

**The Writer as Witness: Latin American Jewish
Women's *Testimonio* in the Works of Marjorie Agosín, Sonia Guralnik, Alicia
Kozameh and Alicia Partnoy**

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Abstract

Latina Jewish writers enact a typically Jewish attitude toward the historically important injunction to remember and the contemporary drive to bear witness. This essay explores the connection between art and human rights. In particular, it looks at how, from their different personal, political, and academic backgrounds, Latina Jewish writers arrive at the importance of *testimonio* as an effective means of bearing witness and inscribing into history their right to grant speech to others as well as for themselves.

As transmitters of the social consciousness of a people, Latina Jewish writers enact a typically Jewish attitude toward the historically important injunction to remember and the contemporary drive to bear witness. This essay explores the connection between art and human rights. In particular, it looks at how, from their different personal, political, and academic backgrounds, Latina Jewish writers arrive at the importance of *testimonio* as an effective means of bearing witness and inscribing into history their right to grant speech to others as well as for themselves. For some, *testimonio* is a process that feels familiar, harkening back to familial storytelling that took place in their mothers' and other relatives' kitchens. For others, it was a process begun later after experiencing torture firsthand. According to Linda Maier, testimonial involves textualizing those otherwise silenced voices so that their stories become tools for political and social change (3). For example, Marjorie Agosín states that her "passion to tell stories and listen to others weave tales" began at the dinner tables of her childhood (*Memory* xi). Belonging to a culture of "vibrant" but sometimes "silenced" voices, Agosín translated her knowledge of the unspeakable both to the Holocaust as well as what happened during the Chilean dictatorship (*Memory* xii).

Those two forces—the Holocaust and Latin American dictatorships—are omnipresent in Agosín's work. Sonia Guralnik, a Chilean writer who began her career as a means to preserve the memory of disappeared members of her family, claims seemingly insignificant actions become a means to transform the personal into the historical. "I realize that mine is not a history of great events," Guralnik notes, "but an account of small episodes," personal stories that collectively take on the power to change the world (183). In such *testimonio* by women, political considerations are thus often connected with issues of family and gender, though driven always by a need for personal stories to account for the pain of history. For example, Alicia Partnoy's description of imprisonment in an Argentinean concentration camp provides the human interest, but it is augmented by political commentary meant to contradict the propaganda put out by the government. A victim who could step outside the dehumanizing system of repression in

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which she was trapped, Partnoy asks the question that is at the core of *testimonio*: "How do you see when you've been blinded-folded" (*Little* xv)? Partnoy's refusal to give into the inherently deceptive structure of a regime which denied witnessing even by its victims remains relevant today.

Each writer explores the particular experience of Jews in their respective countries as well as the cultural tradition of storytellers who acknowledge through words the power of a shared humanity. All bear witness and demand justice for crime. In addition to denouncing human rights violations, Linda Maier lists two other objectives of *testimonio*: converting readers into witnesses and giving voice to the Other (5). A witness to personal loss as well as a chronicler of her country's history, Guralnik's writing fits this mode. By offering impressions in which the personal is historical, she reclaims her voice. Whether the writer provides direct testimony or mediated discourse, all speak not for the individual but for their communities, as they frame their stories to express the lives of others. As such, they follow a common process of producing *testimonio*, a literature that embodies the feminist ideal of transforming the personal into the political.

According to Joanna Bartow, *testimonio* often neglects sweeping historical events in favor of incorporating social relationships that highlight collective experience, especially that of women (110). For example, Partnoy presents a personal testimony of injustice suffered, an account used "as a gun," she says, against tyranny otherwise suffered in silence (*Little* 69). As she implies, not only do these texts exist outside of established canon, they also seek to alter relationships of power. As Barbara Harlow notes, writing has been integral to resistance struggles both as a "force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination" and as a "repository for popular memory and conscience" (143). Seeking to contest and transform coercive means of state control and authority, the writer in prison, as Harlow claims, has a unique role to play.

In *Steps under Water*, for example, Alicia Kozameh uses *testimonio* to theorize oppression, resistance, and individual subjectivity. For Kozameh, the process of remembering is an act of individual vindication, an affirmation that she is still alive; "what I have inside...is all mine," she says, and it takes her away to a solitude that defies resistance (143). Her moral need to witness is born from losing her own identity while imprisoned. She also restores by writing the lives of others who were disappeared. Aware that to forget dishonors the Disappeared, Kozameh relies, she says, on "the word" as a means to inscribe memory into the history of Argentina (143). "For so many who can't even imagine certain realities, who have passed through zones so different from actual experience, or who haven't passed through any zone at all," Kozameh believes that "there's no recourse other than words" to bring justice to those who otherwise would be erased (143). As a witness, she preserves her sense of self and certifies the experiences of others.

According to Agosín, Jews are a Diasporic people with a complex history that includes resisting oppression but also toleration and intermingling with the people they have lived among (*Memory* 222). In their search for roots, too, these Latina Jewish writers comprise a community, not only in their consciousness of difference but also in

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their knowledge that the composite history of Jewish people links them to others' memories of the twentieth century. In recent years, *testimonio* has emerged in Latin America in relation to the political and cultural responses to de facto regimes and civil war or political distress. According to John Beverley, *testimonio* surfaced as a distinct narrative genre in the 1960s as a response to national liberation movements and radical cultural trends of that period (91). Those years saw the emergence of what Barbara Harlow has called "resistance literature," popular forms that serve as an incitement to action (28). As a work committed to giving voice to the voiceless, *testimonio* aligns itself with the Jewish ethical imperative to bear witness. Indeed these writers often see class and political allegiances as overriding conditions of birth in determining one's existence. For Marjorie Agosín, a Chilean poet who has lived in exile since the overthrow of Salvador Allende in 1973, those years of witnessing right-wing extremism in her country from abroad mark the self-proclaimed beginning of her life as a poet and human rights activist (*Invisible* 237).

Writing from exile, Agosín felt that her history was erased, just like those whose disappearance was denied by the military governments who held them in their jails. Remembering and bearing witness, then, became a means to write her self back into history, but always within a framework of other struggles (*Invisible* 236). Coincidentally, there emerged throughout the decade of the 1970s in Latin America a literature that drew on personal witness. Ways to insure survival for the next day, these direct-participant accounts are a means to restore the writer's sense of justice. "You have to live this because it's a part of existence," writes Kozameh of the daily horrors she experienced in prison (41). Existence, for her, meant finding the right words to communicate her experience, "searching for,...finding words that are more and more original, words that by their originality counter the tedium" that would have otherwise crushed her imagination and her spirit (42). Alicia Partnoy, too, best known as the author of *The Little School* (1986) and *Survival in Argentina* (1986), whose stories and poems were smuggled out of prison during 1977, writes that her need to tell emerged after her exile in 1979 (*Revenge* 13). Responding to a need to tell her story, but also that of detainees left behind, she translates her experience into writing.

Her inner self is formed in opposition to external limitations. Although she interprets herself publicly through an androcentric genre, autobiography, her work carries the collective import of a group experience. For Partnoy, the word holds the greatest possibility for bringing "we/ the victims/ the displaced/ the marginalized /" into the historical mainstream (*Revenge* 91). By speaking from a historically marginalized experience in order to raise a privileged audience's consciousness of official truth's deceptions, Partnoy's narrator represents a group, rather than a single individual, thus distinguishing her work from autobiography. Shifting focus from personal to political, from individual to collective national history, her writing blurs the lines between fiction and fact, conflates private and public worlds, and offers suggestions for literary and social change. As her translator notes, Partnoy writes "poetry with the moral imperative of spiritual law," thereby suggesting an ambiguous site where commitment and art converge (*Little* xvi).

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Wanderers all, these writers reflect the contradictions of living in a Diaspora. The concept of *mestizaje* (hybridity) has emerged as a critical metaphor in borderland studies, yet the Jewish presence in Latin America has only recently become part of this equation. Nevertheless, their texts mesh two universes: the Jewish and the Christian, the sense of being "the other," a foreigner, yet desiring to be a native of that place. For example, Natania Remba Nurko talks about various experiences: "enduring fear and suffering" due to anti-Semitism in Poland, a "readaption" to Catholic Mexico, and finally integration to a "democratic" America (127). Her life reflects a long-standing ability among her people to survive despite an often hostile climate and into acculturate without losing Jewish traditions. Identity, then, for many Latina Jewish writers, as for Natania Nurko, means "crossing over cultural and creative barriers" (127).

Whatever the circumstances, these writers yearn for a creativity that provides balance in their lives and nourishes their sense of wholeness. Permanence, for many Jewish people, exists in Diaspora, in a constant state of homelessness. For Agosín, faced with translating her self across borders and languages, home became a place found only in the world of books (*Invisible* 11). At the heart of nomadic peoples, claims Agosín, are words, portable across borders, capable of hurting but also "used to console and alleviate pain and sorrow" (269). Lost in translation, she recreates a self in writing, using words that "allowed [her] to define who [she] was and who [she] was becoming" (*Taking Root* xv). Narratives, she concludes, have allowed a rootless people to find a home in books (*Taking Root* xv). Texts that resist oppression and celebrate cross-cultural experience, as does *testimonio*, lend themselves particularly to this genre.

As several writers claim, the process of writing serves to recreate a fragmented self unified by the power of memory. Although it cannot restore the past, remembrance often honors the power of human agency to create as well as to do harm. In the midst of "fratricidal war" in Chile, Sonia Guralnik recalls, she began her own "battle of words" that allowed her to smash the "worm" of terror threatening to tear apart her life (186). "Piece by piece," she constructed a new self "with memory and with words," a process that inspired her to recreate and dream a world (192). Writing is a process in which she reconstructs her own memory as well as stories passed on to her by others.

According to Agosín, her generation was scarred by disappearances, an "absence of bodies" that created an obsession to speak on behalf of previously suppressed or censured voices (*Invisible* 269). As Angelina Muñoz Humberman notes, memory plays a dominant role in Jewish culture as a tool for preserving tradition (24). By recuperating the past, Latina Jewish writers also seek inclusion in the history of a country not their own. As the relative of Holocaust survivors, Agosín implies that she has a special affinity with other silenced histories. Admitting her privileged position, Agosín nevertheless discloses a long-held "deep and authentic kinship with displaced people of the world" (*Absence* 12). Feeling always like a foreigner in a country to which she wanted to belong, Agosín recalls the pain she felt when Carmencita, the nanny of her childhood who affirmed her, left her home. As her "voice and anchor," Carmencita embodies that which Agosín wanted to own, an identity that does not require explanation (*Amigas* 36). As Bartow notes, "speaking vicariously through another enables and legitimates," a process that would fuel Agosín's journey from displacement to self-knowledge (83).

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In *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement of Chile, 1974-1994*, Agosín records the voices of women who, during the Pinochet dictatorship, wove stories of the Disappeared. After meeting with the original fourteen women in 1976, Agosín returned repeatedly to Santiago so that she could gather their stories for her book. Through her friendship with the women, Agosín notes that she became a “nobler human being”; by transcribing the voices of previously silenced women, Agosín exhibits a desire to appropriate what is valuable about the narrators (*Tapestries* ix). As Bartow asks, when does locating oneself in the subject’s voice shift from a stable to shifting interpretation (83)? In this case it is when Agosín inscribes herself in the other’s history in order to work in solidarity, as a “participant” rather than as an “observer” (*Absence* 1). Not wishing to “idealize” or “convert them into martyrs,” thereby resisting the urge to commodify and essentialize her subjects, Agosín does depend on her subjects for self-knowledge (*Tapestries* 28).

Using their photographs to reconstruct the history of her country, a place in whose “silences and shadows” she longs to find her own place, Agosín universalizes the experience of Jewish people in the 20th Century to include all those whose suffering has been ignored (*Absence* 1). The *arpilleristas* (women who made patchwork tapestries) became companions in her exile, Agosín recalls, demonstrating that in creating *testimonio*, control of representation does not flow in one direction (*Tapestries* 242). Giving her photographs of their missing children so that she could publicize their plight, the *arpilleristas* are also in a sense using their spokesperson in order to have their stories reach a wider audience (*Tapestries* 240). For a woman writer who acknowledges the silencing among most women contrasted with the power that she possesses as a published writer, but who also remembers her feelings of marginalization as a child, Agosín’s adoption of these dispossessed voices becomes a logical political strategy in her quest for social justice and equality. An activist for human rights and a Chilean committed to her country, Agosín attempts to do so without subordinating the voice of her subjects to her own.

Also a political exile, Alicia Partnoy uses words as a metaphor for home. In her poetry collection, *Revenge of the Apple*, Partnoy claims no belongings but her “oldest poems” carried like a pack on her back. Bereft of “things” and “people” that an “uneven struggle” took from her, she relies on “new sheets of paper,” the blank page, to entertain her with stories (67). An “embalmer” of poetry, walking with “my corpses on my back,” Partnoy, in her poem “Confession,” relates that she is no longer a poet in the traditional sense (66). Not a seeker of “lofty heights,” she finds “the word” that heals her by “flying low,” near the ground, where she encounters her deepest self. “Like the flesh / of a human corpse going / to seed,” Partnoy transforms the bodies left behind into words that will bring them back to life (69).

Speaking in this context, too, means healing. Partnoy, like many of her generation in Latin America, became displaced. After her release from prison in Argentina, she lived in exile with her daughter in the United States. As an exile she felt a deep kinship with displaced people of the world. Since arriving in America in 1979, she has presented testimony on human rights violations to the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Amnesty International, and human rights organizations in Argentina

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(*Revenge* 101). In a poem aptly titled "Testimony," she urges "action as a prescription" and views "information" as an "infallible antidote" for her own and others' suffering (9). Telling her story as a remedy for dehumanization of the disappeared, she finds a way to make history visible. To witness implies an act of resistance, Partnoy claims: "I resist," she tells her readers, and, therefore, "I am whole" (9).

While Latina Jewish writers live in a cultural diaspora and some identify their work as *testimonio*, all express their solidarity with other dispossessed. Several arrive at the importance of testimony as a crucial means of bearing witness, making visible the lives of those who might otherwise succumb to silence. Partnoy, for example, cites her personal history and her life as a writer in exile. Both circumstances resonate with other dispossessed, forming the basis for bridging different histories and origins, building cross-cultural coalitions and personal relationships. "From the dismembered reality of exile," Partnoy forges political connections with others who share parallel emotional and experiential terrain (*Revenge* 15). From this perspective, Partnoy seeks those spaces in and across borders "where language is a bridge," she claims, for "help[ing] other Latin American women reach this shore with their own stories" (39). Her emphasis on the collaborative process flows from a political commitment to equality. Avoiding appropriation of other voices, Partnoy conveys a sense that in working together, Latin American women can bring their experiences to a larger public. Moreover, by giving voice to the experiences of other Disappeared, she facilitates a process of theorizing about her own. Just as *testimonio* implies a new kind of relation between narrator and reader, the contradictions of sex, race and age that frame the narrator's production are dissolved. By telling others' stories, Partnoy "grasps an image that better defines herself," thereby overcoming the solitude she feels living in a foreign land.

Like a variety of Latin American women, the best known being Mexican writer Elena Ponitowska, Latina Jews have contributed to liberation movements in both Americas, using this artistic form and methodology to document unofficial histories. Barbara Harlow states that the resistance writer who uses the pen rather than more conventional weapons is an equal participant in the struggle. Along with participation in political movements, Latina Jewish writers have also engaged in developing methods of political praxis. In this way, the issues raised by resistance leaders are questions confronted by Jewish writers too. Drawing from their various experiences, they offer an artistic form and methodology to encourage politicized understandings of identity and community. In her works, Agosín, for example, honors women's stories and shows in her own writing how personal experience contains broader political meaning. Accordingly, Agosín attempts to legitimize women's voices, so that the cultural and historical experiences of silenced people will not be left out of history (*Invisible* 171). Similarly, each writer creates her own *testimonio*, in which the personal and private become profoundly political.

Agosín emphasizes the importance of defining the particular moment in determining the written word. "To recreate one's personal and intimate life," claims Agosín, "as the life of other women implies a great act of courage and a willingness to be a part of the historical experience in which the protagonists are women themselves" (*Invisible* 72). In a manner similar to the way that Rigoberta Menchu's memoirs speak

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not from a particular voice but for the voice of the community, Jewish Latinas serve as repositories of memory, editors and translators in an enterprise that allows them to step out of expected roles. They do so in a manner that is both collaborative and individually empowering. As Agosín proclaims, the collective voice, the women-centered point of view and the collaborative, gendered mode of production of Latina Jewish texts, illustrate a kind of women's writing that has important literary and political implications (73). Refusing to be silenced, they bring to light their own and others' stories and, in the process, render their *testimonio* through autobiographical narratives, short stories, poems and dialogues.

Departing from the heroic tradition, Alicia Partnoy explores the ways in which her own prison experience expresses the collective history of all detainees. In *Revenge of the Apple*, Partnoy's personal career as a teacher becomes the focus of communal resistance and leads to a collective concept of human rights. When she travels and when she teaches literature, Partnoy says, her memory is always individual. Yet other voices go with her, and their voices, like hers, "gather the voices of their peoples" (17). Thus, the political is doubly personalized; she claims this as her story, but it is also the story of a larger social unit. They, like Partnoy, are "the fruits tossed out of their crates," condemned to exile, where, as in the prison system, the purpose is to destroy any collective sense of struggle. "Ours is the revenge of the apple," Partnoy claims, testifying to a prison culture organized to defy the official story. "To come back after years of fermentation, our cider mixed with that of other survivors, to overpower with our sweetness the strength of the executioner who has cast us away," these "rotten fruits" of the prison system are reconstituted through an affiliation which defies various strategies within the penal framework to deny the prisoners' individual and collective sense of self.

Partnoy's writing is the intimate story of a woman who "reappeared," but, simultaneously, it is the story of all women who were detained. In "Tragedy in Two Voices," she writes: "I open my mouth / and their voice speaks," evoking thus a composite of absent voices (75). Constructing a persona that has many selves, all products of the divided self in exile as well as a sense of belonging to a collective thread of history, Partnoy invokes the lives of many others; as she creates her own. In so doing, she links the history of her life with the more complex background of Argentina. When they came to arrest her, she recalls, it was a "sinister time for the nation..and for History." In this way, Partnoy inserts her own adversities into her country's history.

Memoirs of Partnoy's life are juxtaposed with the story of her nation and her attempt to reinvent herself. According to Agosín, writing is part of the Jewish tradition (*Invisible* 16). Those who write from exile, Agosín avers, do so to recover a blank space that can only be filled with words. Just as people deprived of roots often invent their lives in books, so words become the means for the disappeared to retake the page left blank of their identity and leave some marks for history. In *Revenge of the Apple*, Partnoy recalls that while in prison, she chose not to write new poems, because no words, she claims, could express the horror that she saw there. To write again meant a gesture of survival, a "recovery of her soul, her history" (12). Her poetry articulates human suffering but it is also a metaphor for the world as it should be; with "[her] freedom and [her] voice," Partnoy "tear[s] down the walls" that dehumanize those confined, for words are

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her "life," her "fist" and her "song," all weapons that sustained her spirit while in prison (25). Her revenge was "to survive to tell the story," to bear witness by creating and building another world through words (16).

As a social text, marked by decentered and minority status, Latina Jewish writing plays an important role as a counter voice to the dominant culture. According to Agosín, to witness suggests an act of resistance (*Invisible* 170); like guerilla leaders of opposition movements, writers of *testimonio* have tried to retake take back an appropriated past, reappropriating it in order to oppose established history. Placing herself at the core of her history and taking control of it, Kozameh tells of torture and repression in the Southern Cone in order to access the "truth." In *Steps Under Water*, an aesthetic text (its form, the literary elaboration of the material) and a documentary (its content), Kozameh acts as both observer and observed. Looking for "some point of origin" in a world where fear and disbelief mitigated against rational explanation, Kozameh addresses the way in which repressive systems operating at that time in Argentina prohibited the witnessing of their crimes (20). While Sarah/Kozameh survives to bear witness to violence committed against her, many victims of repression in Argentina did not.

Writing is a fact that confirms Kozameh's own existence, but transposing her voice onto the fictional Sarah also emphasizes through literary strategies the displacement that Bartow notes takes place in *testimonial* texts, in this case physical displacement, including exile, as well as collective delusion fostered by an alternative reality under the dictatorial regimes (146). Consequently, the very act of writing helps Sarah/Kozameh escape reality at the same time she supposedly represents it, an ambivalence underscored by the third person Sarah who watches life roll by juxtaposed with the "I" who insists on "seeing" to insure a witness to collective crimes. Because there is no history without witnesses, "you have to see," declares the narrator, to "get to the answer" (2). Kept blindfolded to prevent collaboration or even recognition, Kozameh's revenge is to "see," to "flex [her] imagination," which was denied the stimulation of and intimacy with other prisoners. Not interested merely in discovering herself in prison, but rather imprisoned because she wrote, Kozameh's circumvention of the ban on oral and written communication becomes part of a larger struggle against authoritative regimes and their prison apparatus. "They aren't going to let me see anyone," writes Kozameh, "but she vows that won't stop [her] from seeing everything," even if that gaze must be through the lens of her imagination (26). Using "almost invisible handwriting" to copy onto "rolling papers" several of her poems, Kozameh hides these slips inside the lining of her shoes (36). In this way, Kozameh sustains her memory as well as a sense of self and purpose.

Kozameh's double role as narrator and transcriber of her experience exaggerates the conflicts and contradictions found in *testimonial* texts, in particular the project of balancing individual and collective representations as well as the notion of sisterhood that often obscures the *testimonial* process. As a narrator in this fictionalized version of her life it is inevitable that Kozameh occupy center stage. Accustomed to being the center of attention as a writer, she parodies the transcriber-informant relationship through Sarah's location as both part of the community, suffering the same hardships as everyone, and an extraordinary individual who separates herself from the rest in order to expose the reality

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of prison life. Her self-identification vacillates between collective third-person object and judging "I" observer, yet her desire to increase political awareness of a collective reality emphasizes her personal motivation for writing.

Moreover, Sarah's affair with a comrade's husband belies the idea of solidarity among women. Just as Agosín finds in the Mothers of the Plaza an essential truth that compensates a lack she perceives in herself, so Sarah asks to borrow Elsa's "honesty and...strength" because appropriating her husband (story?) has cost hers (56). Elsa replies that "when those attributes are yours you want the entire world to know," but when they are the other's identity "they're a part of life, or any other abstraction you can come up with" (56). Just as the transcriber sometimes appropriates another voice to gain greater authority to speak for a particular cause, so Sarah commits both psychological and literary violence against her friend who refuses to lend her voice to the writer telling her story.

Contributing to an alternative literary tradition, Kozameh disrupts both textual and official authority by redefining the self in terms of collective struggle, albeit one in which her self-representation often undermines the communal project. Not only does her novel offer an interesting mirror of the relationship between transcriber and informant, individual and collective identities, it also demonstrates the power that Kozameh possesses with her access to publishers through which she must participate in order to give voice to silenced comrades. Illustrating more complicated levels of privilege, until recently only a few Latin American women have had access to the printed page. According to Agosín, patriarchal culture gives men the exclusive right to speech and refers to women with such "gender-based" terms as "poetess" or "poet apprentice" (*Invisible* 61). Their power relegated to the domestic sphere, Jewish Latinas have been in exile within their both their own culture and the larger group. According to John Beverley, *testimonio* offers a solution to this history of trivialization and/or denial of women's texts (103). In "A Passion to Remember," for example, Sonia Guralnik recounts that after meeting other women writers who struggled with problems like her own, she overcame the notion that literature itself is phallogocentric by transforming her struggle into a collective one (193). As she learned to write "by women and for women," she realized that those stories that create identity and memory might be told by women within their homes, but those identities make up "half the world" and so encompass many houses like her own. In this way, by writing *testimonio* that relocates women's stories within the context of public struggle, Guralnik transformed her "sadness of being a woman" into the "joy of discovery" that her writing contributes to reviewing and revising accepted norms.

Women whose family members have been killed or imprisoned as a result of their resistance activities, as were those of Guralnik, found their domestic concerns reformulated into a collective struggle for liberation. For example, while detained in the Little School (a macabre euphemism for this prison), Partnoy discovered her common lot with fellow prisoners. In the introduction to her autobiographical account of that time, Partnoy relates that she placed herself within the fight for social justice "for the sake of {her} child's future" (*Revenge* 13). Through her writing as well as collective action, she reformulates the demands of maternal devotion in order to "walk by [her daughter's] side / through a better world" (*Revenge* 23). In the introduction to *Revenge of the Apple*,

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Partnoy views her poetry as a tool to "denounce injustice," thus carving out a textual space in which she survives and articulates the language of freedom. Maintaining a consciously women-centered stance in her writing, she is called upon, she says, to write commemorative poems for the other women's ritual occasions, trivial themes, she implies, that she has always shied away from. Despite her undermining of these gestures, Partnoy knows that they are embedded in a historical process and ideological development; her poems, she claims, are "tokens of solidarity in bitter moments," a challenge to prison authorities who seek to suppress such moments of intimacy and community. In this way, Partnoy concludes, her poetry, "too tied to the situation that generated it," becomes not only a document of the times but an indictment (14).

Relying upon the written word, the metaphor of the refugee, and the displaced past, the works of Agosín, Guralnik, Kozameh, and Partnoy make Judaism a metaphor for human life that struggles against intolerance. As each employs her pen to call attention to the lives of women without access to print culture, these writers also affirm a commitment to bear witness, to inform those who are not there. Emerging out of silence, their voices ensure that those who are similarly disenfranchised and displaced will find a voice and thereby raise the consciousness of their audience.

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