Forgotten Legacies: Verses from an Exile in (the) Feminine

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It has been more than 80 years now since the end of a Civil War that brought with it the exile of 1939 and marked the history of Spain forever. This exile, separated from dominant strategies and narratives of the nation-state of Franco's regime, left open wounds that remain unhealed to this day. It should be noted that there are as many different experiences of exile as there were exiled individuals. According to Josefina Cuesta in *La odisea de la memoria*, although the research on the Spanish Republican exile has not stopped growing in the last forty years, this bibliography remains incomplete. Among the necessary work still overdue is an in-depth study of the works of exiled women writers who have been relegated to an inferior peripheral position within exile studies. These women also represent spaces of memory and experiences of forced displacement. Therefore, I will attempt to contribute to the process of recovering some of these women writers

and their verses in exile, in order to give them the visibility and recognition they deserve. Additionally, I aim to highlight, in the itineraries of the Spanish exile in the Americas and its common conditions of uprooting, some of the differences among the first and second waves of exiles and their destinations.

Specifically, here I delve into the geographies of memory presented in some poems written in the Americas: Mexico, the USA and Puerto Rico. Through a brief selection of verses by Concha Méndez (1898-1986), Ernestina de Champourcin (1905-1999), Concha Zardoya (1914-2004) and Aurora de Albornoz (1926-1990), I will attempt to display exile and those experiences written under the effects of war and uprooting, with an emphasis placed on the condition of being written by women, and anchored in a nostalgia for a past. They deserve their own spaces within exile discourses and history books for their particular feminine experiences, alongside what for far too many years has been dominated by the writing and experiences of men.

Contextual Precedents and Places of Exile

As for the historical and social contexts of these women poets, it is important to point out that the most notable changes for women in Spain started in the 19th Century. Their activities began to stand out more in intellectual and political spaces through Emilia Pardo Bazán, Rosalía de Castro and Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer, followed by political activists such as Clara Campoamor, Margarita Nelken, Federica Montseny or Victoria Kent. At the turn of the 20th Century, with the founding of the Residencia de Señoritas, university education was promoted for women, and the Asociación Universitaria Femenina and the Lyceum Club aimed to develop social, cultural and literary activities for them. The access to education allowed for the literary empowerment of women and, consequently, an increase in women readers. One of the most important accomplishments of the Second Republic was the inclusion of women's rights in the Constitution of 1931. This acknowledged a new model of woman: modern, young and across-classes with professional as-

pirations, even transgressing traditional feminine appearance and destabilizing masculine norms. It is at this time of change that Concha Méndez and Ernestina de Champourcin came of age. Both were members of the Lyceum Club and contemporaries of the Generation of 27. Concha Zardoya and Aurora de Albornoz also experienced their important formative years during this time. These authors participated in and were witnesses to the social advances in civil society and the modernization of Spanish life and culture. Although all of them were advanced and erudite for their times, the social pressures in their creative environments and settings, the disapproval and oppression by their peers and families, the normative stereotypes, social censorship,[1] and lack of dedicated spaces and independence created a dependence on others for publishing and recognition of their work. This is not to mention the added difficulties of war, exile and dictatorship.[2]

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1 It is important to remember *Las sinsombrero*, who had stones thrown at them for taking their hats off in Puerta del Sol. In the documentary by Tania Balló and Capdevila, Maruja Mallo explained that the hat was something established by the social norm of the time (a sign for aristocracy, education, and privilege) and the attack with stones was an accusation and a call for attention because they were associated with the third sex.

2 I would like to point out that there are other understudied women who did take a more militant feminist position: women workers who went hand in hand with unions, such as the National Labor Confederation (CNT), the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth and the Iberian Anarchist Federation. A feminist organization was created within Spanish anarcho-syndicalism: *Mujeres Libres*. They fought both inside and outside the home: some held arms during the war and looked like true Spanish suffragettes, while taking aim at machismo and homophobia. With the Second Republic, progress was made, but machismo was still latent, and men felt threatened by the advances of women. This presented a problematic social contradiction: all wanted changes, since men and their causes needed these women's support for success, but these same union and many anarchist comrades also sought to maintain the traditional model of women who stayed at home. Meanwhile, some women organized, demanded more rights and were even jailed for their role. They supported their significant partners and saw them die, abandoned their lands and crossed the border carrying their children (Lorusso 2019).

These exiled women's points of arrival in a new world, where they sought asylum, are spread across the American continent: as a geographical space encompassing a very large area consisting of diverse territories in two hemispheres, the Americas have served as an ideal receptacle for diasporas, exiles and migrations throughout history, a tradition that continues today. It is evident that in certain periods period of displacement such as 1939-1947, the reception of Spanish Republican exiles was markedly different in the northern and southern regions. Diplomatic relations of Republican Spain with the Latin American governments, such as the case of Mexico, were notably more visible, unlike the different ties woven throughout North America. Similarly, as I have mentioned, there is an imbalance in academic studies geographically and critically around readings of these Spanish female intellectual exiles. Therefore, I offer here a sketch and a cartography that occupy different parts of the Americas and present a field of study in need of further investigation.

Although the first group of intellectuals exiled in Mexico throughout 1939 set a precedent for the destinies and experiences of exiles, these intellectual women help us to fill a critical void by focusing on later times in North America. Concha Méndez and Ernestina de Champourcin belonged to the first generation of exiles from 1939; Concha Zardoya, and Aurora de Albornoz to the subsequent generation of exiles during the 1940s. Both generations present differences and similarities in their lived experiences in exile but also represent alternative transoceanic places that mark the geographical diversity of an exodus in the feminine for the Spanish Republicans. Being uprooted, loneliness, the memory of war and longing for a homeland are constant themes in the poetry of these two groups, as well as Antonio Machado's metaphysics of time and the chronotope of exile previously sketched by Juan Ramón Jiménez. However, the process of reception and the experiences of exile reflected in the poetry of the North American exiles display greater isolation through the trials of a different language. These poets embodied the tradition found in Lorca's *Poet in New York*, although it allowed them greater intellectual growth.

South America vs. North America

Víctor Fuentes points out that Spanish political exiles to the United States were constant since the 19th century. Although Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Cuba and the Dominican Republic stand out as great reception centers, some liberal and socialist intelligentsia passed through or resided for a time in New York City in the late thirties, before traveling to Latin America. Among them, we find Fernando de los Ríos, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Américo Castro, Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel or Pedro Salinas. The founding in 1904 of the Hispanic Society of America, and in the 1920s of the Casa Hispánica at Columbia University, had helped to shape and extend the cultural reach and welcoming for the Hispanic cultural world in NYC.

However, the United States was a country that offered little ease of access during the Spanish Civil War as it did not implement an official asylum plan like Mexico. Nevertheless, the Junta de Ampliación de Estudios (JAE) established some cooperative relationships with North American universities. Some intellectuals were able to obtain positions in Departments where Spanish was taught, especially in New York and the New England area (Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut). Others, like the second wave of Spanish Republican cultural exiles, began their journeys in Latin America and later moved into the North American academic system. Sometimes they lived apart from an environment they often misunderstood, using and hearing a foreign language that replaced that of their homeland. However, they attempted to reproduce the liberal and heterodox traditions of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE) and fostered the structures of Hispanism or Hispanic studies in the North American university system (Fuentes 52-53). Fuentes places special emphasis on remembering that many key exile works are a direct result of those intellectuals who stayed or passed through the USA: among them, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Luis Cernuda and the universal poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, whose Nobel Prize, awarded during his time in exile in the Americas, could be considered a tribute

to all exiled intellectuals (54). However, women such as Rosa Chacel, María Luisa Elío, Margarita Nelken, Silvia Mistral, María Teresa León, María Zambrano, as well as the poets studied here, contributed to the experience of dislocation, this time in the feminine, in both North and South America. They add to our understanding of this process and its repercussions.

South America: Concha Méndez (1898-1986) and Ernestina de Champourcin (1905-1999)

In the early 20th century, Concha Méndez and Ernestina de Champourcin received an education at home with a special emphasis on language learning. Both grew up in Madrid and belonged to aristocratic families. Due to Concha Méndez's longing for freedom, her adventurous spirit and her desires to be a poet, she emancipated herself from home and traveled to Argentina, although she returned to Madrid at the beginning of the Second Republic. Ernestina de Champourcin was a translator from a very young age. Going against her father's wishes, she enrolled in university studies, but was required to be accompanied by her mother. Unfortunately, the atmosphere of male dominance forced her to quit before finishing her studies. However, both poets participated in the vibrant cultural life of Madrid in the 20s and 30s through intellectual elite circles where they met their future husbands. Concha Méndez married Manuel Altolaguirre and Ernestina de Champourcin Juan José Domenchina, both noted writers.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, Concha Méndez moved to England and later to France, to protect her daughter while Altolaguirre stayed in Spain to work on propaganda projects. After he passed through a concentration camp, he joined them sick and suffering in Paris. With the help of other intellectuals, they were able to leave for the Americas. They spent four years in Cuba and later moved to Mexico in 1943. Ernestina de Champourcin moved from Madrid to Valencia, Barcelona and Toulouse. Domenchina was committed to politics, with a political position in the government of the Second

Republic. Aided by the Intellectual Assistance Committee in Toulouse, they were invited by Alfonso Reyes to la Casa de España in Mexico.

These women's lives changed in exile. After the horrors of the Civil War and forced displacement, they began the process of starting over, adapting to new places, and finding accommodations and jobs to survive. Both Méndez and Champourcin left behind their family privileges in Spain and became the main economic support for their writer husbands who had been psychologically and emotionally devastated by the Civil War. To get money, Méndez sold books door-to-door, published mostly by her husband. Of course, this was all while taking care of their daughter. Champourcin had to work as a translator for the Fondo de Cultura in Mexico to provide for her family. Cordero Olivero points out those women intellectuals exiled in 1939 had even fewer opportunities than other women from lower social classes.[3] Banishment meant sacrifice and resignation to family obligations for these women. Their creative work was interrupted, their intellectual life paralyzed and their writing pushed aside. Méndez published poems in 1939 and 1944, and again in 1977 and 1979, coinciding with a return trip to Spain. Due to the war, Champourcin would not begin writing again until 1952. She published six works that delve into a spiritual crisis, before returning to Spain where she continued publishing until 1978. It is not a coincidence that both resumed writing within trips to Spain. In addition, Champourcin's thematic material changed significantly after her return and encounters with the up-and-coming generations. These interactions stoked the melancholy and nostalgia for her paradise lost.

The poetry of Concha Méndez in Mexico emphasizes the nostalgia and memory of a past marked by divorce and depression where she befriends her solitude. We see a nostalgic poetic voice

3 Cordero explained this point in her presentation "'Supervivir', perpetuar, tejer redes. El exilio de 1939 en femenino" on June 4, 2019 at the University of Huelva in the International Conference: "1939-2019: 'España sale de España' 80 years of the Spanish Republican exile."

that searches for a bond that still ties her to her native land. The sea, that poetic element used by Juan Ramón Jiménez as a means of connecting and disconnecting with Spain, is a recurrent theme for Méndez:

[. . .] soy de tierra adentro,
y de la meseta alta
pero la voz de los mares
de norte a sur me reclama.
Y no sé con quién quedarme
—yo que nací castellana, si con la parda Castilla
o con el mar que me llama.
Oigo sus voces azules,
como líquidas campanas,
y esta otra voz que es de tierra
que es como la voz de un alma . . . (220)

The sea also represents a stream of memories of youth and freedom that has now become full of pain and melancholia:

Antes, me asomaba al mar
y el corazón en el pecho
se me ponía a cantar.
[.....]
Ahora cuando veo la mar,
escucho a mi corazón
y se me pone a llorar . . . (211)

This sensorial memory is both a vehicle for and transfer to another space and time. While walking through a park in Mexico, she notes:

Me senté a reposar y ancho perfume
sentí que en mis sentidos se adentraba.
Y se me vino al alma extraña angustia.
El ala de un recuerdo aleteaba . . .
¡Ah sí, ya sé! . . . ! ¡Perfume de unas rosas! . . .
¡Otro país! . . . ¡El mío! (221)

Ernestina de Champourcin resumed writing upon her return to Spain but was again confronted with the experience and feeling of being uprooted. The memory of the voyage and her life outside of Spain made her painfully aware of an eternal exile. The absence of her homeland brought about a new consciousness of exile and war-time memories:

La noche se desgarra
a golpes de culata.
Extrañeza de pasos irreales.
Ciudad en vela.
O tal vez es el campo
y un moscardón se obstina
contra vidrios herméticos.
Pero el campo no existe,
Hay una fuerza oculta
empeñada en destruir
lo armonioso y lo puro (*Primer exilio* 15)

She also remembers the firing squads:

Un miedo desde fuera
estrujaba los cuerpos
contra la cal sobrante
de la pared sin fondo.

and traces the trajectory of her voyage to Mexico:

Quisiera llegar pronto
porque el mar nos aleja.
Este navegar juntos
extiende entre los dos
una enorme distancia.
¡el mar más mar que nunca! (17)

Distance and belonging or the juxtaposition of different places, a spatial estrangement as the fusion of the *here* with the distant *there* are part of a *totem* for Champourcin:

Todo es nuestro allá lejos
y los que ya no aguardan
la vuelta hacia su luz
saben que están aquí
aun en su allá distante (40)

The Second Group of Exiles in North America: Concha Zardoya (1914-2004) and Aurora de Albornoz (1926-1900)

The massive displacement of 1939 continued throughout the forties. Oppression, autarchy, nullification of rights, freedoms, persecution and censorship forced subsequent escapes. This resulted in a second generation of exiles, among them, children of the war. Under the dictatorship, the model of the *perfect* married woman was imposed: a Catholic woman dedicated to children and the domestic space, which hardly agreed with the women poets, their liberal minds or the *modern* models they represented.

Concha Zardoya and Aurora de Albornoz left Spain after the massive outflow of 1939. As they were younger, they had experienced more fully the modernity of the Second Republic. Their migrations offered opportunities for academic endeavors as they were not forced to sacrifice their priorities for family obligations. But even though they were granted opportunities they would not have had in Spain, the estrangement and nostalgia for their homeland are present in their works through memories, melancholy and a need to reconstruct their identity across a new environment. In this second wave, poets present a feeling of being torn between their new homes and a sensation of loss brought on by their separation from Spain and the anguish over their banishment.

Concha Zardoya was born in Chile to Spanish parents. Her family returned to Republican Spain when she was 17. Zardoya attended university in Madrid where she studied Philosophy and Letters but ended up in Valencia in order to to become a librarian. She was marked by the loss of her only brother in the Civil War, and reflected

on it in her poetry. She went into exile in 1947. The displacement gave her the opportunity to finish her PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She taught Spanish, culture and literature in Tulane and Boston. She would spend 30 years abroad before returning to Spain in 1977.

Exile is at the root of a deep poetics of reflection on and criticism of the painful experiences suffered during the Civil War and separation from Spain. Death, solitude and the homeland as a lost space, distant and longed for, are all recurring themes in her poetry. Writing as an exercise in self-exclusion and language became an adoptive motherland, standing in for both her original home and her inability to adapt to the spaces that had welcomed her:

> Es mi única patria la palabra.
> Esta palabra viva que derramo
> [.....]
> Las sílabas rezuman toda el alma
> el poso de silencios acuñados.
> Y flor, sustento, luz, piedad, el agua
> vivo, respiro, bebo, pronunciando
> quedos versos y prosa castellana,
> "buenos días" al aire tan callado. (*Corral de vivos* 127)

The poetry of Concha Zardoya reflects the terror and pain of a country oppressed, of life stained with hate, but with a hope of reconciliation:

> ¡Si el dolor naciera la alegría
> la ilusión de una España clamorosa,
> unánime, feliz y trabajada
> por las manos de todos, cada hora!
> Si de las penas, madre, de tus hijos
> salieras consolada y luminosa. (19)

Many of her poems are similar to those of Méndez and Champourcin, charged with nostalgia for a lost country and those killed in the war:

Cicatrices del tiempo en las paredes,
amarillas, verdosas, funerarias,
con asomos de musgos delicados,
de aguas negras, perdidas,
resbalando, sepultas, al origen
secreto de las lágrimas.
¡Melancolía es para los ojos
y este sensible amor que los traspasa! (43)

Other diasporic poems reflect on her experiences in the United States, like living in Manhattan: the technological development, dehumanization or mechanization of individuals, as Zardoya reflects and sings in her poem "Subway" (*Manhattan y otras latitudes*, 1983):

el hierro penetra en los abismos
en la roca horadada, en esos pozos
que minan la ciudad y la sostienen
[.....]
robot, clavija, biela o torniquete. (14)

On the other hand, her poems also address social class inequality, racism or a condemnation of the treatment and living conditions of the Black community living in Mississippi, as an echo of Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* (1930).

Aurora de Albornoz, the youngest of these women authors, was born in 1926 when Méndez and Champourcin were publishing their first poems. This ten-year-old witness of 1936 would be marked by the conflict poetically. Eight years later (1944), Albornoz was exiled with her family to Puerto Rico. Her Asturian relatives had strong literary and political ties to the Second Republic: her uncle Álvaro de Albornoz was the minister of Justice and later president of the Republican government in Paris and Mexico.[4] She studied at the University

4 It should be noted that part of her family also lived in exile in the USA her uncle, Severo Ochoa, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1959, yet another Spanish exile with a prize of international recognition.

of Puerto Rico under the mentorship of Juan Ramón Jiménez. She married an exiled Republican from Andalucía, but they later divorced. Albornoz enjoyed several stays in Kansas (USA) and Paris. She was one of the intellectual women from the second wave living in Puerto Rico who also shaped Hispanic studies through the North American University system. She studied comparative literature, and spent time in Salamanca doing her PhD. She traveled again to Puerto Rico in 1966 but returned definitively to Spain in 1968. She taught at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid and New York University in Spain. Her academic work deals mostly with exiled writers from Spain.

Just as Proust has pointed out in relation to the juxtaposition of times and spaces lived in the homeland of origin and in the host country, her poetry is defined by a dialectic of separation, an interior garden split in two by the past and the present:

> Yerbas nuevas
> alrededor de mi sueño.
> Joven olor de resinas
> en el viento.
> Aguas niñas por el río.
> Un cielo mío y pequeño.
> Sonido azul de campanas
> lejos . . . (*Brazo de niebla* 15)

Her verses display echoes of both Machado and Juan Ramón with a flow of time that is impossible to detain and a preoccupation with leaving evidence of this "word in time". As in "Time" and "Space", major landmarks by Juan Ramón Jiménez, the free flow of consciousness and navigating through the memory of time are reflected in Albornoz's poems:

> guardar este segundo
> encerrarlo en palabras, o en notas, o en colores.
> Vencer al otro tiempo
> (el otro tiempo fuera, con arrugas y olvido). (20)

At times, a division reflects a splitting of the subject:

Mi yo diferente.
Mi punta igual y contraria.
Lleva dentro
un distinto yo posible
[.....]
Mi mirada/ quiere entrarte por los ojos
y se congela delante.
Mi más yo,
absurdamente lejano. (28)

And again, distance and memory appeal to the senses and remind us of what we saw before in Méndez's verses:

Flor de olor amarillo,
¿es verdad que en el prado de la niebla
tanto ha llovido
que hasta los naranjales
han florecido? (*Poesía comp.* 225)

Hoy con la primavera,
en un marzo lejano de distancias y tiempos,
me trajo el sol un ramo de violetas.
Violetas infantiles, sin perfume,
con frescura de yerba
y claridad de lluvia.
[...]
Vienen llenas de tardes
con sabor de boroña
y nombres repetidos de los bueyes. (*Brazo de niebla* 60)

Albornoz uses writing as a door to her childhood memories in order to testify to her experiences marked by war and exile. This is not simply the byproduct of nostalgia in her poetry but is driven by a modern spirit of discovery of the Spanish world in the Americas. She was fascinated by the Afrocaribbean influences in Puerto Rico and often included characteristics of Caribbean mythology or regionalisms in her poetry. A product of hybridity in many ways, reflecting a *Pilgrim Spain* that arose from an America open to avant-

garde dimensions and connections with other languages and cultures.

Conclusions

Through these four women poets, I have attempted to present different experiences of exile and its multiplicity through voices in the feminine. They all take refuge in their memories to survive forced displacements and recover lost spaces. There is a clear division when considering the first two women poets who prioritized their family responsibilities and supporting roles. These are exiles according to a patriarchal framework of commitment and dependence on their husbands and an accommodation within circumstances. The second group is determined by a later displacement, and they use the poetic word in order to maintain their memories alive, but they do not sacrifice their literary creativity; on the contrary, they evolve in academic and intellectual ways. However, those forgotten exiled women are also the ones who suffer most intensely from the alienation of exile. The contrasting concordance between here and there, then and now, and their poetic voices remembering former spaces place them as though they were passers-by encountering new grounds. They are also marked by their marginality as women with a blurred identity, in need of fresher valuations.

All these experiences are linked to autobiographies that take refuge in poetry in order to conceal unhealed wounds: traumatic experiences from the Civil War and forced displacement, dislocation between the expelling land and the preserving ones. A unique set of displacements within the Spanish Republican diasporas. These women deserve the full recognition of yesterday and today.

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