

Reading for *Stimmung* in Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*

En su novela Sefarad, Antonio Muñoz Molina logra sumergir el lector en un mundo repleto de olores y sabores, objetos, lugares y circunstancias, y sensaciones físicas y emocionales que desencadenan una reacción física en el lector que sobrepasa la lectura pasiva del texto. A base de las ideas de Heidegger, Gumbrecht, y otros, se desarrolla aquí una manera sobretextual de aproximarse el lector al texto. Aplicando las ideas de Stimmung, veremos cómo el autor ha logrado injertar en los recuerdos de su narrador sensaciones que individualizan la experiencia vivida. Lo significativo de esa técnica es la capacidad de esas descripciones de afectar al lector, ligando sus experiencias y recuerdos con los del narrador. Esa técnica complementa y aumenta la importancia de la identidad individual frente a su neutralización en el contexto de una identidad nacionalista, sutilmente representado en el contexto franquista. Como sugiere el título, Sefarad recalca el papel que juegan los elementos culturales (comida, aromas, lugares, celebraciones, etc.) que estimulan al individuo y causan una reacción física (e.g., escalofríos, hambre, salivar, lágrimas). Como resultado, la novela sirve como propaganda antinacionalista y reafirma la peculiaridad de la identidad individual y cultural que define a un pueblo.

I want to understand that 'life' at which we can arrive, by paying attention to the *Stimmungen* condensed in literary texts, as a life and an environment with physical substance. I am doing so, and I believe that literary readings will increasingly be 'readings for the *Stimmung*,' because we have begun to actively suffer from living in an everyday world in which it has become tenuous to physically wrap our bodies and frame our existence.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

Several literary critics, including Mechthild Albert, Gero Arnscheidt, Nicola Gilmour, Elide Pittarello, Dagmar Vandebosch, and David K. Herzberger,

have broached the topic of memory in Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*. These studies have defined the role of memory in the novel in terms of the Holocaust, of the effects of empathy and trauma on reader reception, of the development of identity, and as an existential musing on the moral aspects of society and being. Gilmour's article is particularly significant to the present study given her association of *Sefarad's* narrator with the role of empathy. Pittarello reinforces Gilmour's argument noting that "en *Sefarad* el autor se expone como *sujeto a*, en vez de *sujeto de* todas las historias que le llegan y que lo plasman consciente o inconscientemente" (135). Within this context of trauma and subjection to the process of memory, *Sefarad* engages the reader at a deeper, more intimate physio-emotional level best described as *Stimmung*.

Theorists, including Leo Spitzer, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and Marc Augé, propose that there is an intimate linkage between time and space (or place), and the physiological responses that these settings have on memory. As will be shown in this study, Muñoz Molina's work transcends the idea of the novel to become an anthropological study of human identity inferred through cultural indicators (e.g., food, customs, celebrations, dialects) with each one evoking a physical memory that manifests itself in the form of a shiver, a smile, an expression of calm, or anxiety. Within this "imaginary community" both narrator and reader meet to exchange and intermingle experience and memory (Gilmour 852). Augé notes that this anthropological place designates "a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it" (42). Here the term intelligibility, or the clarity with which a circumstance is perceived, does not occur solely at a rational level but on a physical and emotional plane embodied in *Stimmung*. Relying primarily on the first chapter of the work as the template for the remainder of the novel, I shall show how Muñoz Molina inserts the reader into *les lieux de memoire* ("place of memory"), or a personal landscape, a place that "belongs to the senses, perhaps therefore to the person who looks at it and translates it" (Nora xiii).

Let us begin by understanding the concept of *Stimmung*. Traditional definitions link the term to sound and resonance that cause physical and emotional responses in the listener. In other words, there is an *attunement* between memory and sound that links both responses to personal experiences or significant events. These responses transcend the objectivity of language, or the common, and engage the individual's subjectivity and responsiveness to his circumstances.¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht notes, "Reading for *Stimmung* cannot mean 'deciphering' atmospheres and moods, for they have no fixed signification... Instead, it

means discovering sources of energy in artifacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily - yielding to them and gesturing toward them" (*Atmosphere* 18).

When applied to the act of reading, *Stimmung* transforms the dialogic nature of the text into a physically engrossing experience. Theorists like Spitzer and Gumbrecht suggest that an author holds the power to saturate his work with discourse that evokes memories based on odors, tastes, and both visual and audible stimuli. These sensory inducements steep both the syntactic and narrative functionality of the text in passions, appetites, desires and longings, all of which forge a more intimate emotional connection with the reader. Thus, within a given narrative space, *Stimmung* will fuse both sensory and temporal-spatial perceptions into a synthetic whole. These spatial and environmental factors appear at multiple points within the text, including the work's title, concrete and sensory images, language, events, or places where the action occurs.² Indeed, all these constituent parts hold the potential to evoke a physical or emotional response in the reader that overlap, intertwine, and coalesce into a space (e.g., the text) in which the past resonates and intermingles with the present. This overlapping of the past with the present through memory, based primarily on psychological and sensory cues, serves a significant purpose in rescuing and codifying feelings of belonging, identity, and self. It is worth recalling here what Gaston Bachelard noted in his *The Poetics of Space*. He states that "through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own" (xvi). Bachelard develops his theory of space and its relationship to emotional responses around Eugène Minkowski concept of *reverberation*, which is an experience that brings space and time to the "threshold of being." Both *reverberation* and *attunement*, or the bringing into harmony or "at oneness" with another being, operate simultaneously to produce physical memory. As a result lived space collapses into textual space and creates a ripple effect across the novel that imbues it with a dynamic, living tonality. By suffusing *Sefarad* with experiences couched in moods and environs, Muñoz Molina creates an "aesthetic experience" for the reader that consists of a "tension-filled simultaneity of effects of meaning *and* effects of presence (as opposed to everyday experience..." (Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere* 7). These tension-filled spaces solidify, or at times dissipate, the narrator's (and by proxy the reader's) perceptions of the self and the feelings of belonging embodied within specific social, political, and ethnic communities. On the contrary, these same unique cultural circumstances

hold the potential of evoking feelings of estrangement and foreignness when juxtaposed to the dominant political or social *milieu*. Indeed, *Stimmung*-driven discourse engages physical memory, particularizing and individualizing the human experience while official or state-sanctioned discourse regiment the human experience by de-emphasizing the role of the individual and identity in favor of a more homogenized nationalist point of view.

Significant in the application of *Stimmung* to texts is the tracing of regional expressions, cultural idiosyncrasies, and dialectical peculiarities that form a crucial intersection between subjectivity and identity or, as Marc Augé notes, “an elementary symbolic relation with him, respecting him and joining him; crossing the frontier” (xiv). On a broader scale, the frontiers that tend to separate the past and the present blend into what Unamuno termed “un presente eterno.” Unamuno elaborates, “Y es el crecimiento íntimo, de dentro afuera, el enriquecimiento del contenido espiritual. En la historia vive el pasado con el porvenir y engendrándolo en un presente eterno. Porque la historia es el espíritu y el espíritu es la creación” (773). In this context, Muñoz Molina’s *Sefarad* can be approached as a counter-discourse enveloped in physical memory that re-memorizes (or re-memorializes) identity and individuality with a panoptical eye that looks forward and backward, inwardly and outwardly as it re-constructs cultural and personal history.

Under these conditions, Muñoz Molina explores throughout the pages of *Sefarad* the quest for identity in the face of an impersonal, dehumanized, and nationalist milieu, that non-place where individuality comes face-to-face with a fragmented space that is neither relational, nor historical, nor concerned with identity. His narrator becomes a reflective observer whose voice weaves in and out of episodes, linking together diverse voices that represent the peoples, communities, situations, and experiences that constitute a “history” of Spain. It is through this counter-collective memory that the text becomes a catalyst for *difference* and *subjectivity* in contrast to collectivity of state-sanctioned *sameness* and *detachment*.

The structure of *Sefarad* lends itself well to a *Stimmung*-based analysis. Muñoz Molina engineers a text that leads the reader through a series of events to which his primary narrator is a passing observer. This narrator acts as a gatekeeper who manages the ebb-and-flow of characters, memories, spaces, and ideas. Simultaneously, the narrator links the events together into a memory chain that constructs an intimate history of frustration, disappointment, and loss.³ In an interview with Norbert Czarny, a contributor to *La Nación*, Muñoz Molina describes the challenge associated with creating a text that embodies the emotion,

memory, and environment that constitute the human existence. Muñoz Molina remarks,

En mi novela *Sefarad*, me había pasado algo parecido: tanteaba en busca de la mejor manera de contar algo que me importaba mucho, pero no sabía exactamente qué era. Utilizaba un conjunto de técnicas que mezclaban la ficción, la memoria, la narración histórica, la nouvelle, etcétera. El secreto de un libro radica en encontrar una materia y una forma que se correspondan. (Czarny)

If, as it appears, *Sefarad* embodies a more transcendent form of narration, it must engage not just the imagination, but the body and soul of the reader to be effective as well as affective. Muñoz Molina's tactic here is to permeate the work with something unique; something that gives it a sense of "alive-ness" that transcends the text and the word. The ink-and-paper novel is transformed into a spatial and temporal universe through which the narrator wanders and explores his memories to find significant connections between the past and the present, as well as the significance of place and "non-place" that feed into this sense of self.⁴ For example, the narrator recalls a particular incident at a train station, creating an alternate space and time wedged between the real and the imaginary. He states,

Todo era tan raro esa noche, la del primer viaje, raro y mágico, como si al subir al tren - incluso antes, al llegar a la estación - yo hubiera abandonado el espacio cotidiano de la realidad y hubiera ingresado en otro reino muy semejante al de las películas o al de los libros, el reino insomne de los viajeros: yo, que sin moverme casi nunca de mi ciudad me había alimentado de tantas historias de viajes a lugares muy lejanos, incluyendo la Luna, el centro de la Tierra, el fondo del mar, las islas del Caribe y las del Pacífico, el Polo Norte, la Rusia inmensa que recorría en el transiberiano un reportero de Julio Verne que se llamaba Claude Bombarnac. (42)

Muñoz Molina's description of the train station, its environs, and his experience within this space dovetail with Augé's understanding of the relationship between individuals and their relationship to "non-places." Augé notes,

... non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified - with the aide of a few conversions between area, volume and distance - by totaling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport...', the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize

extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself. (64).

Frequently the narrator moves in and out of these differential spaces (place vs. non-place) signaling moments when the narrator realigns and refocuses his sense of identity.

In the same interview published in *La Nación*, Muñoz Molina ties indirectly *Sefarad* to the urban spaces created by Walter Benjamin in his *The Arcade Project* and Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*. This comparison is significant in light of the fact that both works rely heavily on descriptions replete with living, breathing, sensual spaces where time and location envelope the text. Muñoz Molina's story engages existence at similar levels, among them urban spaces, people, and history. Perhaps stated differently, the case can be made that Muñoz Molina attempts to *provoke* a response by rendering space and time as concurrent with the present, rather than *evoking* a deferential image devoid of emotion and memory.

Muñoz Molina provides a key to interpreting the text that relies on an emotional rather than intellectual response to the sights, sounds, and situations offered in each of the work's episodes. This baroque mosaic made up of voices, words, signs, images, and spaces combine to create an "imagined" space that parallels art. Muñoz Molina comments,

Existe una tensión que se *huele* de distintas maneras, entre las obras de arte: las palabras querrían aproximarse a la pintura o a la música, la música querría ser tan concreta como las palabras y al pintor o al fotógrafo les gustaría contar una historia. *¿Cómo podría atrapar con palabras lo que estoy viendo, lo que ocurre en este mismo momento y que en un instante se habrá borrado?* Esta es la aspiración insensata de la literatura. (Czarny; emphasis added)

Note that the challenge lies in being able to capture in words what one sees (i.e., ekphrasis) or smells ("huele") to describe the multiple ways one perceives art and literature. It is particularly curious that Muñoz Molina chooses to employ the word "huele" to describe the relationship that the observer has to the thing being observed. Muñoz Molina concretizes the relationship that the sensory has to the experiential and reinforces the notion that perception transcends mere observation. Therefore, to experience a work of art, and by default literature, it is not only what one sees but the resonating effect (e.g., smell) triggered by the work. Thus, consistent with the theory of *Stimmung*, the primary mode of communication in *Sefarad* involves the narrator contextualizing a scene, an event, or an intimate moment and linking it to a particular sense, involving

taste, smell, touch, sight, or hearing. All these elements blend and intertwine to elaborate a sense of being and identity that contrast sharply with the more homogenized and sterilized perception of being a Spaniard. As a result, *Sefarad* amasses situational cues that emphasize and mediate an environ-centric and impressionistic narrative that focuses on the physicality of identity.

The core concept illustrated through the careful layering and juxtaposing of memories and perceptions in *Sefarad* addresses the complex tapestry involving nationalism and social identity. The term “sefarad” embodies the uniqueness of a marginalized class in search of identity, being, and belonging, in other words, a “lieux de mémoire” where the self is defined.⁵ The identity of the Sephardic community relied heavily on external cues (e.g., food, custom, religion, and practices) to retain that sense of selfness. Through the work’s title and its cultural and social connotations, Muñoz Molina suggests the search for an identity that stands in opposition to an imposed, political “other” which attempts to subjugate the natural, social order and identity of a people. To accomplish this task Muñoz Molina develops multi-layered discourses rooted in the past that embrace social, geographical, linguistic, and cultural parameters, and reaffirm the unique qualities of individuality and regional character. Within this context the narrative reflects a reality entrenched in and reinforced by the senses’ responsiveness to aromas, tastes, spaces, and other physical sensations. By focusing on individuality the narrator evokes nostalgia for a bygone, pre-Franco era when identity and selfhood were intimately entwined in geographical, social, and ethnic idiosyncrasies.

Sefarad opens with a nostalgic reflection that draws on commonly held expectations regarding idealized perceptions of the past. Couched in the first-person inclusive “nosotros” the narrator gestures to the reader and invites him to accompany him as he reminisces. This opening chapter embraces the idea of “return” to that point where identity formation occurs, with all of its emotional, physiological, and psychological inferences. The narrator recalls,

Nos hemos hecho la vida lejos de nuestra pequeña ciudad, pero no nos acostumbramos a estar ausentes de ella, y nos gusta cultivar su nostalgia cuando llevamos ya algún tiempo sin volver, y exagerar a veces nuestro acento, cuando hablamos entre nosotros, y el uso de las palabras y expresiones vernáculas que hemos ido atesorando con los años, y que nuestros hijos, habiéndolas escuchado tanto, apenas comprenden. (11)

The narrator details the way that his native, regional speech pattern affected his emotions and reminded him of his childhood. The product of his nostalgia is a dissonant intersection between his pleasant memories of the past and the unpleasant circumstances of the present. For him, these distinctive speech patterns distinguish him from the “other” (i.e., the desensitized world that surrounds him) that is devoid of emotion and significance. This contrasting notion becomes evident in the linguistic and cultural gap that separates the narrator from his children. The narrator links language and memory into a single concept that evokes a response, both physical and emotional. On the other hand, the children exist within a non-descript environment dominated by large cities, electronic devices, and non-communication. This disparity of reaction defines the central concern regarding identity and its loss due to the abundance of “non-places” that are devoid of distinct cultural markers. In this instance the narrator suggests that memory and identity surpass the rudiments of language and dialect. The children hear their father’s stories and dialectical usages, but nothing resonates or finds a place in them. They are the products of a collective society where cultural distinctions have been suppressed. With this suppression comes the accompanying apathy towards difference and identity.⁶

The nostalgia associated with regional speech patterns is only the initial tool used by the narrator to frame the story’s space. As the narrator reflects on his hometown and its people, he centers his musings on a local character, Godino, who embodies the regional color reflected in its customs, foods, activities, and speech. The activities associated with Godino engender an anthropologically rich space that anchors the town and its people to those traditions that reinforce their cultural singularity from the homogenized collectivity that surrounds them. Marc Augé notes that,

... the organization of space and the founding of places, inside a given social group, comprise one of the stakes and one of the modalities of collective and individual practice. Collective (or those who direct them), like their individual members, need to think simultaneously about identity and relations; and to this end, they need to symbolize the components of shared identity (shared by the whole of the group), particular identity (of a given group or individual in relation to others) and singular identity (what makes the individual or group of individuals different from any other. (42)

The spatial organization described by Augé finds its initial manifestation in *Sefarad* in the figure of Godino who regularly organized dinners where

friends and neighbors would eat and socialize. The purpose of the meals was to revitalize the town's citizens from "un triste letargo" suffered by all. Though the narrator does not explain explicitly why the people suffer from lethargy, the context of the work suggests that he is living during the Francoist regime when national trumped regional identity. Godino reinforced the people's regional identity by serving traditional dishes that held particular meaning for those who attended. The narrator's description of the meals details the peculiar tastes and aromas of the meal. The narrator states,

[Godino] ... organiza regularmente comidas de hermandad en las que disfrutamos de los alimentos y de las recetas de nuestra tierra, y si nos disgusta que nuestra gastronomía sea tan poco conocida por los forasteros como nuestra arquitectura monumental o nuestra Semana Santa, también nos complacemos en poseer platos que nadie conoce y en designarlos con esas palabras que sólo para nosotros tienen sentido. ¡Nuestras aceitunas gordales o de cornezuelo!, declama Godino. ¡Nuestros panecillos de aceite, nuestros borrachuelos, nuestros andrajos, nuestros hornazos de Pascua, nuestra morcilla en caldera, que es morcilla con arroz, y no de cebolla, nuestro gazpacho típico, que no se parece nada a eso que llaman gazpacho andaluz, nuestra ensalada de alcauciles! (11)

One of the essential qualities of the narrator's description is that he emphasizes the unique quality of the food, unknown to those who live outside of the town's borders. The narrator adds another dimension by emphasizing the distinct names given to these regional dishes. Here food, location, and regionalisms combine to create a secure environment where the identity of the townspeople is reinforced. These idiosyncratic qualities (i.e., names, smells, taste) form a boundary or space within which the narrator detaches his self from the outside world and allows it to enter a past-infused present. This detachment distances him from the normalcy and mundaneness of his daily routine. By excising himself from the present and reintroducing it into the nostalgic past the narrator creates a tangible space where he can reflect on the essential qualities that life in his hometown afforded him and the loss he experienced when he relocated to Madrid.

The regionally specific character of the foods and their particular smell waft through the opening chapter and engulf the narrator in a sensual orgy. The food is not ordinary nor is it a false imitation. It is as authentic as the people and places associated with it. One example comes from the narrator's description of a particular incident where he notes,

El dueño del Museo es paisano nuestro, y suele encargarse, como dice Godino, del catering de nuestras comilonas, en las que no hay ni un solo producto que no haya venido de nuestra ciudad, ni siquiera el pan, que se hace en el horno de la Trini, el mismo que sigue hacienda las magdalenas más sabrosas y esos hornazos de Viernes Santo que llevan un huevo duro en el centro, y que tanto nos gustaban cuando éramos niños. (12)

At this point the narrator confesses that the “hornazos” were not as savory and palatable as he remembers. This altered perspective does not diminish the significance of the memory. To the contrary, the shift represents a balancing of the positive with the negative; a deeper engagement with the memory that transcends the purely descriptive. The significance of the alternate view of the greasy bread still resonates with the narrator. Despite the negative reaction to the “hornazo” there still remains an identity factor associated with its form and name. He describes the “hornazo” in the following terms.

Ahora, la verdad, nos damos cuenta de que su masa aceitosa se nos hace un poco pesada, y aunque en nuestras conversaciones seguimos celebrando el sabor del hornazo, su forma única en el mundo, hasta su nombre que nadie comprende más que nosotros, si empezamos a tomarnos uno nos lo dejamos sin terminar, y nos da un poco de pena desperdiciar comida... (12)

At this juncture in the opening chapter the narrative engages in a dialogue between the past and present, the nostalgic and real. Perhaps more concretely, his memory of the “hornazo” represents a significant point where its nostalgic value outweighs its taste. Memory is couched within the mood that the food evokes rather than its taste. Intimately linked to this memory is yet another. He reflects on the impression that the lack of food had on his life and on his mother’s warning not to waste food. For the narrator, food ceases to be simply nutrition or an association with a specific place and time. It becomes a reflection of his moral foundation and belief, entrenched in his social and economic environment. In one of the several reflective moments the narrator states,

... nos acordamos de esas veces, en los primeros tiempos de Madrid, en que íbamos a la agencia de transportes a recoger alguno de aquellos paquetes de comida que nos mandaban de nuestras casas: cajas de cartón bien selladas con cinta adhesiva y aseguradas con cuerdas, trayéndonos desde tan lejos el olor intacto de la cocina familiar, la sabrosa abundancia de todo lo que nos faltaba y añorábamos tanto en Madrid: butifarras y chorizos de la matanza, borrachuelos espolvoreados de azúcar,

hornazos, incluso algún bote de cristal lleno de ensalada de pimientos rojos, la delicia máxima que uno podía pedirle a la vida. (12)

This spatial frame is further defined as the odors penetrate all aspects of the narrator's environment, even to the point that the furniture, the family's armoire, "adquiría la succulenta y misteriosa penumbra de aquellas alacenas en las que se guardaba la comida en los tiempos anteriores a la llegada de los frigoríficos" (13). Here memory, substance, and smell blend together to form a coherent, all encompassing environment rife with texture and meaning. This redoubling of space and time assumes a type of *mise-en-scene* where the narrator's memory of his home and its environment are reframed within the context of his exile in Madrid. For example, he recalls, "Llevábamos meses muy largos lejos de nuestra casa y de nuestra ciudad, pero el olfato y el paladar nos daban el mismo consuelo que una carta, la misma alegría honda y melancólica que nos quedaba después de hablar por teléfono con nuestra madre o nuestra novia" (13). The enclosing of memory within another brings out the simultaneity of space and time. At the same time, these memories, and the mood that they trigger, sooth the narrator and counteract his feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation. Even though in the present the narrator experiences a displacement from those familiar, "hometown" spaces, he compensates by enveloping himself in the aromas and sensations that define him. Clearly Madrid, the negative "other," occupies an adverse space that provokes feelings of isolation. Much to his displeasure, his children are the product of that negative space, therefore he laments,

Nuestros hijos, que se pasan el día colgados del teléfono, hablando horas con alguien a quien acaban de ver un rato antes, no pueden creerse que para nosotros, no solo en la infancia, sino también en la primera juventud, el teléfono era aún un aparato inusual, al menos en las familias modestas, y que llamar de una ciudad a otra, poner una conferencia, como se decía hace nada, era un empeño hasta cierto punto complicado, que exigía muchas veces hacer cola durante horas en locutorios llenos de gente, porque los teléfonos aún no eran automáticos. (13)

From this vantage point the narrator experiences (and re-experiences via the text) a world that is far removed from that of his children. The text divides into two parallel spaces that reference two diverging socio-economic paradigms. On the one hand the narrator views the world through the eyes of a young and materially-poor exile and on the other from that of a father materially and technologically distanced from his

children. The contrast between how the father feels and how the children react reinforces the sensibility associated with identity development. As Gumbrecht suggests, the absence of identity markers (e.g., sounds, smells, language) engenders passivity and conformity to the *status quo*. On the other hand, the recognition and engagement with these markers is akin to weather or music that “[wrap] our bodies and that [affect] them with a physical touch so light that we are tempted to overlook its material character” (“How [If at All]” 90).

Muñoz Molina brackets time and space, past and present, here and now around the narrator’s return to his hometown. His arrival at the outskirts of the town jars his memory and closes the circle on the earlier episode when the narrator describes his departure from home to live in Madrid. Concealed within this narrative is another bracketing that centers on the metropolis. After the charm, excitement and adventure that living in Madrid had dissipated, the narrator finds himself in a world that “se le convierte en aburrimiento, en fastidio, en irritación escondida” (16). In contrast, the adult protagonist reminisces and recalls the emotion he felt when returning to his hometown. He recounts,

Preferíamos la emoción de la otra llegada, la lenta proximidad de nuestra tierra, los signos que nos la anunciaban, no ya los indicadores kilométricos en la carretera, sino ciertos indicios familiares, una venta en medio del campo, vista desde la ventanilla del tren o del autobús, el color rojo de la tierra en las orillas del río Guadalimar, y luego las primeras casas, las luces aisladas en las esquinas, cuando llegábamos de noche, la sensación de haber llegado ya a la impaciencia de no haber llegado todavía, la dulzura de todos los días que aún nos quedaban por delante, las vacaciones ya empezadas y sin embargo todavía intactas. (16)

Note that the initial spatial markers are geographic beginning with the countryside with its remote inn, then the color of the landscape and the river. The next marker is the town itself, initiated by familiar homes and the lights that indicate a line of demarcation. Like sounds, aromas or physical caresses, the visual cues, especially the image of lights on the horizon, strike an introspective cord. Implicit in the description is the symbolic attachment of light to fire, fire to hearth, hearth to home. The narrator marks these beginning and ending points with the Casa Cristina, a small hotel, which was the first place the traveler encountered when entering the city and the last as he left. As if to give the place added character and significance the narrator notes that it was the last place “donde se despedía a la Virgen cuando su imagen regresaba, a principios de septiembre, al santuario de la aldea de donde volvería el año siguiente,

en la populosa romería de mayo, la Virgen a la que íbamos a rezarle los niños en los atardeceres del verano” (16). Here the narrator imbues the scene with a reverence that engulfs the city and its inhabitants in an aura of sanctity; the creation of a sacred space.

As the narrator continues his description, he recalls aspects of the town and the location of Casa Cristina stating,

Quizás entonces estaban más claros los límites de las cosas, como en las líneas y colores y nombres de los países en los mapas colgados en las paredes de la escuela: aquella casa, con su pequeño jardín, con su farol amarillo en la esquina, era el final exacto de nuestra ciudad, y a un paso de ella ya empezaba el campo, sobre todo de noche, cuando el farol brillaba en el principio de las oscuridad, no alumbrándola, sino revelándola en toda su hondura. (16)

The small inn stands as a landmark and a place that defines the narrator and his history.⁷ Marc Augé expresses this feeling best when he notes that we “may be tempted ... to look back from the upheavals of the present towards an illusory past stability. When bulldozers deface the landscape, the young people run off to the city or ‘allochthons’ move in, it is in the most concrete, the most spatial sense that the landmarks - not just of the territory, but of identity itself - are erased” (39).

The narrator speaks of the light from the inn that welcomed the traveler and marked the limit, or frontier, of his hometown. The light holds a significant symbolic value that links time, space, and memory for the narrator. As noted from the quote above, light functions as both “illuminator” and “revealer.” In the former the function simply allows the object to be seen while in the latter the observer unveils some distinctive quality that enhances the quality of the object. Like his other recollections, light as revealer causes the narrator to perceive the inn and its surroundings at a more emotional, spiritual response-level. The Casa Cristina is a place marker in his life history, a physical space that he will ultimately associate with his mother and father and his experiences with them while working in the olive groves that surrounded the city. He attempts to communicate that emotion to his distracted children saying, “hacia tanto frío que las orejas y las manos se me quedaban heladas, y mi madre tenía que frotármelas con las suyas, más calientes y más ásperas, y me echaba en las yemas de los dedos el vaho de su respiración” (17).

The memory of his childhood experience causes him to react strongly, especially when he speaks about his mother. Not unsurprisingly, there is perceptual gap between his experience and that of his children. The narrator explains, “... para ellos era ya inimaginable que niños casi de su

misma edad tuvieran que pasarse las vacaciones de Navidad ganándose el jornal en el campo” (17). The perspective here is notable. Where the narrator views his mother’s love as she attempts to warm his cold hands, the children only consider the inconvenience of having to work over the holiday. For the children the memory is incomprehensible since there is nothing in their own cadre of experiences to compare. They consider the experience to be an injustice while for the narrator it marks a turning point in his life.

While the children remain engrossed in their virtual game world, the father anxiously searches the horizon to locate that geographic marker that will signal his return home. However, much to his dismay the Casa Cristina no longer exists. It has been torn down to make way for a wider highway that connects his hometown with Madrid. Now, “habían crecido barriadas nuevas con bloques monótonos de ladrillo, había un polideportivo y un nuevo centro comercial” (17). The edge that signaled both beginning and end for the narrator has disappeared. The space that he called home has become like every other urban space having lost the uniqueness and warmth that the town once held. Again, the contrast between space and non-space arises in the narrative signaling a moment when the narrator pauses and reevaluates his sense of self and identity in the face of displacement and change.

In an ironic twist, the structural monotony (e.g., cultural homogenization) that has engulfed his hometown is redoubled in his children and their attitude. Both the restructured town and the technologically savvy children represent a sterilized present and an emotional disconnect from the past. Furthermore, the narrator suggests that the loss of the Casa Cristina is a loss of that sacred space where he identified with family, the past, and the familiar. The narrator concludes that those who leave are not those who “disfigure” these familiar spaces, but those who remain and who have forgotten the symbolic value that the town and its environs represent. Despite the loss of the “memory marker” the narrator retains the resonate feelings associated with the Casa Cristina, his mother and his father. Even in the absence of the object the memory continues to reverberate within his mind and soul. Augé suggests,

... for what they see projected at a distance is the place where they used to believe they lived from day to day, but which they are now invited to see as a fragment of history. Spectators of themselves, tourists of the private, they can hardly be expected to blame nostalgia or tricks of memory for objectively evident change to the space in which they still live, which is no longer the place where they used to live. (45)

As the chapter moves toward its conclusion, the narrator waxes philosophical regarding memory, time, identity and being. He muses, "Dice mi mujer que vivo en el pasado, que me alimento de sueños, como esos viejos desocupados que van a jugar al dominó en nuestra sede social y asisten a las conferencias o a los recitales poéticos que organiza Godino" (18). The narrator compares memory to the image of old men playing dominoes, a game that relies on linkages and pairings. At any moment a player can put down a "double." From that point the game tree branches allowing for two lines of play. Similarly, the narrator, and in a broader sense the novel, is a game of dominoes as one memory is linked to another, one experience to another. At any given point the memories can redouble forming parallels. The result is the creation of a pedigree of interrelated feelings and memories. Like Godino, the domino player lays down pieces that link those previously played by others. The narrator confesses,

... ya me gustaría a mí vivir de verdad en el pasado, sumergirme en él con la misma convicción, con la voluptuosidad con que lo hacen otros, como Godino, que cuando come morcilla en caldera o recuerda algún chisme o algún apodo de un paisano nuestro o recita unos versos de nuestro poeta más célebre, Jacob Bustamante, enrojece de entusiasmo y felicidad... (18)

The narrator's perspective intuits a past that is experienced through emotional linkages. Note that he "submerges" himself with a sense of "conviction" similar to the "voluptuousness" expressed by his friend Godino who immerses himself in food, gossip, poetry, and other relative ambiances. These connections revive latent sentiments and renew the narrator's sense of belonging and identity that cannot be recuperated by other means. At this point in the opening paragraph the narrator makes a significant shift in the narrative voice that establishes a universal tone for the novel. He continues,

Es cierto, a muchos de nosotros nos gustaría vivir en el pasado inmutable de nuestros recuerdos, que parece repetirse idéntico en los sabores de algunos alimentos y en algunas fechas marcadas en rojo en los calendarios, pero sin darnos cuenta hemos ido dejando que creciera dentro de nosotros una lejanía que no remedian los viajes tan rápidos ni alivian las llamadas de teléfono que apenas hacemos ni las cartas que dejamos de escribir hace muchos años. (19)

The narrator proposes that time and space may pause or even continue to reverberate independent of an individual's capacity to perceive or recognize them. However, those reverberations may remain undetected

since the cues that trigger memories have been ignored or lost. The narrator concludes that it is not society's rapid development or our mass transit that narrows the gap between locations that were once far away and exotic. To the contrary "somos nosotros los que nos vamos quedando poco a poco más lejos, aunque repitamos las palabras antiguas y forcemos nuestro acento, y aunque todavía nos emocionemos al escuchar las marchas de nuestras cofradías o los versos que viene algunas veces a recitarnos 'el vate insigne por antonomasia', como dice Godino..." (19). The narrator suggests that it is only in retrospect that we recognize the tragedy, that we allow to immerse and overcome our sense of individuality. Once lost, that identity is difficult to recuperate and, at worse, is lost. What we witness in *Sefarad* is the narrator's gaze looking backward in the hopes of recuperating a past that has dissolved into an amalgam of emotions, sensations, experiences, desires, and hopes. The narrator surmises,

Vivir en él, en el pasado, qué más quisiera yo. Pero ya no sabe uno dónde vive, ni en qué ciudad ni en qué tiempo, ni siquiera está uno seguro de que sea la suya esa casa a la que vuelve al final de la tarde con la sensación de estar importunando, aunque se haya marchado muy temprano, sin saber tampoco muy bien adónde, o para qué, en busca de qué tarea que le permita creerse de nuevo ocupado en algo útil, necesario. (22)

Stimmung in *Sefarad*, coupled with the title's association with Jewish nationalism (as noted by Herzberger) suggests a "tuning in" to sentiments and experiences held commonly by individuals within certain ethnic, social, or political ideologies, especially those who have been subjected to persecution, violence, and exile (e.g., Jews, *republicanos*). Strangely, the work relies on the same memory and sensory-driven techniques used by Francoist nationalists as those employed by regionalist or disenfranchised groups to reinforce their sense of individuality, identity and self. As has been noted, this deep-seeded sense of belonging and identity resonates throughout the narrator's recounting of life events that he contrasts with the current state in which he lives and functions. The narrator's memories of his parents, the starkness of his living conditions, the places, aromas, and other sensory triggers all point to a moment when the narrator is transformed and becomes aware of his origin. For the narrator the experiences suggest a crucial passage from being to becoming not experienced or recognized by his children, whose sensibilities have been numbed by a depersonalized, technological world.

It is significant that Muñoz Molina chose to envelope his text in the emotion associated with Diaspora, Holocaust, and the longing for a return to a homeland, all of which are encapsulated in the term “sefarad.” Via *Stimmung* the author has linked the plight of the Jews with his own Francoist experience, both of which resonate with loss and the need to recuperate a lost sense of self and identity. It is apparent that the narrator identifies more closely with his childhood in a pre-Franco time and space, awash with regional selfhood embodied in scents, tastes, sights, and sounds. In contrast, the narrator’s social altruism and selfhood clash with his children’s more sterilized, technological, desensitized life. The implication of the text is that social uniformity and control, like that of Franco’s Fascist regime, undermine individuality, sentimentality, and identity by replacing it with artificial, perhaps virtual, trappings of selfhood.

Muñoz Molina’s *Sefarad* is a testimonial text; a plea to engage and immerse oneself in the sentiments that saturate the text with meaning; an appeal to reengage emotionally, spiritually, and physically with a predictatorial time and with the uniqueness of identity and self. The novel signals a re-attuning of the dissonance that exists in contemporary society, the reestablishment of truths and ideals that have been deformed by Fascist ideology, and the neutralizing effects of non-places on human identity. Ironically, this dissonant chord is both frustrating and comforting for those who identify with the work. It is frustrating because the deeply felt, redolent nostalgia evoked by the text remains spatially distant and psychologically present. It is comforting because this nostalgia serves as an anchor that secures, reinforces, and defines the consumer’s sense of individuality as he fends off the assaults that come from the opposing “other” that strips him of his subjectivity. What remains at the core of the work is the power of *Stimmung* to evoke and reinforce the centrality of identity, individuality, and the self that constitutes a “history” of Spain.

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NOTES

- 1 Leo Spitzer reaffirms that “the unity of feelings experienced by man face to face with his environment (a landscape, Nature, one’s fellow-man), and would comprehend and weld together the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity” (412).

- 2 Gumbrecht notes that, "... wherever *Stimmung* penetrates texts, we may assume that a primary experience has occurred to the point of becoming a preconscious reflex. Something similar occurs - on a more abstract plane - when sensitivity to [it] has been refined as is the case in our cultural present" (*Atmosphere* 19).
- 3 Gumbrecht submits that such narrative structures "[make] us sensitive to the modes in which texts, as meaning realities and material realities, quite literally surround their readers, both physically and emotionally" ("Reading" 216). He then concludes, "It is like touching the stones of an old building. What we touch and what touches us *is* a substantial presence of the past - not its signifier" ("Reading" 219).
- 4 Augé notes, "Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (64).
- 5 Arnscheidt notes, "... es la explotación de la imagen sefardí en la que se manifiesta la construcción más forzada de lugares de memoria en la obra de Muñoz Molina. El autor descubre entre sefardíes y españoles una semejanza esencial que denominó en una entrevista 'la condición sefardí en el español'. Así le resulta posible identificar la expulsión y el destierro de los judíos con 'el destino del liberal del siglo XIX, el destino del emigrante, el destino del republican, el destino del que tiene que irse ahora del País Vasco...'" (52).
- 6 In her article, "Afterlife of Traumatic Memories: The Workings and Uses of Empathy in Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*," Nicola Gilmour writes, "This is the 'we' of those who share a sense of exile (in this instance an economic exile from their village), an imaginary community based on a shared gastronomy, on accent, on memory, on a common experience told in a shared language" (852).
- 7 Philip Sheldrake notes, "Landscape is not merely shaped by enclosure, agriculture, forestation or settlement. It is also named. Names give the landscape a particular meaning in relation to human memories. No name is arbitrary. Every name, even a single word, is a code that, once understood, unlocks a world of associations, events, people and their stories" (16).

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