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Memory, Oblivian, and Jewish Culture in Latin America
(review)

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the Hispanic world, which is overlooked once more in favor of the central European tradition. Posada, Gutiérrez Solana, Valle-Inclán, Picasso, Buñuel, Saura... Goya lives.

Edward F. Stanton
University of Kentucky

***Memory, Oblivian, and Jewish Culture
 in Latin America***

University of Texas Press, 2005

Edited by Marjorie Agosín

Marjorie Agosín's well conceived anthology brings together a wide range of writing on Latin American Jewish experience. Together these essays—some funny and warm, some intense and disturbing—help the reader to understand the richness and variety of Latin America's diverse Jewish communities.

"Jews are storytellers", writes Agosín in her introduction. At her childhood home in Chile, Jews who arrived from all parts of the world gathered around her family's table and told their stories. Their tales evoked faraway places—Russia, Europe, and ancient Sepharad—and expressed their struggle to build new lives for themselves in the Americas. "Judaism meant not only belonging to a religion but also to an intense culture of vibrant voices," she writes. This anthology represents Agosín's effort to capture this multiplicity of voices and share with readers the collective history of a people.

The book is divided into five sections. Section I, "Sephardim in Our Memory," focuses on the expulsion of Jews from Spain and its consequences. In her essay, "Remembering Sepharad," Reyes Coll-Tellechea provides an overview of the thriving Jewish culture of medieval Spain, the felicitous result of cooperation among Jews, Christians and Muslims, and of the virulent anti-Semitism that brought it to an end. Just as Jews enriched Spanish culture through their poetry, philosophy, science, and linguistic skills, they contributed to the creation of a new Latin American society. But, Coll-Tellechea shows,

the same misguided politics and blind prejudice that destroyed Sepharad are still at work in Latin America. "The Sephardic Legacy," by Angelina Muñiz Huberman, focuses on the importance of the Sephardic language to the preservation of ethnic Spanish-Jewish identity. The *lengua florida* nurtured artistic, intellectual and spiritual traditions such as cabbalism, which traveled to the far ends of the earth after the Diaspora. The essay concludes with a brief exploration of the situation of Sephardim in colonial Mexico and the challenge for today's researchers wishing to unearth Mexico's rich Sephardic history. Unfortunately, the author packs this essay with too much inadequately developed material. She includes a long quote from *Don Quijote*, in which Cervantes exposes the human consequences of Philip III's expulsion of the *moriscos* (Christianized Moors) in 1609. However, she does not mention the *morisco* revolts or the economic conditions that made the regime of Philip III different from the one that expelled the Jews more than a century before. A parallel could be drawn between the expulsion of the *moriscos* and that of the Jews, but the author leaves this task to the reader.

Part II, "Journeys," deals with the constant voyages to uncertain destinations intrinsic to Jewish history. In "Tuesday Is a Good Day," David Brailovsky tells a fascinating story of leaving Shanghai, where foreigners fear a Communist takeover for Chile. As a non-Chinese, he has always felt like an alien in Shanghai and is determined to integrate perfectly into Chilean society. However, once in Santiago, his Jewishness takes on a fresh importance. Through contacts with Jewish friends he gains a new sense of self and community. "My Panama," by Murray Baumgarten, captures beautifully through a kaleidoscope of images and memories the confusion of lives cast asunder by war and rebuilt time and again in diverse places. Fleeing Nazi Germany, Baumgarten's family settles in Panama, then New York, while some relatives seek refuge in Israel. The Jewish identity that holds them all together and his love of Panama are two of Baumgarten's salient themes. In "A Journey through My Life and Latin Ameri-

can Jewish Studies,” Sandra McGee Deutsch explains how she came to devote herself to Judeo-Latin American studies after confronting Holocaust deniers in Argentina. For Deutsch, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, her scholarship became a personal journey to explore the rabid anti-Semitism that still exists in parts of Latin America.

Section III, “The Paradox of Communities,” begins with a powerful study by Graeme Mount of the Nazi presence in Chile, which he links to the rise of the fascist government of Augusto Pinochet. Mount’s description of Colonia Dignidad, a German colony created in 1961 by Paul Schäfer, a Nazi veteran, is truly chilling. Inside the enclave discipline was ferocious, with electric shock treatments used to keep people in line. Under Pinochet it became a political prison where dissidents were tortured. Mount also discusses the *Llanquihue* ice fields, populated by Neo-Nazi paramilitaries. The article brings to light important information on the horrors of the Pinochet regime. Although this essay does not deal directly with Jewish identity, the existence of Nazis and Neo-Nazis in Chile is of obvious relevance to Agosin’s topic. The next two essays portray Jewish communities in Mexico. Diana Anhalt’s “Are You Sure They’re Really Jewish?” deals with the founding in 1953 of Beth Israel, the first conservative Jewish temple in Latin America. Because it was more liberal and relaxed than orthodox Mexican synagogues, and because it was as much a community center as a house of worship, Beth Israel met with considerable opposition. Adina Cimet’s “Dancing around the Political Divide” is an insightful examination of the power struggles within Mexico’s Jewish communities. While Cimet shows respect for the services provided by these communities, she censures the authoritarian, secretive way they are governed.

Section IV, “A Literature of Transformation,” showcases the contributions of contemporary Jewish writers to both Jewish and Latin American culture. In “The Heterogeneous Jewish Wit of Margo Glantz,” Naomi Lindstrom argues that Glantz’s writing contains few examples of the traits typically associated with Jewish humor,

such as self-deprecation and comic treatment of disturbing subjects. Glantz’s knowledge of popular culture is so broad and her style so innovative that her wit is not easily classifiable, concludes Lindstrom, although one *can* find elements of traditional Jewish humor in her biting social criticism. Rhonda Dahl Buchanan’s highly personal examination of *Letargo* describes Perla Suez’s novel as “a travelogue that records the protagonist’s quest for identity and belonging.” The story, which takes place in Basavilbaso, a Jewish agricultural colony in Entre Ríos, Argentina, recreates the tragedies and pleasures of the author’s own childhood. In spite of its bleakness, concludes Buchanan, the story holds “a promise of rebirth among the ruins of the past.”

The last section, “Culture, History, and Representation,” contains five essays on Jewish Latin American literature and intellectual life. Stephen Sadow’s “Lamentations for the AMIA” explores literary responses to the 1994 bombing of the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina in Buenos Aires*. Sadow examines the fiction and poetry of writers such as Sofia Kaplinsky, Carlos Levy, and Ricardo Feierstein to show how their expressions of grief and trauma not only bear witness to social injustice, but also serve as a demand for equal treatment for Argentine Jews. In “Nationalism, Education, and Identity,” Raanan Rein examines how Jewish leaders actively but quietly met the challenge when, in 1943, the Argentine government imposed Catholic education in state schools. Rein argues that in spite of the anti-Semitic image of the Peronist regime, under Perón the lot of Jews actually improved, since the government attempted to promote national unity by opposing anti-Jewish policies.

Darrell B. Lockhart’s “From *Gauchos judíos* to *Idische mames posmodernas*” is an overview of Jewish contributions to Argentine popular culture. Although Alberto Gerchunoff’s enduring image of the *gaucho judío* links the Jews to Argentina’s mythical rural past, Lockhart sees Jewish popular culture in Argentina as a primarily urban phenomenon. He examines writers such as Nora Glickman, known for her depiction of Jewish white slave trade, and Silvia Plager, whose *Como papas para varenikes* is a parody of Laura Esquivel’s

Como agua para chocolate. The most engaging part of the article is Lockhart's discussion of cartoons depicting Jewish and Argentine stereotypes. David William Foster writes on Gabriel Valansi, an innovative Argentine photographer whose nocturnal black-and-white urban landscapes evoke Holocaust associations. Foster shows that Valansi's eerie images constitute a commentary on Argentine neoliberalism. They suggest the impoverishment of a once prosperous country and force spectators to draw parallels between postwar Europe and contemporary Argentina. The section concludes with Ruth Behar's, "While Waiting for the Ferry to Cuba," in which Behar, a Jewish Cuban-American filmmaker, describes the genesis of her film *Adio Kerida*. As a Sephardic Jew, she wanted not only to explore her roots but also to challenge the Ashkenazi view of Jewish identity. Her research led her to a deep understanding of the multifaceted nature of Jewish Cuban society, resulting in a film that is thoroughly Cuban, yet focuses on Jewish identity. Behar concludes by lamenting that *Adio Kerida* has not been embraced by Jewish film festivals; she speculates that Jewish Americans, predominantly Ashkenazi, may not identify with it.

By bringing together essays on a splendid array of Jewish-related topics, Marjorie Agosin has greatly enriched our understanding of one of Latin America's most energetic and productive minorities. It is noteworthy that Agosin has included essays by both Jewish and non-Jewish writers, thereby demonstrating that Jewish Studies are not relevant only to a particular group, but to a broad range of scholars and readers.

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Bridging Continents:
Cinematic and Literary Representations
of Spanish and Latin American Themes
Chasqi: Revista de Literatura
Latinoamericana, 2005
Edited by Nora Glickman and Alejandro
Varderi

In his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, published in 1992, *Bridging Continents* is one of the first collections in the corpus of Peninsular and Latin American film criticism to take seriously the need for a triangular, that is, Trans-Atlantic view of the production of film texts. Many of its essays, written by a diverse group of scholars from Spanish and Latin American literature programs in both the U.S. and Spain, bridge the Atlantic using a variety of different methodologies. The coherence of the book, then, derives not so much from the sharing of a theoretical line, but from its convergence around a set of themes. Instead of seeing the transatlantic as an essence, it conceptualizes it as a debate, organized according to the following thematic: the colonial/the postcolonial; Spanish nationalisms; youth and gender; and the female vs. the male gaze. The transatlantic is here defined by its praxis. The individual essays constitute epistemologies of the Iberamerican ideal.

Understanding colonial and post-colonial histories and hybrid identities is crucial to a transatlantic studies approach whose ultimate aim is to un-think Eurocentrism. In light of this border thinking, the essays in the first section, "Reassessing the Heritage: Colonial and Postcolonial Connections Between Latin America and Spain," provide analyses of their films' historical and ideological contexts. Nina Gerassi-Navarro, for example, in her analysis of *Como era gostoso o meu francês*, directed by Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, not only considers the film's representation of cannibalism and the significance of cannibalism by women, but also observes the shift from Europe to Latin America of the historical reconstruction of the conquest, from the chronicles of European explorers to the Brazilian modernism of Oswald de Andrade's *Movimento Antropófago* of the 1920s. Cynthia Stone looks at how historical and literary texts have characterized the conquistador Lope de Aguirre's sixteenth-century exploits in the Amazon, and how these representations get played out in *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), by the German filmmaker Werner Herzog, and in Carlos Saura's *El Dorado* (1988). Eyda