

RED AND BLUE TRIANGLES IN A GRAY PLACE: SPAIN AND THE HOLOCAUST IN STORIES, LETTERS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS

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Consideration of the Holocaust and its meaning in Spain materialize and continue to emerge, silhouetted within haunting spaces encircled by memory, absence, presence, and oblivion. The doubled and layered construction and reconstruction of the shadow of Raquel, or what this figure signifies, points back to the farthest reaches of history and legend. Eventually, looping forward, this narrative develops in the direction of a future that is now the past; arriving, in other words, at the twentieth century's Second World War and the Shoah. The effects of fascist persecution and the exile of Republican and Jewish refugees after the Spanish Civil War, in Spain and in the German extermination camps, winds through the Spanish encounter with the Jewish Other as Self. The connecting past and present is a liminal area that is central to the development of Spain and Spanish identity in and outside of the Peninsula. Raquel, in the shadows of the past, maintains a subtle link with the gray area that is illuminated in the present by the Italian Sephardi, Primo Levi. In this article, in response, I analyze portrayals of Sephardim and of shadows, and locate them in Spain, in the stories of refugees, and in testimonial and memory documents of the stateless Republicans in Mauthausen. I effect this analysis via a focus on oral history, photographs, letters, and selected chapters from Primo Levi's memoirs alongside Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad: Una novela de novelas*. These narrative forms are bound by history and documentation that revolve less around Raquel and her semiotic value and more around Levi and his own; yet, inescapably, both sides of the historical coin reflect the ambivalence of the Self and Other embodied in the story of the Sephardim and Spain.

It is useful to first consider the medieval legend of the ill-fated love between Alfonso VIII of Castile and the Jewess of Toledo, if for no reason other than to view it against the later history. This story originates in the thirteenth century and evolves, finding voice in poetry, chronicle, theater, and prose in and outside of Spain. Its telling foregrounds erotic seduction, political conflict, and gender-marked violence. Depictions of Alfonso's neglect of duty in favor of Raquel of Toledo, who will be murdered, finally, by the king's associates, include Lope de Vega's *Las paces de los reyes y judía de Toledo* (c. 1610), and *La judía de Toledo / La desgraciada Raquel* by Mira de Amescua (c. 1620), while the best-known drama on this theme is García de la Huerta's *Raquel* (c. 1770). Raquel was popular in historical novels, such as *Die Jüdin von Toledo* (1954) by Lion Feuchtwanger, which was translated into English as *Raquel: The Jewess of Toledo* (1956). Whether or not the legend involves a greater or a lesser degree of historical veracity is problematic at best, and in fact, "When we try to trace the story's pedigree [...] we run into difficulties" (Cruikshank 11). Ultimately, this figure has greater symbolic value than historic weight.

The imaginary of this Jewish woman and her semantic function as part of the sociohistoric and political development of Peninsular Spain resonates, not only in terms of eroticized or orientalist fascination, but also due to this figure's ability to embody conflict related to nationalism and religious identity. In Lope's version, Raquel dies a Christian. The symbolic worth of her religious status as a convert is clarified by its contextual placement vis-à-vis the Arabic Other. Indeed, "[...] more striking than Raquel and her family, who do not directly endanger Christian Castile, are the constant references to the Moorish threat, which can be overcome only by defeating the Moors and expelling them" (Cruikshank 20-21). In García de la Huerta's rendition, Raquel is not a secret Christian. Instead, she resides within an ambivalent political and ethical matrix that restricts the role of Alfonso VIII to none other than that of guardian of Christian and political hegemony. García de la Huerta's depiction of this figure is such that the relationship of Raquel to Alfonso reflects and distorts the monarch's ability to rule and to fulfill his obligations with the dignity that his station requires. In not responding to Raquel's murder, Alfonso demonstrates "su propensidad a huir de esas contradicciones en la muerte," while "En cuanto al perdón otorgado por él a los asesinos de su amada, más es declaración de culpabilidad propia que movimiento de generosidad" (Andioc 32).

In essence, the Raquel story mirrors and is mirrored by the same ambivalence and elliptic quality found in the narrative and history of the Sephardim, both within and exiled from Spain. According to Ilan Stavans, "The Sephardic condition is one of fracture and displacement" (xvii); yet, in his introduction to *The Schocken Book of Sephardic Literature*, he also asks, "Are the Iberian communities from 900 CE to 1492 not part of the same history? Is Sephardic life solely a litany of nostalgia for what has been lost, an impossible quest for *la España perdida*, the land of loss and the lost land?" (xvii). Primo Levi has declared that he did not become Jewish until he was deported to Auschwitz and met the Ashkenazim there; an assimilated Jew of Sephardic origin and a native of Italy, he did not speak Yiddish or Hebrew. Thus, by their standards, he was not a real Jew. But for Stavans's acquaintances in Mexico in the 1970s, Spain, "rather than being *en el corazón*--in the heart, as Pablo Neruda once said--is simply a figment of historical imagination" (xvii). The reverse relation of Self and the Other, especially when contextualized by the trauma of the Holocaust, simultaneously rejects and requires Spain; this posture, in part, relates to the semiotic value of the Raquel story in its original form.

However, *altro canta miglior* that chronicle. I turn, now, to contemporary narratives of Spain, the Holocaust, and the Gray Zone that are found in the extermination camps and in the depictions of the activities of regular Spaniards of that time period. This exploration begins with selected material related to Primo Levi and folded into Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad: Una novela de novelas*. It also considers *Memòria de l'infern* with its testimonials from survivors of the Mauthausen work camp, the oral histories recorded by Trudy Alexy, and the letters of the Republican prisoner of war Pere Vives i Clavé. My ultimate purpose is to draw together these varying narrative strands and to analyze how the participants in these events

reconstruct their stories, ex post facto, keeping in mind that, “To bear witness is to respond. It is to say: ‘Here I am.’” (Robert 38). Yet who is this “I”, and what is its relation to the Sephardim? Levi’s story, like that of Raquel and the emerging Spanish nation of her time, is one of politics and power differentials, and it relates to the ways in which individuals position themselves against or alongside the Other, Jewish or not. It is a story that is articulated with that of Republican prisoners, with the ones among them who never came home again, and with the stories of the people they left behind.

In an echo of the artistic and literary appropriations of the figure of Raquel, the public figure of Primo Levi is also given voice in Spain by way of a fictionalized reconstruction. Muñoz Molina’s *Sefarad* consists of seventeen intertwined chapters, each of which is also able to stand alone as a short story. Recognizable figures in it include, but are not limited to, Levi, Franz Kafka, Jean Améry, Walter Benjamin, and Eugenia Ginzburg. The element that synthesizes the characters’ varying tales is the shared experience of loss and exile that connects them, always, to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in the fifteenth century. Levi, as a literary character, appears and disappears, a ghost in the narrative, and only sometimes in a way that is a logical part of the larger plot. In other appearances, as metaphor or by way of allusion, Levi’s presence signals the need to remember; at times, he seems a haunting synecdoche for those who have suffered. The narrator of the third chapter of *Sefarad* explains, “En el tren donde lo llevaban deportado a Auschwitz Primo Levi encontró a una mujer a la que había conocido años atrás, y dice que durante el viaje se contaron cosas que no cuentan los vivos, que sólo se atreven a decir en voz alta los que ya están del otro lado de la muerte” (42). This comment is a foreshadow of what is to come and, equally, it echoes with shadows of the past. After the loss of the markers of being human and individual (autonomy, place in society or nation,¹ possessions, bodily integrity, sense of control, and freedom), there is little left with which to prove one’s existence other than one’s own story. In telling it, the speaker retains his or her sense of having a history, an existence, a self. It is also a way to give voice to grief, since “To bear witness, finally, is an act of mourning” (Robert 47). For Muñoz Molina, as for many, Levi’s story, with its noted *ritegno* that does not mitigate in the slightest its painful honesty, is an exemplar of Sephardic and Holocaust testimony.

Muñoz Molina’s narrative reconstruction provides a faithful reflection of the sense of dislocation and the resulting trauma that Levi, as a literary character and on a metaphoric level, provides. What Levi himself wrote is but one connecting thread that draws together not only the implied messages of *Sefarad* but also those of the photographic project that commemorated the experiences of the Spaniards incarcerated at Mauthausen. Levi’s act of sifting through his experiences related to Auschwitz is intimate and personal, belonging to Levi himself as they do. Yet Levi’s memoirs resound and cast a shadow over all who suffered in the camps, Jew or not. One of his best-known works, *The Drowned and the Saved*, with the widely-cited chapter “The Gray Zone,” provides a backdrop for Levi, and it also can be applied to the Spanish survivors of Mauthausen, whose stories are compiled in the Catalan-authored *Memòria de*

l'infern. Its findings are also reflected in, and reflected against, David Wingate Pike's historical review of the work camp where the majority of the Spanish prisoners were sent, and where so many lost their lives. *Memòria* reflects the need for testimony, framed within history and brought close by paratext, which in this case is the photograph that accompanies each individual's recollection of the time spent imprisoned in Austria. In Pike's version, there is a need most of all to document and show proof of what to this day beggars belief in its cruelty and inhumanity.

Mauthausen was not intended to become an extermination camp. Not originally a destination for Jewish prisoners, it contained POWs and political prisoners. Jews were on occasion sent there, and a systematic extermination of its inhabitants occurred, just as in other camps. The largest group of POWs consisted of Soviets, and the second largest was the Spaniards, many of whom were deemed stateless because neither Franco nor the French Vichy government nor Hitler cared about their fate (Pike xii). Camps were classified in one of three categories: those with rehabilitable prisoners (Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Auschwitz I [Gleiwitz]); those with prisoners charged with crimes deemed more serious yet still rehabilitable (Buchenwald, Auschwitz III [Buna-Monowitz], Flossenbürg, and Neuengamme); and, finally those, considered irredeemable and not ever to be allowed to go free (Mauthausen, Gross-Rosen, and Auschwitz II [Birkenau]) (Pike 14). Next was a sub-constellation of camps called *Nebenlager*; eventually, many of the Mauthausen prisoners remained there only for a quarantine period, after which they were sent on to the subsidiary forced labor camps that fell under this recent category (Pike 18-19). Prisoners were identified by a colored badge on their uniforms. Blue was for prisoners stripped of their nationality, but "it was only worn by Spanish Republicans and some stateless Russians" (Pike 15). Meantime, red was for political prisoners (Pike 16).

Pike's findings are striking, not only for their documentary value, but also because he makes his position clear in terms of his admiration for the Spaniards. For Pike, "the Spanish community serves ideally as a case-study," and, he explains, this is because "firstly, no national community emerged from Mauthausen with a general reputation as high as theirs; and secondly [...] no other national group succeeded in placing so many of its members in key positions as clerks or assistants (the key to personal survival) in the SS administration" (Pike xiii). In 1941, Spaniards constituted 61% of the Mauthausen prison population, and more of them were murdered by the SS than died of hunger or illness (Pike 12-13); the implication is that Spanish defiance attracted the rage of their guards, and that they did not passively wait for death by starvation. Part of that propensity to resist included their determination to collect and maintain documentation, and "the evidence that remains, especially the photographic evidence, is entirely the work of Spaniards" (Pike xiii). Mauthausen is the only camp, besides the fragments remaining from the *Nebenlager*, that produced accurate statistics following the liberation (Pike 11).

And yet, when they returned to Spain or to France, the Spaniard's stories disappeared, almost the way they themselves did when categorized as stateless, and thus nonexistent. They suffered the same fate Levi did; when he first wrote his memoirs, Italy was still emerging from the nightmare of the war. The country was still fragile and not in the mood for stories of concentration camps and what the citizens suffered within them. This silence might also revolve around issues of guilt, shame, and complicity. An eternal question haunts the entirety of Levi's memoirs. To wit: who, after all, among the survivors is entirely blameless? For even if one has done nothing other than live when one's neighbor has died, survival carries along with it the shame and uncertainty related to survivor's guilt and the question, why me, and not the other?² Historian Pike is unforgiving of the kind of self-questioning that articulates shame with issues of guilt, and declares that, "The Italian survivor Primo Levi presented, just before his suicide in 1987, a harrowing thesis that the survivors were in the main not the best but the worst: the selfish, the violent, the insensitive" (27). Pike judges Levi's posture as "extreme pessimism" and (rather nastily, in my opinion) states that his attitude is "no doubt linked to the depression that killed him" (27). Pike's narration of Spanish experiences of the camps sees efficacy as the key to survival, stating that, "Perhaps the secret of survival in this implacable world was this: to concentrate upon one tiny act of resistance, or if that were impossible, to construct some little corner –if not of tangible form, then a corner of the mind—where nothing could intrude upon human dignity, a corner proof against all pressures to conform, all efforts to degrade" (Pike 27).

Ex post facto difficulty with issues of guilt and shame may have worked to suppress testimonial narrative at its outset; though the victim might wish to speak, the intended recipient of the testimony was not yet ready to listen. And, just as Levi struggled to be heard, the Catalan survivors have been overshadowed, at least to a degree, by the silence imposed by the Franco regime and later the *pacto de olvido* that allowed Spain to ostensibly maintain cohesion following the death of the dictator.³ It might also be that, since *Memòria* is written in Catalan, this text has remained inaccessible to those who do not have a command of the language. It could be because many of the Republicans in Mauthausen were themselves Catalan. In any case, their narratives beg to be heard.

Memòria offers an intimate and tangible retelling of Montserrat Roig's documentary investigation that was published in 1977 under the title, *Els catalans als camps nazis*. Its implied message is not as defiant as the one promulgated by Pike that emerges from an impassioned historian's perspective. Simply, each individual told his or her story to David Bassa; photographer Jordi Ribó, for his part, contributed the visual imagery. The result was published as a book in a collection and accompanied by a museum exhibit.⁴ The former prisoners are elderly now, and their close-up portrait shots show the face and the person's hands. The hands are old and veiny and weathered. The faces are those of grandparents; sweet, aged, tempered by a lifetime of experience. Some visages are peaceful, while in others it is clear that emotional wounds have left scars. This set-up is deliberate, so that, "The reader is thus visually

persuaded to imagine the same face fifty years before as each witness recalls his or her tale of suffering and resistance. In each black-and-white portrait, the deep creases in the skin and the bright eyes, emphasised by the dark background, induce contrast and emotion” (Loew 27). Each story begins with a name, a birthplace, and the person’s prison number and date of incarceration. All narratives tell how the individual ended up in the camps; an anecdote or two that stands out in memory and is mediated by Bassa’s accompanying commentary; and, finally, word of the former prisoner’s eventual settlement, be it a return to Spain, permanent residence in France, or, for some, marriage in Austria and citizenship there.

Arrival at the camp is a pivotal event, and many survivors recount it as a memory that is a synecdoche for the entire experience. Levi himself notes of Auschwitz that there is an element of theater involved in the suffering that he and his fellow internees endured therein. Regarding the routine gestures of cruelty meted out to newcomers, he states: “it is difficult to say whether all these details were devised by some expert or methodically perfected on the basis of experience, but they certainly were willed and not casual: it was all staged, as was quite obvious” (Levi 39). Thus it went, precisely, for the newcomers to Mauthausen. The opening ritual that accompanied the arrival attracted much attention in Pike’s account as it did in Levi’s; it was a moment of psychological rupture designed to destroy the morale of the prisoners and was unforgettable, no matter how it was reconstructed at a later date. These mortifying experiences include: having one’s identification papers taken, one’s head shaved, one’s clothes removed, all personal effects confiscated, and then physical tortures such as scalding hot showers that suddenly turned freezing, or beatings (Pike 22). For the Germans, “the Spaniards were dedicated antifascists who had fought the Germans and Italians in Spain, and as inveterate enemies of Nazi Germany they deserved the worst that Germany could devise” (Pike 11).

One elderly gentleman memorialized by Bassa and Ribó, Manel Alfonso i Ortells, remembers that the deportees were shocked by what awaited them outside of the train that delivered them to Mauthausen. One of his companions, he recollects, exclaimed, “It is full of SS!” while outside, “*Raus! Raus!* [Out! Out!], the soldiers began shouting over the barking of the dogs who, leashed, seemed to want to break their ties [and] attack the prisoners” (92).⁵ The recollection of just how terrifying it was is a commonplace in the narratives; over and over, stories such as this one, or that of Antoni Ibern i Eroles, form an ubiquitous facet of what is never to be forgotten. Ibern i Eroles relates his arrival, describing it thusly: “--*Raus!* -- And a blow to the buttocks. -- *Raus!* -- And a shove to the ground. --- *Raus!* -- And a kick. -- *Raus! Raus!* It was madness [Bassa relates], an orgy of violence in which the Republicans, stiff after three days of immobility and frozen after enduring [a voyage of] seventy-two hours, moved like puppets. They seemed like a flock of terrorized sheep, in the middle of a circle of hungry wolves” (77).

Next, they were shaved, disinfected, and dressed in camp clothes, a process that Josep Egea i Pujante related was “a morally humiliating experience because those who shaved them used worn-out machines that didn’t only cause pain but also drew blood” (Bassa 222). Francesc Batista i Bayle

reconstructs his arrival, accompanied by the shouts of “*Schweigen!*” [Quickly!] and “*Raus!*”, and Bassa explains, “Nobody understood them but the blows educated quickly and in few minutes, they [the prisoners] found themselves walking in the snow in military formations, in columns of five, and saying not a word” (Bassa 132). A Spanish-speaking guard (not identified) told them, upon arrival in the main of the camp, “*Véis esas chimeneas, ¡pues por ahí es por donde saldréis! No hay más salida de este campo y lo único que podéis hacer es trabajar y obedecer. Sólo así podréis alargar vuestras vidas...*” (Bassa 133). This utterance was doubly shocking, coming from a Spaniard who apparently had no sympathy for his own brethren. Batista i Bayle’s memory of the arrival tells of “one of the guards who, knowing Spanish, would translate what an SS was saying. Terrible wishes with an impassive smile, as much as on the part of the official as on that of the guard” and, Bassa writes, “That day, Francesc learned a new word in German: *Krematorium*” (133).

Levi’s account of the Nazi lager locates the gray zone, or area, in a psychological and ethical sphere. In the mediated reconstructions provided by Bassa’s narratives of his subjects’ memories and Ribó’s photographs, the dominant metaphor offered by the former prisoners aligns with Levi’s experiences on a combined visual and literary plane. Spaniards were not just in Mauthausen, but also at Dachau and Ravensbrück (Bassa 371). No matter the camp, the sense of shock and disbelief cuts across all narratives. The road to Dachau was described as “a hellish journey” by Ramon Buj i Ferrer (Bassa 399), while “the night there was surrealistic,” said Joan Escuer (Bassa 381). At Mauthausen, Francesc Aura found that “everything was so bestially surrealist and so exaggeratedly absurd that it could not be real” (Bassa 249). The incomprehensible cruelty of the entrance ritual was subsequently reiterated via the continued abuse meted out by guards, and “programmed hunger was to serve as the means to destroy not just intellectual ability but the reasoning faculty itself” (Pike 24).

The Spaniards, however, according to the history detailed by Pike, had some agency, in that, “Fate was determined by solidarity and collective defence” (26). It was possible to resist, if one kept one’s wits about him, and, “A Spanish survivor writes that the only way to survive was not to let the mind dwell on the atrocities of the day and to keep calm and vigilant. Another recalls that it was important, whenever struck, never to fall to the ground [because] “If you fell, it was usually the end; you would be beaten [even more viciously], or kicked and incapacitated”” (Pike 26-27). Describing the close of his first day, one prisoner relates: “Everything we had had been taken from us. We had the feeling that we were nothing, simply *Stücke*. It was to foster the sentiment that the whole system had been invented”” (Pike 48). And a word that struck fear into the prisoners’ hearts was one they learned well because they heard it often. When Himmler came for an inspection, for instance, he asked who the prisoners were, and upon hearing that they were Spanish “Reds” his response was “--*Den Krematorium!*” he shouted, “To the Krematorium!” and the listening Spaniards were terrified (Bassa 136).

This language barrier reinforced the sense of terror and helplessness. One such memory is that of Josep Jornet i Navarro, who entered Mauthausen in December of 1940. As related by Bassa, ‘--*Häftling?*’--the soldier asked him” and “Josep looked at him with an uncomprehending face, but the soldier insisted, now shouting, ‘Prisoner?’ And Josep did not know what the soldier was saying but he struck him. The language of blows needs little translation, and as Josep stood there and hyperventilated, the SS guard assigned him his new number: --*Fünf drei acht vier! Fünf drei acht vier! Ein! Häftling?--Fünf drei acht vier...*” (286). Daily life was full of horrible contradictions and uncertainty, and cruel plays on words were painful, especially when in reference to food. The prisoners would be sent out from their blocks to go “esmorzar” which was a joke, since “the kapos had the cruelty to speak of it in those terms, when it was nothing other than a bowl of blackish water that, not even remotely, resembled coffee. A bowl of water and nothing else. And hard labor, designed to kill a prisoner within days, awaited; “To the quarry!” the kapo would shout...” (81). And make no mistake; the kapos were so erratic that death could come “according to the mood of the soldier” (Pike 62).

Pike’s historical study is thorough, meticulously researched, and supported by an extensive range of sources, ranging from oral testimony to statistics, camp records, photographs, and later corroborative reports. He systematically evaluates survivor narratives and chastises, by name, those who appear to have exaggerated what they suffered in the camps. His depiction of Mauthausen and the inmates therein is not sensationalist even as he explicitly describes the suffering and degradation that the inmates experienced. Yet he is strangely unforgiving of Levi. It is as though he feels the need to defend the Spaniards’ work in the camps against what Levi wrote about what the Auschwitz survivor viewed as a species of petty collaboration, those who constituted the gray in the Gray Zone. In contrast, Bassa and Ribó’s portrayal of the survivors of Mauthausen in *Memòria* gives names and faces and stories to what Levi himself portrayed in Auschwitz: the horrible, frightening arrival, the hunger, the fear, and the ambivalence at what to tell and whom to tell it to that is the lot of survivors.

Perhaps Muñoz Molina captured the uncertain thread of the testimonial narrative when he wrote, in *Sefarad*, of the displaced Jews, “No eres una sola persona y no tienes una sola historia, y ni tu cara ni tu oficio ni las demás circunstancias de tu vida pasada o presente permanecen invariables. El pasado se mueve y los espejos son imprevisibles” (143). If the camp survivors’ stories are constrained by ambivalence and alienation, then the memories of a child who has grown up and is returning in search of her past have their own circumscription. Yet equally, such memories reach deep into the history of Spain in an attempt to make sense of the present. Indeed, *el pasado se mueve*.

Trudi Alexy, who settled finally in the United States, where she worked as a family therapist and writer until her death, was born in Romania and took refuge with her family in Barcelona during part of World War II. Before taking refuge in Spain, Alexy’s family ostensibly converted to Catholicism in an effort to survive. Alexy’s presentation of her story is intimately personal, and her book, *The Mezuzah in*

the Madonna's Foot, is a memoir of her attempt to retrieve her own history with a return to Spain and via interviews of Jewish survivors who had availed themselves of Spanish aid. *Mezuzah* is intended for a popular audience, rather than a scholarly one. Its content fixes on vexing themes, with its central concern the role of Spain and the Peninsula's response, not only to the Holocaust of the 20th century but also to the purges, expulsions, and atrocities of earlier times. Alexy foregrounds the personal, stating that, "The paradox of Jews seeking and finding refuge in Spain at that time, as Jews, hounded me" and asking, "Why would Jews, by the thousands, seek refuge there? Was there any truth to the story that nearly all who did [request asylum] not only survived but [also] found the Spanish people to be remarkably hospitable, generous, and willing to risk arrest (or worse) to help them?" (12).

Alexy defends her motives for returning to Spain, recognizing that this idea might seem incomprehensible. Her childhood had been pleasant and uneventful; like Levi's, it was not marked by any strong sense of being Jewish. Indeed, "until that fateful day in 1939, when Father announced we would become Catholic because 'it was not safe to be Jews,' religion had been a non-issue in our thoroughly assimilated family" (14). With this twist, one that is reminiscent of the fate of the Sephardim and their history of forced conversion followed by exile, her own journey, first that of self-preservation and, later, the one of self-reconstruction, began. Like those who survived, "my guilt over surviving by fraud while so many others perished as Jews pursued me into my adult life" (14). For her, "Spain held the key to my finding that lost Jewish part of me" (18). But time was of the essence. Alexy was "aware that [first-hand testimony would be derived from people who] were quite elderly and their stories might be lost forever if [she] did not hurry" (19).

One couple with whom she spoke, Mendel and Ruchel Slucki of Warsaw, landed eventually in Southern California by way of France, Spain, and Cuba. The two saw a symmetry in their travel through Spain. Mendel Slucki says of their refugee flight, "I thought about the ironic destiny of the Jewish people. Nearly five hundred years before, our ancestors had crossed this spot from Spain into France to save their lives. Now, here we were, crossing from France into Spain for the same reason. That is the way Jewish people have survived for centuries" (Alexy 148). They also found a conscious desire to rectify the past in the help that they were given. Mendel related that "a lady [who helped them] told us that she felt Spaniards owed the Jewish people a debt because of what they did to Jews during the Inquisition" (Alexy 154-55).

Not everyone thought that a return to Spain was logical, and responses to Alexy's project were echoed by Jewish groups and her own family. In effect, "Jews of Spanish ancestry (Sephardim) basically dismissed the project as an 'Ashkenazic issue,' while Central and Eastern Jews wanted nothing to do with 'anti-Semitic Spain,' which had been allied with Hitler" (66). In addition, a representative of a "major Jewish organization" sent the author a letter that recited a list of reasons why she should not seek goodness in Spanish history (66). Alexy wrote back in defense of Spain, declaring that, "The fact that

thousands of Jews are alive today because they were granted asylum in Spain during the Holocaust deserves to be told and remembered” (66). But, she says, “that letter went unanswered” (66). Alexy’s mother also contested her memories, saying that they “were scared all the time,” and asking “[why do] you want to make Spain look good?” (66).

Alexy’s efforts echo the findings of Rabbi Chaim Lipschitz, an American who sought to unravel the contradictions between word and deed associated with Spain’s reception of Jewish refugees. He notes that Franco’s anti-Semitic comments were not in correspondence with his actions and finds that there were “at least 45,000 Jews who [without asylum in Spain] would have otherwise almost certainly have perished at the hands of the Nazis” (3-4). The rabbi experienced trepidation regarding the publication of this information and wondered, “Should I, then, as an American Jew and a rabbi, put myself in the position of appearing to sanction this regime by publishing my findings?” (5). He acknowledges that, “while the pattern of intervention leading toward saving Jews from extermination was widespread and continuous, it was not always consistent. There did exist instances where opportunities for rescue by the Spanish government were not acted upon” (6). Lipschitz found that refugee organizations were allowed to work as long as they were not officially declared relief organizations, and he learned that border guards, often, were simply lax about entry papers (138). Negligence, to the benefit or to the detriment of refugees, was also rooted in pragmatic and financial concerns, and “Only after Spain’s refugee burden was alleviated did Franco actively seek to protect non-Spanish Jews, as well as Sephardim in Nazi-occupied territories, from extermination” (140). Yet, although Lipschitz relates that Jews were given asylum in Spain and in Spanish embassies in occupied countries, it seemed that “These facts, although amply documented, are considered by many too controversial and contradictory to be true and have remained lost in conjecture” (79).

Alexy’s testimony, granted authority by her repeated insistence that she, personally, spoke with people who were there, contradicts this conclusion; though written more for Alexy’s benefit than that of Spain’s reputation and treatment by history, her interviews consistently relate that Spaniards were actively willing to help the refugees. The personal findings of both Alexy and Lipschitz are supported by historical record. For instance, “At no time did Spain play a major direct role in Hitler’s policy, which consigned the entire Mediterranean primarily to the Italian sphere of influence” (Payne 31). Rather, “Hitler had attained his two main goals--a longer Spanish conflict that distracted and divided his adversaries while Franco moved inexorably toward triumph, and a friendly antileftist regime in Spain [...], which guaranteed shipments of key raw materials to Germany” (Payne 31). In part, “the latent differences between the German and Spanish regimes were revealed by the fate of a special cultural agreement negotiated with Germany at the same time [which] was never ratified, mainly because of opposition by the leaders of the Spanish Church, who feared inundation with pagan Nazi racist propaganda” (Payne 31). In response, “Berlin was disappointed, but the issue was secondary at a time

when the most pressing German interests in Spain were economic” (Payne 31). While there was not active malice against the Jews, apparently, neither was there a notable rejection of Hitler on the part of Spanish military and political authority.

Yet, following the beginning of Allied domination in 1944, Spain became less connected with Hitler’s policies; self-interest, here, was a factor. “Playing the Jewish card,” as Payne terms it, regarding the existence of the Sephardim, was one way for Spain to ingratiate herself, since “the Spanish regime [had] few other credentials of that sort to present after its long collaboration with Hitler” (Payne 232). Response was enthusiastic. To wit, “Though not uniformly, American Jewish organizations generally expressed gratitude for Spanish efforts, and their praise reached its apotheosis in the lengthy report that [head of the World Jewish Congress, Maurice] Perlzweig delivered to the meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Atlantic City in November 1944” (Payne 232). Israel was unimpressed, and after a vote to not admit Spain to the United Nations in 1949, “the Spanish Foreign Ministry quickly whipped out two slightly differing pamphlets, *Spain and the Sephardic Jews* and *España y los judíos*, portraying Franco as the savior of the Jews” (Payne 232). These were accepted and “various Jewish spokesmen and writers have continued to echo Perlzweig’s sentiments down to the present time, most prominently the American rabbi Chaim Lipschitz, author of the [above-mentioned] book *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (1984)” (Payne 233).

The response on the part of Alexy’s mother to her daughter’s desire to return to Spain is not different from that of Jewish groups and world organizations. Her ambivalence toward Spain is lessened only by recollection of personal experience. After the initial rejection, Alexy relates, her mother softened and recalled good things about Spain, finally saying, “I hated the fear, but I loved Spain” (68). This declaration leads the older woman to remember how, “The Germans were everywhere [...] but the Spanish people were different, they were wonderful” (69). At this, the mother tells how they supported themselves by making gloves. She made samples and went to a department store, “the Martí-Martí department store, the biggest one in Barcelona at the time” (70). Its owner, Mr. Martí-Martí, liked her product and made a substantial order, but she had to confess that she was a penniless refugee and could not afford to purchase enough leather to fill it. The man wrote a note to his supplier, Alexy’s mother says, and told him to give her what she needed, with no proof that she would complete the order and no credit statement, either. “Yes, the Spaniards knew we were refugees but they were wonderful to us,” she concludes (70).

Many of those interviewed by Alexy had warm recollections of individual Spaniards. The remembered decency is attributed to both political leaning and to human goodness. One woman, Nina Mitrani, who went from Poland to Paris and then to Barcelona, where she still lived at the time of her interview, related that “Catalans were mostly against Franco, and the people here understood the suffering of the refugees well, because they, themselves, were treated so badly by Franco’s people”

(Alexy 97). Mitrani recalls that, “Despite how hard things were for [the Spaniards] during the war, they were generous and treated us incredibly well” (Alexy 97). In an echo of Lipschitz’s findings regarding benign neglect of duty, Mitrani described her journey across the border between France and Spain. Then a young woman, she found herself confronted by three members of the Guardia Civil. Rather than running, she sat down and told them she was not going anywhere, not returning across the border, not taking another step. And, Mitrani said, “First they looked at one another, not sure what to do with me. I must have looked a fright, after spending three days climbing in those mountains” (Alexy 94). Then, she says, they whispered together a moment and made a decision: “they said I could pass, but first I had to give each one of them a kiss!” The girl was saved by fate in the form of a gunshot in the distance. Mitrani thinks that they became frightened; in any case, they left her alone, and she made it safely to Barcelona (Alexy 94).

Another pair of former refugees that Alexy interviewed was Hilde and Peter (no last name given), a mother and son who went from Vienna to Barcelona. At the time of the interviews, they lived in an unidentified area of the United States. Trauma and detachment are central to their story. The difference between the way the mother, Hilde, remembers their time in Spain and the way the son, Peter, recollects it is poignant. Hilde’s memory of the prison where she was held until her papers were processed denies her child’s suffering. She explains that “There were hundreds of refugees in that prison, most all of them Jews caught trying to escape from Hitler,” and the nuns and priests would bring their children to visit; although the children would weep for their parents, she “wasn’t worried about Peter, because I knew he was well taken care of” (106). But Peter objects, saying, “I was very fearful” and reminding her that “I was not yet three. The priests at the Catholic institution scared me. All I remember is black” (106). He says, “I remember always being hungry” and recalls the beatings when he was caught for stealing food, and how the other children were orphans who only spoke Spanish, and how nobody had enough to eat (106).

One way of mitigating the pain of the memories did seem to be drawn from a reframing of them within a larger trajectory of Jewish migration to and from Spain. Several of the people interviewed drew an explicit connection between Spain’s medieval history and the present. Leon Nussbaum, who was from Vienna and who went to France and then to Spain before settling in Canada, crossed over the mountains and through a tunnel. There, the Spaniards protected the refugees from the Nazis. During this passage, he says, “I wondered, could the roads on which we came *into Spain* possibly be the same roads other Jews took to get *out of Spain* nearly five hundred years before, trying to escape persecution by the Inquisition?” (126). His experiences with Spaniards supports Alexy’s memory of them as being helpful and generous; when his refugee group arrived at the coal-mining town of Puente de Suerte, he had nowhere to go, he relates, but a passerby took him home to wife and son. Dinner was only cornmeal mush and coffee, with the two saccharine tablets that they saved for special occasions going to the guest.

They gave him what they had as though he were family. Nussbaum explains that the father had been a refugee himself, so he understood the plight of the exhausted stranger. “Here was this poor, poor man, and he *did* care” said Nussbaum, adding, “I was never afraid the Spaniards would turn us over to the Germans. Never. They *protected* us!” (126-127).

Individual stories that put a human face on the suffering remain more vivid and tangible than what may be gleaned from historical record. The Alexy interviews, consequently, enrich and are enriched by their symbolic affinity to the aim of the Bassa and Ribó collaboration that, in turn, was a response to Roig’s journalistic intervention. Roig’s documentation, its treatment by Bassa and Ribó in their project, and its eventually filtering through a historicist’s lens by Pike, reconstruct events, each in its own fashion, just as did Alexy’s return to the source and act of interviewing individual, and thus humanized, survivors. Levi, in his time, wondered if “Perhaps the dreadful gift of pity for the many is granted only to saints” and lamented that the anonymous masses are either forgotten or condemned (56). Chiming in with his fictional voice, Muñoz Molina’s narrator contends that “No eres una sola persona y no tienes una sola historia” (143). There is ambivalence in facing back, in the direction of the shadow of Raquel, towards which Alexy’s return seems to have ventured, or forward, to the omnipresent ghosts of contemporary history, to the gray zone with blue and red triangles floating through it in Mauthausen. In the present, it is the individual voice that speaks the loudest.

Pere Vives i Clavé’s letters to his family and to his friend, the poet Augustí Bartra, loop forward once again. They do help to connect the lacunae between historic and/or documentary evidence of the loss entailed by the Republicans following the Civil War and the experiences of the Jewish refugees in Spain and their interactions with everyday Spaniards as recorded by Alexy. At this juncture, where Spain’s history intersects with that of the world tragedy that is the Holocaust, recollections of loss predominate, insofar as “The survivors’ memory of the camps in France is by definition a memory of the dead; thousands of Spanish internees died of disease or war-related injuries between 1939 and 1944” (Cate-Arries 72). Like the individuals memorialized by Roig, Bassa, and Ribó, Vives i Clavé ultimately arrives at Mauthausen.

Bartra’s introduction to *Cartes des dels camps de concentració* frames the collected letters in an intimate fashion, one that offers a loving reconstruction of physical description, memory, facts, and history. It begins with Bartra’s recollection of his friend’s face. Warm memories are subsequently contrasted with autobiographic detail that relates their shared time at the detention camp in Agde and the friendship forged therein (5-8); biographic description (he was born in Barcelona on the 24th of February, 1910) rounds out the depiction of the young man (8). There are 42 letters, all sent by Vives i Clavé during his imprisonment in France and Austria. Most are written in Catalan, some in Spanish, and a few in French. Within the missives, there is a “spiritual richness and human interest” just as much as there is, Bartra insists, a “document of our times that I believe relates to all of us, and to the future...”

(10). Tangible artifacts provide both solace and a reopening of old wounds. Proof of his friend's fate, which Bartra wishes to disbelieve, is in a letter sent by Vives i Clavé's sister, who describes the identity card that her brother signed upon entering Mauthausen: the weak, shaky signature spoke volumes about the cardholder's physical state (9).

The first letters are to Bartra. The prisoner is upbeat, saying in one letter that he has made in St. Cyprien three Catalan friends (17). He says that he will write to British authorities because "every day I am liking more the idea of going to London" (18). In the next, he complains that the French know how to make the most wretched camps possible, and that he has been transferred to "the most inhospitable, the most hateful, the most *hideux* of all" (19), but in subsequent letters, he speaks of poetry and the joy of getting letters from Bartra; soon, he is happily installed in a "deliciós" spot: the sick bay, with its small library, and books by Joyce and Gabriel Miró (21). Vives i Clavé marvels at the bad luck of being in a war camp, but he will try to keep his spirits up, he writes, and will speak of other things as though the rest were not happening (22). And so he does, relating stories of daily life, the friends he makes, and some small and petty difficulties, while leaving aside any despair at the uncertainty that he and his camp-mates face. By August, Vives i Clavé is writing with comparisons of García Lorca's poetry to Bartra's, saying that his friend's work is better (28). The letters show a lively intellect, one belonging to a person who seems to wish to impress Bartra with erudition, or perhaps it is only a young man's bravado in the face of the unknown. Rather than complaints, he writes about Dumas and Joyce and Galdós and Faust (29). Bartra, in the introduction, says of his friend that, "He believed in poetry as if were a magical essential being, and he considered it potentially as a vehicle of individual and collective salvation" (qtd in Cate-Arries 192).

Letters make a huge difference, and the prisoner declares that in writing them, "I have the sensation that it helps me to leave the suffocation of the camps that in recent days have become insufferably oppressive" (31). But later, in a work camp, he is happier, and glad of his friendships (31); he is determined to be brave and cheerful, stating that, "I've fallen in with good people. The mayor, a socialist, is 'un *brave type*. Very human'" (32); and he continues to read and to take recourse in memories of having read authors such as Baudelaire and Rilke (34). This mood is followed by a down-turn, and the prisoner says, "the return to the camp--what a camp!--after the past month in Laignan produced in me an impression more or less as pained as the first night I spent in Argelés" (37). Later, thinking that he would be freed but again frustrated, Vives i Clavé writes that "the sensation of oppression was utterly violent and the impotence to resolve it in some way left me in a state [...] I think that the French have decided to liquidate the concentration camps at the end of the month. Thank God, the hell is over!" (41). He is young; thus, "to die in this bovine fashion is a thought that revolts me!" (42).

The prisoner also wants adventure, he says, declaring that, "The urge to go to America has come furiously back to me" (45). He tells Bartra not to think that he is sitting around complaining, though, and

that their friend Hernández will attest to it, no, he is not sitting around chewing his nails and whimpering. Indeed, he declares, “when the cold isn’t scaring me, I’m even in a good mood!” (46). By 1939, the prisoner writes to his friend and tells him that he can’t say where he is, but that he is okay, and that he is eating decently (48). The letters that are translated from German become darker, and missives directed to Bartra give way in the collection to notes written to Vives i Clavé’s family.

The prisoner writes to his family in Castilian, and the contrast between the literary references that characterize his correspondence with the poet, Bartra, and what he writes to his relatives is noteworthy. These letters are homey, not centered on what he reads, and they reveal a sorrowful outlook. In one, he writes, “Os escribo en horas de extrema angustia. ¿Qué va a pasar? Nadie lo sabe” (59). Later, though, from a work camp, “os mando un abrazo desde el pueblo donde trabajo actualmente. Estoy maravillosamente bien” (60); when they have apparently complained that he has not written, he says, “Hablo mucho de vosotras con los amigos. Y cuando hablo es como si ese pasado inexplicable se me hiciera de golpe demasiado grande para mi corazón y no me cupiera en él,” but he does not want to be sentimental and “de momento prefiero deciros que estoy bien y que pienso mucho en vosotras [...]. Mi estado moral es excelente. La dureza real del campo no influye más que muy poco sobre mí. No sería un hombre si me asustara ante los estados incómodos. Estoy bien, como mal y voy muy sucio. Pero sólo físicamente” (61). He alludes to difficulties, writing, “Hay otras cosas, otras muchas cosas de las que te iré hablando. Pero ¡por Dios! Mandarme cartas, aunque yo tardo en escribiros. A veces, no tenemos sellos” (63). Eventually, Vives i Clavé writes that his attempt to leave with a work camp has failed, so they can still write to him at Saint-Cyprien; this missive is dated November, 30th, 1939 (64-65). His loved ones should not be sad, he says in the next letter, for “esta Navidad vamos a jugar a no pensar en cosas desagradables. Que yo voy a pensar en vosotros y vosotros en mí cuidadosamente, a ver si podemos llenar un poco el vacío. Es un procedimiento sentimental, pero no se me ocurre otro” (66).

By the 25th of January, 1940, the prisoner apologizes for earlier letters full of sadness, and says that, “me parece que he dicho cosas brutales; perdonadme! Hoy me doy cuenta de la estupidez injuriosa de mis suposiciones” and, he insists, “No estamos mal. Sobretudo yo no estoy mal” (67). One Hernández is blue, though, and he asks someone named Pere to tell his friend’s family to write, saying “Él quiere mucho a su madre, que ha ejercido y ejerce una gran influencia sobre él, sobretudo en estos momentos en que nos hemos vuelto como unos chiquillos. Físicamente está bien, pero moralmente está pasando una mala temporada. Me parece que yo no puedo hacerle nada, y estoy seguro que le hace falta sentir que su madre piensa en él y cree en él” and suggesting that “Porqué no escribís las cartas juntos y nos las mandáis?” (67). This procedure would save money, and it cheers the Catalan prisoners to think that their families on the outside are getting to be friends by way of collective letter-writing and news-sharing, he

says (67). At the end of the month, he is well. A French woman who has been sending him letters through a religious charity gave him 100 francs so that he could buy stamps (69-70).

Time passes, and only hope remains. Vives i Clavé writes, “Esperar no es una solución, ya lo sé, pero buscar soluciones en estos momentos equivale a una tentativa desesperada de suicidio o de ingreso en un manicomio. Esperar es una manera -- provisional -- de aceptar la vida” (74); he still hates the cold and “comemos bien, mi trabajo es casi nulo, recibo libros” so he cannot say that he is so badly off, but in a switch to Catalan, he says that he wants good food (“bons aliments”) (75). He is homesick, and by March 1940, a big problem is the laundry. One friend fights the good fight and tries to stay clean; another has decided to give up, and Vives i Clavé is in the middle. Though he would like to toss aside all notions of decency and let dirt win, he says, “Yo... Yo, aunque la decisión de Arnal me atrajo con una seducción pavorosa, no tengo su valor y pacto con el enemigo. A veces... lavo. De una manera tan rudimentaria e inútil” but, even if he cannot become truly clean, he says, he does his best (77).

1941 arrives. Vives i Clavé’s letters are written in French and they are short, rote, and frightening. “Je suis prisonniere de guerre et en bonne santé” is all that he is allowed to write in the few remaining letters (86). In the end, Pere Vives i Clavé was the victim of a Nazi medical experiment. His heart was injected with gasoline, and he died in agony as a result at a Mauthausen work camp in 1941.

From the medieval era forward, the shadow of Raquel cast itself throughout and over the nation-building process of Spain; the eroticized Other stood in for what the Self was not, and what it yearned to both destroy and embody. Today, memory projects, trauma theories, witnessing, and archival reconstruction come to the fore in reaction to the end of the conscripting narratives bound by the *pacto del olvido*. In the end, Muñoz Molina’s novel speaks directly to its readers; his narrator, in a chapter entitled “Eres,” folds everyone into this “you are,” from Laura García Lorca’s act of guiding the narrator through her uncle Federico’s house (446) to the musing on what Baruch Spinoza felt upon commencing his journey of exile (446-447) to Levi’s feelings as he left his home in Turin. Its refrain is “Eres después de todo judío y sabes lo que es el temor” (447), because “eres cualquiera y eres nadie, quien tú inventas o recuerdas y quien inventan y recuerdan otros” (452). Ultimately, the “eres” reader, this *you*, is nothing more and nothing less than the you “quien mira su normalidad perdida desde el otro lado del cristal que te separa de ella, quien entre las rendijas de las tablas de un vagón de deportados mira las últimas casas de la ciudad que creyó suya y a la que nunca volverá” (463).

Muñoz Molina was inspired by “The Gray Zone” and perhaps, as a consequence, used a version of its conclusion for himself in his novel.⁶ Levi, in the final lines of that chapter, reminds his reader that “[...] we too are so dazzled by power and prestige as to forget our essential fragility. Willingly or not we come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting” (69). This train metaphor does not signal a contemporary reprise of the ancient wound that is the forced departure of

the Sephardim. Rather, as Levi makes clear, the train represents the death that comes for every living human being. Thus, if it is Raquel who speaks to the past, then the questions that the Italian Sephardi's work asks are what interrogate the present. His shadow reaches across the centuries and stretches to touch hers. Yet today, as Spain recovers its most recent history, it is Levi's shadow that casts itself the furthest, covering a communal ground, reminding us of the past and of the common future that everyone shares, of the final journey that awaits all of us.

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Notes

¹ The study of memory and nationalism is fraught. Olick reminds us that, "Memory and the nation have a peculiar synergy. Even when other identities compete with or supplant the national in postmodernity, they draw on--and are increasingly nostalgic for--the uniquely powerful forms of memory generated in the crucible of the nation-state" (2).

² Trauma theory offers competing narratives. With respect to shame, the performativity theories and anti-mimetic tendencies that have recently gained currency are faulty, according to Ruth Leys, who states that the "antiintentionalist, anticognitive position embraced by shame theorists [Donald Nathanson, Bernard Williams, Eve Sedgwick, Giorgio Agamben, and Eslbeth Probyn] cannot be sustained not only because it is theoretically incoherent but also because the empirical-experimental evidence is flawed" (126 "Guilt"). Questions of guilt vs. shame are also contentious. Levi was merciless in his self-questioning regarding issues of guilt and shame, and has stated that, "In my opinion, the feeling of shame or guilt that coincided with reacquired freedom was extremely composite: it contained diverse elements, and in diverse proportions for each individual. It must be remembered that each of us, both objectively and subjectively, lived the Lager in his own way" (75). Leys observes that "Levi's insight is compatible with the psychoanalytic notion of survivor guilt" (24). For his part, Levi parses reasons for guilt in many of his works, though he contends that, "Few survivors felt guilty about having deliberately damaged, robbed, or beaten a companion. [...] By contrast, almost everybody feels guilty of having omitted to offer help" (78). For Leys's response to the "crisis of witnessing," see *Trauma: A Geneology* and Hacking, who dissects contexts and diagnostic trends in psychoanalysis.

³ Refer to Loew for discussion of Montserrat Roig's desire to tell the Catalan story via her 1977 book *Els catalans als camps nazis*. The exhibit at the Museu de Granollers in Barcelona that accompanied the publication of Bassa and Ribó's collection was a communal act of witness and mourning intended to rectify the oblivion regarding the

Catalan prisoners. The use of photographs to realize this aim was deliberate, in that “On the one hand, they [their subjects] are individuals, thanks to the fact that each can tell and recover his or her own story. On the other, they symbolise a collective trauma due to the formal repetition in each photograph” (Loew 28).

⁴ Photography and memory study finds that, “As markers of collective memory, photographs are most useful when they symbolize socially shared concepts or beliefs” (Griffin 147). In the instance of the *Memòria* project, “The aim of this [sic] objective data is apparently to establish a link with the younger generations, who have lost touch with this part of their people’s history. Bassa [who wrote the text] and Ribó [the photographer] are thus attempting to remind Catalan citizens of their own past” (Loew 30).

⁵ All translations from Catalan to English are mine; unless otherwise noted.

⁶ In the final chapter of *Sefarad*, the narrator asks if his implied audience has read Levi, whose family, he reminds, left Spain in 1492 (550). In the *Nota de lecturas* coda, Muñoz Molina declares that he invented very little of what is in this novel, that of the stories, “algunos les he escuchado contar y llevaban mucho tiempo en mi memoria. Otros he encontrado en los libros” (597) and declares of Levi that, “no creo que sea posible tener una conciencia política cabal sin haber leído [*La Tregua* y *Los Abogados y los Salvados*], ni una idea de la literatura que no incluya el ejemplo de esa manera de escribir” (599).