

The two chapters in this section foreshadow the purpose, significance and intention of the volume as a whole by claiming speech as a political act. Telling the stories of immigrant women, as women in and of themselves; subjects, and not objects of knowledge; carving out a space in the discourses of migration; agentic and defiant, is by definition an act of power. As bell hooks (2008/1993) explains,

Moving from silence into speech is from the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and

those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice. (p. 18)

Espín as well as Suyemoto and Donovan serve as models, as templates, and together as an introduction to a collection that we believe does just that.

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1

A Geography of Memory: A Psychology of Place

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My life has been marked by the experience of migration; I have lived most of my life removed from my country of birth. As I wrote several years ago,

I possess the vague certainty that I could have been another person were it not for the particular circumstances that migration brought into my life. I do not know and will never know the person I could have been had I not left my country. The only me I know is the one that incorporates the consequences of migration. Even though my life has been very rich in experiences, and I have never felt particularly deprived, I know that whatever I have succeeded in creating and living has been developed at the expense of some significant losses. Of these losses I am only vaguely aware. Far more clear are the undeniable opportunities, achievements, successes, and fulfillments brought about by migration. For the person who has migrated, identity issues are further complicated by their polyvalent circumstances. One is aware that both life's losses and failures and life's possibilities and triumphs are magnified and distorted by the lens of the migration experience. Migration for me, as for most immigrants, has given a dual and contradictory legacy. It provided safety and success, yet it also brought losses and silence about them. Mention of them is easily confused with self-pity or even ungratefulness to the new country. (Espín, 1999, p. 1)

In 1961 I left Cuba, my country of birth, and started life as an immigrant in Spain, Panama and Costa Rica. Later circumstances brought me to Belgium and to Canada. Finally, I came to reside in the United States. Although I have been a citizen of this country for several

decades, my memories of childhood and adolescence in Cuba and the memories of early adulthood in other countries continue to be at the core of who I am.

Historical events and individual lives intersect to create autobiographical memory. The historical events I have witnessed or lived through in different parts of the world have served to frame my life in reality, to give it a sense of groundedness despite the many breaks and dislocations that have characterized it. Conflicts that occurred in places where I was living at the time – such as the Cuban Revolution, including the Bay of Pigs Invasion or the incidents at the Panama Canal Zone in the early 1960s – serve to anchor my memories. With aging has come a clearer sense of the importance of the events I have witnessed and of how entangled they have been with the fabric of my life, as well as the need to understand at a deeper level what role they have played in the weaving of that fabric.

In this chapter I discuss the role of memories in the formation, preservation and integration of self and identity, particularly for immigrants, as well as the role of language in the encoding or decoding of those memories. The importance of memories of place and the place of memories – what I call a “geography of memory” – are central to my discussion.

Memory and identity

Some psychologists who study autobiographical memory (e.g. Rubin, 1986) believe that we *are* our memories, that we are what we remember, real or imagined. Although autobiographical memory is important for everyone, for immigrants or those who have lived in many places throughout their lives, memory provides the only sense of continuity. Places and people change; the only way of knowing who you are – that you are – is to remember. Memory ~~functions~~ to construct a sense of continuity in our lives. The thread created by memories binds multiple experiences into a sense of personal identity and subjectivity – a sense of continuity to feel whole, which can be summarized as “who I am” (Taylor, 2010).

When powerful dislocations occur in life, as in migration, memory may be the only tool to recover a sense of self. Memory is the only witness to immigrant lives. It is the only way to *re-member* all the scattered pieces of life. As Chilean author Isabel Allende explains, “[t]hose of us who have moved on many times... lack roots and corroboration of who we are, we must put our trust in memory to give continuity to our lives” (2003, p. 79).



However, psychologists know that memory is precarious, fragile and changeable. Psychological and physiological studies demonstrate that memory is not always reliable, that autobiographical memory can be distorted, that memory is affected by many factors (e.g. Kandel, 2006; Schacter, 1996; 2001), including the languages in which memories are encoded and decoded (e.g. Javier, Barroso & Muñoz, 1993; Schrauf, 2003; Schrauf, Pavlenko & Dewale, 2003). But memory betrays, it mixes events and it leaves holes precisely about the moments you need to remember most. “Memory is always cloudy, we can’t trust it” (Allende, 2003, p. 79).

Absence of places and people and even familiar smells create a discursive obstacle in the creation of identity that is unavoidably filled with “remembered” imaginings. Memory is not just a residue or a fixed reproduction of events but also a dynamic, conflictual and constructive process, deeply intertwined with values, communications, language and feelings, to name a few. Emotion both intensifies and obliterates the memory of events.

On the positive side, as cognitive psychologist David Pillemer (2000) explains, “although examples of memory distortions exist...those memories that do persist into later life are likely to generally be truthful” (p. 56). Memories of peripheral details tend to be more susceptible to distortion than the memory for central themes, which tends to be very reliable. Pillemer tell us “that we can largely trust our vivid memories of emotional events (p. 56) [because] emotional memories, although not infallible, are often broadly accurate” (p. 55). “Memories of apparent trivial details can [also] fulfill important psychological functions” (p. 62). Critical insight and engagement also have a transformative effect on memory and narratives.

I know that my individual memory is simultaneously my own process, connected to the nerve cells in my brain *and* the product of relationships and social contexts that have shaped it to determine what is important to remember. I also know that, to some extent, all childhood memories are imaginary. Memories of childhood idealize and distort; they may be full of resentment or rosy fantasies. The inevitable lacunae get filled up with those imaginations. Although adult memories can be more stable, they are also subject to multiple factors that influence what and how we remember “facts”.

And yet, despite all its limitations, all I really have is memory.

Memory, culture and society

In addition, memories and self-understanding are “always shaped by culture. The tales we tell each other (and ourselves) about who we

are...are individual variations on the narrative templates our culture deems intelligible" (Ochberg, 1992, p. 214). What is remembered has a great deal to do with what is culturally and theoretically acceptable at a given point in history. As in all identity development processes, individual desire and societal possibilities both push the limits and constrain the boundaries of the lived story and of the memories that sustain that story. When societal transformations occur, when people find themselves in a different cultural context, the acceptable accounts of life stories are also transformed.

Stories lived and stories told by people, acceptable behaviors and acceptable accounts of behavior are regulated by society (Rosenwald, 1992). The social construction of past events has an enormous impact on the structuring of present day social and political realities as well as on the meaning of our individual lives (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). "Insufficient attention to the accumulated meanings given by society and culture and their inescapable impact on our understanding of our world and ourselves" (Taylor, 2010, p. 26) interfere with understanding individual lives.

Collective narratives of "who we are" interact with our individual histories to create our sense of identity and our way of interpreting our surroundings. Collective narratives are schemes by which we make meaning of "our history". They do not appear out of nowhere but are created from the way groups reconstruct their history and identity. In the first part of the twentieth century, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1941/1992; 1950/1980) devoted considerable attention to the social construction of memory. According to Halbwachs, individual human memory is possible only within a collective understanding. Our ideas about the present are based on collective reconstructions of the past. According to Halbwachs, individuals organize and understand events within a social context, and therefore, they remember those events in the light of the collective understanding. Halbwachs believed that individuals' understanding of themselves and of historical events is linked to their social group's consciousness (Halbwachs, 1941/1992; 1950/1980). The group constructs the memory, and individuals do the remembering within those parameters. Collective memories are always selective; therefore, different groups may have different memories of the same event, which in turn affect modes of behavior for both individuals and groups. To illustrate his theory Halbwachs (1941/1992) used examples of how memories of the past in wealthy families in France diverge considerably from those of other French citizens. As an additional illustration he showed how changes in the memories of

pilgrims to the Holy Land through the centuries depended on their historical moment.

Other authors have affirmed that collective historical memory is a powerful force that shapes who we are as individuals (e.g. Salomon, 2004). As Salomon states, citing Ignatieff (1996), "...the collective memory of the past isn't past at all" (Salomon, 2004, p. 275). It plays an enormous role in how we remember the events of our lives and what we remember about them, which is to say that collective memories contribute to distortions in the individual memories about "what really happened".

Several reference groups compete for the loyalties of women immigrants. The collective memories on which they base their own are not only those of the history of their country of birth but also those of the new country and of the immigration process itself. Each migratory wave arrives with its own particular socio-historical location and is received by a host country whose socio-historical processes and consciousness are also being transformed. Grievances and guilt as well as hope and anticipation that are experienced by individual immigrants are determined by collective interpretations of the "essence" of both nations and of the migration itself. They are expressed in individual behavior and experienced as personal by the individual immigrant.

Immigrant communities frequently "invent traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992) as a way of coping with the stress of the new environment by holding on to some aspects of the real or imagined past. These invented traditions may include distortions of "how things were" back in the country of origin or may consist on preserving a past that is no longer viable in the home country. This is an effort to preserve values, beliefs and norms that safeguard a social identity and the authority of some members of the community. For women, issues of gender become entangled with this need to preserve the past at all costs in the midst of rapid change. Their loyalties to group and family may conflict with their developing identities in the new context. Collective understanding of what it means to be a woman in a particular culture may conflict with expectations in the new country. They frequently become a source of conflict in immigrant families, as therapists and researchers have observed (e.g. Espín, 1999).

Memory through the generations

Migration also produces psychological effects for the immigrants' descendants beyond the obvious fact that the younger generations are

born and/or grow into adulthood in the new country rather than the country of their ancestors. Migration influences the nature of parenting and other relationships. Parental behaviors may be influenced by the expectations of the new surroundings concerning family roles. Younger children of immigrants may experience different parental behaviors than what their older siblings experienced because parents may respond to the demands of the new environment.

The intergenerational transmission of trauma combines with the psychological transformations prompted by the migration to produce multiple effects. Post-traumatic stress, mourning and grieving, acculturative stress and other phenomena that are common among immigrants and refugees impact the lives of their children, even though those children have not experienced the process of migration in their own lives.

Descendants of immigrants do not have memories of any place other than the one where they live. And yet, their parents' memories of another place that the children may have never seen continue to haunt them in their present life and location and continue to influence their own sense of identity. Children of immigrants "received the emotional traces of parents' experiences...but not memories" (p. 114). Memories are not genetically transmitted. Therefore, "whereas adults who live through violence and atrocity can understand what happened to them as actuality – no matter how awful its terms – the generation after receives its first knowledge of the terrible events with only childish instruments of perception, and as a kind of fable" (Hartmann, Hoffman, Mendelsohn & Miller, 2011, p. 114). "[M]emory is individual, you can't remember things that didn't happen to you" (p. 115). But "when you grow up in an immigrant family you are always hearing about the country of origin. So [if you ever go there] it feels like going back" (p. 112).

Paradoxically, the psychological effects of migration on children of immigrants are derived not only from losses and traumatic experiences of their parents but also from the successes immigrants may achieve as a consequence of the migration. New loyalties in the host country may be experienced by both immigrant parents and their children as betrayal of loved ones and the homeland. As Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) put it, "invisible loyalties" can be emotionally paralyzing and can induce compulsive behavior in individuals and families who may feel guilty if they "forget" what happened in the old country. "Invisible loyalties" may interfere with adaptation to the new country. Indeed, the immigrant's "sense of their own identity may be profoundly disturbed, if they feel that adaptation requires them to betray their earlier attachments" (Marris, 1974, p. 82).



The "geography of memory"

When violent or tragic events have occurred in a particular place, the memories of that place become "contaminated" by those events. According to cultural geographer Kenneth Foote (1993), the physical space impacted by those events requires some form of reaction to the specific place that can range from sanctification to obliteration of a given place. Elizabeth Jelin (2003) and other South American authors have studied memories as they pertain to events and places impacted by the dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s in the countries of the Southern Cone. Jelin and many others have used memory studies during the last twenty years to explore the relationship between memory and trauma. For immigrants, particularly those who are refugees, the place where their past lives took place are deeply associated with traumatic memories.

But even when that is not the case, having immigrated to another country, no matter how long ago, means you are always from somewhere else. You are always betwixt and between, neither here nor there. Many important events of your life have occurred in another place. Who you are is influenced by absence; the absence of people and places that shaped those events. Distance from your original place, exile of whichever kind, necessitates understanding yourself from a different geographical and cultural setting than the one in which many of your memories were encoded. You have to organize your memories in a certain way to make them intelligible in your new context; you have to explain details that would otherwise have been taken for granted. Sometimes I feel as if I have to explain myself constantly in order to be understood by those who matter to me in this new life and place.

The *place* in which remembered events occurred is of paramount importance to immigrants. The immigrant's preoccupations are frequently focused on the vicissitudes of place and geography. This preoccupation has two components. First, whatever events may be occurring at a distance in the country of origin give it a sense of reality because of its psychological presence for the immigrant. This, I believe, is a manifestation of what Parkes (1975) described in his classical studies of grief as the "urge to search for and find the lost [love] object". Then there is for immigrants a persistent preoccupation with "what could have been" that takes different shapes: preoccupation with what could have been if the immigrants had not left their countries is a central theme in immigrants' emotional lives and ruminations about what life might have been if the immigrant had remained in her homeland or

migrated to a different country or if the immigration had taken place at another life stage. She asks herself what could have happened in her life had she stayed in her country of origin. Then, her concern shifts to ask what has been gained by the migration. Finally, distortions of memory of places where events occurred develop progressively, mostly outside of conscious awareness.

My own reflections following a return to my homeland after several decades of absence manifest these preoccupations.

My trip to Cuba made me realize that for years I had felt as if my memories had no geography. It made me realize that what I remembered had actually happened in a definite physical space that continues to exist in reality and not only in my memory. That Cuba exists beyond what I think or feel or remember about her. This realization, which may seem all too obvious, was the more powerful because before this return trip I never knew that I felt as if my country did not have a real existence beyond my memory. (Espín, 1992, p. 16)

In the interpersonal realm,

my trip put me in touch with childhood friends and made me reflect about the differences in our lives, about the choices to stay or leave that have dramatically influenced our life projects. None of us has any way of knowing what our lives would have been like without the historical dislocations that have marked them....It is impossible to know if our decisions have resulted in a better life project for any of us, although we each hope and believe to have made the best decision. (Espín, 1992, p. 17)

One researcher has characterized these ruminations by describing how "the migration experience creates an emergent phenomenology of incessant reference group comparisons and trade-offs between the benefits of the host society and the losses incurred in departing from the society of origin" (Rogler, 1994, p. 704). Cuban-American writer Achy Obejas, describing her own ruminations about her migration, illustrated these concerns and their relationship to sexuality in an autobiographical story. She pondered,

What if we'd stayed? What if we'd never left Cuba? ... I wonder, if we'd stayed then who, if anyone, would have been my blond lovers, or any kind of lovers at all....I try to imagine who I would have been...but



I can't. I can only think of variations of who I am, not who I might have been. (1994, pp. 124–125)

The nagging of "what could have been" is always in the back of my mind since, as I said earlier, I don't know another me than the one I have become. All I know is that this me I am would have never taken shape had I not boarded that plane in 1961, leaving my country behind.

Place, gender and identity

As British psychologist Stephanie Taylor (2010) states in her studies of narratives of identity and place, changes in those areas have particularly impacted women in contemporary society; therefore, the burden of creating an identity is greater for women than for men. This differential impact of gender becomes even more evident when we focus on immigrant women. Regardless of age, race or social class, gender differences are present in immigrants' experiences (Espín, 1999; 2006). "Diasporic experiences are always gendered" (Clifford, 1994, p. 313). At each step of the migration process, women and men encounter different experiences. Women's roles and sexual behavior may be modified more dramatically and profoundly than men's, as a consequence of the acculturation to a new society (Espín, 1999; 2006). Young women from "racialized" groups may confront additional conflicts concerning their sexuality and body image. They have to find a balance between the imposed hypersexualization of immigrant women as "exotic" and the "hyperpurity" expected of them by their families and communities.

A generalized assumption is that women immigrants are focused on their families and homes. And, needless to say, "home" is a powerful place. "There is a long tradition of feminist criticism of the family life conventionally associated with home" (Taylor, 2010, p. 45). However, some of those critiques seem to disappear the moment we are referring to immigrant women. It seems easy to forget that gender is a social construct, and as such, it is being constructed by immigrant women in the process of remembering the old and confronting the new. Immigrant women are experiencing processes of transformation in many aspects of their lives. And while it is inappropriate to push someone beyond what they are willing to transform in themselves, it will be equally restraining to assume that immigrant women's gender roles are frozen in the past and that they are incapable of analysis and transformation concerning the ongoing performance of their gender and identity. "[A]ny identity positioning is not once and for all because social life and identity are

always in the process of being lived out, in the ongoing, ever changing moment" (Taylor, 2010, p. 49). This is true of all women, including immigrants, despite the reality of the extensive self-surveillance and discipline normatively required of them by their communities that establish limits to the range of identities that can take place.

Evidently, relevant identities are never that of "a woman" but a woman of a certain class, ethnicity, age, religion and migration history. Gender is not separable from other identities. We know that the unsettled nature of social life, particularly for immigrants undergoing a process of acculturation and working through memories of the past, requires repeated performances of all identities (Taylor, 2010).

For women immigrants, the stress of gender expectations in home and society are added to the stress created by migration. Inconsistencies are unavoidable. No matter how fragile memories about women in their country of origin might be, they are the thread that tethers the immigrant to who she is; they serve to ground her both in the past and in the new place.

Loss and migration

An additional dynamic of utmost importance in the experiences and memories of immigrants and refugees relates to issues of loss, grief and mourning. Discussions of the psychological distress experienced by immigrants and refugees usually emphasize their need to cope with new experiences rather than the loss of the old familiar environment implied in the loss of home country and loved ones.

Losses usually stem from the traumas of the uprooting experience through involuntary or voluntary extraction from the primary group networks in the society of origin. The loss of the social circle composed of intimate face-to-face contact with family, friends and neighbors is pungently distressful. (Rogler, 1994, p. 704)

Scholar of urban studies Peter Marris (1974), in his classic exploration of the impact of experiences of loss and change, described the difficulties in mourning losses brought on by ambivalent experiences such as migration, in which positive and negative outcomes overlap. According to him, "loss disrupts our ability to find meaning in experience, and grief represents the struggle to retrieve this sense of meaning when circumstances have bewildered or betrayed it" (p. 147). "The degree of choice or necessity at the time of and preparation for relocation influence the

kind of loss that is experienced...and play a major role in the kind of mourning process required" (Levy-Warren, 1987, p. 307). Regardless of the conditions that determine the decision to leave, "acts of mourning attenuate the leave-taking" (Marris, 1974, p. 84). However, most immigrants are supposed to be happy that they have succeeded in migrating rather than sad for what they have lost. Sadness and grief are easily perceived as ingratitude by the members of the host culture and perhaps as incongruent even by the immigrant herself. Regardless of gratitude for their new country and relief from whatever anxieties were experienced in the home country, the transitions created by immigration demand that one grieve for the old attachments to country and people. In other words, the mixture of positive and negative feelings involved in migration complicates dramatically the emotional picture of the immigrant.

Frequently, well-meaning but under-informed friends and social service agencies emphasize the woman's adaptation to her new life and ignore her feelings of loss, despite the fact that these feelings and the need to mourn those losses are at the crux of the process of successful adaptation. These feelings of loss must become integrated into the individual's psyche. But, in so doing, identity is unavoidably transformed, and this transformation brings with it the additional need to mourn the old identity.

The loss of some of life's small, taken-for-granted pleasures may acquire enormous proportions in the emotional life of the immigrant. The pain of uprootedness is activated in subtle forms by the everyday absence of familiar smells, familiar foods and familiar routines for doing the small tasks of daily life. It is the lack of "the average expectable environment" that can become a constant reminder of what is not there anymore. It can be most disorienting and most disruptive of the immigrant's previously established identity (Espín, 1992; 1997).

Normally, the grieving process involves a moderate level of emotional disorganization. It may manifest as apathy, insomnia, loss of appetite, irritability, angry outbursts, psychosomatic symptoms and other signs of distress. When these feelings are inhibited because the loss is denied or otherwise defended against, the normal signs can become pathological by prolongation or exaggeration. Parkes's 1975 seminal study of grief and bereavement suggested several identifiable features of grief and mourning, which include a gradual process from denial to recognition and acceptance, alarm reactions such as anxiety and other related physiological symptoms, an urge to search and find the lost object, anger and guilt, feelings of internal loss of self and identification with the lost [love] object. Despite the fact that the migration may have been

motivated by less than optimal conditions in the homeland, the unrealistic feeling that one has lost a paradise may persist. Idealization of the home country may increase the feeling of loss.

To compensate for these losses and feelings of grief, many immigrants struggle to maintain contact with the home country. They do this through food, music or physical proximity to other immigrants from the home country. The presence of others who share the same ethnicity and sense of cultural heritage has been found to be positively related to mental health and well-being among immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Although there are similarities between the mourning of bereavement and the losses experienced with migration, the two processes differ in substantial ways. The bereaved's grief can be traced to the nature of the relationship to a specific person. While in migration, the lost object is vague and the loss pervasive. Migrants have lost country, culture and loved ones. With most of their habitual patterns being disrupted while they simultaneously learn new ones, the distress can be considerable. Immigrants themselves seldom understand the magnitude of this loss while they are experiencing it. They and others may miss the extent of its impact.

Sometimes immigrants experience reactivated grief when they retire from their jobs after many years of residing in the new country. Depression and emotional distress in later life could be traced directly to their lack of successful mourning years earlier at the time the migration took place. The urgency of survival and adaptation needs at the moment of migration forces postponing their feelings of loss and may lead to delayed reactions of grief.

The healing power of narrating memories

How can memory help to integrate all ~~the~~ we are into a fuller sense of our fragile selves? Well, of course, a ~~further~~ sense can be actualized through the memory work that constitutes the essence of the process of therapy but also through the telling and re-telling of the memory to others, as well as in our private and public writing.

There is much to be learned from the process of elaborating an individual narrative. For the last few years I have been engaged in the experiential analysis of my own migration story as a research project as well as in the writing of memoir about my childhood and adolescence in Cuba. My individual memories and the collective interpretations of Cuban history intermingle in my life. As I stated ~~earlier~~, I am conscious of how historical events and individual lives intersect to create autobiographical

memory. Now, more than 50 years after emigration and after three return visits to the places of my childhood and adolescence, not only do I know that leaving Cuba changed the course of my life, but also I cannot avoid wondering what my life would have been in Cuba, even if there had never been a revolution.

Narrating the events of my life and my memories of them is further complicated because Cuba is so conflictual and because so many people have opinions about it and about Cubans living abroad. I frequently encounter people who question my life decisions and judge who I must be on the basis of how I fit their own political opinions. Too frequently I feel like saying to those who question me from their self-constructed high moral ground, *What do you really know? My life experiences have to do with the powerlessness of being a toy of history, not with some interesting political theories or treatises you may have read.* And yet, despite the incomprehension I frequently encounter, perhaps because of the lack of continuity of people and places that Allende describes, I have a desperate need to talk, to tell, to show, to make myself understood. How do I explain to people who matter deeply to me but who have lived different lives what the essence of my life is? How do I explain that, in many ways, I am not who I seem to be? In other words, how can narrating my memories help to integrate a fuller sense of myself?

Memory, narratives and health

In 2001 the American Psychological Association's *Monitor* featured an article entitled *A new reason for keeping a diary*. The article reviews the results of several studies on the beneficial health effects of writing down our memories. These studies explored further "the well-established connection between writing and health" (Carpenter, 2001, p. 70). Apparently, "repeated writing about negative events decreases their emotional impact" (p. 70). Accordingly, the results of these studies demonstrate that "expressive writing – that is, writing that includes emotional descriptions of life events – helps people simplify and organize fragmented memories" (p. 69). "It squashes intrusive and avoidant thoughts about negative events as it may lead to improvements in working memory" (p. 70).

A volume edited by Lepore and Smyth (2002) with the suggestive title *The writing cure: How expressive writing promotes health and emotional well-being* presents the results of multiple studies on the effects of writing on illness such as blood pressure and cancer, as well as on a variety of emotional conditions. The studies reported in this book amply confirm the positive effects of writing narratives on populations of children and

adults. They demonstrate the power of translating emotional experience into language and writing. The beneficial health effects of writing and other forms of disclosure are now a well-established fact (e.g. Jourard, 1958; 1959; Pennebaker, 1990; 1993; 1997; Lepore & Smyth, 2002). Consistently, researchers have found that writing and self-disclosure, particularly about emotionally laden events and negative experiences, improves our sense of well-being, boosts the immune system, increases our T-cell growth and antibody response, lowers our heart rate, helps us lose weight, improves sleep, elevates our mood and can even reduce physical pain, in addition to strengthening social relationships, which in turn has beneficial health effects (e.g. Carpenter, 2001; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 1990; 1993; 1997).

According to a number of studies reviewed by Norman Anderson (2003) in his book on psychology and aging, writing also appears to prolong life, even when it is only writing for yourself. It seems that writing creates changes in the way people interpret events and gives meaning to those events. When we reflect about causes and effects of life events, particularly when we do that in writing, our lives make more sense and become more manageable. The negative events become less intrusive, leaving us with more "memory space" and more energy to live our lives (Pennebaker, 1990; 1993; 1997).

For as long as I can remember, almost as soon as I learned to write, I have kept some form of diary/journal. Through the years, volumes have accumulated. These studies about the value of writing memories have been a delightful discovery. Apparently, that pile of what may have seemed more or less useless writing has played a role in helping me manage the chaotic events of my life and may have even helped to prolong it!

Because a memory that is communicated in a story shows at least a minimum of coherence, writing down memories helps the individual construct a sense of the past, even if the story is told only to oneself in the writing of a journal. The narrative communication required in the writing or telling of memories becomes the form in which the individual constructs a sense of the past and of personal continuity. Reflecting on our memories and writing about them increases critical insight and engagement. Telling our stories reinforces social bonding, learning and the memories themselves. According to Pennebaker (1990; 1993; 1997), this sharpening of communicative intent provides a mental frame of reference and a point of comparison for future decisions and actions that serves to modulate emotional reactivity and, in turn, has positive effects on health. In other words, sharing the intimate details of our

lives has many functions. The act makes us feel connected to others, alleviates stress and makes us healthier.

Stories are essential because they permit moments of reflection without which actions and judgment would not be possible. In essence, in writing about experiences, the mind "is telling itself a story" that serves to create our sense of self and identity. As Donald Polkinghorne (1988) puts it, "the self needs a story in order to be" (p. 105).

Political impact of memory narratives

Life stories, although deeply personal, also have important political purposes that may also produce psychological consequences. They allow us to reinsert ourselves into the narrative that is history, to become a part of the public world by participating in the process of its making. As British sociologist Ken Plummer (1995) tells us in his book *Telling Sexual Stories*, "[s]tory telling flows in the stream of power... The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story... is part of the political process" (p. 26).

"In the United States, a country of immigrants, being an immigrant still often means to stand as a silent outsider in relation to both the culture of origin and US culture" (Giunta, 2002, p. 71). Narrating memories, either verbally or in writing, gives voice to the immigrant experience. "Memory frequently represents the inaccessible, the unspeakable" (p. 119), which is why "gathering the fragments of one's life into a unified, cohesive narrative" (p. 120) is so important "for those who have been marginalized and denied access to public forums because of their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, sexuality or class" (p. 120). Therefore, "memory has enormous political importance in the contemporary context because it creates or helps sharpen a much needed political awareness of social issues" (p. 120) for both immigrants and others who interact with them. Appropriating their memories and narrating them is thus a powerful tool for women immigrants.

In fact, the process of valuing our memories and telling them in writing provides an important vehicle of expression to progressive individuals, feminists, clinicians, academics, students, interdisciplinary scholars and writers because it entails having the courage to challenge our old categories and make space for contradictions and ambiguities while opening us up to our new creative possibilities. When women of different generations, ethnicities or sexual/affectional orientations write and speak about their memories, we can examine the influences of age cohorts, historical generations, cultural communities or feminist priorities. Writing memories evokes unexpected varieties of feelings and relationships, expanding the definition of women's lives and identities.

Language and memory

An important consideration in the deliberate transmission of any message is the decision about what language to use for the narration. And if the construction of memories is essential for the development of identity, the linguistic decisions involved cannot be underestimated, particularly for immigrants whose memories may have been encoded in languages other than English. "You can never sidestep the question of identity when you learn to live in a new language" as Isabelle de Courtivron (2003, p. 4) says in the new collection of writings by bilingual authors she recently published. In her words, "where does the deepest material of the self, lodge itself if not in language? ... [T]he elusive search for oneness, and the haunting quest for the self are perhaps foregrounded more acutely in texts by bilinguals because their authors face an ultimate disconnection. How much more difficult the fragmentation when you don't quite have 'the words to say it'" (p. 4).

Despite the fashionable postmodern emphasis on displacement and dislocation; despite the intellectual persuasion that trying to find wholeness in our lives is a somewhat obsolete ideal, the anxiety about fragmentation and the search for existential coherence remain primordial human responses. The life-long struggle to reconcile the different pieces of the identity puzzle (or at least to acknowledge that they cannot be reconciled) continues to be a painful and constantly renegotiated process. All the more so when the fragmentation exists in that most intimate of sites—language. (de Courtivron, 2003, p. 2)

For some people, such as me, a language other than English may be the depository of most of those memories, at once trivial and significant, of songs, poetry, places, customs and daily events, shared through many years with others who have since disappeared from my life or stayed behind in places where I am not. I experience a constant need to retell because those who are with me in this here and now don't know, don't understand, don't see. How could they? Their memory is of TV programs, sports events and popular songs that are not mine. That is why I always lose at "popular culture" and "sports" when I try to guess these categories while watching Jeopardy on TV during dinner.

In a study of autobiographical memory among bilinguals, Javier and his collaborators (1993) posited that "the nature of bilingual memory is influenced by the kind of linguistic organization the individual develops

[because] memories of personal events are linguistically organized in bilinguals" (Javier, Barroso & Muñoz, 1993, p. 336). In other words, the way memories of personal events are organized in the brains of bilinguals differs from monolingual individuals – a point that Albert and Obler (1978) have also made. According to Javier, Barroso and Muñoz (1993), "the communication of memories of personal events is qualitatively different in the two languages" (p. 334); the experience is remembered differently in each language.

Examination of work in experimental psychology on bilingual autobiographical memory and clinical case reports from psychoanalytic therapy with bilinguals suggests that memory associations and retrievals for events of childhood and youth (in the country of origin) are more numerous, more detailed and more emotionally marked when remembering is done in the first language ("mother tongue") rather than in the second language (Altman, Schrauf & Walters, 2013; Schrauf, 2000).

In addition, "language serves a strong function as a retrieval cue when eliciting memories for past life experiences.... [L]anguage is specifically tied to memory traces and those traces appear to carry 'language tags'" (Altarriba, 2003, p. 316), strangely enough, even for people who do not speak that language any longer.

Moreover, it appears that "how and when the two languages are learned will determine the nature of the linguistic organization possible" (Javier, Barroso & Muñoz, 1993, p. 322). As Hoffman (2003) astutely puts it, "the kind of relationship one develops with an acquired language is deeply influenced by the kind of bond one has with one's mother or father tongue – and by extension, with all the intimacies and intimate sensations of early life" (p. 52).

Memories appear to be loaded in favor of the language in which the experience took place. In other words, "the language of the experience may not necessarily be (the bilingual person's) primary language... [but rather] the linguistic context in which the verbal interaction occurs" (Javier, Barroso & Muñoz, 1993, p. 335).

These studies' results have obvious implications for immigrant women's experiences in therapy. At best, it appears that decoding the affective meanings of memories through the use of another language is problematic. The use of English in therapy, rather than the mother tongue, may render unavailable to the therapeutic process certain areas of the intrapsychic world because apparently "memory storage is pattern storage, and patterns evoke other patterns.... [A]wareness of a small portion can trigger awareness of a whole; a single moment, a sound, or a sensation can evoke recall of an entire event" (Aragno, 1996, p. 32). Indeed, "the

retrieval of information from memory is both activated and constrained by language" (Schrauf, Pavlenko & Dewale, 2003, p. 228) because both positive and negative experiences are powerfully connected to language (Dewale, 2013a, b).

Psychotherapists working with bilingual clients often find that experience is available in some privileged way in one language versus the other. The immigrant's memories of childhood or adolescence spent in their home country may be more numerous, detailed or emotionally charged when dealt with in the mother tongue than the second language.... Representations of self-identity and the narration of emotional experience may be particularly dependent on linguistic and cultural factors.... Memories in two languages may undergird the complex sense of identity so often reported by bilinguals. (Schrauf, 2003, p. 239)

Schrauf goes on to report in several of his studies that "language is involved in both encoding and retrieval of bilinguals' memories" (p. 240). And, indeed, his results confirmed that "memories in Spanish commemorated events from before immigration; memories in English commemorated events after immigration" (p. 240).

In another study Schrauf, Pavlenko and Dewale (2003) theorize that "the argument that language might play a critical role in conditioning and constraining the path of...retrieval rests also on the notion that language is a privileged carrier of cultural meaning" (p. 239).

While it is true that psychodynamically oriented therapies pay special attention to memory processes and language associations (e.g. Amati-Mehler, Argentieri & Canestri, 1993), memory and language are undeniably essential for all forms of therapy regardless of the specific theoretical orientation. All forms of therapy are forms of a "talking cure" because language is absolutely necessary to establish rapport and to communicate during treatment. Immigrant women in therapy are involved in a process that evokes their memories and their languages in ways that question or reaffirm their sense of identity and connection with their communities. The ways in which they understand and narrate their experiences are profoundly tied to the cultures and languages of both the old and new communities.

Providing culturally relevant mental health services to immigrant women in the US unavoidably involves language use. Both multilingual clients and multilingual therapists report the significance of language in effective treatment (e.g. Dewale, 2013 a & b).

Language and identity

Language – the forced learning of the new and the loss of the old linguistic community – is central to the migration experience; it becomes evident that language changes are critical in the transformation of identity.

In fact, language change is one of the most difficult problems the immigrant faces – and I am not referring to issues of vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation (Espín, 2013). Because "language determines one's knowledge of the world, of others, and of oneself, [it] provides a basis of support for one's identity" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984, p. 109). Therefore, language loss and its concomitant sense of identity loss and transformation are one of the most powerful components of the immigrant experience.

In her autobiographical account of migration, *Lost in Translation*, writer Eva Hoffman (1989) vividly describes the intensity of this experience for immigrants:

Linguistic dispossession is...close to the dispossession of one's self.... [There is feeling that] this language is beginning to invent another me.... [And] there is, of course, the constraint and the self-consciousness of an accent that I hear but cannot control. (p. 121)

Beyond allowing the immigrants to function in the new context, a new language has profound impact on their sense of self and identity as Hoffman's statement illustrates. Like Hoffman (1989) and Giunta (2002), I am perennially homeless in language. Besides the physical distance from my place of birth, my exile is also linguistic. I will never have the same facility with language that I enjoyed the first decades of my life. Never again will I be fully comfortable in any of the languages I speak because I am not fully me in only one of those languages anymore.

Immigrants learn "to live in two languages;" similarly, we learn to live in two social worlds. Learning to "live" in a new language is not merely an instrumental process. It is not a neutral act. It implies becoming immersed in the power relations of the specific culture that speaks the specific language. Paradoxically, learning the language of the host society implies learning one's place in the structures of social inequality.

For adults, to speak with a foreign accent places one in a subordinate position within those power relations.

For children, for whom immigration usually implies schooling in a language other than the language of their parents, this process involves

a "creation" of their incipient identities as members of a second-class group in the new country (Espín, 1999; 2006; 2013).

The issue becomes further complicated when different generations within a family have different levels of proficiency in the different languages spoken. While the first language or mother tongue may be taken to mean the native language of the family, in immigrant families, children are usually more fluent in the language of the host culture, which is really their first language rather than the language their parents speak (Bammer, 1994). Parents and children often end up with different native languages (Bammer, 1994). When parents and children are fluent in different languages, they may in fact be guided by different cultural codes.

On the positive side, learning a new language provides the immigrant with the opportunity to "create a new self". This facilitates working through early intrapsychic conflicts and finding new ways of self-expression that may not have been available in the world of the first language (Espín, 1999; 2013).

People who learn to use two languages have two symbols for every object. Thus, from an early age they become emancipated from linguistic symbols – from the concreteness, arbitrariness, and "tyranny" of words – developing analytic abilities to think in terms more independent of the actual word. By contrast, monolinguals may be at a disadvantage (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, pp. 200–201).

Clearly, access to more than one language pushes at the boundaries of what is "sayable" or "tellable". While the first language is usually the "language of emotion" even for individuals who are fluently bilingual, in some cases the second language could become a vehicle for expressing concerns that could be too embarrassing to verbalize in the first language. Since the use of language is essential in counseling and psychotherapy, understanding its many implications for the immigrant woman client is of utmost importance (Espín, 1999; 2006; 2013).

A therapist who speaks the same languages of the woman immigrant can provide a unique link to her psyche – but also can a therapist who is sensitive to and aware of the importance of language even though s/he may not speak the native language of the client. In these instances, other alternatives could be used, such as having the client tell the story of an important (perhaps traumatic) life event in their native language, even if the therapist doesn't understand, as a way to access the emotional valence of the story telling, facial expressions, and so on. Pérez Foster (1998) suggests a process that I have also used since the early 1970s. Basically, the client speaks in her first language while the therapist

observes emotional expression and body language. This is followed by the client providing a brief summary of what was said.

An important implication of this discussion is the need to consider language issues in therapy with immigrant women even though they may be fluent in their second language.

Obviously, some of these issues are relevant for therapy with multilingual individuals who may not be immigrants. But it is important to remember that language plays a unique part in the daily lives of women immigrants and that they are likely to have memories and associations tangled with language issues perhaps in deeper ways than those whose histories do not include the traumas of immigration.

Memory, language and ethics

Other issues that deserve attention refer to therapists' reactions to multilingual clients, the ethics of work with these populations and the need to educate therapists and their supervisors on the importance of language for these clients. Even when therapists speak more than one language, their training may not provide support for working in languages other than English. Schwartz and her collaborators (2010) address the ethical conundrums of supervising students who are providing therapeutic services in languages the supervisor does not understand.

Pérez Foster (1998) speaks of the effect on the therapy process of therapists' countertransferrential reactions to persons from other cultures or to clients who speak other languages. Therapists and their supervisors may have negative associations with languages they do not understand.

Beyond language issues, memories present us in life and in clinical work with important ethical considerations. When does remembering events of individual life or collective history lead to positive outcomes or significant transformative results, and when do these memories paralyze or even destroy lives and societies? When does the duty or the need to remember become a weapon of destruction (e.g. Margalit, 2002)?

Published memoirs and narratives of trauma and conflict can be a tool of accusation and revenge as much as apology or justification. It is difficult at times to avoid making them into expressions of resentment or guilt, to develop a testimony that is not just the self-affirming monologue of a victim or a condemnation of a real or imagined executioner. They will be instruments of healing in the measure in which they can avoid these pitfalls, although in private writing, it can be necessary to process the negative feelings before psychological clarity is achieved.

If groups in situations of intractable conflict are to reach some degree of reconciliation, they must work through their unresolved pain and anger related to the memory of past intergroup encounters (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). "Working-through enables people who have suffered traumatic social experiences to learn to live with those painful events while developing an ability to listen to the pain of the 'other.' The storytelling approach focuses on the way personal storytelling facilitates the working-through process in intractable conflicts" (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, p. 289). The emphasis is on the working-through: on memory and narrative being used as tools for healing rather than as weapons against the other. Although Bar-On and Kassem (2004) focus on situations of group conflicts, their points are equally applicable to situations of individual trauma and any other form of individual suffering.

Some concluding thoughts

Psychologists are interested in the development of lives. Our access to lives is through stories about them. We know that life stories heard by psychotherapists are influenced by what is culturally and historically acceptable in a society because collective memories inform individual autobiographical memories. And collective and autobiographical memories can become sites of contention and conflict as well as sources of identity and self-understanding. Although this is true for everyone, the specific life experiences of immigrants make these processes more poignant.

Understanding the importance of memories of place and life events is central to the psychology of immigrant women. In addition, there are lessons here for therapists working with clients who have been dislocated and displaced in other ways. These are people who have not crossed national borders, but who are "immigrants" of a different kind, living in new regions or navigating other transitions and losses related to race, class, ethnicity, age, culture, class and sexuality as well as second and third generation women who may have been impacted by intergenerational transmission of the migration trauma. Language, place and space are also important to explore in the therapeutic context for these women who are not immigrants in the usual sense.

For psychologists whose primary interest is research, issues of memory, language, place and gender in the lives of immigrant women present an exciting wealth of ideas and opportunities for research and theorizing to investigate these processes. Once again, these studies and such theorizing may also impact lives of others who may not be immigrants to a new country but may have been displaced inside their own country.

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