



Marjorie Agosín: The Poetics of Memory and Identity

Jacqueline Nanfito

Since the mid-1980's Marjorie Agosin has emerged as one of the leading voices of Latin American feminism in the United States. She is considered to be among the most original and versatile writers of her generation. Her poetry and prose intertwine the personal with the historical as well as the prevalent themes of social justice, exile, memory and identity. Marjorie is the author of more than thirty books that include poetry, fiction, essays and literary criticism. She has won several distinguished prizes including the Letras de Oro Prize for Poetry, the Latino Literature Prize, the Morgan Institute Prize for Achievement in Human Rights, The United Nations Leadership Award for Human Rights, The Gabriela Mistral award for Life Achievement by the Chilean Government, as well as the International Latino prize for several of her works.

Marjorie Agosin was raised in Chile, in a family of survivors of pogroms and holocausts, and her earliest recollections are filtered and conditioned by the rhythms and melodies of the rich mosaic of foreign idioms that surrounded her as a child. This confluence of languages was to become a source of strength and inspiration in the young poet's life guiding her through landscapes that had been preserved by her ancestors, who could not forget the sounds and images of the lands that they had left behind. Marjorie observes:

“The Babel of languages that was heard in my house, helped me reflect on the meaning of language and Diaspora. I saw how easily languages traveled from one country to another, opening new frontiers and closing others. But I also understood that the language of childhood [Spanish] was the most beautiful and intimate site for memory and affection. (“A Dream of Babel”, I Carry My Roots With Me/Touchpoints of the Latin American Jewish Diaspora. The District of Columbia Jewish Community Center, 2000, p. 29)



When she was in her teens, rumors of an impending coup led her immediate family to move to the United States. They settled in Georgia where Marjorie received an undergraduate degree in Philosophy from the University of Georgia. She went on to earn a Ph.D. in literature from Indiana University where her doctoral dissertation concentrated on the work of Chilean writer Maria Luisa Bombal. She is currently the Luella Lamer Slaner Professor of Latin American Studies at Wellesley College, and was recently named a fellow to the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University.

While most of her books have been written in the States, Marjorie Agosín continues to prefer Spanish for much of her creative work because this language belongs to a “sacred zone” that is connected to her early memories of life in the southern hemisphere. Upon contemplating her writing life, she states that she never stopped writing in Spanish because she “could not abandon [her] essence, the fragile, divine core of [her] being. It would have meant becoming someone else, frequenting sadness, losing a soul and all the butterflies.” (The Alphabet in My Hands: A Writing Life. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000, p 144). By writing in Spanish, Marjorie has been able to maintain her ties to her homeland and diminish the pain of exile, while creating a significant space or place, a new homeland, in which to explore her identity as a Jewish woman author writing in the United States.

Reflecting upon her painful adolescence in Georgia, Marjorie states poetically in the essay “Always From Somewhere Else: Reflections on Exile”:

I began to write long letters to my girlfriends, asking about the weather, certain flowers, fragrances, certain streets. I wanted to reconstruct all I had lost and all I longed for: my house, my grandparents’ garden, the smell of the food, my friends’ giggles when they talked about love. The writer in exile tries to recreate what has been drastically lost. Memory becomes her most precious ally, as well as her most disturbing obsession....These letters allowed me to stay in direct contact with my language, with my history. Later such epistles grew into long poems that evoked the land, the longed-for country, but the political drama of Chile was also present. The experience of exile



and the historical context of my departure became the central focus of my writing. Were it not for the military coup of 1973, I would not have written poetry about the blindfolded and the disappeared, about the pain of nameless bodies buried in common graves. I wrote obsessively because I could not forget. Nor did I wish to because by writing about a darkened continent, I also reconstructed my own history and my flight. My only possible return was through words. (“Always from Somewhere Else: Reflections on Exile” in *Ashes of Revolt*, ed. Marjorie Agosín)

Memories, migration, exile and identity have become some of the main topics of the literary discourse of Marjorie Agosín. Through the Spanish language, Marjorie creates a homeland in exile, a literary homeland in place of one that was lost or is lacking, a homeland longed for and created with words and phrases in Spanish, the language in which she feels most at home. In her essay entitled “Recovering The Familiar, Through Language” (“Always Living in Spanish”), Marjorie asks how one recovers the familiar, how one names the unfamiliar, how one can be another and live in a foreign language, all of which are the dilemmas of one who writes in Spanish and lives in translation (*The Literary Life, Poets & Writers*, p. 25)

She redefines the diasporic experience, often equated with geographic and emotional exile and uprootedness, and establishes a unique identity through her writing. Through her texts Marjorie creates a space in which the writer is free to explore multiple identities, as writing becomes for her a vital force, a locale to inhabit, as if the word were a room of her own, a place of significant space for the unfettered expression of the self and the other. The borderless territories of these imagined homelands are comprised of fiction, poetry, essays and memoirs, all in Spanish, all of which provide Marjorie with the flexibility and the freedom to utilize the most effective means to communicate her ideas and lived experiences. It is, however, through the essay, perhaps, with its characteristic openness, fluidity and elusiveness, that Marjorie best establishes a diasporic discourse, reconfiguring the space of interpretive practice, once the exclusive domain of male writers within the context of Latin American patriarchal hegemony, and inviting the reader to visit the homeland that she forges through her writing.



The word diaspora comes from the Greek *dia* meaning ‘through’ or ‘over’ and *speiro* meaning ‘dispersal’ or ‘to sow’. Diaspora traditionally referred to a very specific situation: the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land and their dispersal throughout the globe. In recent years, however, the notion of diaspora has moved from religious studies to the realm of migration and cultural studies, to the policy realm as well. Diasporas have come to be seen as central in relation to a range of issues, from struggles for political recognition of nation states over identity politics to transnational mobilization of development and reconstruction projects. For Marjorie, the diaspora is a very personal source of creativity and reality. It is a place, she writes, where “our precarious / genealogies / made memory magnificent” (29, *The Angel of Memory*). Diaspora also affords the writer the opportunity for transcending and reconstructing history by recalling voices moving in the sinuous harmony of remembrance. Beset by memory, Marjorie’s approach to questions of identity and memory is intimate, multi-layered and self-reflective.

The tendency toward a discourse of diaspora in the texts of Marjorie is a response to the condition of being de-territorialized both geographically and culturally. The literary act becomes a way of writing herself into existence, essaying herself into being, as Emerson would say, in the forging and fashioning of self in and through the written word on the page, and through the observation of self as reflected in the other. Like her fellow compatriot, Nobel Prize laureate poet from Chile, Gabriela Mistral, Marjorie Agosín the poet frequents the essay, that amorphous, protean testimonial form, with its focus on the ontological self as it ruminates and remembers while living in exile. In her texts, the self is progressively discovered and developed in and as discourse in the essay, which serves as a vehicle for speculative, ruminative reflections and expressions on the self and the other.

As a Jewish woman writer from Latin America living in exile in the United States, it is necessary to consider Marjorie’s condition in terms of a hybrid identity. In other words, she inhabits numerous cultural and geographic spaces, the result of multiple diasporas. In her works, Marjorie addresses a sense of dislocation from a stable/concrete geographic space or specific nation (a form of perpetual exile), given the reality of her family’s exile to the US from Chile in the 70’s, the process of her personal transculturation, and the



mechanisms for coping with the ongoing processes of assimilation, integration and identity reconfiguration, all of which contribute to the foundation of a unique diasporic discourse. Aware of the persecution of the Jews in Europe at the end of WWII and the Holocaust and of the potential dangers of being Jewish in the Diaspora, Marjorie's writing reflects the lives of immigrants that have been marked by historical hardships and persecution, and the inheritance of a diasporic consciousness that spans generations.

Given the physical, cultural and psychological exile that Marjorie and others like her have experienced, writing becomes a way to reconfigure identity and recover the homeland, and her welding of various literary styles and genres a means to communicate herself through the written word. Marjorie has authored a number of essays, many of which could be characterized as prose poems, that speak directly to her potentially perplexing and conflicting hybridity, in which she attempts to resolve her inner conflicts through the act of writing. She utilizes personal testimony, autobiography and memoir as a means to express herself and resolve the difficult differences of being Jewish in Chile as a child and adolescent, or, later on, a Latina Jew in the US as a teen and then as a female academic.

Like so many writers in the Latin American diaspora, Marjorie is perpetually in search of a personal identity and a cultural homeland, evoked through the often painful process of remembrance and writing. There is a powerful tradition of women writers whose work derives from their Jewish experience and their symbolic relationship with the dispossessed and the marginal. Jewish writers like Marjorie not only try to demonstrate their Jewish experiences in their texts, they also write about people who are oppressed and discriminated against, thus forging an even stronger link to this universal experience. Rather than seeing the Jewish female as a marginal being within the confines of her own cultural heritage, Marjorie finds the traditions and the link recovered by memory as empowering women and giving them a voice and identity in a land that can no longer remain indifferent to their lives and experiences (Introduction, *At the Threshold of Memory*, ed. Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman, Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2003, p. 23).



In his Prefacio to *Memorias migrantes*, the Uruguayan literary critic, Abril Trigo, writes that the second of the essays in this text, entitled “*Memorias*”, investigates the role that the distinct modalities of identity play in the constitution of identity, both individual and collective. He writes:

“Migration and memory, two axes of reflection in which the following problems arise: identity and nation, state and history, modernity and globalization. The mere existence and viability of the country, whose essence can be found in the intersection of memory and migration, in the enigma of diaspora, in that fragmented country, in the liminal experience of the exiled writer and his work with memory....When, under the traumatic experience of migration and diaspora, the social imaginary and the historical memory enter into crisis, producing a reactivation of cultural memory, the effect of intersubjective practices of signification constantly reelaborated between the consciousness of the present and the experience of the past...This is precisely what happens to Uruguayans (and by extension. all exiles from the Southern Cone) in diaspora, who, upon no longer operating under the influence of the national imaginary and its historical memory, confront the inevitable fracture of their identity, which is revealed to them as a zone in dispute, a building constructed upon the moving sands of history. (my translation. *Memorias migrantes: testimonios y ensayos sobre la diáspora uruguaya*. 1a ed. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2003, p. 13-14).

Marjorie Agosín belongs to a generation of writers and artists who not only search for an identity from a place of exile, but have also dedicated themselves to writing about the defense of human rights and educating a global community about the plight of politically and culturally oppressed groups. Marjorie’s Jewish heritage and human rights activism in and beyond Chile has coincided with her passion for always forming alliances with marginal beings and victims of political oppression. Writing for Marjorie and other Jewish Latin Americans becomes a process that leads to the discovery of self and the other, to survival, and to an impassioned commitment to social justice. The Spanish language is for Marjorie and other Jewish Latin American writers a means to not only redefine their identity, but to also affirm their commitment to



the defense of human rights. For Marjorie and many others, words became the only weapon in the face of persecution, resistance and exile suffered by so many during the 70's and 80's in the countries of Latin America. She takes refuge in a saying from the cabala –Tikum olam—which means “mending the world” through good deeds. Through her writing she tries to mend the sufferings of the world. (p.1 Introduction, *The House of Memory*)

Over the years, Marjorie came to the realization that exile and memory and the ability to see her country from the periphery heightened her sensitivity toward the situation of women in general and the state of human rights in Chile and Latin America in particular. (Barbara Mujica, “Marjorie Agosín Weaves Magic With Social Justice”, *Américas*, pp. 44-49). Growing up among exiles and among loved ones who had suffered unimaginable losses in the Holocaust has made Marjorie Agosín feel a profound link between the poet's Jewish heritage and identity and her devotion to victims of political oppression and violence. Through her works, Marjorie approaches what she herself defines as “the essence, the inner voice of poetry: a dialogue with memory, a meditation against forgetting.” (Preface to *An Absence of Shadows*. NY: White Pine Press, 1998, p. 11). As a transmitter of the social consciousness of a people, Marjorie might be seen as a moral historian who embodies a typically Jewish attitude toward the historically significant injunction to remember and the contemporary drive to bear witness.

In his brilliant essay on the Argentine writer, Ana María Shua, entitled “Memory and Myth,” the Mexican cultural critic Ilán Stavans comments on the problematic nature of reminiscence: “History might not be a Jewish invention, but memory surely is and so is forgetfulness. To remember is to be selective with the past, to forget what is judged unnecessary.” (79, *El río de los sueños: Aproximaciones críticas a la obra de Ana María Shua*, ed. Rhonda Dahl Buchanan, vol 70. Washington, D.C.: Interamer Collection of the OAS, 2001, 79-82.)

Marjorie traverses the tenuous terrain of memory, in an attempt to capture the past and recreate it though the literary text. In her essay “Always Living In Spanish”, she writes that as a young child in Chile she lived with the rhythms and melodies of a multiplicity of tongues: German, Yiddish, Russian, Turkish,



among others. Because everyone was from somewhere else, her relatives laughed, conversed and argued in a Babylon of languages. Spanish was reserved for matters of extreme seriousness, for commercial transactions, or for illnesses, but everyone’s mother tongue was always associated with the memory of spaces inhabited in the past.

“Destiny and the always ambiguous nature of history continued my family’s enforced migration, and because of it I, too, became one who had to live and speak in translation....I had left a dangerous place that was my home, only to arrive in a dangerous place that was not: a high school in the small town of Athens, Georgia.

In one of a series of lectures entitled “Crossing Boundaries” at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Gregory Donovan interviewed Marjorie and asked her to elaborate on her remarks that her writing resembles a collage. Her reply:

“I think that all the memoirs are written in the form of collage...I think “collages” respond to the evanescence of memory and of the sense of belonging. I’ve always struggled to retain what I have lost, and I’ve tried to retain it through writing, but then I realize that not even writing can hold to this tremendous loss, and that’s why it is so fragmented.

Aware that there is no single, authoritative rendering of the past, the solitude of exile accentuates Marjorie’s feelings of homelessness and isolation. She attempts to reconstruct the past poetically and forge a new space in the interstices between two worlds—the one of the past lost and the one of the present endured--, an intangible, liminal space overflowing with mysteries, one waiting to be discovered and colonized. Yet as she insists in this same interview with Donovan, she lives in an English-speaking world where she feels that she doesn’t fit in, and this is a constant source of torment and frustration for



her. Even though she has lived in the States more than half of her life, Marjorie still feels that she doesn't belong, she feels like a stranger who struggles to make herself understood by those who look with suspicion at those who do not speak English well and especially those who have come from the supposedly uncivilized regions of Latin America.

In the introduction to her collection of essays entitled *Passion, Memory and Identity: Twentieth Century Latin American Jewish Women Writers*, Marjorie writes:

“Each of these [Latin American Jewish] writers places himself or herself in his or her own space and reality, but we can say that the commonality of the Diaspora serves as a link that unifies all of them. The Diaspora is also a source of creativity and reality, a possibility for transcending and reconstructing history, an exile and its multifaceted themes that focus on a time inhabited from exile, linked to a permanent state of memory. The diasporic memory signifies escape and departure. It is constantly associated with the capacity for memories, and it legitimizes remembrance.”(x-xi, Introduction, *Passion, Memory and Identity: Twentieth Century Latin American Jewish Women Writers*. Ed. Marjorie Agosín. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999).

Whether through forced or voluntarily exile many exiled Latin American writers like Marjorie Agosín continue writing in the Spanish language of their childhood and youth, strengthening not only their identity with their lost or absent country, but with other Spanish speakers, at the same time as they reaffirm their links with their heritage, Judaism in her case, and explore the dilemma of emigration and acculturation.

In *Falling Into Language*, the Australian poet Chris Wallace-Crabbe writes: “All works of literature are to an extent acts of retrieval. Life escapes, it is lost and the writer erects, creates the verbal substitute on paper, a complexity of gestures adding up to a larger, former gesture which is time regained. (7, *Falling Into Language*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989). Through her recollection and expression of memories in the Spanish language, Marjorie strives to retrieve and regain the past that continues to haunt her in the present.



In an essay on “Diasporas”, James Clifford writes:

“A shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin...Positive articulations of diaspora identity reach outside the normative territory and temporality (myth/history) of the nation-state...Disapora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place (306-7, 311, “Diasporas.” *Cultural Anthropology* 9-3 (1994): 302-38).

In one of her poems from the collection *Poems for Josefina/Poemas para Josefina* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Sherman Asher Publishing, 2004), entitled “To Feel a Distance”, Marjorie writes:

And exile meant

Suffering a distance

Being an orphan

Of the air

Of the times

Sharing only from afar

That distance

Bore deep holes

Wells of doubt



We imagined our return

Parks fountains bicycles

All asleep

And exile

Split generations

Precluded our celebration of life

Our presence at the hour of death

In exile

We began to change

Our speech

Our words

We were like the bark of a tree

Broken off

In the loneliness

Of a storm

We lived



Passed the days and nights

Captive in empty houses

With few guests

Envisaging

Those who had stayed behind

And finally

When we were able to return

We found no one there

But the dead

Watching

An important marker of cultural identity for Marjorie and those living in exile or diaspora is language. In her interview with Donovan she states: “When you’re thinking in Spanish, the world is different, even, you know, when Spanish speakers are talking to one another, even their physical proximity is different than when you’re speaking in English. It’s a whole way of decoding and coding a world. So language is identity.” David William Foster writes: “Language conflict is an abiding feature of the immigrant experience, and it is often an eloquent marker of the difficulties of accommodation, the nature of assimilation, and the negotiation undertaken between different cultural establishments.” (“Recent



Argentine Women Writers of Jewish Descent”, Passion, Memory Identity, ed. Marjorie Agosín. Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 1999, 35-57).

In one of the poems dedicated to her grandmother Josefina, entitled “Tu voz/Your Voice”, Marjorie celebrates the love shared with her grandmother for the Spanish language:

“Beyond your voice

And its clear cadence

Is a history

A silence petrified by enigma

Beyond your voice

Is a remembered voice

Another voice

Of a cloistered language

And a buried history

I imagine you combing your words

To bless or curse in Yiddish

Or recall your father

Head bowed on a street corner

In a town strike from the maps



His song a lament

Reverence for a silenced history

But your voice

Was Spanish

Espanol Castilian Ladino

The Spanish you loved

Incisive primitive rapid

That hid nothing

That let you say it all

The Spanish that blossoms in your exile

In Chapter 7 (“Words: A Basket of Love”) of *The Alphabet in My Hands*, Marjorie writes about the enchanting topographies and cartographies that she found in the literary text written in Spanish:

“In literature I found the caress, the unguarded pleasure, and the voice that had eluded me in this new country (the States). I turned to books with a passion, almost in desperation, because they consoled me. I saw myself criss-crossing the hallways of the library, ransacking in particular the Spanish section and shelves. I discovered the warmth of words, words that belonged to me alone. I paused along their hills, invented the destinies of those exiled like myself....Through books I



crossed borders. Wasn't Latin America an immense shawl united by a free and beautiful language?
(p.141)

Continuing her thoughts on books she writes:

Books have been my traveling companions because I am from nowhere, and they provide me with the transfiguration of memory. Books help me to invent countries that I have visited in the forests of my dreams, to have certain faceless friends who, in the storm of exile, I took for my own." (p. 142).

Writing in Spanish has become for Marjorie a means to rescue memory and invent an identity. In that same chapter she writes:

"How I love my language. It is like the sky, high rooftops, and elongated words.

Always in transit, all I was able to carry with me were my words. I took care of them, placed them in the moist womb of my pillow. I communed with them. Sometimes they made noises, like a garden, a threshold, lace and nighttime fragrances. I like my language. Looking up words in the dictionaries made me happy and I found myself in words, because I, too, wandered lost along the avenues. I did not recognize myself, and no one recognized me.....Why could the mere act of speaking out displace my tongue and brand me as an outsider? By contrast, my language loved me, sheltered me from the gray wind of deformed cities, of locked doors. I lost my keys and wandered among the omens of return. My language defined my past, it was relaxed and brave. The words, such ample, respectable ladies, were fraught with the possibility of love beyond diminutives. I never stopped writing in Spanish because I could not abandon my essence, the fragile, divine core



of my being. It would have meant becoming someone else, frequenting sadness, losing a soul and all the butterflies. ("Spanish" p. 144, *The Alphabet in My Hands*).

Like other Latinos in the US, Marjorie lives on the hyphen (Gustavo Pérez Firmat), in the borderlands (Anzaldúa), existing in two languages but only feeling at home in the one of her youth, Spanish. For Pérez Firmat, Cubans living in the US form a hyphenated culture, a world that is both Cuban and American, where the two parts of the hyphen perform a precarious balancing act. "Spiritually and psychologically," the author writes, "you are neither aquí nor allá, you are neither Cuban nor Anglo. You're 'cubanglo,' a word that has the advantage of imprecision, since one can't tell where the 'Cuban' ends and the 'Anglo' begins. Having two cultures, you belong wholly to neither one" ("*Life on the Hyphen*", p. 7). For Gloria Anzaldúa, "To survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras be a crossroads." The author discusses how she, being a border woman, and other people straddling the border did not identify with any of the languages spoken by the majorities of people around her, and had to create their own language by combining several languages and dialects. In her opinion, language identifies people, and Chicanos needed a language with which to identify themselves. They needed a language to use to communicate within their group, a language to call "home". Like Pérez Firmat and Anzaldúa, Marjorie came to the realization that her country exists in her heart, in her thoughts, in her memories. It is a matter of writing the nation, the homeland, in the language in which she feels most at home. In *The Alphabet in My Hands*, Marjorie writes:

"What does it mean to live in two languages, to exist on the border, not knowing when to cross from the realm of the mother tongue to the realm of the acquired language? Living through two languages is a marvelous thing, say the guardians of order, not memory. I only lived in one because the other did not adjust to my feelings or my skin. One language insisted on forgetting, the other on memory....My mother's language I identified with love. English meant codes of silence....The English language never took on the texture of my soul the feel of my skin. It showed me the



precision of detail, the melody of never-before-heard consonants, and I still must pause before uttering “th” (p. 143-144).

In his “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said writes that most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that to borrow a phrase from music, is contrapuntal.[...]Both the new and the old environments are vivid, actually occurring together contrapuntally. (Reflections on Exile and other literary and cultural essays. London: Granta, p. 184).

Marjorie writes about something similar, the time that she left her language behind, and felt the loss like a mutilated body. She wrote about what was missing, wanting to capture the pain of those who had been evicted from their lives. Her work sprung from places occupied by outsiders, strangers and absences, as she chose from early on to bear witness to an often painful historical reality, through the act remembering. She revisited the past obsessively and her alphabet was made up of poems and prose in search of a country and an identity. Her passion was not nostalgia, nor the prudence of the past. Her passion was merely writing in Spanish because it allowed her to commemorate the faces of the disappeared and the deceased and those who had been banished to an existence in the shadows of society. Through her writing she could always find her way to the sacred place of words, to the music of being or not being, to the zones of love within the circle of knowledge where time, seasons, and alliances coincide. Words in Spanish gave her back her imagination. (The Alphabet in My Hands, p. 146).

In that same interview with Donovan she writes: “. . . what has kept the Jews together is the idea of home and the idea of memory, which {are} the ideas that I write about: home as an inner center, and memory as giving voice to the invisible and becoming a witness.

Marjorie’s homeland then is the Spanish language...which is at once a refuge and an inspiration, as language evokes for her emotion, intimacy, affection, and serves as a means of re-membering or piecing



together an identity. As we saw in an earlier quote from Marjorie, to lose her language would be to lose her soul, her being, as language has become the one thing that she truly possesses in a world of exile and diaspora. At the end of the Introduction to *The House of Memory. Stories by Jewish Women Writers of Latin America*, Marjorie states that

“Writing, in the best Talmudic tradition, is practiced as a way of ordering one’s identity as well as belonging to a tradition. By making their voices heard, these women (Jewish women writers of Latin America), silenced and marginalized, have created for themselves an identity and a tradition in which they belong. Through their work, these writers, exiles and outsiders, have built for themselves a home, in the house of memory.” (p. 21)

Through her poetry and prose, Marjorie Agosín has constructed for herself a homeland, a house of memory with infinite rooms in which she articulates in Spanish an experience that is at once essentially personal and simultaneously the social and cultural history of a people. Through her writing she seeks to recover memory and connect it with an identity, to return to the historical past and reshape its narratives in the present. Marjorie’s preference for the Spanish language over English in terms of the recovery, the comprehension and transmission of an identity is stated very eloquently in her poem entitled “English”:

“English”, Marjorie Agosín

I discovered that English

is too skinny,

functional,

precise,



too correct,

meaning

only one thing.

Too much wrath,

Too many lawyers and sinister policemen,

Too many deans at schools for small females,

In the Anglo-Saxon language.

II

In contrast Spanish

Has so many words to say come with me friend,

Make love to me on

The césped, the grama, the pasto.

Let's go party,

At dusk, at night, at sunset.

Spanish loves

The unpredictable, it is

Dementia,



All windmills and velvet.

III

Spanish

Is simple and baroque,

A palace of nobles and beggars,

It fills itself with silences and the breaths

Of dragonflies.

Neruda's verses

Saying "I could write the saddest verses

Tonight,"

Or Federico swimming underwater

Through the greenest of greens.

IV

Spanish

Is Don Quijote maneuvering,

Violeta Parra grateful



Spicy, tasty, fragrant

The rumba, the salsa, the cha-cha.

There are so many words

To say

Naïve dreamers

And impostors.

There are so many languages in our

Language: Quechua, Aymará, Rosas

Chilensis, Spanglish.

V

I love the imperfections of

Spanish,

The language takes shape in my hand:

The sound of drums and waves,

The Caribbean in the radiant foam of

The sun,

Are delirious upon my lips.



English has fallen short for me,

It signifies business,

Law

And inhibition,

Never the crazy, clandestine,

Clairvoyance of

Love.”

Bibliography

Agosín, Marjorie. “A Dream of Babel”, I Carry My Roots With Me/Touchpoints of Latin

American Jewish Diaspora. The District of Columbia Jewish Community. Centa: 2000.

Agosín, Marjorie. The Alphabet in My Hands. A Writing Life. NY: Rutgers UP, 2000.

Agosín, Marjorie. An Absence of Shadows. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2004.

Agosín, Marjorie. Angel of Memory. Texas: Wings Press, 2000.

Agosín, Marjorie. “Always from Somewhere Else: Reflections on Exile” in Ashes of

Revolt. NY: White Pine Press, 1996.

Agosín, Marjorie. Always from Somewhere Else. A Memoir of My Chilean Jewish



Father. NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1998.

Agosín, Marjorie. *The House of Memory. Stories by Jewish Women Writers of Latin America*. Ed. Marjorie Agosín. NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999.

Agosín, Marjorie. *At The Threshold of Memory*. Ed. Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2003.

Agosín, Marjorie. *Passion, Memory and Identity: Twentieth Century Latin American Jewish Women Writers*. Ed. Marjorie Agosín. Albuquerque, NM: U New Mexico P, 1999.

Agosín, Marjorie. *Poems for Josefina/Poemas para Josefina*. Santa Fe, NM: Sherman Asher Publishing, 2004.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: the new mestiza: frontiers*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 4th ed. 25th anniversary, 2012.

Clifford, James. "Diaspora", *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3, (1994): 302-338.

Foster, David William. "Recent Argentine Women Writers of Jewish Descent" in *Passion, Memory and Identity: Twentieth Century Latin American Jewish Writers*.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. NY: Routledge, 1988.

Mujica, Barbara. "Marjorie Agosín Weaves Magic with Social Justice", *Américas* pp.



44-49.

Pérez Firmat, Gustavo. *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. Austin:

UTexasP, 2012.

Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. London:

Granta 13 (1984): 159-172.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return."

Diaspora 1.1 (1991): 83-99

Stavans, Ilan. "Ana María Shúa: Memory and Myth" in *El río de los sueños*:

Aproximaciones críticas a la obra de Ana María Shua. Ed Rhonda Dahl

Buchanan. Vol. 70, Washington DC: Interamer Collection of OAS, 2001, 79-82.

Trigo, Abril. *Memorias migrantes: Testimonios y ensayos sobre la diáspora uruguaya*.

1a ed. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2003.

Wallace-Crabbe, Chris. *Falling Into Language*. Oxford: Oxford UP 1989.

Wallace-Crabbe, Chris. *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New*

World (2004, with Judith Ryan).