The Moradas of Angelina Muñiz Huberman, Esther Seligson and Teresa of Avila: Exile as Spiritual Experience

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Abstract

An exploration of the theme of exile in Angelina Muñiz Huberman’s Morada interior (1972), drawing on the related texts La morada en el tiempo (Esther Seligson 1981) and Las moradas (Teresa of Avila 1580), and utilizing Michel de Certeau’s theory of mystic speech. Exile and related identity issues are typically explored through selecting textual elements that locate exile and related identity issues within physical place, within concepts of nation, and within particular imagined communities. In the selected texts the protagonists are female and Jewish or crypto-Jewish, aspects of their being, which serve to distance them from their historical contexts. This essay undertakes a novel exploration of exile as not only upheaval and rupture from physical place, but also more specifically as the void felt when exiled from something, which is signified as God.

Angelina Muñiz Huberman is a major Mexican author and scholar whose insightful works have contributed significantly to both Jewish and Latin American letters. Commentaries on the imaginative works produced by this Jewish woman have focused on a theme of the physical exile of Jews from medieval Spain and/or the exile of Republicans from Franco Spain and, to a lesser extent, on Spain itself as an exile from the Holy Land. The commentaries focus on how the characters resolve, or do not resolve, their physical condition of exile in contexts that are predominantly non-Jewish. Literary criticism pertinent to the work of Muñiz Huberman therefore, has thus focused on the problem of circumscribing an identity through selecting textual elements which locate exile and related identity issues within physical place, within concepts of nation, and within particular imagined communities.

Michel de Certeau argues that “communication' (communications from God or those established among the saints) is everywhere a void to be filled, and forms the focal point of mystical accounts and treatises. They are writings produced from this lack. The rupture, ambiguity, and falsity that plurality spreads throughout the world creates the need to restore a dialogue” (88). The works of fiction selected for this essay actualize the theory of de Certeau: There is a void experienced in the miscommunications that arise through the misunderstandings and disconnections that are inherent in the rupture and ambiguity caused by exclusion (Jews, or crypto-Jews, in an Inquisitional context) and by physical emigration. The texts on which this essay focuses are written narrations that have arisen out of a need to fill the void.

De Certeau observes that the particular historical situation of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe led to physical and/or social exile, which in turn created this void, this need for communication, to which mysticism responds. In this essay it is argued that the material, physical environment of the sixteenth century served to create an awareness of this spiritual void. The material condition of physical exile serves as a trigger which brings to consciousness the underlying and more fundamental issue of spiritual exile.

Reflecting on Muñiz-Huberman’s *Morada Interior* through de Certeau’s theory of mystical speech allows this novel examination of the theme of exile in Muñiz-Huberman’s fiction. As noted above, previously exile has been explored in this author’s works as fundamentally a physical experience. This article elaborates exile as primarily a spiritual experience, as conceptualized by de Certeau. This raises the following questions, and they will be explored through the commentary below: If exile is conceptualized as a fundamentally spiritual experience, does this add to our knowledge about the identity issues which arise as a result of the rupture and void created by material, physical exile? Does understanding exile as a spiritual experience allow for understandings, which point to integration and integrity rather than to the ambiguity and falsity, which de Certeau postulates stems from plurality?

*Morada interior* is the first novel of Muñiz-Huberman, published in 1972. This novel is significant as it introduced neomysticism into contemporary Mexican literature (Menton cited in “Tinieblas” 34). In addition, the experimental, unconventional novel structure utilized by Muñiz Huberman was at that time markedly different from mainstream Mexican literature that was preoccupied with realism, colloquialism, and nationalism (Muñiz Huberman “Tinieblas”). The willingness of this author to diverge from mainstream letters despite the difficulties in publishing that she encountered as a result of taking this risk has added depth and breadth to contemporary Mexican literature.

An analysis of Muñiz Huberman’s *Morada interior* made in combination with the texts *La morada en el tiempo* (Seligson 1981) and *Las moradas* (St. Teresa of Avila 1580) utilizing the theory of mystic speech proposed by Michel de Certeau provides fertile ground for an exploration of exile not only as upheaval and rupture from a physical place, but also as the void felt by the protagonist when exiled from something which is signified as God. De Certeau brings St. John of the Cross to bear on this point when he comments that people are distressed and troubled when they do not understand themselves and are not understood.² De Certeau argues that such understanding is achieved through dialogue with God, and this dialogue happens through mystic speech.

*Morada* means dwelling. In the context of the three literary texts under consideration, dwelling is self-understanding, achieved through dialogue and hence connection with God. Spiritual exile is characterized by confusion, misfortune, and illness, and necessitates establishing dialogue with God in order to resolve this exile.

² “‘It is a difficult and troublesome thing for a soul not to understand itself or to find none who understand it’: like The Ascent of Mount Carmel, all mystic texts are born of this ‘trouble,’ this distress in expectation of a dialogue” (De Certeau, 88).
The establishment of this dialogue creates a connection, which brings about understanding and the cessation of feeling troubled and distressed.

The protagonist of *Morada interior* is located within a historical sociopolitical context of upheaval. In addition, she is suffering from the forced rupture of her amorous relationship with her cousin (45, 59, 71, 78), the memory of which remains present in the text through the sound of his horse’s hooves reaching her ears from a space outside of her confinement in the convent (52, 68). It is the fact of living in this difficult historical period, combined with her separation from her lover, her social seclusion, and her illness which turn the protagonist inward. The narrating “I” struggles to suppress her sexual desire (53, 72), also evident in her comments about her confessors (78, 80, 106). Yet sexualized imagery, such as the Song of Songs (54, 55) enables her to begin to understand the kind of integrity and unity that she seeks. This imagery ceases, as does the sound of horses hooves, when the protagonist has visions of God and the angels (83).

The protagonists in each of the above-named texts, the “I” of *Morada interior* and the “I” of *Las Moradas*, as well as the shifting narrative perspectives of *La morada en el tiempo*, all act outside of the dominant paradigm of their respective textual diegetic worlds. The problematic of these characters is that of trying to understand the way they experience who they are and to have integrity with that experience, within diegetic worlds which do not accept the plurality of divergent ideas. The characters do not limit their struggle for understanding themselves to rational, empirical, cognitive knowledge; rather, metaphysical knowledge is the key component through which these characters gain understanding of their lived worlds. This problematizes de Certeau’s postulation of mystic speech as dialogue to breach the void because in the context of metaphysics the fundamental question is: a dialogue with whom, or with what. In other words, with whom, or with what, is communication established?

De Certeau directly confronts this question by addressing the issues of reference and representation: to what does mystic literature refer? He describes the referent of mystical texts as a “locus” established by mystic speech (82). Does this mean that Something is inscribed in mystical texts, that a locus is established, by the operation of writing? Or does this mean that the speech itself creates the referent? De Certeau considers both possibilities.

He observes that all mystical texts “display a passion for what *is*, for the world as it ‘exists,’ for the thing itself (*das Ding*) – in other words, a passion for what is its own authority and depends on no outside guarantee” (81). He conceptualizes mystical texts as “beaches offered to the swelling sea; their goal is to disappear into what they disclose [. . .] an ab-solute (un-bound), in the mode of pain, pleasure, and a ‘letting-be’ attitude inhabits the torture, ecstasy, or sacri-fice of a language that can say that ab-solute, endlessly, only by erasing itself” (81). This autonomous and impermanent characteristic of a “God” referent inscribed by the operation of writing is something that Muñiz-Huberman evokes in her story “The Name of His Name.” Abraham of Talamanca is lost in a dark night of the soul that becomes darker and darker, so distressed is he that he cannot hear God (as he himself identifies the referent for his distress in the absence of dialogue). So, Abraham of Talamanca goes in search of the divine word. He eventually reaches the sea, where “he furrows the water and creates light foam and soft
waves which, uncreating, erase his vain steps” (357). This imagery is the narration of de Certeau’s theoretical concept: the referent of mystical discourse constantly washes itself away. Abraham of Talamanca’s steps in the sand of the beach are visible, like words, and they disappear into the swell of the ocean.

When Abraham of Talamanca reaches the Holy Land he goes northward in search of the Sambatio River as the revelation of the word, as the manifestation of what is. The narrator then observes: “but the river is a mirage. It appears and disappears. It recedes and overflows. It sings and is silent. It approaches and withdraws forever.” Here again we see the concept de Certeau analytically describes, that the language of mystic texts evokes an elusive referent. And indeed, once Abraham of Talamanca hears the word within him, once he has experienced union with it, he no longer speaks and he no longer writes.

In regards to the necessity of language erasing itself in the process of disclosing what it disappears into, in the process of saying that ab-solute, de Certeau writes, the other that organizes the text is not the (t)exterior [un hors-texte]. It is not an (imaginary) object distinguishable from the movement by which it (Es) is traced” (82). To set it apart, in isolation from the texts that exhaust themselves in the effort to say it, would be to exorcise it by furnishing it with a place of its own and a proper name; it would be to identify it with the residue of already constituted systems of rationality, or to equate the question asked under the figure of the limit with a particular religious representation [. . .] it would be tantamount to positing, behind the documents, the presence of a what-ever, an ineffability that could be twisted to any end” (82).

This is a primary issue with any “spiritual” or religious text: to what extent is the elusive referent coming through sincerely and to what extent is that ineffable referent being twisted, either unconsciously or purposefully, by the author of the discourse. This is the second possibility that de Certeau considers: that the speech itself creates the referent. He asks the skeptical question: “how can one hear, through signs transformed into things, that which flows from a unique and divine will to speak? How can this desire in search of a thou cross through a language that betrays it by sending the addressee a different message, or by replacing the statement of an idea with utterance by an “I”? (88). This is the perturbing question, the question of whether communication with the thou, with God, is simply communication with oneself. In a similar vein de Certeau ponders whether “‘I’ is an ‘empty’ form that simply announces the speaker. It is a ‘siteless site’ related to the fragility of social position or the uncertainty of institutional referents” (90). In this way, he acknowledges the possibility that the elusive referent is simply a psychological or sociopolitical projection of the author of the discourse.

The intertextual referent of Morada interior is the medieval Spanish mystic, St. Teresa of Avila. In the opening lines of Morada interior the narrator explains: “El libro que escribí como Mi vida salió en imprenta, pero este mi diario verdadero quedó aquí arrinconado, lleno de polvo, apenas legible” (9). (The book that I wrote as My Life came out in print, but this my true diary stayed here cast aside, full of dust, barely legible.) Throughout the text there are similar biographical parallels between the narrator and St.
Teresa: serious illness, becoming a Carmelite (105), indications of a converso element, and the founding of convents (104). Most significantly, the theme of each work under consideration is a turn to interior dwelling places, conceptualized as constructed of diamond (66) and explored by a movement through levels of prayer (43, 54, 58). There is little description of the physical setting of *Morada interior*, only some brief mentions of convent routines and one comment that it is winter (76). These sparse descriptions of physical space reinforce the interior, spiritual focus of the text, as experienced by the narrator.

De Certeau identifies the formal characteristics of mysticism as follows: “the establishment of a place (the “I”) and by transactions (spirit); that is, by the necessary relation between subject and messages. The term ‘experience’ connotes this relation” (89). Experience is the key to this noetic area, this area of understanding that comes out of a kind of knowing that is not based on reason. The post-Enlightenment location of the implicit authors of *Morada interior* and *La morada en el tiempo* is reflected through characters who question the validity of their noetic understanding that comes to them through experience. The “I” of *La moradas* however, does not reflect this kind of questioning; this sixteenth century author seeks only to explore more fully the interior castle.

The text in some ways is a long interior monologue, the protagonist writing to herself in an effort to understand her experience. Published nine years after Muñiz-Huberman’s *Morada interior*, Esther Seligson’s *La Morada en el tiempo* with its similar neomystical themes “podría entenderse, tal vez, como un largo monólogo interior” (Menassé 40). (*La morada en el tiempo* “can be understood, perhaps, as a long interior monologue.”) The publication of this second text with a Jewish neomystical referent brings aspects of shared literary structure to light, highlighting intertextuality diachronically through historical and mystical time as well as synchronically within the contemporary realm of Jewish Mexican letters authored by women.

In the field of textual studies, De Certeau states that through writing, a world is created— as text, and that this mystic space—this textual space— is constituted outside the fields of (rational) knowledge (89). Muñiz-Huberman echoes this perspective out of her own experience: “escribir, para el exiliado, es su verdadera patria” (Testimonio” 28). (Writing, for the exiled, is her true country). It is through writing that dialogue is established and the ineffable “it” or the “thou” from which one is exiled is made manifest; it is empirical language which “animates” this other, this it (see de Certeau 89). The protagonists of *Morada interior* and *La Morada en el tiempo*, together with the implicit author of *Las moradas*, are all fictionalized subjects utilizing language to express their experience of a referent that is its own authority and depends on no outside guarantee. However, de Certeau persists:

It remains to be known who or what say ‘I.’ Is the ‘I’ a fiction of the other, which offers itself in its place? St. Teresa, when discussing the crystal-castle that is the soul, speaks of a disappearance (ecstasy) or death that constitutes the subject as pleasure in the other. ‘I is an other’—that is the secret told by the mystic long before the poetic experience of Rimbaud, Rilke, or Nietzsche” (96).
Thus while de Certeau does express a questioning skepticism appropriate to his own historical location, he returns to the possibility of an elusive referent coming through sincerely, that the “I” is in fact a fiction of some greater Reality. He explores the Reality of this fiction, and the limits of language:

The scriptural experience of letting the other write is not an affair of theory, but takes place ‘today.’ But where will the other come from, in what space? At this point a ‘foundation’ ‘offers itself.’ It is analogous to the dreams from which St. Teresa’s writing constantly departs. It is fiction, a nothing that causes one to speak and write, but it is also something ‘there is no point in fatiguing ourselves over by attempting to understand’ or verify. It is not something true, it is only a thing of beauty: ‘a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal” (94).

De Certeau is here referring to the difficulty of articulating the reality of non-rational, non-empirical, non-quantifiable experience. He resolves the aporia by stating that it is not true, it is just beautiful.

A number of commentators have noted the relationship between the historical context of mystics and their mysticism. For example, Menassé comments that La Morada en el tiempo “arraiga en la desolación de un siglo que no escucha ya mensajes de lo Alto, que ha perdido la Voz como ha perdido su centro” (41). (La morada en el tiempo takes root in the desolation of a century that no longer hears the messages of the High, a century that has lost the Voice as its centre.) De Certeau observes that “St. Teresa belonged to a hidalguía (noble class) that had lost its duties and holdings” (84). The protagonist of Morada interior located in an historical context strongly characterized by upheaval and rupture:

Era necesario partir al Nuevo Mundo [. . .] era necesaria la experimentación pero lo que se aportaba era viejo y corrompido y todo habría de estallar con mayor estruendo y apestaría esas nuevas tierras. El crisol que se instalaba allí no era purificador y las manos ansiosas de recibir verdades las transmutaron en horrores y en peste, en hipocresía y en falsedad. [. . .] aquel hedor de mentiras llegaba hasta las playas españolas [. . .]. Danza macabra que nunca habría de realizarse” (56).

It was necessary to go to the New World [. . .] it was necessary to experiment but what it brought was old and corrupted and everything would explode with a loud sound and stink in these new lands. The crucible that settled there was not purifying and the hands anxious to receive truths transmuted them into the horrors and disease, into hypocrisy and falseness [. . .] that stench of lies arrived even to the Spanish beaches [. . .]. Macabre dance that never should have happened.

This unnamed protagonist, the speaking “I” who is narrating the text, is ostensibly located in a present that is co-contemporaneous to the Inquisition (96, 104, 107-108). However, the knowledge the protagonist has of the impact of the Conquest on both the New World and on Spain indicates that she is telling the story from a position future to
the historical location of which she is ostensibly a part. Other anachronisms locate the narrator in a temporal space quite distant from medieval Spain. Her knowledge of the Spanish Civil War (57; 87-108), Israeli soldiers (59, 71, 74), and Holocaust crematories (61, 87) certainly places her post-World War II, but it is the mention of the 1969 moon landing (102) which clearly locates the narrating “I” in a present that is co-contemporaneous with the author of the book. Through the use of this literary strategy, the protagonist of Morada interior becomes a timeless woman, existing in both a medieval and a modern space, who has been exiled from what she loved.

Muñiz Huberman comments that “la figura central, Santa Teresa, se me convirtió en un yo contemporáneo: sin raíces: sin fe: en busca de identidad: en el exilio y en la separación: en el centro de un erotismo silencioso” (De cuerpo entero 34-35). (The central figure, Saint Teresa, converted herself into a contemporary I: without roots, without faith: in search of identity: in exile and in separation: in the centre of a silent eroticism.) The central figure is in physical exile as she is forcibly separated from her lover and confined to a convent. However, this exile is not resolved by reconnecting to place or person. The protagonist actualizes her identity in relationship with God, in dialogic mystic speech by which she creates a locus through which the Spirit could speak, allowing her to become truly her Self, no longer in exile. Therefore, although the protagonist remains in physical exile, confined to the convent, through connecting with God she no longer feels the trouble and distress of exile. Reconciling her spiritual exile allowed this character to come to terms with issues around her own identity.

The conflation of time in Morada interior serves to emphasize a particular dynamic, rather than a reconstruction of a particular historical period. Both St. Teresa and the protagonist of Morada interior desire the restoration of a dialogue; not with a missionary institution that has lost credibility or neglected its duties (de Certeau 94), but rather with “something other that comes without reason: the poem and, secondarily, the dream. A ‘there is’ – ‘es gibst,’ it gives (Heidegger)—is the beginning” (de Certeau 96-97). The particular dynamic is the desire for connection with non-rational Being, for a return from spiritual exile, and this desire is stimulated in difficult historical periods. It is a desire for integrity, for unity, with another from which the protagonist has been exiled. De Certeau points out “that is the question the organization of every mystic text strives to answer: the truth value of the discourse does not depend on the truth value of its propositions, but on the fact of its being in the very place at which the Speaker speaks (the Spirit, ‘el que habla’)” (92). (The Spirit, ‘he that speaks’). The mystical text is the search for this authentic place.

De Certeau argues for a relationship between rise of seventeenth century mysticism in the context of decadence and “corruption” within Christianity and the dawning of the Enlightenment (80). The argument doesn’t quite fit however as all ages are marked by some kind of struggle between different sectors of society and long before the seventeenth century the Crusades and the Inquisition attempted to deal with decadents who were understanding the world differently. As de Certeau notes, mystics established an epistemic foundation based on ways of knowing which were different than the ways that had been set out in institutionalized doctrines. The epistemic foundation established by the mystics, already outside of hegemonic and politically
powerful domains, was further challenged by the status placed on positivism as the only means of attaining true knowledge.

De Certeau observes that “St. Teresa’s Life is written as a journey to the center. It is a journey whose itinerary combines the normality of an order imposed from without, by history, and the gaps created in it by interruptions of ‘folly’” (95). In times of catastrophic personal and collective history, those gaps are sought. The protagonist of Morada interior expresses emptiness (71, 79, 99) and frustration within the confines of the convent (81, 82). She writes of how intolerable these feelings are that she must do something (81, 94). She recognizes human insignificance (102, 103) and senses something bigger (99-102) that she wants to see and hear (113). She comments on Judaism as a means to “llegar adentro de mi mismo” (63). (arrive inside myself.)

In regards to narrative emplotment in Esther Seligson’s text Morada en el tiempo, Menassé observes that “la Voz es inaudible o no se manifiesta y quien vive ‘con hambre y sed de la Presencia’ va a buscarla allí donde ha estado alguna vez y se ha escuchado –al origen de una tradición donde la fidelidad es exigencia absoluta” (41). (the Voice is inaudible or it does not manifest itself and whoever lives ‘with hunger and thirst of the Presence’ will search for it there where they have once been and where they have Heard it –at the origin of a tradition where loyalty is the absolute demand.) In all three texts, La morada en el tiempo, Morada interior and Las moradas, that seemingly inaudible Presence is signified as God, and the religion of origin is Judaism. In regards to mystical texts in general, de Certeau notes that “by centering on ‘God,’ [the text] sticks to a religious language in its very focus” (92). That religious language is an attempt to articulate and thus manifest and make present the world as it “exists,” to make present what is.

In all three texts, the protagonist is exiled from that ontological referent and is actively seeking it. Until this exile can be resolved, the main characters in all three novels are mentally and emotionally unsettled. This interior unrest, this exile from an indeterminate Presence, is metaphorically made manifest through their physical unrest (illness or wandering). In selecting textual elements that highlight the religious aspect of each text, rather than the material aspects of exile, the circumscribing of an identity occurs in a different place: a non-physical, non-empirical place.

De Certeau defines the term “mystical” as:
the establishment of a space where change serves as a foundation and saying loss is an other beginning. Because it is always less than what comes through it and allows a genesis, the mystic poem is connected to the nothing that opens the future, the time to come, and, more precisely, to that single work, ‘Yahweh,’ which forever makes possible the self-naming of that which induces departure” (100).

In the context of the whole of de Certeau’s essay, the phrase “an other beginning” is crucial. De Certeau argues that mysticism is the search for dialogue with a non-empirical “other” and that a prerequisite for the establishment of this dialogue is the loss of the “I” –at the same time that the narrating “I” creates the discourse which is the locus through which the Spirit speaks.
De Certeau writes that “the ‘I’ is ‘formed’—by its act of willing nothing or by (forever) being incapable of doing what it wills—as a ‘desire’ bound only to the supposed desire of a Deity. It is created by the state of being nothing but the affirmation of a will” (92). The narrating “I,” like the mystic text itself, is in itself the place where something more than the “I,” something more than the text, can come through. The referent for that something more can be named “God.” De Certeau continues: “the opening chapter of St. Teresa’s Interior Castle [Las moradas] illustrates the imaginary, formal schema that is common to so many mystics. Since she ‘could find nothing to say and had no idea how to begin,’ she beseeched ‘Our Lord today that He would speak through me’: this discourse is nothing if it is not the other speaking” (94). In other words, the protagonist in the first person texts Morada interior and Las moradas, and the implicit author in La morada en el tiempo, write because they are “commanded” to; they write because they must, in order to create the space for dialogue and for “an other beginning.”

“Yahweh” is cited as the name of “that which induces departure.” Yahweh is of course the Christianized form of יהוה ha Shem, the Name of the Name. In commenting on Morada interior, Judith Payne observes that “the religious preoccupation found throughout the text shows that the reference to the ‘camino verdadero’ (true path) as well as to ‘el mal, el pecado, y el disimulo’ (evil, sin and dissimulation) is a reference to Judaism” (52). Support for this observation is particularly evident in Chapter XIX, which has been italicized to stress its importance: it is an affirmation that the speaking “I” confined to a Christian convent is both a Spaniard and a Jew.

In regards to La morada en el tiempo a commentator brings out why the Jewish religion was of such importance to those forced by external conditions into crypto-Judaism: “[el] cúmulo de contradicciones y conflictos de una historia de dispersión y falta de arraigo, la fidelidad del judaísmo es condena pero es también la única posibilidad de saberse propios y legítimos en su identidad” (Menassé 41). (The accumulation of contradictions and conflicts of a history of dispersion and lack of roots, the loyalty to Judaism is a sentence but it is also the only possibility to belong and be legitimate in one’s identity.) Nevertheless, in the context of the rupture and upheaval of medieval Spain, the pull towards assimilation for Jews was extremely strong, so closely was religious assimilation related to physical survival. De Certeau comments that St. Teresa’s grandfather had converted to Judaism but was forced to abjure in 1485 (84).

M. H. (Meyer Howard) Abrams identifies St. Augustine’s Confessions as the first fully developed autobiography (397CE). He comments that “the design of this profound and subtle spiritual autobiography centers on what became the crucial experience in Christian autobiography: the author’s anguished mental crisis, recovery and conversion in which he discovers his Christian identity and religious vocation” (26). The intertextual reference for the narrating “I” in Muñiz-Huberman’s Morada interior is Teresa of Ávila, who does have Jewish ancestry. However, unlike the protagonist in Morada interior, Teresa of Ávila’s Jewishness remained buried in Christian theology. Despite Teresa of Ávila’s Jewish ancestry, Las moradas is a spiritual autobiography, which is – understandably-- ostensibly framed through Christian paradigms.

The parents of the speaking “I” in Morada interior were conversos—to Judaism. In the text of Morada interior there is evidence that the protagonist has experienced a
rupture from the Jewishness of her childhood (47, 60, 63, 75, 84, 96, 98, 111, 94). Yet although confined to a Catholic convent, supposedly to protect her and keep her safe, the protagonist of *Morada interior* clings to her Judaism. She searches for her earliest roots in the Promised Land and draws on images and myths of Hebraic origin: Moses (58), Abraham (74), others (98).

De Certeau closely associates *converses*, in particular, with mystic speech: The “new Christians,” or converted Jews, in whose features their contemporaries saw only the mask of the Excluded, remained close in many ways to the Jewish tradition; they were prominent in the ranks of the illuminati, whose greatest figures number among them. Barred from certain orders, suspected by the Dominicans, these ‘scorned ones’ went on to become great spiritual leaders among the Franciscans, the Augustinians, the Jesuits, and the Carmelites. From John of Ávila to Molinos, a strange alliance linked ‘mystic’ speech and ‘impure’ blood. In fact, their position midway between two religious traditions, one repressed and internalized, the other public but weighed down by success, allowed the new Christians to become the major initiators of a new mode of discourse freed from dogmatic redundancy (84-85).

The protagonist of *Morada interior* explicitly refers to herself as a new Christian (67), a term used synonymously with *converso* in medieval Spain to specifically identify Jews who had converted to Christianity. Christianity is imposed on the main character when her father sends her to a convent in order to exile her from her cousin. It also served to exile her from Judaism.

*La Morada en el tiempo* on the other hand is overtly located within Judaism. Muñiz Huberman describes this text as “la historia del pueblo judío en sus manifestaciones místicas” (“Tinieblas” 35). (The history of the Jewish people in their mystic manifestations.) Muñiz Huberman attributes the Judaism of the text to the obvious archetypical characters of Jacob and Rachel, but also to the less obvious archetypical characters such as la Artífice, as a conflation of the alchemist and the caballist, and la Anciana as representative of Shehkinah. The text interweaves the distinct points of view of each of these characters in a dense framework with few paragraph breaks. Menassé also reads Judaism through this density, pointing to images, which reference biblical stories and invocations to the Loved One (40). She comments that “el libro de Esther Seligson parece constituir [. . .] un círculo concéntrico más en la correa de transmisión de una cultura que se prolonga a través de los siglos y que *La Morada en el tiempo* preserva e interroga” (41). (The book by Esther Seligson seems to constitute [. . .] another concentric circle in the transmission of a culture that prolongs itself through the centuries, a culture which *La Morada en el tiempo* both preserves and questions.)

In Judaic tradition, loyalty to one God prevents spiritual exile. In regards to *La Morada en el tiempo* Menassé addresses the communal aspect, fundamental to

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3 de Certeau describes Jewish tradition as the tradition of the *gespaltete Seelen*, divided souls, whose cleaved lives created a hidden interiority (84).
Judaism, of the articulation of the non-rational referent of mystic speech: “desde el pacto y la alianza establecida por el pueblo judío con Dios, desde la intimidad de una tradición amada y comprendida desde dentro, y así, desde dentro iluminada, el mensajero clama ante la Ausencia, llama a las puertas de la Mudez pues la Voz ha dado la espalda y el Silencio no es suficiente todavía” (41). (From the pact and the alliance established by the Jewish people with God, from the privacy of a loved tradition and understood from inside, and in this way, from an illuminated inside, the messenger cries out before Absence, calls at the doors of the Silence but the Voice has turned Its back and the Silence is still not sufficient.) The frustration, seen throughout mystical texts, is the difficulty in connecting with that other, in establishing dialogue with that other.

De Certeau points out that when St. Teresa discusses the crystal-castle that is the soul, she speaks of disappearance (ecstasy) or death that constitutes the subject as pleasure in the other” (96). It is the point at which the speaking “I,” the ego of the subject, like Abraham of Talamanca, experiences being wholly subsumed into ha Shem. “What [is] mystical then, is the disappearance of the actors (the lover and the loved one, God and man) whereas the transactions between them prevail: ‘God and I are one in the transaction’ “ (de Certeau 99).

Attaining this end seems as elusive as the elusive referent itself. The way is fraught with dangers at all levels: physical, emotional, social, psychological, political, and spiritual. One of the primary questions that arises as these multiple dangers present themselves is: is this the right way? In regards to Morada interior, Judith Payne points out that ‘mal’ (evil) and ‘pecado’ (sin) are judgments of Judaism made by the Catholic church of her time, while acts of dissembling are strategies used to protect the narrator from the Church and maintain her on ‘el camino verdadero’ (the true path), which is her Jewish faith” (52). Here Payne is referring to sociopolitical danger of following a particular way and the related physical danger of death by burning. The emotional and psychological factors that are brought into play for political ends (in this specific instance, Catholic hegemony) are very powerful, compounding the general worry about whether the way is the right way.

The protagonist of Morada interior worries frequently throughout the first two thirds of the text that she is being led by the devil (46, 47; 16; 58, 66, 69, 72, 73). An important event for her was being seen and heard by Padre Francisco, who advised her act “sin vacilación” (without hesitation) and that she stop resisting the power of God (69). This external reassurance regarding the path she is on gave her some mental calm. However, the real turning point for the protagonist is her own visions of God and angels (83, 85). It is at this point that she becomes self-reliant:

Lástima que esa visión sobre la cruz sólo me era dada a mí, y nadie más la pudiese contemplar, para de nuevo surgir las dudas. ¿Por qué lo que yo veía tan claramente sólo a mí me era mostrado? ¿Cuál era la ceguera de los demás? O ¿sería yo la ciega, que no pudiera conformarme con un simple trozo de madera y que todo lo transmutara? De la madera, el diamante: alquimista del alma sería yo (84-85).
Morada interior ends with death, “el ciclo ha terminado” (112). (The cycle has ended.) However, the use of the imperfect grammatical tense here in the written text indicates that there is not a definitive end to the cycle. Indeed, this last chapter is followed by an Epilogue. The is a series of negations, still in the first person voice, that attempt to put into language that which cannot be put into language. The difficulty is stated by the narrator: “la fuerza interna que me mueve no es definable” (112) (The internal force that animates me cannot be defined). Rupture from that internal force is the angst of spiritual exile, which manifests externally in emotional unrest, confusion, illness, misfortune and/or physical exile, which then in turn serve as a trigger that brings to consciousness the underlying and more fundamental issue of spiritual exile. Morada is dwelling in self-understanding, achieved through dialogue and hence connection with God. The establishment of dialogue by the female protagonists through mystic speech that overtly or covertly utilized Jewish paradigms was the means by which connection with an ineffable referent was established. This in turn brought about understanding and the cessation of feeling troubled and distressed.

Circumscribing an identity through selecting textual elements which locate exile and related identity issues within physical place, within concepts of nation, and within particular imagined communities has been the approach to the theme of exile in Muñiz-Huberman’s fiction. Reflecting on Muñiz-Huberman’s Morada Interior through the lens of de Certeau’s theory of mystical speech, and together with the intertextuality of Las moradas and La morada en el tiempo, opened the possibility for the novel examination of the theme of exile that was explored in this essay. When exile is conceptualized as a fundamentally spiritual experience, it adds to our knowledge about the identity issues, which arise as a result of the rupture and void created by physical exile. De Certeau postulates that plurality gives rise to ambiguity and falsity, yet conceptualizing exile as a spiritual experience allows for understandings which point to connection, integration and integrity.
Works cited