevents nations from transitioning into democracies.¹⁰

Heker, Rosenberg, and Fingueret work to get the Argentine society out of this paralyzing state and transform it into a nation that not only remembers, but also acts upon that remembrance by transmitting its history. These authors inaugurated the path towards that remembrance/transmission by transforming the narrativization proposed by the literary world: Analyzing the stories' non-linearity, as well as the subtle (but overriding) blurring of "reality" and "fiction," allows for an insightful comprehension of this nation's struggles to sort through the conflicting and competing spaces for memories of the recent past and their possible location throughout the democratization process. Furthermore, by reflecting on the inclusion of Jewish characters and the connection with previous genocides, a path is initiated to deconstruct the underlying stories that had already been passed from generation to generation.

The End of the Story, the Beginning of Narration

Liliana Heker (Buenos Aires, 1943) authored a semi-autobiographical novel *The End of the Story* (*El fin de la historia*) where the protagonist, Diana Glass, struggles to tell the story of her friend and high school classmate, Leonora Ordaz.¹¹ Diana cannot find a way to transmit the experiences of Leonora, as these are not first-hand accounts, and the end of the story changes the perspective Diana had of her friend and of the cause that engulfed a whole generation. Therefore, both the main character and the author herself are forced to deal with the responsibility of leaving the story of a failure to the next generations. How does one transmit the memory created while preventing discouragement from envisioning an equal world and from challenging the authorities? To find her way, Diana has the unexpected help of Hertha Bechofen, a Viennese writer born in 1906 who now lives in the Buenos Aires exile community (where she arrived in 1938 escaping from the Nazis) and who hosts literary courses in the midst of yet another authoritative government. Diana recognizes that her search for a way to narrate the story of her friend is also a way to make sense of the madness of the time, as well as her own: "I want to discover her. Or discover myself?"¹²

Hecker starts her story in 1971 when certain leftist groups in Argentina, which had started to organize and train for a more violent confrontation with the government since the 1960s, took a more aggressive approach to their claims. Leonora enters one of these groups, and we see her involvement in these pre-dictatorship years while Diana takes a more passive role. When in 1976 Leonora disappears, Diana commits to write her story not knowing the ending would

¹⁰ Irene Wirshing, *National Trauma in Postdictatorship in Latin American Literature*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 6-7.

¹¹ Even though Diana's Jewishness is not a central topic throughout the novel, the author leaves no doubt when she tells that her grandmother used to insist that her mother found "[a] good Jewish husband like hers" ("Un buen marido judío como el suyo", 173). Diana even wishes her friend Leonora would someday get married to "a good Jewish husband who worries about the household and is married to her and not to politics" ("un buen marido judío que se preocupe por la casa y esté casado con ella y no con la política", 174). An ironic wish, as Leonora's husband (a highly political individual) was Jewish on his father's side.

¹² "Yo quiero descubrirla a ella. ¿O descubrirme a mí misma?" Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 166.

surprise her. Her uneasiness with the country's environment replicates what many Argentines were feeling at the time, and it becomes more confusing and terrifying as time goes by and people start to whisper horror stories. Diana's words reflect what much of the citizenry was feeling as people slowly became aware of the underground tragedy happening at the time:

Because my horror consisted of being alive, and cruelly, ferociously, I was being harassed by the insufferable desire to live, to laugh, to be happy. And the intolerable guilt of being alive. That was the horror that I had to tell: The joy, and the fear, and the guilt, and the fury, and the impotence, and the revulsion, all together coexisting inside me in that ruthless winter of '77.¹³

That guilt is now transmitted to the next generation, but it is a guilt that is difficult to comprehend if one has not lived through the specific situation. That is where the character of Hertha Bechofen helps both Diana and the younger readers. She advises Diana to explain that what is happening in Argentina in the 1970s is not a rare and new phenomenon in humanity—Hertha had lived through this only a few decades ago. She is trying to convey to Diana what Heker is trying to convey to us: As difficult and complex as these events were, we are obliged to narrate them and to pass them on. Consequently, Hertha explains to Diana that “[t]here is much madness in this period that we are living, dear, so, after this time of death, a time of great confusion waits for us.”¹⁴ The time of confusion has extended long enough to reach to us in a new millennium and elicit a bridge of memory *l'dor v'dor*.¹⁵

What Heker is compelled to transmit—as painful as it may be to admit—is not just the horror of the Dirty War and its intricacies, but also the failure of a whole generation to achieve the expected goals to create a so-called “better world,” as well as the acknowledgment of the existence of traitors within leftist ranks (as there were in Leonora's case). The author chooses to show us this layer of the 1970s through Leonora and her betrayal: After being kidnapped and tortured, she eventually forms a relationship with one of her torturers and helps him and his comrades carry on their illegal and violent ventures. The concrete, profound pain Diana feels when she finds out Leonora is alive (an oddity in itself) and has switched sides triggers Diana's confusion and her proclamation: “The story that I wanted to tell ends, it always ended, in that first chapter. Because the awaited woman will never do, never wanted to do the same revolution

¹³ “Porque mi horror consistía en que estaba viva y cruelmente, ferozmente, me seguía hostigando el insoportable deseo de vivir, y de reírme, y de ser feliz. Y la intolerable culpa de estar viva. Ése era el horror que yo tenía para contar: la alegría, y el miedo, y la culpa, y la furia, y la impotencia, y el asco, todo junto conviviendo dentro de mí en ese despiadado invierno del setenta y siete.” Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 206.

¹⁴ “Hay mucha locura en esta época que nos ha tocado vivir, hija, así que, luego de este tiempo de muerte, nos espera un tiempo de gran confusión.” Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 210.

¹⁵ Diana also explains to Hertha that the novel she was trying to write about Leonora was supposed to be a reflection of a whole generation who dreamt of a world they did not have to be ashamed of; a homage to the dead of that generation, but also to the survivors. “We had everything,” (“Lo tuvimos todo”, Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 229) says Diana who struggles to comprehend her friend's treason—a metaphor of the decay of the biggest, boldest dream Argentines would have.

that the one who waits expects.”¹⁶ The whole project of an entire generation is summarized in Leonora’s character, and Heker takes the risk of narrating the collapse of it all. She was fiercely criticized when this novel came out, so much so that three years later she published another book where she gathered several of her texts published in different contexts, among them responses to these criticisms.¹⁷ She affirms she is always looking to blur the limits between document and fiction, and she prides herself on the ambiguity she sows. Moreover, in a paper delivered in Tel Aviv in 1997, Heker states: “I think that literature’s task is to dismantle that dead memory and to replace it with a real memory, unfinished and imperfect, a memory that includes us and reclaims us, that leaves us in the center of history, responsible for correcting the imperfect and finishing the unfinished.”¹⁸

In *The End of the Story*, Liliana Heker is conscious of the inheritance she leaves: Her narration is one way to transmit the memory of the events of an era that marked the Argentine nation for decades and generations to come. Her history/story encompasses a difficult questioning of the roles of both sides, and she demands from her readers nothing less than correcting the imperfect present received and finishing the incomplete struggles of her era. As Hertha Bechhofen explains: “And it is also a story of survivors.”¹⁹

Piecing the Story Together in *Absentia*: A Red Thread

In *A Red Thread*, Miguel Larraín is hired to write a script for a film about the *disappeared* during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. He realizes the main character has to be his childhood friend and lover, Julia Berenstein, who was active in the ERP in the 1970s and was killed in Bolivia at the height of the Dirty War.²⁰ Sara Rosenberg (Tucumán, 1954) places her story in her hometown, one of the most violent provinces during the time, and structures her novel following a documentary style, with transcripts of recordings Miguel makes when interviewing people that knew Julia, his own memories and thoughts, and parts of her diary. Interestingly, there is no chronological order, but this chaotic way (both in time and type of

¹⁶ “La historia que quería contar se termina, siempre se terminó, en ese primer capítulo. Porque la mujer esperada nunca va a hacer, nunca quiso hacer la misma revolución que espera la que espera.” Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 233.

¹⁷ The book is called *Las hermanas de Shakespeare (Shakespeare’s Sisters)*, Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1999.

¹⁸ Pienso que es tarea de la literatura desarmar esa memoria muerta y reemplazarla por una memoria real, inacabada e imperfecta, una memoria que nos incluye y nos reclama, que nos deja instalados en el centro mismo de la historia, responsables de corregir lo imperfecto y terminar lo inconcluso. Liliana Heker, *Las hermanas de Shakespeare* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1999), 112.

¹⁹ “Y también es una historia de sobrevivientes.” Heker, *El fin de la historia*, 234.

²⁰ The ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo; People’s Revolutionary’s Army) was the military branch of the communist Worker’s Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores) and had an important presence in the northwestern province of Tucumán in the 1970s.

documents) seems fitting to reflect the confusion of the time and the fragmentary way memory works.²¹

This is another case (as in *The End of the Story*) where the protagonist's story is pieced together by a friend. Nevertheless, Julia never changed her way of thinking and was murdered, leaving Miguel with the insurmountable task of telling her life (and death). In addition, Rosenberg takes the responsibility of carrying the awareness that her fictionalized text goes beyond that realm: Through the different voices spread throughout the novel the author is narrating a very real period in Argentina's history. Rosenberg weaves Miguel's encounters with witnesses and his own thoughts through this fictionalized world, as "[v]iolent histories can be silenced and relegated to secrecy in spite of a circulation of stories and narratives. Hiding in language exists even when stories are told; the traces of such hiding are to be found at the surface of language."²² It is the readers who are compelled to painstakingly remove layer after layer of anecdotal material in order to discover the troubled character of Julia and the thoughtless way she related to others, including Miguel and her children. As much as the narrative tells us of the horror she went through when detained as a prisoner and when she was killed, it is an honest story of the flaws of a woman—flaws that Rosenberg lets spill onto that whole generation. Julia only stops to reflect on her doings when she feels surrounded by a red thread: That fear paralyzes her and starts unraveling her tragic end.²³

Nonetheless, it is Miguel who many years later is left with a hefty burden of piecing Julia's life together and making sense of her struggle (and of their generation's struggle) to achieve the world of which they had dreamt. Julia, then, becomes the narrative voice *in absentia*, and Miguel becomes the bridge between her and the following generation.²⁴ The book ends with a reflection of this double task of gathering the pieces of stories and being accountable to pass those stories, those memories, *l'dor v'dor*. Miguel reflects after meeting Natalia (Julia's daughter) for the first time, using Julia as his imaginary interlocutor, when he is about to conclude his script:

And in some History book, ten lines will talk about the attempt by a marginal group of students to explain that you can't build a fire and pretend it will burn a prairie which roots have been forever dead, since before the first rain. And then, turning the page, we will confidently read that later elections were held, and people voted for the murderers

²¹ At the beginning of the second chapter, Gabriele Schwab quotes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (*from Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*): "Holes and gaps are so central in narrative fiction because the materials the text provides for the reconstruction of a world (or a story) are insufficient for saturation." (Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 41.)

²² Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 55.

²³ It is explained in the novel that in order to hunt vicuñas people use a red thread to encircle them and the animal then freezes and does not fight the hunters. (Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 113-114.)

²⁴ Julia had two children, Federico and Natalia (the link to the next generation). It is worthy to mention that Rosenberg uses Natalia as a way to tell the story of the children of the *disappeared*, many of whom were appropriated by their parents' captors or given in adoption illegally and were never told the truth about their identity. In the novel Natalia finds out the truth and is returned to her family, but not without tension (she decides to live with her grandmother in Spain and refuses to move to Mexico where her father and brother reside). (Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 165)

who won by majority, and when in the north, near Central America, for example, other voices ask for justice and cropland, we will think: Again, what a useless gesture, again another struggle that will not go anywhere, and we will remain ailing, growing old, with grandchildren, if by chance we had them or our children had them, and we will put together a long fable to say that we have learned something that makes sense beyond making the bed every morning and leaning out the window to look at the sky, sometimes overcast, sometimes clear. Every day.²⁵

The self-criticism that Miguel embarks on is perhaps the most valuable message he—through Julia—can transmit. The scattered narration of memories is an exercise in working collectively to recuperate what has been left after the devastation: The ones who are left should choose to talk; the ones who are gone can (albeit incompletely) be recovered by the survivors and all that is left is to work together in order to shape and recount history. The younger generations are, per se, waiting and watching.²⁶

There is also this awareness of the transmission of memory coming from a previous generation. Julia's grandfather, Isaías Berenstein—who had come to Argentina in 1920 already married to Olga Trechk, both from small towns near Kiev—told his stories of the old country filled with nostalgia.²⁷ In 1971, he had to face his neighbors who started harassing him for having a granddaughter who robs banks—Julia was already involved with the armed movement at the time. Instead of confronting them, Isaías wanders back in time to the day the soldiers took his brothers to the Russian-Japanese war, never to see them again, when the Cossacks came to his town and beheaded his aunt Eli and cousin Sonia, and when his neighbors denounced them and his father was taken away.²⁸ He concedes that everything changes and that we forget history, but he did find a way to oppose this fate through telling Julia about his past and talking to Miguel: His narration is now part of a text (Miguel's script as well as Rosenberg's novel), and, even though his granddaughter is eventually murdered and cannot pass on the stories, his memory is inserted into Argentina's historical archive. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith

²⁵ Y en algún libro de historia, diez líneas hablarán de un intento de grupos, marginales, para explicar que no se puede armar un foco y pretender que incendie una pradera cuyas raíces están muertas desde siempre, desde antes de la primera lluvia. Y entonces, al pasar la página, leeremos confiadamente que más tarde hubo elecciones y votaron a los asesinos que ganaron por mayoría, y cuando en el norte, cerca de América Central, por ejemplo, otras voces pidan justicia y tierra de cultivo, sabremos pensar: otra vez, que inútil el gesto, nuevamente una lucha que no irá a ninguna parte y nos quedamos achacosos, envejeciendo, con nietos, si por casualidad los tuvimos o nuestros hijos los tuvieron, y armaremos una larga fábula para decir que hemos aprendido algo que tenga sentido más allá de tender la cama todas las mañanas y asomarnos a la venta a mirar el cielo, a veces cubierto, a veces claro. Cada día. (Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 202.)

²⁶ When asked how he is planning the film he is in charge of, Miguel says: "I try to reflect about memory. Only the ones who remember talk. Or rather we can only talk about what we have lived. Something like that. The voice is always collective, the recuperation of a story of all of us, where Julia is the axis, or rather the catalyst." ("Intento reflexionar sobre la memoria. Sólo los que recuerdan hablan. O más bien sólo podemos hablar de lo que hemos vivido. Algo así. La voz es siempre colectiva, la recuperación de una historia de todos, que tiene a Julia como eje, o más bien como detonante.") Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 158.

²⁷ According to one of Julia's cousins. Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 43.

²⁸ Rosenberg, *Un hilo rojo*, 90-91.

suggest, “Cultural memory is most forcefully transmitted through the individual voice and body—through the testimony of a witness.”²⁹ Sara Rosenberg reinforces this idea by incorporating the various testimonies Miguel gathers but with the caveat that it all happens without the voice and body of its main character: Julia is gone, and her disappearance illustrates the state of her country, where the families of the *disappeared* are forced to piece together the lives of their loved ones and to give voice to those who did not return.

Daughter of Silence and the Challenges of Transmitting Memory l’dor v’dor

Manuela Fingueret’s (Buenos Aires, 1945-2013) second novel presents the stories of a mother and her daughter and the presumed inability by the former to talk about her past. In *Daughter of Silence*, Tinkele survived the ghetto of Terezín and later Auschwitz and migrated to Argentina where she got married and had one daughter, Rita.³⁰ The novel interweaves the voices of both mother and daughter in their most traumatic moments: Tinkele in Terezín and Rita as a prisoner in the ESMA during the Dirty War.³¹ It is in this tenebrous setting that Rita starts slowly piecing together the story of her mother, a story that loomed throughout her life in the silence and gestures of her mother, in secrets and hidden objects, among them, a yellow star found hidden in a box.³² It is the knowledge of Tinkele’s experience that helps Rita survive the imprisonment, the torture, and the ongoing brutality. Their voices and their bodies come so close in this imaginary realm that they become one: They share the pain each one suffered while proudly telling their stories of courage and resistance. Marianne Hirsch sees the connection between these stories:

The child of survivors who “transposes” herself into the past of the Holocaust lives the “burden of a double reality” that makes “functioning” extraordinarily “complex”. Karpf receives her mother’s memories in her own body as symptoms that plague even as they fail to lead to understanding. In the sense that they repeat the trauma of the past in what she calls an “awful, involuntary mimetic obsession,” her mother’s memories are rememories engaging both mother and daughter with equal vehemence. [...] When the mother’s experiences are communicated through stories and images that can be narrativized, integrated—however uneasily—into a historically different present, they

²⁹ Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction,” in *Theories of Memory*, ed. Michael Rossington et al. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 225.

³⁰ Tinkele named her daughter Rita in honor of her mother Rivke, but changed the name into Spanish (her new acquired language). Tinkele wants Rita to be “strong and sensitive” (“fuerte y sensible”) like her own mother “in the long journey of a family that can find continuity with her” (“en el largo trayecto de una familia que puede encontrar continuidad en ella”). Fingueret, *Hija del silencio*, 199.

³¹ The ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada; Navy School of Mechanics) was one of the largest clandestine prisons during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). About 5,000 people were taken to the ESMA and only over a hundred survived.

³² Fingueret, *Hija del silencio*, 104.

open up the possibility of a form of second-generation remembrance that is based on a more consciously and necessarily mediated form of identification.³³

Rita, then, carries two functions in the narration: She embodies Tinkele's memories and, through her own telling of her mother's story and her own, she ensures the continuity of this narration for younger generations. This dialectical relationship between memory and narrative allows for the readers to also take responsibility and transmit the history.³⁴ Memory is the catalyst for narrative, and both mother and daughter revise their lives while foreseeing a future less bleak than their own. The line of women in the family has had its limitations when trying to convey the past in words, but the significance of those words had always been there. Rita declares in her cell: "Rivke enjoys the audacity that lives in me, Jasia binds the pain, and Tinkele is this useless survival. Here I am all of them. They are my vengeance, my pleasure, and my conviction."³⁵ Rita's mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had managed to transmit both pain and prevalence in the silence of their narration: Their transmission, overridden by gaps and crevasses, has nevertheless been passed *l'dor v'dor*. Rita has to wonder if those silences—that effort to complete her mother's story by herself—affected her choices.³⁶ Her decision to be active politically in perilous times in Argentina and to survive without succumbing to torture and the betrayal of her *compañeros* are, in Rita's mind, direct consequences of the silent narration of her mother's story. The way Fingueret shapes Tinkele's character resembles Marianne Hirsch's depiction of the figure of the mother (drawing from Julia Kristeva's theoretical discourse): "The mother as split subject, as locus of the semiotic, as both phallic and castrated, present and absent, omnipotent and powerless, the body before language, unrepresentable, inexpressible, unsettling, has become the privileged metaphor for a subversive femininity."³⁷ Tinkele's narrative—the way her story is constructed—lays bare the subversive facet of her motherhood: The only way she can survive—the only way she had learned from her mother and grandmother—is to guard her story while sharing it. Rita's subversiveness lies in the non-chronological telling of events, as well as her lifelong struggle to decipher her mother's memory. It is this endeavor, not the findings, which brings mother and daughter together and allows for a layered story, memory upon memory. The author gives Rita the main voice of the narration as the youngest generation in the novel and composes Rita's story in the first person, while leaving Tinkele's in the third person. Even though Tinkele's story is written in form of a diary, it is Rita who has appropriated her mother's story and now

³³ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 85.

³⁴ Rita doesn't have children; therefore, the familial re-telling ends with her.

³⁵ "Rivke goza la audacia que vive en mí, Jasia aprisiona el dolor, y Tinkele es esta inútil sobrevivencia. Aquí soy todas ellas. Son mi venganza, mi placer y mi condena." Fingueret, *Hija del silencio*, 100.

³⁶ Rita wonders during the long days and nights in her cell: "If Tinkele knew the anger that she provoked me with her quiet way of hiding the past... She cannot imagine and maybe to know now, in these conditions, it would be insufferable. Would she have revealed her secrets if she had predicted my choices?" ("Si Tinkele supiera la ira que provoco en mí su modo callado de ocultar el pasado... Ella no se lo imagina y quizás saberlo ahora, en estas condiciones en que estoy, le resultaría insoportable. ¿Me habría revelado sus secretos si hubiese previsto mis elecciones?") Fingueret, *Hija del silencio*, 61.

³⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, 171.

recounts it.³⁸ She is also the one who brings history into the narrative as Fingueret intertwines poems from the collection in *Terezín 1942-1944: Children's Drawings and Poems* published by the State Jewish Museum in Prague in 1959. By having Rita tell Tinkele's story (as well as her own story) and include these poems in Tinkele's experience, the blurry line between reality and fiction starts to help one discern the role of memory in the transmission of memory.

Towards a Conclusion

The three texts analyzed in this article are representatives of a continuous debate being held in contemporary Argentina about the power of memory and the question of who holds that power. In addition to this discussion within the nation, there is the added identity of the Jewish community and the responsibility not only to bear witness, but also to communicate to younger generations. Liliana Heker, Sara Rosenberg, and Manuela Fingueret utilize their narrative voices to articulate the stories that go from pogroms to the Shoah to the Dirty War. However, they subvert the traditional roles and create literary spaces where the non-linear, non-chronological, feminine subject-centric stories are a collective effort to accept the responsibility of the transmission of memory, which is—in itself—a process of creating meaning. While remembering (or silencing the remembrance as another way of making memory) and passing it on to our descendants, we construct a narrative that is meant to give meaning to the past and develop a consequential future. The characters in these three novels work page by page to reach this goal in a most imperfect way: as a frustrated and betrayed writer searching for the story; a parlous free spirit filling the blanks *in absentia*; and a daughter piecing together her mother's life before the end of her own.

“When memories manage to seep through the wounds, I survive.”³⁹ It is the trans-generational transmission of memories that allows Fingueret's Rita to survive another day. It is also the awareness of the function of narrative as a source to conserve and pass along memory that allows the Jewish Argentine history to withstand *l'dor v'dor*.

³⁸ Marianne Hirsch calls this type of memory “postmemory”: “‘Postmemory’ 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.” Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 5.

³⁹ “Cuando los recuerdos logran filtrarse entre las heridas, sobrevivo.” Fingueret, *Hija del silencio*, 162.

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