# Building Exile Identity through Poetic Translation: Claribel Alegría and Carolyn Forché

# La construcción de la identidad en el exilio a través de la traducción poética: Claribel Alegría y Carolyn Forché

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims at showing the way in which Alegría's poems in *Flores del volcán* (1982) and their translations into English by Carolyn Forché represent for an English-speaking readership what Central American identity meant in the late seventies and early eighties. Though the volume received attention in its day, no deep studies have been published regarding its connection to Latin American identity. This article draws notions from Antoine Berman's translatology, Lawrence Venuti's idea of the invisibility of translators; Doreen Massey's and Setha Low's ideas about the spatialization of culture, identity and social interaction. By applying the methods of translation studies and the spatial turn in the literary field, we conclude that *Flowers from the Volcano* presents readers with what Forché suggests is the social: namely, that which stands between the political and the personal in poetry.

KEYWORDS: Claribel Alegría; Carolyn Forché; Flowers from the Volcano; Identity; Poetry.

RESUMEN: en este artículo se analiza la forma en que los poemas de *Flores del volcán* (1982) y sus versiones en inglés a cargo de Carolyn Forché representan para el público angloparlante lo que significaba la identidad centroamericana a finales de los años setenta y principios de los ochenta. Aunque el libro recibió atención por parte de la crítica, no encontramos estudios que analicen su conexión con la construcción de identidades latinoamericanas. Se expone la traductología de Antoine Berman, la invisibilidad del traductor según Lawrence Venuti y las ideas de espacialización de la cultura, la identidad y la interacción social según Doreen Massey y Setha Low. Al aplicar los métodos de la traductología y del giro espacial, se concluye que *Flores del volcán* otorga a los lectores lo que Forché llama lo "social": el espacio entre lo personal y lo político en la poesía.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Claribel Alegría; Carolyn Forché; Flores del volcán; Identidad; Poesía.

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## Introduction

Claribel Alegría (Clara Isabel Alegría Vides) was born in Nicaragua in 1924, but her family moved to El Salvador before she turned one year old. As a college student, she attended George Washington University, from which she graduated in the late 1940s. She married American diplomat Bud Flakoll, and lived in several countries, though she was always in contact with and writing about her native Central America. She wrote poetry in Spanish, and prose in English (some of the books, in collaboration with Flakoll). In her own words, after a period of writing lyrical poetry in a subjective strand, she felt the urge to write "a more objective, facing-outward type of poetry" (Alegría 1984: 11), which was not yet political poetry. The first volume in which Alegría felt what she calls "the urge to write political poems" (Alegría 1984: 11) was *Vía única*, published in 1965. Almost twenty years later, reflecting upon that change and her subsequent books, Alegría considers that the political turn in her writing stems from "the fratricidal tragedy of Latin America" (Alegría 1984: 12), which led to the torture, disappearance, or assassination of close friends. Yet, as she was living in Mallorca, the urge to write political poetry was also charged, in the poet's own words, with a sense of guilt which turned into a strong impulse to do the only thing she could do, "to scribble verses" (Alegría 1984: 12). By the late 1970s, a series of coincidences and personal contacts led Carolyn Forché to meet Claribel Alegría and her poetry, which Forché started translating. The result was the publication of the volume *Flores del volcán / Flowers from the Volcano* (Alegría 1982). In her poems, Alegría explores what it means to be a Central American both in the specific *locus* and from the nostalgia of exile. Forché's translations, in turn, attempt to show American readers how that Central American identity is built at a specific social, political and historical context. *Flores del volcán / Flowers from the Volcano* can be read as a volume which puts forward the process of creating exile identity through poetry and positionality in translation. In the 1960s and 1970s political and social context that would eventually lead El Salvador to civil war (1980-1992) (Grenni 2014), Claribel Alegría "felt the urge to write political

poems" (Alegría 1984: 11), even if she was not living in her country at the time. The need stemmed from her shock at "the imprisonment, torture, disappearance or assassination of [her] closest friends" (Alegría 1984: 12). The reaction to that horror was, together with shame for not being at El Salvador, the impulse to convey what she felt and thought in the poems she scribbled. In her appreciation of the Latin American context (and the weight it has on poetry), one may clearly see the points of coincidence with the Salvadoran context described above:

> In Latin America, politics is always black or white. You are for dictators or against them. You are on the side of the oppressed and dispossessed or you are on the side of the oligarchs, the multi-national corporations, and you defend their and your own interests. Latin Americans are forced to live in the shadow of an enormously rich, imperial power that has continuously intervened in the internal political affairs of each Latin American nation over the past 150 years, and has been intervening more crudely during the last 25 years to install in power and support oligarchic parties and military dictatorships that will maintain the status quo (Alegría 1984: 12).

In explaining this background to interviewer Carolyn Forché, Alegría emphasizes the need for Latin American poets to speak up, a need that results in their being taken seriously, as Gómez Vides puts it (Forché 2019: 54). Even if she was not living in El Salvador, and if she did not partake in the armed revolution, Alegría writes and ships "poetry / instead of bread" (Forché 1981: 12). Reflecting upon Alegría's poetry which she discovers prompted by the poet's daughter, Forché in turn considers the need for translation: what started as a mere exercise eventually becomes a contribution to let other Americans get to know Alegría's poetry, and the situation in Central America. In the Preface to *Flowers from the Volcano* (1982), Forché writes: "These poems are testimonies to the value of a single human memory, political in the sense that there is no life apart from our common destiny. They are poems of passionate witness and confrontation" (Forché in Alegría 1982: xi). Forché undertakes the task of translating a selection of Alegría's poems so that her fellow Americans will understand that common destiny, and how the identity of an exiled people can be saved and re-built through writing, and through translation.

Even if Alegría and Forché's collaboration received attention upon its publication, not much has been studied about their common objective of giving witness and their concern for the social or political in poetry, as well as the value of poetry in creating identity. This paper aims at filling that niche by exploring *Flores del volcán / Flowers from the Volcano* (Alegría 1982) with notions derived from translatology and spatial studies. Reading the poems with special attention to spatial references, to cultural issues that define Latin Americans, and to the need to give testimony; while at the same time considering the process by which texts written originally in Spanish are translated into English as a possibility of expanding readership (not in commercial terms, but in connection to the extension of witnessing), allow us to conclude that Claribel Alegría's poetry in *Flores del volcán* and its translation in *Flowers from the Volcano* has helped create a translocal Central American identity across borders and languages.

## Translatology, Spatialization and Poetry of witness

Translatology is the term used to describe Antoine Berman's approach to translation, literary translation, to be specific. The title of his book *La traduction et la lettre* (1999) defines translation as "*l'auberge du lointan*", a notion that introduces the ethical call of translation. Making the translated text easily readable for the target audience through a domesticating, ethnocentric tendency, would imply denying the *foreignness* of the text. Instead, Berman proposes the need of recognizing the other, even if this implies introducing a *foreignizing* tendency in the translation. An ethic translation is that which respects the Other, a translation which: "dans son essence meme, animée du désir d'ouvrir l'Étranger en tant qu'Étranger à son propre espace de langue" (Berman 1999: 75).

In another book, *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (1984), Berman explores the notion of bad translations which, from his perspective, are those that deny the Other's otherness: "J'appelle mauvaise traduction la traduction qui, généralement sous couvert de transmissibilité, opère une

négation systématique de l'étrangeté de l'ouvre étragère" (Berman 1984: 17). On the contrary, a good translation opens readers' eyes to the text's foreignness, revealing a whole new world, even if that makes the target audience uncomfortable, or if it shakes the readers' world: "tout texte à traduire presente une systématicité propre que le mouvement de la traduction rencontre, affronte et révèle" (Berman 1984: 20).

Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) follows Berman's ideas and explains in a critical way, "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (Venuti 1995: 1-2). Just as translators become invisible, so do the foreign elements of the translated text, which are domesticated in an attempt to make the translation sound as if it were the original text: "An illusionism produced by fluent translating, the translator's invisibility at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts, rewriting them in the transparent discourse that prevails in English and that selects precisely those foreign texts amenable to fluent translating" (Venuti 1995: 17). That illusionism destabilizes the translation, which in all cases (even in foreignizing tendencies) violates ideologies, taboos and signifiers that were present in the original text: "All these conditions permit translation to be called a cultural political practice, constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming or transgressing discursive values and institutional limits in the target-language culture" (Venuti 1995: 19). In this sense, translation may also exert violence in the target language and culture. Where does the answer lie, then? The ethics of translation, which Berman locates within the scope of respect and acknowledgment of the Other, can be expanded to include the translator, his/her decisions to unveil the foreignness of the original text, as well as his/her own creative role across languages, ideologies, cultures and agendas. In this point, translation intersects with *testimonio*, its speakers and audience.

We will begin by defining poetry of witness within the scope of *testimonio*. Much has been said and written about the genre, whether it is considered specific of Latin America or extended to other cultures and experiences. Based on the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú as edited by

Elisabeth Burgos Dubray (1985), critics such George Yúdice (1996) consider that *testimonio* stems from the conflicts (dictatorships, civil wars, torture, disappearance) that Latin America underwent from the seventies to the eighties (and in some cases, even beyond that). Though this paper focuses on poetry, the bibliography on prose testimony provides accurate tools/clues to define the genre. As Mercè Picornell affirms, since the 1990s "*se producirá un repunte en la producción crítica sobre el género, convertido en un emblema de la crítica latinoamericanista —sobre todo de la elaborada desde los Estados Unidos*" (Picornell 2011: 115). Marked by some as typical of Latin American literature, *testimonio* has been defined very strongly from within the American academy, while in more recent years, as will be seen below, Latin American scholarship has debated those traits and provided a self-reflective critical discourse on the genre. The debate over the status of witness writing happens along three main lines, according to Picornell: the contact between history and literature and the possibility of the subaltern speaking in them; the institutional contexts which grant *testimonio* its validity; and the complex authorship of *testimonio* which may affect the way it is perceived as having (or not) historical value (Picornell 2011: 115). Far from a naïve interpretation of witness literature, Picornell concludes that "el testimonio nos permite reflexionar sobre las condiciones de elaboración del texto, el diálogo problemático del que es fruto, o sobre las instituciones y comunidades de lectores que han propiciado su difusión" (Picornell 2011: 139). Thus, the rhetoric of *testimonio*, as well as the context of production and reception should not be overlooked in attempting to define the genre.

On the one hand, *testimonio* has been studied in depth in the Anglo-American academia. Gugelberger and Kearney define the speaker or narrator who gives testimony as someone who "does not conceive of him/herself as extraordinary but instead as an allegory of the many, the people" (Gugelberger; Kearny 1991: 8). Probably more explicitly than any other genre, testimony aims at producing a change in society, which Gugelberger and Kearny consider transforms into "a weapon on the cultural front" (Gugelberger; Kearny 1991: 9). This weapon does not destroy, but instead is used "to rewrite and to retell, to correct Latin American

history and reality from the people's perspective" (Gugelberger; Kearny 1991: 11). Both the genre and its implications have found a counter-voice within Latin American literature itself. Guatemalan author Marco Antonio Flores's novel *Los compañeros* (1976) is the first "dissident novel" (Leyva 1995) which, together with *La diáspora* (1989), by Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya, point out another direction in the guerrilla or revolutionary theme. Leyva Carias points out how these two texts put forward "una ruptura pues si los demás textos se escribieron en contra del silencio oficial, éstos se escribieron en contra de los silencios de los propios revolucionarios. Se trata de dos novelas marginales con respecto al vasto conjunto de la narrativa revolucionaria pero importantes por la singularidad de su propuesta narrativa" (Leyva Carias 1995: 387).[1] Flores's and Moya's fictional writing provide a strong critique against the commitment that can be found at the center of other writing of the period.

Another common trait of testimonial literature is its themes, among them "the violation of human rights of members of the community by agents of the state" (Gugelberger; Kearny 1991: 11). Because much of the bibliography on testimonial literature is not prescriptive, but descriptive, its being a "gendered" genre (Henderson 2001: 1) is a quality that can be appreciated if attention is paid to the main *testimonies* published in the 1980s, of which Gugelberger and Kearney point out Rigoberta Menchú, Domitila Barrios, Elvia Alvarado, and Claribel Alegria.

Because *testimonio* is related to issues of authorship, genre, aesthetics, politics, context etc., it "cannot be regarded as a static genre" (Webb 2019: 13). What is more, Webb defies the academic world by asking whether it really matters that *testimonio* is a genre. This defiance involves not only the categories used by researchers and critics but, more importantly, the very role of academics (and, we add, of the reading public in more general terms). If the question of *testimonio* as a genre is set aside, "we are able to receive *testimonio* as participants, rather than consumers

[1] Though our article focuses on poetry, and present this theoretical background on testimonial non-fiction, Flores and Castellanos Moya are mentioned here so that it is clear that not all revolutionary texts idealize the revolution.

and analysts, for that is what *testimonio* requires of us" (Webb 2019: 21). This aptly defines what *Flores del volcán/Flowers from the volcano* calls for. The book easily complies with the forms and style of poetry, but it also shows characteristics of *testimonio*. In addition, hybridity is not just a mark of its genre, but also of the languages in which the volume is presented. What is more, both Alegría in writing the original poems and Forché in her desire to convey them in English call for active readers, participants who can get involved and acknowledge responsibility or solidarity with Central America in the seventy and eighty. It could be argued that both the poet and the translator are putting forward what Gugelberger and Kearney say of testimonial narrative, that it "does not write to the past; it is not concerned with 'tradition' per se, but with the future" (Gugelberger; Kearny 1991: 5). Readers, whether academics or the general public, are shaken by the testimonial poems so that they will take action, or conscience, or both.

Taking the possibility of considering *testimonio* as an "outlaw genre" (Kaplan 1992) which is constantly pushing the boundaries (in the sense that as a genre it is constantly evolving, transforming, as new testimonies are written), then one may turn to the notion of spatialization in connection to the definition of *testimonio*, and in particular, to apply them to our object.

Webb recognizes that it is within "dislocation and collapse that *testimonio* finds its power" (Webb 2019: 17). Dislocation implies going outside the boundaries, the clearly demarcated *space* a genre should occupy. At the same time, and also according to Webb, *testimonio* is strongly grounded on specific circumstances: "*Testimonio* is inseparable from the personal, political, cultural and social context in which it is produced" (Webb 2019: 19). The context bears the signs of what Forché calls extremity. Forché makes it clear that "the impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination" (Forché 1993: 30) does not necessarily mean that the content of the poetry is *extreme*, but their authors have lived through extremity. To interpret such poems, Forché presents the limitations of the classic division between personal and political texts and suggests instead a third term: "one that can describe the space between the state and the

supposedly safe havens of the personal" (Forché 1993: 31). It is interesting to note that Forché does not consider that the social is a haven either. On the contrary, "the social is a place of resistance and struggle, where books are published, poems read, and protest disseminated. It is the sphere in which claims against the political order are made in the name of justice" (Forché 1993: 31). Thus, poetry becomes part of that claim, reading poems is a way of protesting, and poets' words resonate beyond the printed page, giving testimony of a struggle. Forché goes further in her appreciation of poetry of witness by saying that the notions of accuracy or truth are as insufficient as the terms personal and political: "it will have to be judged … by its consequences, not by our ability to verify its truth" (Forché 1993: 31). The poems that Forché writes about are a claim against forgetting; in this sense, their connection to memory is evident, an obvious necessity: "an attempt to mark, to change, to impress, but never to leave things as they are" (Forché 1993: 33). Viewed from this perspective, poetry has a special weight, a direct impact and responsibility, a possibility that is ethical in its respect for otherness (Forché 1993: 37), a theme that will be relevant in our approach to poetic translation of witness.

On the other hand, in the Hispanic American context, testimonial literature has also received attention, not only during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (the era when most of the *testimonios* related to Latin American dictatorships were published or when the events recollected in the texts took place), but also more recently. In the recent revision of the genre, critics agree that the propaganda hovering over *testimonio* cannot be overlooked. One relevant contribution is that of Isabel Sarlo in *Tiempo pasado* (2006). Sarlo emphasize the moral effect of testimonial discourse (45) and stresses that it aims at being believed as truth, though the proofs are not intrinsic qualities of witness discourse (47). When a witness speaks (or writes) her discourse is accepted as the truth because there is no other way, there are no other documents, to know what happened under certain circumstances. In this sense, Sarlo explains that testimonial discourse "es una institución de la sociedad, que tiene que ver con lo jurídico y con un lazo social de confianza, como lo señaló Arendt […] fundando así comunidad allí donde fue destruida" (Sarlo 2006: 67). Different from his-

tory, testimonial discourse is detailed in that it tries to include everything that happened, so that the audience (listeners, readers) can be persuaded at present of what happened in the past and, at the same time, repair identities and subjectivities, in relation to the future (Sarlo 2006: 68). This aspect is central to our analysis, since Alegría's poetry wishes to bring back from memory and from first-person (or vicarious third-person) narrative a common past that Central Americans will recognize as theirs; and Forché's translation aims at conveying that identity to foreign readers, persuading them in another language. Yet, in remembering the past, Sarlo acknowledges there are ethical issues: "es insuficiente la tendencia a colocar allí las formas presentes de una subjetividad que, sin plantearse una diferencia, [...] en realidad, está dando una forma enteramente nueva a los objetos reconstruidos" (Sarlo 2006: 82). How much truth is there in testimony? How far can a witnessing subjectivity be taken as representative of other subjectivities? Sarlo answers, "el atentado de las dictaduras contra el carácter sagrado de la vida no traslada ese carácter al discurso testimonial sobre aquellos hechos. Cualquier relato de la experiencia es interpretable" (Sarlo 2006: 84). The truth that was originally attributed to testimonial texts as a moral attribute, is now put into question by contemporary criticism when witness narrative and history compete: "Cuando una narración memorialística compite con la historia y sostiene su reclamo en los privilegios de una subjetividad que sería su garante [...] se coloca, por el ejercicio de una imaginaria autenticidad testimonial, en una especie de limbo interpretativo" (Sarlo 2006: 94). However, for our analysis, in order not to apply an anachronistic interpretation, it should not be forgotten that at the moment Alegría wrote her poems, and in the almost immediate translation by Forché, the texts were not competing with history but, on the contrary, were a way of bringing events to light, even if it was through a subjective and literary imagination.

A more recent (and even more critical, deconstructive) perspective on testimonial literature is offered by Jorge Urrutia in *El espejo empañado. Sobre el realismo y el testimonio (desde la literatura hispanoamericana)*, published in 2021. At the core of his analysis is the intersection between literature and identity, which we aim to see at work in Alegría's

poetry and Forché's translations. How do writers, and people in general, define themselves? And how is that identity perceived by others? Urrutia points out how in the ample territories where Spanish is spoken and written (both in the Americas and Europe), the linguistic aspect is favored over the national one in providing identity. Yet, the fact that the same language (Spanish) is the most widely spoken from the Rio Grande southwards up from down to Ushuaia, would not allow to distinguish national literatures in Hispanic America (Urrutia: 60). The issue of identity, then, could be found in the relation between texts and reality: "Son pocos los escritores americanos que se sienten situados en un espacio literario separado de la realidad inmediata" (Urrutia 2021: 71).This allows Urrutia to ponder in his book how realism and the social function of literature have marked the history of Hispanic American writing: Notions such as truth, historicity, memory and the imagination help the author build the theoretical background for this approach to Hispanic American literature, which has traditionally been defined as essentially testimonial. This connection implies political and ideological definitions, which Urrutia, instead, discards in favor of the literary truth. If testimonial literature calls for a special rethoric (which Urrutia defines following Sarlo), then its truth is literary, albeit guided by a political objective, of which Urrutia is critical.

Urrutia analyzes testimony in Hispanic (not Latin) American literature, and his search focuses on the issue of identity among a series of literatures and genres which share a language, spread throughout territories. As stated above, *testimonio* cannot be severed from the context in which it is produced, and in this sense, it is inseparable from space. Which brings us to the third theoretical pillar of our analysis, connected to the spatial turn. Setha Low defines space and place as "always embodied" and considers that the social construction of space "refers to the transformation of space through language, social interaction, memory, representation, behavior and use into scenes and actions that convey meaning" (Low 2017: 7). This notion is of particular interest to our analysis, which considers social construction of space in connection with identity in a displaced community, where memory and witness become central in the creation process. Social structure brings together different

subjective meanings which, according to Low, may depend "on language and symbols for its communication" (Low 2017: 70). The value placed on language and symbol make this approach suitable for poetic criticism, which in the case that we present on these pages is a clear sample of processes which "emerge from a collection or grouping –an assemblage– of interrelated facts and phenomena" (Low 2017: 72). How is space built when there is no specific, physical anchorage to a site? How do memory, recollection, shared experiences become those interrelated phenomena that can provide a cohesive ground for identity? Low explains that, "memory and place-making also figure prominently in diaspora studies where associations of people, culture and space are historically and socially constructed" (Low 2017: 77) "Moral geographies" as Low calls them (Low 2017: 76) can be built even in the diaspora, where memory gives substance to space and "a sense of place" (Low 2017: 77). What, then, is the difference between space and place? Space is socially constructed, both by groups of people, political forces, bodies; while place is a space "that is inhabited and appropriated through the attribution of social and group meanings, feelings, sensory perceptions and understandings" (Low 2017: 32). Space is transformed into place when it is lived, when subjectivities experience it and interact among themselves. The careful and deep ethnographical reading of space in Low's approach, her ideas about language and discourse bear a necessary connection to our study of poetry and poetic translation.

Low takes up Schiffrin's definition of performatives as "speech that can make something happen, which gives agency to the speaker and redefines speaking as a material practice" (Low 2017: 123). Even if ours is an analysis of written discourse, and of its translation, this idea will be considered as relevant to the reasons implied in *Flowers from the Volcano*. Setha Low places as much emphasis on what discourse conveys explicitly in relation to space, as well as on that which is left unsaid. Both "uncover meaning and power" (Low 2017: 143). This appreciation can take a special significance if we apply it to the study of poetry, which is densely charged and, paradoxically, may feel the constraints of ineffability. Because Low is mainly an ethnographer concerned with space and place,

she sees texts in connection to the environment, and she maintains that, "writing, reading and seeing text are also central to person-environment interactions and relations" (Low 2017: 127). When those interactions happen across languages, *seeing* text implies *seeing* the other language, culture, speaker and community. In this new light, translation acquires new implications. Low says that, "text is recognizable even when reading is not possible, and it remains socially and psychologically relevant" (Low 2017: 128). How that relevance comes into the scene when approaching poetry written in a foreign language is a central interest of our paper. All these notions, namely space, place, language and culture, are in turn central to constructing identity beyond individual lines. "Emotions are always socially constructed and key to understanding the culturally constituted self and lived world are foundational" (Low 2017: 145). In order to experience and express space, whether lived or remembered, emotion and affects become part of a continuum across bodies (Low 2017: 152), which encompasses the political, ideological, spatial and affective levels. Even if Low suggests that the affective and ideological levels can be contradictory, this can be a tool in understanding "ambiguous reactions to a space or environment" (Low 2017: 153).

This may in turn be related to another perspective presented by Low, that of translocal space, which "encompasses the experiences and materialities of everyday lives in multiple places" (Low 2017: 174). Understanding translocal space in the 21st century requires bringing globalization, cultural reproduction, the media and social networks into the scene. Yet, Low's contribution can be applied to our poetic corpus from the late 1970s and early 1980s in two ways. On the one hand, Low argues, "the concept of translocality disengages the experience of locality from being situated in a particular neighborhood or homeland and instead locates it in the mobile bodies and multiplicity of spaces of immigrant lives" (Low 2017: 181). But translocality also "opens up the possibility of multiple kinds of social, spatial and political formation through the shared sense of meanings, loyalties and interests that bind people and places together" (Low 2017: 181). How does translocality affect poetic translation? What loyalties are created across languages, and what impact does translocation have on

writing from memories and translating for a people to understand political implications? Language as a social practice, bearing witness as a political act, spatiality as body experience, all coincide in Low's appreciation of the role of spaces "not only for cultural identity and sociality, but also for economic and political relationships and the development of new kinds of solidarities …" (Low 2017: 211).

Low recognizes that she views "space and place as always under construction, produced by global to local interactions and constituted by multiple bodies, collectivities and trajectories" (Low 2017: 211), in the same lines as Doreen Massey. The word interaction is key in understanding Massey's contribution to the study of space (and the way her ideas may be applied to the study of both translocal identities and poetic translation). Massey argues that, "identities/entities, the relations "between" them and the spatiality which is part of them are all co-constitutive" (Massey 2005: 10). Massey's anti-essentialist approach posits a challenge when thinking and writing about identities, which are not set once and forever, but always on the move, in a creative process that engages several actors and factors. This "dynamic simultaneity" (Massey 2005: 55) values coexisting trajectories, languages, experiences, and identities that are constantly being created, negotiated in multiple ways and with multiple results. Massey considers that space is "the *social* dimension […] in the sense of engagement within a multiplicity. It is the sphere of the continuous production and reconfiguration of heterogeneity in all its forms –diversity, subordination, conflicting interests" (Massey 2005: 61). These ideas may be helpful when considering identities created through language(s), across memories and cultures, with their social and political implications. As Massey points out, "there can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity" (Massey 2005: 140). The question of identity, identities, which is social and political, calls for dialogue, negotiation, building new ways of being in place with others. This is the solidarity that Low introduced in her conclusion, and this is what Massey calls the "challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness" (Massey 2005: 195).

## Creating identity in exile: Claribel Alegría's poetry and Carolyn Forché's translation

The question of identity as a process, an ongoing construction, seems an appropriate answer not only to our contemporary concerns in the 21st century, but also to situations arising from civil war, exile and other conflicts that marked Latin American history in the last quarter of the previous century. Away from essentialist definitions, identity in exile is built not only over changing times, but also across different spaces and cultures. Translocality implies understanding the way in which a certain people or group see themselves, and also how they are perceived by the locals. This is particularly the case of the text we analyze in this article, since Alegría's poetry aims at defining what it means to be a Central American away from her home country, and Forché's translation originates in the desire to make that process of identity building visible and understandable for an English-speaking readership, this developing the new kind of solidarity at a literary level with social and political implications.

The question of how Central American identity is defined from the context of exile, then, calls for two answers: how that identity is defined for Central Americans, and how the North American audience perceives it. Bearing in mind the exiled Central American community, their identity will not necessarily coincide with the one they had at home, or with the way it would be perceived by other members of the translocal community, who could presumably assume that the distinct nationalities of modern nation-states in Central America are all clear-cut. Thus, the need to speak of a construction of identity arises.

One of the notions closely connected to identity is *home*:

> What does "home" mean in the disrupted world of colonial space? How can "home" become the transformative habitation of boundaries? For certainly that *unheimlichkeit*, that 'unhousedness' or 'uncanniness' which characterizes much colonial displacement, is a primary force of disruption in postcolonial life. Can it also be a source of liberation? The phenomenon of diaspora, with its exemplary model of dislocation and displacement begins the answer to this question (Ashcroft; Griffiths; Tiffin 2004: 218).

The idea of home and how it can be built in exile can be easily connected to women's roles and their voicing of the voiceless in testimonial accounts. According to Henderson: "It appears that the genre of *testimonio* is uniquely suited to women's experiences. The intersection of personal and political that is a central theme in women's history is also crucial in *testimonio*, as are themes of violation and silencing, and the emphasis on collective experience and communal voice" (Henderson 2001: 85).

The "intersection of the personal and the political" is central in our analysis of Alegría's poetry and Forché's translation. One of the first poems in the collection, "Santa Ana a oscuras / Santa Ana in the Dark", refers to a home that has been lost in time and memory, but also lost to decadence:

> Se derrumba nuestra casa
> en Santa Ana
> me escribió mi hermano
> hace unos días (Alegría 1982: 10).

The four verses in Spanish become two in English: "Our house in Santa Ana crumbles / writes my brother" (Alegría 1982: 11). The fact that the news comes in written form, points to the distance, the deferred communication, the house from the past, and the present decaying which has become past, too, by the time the news reach the speaker.

> Poco a poco
> La fuimos abandonando
> Y lo dejamos solo (Alegría 1982: 10).

What used to be the family home, where all members shared their lives, was left little by little, not all at once (so not even the abandonment was a cohesive family action); and only one brother remained, as a token to send the written news. It is interesting to note that the verses in Spanish use the past tense, while Forché prefers to translate in the present: "Little by little we abandon it / one by one we leave it alone" (Alegría 1982: 11). In the English version, the act of leaving is an ongoing process, which will continue as long as returning is impossible. In any case, Alegría knows she will not go back, because the house and its feminine creator, her mother, is dead:

Mi madre cuidaba los clavelones
y regaba el pasto
y le ayudaba al jazmín a que subiera
Ahora no está ella
y todo ha muerto (Alegría 1982: 10).

Forché translates,
My mother tended the carnations,
she watered the grass
and nurtured the jasmin.
Now that she has gone
Everything has died (Alegría 1982: 11).

The house, the garden and its plants as a symbol of life have died, because the nurturing figure of the mother is not there any more. Something new will have to be created as the navel to which the family can relate, a place from which the common identity stems. The house is one element that gives identity, but in this case even its memory recalls destruction. Bachelard sustains that, "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (Bachelard 1994: 17). But the maternal house in Alegría's poetry is a living proof of abandonment, instability, displacement; and the deaths in the family, particularly her father's death, cause darkness to begin:

La oscuridad se hizo
cuando murió mi padre.
Era el médico del pueblo
y trajo su linterna de Estelí
[...]
Cada vez que se apaga una linterna
se opacan más las cosas (Alegría 1982: 8).

In her translation, Forché writes:

Darkness was created
When my father died
He was the village doctor
who brought his lamp from Estelí (Alegría 1982: 9).

"Santa Ana a oscuras" then, can be read at two levels: darkness results from the poet's feelings at her father's death, at her house's decay and the family leaving; but it is also a metaphor of the darkness brought about by dictators and wars. And in spite of everything, the need to go back is so strong, that identity cannot be severed from its roots. The poem ends with two powerful lines, "me asaltan a veces / unas ganas violentas / de volver" (Alegría 1982: 16), which in English take only one verse: "I am desperate to go back" (Alegría 1982: 17). It is significant that in Spanish it is a deep, *violent* wish to return, as if the fierceness of war and the forcefulness of the exiled life were central to the poet's and her compatriots' identity.

The light that her father had brought from Estelí to Santa Ana is the light of knowledge and compromise, and lives on in a legacy of exile, as Alegría writes in 'Se hace tarde, doctor':

> Me legaste riquezas:
> Sandino, por ejemplo,
> la unión de Centroamérica,
> el afán de tener una cesárea.
> El exilio nos duele (Alegría 1982: 60).

The riches that a Latin American can pass on as heritage are not material (not at least in the context of a civil war); instead, the reverence for heroes, and the ideas for which one lives and dies are the core of that legacy. Among them, unionism is one of the key treasures of that legacy.

The nostalgia of these lines is carried a step further in Forche's interpretation:

> You left me riches:
> Sandino, for example,
> the Union of Central America,
> the need to have a caesarean.
> Exile destroys us (Alegría 1982: 61).

Her translation wishes to explain to a North American audience in a didactic way: by choosing to write Union with a capital U, we could understand that just as there is a "Union" of the States of America (North America),

so there could be a United Central America. If Alegría writes "*la unión de Centroamérica*", where union is an attribute of the place and its people, Forché's translation "the Union of Central America" makes an explicit reference to unionism.[2] It is relevant to notice that by capitalizing the word Union, Forché shows an awareness of the shared cultural and historical identity of Central America (including El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica). Especially in Salvador and Honduras, the unionist movement was strong in the 20th century, and Santa Ana, where Alegría's father came from, was the site of the Santa Ana Agreement, signed by Guatemala and El Salvador in 1946. When the agreement was signed, Alegría was already living in the United States, but Santa Ana's mayor doctor José G. Guerrero's words, delivered on that occasion, can pretty well be considered to forebear what the poet recalls as a legacy in her poem. Guerrero says: "Introduciendo en nuestros pueblos frágiles barreras artificiales, una rica nación a quien la historia había dado un alma común fue desde entonces condenada a consumirse en absurdas y estériles querellas [...] Así fue desviado el curso natural del destino fijado a Centroamérica" (Guerrero 1946: 3009). Alegría has inherited from his father, and also from the line of Central American heroes, the love for the union of Central America, which Forché, in turn, makes politically explicit through an almost minute detail, a capital U.

In the same sense, there is another decision made by the translator: the word "destroys", more powerful and extreme than the verb "nos duele" in Spanish, can probably produce the desired effect of empathy in her American readers, who need to understand what goes on in other countries. In this case, the chosen word implies the foreignness of what it means to be exiled since, as Forché puts it,

> As North Americans, we have been fortunate: wars for us [...] are fought elsewhere, in other countries. The cities bombed are other people's cities. The houses destroyed are other people's houses. We are also fortunate in

[2] The United Provinces of Central America were formed in 1823 and were dissolved after a civil war in 1842. Yet, there were attempts at reunification throughout the rest of the 19th and the 20th century.

> that we do not live under martial law; there are nominal restrictions on state censorship; our citizens are not sent into exile (Forché 1993: 31).

This realization, which prompts Forché's compilation of poetry of witness, is also the force that drives her effort to translate Alegría's poetry. So that North Americans open their eyes to what it means to be destroyed not just by bombs, but by exile as in "Se hace tarde, doctor".

Alegría herself expressed that writing these poems was a way to engage in the struggle of Central Americans, through testimony, that is, through words. In her Preface to *Flowers from the Volcano*, Forché quotes Alegría as saying "I have no *fusil* [rifle] in my hand, but only my testimony" (Forché 1982: xi). The identity that she helps building in her testimonial poems is not only that of her family memories, the childhood home that no longer exists, but also the primary identity of all the individuals whose names even would be erased form the face of earth if the tyrants were to succeed in their aim:

A callar
nos chilla el carcelero
haciendo sonar llaves
en las rejas
nadie lo escucha
las voces de todos
confundidas
en un solemne
y obstinado coro
que sube
crece
se desborda.
Desde mi soledad
acompañada
alzo la voz
pregunto
y la respuesta es clara:
soy Georgina
soy Nelson
soy Raúl (Alegría 1982: 38).

These lines from 'Sorrow', the poem dedicated to Roque Dalton, recalls the importance of names as signs of individual identity, the names that are shouted, recited from the darkness of illegal detention and disappearance. Forché echoes the names in her translation:

> shut up! The turnkey shouts
> clanking his keys on the bars
> no one listens to it
> the voices of all
> mingling in a solemn
> a stubborn chorus that rises
> swells, overflows
> from my solitude I raise my voice
> I ask and the answer is clear:
> I am Georgina
> I am Nelson
> I am Raúl (Alegría 1982: 39).

The twenty original verses are twelve in the English version (a usual procedure that Forché's uses throughout the book is comprising Alegría's short lines, made up of just one word on occasions, and re-creating them in longer verses). The sense of urgency, though, is maintained through the adding of the exclamation mark to emphasize the jailor's shout, and the omission of the stop after "overflows": thus, the speaker's voice that rises and asks about the inmates' identity is part of the overflowing chorus, the poet is one with the others, they all share an identity that has to be remembered, for everyone's sake.

Alegría echoes those names in her poetry, written in exile. Forché replicates the names in her translation, which functions as an analogy of the interviewer in prose *testimonios*. Because that identity is built away from home, and in a context of interaction with mainstream American society, the effects of the question on that readership can be considered part of the issue as well. Even if, as Sandra Henderson notes, "*Testimonios* are problematic because they are written both for and against dominant cultures [...] Perhaps the most significant attraction of testimonial literature for North Americans is the compelling promise of authenticity, of

unmediated proximity to the lived experience of recent Latin American history, especially among subalterns" (Henderson 2001: 91). The fact that *testimonios* are written for, or will be read by, dominant cultures implies that the identity of the source culture is created, explained, conveyed for that audience; while the witness needs to re-accommodate, recreate identity away from the home culture, and interacting with the target culture. In the case of *Flowers from the Volcano*, this appreciation relates to the translated poems: Alegría writes in Spanish for Spanish-speaking readers: and Forché, having a glimpse of the Central American struggle, wishes to convey that to the American audience. Where Henderson sees testimonial texts as "problematic because they are written both for and against dominant cultures. Their critiques of oppression have been largely consumed by educated, affluent North Atlantic populations that share many of the same characteristics of the Latin American elites implicated in *testimonios*" (Henderson 2001: 91), Alegría's poetry gives testimony of the Central American plight; Forché's translation is the ethical commitment undertaken by a poet who feels knowing the two languages involved (Spanish and English) implies a responsibility.

Because Alegría writes from exile; because El Salvador was struck at the time by the prelude of civil war (and by the time the book was published, that war was ongoing) the poems and Forché's translations are ways of describing what it meant to be a Central American in that context. Just as Alegría builds identity in her poetry through recollections of an inaccessible house and of family and friends that are gone, in translating that, Forché not only conveys but also helps build that identity, or at least to make it recognizable in its foreignness to her American readers. Maria Tymoczko emphasizes the political role of translation. In the Introduction to the volume she edits, she comments, "Translation is seen as an ethical, political, and ideological activity, not simply as a mechanical linguistic transposition or a literary art. Even when literary translation is the subject of these essays, the ideological implications of translational innovations are sounded" (Tymoczko 2010: 3). In this line, Forché's work can be viewed as resistant translation, and as political activity in her desire to shake Americans' consciences and make the Central American struggle as

clear as possible. For her Latin American partners, seeing the identity traits on which to start anew is quite easy, the signs are evident, as in "Sorrow":

> Un tatuaje en la frente
> nos señala
> un obstinado brillo
> en la mirada
> de animal en acecho
> de vigilia
> de llanto endurecido
> nos olfateamos en el metro
> nos buscamos los ojos
> titubeantes
> desviamos la mirada
> y seguimos sin rumbo
> por las calles heladas (Alegría 1982: 24).

Forché translates,

> This mark on our foreheads
> betrays us, the obstinate gleam
> in our eyes of hunted animals
> of vigilance, of calloused tears
> we sense one another in the Metro
> we seek each other's glances then turn away
> we walk aimlessly in cold streets (Alegría 1982: 25).

This poem, in particular, is punctuated by cultural, historical and literary references that any Latin American (whether exiled or not) would promptly recognize: verses from poems by Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Miguel Hernández and Federico García Lorca, a line from a tango by Discépolo, mentions of "mate", "puchero" and "guayabo", Víctor Jara, Violeta Parra, Sandino, Che Guevara and Jesus. The Spanish and Latin American poets quoted in "sorrow" share ideology, or exile, or extremity as Forché calls it in the Introduction to *Against Forgetting*. A certain identity can be negotiated by including references to heroes, religious figures, revolutionaries and food Latin Americans recognize as theirs, even if each is typical of one or another country. All exiles who meet in the public baths (Alegría

1982: 29) understand the references and their implications. How can this be conveyed to North Americans? Forché makes two decisions: on the one hand, she introduces the otherness of culture and language in her translation, by quoting the cited poems in Spanish and then translating the verse, as for example:

> *El crimen fue en Granada*
> *en su Granada*
> (The crime was in Granada
> in his Granada)
> everyone knows that (Alegría 1982: 21).

The lines in Spanish reinforce the idea that there is an-other language, that even in exile, that language is spoken and forms part of exile identity, together with its culture. Yet, American readers may be unaware of that culture; and to bridge that gap, Forché includes on the last pages of the volume short explanatory notes about the poems, the poets, the historical names, and the places mentioned in "Sorrow" and other poems of the collection. Without these notes, several aspects on which the Central Americans can build a translocal identity (common to other Latin American exiles), would pass unnoticed or deemed irrelevant. Forché becomes an active agent, not just by merely translating the letter, as Berman calls it, but what the "*auberge du lointain*" contains.

Distance, *le lointain*, is not only a quality that appears ingrained in Forché's translation, but it is embedded in the very identity of exiles. The poem that gives its title to the collection, "Flores del volcán", speaks of memories of a country that is distant both in time and space:

> Catorce volcanes se levantan
> en mi país memoria
> en mi país mito
> que día a día invento (Alegría 1982: 44).

Like in ancient stories and tales, the faraway country is invented, it is part of a myth that the poet creates, and which can be shared with those who have the same memories in stock. In this sense, the poet also performs

a social function, helping to put into words that myth (of origins?) that many will recognize as theirs. Forché writes in the English version:

> Fourteen volcanoes rise
> in my remembered country
> in my mythical country (Alegría 1982: 45).

We can perceive a slight difference between the "*país memoria*", "*país mito*", and the "remembered country", the "mythical country". In the Spanish poem, the country itself is a myth, Alegría uses the noun "*mito*" and the noun "*memoria*", while Forché prefers to translate using the adjectives "mythical" and "remembered". To Alegría, her identity as a Central American is something to be built in exile from her memories and her imagination, which places emphasis on the need for creativity and deep understanding on the part of exiles. In addition, while Alegría stresses the inventiveness of myths and memories, in Forché's version this line (and the underlying meaning) are omitted.

The poet's inventiveness, however, is not fictional; and it is, in fact, an indictment against those who idealize Central America:

> ¿Quién dijo que era verde mi país?
> es más rojo
> es más gris
> es más violento (Alegría 1982: 44).

In Forché's translation: "Who said that my country was green? / It is more gray, more red, more violent:" (Alegría 1982: 45) Whereas North Americans, or foreigners in general, would describe Latin America as a place of lush rainforests, the poet prefers to present the violence of volcanoes as a metaphor of the destruction brought about by invaders: the Spanish colonizers of old times, and the present "*yanquis*" who deviate hurricanes towards Central America, and take away the golden coffee of the small country (Alegría 1982: 46-49).

The poem opens, as we have seen, with a reference to the "*país mito*", the shared background of all Central Americans who can relate to the volcanoes as landmarks of El Salvador (even if the poem also includes

references to other Central American countries). Identity, thus, becomes translocal not only because Alegría writes from abroad and about exiles, but also because national borders between Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala -the four countries mentioned in the poem- (Alegría 1982: 46) are the result of colonial history and the birth of independent nation states in the early 20th century; while the myth of origins referred to in the poem dates back to Mesoamerican civilization. The Chacmol (defined in the Notes on page 86 as the god of lightning and thunder) has claimed for the blood of Central Americans along the centuries, and in a cyclical fashion continues to do so:

> … el chacmol de turno
> sigue exigiendo sangre
> porque se acerca el ciclo
> porque Tlaloc no ha muerto (Alegría 1982: 50).

Forché translates,

> today's Chacmol still wants blood,
> the cycle is closing,
> Tlaloc is not dead (Alegría 1982: 51).

The rich inhabitants, hidden behind the high walls of their mansions, are scared of Chacmol, and they stare at the red wave flowing from the volcano like lava. But the poet knows better: it is not lava, it is just another sign of the inequalities that have defined, as still another mark of identity, Central American society:

> sólo son pobres niños
> con flores del volcán
> con jacintos
> y pascuas
> y mulatas (Alegría 1982: 50).

In Forché's version, we read,

> They are only children in rags
> with flowers from the volcano,
> with *Jacintos* and *Pascuas* and *Mulatas* (Alegría 1982: 51).

These children, who live inside the volcano (both literally and metaphorically, hidden from the elegant two-storey mansions and growing up in the understanding of some necessary change to come) will be swallowed by the chacmol, like their ancestors.

The poems in the book can be read separately, but there are instances in which a narrative thread appears, as is the case between "Flores del volcán" and the following text, "Éramos tres / We Were Three". This poem is dedicated to Paco (Urondo) and Rodolfo (Walsh), two Argentine writers killed by the military government in 1976 and 1977, respectively. Just as the children walk down from the volcano carrying their flowers, in "Éramos tres" the image of the three friends walking arm in arm conveys the idea of youth, cut short probably by the same chacmol:

> era de noche
> los brazos enlazados
> por el vaivén de un canto (Alegría 1982: 52).

Forché translates:

> it was night,
> our arms circled each other
> we swayed to our songs (Alegría 1982: 53).

Their arms do not bear flowers, but songs; yet all that is just a memory, since death has left the poet alone. The dead are so many, Paco and Rodolfo are just two representations of so many more, that they build a wall along the continent, from Argentina up to El Salvador:

> el muro de mis muertos
> se levanta
> se extiende de Aconcagua
> hasta el Izalco (Alegría 1982: 54).

These lines, which become two in the English version —"The wall of my dead / rises and reaches from Aconcagua to Izalco"— (Alegría 1982: 55) can be understood making reference to Massey's thoughts on interaction

and engagement in multiplicity. Across thousands of kilometers, in countries that suffer various forms of internal distress, Alegría is able to build a common walk and make herself a "*cementerio apátrida*" (Alegría 1982: 54) in a phrase that finds no direct equivalence in English, so that Forché translates, "I am a cemetery, I have no country" (Alegría 1982: 55). How does a sense of belonging (an identity) stem, if the poet has no country? This is a clear example of what Setha Low calls, as seen earlier, "moral geographies" (Low 2017: 76). Civil wars, dictatorships, exile and diaspora have brought together the different peoples of Latin America, so that even if they have no country, they create a translocal loyalty which gives roots to the shared experiences and binds together different spaces (lived through memory and poetic recreation).

The poet herself becomes the root in the poem "Soy raíz / I Am Root" (Alegría 1982: 66-73), a root that advances in a large territory made of memories and darkness:

> recojo mis fragmentos
> y voy reptando
> a ciegas
> voy olfateando el mar
> en el que un día
> el olvido me cubra
> la memoria (Alegría 1982: 72).

In the English version, Forché writes,

> I gather my fragments and slip away,
> I slither, I smell the sea
> in which one day my memory will be
> buried… (Alegría 1982: 73).

The translation recreates the musicality through alliteration, though the idea of forgetfulness taking over memory, present in the original, is not explicitly stated in the translation. Until that oblivion happens, the poet continues to contribute with her memory and her poetic witness to create a bond among those with whom to share the construction of identity. In

this sense, the last poem in the collection, "Mis adioses / My Good-Byes" (Alegría 1982: 74-83) can be read as a continuation of the slithering in "I Am Root". Along its verses, the poet departs from Ezeiza (the international airport in Buenos Aires), and passes over the Aconcagua in western Argentina, reaches Santiago and then flies over the Pacific; glimpses the volcanoes in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, gets to Mexico and then back to South America, to Colombia, Chile, and Paraguay. The journey creates a solidarity based on personal friendships, but also on a shared history:

> Mi América es sangre derramada:
> una puesta en escena de Caín y Abel,
> una lucha sin tregua
> con el hambre,
> la rabia,
> la impotencia (Alegría 1982: 78).

Carolyn Forché interprets for the (North) American readers:

> My America is spilled blood,
> the theater of Cain and Abel,
> a struggle with no quarter given
> against starvation, rage or impotence (Alegría 1982: 79).

By using the word America (which in English refers to the United States) Forché makes a clear political decision: she stands with Latin Americans, for whom the word in Spanish is not attached to any particular country, but to the whole continent. The continental roundtrip taken by the poet shows the constant flow of blood taken by the chacmol of "Flores del volcán". The civil wars, the brotherly confrontations like that of the biblical story, do not bring an end to starvation, but only foster rage. Alegría says good-bye to this all, but in her withdrawal keeps seeing and hearing and remembering friends. The letter she gets from Roa Bastos summarizes what it means to have to recreate one's identity, stemming from a common root, and including the diversity of experiences that will eventually construct a future for all:

"… ¿Te acuerdas de lo que hablábamos con Bud, contigo,
oyéndonos los pensamientos, queriendo para nuestra América
así en singular, un destino que no nos hiciera avergonzar?" (Alegría 1982: 82)

These are the longest verses in the book, which may be because they resemble the style of a letter, written in prose, or because the speaker is a novelist. In any case, different from the rest of the book, instead of comprising lines, here Forché divides each into two:

"Remember what we talked about
with Bud and you
attentive to our thoughts:
for our America a destiny
that would not fill us with shame?" (Alegría 1982: 83).

Apart from expanding the number of verses, the translation presents three differences with the Spanish poem. Alegría uses two gerunds, "*oyéndonos*" and "*queriendo*". Forché chooses to translate the first as an adjective, "attentive" which implies the idea of listening to each other, though the metaphor of thoughts speaking up is lost. The second gerund, or its meaning, is replaced by the colon which directly introduces the thought. It is not a wish, a desire, as in Spanish, but a thought. The third difference is the omission in the translation of the idea implied in "*nuestra América* / *así en singular*", which in English is just "our America". It has been said earlier that Forché uses the word America in the continental sense it has in Spanish; though an excursus should be made here to refer to the word America modified by the possessive 'our'. *Nuestra América,* "Our America" is the title of José Martí's well-known essay, which shaped the Latin Americanist ideal ever since its publication in 1891. At the end of the 19th century, Martí suggested that true growth would happen if the two Americas (North and South, or English and Hispanic) were no longer separate, but instead engaged in a fruitful dialogue that would breed not imitation, but mutual knowledge:

> The self-evidence facts of the problem should not be obscured, because the problem can be resolved, for peace of centuries to come, by appropriate study, and by tacit and immediate union in the continental spirit. With a single voice the hymn is already being sung … (Martí 1891).

Martí places a strong emphasis on the need to recognize both the Native origins and the African contribution which, together with the Hispanic heritage characterize Latin American, *nuestra América*, which is only one, across national borders. This is why in remembering Roa Bastos' letter and quoting it in her poem, Alegría, or Roa, or both together with Bud (Flakoll, Alegría's North American husband) refer to it "in the singular". The shame they want to leave behind can be that of the fratricidal wars within the Latin American countries, the poverty-stricken children that live inside a volcano, the tanks that advance towards their capital cities; but if we consider that Flakoll is also part of those conversations among thoughts, then the shame can be interpreted as extending across the whole continent. Thus, Forché implies (even if she does not translate "*así, en singular*", because American readers feel part of the word America) that everyone can take responsibility for the shame and think of a different destiny for all. Such a destiny is to be considered part of the constructed identity these poems bring forward, a way of being *American* from a new perspective.

Referring to *testimonios*, Sandra Henderson states that,

> Their critiques of oppression have been largely consumed by educated, affluent North Atlantic populations that share many of the same characteristics of the Latin American elites implicated in testimonies … in the context of globalized culture, the target audience has become a distant and privileged one that, it is hoped, is best positioned to employ liberal solidarity and political pressures in support of indigenous struggles for social justice (Henderson 2001: 91).

The last poem in the collection, "Mis adioses / My Good-Byes", somehow suggests that Alegría is part of an elite that can establish networks of intellectuals, writers and other social and political actors; through Forché's translation, the poems reach an American audience who may become aware of Latin America's struggles and pressure to support them. It is in this sense that we can affirm *Flowers from the Volcano* is *collaborative*, not as the prose *testimonies* in which a journalist, writer or another literate agent puts down in written form the oral testimony of an exile; but because the poems in Spanish would not reach the wide English-speaking,

"distant and privileged" readership who can eventually "employ liberal solidarity and political pressure" (Henderson 2001: 91). Forché's translation becomes part of the witness' responsibility, performative in the sense that it aims at her readers taking action and reflecting upon the meanings and implications of being *American* in the continental sense, making room for Central Americans and their plight.

## Conclusions

*Flowers from the Volcano* has two paratexts: one is Neruda's poem "In Salvador, Death", which functions as an epigraph stressing the flow of blood since Maximiliano Hernández Martínez's 1931 coup. The other is Forché's "Preface", which bears as subtitle a line from one of Alegría's poems: "With Tears, with Fingernails and Coal". Neruda's poem signals the spatial anchorage of the book (El Salvador); Alegría's line quoted in the Preface refer to how poetry is written in difficult times. In her Preface, Forché affirms, that "These poems are testimonies to the value of a single memory, political in the sense that there is no life apart from our common destiny" (Forché 1982: xi). These words, placed at the beginning of the book, echo what the poet and her friends dreamed of in the last text in the collection, a destiny for America in the singular, of which to be unashamed. The Preface recalls the translation process which started five years before its publication, the 40,000 Salvadorans killed during that time, Alegría's return to Nicaragua after the triumph of the revolution, and the "stark cry of the human spirit" (Forché 1982: xi) readers will hear in reading Alegría's poetry. By undertaking the task of translating the poems, Forché becomes engaged in the construction of Central American identity, at least in the way it will be perceived by North American readers. The poems were composed by Alegría during her years in Mallorca; the translation process began there, and was revised while Forché travelled to Nicaragua, a part of her own involvement with Latin American history depicted in *What You Have Heard Is True* (Forché 2019). The poems recollect memories from childhood in El Salvador, images of Latin American

friends who have gone into exile or, even worse, disappeared; throughout the book, the poet speaks up for those who are away from their homeland, and attaches responsibility to the Cains and Abels at home, but also to those who intervene for their own interests and deepen the divide. Forché translates, interprets, adds notes so that there will be no excuse for English-speaking readers who wish to understand what it means to be Central American at a time when civil war pushes its people either in a bloody swirl or away from their roots. Central Americans in exile could look in these poems and find the shared memories and struggle; Anglo Americans reading the translation could start understanding the reasons for exile and the liabilities in displacement. The foreignness or distance of the poems, which are written in Spanish and dwell on situations that may seem out of place in the North American context, are presented by Forché, who engages in the social poetry of Alegría and creates a *translation of witness* so that all readers can accept the shame of past deeds and start being involved in the construction of an identity across borders and, at the same time, respecting and acknowledging a translocal Central American identity, one that brings "*le lointain*" close, in two languages and in a powerful bilingual book that shakes our conscience. Both the poet and the translator help generate, construct identity through language, across languages, in translocal contexts that aim at making sense of displacement and uprooting. Regarding the immediate public who received this book in the early 1980s, it can be said that *Flowers from the Volcano / Flores del Volcán* brought into the spotlight issues of identity that may otherwise have passed unnoticed by North American readers. The book calls for active involvement not only in acknowledging the identity of the Central American exiles, but also in recognizes what it means to *be* in and across the Americas.

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