

The imprint of exile through the plot of the narratives

As pisadas do exílio através do enredo das narrativas

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ABSTRACT

Exile is a circumstance different from other migrations, although it resembles them in the possible insertion or alienation from the receiving society. It is with no a doubt a forced migration process which is always accompanied by an idea and an imaginary: the disappearance of the conditions that forced to exile and thus, the return.

Although it is not possible to generalize, because there is no one single experience of exile and the subjectivities that compose it are diverse, it undoubtedly produces a sensation of alienation, which can lead to the rejection of the cultural norms of society; it is part of a process of “being in one place, but thinking about another.” However, as exile is prolonged, the experience of adaptation for the different generations involved becomes diversified, communication vessels develop, feelings of inclusion, of adaptation, of attachment with the social and cultural environment that the place of refuge offered.

The present text builds on testimonies of Uruguayans exiled in Mexico who have returned to their country. In their narrative, the meanings that relate to the subjective perspective that provoked the “return” to their country of origin as being viable and a palpable event are perceived. In summary, an incursion through the testimonial plot explains to what extent the return is a recovery of the space of identity longed for and the subsequent abandonment of the foreign space, in other words, it adds to the perspective of identity as a dynamic and relational construction.

KEYWORDS: Exile; identity; narration; Uruguay; Mexico.

RESUMO

O exílio é uma circunstância diferente das outras migrações, embora se assemelhem na inserção possível ou alienação da sociedade de acolhimento. É sem dúvida um processo de migração forçada, que é sempre acompanhada por uma idéia e um imaginário: o desaparecimento das condições que o forçou ao exílio e, portanto, o retorno.

Embora não seja possível generalizar, porque não há uma única experiência do exílio e as subjetividades que o compõem são diferentes, sem dúvida, produz uma sensação de alienação, o que pode levar à rejeição das normas culturais da sociedade, é parte de um processo de “estar num lugar, mas pensando no outro”. No entanto, como o exílio é prolongado, a experiência de adaptação para as diferentes gerações envolvidas torna-se diversificada, desenvolve meios de comunicação, sentimentos de inclusão, de adaptação, de ligação com o ambiente social e cultural que o local de refúgio oferece.

O presente texto baseia-se em testemunhos de uruguaios exilados no México, que regressaram ao seu país. Na sua narrativa são percebidos os significados que se relacionam com a perspectiva subjetiva que provocou o “retorno” ao seu país de origem como sendo viável e um evento palpável. Em resumo, uma incursão através da pisadas do depoimento que explica até que ponto o retorno é uma recuperação do espaço da identidade almejada e posterior abandono do espaço exterior, noutras palavras, que acrescenta a perspectiva da identidade como uma construção dinâmica e relacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Exílio; identidade; narração; Uruguai; México.

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Montevideo was covered with rumors which went from mouth to mouth, the uncertainty wouldn't leave us in peace [...] We found shelter in a summer house, who's owners lent to us risking prison for complicity, conspiracy, etc., etc. With the dictatorship, the State spread terror. Anyway, the situation was unsustainable, the idea of going out of the country without exile in order to be able to return became present in our minds; we had to make a decision, more sooner than later.

We evaluated the truth in the news that came to us from jail, "tell A. that they asked me about him, that they're looking for him," "they showed me his file, this big [gesturing]"

It seemed to us that our neighbor's story was pure fiction and a farce: "they came looking for you, they closed the street, their bodies were on the ground as they pointed to your door with their weapons". "You are requested, your picture was in the newspapers lists".¹

Exile is a product of adverse political circumstances, of conditions in which human rights are violated. It is a result of extreme situations such as those provoked by State terrorism. It follows the necessity to seek *another land* to protect one's freedom or life. It is an individual experience, but it is deeply entwined with a collective path, especially loaded with "a plurality of belongings." (GIMÉNEZ, 2004: 51) This allows us to assert that the collective demands are to be conceived and analyzed as a plural event: the exiles.

To inquire into these aspects of identity, three Uruguayans individual exile experiences, product of the same recent historical context and a shared geographical and cultural space (expelling country – receiving country), are situated in dialogs. These actors have in common a militant experience in a political sphere within Uruguay; two of them share the accession/membership to the same organization and a direct persecution from the State's agencies. All three of them arrived to Mexico after having lived in other countries (Argentina, Chile and Switzerland, depending on the case.) They are all males in their adulthood, with a partner, two of them had children but they were reunited and lived together in just one case. They all coincide in having a university education and a previous exile in other countries before arriving to Mexico (from one to three years) and finally, the three of them returned to Uruguay, and one of them, after several years returned to Mexico. While this universe of narrators is small, it is significant in

¹ Anhelo Hernández (Testimony of... 2008) received asylum in the Mexican Embassy in 1976 with his wife and younger son. His older daughter and grandchildren were also received, pp. 13-14. He returned to Uruguay in 1986 where he passed away on March 11, 2010.

some of the characteristic traits proper to exile that were systemized after an extensive investigation.

In the testimonial narration of the three exiles in Mexico it was possible to grasp relative meanings of the incorporation of the cultural and identity codes of the receiving society and the subjective perception that provoked the return to the country of origin as a possible fact and the return as a palpable event.² These testimonies were produced in 2002. This temporal location indicates that more than thirty years had passed, according to the actors, since those political circumstances in Uruguay which led them to take the path of exile (1972-1976) as well as almost twenty years since the re-democratization which would leave these events behind (1984-1985.) Undoubtedly, these are experiences with painful sequels, not only because of the impact that migration causes (abandonment of one's land, detachment of the shared socio-cultural and emotional space, perception of being "another" and confusion of otherness,) but because, on the one hand, of the sign of politics as a determinant of expulsion, and on the other, of the traumatic imprint of repression and terror.

The interviews in which the testimonies were collected raided a complex field, that of a past that has long remained in the shadows, which hurts because of what it was but that still throbs because of the repercussions it had in each one's life. Despite this, the past's "balance" is not necessarily valued in a negative way.

The argument in the following pages is built through the plot of narrations from the certainty that exile is a circumstance originated in the violations of the most elemental rights of men and citizens, it is a decision forced by a political component which makes it different from other migrations even though it resembles them in the insertion or alienation from the receiving society. This argument is based on the idea that exile, as a forced migration process, has a moment of conclusion which corresponds to the disappearance of the conditions which forced the exile. However,

² It is not incidental that we turn to Oral History. A different sensibility grounded on the idea that exile, in this case, is much more than a political circumstance, it is a diverse and multicolored world of personal experiences, of subjectivities that far from being frozen, remain in those who were part of this universe and are transmitted even imperceptibly, impose the rescue of these silenced voices from the past. See Philippe Joutard (1986).

especially in massive and prolonged exiles, the experience leads to a sometimes imperceptible blurring of the alienation with the receiving society. This society can come to be confused with that of origin to the point where feelings for one are converted or shifted to the other. An individual and collective sense of belonging would seem to be produced from exile for both societies, suggesting that identity is not static but is instead in constant movement. The creation of an *adaptive re-composition* can also be noted.³ Testimonial narration allows the understanding and knowledge of the intricacies of subjectivity in a privileged way, those which are invisible in the public sphere and in the general view of exile as a collective political event. The latter is due to the fact that exile can be seen as a defeat or as a heroic gesture, but above all, as a political action impervious to human experience, as an individual experience.

The text is structured around three axes: the individual experiences in the political context that forced the migration and the creation of undesired exits; the exiles as each one's migrations which are forced by politics as reason and explanation and constitute a collage of circumstances built from the personal and collective alienation and rebuilt from militant commitment; interpretations of the conditions that allow the return and lead to: identity ambiguity, individual and collective identity reconfigurations or new exiles.

Individuals in the context of escape

The predictable coordination of the region's dictatorships, armies and police began to be palpable, nonetheless, I kept thinking it would be possible to disorient the repression, do something like the chess horse movement: go to Buenos Aires, remain there for some time, communicate with someone and return in a more undercover way, or go to Peru while the storm passed and I started to see more clearly... Of the former I was discouraged by the news that circulated everywhere, there were thousands of Uruguayans swarming in Buenos Aires; the borders were heavily guarded... I was informed of the latter's impossibility by the ambassador of Perú, who I had reached through the mediation of the writer Javier Abril, cultural attaché of the Embassy, and who took from the drawer in his desk a strict communication that had just got to him, he was not to receive political refugees. (Hernández, 2008: 15)

³ That which Giménez (2004) refers to by noting "it is more the dialectic between permanence and change, between continuity and discontinuity that characterizes equally personal and collective identities", pp. 63-64.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Latin America's South Cone was first a stage of a diversity of political and armed movements which struggled for national transformations, government alternatives and "new paths" within the political regimes. These circumstances were followed by the breakdown of the institutions and State violence let loose. The dictatorships that were installed after the Brazilian shared the philosophical and action guide represented by the National Security Doctrine. Notwithstanding the general framework, it was diffused and adjusted locally, favoring at the same time the doctrinal cohesion of the armies. The shared *slogan* of "preserving democracy" and the emblematic objective, while effective, of the "enemy's elimination" –conceived in a broad sense–⁴ was implemented in practice through a systematic and regional repression supported in the coordination of the different countries military intelligence groups (Operation Condor.)⁵

Uruguay was part of this trend.⁶ The coup d' Etat on June 27, 1973 established the end of the long process of constitutional authoritarianism and marked the beginning of a declared dictatorship. By then, the road to escape, exile, found its first records in 1970 and was increased from 1972 to locate between 1975 and 1977 the years of most migration.⁷ The voices of the actors of exile open a framework constituted between difficult collective vicissitudes and the complex moments in which men and women, in a private way, faced extreme circumstances in their citizen and political life, but also in their own subjectivity. It was the encounter with the collapse of a project, of a life

⁴ "Every living being –and the Nation is a living being– must, if it wants to survive defend itself from everything that can hurt it, from within itself and from outside. It is an illusion to count on a providential situation which will guarantee that the social body can never get sick [...] Faced with subversive aggression, which constitutes a disease of the Uruguayan nation, it must be concluded that the first role of the defense is, and will always be, to protect the fundamental bases of society [...] because the diseases of the social body are like those of human beings: it is imperative to prevent them and attack them when they appear [...] The most serious threat against the Nation's body is the danger of intrusion of strange ideologies [...]" (REPUBLICA ORIENTAL DEL URUGUAY, pp. 12-13)

⁵ For detailed information see, for example: Dinges (2005) and Serra Padrós (2009).

⁶ On the subject of the circumstances within the region in times of the consolidation of the Condor Operation, see Eduardo Rey Tristán (2007).

⁷ Some works on this subject are registered in the national historiography; there is not, however, much research yet about the consequences of repression on exile. See as examples and with different focuses of observation: Clara Aldrighi (2009); Enrique Coraza (2007); Silvia Dutrénit Bielous, coord. (2006); Vania Markarian (2005); Republica Oriental del Uruguay (1977) and Servicio de Paz y Justicia –SERPAJ– (1989).

commitment, but it foretold above all, moments of decision about how or what to do to preserve liberty.⁸

I feel I didn't have an option. Until April of 72, really, in the *MLN* [National Liberation Movement- Tupamaros] no one thought of exile as a possibility, no one thought of that subject, it wasn't something that came into your mind. If you were irresponsible you thought you'd fight until winning, and if you were a little more sensible you thought of the possibility of losing, and what do I know, ending up in jail, but exile was not an option. However, something changed, many things changed from April 14, 1972 [milestone of the *MLN* actions and beginning of the repression which ends in their defeat] and began making tangible the conscience that exile could be a less dangerous way out, not only for the individual but also for the organization. (1st Testimony).

My intention was to stay, because the political line was to stay and fight. We were imprisoned in March of 75 [...] they let us go after a few months [...], and let's say that in my case it was less than kindergarten with regard to what my colleagues went through, and we were left on parole. In my case, parole meant that I had to ask for permission to travel, to move from my house and go sign every fifteen days to Maldonado and Paraguay, Department of Intelligence and Information [National Direction of Intelligence and Information].

In October of 75 the extremely hard blow to the Communist Party and its organs took place [...] I went to sign from the 15th of November, and when I entered the Department I remembered the Dante's phrase when he enters hell, or not? : "voi qui entrete lasceti ogni speranza," or something like that: "those who enter abandon all hope." (2nd Testimony).

In both narrations it can clearly be seen that exile was not part of the militant imaginary. Also in both, but more noticeably in the *First Testimony*, the turning point is recorded. In other words, the moment when the non-consideration of exile is incorporated into the militant imaginary is evidenced. It was therefore necessary that the repression become extreme and that it had to bring the magnitude of persecution and defeat closer to everyday life, so that, from different trenches of the Uruguayan left, its militants accepted the necessity of exile as a means to protect liberty. It was only in that extreme moment that the departure was accepted from a subjective conviction of danger without necessarily justifying it as an instruction from the political organization.

Really, truthfully, I had my children here of course I desperately wanted and I still want, but really, when I was faced with the necessity to leave, I didn't hesitate. I didn't hesitate, it was very clear, I figured it out in one night, I left the next morning, without having gone by my house, I left with a pair of borrowed underwear, a small briefcase, ciao, with what I was wearing. It was the night of the 23rd when I heard about my friend being taken and the 24th by noon I was on a plane to

⁸ A shared "complicity" exists in the understanding of the three narrators about the episodes that can be defined as a collective experience of a repressive regime. See Laura Velasco (2004).

Buenos Aires, with my identity-card, I didn't have a passport, but I knew I could get to Chile from Buenos Aires with my identity-card in those days. (1st Testimony).

I had received several warnings that I was going to be detained, imminently. And they did come looking for me, a few days after I had gone they went to the Court House I worked in and to my house. No sooner had the "internal war state" been proclaimed that they had already raided my house, more or less in the middle of April [1972], my house had been raided in a very spectacular raid of the *Fuerzas Conjuntas* [Joint Forces]. (3rd Testimony).

And the passage towards being clandestine was very difficult; there were colleagues with heroic behaviors, who fell afterwards. In my case, I thought it was very, very difficult [...] At a certain point the decision to leave was: I leave with my family. I left alone but my family joined me in Buenos Aires, because I left from Buenos Aires to Mexico [...] I could only go to places where I could get there with my identity-card, which were all of the countries in the South Cone, and the only country in the South Cone that didn't have a dictatorship at that moment was Argentina, under the administration of María Estela Martínez [...] The triple A was in full force [paramilitary organization] and the coup d'état was in the air. But well, the other countries were ruled by Stroessner, Pinochet, Banzer, which is just one line in front of ignominy. (2nd Testimony).

They all fled, and they didn't follow any orders than that of their consciousness about the danger they were in, but each one did so differently. A question arises: how much of this happens because of the diversity of the events and how much happens of this because they are different people? In the three testimonies underlies the sensation of "not wanting" but "having to" escape the country. It must be considered that in these exile experiences the escape isn't remembered mainly as a militant action but as a means for protection in the midst of repression.

In this context, Argentina received a large percentage of the politically persecuted. It was not a novel destination; the simplicity of reaching the other side of the river (Río Uruguay) has allowed the permanent migration flows of different natures and magnitudes throughout history. In the circumstances of the seventies, migration was correlated to repression milestones –which can be observed in the records of tens of thousands of political prisoners, thousands of which were held for many years, in the systematic practice of torture in clandestine centers of detention, the disappearance and execution of many prisoners, and of course, the exiled.⁹ Although there is still no accurate figure of the political migration, some specialists indicate that the trend is close to 12 per

⁹ A compendium of the exercise of State terror can be found in the work of the Presidency of the Republic published in five volumes, a result of the research conducted by a group of academics (2007).

cent of the population, within the critical period that starts in the sixties with the economic crisis and finishing with the end of the dictatorship in the mid-eighties.¹⁰

Thus, the resistance to escape –that destiny which was not a part of the militant imaginary at the time– was overcome by the State's violence. The protagonists of exile, at least to some extent, recognized themselves as part of a collective and carried individually an “un-tradable and irrevocable biographical past.” (GIMÉNEZ, 2004: 51). This led to the permanence of a feeling of loyalty within the exiled throughout their journey.

Rejection or acceptance: an exile dilemma

I remember, as if it had been today, when we left Uruguay after five months of living in the [Mexican] embassy. Our exile began when we arrived at the residence with our guilt-ridden conscience, we were a little more than a dozen, but after some days we became a hounded sixty-five [...] When speaking of exile we many times forget what they mean to children, and yet... Reality, and therefore exile, has more than one face and it would be absolutely simplistic to believe otherwise. If I dwell on these episodes it is because they help me support my belief that it is precisely because of the multiplicity of its faces, real or imagined, that reality penetrates our hearts so deeply. (HERNÁNDEZ, 2008: 16).

Exile is diverse as a process and as a condition. It has many causes and different purposes. Whether it is wanted or not, exile is a defeat, it could not be conceived in another way. Why? Because it means abandoning the country, the dispossession of the self, the breakdown of personal history in order to search for a place to survive in foreign lands.¹¹ This survival takes two different positions: exile as resistance, that is, as a way of maintaining oneself in politics, or exile as an enclavement, that is, the separation from the main area that forced the escape: politics. The individual resistance position is evidenced when exile is conceived as an organized space and a militant structure. This organization surely does not integrate the whole set of exiles but it is the public

¹⁰ While other consequences linked to the crisis of the model anticipated this migration tendency, the seventies triggered the exit flows because of political circumstances. It has been estimated that between 1963 and 1985 the net negative balance was of 310,000 people, equivalent to 12 per cent of the population at the time, and 20 per cent of the workforce. It is also noted that the net rates of migration had its highest levels between 1972 and 1976. See: Adela Pellegrino (2003).

¹¹ Moscovici understands that: “the experience of exile is summarized in three familiar and terrible words: uprooting, terror, nomadic”. (Moscovici, 1996: 146).

and visible portion, it is the presence that is aware of its existence, which manifests the rationale of the exiles and their militant disposition. This resistance can be understood as a *lifeline in the midst of wreck*. At the same time, this position builds the structures of contention. It is mainly these that shelter the identity codes that were “taken in the suitcases.” At the same time, it contributes to the preservation of the militant condition of “being exiled” individually as well as collectively. The exiled are “the others,” they are distinguished by their condition in the receiving society while at the same time trying to remain true to themselves, to preserve who they are. Nevertheless, a *continuity in change* is observed (GIMÉNEZ, 2004: 63-64) because as they struggle to re-enforce their otherness in the foreign environment, they begin to adapt. According to what is perceived in the protagonist’s narrative, their identity is shaped.

Diversity exists because in each biography, in each protagonist’s subjectivity, a range of practices is opened to take in and integrate the destiny of exile. This range instills uncertainty disrupting the terms of reference, the implanted codes in each one’s biography. Exile is a journey in which subjectivities emerge and react in different ways.

A whole subject. In this sense I tried all my life [...] to incorporate as much as possible, but with the certainty that I would go back to Uruguay, inevitably. But not tomorrow, who knows when [...] The Spanish had spent this thought, because they said next year I’ll go back to Spain. So, these experiences are useful. There were people, I think, who thought it was horrible to be there [Mexico] and that it was terrible. And there were other people who thought “I will never return to Uruguay.” I tried to do something else, which is, to incorporate as much as possible, but with my head in Uruguay. (2nd Testimony).

Hence, there are no *clichés*. The many ways of insertion can barely be insinuated from the often shy intonations of a testimony. This testimony becomes difficult to fathom given the changes in the hierarchy of values between the extremes of the temporal arch –the moment when exile begins and the moment of the interview. In the former, the important thing was the political commitment, the commitment with returning, “head in Uruguay” as it was said in the exile jargon. In the latter, the more recent one, the political commitment understood as militancy does not necessarily exist, also there are less taboos to express feelings and affections, which could have been considered irrelevant or superficial at the time. It is necessary then to appreciate the narrative plot of the testimony, knowing that it is

the expression of a life experience that with time disarmed the terms of reference.¹²

Look, since we left Uruguay we knew we were going to return. In the three countries we were, we made every effort to adapt as if we were going to stay there all our lives. I mean, we did not hold reservations or resentments; we gave all of ourselves in each place [...]

Yes, of course, we missed it [Uruguay]. In reunions, in Uruguayan's birthdays what we listened to was Jaime Ross, and we listened to *Los Olímpicos* and wept, "... Uruguayans, Uruguayans, where did you end up..." but "we cried our eyes out." Someone arrived from Uruguay and we would all go, we would take him to someone's house, we called everyone, close friends to know what was going on, to talk. The effective vehicle with Uruguay, being there [Mexico] was very intense and very narrow, affectionate but we tried to make it political, the interest for politics remained. Now, we always knew we would return, that as soon as we could we would go back, however we may be. (1st Testimony)

I had a very nomadic exile, because I went to Chile carefully avoiding going through Buenos Aires, because at that time there were problems with some people that had departed from here, that had gone through Buenos Aires, they had trouble, so I took a flight directly to Chile. In Chile the problem was the coup, on the 11th of September in 73 [...] There, I asked for asylum in the Argentinean embassy the 16th of September, and I was there for a month, under asylum [...]. It was already a time when the Triple A was working [...] and I had the possibility of going to Geneva [...] I worked for four years in an organization that was not international, it was of the Swiss government, but it was an organization meant to modify the Geneva Conventions of 1949, luckily it was a conference that would last a year and it extended for four years [...] When the conference finished in 78 I had the possibility to keep working in other international organizations, but I preferred to return to Latin America, I felt very foreign in Switzerland [I went to Mexico].

My idea was always to return to Uruguay. That may be perhaps the explanation of this nomadic exile [...] I made an effort not to enroot myself in each one of these countries. I did not establish many relationships with Mexicans, among other things because I continued living in my Uruguayan world. I think that in Switzerland even if you make a lot of efforts to enroot yourself, it is very difficult [...] I think that with Mexicans there are certain codes [...] (3rd Testimony).

The texture of the testimonial fragments and the set of narrations of the three protagonists allow us to appreciate how, faced with a shared strategy of return, different ways of being in the receiving society were revealed. The extremes are represented in the *1st and 2nd Testimonies*. For the former, the time of exile had to be an insertion, an adaptation to the receiving society, regardless of which one it was. Completely missing Uruguay, the affectionate vehicle with the country was not in tension with the disposition of temporary acclimation. Instead, the latter narrates a strategy of alienation, of avoiding all

¹² Chambers refers to the impossibility of "returning home," (1994: 18).

adaptation to the receiving environment. It plainly transmits that the exile in Switzerland did not strain the strategy of return and its implementation, maybe in contrast with what happened in Mexico, but without expressing it. However, the extreme of zeal is condensed in living within a “Uruguayan world,” of the ghetto. As the remembrance of the protagonist advances, his narration states that despite the zeal to protect an identity intact, it will show the permanence of interaction.

Between the rejection and the understanding of these codes, subjective manners present among the exiled were, in the case of Mexico, the unraveling of the Mexican political culture. Mexican politics was particularly confusing for those Uruguayans who came, it is true, expelled from a dictatorship, but who brought the matrix of liberal Uruguay anchored in their “genes.” It is possible in this case to take an insinuation from Chambers regarding what exiles *en route* must face. The terms of reference are disarmed and a gap is opened between the borders of itinerary: the exit from home and the promise of return (Chambers, 1994: 14-15).

How could they be crisp and clear! Mexican politics was so complex as the society which originated it, and it took us years to try and unravel it. I do not know if we ever accomplished it, but we undoubtedly began to come closer, helped above all by contacts with Mexican friends. (1st Testimony)

I imagine the PRI's structure [Institutional Revolutionary Party] as a pyramid thing, where every hierarch has his group that surrounds him which is made up of all kinds of people, and who can say whatever he wants. But when the chief says: let's go right, ah, no one can say let's go left, let's go right, and if you don't say that you have to go. That chief is part of the nucleus with another chief, until we reach the maximum chief who is the President of the Republic, who is an Emperor and has amazing powers. In part because of the Constitution and in part because the PRI was the absolute majority everywhere [...]. It was an authoritarian structure, the President was not criticized, at most you criticized a minister, in the press. Not now though, he must have some power but the press criticizes him without a problem.

What did you miss? The Uruguayan democracy, the republican virtues. A minister walking along the street, even today. I mentioned that a lot there [...] I love Mexico, I say it like that. (2nd Testimony)

One of the challenges was to understand the codes of another political culture. They came from ways of belonging built upon different systems of social and political relationships which should be confronted in an everyday basis. With time there was some learning, in other words, new references of identity

were incorporated with social interaction.¹³

From the state of alienation to the encounter of another identity

Even though taking the decision of exile was difficult, it was even harder to make the decision of taking the road back.

I have said that it was difficult for us to take the road of exile. What I want to say now is that in another way it was also difficult to leave Mexico.

When the dictatorship began to tumble all the exiled began to re-consider returning

We justified our wishes with one reason or another.

What attitude to take was the obligated subject among the exiled. In general, there were no explicit agreements among ourselves about whether to return or not.

We understood, without grudge, the differences of opinion, those who decided to stay, and those who had decided they would return. Each one knew or thought he knew about his possibilities for re-insertion [...]

Returning? You never return, Heraclitus said it clearly.

Did our exile end when we returned? To our children our return was an exile which we imposed on them authoritatively. What for us was the return to our own was an exile to them, different from ours, but an exile nonetheless.

It was also their way of entering today's globalized world.

For us, what happened after our return was something unexpected.

In Montevideo the buildings continued to be where we had left then, but time had scraped them, from outside everything looked almost the same, but it wasn't [...] (HERNÁNDEZ, 2008: 21)

The inclusion into another cultural and emotional diversity is present in the different perspectives about the recent histories in all three narrations. In all three of them the sensation of danger and the feeling of fear is also present, because of how painful the circumstances were, coupled with the political commitment each one had. This assessment states that memories remain in the collective because other people are identified with the remembrance. The idea that those who lived the experience of exile, those who shared the daily life of clandestinity, and those who shared the experience of jail –in circumstances like those that occurred in the South Cone and particularly in Uruguay– constitute relational entities linked by the feeling of belonging which are reaffirmed increasingly in societies that underwent these processes of institutional breakdown and terror.

Nevertheless, the intertwined narrations that pave the collective memory are differentiated at the same time by the singularity of each subjectivity, of

¹³ See the introduction about theoretical elements that allow the approach to the understanding identities by José Manuel Valenzuela (2004).

every individual experience and of the way in which each subject perceives it as his own drama. It is difficult then to make analogies. The narrative episodes chosen here define common experiences regarding the idea that exile was a “temporal situation” even though it lasted years. Chambers refers to the dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a way of living time and space as if they were fixed and closed structures (CHAMBERS, 1994: 18). However, conceiving this idea of mobility requires living the mutation of identity, an understanding that there is an interaction with the historical context in which the individual and the collective are inserted.

The path of escape had been taken, but it would be retraced. It was something like an undisputed principle, both for those “voices” who narrate a position of insertion that seems to be self-imposed in the receiving society, as for those who recognize having sought *ex profeso* not to incorporate. Therefore, both because the time of exile was imposed, and it had made them “love” a land they had not wanted to love, and because the return to their country, who’s image had remained frozen and held fondly, shook the conviction of an unalterable identity. The testimonies tell us of imprints that could come to mean more than that.

Being there, I missed a lot of things from here [Uruguay]. I missed the people. Obviously, one misses more in limit situations. I would say that the cases of deaths are the moments in which one feels the exile most. I mean, when you find out someone of your family in Uruguay has died, that you can’t be there, it’s very hard. It’s very hard also when you find out someone died in exile and their family wasn’t there. These situations are, undoubtedly, the most difficult ones. Or the news that someone has been detained or had some sort of problem, those were difficult things. Then there are things that one misses, of course, sometimes you miss the food and definitely what you’re missing is not the food but what you’re placing in the Uruguayan food [...] You miss places [...] But I also sort of reached the conclusion that, sometimes you’re too selfish to miss, because you think that you miss the country and definitely you’re living the time that you lived in that country, the period in which you were [...]

You ask me about Mexico, because I will tell you one thing. You saw the military, the priests who never cease to be priests, retired militaries or priests who hung up their habits. I believe that once a man is exiled he remains an exile even in his own country.

There’s a Brazilian who told it very well, his name was Eric Nepomuceno, a journalist, who told about it in an article entitled “Does exile end?” as a question. He told a story about how in Paris he had met a group of Brazilians who used to gather every Saturday in a coffee shop, to play a game that consisted in each player saying a line from the Rio de Janeiro omnibus, then the other players had to say which were the stops in that line, it was the most nostalgic thing you can imagine. Years later, he ran into most of the members of that group in a beer shop in Rio de Janeiro, playing the same game but with the subway stations in Paris. Thus, it is these kinds of

mechanisms, that is why I was telling you today that you also miss the previous country. (3rd Testimony)

Returning, I already spoke of that in the beginning of the interview, returning was like trying on an old shoe after having walked with new shoes, putting on an old shoe that is incredibly comfortable, you loosen up, you feel that you're definitely in your place. Do you miss Mexico? I missed my Mexican friends a lot, I missed them a lot, and there's no use lying, the money I made in Mexico, the economic wellbeing that I had in Mexico I never again had here [...]

I returned to Mexico once, in 1988. I reunited with my friends, it was a very beautiful experience, filled with love, but the separation from them was so painful that I never wanted to go back; I never wanted to expose myself to another painful breakup. (1st Testimony)

Everyone, we all wanted to return, except maybe my daughter who had a Mexican boyfriend. My daughter was very young when we arrived; she was nine or ten years old [...]. The Mexican imprint is present at every moment. First, we had to learn a little about doing politics, because here [Uruguay] it was much more straightforward, when I left it was them and us and the *piñas* [beatings]. There was no negotiation; at most there was negotiation in the left wing. Not in Mexico, in Mexico it is everything. I think I have the imprint, I think I have that training. (2nd Testimony)

Even though a very thorough research about exile has been made it is difficult to generalize, but even at the risk of error, it can be alleged that for all exiles who returned and for those who did not, the sensation that exile was incorporated into their lives, and changed them culturally and emotionally, is an unconcealed reality. With this perception, even though the protagonists themselves do not argue so, the exile experience shows that identities are not given, they can be referred to as traditional cultural codes, to that biographic identity, but they also derive and mutate from unprecedented conditions.

Temporal and spatial separation from the society of origin and the approach to the receiving society produces an enrooting and uprooting unimagined at the moment of escape. During exile life is lived as a foreigner, as an "other" and the return seeks to be, in addition to the fulfillment of the commitment assumed collectively or individually, publicly or privately, the recovery of "space and identity." The narrations show the differences from what each person perceived and processed in their readjustment, in their subjectivity.

Néstor García Canclini argues that: "Today, millions of people go from one place to the other frequently, they live in a more or less enduring way in different cities from that in which they were born and they modify their lifestyle when they change context. These interactions have

conceptual effects on the notions of culture and identity: using Hobsbawn's eloquent formula, now "the majority of collective identities are more like shirts than skins: they are, at least in theory, optional, not unavoidable" (GARCÍA CANCLINI, 2004: 36).

The experience of exile does not escape this trend. Despite being considered temporal because of its political component, by its own force of ideology, the plot of narration of experiences ends up revealing a different identity by confronting it *in situ* with that which was thought to be deeply rooted.

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