ASHKENAZI LITERARY DIASPORA IN THE ARGENTINA OF THE *JUNTA MILITAR*: THE POETIC LEGACY OF JUAN GELMAN, TAMARA KAMENSZAIN, ALICIA BORINSKY, AND ALICIA KOZAMEH

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Abstract - The following research intends to trace the tradition that was forged by the Ashkenazi literary Diaspora via a comprehensive examination of the work of four Argentinean Jewish poets of Eastern-European Ashkenazi descent, all of whom were forced to leave Argentina and live in exile either in Mexico or the United States. During the period of Argentina's last dictatorship (1976-1983), the nation was suspended within a dimension of viselike terror vis-à-vis countless encounters with the notorious Junta Militar.

The most notable manifestation of the Junta's savagery was the alarming state of disquiet and subsequent "disappearance" of approximately 13,000 individuals perceived as a threat to the established order. A large percentage of the vanished faction were of Jewish origin as it is a prevailing anti-Semitic truism that Jews are viewed as intellectuals, and, as such, harbor Socialist leanings.

Among these individuals are the four following poets, whose works were extensively awarded and honored: Alicia Borinsky—Guggenheim Fellowship and Latino Literature Prize—, Juan Gelman—Juan Rulfo Award and Cervantes Prize—, Tamara Kamenszain—Guggenheim Fellowship and Pablo Neruda Presidential Medal—, and Alicia Kozameh—Argentine National Poetry Prize—.

The most obvious link between these four extraordinary individuals and writers is that they were all forced into exile either in Mexico or the United States, however, one cannot overlook other existing similarities, such as they are all Jewish, all individuals of Eastern-European Ashkenazi descent, and heirs to a body of work created by writers that were part of the Diaspora.

Keywords - Exile, Latin American Literature, Political Poetry, Dictatorship, Juan Gelman, Tamara Kamenszain, Alicia Borinsky, Alicia Kozameh, Argentinean Jewish Poets of Eastern-European Ashkenazi Descent.

I. PROJECT NARRATIVE

Proposal: Research and contribution. The following research intends to trace the tradition that was forged by the Ashkenazi literary Diaspora via a comprehensive examination of the work of four Argentinean Jewish poets of Eastern-European Ashkenazi descent, all of whom were forced to leave Argentina and live in exile either in Mexico or the United States. During the period of Argentina's last dictatorship (1976-1983), the nation was suspended within a dimension of viselike terror vis-à-vis countless encounters with the notorious Junta Militar. The most noted extension of the Junta's savagery was the alarming state of disquiet and subsequent "disappearance" of approximately 13,000 individuals perceived as a threat to the established order. These men and women included armed urban leftist guerillas, however, the Junta perceived pacifists posed a threat to societal stability, as well, and seized and murdered trade unionists, students, journalists, and sympathizers, including academics, visual artists, and writers. A large percentage of the vanished faction were of Jewish origin as it is a prevailing anti-Semitic truism that Jews are viewed as intellectuals, and, as such, harbor Socialist leanings.

The Junta was particularly ferocious in its persecution of artists and intellectuals who united in their opposition to state-sanctioned terror. In response, many Argentine social critics and creative dwellers either self-censored public opinion to avoid brutal backlash or were forced to seek safe havens in foreign homelands. The climate of the time begs the following pressing consideration, not yet posited, which is an examination and assessment of the extent of the effect of the Junta's repression on artistic creativity, and, in particular, on Argentine poets. For some, relocation in a foreign country brought with it a newfound freedom of expression together with an altered vantage point that enabled a better understanding of Argentina's political and poetical history. Ironically, it would seem that the overriding shroud of tyrannical oppression ultimately served to reignite the artistic sensibility of select exiles.

Among these individuals are the four following poets this work will study intensively: Alicia Borinsky, Juan Gelman, Tamara Kamenszain, and Alicia Kozameh.

Aided by a military coup, Buenos Aires-native Alicia Borinsky fled Argentina and exiled to the United States. She has received several honors for her work – including a Guggenheim Fellowship (2001) and the Latino Literature Prize (1996).

Juan Gelman escaped Argentina after the coup d'état, as well, and has stationed himself in Mexico City since. His story, unfortunately, is overcast with the intimate experience of the Junta's barbarity as his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and nephew were kidnapped and executed. Gelman's work has garnered the following highest honors: the Juan Rulfo Award (one of the Spanish-speaking world's most coveted prizes); and the Cervantes Prize (the most prestigious honor a Spanish writer may receive).

A prolific poet and critic, Tamara Kamenszain also fled Argentina for Mexico where she established herself as a faculty member at the University of Mexico, as well as a contributor to Mexico's National Endowment for the Arts. She returned to Buenos Aires in 1984, and, today, is a faculty member at New York University's Argentine campus. Her work has been honored with a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and the Pablo Neruda Presidential Medal, amongst other prizes.

Like Juan Gelman, Alicia Kozameh suffered from the Junta's flamboyant cruelty. From 1975 to 1978, she was held as a political prisoner, and even after her release, was the target of ongoing persecution. She evacuated Argentina in 1980, settling in California. Today, she participates in public discussions and conferences sponsored by Amnesty International, as well as literary symposia and special events in the United States, Latin America, and Europe. She has received several awards for her work – including the Argentine National Poetry Prize.

The most obvious link between these four extraordinary individuals and writers is that they were all forced into exile either in Mexico or the United States, however, one cannot overlook other existing similarities, such as they are all Jewish, all individuals of Eastern-European Ashkenazi descent, and heirs to a body of work created by writers that were part of the Diaspora. Individually and stylistically, each carved out an indelible presence through their innovative approach to poetic composition. With a richly hued network of categories, and a precise system of connotations and stylings, they also paid homage to tradition. Their poetic dialogue, imbued with a vanguardist perspective, tapped into the tradition and imagery pioneered by José Hernández, Leopoldo Lugones, and other foundational poets. And in their exquisite use of language, they also utilized methods initiated by the River Plate region's Gauchesca and Criollismo movements (from the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively).

The thrust of this study, in fact, is a close examination of how these four poets were affected both by the Argentine literary tradition and the rampant barbarism of the Junta Militar. Through the research presented, readers and scholars may gain a better understanding of the poetic substance, devices, impact, and implications of this group. This type of restorative analytical work will be essential for those who are revisiting and revising this historical period, and for those who seek a detailed, well-documented relationship between anti-Semitism, social politics, and poetry.

II. METHODS AND WORK PLAN

Contemporary literary research is based upon parameters and methods, which appear to have evolved differently from those within other fields of inquiry. Literary studies have had a longer history than most contemporary sciences; for this reason, literary studies are likely hampered by more traditional approaches and constructions. A longstanding honored tradition can serve as a hindrance to advantageous change. Contemporary literary scholars often face the daunting challenge of overcoming awe regarding their shared heritage to the point of intimidation. This type of rooted fascination cannot, and should not, impede seamless methodological and epistemological progress. To attempt to avoid any such impediment, the organizing themes of this work-in-progress will be built upon the dual theoretical framework of Ashkenazic Jewish Argentine identity and political exile. To boost awareness concerning the specific and theoretical construct that this work entails, I will examine the works of these four writers as they relate to the grander canvases of literary criticism; Argentine literary history and culture; the particularities of Argentine Jewish identity; and the painful realities of political exile. It also addresses the influence manifested by social activism and a secular worldview in these poets' lives.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion 1: "Living as a Jewish writer under the Junta Militar." The scope of this analysis includes pre-exile works by Borinsky, Gelman, Kamenszain, and Kozameh. It casts the following fundamental questions: How does the poetry of these writers fit into the Argentine canon? What role did Jewish organizations in Argentina play in the lives and work of Jewish authors? Why did they choose to incorporate slang-heavy underworld idioms in their poetry? As the toxicity level of the political environment spiked and freedom of expression compromised, what coping mechanisms did these artists employ to inflate individual and collective morale to ensure a continuing flow of work?

Discussion 2: "The dialectics of exile: nation, time, language, ethnicity, space, and influence." This chapter addresses the lives these poets inhabited in exile. How were they received in the United States and Mexico? What were the dynamics of the

relationships between each writer and their new publishers and employers? The challenges of dealing with markedly different public dynamics, publishers, universities, and colleagues will be discussed. Each of the four developed fresh networks of colleagues and managed to establish relationships with other Jewish Argentine writers in exile, such as David Viñas; Humberto Costantini; Luisa Futuransky; Alicia Steimberg; Alicia Dujovne-Ortiz; Aída Gelbrunk; Nora Glickman; Ana María Shua; Mario Golobof; Aída Bortnik; Alicia Partnoy; Samuel Pecar; Oded Sverdlik; Eliahu Toker; José Isaacson; Manuela Fingueret; Rubén Kanalestein; Alberto Szpunberg; Daniel Freidemberg; Noé Jitrik; León Rozitchner; Betina Edelberg; and Máximo Simpson. What role did these new relationships play in their creative output? Having started their careers in Buenos Aires, one of Latin America's largest cities, this work will also explore what artistic influences these poets unearthed in the Mexico City megalopolis, as well as in the United States.

Discussion 3: "Combating the invalidating, incubating effects of exile." Among other literary and rhetorical strategies for navigating challenging aspects of exile as, for example, dealing with different languages and cultures, this chapter will cover what I have cataloged as part of their poetical/political experience: 'the anaphora,' 'anacoluthon,' 'aphasia,' and 'slanging,' including the poetic and political emphasis placed on Argentinian vernacular and slang-heavy underworld idioms as an antidote to the identity crises caused by the continuum-displacement, i.e. Ukrainian or Russian-Jewish Argentines who are exiled in Mexico or the United States.

Discussion 4: "Post-exile: Writing the Diaspora." This chapter investigates what it was like for these artists to return to the new hypocritical and hypercritical reality of Argentina. Readers will find an analysis of the experience of reestablishing relationships with publishers, Jewish organizations, academic institutions, and, most fraught with complexity, the intellectuals who remained in Argentina during the reign of the Junta. For each of these four writers, circling back to Argentina fueled crises in identity as Argentine citizens, as artists, and as Jews. Making a conscious decision to forego exile, instead of helping to suture ancient wounds, resulted in a deeper Crisis of Identity (Diasporic Identity), which will be analyzed via a deconstruction of their Diasporic Poetics. In addition to presenting poems created in the post-exile period, readers will also discover a challenge to existing theories assessing identity issues during exile and after exile, such as, for instance, the unattainable desire to return to an idyllic, pre-exile existence.

The research in this study will provide readers with a sophisticated and illuminating, in-depth analysis of four of the most renowned poets Argentina has given the world. Assessing the relationship between exile and creativity will yield a firmer grasp of the relationship between anti-Semitism, social politics, and poetry.

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