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THE EXILE CONDITION

SPACE-TIME DISSOCIATION IN HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

A READING OF *SEFARAD*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990's, historical writing has shifted its focus from historical representation, as reflected for instance in theories of narrativism and constructivism, towards the problems of memory and experience. (Domanska 2009: 177). The recent work of Frank Ankersmit is a notable example of this shift. Ankersmit argues with his 'theory against theory' for a reevaluation of a direct contact with the past by breaking through built-up layers of representations that separate the (historical) object from the subject. In his recent book *The sublime historical experience* (2005), he defines the sublime historical experience as both a dissociation in time and a dissociation of identity, departing from a classification of four types of forgetting.

Memory studies also focus on the function of the past in the present, especially with regards to the construction of collective identities. Jeffrey Olick has recently pointed out that within this field, scholars in memory studies have been mainly interested in the products of memory, such as

stories, images, or statues, and in the practices of memory, such as representations, commemorations, and celebrations. However, he reminds us that memory is a process and not a thing, a faculty, rather than a place. (Olick 2008: 158-159). Thus, both Ankersmit's concepts of historical experience and memory studies focus on the process of getting in touch with the past.

In the analytical framework of memory studies, the notion of places of memory, coined by Pierre Nora, continues to play an important role in understanding how we reconnect with the past. Here we can think of a place as a trigger of memory and of a place as a carrier of different layers of interpretations of the past, as in the concept of *lieux de mémoires*. (Nora 1989). Notwithstanding the abundant theoretical explorations of the concepts of place and exile in memory studies, the notion of place seems to be of no significance in Ankersmit's conception of historical experience. Nevertheless, Ankersmit provides examples of historical experiences that are based on objects and places as triggers of experience, very much akin to their function in memory studies as triggers of memories.

How can notions of place play a role in Ankersmit's conception of historical experience? We will explore how the literary category of exile and the resulting displacement in the novel *Sefarad* from Antonio Muñoz Molina (2001) relate to the theories surrounding Ankersmit's concept of historical experience. In the novel *Sefarad* the past plays an important role in the shaping of identity of the characters. The relation between past and present is continuously accentuated, as the protagonists voluntarily or involuntarily remember and experience the past in the present in various ways.

In this article a conceptual framework will be devised based on Frank Ankersmit's analysis of (sublime) historical experience in relation to memory theory as established by Maurice Halbwachs. In this framework we will show that memory, trauma and (sublime) historical experience are different categories that are confined by the notions of time and identity. This framework will serve as a structure for the analysis of the use and the importance of place in memory and historical experience in *Sefarad*.

Historical Experience and Memory

Frank Ankersmit conceptualizes the way in which the past can be experienced in the present in his concepts of *subjective* and *sublime historical experience*.¹ In these concepts he has incorporated important elements of Johan Huizinga's idea of *historical sensation*.

Huizinga's historical sensation goes beyond the rather psychological concept of 'nachfühlen' or 'nacherleben' as suggested by Ranke. Where 'nacherleben' is a way of becoming aware of the past through reliving it, the historical sensation is a form of understanding or 'ahnung', closely related to the understanding of music. Huizinga's sensation is only evoked in specific moments of mental clarity and can be seen as a resurrection of the past (Huizinga 1929).

For Ankersmit, historical experience is only possible in a 'thoroughly historicized world'. From his narrativist point of view, it is only when the representation has taken over completely and the represented (the past itself) has disappeared, that it will be possible to break through the thick crusts of effective history and meet history in its quasi-noumenal nakedness.' (Ankersmit 2005: 277). It is important to notice that in Ankersmit's view, although the subjective historical experience breaks through the discursive layers of representation, this does not imply any truth claims towards the past. However, in agreement with aesthetic experiences, the historical experience supports the conviction of authenticity. The experience is complete in itself and requires no contextualization. It is precisely the contextualization of the past (through our representations) that we want to break through. In this respect, Ankersmit's subjective historical experience requires a distance in time between the object and the subject (when the past itself is gone and we only encounter representations or narrations of that past). The historical experience then allows bridging this gap in time and for an instant subject and object merge. This distance in time between the object and the subject is also important in Maurice Halbwachs' theory of memory.

Maurice Halbwachs, in his book *On Collective Memory* (Halbwachs 1992) puts forward a clear distinction between individual and collective mem-

ory on the one hand, and historical memory on the other. Important in Halbwachs' categorization is the time aspect: collective and individual memory are related to those events that we experience as individuals ourselves or via group memberships, while historical memory concerns a knowledge of the past that reaches us only through historical representations and with which we no longer have an 'organic' relationship. Here, it is important to note that memory is always constructed as a function of individual and collective identities in the present. Halbwachs understands collective memory as a result of the continuous interpenetration of personal and collective memory. Individual memory can only be recalled in the social framework within which it is constructed. Furthermore, since individuals belong to many social groups, collective memory should be considered as multiple. Historical memory, on the other hand, starts when collective memory and tradition end; it represents a lost past in a singular narrative. (Halbwachs 1992).

While keeping Halbwachs' distinction in mind, let us now go back to Ankersmit's notion of (sublime) historical experience. Ankersmit embeds his concept of the sublime historical experience within a framework of four stages of *forgetting*. Thus, contrary to Halbwachs' focus on memory, Ankersmit's discussion of the (sublime) historical experience departs from the idea of forgetting of the past. However, as we will show underneath, their approaches are not that different since forgetting and remembrance can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

The first two stages of forgetting described by Ankersmit involve *unconscious* ways of forgetting. The first type comprises the things from our personal or from our collective past that we can safely forget because they are of no relevance to our identity. Contrarily, the second type of forgetting consists of things that we might have forgotten but that are truly relevant to our identity, although we might not have been aware of this before. As both the latter stage of forgetting as well as Halbwachs' frameworks of memory are to be understood in relation to the construction of our identity, we could argue that this type of forgetting is the negative reverse of individual and collective memory as defined by Halbwachs.

Ankersmit understands the third and fourth stages of forgetting as *conscious* and therefore traumatic types of forgetting. The paradox of the traumatic experience is that something is both forgotten and remembered. For this, these last two types do not form a counterpoint to memory as a *constructive* part of identity, as they concern both sides of the coin at once. The conscious forgetting leads to a *dissociation* of identity. As Ankersmit states:

‘The dissociation of the self into a conscious and an unconscious self guarantees the possibility of a not forgetting to forget. By relegating the traumatic experience to the domain of the unconscious, we can, indeed, forget it. But precisely by storing it there, we will also retain it as an unconscious memory.’ (Ankersmit 2005: 322)

The third type of forgetting is caused by the experience of something too threatening or too painful to be remembered. Ankersmit gives here the paradigmatic example of the Holocaust trauma. For this event, both remembrance and forgetting has been withheld from conscious memory, especially in the case of Germany. The German so-called collective amnesia created a dissociation on the level of identity.

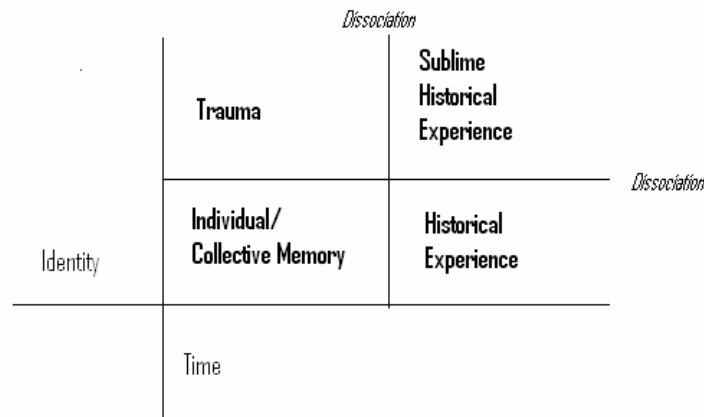
The fourth type of forgetting is exemplified by the French Revolution. This type of forgetting is caused by the most profound and decisive changes that Western man has undergone in the course of history. As Ankersmit states, ‘In all these cases they entered a new world, something they could do only on the condition of forgetting a previous world and of shedding their former identity.’ (Ankersmit 2001: 301). Thus, there is a dissociation in time with ‘the *previous* world’ as well as a dissociation of identity, as they ‘*shed* their former identity’.

With this fourth type of forgetting, Ankersmit introduces his concept of the *sublime historical experience*. To explain this concept more clearly at this point, a graph, in which we can visualize the relationship between the different forms of historical experience and memory, might be helpful. We could imagine individual/collective memory, subjective historical experience, trauma and sublime historical experience in four boxes with a different relation to time and identity. Here it is important to note, that

these four boxes do not correspond seamlessly to the four levels of forgetting that we have just summarized. The first notion of forgetting is not part of this graph, since it has no relation to one’s identity. The first box represents, then, the second notion of forgetting, which has been identified as the counterpart of individual/collective memory as constitutive of one’s identity. Here there is no dissociation at the levels of time and identity.

In a second box, we find the subjective historical experience, a form of connecting to the past that Ankersmit does not connect directly to one of the four types of forgetting. Subjective historical experience can only take place where collective memory has ended, analagous to Halbwachs’ distinction between collective and historical memory. Moreover, the subjective historical experience breaks through the layers of historical memory or of the writing of history. On the graph’s timeline there is a division between the time that is still part of one’s lived life, or one’s community, and the time in which there are no survivors left and historical representations take over. From the perspective of the subject, we could call this a dissociation with the past. It can be argued, that in the creation of historical memory or in the writing of history the second type of forgetting does play a role, since all representations of the past sometimes ‘forget’ something that with hindsight has truly been decisive in the past (Ankersmit 2005: 322).

In the box of trauma a dissociation takes place on the level of identity: a painful part of one’s life is actively forgotten. As we have seen, trauma corresponds to the third type of forgetting. This brings us to the last box, the case of the sublime historical experience. Here a double dissociation takes place. As with the subjective historical experience, the past it refers to is no longer there. And as in the case of trauma, there is the painful abandonment of an identity, in this case of a traditional and familiar previous worldview.



Crucial however to trauma is that closure of the trauma is in principle possible as it takes place within the time span of a lived life or community life. As soon as the traumatic experience can be narrativized and can find a place in the story of one's life, the tension between remembering and forgetting will (or can) be dissolved. The possibility for closure of the trauma, creates a desire of being, they want to be(come) again who they were once in the past. (Ankersmit 2005: 327). Within the sublime historical experience, there is no possibility of closure, since it creates an abyss between two different historical and cultural identities. The desire for the past can therefore only be a *desire to know* the historical world that is forever separated from the world of the subject. As Ankersmit reminds us 'trauma can be seen as the psychological counterpart of the sublime, and the sublime can be seen as the epistemological counterpart of trauma'. (Ankersmit 2005: 338). For the historical sublime, the subject of trauma is not individual persons but Western civilization itself. Another important difference between trauma and the historical sublime is the possibility of narrativization. The difficulty of a traumatic experience as the Holocaust is exactly the possibility to create a narrative. For the sublime historical experience, however, 'the past must first be historicized, transformed by association into narrative understanding, before, with a subsequent gesture, it can be repudiated and thus ensured of entry into a new world'. (Ankersmit 2005: 344). This kind of experience makes us look at ourselves

from the perspective of the outsider, as if we were looking at somebody else. We can only become aware of this previous identity, *because* we have acquired a new identity. With this, it has to be noted that the historical sublime is not necessarily to be found in a distant past, yet it can be found every time civilization enters a truly new phase in its history.

The historical sublime has a close relationship to the notion of myth. Ankersmit understands myth as a past that has left no traces in our contemporary reality, hence it represents a past that we have wholly 'forgotten about' and that is 'dissociated' from our present historical world. It is the intense historicization and narrativization taking place at the occasion of a sublime historical event that creates in the end a quasi-eternal and mythical past. Crucial for Ankersmit is to understand myth as a product of history and historical awareness. This is most notably exemplified in Ankersmit's book with the mystified Athens in Hölderlin's novel *Hyperrion*. In this case, myth, as it is related to Athens, relates to a phase in human history itself (Ankersmit 2005: 384-385).

The framework presented above offers a starting point for an analysis of the role of place in memory and historical experience in the novel *Sefarad* from Antonio Muñoz Molina. In this novel, the dimension of space² intersects and traverses the dimensions of time and identity. We will make use of the analytical tools of memory studies and narratology (specifically Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, that points at the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships) to identify the various functions of place in the novel. As we have mentioned in the introduction, the theories of (sublime) historical experience as set out by Ankersmit, are lacking a notion of place. Although he does mention and praise Pierre Nora's work *Les lieux de mémoire* (Ankersmit 2005: 262) and the innovative contribution of Nora to memory studies, the notion of *places* of memory are not touched upon in Ankersmit's analysis of historical experience, and are not even discussed in his comment on Nora's work.

However, a specification of the notion of place within the theory of historical experience does seem to deserve more attention. First, when considering the idea of historical experience within the realm of memory studies, it is striking that the idea of place is ubiquitous in the latter, while

hardly present in the former. Second, the examples of historical experiences seem to give a special role to objects as the triggers of these experiences. The spatial dimension of these objects requires more detail. Third, the Eurocentric examples given by Ankersmit in his description of subjective and sublime historical experiences are specifically located.³ And finally, if we think of the notion of dissociation as a necessary pre-condition for a historical experience, we could argue that displacement or exile could also be a category of dissociation.

Sefarad: dissociation in space-time

The novel *Sefarad* (2001) from Antonio Muñoz Molina⁴ narrates upon the condition of exile and diaspora and its relation to identity. What would you do, asks Muñoz Molina, if from one day to another you are no longer who you think you are, if you are nothing more than what others tell about you? In seventeen interdependent stories, Molina's characters live through all possible forms of exile: they flee from Nazis, Communists and Franquists, they look for better opportunities in a big city far from the familiar village or they suffer a psychological exile due to disease or drugs. The life stories of Primo Levi, Franz Kafka, Dolores Ibárruri and Walter Benjamin are inserted in the stories of fictional characters and take place in different countries and in different times. Sefarad, the Hebrew word for Spain, becomes a metaphor for the general condition of exile. *Sefarad* has been mostly defined as a novel of memories. However, we would like to broaden this definition with the notion of (historical) experience, along the lines of the discussion described above. Within this framework we will use the exile condition, and the subsequent importance of place in the novel, to explore the role of place in Ankersmit's conception of historical experience.

The condition of exile creates different forms of tension in *Sefarad*. There is an obvious thematic tension between the different stories of forced exile and those of voluntary exile. But the exile condition also creates a double feeling within the characters. On the one hand there is the lightness of being once you become separated from your past and you can make up

your own identity, for instance when you start to live in a new city or when you travel. Travelling is not so much a metaphor for becoming somebody different for Muñoz Molina, yet it serves as an example of the possibility to distance yourself from your past by the spatial movement of travelling.

'No creo que sea verdad eso que dicen, que al viajar uno pueda convertirse en otro: lo que sucede es que uno se aligera de sí mismo, de sus obligaciones y de su pasado, igual que reduce todo lo que posee a las pocas cosas necesarias para su equipaje.' (37)

'I don't believe it's true what they say, that as you travel you become a different person. What happens is that you grow lighter, you shed your obligations and your past, just as you reduce everything you possess to the few items you need for your luggage.' (22)

This is also what happened to Isaac Salama, the son of a Sephardic Jew from Budapest, who could escape to Tangier in 1944 with the help of the Spanish embassy.

'(...) la felicidad de estar en Madrid sin vínculos con nadie, sin ser nada ni nadie que él mismo, tan libre de la fuerza de gravedad del pasado como de la de la tierra, libre, provisionalmente, de su vida anterior y tal vez también de la vida futura que otros habían calculado para él, libre de su padre, de su melancolía, de su negocio de tejidos, de su lealtad a los muertos.' (142)

'(...) the happiness of being in Madrid with no ties to anyone, being nothing more or less than himself, as free from the force of the gravity of the past as from the earth's, free, temporarily, from his former life and maybe from the future life others had planned for him, free from his father, his melancholy, his cloth business, his loyalty to the dead.' (102)

On the other hand, however, there is always the melancholy of the loss of identity and the meaningful things from the past. The different characters surrender to melancholic memories when encountered with persons or objects from the past. They collect these objects from the past and want

to return to the places of the past. This division is also represented throughout the novel in the elaborations on the narrative identity of the characters versus a possible ‘real’ identity, as well as in the tension between stories about the past and tangible objects from the past in the present.

But what will be most important for our reading of *Sefarad* in the function of memory and experience of the past, is that the condition of exile creates a dissociation in the identity of the characters. This dissociation does not only take place in time (which mostly does not cover a very long period) but also in *space*. The condition of exile creates a severe disruption with the past, because all evidence of the past has disappeared. These evidential objects, like photographs or personal belongings, or places where one experienced important parts of one's youth, are no longer available to the characters. Only the mental images have survived. But, as Muñoz Molina recounts in one of his stories, there was once a man who became blind in his twenties, and when he was around fifty years old even the images he remembered from when he still could see had disappeared (Muñoz Molina 2001: 143); (Muñoz Molina 2003: 103-104). Some of the exiles do keep several objects from before their exile, however they are never more than ‘the little necessary things for someone's luggage’.

In the following analysis, we will consider what roles the notion of space plays in the novel *Sefarad*, in relation to the remembrance and experience of the past along the four ‘boxes’ of our framework: memory, historical experience, trauma, and sublime historical experience.

Memory

We want to distinguish three types of relation between memory and place. On the one hand a place can be a trigger for memories of the past; on the other hand one can have memories *of* a place, as if one imagines the places of his or her past. Lastly, we could think of the reconstruction of a place of the past in the present.

The fifth story of *Sefarad* is called ‘Valdemún’.⁵ This story tells of the journey of a woman and her husband back to her village Valdemún, where she will visit her dying aunt. The narrator of the story is the woman's husband, who becomes a kind of spy of her past life through his engagement with the objects and persons in the house where she was born and raised. The trip to the village becomes a trip to the past, where

‘según progresa el viaje los nombres de la carretera invocan lugares de la infancia, y el espacio se trasmuta en tiempo, se proyecta en dos dimensiones simultáneas, el ahora mismo imperioso de llegar cuanto antes y el ayer recobrado y estático, (...). Al mirar por la ventanilla y reconocer los paisajes que habías visto de niña tus ojos adquieren sin que te des cuenta la mirada de entonces.’ (114)

‘The place-names along the highway invoke your childhood, space transmuting into time [and projects into two simultaneous dimensions, the urgent present of arriving as soon as possible and the recovered and static past] (...). You gaze out of the window, recognizing the landscapes you saw long ago, and your eyes take on [the look from those days].’ (80)

The places from the past uncover the past identity of the narrator's wife: she literally recovers her gaze from back then. Space *turns into* time and, even more, it is simultaneously past and present. When going back to the place of the past, memories seem to return with such intensity, that Muñoz Molina's description here comes close to Ankersmit's understanding of a historical experience, in the sense that object (the past) and subject merge.

The husband, who is painfully aware of the fact that he will always be a foreigner to his wife's past, recounts attentively every object in the house and how it is related to his wife's memories. When the aunt dies, the door of the house will be closed, and, little by little the house will fall apart, like the other abandoned houses in the village. When this place of the past will be gone, the childhood memories of his wife will also fade away. Collective memory will become historical memory.

The first story of *Sefarad*, ‘Sacristán’, also stresses the separation of someone who has moved from a village to the big city. In this story however, the village from the childhood remains at a distance, and the main character can only go back in memory. The memory of the village is evoked within a small group of people who originate from the same village. They remember a specific vocabulary that was used, they remember certain culinary delicacies and the voice of a relative on the other side of the rare long distance calls. At the time in which the story is told, even these things slowly disappear. But then the narrator runs into a person from the past, Mateo Zapatón, on a square in the centre of Madrid.

‘Con un sobresalto de alegría vi en medio de la ciudad hostil esa cara de mi infancia, vinculada a los recuerdos más dulces de mi ciudad y de mi vida.’ (29)

‘It gave me a [shock] of pleasure to see that face in the middle of a hostile city, a face tied to the sweetest memories of my hometown and childhood.’ (16)

His lost city gives room to the sweetest memories of his life. He does not only remember happy moments, but he also remembers something else of which until then he did not know was still in his memory. He remembers going behind one of the shops in his village to drink some water, and when he returned to the shop he found himself lost and it took him some time to see that he had actually entered into the wrong shop, the shop of the man he now runs into in Madrid. This is the kind of recovery of memory which is similar to the kind of forgetting that Ankersmit defines as the second type of forgetting: things we might have forgotten but that are truly relevant to our identity. In this case, the feeling of being lost endures in the narrator’s condition of living in the city.

In the first and second case, the re-encounter with something or somebody from the past, brings up ‘madeleine-like’ effects. The re-encounter with something authentic from the past revives memories that even the person who remembers them unconsciously might have forgotten. In the third case however, the reconstruction of a place from the past, that place does not bring up these authentic feelings, but only feelings of nostalgia.

In the chapter ‘Sherezade’, Muñoz Molina tells us the story of a Spanish woman living in Madrid but surrounded by communist paraphernalia. The woman had emigrated to the Soviet Union with her parents when she was young. Although she came back to Spain at a later period in order to collect a better pension, she did not distance herself from Soviet rhetorics.

‘Cómo voy a tirar nada, si cada cosa tiene una historia tan larga, y yo me las cuento a mí misma cuando estoy sola, como si fuera la guía en un museo. Ese Lenin que hay encima del televisor es de bronce, cójalo y verá cómo pesa, y fíjese lo bien que está sacado su parecido.’ (348-349)

‘How can I throw anything away when everything has its own story? I tell stories to myself when I’m alone, as if I was a guide in a museum. That Lenin on the top of the television set is bronze, pick it up and you will see how heavy it is, and just look what a good likeness.’ (250)

The woman suffers from a constant nostalgia towards her past in the Soviet Union. However, now that she has moved back to Spain, even if she would go back to Moscow, the Soviet Union she so much longs for no longer exists. It has been reduced to the little museum she has created for herself in her apartment in Madrid.

In another story, Berghof, a similar situation is described where a doctor has to come to rescue to a man whom he discovers to be an old Nazi. This old Nazi had turned his villa in Spain into a small museum of idolization of the Third Reich. This reconstruction of other places is even more strongly emphasized in the enumeration of the melancholy of Spanish places far away from Spain.

‘Tejadillos falsos, ficticias paredes encaladas, imitaciones de rejas andaluzas, mugre taurina y regional, (...); la imitación de las cuevas de Sacramonte en un cruce de carreteras cerca de Frankfurt, donde daban sangría en diciembre (...). [E]l café Madrid, y se respiraba un aire cálido con olores aproximadamente familiares.’ (140-141)

'Fake-tile roofs, mock-whitewashed walls, imitations of Andalusian railings, regional bullfight posters (...); The imitation caves of Sacromonte at a crossroad near Frankfurt, where they served sangria in December (...). Café Madrid and breathe in warm air carrying odors that were familiar.' (101)

When we consider the dimension of space in these examples, it is interesting to note that the villages that are remembered by the characters can be seen as the chronotope of the 'provincial town'. Even in the reconstruction of Spanish places abroad we can see the iconic elements that belong to the 'provincial town'. The word 'chronotope' was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin to refer to 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. (Bakhtin 1981: 84) The chronotope of the 'provincial town' refers to folkloric time, in which time is not an advancing historical movement. This idea of a 'timeless' past reminds us of the relation between the myth and the historical sublime as recounted by Ankersmit. However, while the myth as the historical sublime is created by history and is to be understood at a collective level, in these fragments the myth seems to be created through a process of thorough memorization, which can be seen as a form of narrativization by a single person.

Furthermore, in the previous examples we can not speak of a dissociation in time. None of the previous examples reflect the 'desmemoria absoluta, la que cae sobre los hechos y los seres humanos cuando muere el último testigo que los presencié, el último que escuchó una voz y sostuvo una mirada.' (177); ('*absolute oblivion that claims events and human beings when the last person to witness them, the last person to hear a certain voice or meet a certain pair of eyes, dies.*') (130)). It is this *absolute oblivion* that is a necessary condition for a subjective historical experience to take place. Let us then now pass to the territory (literally!) of experience.

Subjective Historical Experience

Sefarad shows some spare instants in which the characters undergo a true subjective historical experience, mirroring the notion that these experiences are not as common as (unconscious) memory recollections. In the subjective historical experience a reconnection with the past takes place in which our representations of that past fall away and for a moment the dissociation in time is bridged: past and present collide, only to separate again shortly after.

In the final story of *Sefarad*, entitled 'Sefarad', a Spanish man and his wife wonder through the museum of the Hispanic Society in New York. Here they meet a woman, the curator of the museum, who tells the man about her fascination for a painting by Velázquez, a portrait of a girl.⁶ What is mesmerizing about the painting for the curator, and afterwards also for the man (who in a way is even haunted by it) is that it is a painting *without any context* (the girl is nameless and unknown). In this way the girl does not *represent* anything and it is exactly this aspect of her authenticity which in the end deeply moves the characters in this story:

'Los cuadros aquí, y en cualquier museo, representan a poderosos o a santos, a gente hinchada de arrogancia, o trastornada por la santidad o por el tormento del martirio, pero esa niña no representa nada, no es ni la Virgen niña ni una infanta ni la hija de un duque, no es nada más que ella misma, una niña sola, con la expresión de seriedad y dulzura, como perdida en una ensoñación de melancolía infantil.' (531)

'Paintings, in any museum, portray the powerful and the holy, people puffed up with self-importance or crazed by saintliness or by the torment of martyrdom, but that child doesn't represent anything, she isn't the young Virgin or a princess or the daughter of a duke, she's just herself, a solitary little girl with a serious, sweet expression, as if lost in a daydream or some moment of childish unhappiness.' (378)

It might be debated whether Muñoz Molina really describes a subjective *historical* experience here (where he does not describe in detail whether the painting reconnects the characters with the past). However, one could at least argue he does describe an *aesthetic* experience here.

As it concerns subjective *historical* experiences, space plays again an important role in *Sefarad*. Again not only do (historical) places trigger giant leaps through space-time, subjective historical experiences also seem to bring the characters in *Sefarad* back to certain (historical) places. For example in the story 'Berghof', the narrator, a doctor, recalls how as a child he would walk on the old wooden floor of his grandmother's house, and how he would then feel like being in another place, in another life. He describes having the same experience whilst listening to music, which even conjures up places from before he was born. It is interesting to notice the detailed description of the process of the historical experience, as Muñoz Molina literally tries to capture the velocity with which object and subject merge.

'Era como estar en el camarote de un barco, en otro lugar, casi en otra vida. Tengo una sensación parecida, de plenitud, de plenitud material de algo, cuando escucho un violoncello. De nuevo el tiempo salta, de una cosa a otra, de un tiempo a otro, a la velocidad de los impulsos neuronales, unos doscientos kilómetros por segundo: Pau Casals toca las suites para violoncello de Bach en Barcelona, en el otoño de 1938, cuando ya se ha perdido la batalla del Ebro, y Manuel Azaña y Juan Negrín lo escuchan desde un palco, en el teatro del Liceo.'(245)

'It was like being [in a ship's cabin], in another place, another life. I have a similar sensation when I hear a 'cello. Again time leaps from one thing to another, [from one time to another,] an almost instantaneous impulse between neurons [, with a speed of two hundred kilometers per second]: Pablo Casals playing Bach's suites for 'cello in Barcelona, in the fall of 1938 when the Battle of the Ebro has been lost and Manuel Azaña and Juan Negrín are listening from a box in the Liceo Theater.'(178-179)

A similar thing occurs in the story 'Olympia'. The main character, an office clerk, visits a museum in Madrid. After he has seen a photograph of

Spanish Republicans exiled in Mexico, and briefly talks with a woman who claims to have been one of the figures on that picture, he walks outside the museum and feels like he is being transported through time and space:

'Recobro ahora otros pasos, el recuerdo que iba a contar cuando apareció delante de mí la caminata por el Retiro en la mañana de niebla, la forma sin peso del palacio de Cristal, el morado bello y melancólico de las banderas republicanas en los anaqueles de una exposición, insignias de un país que yo había perdido antes de nacer.' (229-230)

'Now I am in a different past, a different morning, not the one in which I walked through the Retiro and fog to the weightless shape of the Crystal Palace, the beautiful and melancholy purple of Republican flags on the shelves of an exhibition, insignia of a country I had lost before I was born.' (167)

Although both these examples do conjure up thoroughly historicized objects (music by Bach played by Casals, a picture of Spanish Republicans), in contrast with the authentic girl, here they serve as representations of a past long gone, which for a moment comes back to the characters in all its clarity. Interestingly enough, in all three cases one could argue that the characters also undergo aesthetic experiences, as they do not encounter common, daily objects, which in *Sefarad* mostly serve to trigger memories, but objects of art (paintings, pictures, music), objects which represent another time. Ankersmit also points to the similarities between the aesthetic and historical experience, which both support the conviction of authenticity.

Objects also have a spatial status, as they determine the spatial effect of the room. But in this case, the objects seem to define the function of the different places similar to the Bakhtinian chronotope of 'the castle'. The castle, according to Bakhtin, is saturated with the time of the historical past. Traces of past centuries are encountered everywhere in the castle and give the castle a museum-like character. Although the examples here do not resemble real castles, as Bakhtin exemplifies in both Gothic and historical novels, it is notorious that the places in which the historical experiences

are described in *Sefarad* have indeed such a strong reference to the historical past.

Trauma

While in the previous parts we have been dealing with voluntary exiles, the forced exile is closely related to traumatic memories, and, in the case of *Sefarad*, this relationship comes to the front in stories on the Holocaust and the diaspora of the Jews. In the chapter 'Oh tú que lo sabías' (Oh you, who knew so well), we get to know mister Salama and his son Isaac Salama. Isaac flees from Budapest with his father at the moment they discover that Isaac's mother and sisters have been arrested at their house, while the men were out. They seek the assistance of Mister Sanz Brinz, who works at the Spanish embassy, and try to arrange Spanish documents for Jews of Sephardic origin. Together they try to find out where his mother and sisters have been sent, so that Sanz Brinz can manage to get them out of the concentration camp when handing over their Spanish documents. But as Isaac and his father later found out, the women had been sent to a camp of which, at that time, nobody had yet heard, and which even now is still just a name at an abandoned railway station. Isaac and his father eventually come to live in Tangier, which was then still a part of the Spanish colonies.

While the other stories emphasize remembering more, this story focuses mainly on the theme of forgetting. The father tries to forget the past and builds up his fabric store, *Galerías Duna*, called after the river Danube in Budapest. But by that name the place of his past is actually present in his everyday life. Nevertheless, he refuses to visit the camp where his wife and daughters have been killed. His son Isaac wants to get out of Tangier, to finally get to know the real Spain, Sepharad. During his student life in Madrid he seems to be able to live without the burden of the past for a while. However, a car accident that cripples him brings Isaac back to Tangier. He becomes the director of the *Ateneo Español*.

Both father and son try to forget not only the past, but also the places of the past. Even more, Isaac has internalized the trauma of exile which urges him not to stand out amongst others. He testifies with shame that when he was nine years old and living in Budapest,

'lo que quería no era que los judíos nos salváramos de los nazis. Se lo digo con vergüenza: lo que yo quería era no ser judío.' (157)

'*what I wanted was not for us Jews to be saved from the Nazis. I say it now, what I wanted was not to be a Jew.*' (114)

And now he feels the same about his crippled legs:

'Qué puede entender usted, y perdóneme que se lo diga, si tiene sus dos piernas y sus dos brazos. Eso sí que es una frontera, como tener una enfermedad muy grave o muy vergonzosa o llevar una estrella amarilla cosida a la solapa.' (157)

'*How can you understand – forgive me for saying so – when you have two good legs and both arms? When you don't, it is like having a grave illness, or a yellow star sewn to your lapel.*' (114)

However, the important paradox in the Salamas' trauma is that the past and its places are at the same time forgotten and present as a result of the imperative of not forgetting to forget, as mentioned by Ankersmit in this type of traumatic forgetting. This is symbolized in the name of the shop 'Galerías Duna'. Isaac even becomes the official representative of Spanish culture in the Moroccan city of Tangier. In this way, it is not the traumatic exile from Hungary that is constantly present, but Sepharad, the mythical past and origin of the Sephardic diaspora, that is present in his everyday life.

On the level of the Holocaust trauma we could say that Isaac Salama manages to get to a certain form of closure when he visits the camp where his mother and sisters had been murdered and says the Kaddish for his deceased father during eleven months. Yet on the level of the trauma of the diaspora of the whole lineage of Sephardic Jews, and despite the literal

return to Sepharad, father and son do not escape from their traumatic condition.

‘Ahora Tánger pertenecía al Reino de Marruecos, y poco a poco los extranjeros tendrían que marcharse, nosotros los primeros, dijo su padre, con un brillo fugaz de la agudeza y el sarcasmo de otros tiempos. Sólo espero que nos echen con mejores modales que los húngaros, o que los españoles en 1492.

Dijo eso, los españoles, como si no se considerase ya uno de ellos, aunque tuviera la nacionalidad y durante una parte de su vida hubiera sentido tanto orgullo de pertenecer a un linaje sefardí.’ (155)

‘Now [Tangier] belonged to the kingdom of Morocco, and little by little foreigners would have to leave – “we first”, said the father with a flash of the wit and sarcasm of old. “I only hope they throw us out with better manners than the Hungarians, or the Spanish in 1492.”

That’s what he said, the Spanish, as if he didn’t consider himself one of them anymore, even though he held that citizenship and during a period in his life had felt such pride in belonging to a Sephardic line.’ (112)

We will come back to the condition of Sephardic diaspora in our concluding discussion on sublime historical experience. For now, we have suggested that space within the realm of memory and trauma is to be understood along the second (unconscious) and the third (conscious) stage of forgetting as proposed by Ankersmit. Within the domain of memory, a place might be forgotten, but it can still be recalled. However, when the memory is traumatic, the places of the past are consciously forgotten and paradoxically still present.

The categories of memory and historical experience seem to connect with one of the chronotopes defined by Bakhtin. For the category of trauma, however, the presence of such a chronotope is less evident. One could think of the chronotope of ‘the road’, the metaphor for the path of life and also for becoming another person. The road is not specifically evoked in the narration of the diaspora of the Sephardic Jews, nor in the exile of

father and son Salama. However, ‘the road’ is evoked in two important instances in Isaac Salama’s life. First, Isaac is crippled during a car accident in Spain, just when he gained his independency from his father and from the past, as he finally built up a life in Spain. Due to this accident, he was forced to move back to Tangier. Second, a train trip is evoked, in which Isaac Salama for the first time falls in love with a woman. The romance is abruptly ended however, because Isaac wants to hide his crippled leg from her. The road, then, symbolizes how Isaac Salama has internalized his traumatic memory of ‘otherness’, being now socially excluded by having a crippled leg instead of wearing a yellow star.

Sublime Historical Experience

In the sublime historical experience, as we have explained before, a double dissociation takes place: along the axis of time and along the axis of identity. One could make a plea that with Sepharad, Muñoz Molina does describe such a breaching moment in the history of a society, one in which a whole society is disconnected from a previous identity and a previous past.

Sefarad describes several moments of historical diaspora in which the Sephardic Jews were involved, from the banning of Sephardic Jews in 1492, to the Holocaust, and the rise and fall of communism. Especially in the case of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, as we described before, there is still the possibility of reconciliation with ones identity within this lifespan, and thus in Ankersmit’s terms, of the desire of being. However, as Muñoz Molina tries to describe, in the more general theme of the diaspora of the Jews throughout history this closure is no longer possible, and where he refers to the general Jewish identity as represented in Sepharad, as a lost and bygone *place*. Sepharad thus stands as a metaphor for both a lost *past*, a lost *identity* and a lost *place*, where closure is no longer possible on the level of being. Through the continued diaspora of the Jewish people, Sepharad has already turned into a myth.

‘España es un sitio casi inexistente de tan remoto, un país inaccesible, desconocido, ingrato, llamado Sefarad, añorado con una melancolía sin fundamento ni disculpa.’ (154)

‘Spain is so remote that it is nearly nonexistent, an inaccessible, unknown thankless country they called Sepharad, longing for it with a melancholy without base or excuse.’ (111)

The diasporic condition on the level of the Jewish identity as a whole is amply described in the story ‘Oh tú que lo sabías’ (‘Oh you, who knew so well’), where a short history is given of the whole exodus of the family of Salama, exemplified in an object which again refers back to a lost place: the key of a house in Toledo that the Sephardic family has passed on from generation to generation.

Similar to Ankersmit’s example of the mystified Athens in Hölderlin’s novel *Hyperion*, Sepharad is both a myth and an aspect of history. It is the identification of the specific space-time of Sepharad (Spain before 1492), that allows us to introduce the myth in history, and hence to understand myth as a product of history. The expulsion of the Sephardic Jews from Spain might not have been a breaching moment in Western civilization, however, for, as Muñoz Molina shows, it is seen as preceding the historical time of the diaspora of the Sephardic community and in this way attains the qualities of a quasi-natural utopian past. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain was not accompanied by a ‘severe storm of historicization’ as Ankersmit’s examples of the historical sublime, for instance the French Revolution, testify. However, for the Sephardic community it *has* been accompanied by a severe storm of narrativization with which it has become a dominant story in historical memory (as understood by Halbwachs). After the expulsion from Spain, the Sephardic Jews gained a new identity as a diasporic community.⁷ The old ‘Spanish’ identity was both lost forever and constitutive of the new identity.

In *Sefarad* this diasporic condition is also taken to a further level and is lifted from its specific Jewish context. Muñoz Molina pulls the exile condition from its Jewish context and places it onto the level of society as a whole, where it has become an inherent part of all the characters’ beings

and thus of our modern society. The myth of Sepharad has thus been transformed by Muñoz Molina into a constitutive element of our whole (modern) society beyond the Jewish community. It would go too far to argue that the exile of the Jewish communities has shaped modern Western society, as for instance the French revolution did. To understand exile within the realms of the sublime, we should refer to the idea of ‘otherness’ that precedes the expulsion of a specific group from society. Dominick LaCapra stresses that the notion of ‘totally other’ may be construed as sublime (LaCapra 2009: 89).

Throughout the different stories that constitute the novel *Sefarad*, the possibility of becoming ‘the other’ is a recurrent theme. What would you do if from one day to another you are no longer who you think you are, if you are nothing more than what others tell about you. What would you do if at any given moment they can come and arrest you? Hence, there is a strong recognition of how the ‘totally other’ constitutes one’s identity. However, once you have been singled out as ‘the other’, your previous identity will be lost forever. In Western culture, the ‘Other’ has even gained certain mythical qualities that persist throughout the flow of time.

On a spatial level, the resistance to otherness is symbolized in the space of a room. In the story ‘Eres’ (‘You are...’) for instance, the room is, on an individual level, a place of both refuge, of exile, as well as a prison:

‘Si acaso lo que menos cambia, a través de tantos lugares y tiempos, es la habitación en la que te recluyes, ese cuarto del que según Pascal no debería uno salir nunca para que no le sobreviniera la desgracia. “Estar solo en una habitación es tal vez una condición necesaria de la vida”, le escribió Franz Kafka a Milena.’ (403)

‘Perhaps what changes least, through so many places and times, is the room you take refuge in, the room that according to Pascal one should never leave if one is to avoid disaster. “Being alone is perhaps a necessary condition of life” Franz Kafka wrote Milena.’ (289)

It is a prison, for this room is at the same time also the place one runs away from, where different characters in *Sefarad* also choose a conscious

exile, in which the room then forms a metaphor for both a lost past and a longed-for future. And between these spaces in time identity is formed:

‘Encerrado en mi oficina leía las cartas y los diarios y cuadernos de notas de Soren Kierkegaard, y aprendía de Pascal que los hombres casi nunca viven en el presente, sino en el recuerdo del pasado o en el deseo o el miedo del porvenir, y que todas las desgracias le sobrevienen al hombre por no quedarse solo en su habitación.’ (452)

‘Closeted in my office, I read his [Sören Kierkegaard] letters, diaries, and notebooks, and learned in Pascal that men never live in the present, only in their memory of the past or in their desire or fear of the future, and that all our miseries outlast us because we are not able to sit quietly in a room alone.’ (324)

The room can be understood as the mythical place of one’s pure identity.⁸ However, once you have left the room, your identity will be based on the dualistic nature of otherness. Thus, therefore, Bakhtin defines the ‘threshold’ in the form of staircases, front halls, and corridors, as the chronotope that represents the crisis in an individual’s life.

However, both otherness and the symbol of the room are timeless referents. It is only within the framework of the Jewish community that the mythical past identified as Sepharad attains the qualities of the historical sublime as a myth that is produced by history. To clarify the idea of Sepharad as the historical sublime in terms of Ankersmit, we should make a well-defined distinction between exile and diaspora.

The condition of exile presupposes the existence of a homeland, and hence the feeling of melancholy towards that homeland. The story about the Spanish women living in Madrid surrounded by communist paraphernalia, or the stories about the persons who have abandoned the village for the big city are examples of the exile condition. Also father and son Salama live in exile, if we consider Hungary their homeland. The melancholy towards that homeland is symbolized in the name of the shop, ‘Galerías Duna’. Diaspora, on the other hand, erases the concrete idea of a

homeland. As we see in *Sefarad*, that homeland has become a myth that has nothing to do with contemporary Spain.

Conclusion

As we have shown, *place* does not contradict or stand at right angles to *time* as a dimension in stirring memories and experiencing the past. Although exile results in a strong identity dissociation for the characters in the novel *Sefarad*, it is still the *time* aspect that mainly dominates the distinction between memory, trauma and historical experience. Place however seems to run parallel to time: if another time is evoked, it implies also another place. Therefore, we could argue that the concepts of memory and historical experience do not depend solely on a time dimension, but on a dimension of space-time.

Alongside the function of places of memory as defined in memory studies, the places in the novel function as a trigger for the evocation of the past as well as being carriers of different layers of representation of that past. Alongside Ankersmit’s concept of historical experience, memory, just like history writing, also builds up layers of representation or narrativization, which evaporate when one reencounters the places of the past. The places that give rise to the different evocations of the past show interesting parallels with some of Bakhtin’s chronotopes. The chronotope of the ‘provincial town’ evokes a ‘folkloric time’ through the faculty of memory. The museum-like qualities of the chronotope of the ‘castle’ provide a thoroughly historicized space for a possible subjective historical experience.

The condition of exile and diaspora, or displacement, provides the condition for the dissociation of identity. In the case of trauma, the chronotope of the ‘road’, points to the internalization of being different, or ‘otherness’, in the character of Isaac Salama. What then, could be a chronotope for the historical sublime? The *location* of the myth in space-time, in Ankersmit’s example that of Athens and in the case of this article that of Sepharad, seems to be important to overcome the initial idea of ‘timelessness’ associated with a myth. But the literal location of the myth in time

and place, points at the causal relation between history and the myth. Myth is here to be understood as the product of history. As Bakhtin writes, when defining his word 'chronotope': 'In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.' (Morris 1994: 184). Thus, for time to be visible, it needs to be entangled with place. We have not found a relevant chronotope in Bakhtin's descriptions to define such a space-time dimension for the historical sublime. In the case of the novel *Sefarad*, we would conclude that Sepharad is the chronotope for the historical sublime.

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¹ It is important to note, that this is essentially a different concept than the debates on experience *in* history, that is on how historical actors in the past experienced their own

time. Joan W. Scott shows in her valuable contribution how this debate revolves around the relation between experience and historical evidence. Scott however, understands experience not as the origin of our explanation (evidence), but as that which we want to explain. (Scott 1991: 780).

² In our analysis we will use the word ‘space’, meaning places in relation to their perception. We make an exception when we use the combination space-time, which has become a common expression that relates space as three-dimensional to time playing the role of a fourth dimension.

³ As for Ankersmit’s example of his historical experience on basis of Francesco Guardi’s painting *Arcade with a Lantern*, the question is whether his experience gives him access to the mood of eighteenth century *Europe*, or to the specific conditions in *Venice* at that time (Ankersmit 2005: 266-275).

⁴ In this article we will use two different editions of *Sefarad*. All the quotes in Spanish refer to the following Spanish edition Antonio Muñoz Molina (2001) *Sefarad*. Barcelona: Seix Barral [Booket] 2009. The Spanish quotes are followed by quotes in an English translation from Antonio Muñoz Molina, translation by Margaret Sayers Peden (2003) *Sepharad*. Orlando: Harcourt Books. For some quotes a more literal translation was needed to follow the argument, the insertions between square brackets in the English translation are from Marije Hristova.

⁵ This chapter was entitled ‘Ademuz’ in the first edition of the novel.

⁶ Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of a girl*, ca. 1640. Hispanic Society of America, New York.

⁷ The precise origins of the Jewish communities of the Iberian peninsula are unclear. Although the spread of the Jews into Europe is most commonly associated with the diaspora which ensued from the Roman conquest of Judea, what is important here is that the Sephardic Jews relate their current identity to their Spanish (‘Sephardic’) origin.

⁸ This mirrors the notion of the house in the classic work by Gaston Bachelard (1958) *The Poetics of Space*.