OUTSIDE THE NATION, INSIDE THE MELANCHOLIC STATE(S) OF MIND: RE-THINKING THE RHETORIC OF DISPLACEMENT AND RE-MEMBERING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Wanderers in the spaces of their memories and the streets of their would-be homes, generations of suffering immigrants are traced back to the past, propelled by the crescendo of melancholic stillness that moves displaced bodies through states of in-betweenness that both dispels and teeters on the far side of either assimilation or exclusion. Many transnational narratives situate the immigrant at a crossroads in terms of a loss of the 'original' culture in exchange for the new 'American' culture, where national diversities are confined to a singular framework and rhetoric of displacement, overruled by the myth of successful assimilation, whereby the hardships of adjusting to foreign spaces are 'normalized' and reduced to a series of trials. This portrayal, in turn, does not leave any room for the rhetoric of pain, or what I label as the 'migrant's mourning', where the immigrant's suffering is suppressed and eclipsed by a collective history of racial abjection. Insights into the psyche of the immigrant serve to map the hedge between the past and the present and absolute versus relative spaces. Applying psychoanalytical and postcolonial frameworks to literary analysis, this dissertation explores some of the prominent transnational narratives to establish that the melancholic dynamics of space, memory, and language can subvert misrepresentations and grant the immigrant mobility within the confines of homogenized spaces. It seeks to explore the ways in which the transnational American narrative employs melancholic tenor as aesthetics to empower displaced figures. Situating its protagonists at the locus

of nations, these narratives underscore melancholia, mourning, and memory as tools and protocols of agency that challenge the myth of assimilation and re-think the rhetoric of displacement.

For my parents and my older brother, wanderers whose way of life showed me that home is so much more than merely a place, but rather the culmination of memories that exist outside the boundaries of any spatiality. For my eldest brother, whose untimely passing kindled and infused melancholia to my very existence. For all the refugees and immigrants I have met along the way: Thank you for reminding me to never take home for granted, wherever or whatever it may be.

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INTRODUCTION

"What does it mean to depart? What does one want, what does one wish to accomplish with a departure? Does one want to depart or does one want to arrive?"
-Hélène Cixous

"Successful integration is accomplished perversely through pain." –Oscar Handlin

This project began in earnest when I read Douglas Robinson's *Displacement and the Somatics of Postcolonial Culture* (2013) during my internship at Boston's Somali Development Center (SDC), a social work agency providing resettlement information and support for Somalis and other African groups, where I served as an ESL instructor to Students with Limited or Interrupted Form of Education (SLIFE). Contributing to the partnership between the Boston University School of Education and the SDC through the teaching of the English language classes for adults ranging in age from 22-65 years of age, many of whom were not literate in either English or their heritage languages, I witnessed, firsthand, the lingering effects of imperialism and neocolonialism on this not-so postcolonial continent. In trying to support these uprooted refugees, I observed with a heavy heart, yet hopeful approach the struggle these immigrants, now clients at this center en route to becoming American citizens in courtrooms, underwent each and every day. Drawing from an array of sources like ESL textbooks and refugee support pamphlets, I was able to form a basis of communication with these eager, yet fearful and hesitant souls. However, what enabled me to form a

more intimate connection was our experiences that acquired meaning through being told and being heard, stories that comprised who we once were, who we thought we were, or who we strived to be in this new environment, a nation shaping and shaped by immigrants that more or less capitalized on displacement and its dysregulatory effects. Beyond the intellectual communication, this emotional connection and linkages comprise a form of transnationalism. I do not wish to undermine the particular struggles experienced by these refugees or equate my personal memories of mobility, my search for home, and my struggle both for and against assimilation with theirs. What I wish to achieve with this disclosure is to situate myself and hold myself to critical scrutiny in the research and make the connections to the body of work very clear. I trace my educational background and 'transnational upbringing' as it has inspired and lead to this project. I am the child of a Turkish/Circassion mother and a Turkish/Kurdish father, parents from historically displaced backgrounds and an exodus. This hybrid identity as well as my upbringing as a third culture kid in several geographical locations, namely the Middle East, Turkey, and the United States, enabled to me to feel a sense of belonging to all these places and none of them at once. These experiences have driven me to study immigration not only as a historical and inevitably socio-political process, but also as a social psychological and transnational process in the context of interdisciplinary frameworks. Having lived in the politically turbulent and often misrepresented environment of the Middle East, namely the diverse settings of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, I have come to play the role of both the observer and observed. Also, having spent my childhood and young adult years oscillating between the United States, Kuwait, and Turkey, I would exit one world and enter another where stories tethered

me and helped unite these multiple frames and spaces of existence that were split by time and geography. As a result, my identity and sense of self is loosely connected with the location of this interdisciplinary research geographically, politically, and most importantly, psychoanalytically. The genesis of this research dates back to the transnational narratives that comprise a melancholic childhood spent in a myriad of homes in multiple countries. Moreover, it is rooted in my present investment and interest in the transformative power and possibilities of transnational literature in establishing a connection beyond the rhetoric of displacement and assimilation embedded in not just the recycled, prosaic use of postcolonial theory, or the desensitized representation of immigrant agency, but the mindful paradigm(s) of its own re-presentations of immigrants as 'traveling texts.' More importantly, I focus on the claim of foregrounding the rhetoric of pain and melancholia and re-thinking the rhetoric of displacement and national boundaries in the transnational text. I present a case for how nostalgia and memory serve as tools stronger than the repressive rhetorics of assimilation and displacement for fostering communication beyond borders in the face of dysregulatory experiences like occupation and poverty induced mobility, from which sites of mobility may emerge. In centralizing the immigrant figure's experiences and struggles instead of the nations they relocate in, I emphasize how these frameworks should be employed not merely for the sake of romanticizing and circulating trite narratives in today's global market oriented towards a Western audience, but more so in order to mitigate the debilitating effects of misrepresentations and forced assimilation as they undermine and overlook the affective connections at the heart of these narratives. Referring back to my eye opening experience as a social worker/ESL

instructor at the Somali Development Center (SDC), in what may could have been the 'primal scene' of refugee studies, this encounter between the 'loconormative' researcher or aid worker and the 'xenonormative' refugee,[1] I use this personal encounter coupled with the power of storytelling and sharing narratives across borders and language limitations, an encounter that is laced with undercurrents of melancholia, memory, and nostalgia in order to convey the effects of traumatic memories "that continue to plague later interaction with the host community, supposedly after assimilation" (Robinson 2013). I should note that my personal attachment to this project goes in so far as to establish my stance and connection (to its genesis), with the awareness of steering clear, if not avoiding altogether insider solipsism, as I make clear distinctions between literary characters and universals. My story mentioned in passing here is not the subtext in this research, but merely the pretext that draws on the rhetoric of identity and inextricable affect and emotion. That being said, I focus here on the immigrant experience through an exploration of the role of memory and melancholia in a selection of transnational narratives that are "postcolonial in genesis" more often than not, but framed here in the context and paradigms of place, language, and memory with which I hope to offer a re-situating, re-presenting, and re-membering of these immigrant narratives especially at a time when nations seek to return to imagined greatness and we are gripped with a surge of nostalgia in the wake of these projects of restoration that aim to re-write or carefully curate a past that is at once characteristic of postcolonial agendas and the current digital age in which families are scattered across the globe and nations are challenged by hybridity and their own borders, which are

[1] Douglas Robinson defines this as Western aid organizations that bring to refugee groups their own foreign norms and values

drawn and re-drawn but never revoked to truly let in the 'tired, the poor, and the huddled masses.'

Existing Research

Many critical examinations of the rhetoric of displacement and assimilation in transnational American literature have neglected the linguistic and narrative strategies that form the basis for the analysis of the immigrant figure's painful past. The transnational turn in American studies is a turn that has become prevalent and commonplace in American literary studies, its ripples of change affecting not just American literature per se, but categories of ethnic, multicultural, and possibly minority U.S. literature with complex links to Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. In that sense, foreigners and foreign writing has been used as a point of reference with which to emphasize the recognizable aspects of being American. What, then, goes beyond the borders of the nation-state, beyond this 'transcendence?' The issue of national borders and boundaries is addressed by Gregory Jay in his polemically titled essay "The End of American' Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice" (1991) in which he notes that contemporary scholarship "continues to reproduce the oppressive nationalist ideology which is the nightmare side of the American Dream," arguing that this nationalist discourse and focus empowers and strengthens certain races and classes over others (1991, 264). Moreover, he emphasizes that the "legacy of nationalism must be reevaluated" and that "multicultural experience is our reality" (266). While this perception forms a basis for and enables the study of marginalized texts beyond the canon, which has been done since the publication of this essay, the

discourses in the field to this day do not exceed or go beyond "inverting binary configurations or overturning hierarchies when in fact the field of transnational literature should ideally serve to challenge the disciplinary boundaries of 'American' and transnational studies, to "displace, disturb, and dismantle their inner logic, their governing frameworks and paradigms" (Muthyala 2001, 98). Although transnational literature has provided grounds for the contestation of 'American' studies with its cosmopolitan and celebratory nature that transcends boundaries in an age in which "the relations between historical time and national entity has begun to fracture, it does not map, reconfigure, or re-imagine the divergences of cultural exchange beyond the flow of power, capital, colonialism, and commodities (Weigman qtd in Muthyala 98).

Situated in the epoch of modern warfare, where the ambitions of totalitarian leaders and the circulation of misrepresentations result in cultural fragmentation, exploitation, and commodification of subjugated groups, literary representations of immigrant figures can be used to naturalize subservience and deny agency. It is therefore critical, in our current age of mass immigration and displacement, to consider alternate depictions of displaced persons. In his *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1994), Iain Chambers contends, "Migration, together with the enunciation of cultural borders and crossings, is also deeply inscribed in the itineraries of much contemporary reasoning. For migrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a 'discontinuous state of being,' a form of picking a quarrel with where you come from" (2). Similarly, Barbara Schröttner paraphrases the renowned postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha as arguing that "the transgression of national or ethnic borders is crucial for the condition of hybridity" in order to challenge existing paradigms of identity

(22). Given that migration involves a movement in which "neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain," where "identities are constantly subject to mutation" by both internal and external factors (Chambers 4), many theorists consider it crucial to develop a framework of thinking in which the migrant figure is depicted as a subject with agency. The immigrant must be central, not marginal, to the historic processes, free to assemble, re-member, speak, and re-write collective and individual stories—acts that are essential to the possibility of resistance in the face of colonial subjugation or neocolonial exploitation. In other words, it is essential to look at where migrants are situated in what Floya Anthias calls "their narrations of their social position" (qtd. in Schröttner 22). That being said, in order to imagine the possibility of resistance against the power politics from which terrible consequences such as displacement, gender chauvinism, racial division, and human dispositions emerge, Douglas Robinson argues that "we have to imagine a subject with agency […] that has pragmatic rather than ontological value, but a subject nonetheless, with the ability to plan and take action . . . [and] function in the complete middle ground between absolute automatism and absolute autonomy" (xii). To this end, I highlight the relationship between autobiographical memory and identity before presenting a stylistic and thematic analysis of the narratives chosen. I present a case for how nostalgia and memory serve as tools stronger than the repressive rhetorics of assimilation and displacement for fostering communication beyond borders in the face of experiences of occupation, poverty, and moving, from which sites of resistance may emerge.

Many critical examinations of the rhetoric of displacement and migration in transnational American literature have neglected the linguistic and narrative strategies that form the experiences of the immigrant figure's painful past, instead focusing on locating the events, themes, or settings of the work. By considering only these elements, our efforts to identify the connections between literature and society are limited to projecting contours of borders and forgotten histories, and literature is read as merely a reflection of socio-economic changes instead of an account of remembrance or instigator of empathy and understanding. One thing these scholarly discussions tend to overlook is the traumatic experience of the immigrant figure, which is at the heart of this discipline and field. Hence, the critical questions are: How can we effectively integrate the rhetoric of the immigrant's melancholic mobility beyond the mere transitioning of borders without glamorizing or romanticizing the narrative for the global market? Can the rhetoric of displacement in the field of transnational literature extend further to encapsulate those displaced both within and beyond the grasp of a Eurocentric America? If so, can the frameworks of transnational literature serve to represent and re-present the displaced in 'national literature,' "a literature that requires translation if it is to cross national boundaries?" (Kirsch 2016, 29) To address these questions, I propose the use of three frames of reference in this project-place, language, and memory- all of which are integral, indispensable, and 'universal' elements in transnational, 'immigrant' narratives. The issues of language, memory, and place are key themes to understanding the immigrant figure's engagement with and position in the greater narrative of nations.

Exploring the melancholic underpinnings and representations of immigrant figures as depicted in transnational narratives through a psychosocial and interdisciplinary lens can enable us to break through the issues of nationalist ideologies that do not go beyond narrow frameworks that has consumed and constricted critics of transnational literature. With this interdisciplinary exploration, we can begin to look at the transnational immigrant narrative within its material historical context that is, in terms of the dynamics and paradigms of memory and melancholia, which are crucial to the composition of both figures and nations, past and present. Approached from this angle, the case of the transnational narrative begins to offer fruitful differences rather than exceptional distances and fearful gaps. First and foremost is the attempt to move beyond the persistency of the rhetoric of assimilation that is not revised to consider the evolution of a different kind of border consciousness and shifting borders in our modern times. This dissertation falls in line with transnational theories, and will build off of an interdisciplinary approach in light of a variety of theories and critics. It approaches the topic both conceptually and practically by looking at very specific ways in which the chosen narratives engage the highlighted paradigms of memory, language, and place to situate the immigrant's melancholic mobilities and experiences at the heart of the transnational experience. At the heart of this dissertation is an emphasis on the need to study immigrant experiences from an interdisciplinary lens given that the displacement of the immigrant is geographically and historically nuanced and contextualized. In emphasizing the immigrant experience, I argue that the discourse of 'displacement' cannot be generalized, contextualized, or confined to a singular framework in transnational studies. The exploration of the themes of place, memory, and language

within the overarching framework of mourning and melancholia as aesthetics beyond narrative devices in these contemporary transnational texts demands that readers recognize the importance of instigating empathy towards displaced figures through fictional worlds and characters, as they teach "us to recognize that the boundaries and cultural demarcations in our mental geographies are subjective and can be redrawn" (Trousdale 2010, 19). Through this argument, I hope to redraw these physical boundaries of displacement in order to bridge between the sense-bound and the conceptual, to re-situate and re-contextualize the immigrant experience in these transnational narratives that reflect the real world, so that they are re-membered not just as 'literary universals,' or mere actors who "follow ideological scripts," but as agents who read, re-write, and take active role in these 'scripts' and spaces that trigger empathic responses and "evoke a forgotten or half-forgotten emotions that are partial and fluid and embedded unevenly at various levels in the collective locus of a nation" (Lim et al 2006, 127) or what Chevigny and Laguardia call the "rhetorical malpractice" (qtd in Muthyala 2001, viii). Perhaps similar approaches can help reconfigure Transnational American literature from 'American' Studies to 'Writing in the United States.' [2] Although they convey distinct implications, I employ the terms 'refugee' and 'immigrant' interchangeably throughout this work to establish these figures as agents and antidotes to the current wave of nostalgia that threatens to replace, forget, and re-write a past that is increasingly xenophobic and unstable in the present and resistant to the future.

[2] Reworlding America: The Globalization of American Studies Author(s): John Muthyala Source: Cultural Critique, No. 47 (Winter, 2001), pp. 91-119

Organization

This project is divided into three parts, each of which covers a paradigm that informs and affects the model of assimilation and that is closely intertwined with the immigrant's experiences. In this opening section, I discuss the transnational turn in (American) literary studies and sketch out a broad genealogy of border conflicts that differ from (or converge with) this literary turn. In part one, I begin with introducing the melancholic formulations of the spatial and temporal in the context of immigrant displacements to re-situate the immigrant from the margins to the center; in the second part, I outline theories of language to re-write the role of the immigrant as not just an actor exiting and entering stages, but agents capable of translating themselves and subverting their narratives, whereby their inassimable bodies are no longer perceived as threats or commodities to nations, but as storytellers capable of re-writing their individual and collective stories in the fabric of a forgetful nation; the third part explores nations imagined and re-membered from the clear-eyed perspective of transnational children's narratives to establish child immigrants not as pawns of nations but as future storytellers and antidotes to subvert the stories of tyranny and power. I use these formulations to begin a discussion of the critically productive ways in which psychoanalysis and other interdisciplinary studies help to understand the ways in which the experiences of the immigrant may provide a satisfactory if not better transnational framework alternative, one that rarely champions the nation or border crossings and critiques or questions the too celebratory nature of transnational narratives and their dystopian attack on U.S. empire. The section will begin with a look at *American Literature in Transition, 1910-1920* edited by Mark W. Van Wienen (2018) that will

help provide a genealogy of the topic of immigrant displacement and assimilation and the 'immigrant question.' Although the choice of autobiographical and fictional texts addressed is widely dealt with in postcolonial literature, I wish to provide a comprehensive perspective by situating the immigrant at the heart of their struggles and experiences without romanticizing or glorifying the protagonists.

This dissertation is divided into three parts with respective chapters that cover the three unifying paradigms at the heart of the immigrant experience, which are aesthetically employed in transnational narratives. Each chapter or 'essay' contains a study of literary representations of the main topic and a study of postcolonial, hermeneutical spins. The literary representations in the first section are fictional narratives by Nel Freudenberger, Miral al Tahawy, Teju Cole, Orhan Pamuk, and Mohsin Hamid; in the second section an autobiographical narrative by Diana Abu-Jaber and Firoozeh Dumas and a translated novel by Inaam Kachachi; and in the third section, a selection of bildungsroman featuring child immigrants as protagonists. The first section's theoretical spins include Ian Chambers on Migrancy and theories of space; the second section employs Azade Seyhan's *Writing Outside the Nation*, and Yasemin Yildiz's *The Postmonolingual State* among other prominent theories of translation and language; and finally, the third section emphasizes memory and remembrance in the context of children's narratives, alluding to the frameworks of Freud and other theorists of psychoanalysis. Underlying this project is the overarching argument that contests a singular framework of displacement, which I argue fails to represent nuanced figures that are either geographically unified and demographically varied or vice versa. I analyze melancholia as narrative aesthetic and cathartic device, as a redemptive state

of mind for centralizing the immigrant's narrative and granting them agency without romanticizing or over sentimentalizing the immigrant's painful past, which I argue has the potential to serve as an alternative space that is free of any anxious, long-standing rhetoric of exceptionalism fueled by the fear of inassimable bodies.

This project reconsiders the role of transnational frameworks and provides 're-presentations' of the representation of immigrant figures at the center of transnational narratives. In doing so, it emphasizes the paradigms of memory, language, and place, an affective triad that comprise and structure migrant mobilities beyond border-crossings, narrow nationalism, and the national boundaries and borders. It reexamines the discourses of displacement and assimilation and the relation between nations and immigrant figures, spatiality and temporality, between memory and forgetfulness in the context of melancholia as a confrontation of the 'enigma of loss' that is at the heart of historical issues like (global) migration, relocation, and uprootedness. It sheds light on the urgency and necessity of exploring binary extremes of local/global and Western/Eastern discourse in the circulation of transnational narratives. Moreover, it foregrounds the language of affect and pain that is crucial in the recovery of a public ethical dimension of memory, which is typically "barred or abolished from the pubic sphere" in the new virtual space of the commercial media that has so far been dominated exclusively by postcolonial and postmodern theories (Ricciardi 2003). In other words, I situate migration and mobility in an interdisciplinary context, proposing an alternative look at the long-standing discourse of nations and nationalism at a time when the 'transnational,' a product of mass mobility, is overly celebrated, inassimable bodies are easily disposed, and "the spectacular character of the phenomenal world has

increased to the point that it looks like no space exists for critical reflection or remembrance," (2003, 2) whereby an understanding of the past is compromised and flattened. This, in turn, calls for a re-phrasal and re-thinking of displacement induced melancholia not just as consumerist aesthetic devices employed in the circulation of the transnational narrative, but as an alternative framework, a reinscription of mourning, and a state of mind in which the return of the repressed immigrant figure is manifested in relation to a past that reemerges in the contemporary imagination and confronts the reader with "the ultimate enigma of the Other" (Ricciardi 2003, 4). "Outside the Nation, Inside the Melancholic State(s) of Mind" takes a triad of (postcolonial) melancholia's tenets-memory, place, and language-as representational tropes in order to dissociate the immigrate from the mere constructs of the nation and dislocate nation from its 'abstracted association' by centralizing the experiences of the displaced immigrant figure. The move to 'dislocate' the nation by re-presenting the role of space in the immigrant narrative and designating a whole section to do so may seem paradoxical at first, which is also the very ironic nature of transnational literature that is at question here. I argue that it is only by displacing ideologies of exceptionalism and models of assimilation that a future far removed from this increasingly xenophobic present can be imagined. I propose relocating the nation in the immigrant's narrative and the immigrant's narrative in the nation in order to challenge misrepresentations.

While the boundaries between reality and fiction remain intact and are not intentionally blurred, this project reinforces the value and significance of 'imaginative empathy' and narrative empathy, which elucidate how important fictional characters are to us in literature that serves as humanity in print. The narratives that I explore here

serve as melancholic representations and re-presentations of immigrant figures, albeit fictional ones, for understanding the ways in which immigrant figures from diverse social backgrounds re-present and re-configure the tenets of displacement, in turn are represented, reconfigured, and redefined in transnational literature. In discussing these approaches, my aim is to make a case for the significance of remapping the disciplinary boundaries of American studies and transnational literature. Part one offers a model for alternate ways of thinking about postcolonial and transnational notions and the intricate relationships between self and space, between place and person in contemporary transnational narratives that continue to shape our understandings of nations, races, and the people within and without these conceptions, while part two explores the price of linguistic diversity, the imperialism of the English language in the context of migration, and power dynamics of language as it estrangers, constructs, and deconstructs immigrant figures from their motherlands and mother tongues. Part three of this dissertation consolidates the role of memory and re-membering in transnational children's narratives. Viewing memory, place, and language in the traditional and contemporary context of mourning and melancholia as a mutable set of tropes that takes into account other overshadowed or disregarded tropes in migrant mobilities, such as exploited or overlooked childhoods, this project demonstrates how the immigrant constitutes, and is constituted by, the circulatory framework(s) and aesthetic devices of the transnational narrative. My purpose in this project, then, is to examine the ways in which literary representations help us to understand the often misunderstood immigrant figure in the contested context of transnational narratives from the perspectives of renowned international writers and theorists like Freud, Paul Ricoeur, Benedict

Anderson, Yasemin Yildiz, Azade Seyhan, and Orhan Pamuk among others. The core contribution of this project is to make a case for the importance of foregrounding the immigrant's experience to provoke empathy and understanding, to challenge narratives or singular frameworks that suppress and misrepresent immigrants. I focus on texts that may shed new light on existing insights on the fictional representation of immigrant figures in ways that can connect the real with the unreal with a frame of reference that starts out as the United States but diverges into other nations and transnational planes of existence. In doing so, I weave together a fabric of multi-ethnic representations and backgrounds, sacrificing a certain amount of historical specificity. Some of these texts are common and accessible, belonging to mainstream genres like the bildungsroman or autobiographical narratives, whereas others are experimental, but all deploy memory and a melancholic tone as representational strategy that enable us to understand what is most affective and significant about the immigrant experience that undergoes the conflicting processes of displacement and assimilation.

Employing an interdisciplinary stance this dissertation conceptualizes spatio-temporal intuitions to reconsider the rhetoric of displacement in transnational literature that is too keen on celebrating border-crossings at a time when nationalism is resurging in this epoch of warfare in which memory has become evasively characterized by a collective amnesia and reduced to postcolonial remembrances and 'forgetful sites' that must be re-membered.

How 'Transnational' is Transnational Literature?

Human migration has a long history that spans almost two million years. Several geopolitical, environmental, social, and economic factors influence movement and migration, namely poverty, natural disaster, and war. Mass migrations play a crucial role in economic growth, which with time turns migrants into commodities in the eyes of nation-states. I first introduce the definition of transnationalism now in use: "the process by which immigrants 'force and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement'" (Basch et al qtd in Mahalingam 2006, 45). While the history or genesis of transnationalism cannot be traced in a linear fashion, studies converge on the fact that it originated and developed in response to and at a moment of nationalist resurgence, which is ironic just like the term itself. As a result of the fourth wave of American immigration that we are still living through, this 'seismic shift' in today's political landscape calls for the need to revisit the "bravura" of an "America first" rhetoric as headlines speak of promises of border walls, travel bans, and "contempt for international accords," reminding us that "we are not done with nationalism yet and that any theorization or literary imagining of the transnational would have to reckon with both the renewed force of xenophobic affect and nationalist policy" (Castronovo 2017, 465). While "diasporic subjectivities have always coexisted within and outside the long migrant history of a nation," their "experience as text has long been disregarded" (Maver 2009, xi). However, diasporic (trans)cultural experience and practices have come to be "a mode of everyday existence that several successful post-national and post-colonial literary writings demonstrate,

with home and abroad appearing as perpetually shifting and very marketable concepts" (xi). In the Critical Psychology of Immigrants (2006), Silvia Pedraza notes,

> the concept of transnationalism arose when social scientists noticed that under the impact of changes in the nature of modern communications, […] many immigrants failed to shed their old identities and totally assimilate. Instead, they developed new bicultural identities and lived their lives and were quite involved in more than one nation, more than one world-in effect, making the home and adopted countries both one lived social world (45).

"Outside the Nation, Inside the Melancholic State(s) of Mind" underscores the question of how encompassing the rhetoric of transnationalism truly comes at a time when immigrant dislocations and displacements are widely debated in the headlines. This work re-thinks the notion of place and spatial turn in favor of a quest for temporality and memory, an alternative to the notion of Homi Bhabha's 'third space' that is neither consumed by the past, nor dismissive of its painful implications and ontologization. It is important to note that this displacement does not denote an extreme spatial discontinuity like denationalization. On the contrary, it examines this circular discourse, the paradox of various border-crossings and diverse sites where cultures merge and diverge. In order to overturn assimilationist directives and overarching anxiety concerning potentially inassimable subjects with no agency, I place emphasis on the dynamic, hence the temporal and diachronic thematics of melancholia and memory. In other words, the potentially transformative realm of transnational literature brings to the collective minds instances of amnesia, which have perpetuated the notion of the 'exceptional nation.' Configured with the sites of nostalgia, transnational narratives provide grounds for exploring the dissemination of re-embrance, where "memory is not only taken in, introjected or accrued, but reworked, and given back"

(Ricciardi 13, 2003). While "Postmodern texts demand that readers recognize the impossibility of their fictional worlds," transnational fiction, by contrast, "teaches us to recognize that the boundaries and cultural demarcations in our mental geographies are subjective and can be redrawn" (Trousdale 2010, 19).

The study of the current migration dilemma calls for humanistic understanding of fictional narratives that trigger empathy. Although most transnational narratives depicting immigrant figures employ melancholia as aesthetic device, the empowering and debilitating effects of mourning and melancholia are not studied extensively outside the confines of psychoanalysis the same way that memory studies is confined to the effects of the Holocaust. As such, this project explores how "the journey of the refugee opens up a possibility for critiquing the nation-state and its practices of exclusion." (Nyman 41). Although I deviate from the prevalent contexts of slavery or the Holocaust, I should note that the concept of memory here is shrouded in a certain quality of trauma experience, namely amnesia induced by systematic violence and marginalization given that "the theology of memory in the contemporary setting arises out of suffering and violence." In order to examine the relationship between memory and identity, "it is important to be able to re-open and re-examine the tensions within narrative memories" (Duffy qtd in Ricoeur 2011). In Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory of memory the liberation of this exchange is understood as a form of mourning for the losses of the past, which can ultimately lead to reconciliation. Memory in this framework signals "a network of sepia-like images and ideas, to evoke a forgotten or half-forgotten emotions that are partial and fluid and embedded unevenly at various levels in the collective locus of a nation" (Blair 2006, 127). Moreover, trauma scholars

have noted that one of the most telling features of traumatic memories is their absence, which is why I attempt to foreground their presence, arriving at a term I label as 'migrant's mourning,' designated for the immigrant's experience. This framework helps capture the immigrant's emotional journey in a way that other forms of literature do not.

In bringing to light the theology of memory and remembrance, and mourning and melancholia, the two mutually exclusive responses to loss in the literary representations and portrayals of the immigrant figure in these narratives, I argue for the need to challenge the closedness characterizing the space of the nation-state. I unsettle the dominance of discourses that are limited to border crossings and boundaries that fail to present alternative representations of the immigrant's debilitating experiences, which has so far been overshadowed by the prevalent, long-standing debate of assimilation that circulates and reinforces an image of the immigrant as a potential threat to nationality or the so-called 'exceptional' nations defined by the erasure of history. To contest this misrepresentation, I employ the enigma of melancholia and mourning as cathartic form of aesthetic device that intervenes with this flattening and forgetting of history, reminding the forgotten motherland and repressed mother tongue that infuses meaning to mobilities and border crossings. In doing so, this project considers "melancholia as an exact inversion of the process of incorporation and assimilation that allows the successful mourner to let go of the desired object while preserving its desirability," which in this case is the lost homeland or the repressed past (Armstrong 2005, 63). In unsettling the boundaries and frameworks of Transnational American Literature and covering how the field has been

shaped in relation to postcolonial studies, modernisms, and critical geographies, The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature (2017) addresses the transnational turn, exploring how it appears to be 'redundant' or too celebratory of a crossroads of cultures. While it is difficult to trace the genealogy of this turn, or to assign a starting point to transnationalism, what interestingly stands out is that "little consensus may be said to exist on the subject," (2) which may account for its growing popularity in the field of migration/assimilation studies that reflect on the nature of our current situation of global warfare and shifting borders.

The transnational turn in American studies is a turn that has become prevalent and commonplace in American literary studies, its ripples of change affecting not just American literature per se, but categories of ethnic, multicultural, or possibly minority US literature with complex links to Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. However, this is more an assumption at this point than it is a settled truth as "even the title 'transnational American literature' raises more questions than it resolves," (Goyal 2017, 1) namely questions of national movements and categorizations. Can the category of transnational literature include non-US writing or even 'national' literatures, or does it reinforce American exceptionalism? Does it truly serve to recognize the hybrid immigrant, the 'other,' outside of the nation and other spatial confinements or does the term contain the history of that very violence, oppression, and misrepresentation(s)? While transnationalism has significantly reshaped literature and cultural studies since the rise of critical theory in the 1970s (Paul Jay), the confusion regarding what goes beyond the borders of the nation-state, what this alleged 'transcendence' does to American literature and to narratives beyond the borders of the United States, and if this notion,

being an oxymoron in and of itself, truly succeeds in decentering the nation. In any case, the urgency to address these questions stems from the fact that "critics of the transnational turn have not succeeded in outlining a satisfactory alternative," (Goyal 2017, 2) which is what this research, at best, attempts to accomplish. I explore the works of immigrant writers, namely Mira Al-Tahawy, Inaam Kachachi, Diana Abu-Jaber, Firoozeh Dumas, Nel Freudenberger, and Orhan Pamuk among other transnational authors. While most of these writers chosen are female and feature female protagonists at the center of their narratives, this choice of texts does not intend to take the spotlight away from the rhetoric of displacement to configurations of gender roles or hierarchies. I do not exclusively employ gender theory to explore the roles and portrayals of these figures; Instead, I wish to shed light on the importance of studying the immigrant experience in texts that are geographically and historically wide-ranging and diverse. In exploring the depictions of melancholic immigrant experiences beyond the confines of gender theories or the overly celebratory rhetoric of 'post' nations or colonial states, I situate the immigrant at the center of transnational narratives to explore the significance of the poetics of place, the frameworks of language, and the nuances of memory, a triad which I believe is essential in construing and eventually mending the tears in the individual and collective fabrics of forgetful nations that are made up of the memories of these wandering souls who are so often misunderstood or misrepresented. I hope to overturn these misconceptions into re-presentations so that the rhetoric of displacement does not overshadow or eclipse the immigrant's agency. This reading offers interpretations of self with the interpretation of others through narrative discourse especially in terms of human suffering and the immigrant's struggle

to be acknowledged as multifaceted and capable agents, underscoring their recollected past and imagined futures in the context of transnational narratives and humanistic approaches that help theorize identity at the point of interaction and confrontation between the speaker/actor or unassimilated bodies in this case. It mourns the misrepresentations of the so-called unassimilated bodies so that they are re-membered in light of new projections as they navigate the old and new terrains of mobility.

PART I

RE-SITUATING THE IMMIGRANT IN THE NARRATIVE

"Among the great struggle of man-good/evil, reason/unreason, etc.-there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey."
-Salman Rushdie (1999)

"Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference."
-Bell Hooks (1990)

CHAPTER 1

WEDDING TRANSNATIONAL SPACES AND SELVES IN *THE NEWLYWEDS* AND *BROOKLYN HEIGHTS*

Spatial Dimensions and Displacements in New York

While transnational literature is quick to move past borderlines, literature on the topic of how location becomes place or whether transnational approaches and most promising utopian formations "threaten to eclipse the borderlands," especially for displaced communities, is slight (Goyal 2017, 158). This section explores the melancholic relationship between places and immigrants and builds on the discourse of displacement. It addresses space in relation to the immigrant figure's identity and representation in the context of diaspora and migration. Moreover, it does not merely reinforce cosmopolitan outlooks, but frames this perspective with a (multi-) spatial approach to immigrant identity in order to recognize the complexities of transnational mobilities and belonging in not just physical, but also symbolic and possibly digital or virtual spaces. Spaces provide cues for behavior, which varies with the cultural and individual groups. Moreover, "the increasingly diverse cities and the complex social action among migrants, diasporas, and other groups marginalized in the national and supranational formations of citizenship and economic engagement are now recognized as fascinating and critical elements of our changing world" (Georgiou 2010, 19). I explore these themes in the context of the quintessential immigrant city. New York,

with its landmark of liberty, serves as a metonym for the gate through which immigrants entered the new world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This transnational and urban space attracts the disoriented, the deracinated, the exhilarated, and the first immigrant "still unassimilated, ever indigestible" (Whitehead qtd. in Miller 2015, 195). The role of past and present as well as public and private spaces in New York City is contextualized in relation to ethnicity and race, notions that comprise and challenge identities, especially hybrid ones and dual loyalties that can be conflicting. In a chapter called "The Color Line in New York," Jacob Riis writes, "The color line must be drawn through the tenements to give the picture [of tenement life] its proper shading" (1890, 112). Once drawn by the landlords and shaped by the ethnic geography of New York, the immigrant today in contrast to the nineteenth century America both draws and is drawn by, shapes and is shaped by the spatial dimensions in cosmopolitan cities, locations, and spaces as dependent on memory and mobility, as lived and as imagined, mentally mapped to include a variety of colors, which I explore here without obscuring the material realities of intra and interethnic difference.

Susanne Pichler explores how the sociocultural and political realities of global and international migration have drastically transformed the 'textures' of the nation-states in the 'West' since the early 1990s in *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature* (2011). She argues that new webs of belonging "trouble spatial fields of nation, 'home,' [and] 'community,' webs whose threads are spun between 'here' and 'there', 'majority' and 'minority', continuity and change" (Pichler qtd in Kurz et al 88). She questions how and when diasporic/migrant identities "establish 'home' and a sense of feeling (at) 'home', away from 'home" (88). This

raises questions about who belongs and who can be 'at home' in New York and in America as a whole. Is this sense of belonging in residential enclaves a prerequisite for new modes of being, or can the displaced individual have binary longings for the here and there? Is the sense of being ensconced by a landscape the extent of the desire to belong? Is home a mythic place of belonging like the notion of paradise, "a place to which re-turn is impossible, a place permanent inhabitation of which is illusory, a place that remains a dream for diasporic writers as much as for migrants?" (89) In this chapter, I address these questions and argue that space and the spatio-temporal intuition can be fundamental in studying identity through melancholic mobilities and resettlements, namely the emergence of heterogeneous publics and the transformations of cities into cosmopolitan spheres of representation and re-presentation that "can best frame analyses and interpretations of conflict and dialogue, especially as encountered in the intense juxtapositions of difference in (trans-) urban worlds" (Beck et al qtd in Georgiou 2010, 4). I distinguish here between the old and new, past and present, and physical and digital spaces and places, the constituents of identity, in Nel Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds* and Miral Al Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*, a distinction that is overlooked and generalized in the overly celebratory nature of transnational literature. Too eager to transcend the notion of space and replace national borders for more cosmopolitan transitions, transnational literature at times may blur the material realities of ethnic mixture and interethnic difference in favor of an imaginary map that does not allow for a distinction between geographic locations of particular nationalities. I make this distinction with spaces that have emerged and are emerging whether in memory, reality, or virtual platforms in the digital era, where boundaries are

easily blurred or otherwise reinforced through means such as warfare, mass migration, or neocolonialism. Additionally, I explore this digital and urban experience that might enable the immigrant to feel 'at home' in the city or on other platforms and by extension, in the nation as a whole. In this chapter, I situate Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds* and Al Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* in their respective geographical contexts, which happens to be the cosmopolitan space of New York City and the suburbs of Rochester through a reading of Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977) and Eric Prieto's *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (2013). In doing so, I present the social, geographical, and thematic ways in which immigrant figures imagine and configure their relationship to home within and without metropolitan cities.

The bulk of these narratives, namely Miral Al Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*, and Teju Coles *Open City,* takes place in New York City, a city "pauperized in its citizenship by great wealth and its perilous prosperity; by a pampered prosperity that is not good for anybody in the long run," a 'homeless city' in 'a nation of homeless men' or as Dickens simply notes, a city of immigrants, serving as a backdrop for those borrowing, begging, and selling everything only to arrive in this promised land and find that the streets are not really paved with gold but rather the world of immigrant laborers (Riis 1903, 15). Although the characters in the texts that I examine are not homeless in the physical sense and have roofs over their heads and four walls surrounding them, they are beset with a larger desire for the experience that will allow them to feel at home in their respective cities, and by definition, in the nation or country as a whole, which in this case is the United States, a nation of immigrants.

In *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (2013), the subjectivity of place is explored through phenology and humanist geography, where place, for Malpas, is depicted in its spatial dimension as "a bounded yet open space, a spatio-temporal entity," whereas in its experiential dimension place is "perspectival, subject inducing, linked to agency, and intersubjective" (Prieto 28). Regardless, "any conceivable place, however well-defined and apparently self-contained, remains open to these influences and resonates, so to speak, in response to them" (29). As A. N. Whitehead puts it, "you are in a certain place perceiving things…But this functioning of the body in one place, exhibits for your cognizance an aspect of the distant environment, fading away into the general knowledge that there are things beyond" (qtd in Prieto 2013, 29). In the following pages, I begin by defining space in the context of the chosen texts as models for understanding this intricate relationship between space and the displaced self in transnational narratives, especially at a time when borders may have come to seem irrelevant and at the same time "the paradoxical confluence of border retrenchment and neoliberal policy corresponds to the conflicted relationship between borderlands studies and the so-called transnational turn in American studies" (Goyal 2017, 157).

Displacement in Digital versus Domestic Spaces: New Webs of Belonging and Citizenships in Nel Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds*

In the interview excerpt on the back cover of Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds*, Amina Mazid Stillman, the Desi woman and real-life equivalent to the protagonist who inspired Freudenberger's novel, shares her successful immigrant story, which dates back to when she dreamt of going to college in America as a kid, loved everything foreign, and was granted the opportunity to follow her dreams upon meeting her

American husband, George on AsianEuro.com, an international online forum at one of the houses where she tutored English for wealthy children in Bangladesh. Amina's intercultural marriage and relocation to the United States affectively explores the complex systems of citizenship and belonging in various communities-distant, transnational ones or those including the nation. An immigrant leading two distinct lives that converge on an online social platform, Amina believes "that it is only by sharing our stories that we truly become one community," (337) and thus provides a model for understanding the relationship between domestic and other spaces by which social relationships are constituted, especially in immigrant communities, where the subjective experience of in-betweenness is the dominant thematic motif. In order to define the notion of place, I refer here to the Greek etymon plateia, a term that can be translated as 'broad way' or 'open space' with relation to the idea of the town square. In Malpas's sense, a place is defined by external boundaries. Yet, "the boundedness of place does not preclude permeability to the rest of the world" (Prieto 2013, 28). It is also equally important to note the spatio-temporal nature of place given that "a place cannot be defined in isolation from its temporal dimension any more than it can be isolated from its qualitative aspects like color, texture, and so forth" (29). These points imply that place is *perspectival*-"that it requires the presence of an experiencing subject to be activated as a place" (29). In that vein, place is not an objective fact, but rather an "interaction between a physical environment and an active, experiencing agent who both shapes and is shaped by environment" (29). This definition raises questions about the relationship between immigrant figures and the private or communal spaces they come to occupy, namely Amina's online correspondences with her family back home

in Bangladesh and her hybrid household in Rochester where she meets her American in-laws and family. Do these communities provide a sense of belonging, which nations or urban space cannot? Are these spaces transient places of passing that liberate and identify, or are they lifelong localities confined by the preset borders that limit and alienate? These questions embody the ongoing search every immigrant undertakes in their journey and perhaps is best able to confront when encountered with the revealing experience of diaspora.

According to Victoria Bernal, professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, the diasporic individual is one "who is never completely grounded or at home, who lives in ambivalence and instability" (qtd. 9). Guided by the contemporary definition of diaspora as it creates new 'social geographies' and citizenship, I employ some of the relevant eminent theories in the field of cultural studies to argue that place plays a critical role in re-establishing identity and redefining the notion of home through occasionally destabilizing influences like intercultural marriage, emigration, and social relationships as portrayed by the main character, Amina, in Nel Freudenberger's novel *The Newlyweds*. This relationship between home and the individual is best explored through the migrant's enriching experiences like the entailing 'in-betweenness,' hybridity, and the exploration of self-identity. As the shifting paradigms of diaspora create new mobilities, the notions of cultural geographies and boundaries of home are also modified. Moreover, "relationships between dwelling and mobility, and the mobilization of transnational and diasporic networks and other connections are redefined" (qtd. Blunt). The fact that some mobilities are facilitated while others are restricted depends on the politics of

difference. In addition to the change in the notion of social geographies, "citizenship is being rescaled upwards above the nation-state...In an increasingly cosmopolitan and globalized world, new transnational citizenships are emerging based on ethnic, cultural or religious identities and promoted by diasporic communities or faith groups" (Blunt 1). Similarly, this dilemma is conveyed via Amina's intercultural experiences as she undergoes the unnerving experience of paperwork and the hurdle of visas necessitated by the phase of emigration, application for the American citizenship, and re-settlement. Freudenberger explores "how diversity and differences among migrants mediate migrants' transnational ties and their understandings and practices of citizenship" and place (qtd Blunt).

In *The Newlyweds*, cultural difference and diversity is explored through intercultural relations and hybrid domestic and digital spaces. This usually entails romanticizing the 'cultural other' or constructing them as an 'object of romantic desire.' Amina, a cosmopolitan young woman who is born and raised in a village in Bangladesh, fantasizes a romantic marriage like most girls her age. However, an unplanned occurrence, her courtship with George, an American man with mediocre looks and a banal personality, proves to be far removed from Amina's fantasies. Yet, this logic contradicts the reasoning for Amina's spatial mobility, which is instigated by aspirations for upward economic mobility. Ensuing her marriage with George, Amina's emigration to the States reveals to her the complexities of intercultural marriage when her Desi self contradicts and clashes with her newly emerging identity as she tries to acclimate and assimilate to life in a foreign environment. The marriage and meeting point of George and Amina is the epitome of hybrid spaces, the merging of different

cultures under a single roof, as they try to work around their individual standards and ethnic and personality differences as a couple. Freudenberger employs the third person to relay Amina's thoughts: "Amina stared at her husband…she didn't know how you could live with a person for three years and still have such a wrongheaded idea about her personality" (Freudenberger 182). Following their online union, the couple consolidates their matrimony at an Islamic center in Rochester, where Amina notes the diversity in spotting an Egyptian, a Saudi, and a Pakistani as witnesses from the congregation "who would never have met if they'd stayed in their own countries […] and who were struggling to make better lives for themselves in Rochester" (Freudenberger 2012, 336).

This romance proves to the couple that hybridity and intercultural marriage is a risky notion because "by moving away from places where their own group is numerically strong, individuals risk losing a range of social and moral resources that make for psychological well-being" (Portes et al 1990, 53). As Marwan M. Kraidy states, "rather than a single idea or a unitary concept, hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other." Thus, instead of promoting a sense of separateness, multiculturalism or transnational relations should work to merge and integrate the differences into one coherent whole, a concept embodied by the husband and wife from different ethnic backgrounds whose lives are intertwined under a single roof, a domestic hybrid space, by the institution of marriage.

What constitute a diaspora house of hybrids are the cultural differences that either distance couples or bring them closer together. For example, Professor Bhikhu Parekh claims that instead of "putting people into ethnic boxes", multiculturalism is

"about intercultural fusion in which a culture borrows bits of others and creatively transforms both itself and them. It calls for "integration," rather than assimilation, "which recognizes group identities and heritage" (Lerman 1). However, this is easier said than done since "ethnic communities have been much less the Trojan horses portrayed by the xenophobes than effective vehicles for long-term adaptation" (Portes et al 1990, 55) in spaces and places where the state and self-imposed boundaries play a greater role.

When Amina decides to marry George instead of the probable ethnic partner, the family friend Nasir, she recklessly chooses the exotic over the ethnic. Unlike Nasir, George represents a window of opportunity for Amina, through which she intends to flee her unfulfilling life in Bangladesh, where she is accused by demeaning relatives of "sleeping under a torn quilt dreaming of gold" (Freudenberger 336). Her parents, on the other hand, encourage and support her needs, as her father

> cared much more that Amina be legally married. Only once she was married could she get the green card, and only once she had the green card could she apply for her citizenship. As a citizen, her father knew, she could sponsor her parents, and in his mind the sponsorship was the only thing keeping him and her mother from making the journey to America (41).

They all realize that George optimizes the chance of this economic upward and spatial mobility, for "if there were a problem at the embassy, God forbid, it would be an enormous help to have her white, native-born American husband standing next to her in line" (183). However, although George is a responsible, rational, and dependable husband, Amina is dismayed to realize that he fails to embody the man of her dreams. His individualistic and pragmatic American mind-set approach towards certain matters tends to clash with Amina's sentimental, analytic nature. Nasir, unlike George, is more

prone to supporting these sentiments and fears of Amina, as he, too, has lead life outside of Bangladesh in London before returning home. This common ground and shared memories of the motherland create a bond between the two friends, which George can never comprehend, but merely sense through Amina's behavior as "there was a part of her that was eager to see Nasir…She was curious to know what his life was like-how did it feel to leave Bangladesh and then return here to live?" (236). Yet, she does not once consider leaving but works hard and patiently awaits for the green card, her perception of the American Dream. In that vein, "ethnicity seems to play a greater role for ethnic return of migrants from the developed world" (Quayson 2013, 174). Enamored with the concept of return, arrivals and departures, Amina's restlessness conveys how "body implicates space" and "space coexists with the sentient body" (Tuan 1979, 389) and mind that is dependent on memory and the experience of "deterritorialization and reterritorialization, of mobility and of contact or interruptions of contact with old and new others" (Georgiou 2010, 20).

Amina's meeting with George through an online platform and her relocation from this imaginative geography and her homeland, Bangladesh to the United States juxtaposes with traditional marriage ceremonies she has witnessed in Bangladesh. In contrast to the courtship of her grandparents, George and Amina's online courtship reveals that they "had trusted their introduction to a machine…" (Freudenberger 186) in a space or 'non-place' that exists virtually, where "social interaction and relations are no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial co-presence" (Georgiou 2010, 21). This initial online 'distance' and the ensuing one between Amina and her homeland corroborates that Amina's melancholia and displacement here is not merely a notion of

'distance' but a point in time or a spatio-temporal intuition that sets up the displaced self as "a persisting object which is able to relate to other selves and objects" (Tuan 1979, 390). Hence, in order to cope with the consciousness of this distance between herself and her homeland and family, Amina often compares George to Nasir, wondering how her life would have been had she stayed in Bangladesh and married him instead. However, she dismisses the thoughts by convincing herself that "all Deshi men were [demanding and assertive] like that…no matter how open-minded and modern they appeared on the surface" (254). More importantly, her childhood memories and shared history with Nasir widen the gap between her and George in spite of their physical proximity to one another. Amina believes that "marriage counts everywhere" and that "just because you travel doesn't mean you aren't married" (281), whereas George dismisses his adopted cousin, Kim's marriage in India as some sort of passing 'ceremony.' Kim, George's cosmopolitan cousin and the antithesis of Amina, is a barefoot healer type who works in a yoga studio and has been to India. Unlike George's other family members and friends, Kim is "a person who couldn't resist putting herself into every vista she encountered," knows that Bangladesh is not in the Middle East but in South Asia, and acknowledges the questions of appropriation. I think it essential to quote Myria Georgiou's argument in its entirety here. As such,

> Diaspora can arguably become a metaphor for life and identity in cosmopolitan times. As a metaphor, it captures the human connection across boundaries and growing mediation. Media, telephony and digital technologies have altered transnational communication practices in the last couple of decades to such an extent as to allow daily and vast transnational exchanges online, on the phone and on television screens. Cohen proposes a redefinition of diaspora in the light of these changes: "Nowadays, with the increased use of the term to describe many kinds of migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, a more relaxed definition [of diaspora] seems appropriate. Moreover, transnational bonds no

> longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination" (2010, 21).

Within this framework, I emphasize diasporas and displacements as transnational communities that integrate imagined and virtual spaces in thinking beyond the binary opposition of the global/local. In trying to settle in Rochester, New York and adapt to her new environment and partner, Amina grows aware of the new identity and tradition she is constructing for herself. Her experiences of resettlement and relocation play the role of contributing to this complex construction. Amina's relocation also enforces her to reconstruct the definition of the space of home as she oscillates between Bangladesh and America, crossing borders she never would have imagined crossing. Therefore, it is understood that her perception of home is distorted in a world of constant, ceaseless movement. On one hand, she represents the object of envy, targeted by envious relatives who "know what a hole it is" in Bangladesh and would "like to leave" just like Amina did (236). On the other hand, some praise her for relocating to America. Sharing the same ethnic background and homeland, Nasir and Amina share a similar perception of home, one that George cannot perceive. They both agree reluctantly that leaving home sometimes means forgetting the ones you left behind, whether you ever return or not. According to Nasir who has relocated to London, "it'll improve. It's always going to be better than here. The problem was-I couldn't stop thinking of home. It's like a girl. She's perfect while you're away, and then you come back and she's changed so much…Amina agrees, "and you've forgotten what they're like" (Freudenberger 249).

Shaped in different spaces, diasporic identities and transnational connections

"depend on shared myths and memories, as well as upon a sense of belonging in an imagined community which has some continuity and relevance across time and space" (Georgiou 2010, 22). Although both characters traverse borders and call multiple places 'home,' they are both ironically confined by memories of their imagined and real homeland. The role of memory and the past is just as crucial as place in this novel and others explored in this section and the following sections of the dissertation. A fine line divides Amina's past and present being similar to the way the borders divide America from Bangladesh, so that she is forced to lead a split life. Often misunderstood by those around her, Amina struggles to find her own inner voice and drown out those that infiltrate her thoughts with misguided beliefs like "…we're rich simply because we're going to America" (264). She contemplates her transforming identity as her mannerisms change with time, from the way she dresses, jeans in America and sari in Bangladesh, to her eating habits, which is noticed by the people close to her through instances like when "her aunt brought a knife and fork with the food, even though they'd always eaten with their fingers when she'd visited in the past" (209). With every action, she questions and critiques her true identity through inquiries, like "if she truly were an American she would have wanted to hug them" (236).

Gradually, however, Amina's perspective towards both places evolves as she grows mentally and emotionally. In that sense "each different space is attached to a shared sense of belonging and to a sense of longing and shared memory of uprooting" (Cohen qtd in Georgiou 2010, 22). On her final trip to the States, this time with her parents, she bids her homeland and Nasir one final goodbye, before she realizes she is ready to reunite with George and work at closing the gap between them. Returning to

the States after a visit to Bangladesh, she is able to see the place in a different light as she reflects in retrospect on her experience at the embassy, a space that would grant or deny her access to the United States:

> Four years ago, these embassy workers had seemed to her like angels…clearly existing in another realm. Now, sitting in the first row chairs with her American passport in her purse, she wondered if it had simply been the seductive legal fiction that this building existed on U.S soil…The U.S passport meant better treatment and shorter lines in both airports (255).

This remembrance in this particular location is significant as "spatiality is of particular importance" for diasporic identity especially since this type of mobility and resettlement connect at least two places "in social positions of marginality or relative prosperity" (Georgiou 2010, 22). Through her newly gained perspective, she acknowledges that difference and variety is essential and that identity is what she makes of it. She now knows that "there's nothing all Americans do. Just like there isn't anything all Deshis do" ((259). Consequently, for the first time since she'd left the country, "she allows herself to wonder about the value of the long journey that had lead them all here" (256).

Through the immigrant's plight, readers of this transnational narrative come to realize that "the tenets of Diaspora particularly continue to shift and develop" (Pellerin et al 2012, 90). The immigrant experience as it shapes and is shaped by different spaces beyond discourses of border crossings enable us to rethink and reconfigure the notion of identity in relation to space and time, and nationalism in relation to citizenships. Ultimately, diasporic theory is to 'travel well' and it reveals that "home is no longer one place, it is locations" (Amin et al 2002, 46). In that vein, "everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location" (29).

This entails that "there needs to be a significant adaptation to a different map and history" (Brown 6), which Amina's relocation to America and her unconventional marriage with George signify. The severed bonds between Amina and George are reconstructed and the symbolic distance between them bridged, as they learn to converge their differences and represent one hybrid body under a single roof of a domestic space. Revelatory and affecting, *The Newlyweds* achieves and conveys the immigrant's journey toward belonging if not assimilation, which is negotiated through mobilities within and without the physical, digital, and re-membered spaces that continue to dwell in memory.

Melancholic Mobilities and Haunting Memories in Miral Al Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*

I continue to explore the importance of place beyond border crossings or boundaries in transnational studies. Additionally, I examine the relations and connections between diasporic identities or displaced immigrants and transnational spaces that form layers and spheres of belonging in the context of New York City, which plays a key role here in defining the meanings and limits of diasporic identities. Themes and theories of spatiality overlap with those of language and memory, as they are interconnected and not mutually exclusive in immigrant experiences. First, I provide a broad geographical and historical scope of this quintessential immigrant city here and in the follow chapter. The city of New York "is a chaos of confusion and change […] ever promising and ever withholding, a bad mother, queen of the double-bind, […] where ambitious people […] are not as successful as they had hoped to be" (Miller 2015, 196). Yet, "they stay in New York because the city is exhilarating and

cosmopolitan" (194). Divided into districts and portions, New York neighborhoods served as "'staging areas' where newcomers embarked on the journey toward assimilation" as one urban sociologist notes (Mele 2000, 42). Interestingly, these neighborhoods are said to facilitate the Americanization of migrants. However, this is not the case in the texts I explore. I argue that each displacement is nuanced as space is subjective and that "immigrants did not just become incorporated into American society, they also transform it; they made and remade America and are fashioning her still" (Pedraza qtd in Mahalingam 2006, 44). Miral Al Tahawy and Teju Cole, whose work I address in the following chapter, detail the struggles over defining and re-defining home that characterize the (im)mmigrant protagonists' new and past lives. Here, I am interested again in the multi-spatial and temporal approach to convey how the characters of an immigrant narrative like *Brooklyn Heights* and *Open City* negotiate the public and private spheres of New York city to achieve not assimilation, but a sense of belonging that is interconnected to memory, a platform that brings together past lives and other possibilities of belonging. Theorists and critics of space note that space, like memory, is multiple and not singular. Georgiou attests that space, "shaped in contexts of continuities, links, and conflicts," is always plural in bringing together "meaningful relations and formations places and practices" (22). She elucidates,

> The home, the public, the city, and the national, in its interconnections with the transnational space form layers of the spheres of belonging; they together form the puzzle of the context where social relations, communication and action take place and shape the meanings of identity and community. Each of these elements of space is an autonomous node and each has its own dynamics, its morality, economy, and its social and cultural meanings (2010, 22).

In acknowledging the nuanced nature of space, we acknowledge, "knowing where we

are is as important as knowing who we are, and of course the two are intimately connected" (Silverstone qtd in Georgiou 2010, 22). I present the knowledge of this discourse and the discourse of this knowledge in the context of transnational narratives, which are shrouded in a melancholic and nostalgic tone. The nature of this tone and aesthetic device is perhaps best conveyed via Baudelaire's depiction in "The Swan," where he writes "Paris changes! But my melancholy remains the same. New palaces, scaffolding, blocks, old neighborhoods-everything becomes for me an allegory" (qtd in Miller 2015, 27). Similar to the character in "The Swan," the protagonist in *Brooklyn Heights* cannot escape the grasp of this melancholia that she has carried with her from her home country, Egypt, to the streets of Manhattan. Shortlisted for the Arabic Booker Prize, Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2012) presents an elegiac look into the immigrant's life that straddles binary notions, where dreams are always out of reach and in danger of being ensnared, eclipsed by nostalgia and the fear of forgetting or betraying the origins-the motherland and mother tongue. Fleeing her meek former existence in search for a better life in Brooklyn, Hend, a single Bedouin (nomadic) mother, who was once an Arabic teacher in Egypt, dreams of becoming a writer in America, but instead ends up working at Dunken Donuts, 'alone and anonymous.' Overwhelmed by failed attempts to juggle her Middle Eastern roots and American lifestyle, Hend lacks incentive to write and ironically refuses words, which she believes are meaningless, and instead adopts "only silent gestures" to "guarantee an existence free of lies" (al-Tahawy 101). Consequently, her identity is reduced to and equated to her inabilities and failed dreams, which instantly alienates, distances, and somehow justifies the exchanged "truncated sentences, as though she were an outsider, not

belonging" (al-Tahawy 15).

Hence, she remains outlandish, no longer wanted like the antique items in the flea markets she passes by. Although Hend values Brooklyn's linguistic diversity and cosmopolitan aura, it is with a defeated, sometimes curious manner that she aimlessly roams the streets, which leads her to "seek refuge in the familiarity of the Bay Ridge coffeeshop [a microcosm of the Arab world] that reminds her of home with its myriad of dialects" (al-Tahawy 25). Never tired of walking along the endless streets of Brooklyn, Hend grows weary of the cacophony of languages and code switching surrounding her, realizing that even people who share her cultural and linguistic background "never speak to her in Arabic," but "chatter together in bad English" (al-Tahawy 16). With regards to the relation between spatial coherence, language, and memory, Tuan asserts, "the structure of the present world can be elucidated and enforced by architectural means: spatial coherence can be perceived. But the past is gone and can be recalled only with the help of language" (1979, 392). Hend, however, fails to communicate and makes no effort to learn English except for the essential words like 'savings' and 'coupons.' Hence, she is unable to situate herself or belong in a public or stable realm to which all who speak the same language have access. Time and memory compensate for spaces Hend feels she is not privy to, serving as a ghostly shadow that tails her around the city. It should be noted here that interestingly, in philosophical discourse, "time has assumed greater importance than space […] a belief that seems to rest on the nature of being, becoming, duration, and experience" (Tuan 1979, 391). In roaming the streets of Manhattan, Hend spatialises time and vice versa, whereby space is temporalized as a town or neighborhood comes alive not the way it

is but as “unique and complex ensemble-rooted in the past and growing into a future” through the detailed narrative and description of her childhood memories. Her seemingly aimless strolls and observations of day-to-day living in the city which she cannot take part in as an ‘alien’ or immigrant, are enlightening, almost biblical, as she feels like she is “in some dimension or other,” frozen “with that same expression of martyrdom” like the plaster virgins that stand in front of the houses and a huge church. Hend’s visual perception, thought, movement, and memory, with which she compares past/present and native/foreign spaces, “combine to give [her] a characteristic sense of space” (1979, 390).

Passing through the Vietnamese markets, Turkish, Asian, Italian, and Latino neighborhoods, which she describes as “much gayer” with its residents, the beautiful mulatto women who “noisily bustle around houses whose front rooms have been turned into small restaurants,” Hend orients herself, albeit from a distance, in relation to these new territories by sensory perceptions and affective responses that enable her to register the music, dancers, and warm bars, or as she artistically perceives it, “the smell of the great trade in temporary joy,” (al-Tahawy 19). Scenes of these neighborhoods in New York City are juxtaposed with Hend’s memories of her father’s house that “was like no other house,” (19) “surrounded by a sturdy mud wall covered with coloured chalk pictures of camels, litters, and caravans travelling to Mecca with drawn curtains” (20) in a village where the roofs “were made of straw piled in high mounds and the walls were left unpainted,” and “the streets were dry and dusty in the summer and full of sticky mud in the winter” (19-20). She recalls her daily trip to the mosque and watching the women carry out their daily chores. Hend’s displaced body that traverses a

kaleidoscope of spaces and neighborhoods in this metropolitan NYC that is starkly distinct from the "sandy land on the edges of Buhaira province" in Egypt (21) symbolically serves as a yardstick for the measurement of space that often rests on the measurements of time and memory.

Haunted by memories of her homeland, she ironically appropriates not the ways of New Yorkers, but the mannerisms of those she has left behind, people who are sense-bound in conceptual spaces that are mapped in Hend's imagination. For instance, she finds herself repeating her mother's words, "there's a time and place for everything," and "her walk has also taken on the same listless gait that her mother had at the end of a long day" (al-Tahawy 10). Realizing that she has also become more like her grandmother, who never once left home and was labeled 'The Guest' or 'The Master Foreign Woman,' Hend finds herself still confined to this conceptual space that is her childhood, where she could only look at the dividing line between the threshold and the outside world and "swallow her want till the day when she too could step over to the other side and never return" (24). As a result of this confinement, Hend's aimless walks are now imbued with meaning as she walks along the endless streets of Brooklyn, never tired of "walking in this land, alone and anonymous" (24). Once confined to the threshold of a house that "was not beautiful," where her mother would sit in the balcony and "dream of a new house like the many-storied houses of the village with commanding views of the world inside and out," (21) Hend's transatlantic crossing embodies a long-standing dream, which she has inherited from her mother and her Bedouin heritage. The act of walking in NYC for Hend plays the role of retaliation against her childhood that was spent watching the gypsies pass through in springtime

and dreaming of a house

> whose insides she could see without having to knock, a house with a wide hospitable courtyard to invite the greetings of passers-by, a house across whose open threshold floated the smell of cooking, of washing and the sweat of strangers. But the gate of her father's house was high and shut fast. She would stand staring at it, and it would stare back at her (al-Tahawy 24).

Although she does not forget, Hend retaliates against and renounces this past by wandering Brooklyn's streets that denote a sense of foreignness, homelessness, exile, and freedom all at once, mixed sensations brought on by the double estrangement of having lived as a woman who could not thrive "in a jungle of men" in a chiefly patriarchal society that even transposes to the enclosed hubs and cafes of Bay Ridge, reminding her "of the smells and tastes of sweet and distant places and times" (al-Tahawy 129). She cannot forget a past that has transposed to her present. Mapped onto this place, "from her husband she inherited a visa for the US, a child, and two suitcases containing the smallest and lightest of his toys. And this was how they ended up in a tiny apartment on the corner of Flatbush and Fifth" (13). Navigating both the streets of Manhattan and her own confused feelings and memories, time is reduced to space as she recalls her father's words, "'Whatever the north wind brings, the south wind takes away.' And here she stands now, wretched and alone, in a place where the four winds mightily converge" (13). Tuan writes, "Homogenous time is reducible to space because its units are not successive but lie side by side." (1979, 393). In that vein, Hend tries to cope with her displacement in New York City by aligning her memories and re-membering a painful past that is paradoxically comforting at the same time. Caught somewhere between a melancholic past and a hopeful future she is on the brink of

forgetting, Hend takes comfort in and likes going

> to the Library to look at the pictures of famous writers whose ranks she dreams of joining. They comfort her high up there on the walls, because they, like her, one day discovered that life is not beautiful […] Above the table there is a poster with the words 'Learn English' printed on it. Next to the poster hangs a black-and-white photograph of Albert Einstein, underneath, which is written, 'Einstein was a refugee too' (14).

Wandering like the body she inhabits, her "sensations, perceptions, and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible because language cannot clothe it without arresting its flux and making it into public property." As a result, this perpetual state of becoming is contested and confused with its "permanent external object, and especially with the word, which expresses this object," (Tuan 1979, 393) which is delineated in her ESL class, where she introduces herself: "My name is Hend. I came here from Cairo-why, I don't exactly know […] I like to go to places where cultured people gather, and I pretend to be one of them though I don't really understand what they are talking about […]" (14). She admits that she has a serious problem communicating with people, which most likely stems from her debilitating fear of trying to lead life in a foreign place. She talks about her country "and tries to pinpoint its location for them somewhere between Israel and Mecca-those two poles of strategic interest in the region" and is "forced to show her own ignorance when she asks about the location of Haiti or Peru" (14). While Hend "longs for connection, a few friendships or acquaintances to pass into her life," she travels "the vast length of Flatbush alone because for the longest time she was too shy to go into any of the many Arab café's and restaurants by herself" (18). At other times, Hend treads these diverse spaces with her son who reminds her of his father. She wistfully realizes that the older he gets, the

more they begin to move in opposite directions, and that "she will have to let go soon" (18).

Although she passes through a gamut of ethnic neighborhoods, she merely watches, her desire to engage at odds with, and masked by, a disregard, evident in her lack of interest in assimilating to this place in which other immigrants exchange information on the best places to shop cheaply, find welfare offices, and conveniently priced apartments near the subway line, where "the exiles sit on benches by the sea that reminds them of other ports and waterways" and "they spend endless time on their hands fishing in the ocean that separates them from their homelands" (15). Through Hend's vantage point, the novel constructs sites of not just spatial, but also temporal transgression via multi-spatial approaches and crossings as well as nostalgic re-membrances that are shared in these immigrant hubs and spaces that range from the coffee shops, benches by the sea, and the ESL classroom. While Hend shares a culture with the Arabs she meets in class, she notes that they never speak to her in Arabic, but "chatter together in bad English and claim that they know next to nothing about each other's countries because the Arab world is so big and wide and very different" (16). Yet, she clings to the idea that the Arabic language is slowly dying out "because unfortunately, she tends to get insanely attached to things and love defies forgetfulness" (15). Hend's son, the only recipient and 'object' of her love and affection notes that she has to change and that she is 'always sad.'

In defying forgetfulness on her melancholic walks around the city, the protagonist in *Brooklyn Heights* establishes how "memory in this framework signals a network of sepia-like images and ideas, to evoke a forgotten or half-forgotten emotions

that are partial and fluid and embedded unevenly at various levels in the collective locus of a nation" (Lim et al 2006, 127). The narrative plays with notions of memory as the protagonist notes that "the planet of memory moved into Capricorn," Hend's horoscope (165). She asserts,

> People wonder in amazement how all the distant memories they left behind long ago are now suddenly standing squarely before them. They cannot understand why so many things that had been erased from their thoughts are once again haunting them. The past has become the present and it is sweeping one and all away with the force of its violent return (165).

Burned into her ever-present memory, Hend's presence in the neighborhoods of New York City denote how the representation and this case, the re-presentation, of the immigrant is compounded in memory, a nuanced and multilayered paradigm that "lies either in the remote past or future like distant places" (Tuan 1979, 390). Unable to truly shed or past or assimilate to her present place, Hend is condemned to "feel that she is nothing but an indefinite noun, a pitiful anonymity, a woman solitary and neglected" (al-Tahawy 60). Caught in this state of rootlessness that she likens to "the twilight space between life and death," Hend ironically manages to cross the once confining thresholds and boundaries of her childhood, but relents to the fear of forgetting her origins, killing all her dreams in the process. Thus, the house, with its high gates, from her childhood remains shut, its threshold off limits and uninviting. A native of the desert, her dreams, like her mind and body, continue to wander restlessly, unsettled in the confines of a nomadic past. However, I argue that what the immigrant figure realizes but fails to face is that freedom and agency hinge on properly and rightfully mourning a past so that it does not haunt but define the unity and coherence of any given place. The following chapter further elucidates this notion of melancholia and

mourning in the context of place.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSCENDING PLACE IN *OPEN CITY, ISTANBUL: MEMORIES AND THE CITY,* AND *EXIT WEST*

Affective Spaces in Teju Cole's *Open City*

This chapter, like the previous one, builds on the rhetoric of displacement and assimilation in the context of places that are defined by the melancholic memories attributed to their landscapes and landmarks instead of their mere physical nature. The dilemma of the displaced individual's identity that is defined by this pervasive in-betweenness that rejects the possibility of complete integration and assimilation is also affectively portrayed in Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), which "combines an investment in cultural difference with a markedly melancholic tenor" (Vermeulen 2013, 41). *Open City* is a narrative about spatial relationships, which is rigorously tied to the perspective of its protagonist Julius, a psychiatrist with Nigerian and German roots, who crisscrosses the social territories of Manhattan, Brussels, and the Nigeria of his youth through the private spaces of his mind. The New York of Teju Cole-a photographer, writer, and historian who was raised in Nigeria and came to the United States in 1992-is the city of immigrants, which he so vividly and eloquently captures: Kenyans, Lebanese, Syrians, Haitians, Chinese, and others "who have come to escape the sorrows of their own history or to pursue their versions of the American dream"

(Michiko 2011). The narrator of Teju Cole's intriguing, yet 'odd' first novel is a med student named Julius who likes to wander through the streets of New York City, "and the book is filled with arresting, strobe-lit glimpses of Manhattan, 'this strangest of islands.'"[3] Unlike the other narratives explored here, *Open City* offers glimpses of the city in fragments and a stream-of-consciousness narrative that reads a lot like Camus's novel "L' Etranger."

Like Hend, the protagonist from Al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010), Julius, the narrator of *Open City*, covers both emotional and physical landscape, wandering New York City at night, going to museums and concerts, and watching bird migrations from his apartment. Unlike Hend or Amina, however, Julius is detached from his own past as the offspring of a white mother from whom he is estranged. Seemingly indifferent, yet melancholic and moody, this young fellow completing a fellowship allows his moods to lead the way and "color his reactions to people" (Michiko 2011) as he meets an interesting array of people ranging from a Belgian doctor he meets on a flight to a former professor who is suffering from cancer to other strangers, all of whom share with Julius their life stories, projections of Julius's own sense of dislocation. He oscillates between physical and alternative spaces, tuning to Internet stations from Canada, Germany, or the Netherlands. Leading a melancholic life of isolation like Hend, Julius finds his walks around the city therapeutic, "a reminder of freedom," where "each neighborhood of the city appeared to be made of a different substance […] a different psychic weight," all of which begin to "morph into each other and assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city" (Cole 6). His descriptions of the city are

[3] Karutani, Michiko. *The New York Times (2011)*

eloquent, artistic, and captured like photographs studied from historical and literary-artistic perspectives. A town or neighborhood comes alive through the artistry of his description as he "combines detailed narrative with discerning vignettes of description" perhaps further enriched by his eclectic nature and journalistic eye (Tuan 1979, 388). Julius walks many areas of Manhattan, from Wall Street to Washington Heights and Morningside Heights on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where he lives. This narrative has many autobiographical narratives, "but Cole's narrator should not be confused with the author" whose parents are both Nigerian, whereas in the novel, the narrator's mother is German, but his father is Nigerian (Miller 2016, 198). The novel opens with the line "And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city" (Miller 198). He goes on to describe these walks serve as a 'counterpoint' to his busy days at the hospital, explicitly stating the reason for why he walks, "The walks met a need: they were a release from the tightly regulated mental environment of work, and once I discovered them as therapy, they became the normal thing, and I forgot what life had been like before" (Cole 7). Walking through spaces that are less abstract than his scattered thoughts, bust still conditioned by the fact of his being in them, Julius plays center role in these spaces, as do his moods and intentions.

For instance, he dislikes forming connections by virtue of his skin color or African origin. Yet, ironically, he is especially interested in New York's African American past, evident in his excursions to a memorial for the site of an eighteenth century African burial ground in Lower Manhattan and walking on Ninth Avenue, he feels as if he has walked into the past when thinks about the draft riots in 1863, which

he descries as an "afternoon during which I flitted in and out of myself, when time became elastic and voices cut out of the past into the present, the heart of the city was gripped by what seemed to be a commotion from an earlier time" (Cole 74). Engrossed in the moment, Julius believes to have seen the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree, which soon turns out to be canvas sheeting. The moment at this site, which is described by the narrator as "a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten," (Cole 58-59) is closely tied to 'sense experience' that reflects how the "body implicates space" and how space and time "coexist with the sentient body" (Tuan 389). Fantasizing a New York subway line as a ride to his past, Julius admits the emotional tie he feels toward African blacks and that he wants to "find the line that connects [him] to his own part in these stories" but in the end concludes that no such line exists what with his many pasts and interracial background (Cole 59).

This portrayal of spatial discontinuity is significant in that it reflects the very turn of transnational literature and how these experiences are often expressed in a language of affect and pain, which is overlooked or overshadowed by discourses and debates of assimilation. The novel and its setting, New York City, serve as the microcosm of the United States, a nation where many people come to from elsewhere with stories to tell if only we lend an ear. As a psychiatrist, Julius plays the role of this compassionate listener who is displaced and disoriented himself. Tuan notes that "place is perceived when people apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations" (410). Similarly, Julius projects components of his own identity and identity crisis onto the cityscapes, where he both finds and loses himself in shops, historical sites, and "an endless array of curious objects" (Cole 190). I wish to suggest a different

reading of this phrase. These experiences are constant reminders of moments both within and out of time, whereby the aesthetic of lost time remains a dialectic force and a reminder to take into account the nations' changed attitude toward the past, which Julius embodies and resists with instances of 'mental weakness' or moments in which he cannot remember something as trivial, yet crucial as the PIN of his ATM card, resulting in a minor identity crisis. This aesthetic device reinforces the need to "search for a new ground on which mourning may be redefined and thus allowed to retain its imaginative urgency" in our postmodern times (Ricciardi 2003, 8). On this view, space and displacement may be "resituated and reinvigorated" from the 'mournful imagination' that does not flatten or forget, but rather re-member past injustices that continue to reoccur and remerge (Ricciardi 4). While it may seem like "no space exists for critical reflection or remembrance," (Ricciardi 2) to examine the status of immigrant displacement, Julius's moments of harmony where all identities merge in the fabric of the collective stories he listens to, offers hope for the future of transnational discourses that are written, re-written, and re-membered in the minds of these nations and their citizens.

A critical reflection of the relation between memory and the affective spaces that are spectacles of mass media and consumerism is conveyed in Julius's depiction of Central Park in a blizzard, when the snow "erased the most obvious signs of the times, leaving one unable to guess which century it was." Similarly, the abyss at Ground Zero is portrayed with "three or four tractors scattered around inside it" so dwarfed in size that they resemble toys. Yet in another description of a notable space in NYC, the sidewalk trade in Harlem, the narrator observes an array of transnational

objects being sold by the Senegalese cloth merchants in a single space, "the young men selling bootleg DVDs, the Nation of Islam stalls […] self-published books, dashikis, posters on black liberation, bundles of incense, vials of perfume and essential oils, djembe drums, and little tourist tchotchkes from Africa" (Cole 49).

Some of Cole's descriptions of New York "have a hallucinatory feel" with zombie-like crowds surging through the streets. At other times, "his city feels like an intimate small town-a constellation of convivial neighborhoods linked by familial ties, religion, ethnicity and serendipitously shared passions" (Michiko 2011). Walking above-ground "with thousands of others in solitude," Julius, unlike Hend, is sentimentally attached to this space as he finds himself standing close to strangers, "jostled for space and breathing room, all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified" in the subway. The use of the word 'us' here denotes that this collective state of being affected "contributes to the understanding of the contemporary micro-politics of affects and the changing relational geographies underpinning them and thus eventually to understanding how affective spaces mold our lives and the selves we come to embody" (Tygstrup qtd in Agostinho 2012, 209). Yet, the question of who truly belongs to the space of the nation-state trumps this feeling of identity and unity when Julius finds himself on the receiving end of racist remarks on several encounters in the city, after which it is noted, "we were all confused about what was happening; we were American, had always thought ourselves so […]" (Cole 13). Conducting a clinical study of affective disorders, Julius is further affected and mobilized by the accounts of his patients, which mirror his restlessness and serve to map the hedge between the rooted and the cosmopolitan, between home and homelessness, the past

and the present, and absolute versus relative spaces. One patient notes the importance of re-membering as she recounts,

> It's a difficult thing to live in a country that has erased your past […] There are almost no Native Americans in New York City […] It isn't right that people are not terrified by this because this is a terrifying thing that happened to a vast population. And it's not in the past, it is still with us today; at least, it's still with me (Cole 27).

Another citizen similarly laments, "I'm still angry. We lost so much […] and when I think about Africans-and I know we are not supposed to say such things in America-when I think about Africans, I want to spit" (Cole 30). Instigated by these catalogues of stories from around the city, Julius recalls how he had become estranged from his mother, his roots, just before he left for America, an estrangement handed down to generations of immigrants. Mapping and belonging, "a major theme in postcolonial fiction," is prevalent throughout the narrative in which Julius's individual memories intermingle with collective ones of racial or cultural persecutions. He compares the past, pre-9/11 Manhattan with the present day, where he remains attentive to the city's commotion, almost as if it were a living, breathing thing. His loneliness is foregrounded against the background of a city bustling with life, as Julius "imagines that [his] suffering amuses people" (Cole 48). Traveling the public transport systems of New York and Brussels, his encounters with the city's inhabitants and his own "memories, which connect the narrative present to his and his family's Nigerian and German pasts" generate a perspective that is both intimate and detached (Vermeulen 2013, 41). What the ruins of the World Trade Center is to New York and its inhabitants, a metonym of its disaster and subsequent fear and hate mongering, so these spaces are to suffering immigrants who reject and are rejected by the myth of successful assimilation.

However, what overturns this portrayal is the narrative's attentiveness to the interconnections that emerge in the catalogue of stories from around the cityscapes. Instead of employing melancholic tenor to further suppress the past, trivialize, or exploit the immigrant's painful remembrances, *Open City* embodies memories as "an appropriate tool for fostering connections beyond ethnic, cultural, or national borders" (Vermeulen 2013, 42) if not for absolute assimilation. Unlike the Leong family's detachment from San Francisco's Chinatown in *Bone,* which I address in chapter 4, and Hend's alienation from Brooklyn's streets in *Brooklyn Heights,* the narrator and protagonist of Teju Cole's *Open City* "enjoys a cosmopolitan detachment from his American experiences," (Mesud qtd in Vermeulen 2013, 41) a detachment that shields him from the mental and social suffering in the wake of failed assimilation. This demonstration of 'productive alienation' overturns the generalized narrative of immigrant suffering in this foreign space that is shared by both the animate and inanimate- the ships, the migrating birds, and "the generations of New Yorkers who had come here to the promenade to watch wealth and sorrow flow into the city," where the Statue of Liberty, "the focus of so many myths," remains watchful, as omnipresent as ever (Cole 2011, 250).

While the "vision of needless suffering" colors the landscape of Brussels and New York City, Julius gains further mobility and agency in mapping reality the way one does in normal mourning, a notion he encounters in his reading of Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia.* Upon realizing that the anxiety of incomplete mourning 'cloaks the city,' Julius finds a way of recreating the reassuring albeit tenuous connections in the exchanged glances, nods, and quick greetings in the city, after which

the cloak lifts and "the miasma of Manhattan's electric lights did not go very far up into the sky, and […] heaven itself shimmered," where the true nature of the stars "was the persisting visual echo of something that was already in the past" (Cole 2011, 256). Granted a sense of agency by a suffering overturned to 'productive alienation' and detachment overturned to insight, Julius "diagnoses the affect in the ways in which the life of the city seems to stutter, how sensation becomes myopic and disoriented, how the familiar spaces of everyday life become partly unrecognizable, partly spaces of punctual wonder and strange beauty" (Trygstrup qtd in Agostinho 2012, 206). In that sense, *Open City* celebrates the strange beauty in the unrecognizable, in diversity and difference whilst distorting the familiar and here I present a feature of Freud and Proust's handling of the topic from Alessia Ricciardi's *The Ends of Mourning (2003)*. *Open City* seeks to transform the mourning of collective and individual pasts that converge in the spaces of a cosmopolitan city "from a drastically enigmatic constellation into a riddle or puzzle that, like all such distractions, implies a determinate resolution," (Ricciardi 4). This riddle is one that is not meant to be solved, but understood through the disorienting and enlightening experience of living in an 'open city' or "a cosmopolitan culture that surprises us" (Miller 204). It is no coincidence that the narrative ends where it began-with a great number of the disoriented migrating birds recorded dead "although the night past just hadn't been particularly windy or dark," another punctual wonder of everyday life unnoticed by all save for the bewildered immigrant (Cole 2011, 260).

From Local to Global Spaces and Melancholic Modes of Being in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City*

I now shift focus from New York, the United States to Istanbul, Turkey and move from the local to the global to explore an autobiographical text that is deeply melancholic and that resembles some other narratives in the genre which tell of a child's experiences growing up displaced and disoriented in a place infused with melancholia in the wake of an unending battle between the modern and the receding past, which defines the very identity crisis of Istanbul, a convoluted and cosmopolitan city. Guided by Antonio Damasio's notion of the 'autobiographical self' and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) among other theories, I address the question of melancholic modes of being in other national contexts: Does the affect of melancholy remain unchanged regardless of where it originates or is situated? In other words, does melancholia in the East differ drastically from melancholia in the West? More importantly, I revisit and emphasize the overarching question that frames the argument and forms the basis of this dissertation: Can any given framework or rhetoric of displacement encompass the multifaceted immigrant experience that is so nuanced and intricate? Firstly, I define 'national' literature and reflect briefly on its stance in the framework of transnational and global literature. At a time when "new webs of belonging trouble spatial fields of nation, 'home,' 'community,' webs whose threads are spun between 'here' and 'there,' 'majority' and 'minority,' continuity and change," (Pichler qtd in Kurz et al 2011, 83) national literature in relation to transnational literature provides grounds for the exploration of how the displacement of a migrant/diasporic identity within the confines of a city far removed from the nation-states in the 'West' resembles and differs from that of an individual in the Western

context. If any author "has flourished in the twenty-first-century ecosystem of world literature, it is Orhan Pamuk," writes Adam Kirsch in his *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century* (2016, 29).

Born in Istanbul in 1952, Pamuk writes in Turkish, which renders his work a form of 'national literature,' "a literature that requires translation if it is to cross national boundaries" (29). While this definition of national literature does not blur the explicitly drawn boundaries between the local and the global, I argue that Pamuk's displacement, and by virtue, Istanbul's melancholic making that is characteristic of an identity crisis, shows how cultures can be characterized as interacting and overlapping. This characteristic is epitomized by Istanbul where "the greatest virtue is its people's ability to see the city through both Western and Eastern eyes" (469 Kindle location). Neither too Eastern, nor too Western, the inhabitants of this city, though not displaced by definition of border crossings, are still restless, uneasy, and feel they don't quite belong. In creating marginal characters caught between spaces of Western hegemony and domination on one hand and Eastern affiliation on the other, Pamuk sheds light on the dilemma of where the loyalties of contested, displaced characters should lie, if anywhere at all.

Although *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003) explores a region set far apart, geographically and historically, from the United States and is not a memoir that explores immigrant figures per se, this text is chosen because of its stance amidst a canon of the global novel, if such a thing exists, but more so because it contests the idea of a 'national' narrative against these transnational narratives in spaces where "local allusions and references" may disappear in the hands of an author like Pamuk

who has the "tendency to remove obstacles to international comprehension" that seem to transcend place (Kirsch 2016, 18). Although this text serves as a eulogy to all that is no longer a part of a modernized Istanbul, it presents an intimate view of one of the world's great cities from the perspective of Pamuk's memories of and relationship with Istanbul. In spite, or perhaps because, of issues of untranslatability or communication across borders, this affective depiction of Istanbul, a city, which like New York, is a palimpsest of sorts with layers of identity, locates culture beyond the confines of borders and shows how "the individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement," whether it is an internal displacement within a single nation or a transatlantic crossing across multiple nations (Robinson 2013, 143). It is important to clarify at this point that although it originates in an imperial center, *Istanbul: Memories and the City* is not a nemesis to national fiction by virtue of the language it is written in, which is Turkish, "a language whose literary achievements are generally unknown to the wider world" (Kirsch 29).

I argue here that a work of national literature like *Istanbul: Memories and the City,* serves to contest and debunk "the myth of a unified, homogeneous nation-state made up of one people, one ethnicity, and united with an attitude of tolerance and respect for 'difference'" (Pichler qtd in Kurz et al 2011, 84). Debunking this myth and contesting national literatures with the transnational sheds light on how the inhabitants of such diverse nations cannot be understood with singular, 'fit for all' frameworks that have emerged and continue to emerge from the West. Pamuk begins his memoir with one of his earliest memories, the recurring nightmare of the ghost of another Orhan living in another house somewhere in Istanbul. The reader is compelled to ask, why is

it that this imagined persona in an imagined part of Istanbul who has never really bridged drastic distances feels compelled to transgress metaphysical ones at the expense of a split identity that mirrors the city's melancholia? Perhaps this is a question best addressed through an analysis of the 'autobiographical self' that helps construct and re-construct individual identity in relation to collective, transnational identities and projections of consciousness and memory. Antonio Damasio, Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Southern California, bases the concept of consciousness and mind on evolutionary grounds in his book *Self Comes to Mind* (2010), in which he distinguishes between the three levels of "self." Here, I am concerned with the *autobiographical self,* which incorporates "social and spiritual dimensions" and contains our sense of identity (10). Understanding the concept of consciousness is essential to understanding cultural impact and the influence of narrative empathy instigated by literature and literary representations. Pamuk's memoir, in which memory is almost entirely visual with the aid of photographs of the city interspersed throughout the text, is exemplary of the 'autobiographical self,' which Damasio defines as the self that incorporates the multiple dimensions of culture and has personality-built up over time with beliefs, memories, and life history" (Asma et al 2010). Although he has never left Istanbul, the houses, streets, and neighborhoods of his childhood, Orhan Pamuk shares a bond with the perception of another Orhan residing in another place and time, and wonders why he stayed not only in the exact place, but also in the exact building in this age of mass migration. In *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing* (2017), Jopi Nyman writes, "The memoir's discourse is further placed in the context of the transnational that

becomes the site of the protagonist's identity formation" (62). With regards to sites of identity formation, Pamuk admits that his imagination has required him to stay in the same city and place that has come to define him. Istanbul has always been "a city of ruins and of end-of-empire melancholy" for this cosmopolitan protagonist who is displaced not by national boundaries and territories, but by the passage of time where new sites of identity merge with imagined lives.

This establishes that space is not just the effect of orientation but temporality as well, a 'great expense of time' that is "necessary for the completion of the sorrow work" (Ricciardi 2003, 25). While time is a universal concept, the perception of melancholia or what I call the rhetoric of pain or sorrow may range from one culture and individual to another. To address the question of whether the affect of melancholia differs drastically in the Eastern versus Western context and to understand why it dominates the landscape and culture of Istanbul, I quote Pamuk, who explores two very different *Hüzüns,* "each evoking a distinct philosophical tradition" (178). He writes, "*Hüzün,* the Turkish word for melancholy, has an Arabic root [that] means much the same thing as the contemporary Turkish word," that is "meant to convey a feeling of deep spiritual loss" and that has been central to "Istanbul poetry, culture, and everyday life over the past two centuries" (179). Melancholia to Freud is when a person grieves for a loss he cannot identify or comprehend, a process that takes place in the unconscious mind. On the other hand, melancholy or *hüzün* to Sufis in the Eastern tradition is the spiritual anguish and grief felt from the distance between man and his Creator in the wake of an interest in worldly concerns. Following the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, "the *hüzün* of Istanbul is not just the mood evoked […] but a way of looking at life that

implicates us all, not only a spiritual state but a state of mind that is ultimately as life-affirming as it is negating" (180). In this sense, while distinct in its context and etymology, *hüzün* "stems from the same 'black passion' as [the] melancholy" in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Pamuk 181).

What distinguishes this form of melancholy from its Western counterpart is that "*hüzün* is not the melancholy of a solitary person but the black mood shared by millions of people together," in a given space (181). To contest this particular portrayal of Istanbul's melancholy, Pamuk provides a panoramic view of the cityscape from the eyes of Western philosophers. While Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, Turkish poet, novelist, literary scholar, and a widely regarded representative of modernism in Turkish literature, sees the remains of great empires, the preserved museums, and the ruined neighborhoods as symbols of the many conquests, defeats, and miseries its people have had to endure, many Western travelers and writers find this charming. Nationalist writers like Walter Benjamin are said to see the city's 'beauty' "only in those parts, where they themselves were outsiders" (Pamuk 468). The foreigner's gaze substantiates that a city owes its character to how it is viewed by the outside observer just as much as it is shaped by its inhabitants. To see a city from a different vantage point lulls the native into believing that these foreign accounts are their own personal memories, which is interestingly characteristic of a feature in the Turkish language. Pamuk notes,

> In Turkish we have a tense that allows us to distinguish hearsay from what we've seen with our own eyes, a useful distinction that helps us remember earliest life experiences so that once imprinted in our minds, other people's reports of what we've done end up mattering more than what we ourselves remember (31)

Thus, memory in this framework signals a network of collective remembrances dispersed, gathered, and compounded in not just the cityscapes, but also the gaze of the 'other.' The question begged here is how reliable is memory in the context of national and individual histories? While "memory is both more and less than history…history also includes elements that are not exhausted by memory" (Nyman 2017). Although it may seem like Istanbul, a city permeated and riddled with the remnants of past civilizations, is not free from imposed stratifications, *hüzün* in this context grants a 'poetic license' for only its inhabitants to be paralyzed, and while it is praised by the outsider, it is *"*not a feeling that belongs to the outside observer" (Pamuk 202). Ironically, the distance that *Istanbullus* feel from the centers of the West "make Istanbul a city that newly arrived Westerners are at a loss to understand," attributing it to a 'mysterious air' and "thus identifying *hüzün* with the *tristesse* of Levi-Strauss," (Pamuk 196). Contrary to emotion that Montaigne called *tristesse,* which he saw as the enemy of individualism, "the hüzün of Istanbul is something the entire city feels together" and embraces as one (Pamuk 206).

Yet, this distinctive melancholic viewing of history is what situates the narratives of displaced figures amidst the binaries of the universal and personal, and the global and local. Spread like a blanket over Istanbul's people and its landscapes, *hüzün* or melancholy enables its inhabitants to respect, preserve, and maintain the manifestations of history and evoke the memory in these cosmopolitan spaces. In lieu of that, Pamuk believes that "the fastest flight from the *hüzün* of the ruins is to ignore all historical monuments and pay no attention to the names of the buidings, or their artchitectural particularities" (199*).* I argue that this moment of epiphany sheds light

on the paradoxical nature of transnationalism. Caught in the vortex of a crossroads of histories and melancholic displacements where the native, the foreigner, and the immigrant all convene in the space of shared sentiments, this placelessness within the confines of a given place is best portrayed through Pamuk's metaphor of a "smoky window between the self and the world," an unsettling but gratifying position that draws attention to the construction of culture. This position, in turn, "distinguishes between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences [that] circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value" (Bhabha 1994, 32).

A lonely walker in the city like the protagonists of *Open City* and *Brooklyn Heights*, Orhan Pamuk takes the reader on a sublime tour of Istanbul that is home to past empires and a present republic, which has given rise to diverse interethnic communities like New York City. In the same way that *Open City's* narrator, Julius walks to re-member, Pamuk draws his strength from the realization that even "if the city speaks of defeat, destruction, deprivation, melancholy, and poverty," he can always take a walk along the Bosphorus, the waterway between East and West for the last two hundred years that "sings of life, pleasure, and happiness" (102). Juxtaposing these conflicting notions and emotions, Pamuk relays the affective experience of space as not just a location but a melancholic mode of being. Pamuk presents a balanced portrayal of melancholia in his work, which does not tip the scale the way overly celebratory texts do by glorifying and romanticizing the displaced individual's suffering at the expense of circulating transnational narratives.

What is particularly significant is that Pamuk enters this transnational network characterized by the global presence of memory through his strolls around the city without ever having to relocate from Istanbul or physically cross borders. Another means of transnational mobility for him is his father's suitcase, an epitome of memory with its contents from his travels around the world. A passage to another dimension bound by the senses and imagination, this suitcase to Pamuk is "the meaning of literature" that enables him to realize and acknowledge that his world is "a mixture of the local-the national-and the West" (1999). Pamuk's work elucidates the transnational dimension of cultural transformation without necessitating a (physical) border crossing. The displaced autobiographer then, is not merely an actor who acts and is acted upon, but rather an agent who reasserts him or herself into a collection of stories that comprise a kaleidoscope of nations and narrations.

Transcending Place in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

In exploring the affective immigrant experience, I have so far paradoxically situated the discourse of displacement within frameworks of place and explored melancholic states of being within spatio-temporal theory. Now, I move away from particular localities, the binaries of East/West, and the local/global to broader scopes and dimensions of the immigrant experience with the hopes of emphasizing and foregrounding the immigrant's journey over the destination and setting, which is tactically made irrelevant and discreet in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). What sets the final text in this chapter apart from the rest of the narratives I have explored is its style and distinctive use of magic realism, which frames the refugee crisis in a unique and striking manner.

I first provide a brief contextual background of South Asian fiction before presenting an analysis of the narrative. It can be argued that South Asian diaspora novels, like other contemporary postcolonial narratives in the rapidly changing field of transnational literature, are primarily designed for the mass market and the white reading public and therefore, lack depictions of the real India, the real Pakistan, Bangladesh, or the real diaspora communities. Instead, they project romanticized depictions of exotic homelands for Western observers that skew the reality of South Asia and its people. Foregrounding the overused themes and models of assimilation, diaspora, ethnicity, and race, these narratives may be said to misrepresent, glorify, or skew the immigrant experience, resulting in representations that are not always up to par with the changing times that consequently suffer when transplanted to new tough terrains. Caught in between the depictions of past paradigms that are becoming increasingly unsuitable in a digital age that is re-defining its borders and reinforcing old ones, and a future that does not look any welcoming for refugees and immigrants, stories and storytelling play the role of antidotes that may ideally liberate us from tyranny and what once was and still is. In article for The Guardian, which addresses the dangers of nostalgia, Mohsin Hamid writes, "the future is too important to be left to professional politicians…we are all creators of fictions, and we all have a role to play in imagining our way" out of these traps of misrepresentation. He shares his own identity crisis and the solace offered by the books he read to cope with a childhood spent straddling two jarringly different geographical regions. He recounts how he was intrigued with almanacs and drawing out borders on maps and atlases, claiming peninsulas for a new nation state and conjuring non-existent islands, a starting point for

what was to become his current profession. Born in 1971 in Lahore, Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid is an immigrant himself who moved to the U.S. at the age of 18 and now lives in London. His work, which largely deals with the current events and issues in the fraught region of Pakistan, deals with the region by drawing comparisons between the contemporary world and his homeland that in contrast, appears to be shut off from the rest of the continent in Salman Rushdie's narratives. However, Mohsin's modern writing style that relies on heavy symbolism offers a vision of Pakistani modernity, which breaks the stereotypes of 9/11 that have since prevailed and perceived the region as anti-modern and fundamentally traditional. Hamid addresses themes of nationalism, fundamentalism, religion, war, and migration in his recent novel.

Set in an unnamed city on the brink of civil war that resembles Pakistan and is filling with refugees, *Exit West* follows a couple, its two protagonists, Saeed and Nadia who, in search of a new life, embark on a journey that unbeknownst to them, takes them on an almost magical odyssey to Mykonos, London, and San Francisco. The city's anonymity serves to universalize the context for its readers. The novel begins with the lines "In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war, a young man met a young woman in a classroom" (Hamid 3). In this narrative, place and location serve as the backdrop to mobilities in an alternate reality where doors serve as portholes, wormholes, and rips in time that open to anywhere, offering refuge to those fleeing war and other perilous situations: "Location, location, location, the realtors say. Geography is destiny, respond the historians" (Hamid 11). Hamid employs a third person narrative to present an omniscient view of the events as they unfold in this novel of "sweeping transnational scope" (Sulter 2017).

Characters are transported through time and space "to places distant and near" with ease in the absence of the laws of physics, where any door "could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all" (10). Nadia and Saeed, the couple that meet at a time when the city is deteriorating, flee their country of birth in search of a safer place. Their escape, however, does not occur conventionally via the Mediterranean Sea or the route west, to Europe. Rather, they travel through a door, one of many, with the ability to 'take you anywhere' (69) and with powers like the closet in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* The couple soon realizes that people from around the world are using these magical doors through which characters are transported from the known to the unknown whilst escaping threatening situations. Almost every chapter in the novel includes a detailed reference to and description of a door that unexpectedly and inexplicably transformed into a passage or porthole from one part of the globe to another. Some examples include doors from the Rio de Janeiro to Amsterdam, from the Philippines to Tokyo, and from Kentish Town to Namibia. However, it is ironic how even in this state of complete freedom of mobility and an 'open door policy,' human nature inevitably intervenes as people self impose boundaries and regulations for protections, divide between public and private places, are quick to draw territories of their own, and fail to respect one another. Transported to the Philippines through one of the doors with Nadia, Saeed notes how "they were in his territory" and that "he disliked Filipinos" (31). Like others fleeing and transporting from one place to another through the magic doors, Saeed and Nadia are forced to leave some destinations behind when violence breaks out at any given place and "when refugees had occupied many of the open places in the city, pitching tents in the

greenbelts between roads" (26). Observers and participators in communities they meet at each given destination, Saeed and Nadia realize how "everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense no one was," which constitutes an odd sense of belonging (105). Gazing at the stars, she realizes how these "ghostly cities-New York, Rio, Shanghai, Paris-" were 'achingly beautiful,' "images as though from an epoch before electricity, but without the buildings of today" so that she cannot decide if they looked like the past, the present, or the future.

Hamid also alludes to the digital divide in this alternative dimension, where in Nadia and Saeed's "phones were antennas, and these antennas sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic, a world that was all around them, and also nowhere" (39). Saeed marvels at how "this phone stripped so much of its potential [still] allowed him to access Nadia's separate existence," while in contrast to Saeed, Nadia sees no need to limit her phone and "frequently explored the terrain of social media" (40). While Nadia sets no limits or imposes no solid boundaries between her virtual and real world, she does not do so without caution. Free to be whoever she wants to be on social media, she dons her black robe in the real world with which she resists the claims and expectations of the world and shields herself from eager men in the absence of Saeed. I employ this metaphor to show how, like Nadia, transnational literature masquerades to celebrate or critique national boundaries as it treads these in-between spaces with either caution or confidence, leaving behind a blazing trail that traces the mobilities of immigrants. Interestingly, the effect doors have on people alter as people approach them with either superstition or indifference. Just like it is in real life, doors to richer destinations are more heavily guarded, while "doors that led to undesirable places were

left unguarded," referred to as mousetraps by the people in the camps (114).. Hamid details a variety of people and places behind these doors, among them the memories of an old woman in Palo Alto, the disturbed presence of a door in a retired Naval Officer's house in San Diego, and an afternoon in the life of a young political activist in Vienna.

These frequent oscillations situate Saeed and Nadia within a broad geopolitical context as they learn to navigate these "cosmic corridors of connection," (Sulter 2017) but have no say in where they may end up. Hence, destination is irrelevant as long as there is constant motion. Once united by the ebb and flow of mobility and resistance, Saeed and Nadia drift apart towards the end of the narrative when the doors stop operating after the war. Adrift and lost, yet hopeful in this new state of being, Nadia and Saeed "lingered in a state of tangential connection…and distanced themselves from each other on social networks," (222) a turn of events that relay the fragility and fraught nature of relationships between people and places. While the novel is steeped with melancholic undertones, it remains hopeful until the end, where desirable futures, previously unimaginable, begin to emerge.

In the final chapter, Nadia returns for the first time to the city of her birth half a century later, where "the fires she had witnessed in her youth had long since burned themselves out" (229). She describes this "familiar but also unfamiliar" place as neither heaven nor hell as she wanders slowly exploring and observing the young people of the city who "had no idea how bad things once were" (229-230). Propelled by this constant motion "between genre, between psychological and political space, and between a recent past, an intensified present and a near future," (Sandhu 2017) Hamid further complicates the notion of boundaries and offers a look at a world of refugee crisis with

open doors, one that discreetly alludes to the closed door policies that reign our real world and shut out those fleeing politically unstable landscapes. While boundaries may be 'porous' on one hand, "in the sense that they do not exclude an awareness that there is an enviornmenting world that interacts with and impinges on the locally defined place in various ways," on the other hand "these boundaries provide a way to define the unity and coherence of any given place," and it is equally hard to live with or without them (Maver qtr in Prieto 2012, x). In that regard, *Exit West* "theorizes a sort of innovative dimension of the third space which dialogizes 'movement and stillness, the nomadic and sedentary'" by virtue of the perpetual motion of doors that halts only when peace is achieved (Moslund 2010, 15). For Mohsin Hamid, these alternative futures and dimensions of existence offer hope and prayer for the loss that "unites humanity, unites every human being, the temporary nature of our being-ness, and our shared sorrow, the heartache we each carry" regardless of where we carry them.

This chapter has presented analyses of *Open City*, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, and *Exit West*, transnational narratives distinct in style and form, from which separate notions of place emerge and converge. I emphasize my overarching argument, claiming that a single framework or rhetoric of displacement is not fit to explore the nuances of displaced figures given that "diasporic identities are shaped in different spaces, which are interconnected and sometimes distinct and competing" (Cohen qtd in Georgiou 2010, 22). Hence, it is crucial to explore alternative frameworks for narratives that continue to shift in a digital and social networking age, where some barriers are dissolved and new digital and physical divides are introduced and old ones

are reinforced. This dilemma is especially relevant at a time when the majority perceives themselves as ‘citizens of the world,’ rejecting any form of rigid, geographical identity that clashes with citizenships that are still not up to par with our times. The following section looks at the role of language in translated and original texts where the immigrant serves as the translated and the translator, and the mediator between cultures and nations.

PART II

RE-WRITING THE IMMIGRANT IN THE NARRATIVE

"Rewriting is both a symptom and an active instrument… a political act…The ever-expanding phenomena of postcolonial rewriting perfectly illustrates this sort of resistance. For quite a while, former colonies have been 'rewriting back' aggressively taking on the center's literary canon and disputing in the process the very notions of center and canon"

-(Moraru 2001, 156).

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE AS MELANCHOLIC REDEMPTION IN *THE AMERICAN GRANDDAUGHTER* AND *THE LANGUAGE OF BAKLAVA*

The Immigrant as Translator and Translation in *The American Granddaughter*

In *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-colonial Literatures* (2009), Maver contends, "language, the basic element of dialogue, is at the same time still an inexhaustible source of conflicts, which can divide people and can result in the fact that they live in different worlds even if they live on the same street" (xi). Originally published in Arabic in 2008 and translated to English by Nariman Youssef in 2010, Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* explores language as both conflict and redemption in warfare through notions of the motherland and mother tongue. Set against the political backdrop of 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq where many Iraqis returned to their country as refugees, residents, or Iraqi-American interpreters recruited by U.S. companies. Characterized by its melancholic, autobiographical, and linguistic underpinnings that provide grounds to explore the tricky terrain of the familiar and foreign, this narrative sheds light on the predicament of the immigrant who serves to trace the nation and the other in the self through the process of identification, which Stuart Hall defines as the moment that "constitutes and continuously re-forms the subject who has to act and speak in the social and cultural

world" (Hall 1995, 65). In his *Motherless Tongue: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (2016), Vincente Rafael validates how language is one with the 'character of the nation:'

> Despite their essential function in fighting insurgents, [Iraqi-Americans] were also feared as potential insurgents themselves. Unlike the Americans they worked for, interpreters were forced to hide their identity. They often covered their face with a ski mask and sunglasses as they ventured outside the military bases and adopted American pseudonyms […] so as to protect themselves from being singled out for insurgent attacks. At the same time, their identity within the U.S. military remained unsettled and unsettling inasmuch as their presence generated both relief and suspicion among soldiers […] Aliens in their new surroundings, they continued to be alienated from their own countrymen (Rafael 3).

Approached from this perspective, *The American Granddaughter* makes a case for how translation, an ongoing process of 'intercultural transfer,' provides grounds for examining a plethora of issues such as race, gender, (post-) colonialism, and otherness. Kachachi dramatizes and underscores the identity crises of the transcultural immigrant at war through her novel, which explores the experience of a fictional Iraqi-American girl torn between two powerful bonds while serving as an interpreter with the invading American army in Iraq in the same way Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* portrays its protagonists as the (traumatized) "social tissue spread across the diasporic web" (Elahi 2006, 4).

Written from alternating first and third person perspectives, both narratives employ a melancholic tone and sentimental prose characterized by acts of poetic self-reflexivity, a narrative device that mirrors the immigrant's dual identity. This tone permeates *The American Granddaughter* from the onset as it opens with the narrator, Zeina's words "if sorrow were a man I would not kill him. I would pray for his long

life […] Miserable, that's what I've become," (Kachachi 3) a lament, which is followed by the memory of a lullaby her grandmother Rahma used to sing to her:

> Dil dil dilani,
> To Baashika and Bahzani.
> Baba went to the old town stall,
> Brought us chickpeas and raisins.
> He gave them to our nanny
> And she ate them all (Kachachi 4).

Zeina reminisces the rhymes inherited from the days of Mosul and the old stone house from her childhood as she recalls, "My grandmother Rahma rocks me back and forth, after settling me on her warm lap with my face towards her […] I look at her, spellbound" (Kachachi 4). The physical closeness of the grandmother's body "and all that it suggests about affection, proximity, and presence continues to function implicitly in the still-active concept of the mother tongue" and how it "emanates from the mother's body" (Yildiz 2012, 11). Yildiz argues against the preconceived romanticized views on the correlation between the mother tongue and national identity, which claim that one could properly think, feel, and express oneself only in one's 'mother tongue,' a term that is ironically a translated concept. She asserts that "this notion of the mother tongue has been in turn a vital element in the imagination and production of the homogenous nation state," (2012, 7) which constitutes the individual identity. Contrary to this argument that the mother tongue is not always the language of emotion, Kachachi initially romanticizes the notion. Employing the language of emotion, she introduces and instantly draws attention to the maternal figure, the identitarian force of language and natural kinship. Zeina's grandmother literally and metaphorically serves to concurrently trace back and reconcile the family roots and the lineage of the mother tongue, in which case the weight of the language falls on the element of the 'mother.'

The narrator retorts, "how could I not love Mosul, when everyone there spoke my grandmother's accent?" (Kachachi 5). The words imply a rupture between the narrator and her roots as she reiterates the distancing pronoun 'they:'

> When **they** spoke it was as if the kitchen cupboards had collapsed and a cacophony of pots and pans were spilling out. Words rolled out of my relatives' mouths in a burst of *qafs* and *gheins*, with the elongated *alef* at the end making everything sound like the finale musical *mawwal*. *Ammaaa…Khalaaa…* **They** sounded like they had just stepped out of a period drama in classical Arabic extolling the chivalry of Seif Al-Dawla (Kachachi 6).

Here, the "deprivation of national language is also the denuding of national identity, an identity that has to be reconstructed and consolidated in secrecy" (Dictee qtd in Blair 2006, 22). The tongue that is forbidden is the mother tongue, which Zeina speaks "in the dark (or the warzone), or in secret" because the mother tongue by definition is 'refuge;' "it is being home" (22). Ingrained in the tune and rhythmic moments of this memory is "the uniqueness and organic nature of language imagined as 'mother tongue,' [which] lends its authority to an aesthetics of originality and authenticity" (Yildiz 2012, 9). This authenticity, achieved through the juxtaposition of the native Arabic and acquired English language, situates Zeina in the postmonolingual condition, as it portrays her yearning to identify and reconcile herself with the mother tongue:

> At home I never heard my mother speak anything but Iraqi Arabic, although my father wanted us to learn Chaldean too, his mother tongue. English remained the language of the street, work and the news […] Our cars took us and our English round from street to street and from mall to mall. Then they brought us back to the zinc-covered garages in front of the house, where we changed language again and slipped indoors (Kachachi 13).

Although she has appropriated her American identity, Zeina maintains unsurpassed mastery in the command of Arabic, her mother tongue. She states, "there was no doubt that it was army job that armored me with my lexicon of obscenities […] Did my father

teach me the language and train me in careful pronunciation so that I could end up an accredited interpreter for the US army?" (Kachachi 131). This is made even more prominent in the translated English version of the narrative, where some words are left untranslated to deliver the intended effect. Zeina asserts,

> "Now, one thing I was confident about was the flawlessness of my Arabic. I'd caught the language like a contagion from my Assyrian father […] 'How come your daughter hasn't forgotten the language of your country?' the neighbors would ask […] and my mother would smile and look at me with a pride that bordered on gratitude" (Kachachi 13).

Yet, inherent in this bilingual state is the yearning to re-associate solely with the mother tongue as Zeina realizes her absolute alterity or otherness outside the physical space of home, where she "never felt fully at home in that big humid house" (Kachachi 6) as well as the figurative space of the native language. After failing to find the American dream on American soil, Zeina applies for a job and is recruited by the U.S. army as an interpreter to make money and 'bring happiness' to her mother, an ambition she sets out to pursue in her own homeland. Returning with the passport of the 'invader,' Zeina is labeled a betrayer to the motherland and the mother tongue, a label she initially refuses to accept:

> I hadn't given much thought to how the Iraqis would receive us […] I repeated after Fox News that I was going on a patriotic mission. I was a soldier stepping forward to help **my** government, **my people**, and **my army**, **our** American army that would bring down Saddam and liberate **a nation** from its suffering" (Kachachi 10).

However, this sense of betrayal and guilt eventually feeds the rhetoric of otherness reflected in the language:

> I wanted to flaunt my kinship in front of **them**, show **them** that I was a daughter of the same part of the country, that I spoke **their** language with the same accent […] Orders demanded I be mute. And so, for the first time, I resented my army uniform that was cutting me off from my people […] I felt I had the ability to adopt a role and change character, to be simultaneously

> **their** daughter and **their** enemy, while **they** could be my kin as well as my enemy (Kachachi 7).

The 'Them' and 'Us' connotes a number of problems typical of the translation process in general given that what is to be made 'ours' in translation must still contain sufficient qualities of 'theirs' to be recognizable (Collier 1992, 329). In that sense, Zeina partially identifies as "Us," her Western comrades with whom she resides in the Green Zone army base. The epistemic underpinnings of her situation also require her to objectify her own people as Them, which further reduces language into an instrument of 'colonial conquest' and 'social control' (Rafael 2016). These militants, however, are also "Them," which Zeina cannot bring herself to accept and go against the grain of her job as an interpreter:

> **They** hate **us**,' my companions in the car said…but I refused to believe it. I convinced myself that I was exempt. I was born in Iraq, and I had the same skin color, the same language, and the same fiery temperament as these people. **They** couldn't hate me. 'Can't you see that **they** hate you even more than they hate **us**?' Deborah was telling me only half the truth […] But **they** saw me as a traitor (Kachachi 144).

In this context, the immigrant is by virtue an interpreter of cultures, a double entity who "exists within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture" (Seyhan 2001, 10). Hence, these "Them" versus "Us" binaries tend to create obstacles to an independent vision of a 'truth' rather than providing a venue for the perception of otherness. Whether it is through a lack of self-reflection or residual American tendencies, Zeina imposes 'their' categories blindly on her own people until her absolutes are shaken by her milk 'brother,' Muhaymen, who lectures Zeina on theories about how "emigration created a rupture in the migrant's spirit" (Kachachi 130). He questions, "Is your name Zeina or Chameleon?

I only know the motherland, and I can't imagine having a stepmother land. I find the idea of a second homeland ridiculous" (Kachachi 130). Zeina is offended as she ponders, "Did he take me for an insensitive American who didn't comprehend the obsessions of victims of the Arab condition…?" (Kachachi 119). In that vein, Zeina's bilingualism and self-imposed duality dominates and underscores everything she narrates, transposing the novel into a metaphysical representation of her hybrid existence that is "a tangible sign of [her] new character: intrepid Zeina going to war" (Kachachi 25). This figurative 'exile' causes a split in Zeina's identity. Faced with "charred pieces of identification, shards of language […] and cultural fragments," (Seyhan 2001, 7) Zeina both betrays and is betrayed by her mother tongue and motherland when she proves incapable of providing the exact equivalence of the style and substance of one language in another, in which case the interpreter is always looking to make up for the shortcomings. The burden of the immigrant as interpreter is translated as the burden of trying to merge the two distinct worlds, to interpret not just words or experiences, but somehow convert cultural concepts and traditions into a language that appears inflexible, which Zeina realizes through the interactions with her American boyfriend, Calvin: "I once tried to translate for him the Arabic saying about the monkey being as beautiful as a gazelle in his mother's eyes, but he stared at me blankly […] I didn't have the energy for the process of translating *shabka* for him" (Kachachi 45). This moment portrays how the the untranslatability of language is registered, which "reckons with ideologies that reduce translation and languages into mere instruments of conversion, colonial conquest, and social control" (Rafael 2016).

Interspersed throughout the narrative, these Arabic proverbs originating from Turkish/Kurdish roots provide linguistic diversity and multilingual forms that challenge the singularity of the mother tongue in the postmonolingual state. Moreover, they serve to compare the old Iraq with this 'New Iraq,' where interpretation is used as a "complex weapons system" (Rafael 2016, 2) and Zeina's native language is utilized as a nationalistic imperative linked to an imperial project that also subverts the preconceived romanticized view of the mother tongue:

> I was a stranger even to my grandmother, my mother's mother. Haydar and Muhayman…were closer to her than me because, like her, they'd remained pure Iraqis, like pure gold. Their patriotism wasn't tainted by a dual nationality, and their blood raced in their veins when they heard the name Iraq (Kachachi 117).

With the conflicted words she exhausts, Zeina becomes aware that her two clashing identities can never reconcile in any given space, a dilemma for which translation is so resonant a metaphor. She relents, "I'm an army interpreter and that's what I'll remain […] Wasn't it blood that opened the rift between us, and drove me to say 'you and us.' I couldn't be anything but American. My Iraqiness had abandoned me long ago…I tried to be both but I failed" (Kachachi 163). Hybridity can thus be found not just in the 'geographical peripheries of borderlands,' but also within the body that inhabits an 'in-between reality.'

I pause here to draw a comparison here between the conceptualization of the paradoxically alienating and uniting characteristics of language in Al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* and Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*. For those who are displaced like Zeina and Hend, "the ontology and epistemology of language suffer a kind of trauma" in a place like the camp base in Iraq where language that has become and is becoming "contaminated by discursive centralization" (Moslund 2010, 11) in

the post-monolingual condition aligns with ideological affiliations (Elahi 2006, 4). Unlike Zeina who is able to traverse both worlds with her fluent Arabic and English, Hend fails to communicate and makes no effort to learn English except for the essential words like 'savings' and 'coupons.' Amazed at the speed and confidence with which her son speaks English, Hend is only able to "look at the dividing line and swallow her want till the day when she too could step over the other side and never return" (al-Tahawy 24). Until then, she merely listens, fails at communicating, and "often talks to herself in that obscure, whispered, endangered language that makes passers-by stare at her" (al-Tahawy 16) the same way her grandmother's "voice rang with that Delta accent that distinguished the outsiders from the Bedouin" (al-Tahawy 42). Hend's attachment to the mother tongue and Zeina's conflicting loyalties reflect how the use of foreign languages is perceived as un-American in a nation where "immigrants were not only compelled to speak English, but to speak English only as the prerequisite of social acceptance and integration" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 184). Lost and confused like the bodies they inhabit, these two protagonist' sensations, perceptions, and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible because language cannot clothe it without arresting its flux and making it into public property" (Tuan 1979, 393).

In order to bridge the growing rift between "a beloved language of birth and an acquired language of immigration," (Elahi 2006, 6) the immigrant "will go over some complicated grammatical rules so as not to forget them, or repeat a few lines of poetry to sound out their metre, and he can often be heard cursing the exile that has made him forget the rules that govern the negative and possessive construct" (al-Tahawy 135).

For both Hend and Zeina, the mother and the motherland and tongue are the same, so the past becomes the present, and as consolation from the demise of the mother and mourned, which translates to this unconscious identification, "amnesia strikes and you don't even know who you are-or used to be- anymore" (al-Tahawy 171).

The Language of Food and Trans-Memory in Diana Abu Jaber's *The Language of Baklava*

A marker of difference that "separates the migrant from the host," food has traditionally played a major role in ethnic literatures "as ways of preserving tradition and creating communal spaces (Nyman 94). The dilemma of this pervasive in-betweenness that complicates the possibility of complete integration and the process of assimilation is affectively portrayed through another memoir, Diana Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* (2005), an autobiographical compilation of her immigrant family stories framed with ethnic recipes and aesthetic details of food upon which the immigrant's memory thrives. Born in Syracuse and raised in Jordan and the United States by a Jordanian father and American mother, Diana, a second-generation immigrant woman, learns early on how they are "Arab at home and American in the streets" (Abu-Jaber 2005, 5). Growing up in an Arab community in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, "the narrator hears the community's voices, stories, and memories, which she then seeks to make sense of by traveling and living in Jordan as an adult to negotiate her own bi-cultural identity" (Nyman 103). The stories are often in some way about food, "which turned out to be about something much larger: grace, difference, faith, and love" (Abu-Jaber 104). Food serves as both a source of nourishment and an instrument to gauge the immigrant's sense of belonging to multiple places at once, where "everybody is hungry for home, for family, for the old smells and

touches and tastes" (Abu-Jaber 6). These markers set the narrator apart from her American counterparts from early childhood onwards. Framed in narratives of memory and food, Abu-Jaber recalls, "American girls are always dieting, whereas the daughters of immigrant families happily enjoy their eating" (46).

In her article "Bedingfield shows that the notion of trans-memory operates at three levels, including (i) linguistic challenges, especially untranslatability, (ii) trans-generational dilemmas expressed in parents' 'fears and inhibitions,' and (iii) the idea of the return to the old country" (qtd in Nyman 107). While food is present in all three levels in *The Language of Baklava,* I focus here on the linguistic challenges, which range from the father's inability to learn 'correct' English to the daughter's learning of Arabic in Jordan. Shuttling between the United States and Jordan, Abu-Jaber notes how "America is a cold breeze that snaps [the immigrant] awake" where even the chewing gum tastes different and the hunger for the tastes of home is overbearing. Identity here is inseparable from the linguistic challenges or the memories of taste:

> Sometimes I lose track of what language I'm in and gibber between the two of them, substituting English words for Arabic and vice versa. My favorite breakfast is no longer pancakes, but bread doused with oil and *zaatar*. Just once in a while, something reminds me of my former life: a woman who laughs like my grandmother or a Jordanian cousin who smokes his cigarette the way an American cousin does. When these reminders occur, I stop and think: Am I still an American? And it confuses me, because it seems like a kind of unbecoming or rebecoming-to turn into this other Diana-pronounced Dee-ahna, a Jordanian girl who has forgotten the taste of fluffernutter sandwhiches or Hershey's bars (53).

Forbidden to speak Arabic in school because "according to Sister Helene-Therese, Arabic is the language of animals and English the language of mortals," Diana is told,

"you don't belong with them […] The sort you are belongs with the sort I am. Like belongs with like" seeing how "the world isn't meant for in-betweens" (Abu-Jaber 49). Having left behind entire countries and lifetimes at the tender age of eight, she is lead to question, "What sort of person am I? Where are my loyalties?" (AbuJaber 51). Failing to understand others and unable to make herself understood, Diana is lost until she starts communicating in Arabic, her father's language. Interestingly, she appropriates Arabic the same way she acquires English: "And one day, after weeks of running around in the streets, I am speaking Bud's language. It's the language we spoke in tiny specks and pieces back home […] Suddenly all of it is there in my head." However, it is not long before she develops distaste for this newly appropriated language upon receiving a questioning look from her mother and "doesn't want these words in [her] mouth anymore" (AbuJaber 34). Caught in this "perpetual metamorphosis that attempts to re-imagine the national or ethno-linguistic self as an in-between identity," (Elahi 2006, 6) Diana embraces her bilingualism with every Jordanian and American dish she consumes. She wishes to retrieve and hold on to her former, 'second self,' including all the 'tastes,' good or bad, that accompany it. In doing so, she convinces and is convinced that an individual need not be the bearer of a single identity:

> Come back, I want to say […] There is tea and mint here, there is sugar, there is dark bread and oil. I must have these things near me […] The second self draws close, like a wild bird, easy to startle away: It owns nothing and it wants nothing, only to see, to taste, and to describe […] We grow into the curve of what we know; for me, that was my family's rootlessness and confinement […] A reluctant Bedouin- I miss and I long for every place, every country I have ever lived […] and I never want to leave any of these places. I want to cry out, to protest: 'Why must there be only one home!' (AbuJaber 327).

Listening to her friends and family, the narrator reflects on her own linguistic identity, which points to the problem of untranslatability:

> Their voices press together and climb…What is it about? I only half understand. Even though its been a year or two since we've returned to America, it's already too long away from Arabic. English is a glass mirror, and Arabic is the silver inside the glass-hidden and essential. The languages show me different things. I hear words I know by heart-war, soldiers, the English, the Israelis, and more, words like *mishakkel:* problems, craziness, turmoil. The voices grow louder, they leap into flames (54).

Food and memories of food construct the narrator's ethnic identity that is warped and split through these passages of time and place. Abu Jaber senses how the "distance between places, the country house, and the suburbs, even between American and Jordan, start to disintegrate. Geography turns liquid. There is something in us connecting every person to every other person" (110). In comparison to the protagonists of *The American Daughter* and *Brooklyn Heights,* Zeina and Hend are not as readily confident as Diana in embracing these clashing binaries. Granted, "language as a whole assumes its importance as the mirror for the ways a culture perceives reality, identity, self, and others" (Faiq 2010, 15). Therefore, markers like the notion of accented language, though organic to the immigrant, "is frequently buried beneath personal inhibitions and doubts" (Elahi 2006, 5) as identity is translated into a new language. Zeina, for example, claims she is an American born in Baghdad when questioned about her Baghdad accent: "They turned and looked at me like I was the spokesperson for the enemy" (Kachachi 140). From this sense of guilt and site of rupture rises a transnational, bi-lingual entity, a 'second generation' immigrant who

> inhabits the national language (and through it the nation itself) in a manner as spontaneous, as 'hereditary' and as imperious […] as the native. Although the

> national language community appears as if it had always existed, it cannot script the destiny of future generations or assimilate them (Seyhan 2001, 9).

Referring back to Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds*, where language defines and is defined by the spaces that Amina comes to inhabit. I quote the passage in its entirety:

> Amina knew she was a different person in Bangla than she was English; she noticed the change every time she switched languages on the phone. She was older in Bangla, and also less fastidious […] Was there a person who existed beneath languages? That was the question. As a teenager, Amina had thought there was. She had believed that she'd been born with a soul whose thoughts were in no particular dialect, and she'd imagined that, when she married, her husband would be able to recognize this deep part of herself […] In a way, George had created her American self, and so it made sense that it was the only one he would see (Freudenberger 105).

In writing their memoirs and sharing their fraught experiences, the protagonists counter write against these destabilizing forces as a means of coping. While Kachachi's narrative emphasizes the motherland and mother tongue in the context of translation, *The Language of Baklava* shows that the functions of food, like language, both unify members of the family and separate them from mainstream American community. These narratives show how displaced immigrants employ different ways of relating to and re-membering the past. In passing through the spatial and temporal dimensions of memory and place, the protagonists write and re-write their narratives as a means of resisting against "the assimilating demands of mainstream American culture" (Nyman 112). In showing these double roles and processes of adaptation that are neither romanticized, nor exoticized, the narrator of *The Language of Baklava*, unlike that of *The American Granddaughter*, "resists an either/or choice between Western and non-Western identity (Nyman 113).

CHAPTER 4

CELEBRATING AND MOURNING DISPLACEMENT IN *BONE* AND *FUNNY IN FARSI*

Celebrating Displacement in Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi*

Contrary to Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* (2004) employs humor as its dominant narrative device to convey how its protagonist is similarly burdened with futile attempts at communicating in a foreign land. Driven to "be a worthy representative of [her] homeland," (Dumas 33) seven year old Firoozeh and her mother settle in Whittier, California, counting on her father "not only to translate the language but also translate the culture [and] to be [their] own private Rosetta Stone" (Dumas 8). However, she soon realizes that "somewhere between his thick Persian accent and his use of vocabulary found in pre-WWII British textbooks, [her] father spoke a private language" (Dumas 9) that nobody in America understood, a situation that officially appoints her as interpreter for both parents. Underlying this humorous representation is the reality of how "the most comfortable sounds and senses of a mother tongue become marginalized and impotent [and] the performativity of language becomes self-conscious and awkward" (Elahi 2006, 4). Fraught with humorous obstacles and challenges that come with adapting to a new home, the toughest one being the

foreignness of her name, Firoozeh resorts to adopting an American name and personality, shedding her former Iranian self like Zeina and communicating fluently in English to avoid the trauma of exile that manifests itself in language. Nonetheless, the trauma is unavoidable as Firoozeh reveals, "I felt like a fake. My life became one big knot, especially when friends who knew me as Julie met friends who knew me as Firoozeh" (Dumas 65). These encounters between the native and the immigrant are intrinsically problematic in that "those carrying out the acts of translating or interpreting bring with them prior knowledge (culture) learned through their own (usually mother or first) language," (Faiq 2010, 15) which shows how culture and language are inextricably intertwined with one another. Eventually inspired by the same father who spoke a different variety of English unbeknowest to Americans, yet "remained an Iranian who loved his native country but also believed in American ideals," (Dumas 121) Firoozeh believes that "people sometimes talk louder and laugh harder in their native tongue" (131). In between linguistic misnomers that lead to humorous accounts of storytelling and cultural anomalies that give birth to hatred in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, Firoozeh grows up with the best and worst of both worlds in English and Persian,

> the language of a global diaspora [which] provides a fascinating cultural-linguistic medium for the construction and reshaping of identities because it remains ambiguous enough to be both essence and performance, registering displacement both on the tragic register of loss, and the ecstatic register of creative self-fashioning (Elahi 2006, 5).

In light of this self-fashioning, Firoozeh realizes, "without my relatives, I am but a thread; together we form a colorful and elaborate Persian carpet" (Dumas 103).

Like Diana, she wholeheartedly embraces her hybrid Iranian-American identity, including the offensive stereotyping that is attached to the label. Unlike Zeina and Hend, however, Firoozeh and her family "choose to remember the kindness more than ever, knowing that relatives who immigrated to this country after the Iranian Revolution did not encounter the same America [where] these Americans felt that they knew all about Iran and its people and had no questions, just opinions" (Dumas 35). Although those displaced realize that their relationship to language is "always a matter of displacement" (Elahi 2006, 5), choosing to adopt the positive aspects of both cultures alleviate the traumatic shock of uprootedness, transforming it into a creative remaking of identity.

Mourning Displacement in *Bone*

Set largely in San Francisco's Chinatown, Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) provides ground, with its deeply melancholic underpinnings, for investigating "the constitutive role that grief [and racial melancholia] plays in racial/ethnic subject-formation" (Cheng 2011, xi), identity, and assimilation. The narrative content is thematically and structurally, with its reversed chronology and prevalent symbolism, organized around individual and national loss as experienced by the members and surrounding community of an immigrant family in Chinatown, a space that does not represent a fixed, discrete culture, but is rather "itself the very emblem of shifting demographics, languages, and populations" (Lowe 2010, 137). An impromptu proverb in Wayne Wang's film *Dim Sum* depicts the significance of space in constructing and de-constructing the immigrant's identity given that "you can take the girl out of Chinatown, but can you take the Chinatown out of the girl?" (Lowe 137). Spaces,

therefore "are spaces not only of geographical mapping but of cultural, emotional belonging*"* (Nayar 2010, 146). While spatial dimensions can be perceived in a straight line, "a temporal duration, no matter how short it is, cannot be comprehended at once. Once we are at the end of it, the beginning can no longer be perceived" (Piaget qtd in Tuan 1979, 392). Ng's *Bone* effectively explores these issues by emphasizing the unspoken and infusing silence into a plot that follows a movement back into the past. Organized in a reverse chronology "whereby each subsequent chapter takes place at a moment prior to the events of the preceding chapter," (Chang 2005, 114) *Bone's* narrative structure effectively represents the significance of re-membrance by commemorating the (national) past and keeping it alive in both the reader's and narrator's space of memory. Otherwise, repressing the past, "looking at the typical stuff," and only "looking at now" (Ng 139) limits what can be perceived. In her article "Melancholic Remains: Domestic and National Secrets in Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*" (2005), Juliana Chang writes

> Rather than unfolding into the future-locating the story in a present that replaces and is caused by the past-*Bone* disturbs this historical temporality of modernity. Instead of an inevitably arriving future, it is the past that we are propelled into, a past that remains unknown and radically open. These contrasting concepts of time correspond to Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is a process that exemplifies progress; it acknowledges loss so that the attachment to the lost object may be removed, and the subject may thus achieve closure and move on. Melancholia, in contrast, signifies an improper attachment to the past, palimpsesitcally keeping alive what should be left behind.

I argue that suffering as a result of loss becomes internalized when the lost object is not properly mourned or addressed. Repressing the past and internalizing the melancholic

silence, therefore, functions as a counter-memory, which prevents the immigrant from making progress and gaining agency. When the lost 'object' is properly mourned, however, melancholia can function as (narrative) agency, purging the adversities of disidentification, and dislocation. It is argued that this trajectory instigates a 're-membrance' (Pehkoranta 2012, 80) of the past, through which the immigrant seeks to re-establish identity and retain the notion of home with the help of destabilizing, traumatic influences such as exclusion, death, and rejection, as exemplified by the family at the center of *Bone*. In this context, it is not necessarily the melancholia per se or the 'improper attachment' to the past that hinders and stagnates progress, but rather the deferral of mourning, the fear of betraying the roots, and suppressing these emotions of suffering. In a different context that addresses assimilation through the lens of melancholia, Homi K. Bhaba proposes that the "Asian-American minority experiences of assimilation into US culture is understood as an unattainable process" (Byrne 2009, 120). Since "ideals of whiteness for Asian Americans (and other groups of color) remain unattainable, processes of assimilation are suspended, conflicted, and unresolved" (Eng et al. 2000). In that sense, "a national memory haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship" so that the Asian "is always seen as an immigrant, as the 'foreigner-within,' even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before. (Chang 2005).

Melancholia is described as an 'unresolved process,' and it is the irresolution of this process that places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework. From this particular vantage, "melancholia might be thought of as underpinning our

everyday conflicts and struggles with experiences of immigration, assimilation, and racialization" (Eng et al. 2000, 669). Although it is contended that racial melancholia is a universal experience for (traumatized) transnational individuals, an "instrumental in both racial group identification as well as individual subjectivity," (Eng et al. 2000, 668) Ng succeeds in contributing to the problem of narrating Asian American identity formation with her distinct style that is deconstructive of the narrative hierarchy. Narrated from the perspective of Leila, the eldest of the three American-born daughters, *Bone's "*melancholic domesticity," which is at the heart of the dysfunctional family unit, "subverts the interpretation of Chinese American family formation as signifying racial and national progress" (Chang 2005, 114). Leila articulates this reversal as "forward and forward and then back, back" (Ng 145), which prevents closure. Deeply rooted in the narration is the immigrant's conflicting desire to both remember and forget the past, which further agitates and haunts the victim of loss and displacement, evident in Leila's words, "What I wanted was to forget. The blame. The pressing fear. I wanted a ritual that forgave. I wanted a ritual to forget" (Ng 1993, 51). Unable to forget the past and fearful of moving on, the hybrid subject is caught in an inextricable state of in-betweenness. Following the suicide of middle daughter Ona, which "may be understood as a spectacular display of melancholia," (Chang 2005, 114) the Leong family's desire to preserve a lost object, in this case Ona's body left unassimilated and unacknowledged by the dominant society, drives them into disillusionment in the promised life, the failed American dream. Presented as "the middle girl, the in-between one," Ona was and is "a dangerous mix," unanchored (Ng 48) in the historically layered space that is Chinatown, where "you can only talk about the bare issues. In American

restaurants, the atmosphere helps [one] forget" (Ng 24). In tracing this spaced and timed self, "landscape becomes not only 'graphically visible' in space but also 'narratively visible' in time, in a field of discourses all attempting to account for human experience" (Forch-Serra 1990, 258) and memory. Ona's suicide is disclosed from the onset of the narrative: she jumps from the thirteenth floor of a building in the Nam Pin Yuen in Chinatown, which is perceived as the juxtaposition of bad luck by American standards and symbolic 'revival' by the Chinese norm. Although annihilated, her unassimilated body is not represented as absence but rather established as a silent presence, a reminder for the living throughout the novel. According to Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (2010), one internalizes the dead in normal mourning, as they are "fully assimilated into the living" (50). However, "in mourning that does not proceed normally," which is detrimental to the immigrant's trajectory of growth, "this benign internalization does not happen. Instead, there's an incorporation. The dead occupy only a part of the one who has survived; they are sectioned off, hidden in a crypt, and from the place of encryption they haunt the living" (50). This haunting, in turn, cloaks the spaces and places occupied by the living immigrant, too anxious to forget, too timid to re-member.

Unlike Ona, whose free-floating body belongs nowhere, Leila survives because regardless of the misfortune and tragedy that has befallen them, Leila is capable of considering the San Fran "our family's oldest place, our beginning place, our New China" (Ng 2). The melancholic silence that resounds in the unkempt corners of Chinatown, therefore, appears to cover over the remains of a past place and identity that the immigrant yearns to return to, but refrains from remembering in mourning for

fear of breaking the 'vertical' generational model of culture and rousing more 'bad luck,' as "a family of three girls, by Chinese standards, wasn't lucky" (Ng 1). These cultural differences are highlighted as different, and other than, white Americans. While immigrant suffering is suppressed by fear here, it is not obscured or trivialized as mere familial conflict but emphasized through doubts of belonging and the lack of a feeling of unity and identity attached to territory or space. As a consequence of Ona's suicide, Chinatown, once imagined as an analogue of home, becomes a space of the loss of freedom and agency. In that sense, Chinatown ironically serves as an ominous abode that brings about suffering, rather than a sentimental attachment or a microcosm of home and its comforts. Literally out of place, Ona's broken body demonstrates how "belonging itself is a fraught condition, for to 'belong' is to be embedded" (Nayar 2010, 142) and to be embedded is to shed and 'discolor.'

On a similar vein, Ng's circular narrative enables the past to resurface through the reverse chronology, albeit in silence. The family narrative makes it clear that it is impossible to move forward and even harder to assimilate unless the loss is properly mourned and the past is collectively re-remembered. According to Freud's definition, "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction, which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (2015, 240). He goes on to assert that "in some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition" (Freud 2015, 243). I argue that while mourning "contains the same painful frame of mind," it is a cathartic experience that helps the individual connect with the thoughts of the lost object instead of having it withdrawn from

consciousness. It also helps in that with mourning, "there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (Freud 2015, 245). It is this consciousness (of the guilt that comes with assimilating), which essentially constitutes the melancholic ethics and narrative agency, as "the melancholic content of racial abjection lies, to a greater extent, in the tragedy of being excluded from the national histories that are told, repeated, and thus kept alive" (Pehkoranta 2012, 81). This history is revived and kept alive through the catalogue of stories in Teju Cole's *Open City* and through Ona's death and Grandpa Leong's lost bones, which "reminded [Leila] to look back, to remember" (Ng 191) in the temporal organization of *Bone*.

While it seems like the family at the center of *Bone* "represents development and progress on the part of racial community (from immature 'bachelors' to mature families) and nation (from flawed democracy to fulfilled democracy)," (Chang 2005, 114) the Leong family is inscribed as "failed" (Ng 3) and incomplete. This failed domesticity, therefore, represents the failures of the nation on a larger scale and the "continued exclusion of the Chinese American subject" (Chang 114). Haunted by the past mistakes of her mother, which she is unable to fix, Leila embodies the hybrid subject through her desire to fully assimilate and make amends with a rejected past that she perceives to be a stranger like her sister Nina, whereby even the familiar becomes foreign. She claims, "I felt strange. Everything seemed foreign. I felt like we should be different people. But each time I looked up, she was the same. She was my sister" (Ng 25). Nina, countering Leila's suffering on the other hand, represents the assimilated body with no desire to remember the past or return to the old world. When reminded of "ancestral retribution" and "Confucian rites," she responds with "what ancestor?"

(Ng 120), which enrages her father, Leon. This 'racial amnesia' fuels Nina's need to escape, as she chooses to 'exile' herself from a Chinatown that is unbearably claustrophobic and layered with the history of a national past. Ironically, she is the one to return to Hong Kong. This return serves as a remembrance, which "helped Nina make up with Mah and Leon," but widens the gap between her and Leila, who "thought about our different worlds now. Nina had a whole map of China in her head; I had Chinatown…" (Ng 26). Unable to retrieve the past or truly assimilate in this state of in-betweenness, each family member takes a leave of absence and an individual migration. Ona's displaced body seeks escape in suicide, which signifies the death of assimilation; Leila's "out" is her boyfriend Mason who is more or less Americanized; Nina finds herself in a different space altogether in New York; and "disappearing is the father's way of dealing [as] he needs time away" (Ng 59). Conscious of the past, Leila, as a second generation Chinese American, is able to both stand for and against the traditional Chinese norms that conflict with her American sense of individualism. This consciousness stays true to Ng's melancholic ethics motivated by loss. Aware of how their past, their grandfathers and uncles, have always been a stranger to them, Leila believes that "family exists only because somebody has a story, and knowing the story connects us to history" (Ng 33). This awareness accounts for Leila's melancholic state of mind and why she yearns to move out of Chinatown and live with her boyfriend Mason, but is unable to leave her parents' side. Consumed by the guilt of being the 'lucky' generation, Leila's narration portrays how "everything's all turned around, all backward" and how they "lived with the ghost, the guilt" (Ng 13).

The convoluted process of assimilation is better addressed and understood in relation to "the utopian myth of the immigrant's Americanization that underlies it" (Chu 2000, 143). Abandoning the old world, the immigrant leaves behind the disordered and incomplete for a promised land of greater economic and social opportunity, which is to be achieved by remaining true to the American dream in the face of substantial difficulties portrayed in *Bone* (1993). Uncomfortable and unhappy with the American identity he has 'bought,' Leon clings to the idea of returning to China to reclaim his 'lost' Chinese identity. In that sense, Leon, like Ona, "fails to recover from his paper suicide" in a new world where "paper is blood" and the power of "textual identity" overrides the "essential or biological one" (Goellnicht 2015, 305) in a country where "paper is more precious than blood" (Ng 7).

PART III

RE-MEMBERING THE NATION IN THE NARRATIVE

"When a war ends, it does not go away," [my mother] says. "It hides inside us…Just forget!" But I do not want to do what Mother says. I want to remember.

—(Barakat 2007)

"I believe that this country was built for children"

-(Lilianet Brintrup 2000)

CHAPTER 5

A COUNTRY BUILT FOR CHILDREN: RE-MEMBERING THE CHILD MIGRANT'S AGENCY IN TRANSATIONAL CHILDRENS NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I revisit previously outlined themes of memory, remembrance, and displacement in the context of transnational children's narratives. To illustrate the significance of incorporating child migrants in a body of work that has so far been dominated by adult discourse, I quote a passage from the compilation of short autobiographical accounts in *Becoming American: Personal Essays by First Generation Immigrant Women* (2000):

> Assimilation came almost immediately to my son, who was five years old. My husband and I placed him in charge of answering all calls in English. He quickly learned how to get rid of calls from banks, offices, vendors, and other unwanted intruders. He was the tongue of the house, the role model of gestures and new ways of thinking. We looked to him as our permanent teacher…because he was an American boy who seemed to gracefully understand and accept why we were in the USA…Many times, when I think of the ease with which he adapted, I believe that this country was built for children (14).

This passage portrays how the child migrant can serve as the ideal subject with agency in narratives of displacement since children are relatively free from the restraints of histories given that they "apprehend space before time" (Piaget qtd in Tuan 1979, 392). Migration involves a movement in which "neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain," where "identities are constantly subject to mutation" by both internal and external factors (Chambers 4). Many theorists consider it crucial

to develop a framework of thinking in which the migrant figure is depicted as a subject with agency. The immigrant must be central, not marginal, to the historic processes, free to assemble, remember, speak, and rewrite his or her story--acts that are essential to the possibility of resistance in the face of colonial subjugation or neocolonial exploitation. In other words, it is essential to look at where migrants are situated in what Floya Anthias calls "their narrations of their social position" (qtd. in Schröttner 22). That being said, in order to imagine the possibility of resistance against the power politics from which terrible consequences such as displacement, gender chauvinism, racial division, and human dispositions emerge, Douglas Robinson argues that "we have to imagine a subject with agency . . . that has pragmatic rather than ontological value, but a subject nonetheless, with the ability to plan and take action . . . [and] function in the complex middle ground between absolute automatism and absolute autonomy" (xii).

In that vein, I present the literary constructions of the child migrant as the ideal subject with agency at the heart of the migrant's narrative, since we may assume that children are not inherently xenophobic but are taught by institutional practices and other ideological orientations that override not only their potential resistance to this stance, but ultimately their freedom on both a national and an individual level. I do not intend to juxtapose these constructions and representations with policy from real child migrant narratives. While, as Anna May Duane observes, "actual children raise uncomfortable questions that complicate the stance that authority is inherently oppressive and that subversion and resistance are unqualified positives" (qtd. in Flynn 251), these child protagonists illustrate that agency is particularly challenging to

interpret in texts that are highly mediated by adults and adult institutions. I emphasize the importance of the study of children's narratives to help conceptualize and shed light on how migrant child protagonists imagine nations and construct identities within particular cultural contexts and geographies of power, namely memory and nostalgic representations of the past. As they navigate the transnational spaces of biculturalism, the child migrants in these literary texts are able to see both sides and explore new sites of identity. Contradicting preconceived, adult-dominated notions of the subservient and dependent child protagonist, I argue that when subjected to the disruptive and cataclysmic experience of migration, representations of displaced children who are forced to balance multiple identities can act as counter-hegemonic subjects who do not easily or readily conform to power-political paradigms. Instead, they play the significant role of inventors of culture rather than mere appropriators or learners. Despite the undoubted importance of these perspectives, to date there has been remarkably little research on diasporic children in children's literature. This is mainly due to the fact that, as Katy Gardner puts it, "within discussions of diasporic communities . . . children are generally either over- looked, or lumped into wider questions concerning family or intergenerational relationships with scant consideration given to how the children themselves may have specific roles and perspectives" (9). Allen White, Caitríona Ní Laoire, Naomi Tyrrell, and Fina Carpena Méndez note that in growing recognition of this lack of consideration, there are now calls for research that "challenges the adult-centrism of migration research . . . and queries dominant views of migrant children as vulnerable, needy and powerless" (7).

Situated in the epoch of modern warfare, where the ambitions of totalitarian

leaders result in cultural fragmentation, exploitation, and commodification of subjugated groups, literary representations of colonized childhoods can be used to naturalize subservience and deny agency. It is therefore critical, in our current age of mass immigration and displacement, to consider alternate depictions of displaced persons. In challenging conventional portrayals, children's narratives shed light on a question posed by Karen Sánchez-Eppler as to whether "the roaming youth [is] a crusader or a truant, the laboring child valued or abused, the child reader virtuous, imaginative, or indolent" (36). This article addresses the following related questions: How does children's literature portray the effect of migration on children, both as characters and as narrators of their journeys? How do these nostalgic representations construct and deconstruct the child protagonist's identity? Guided by the framework of postcolonial theory, particularly the discourse of Jens Brockmeier and Donal A. Carbaugh's edited collection *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self, and Culture* (2001) and Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), I seek to demonstrate the significance of contextualizing literary representations of child migrants as agents capable of re-imagining the individual and collective past as they navigate both geographical and imagined terrains.

To this end, I highlight the relationship between autobiographical memory and identity before presenting a stylistic and thematic analysis of four novels. Nostalgia and memory serve as tools for fostering communication beyond borders in the face of experiences of occupation, poverty, and moving, from which sites of resistance may emerge. At this point, the reader might question the affective value of an autobiographical account or a past that is revived and re-told in a possibly misleading

or inventive manner given Michael S. Gazzaniga's aphorism that "autobiography is hopelessly inventive" (2), to which I respond by exploring narratives that depict child protagonists who are not old enough to attribute to these recollections a meaning that they never had without comparing them to later elements or experiences. Discussing postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon's conceptualizations of children and childhood, Erica Burman suggests that "children figure in complex and contested ways in colonial analyses, including the affects mobilised and exercised around them" (42). Counter-hegemonic portrayals in children's literature can therefore challenge the biased portrayals of subjugated childhoods. This analysis considers the role of child immigrants as agents capable of resisting exploitation and re-conceptualizing their identities through an autobiographical self-distancing, which grants them self-awareness in addition to an awareness of the "trouble spots" of history. It showcases how, once granted agency, child migrants can break free from the constraints of what Christine Wilkie-Stibbs calls "mapped hyperborders," extreme nationalism, and "macro- and micropolitics [that] translate into their everyday lives" (125). Such a claim does not essentialize the child protagonist, but rather considers the realities of the human condition through a positivist, interdisciplinary approach. The narratives explored are Fran Leeper Buss's *Journey of the Sparrows* (1991), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Ibtisam Barakat's *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (2007), and Edwidge Danticat's *Behind the Mountains* (2002), which are set against the contextual backgrounds of Latino, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern heritage. These literary representations portray the child as an allegory for the colonized nation dependent on the parental figure(s)--a metaphor for the colonizing power(s).

These narratives foreground the struggles of the child protagonists as they journey from repression toward forms of self-knowledge and agency that, in Chambers's words, "depend upon the recalling and re-telling of earlier fragments and traces that flare up and flash in [their] present 'moment of danger' as they come to live on in new constellations" (3). However, the road to such new constellations is a bumpy one, as it requires displaced children of migrant families to inhabit two (or more) worlds simultaneously, traverse a complex history, and learn how to navigate multiple identities on both a national and an individual level under the dominion of authority figures. While these narratives are culturally and historically variable, they converge in representing subjugated childhoods. These unlikely texts are yoked together by the very diversity of the perspectives that they offer. They provide realistic portrayals of how young people re- member and re-tell their stories to purge themselves of the ideologies imposed upon them, navigate boundaries, interrogate the motives and consequences of migration, and escape the maelstrom of internal wars, brutal regimes, escalating violence, and grinding poverty.

Journey of the Sparrows

Buss's *Journey of the Sparrows* spotlights the plight of Central American child refugees as they arrive in the United States from El Salvador jammed together inside a nailed-up crate. By depicting a corrupt state bureaucracy under which those directly affected by displacement are estranged and de-familiarized, the narrative lays bare how power operates to exclude and discriminate against certain groups, especially colonized children, who are doubly marginalized, disempowered,

excluded, and forced to flee their war-torn homelands. Some scholars argue that transnational analyses too often overlook the significance of local histories, as "the border that migrants encounter in the twenty-first century is a very different space from the border migrants encountered in previous generations," (Goya 164). This is a gap that should be taken into account given that the US-Mexico border continues to be ground zero for understanding the failures and fortunes of the nation-state in the twenty-first century" (170). The recipient of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, this novel relies heavily on symbolism and imagery as it paints a binary portrait of the hardships that merge with the hopes and dreams of the displaced Latin American child. It provides a grim look into the life of fifteen-year-old María; her older sister, Julia; their little brother, Oscar; and a boy named Tomás, all of whom must endure a torturous and terrifying journey across the US border, fleeing violence and poverty to face an uncertain future as illegal immigrants. The events unfold from María's vantage point. The novel opens with a vivid description of the dreary and brutal conditions in which the siblings are smuggled into the United States before traveling north to Chicago:

> My sister, brother, and I were pressed together in the dark crate. . . . "Immigration, *la migra*. Be still!" warned the man who was smuggling us north. . . . [Another man's] voice sounded cruel, like the voices of the government soldiers, the Guardias who had come to our house before. . . . I tried to think of my home. . . . We'd been so poor at home. Just flowers and hunger. . . . I jerked my head . . . back and forth in the crate, trying not to remember. . . . Finally I no longer moved or thought but lay silently against the other bodies. (1–7)

Interspersed throughout the novel and framed with significant symbols and metaphors are accounts of traumatic remembrances such as this one, which reflect María's

yearning for her homeland in spite of its poverty and oppression. Embedded in this traumatic longing is the need to archive the irreversible order of the events that constitute her identity. While María tries to suppress her memories, she does not bypass nostalgia because the sentiment itself--what Boym calls "the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility" (xvi)--is at the very core of this affective dimension, which she must navigate via the compass of memory in order to begin the healing process. Because María lacks historical consciousness, in place of overtly historical and political representations of El Salvador's struggle with conquests and corruption the narrative substitutes vivid, almost mythical portrayals of her homeland as she imagines and remembers it. It is worth quoting an extended passage to convey the intended somatic effect:

> I squeezed my eyes shut, despite the darkness in the crate, and tried to see the colors. The piercing blue of the sky, always with me, seemed to pull me upward, and I felt it touch my cheeks and calm my face, like my mother's hand on me when I was younger. Then I saw our land during the rainy season. The world was green, and immense white clouds shared with me their secret faces of the saints. Flocks of green and yellow parakeets soared over our heads, and in October, light pink coffee blossoms whispered their sweet smell into the clear air. Our brown- and-white rooster crowed at dawn each day, and in the evenings, sunsets wove the clothes of the Indians from Papá's stories, using yarns of red, gold, violet, and blue. Inside the church, the blue robes, yellow flowers, and the holy faces of the Virgin and the saints gave us courage (3–4).

While this slow rhythm of reflected time and the idealized pastoral scene might confuse the actual home and the imaginary one, María's dream refigures her past as a safe space in which she can comfort and fortify herself. Although this confusion is recognized as a danger of nostalgia--in extreme cases one could be driven to kill for a phantom homeland--it does not necessarily emerge as a threat or opposition to progress in the

child protagonist's mind, but rather as an empowered rebellion, or as Boym puts it, "refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition" (25). Defined by Boym as "a sentiment of loss and displacement" (xiii), for her nostalgia is also "a romance with one's own fantasy"--in this case a fantasy of returning to a childhood that was never embodied or rightfully lived. Such disillusionment creates a barrier that divides the past from the present; Christopher Lasch identifies this as a contrast between "simplicity and sophistication" whereby "nostalgia finds its purest literary expression in the convention of the pastoral. . . . The charm of pastoralism lies, of course, not in the accurate observation of country life but in the dream of childlike simplicity" (83). Enveloped in such dreamlike splendor and mysticism, this fantasy is immediately followed by a stylistic and thematic subversion, a systematic distortion achieved by a sudden, jarring shift in imagery and color:

> [I]n the tower, the bell rang out the rhythm of our lives and tolled the death of my brothers and sister. . . . the red of the sunset began to spread outward, toward me, flowing as though bleeding, and I heard the clicks as the guns went into position, and I saw people, their mouths open, screaming. . . . "Quetzal!" I suddenly cried out loud. "Quetzal! Quetzal! Help us! Help us!" I pounded the crate above my head (4).

The distorted imagery in this case hints at a point that Boym makes about the nostalgic, namely that it "desires to obliterate [violent] history and turn it into private or collective mythology" (xv). Embedded in the imagery of the quetzal, a tropical bird that represents liberty, beauty, and independence in María's mythology, is the subjugated child's need for freedom from this state of fraught citizenship and life of captivity, conditions in which the quetzal is known to perish. This symbolism also reflects the novel's title, given that María, like the sparrow, finds herself fleeing captivity. While the sparrow appears physically insignificant and dull in contrast to the colorful quetzal,

its lightweight body's ability to ascend signifies how appearance and color are irrelevant in the journey toward freedom. María's self-reflection bridges the gap of a national and historical conscious- ness. Upon arriving in Chicago, she starts questioning past events: "Back home, I heard the villagers whisper that the *norteamericanos*, the people up here, had helped our leaders hurt us, that the guns they used came from the United States. Do you believe that?" (39). The migrants' complex situation in no-man's land, where they are "not even wanted, except to do work that others wouldn't do," is foregrounded in their realization that "if we go home, we'll be killed. If we stay in Mexico, we'll starve. If we go north, we'll die" (Buss 15). Drawing from the memories of her homeland, which are laced with both historical and imagined accounts, María seeks refuge by painting rosy, romanticized narratives of an almost mythical El Salvador to her younger brother Oscar:

> The little boy's family lived in a home made of sticks . . . but the men burned the family's house. In the light of the fire, the children saw the colors from their village melt, then turn to gray . . . And so the family began their journey. . . . "Don't be afraid," the sparrow said to the children. . . . I thought about the pink, yellow, and blue buildings in the village at home, remembered the hot, burning sun, and pictured the sparrow from my story. In my mind, it perched on my shoulder and lit up all the gray buildings with color (33).

Living at the intersection of historicity and memory, where both are fragmented, María creates her own perception of the national past by painting it over with her own designated choice of colors, replacing the gray tint of oppression with the promise of a rosy future. The future that she imagines and envisions reflects Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community . . . imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). María thus comes into being within what Mark Freeman and Brockmeier call "this cultural-historical matrix that has to do with the

transformation from an essentially mythic framework of time into the domain of history" in which imagination and reality are inextricably entangled. These nostalgic representations establish that child protagonists are agents capable not just of "tracing and recounting their lives as a measure of self-understanding" (76) but also of rebelling against a warped history by imagining vibrant communities and nations in the midst of stagnant and dreary ones, where notions of captivity and violence are swept away by the majestically beautiful quetzals and the strong, free-spirited sparrows.

The stark contrast between the colors of these birds parallels María's sense of guilt for having a darker skin color than her siblings. She is convinced that she "was as dark as always. Julia is the beautiful one, Julia is older" (90). Distressed about Julia's newborn baby, whose skin turns out to be as dark as María's, she asks, "Why did she have to be so dark-skinned? She would know enough pain" (98). María's first contact with the locals in Chicago is indicative of this internalization as she exchanges a smile with someone before "looking down and wondering what she thought of [María's] darkness" (33). Still alien to her developing body, María questions whether darkness is exclusively sexualized when she is physically abused by her boss, "the white man with the white hair [who] stood behind [her] with his hands on [her shoulders]" driving her to shame (42). For Fanon, notes Burman, the white male who instills or even re-produces racism "and shows the cultural and affective transmission of colonial relations" inevitably "precipitates an existential crisis, a traumatic rupture in the relation not only between self and other, but between the now-blackened subject and his (or her) own body" (43). Upon discovering her ethnic features and darkness, María realizes that America is "no land of milk and honey," especially for girls like her (Buss

50).

Having internalized her position as an illegal migrant in the national hierarchy and as the meek darker sibling in the family, María persistently seeks guidance and approval from prominent religious figures who are intertwined with her sense of self. She struggles with this lack of agency, convinced that God is punishing her for leaving behind her mother and younger sister Teresa. However, the narrative is quick to subvert this depiction. Guided by the Quetzal Lady, a mysterious woman who appears to her in the streets of Chicago, advising her to "turn to the wise ones" instead of "talking to stiff old boards" (111), María finally seeks the help of a friend and makes money selling her drawings. Empowered by her unwavering gumption and labor, she finally overcomes her fear and embraces her full potential as the savior of the family to such an extent that she defies Julia for the first time in order to appropriate her older sister's role and trek the dangerous route back to retrieve what is left of their family. María confidently claims,

> "'You can't do it. . . . I know more English than you do. I can read and write. I'm stronger. I'm the one who should go. . . . You can't stop me. If you try to, I'll leave tonight.'... Her eyes locked into mine, searching back and forth for my weakness. But I was strong'" (109).

María migrates independently this time to prove herself capable and visible in the face of the laws that have exploited her labor. She makes it past the Immigration checkpoint before realizing that "saving Teresa wouldn't bring Papá back or always keep Oscar strong. It would have nothing to do with determining when [they'd] be together with Mamá" (154). María awakens to the realization that the migrant's journey, depicted as an unending, circular narrative of loss and sorrow, serves as a

vehicle for tracing the trajectory of a life spent seeking freedom from a forgotten past and a future with no new constellations. Yet having fulfilled her quest for self-knowledge and agency, Maria insists on re- telling her story of "a warm village with a thousand colors, [where] there lived a little sparrow who loved a little girl" (155). At this juncture where narrative and nostalgic representation merge, once again the resiliency and creative power of the child migrant emerge. In making possible the dream of freedom by re- fusing to surrender to the irreversibility of a time abundant with misfortunes, María's journey toward reconciliation with the past establishes Boym's point that "nostalgia [is] not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space" (226).

Perhaps this form of longing can best be understood through the borderland paradigm, which draws on Gloria Anzaludia's *Borderlands* especially because transnationalism's most promising utopian formations are located in the borderlands, which "inaugurates a paradigm not only for thinking about the specific conditions of the US-Mexico border but also for theorizing states of fragmented subjectivity resulting from other sites of conflict" (Goyal 158-159). In lieu with the idea of the US-Mexico borderlands as a third space between two cultures, Mary Prat Brady observes,

> Anzaluda questioned the production and maintenance of binaries, their exclusionary force, and the maxims that suggest that living with contradiction necessarily entails psychosis. Instead, she mobilized a second spatial metaphor-that of the frontera or borderlands-to insist that no on can embrace multiple contradictions and refuse the impossible effort to synthesize them fully, thus turning apparent oppositions into sources of insight and personal strength (Brady 2014).

Through an analysis of *The Journey of the Sparrows,* I have shown that although replaced by temporal dimension and nostalgia over the spatial valence, margin and

marginality still continue to play a role even in transnational children's narratives, which, at best, overturn these fragmented subjectivities to more hopeful efforts that can only stem from the clear eyed perspective and insights of displaced child agents.

Behind the Mountains

Danticat's debut novel, *Behind the Mountains*, also successfully depicts the migrant's journey. This first-person fiction is thematically similar to *Journey of the Sparrows* in that both narratives achromatize the events from the vantage point of the protagonists as they configure their identities at the intersection of past and present events. However, unlike *Journey of the Sparrows*, *Behind the Mountains* depicts the written word as the migrant's tool for acquiring agency. The narrative portrays the struggles of a contemporary Haitian American family as they undergo double displacement, first from the village of Beau Jour to the city of Port au Prince, as implied in the protagonist Celiane's later journey to Brooklyn. Set against the background of the Haitian elections, with bombs and economic pressures forcing Celiane and her family to flee the country, this novel, unlike *Journey of the Sparrows*, overtly presents the national history of the country as well as its presidential politics. Both are contained within thirteen-year-old Celiane's diary, a format that weaves together fact and fiction. She recounts events in a childlike voice, a tone that captures her innocent perception of Haitian life, as in the words "*Ti liv mwen,* my sweet little book. How wonderful to have your crisp white pages to write on" (Danticat). Separated from her father, who has been living in New York for the past five years, Celiane, like María, longs for the absent parental figure. Juxtaposed with the descriptions of hardship is a romanticized image of Celiane's fondness for her tiny mountain village with "the rainbows during sun

showers, the smell of pinewood burning, the golden-brown sap dripping into the fire" (Danticat)--another glorified, almost mythical representation of the homeland as imagined by the child protagonist. Celiane's persistent hope and innocence serve as a mechanism of self-defense against the growing awareness that she gains through writing the events around her, all of which are imprinted on her historical consciousness. She declares, "This really makes me angry" and asks, "Why must children be killed? They are not involved in politics" (Danticat). Influenced by her mother's views and the history lessons on the Battle of Independence between Haitians and French colonists, Celiane, unlike María, begins to develop a sense of national identity as she takes pride in recounting that "a hundred and ninety seven years ago, our ancestors had declared our small island a free nation" (Danticat). Similar to María in her nostalgic desire to obliterate a violent past and turn it into private or collective mythology, Celiane selectively revisits and glorifies moments in history that feed and make possible the dream of freedom. In making his family sit around the radio to listen to the unfolding political events, Celiane's father gradually inscribes in her consciousness these ideologies and myths that constitute national identity. Contrary to her introverted nature in the real world, Celiane freely speaks her mind in her diary, where a thin line divides fact from fiction, history from myth. Significant entries that are prefaced with comments such as "I must write this before I sleep because I never want to forget it as long as I live" (Danticat) validate how the child protagonist both re-members to write and writes to re- member, to gain agency and self-awareness and reconstruct the past according to recollections. As Freeman has observed, "Remembering the personal past seems to give itself over 'naturally' to narrative," and

to create that narra- tive, he continues (quoting Gazzaniga), we need "something that expands the actual facts of experience" (266). In that sense, Celiane's journal serves as a platform, a vehicle from which she can oversee, in Freeman and Brockmeier's phrase, a "transformation of an essentially mythic framework of time into the [current] domain of history," where she wishes for a more peaceful Haiti (86).

Given that "autobiographical self-construction requires self-distancing, a 'second reading' of experience" (Freeman and Brockmeier 87), Celiane's actions corroborate how re-membering and re-writing make sense of experience locating the self within history to gain accountability. This point is substantiated especially in the second half of the novel, which centers on the family's resettlement in New York. Unlike María, who is empowered by her absent father, the child figures in this narrative are stealthily conditioned to accept their lack of freedom. Lost in the Big Apple, Celiane writes, "I felt as though I was looking both for my new home as well as for myself " (Danticat). She comes to terms with how powerless she is once removed from the shadow of her family. Having internalized her role as the dependent, needy child who mirrors the nation of Haiti, Celiane never vocalizes her thoughts but internally asks, "Was America a prison that once you entered you were never allowed to leave?" (Danticat). She is the only character who readily accepts that her brother Moy at nineteen "is already a man" and not the child that he will always be to their mother. This perception allegorically represents Haiti as an undeveloped "child" nation held captive by the perceptions of its colonizers. Celiane takes note of the shift in Moy's character as he defies his authoritarian father with the words, "I am not a package. I am your son. I am a man. . . . I had to step in and take your place. . . . It has not been so easy being a boy, either"

(Danticat). Not necessarily opposed to modernity or individual responsibility, Moy embodies the historical emotion that is nostalgia, which Boym describes as "coeval with modernity itself " (xvi).

Following this pivotal point, which allegorically represents the end of the political conflict in Haiti, Celiane begins to shape her own identity. She realizes that she and Moy "were still the same people [they] have always been, the same people living in a different language" (Danticat). This discovery entails the allied point that there is no escaping the "conventional dimension" of autobiographical memory, which Freeman identifies as "part and parcel of our hermeneutical situation, that is, the fact that we are always already in the world--in the midst of language, culture, history, and 'prejudice'" that also requires a "narrative pressure" to speak the truth (268). Granted the differences of gender and age, Celiane speaks the truth and gains agency not with her voice as Moy does, but with the might of her pen. Inspired by her brother's newfound freedom, she successfully communicates with her father for the first time by writing him a letter in which she empathizes,

> We love you very much and when you were gone we missed you every day. . . . Perhaps it is harder for you to tell us now, without an ocean between us, but I know in my heart that it is no less true. . . . I know we cannot return to the past and be the way we were in Beau Jour, but whatever family meant there and whatever it means now, I know we can be that, too. . . . Five years of absence cannot hurt us. (Danticat).

This turning point represents the moment when Haiti, like Celiane, has to stand on its own as an independent nation, emerging into its own identity like a child emerging into incipient adulthood. However, the transition is imperfect as Haiti still maintains its subaltern position, and Celiane is still a child who needs a father figure. She acknowledges the Haitian saying "behind the mountains, are more mountains" by

seeing that they "had faced mountains of obstacles, but with help from family and friends seemed to have conquered them, at least for now" (Danticat). Empowered by her displacement, Celiane is compelled to immortalize her narrative in spite of those who want her to forget. She writes convincingly with newfound confidence, "Moy and I will write a book. Moy will tell our story in images. And I will tell even more of our story with words." Through nostalgic re-presentations and re-tellings, Celiane's narrative conveys the relationship, as Freeman puts it, "between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (28). The histories of the individual and of the nation converge as the process of independence.

Tasting the Sky

Barakat's *Tasting the Sky* similarly situates the child migrant in this process of independence through remembering. What distinguishes this bildungsroman from the preceding narratives is the use of flashbacks and memories that is characteristic of autobiography. Set against the background of the Palestinian city of Ramallah during the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, *Tasting the Sky* captures the harshness of life as a refugee in the Middle East. Forced to flee their home in the formerly Jordanian-held West Bank, the Barakat family migrate into Jordan and remain there as refugees for more than four months. Like Celiane, Ibtisam situates herself at the center of her narrative as she recalls the aftermath of the war from the point of view of her child self. Ibtisam's perspective provides a sympathetic glimpse into the realties of war, particularly the hardships of fleeing the shattered homeland, the separation from family, and the

passionate connection to words, inasmuch as the discovery of Alef (the first letter of the Arabic language) becomes her refuge and the language with which she pieces together the fragments of her story and her country.

Divided into three parts, the novel reflects Ibtisam's memory as she reminisces about the stages of childhood and growing up in the midst of war. The narrative opens as the protagonist, a more mature Ibtisam, is midway between Birzeit and Ramallah, at the Israeli army checkpoint. Overcome with fear and rendered speechless at the sight of a soldier, she is convinced that "if I don't see him, perhaps he won't see me" (4). Situated literally and figuratively in between fluid yet impenetrable boundaries, Ibtisam mediates between binaries, the visible and the invisible, the oppressor and the oppressed, and the colonizer and the colonized. Like Celiane and María, Ibtisam is silenced, wanting to "open [her] mouth and let [her] feelings escape like birds, let them migrate forever" (5). Oppressed by her mother, an allegory for the consummate colonizer who insists on disciplining the dependent child, Ibtisam is told to "be invisible if [she] can" and to "forget, just forget" (8, 7). But she does remember, in order to resist, gain agency, and reclaim her identity through sharing her story, albeit fearfully, with international pen pals. She writes, "I have my freedom. It is hidden in Post Office Box 34. . . . Having this box is like having a country, the size of a tiny square, all to myself. . . . Paper and ink, poems and my postbox are medicines that heal the wounds of a life without freedom. . . . But when they ask me about my childhood, suddenly I have nothing to say. It's like a curtain comes down and hides my memories" (8–11). Uprooted in a war-torn homeland where she is told to forget everything, Ibtisam hesitates to remember her childhood and reconnect with her country's past. Convinced

that “mothers and soldiers are enemies of freedom” and that she is “doubly occupied” (12), she defies her mother’s orders and reflects on her childhood after crossing the checkpoint, a metaphor for the crossing of all boundaries including that of time. Hence the child living in an occupied territory is confined within an ambivalent space, where, in Susan Stewart’s phrase, “nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions and denies the repetition’s capacity to define identity” (qtd. in Boym 31).

Ibtisam prefaces her autobiographical account by claiming that her “true journal is written with no pen and paper, but in [her] mind, with an invisible hand in the air” (12), thereby freeing herself from all impositions and constraints. While she wishes to “walk away from a world that tells [her] daily there is no place for [her]” (12), she fights to find a place for herself in the midst of a male-dominated household and more importantly, under the vigilant gaze of a strict mother keen on discipline. Her parents restrict her agency by insisting on overseeing her every move, like the snipers on top of the buildings in Ramallah: “They, too, watch how we walk and what we do. Without looking at them, we know exactly where they are” (13). Interestingly, Ibtisam’s doubly oppressed point of view, like what Boym calls the “Janus-faced . . . double-edged sword” nature of nostalgia (xviii), serves to differentiate and mediate between the “soldiers” in her own house and the soldiers at the checkpoints. As she realizes, “The soldiers are another force that separates us. Father knows that they, not he, are the ones who control every one of us. We are not free to be a family the way he wants, with him a lion in our lives. He is like a lion in the zoo. Any of us can be taken away any day” (14). The dividing dichotomies and the binaries of “we” versus “they” are tactically blurred to showcase the thin line between the oppressors--the Palestinian parent(s) and

Israeli soldiers and the oppressed migrant perpetually chained to a colonizer who stunts her independence and growth. Upon realizing that her oppressor is also oppressed, that her father "has no language for the pain and loneliness he feels," possibly "because he has lived all his life not knowing freedom" (14), Ibtisam fights to reclaim the right to her roots by rekindling her love for language and seeking to control the words that come between her and her father. The older Ibtisam claims that "the books, not he, are my references" (14), while her childhood self embraces the letter Alef and adopts "all twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet" as her own "extended family" (142). A synecdoche for the significance of education and literacy, Alef is the instrument through which Ibtisam is liberated from a past that haunts her. In that vein, the narrative subverts the depiction of the child migrant as an instrument and instead depicts the written word as a tool for shifting oneself from the margins of the overarching hierarchy into its center. When observed from the perspective of a child migrant, the desolate Palestine is presented not as a land shattered by war but as a landscape of distant towns, "each with a minaret that pointed to the sky like a pencil pointing to a page" (123). Ibtisam's "love for language and words," reflected in this simile, "takes away [her father's] authority over [her]" (14). This image evokes Boym's reference to how "the physical spaces of city ruins and construction sites, fragments and bricolages, renovations of the historical heritage and decaying concrete buildings in the International style embody nostalgic and antinostalgic visions" (xviii). María and Celiane similarly capture the desolate landscapes of El Salvador and Haiti, repainting them with innocence and hope, characteristics that children can ideally unearth at times of crisis. Their memories offer what Boym calls "reflective nostalgia," as opposed to

"restorative nostalgia"; while "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home, reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming--wistfully, ironically, desperately." In that vein, "Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt." Moreover, Boym concludes, "this typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory" (xviii). This bidirectional relationship between the nation and the individual finds the colonized nation free from all constraints in the eyes of these child protagonists who seek agency and find refuge in the imagined version of the homeland. Furthermore, children's narratives lay bare how children engage more readily in reflective nostalgia, not following "a single plot, but [exploring] ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones" as they gravitate toward details rather than embracing symbols as their adult counterparts do (Boym xviii).

Marginalized not just by the Israeli soldiers but also by her parents and a male classmate, who is Palestinian like "them," Ibtisam is convinced that "they wanted the same thing" (164) and that prejudice is prevalent both within the nation and beyond national boundaries. For Lisa Weems, this phenomenon signifies how "resistance not only is about fighting an outside oppressive force but also includes dealing with the affective dimensions of difference, conflict, and the struggle of everyday life" (qtd. in Flynn 249). Unruly and rebellious, much to her mother's dismay, Ibtisam believes that she can climb over walls and overcome barriers just as well as the boys in her class.

Empowered by this realization, "each passing day, [she] dared to go closer to the soldiers, until one afternoon [she] stood only yards away and could look into their faces" (96). Like other authoritative figures in adult-ruled institutions, the Israeli soldiers become part of her daily life.

As a result, in her re-telling, one may discern a pattern described by Boym, in which "Nostalgia charts space on time and time on space and hinders the distinction between subject and object" (xvii). The older Ibtisam recalls how driven by her childlike curiosity, she "watched them, imitated them, puzzled over their actions, and talked about them all the time" until they become "the source of [both her] anxiety and [her] entertainment" (98). In "watch[ing]" the "other" so closely for the first time, Ibtisam deems herself visible in the eyes of her oppressor, thereby removing herself from the margins. Traversing occupied territory, Ibtisam, like the other migrant protagonists, is alienated from her own land. Disregarding her mother's advice, she writes, "I want to remember" and moves into verse: "*Sinking in the sea / Of forgetfulness / I reach for the raft / Of remembering*" (16; italics in orig.). With this act of rebellion comes another realization that Boym discusses, namely that in order "to unearth the fragments of nostalgia one needs a dual archeology of memory and of place, and a dual history of illusions and of actual practices" (xvii), located along the historical trajectory of "colonized" memories.

The House on Mango Street

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* also foregrounds the significance of re-membering and re-telling the migrant's story. Situated at the center of this web of short

stories interwoven with poetry is Esperanza, a twelve-year-old Mexican American girl who stitches together the memories of growing up with a dual identity. Like Celiane's journal entries, the vignettes in *The House on Mango Street* are organized so that they begin with accounts of childhood, in this case the activities of the neighborhood's children as they go through puberty and configure their collective and individual identities in a congested Latino neighborhood in Chicago. This circular narrative begins and ends with Esperanza's perceptive portrayal of a migrant's life in perpetual movement: "We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot" (7). The protagonist's third-person perspective both blurs the boundaries and distances her from the persona of "the writer" who "wants to write stories that ignore borders between genres, between written and spoken, between highbrow literature and children's nursery rhymes, between New York and the imaginary village of Macondo, between the U.S. and Mexico" (7).

In ventriloquizing herself through Esperanza, Cisneros holds up a mirror of self-consciousness that, as Timothy Dow Adams writes of Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*, "employ[s] the classic rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, which Paul de Man describes in his . . . [1979] essay 'Autobiography as Defacement' as giving 'face to the faceless' and 'voice to the voiceless'" (15). Like María, Celiane, and Ibtisam, Esperanza showcases the displaced child protagonist's ability to empathize as she "thinks to herself in her father's language" and realizes that "in a way he was right" and "in a way she was right."

Yet when "the writer" "thinks in English, she knows she should've been on her own since eighteen" (3). English is the primary language in Cisneros's novel, where the narrator separates herself from her Spanish-speaking community and, as Regina M. Betz notes, "both author and character claim themselves as English in order to flourish as writers and independent woman" (18). Betz adds that although "Cisneros and by extension her character Esperanza are born in America, they are raised in Spanish-speaking communities. Growing up in multi-cultural Chicago, Esperanza expresses subtle distaste for her Hispanic culture by placing only English language in a positive light" and by "dwell[ing] on the differences between English and Spanish" (19).

For instance, Cisneros says, "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting" (Qtd. in Salazar 397); thus she attaches a negative connotation to her identity. *The House on Mango Street* illustrates how child migrants must configure their identity within the community's hierarchy before confronting the boundaries of the nation. By employing the persona of the writer to narrate her story of the hardships of resettlement, poverty, and racism, Esperanza grows emotionally and artistically, transforming from the little girl who "couldn't trust [her] own voice" into one who does not wish to belong but who is strong enough to say goodbye to Mango one day in a way that "sets [her] free" (110). While she dismisses her Hispanic ethnicity and identifies herself as an English-speaking American in order to thrive outside her community, Esperanza yearns for a house where she can write freely. This duality in voices suggests that her ethnic side still remains a part of her being. Like her ethnic "divergence," Betz argues, the intentional escape from Mango Street to a physical and metaphorical house of her dreams "marks the growth

of Esperanza's personal identity" and indicates that "it is only by separating herself from her Spanish native tongue and community, but by also acknowledging it as an irreplaceable part of her past and being, that she will gain the sense of belonging" (32).

Through the culmination of autobiographical memory and nostalgic yearning, Esperanza finds solace in putting her story "down on paper," much as Celiane writes in her diary, María "paints" stories of her homeland, and Ibtisam adopts the letter Alef. The fact that María recalls her story while the other two child protagonists write theirs raises the possibility of an acquired power of speech as well as illuminating the rift between literate and nonliterate children. In portraying the predicament of the child migrant who can never truly return home "for the ones left be- hind" or stay "for the ones who cannot [get] out," these narratives successfully showcase how, as Freeman and Brockmeier put it in one of this article's opening epigraphs, "historicity, autobiographical memory, and narrative identity emerge as an interlocking discursive configuration" within this interplay (79).

As the texts discussed in this article illustrate, children's narratives can employ the indispensable perspective of child migrants in order to portray them as ideal agents capable of replacing apathy with empathy. In choosing child narrators, these authors advocate for exploring issues beyond the repetitive repressive aspects in children's literature, for seeing the child's intimate nature as a tool with which one might "analyze representations of childhood and youth as ethnographic subjects, literary characters, and historical figures" to help us "complicate notions of power and agency beyond the binaries of oppression/resistance or fear/confidence that structure nostalgia and protectionism" (Weems, qtd. in Flynn 249). This article agrees with Richard Flynn,

then, that "questions of agency are . . . central in the field of childhood studies" but, as Flynn goes on to quote Sara Schwebel as noting, they make for a difficult subject to study because "the evidence of this agency is particularly difficult to locate and particularly challenging to interpret" (251)—especially against the back- drop of complex issues such as identity and migration. I have explored how children's literature utilizes autobiographical memory, nostalgia, and agency as instruments to subvert the representations of children as "passive, needy and indifferent," replacing "their accounts of themselves and their lives silenced through adultist discourses" with their own "migration decision-making and experiences" (White et al. 1).

The disparate points of view are reconciled in the works of Buss, Danticat, Barakat, and Cisneros, which assert that while nostalgia tempts us, these children's narratives repeat the unrepeatable in the face of what Boym calls a "fear of untamable longing" and make us more empathetic. Yet nostalgia is paradoxical in that "the moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding," a dilemma that is reconciled by the child protagonist's nostalgic re-presentations and fantasies of the past, which help to shape the realities of the future (xv).

Having contextualized the child migrant's predisposition to assimilate and adapt much sooner than the adult counterpart, this chapter points to "the loss of origin and childhood innocence that condemns the immigrant to exile and wandering, and the need to retrieve that paradise which is not so much a place as a memory" and the only way left to preserve human imagination lies in "its capacity to envision a new and better future by having intimations of transcendental beauty and bliss" (Kurz et al 2011,

4).The narratives explored here relocate the migrant child to the center of the marginalized nation and, reciprocally, place the marginalized nation at the center of the child's narrative, a juncture from which sites of resistance emerge. These are the sites where children are ideally re-born as subjects with agency, where they are free to re-member, re-imagine, and re-write individual and national identities in the eyes of the "other." It is this act of re-membering and re-telling that ultimately builds the raft of hope for those refugees still struggling to traverse the sea of forgetfulness and untamable longing.

CONCLUSION

"American institutions rest solely on good citizenship. They were created by people who had a background of self-government. New arrivals should be limited to our capacity to absorb them into the ranks of good citizenship. America must be kept American."
–Calvin Coolidge (1923)

Re-contextualizing the Confines of Transnational Narratives

All academic work "extends the field of consciousness" (Tuan 1977, 388). Yet, the distinction with humanistic studies is that it additionally contributes "towards self-consciousness, towards man's increasing awareness of the sources of his knowledge" (388). The methodology of interdisciplinary analyses is the means by which "we come to know the world: we know the world through sensation (feeling), perception, and conception" (Oakshott et al qtd. in Tuan, 388). "Outside the Nation, Inside the Melancholic State(s) of Mind" explores these sensations and perceptions through a reading of transnational narratives that "trigger emphatic response to literary characters" and emphasizes the importance of storytelling as catharsis (Mossner 2014, 33). In *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1994), Iain Chambers states, "Migration, together with the enunciation of cultural borders and crossings, is also deeply inscribed in the itineraries of much contemporary reasoning. For migrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a 'discontinuous state of being,' a form of picking a quarrel with where you come from" (2). Similarly, Barbara Schröttner contends, "the transgression

of national or ethnic borders is crucial for the condition of hybridity" in order to challenge existing paradigms of identity (22). The transnational texts, which I have analyzed here vary in geographical and historical context but converge in the space of an immigrant nation. These texts employ the emotional linkages of memory and melancholia as aesthetic devices to constitute a form of transnationalism and what I have termed as 'migrant's mourning.' I claim that the surplus of these narratives point to the emergence of a new genre, a counter-narrative that argues against ultimate assimilation or the glorification of displacement, attempting to make the experience of immigrants more accessible to readers and connect migrant networks, albeit fictional, with outside actors. The works of immigrant writers whose individual experiences are projected onto collective melancholic states of being situate the immigrant beyond the confines of physical or virtual spaces. This circulation, in turn, re-contextualizes the confines of home that is not necessarily a city or even a physical place, but a multi spatial (textual and intertextual) existence. Place and space are complex paradigms that are best understood when studied against the backdrop of transnational literature and memory studies that should not stop at the Holocaust. The natural world is not geometrical, which is why an encompassing framework of experiential and imagined spaces is essential in immigration studies by way of literature and the social sciences. This is especially true for experiential and conceptual spaces that are not geometrically recognized, but rather imagined or re-membered, spaces that "can only be known as resistances […] by virtue of the presence of the human body" (1979, 389) that is predisposed to mobility and movement. In that vein, "not only does migration result in remittances, but remittances also result in migration" (Pedraza qtd in Mahalingam

2006, 48). I re-address the questions that underscore this work: Does the plight of being 'placed' or ensconced in a landscape weigh heavier than being 'displaced?' Is home an elusive memory or mythical place of desire, or is it truly attainable? Is assimilation in foreign spaces and places attainable or does it entail a compromise or reduction of the other's true alterity? Broad in scope, these questions serve as that mode of discourse through which human mobility is interpreted as meaningful agency. While no singular framework can encompass displacements from the East to the West, from the global to the local, the confines of transnational narrative must be re-contextualized to include a greater variety and broader scope of writing that neither celebrates, nor disregards border crossings entirely.

In The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century (2016), Adam Kirsh claims,

> What unites all these various approaches is the insistence on the global dimension not just of contemporary experience, but of contemporary imagination. If we understand ourselves as citizens of the world, then the novel must come to grips with this cosmopolitanism […] In the process, such writers will indeed encounter the problems of representation and homogenization that criticism has been quick to point out. But such problems are not necessarily disabling; for the resourceful novelist, they can be stimulating and productive. To examine the global novel in its twenty-first-century variety is to be hopeful, if not for humanity, then at least for the capacity of fiction to reveal humanity to itself (26).

It is the scope of imagination that grants immigrants the agency to write and 'perform' their own stories regardless of where they come from or where they are headed. Herein lies the significance of centralizing the immigrant's experience without overly celebrating border crossings or romanticizing them. Ali Behdad's *A Forgetful Nation* (2005), a timely critique of immigration and nationalism, reminds us of

America's treatment of immigrants and foreigners as it has fluctuated and is fluctuating between hospitality and hostility, an ambivalence that is fundamental to the construction of national identity, which I have challenged with an array of diverse texts. Emphasizing issues of assimilation and overly celebrating border crossings, transnational literature at times does not leave any room for what I propose is the migrant's mourning, which should be centralized. I have argued that it is only by displacing ideologies of exceptionalism/nationalism and reinforcing the more distinct, yet universal notion of memory and melancholia that a future far removed from this increasingly xenophobic present can be imagined. While it is true that I have made a distinction between Eastern versus Western melancholia, or the effects of mourning in the neighborhoods of Brooklyn versus Egypt as depicted in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*, I have established that the immigrant's presence is compounded in memory and the stories we exchange, lest we forget. Transnational connections depend on shared myths and memories, bonds that are not just cemented by migration or movement, but re-created through re-membrance. I assert that there is not just a need for utopian theories of postcolonial identities so as not to succumb to the disastrous semantics of despair, but also a re-imagining of existing theories of displacement beyond the flow of powers like nationalism and colonialism that systematically trigger historical amnesia. The study of immigrant experiences in a transnational context, therefore, presents multiethnic contact zones comprised of memories these individuals are forced to forget, the language they feel compelled to suppress, and the spaces they are transposed to from the nations they were born into. In re-framing and re-contextualizing the confines of

transnational narratives, “Outside the Nation, Inside the Melancholic State(s) of Mind” subverts the image of immigrants, transforming them from inassimable bodies that pose as a threat to the nation, to figures that trigger empathic response in the face of historical phenomena and the destabilizing effects of mobility, displacement, and colonialism.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH THE AUTHORS

Below are some of the questions I have explored in this dissertation, which I have addressed to the authors of the narratives chosen. I thank Nel Freudenberger and Firoozeh Dumas for taking the time to respond to my questions via email.

Interview Questions with Nell Freudenberger, Award Winning American Novelist and Winner of the Pen/Malamud Award and the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters

1. **Do you think of yourself as a regional writer? How important do you think place and setting is in transnational American narratives given that the reference frame is no longer simply the United States?**

I don't think of myself as a regional writer. Place and setting have been important to me personally as a writer, but that impulse to describe is usually activated for me when I'm writing about an unfamiliar place. Michiko Kakutani once devastatingly wrote that my prose was boring until the action shifted somewhere other than the United States, after which it took off. (Having just finished a book that takes place entirely in the U.S., I hope that's not the case.) I think that because I've always lived in large, heterogeneous American coastal cities, I never felt a strong sense of belonging or attachment to a particular place—the thing that defines many writers I love: Alice Munro, Grace Paley, Eudora Welty. Grace Paley claimed once in an interview not to bother with description, saying of New York: "it's been described enough!" To my mind, she does describe it, but she does it through the particular voices in her stories.

Her characters' voices are the element in her work that make it regional, I think, something like in Welty's.

2. **In an interview with The Guardian, you have stated that you "find it hard to write about being American without an outsider's point of view." To what extent does your (American upbringing) and background influence your work?**

I'm sure that my particular American upbringing has everything to do with the way I see the world. I'm not sure how much it ties me to other American writers, who may have had very different upbringings in this country. Because the U.S. is in many ways so isolated from the rest of the world, interaction with other cultures was the way I first started to think about being American. That isn't true for every American writer, of course. I was fortunate enough not to have my Americanness challenged or even remarked upon until I spent significant amounts of time abroad; unfortunately in this country, that privilege depends on the way you look, your accent and other superficial signifiers.

3. **The setting (upstate New York) plays a significant role in *The Newlyweds.* However, the main protagonists initially meet on a digital platform. What do you think about these emergent spaces beyond 'borderlands?'**

I'm not at all qualified to speculate about the effects of technology or social media on human interactions. What interested me about Amina (and the woman who inspired her) was the fact that she manipulated a traditional cultural practice, arranged marriage, with the help of technology. Amina has an arranged marriage, as her parents always expected her to, but she arranges it herself on the internet—something they never could have imagined. I've always been interested in writing about accidents, and it seemed to me an accident that a middle-class girl in Dhaka might dramatically change her life because she happened to be born at a time when this new technology was available.

4. **Strung by a universal longing for the past, your stories offer a glimpse into the double lives of those oscillating between places: Do you think this sense of 'nostalgia' or re-membrance is truly uniting regardless of ethnic backgrounds, or does it differ from one geographical context to another? In other words, does the strength of such sentimental ethnic attachments vary with geographical location?**

My guess is that the strength of sentimental attachments or nostalgia for a particular place depends on loss. I think that fiction is basically the study of loss, and I often think about a line from the poet Robert Hass: "Longing, we say, because desire is full of endless distances." I've never made the kind of journey in which I would have to sacrifice my homeland, and as a consequence, I don't think I'm very attached to it. I think it's a perversity of human nature that we long most for people and places we've lost, to one degree or another. I don't think one part of the world exerts a stronger pull on the people who leave it than another, but if you are forced to leave a place permanently, or your leaving makes it difficult to return, I think that place is likely to inspire more nostalgia. I would qualify this by saying that if a place is connected in a person's mind with some kind of trauma, the nostalgic feelings are likely to be qualified or nonexistent.

5. **What do you think is the role of literature in granting agency and/or assimilation to displaced immigrants whose voices have been stifled?**

This is a hard question. I don't think that literature written by people in a dominant culture can grant agency to immigrants, or help them assimilate. White American writers who write about immigrants to this country should think hard before doing so, and I was very hesitant to write the Newlyweds from Amina's point of view. I tried to do it several other ways, but only "her" voice seemed to work. With the subplot about Kim, who helps. Amina write a personal essay in order to win a prize in a contest, I was hoping to acknowledge the fact that I had appropriated Amina's voice, and that what I was writing was only my impression of what it might have been like for her. I

do think that there is value in imagining and reading about other experiences, and that we stop doing that at our peril, especially in this country. But if you write the way I did in the Newlyweds, you have to be willing to have someone from the culture you're writing about tell you that you were wrong to do it. I don't do that kind of writing unless I can find a way to situate myself in the story, and a reason for why I'm writing it at all. In Amina's case, I was interested in the cultural expectation for daughters to please their parents, their teachers, their romantic partners—an expectation that I do think is "transnational," as you put it, if not universal. I'm not sure how well I succeeded, or justified the liberty I took in writing from Amina's point of view.

Interview Questions with Firoozeh Dumas,
New York Times Best-Selling Author

1. **Do you think of yourself as a regional writer? How important do you think is setting in transnational narratives?** Not at all. I think my stories are entirely universal and the regional aspects are quite minor. I don't think the setting matters as much as the themes.

2. **To what extent does memory and nostalgia serve as a narrative device in your work to bring into light collective and individual pasts in the fabrics of forgetful nations?** Memory and nostalgia are the main tools. I wouldn't be able to do what I do without them.

3. **Humor and language play a significant role in *Funny in Farsi* and *Laughing Without an Accent.* Would you say that the motherland and mother tongue are an indispensable part of the immigrant's life in the endless sojourn for home or does forgetting the mother tongue entail ultimate assimilation and a shedding of one's past?** Language is the key connection; I would feel totally untethered without it. There is no need to shed the language in order to assimilate. In fact, keeping the language gave me the confidence to venture forth and learn other languages. Shedding the past

entailed letting go of ways of thinking that kept me back, in particular all the limitations placed on girls. You can forget the language and still not assimilate into your new culture. I say keep the language! Keep the recipes! Keep the music! Forget the limitations! Those would be my slogans.

4. **The protagonists in your narratives revisit memories of their home countries, juxtaposing it with their current lives. Do you employ the tone of melancholia as literary catharsis? What is the role of literature in healing trauma?** I think literature serves as a reminder that we are not alone. Literature also puts the events in our lives in a bigger perspective, making it possible for the reader to see the bigger picture in her own life as well, and hopefull finding strength to move on.

5. **You navigate between languages and cultures, as does your work. The main protagonists/narrators in *Funny in Farsi* and *Laughing Without an Accent* serve as a mediator, a 'translator' for her immigrant parents. What role does language play in your work?** I love language. Every language is like a new color and I love a full paintbox! Different parts of my life have been formed by different languages and each language brings out different parts of me. I was born in Iran, raised in America, married a Frenchman and currently live in German and Greece. I am surrounded by words and accents and I love it, and I want everyone else to love it too.

6. **Strung by a common longing for the past, your stories offer a glimpse into the double lives of those oscillating between places: Do you think this sense of 'nostalgia' or re-membrance is truly uniting regardless of ethnic backgrounds, or does it differ from one geographical context to another? In other words, does memory in an Iranian context (given the history of the geographical location) differ from memory and remembrance in the U.S. context?** I think memory is memory. I don't think the fact that I am Iranian

makes that much of a difference for the reader. Most of my readers are not Iranian. They connect with my process, which is universal.

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