

**THE NON-NATIONAL SUBJECT: AMBIVALENT “AMERICANS” IN  
CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES BY WOMEN WRITERS IN THE US**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This study argues that the notion of Americanness is constructed nationally within the U.S. geographic space, as well as transnationally outside that space. The transnational perception of the U.S. nation-space and Americanness makes possible ambivalent positionings which I call non-national and through its lens I examine migrant narratives by Arab-American, Chicana, Indian-American, Pakistani-American, and Cuban-American women writers. I explain in my study that the non-national subject does not merely occupy a liminal space between home-country and host-country but rather reconfigures the implications of the “foreign” and the “domestic”; “home” and “abroad” within that interstitial space. I also argue that the non-national is a specific moment that complicates and contests singular national identifications. In that sense, my study problematizes essential concepts that are eminent to the formation of the nation: national consciousness, national time, national space, and national belonging in specific texts by Diana Abu Jaber (*The Language of Baklava*, 2005), Laila Halaby (*West of The Jordan*, 2003); Pauline Kaldas (*The Time Between Places: Stories that Weave in and out of Egypt and America*, 2010), Alia Yunis (*The Night Counter*, 2009); Bapsi Sidhwa (*An American Brat*, 2006); Cherríe Moraga (*The Last Generation*, 1993); Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Namesake*, 2003) and Cristina Garcia (*The Agüero Sisters*, 1997).

In each chapter I compare an Arab-American text to a Pakistani-American, Chicana, Indian-American, or Cuban-American text to examine the implications of the non-national in these texts. I work my analysis of the non-national through two theoretical frameworks that are interrelated: the transnational approach in American Studies, and Arab-American Studies. Thus the significance of my project is twofold. First, I aim to expand, complicate, and open new questions about the meanings and use of the term “non-national” within new Americanists’ studies. Second, I am calling attention to Arab-American literature by putting it in conversation with other literatures by minorities in the U.S.

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*In memory of my wonderful mother  
whose love was my guardian angel*

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## INTRODUCTION

The transnational turn in American Studies has been crucial in decentering the tenacious model of the nation as the basic unit of knowledge production. It traces alternative spaces and modes of belonging to collectivities not subsumed by the nation-state ... and it reconceives immigration as multidirectional movements. (Amy Kaplan 11-12)

In the presidential address to the American Studies Association in 2003, Amy Kaplan underlines the necessity of re-conceptualizing national identity in American Studies in light of a newer understanding of the U.S. and Americanness as relational concepts, constructed *nationally* within the geographical boundaries of the U.S. and *transnationally* outside of that space. This creates the possibility of the formation of problematic, sometimes paradoxical affiliations and identifications which I call non-national, and through its lens I examine narratives by Arab-American, Chicana, Indian-American, Pakistani-American, and Cuban-American women writers. My study problematizes essential concepts that are eminent to the formation of the nation: national consciousness, national time, national space, and national belonging in texts by Diana Abu Jaber (*The Language of Baklava*, 2005), Laila Halaby (*West of the Jordan*, 2003); Pauline Kaldas (*The Time between Places: Stories that Weave in and out of Egypt and America*, 2010), Alia Yunis (*The Night Counter*, 2009); Bapsi Sidhwa (*An American Brat*, 2006); Cherríe Moraga (*The Last Generation*, 1993); Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Namesake*, 2003) and Cristina Garcia (*The Agüero Sisters*, 1997). I work my analysis of the non-national through two theoretical frameworks that are interrelated: the transnational approach in American Studies, and Arab-American Studies.

*The Non-national in American Studies*

The nation and the national have been central concepts in American Studies and recently problematized and critiqued by new Americanist scholars.<sup>1</sup> New Americanist scholars such as Donald Pease, Amy Kaplan, Annette Kolodny, Myra Jehlen, Janice Radway, and John Carlos Rowe, to name only a few, critique national narratives that developed out of the consensus politics of the post-Cold War era that universalized notions of the nation-state and national subject. As counter narratives to national narratives, what Pease in *National Identities* (1992) calls “postnational narratives” contest these social arrangements that “produced national identities by way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities, such as race, class, and gender” (3).

Postnational narratives rewrite the genealogy of national identity in American Studies to locate it within social movements and historical events. By way of doing this, new Americanists re-historicize literary texts written during the decades of “literary nationalism”<sup>2</sup>—the mid nineteenth century—that emphasized notions of manifest destiny, expansion, exceptional, and isolation. New Americanists’ re-readings of texts from these decades restore the correlation between the political context and literary texts in nineteenth-century America. For example, John Carlos Rowe in his re-reading of Herman Melville’s *Typee*—in “Postnationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies” (2002)—explores “the relationship between domestic policies of southern slave-holding

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Crew is one of the first to describe—and resist—the “new Americanists” who brought a change to the field of American Studies in his article “Whose American Renaissance” in (1988) (qtd. in Pease *National Identities* 1).

<sup>2</sup> Rob Wilson uses this description, in “Techno-euphoria and the discourse of the American sublime,” to refer to the expansionist decades of manifest destiny (1835-1855) (206).

and the extraterritorial [outside the North American continent] policies of U.S. colonization that began as early as the war of 1812” (256). Making this connection between the U.S. domestic and foreign policies situates U.S. history of slavery within its colonial past. In a different sense, Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease in *Cultures of United States Imperialism* link the domestic and the foreign to foreground “the multiple histories of continental and overseas expansions, conquest, conflict, and resistance which have shaped the cultures of the United States, and the cultures of those it has dominated within and beyond its geopolitical boundaries” (4). Along the same lines, in what they describe as “hemispheric” American Studies, Caroline Levander and Robert Levine take a “comparativist approach to consider the overarching shape and texture of American literary and cultural history.” Hemispheric Studies moves beyond the nation to “consider regions, areas, and diasporan affiliations that exist apart from or in conflicted relation to the nation” (2).

Within these studies, the term “non-national” has been used in different ways. Levander and Levine have used it to criticize how narratives by African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos/Chicanos have been excluded from American Studies because they do not fit in a nation-based teleological schema (1). Radway in “What’s in a Name” (2002) uses the term “non-national” as part of her argument to change the name of the field from American Studies to either “United States Studies” or “Society for Intercultural Studies” (60, 64). She holds that these alternative names expand a narrow definition of America/Americanness beyond the geographical boundaries of the U.S. and contest a coherent nationalism. By the same token, Russ Castronovo uses the term to argue for a different pedagogy in American Studies

programs and to critique the current pedagogy which emphasizes U.S.-centrism in American Studies. Non-national pedagogy, as Castronovo holds, encourages an understanding of the U.S. within a wider context than the narrow understanding of the U.S. as a nation-state. In two scholarly studies, Lori McNulty—in *Contagious Poetics: Rumor, Ritual and Resistance in Zora Neale Hurston's "Tell My Horse"* (1999)—and Chandan Reddy—in *The Migrant Present: Alienage, Race and the Politics of Black Internationalism, 1898-1953* (2004) use “non-national” to describe, respectively, color-based affiliations between blacks in Haiti and Saint Domingue and blacks in the African continent, and the racialization of African-American and Chinese-American laborers. Lori McNulty examines voodoo communities as sites of resistance in colonial Haiti and Saint Domingue and argues that it is a community-based movement rather than a nation-based one. It is a form of collectivity which is outside and before the Eurocentric tradition of forming collectivities/communities predicated on a notion of the nation. It is rather a ritual of resistance among displaced West African slaves. Chandan Reddy discusses the material conditions of black and Chinese laborers at the time of the U.S. expanding its imperial policies in Asia and the Caribbean—in the mid nineteenth century—that rendered blacks and Asians the “outsiders within” (10). In that sense, the “non-national” is “a terrain of intersecting racial histories of colonialism, imperialism, displacement and migration” (16). Still in the Americas, but outside the U.S., Patricia Eugenia Varas, in her study, uses the term “non-national” to describe literature in Ecuador that has its roots in Europe. Varas concludes that Ecuadorian literature that is rooted in Europe is non-national. On a wider scale, Pascal Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* (2007) uses “non-national” to describe literature written outside its country of origin (e.g. Gertrude

Stein writing about the U.S. while in France) or literature claimed to be universal, appealing to all other cultures (e.g. William Shakespeare).

In my project, I examine the perception of America and Americanness from inside the U.S. as well as from outside it. The incidents in the literary texts I include in my study take place in the U.S. and also refer to or take place in pre-colonial Mexico, Cuba, Jordan, the West Bank, India, and Pakistan. They reveal the intertwined political and cultural histories of the U.S., Central America, the Arab region, and South Asia. Despite their different histories in the U.S., the groups of writers and texts in my study share the themes of migration and problematic belongings. I deliberately chose to read these texts together because they are about mobility and migrations to the U.S. in the late twentieth century in relation to women of color. I analyze these texts through the vantage point of the non-national, which, I argue, lies at the intersection of the national and the transnational. Each of the minority groups that I include in my study has been excluded or subordinated either as “wet backs” and illegal immigrants (Mexicans/Latinos (as)), as potential terrorists and aliens (Arabs), or as simply people of color (Indians and Pakistanis). The Americanness of these groups is problematic and raises the following question: do they belong to the U.S., or are they part of the U.S without belonging to it<sup>3</sup>? That is to say, Americanness in these texts is relationally defined. Rather than emphasizing the consensus of the American experience, its unity and its homogeneity, the emphasis in these texts is on dissensus and difference. Therefore, like the new Americanists, these writers perceive the U.S. within a transnational context instead of

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<sup>3</sup> I borrow here Justice Edward Douglass White’s definition of “foreign in a domestic sense” when he explained how Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines are not incorporated into the U.S. after their acquisition from Spain. They belong to, but are not part of the U.S. (qtd. in Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall 1).

defining the U.S. in terms of its exceptionalism and isolationism. In the texts I analyze in my study, Americanness is defined not solely by virtue of national belonging but also along the lines of gender and sexuality, racial, class, religious, and/or ethnic affiliations.

As I mentioned earlier, in my analysis I take into consideration the intertwined history of the U.S. and Mexico, Cuba, the Arab region, India, and Pakistan. This range of intertwined relationships is described by Radway as “intricate interdependencies” (“What is in a Name”<sup>10</sup>) that rethink nationalism in light of racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual identities, affiliations, and/or communities, and consequently complicate and re-configure the relationship between “home” and “abroad”, “domestic” and “foreign”.

The non-national does not mean having no nation or lack of national affiliations but means problematic national identifications that entail ambivalence and paradox. By non-national subject, I do not mean a subject merely occupying a liminal space between home-country and host-country but rather a subject re-configuring implications of “here” and “there” within that interstitial space. That is to say, in my discussion of the non-national I problematize the meanings of a liminal subject as simply being “here” and “there” or, alternately, being neither “here” nor “there”. My study complicates occupying an interstitial space between belonging and un-belonging in migrant narratives. In the texts I discuss in my study, there are two moments that help produce the non-national. These are the moment the main characters realize they do not belong fully as Americans in the U.S. and the moment they realize that they are no longer perceived as natives of their countries of origin. The non-national moment is not intrinsic to a specific racial group; it rather has multiple meanings, not only among the texts I discuss here but even within the same minority group.

My reading of contemporary narratives by Arab-American, Chicana, South Asian-American and Cuban-American women writers from the vantage point of an American national space and identity that are constructed within and without the geographical boundaries of the U.S. situates my study within the new Americanist studies. By the aid of these narratives I will expand the meaning and use of the term non-national. By the same token, by putting Arab-American women's writing in conversation with that by Chicana, South Asian-American and Cuban-American women writers, I propose Arab-American literature as a potential field that can expand new Americanists' areas of research. Despite the different directions that new Americanist studies has taken—border, hemispheric, or transnational—it still has a lacuna in its lack of reference to Arab-American literature.

*Arab-Americans, Who They Are*

Michael Suleiman in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (1999) observes that the term “‘Arab Americans’ refers to immigrants to North America from the Arabic-speaking countries<sup>4</sup> of the Middle East and their descendants” (1). Suleiman explains that there have been two waves of Arab migrants, first from 1870 to World War II; and the second from World War II to the present (1). Wars and political changes in the Arab region, specifically since 1948 and the expulsion of Palestinians have impelled Palestinians to move between several countries in the region and have contributed to the rise of Arab migrants to the U.S., especially from the Palestinian occupied territories,

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<sup>4</sup> Arabic-speaking countries include North African countries (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya); West Asian countries (Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Syria, Palestinian occupied territories, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen); Mauritania (in West Africa); and Somalia and Djibouti (in Northeast Africa).

Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon (these countries before the British and French colonization were also known as Greater Syria region<sup>5</sup>). Furthermore, the series of wars with Israel that took place in Egypt and Syria in 1956, 1967, and 1973 and their outcomes that led to losing more Palestinian territories and/or more occupation have brought more migrants from Egypt in addition to the migrants from the Greater Syria region. Although the early Arab migrants belong to religious minorities—Christians and Druze—later waves of Arab migrants were from different Muslim sects (Sunni and Shi’a). Like Suleiman’s study, most Arab-American Studies in the 1980s and 1990s—especially Eric Hooglund’s *Crossing the Waters* (1986); Alixa Naff’s *Becoming American* (1993) and *The Arab Americans* (1999); and Evelyn Shakir’s *Bint Arab* (1997)—chronicle the history of Arabs’ migration to the U.S. to point out their battles for naturalization and citizenship, the challenge of their being accepted as fellow Americans, as well as the different perceptions of Arab Americans before and after World Wars I and II. Whereas before, World War I Arab Americans thought of themselves as “sojourners”, as Suleiman points out (9), staying temporarily in the U.S. to send money to their native countries, after World War II, the political changes that transpired in the Arab region impelled many Arab migrants to claim a new homeland in the U.S. without severing political and national ties with their native countries. These changes were also reflected in how Arab migrants in the U.S. perceive themselves. Because most of the early Arab migrants were from the Greater Syria region, they perceived their identity as Syrians and their affiliations were based on belonging to a certain clan, village, or sect rather than nation.

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<sup>5</sup> For the history of Greater Syria I rely on *Greater Syria* by Daniel Pipes (1990). Pipes explains that before World War I, Greater Syria “refers to a region stretching from the borders of Turkey to those of Egypt, from the edge of Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea” (2). After World War I, Greater Syria was divided into Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine (3).

As Suleiman puts it, these identities were “amorphous,” “indeterminate,” and “shifting from one orientation to another” (7). Nevertheless, as Suleiman elaborates, after the 1967 setback, they perceive their identities as *Arab* to indicate their national and political ties with the Arab region, rather than as solely Syrian (10).

The term Arab Americans<sup>6</sup>, though it includes Arabic-speaking countries, excludes countries such as Turkey and Iran which share Islam as the major religion of their people with the Arab region. Joanna Kadi in *Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* underscores the limitations of the term Arab Americans: though it affirms affiliations with Arab region, it does not link Arab Americans to larger groups of people of color (Asians and Africans). Furthermore, Kadi points out that using alternative terms such as “people of West Asian/North African descent” and “people of Middle Eastern/North African heritage” are problematic as well. Although the term “people of West Asian/North African descent” includes Middle Eastern and Arab countries, it “will once again make Arabs invisible”. In addition, though the term “people of Middle Eastern/North African heritage” includes Iranis, Armanis, and Turks, the term Middle East conjures up the legacy of Western colonizers who have “named the region only as it related to their particular world view” (xviii-xix). Tracing the history of the term, Wael Hassan in *Immigrant Narratives* (2011) points out that the naming of that region as *Middle East* dates back to 1903 when “British and French colonialism drew [the] map [of the region]” (4). The term Arab American replaced the term Syrian, as I have mentioned earlier; it was used more after 1967, when

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<sup>6</sup> The website [bintjbeil.com](http://bintjbeil.com), setup by Arab American community in Detroit, Michigan, has a section entitled, 100 Questions and Answers about Arab Americans. It explains that a hyphen is used when “Arab-American” is used as adjective, but without a hyphen when referring to someone who is Arab American.

the first Association for Arab-American University Graduates was established. Tanyss Ludescher argues in “From Nostalgia to Critique” (2006) that the Lebanese-Israeli war in 1982, the first Palestinian uprising (Intifada) in 1987, and the Gulf War in 1991 further *politicized* the Arab-American community to express their concerns about these political events. In my dissertation, I use the term Arab American to refer to migrants from Arabic-speaking countries, and I select writers from West Asia (Jordan, the West Bank, and Lebanon), and from North Africa (Egypt). Texts by Arab-American writers in my dissertation refer to the political changes that have taken place in the region since the times when the region was under the Ottoman colonization and British mandates to the more contemporary history of the Arab-Israeli wars. Nevertheless, these texts do not suggest or imply that Arab Americans are homogeneous, but rather reflect the diversity of Arab Americans. For example, Egyptians have cultural roots in the Mediterranean, the African continent, and the Arab region, a diverse heritage that has been strategically used for several political reasons and ideologies. Different political incidents have changed the cultural affiliations of the country. For instance, Gamal Abdel Nasser, after dethroning the monarchy in Egypt valorized a pan-Arab identity for Egypt and Egyptians. Anwar El-Saddat, who followed Nasser, adopted an Islamic identity that is open to the West. Furthermore, what has contributed to the fluidity of the Egyptian identity is that Egypt has the biggest Christian population in the Middle East. Hence, identifying Egyptians with one single monolithic identity, either as Arab or as Muslim, effaces its diverse cultural legacy. In a similar sense, “Arab-American” identities are defined along shifting political and cultural views, as well as shifting ideologies. Suleiman underlines that Arab Americans “think of themselves in *different* ways at *different* times or in *different*

contexts, and they argue ... for the use of more descriptive categories that recognize different aspects of their background, culture, or physical appearance” (15).

Arab-American literature can be traced to the early twentieth century. In her genealogical study of Arab-American literature, “Arab-American Literature” (1996), Evelyn Shakir distinguishes three phases in Arab-American literature. The early phase before World War I started in the early twentieth century and was pioneered by Ameen Rihani who published the first Arab-American novel, *The Book of Khaled* in 1911 and Khalil Gibran who published his widely known book *The Prophet* in 1923. Rihani and Gibran, as Shakir points out, were the founders of “Mahjar” literary movement in Arabic literature. They initially wrote in Arabic and their works were known in their home countries. They write about the Ottoman colonization, social and political conditions in their home country, introducing European Romantic themes in Arabic literature. Rihani, in his novels, as Shakir points out, serves as “mediator” between Arab and American societies (5). Building on Shakir, Wael Hassan suggests that Arab immigrant writers play a “transnational role ... as interpreters and mediators between their homeland and adoptive countries” (xii). The second generation of Arab-American writers, unlike the first generation, are American-born writers who were known between the 1930s and 1960s. This generation of writers such as Vance Bourjaily and William Peter Blatty have a complex relation to their countries of origin. Literary works such as *Confessions of a Spent Youth* by Bourjaily and *Which Way to Mecca, Jack* by Blatty, both published in the 1960s, depict Lebanese American characters who do not perceive themselves as either Lebanese or Arab. The third phase of Arab-American literature emerged after 1967; that was also the time when Arab migrants began to identify themselves as “Arabs” rather

than “Syrians”. Hence, the term “Arab” was used as a “statement of solidarity” as Shakir suggests (9), and many post-1967 literary writings were characterized by their “political impulse,” as Nabil Alawi puts it in “Arab American Poets: The Politics of Exclusion and Assimilation” (53). This generation of Arab-American writers includes Naomi Shihab Nye, Elmaz Abinader, Sam Hazo, and Sam Hamod, as well more contemporary writers such as Diana Abu Jaber, Khaled Mattawa, Joseph Geha, Ramzi Salti, Rabeh Alammdin, and Mohja Kahf. This generation of writers stresses the heterogeneity of Arab Americans in order to dismantle anti-Arab racism in the U.S. In this respect, Shakir argues that “[m]ost recently, with ethnicity in fashion at home and Arabs in trouble abroad, Arab Americans have been entering into spirited political debate with one another and with the public at large” (15). I, therefore, situate the Arab-American literary texts in my dissertation within this genealogy to extend Shakir’s framework and I argue that contemporary Arab-American literature, especially that written in the last decade with its emphasis on the close relationship between “home” and “abroad,” reconfigures both terms and consequently invites the reader to rethink notions of belonging and national affiliations within the U.S. and the Arab region.

My critical analysis of Arab-American literature is not only in tune with what Shakir proposes but also aims to contribute to Arab-American literary criticism by suggesting multiple theoretical frameworks and concepts to interpret fiction by Arab Americans writers. My project resonates with what Steven Salaita suggests in *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007) about promoting Arab-American literary criticism: it needs “to be decentered from provincial notions of ethnic atavism and situated instead in comprehensive interethnic dynamics” (6). As I will show

in more detail in the coming chapters, my critical analysis of Arab-American texts is comparative, reading Arab-American fiction as well as Chicana, South-Asian, and Caribbean writers. Nevertheless, my approach is not simply comparative to point out similarities among the writers I discuss here, but rather *contrapuntal*, which I borrow from Edward Said. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Said holds that a contrapuntal reading interprets “imperialism as a matter... of interdependent histories, overlapping domains,” “reading from the center and the peripheries” (259). My contrapuntal reading is attentive to U.S. imperialism and its critique. In other words, contrapuntal reading is a simultaneous awareness of the discourse of imperialism and what it suppresses. The significance of contrapuntal reading to my study is also that it is an expanded reading that goes beyond one single group or experience. As I mentioned earlier, the texts I discuss in my study share themes of migrations and negotiating belonging; together they offer a broader perspective to analyze notions of the nation, national consciousness, national time, national space and national belonging. In this way, I use a contrapuntal reading to re-interpret one of the notions essential to the formation of the nation, namely, “imagined community,” which Benedict Anderson theorizes in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1986). I, therefore, aim at de-centralizing monolithic national identifications. In this regard, I am building on the transnational in American Studies which Amy Kaplan proposes in “Violent Belongings”: “we must understand how ‘America’ is a relational, a *comparative* concept” (11 emphasis added). This new understanding of *America* takes in consideration how meanings of *America* have changed historically in different international contexts; it “traces alternatives spaces and modes of belonging to collectivities not subsumed by the nation-state... and it

reconceives immigration as multidirectional movements” (11-12). My contribution to Arab-American literary criticism is novel in the sense that I do not focus only on common themes in Arab-American fiction or unfold and criticize the stereotype of Arabs in the U.S. that Arab-American fiction always aims at shattering. I rather interpret Arab-American literary texts within a wider context to re-nuance notions of Americanness in American Studies. In this way, my study differs from Salaita’s critical study of Arab-American literature. Salaita’s book, *Arab American Literary Fictions*, is the first book-length critical study of Arab-American literature. In his first book as well as his second critical book, *Modern Arab-American Fiction: A Reader’s Guide* (2011), Salaita focuses on common themes in Arab-American literature. He suggests a study of “thematic archetypes” in Arab-American fiction and observes that specific themes recur in most fiction by Arab-American writers such as, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Islamophobia, intersections of race, gender, and national belonging (7-8). Salaita’s critical analysis of Arab-American literature is twofold. First, he addresses the absence of scholarly critical studies on Arab-American literature. Second, he situates Arab-American Studies within American Studies or Ethnic Studies rather than Middle Eastern Studies. His reasoning is that “Arab Americans are fundamentally of the United States” and hence “Arab American Studies is best developed within the framework of various American landscapes” (*Modern* 6). Resonating with Salaita is Hassan’s study of immigrant narratives by Arab-American writers. As I mentioned earlier, Hassan observes that Arab-American literature *mediates* between the writers’ home and host countries, and hence it is “translational literature” (28). In this regard, Hassan examines a range of texts that specifically address the perceptions of Arabs as orientals to conclude that some writers

re-emphasize the East-West binary, while other writers question and criticize this dichotomy. Hassan points out that for Arab migrants, writing in English has always been “a politically charged translational task, heavily invested in discourses of cultural identity” (29). By the same token, Hassan uses the theory of minor literature by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to interpret three aspects of Arab immigrant writings: defamiliarizing English, the correlation between individual concerns and collective concerns, and the political nature of Arab-American literature (5-6).

*Arab-American Women and Women of Color?*

The implications of the non-national in my dissertation are not only tied to meanings of the national in American Studies but are also intertwined with the place of the national and the transnational in narratives by and about women of color. I have chosen to read together different groups of women of color rather than focusing on only one group because they have different histories in the U.S. and hence different perceptions of the U.S. nation-state, specifically U.S. colonial and imperial history in Central America and the Caribbean Islands, as well as its more contemporary history as the only superpower since the end of the cold war. My choice of texts raises the following question: can we think transnationally about narratives by Arab-American, Chicana, South Asian-American, and Cuban-American women writers, rather than as only literatures produced within the U.S.? In other words, can we situate these narratives within the larger context of transnational political, cultural, and economic relations that have created new forms of alliances and communities as well as asymmetries and inequalities?

To unpack this question, I start with questioning the category “women of color” *per se*. This category is problematic in the sense that it can be too inclusive or too exclusive. On the one hand, encompassing all women based on sharing a “common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications,” as Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, elides differences among different groups of women, and hence can be too inclusive (qtd in Stanley 2). On the other hand, limiting the category “women of color” to women who physiognomically have a non-white color can be essentialist and hence too exclusive. This category is even more problematic for Arab-American women. This is because, though racially white<sup>7</sup>, they are culturally colored. In other words, Arab-Americans share with other minorities of color in the U.S. stereotypical representations as well as systematic erasures from American public discourse. However, unlike other groups of color, Arabs are not perceived as a minority, but rather as the “invisible racial/ethnic group”, as Nadine Naber puts it in “Ambiguous Insiders” (37), or at best as “foreigners” as Nada Elia points out in “Islamophobia” (156). That is to say, Arab-American women might fit uneasily in the category “women of color”.

My doubts resonate with the theoretical concerns that Sandra Soto and Robyn Wiegman raise in “Where in the Transnational World are U.S. Women of Color” (2005) and *Object Lessons* (2012) respectively, but from different positions. On the one hand, Wiegman explains that the overemphasis on the experience of black women inadvertently repeats white feminisms’ exclusions by “similarly subordinating some women’s

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<sup>7</sup> According to the U.S. census of population, people from the Middle East and North Africa are considered “white.” As stated by the U.S. Census Bureau “white” is a “person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.” (quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long\_68178). Mathew Frye Jacobson gives a historical account of the constructedness of Caucasian “whites” and non-Caucasian “whites” in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. He gives different examples of immigrants from some parts of Europe, Jews, and Syrians who were naturalized by court in early twentieth century as “white persons” (237-43).

experiences in favor of those of others” (248). On the other hand, Soto raises a different concern. She holds that the category, “women of color,” “[has] come to be cited... as an undifferentiated monolithic category...reifying the homogenizing categories [it] had initially sought to critique” (121). She also points out the limited presence of feminism by American women of color in transnational feminist critiques. In her later article, “Transnational Knowledge Projects and Failing Racial Etiquette” (2008), Soto discusses the example of transnational scholarship in Chicano/a Studies that focuses on how transnational capitalism inscribes the racial formations of Latinos/as in the U.S. In this regard, Soto, citing Juan Poblete, underlines the colonial history of the U.S. in Mexico and Puerto Rico; and the significant role American imperialism has played in bringing more migrants from Latin America to the United States (69). I share Wiegman’s and Soto’s concerns and I add that despite acknowledging Arab-American communities and the increasing interest in including Arab-American women writers in anthologies about women of color<sup>8</sup>, yet there is a need for more work to be done on Arab-American narratives from a transnational perspective. Thus, I expand Soto’s discussion of the imperial history of the U.S. in Central America, specifically in chapter two, where I analyze *West of the Jordan* by Laila Halaby and *The Last Generation* by Cherríe Moraga. I interpret both texts through the lens of the political and economic relationships between the U.S. and the Palestinian occupied territories and the U.S. and Mexico.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples for these anthologies are: *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (Ella Shohat, 2001); *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* (Daisy Hernandez et al, 2002); *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating, 2002); *The Color of Violence: The Incite!* (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2006).

The ambiguous positionality of Arab-American women as “not quite white” and “not quite women of color”—as Rabab Abdulhadi and Evelyn Alsultany point out in their introduction to *Arab and Arab-American feminisms* (xxxiv)—raises another concern. That is: the reception of Arab-American writers in general and women writers in particular. Hassan points out that, specifically, narratives of Arab women’s oppression “are eagerly received” (36). On the one hand, these narratives re-emphasize the stereotype of Arab women as intrinsically victims of Arab male tyranny; on the other hand, they justify U.S. policies of dominating the Arab region (or more largely the Middle East) to save Arab women<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Abdulhadi and Alsultany hold that within the U.S. feminists’ discourse, Arab-American feminists feel the pressure of responding to and correcting stereotypes of the veil, the harem, and female circumcision (xxxvi). That is to say, mainstream feminist discourse limits the parameters of Arab-American feminist writings to address the *orientalist* stereotypes of Arab women rather than conceptualize and theorize their lived experiences, and hence pre-empts Arab-American feminist discourse.

Another factor that has contributed to the marginalization of Arab-American writings is the assumption that Arab-American writing is necessarily anti-Israel as well as the misrecognition of the Arab-Israeli conflict as Arab-Jewish conflict<sup>10</sup>. This reasoning finds support in the conflation of Arabs and Muslims and the stereotypical perception of Muslims as terrorists or potential terrorists. Hassan cites the example of Gregory

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<sup>9</sup> A relevant example in this context is Laura Bush’s weekly presidential address in November 2001 in which she underscores: “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes” (qtd in Ann Brodsky 116).

<sup>10</sup> This conflation has itself marginalized Arab-Jewish feminists such as Ella Habiba Shohat (an Iraqi-Israeli) and Kyla Wazana Tompkins (a Jewish Moroccan) because they are Arabs and non-Ashkenazi Jews.

Orfalea's memoir that was denied publication because of the writer's Arab identity, even though it portrays intermarriages between Muslims and Jews in 1936 in Palestine (36-7).

In my dissertation, by pairing Arab-American women writers with Chicana, South Asian American, and Cuban American women writers, my goal is to re-nuance the perception of the nation and the national from their point of view vis-à-vis other minority groups in the U.S. To that end, I analyze texts in my dissertation through the critical lens of what Kyla Wazana Tompkins, in "History's Traces," calls "strategic reading—and writing—practices" (126). Tompkins explains that strategic reading and writing practices are tied to "transnational politics of location"; they take "displacement as a starting point for affiliation and alliance with other displaced peoples" (137). These affiliations and alliances do not lie in one singular community. Building on Tompkins I elucidate strategies that emerge in the narratives I analyze in the following chapters, which evoke what I call the *non-national*.

### *Non-national Sites*

I start by re-configuring Anderson's concept of "imagined communities". This re-configuration emanates from my analysis of the formation of ethnic/national communities in *The Language of Baklava* by Diana Abu Jaber and in *An American Brat* by Bapsi Sidhwa. I chose these two texts specifically because they both focus on coming to America and/or growing up in America themes. Ethnic/national loyalties in both narratives are formed within and outside the geographical boundaries of the U.S. In both texts the Althusserian moment of "interpellation," in which the individual is hailed as a subject is interrupted because of the ethnic/religious identities of the main characters:

Diana in *The Language of Baklava* and Feroza in *An American Brat*. I argue that an interrupted moment of interpellation is a non-national moment in which the national consciousness of the subject is re-shaped. The understanding of national consciousness that emerges in my analysis of *The Language of Baklava* and *An American Brat*, is not bounded by essentialist notions of national belonging or ethnic identification. In *The Language of Baklava* food is a trope around which communities are formed as well as negotiated to symbolically stand for situated affiliations rather than the national or ethnic. In a similar sense, in *An American Brat* the moments of estrangement which the main character encounters in both Pakistan and the U.S. re-nuance the definition of national consciousness and create a new sense of imagined community formed through estrangement rather than from shared feelings of belonging.

In chapters Two and Three I propose a new corollary to understand Anderson's "imagined community," namely, if communities are not nation-centered and formed across geographical territories, the time and space that the non-national subject occupies are not nation-centered either. In the second chapter I discuss *West of the Jordan* by Laila Halaby and *The Last Generation* by Cherríe Moraga to elucidate meanings of non-national temporality in the former and queer temporality in the latter. The lineage of a national identity transmitted from parents to children is problematic in both narratives because of displacements and migrations caused by occupation (as in *West of the Jordan*) or conquest (as in *The Last Generation*). Both texts bring together discrepant geographies and histories and make them comparable—the U.S. and West Bank in the former, and the U.S. and pre-colonial America in the latter—and hence complicate the perception of U.S. national time. By the same token, I argue that non-national and queer temporalities make

it possible to re-tell the story of the U.S. nation-state from the perspectives of the displaced and the exiled.

To that end I build on Ernst Bloch's theory of "contemporaneous non-contemporaneity," in *Heritages of Our Time* (1935) and on Julia Kristeva's concept of "monumental temporality" in "Women's Time" (1981). I situate non-national time in Bloch's concept "contemporaneous non-contemporaneity," to argue that non-national time is a paradoxical, interstitial time. Non-national time is formed specifically at a conflictual point, in which the main character, Hala, in *West of the Jordan* has a contentious relationship with her father that unfolds paradoxical moments in which she looks back at her life in Jordan to recollect past stories and looks forward to her future in the U.S. Hence, the narrative structure of *West of the Jordan* has a paradoxical temporality in which the progression of the story line is interrupted by cycles of recollecting stories from Jordan and the West Bank that in turn interrupt her 'coming to America' story. The communities imagined in these stories are not only imagined transnationally but they are also dispersed between two different time zones—U.S. and the Arab region—hence interrupting linear understandings of national time. Similarly, I argue that Moraga's revisited story of Aztlán, "Queer Aztlán", is rooted in queer temporality. Building on Kristeva's monumental temporality which she defines as "infinite," I suggest that Moraga's queer temporality puts queer motherhood at the center to replace the conventional symbolism of the nation as a patriarchal heteronormative national family, and consequently displaces the patriarchal genealogy of the nation.

My third chapter elaborates the notion of "imagined (transnational) communities" and I argue that the notion of homeland as a national space is re-imagined to unfold a

problematic perception of the U.S. as a new homeland in migrant narratives. I draw on Doreen Massey's distinction between space and place in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) to analyze the re-configuration of home(land) as a non-national space in *The Time between Places* by Pauline Kaldas and *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. Both texts problematize the conventional perception of home-country as solely a place of roots and belonging, because characters traveling between their home-countries and the U.S. do not feel that they fully belong to either their home-countries or to their host-country. Massey holds that *space* is a dynamic notion formed and shaped by social relations and *place* is a particular moment in these relations. Although both texts portray the allure of the American dream, my discussion reveals that there is a perpetual tension between feelings of settlement and un-settlement in both the U.S. and the native countries of the main characters. Within these stories of migration there is a particular moment of dislocation, which I call non-national, evoked by feelings of un-belonging and unfulfilling social relations. The conventional perception of the U.S. as the land of freedom and opportunities is problematized in *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* when some of the main characters in each story are successful while others are unable to find their place in the land of opportunities.

In chapter Four I re-open the theoretical debates about national allegories initiated by Fredric Jameson in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986). Jameson observes that literatures produced in third world nations in the post-independence era are open-ended and allegorical. This narrative form is tied to the political crises that many third world nations underwent: specifically their disappointment in fulfilling the national goals of independence because of a dominating, expanding

capitalism. My discussion of *The Agüero Sisters* by Cristina García and *The Night Counter* by Alia Yunis in this chapter suggests that while these narratives may reflect national and political concerns, such as socialism in Cuba, global capitalism, and the aftermath of 9/11 in the U.S., these concerns are not geographically bounded within a singular nation or founded in a first-world—third-world binary, but rather unfold an intertwined political and economic history between the U.S. and Cuba (as in *The Agüero Sisters*) or the U.S. and the Arab region (as in *The Night Counter*).

I draw on Jameson's theory of national allegory, especially his definition of allegory as a "signifying process" that generates complex meanings and messages. However, I extend Jameson's theory by problematizing the notion of the nation in his argument. In both *The Agüero Sisters* and *The Night Counter*, economic relations between the U.S. and the Caribbean Islands and the Arab region transcend geographical boundaries, yet they are uneven and complicate the relationship between individuals and their national affiliations. The non-national as it emerges in my study contests singular identifications and opens up new forms of political affiliations, yet it does not lend itself to allegory. Therefore, I suggest that *The Agüero Sisters* and *The Night Counter* can be read as national allegories, reflecting national concerns, and can be also read as transnational allegories, specifically in light of global capitalism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Non-national Subject in *The Language of Baklava* and *An American Brat***

In the different notions of Americanness that circulated at the turn of the twentieth century, there were tensions between maintaining ethnic identifications; valorizing individualism and liberty as eminent elements of an American national consciousness; as well as a third definition of America as a trans-nationality. James Bryce holds, in *The American Commonwealth* (1888), that “individualism, the love of enterprise, and the pride in personal freedom, have been deemed by Americans not only their choicest, but their peculiar and exclusive possessions” (419-20). Individualism and freedom are not only fundamental in definitions of Americanism but also the core principles of national identification that unite Americans, as opposed to unity based on shared ethnic/religious roots<sup>11</sup>. However, Randolph Bourne, in “Trans-national America” (1916), argues against narrowing the conception of Americanness to the Anglo-Saxon traditions. Bourne holds that “America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors” (121). The escalation of different waves of immigrants to the U.S. from the late nineteenth century heightened the feeling of urgency to find an ideal that could function as the ground for American national identification; individualism served that goal. It is only by adopting ideals of personal freedom that the immigrant is Americanized and will “possess *the national consciousness of an American*” as Louis Brandeis maintains (640 emphasis added). To that end, Woodrow Wilson in his speech to naturalized citizens in 1915 underlined that “[a] man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group

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<sup>11</sup> Theodore Roosevelt held that ethnic loyalties, if they are necessary for some groups, should be only subordinate to the higher unity of the nation (qtd in Yehoshua Arieli 187).

in America *has not yet become an American*” (American Presidency Project, emphasis added). These contrary perceptions of Americanness imply that there are two kinds of consciousness and identifications that are set in contrast: one is national and inclusive, based on the ideal of individualism, which unites *all* Americans; and one is ethnic and exclusive, relying on group belonging, and hence is deemed not quite American. However, “ethnic” is not a self-identity, it is rather a political construction that has developed historically to grant, or conversely, deny specific ethnic groups their political rights based on the binary of white and not-white. Ronald Takaki in “Reflections on Racial Patterns in America” (2008) critically examines the racial patterns in the U.S. since the eighteenth century that have denied non-white individuals (for example blacks, Native-Americans, and non-white immigrants) rights of citizenship and political franchise. In other words, the term “ethnic” has been used to signify non-white individuals and to position ethnic identifications in opposition to national identifications. *The Language of Baklava* (by Diana Abu-Jaber) and *An American Brat* (by Bapsi Sidhwa) revolve around the struggle the female protagonist in each text undergoes, growing up in America, trying to become “American” or to be accepted as an “American” and acknowledging her “ethnic” loyalties.

Diana in *The Language of Baklava* is born in the U.S.—her father is Jordanian<sup>12</sup> and her mother is American—yet wants to define herself as Jordanian and American rather than only American or only Jordanian. Her counterpart in *An American Brat*, Feroza, is sent by her parents in Pakistan to visit the U.S. Feroza wants to perceive herself as Parsee and Pakistani as well as American. These desired terms of self-

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<sup>12</sup> I will clarify later in my discussion the complexity of the racial category of people from the Middle East as white.

definition are contradistinctive to the definition of Americanness founded on discarding group belongings or ethnic identifications. In Woodrow Wilson's definition of the American national consciousness, Diana and Feroza have *not yet* become American because they maintain their "ethnic"/religious belonging. However, both characters do not see a contradiction between adopting ideals of individualism and personal freedom on the one hand and belonging to their ethnic/religious groups. I define the *not yet* in light of Slavoj Žižek's theory of "transubstantiation" in "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" (1997). Žižek holds that "transubstantiation" is a process by means of which the tension between an individual's primary "particular ethnic identity" and his/her "universal identity as a member of a Nation-State is surpassed", when the individual recognizes "the substance of [his/her] being in a secondary community [Nation-State]" and cuts links with his/her "primordial 'organic' community [family and local community]" (42, 41). Building on the tension that Žižek describes, I argue that the *not yet* is a disrupted, incomplete process of shifting from the "particular ethnic identity" to the "universal identity as a member of a Nation-State." *Not yet* American is also a cumulative identity that is formed by constantly deferring singular identifications; hence challenges both ethnic self-enclosures and essentialist national belongings. I expand my definition of the *not yet* to argue that the *not yet* American is the non-national subject. The non-national subject's affiliations and identifications are beyond geographical boundaries of nation-state, and are constructed and severed situationally. This subject's sense of belonging is formed at the disjuncture between the ideal of individualism (eminent to American national identification) and ethnic/religious group belonging. This disjuncture creates sites of ambivalence in which I position the struggles of both Diana in

*The Language of Baklava* and *Feroza* in *An American Brat* with notions of choice and individualism.

Ideals of individualism and freedom of choice are central to American liberalism that underwrites the image of an exceptional America. Bonnie Honig in *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001) points out the problematic status of the immigrant in the exceptionalist accounts of American democracy, as both re-invigorating American exceptionalism, and also posing a threat to its core values of choice, individualism, just economy, and sense of community. Along the same lines, Ali Behdad in “Nationalism and Immigration to the United States” (1997) underlines the nation’s ambivalence towards immigrants: while the discourse of exceptionalism valorizes the U.S. as a nation of immigrants, the immigrants are perceived as the other to be controlled and normalized. I therefore argue that non-national consciousness (formed at the disjuncture between ideals of individualism and group belonging) allows a sense of “imagined community” that is not nation-centered and is not confined to the geographical boundaries of one nation (U.S., Jordan, or Pakistan). In other words, I recall Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism” (1991) to venture a re-definition of his central concept to be “imagined (transnational) communities”.

Anderson holds that the formations of modern national communities (which he traces to the early nineteenth century) are “boundary-oriented and horizontal” (15). I repurpose Bourne’s definition of America’s trans-nationality as “a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors” to argue that communities and comradeships imagined in *The Language of Baklava* and in *An*

*American Brat*, are neither boundary-oriented nor are they necessarily horizontal; they are formed in both Jordan and the U.S. (as in *The Language of Baklava*) or in both Pakistan and the U.S. (as in *An American Brat*). The communities and the affiliations that are formed in *The Language of Baklava* are formed around food. That is to say, food plays the same role that the novel or newspaper has played in enabling people who do not know each other to imagine the presence of other individuals like themselves but not necessarily residing in the same territories. In my analysis of *The Language of Baklava* food is a trope and a sign which I read semiotically to examine the communities that are formed around it. Likewise, the communities that are formed in *An American Brat* are not confined within geographical boundaries but rather formed around religious, political, and/or state ideologies<sup>13</sup> (such as individualism, capitalism, and Islamization) in Pakistan and in the U.S. I use the term “ideology” in Raymond Williams’ sense: a set of ideas internalized by individuals. As I will clarify in my analysis of *An American Brat*, different ideologies create different senses of belonging and un-belonging.

Imagined (transnational) communities are transnational in two senses: they are formed beyond the geographical boundaries of a single nation and are not nation-centered. These new formations are evoked by disruptive moments which I term non-national because they problematize the individual’s sense of national identification.

Abu-Jaber’s book is a “food memoir,” as she describes it in an interview with Robin Field (224). This culinary narrative takes food as the primary means adopted by the characters to define their national-ethnic identities in both Jordan and the U.S. *The*

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<sup>13</sup> Tracing the genealogy of the term, Raymond Williams holds in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) that “ideology” has been used to mean “the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interest, or more broadly, from a definite class or group” and is used paradoxically to mean false consciousness (because it serves the interests of a specific class or group) (155-6).

*Language of Baklava* is the memoir of the writer, who grows up in the U.S.; her father is Jordanian and her mother is American. Her father struggles with homesickness, perceives himself as only Jordanian (never defines himself as American for the major part of the memoir); demands that his daughters should define themselves in the same way; and cooks to keep alive the Jordanian heritage in himself, and by extension in his daughters. *An American Brat* is another growing up story of a Pakistani girl—Feroza—who is sent to the U.S by her parents after the Islamic regime took over in Pakistan in 1978 and imposed its rigid rules on all Pakistanis, specially women, whether they were Muslims or not. Feroza is a Parsee who has to encounter the hardships of living under strict Islamic laws as well as the difficulties of adjusting to a different culture in the U.S. That is to say, *An American Brat* interweaves the growing-up plot with the coming-to-America narrative. Rosemary Marangoly George, in “But that Was in Another Country: Girlhood and the Contemporary ‘Coming to America’ Narrative” (1998) holds that coming-of-age/going-to-America stories “partake of and propagate a developmental narrative in which Americanization and the very American ideal of individualization plays a vital part in shaping and establishing the full adult” (140). The developmental story in *The Language of Baklava* and *An American Brat* differs from the generic coming to America story because the female protagonist grows up in both the U.S. and Jordan (Diana) or the U.S. and Pakistan (Feroza). Therefore, I argue that Diana and Feroza undergo a complex process of *interpellation*<sup>14</sup> which shapes their relationship to the U.S. and to Jordan/Pakistan. On the one hand, the parents of each protagonist emphasize a cultural

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<sup>14</sup> I am referring here to Louis Althusseur’s definition of interpellation, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), as a process of hailing/addressing individuals as subjects (170).

difference between the U.S. and their parents' native country<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, Diana and Feroza struggle with “domestic Americanization,” which is “making *one* people [American] out of many” as Donald Pease holds in “C.L.R. James Moby-Dick and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies” (2002, 151 emphasis added). In other words, both protagonists do not resolve the tension between their “particular ethnic identity” and their “universal identity as member[s] of a Nation-State.” The non-national consciousness of the *not yet* American subject is shaped by maneuvering, challenging, and/or succumbing to the First World-Third World binary and “domestic Americanization”.

### *The Language of Baklava*

As I mentioned earlier, *The Language of Baklava* is a “food memoir”. Published in 2005, it has not received much critical attention, unlike the novel that preceded it in 2003—*Crescent*—where food is also the central metaphor. Carol Bardenstein in “Beyond Univocal Baklava: Deconstructing Food-as-Ethnicity and the Ideology of Homeland in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *The Language of Baklava*” (2010) attributes this lack of critical interest in Abu-Jaber’s text to its genre, namely, cookbook-memoir<sup>16</sup>. Bardenstein holds that this genre is associated with nostalgia and is conservative in its representation of ethnicity in the U.S. context (162). Most reviews of the memoir seem to validate Bardenstein’s point of view, especially the ones that underline one or two of the

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<sup>15</sup> Diana’s experience is somewhat different from Feroza’s. Diana’s mother is American and does not appear to force her daughters to be more “American” than Jordanian. In contrast, Diana’s father insists that his daughters are and should be Arabs/Jordanian.

<sup>16</sup> In “Transmissions Interrupted: Reconfiguring Food, Memory, and Gender in the Cookbook-Memoirs of Middle Eastern Exiles” (2002), Bardenstein explains that there are subgenres and variations to the cookbook memoir genre: memoirs with recipes, culinary memoirs, nostalgic cookbooks (357). I consider Abu-Jaber’s food memoir a subgenre of cookbook-memoir.

following themes: emphasizing the importance of food as a key connection to homeland especially in immigrant literature; seeking identity through the foods of childhood; bridging the difference between the Arab and the American worlds by means of food; and bearing the pressure of being a good Arab girl<sup>17</sup>. Though these reviews point out the central presence of food as a metaphor to convey the main argument(s) in the book—homesickness and bridging cultural differences—they do not address the complexity of interpreting food as a cultural habit that goes beyond the simple correlation between “what we eat” and “who we are”; as Donna Gabaccia reminds us, “[i]f we are what we eat, who are we?” (9)

Gabaccia, a historian of American eating habits, in her often cited study about specific diets and different historical periods in the U.S.—*We are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (2000)—concludes that colonial America and early years of U.S. independence are more hybrid in culinary terms unlike the more conservative nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also shows that “American” social values were perpetuated in the era of American national cuisine (between 1870s and 1920s) which witnessed movements by prohibitionists and food reformers aimed at creating an American national cuisine and Americanizing the new immigrants by rejecting foreign ways of eating habits and cooking. That era, as Gabaccia explains, emphasized the puritan New England cuisine as the “scientific, modern, and *patriotic diet*” (122 emphasis added) “necessary for *national strength and health*” (124 emphasis added) and therefore, appropriate for “*American citizens*” (125 emphasis added). The direct correlation between Puritan New England/white cuisine, patriotism and national

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<sup>17</sup> I am referring specifically to reviews by Devon Thomas, Pat Bangs, Gillian Engberg, Joy Harris.

strength on the one hand, and American citizenship on the other hand, resonates with patterns of citizenship in the U.S. that are founded on the white and not-white binary. As a corollary, foreign foodways were unhealthy, unmodern, unpatriotic, and by extension un-American. Though these movements waned and American cuisine was re-defined regionally—rather than nationally—to reflect the U.S. “culinary cultural pluralism”—as Gabaccia puts it (123)—a distinction still remains between “American” cuisine and “ethnic” cuisine. Categorizing the foodways of immigrant groups as “ethnic” is an arbitrary assumption of an ethnic unity that does not really exist. The inference of this arbitrary assumption is that there are two cuisines in the U.S.: one defined regionally, not ethnically marked, and the other defined “ethnically”, pertaining to particular groups. Whereas in the former the “regional” does not overshadow “national” belonging, in the latter, the “ethnic” and the “national” problematize each other.

Is naturalization into American citizenship “empowerment or marginalization” (221)? R. Radhakrishnan raises this concern in the context of the Indian diaspora in the U.S., and I see it as relevant to the Arab-American community as well. He points out that naturalization makes the ethnic subject subordinate to its nationalized American status and the “ethnic” becomes a mere qualifier rather than a cultural or political identity (221-2). The ethnic-racial-national identity of the Arab-American community in the U.S. complicates Radhakrishnan’s question even more. Racially categorized as “white,” Arab-Americans, however, do not have “legal position within the spectrum of minority cultures from which [they] can legally articulate [their] communal concerns about discrimination,” as Carol Fadda-Conrey says in “Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*” (2006, 188).

Categorized as “non-European whites,” Arab-Americans are not perceived as the privileged “white” race. Lisa Suhair Majaj in “Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race” (2000) describes Arab Americans’ racial categorization as “honorary” whiteness (320). “Non-European white” is not a specific qualifier for Arab Americans. This renders Arab Americans “the Most Invisibles of the Invisibles,” as Joanna Kadi holds in *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994, xix) and as Abu-Jaber in an interview citing Edward Said says: “the Arab was the last ethnicity that it was okay to denigrate and to be openly racist about” (219). One can infer that the national status of Arab-Americans as “Americans” is almost overlooked because of their Arab heritage and always conflated with being Muslims<sup>18</sup>, although not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims come from the Arab countries. Food and restaurants are other means of defining Arab-Americans, especially known for dishes like tabouleh, hummus, baba ghanouj, and falafel. However, restaurants that primarily offer these dishes are not categorized as specifically Arab-American. They are, rather, categorized as “Middle Eastern,” an equally ambiguous category for two reasons. First, it overlooks cultural diversity within the Arab region. The aforementioned list of dishes is more specific to the Levant region rather than to the Arab-Gulf states (like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, or United Arab Emirates) or to the Arab countries in North Africa (like Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). Second, the category “Middle East” includes a wide range of countries that do not share Arabic as the native tongue, like Turkey, Israel, and Iran.

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<sup>18</sup> Based on a survey conducted in 2002 by the Arab American Institute in Washington DC., the religious affiliations of Arab Americans are as follows: 35% are Roman/Eastern Catholic, 18% are Eastern Orthodox, 10% are Protestant, 24% are Muslim, and 13% are of other religions or have no affiliations ([www.aaiusa.org/arab-americans/22/demographics](http://www.aaiusa.org/arab-americans/22/demographics)).

I argue that food and recipes in Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* interrupt the assimilation narrative; reveal the complexity of defining Arab Americans' ethnic-national identity through cooking as improvisation; and produce a *not yet* American subject. The complexity of the ethnic-national identity of an Arab-American subject and its interpellation in the U.S. is right there on the very first page of Abu-Jaber's memoir. Diana's features are a mix of a "white" American mother (Irish, German, Swiss, Dutch) and an Arab father (Jordanian). Diana, mostly, takes after her mother: light skin/eye/hair color. In addition, her first name—Diana—is quite familiar in the U.S. and is easily pronounced. However, her last name—Abu-Jaber—sounds odd, compared to her "western" features and her first name. In the opening scene of the memoir, Diana is a child hosted, among others, in a TV show for children. The broadcaster, having difficulties pronouncing what seems to him "foreign" names—such as Farouq, Ibtisam, Jaipur, Matussem—feels relieved when he comes across Diana's name. However, the broadcaster "crashes into" Diana's last name, trying to articulate it: "Ub-abb-yuh-yoo-joo-jee-buh-ha-ree-rah ..." (sic 3). When asked, "what kind of a last name is that," Diana sarcastically answers: "'*English, you silly!*' into his microphone" (3). This first scene of (mis)communication between Diana and the broadcaster and the laughter it evokes sets the tone for the rest of the memoir regarding her entry as a subject in both the U.S. and Jordan. Diana's dilemma throughout the memoir is whether she is perceived as "ethnic" or "American" (in the U.S.) or, conversely, as "American" or "Jordanian" (in Jordan). Althusser holds that interpellation is central to the subject *of* ideology (i.e. a subject that is hailed into ideology) who hence becomes "subject *to* ideology, having to obey its rules and laws and behave as that ideology dictates" (135 emphasis added). Ideology functions

through four apparatuses, which Althusser calls “realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (143). These apparatuses are: family, education, religion, and mass media (143). “The Brown DeMone”<sup>19</sup> show that airs on national television and hosts and hails Diana, Farouq, Ibtisam, Jaipur, Matussem is in this scene an ideological apparatus that assumes acknowledgment of diversity as the foundation of “Americanness.” Nevertheless, the broadcaster’s confusion about names that do not sound *English* unfolds a counter-ideology, interpellating Diana as a subject who belongs to a “particular ethnic identity.” Both Diana and the broadcaster in this scene are trapped in a moment of incomplete interpellation in which the conversation stops: he is confused by her last name, and she is surprised at his confusion. However, the scene concludes with the broadcaster and Diana laughing, “but at two *different* jokes” (4 emphasis added). Un-understood, Diana is the *not yet* American subject who throughout the memoir will feel an outsider both in the U.S. and in Jordan. Every time Diana leaves the U.S. for Jordan or Jordan for the U.S., there are multiple scenes in which she occupies a place as an American or a Jordanian subject but *not yet*.

In this first scene Diana’s features and first name categorize her as—literally—“white,” while her last name does not. Therefore, while Diana sees herself to be like the rest of the children in the show, the broadcaster sees her cultural belonging(s) to be more problematic. On the one hand, although Diana’s first name sounds familiar to the broadcaster, her last name does not. On the other hand, Diana does not see her name or herself to be in any way different from “Farouq, Ibtisam, Jaipur, Matussem”. Diana,

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<sup>19</sup> “The Brown DeMone” is a comic cartoon show that was popular in the 1960s and known by its vampire-like character.

saying that her name is “English” into the microphone on national TV is like an announcement made to emphasize belonging and ask for an acknowledgment of that belonging. It stands for bringing Arab-Americans into the public sphere and making them visible in the mainstream Anglo-American media discourse. It is also an attempt to “naturalize” Arab-Americans into American citizenship which can work either to help acknowledge the presence of Arab-Americans who are both Americans and Arabs (living among other Americans in the U.S.) or paradoxically “minoritize” the ethnic/racial identity of Arabs. However, if Arabs are “white” but not “precisely white”—as Diana’s grandmother describes Diana’s father (90)—the “white” becomes a problematic signifier for Arab Americans; it does not empower Arabs to be perceived as a white community because their racial identity is overlooked and conflated with Islam. Diana, a mix of a not “precisely white” Jordanian father and a white European-American mother is not a happy hybrid mix. When Diana’s father re-locates the whole family in Jordan, Diana starts to feel her mother’s and her own difference from the rest of the family members. She says: “I sense a deep weirdness about my own existence in the world. How could these two people have ever found each other? How could I have ever come to be?” (64) Diana starts questioning her mixed heritage only when the family moves to Jordan. Diana’s confusion about where she belongs in this scene stands in contrast to her assertive answer to the broadcaster in the first page of the memoir about her last name or to her mother when she describes herself as simply born in Syracuse: “I was born into the Syracuse world. I have no inkling of what other worlds are like” (20). What Diana experiences as a child in Syracuse is her father’s feelings of homesickness and nostalgia, not hers. Therefore, when her mother tells her that they are moving to live in Jordan, Diana simply asks:

“Don’t we live in America?” (30) This means that Diana has a first hand experience of belonging to the U.S. and a second hand experience (through her father) of belonging to Jordan.

The opening of the memoir diverges from the coming-of-age/coming to America plot which usually begins with “a brief chapter that dramatically cuts between origin (the past country of childhood) and final destination [present location in the U.S.]”, as George points out (144). In Diana’s story the “past country of childhood” is the U.S. rather than Jordan and the final destination can be the U.S. or Jordan. Diana’s father, Bud, insists that his daughters will *grow up* in Jordan, unlike his acquaintances who are keen that their children grow up and become “American.” Diana grows up in both Jordan and the U.S. Thus, the linearity of the growing-up/coming-to-American story is disrupted. Another twist in the growing-up story in *The Language of Baklava* is that the first chapter in the memoir is entitled “Raising an Arab Father in America”. That is to say, the memoir is not only about Diana growing up in the U.S./Jordan but also about her father Bud who throughout the novel pursues the American Dream of success and having his own restaurant. On his way back from Jordan to the U.S., Bud admits to an old friend that he is “American” and “is no longer—not entirely—Jordanian” (326). Like Diana’s story there is no linear progression of Bud’s story. Bud pursues his dream restaurant in both the U.S. and Jordan. An origin point and a past country of childhood are mediated in the memoir through Bud’s nostalgia and memories about Jordan. Bud’s story is mirrored in the chapter entitled “Immigrants’ Kids”. The whole chapter is dedicated to fathers who are haunted by the past and insist on teaching their children that they are not “Americans”. Olga’s father, Basilovich, Russian-Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish, struggles with

severe homesickness, is unable to overcome his feelings of loss, and ultimately commits suicide. Bud's story with no chapter of origin and Basilovich's sad story of maladjustment are glimpses of resistance to the generic coming-to-America story that perpetuates the notion of the U.S. as the final destination.

Growing up in Jordan, for Diana, is complex because it is mediated by her perception of herself as "American." This complexity is encountered in two incidents: one in Jordan, at age seven, when she eats "native"/Jordanian food but tries with her mother to cook pancakes, and in a second incident when she is thirteen and bakes baklava with her aunt Aya (from Jordan) in the U.S.

Echoing the first scene of Diana's interpellation in the U.S. where her last name cannot be pronounced because it does not sound American/English, in Jordan, Diana's first name is confusing to some of her acquaintances and is pronounced "dee-ahna"(58) because "Diana" does not sound Arabic. Her acquaintances in Jordan attempt to make her first name sound more Arabic; this is, implicitly, an attempt to make Diana a "native" of Jordan. In contrast, Bennett (Diana's British friend in Jordan) attempts to *de-nativize/de-Jordanize* her by scolding her for eating "native [Jordanian] food." Bennett tells Diana: "You don't *belong* with them! You *know* that. You *know* that. The sort you are *belongs* with the sort I am. Like *belongs* with like. ... No in-betweens. The world isn't meant for in-betweens, it isn't done. You *know* that." Bennett impatiently sums up his argument with Diana, repeating the same idea: "They *belong* with their own kind. You with me, they with them....No in-betweens. It's not allowed" (49 emphasis added). Bennett draws an affiliation with Diana on the basis of his perception of himself and of Diana as non-natives of Jordan: they do not belong to Jordan and therefore have a shared knowledge of

their un-belonging. At the other end of the spectrum, Munira—the Bedouin woman who works for Diana’s family in Jordan—says to Diana: “this is [Jordan] where you *belong*” (67 emphasis added). Bennett believes Diana should not belong to Jordan by virtue of her features that are closer to his British features than most Jordanians, and Munira believes that Diana should belong to Jordan by virtue of having a Jordanian father. Though Diana starts to acquire some Jordanian Arabic and adjust to Jordanian food—both are acquired through habituation—she craves and misses American ice cream, pancakes, and hot chocolate.

Attempting to cook pancakes in Jordan, Diana and her mother improvise with some ingredients, replacing syrup with honey. Though the ingredients are different, “it doesn’t matter too much because we call them pancakes and they look a bit like pancakes.” Munira likes eating them and the neighbors like calling them “burnt American flat food” and eat them side by side with local accompaniments: sesame seeds, fragrant mint, yogurt, cheese, olives, tomatoes, eggs, and pistachios (38). Thus, a new dish comes into existence—burnt American flat bread—and new affiliations are formed around that dish among the “American” mother, the Jordanian “natives,” and the “in-between” daughter. Adding the marker “burnt” to signify the peculiar taste of this new dish *ethnicizes* American pancakes in Jordan by giving them a dark color. This incident blurs the demarcations between “ethnic” and “American” as absolute signifiers with intrinsic meanings attached to them. Thus Diana wonders: “Am I still an American? ... it seems like a kind of unbecoming or rebecoming” (58). The question about Diana’s belonging has changed to a question of “unbecoming or rebecoming.” Is it un-becoming “American” or re-becoming “ethnic” or “American” in Jordan? As I have pointed out

earlier, according to Woodrow Wilson, possessing an American national consciousness is incongruent with belonging to national groups. Abu-Jaber's text re-writes this formula by destabilizing the notion of "origin" as a core principle of belonging to national groups so that belonging to a national group and becoming American are not antithetical. In *The Language of Baklava*, Abu-Jaber gives up the notion of "origin" in favor of "becoming". Becoming implies transformation. In actuality, Jordan the land of origin for Jordanian "native" food is a land and a name constructed over different periods of time in history. Before it was created in 1921 it was called "Transjordan." "There were Assyrians, Nabataeans, Romans, Alexander the so-called Great, Persians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamluks, Turks... you can't imagine the comings and goings!" (128) Diana's father insists that despite these numerous comings and goings there have always been the same families of Bedouins living in Jordan. However, ironically, Bedouins are known to be travelers, moving from one place to another, settling and re-settling. In the same sense, the *authentically* Arab dessert—baklava—does not have a place of origin. It can be Turkish (191), Greek (185) or Arab (189). In short, "everyone invented baklava" (189). At the age of thirteen, back in the U.S., Diana is rebellious, she wants to identify herself and her family as "Americans" and hence rejects "Arabic" food. Nevertheless, what Diana initially rejects—baklava—because of its Arab origin, she ultimately ends up eating because of its non-specific origin. Thus the "language" of "baklava" is a shifting signifier that shuttles between the transnational and the ethnic, transcending geographical boundaries to form new communities and affiliations.

De-nationalizing food, as the example of baklava shows, echoes de-nationalization of American fast food chains that have spread globally. However, the de-

centralization of the origin of baklava is different from the sense of de-centralization latent in fast food chains. Recipes, although set as instructions for cooking a specific meal and meant to describe a specific dish from a specific region, are open to improvisation (for example cooking pancakes in Jordan). In contrast, although the flavors of fast food meals are domesticated, it must appear to fit the standard taste of the same food anywhere in the world. In addition, a recipe reflects a food practice that emphasizes the process of cooking and preparing food, whereas fast food conceals the process of cooking from the consumer. In the memoir, cooking and recipes are personalized, unlike ready to eat food that is represented as a standardized commodity. The recipes in the memoir constitute a multivalent narrative which implies a set of images, tastes, choices, and values. They are personalized in two senses: first, they are situated within the context of the story to evoke a related emotional moment. For example, each recipe has a title that is related to one of the chapters in which it falls: “Peaceful Vegetarian Lentil Soup,” “Nostalgic Chicken Livers,” “Diplomatic *Magloubeh*,” “Poetic Baklava.” Second, the recipes step outside the narrative to address the reader directly and elicit an engagement with the recipes, the described dishes, and the social contexts from which they emerge. The recipes emphasize the material process of cooking and, structurally, interrupt the growing-up and assimilation story of Diana.

Food is a trope, in the memoir, around which several affiliations are formed, severed, and crisscross along the lines of “origins” and racial/regional belongings. Anita Mannur in “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora” coins the term “culinary citizenship,” which she defines as “a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to

food” (13). Borrowing Mannur’s concept, Diana’s grandmother and father stand for two senses of “culinary citizenship”: the former insists on classification and categories, while the latter hints at multiplicity and complexity. “Gram is a baker, Bud’s a cook.” While bakers are “measured, careful, rational, precise”, cooks are “dashing, improvisational, wayward, intuitive” (90). Diana’s grandmother, though she knows—or perhaps does not know—that Muslims do not eat pork, prepares a big dish of “glistening, clove-studded ham” on Diana’s father’s first visit to their house (90). The traditional act of cooking acquires an “ethnic” connotation in this scene to reveal the cultural tension between the grandmother and Bud whom she perceives as “not precisely white.” This, in a way, rehearses the movements by food reformers to unify a national cuisine for “American” citizens. Like the nineteenth century food fights, which Gabaccia analyzes, where American values are asserted by means of following specific diets, the fights in Abu-Jaber’s memoir (between Bud and grandmother; Bud and his neighbors) are also over food and the values each eating tradition stands for.

Borrowing from Roland Barthes’ “Toward a Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption” (1961), food in *The Language of Baklava* “has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation” (26). For example, in an incident in which Diana’s father grills some food in the front yard, the neighbors are irritated by that behavior which they perceive as *un-American*. Jaime, Diana’s schoolmate and one of the neighbors’ daughters, tells Diana in the school bus: “you better know that in this country nobody eats in the front yard. Really. Nobody. ... If your family does not know how to behave, my parents will have to find out about getting you out of this neighborhood” (82).

Throughout the memoir, Abu-Jaber gives numerous tips for being/becoming American. Thus, these tips are themselves national recipes for “American” way(s) of life.

Among the tips that Abu-Jaber includes to construct her “*American self*” (135) are: consuming and observing closely “American culture, TV., music” (134). Especially in college Diana has “finally acquired hip-hugger jeans and a long shag haircut, in the posthippie fallout look of the seventies” (135). Jeans, haircuts, clothing style transmitted through mass media and popular culture stand for what Stuart Hall calls “codes” which Diana emulates to construct her “*American self*”. In “Encoding/decoding” (1980), Hall holds that ideology “once socialized, it becomes a code”; it is “a system of coding reality” (102). Despite the valorization of individual liberty, it is only by sharing the dominant “codes” of what *looks* American that Diana is deemed American or not quite. This unfolds a conundrum between the principle of individualism as foundational to the notion of Americanness and—what I have quoted earlier from Pease—“domestic Americanization”.

Ironically, despite the actual diversity of American culture, this diversity is used to bifurcate American culture into “American” and “ethnic”. For example, Diana’s grandmother wants to educate her granddaughter about the “Orient”. She decides to take Diana to downtown New York to watch the famous opera show “Madama [sic] Butterfly at the Metro-Politan” (93) and dine in a Chinese restaurant, the “Imperial Palace” (98). The choice of this particular opera in which the incidents of the story take place in Nagasaki of the early 1890s, when the Japanese navy claimed the city, implicitly recalls the victory of the U.S. in WWII after bombing Nagasaki in 1945. The circulation of this specific show in the Metropolitan Opera house in New York since 1907 can imply a

commodification of diversity in cosmopolitan New York or a celebration of an imperialist America subduing the Japanese empire. More importantly, the circulation of this opera perpetuates what Aki Uchida calls “the orientalizing of Asian women in America” (1998, 161). In the story of *Madame Butterfly* the Japanese wife is abandoned by her white husband who marries a white woman. *Madame Butterfly* gives up her child to be raised by her ex-husband and his new wife. The story recuperates the submissiveness of “Oriental” women as well as white superiority. Diana’s grandmother’s perception of the “Orient” and “Orientals” is also an example of orientalizing. She praises “Orientals” as “*dainty and refined*”, “[l]ike *little porcelain dolls with their little shoes and parasols*” (97 emphasis added). However, this simile between “Orientals” and “porcelain dolls” de-humanizes “Orientals” in the sense that they are compared to static artifacts that look alike. In other words, the term “Orientals” becomes a signifier for objects rather than people or for people reified as objects. In the “Imperial Palace”, a Chinese restaurant, the grandmother tells the waiter that she has watched a show about “[*his*] people” and tells him how “spec-ta-cu-lar” and “ex-tra-va-gant” the show is (99 emphasis added). Making it a teaching moment, the grandmother tells Diana “[w]e feel it’s more polite to call them Or-i-en-tals” without making a distinction between the Japanese and the Chinese (101). Drawing a distinction between her people and his people, as well as homogenizing “Orientals,” is “racism with a distance,” to borrow Žižek’s words (44). The grandmother’s remarks imply that “we” refers to individuals who identify as members of the nation-state (read: “American”) and “them”/“his” refers to individuals who identify with their “particular” communities (read: “ethnic”). By the same token, the slow enunciation of “Orientals,” “spectacular,” and “extravagant” is a

reminder of the first scene in the memoir where the broadcaster mispronounces Diana's last name. Both incidents exemplify the contradictions in American Orientalism: "deeply committed to U.S. primacy and to multiculturalism," in Vijay Prashad's words in "Orientalism" (2007, 176). In addition, unlike European Orientalism, as Uchida notes, "the Oriental geographically exists in the West" (161). American Orientalism takes shape inside the geographical territories of the U.S. rather than in colonies. Diana's and her grandmother's excursion echoes the American Orientalist discourse as it developed around the migration of the Chinese as indentured laborers<sup>20</sup>. The grandmother homogenizes "Asians" by assuming that the Chinese and the Japanese are one and the same people. Moreover, not only does she emphasize the exoticism, otherness, and foreignness of the "Orientals" but also reiterates the effeminate stereotype of "Oriental" men ("not like men at all," she says (104)). Homogenizing, stereotyping, and emasculating the "Other" are strategies that resonate with colonial national ideologies of American Orientalism that expanded in the nineteenth century as the U.S. emerged as a global power. Ironically, the grandmother tries to imbue her half-Jordanian granddaughter with this legacy of cultural imperialism.

The grandmother's intention to educate Diana about "Orientals" resembles a touristic excursion to an exotic place that simultaneously ethnicizes and empties the signifier "Orientals" of its meaning. Mieke Bal in "Food, Form, and Visibility: *Glub* and the Aesthetics of Everyday Life" (2005) explains how "ethnic" restaurants are a "genre of

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Leong in, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong and the Transformation of American Orientalism*, holds that "Orientalism in the United States had its roots in the attitudes and values of European immigrants who arrived in North America during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. ... [and] took a form specific to and supportive of the United State's emerging role as a world-wide moral and economic force" (2005, 7)

‘tourism at home’” and a “form of neo-colonialism.” She argues that “ethnic” food is “a visible token of foreignness” that is perceived as enriching the diversity of the host country but also “incorporated [and] naturalized as a welcome element of otherness” (53). If “ethnicity” created by the host country is as Bal claims a form of neo-colonialism, then Diana and her grandmother exemplify these dynamics between ethnic restaurants and their customers. Reading the menu, Diana reads “a treasure map that takes me [Diana] on its dotted line over snowy mountains, through hushed trees, past jade lakes” (98). Comparing the menu to a map materializes “Oriental” food in Diana’s imagination. The topographic description of “Oriental” food in terms of mountains, trees, and lakes situates it as exotic food carried by people coming from far away lands. Seeing and tasting the food arouse all Diana’s senses, “touch[ing] all the hidden places in [her] mouth” (102). At the center of the tourist experience is the “tourist gaze” as John Urry holds in *The Tourist Gaze* (2002, 1). One of its characteristics is that the “tourist gaze” is “constructed through signs” (3), hence tourists search for specific venues and landscapes. The grandmother’s *tour package*, visiting specific sites such as “Oriental” theaters and restaurants in metropolitan New York is allegedly to pursue knowledge about a “particular” community and to transmit this to her granddaughter. In fact, the grandmother is purchasing an “Oriental” cultural experience, which is not only pertinent to the tourist experience but also to a Eurocentric conception of “the Other as a self-enclosed ‘authentic’ community”, to quote Žižek (44). In a complementary sense, the restaurant—Imperial Palace—markets itself as a touristic place by virtue of its name and its location. It is what Dean MacCannell calls “staged authenticity” (qtd in Urry 9). Urry elaborates MacCannell’s concept and explains that “staged authenticity” aims at taking

“advantage of the opportunities it presents for profitable investment” (9). Setting the stage for an authentic “Oriental” experience the fortune cookies that Diana and her grandmother open are written in Chinese. Reading the slip—“no blame”—and translating it as “everything taste good if you hungry enough” (108), symbolically render the “ethnic” “Oriental” food generic and commercialized.

Nevertheless, there are two moments of resistance in this scene. First, Diana has a different consciousness of the waiter and the chef. Beginning to realize that the grandmother is talking about a Japanese, not a Chinese opera, Diana, the waiter, and the chef share a smile, as if they are “in on the joke together” (107). The subtle understanding between Diana, the chef, and the waiter in the scene renders the grandmother a member of a particular “ethnic” community (white ethnics). The second instance of resistance is when the chef and the waiter speak in Chinese, having an aside conversation among themselves, which only they can understand.

This experience of consuming “Oriental” food problematizes the “ethnic” as a qualifier for national identity. In the same sense, the “native” as foundational to the notion of “national” identity is also problematized in the memoir. “Native” suggests a point of origin and authenticity. By extension, it defines where a native should belong. Diana is born in the U.S. By virtue of land of birth, Diana is a native of that land and therefore “American.” However, Diana’s father, as he sets the rules for his daughters, has taught them that they “are Arab at home and American in the streets” (5). To emphasize their Arabness, Bud does all the cooking and all the cooking follows Jordanian recipes. I interpret this, paradoxically, as a feminist gesture in the memoir that reverses gender roles and dismantles the arbitrary relation between women and domestic space. Yet, it

can also mean more patriarchal hegemony over the domestic realm that allows Bud to control how he raises his daughters by imposing only Jordanian food on his family (which is all women: wife and three daughters). Bud's cooking, in addition, operates like "cultural mnemonics"<sup>21</sup>; he cooks to remember Jordan. However, as I have pointed out earlier, Diana is not perceived, by her British friend, as a native of Jordan. The mere fact that the purpose of Bud's re-locating the whole family in Jordan to familiarize his daughters with his own land of origin implies that his daughters are non-national in Jordan, *not yet* Jordanian. This is even underscored by Munira's description of Jordan in olfactory terms which Diana is unfamiliar with: "The original scent of Jordan is *here* [Jordan]: sesame, olive, incense, rosewater, orange blossom water, dust, jasmine, thyme" (37 emphasis added). *Here* implies that it is not only Diana who is alienated from the authentic scent of Jordan but also her father since he does not reside in Jordan. That is to say both Diana and Bud acculturate to both Jordan and the U.S. as they move between the two nations.

Bud wants to fulfill the American Dream, as I have previously mentioned, by means of having his own restaurant. His dream restaurant, as Bud imagines it "will be a real breakthrough, an amazing modern combination of Arabic and American food" (169). Bud's restaurant is not only a combination of Arabic and American food but also "a Shangri-la that finally heals the old wound between East and West. All languages will be spoken here, all religions honored" (172). This imagined restaurant evokes multiple

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<sup>21</sup> Hamid Naficy uses this phrase in *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (1993) to describe the circulation of souvenirs, symbols, and icons from Iran among Iranian exiles—especially from parents to their children—to transmit to their children their Iranian heritage. The meanings that "cultural mnemonics" produce involve "establishing both cultural and ethnic differentiation (from the host city) and cultural and ethnic continuity (with an idealized past and the homeland)" (151-2).

connotations. It conjures up the prevalent notion of America as the land of opportunities that welcomes and hosts all religions, all languages, and everyone whether from the old world or the new world. This implies that Bud's restaurant is a site for a heterogeneous imagined community. In addition, because it will be run by his family it is also a congregation site for his daughters. That is to say, the restaurant will transform Bud's perception of America as a place of foreignness to a place of fulfilled dreams and belonging. Nevertheless, the fact that the restaurant is run by Bud's family duplicates the family dynamic—specifically his authority over his daughters—to reaffirm Bud's dominance. Moreover, the reference to “Shangri-la”<sup>22</sup> metonymically means not only a utopian place but also an exotic oriental land. Thus, simultaneously, the hospitality of the land of opportunities is intertwined with ethnicization.

While Bud dreams about a family restaurant in Syracuse, his own house in Jordan has turned into a restaurant—Kan Zaman. Visiting Jordan and the restaurant, Bud fantasizes about owning that restaurant, erected on the land of his ancestors. Yet, the restaurant's name and its tent-like entrance ethnicizes the place to attract more tourists. Echoing the Imperial Palace Chinese restaurant in Metropolitan New York, Kan Zaman is a Jordanian restaurant, located on the desert highway in Amman. Visiting his family in Jordan, Bud finds out that the house has turned into a restaurant—Kan Zaman [Once Upon the Time]—in a touristic neighborhood in Amman and is commodified as an authentic ethnic place by virtue of its name and location. That is to say, within Jordan, the Jordanian restaurant becomes *ethnic* to sell an experience of authenticity to tourists in Jordan.

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<sup>22</sup> Shangri-la is a fictional idyllic place in James Hilton novel *Lost Horizon* (1933).

Diana's visit to Jordan as a writer in residence complicates the question of the national in the memoir even further through the example of the Sri-Lankan maid who works for her uncle Jimmy (originally Jamil). Sri-Lankan young women are "shipped" (256) to Jordan through a "slave agency" (260) to be adopted by Jordanian families for whom they work as maids. Many of these women leave their children in Sri Lanka while they work in Jordan. The uncle's Anglicized name—Jimmy—as well as the resonance between the living conditions of the Sri-Lankan maids in Jordan and the history of slavery in the U.S.—specifically ill-treatment and separating slave mothers from their children—reproduce the binary between masters and slaves that deny the latter any sense of national belonging and rights.

The Sri-Lankan maid cooking for uncle Jimmy's family adds another layer of complexity to the question of the non-national in Jordan. The question is complicated specifically in terms of the Sri-Lankan cook's relationship to the food she cooks by virtue of which she can "claim and inhabit certain subject position," to quote from Mannur's theory of "culinary citizenship" (13). Unlike Diana's and her mother's cooking pancakes in Jordan that has facilitated the formation of new affiliations beyond geographical boundaries, cooking in Uncle Jimmy's house does not facilitate the formation of any communities around food. On the contrary, food in Uncle Jimmy's house rather evokes a sense of estrangement than affiliation. Diana and her friend, Audrey, are eager to leave, rather than stay to finish their dinner.

Jordan as a site for the national is complicated not only by the presence of immigrant labor but also by the widely spread American mass media—specifically soap operas and news networks—which unfolds a disjuncture between what Arjun Appaduari

calls “mediascapes” and “ideoscapes”<sup>23</sup>. Diana’s uncles, when they convene, are always engaged in intricate discussions about nuclear weapons, oil crisis, and political turmoil; and wonder: “why is it... that America gets fatter, that American TV shows get louder, and that TV contestants win millions with a single answer, while rest of the world gets leaner, hungrier, sicker, angrier?” (274) This contradiction between the global political situation and the “chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects,” to borrow Appadurai’s words (35) mirrors another disjuncture between the luxurious life styles portrayed in daytime American dramas such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which is very popular in the Arab region and the Middle East, and the lives of many people in Jordan, “a country crowded with Palestinian refugees [where]... so many people are hungry” (240). In Appadurai’s words, “the lifestyles represented on both national and international TV and cinema completely overwhelm and undermine the rhetoric of national politics” (40). This disjuncture uncovers ways by which the national crisis of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan is subsumed by the fantasy of life in America that is conveyed in American mass media.

In conclusion, the non-national subject in *The Language of Baklava* is formed at particular moments of incompleteness in its interpellations process(es); these moments are marked by tension between “ethnic” belonging and “national” identifications in both the U.S. and Jordan. This creates new sites for identifications that disrupt the growing up and

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<sup>23</sup> In “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (1996), Appadurai defines “mediascapes” to be “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspaper, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios).” He also defines “ideoscapes” to be “concatenations of images, but they are often directly political ... [consist] of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation*” (35-6).

assimilation narrative in more than one way. Structurally, *The Language of Baklava* does not open with a chapter about the protagonist's past life before coming to the U.S. or about a country of origin. Intertwined with this non-traditional opening is a blurring of the demarcations between the qualifiers "ethnic" and "national" by virtue of the formation of communities and affiliations transnationally, confined neither to the geographical boundaries of Jordan nor the U.S.

### *An American Brat*

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *An American Brat* revolves around Feroza's growing up story that is interwoven with her going-to-America story. It portrays the protagonist's struggle with the Islamization of Pakistan and notions of choice and individualism in the U.S. Though published in 1993, *An American Brat* has not received wide scholarly attention, unlike *Cracking India*, published earlier in 1991. Most reviews of *An American Brat* emphasize two major themes in Sidhwa's novel: the adjustments made by the protagonist to make herself fit in a new culture and the startling differences between the conservative East and the liberal West<sup>24</sup>. In most reviews, the novel is read as an assimilation narrative, where Feroza decides to stay in the U.S. and accepts living away from the rest of her family. However, as I show in my discussion here, the novel is not merely an assimilation narrative, but rather reveals Feroza as possessing a diasporic sense of imagined community that imposes on Feroza dual moments of estrangement and assimilation in both Pakistan and the U.S. and yields glimpses of a non-national consciousness.

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<sup>24</sup> I am referring to reviews specifically by Robert Morace, Winifred Sihon, Adam Penenberg, Eliza Bent, and Adele King

Feroza's sense of imagined community is diasporic by virtue of being a Parsee<sup>25</sup>: members of her family are dispersed among Pakistan, India, and the U.S. Nilufer Bharucha explains in “‘When Old Tracks are Lost’: Rohinton Mistry’s Fiction as Diasporic Discourse” (1995) that Parsees have formed three diasporas: first, the precolonial India diaspora (when they fled Iran); second, the division by partition of India; and third, Western/First World diaspora (in Britain, Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand) (57). One can therefore infer that Parsees, scattered as they are in various countries, belong to multiple communities concurrently within and outside the country where they reside, which in turn troubles monolithic identifications as either solely Parsee, Pakistani, or Indian. Sidhwa, herself born in Lahore before the partition, defines her identity ethnically, nationally, and regionally; or as she refers to her identity, a “3P identity”: “I am a Parsi first, then a Pakistani, specifically a Punjabi” (qtd in Randhir Singh 6). Many critical interpretations of Sidhwa’s works—such as *Bapsi Sidhwa* (by Randhir Singh), *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* (by Rajinder Dhawan and Novy Kapadia), and “Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*” (Ambreen Hai)—trace a direct correlation between the writer’s Parsee-Pakistan-Punjabi heritage and the storylines of her novels, which is not only clear in *An American Brat* but also in *Cracking India* (1991), *The Crow Eaters* (1982), and *The Pakistani Bride* (1983). According to these critical reviews, Sidhwa’s fiction familiarizes its readers with the history and culture of the Parsee diaspora in India, and in Pakistan as well as in the U.S. Although Parsees nationally belong to India and/or Pakistan by virtue

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<sup>25</sup> Roots of Parsees are in Persia—what is now known as Iran. The Arabs’ invasion of Persia in the seventh century coerced Parsees to renounce the Zoroastrian faith and convert to Islam. They fled to the Indian subcontinent and congregated in Bombay, Lahore, Karachi; after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, some have stayed in India and Pakistan, and some are diasporic.

of citizenship, right-wing Hinduization in India and Islamization in Pakistan have further minoritized Parsees in both countries. Feroza's dilemma of national identification in Pakistan occurs only after Pakistan became an Islamic state under the General Zia-Ul-Haq. The Islamization of Pakistan has caused Feroza's feeling that she does not fit in Pakistan unless she adapts to the new Islamic rule and, in Žižek's terms, has created tension between her primary "particular ethnic identity" and her "universal identity as a member of a Nation-State." For example, Feroza wants to adopt a strict Islamic dress code imposed by the Pakistani government, whereas Zareen, her mother, disapproves of orthodox traditions. In an argument with Feroza about how to dress, Zareen contends "we're Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently" (10). This moment of contention between Feroza, who dislikes the sleeveless blouse and sari, and her mother, who disapproves the fundamentalist turn in Pakistan, problematizes their affiliations with an Islamic state in two ways. First, dictating an Islamic dress in Pakistan means the Islamization—or in other words, the de-secularizing—of the "public sphere," to borrow Jürgen Habermas's term<sup>26</sup>. Second, the imposition of fundamentalist traditions on the "public sphere" has resulted in the exclusion of religious minorities such as Parsee, and of secular Pakistanis. Zareen, in order to save Feroza from the "puritanical", "mullah-ish mentality" (13) decides to send her daughter to the U.S., which she sees as a more secular place. Despite this binarism between the Islamic state of Pakistan and secular liberal America, there is an interlocking relation between the U.S. and Pakistan, specifically the circulation of capitalism and fundamentalism.

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<sup>26</sup> Jürgen Habermas's study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), is a genealogy of the bourgeois public sphere, focusing on its social and economic bases. Habermas's accounts for the public sphere as a domain of "critical judgment" of state and government (24).

The political changes in Pakistan that brought Zia-Ul-Haq to power and led to the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (the more liberal political leader in Pakistan) were supported by and took place under the auspices of the United States<sup>27</sup>. In order to combat the spread of communism in the region, Pakistan became the third biggest country—after Israel and Egypt—to receive U.S. aid as well as a new market for the spread of commodities from the U.S. The spread of commodities from the U.S. and pro-American Pakistani government were accompanied by the Islamization of Pakistan, thereby “turning religious identities into political ones” as Mahmood Mamdani holds in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (249). Politicizing Islam in Pakistan has led to minoritizing the Parsee community as well as jeopardizing secular persons who protested this regime. The circulation of Islamization in Pakistan is interrelated with the circulation of American capitalism. In the novel, there are references to “secondhand American garments” stores (13) and American and British videos (17). One can therefore infer that Feroza’s encounter with capitalism and consumption starts in Pakistan rather than after her going to the U.S. However, both ideologies—Islamic fundamentalism and capitalism—contribute to Feroza’s feelings of alienation and estrangement within Pakistan and the U.S.

Feroza feels a stranger and the need to adapt in both Pakistan and the U.S. In Pakistan, Feroza feels a stranger, after the Islamization of Pakistan (because she is

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<sup>27</sup> For this background information, I rely on *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* by Mahmood Mamdani (2004). During the Cold War years with Russia, the U.S. supported Muslim Afghan insurgents who were fighting the spread of communism in Afghanistan. After the victory of the Saur revolution 1978 that brought communist parties to power, the Afghan fighters fled to Pakistan and were trained by the CIA. This was also accompanied by a shift in the U.S. politics towards Pakistan. Despite Pakistan’s violations of international humanitarian laws and the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the U.S. offered huge financial and military aid to Zia-Ul-Haq to host and support Islamist militants who joined the Afghan fighters from all over the world in their battle against communism.

Parsee); and she feels a stranger in the U.S. (because as Manek, her uncle, says, she is “a Paki Third Worlder” (27)). Within the course of her journey between Pakistan and the U.S., Feroza encounters moments of estrangement in the U.S. because she is a foreigner and within her Parsee community because of marrying a non-Parsee. These moments of estrangement, I argue, disrupt the assimilation story and complicate the formations of “imagined communities” to unfold instances of the non-national subject.

Upon her arrival at the John Kennedy airport, Feroza, not an American citizen, is non-national in the literal sense of the term. Passports, as Vijay Mishra explains in *Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2006) indicate “citizens whose bodies signify an unproblematic identity of selves with nations” (184). A non-citizen, Feroza in New York’s airport feels a stranger “in a strange country amidst strangers” (54). This collective feeling of anonymity, among strangers, is paradoxically, at the core of Feroza’s sense of freedom. She feels free from the “gravitational pull” of “the thousand constraints that [have] governed her life” (52, 58). Feroza at this moment has an intertwined feeling of being both a stranger and a free individual.

Feroza’s intertwined feeling of being both a stranger and a free individual recalls Gerog Simmel’s correlating freedom to being a stranger in his essay “The Stranger” (1950). For Simmel, the stranger is a figure emblematic of modernity in urban cities at the turn of the twentieth century. Feroza’s shopping expedition on Fifth Avenue resonates with the figure of the stranger in two senses: as a subject who is simultaneously attached to and distanced from life in the metropolis; and as a subject whose relationships are based on sharing common—rather than specific—qualities with other strangers.

Feroza's ride with Manek into Manhattan is, for her, like "climbing into a futuristic spaghetti of curving and incredibly suspended roads, mile upon looping mile of wide highway that weaved in and out of the sky at all angles ... and sometimes they appeared to be aiming at the sky" (67). Feroza's perspective is that of the newcomer, who is fascinated by the vast and entangled layout of New York city (spaghetti of roads and highways). Her description of New York positions Feroza as an observer who is *not yet* part of what she describes. In Simmel's words, Feroza "embodies that synthesis of nearness and distance which constitutes the formal position of the stranger" (404). This dual moment of proximity and distance is even clearer when Feroza feels both shocked and bewildered by the filth and poverty of Eighth Avenue and Forty Second Street, in comparison to the luxury and opulence she has seen in Fifth Avenue. It is "an alien filth" that unveils "the callous heart of the rich country" (81) to which Feroza cannot relate. It is a moment of (un)imagining communities that disrupts her assimilation and triggers her feeling of vulnerability. Feroza's vulnerability can be interpreted as a moment of fear caused by encountering the exploitative face of capitalism. That is to say, behind the enchantments of the U.S. (highways, skyscrapers, abundant food and merchandise, and efficient infrastructure) there is also a sense of confusion, disorientation, hollowness, and loss. Metaphorically, trapped in the stairways of the YMCA, Feroza feels that "America assume[s] a ruthless, hollow, cylindrical shape without beginning or end, without sunlight, an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her fear" (90). This perception of the U.S. echoes, but with a contrasting twist, Feroza's earlier perception of New York as a *futuristic spaghetti* of roads and highways that aim at the sky. Besides, the metaphor of the locked exit door in the YMCA signifies Feroza's in-betweenness, both in and out of

this new world and the new terrains she treads. This moment of mixed feelings of fascination, confusion, and fear is also a moment of nostalgia to the network of family members and acquaintances in Pakistan.

Feroza's feeling of estrangement is not only within the U.S. but also within her Parsee community. Towards the final chapters in the novel, Feroza's complex romantic relationship with David problematizes her belonging to the Parsee community since a Parsee woman is excommunicated if she marries a non-Parsee. Nevertheless, a Parsee man can marry outside his religion. Marrying a *non* is a dilemma for a Parsee woman. When Feroza's parents receive the letter about her plans to marry David, a big family meeting is held in which stories are shared about Parsee women who are denied appropriate funerals and social status by the Parsee community for marrying outside their community. In her attempt to stop Feroza's marriage to David, Zareen flies to Denver. Reiterating the rhetoric of individualism, Feroza ridicules her mother's concern with heritage and pedigree. She says: "If you [Zareen] go about talking of people's pedigree, the *Americans* will laugh at you" (277 emphasis added). It is not Feroza who abandons her religion and community but it is rather sexism that renders her a stranger to her community. Zareen starts questioning interfaith marriage in the Zoroastrian doctrine to conclude that the "mindless current of fundamentalism sweeping the world like a plague has spared no religion, not even their microscopic community of 120 thousand" (305-6). Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan and sexism in the Zoroastrian religious tradition complicate Feroza's national belonging and religious affiliation.

Feroza and David, although they surpass East-West boundaries in their relationship, are unable to overcome the traditional perception of roots and heritage as

intrinsic to their sense of belonging. Consequently, what starts as an intriguing romantic interest between David and Feroza turns into an impossible relationship because of insurmountable cultural differences. The theme of cultural differences frames the whole novel. For example, Manek describes Pakistanis as “Third World Pakis” with a “snow-white Englishman gora complex” (26). Besides, in an argument between Feroza and her mother about Feroza’s relationship with David, Feroza asks her mother to think in new ways because “It’s a *different* culture”, but Zareen responds “It’s *not your culture*” (279 emphasis added). Cultural differences in *An American Brat* can be interpreted through the lens of American capitalism that commodifies *difference per se*. “[C]apital has fallen in love with difference” as Jonathan Rutherford reminds us in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (1990, 11). The novel, in a sense, criticizes the capitalist’s ideology of multiculturalism. As Žižek holds in “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism” (1997), “the ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism” (44). *An American Brat* depicts New York as an intertwined site of capitalism and multiculturalism. Feroza’s impression of New York is of “a kaleidoscope of perceptions in which paintings, dinosaurs, American Indian artifacts, and Egyptian mummies mingled with hamburgers, pretzels, sapphire earrings, deodorants, and glamorous window displays” (76). Blurring the images of art and artifacts with food, clothing, and jewelry conjures up what Richard Sennett concludes in “The Public Realm” about diversity in New York and its planning. In New York there is “linear, sequential display of difference”; as he elaborates, New York is a mix of difference and indifference, races “who live segregated lives close together, and of social classes, who mix but do not socialize” (269). Along the same lines, Peter McLaren in “White Terror

and *Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism*” (1994) holds that despite claims of diversity, the ideology of multiculturalism either has its premises on assimilation or collapses into universalistic humanism that paradoxically re-enforces Anglo-American norms and essentializes differences (48-52). *An American Brat* seems not to break from essentializing difference and valorizing the U.S. ideals of diversity. Structurally, the novel is an amalgam of stories that revolve around *difference* situating Pakistan in contrast to the U.S. It opens with Pakistan as a starting point and ends with the U.S. as a final destination; thus, it resonates with a conventional coming-to-America/assimilation narrative. Unlike *The Language of Baklava*, the first chapter in *An American Brat* “dramatically cuts between origin (the country of childhood) and final destination [U.S.],” to borrow Rosemary George’s words (144). The opening chapter in *An American Brat* encapsulates the dilemma of the Parsee diaspora as well as the crisis of rising Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan versus the more secular, liberal America.

Furthermore, *An American Brat* shares some aspects of popular fiction, specifically, the romantic plot of Feroza and David. The romantic plot in *An American Brat* follows a familiar narrative pattern of pop fiction: a simple plot in which the young woman from the less privileged lands of Pakistan comes to the U.S., meets her dream husband, and challenges her parents and family traditions of marriage. Along these lines Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance* (1984) holds that romances are all about a “man and woman meeting, the obstacles to their love, and their final happy ending” (199). In a similar sense Walter Nash pinpoints, in *Language in Popular Fiction* (1990), the romantic story “is nothing if not predictable” (4). The predictability of Feroza’s and David’s falling in love is precisely what renders *An American Brat* a popular romantic

fiction. The coming-to-America narrative is intertwined with the popular romance genre to re-assert the ideology of individualism specially for the female protagonist, who challenges her community and its religious doctrines.

However, Feroza's and David's love story does not end in marriage and living happily ever after. Unlike the typical closures in romantic popular fiction, Feroza and David cannot surpass their cultural differences. In Woodrow Wilson's terms, Feroza has "*not yet*" become American because they foreground their ethnic roots. That is to say, the un-conventional closure disrupts both the assimilation narrative and the popular romance story; and as a corollary allegorizes a disrupted process of "transubstantiation," to recall Zizek: the shifting from the "particular ethnic identity" to the "universal identity as a member of a Nation-State."

Moreover, the love story between Feroza and David reverses what Mica Nava calls "the Orientalist critical gaze" (25). Nava explains that the Orientalist gaze is a "panoptic controlling male gaze," "in which the oriental woman is cast as object of sexual desire" (26). Contrary to the Orientalist "panoptic" gaze, Feroza objectifies the white male body to her gaze. Feroza's and David's first meeting is described as follows:

At Feroza's timid knock on the garage door, David Press *revealed himself, wearing only* his ragged shorts and a pair of square, metal-framed glasses. The longish gold-streaked hair that swept his forehead and framed his handsome face appeared, if anything, to enhance the wild effect of his *gleaming nudity*. (245 emphasis added)

While reading Sidhwa's description, one cannot help but follow the slow rhythm of describing David's physique and his slow appearance—*revealing himself, longish gold-streaked hair, gleaming nudity*—from his garage door. This portrayal renders the *white* male's body exotic and erotic. To extend the reversed metaphor, unlike the Orientalist portrayals of the exotic women from the East as languid, lewd, and/or oppressed, Feroza is described as "impassive, imperious" (247). Feroza's haughty manner unsettles the East-West dichotomy that frames the whole novel.

Similarly, *An American Brat* subtly exoticizes the U.S. The "America-returned" Pakistanis perceive the U.S. as an "*exotic culture*" (171). Echoing the pancake cooking scene in Jordan in *The Language of Baklava* that ethnicizes *American* food, the perception of the U.S. as an *exotic* place dismantles, what Žižek critiques to be, the U.S. "privileged universal position", granted by its ideology of multiculturalism (44). Multiculturalism sets the U.S. in the superior position that claims appreciation of *diversity*, yet is founded on a demarcation between the "ethnic" and the *American*. This re-configuration of the U.S. as an exotic culture can possibly re-nuance the definition of national consciousness to be in terms of diversity and multiple identifications, not in terms of assimilation and "domestic Americanization". Whereas on the surface level of meaning *An American Brat* reads as an assimilation narrative, on another layer it disrupts this narrative. To recall Simmel, Feroza ultimately decides that she—like the stranger figure—finds comfort living in the U.S. away from family, because her feelings of dislocation, unbelonging, and anonymity are shared by many "newcomers" like herself (312). The last chapter in the novel sounds like Feroza's and Manek's testimony about living in the U.S. and its advantages, which focus on opulence, material goods, freedom,

and technology. The whole chapter echoes and sums up the earlier chapters in which Manek underlines the stark differences between the U.S. and Pakistan. In this chapter, it is Feroza reiterating the same notions, and relieved that she is not in Pakistan, observing “grinding poverty and injustice” and “disturbing Hodood Ordinances” (312). In this final chapter, Feroza refrains from arguing with Manek. On the other hand, Aban, Manek’s wife and a *newcomer* to the U.S., plays the same role that Feroza plays earlier in the novel. The implication is that characters in the novel follow the same linear journey: move to the U.S.; are challenged by a new life style; adapt to the new life in the U.S.; and finally are unable to give up living in the U.S. The linearity of this narrative does not break from traditional migrant narratives that propagate Americanization as the final destination.

Intertwined with Feroza’s journey to the U.S. is “a journey into the English language and into the ‘ethnic’ narrative of successful progress” as George points out (136). In the novel, Manek tells Feroza that she is lucky that her roommate—Jo—is a “real American” (148). Like Diana in *The Language of Baklava* who has to work on constructing her “*American self*” (135 emphasis added), Feroza works on *performing* “Americanness” by emulating Jo’s informal way of talking, calling names, and eating canned and frozen food. In a similar way, Manek lies about being Christian to sell Bibles for Christian families. To make his sales’ talk appealing, Manek uses words and phrases that Christian families would positively respond to: “How is little Jim (or Bill or Barbara) doing?” Have you started him on solids? ... The Reverend told me Kevin is a mighty smart boy for his age” (202). The foregrounding of a singular accent, way of talking, and a dominant faith re-confirms the notion of a unified national community. Thus,

“America” becomes “the imagined nation signified by ... a monolingual tongue (English or rather, American English) and a determined assimilation of all differences into this national story”, as George underscores (136).

Feroza ultimately decides that she finds comfort living in the U.S., away from family, because her feelings of dislocation, un-belonging, and anonymity are shared by many “newcomers” like herself (312). That is to say, by the end of the novel, the community that Feroza imagines herself identifying with is a community of *strangers*. In that sense, *An American Brat* is similar to *The Language of Baklava*; the imagined communities in both novels are neither “boundary oriented” nor necessarily “horizontal”. The “imagined communities” in *An American Brat* are formed around a shared feeling of being “amidst strangers”.

Feroza’s acceptance of being a stranger in the U.S. because others are newcomers and strangers too is similar to the final scene in *The Language of Baklava* in which Bud starts his own fast food restaurant. The ending of both stories is paradoxical. On the one hand, these traditional closures offer the protagonists a place within the imagined community of the nation as Martin Japtok holds in another context (137)<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, within the course of both novels, by virtue of the fact that these are two-world novels, these texts unsettle the notions of a homogenous national consciousness and re-nuance the formations of the imagined communities to be *transnational* and among *strangers*. In other words, whereas structurally, especially in the dénouement, both texts partake of a narrative of integration, the form of individualism that both stories depict is

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<sup>28</sup> I am borrowing from Japtok’s study *Growing up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction*.

contingent and situational, and its *national* consciousness is not pre-set. By the end of both novels Diana, Bud, and Feroza accept being *both* American and Jordanian, or *both* American and Pakistani, without necessarily resolving the tension between the *ethnic* and the *American*.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**Re-imagining the US National Time in *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation***

In chapter one, I have argued that non-national consciousness is a specific moment in which the subject remains immutably foreign despite citizenship and acculturation. Along these lines I have used the term non-national not only to mean moving beyond geographical territories but also to mean using a non-nation-centered perspective to examine communities formed and defined by their ethnic, racial, and religious affiliations, located both within and outside of specific geographical territories. I have also re-configured the notion of “imagined communities” as “imagined (transnational) communities.” This perception of the nation in terms of *transnational* communities stands in contrast to the *paradigmatic story*<sup>29</sup> of consensus and homogeneity of the American nation. Within the context of nation formation, Anderson draws an analogy between the idea of the nation “conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” and the “idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through a homogenous empty time” (26). Nevertheless, the conception(s) of the nation from the perspectives of the colonized, the exiled, the displaced, and the migrant disrupt the genealogy of the nation as a steady movement in history as well the perception of it as a solid community. I argue, here, in my analysis of *West of the Jordan* (by Laila Halaby) and *The Last Generation* (by Cherríe Moraga) that the perception of the U.S. by Palestinian migrants and by Chicanos/as is tied to their history of displacement from their native lands and the movement in time in both texts contends with the forward time

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<sup>29</sup> I rely here on Donald Pease’s introduction to *The Futures of American Studies* (2002) in which he responds to and critiques Gene Wise’s largely cited article “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement.”

movement that is characteristic of U.S. national history. In *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation*, the present moment, what preceded it, and what comes after are not successive. In this chapter, I examine the nuances of what I call non-national time in *West of the Jordan* (by Halaby) and queer time in *The Last Generation* (by Moraga).

If, in Anderson's account of the formation of the nation, linear time is intrinsic to national consciousness, non-national consciousness produces a different kind of temporality which I call "non-national" time. Non-national moments are specific instances which are at odds with what Lisa Lowe calls, in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), the "temporality of assimilation" (6). Lowe holds that the "temporality of assimilation" universalizes the experience of immigration in the sense that different migrant groups assimilate in the same way; hence racialization and hierarchies within minorities are obscured. In *West of the Jordan*, the characters' movement in time is dispersed between the West Bank—the occupied territories in Israel—and the U.S. Hence, it does not have an ordered pattern; it is rather interstitial, fragmented, or cyclical. I root non-national temporality in Ernst Bloch's theory of "contemporaneous non-contemporaneity,"<sup>30</sup> which Harry Harootunian elaborates in "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem" (2005). Harootunian holds that "contemporaneous non-contemporaneity" are moments of different but coexisting temporalities, "where fragments of the past unexpectedly and suddenly rise up to impinge upon the present" (42). The 1967 setback and its aftermath—loss of Palestinian territories, and expansion of Israeli occupation—looms over *West of the*

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<sup>30</sup> In *Heritages of Our Times* (1991), Bloch examines the changes brought by capitalism to peasant life, which render peasant life contradictory, characterized by both traditional and contemporary and modern aspects. Bloch specifically defines "non-contemporaneity" as "unsurmountable remnants of older economic being and consciousness" (106).

*Jordan* and is the core cause for multiple conflicts between migrant parents who demand that their children should acknowledge their Palestinian heritage and their children who are born and raised in the U.S. and perceive themselves as mainly Americans. Along the same lines, queer motherhood in *The Last Generation* produces a different sense of lineage formed at the conjuncture of imperial modern history of the U.S. as well as pre-Columbus and pre-colonial Aztlán. I situate non-national time and queer time within accounts by E.J. Hobsbawm, Donald Pease, and Homi Bhabha that criticize, and replace totalizing national time in Anderson's account with multiple temporalities.

Hobsbawm, in *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990), holds that “the progress of national consciousness ... is neither linear nor necessarily at the expense of other elements of social consciousness” (130). That is to say, within national time there are multiple temporalities formed by virtue of multiple aspects of “social consciousness” such as occupation and displacement. In *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation* the story of the nation is expanded beyond confining geographic territories, hence dispersing the notion of national time between two different time zones (as in *West of the Jordan*), and criticizes American imperialism (as in *The Last Generation*). Non-national time and queer time are two specific moments in the nation's time that are “interruptive” and “disjointed” to borrow Pease's words (154). Hence, national time would be imagined not as a single but as a “double” time: pedagogical and performative, as Bhabha holds in *The Location of Culture*. On the one hand, in pedagogical time, “the people are the historical ‘objects’ ... giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*” (208). On the other hand, the performative time “introduces a temporality of the ‘in-

between.’ ...[that] interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of people as homogeneous” (212). *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation* are narratives that are written from the perspectives of the displaced, the colonized, and the migrants: Palestinians and Chicanos. Accounting for these perspectives re-shapes the U.S. national time to become a temporality intertwined either with Jordan and Palestine or with Latin America and the Caribbean.

Despite their different histories in the U.S., both Laila Halaby and Cherríe Moraga share the experience of displacement and dispersal because of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories or U.S. imperial colonization of one third of Mexican lands. Loss of land and sovereignty over their own territories is at the heart of the Palestinian experience of exile, diaspora, and migration. When Israel established itself as a Jewish state in 1948 and then expanded its occupation of Palestinian territories after the six-day war in 1967, Palestinians fled to several neighboring countries that gave them citizenship in the country of residence—but eventually deprived them of that citizenship—or gave them work permits with various restrictions on the kinds of jobs they were allowed to take. In a similar sense, the neo-imperial project of manifest destiny seized Mexican lands by virtue of the 1848 Hidalgo Treaty. What were once Mexican territories became American territories, and members of the same family residing on Mexican lands became residents of American territories, while other members of the same family who became residents of Mexican territories became foreigners to what were once their own lands. Both writers take as a central theme the passage of heritage from parents—specifically the mother figure—to children to re-affirm belonging to a specific land and its cultural heritage. However, this passage of heritage from one generation to

the next is neither homogenous nor linear. On the contrary, the relation to cultural heritage and to parents as bearers of that heritage has a complex pattern because its genealogy does not move “calendrically” as Anderson holds but rather *recursively*, as in *West of the Jordan* or *monumentally*, as in *The Last Generation*.

National time in *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation* goes beyond the geographical boundaries of the U.S. and unfolds in the historical and cultural interaction between the U.S. and either Jordan and the West Bank (as in *West of the Jordan*) or Latin America and the Caribbean (as in *The Last Generation*). In *West of the Jordan*, the frame story of Hala migrating from Jordan to the U.S. alludes to the 1967 setback that has brought further displacements for Palestinians. The novel is about four Palestinian cousins—Hala, Khadija, Soraya, and Mawal—whose extended family lives in diaspora in the U.S. and Jordan. The novel covers their lives in three countries: the U.S., Jordan, and Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation. Each family has relatives in each of these three countries with whom they exchange stories about their daily lives and experiences to maintain their social network and family ties both within and across these countries. Thus, their lives, stories, and histories are dispersed across the three geographical spaces. *The Last Generation* is a collection of poetry and prose addressing the indigenous heritage of Chicanos/as. It focuses on the usurpation of Chicanos/as’ native lands five centuries ago (first by the Spanish, then by the Americans) and the deteriorating geopolitical conditions on multiple levels in the 1990s. There are two significant moments that Moraga continuously refers to throughout the book. These are: the colonization of the Indian lands that took place in the sixteenth century and the political and social events that took place across the world at the beginning of the 1990s—the

Soviet Union dissolved, the cold war ended, the Gulf War started. Time is shaped by conquest, invasion, occupation, and political unrest in both the occupied territories of Palestine (in *West of the Jordan*) and indigenous Indian lands (in *The Last Generation*). To examine non-national time and queer time in *West of the Jordan* and *The Last Generation*, I read the former as a moment formed at the intersection between an ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories and continued adaptation to living in the U.S.; and I read the latter as a moment formed at the conjuncture between the pre-colonial and the colonial.

### *West of the Jordan*

*West of the Jordan*, published in 2003, caught the attention of reviewers as a novel by a writer with Arab roots which contributed to the emerging literature by Arab-American women writing about Arab culture and heritage to challenge the stereotype of women from the Arab world. This is Halaby's first novel, and her self-described purpose for writing is to challenge "the perception, or misconception, of Arab women vs. the reality of Arab women" (online interview). She also aims at portraying Arab families closely and exploring the effects of occupation and exile on the Palestinian family relationships. The novel has been received very positively and most of the reviews<sup>31</sup> highlight its main themes which can be summed up as follows: the difficulties of cross-cultural existence, multiplicity of Palestinian women's experiences, diversity of Palestinian women, and mother-daughter relationships.

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<sup>31</sup> I refer here to specific reviews by Parama Sarkar, Fay A. Chadwell, Dori DeSpain, Elsa Gaztambide.

Despite the positive reception of the novel, all these reviews, except for one by Fay A. Chadwell, do not acknowledge that two of the main characters are born and raised in the U.S. and hence struggle with defining themselves as solely “Arab”. By the same token, none of the reviews discuss the historical/political context of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank or the interaction between characters living in the U.S. and their relatives living in Jordan and the West Bank. For example, Parama Sarkar’s review discusses how Halaby’s novel “reflect[s] the multiplicity of Palestinian experiences [and women]” (263). In addition, Sarkar describes Mawal as “immobile and located in a specific cultural space” (265). While the first comment ignores the fact that at least two of the main characters—Khadija and Soraya—are Palestinian/Jordanian-American (Khadija does not even know Arabic), the second comment misses how Mawal draws an analogy and a metaphorical proximity between the U.S. and Nawara, which brings into question the “specificity” of the cultural space that Sarkar refers to. In similar ways, Dori DeSpain writes that the main theme of the novel is “the difficulties facing *Arab women wherever they live*, ... seeking acceptance and success in a *foreign country*” (208 emphasis added). According to DeSpain’s reading of the novel then, Khadija who is born in the U.S. and does not know Arabic, is an “Arab” woman who lives in a “foreign country”. These reviews unfold a problem in the critical reception of literature written by women with Arab roots. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj in *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (2000) point out that texts by Third World women are viewed either as markers of “cultural authenticity” or as texts that provide “windows” into other cultures (2). The reviews of *West of the Jordan* contain clichés concerning texts by and about women of Arab roots. As Sarkar’s and DeSpain’s

reviews reveal, they re-affirm a binary between the East that is “immobile” and the West that is a more progressive place for Arab women who are independent and ambitious. This *pre-packaged* reading—as Mohja Kahf holds in “Packaging ‘Huda’: Sha’rawi’s Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment” (148-9)—does not attend to the intricacies and nuanced lives of Palestinian-American women’s writings.

In *West of the Jordan*, as previously mentioned, members of the same family are dispersed between the West Bank, Jordan, and the U.S. Despite that dispersal, what brings members of these families together are watching wedding videotapes of their relatives in Nawara/Jordan and the circulation of gossipy stories. This suggests that despite the geographical distance between these three countries, that distance shrinks by virtue of exchanging videotapes and gossip. These dynamics too conjure up “imagined communities”. As Anderson notes, reading novels and the newspaper bring people of the same community together; “imagined communities” form the core principle of the nation and what distinguishes communities is the “style” by which they are imagined (Anderson 6). The time difference between the U.S. and Jordan/West Bank shapes in a paradoxical manner the ways communities are imagined in *West of the Jordan*. On the one hand, the time difference between different time zones is overcome by technological means of communication. Thus, watching a videotape or circulating gossip is no longer obstructed by the geographical distance between the U.S., Jordan, and the West Bank; a videotape can be (e)mailed overnight and gossip can take place over a phone call. These transnational transactions, made easier by contemporary technologies, challenge the constraints of spatial distance; as Paul Jay puts it: they “collapse the discontinuity between time and space in a radically new way” (36). Herein lies what I argue to be a

non-national time—and paradoxical time that is interstitial; fragmented and non-sequential; recursive and non-synchronous—and through its lens I analyze *West of the Jordan*.

The preface of *West of the Jordan* foreshadows its peculiar temporality. Entitled “Make it Delicious” rather than *Preface* or *Forward*, this chapter is an inner dialogue in which the writer blames herself for not writing as frequently as she should, and she encourages herself to write stories inspired by her own experience of recollecting stories from past incidents and events. The structural purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, by fictionalizing the preface, the conventional opening of the story is disrupted because the preface becomes part of the narrative but not quite. Consequently, no linear progression of the preface can be traced in the following chapter. Second, the present moment which the author perceives as a moment of recollecting stories and writing them is depicted in contradictory terms. She writes:

*now* they [stories] come back to you at the *wrong time*, at the *right time*, at times that make you *hate* where you live, or *love* it more than you can make your words describe. (1-2 emphasis added)

The contradictions of the present moment reveal that the “now” moment for the author is a site for *different but coexisting temporalities*. By the same token, the pleasure of recollecting and writing stories is compared to cooking a delicious meal. This analogy between cooking and writing conjures up the multiple communities that can possibly be formed around food and stories. These communities are formed simultaneously but not synchronically. In other words, the incidents in the novel are set in Jordan, the West Bank, and the U.S. By virtue of their geographical locations, they have different time

zones. When it is daytime in the U.S., it is nighttime in Jordan/West Bank. There is little reference to specific clock-time—whether it is day or night—either in the U.S. or in Jordan/West Bank. For example, the incidents of watching a wedding videotape take place in Jordan, the West Bank, and the U.S. However, the time frame of watching this tape is never given. While the act of watching can be simultaneous, it cannot be in the same clocked time. Consequently, the movement of the imagined communities formed around watching video tapes is not *steady* and is not formed in *homogenous time*.

Time in *West of the Jordan* moves in circuits—incidents, stories, and acts—one leads to another and circulates among family members. There is a glimpse of this temporal manner in the first chapter, specifically, when Hala recalls the political and family incidents that have taken place in 1967 and have forever affected her family:

In 1967, the Occupation began and my father lost a lot of his land.

My mother lost her freedom to visit her family [in the West Bank].

My father became less generous with my mother, and she became less generous with her children. (11)

Furthermore, Hala's mother became terminally ill with cancer. The year 1967 has caused a temporal disruption in Hala's family as well as in the formation of the Palestinian nation. On the one hand, in Hala's family, roles have been reversed and her older sister, Latifa, has taken over their mother's role as a care-giver for both her siblings and their frail mother. On the other hand, since the Six-Day War, Israel has expanded its control over Palestinian territories and seized Palestinians' sovereignty to their own lands. The structure of the novel echoes this temporal disruption: the sequential order of chapters is disrupted and is either reversed or does not follow a specific pattern. The first chapter in

the novel, which is narrated by Hala, is followed by a chapter narrated by Mawal, her cousin in Nawara, then Soraya, then Khadija. This sequence is repeated but in different order: Hala, Mawal, Soraya, Mawal, Khadija; Hala, Hala, Soraya, Mawal, Khadija, Soraya, Khadija, Soraya, etc. The order of incidents in the novel does not follow a cause-effect logic. They are stretched along the course of the novel and within the bigger frame of Hala's visit to Jordan that starts in the first chapter and her return to the U.S. in the last chapter.

Stretching one incident in the novel over a number of chapters fragments and expands the time it takes to narrate the incident. This temporality renders *West of the Jordan* a “spiral emplotment.”<sup>32</sup> A spiral narrative is a paradoxical one that has a sense of both linearity and circularity. The linear parts in Halaby's book, specifically Hala's visit to Jordan and meeting with different members of her family, are loaded with incidents or memories of incidents that took place in the past as well as reflections on them. This results in a turn away from the moment narrated and allows these recollections to interrupt the narrative. As Paul Ricoeur explains in *Time and Narrative*, “excursions into the past” like flashbacks and memories have two effects on the narrative. They “form a *series of loops* that gives its specific distension to the narrated time's extension” and “*paradoxically*, make the narrated time advance by delaying it” (103-4 emphasis added). That is to say, the present moment is expanded, intersects, and moves liminally between

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<sup>32</sup> I am borrowing here from both Jeanette Winterson and Paul Ricoeur. Winterson uses “spiral narrative” to describe her first novel, *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (1985). She explains that a spiral narrative technique is “fluid and allows infinite movement.” It also reflects our mental and reading process: “every turning yields another turning” (xiii). Susana Onega describes the spiral narrative technique to be one that gives a sense of infinity (31). “Emplotment” or “configuration” is Ricoeur's term for the order of events in a novel. It is also what he refers to as “mimesis 2” in his schemata for fictional narrative in *Time and Narrative*, volume 1 (52-73).

various stories. This is clear when reading together the first chapter of Hala's story and the last chapter of the novel, which is also about Hala.

The novel starts and ends with the same character: Hala. As I noted earlier, the story opens with Hala about to land in the Jordanian airport, in an in-between space between two destinations. The rest of the chapter is about her childhood memories, remembering her mother and her mother's stories. Hala, also, remembers the devastating family and political incidents she witnessed as a child and feels the pain of losing her mother anew. The last chapter is also about Hala, her adjustment to a new life in the U.S., and she recalls what her mother told her about the importance of remembering to make her days "new" and "old." The first chapter is entitled "Going Home"—in that chapter, it is Jordan. The final chapter, where the novel reaches a *dénouement*, "home" is the U.S. to which she returns after her visit to Jordan. In this final chapter, Hala compares her uncle's—Hamdi's—upper-class house and its bare walls to her house in Amman, with "every nook and cranny filled with something: a plant, a book, a statue, a flower" (217). In an earlier chapter entitled "Weddings," Hala perceives Jordan as a place "Of Unfulfilled Dreams" and the U.S. as a place of "Reason and Capitalism" (83). The tension in the novel stems from a tension between the "old" and the "new," allegorized by a spatial contrast between Hala's house in Jordan and her uncle's house in the U.S. This spatial contrast implies two senses of temporality: linear and patterned (allegorized by Uncle Hamdi's house) on the one hand; emotional and instant (allegorized by Hala's house in Amman). Hala thinks of Uncle Hamdi's house as one that suits his "professor lifestyle," "high-class American style," neat, lush carpeting, and regulated temperature (216). This functional luxury is tied to affluence and generates a kind of temporality that

is predictable and follows a set pattern. Despite the comfortable life that Hala has in the U.S., she is nostalgic for the emotional connections she has in Jordan. In her uncle's house, despite the luxury of comfort and predictability, time and the movement in time are locked into a present that is empty. When Hala looks at the walls in uncle Hamdi's house, there are no photos or colors and she "cannot imagine anything" (217). In contrast to that empty present, in Amman,

every wall was covered with religious plaques, calendars, photographs. Every gift and every souvenir ever received or bought was on display like a trophy. Always somewhere to look to take you somewhere else, to make you think. Either a memory resurrected or a new place to go or a joy to feel. ... No place for thoughts to stop.

(217)

The circulation of affect—joy and pride—evoked by gifts and souvenirs conjures up what Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* terms the "social potential" of commodities (6). Appadurai proposes defining a commodity "as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature" (13). In that sense, Hala exchanges her feelings of nostalgia with her recollections of the associative meanings of gifts and souvenirs on display in her house in Amman. By the same token, the cluttered walls and memories reflect a structure of time that is cumulative and evocative compared to the bare walls and the neat surroundings which reflect an ordered structure of time. This is precisely a moment in which "fragments of the past unexpectedly and suddenly rise up to impinge upon the present," producing *different but coexisting temporalities*, as Bloch

reminds us. Memories of Hala's house in Amman *impinge* on the present moment and extend the present moment into the past and paradoxically into a new undescribed future: "to take you somewhere else ... a memory resurrected or a new place to go or a joy to feel." This moment of conjunction representing the past and the future recurs throughout the novel to reveal an aspect of non-contemporaneity between Nawara, which is under occupation and without an independent economy, and Glendale/California, which provides affluence and a seeming economic security.

Nawara—like all villages in the West Bank—is famous for stitching rozas. However, working at embroidery declines "for lack of *time* and *money*" (10 emphasis added). Patterns of embroidering rozas can be linear, cyclical, intersecting, or crisscrossing. These metaphorical multiple movements in time stand in contrast to the temporal matrix under capitalism that "seeks to unify and homogenize ... and makes the movement of time a one-way street, all directed toward the product," to quote from Harootunian (45). Rozas metaphorically stand for the "spirit of Nawara" (15) and are set in contrast to Glendale in two senses: a politically occupied territory and a recipient of American money sent by the Palestinian diaspora in the U.S., as well as the homeland of Palestinian cultural heritage. In this regard, Mawal gives a complex description of Nawara in terms of its geopolitical location and its rozas:

The complicated embroidery on our *roz*as—with both *Palestinian and western stitches and patterns*—captures the spirit of Nawara, which sits at the top of the West Bank, just west of the Jordan River, east of Jenin and far enough away from both of these places to be a peaceful village that only ever so often releases an

avalanche of stones and fire. This is something that happens more often as the Israelis take parts of our village to build their settlements. (15 emphasis added)

The art of embroidery in Nawara metaphorically reveals the constraints of both the political and economic occupation of Nawara. This occupation complicates the formation of an “imagined community” for the Palestinian diaspora or its *steady movement down or up history*. Jewish settlements are perpetually disrupting the possibility of forming an “imagined community” within single geographical territories. What is formed is rather an “imagined [dispersed] community.” As metaphors, rozas with their Palestinian and western patterns unfold the multiple dispersals that are characteristic of the perception of Palestine as a nation without sovereignty.

Despite the economic and political occupation, new imagined communities are formed around watching videotapes, sent by their migrant relatives, and around the everyday stories and gossip shared among families in Nawara. Mawal says:

I tuck this story [the story of installing speakers to a mosque’s minaret] into my pocket, wishing I could stitch it into my skin, like one of the *Bedouin tattoos* my grandmother wears. Are there stories like this in lovely, tempting America? Do my cousins there even know these little histories? I doubt it.

Stitch in red for life.

Stitch in green to remember.

Stitch, stitch to never forget. (103 emphasis added)

Bedouin tattoos, like embroidery on rozas, are intricate. They are encoded texts on one's skin that imply meanings of belonging, acknowledging, valorizing, and remembering a specific cultural heritage. Thus, Bedouin tattoos are the means to keep alive the "spirit of Nawara" and by extension to keep remembering people and their lives in Nawara despite the loss of land and the decline of embroidering rozas. Comparing stories to stitching and tattoos implies that these stories are imprinted on the skin of its bearers, removing them is more painful than keeping them. Thus stories and skin become impossible to separate.

The circulation of gossip as stories in the novel functions in the same way that Jörg Bergmann suggests in *Discreet Indiscretions: The Social Organization of Gossip*. Building on anthropological studies about gossip, Bergmann explains that gossip "strengthens the identity and coherence of a social group" (145). Nevertheless, as Bergmann notes, gossip has been also tied to pre-modern societies (141). Along the same lines, Gerald Arbuckle in *Violence, Society, and the Church* holds that gossip "flourishes in pre-modern cultures as an informal method of maintaining loyalty and conformity to the group" (99). In *West of the Jordan*, phones become part of the infrastructure of maintaining community by facilitating the circulation of gossip between Nawara and Glendale. Ironically, the gossip about Hala's mother having an affair with a man from her village started in the U.S., hence disturbing the binary between the U.S. and Nawara.

By the same token, in Nawara, new communities are formed around watching video tapes, which can be interpreted in light of the technological development in the fields of transportation and communication which "foreshortens time"<sup>33</sup> as Hans

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<sup>33</sup> Meyerhoff explains that these developments have made the world "technologically one," in the sense that what "happens now here, happens now everywhere; while we are at one place, we are potentially (with the negligible difference of a few hours) anywhere in the world" (109). Thus, these developments have "shortened time and expanded space" (111).

Meyerhoff explains (109). The paradoxical relation between “foreshortening” time and the expansion of time by remembering stories and incidents that have taken place in the past is tied to capitalist economic structures and new means of visual consumption.

Nawara, as I have pointed out earlier, is famous for stitching rozas, a craft which declines “for lack of time and money” (10). Yet, every house, regardless of its economic status, has a TV and a VCR. These are the means of seeing “faraway sons, cousins, brothers, sisters, neighbors” (18). That is to say, what brings people together in Nawara is not the traditional activity of embroidery (which takes quite some time to finish) but rather another activity that has a shorter time span (watching videos) that has become more and more intensified in different ways due to the widespread capitalist economic policies that “foreshortens” time and necessitate fast transfer of money and information. Watching wedding videos and weaving rozas form “imagined communities” that consolidate the ones formed in Glendale/Hollywood/ Anaheim which Soraya describes and I will discuss later. This disrupts the assumption that members of the family who do not migrate are more settled, or feel more at home than their relatives who have migrated.

The simultaneity of different forms of temporality within a single space opens up the possibility of their comparability to unfold new movements in time. Within the context of the novel, there are three kinds of circulations: of gossipy stories, which is two-way between the U.S. and Nawara; of money, which is unidirectional from the U.S. to Nawara; and of gifts, which is two-way between Nawara and the U.S. These movements in time though they take place in discrepant time zones, become simultaneous, but not synchronic, by virtue of the technology that facilitates long distance communications. Simultaneity and non-synchronicity in the novel constitute a temporal

matrix that dismantles the definition of the nation in terms of unidirectional temporality. To clarify, for example, many marriages as well as many houses in Nawara are built on American money (219, 22). Family members who have left for the U.S. send money to relatives left behind in Nawara to show that they have a better standard of living than other families who do not have the same advantage. The money sent by relatives in the U.S. intertwines the lives of individuals who live in the U.S. with those who live in Nawara.

Money and gifts sent to Nawara as a means of financial support of relatives left behind is also the means by which relatives who left for the U.S. show their connectedness to their land of origin. In this sense, the sender/U.S. is the source of economic support for the receiver/Nawara, while Nawara and its people are dependent on the U.S. for economic survival. Nevertheless, the videotapes/pictures sent from Nawara to the U.S. as well as the stories told to and by Mawal and exchanged with her cousins in the U.S. reverse this sender-receiver dichotomy because relatives in the U.S. are dependent on these videotapes and stories for their cultural and emotional survival. Throughout the novel, though Mawal acknowledges gifts and money sent from relatives in the U.S., she emphasizes the superiority of Nawara over “lovely, tempting America” because the latter lacks stories about people’s daily lives (103). Thus, Nawara becomes the *sender* and the U.S. becomes the *receiver*. Monetary remittance (money and gifts) sent to Nawara as well as “social remittance”<sup>34</sup> (videotapes/pictures and stories) sent to Glendale/California become a “two-way” remittance that de-centralizes the notion of a

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<sup>34</sup> Peggy Levitt defines “social remittance” to be “the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving-to sending-countries communities” (927). These transnational exchanges sustain the family ties between relatives who leave and relatives who stay.

nation of origin and consequently the center-margin dichotomy intrinsic to the meaning of remittance. Kezia Page in *Transnational Negotiations in Caribbean Diasporic Literature: Remitting the Text* (2011) draws on the term remittance<sup>35</sup> from economic discourse and uses the term “cultural remittance” to denote a two-way exchange of remittance—money remittance and cultural remittance—between the host country and home country (11). Not only does this “two-way” remittance de-centralize notions of “national” home but also reflects the double uprootedness of the Palestinian diaspora. Within Israel, Palestinians cannot easily move from one city to another, check points have to be passed and sometimes a special permit is required. Thus, family networks are formed within a perpetual diasporic flow of people across borders whether the borders are within Israel or outside of it. In a similar sense, if one considers Halaby’s novel as a “remittance text”<sup>36</sup>, consumed in Nawara, the homeland of the characters, *West of the Jordan* reverses that order as well. This is because, contrary to what Page holds about diaspora narratives as “cultural remittance,” sent back to be read in the native lands of their writers, the target readers of *West of the Jordan* would be mostly Palestinian-Americans or Palestinians who are well-acquainted with the English language. Thus it becomes a “remittance text” consumed in what is considered home; in that context it is the U.S. rather than Nawara.

Furthermore, *West of the Jordan* portrays an imagined proximity and similarity between Nawara and Glendale from the perspectives of Mawal and Soraya. Soraya, an

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<sup>35</sup> Page in her argument about Caribbean narratives as “cultural remittance” borrows the economic definition of remittance “as a one-way street where the [Caribbean] diaspora is implicated in positions at the center” (11).

<sup>36</sup> Focusing specifically on Caribbean texts, Page explains that the “remittance text” is “the text that highlights, whether in celebration or critique, the inequalities of the exchange between Caribbean denizens of the metropolitan diaspora and Caribbean people who live in the region, traditionally separated as denizens of ‘First and Third’ world spaces respectively” (82).

American-born child, comments: “My parents are from the same village in the West Bank, and half of the village lives here in Glendale or Hollywood or Anaheim” (31). In another chapter, she says: “Our house has an endless supply of visitors, *as though this were Nawara*” (106 emphasis added). “[A]s though this were Nawara” evokes the presence of a Nawara imagined community, in Anderson’s sense<sup>37</sup>, by virtue of which they affiliate themselves emotionally and mentally to a land of origin. However, this sense of an imagined community becomes problematic if one takes into consideration the fact that the West Bank<sup>38</sup>, where Nawara is imaginatively located and to which the title of the novel alludes, has a long, complex, political history of defining and claiming its sovereignty. On the one hand, the West Bank is a disputed territory between Palestine and Israel. On the other hand, Palestine is not politically fully acknowledged as a state; there is no Palestine on the world map and no Palestinian citizenship in the conventional sense. Thus, the novel depicts a metaphoric national community that only emerges within the narrative. This metaphoric national community is also formed outside its geographical territories, namely in California, in the U.S.

From Nawara, Mawal draws a metaphoric proximity between Nawara and the U.S. In the chapter entitled “Nawara”, Mawal says: “Nawara could have a small version of herself in the United States, which is like an army calling all able-bodied young men away and then never returning the bodies” (15). Joining the army always implies combat and the possibility of facing death. Therefore, pairing the U.S. and Nawara in terms of

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<sup>37</sup> I am drawing here from Anderson’s definition of the nation as a community that is imagined. It is imagined because “in the minds of each [member of that community] lives the image of their communication.” It is a community because it is “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7).

<sup>38</sup> The West Bank was part of Syria under Ottoman rule (between 1517 to 1917), then became Palestinian by British mandate (1920). Later, it was annexed by Jordan (1948) and then Israel gained control over it after the 1967 war. Since 1993—after the Oslo Accord—parts of the West Bank are under Israeli control and other parts are under Palestinian control.

joining the army is twofold. First, it implies their destinies are intertwined; thus the safety of one place hinges on the safety of the other. Second, it shatters the presumed binary opposition between the U.S. as the land of dreams and opportunities vs. Nawara as a small village in a war-torn zone. Furthermore, this comparison echoes what Soraya says about her parents' house functioning as though it "were Nawara". Mawal's perception of the U.S. reveals a contradiction. On the one hand, the U.S., though a haven for the Palestinian diaspora, does not lessen their feelings of alienation and dispersal. On the other hand, in a different chapter, entitled "America", Mawal perceives the U.S. as "*a greedy neighbor* who takes the best out of you and leaves you feeling empty" (96 emphasis added). This metaphor reveals the feeling of emptiness—rather than fulfillment—that the U.S., as an alternative country to live in, brings to the Palestinian diaspora, and echoes Hala's perception of Jordan as a place of "unfulfilled dreams".

Not only does *West of the Jordan* cast doubt on the unidirectional movement in national time, but also complicates the generational transmission of the nation from mothers to children, specifically to daughters. In immigrant narratives, the mother figure is often emblematic of national and cultural heritage; hence mother-daughter conflict has the potential to interrupt national time. A case in point is the contrast between Khadija and Mawal in terms of their relation to their mothers. Khadija is perceived as a girl with "an Arab face" but with "an American accent" (19). Khadija's Arab features make her look familiar in Nawara. However, her fluency in English rather than Arabic disturbs that sense of familiarity. Khadija's character complicates the definition of Americanness when she paradoxically perceives Americanness in a homogenous sense, yet defines Americanness in terms of diversity. At school, Mr. Napolitan

expects me [Khadija] to know more than other kids because my parents *are not American*, though there are lots of other kids in the class who *aren't American* themselves. I want to scream at him that *I am just as American* as anyone here. (74 emphasis added)

Khadija's self-perception as an American problematizes the notion of Americanness. On the one hand, Khadija is American by virtue of being born in the U.S though her parents are not American. On the other hand, this is what Americanness is: belonging to parents who come from any part of the world to the U.S. and hence *become* "American." At home, Khadija's mother tells her "You are Palestinian," and she replies "I am American." Khadija elaborates that she does not even know Arabic and that she is "American." Though Khadija tries to convince her mother that she can be "American" and still be her mother's daughter, her mother firmly responds: "No! No daughter of mine is American" (74). Khadija's mother rejects her daughter labeling herself "American" because being American implicitly severs cultural ties with her mother's Palestinian heritage. Unlike Khadija, Mawal sustains a close relationship with her mother; they share stories about their family members in Nawara, Jordan, and the U.S.; and their acquaintances in Nawara perceive them as sisters rather than mother and daughter. If one considers the meanings of Mawal's name (a folkloric ballad that is popular and broadly circulated)<sup>39</sup> and relate them to the metaphoric description of herself as a tree whose branches are breaking, one can conclude that her presence as a safe-keeper of stories of her relatives and friends in

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<sup>39</sup> Mawal means a folkloric ballad that has different themes—female beauty, heroism, unfulfilled love stories, and separation. These ballads are popular because they are in common dialect and are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Nawara/Jordan/the U.S. is essential to keeping the Palestinian heritage within and outside of Nawara.

Mother-daughter relationships in Halaby's novel do not follow the patriarchal family paradigm, in the sense that the novel is narrated from the perspectives of the four daughters—Hala, Khadija, Mawal, and Soraya—and not from the perspectives of the fathers, brothers, or husbands. In that sense, one can consider Halaby's novel a "feminist family romance,"<sup>40</sup> which unfolds different temporalities, formed along the lines of controlling women's sexualities and the role of the mother as a transmitter of national belonging. The conflict between Khadija and her mother reveals Khadija's rejection of bearing the Palestinian cultural tradition of her mother, not only because Khadija perceives herself as American, but also because she resists the patriarchal control over her sexuality. Khadija's father, when he sees her belly-dancing, feels the threat of his daughter's evolving sexuality and beats her. Through the act of violence the father imposes the phallic order that contains and represses female sexuality and relegates it to the realm of the invisible. Khadija's mother re-emphasizes and even complicates that phallic order when she correlates the threat of her daughter's evolving sexuality to the threat of losing contact with the Palestinian ethnic identity. Khadija's mother screams and curses America when she catches Khadija with a sensual picture. At this moment, Khadija's mother comes face to face with the fact that her daughter is acknowledging her

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<sup>40</sup> Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) coins her phrases "female family romance" and "feminist family romance" based on Nancy K. Miller's argument that the process of resistance and revisions in the works of women writers should be identified as "feminist." However, Hirsch limits the use of "feminist" to writings by women writers who specifically deploy ideas of the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s—especially psychoanalytic revisions of the family paradigm. Hirsch uses "female" for earlier works by women writers that include women's "self-consciousness and resistance" (8-15). For the purposes of my argument within the context of Halaby's novel I will use "feminist" in the sense of resisting a dominant patriarchy not necessarily revisiting the psychoanalytic principles of a patriarchal family structure.

own sexuality. This moment is the pinnacle of an earlier moment in the novel when the mother insists that “no daughter of mine is American” and incidents that the mother-daughter bond breaks if the daughter defines herself as “American.” In the Freudian family structure the father figure breaks the mother-child bond so that the child has to identify with the father and the “symbolic order.” Here, the father figure and Americanness play the same role in severing the mother-daughter bond between Khadija and her mother. To become a woman, Khadija has to identify with the phallic law that renders her sexuality invisible and sever ties with the maternal. By the same token, to become “American,” Khadija severs ties with her mother, and metaphorically with the Palestinian tradition. When Khadija plays the maternal role, taking care of her siblings when her mother travels to the West Bank to visit her ailing mother, Khadija reports her father to the authorities for beating her brother, an act that is not expected from her. Thus, Khadija breaks the bond with the father figure as well. The novel ends without telling what happens next. This opens up several possibilities for Khadija whether re-making bonds with the father figure/mother figure or simply not bonding with either. Khadija’s *feminist* stance implies her rejection for what is deemed traditional values and “non-contemporaneous”.

Unlike Khadija, Hala and Mawal sustain the mother-daughter bond, in the sense that they tend to extend their mothers’ interest in keeping stories and connection with their nation of origin, West Bank/Jordan. Hala always recalls her mother’s advice to her: “Remember for yourself and for your tomorrow” (218). In a similar sense, Mawal and her mother are so close that people in Nawara would consider them sisters and share their

stories freely with them. To recall Harootunian, Hala and Mawal live in different but coexisting temporalities, “where fragments of the past...impinge upon the present” (42).

In conclusion, non-national time in *West of the Jordan* is formed at the conjunction of the contradictory social and cultural structures between Nawara and Glendale, rooted in what is deemed traditional and pre-capitalist versus what is deemed contemporary and modern. This contradiction is allegorized by the complicated embroidery on rozas, “with both Palestinian and western stitches and patterns.” This contradiction dismantles a homogenous move in time for the Palestinian diaspora either in Nawara or in Glendale.

### *The Last Generation*

Published in 1993, ten years earlier than *West of the Jordan*, *The Last Generation* has received wider critical attention. Most of the reviews and scholarly studies have focused on Moraga’s revisiting the mythological notion of Aztlán<sup>41</sup> and the mythological figure Coyolxauhqui<sup>42</sup> to highlight the cultural specificity of Chicano/a indigenous history in the U.S. and to gender that history by placing sexuality at its center. As such, Moraga challenges Anglo-centric nationalism and Chicano phallogocentric cultural nationalism. Race and sexuality intersect in Moraga’s revisited narration of the nation. My analysis of Moraga’s text echoes many of these ideas but adds a new layer by

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<sup>41</sup> In the mid 1970s Chicano writers like Alurista (pseudonym of the Chicano poet and activist Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia) and Rudolfo Anaya depict in their writings a pre-Columbian Mexico, an Amerindian land (Aztlán) and its Aztec culture and mythology. Thus, Aztlán became a mythical cultural homeland for the Chicanos.

<sup>42</sup> Coyolxauhqui is the daughter of Coatlicue and sister of Huitzilopotchi—god of war—who upon her birth dismembered her and exiled her to darkness. Thus, he became the sun/son and she became the moon/daughter.

interpreting Moraga's text as an interruptive narrative to the claimed homogenous narrative of American national time.

Moraga dedicates her book to the legacies of Audre Lorde and César Chavez as well as to "the yet unborn." This dedication has multiple implications. On the one hand, it implies the acknowledgement of and carrying on the struggle of U.S. lesbian feminists of color (Lorde) and fights for equal rights of oppressed, exploited Mexican workers (Chavez). On the other hand, it is also dedicated to future generations. In the introduction, Moraga describes her book as "a journey into the *past* as it is into the *future*, a resurrection of the *ancient* in order to construct the *modern*. It is that place where *prophecy* and *past* meet and *speak to each other*" (3 emphasis added). This hybrid timeframe is echoed in the structure as well. *The Last Generation* is a multi-genre book of poems, stories, and essays. Moraga wrote the poems over a period of seven years beginning in 1985 upon returning to Aztlán<sup>43</sup> (2). She specifies that *The Last Generation* is a testimonial written to mark the passage of 500 years after the Spanish conquest of the New World and written in response to the political urgency of the first three years of the 1990s. That is to say, *The Last Generation* is written at the intersection of colonization and imperialism; Moraga situates the colonization of indigenous Chicano lands that began five centuries ago with the Spanish conquest within the context of the political events triggered by the imposition of U.S. dominance over different regions in the world. As Moraga puts it, "Chicano Nation is a mestizo nation conceived in a double-rape: first, by the Spanish and then by the Gringo" (153). The double rape dismantles a linear genealogy.

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<sup>43</sup> Moraga in this part of her book uses the pre-colonial name "Aztlán" to refer to the Bay Area.

Consequently, structurally, Moraga's heterogeneous narrative does not have a "plot" in the literary sense of the term. The absence of a plot implies that there is no specific order of incidents; each of the five parts has a different theme except for the last two sections ("The Breakdown of the Bicultural Mind" and "The Last Generation") that are more coherent and connected. Despite this seemingly arbitrary structure three main themes recur throughout the book: Moraga's concerns about Chicano cultural heritage; American imperialism; and the politics of her sexuality. Throughout, Moraga criticizes U.S. domestic and foreign policies that have contributed to wars, unfair economic policies, and negligence of the impoverished. This heterogeneous structure opens up the possibility of a non-sequential narration of the nation and proposes a new sense of genealogy for the formation of the U.S.

The re-visited notion of the nation that Moraga's narrative proposes intertwines the colonial history of Chicano Aztlán with the contemporary imperial history of the U.S. *The Last Generation* "begins at the end and moves forward" (4); it is a testimonial about the conquest of the native lands of Chicanos—Aztlán—by the Spanish and the U.S. seizure of Mexican land in 1848 (by virtue of the Hidalgo Treaty). On the one hand, Moraga highlights Chicanos/as' past: "we live daily in the moment of that highway robbery" (110). On the other hand, she underlines how Chicanos/as "witness [their] past in order to reconstruct a future" and they "[look] backward in order to look forward" (70, 190). The past and the present are at the core of Moraga's revisited national discourse of "Aztlán." Unlike the Chicano national discourse of "Aztlán" as a land of unity and

liberation, Moraga's reconceptualization of it as "Queer Aztlán" puts gender and sexuality at its center to resist patriarchy, homophobia, and imperial exploitation<sup>44</sup>.

"Queer Aztlán" is a trope for a new genealogy of the nation; it is a counter-narrative that interrupts the colonial/imperial story of the U.S. nation state. Re-visiting the narrative of the U.S. nation dismantles the paradigmatic story of Americanness founded on consensus and homogeneity, as well as the notion of an integrated American entity that is self-contained and exceptional. Moraga's narration of the U.S. nation state is told not in terms of its exceptionalism and isolationism but in terms of its engagement with the rest of the world and in terms of its capacity, or lack thereof, to "embrace *all* its people, including its *jotería* [queer]" (Moraga 147). I connect the new national temporality that emerges from queer motherhood in Moraga's narrative of "Queer Aztlán" to Julia Kristeva's concept of "monumental temporality" in "Women's Times". Kristeva argues that "monumental temporality" is "all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits" (191). This definition of monumental time resonates with Moraga's definition of Queer Aztlán as a nation encompassing all its people without imposed hierarchies. Thus, the patriarchal, heteronormative family structure is replaced by queer motherhood in the "Queer Aztlán" narrative. Anne McIntock, in "*No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism*" (1997), holds that "nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies" (91). These genealogies are hierarchical; in these genealogies women are

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<sup>44</sup> "Queer Aztlan," however, runs the risk of essentializing Chicano/a national discourse. For example, Rafael Pérez-Torres in "Refiguring Aztlán" (2000) and *Movements in Chicano Poetry* (1995) addresses the problematic implications of reclaiming Aztlán to be the indigenous Chicano/a homeland. On the one hand, though Aztlán is perceived as a unifying symbol, its conceptualization "erases the vast differences that help for the richness and variety of the terms 'Chicana' and 'Chicano'" (115 "Refiguring Aztlán").

represented as the “authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity”; men “represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent, and historic), embodying nationalism’s progressive, or revolutionary, principle of discontinuity” (92). Queer motherhood disrupts the traditional symbolic genealogy of the nation. In her introduction to *The Last Generation*, Moraga reveals her concern about the loss of the indigenous heritage of Chicanos/as because she is unable to pass that heritage to her offspring: “My line of family stops with me.” She is queer and will not have children through a heterosexual family: “There will be no one calling me, *Mami*, *Mamá*, *Abuelita* ... I am the last generation put on this planet to remember and record” (9). Moraga positions herself as the last generation of Chicanos/as storytellers and heritage keepers. Nevertheless, Moraga extends her cultural heritage “*through* queerness, rather than in spite of it” as Lisa Tatonetti explains (241). Moraga revisits the traditional patriarchal family structure in two ways. First, Moraga foregrounds her perspective as a daughter and a potential mother rather than foregrounding the perspectives of the male members of her family. Second, there is a resonance between Moraga’s perception of herself as an empowered daughter and the mythical goddess Coyolxauhqui. The patriarchal story of Coyolxauhqui revolves around the bad daughter who wants to kill her mother upon knowing of the birth of Huitzilopochtli, her brother. Moraga reverses this story and celebrates the daughter figure. Shifting the perspective through which this myth has been known symbolically restores the powers of the goddess Coyolxauhqui.

Moraga also dismantles the patriarchal domestic genealogy in her portrayal of the father figure as possibly gay. However, the portrayal of Moraga’s father is problematic.

Although he is the dominating father, and although Moraga's perspective as a daughter and a mother is at the center, the perspective of Moraga's own mother is overshadowed, perpetuating the representation of the mother as a subordinate figure. Another layer of complexity unfolds, especially in the chapter entitled "The Breakdown of the Bicultural Mind," if one takes into consideration that the mother figure is brown Mexican and the father figure is white Anglo. The Mexican mother and the Anglo father echo symbolically, "the Violated Mother" and "the rapist Father" (128). That is to say, the Anglo figure conjures up two acts of betrayal in the Chicano collective consciousness: the rape of the indigenous Indian woman who became the mother of the first mestizo (Mexican of Indian and Spanish descent); and homosexuality as a betrayal of the Chicano movement (the La Raza). The effeminate, non-phallic, white father figure re-affirms the racialization of homosexuality as white in Chicano nationalism. Although suppressed, the Anglo-European heritage is an integral part of the Chicano lineage. Moraga not only dismantles the patriarchal domestic genealogy but also the notion of simple transmission of a single heritage from parents to children. Moraga's family history correlates with Chicano/a national history and reveals a contradiction in her poem "Whose Savior?" (102). Though the poem opens with "I hate white people / white blood," later in the same poem she acknowledges her mixed race identity as well as that of all Chicanos/as: "the white people I am" (102). Chicano/a national history is a combination of indigenous heritage, European/Spanish conquest, and U.S. imperialism.

By the same token, there is no homogenous movement in national time. As I have mentioned earlier, centralizing Coyoloxauhqui's perspective dismantles the patriarchal genealogy in re-writing the national narrative of Aztlán. Coyoloxauhqui is not the only

indigenous female figure that Moraga's narrative evokes; she also evokes the mythical mother figure in Chicano/a heritage "*before* the 'Fall,' *before* shame, *before* betrayal, *before* Eve, Malinche, and Guadalupe; *before* the occupation of Aztlán" (72 emphasis added). Moraga re-writes the stories of the indigenous figures from a pre-colonial perspective to shatter the colonial patriarchal narrative. This re-visited story implies two contradictory movements in time: *before* and *after* the conquest. As I have quoted earlier, Moraga points out living "*daily* in the moment of that highway robbery". The movement in "*daily*" clock time implied in this quote is opposite in direction to indigenous time; whereas clock time is unidirectional, indigenous time is cyclical.

These two temporalities are entwined and create two overlapping narratives of the U.S. nation-state and Queer Aztlán. Moraga's reconceptualization of the native Chicano/a lands renders Aztlán as an "imagined geography,"<sup>45</sup> in Edward Said's sense, namely, *re-claiming*, *re-naming*, and *re-inhabiting* a pre-colonized territory (225). In order to restore the Chicano/a claim of possessing New Mexico as part of their native Aztlán land, Moraga in the poem "New Mexican Confessions" uses Spanish words for landscape description: "piñón / cañón / arroyo (pine, canon, brook)" (34). As such, Moraga defies the "epistemic violence of [Anglo-American/English-only] cultural hegemony" as Mary Pat Brady says (157). Moraga, in a word, "spanglicize[s]"<sup>46</sup> the American landscape.

"Queer Aztlán" is re-configured as a point of origin for Chicanos/as that both reinforces and re-visits the indigenist, nationalistic notion of "Aztlán". It becomes

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Said in "Yeats and Decolonization" argues how imperialism is "an act of *geographical violence* through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control." Therefore, for the native "the land is recoverable at first only through the *imagination*" to "reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land" (225-6 emphasis added).

<sup>46</sup> In the first poem in the book—"En Route para Los Angeles (On the Way to Lost Angeles)"—Moraga refers to New York as "Nueva York" and elaborates that "the name doesn't sound right/even spanglicized" (13).

allegorically the ground of collision and cultural violence inflicted by Euro-American conquest and usurpation of land, U.S. imperialism of manifest destiny, patriarchal and homophobic misogyny. Historically, Aztlán is a pre-Columbus, indigenous land. The overlap of the colonial and the imperial renders “Queer Aztlán” as a trope of “cultural hybridity” and “the ground of conflict, contradiction, change, intervention” as Kumkum Sangari explains in another context (4). Therefore, the linearity of “American” national time and of Chicano national time is replaced by a more hybrid time that does not follow a linear order. It is rather a spiral order with loops, inflicted by the aggression of colonialism.

Moraga’s re-visioning of Aztlán resonates with her re-definition of “Americanness” that is drawn along the lines of a pre-Columbus past on the one hand, and current political crises both within and outside of the U.S. on the other hand. Echoing José Martí in “Our America,” advocating a “union in the continental spirit” and criticizing U.S. hegemony over central and Latin America (120), Moraga defines her Americanness in terms of belonging to the Americas rather than belonging to the geographical boundaries of the U.S. She describes herself as “an American writer in the *original* sense of the word, an “*Américan con acento* [an American with an accent]” (62 emphasis added). That is to say, Moraga re-opens the definition of Americanness into an older pre-Columbus history, traversing the geographical boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. Thus, the “‘*beyond-national*’ comes from a ‘*before-national*’ semantic,” to quote from Sangari—in a different context, in “Ruptures, Junctures, Returns” (167 emphasis added). This going back to the pre-national, pre-imperial, pre-colonial time challenges the core ideas of the U.S as a nation, namely, its separatism and isolationism, and creates

“pockets or series of transformative eruptions,” as Sangari puts it (134). Instead of a limited definition of Americanness, Moraga defines an “American” as a member of “a larger world community composed of many nations of people and no longer give[s] credence to the geopolitical borders that have divided us .... Call it racial memory. Call it shared economic discrimination” (62). Whereas technological developments in media and means of communication facilitate framing an “imagined community” of Palestinians in *West of the Jordan* in which time is not homogenous, racism, wars, and economic discrimination have shaped an “imagined community” on a hemispheric scale in *The Last Generation* where an essentialized myth of origin becomes a critique of U.S. imperialism.

I interpret the point of intersection between “Queer Aztlán” and a hemispheric sense of Americanness in light of what Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* calls the “historical present.” As Mark Muldoon in *Tricks of Time* explains the “historical present”, it is the time in which “the past comes alive...each member of a community, each storyteller borrows from the past, and works with it toward the future. ... [It] is the axial point where history both ends and begins” (212-3). The “axial point where history both ends and begins” in the chapter “War Cry” is, for Moraga, the manifest destiny discourse<sup>47</sup>. In this chapter, Moraga exposes the intertwined relation on the one hand between global capitalism and claims of bringing democracy to the Western hemisphere, and on the other hand the deterioration of local economies and the eruption of political

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<sup>47</sup> Anders Stephanson identifies three historical moments in U.S. foreign policies of “manifest destiny”: seizing half the territory of Mexico in 1840s, adding the Philippines as an overseas colony after the Spanish-American war at the turn of the twentieth century, and fighting “forces of the communist evil” at the cold war era (xiii, 119-121). The post cold war era marked the beginning of “deterritorialized capitalism” which decentralized capitalism so that no specific nation or region is the center of global capitalism. Euro-American “global capitalism” became the new economic system of controlling the world (129).

unrest that have forced many to migrate to the U.S. That is to say, Moraga's criticism unfolds two opposite narratives about the U.S.: democracy and free economy versus imperialism and labor exploitation. She writes:

When U.S. capital invades a country, its military machinery is quick to follow to protect its interests. This is Panamá, Puerto Rico, Grenada, Guatemala... [...] Every place the United States has been involved militarily has brought its offspring, its orphans, its homeless, and its casualties to this country: Vietnam, Guatemala, Cambodia, the Philippines...(55 ellipsis in original)

Throughout her text, Moraga gives specific dates to some parts of her book while some parts are not dated. The parts that are dated are about invasion, conquest, and movements of resistance to both. The parts that are un-dated are mostly the ones where she reflects on the consequences of histories of colonization and imperialism that have affected her personal life as lesbian, feminist, and Chicana. In that regard, she relates colonization and conquest of land to bodies of women, homosexuals, and all the unprivileged in the world.

Moraga redefines the notion of the nation to be one of people "bound together by spirit, land, language, history and blood" (168-9)<sup>48</sup> as well as the notion of the "land" to be one at the center of which lie the histories of colonization and the struggles against it:

For immigrant and native alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live. For women, lesbians, and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies. (173)

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<sup>48</sup> It is an interesting coincidence to see Moraga giving the example of the Intifada of Palestinians as an example for nations of people (169).

Furthermore, Moraga genders this land and feminizes it. She writes: “Like woman, Madre Tierra has been raped, exploited for her resources, rendered inert, passive, and speechless” (173). Correlating land to sexuality and to a woman’s body renders the notion of land as a “third space” that is within and between Chicano male-centered nationalism and Anglo-American nationalism; both rely on linear temporality. Within this third space nationalist notion of land, the notion of land is formed in the violent act of rape—of Malinche, mother of first mestizo—and colonization; it is “more than the rocks and trees, the animals and plant life that make up the territory Aztlán” (172-3). Re-conceptualizing Aztlán as a nationalistic land of origin in terms of violence and violations runs in contrast to the notion of “land” as a newly-discovered and rich land.

In that regard, Moraga makes an explicit reference to Walt Whitman in her poem “New Mexican Confession,” subtitled “Upon reading Whitman fifteen years later. Jemez Springs, 1988” (34). Within the poem, Moraga evokes Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass”:

I fall to sleep contemplating the body of the poet

Whitman at my age, 100 years ago

and see his body knew the same fragility,

the desire to dissolve the parameters of flesh

and bone and blend with the mountain

the blade of grass

the boy.

I *bleed* with the mountain

the blade of grass

the boy

because my body suffers in its womb.

The maternal blood that courses this frozen ground

was not spilt in violence, but in mourning. (36-7)

Moraga alluding to Whitman is not surprising since he is one of the literary founders of the “American” landscape. Yet Moraga renames the American landscape in non-Whitmanesque, non-masculine terms. “[B]lood” and “womb” foreground the feminine as part of that landscape in which Moraga’s body will “dissolve” and “blend” with the mountain/the blade of grass.” Not only does Moraga replace a male-centered perspective with a female one by using female imagery, but she adds a maternal perspective when she describes her body suffering “in its womb.” Moraga’s lesbianism would not allow her to be a mother in a heterosexual sense; it is a “frozen ground.” However, becoming a queer mother re-writes the image of the mother figure who is either the violated mother (Malinche) or the sexless, virgin mother (Guadalupe). The mother figure, as re-written by Moraga is an attempt to re-visit and change the term of the male-centered nationalistic Chicano narratives as well as nationalistic Anglo-American narratives.

In conclusion, *The Last Generation* and *West of the Jordan* open up the possibility of a new sense of time pertaining to the formation of the nation in terms of imagined transnational and/or dispersed communities. The nation’s time is re-conceptualized from the perspectives of the migrants, the displaced, and the colonized. Read together, *The Last Generation* and *West of the Jordan* unfold different types of non-homogenous movements in time which I argue as queer and non-national, respectively, and juxtapose times of linearity and imperialism that characterize the history of the U.S.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Moments of (Un)belonging: the Spatial Configuration of Home(land) in *The Time between Places: Stories that Weave in and out of Egypt and America* and *The Namesake***

A re-visited notion of “imagined (transnational) communities,” I argue, is the ground for re-conceptualizing the interpellation of the *ethnic* subject in the U.S., which changes the relationship between the communities imagined to form the nation and their movement in time. Thus, the consciousness formed by “imagined (transnational) communities” emerges within a “simultaneous” but “non-synchronous” temporality—in light of Bloch’s theory—rather than within a homogenous, seemingly empty time as Anderson holds. These changes are intertwined with changes in the spatial perception of the nation as a *transnational* space that blurs the familiar correlation between territorial demarcations and national affiliations. In this chapter, I argue that a new re-imagining of national space that goes beyond the confinements of geographical boundaries complicates, on the one hand, what counts as home(land) perceptually and physically. On the other hand, I elaborate that within this new spatial imagining of the nation, there is a non-national moment that problematizes the notion of home(land) and diffuses political allegiance for the *ethnic* subject in both the country of origin and residence.

U.S. migrant narratives that portray the experiences of early European settlers, especially during the early to mid-nineteenth century decades of “literary nationalism”<sup>49</sup> emphasize a sense of Americanness, defined spatially as vast, new, and open.

Nevertheless, as Dalia Kandiyoti points out in *Migrants Sites: America, Place and Diaspora Literatures* (2009), in “classical American literature” the spatial imagination of

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<sup>49</sup> Rob Wilson uses this description, in “Techno-euphoria and the discourse of the American sublime,” to refer to the expansionist decades of manifest destiny (1835-1855) (206).

the United States reveals racialization and enclosure<sup>50</sup>. By the same token, Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contested Identities* (1996) suggests re-configuring the U.S. as a “diaspora space”<sup>51</sup> rather than as a “nation of immigrants” (205). In this chapter I suggest an understanding of the nation as a space of suspension and ambivalence in which the pre-set perception of homeland and belonging is dismantled and replaced by the notion of home mediated through mobility and integration, or conversely, exclusion. To that end, I focus on the setting of the events in the stories of migration depicted in *The Time between Places: Stories that Weave in and out of Egypt and America* by Pauline Kaldas and in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

Setting is important to the analysis of both books since mobility and dwellings are central to the stories and the experiences of migration, and by extension the re-definition of Americanness. Nevertheless, it is not only Americanness that is re-defined in *The Time between Places* by Kaldas and in *The Namesake* by Lahiri, but the sense of belonging to a homeland is also re-configured. The stories in *The Time between Places* are set in Egypt and the U.S. to portray the feelings of different characters about the decision to migrate to the U.S. and to show what the U.S. is like in their minds, as well as their feelings about the decision to return to Egypt and their perception of how Egypt has changed during the years of their migration. Along the same lines, *The Namesake* depicts the perspectives of the Gangulis, especially Ashima (the mother figure) and Gogol (the son of Ashoke and Ashima), about fitting into their surroundings (neighborhoods, apartments, houses, as

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<sup>50</sup> Kandiyoti elaborates that enclosure “encompasses racialized spatial segregation and immobilization and literary modalities that ‘enclose’; that is, they center around discursively bordered, particularized loci, such as regionalism and urban writing” (5).

<sup>51</sup> Brah defines “diaspora space” as “the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested.” It is a space, inhabited “not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (205).

well as with families, friends, and co-workers). In my analysis of the two texts, I do not focus on “home” as a physical place but on the feeling of at-homeness (or lack thereof) that the experience of migration provokes.

In this regard, I borrow from Susan Strehle’s distinction, in *Transnational Women’s Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008), between *houses* and *homes*. Strehle argues that “While houses, apartments, and other dwelling places are tangible, concrete spaces, ‘home’ ... [is] loaded with emotional and ideological investment” (5). Feelings of at-homeness in *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* emerge from social relations and networks, or to refer to Anderson, a shared sense of community. Building on Anderson’s definition I would add that communities are formed emotionally and ideologically. Nevertheless, in light of my exposition of “imagined (transnational) communities” and the interrupted interpellation process (emotional and ideological), social relations and networks are formed beyond the limited confinement of a singular nation and the notion of the nation is re-configured. In this sense, I borrow Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake’s conceptualization of the nation as an “imaginary state” in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (1996). In the era of globalization, Wilson and Dissanayake contend, the nation is “the as-yet-unfigured horizon of contemporary cultural production by which national spaces/identities of political allegiance and economic regulations are being undone and imagined communities...are being reshaped” (6). Along these lines, I suggest that the concept “imagined (transnational) communities” does not only imply the formation of a new kind of consciousness and non-homogenous movement in time but also, quoting from Anthony Giddens’ *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), fosters “relations between

‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction” (18). Communities formed among *locationally distant* members have a *constructed* “now” moment which as Doreen Massey explains in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) provides “a source of dislocation ... for people are everywhere conceptualizing and acting on *different spatialities*” (4 emphasis added). It is precisely at this moment of *dislocation* that I situate the re-configuration of home(land) as a “non-national space”. By dislocation I mean not anchored in either the home country or the host country, but suspended between both. My definition of “non-national space” resonates with Nadji Al-Ali and Khalid Koser’s redefinition of “home” in *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (2002). Quoting Roger Rouse, Al-Ali and Koser hold that “home has become a moveable concept, it is pluri-local... a community created within the changing links between here and there” (6). Al-Ali and Koser observe that this new sense of home is “accompanied by a sense of rupture and discontinuity” (9). *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* reveal different nuances of dislocation and discontinuity evoked by the experience of migration. In *The Time between Places* feelings of displacement and rupture occur, almost simultaneously with the moment of making the decision to leave, even before actually migrating. In *The Namesake*, home is multi-located, yet there is a perpetual tension between feelings of settlement and unsettlement. Paradoxically this feeling of (un)settlement is shared by Ashima, who has actually experienced migration, and Gogol, her son, who has not migrated but has *inherited* a sense of unsettlement through his migrant parents.

Theoretical approaches that have focused on the concept of “home” and settlement reveal the complexity of the notion of home(land). Studies by theorists such as

Edward Said, Amy Kaplan, and Donna Gabaccia, to name only a few, underline the correlation between home and nation. Said, in *Reflections on Exile* (2000), emphasizes that home is a community of language, culture, and customs that affirm nationalism and nationalism is an extension of the settled home. By the same token, Kaplan, in “Manifest Domesticity” (1998), holds that home evokes the political agenda of the nation. Thus, migrants are the foreigners within and hence, “unhomed” (111). Unlike Kaplan, Gabaccia, in *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990*, maintains that migrants blend the old and the new in “idiosyncratic ways” (114) to create an ethnic American domesticity. Other theorists such as Susan Strehle, Doreen Massey, and Homi Bhabha re-conceptualize *home* as a *political* space. Strehle criticizes forms of analysis that de-politicize *homes* and inscribe them as sites for the emotional, the spiritual, and the familial rather than “places where worldly power is negotiated on a daily basis” (18). In a similar sense, Massey in *Space, Place, and Gender*, contrary to the views that see space as stasis and de-politicized, views space as inseparable from social relations and concludes that the spatial is “both open to, and a necessary element in, politics” (4). Massey’s and Strehle’s insights resonate with Bhabha’s definition of “unhomeliness” in *The Location of Culture* (1994), as “the estranging sense of the relocation of home and the world” (13). In the experiences of relocation caused by migration, exile, and/or colonialism, “the borders between home and the world become confused”, hence, “recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (13). In light of these views, I argue that non-national space is a mobile, fluid space that opens up different kinds of political engagements formed by virtue of the experience of migration. My analysis of the lives of migrant

families portrayed in *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* reveal that these families are not anchored in specific territories or homes; hence their political and national affiliations are replaced by local and/or regional affiliations as they struggle to be fully integrated in a national homeland.

### *The Time between Places*

Since its publication in 2010, *The Time between Places* has not received any critical attention, neither have Kaldas's earlier two books of poetry: *Egyptian Compass* (2006) and *Letters from Cairo* (2007). However, *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (2004), which Kaldas has co-edited with Khaled Mattawa has received some reviews<sup>52</sup>. These reviews mostly outline the main themes the anthology is addressing and highlight what the anthology can attain in the literary arena of ethnic/American fiction: familiarizing more readers in the U.S. with Arab-American literature; underscoring the heterogeneity of Arab Americans; depicting the burden of migration which Arab-Americans share with different migrant groups in the U.S. This lack of attention can be attributed to the complexity of categorizing the racial identity of Egyptians as Arabs. Egypt joined the Arab League in 1945, when it was under British/Ottoman colonization. After the 1952 revolution and under the Nasser regime a Pan-Arab, Pan-African, Pan-Muslim nationalist discourse was emphasized more. Sadat's era, after Nasser's, witnessed a shift and a revival of the Pharonic, Mediterranean heritage of Egypt as well as an Islamist (rather than Pan-Arab/African) rhetoric<sup>53</sup>. Although

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<sup>52</sup> I am referring to reviews by Jenn Blair, Ali Houissa, and Deborah Donovan.

<sup>53</sup> I am relying on Soheir Morsey's article, "Beyond the Honorary White Classification for Egyptians: Societal Identity in an Historical Context" (1994).

Nasser is valorized in the Arab region, specially in countries that are directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict (such as Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon), many Christians fled Egypt for fear of political wars and religious oppression. As I will show in my analysis of *The Time between Places*, many of the stories are about Egyptian-Christian families who decided to leave Egypt under the rule of Nasser.

As the title suggests, the stories in *The Time between Places* weave in and out of two places: Egypt and the United States. That is to say, place is at the center of this text. The centrality of place is significant in the stories, in the dream at the opening of the book, as well as in the phone calls between a mother in Egypt and her daughter in the U.S. Whether in the dream, the phone calls, or the stories, characters and places are closely tied. This intertwined relation between characters and places conjures up Massey's conceptualization of space as "social relations 'stretched out'" (2) and of place as "a particular moment in ... networks of social relations and understandings" (5). By the same token, Massey elaborates that the spatial "is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result" (4). In this sense, the perception of the U.S. and Egypt in *The Time between Places* is constructed out of multiple social relations between characters inside Egypt, the U.S. and across both countries.

In the dream that opens the book, the mother and the daughter are holding hands and walking in "the sea in Eskenderia [Alexandria]" (2). The mother has left the daughter behind on the other side of the water, time has passed, and the distance between them has grown. As the mother moves away from the daughter, the daughter sees her mother "like a dot on the horizon" (2). The spatial description of the mother—like a dot on the horizon—implies the growing distance and space between the mother and the daughter.

This image resonates with the phone calls between them as well as with the stories in the book that revolve around characters leaving, staying, and/or going back to Egypt or to the U.S. That is to say, space and place are thematic and structural axes in *The Time between Places*.

The growing distance between the mother and the daughter, and the daughter's fear of being left behind are feelings that are echoed in almost every story either in the portrayal of characters in Egypt imagining their future in the U.S. or in the portrayal of characters in the U.S. looking back at their lives in both Egypt and the U.S. Moments of *looking forward* and *looking back* in the stories are characterized by ambivalence and/or emptiness as I will clarify with examples later in the chapter. Structurally, the four parts of *The Time between Places*, are sequential. The book has a preface and the titles of the four parts chart a linear experience of migration: pre-migration hopes and worries and post-migration adjustments and concerns. The preface highlights the book's depiction of "different characters *inside* the experience of emigrating from Egypt to the United States" (ix). To portray emigration from an insider's perspective entails a "thick description"<sup>54</sup> of its intensity, which Kaldas attains by arranging each group of stories to reflect specific moments such as leaving, coming to terms with a different culture, returning to Egypt, and reflecting on the whole journey of leaving a familiar place for a new place. The characters in the stories can be metaphorically described as dots connected to form a bigger landscape of migration. While the theme of migration "stretches across the

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<sup>54</sup> I use the term in an ethnographic sense, where a simple incident "can widen out into enormous complexities of social experience" as suggested by Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected Essays* (19, 1973).

progression of these stories”, as Kaldas says in the preface (ix), it is also encapsulated in the five phone calls that are distributed across the four parts of the book.

The phone calls are between the mother in Egypt and her migrant daughter in the U.S., exchanging greetings during Egyptian Christian feasts and news about members of the family. In these phone calls, readers know only what the daughter says and, indirectly, know what the mother says through the answers of the daughter: “yes, we’re well”; “yes, the phone lines were open” (4,70). The sentences are shortened to phrases. In addition, there are repetitions of “Aloo-Aloo-mama-Aloo” (4) and questions about father, sister, and uncles to indicate that these are long distance phone calls. Thus, the narrative technique of the phone calls is neither showing (including the actual conversation between the mother and the daughter) nor telling (describing in details how the characters feel about the phone calls). For example, in the third phone call, the daughter receives the news of her father’s passing away; the scene is not portrayed in a dramatic way, though it is directive: “What—baba—no—how—his—heart—as soon as he woke up—it can’t be true—no—how—mama...” (112). This indirect communication between the daughter and her family members is significant in two ways. First, it shows that the daughter does not have direct access to any of the incidents happening to her family in Egypt. Second, because of belonging to different time zones, there is a time lag between the time an incident takes place in either Egypt or the U.S. and the time the daughter and the mother share the news.. In other words, despite the immediacy in communication that the telephone can offer, the telephone in *The Time between Places* is dysfunctional in that regard. The phone calls are written, not as full sentences, but as incomplete phrases separated by dashes “—”. These dashes function as ellipses in the conversation between

the mother and the daughter that metaphorically stand for the different spatial realms they occupy. Recalling Massey's definition of the spatial as inseparable from the social, the ellipses imply not only that mother and the daughter occupy different spatial realms but also mark a significant change in their interaction, which can be exemplified by observing two different religious cultural traditions: Eastern Orthodox Christian and Western European Church.

Telephone contact among migrants, diasporas, and exiles, is crucial as Hamid Naficy holds in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001); telephoning "is instantaneous and simultaneous. Its live ontology *obliterates* spatial and temporal discontinuity" (133 emphasis added). Contrary to what Naficy argues, telephoning in *The Time between Places* emphasizes, rather than obliterates, the time difference between Egypt and the U.S. Unlike telephoning in *West of the Jordan*, around which an imagined community is formed among Palestinian migrants and their family members in Jordan and the West Bank, the phone calls in *The Time between Places* are mostly about general subjects (such as the time difference between Egypt and the U.S., what the daughter and her family eat for Christmas/Easter, observing Christmas/Easter according to the Coptic calendar or the Western European Christian calendar). Despite the convenience of making phone calls between Egypt and the U.S., the continuous reference to the time difference between both places and how the daughter manages to avoid jammed phone lines, illustrate the difficulties of maintaining transnational affiliations. That is to say, the phone calls in *The Time between Places*, marked by ellipses, form an emotional narrative of dislocation that reveals the inability of the migrant daughter to belong fully to either Egypt or the U.S. I analyze these elliptical

spaces in the migrant narrative which *The Time between Places* portrays as moments in which the notion of *home(land)* is re-inscribed as a non-national space.

Non-national moments in *The Time between Places* are moments and feelings of uncertainty that characterize the spatial imagination of the U.S. and/or Egypt from the perspectives of different characters. These moments recur in every group of stories whether the stories take place in Egypt or in the U.S., before or after migration. Though the four parts of *The Time between Places* are organized thematically, I suggest reading the stories structurally, arranged around three moments: imagining the U.S. as a prospective homeland; imagining, in retrospect, life in both the U.S. and Egypt; and imagining Egypt as a prospective homeland for Egyptian returnees. These three moments suggest that in the migrants' minds two nations are simultaneously configured and blur demarcations of national belonging based on geographical boundaries. I, therefore, examine two trajectories for non-national moments in *The Time between Places*: spatial imagination home/nation, and the characters' sense of belonging.

Mustafa in "A Game of Chance" (that falls in the first part, entitled, "Chance Departures") works in a pastry store, wrapping pastry packages; he looks for better chances in the U.S. Noticing the customers of the pastry shop, Mustafa categorizes them according to their gender, citizenship, and consequently the tip each would leave him: men are "consistent" with their tips but women are "erratic"; foreigners are inconsistent with their tips (the ones who know some Arabic are less generous than the ones who are tourists or who are temporarily in Egypt). However, Mustafa finds it difficult to categorize the Egyptian woman who has lived most of her life in the U.S. She is

reasonably generous and she is “not skittish like the foreigners and not frantic or tired like the Egyptians” (7).

The Egyptian-American mother who comes to the pastry store with her two daughters intrigues Mustafa about what it is like to live in the U.S. and whether his son will learn and speak in English to him if they live in the U.S. That is to say, though Mustafa thinks of the U.S. as the land of opportunities and better living conditions, it also evokes a sense of ambiguity in his mind. This sense of ambiguity turns into uncertainty and anxiety when he pictures himself in the airport and ready for taking off: “He saw himself *suspended* in the sky, *unable to imagine his landing*” (20 emphasis added). This paradoxical moment of imagining the inability to imagine landing pre-empts his perception of belonging to either Egypt or the U.S. Thus, hopes and dreams of new territories and opportunities give way to fears of rootlessness. Feeling suspended is a moment in which “the allure of escape and the pull of the permanent rub against each other,” to borrow Naficy’s words (243). I interpret this standstill moment as a non-national moment that emerges from the anxiety of encountering what Wilson and Dissanayake call “the *as-yet-unfigured* horizon” (6). Though Wilson and Dissanayake use the term to describe the synergy of the local and the global in contemporary global capitalism that dismantles national affiliations, I borrow their term here to point out the intricacies of shifting affiliations and forming new *imagined transnational communities* from which the perception of the nation as a non-national space emerge.

Mustafa’s perception of himself is ignited by his perception of the U.S as the land of opportunities that is open to any hardworking person who wants to pursue his/her dreams. Nevertheless, when the staff member who conducts the interview with visa

applicants in the American embassy says “America has the right to choose who to let into its country” (7), this casts doubt on what the U.S. seems to promise and what it actually delivers.

The first group of stories is about the intriguing possibilities the U.S. can offer and the anxieties that accompany the migrants’ hopes, as they tread an unknown terrain and take chances. The second part of *The Time between Places*, entitled “Early Arrivals” depicts Egyptian migrants in the U.S. Every story in this part portrays incidents occurring in a specific place that symbolically stands for the characters’ experiences of migrating to the U.S and their perception of the U.S. The two stories I focus on are: “Airport”, and “The Top”. In these stories the nation is perceived spatially through the daily lives of the characters.

“Airport” is a story about Samir in the U.S. and Hoda in Egypt, whose marriage was arranged by Samir’s brother and Hoda’s parents. Samir did not see Hoda; his brother proposed on his behalf, and the marriage is to take place upon Hoda’s arrival in the U.S. The story is narrated alternatively from the perspective of Samir while waiting for Hoda in the airport and from the perspective of Hoda while packing her suitcases to take to the U.S. Samir’s thoughts and feelings of anticipation resonate with Hoda’s, as she reflects on the way she is getting married and her trip to a different country. The spatial arrangement of the text that allows the reader to know Samir’s and Hoda’s perspectives separately echoes the narrative structure of the phone calls between the daughter and the mother, which forms an emotional narrative *with ellipsis* because members of the same family occupy different spatial realms and cannot fully belong to either the U.S. or Egypt.

The portrayal of Hoda and Samir's arranged marriage is devoid of sentimental implications: Hoda feels the pressure to marry before she turns thirty and Samir feels the same pressure because he has already turned thirty. The airport is Hoda's and Samir's first-date place. Airports, in Naficy's words "are not just rhizomatic points of linkage to other points in an abstract network of relation and commerce ... [They] are *nodal sites* of high intensity in which [feelings of] belonging and unbelonging are juxtaposed" (246 emphasis added). Elaborating on Naficy, I argue that airports can be "nodal sites" in the sense that they are emotion-centered spaces, specifically for the reunion of family members. However, these implications are replaced in this story by a portrayal of the airport as an anonymous space rather than an emotionally-laden space. Thus, the airport in this sense becomes what Marc Augé calls a "non-place". In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Augé argues that "a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77). He elaborates, a non-place "does not contain any organic society" (112) because it is a transit place. The airport, hence, stands metaphorically for Hoda's paradoxical reasoning for coming to the U.S. On the one hand, Hoda is encouraged to accept Samir's proposal and travel to the U.S. because the U.S. "is more suited to [her] independent nature" (104). On the other hand, she accepts an arranged marriage, meeting her potential husband in an airport, which—in light of its portrayal in the story—can be interpreted as a *non-place*.

At the end of the story, Hoda decides to take only half of her belongings to the U.S. and leave the other half in Egypt. This decision implies partial belonging to both the U.S. and Egypt as well as perpetual mobility between both places rather than settlement

in either, suspended, in a way, like Mustapha, between two places. The anonymity of the airport emphasizes these implications in the sense that Hoda does not feel anchored in one specific, named place. This feeling of dislocation, as I have pointed out earlier is an aspect of re-configuring the U.S., and implicitly here Egypt as well, as a non-national space.

Another story that reveals a contradictory perception of the U.S. is “The Top”. In this story, although the U.S. is imagined to be like “heaven,” the material reality of the main character—Shoukry—shows otherwise. Shoukry, reluctantly, agrees to quit his job in Egypt as a civil officer and moves with his wife to the U.S. Shoukry’s wife perceives Egypt and the U.S. as opposites. While “America is heaven”, Egypt “is closed” and—especially under Nasser’s regime—there is “no future” in Egypt (73). Most of the incidents in this story take place in an elevator in one of Boston’s skyscrapers. The elevator as a confined space with strict boundaries stands in contrast to the U.S. as “heaven”. The implications of the U.S. as “heaven” (read: promised land, freedom, equality, and comfort) are reversed in the portrayal of Shoukry’s job as the operator of the elevator, which contrasts with his job in Egypt. The detailed descriptions of Shoukry’s office in Egypt and the elevator he operates in Boston contradicts Shoukry’s wife imagining the U.S. as the land of equal opportunities. In Egypt, the desk in Shoukry’s office is

very large. Even if he [bends] forward and [stretches] his arms to either side as far as he [can] ... his fingertips [will] barely grip the edges. The desk chair [is] cushioned, and it [twirls] around. (71)

The description implies that Shoukry has an education that brings him a good job and social status. In the U.S., Shoukry's job is "like a continuous circle but flat, never curving out, no interior space inside the lines," and Shoukry is described as "confined in this elevator, pushing buttons, taking people up, down. The high metal stool to lean against, occasionally rest the weight of the body, back stiff, supported by a thin slip of air" (74). Confining, hollow, and tedious describe Shoukry's world in the U.S. versus the large office and cushioned chair in Egypt. By explicitly challenging the view of the U.S. as the land of opportunities, the story writes back to the American dream as well as casts doubt on the fact of equality in the U.S. With no college degree or prior experience, Shoukry's wife gets a better job than his. Not only that, but Shoukry's wife also gets her job through her sister rather than an application process.

Like the phone calls, the elevator conversations form an *elliptical* narrative. Because elevator rides take little time, Shoukry is not and cannot be engaged in a conversation with everyone in the elevator. Elevator conversations are brief, general, and mainly occur to pass the few moments spent within that space. Thus most of Shoukry's daily conversations at work are limited to the desired floor and daily greetings. This is very similar to the phone calls between the daughter and her mother in which they exchange greetings and ask briefly about each other's lives. Unlike the phone calls that are between two closely related family members, Shoukry's elevator conversations are with strangers who do not share much with the elevator operator. The hollow space which encompasses the elevator is echoed in the empty, incomplete conversations Shoukry has while doing his job.

The elevator also recalls the anonymous airport in “Airport”. Unlike the spaciousness of the airport, the elevator is a more contained space, even a claustrophobic space, yet it is another example of the non-place. An elevator, to clarify, is a non-place in the same sense that Fredric Jameson explains “postmodern hyperspaces” in *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism* (2007). The elevator is a form that “has no internal meaning of its own” (126). Jameson, in *Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (1998), holds that the elevator is an example of *postmodern hyperspaces* which evoke a spatial experience that challenges the subject’s capacities “to locate itself or to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world” (15-16). Though Jameson theorizes “cognitive mapping” within the wider context of postmodernity and late capitalism, I borrow this concept to interpret Shoukry’s dilemma of *locating* himself or *mapping cognitively* his position after he migrates to the U.S. For example, the times when Shoukry craves a specific Egyptian meal/dish, evoked by a smell he comes across in the elevator, imply an imaginary belonging to a space outside the elevator, Boston, and the U.S. In the last scene of the story when he craves *koshari*<sup>55</sup>, gets out of the elevator, and follows the smell that incites the craving, Shoukry, in his mind, blurs his life in the U.S with his previous job in Egypt. While imagining that he is in Egypt, issuing building permits, Shoukry finds himself surrounded by an angry crowd, screaming at him and calling him “bastard,” “foreign idiot,” and “crazy” (79). In that moment, Shoukry is perceived as a stranger who is “not even speaking English” (79), which means that even a brief question about what is happening to him is not possible since he is, presumably,

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<sup>55</sup> An Egyptian dish made of a mix of rice, pasta, and lentils.

unable to communicate in English. I therefore conclude that this impasse moment of Shoukry's failing to *cognitively* locate his position dismantles the stereotypical spatial perception of the U.S. as "heaven" or land of freedom, and is an aspect of a different perception of the U.S. as non-national space.

In the first part of *The Time between Places*, Mustafa feels suspended between two places, unable to land in either Egypt or the U.S. In the second part, in a similar sense, Hoda and Shoukry feel dislocated, unable to clearly perceive where they belong. In the third part, the main characters in "A Conversation and He had Dreamed of Returning" experience feelings of problematic belonging(s), however, not as migrants but rather as returnees. These two stories unfold a disjuncture between the expectations of returnees and the reality of returning. In this part, it is not the U.S. (as a prospective home) that is imagined but Egypt (as an originary homeland).

In the story "A Conversation", an anonymous couple—husband and wife—are arguing about whether or not they should go back to Egypt after living in the U.S. for forty years. Although within the course of the story we learn that this is a Christian couple, their anonymity frustrates the assumption that names are indicators of religious identity in Egypt, which became more common under Nasser's regime and afterwards under Sadat's rule. Readers would not know about the religion of the characters until the wife indicates their religious identity. The imposed Arab/Islamist identity that has dominated Nasser's and Sadat's rhetoric has suppressed the diversity of the Egyptian people and provokes a rethinking of an imposed national categorization of Egyptians.

The indefinite article in the title of the story suggests that this is a common conversation that can take place among members of migrant families in the U.S. As with

the anonymous characters, the story goes beyond the specific experience of the couple to a shared experience among migrant families, namely the tension between looking back and the wish to return to one's homeland, and the possibility—or rather the impossibility—of fulfilling this wish. The conflicted perceptions of the “old” place and the “new” place in this story are set in the form of a binary opposition. The story is structured in the form of a conversation: one point of view in one paragraph followed by another paragraph with the opposite point of view. That is to say, the paragraphs alternate between the husband who wants to return to Egypt and the wife who insists on staying in the U.S. Ironically, it is this same binary structure that dismantles arbitrary oppositions between home country (as a place where one ultimately belongs) and host country (as a temporary place to reside in).

Not only are the characters anonymous, but it is not clear where they are in the U.S. The only place that the husband describes is their house, and he describes it as an “empty space, the walls turning their corners, tucking [them] inside their angles, keeping [them] cloistered” (116). This description of the house as an “empty space” reflects his perception of the U.S. nation-state as an inhospitable “empty space.” To recall Massey's definition of the spatial in terms of social relations, the description of the house as an “empty space” resonates with the husband's criticism of his social life in the U.S. He says:

I have learned their language, their slang, their clothing, how to eat  
 their food, how to laugh at their jokes, how to make their money.  
 Still they *grimace* when they meet me, they scratch their heads  
 instead of shaking my hand (117 emphasis added).

The sense of emptiness that the husband implies here is an *affect* evoked by gestures of disapproval and being unwelcomed despite living in the U.S. for forty years. This perception stands in contrast to what the husband imagines will be their prospective life in Egypt: a place where he feels surrounded by people with whom he is familiar and knows well. If they go back, the husband wants to “pull [his] family together again and loosen the tight grip of isolation. [They] will all return to settle [their] feet into the sand and water of [their] homeland” (118). The places that the husband mentions in the story are the Red Sea, Hurgada, Oberoi Hotel in Giza as places to live when they return. The implication is that the husband and the wife have enough money to afford living away from the hassle and bustle of major cities and hiring individuals to work for them. Nevertheless, the husband’s speculations unfold a problematic sense of return migration. On the one hand, the husband and the wife are familiar with these specific sites by virtue of their social, family, and cultural ties to Egypt. On the other hand, the fact that staying in touristic sites is always temporary and social relations are temporary as well, conjures up what Augé says about “non-places”, being devoid of “any organic society”. To persuade his wife, the husband assures her that they “would be free to come and go as [they] please” (116). Thus, Egypt implicitly is not their final destination; neither is the U.S. Hence both Egypt and the U.S. become transit points, sites of coming and going. That is to say, what starts as an opposition between living in Egypt and living in the U.S. reveals a life of isolation in both places.

The narrative structure of the story reveals a split in the characters’ minds between Egypt as a prospective homeland they return to and the U.S. as their current home. Whereas the husband perceives the U.S. as a ruthless place, the wife perceives

Egypt as an unfair place to the Christian minority. Whereas the husband projects a financially comfortable future in Egypt, the wife believes that the days of Egypt's glory are gone. Whereas the husband sees Egypt as a place of settlement, family ties, and emotional bonding, the wife perceives the U.S. as the place where they should belong, especially her children who are born in the U.S. and whose belonging to Egypt is "too invisible to follow back" (119). At the end of the story, the conversation is not concluded and the tension between the poles of the binary (Egypt-U.S.) is not resolved. This ending implies that the conversation is still open and will recur. The anonymity of the husband and the wife also suggests that this tension could also be an internal conflict within a single mind. That is to say, the characters' sense of belonging to either Egypt or to the U.S. is constructed by a split where they perceive themselves as a minority in both countries. The narrative structure of the story does not only reveal a split in the spatial imaginary of Egypt and the U.S. but also reveals a *dialogic* spatial imaginary. That is to say, in the *dialogue* between the husband and the wife each place (Egypt/U.S.) is imagined and perceived in light of the other, and no final decision is made. To conclude, in this story the non-national spatial imaginary is precisely this lack of finalization that subverts singular definitions of belonging.

No singular definition of belonging and problematic return to Egypt are present in the story *He Had Dreamed of Returning* in which the main character, Hani, actually returns to Egypt. Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield argue that emigration does not "necessarily mean definitive departure" and return "is not definitive return" (17). Along the same lines, this story disrupts the linear narrative of migration, when Hani, the protagonist, decides to return to Egypt. Hani left Egypt at the age of fifteen with his

parents after his brother was drafted and died in the 1967 war with Israel. After 20 years in the U.S. (during which time he has married an American wife), Hani decides to go back to Egypt for good. As the opening lines of the story suggests, the terms of belonging are defined by place of birth:

Hani had imagined his landing back on *the land that had given him birth*. He saw himself walking the streets with his head held high and his broad shoulders embracing the world *that rightfully belonged to him* (141 emphasis added).

Hani's sense of belonging to his home country is perceived in terms of a mother-land. By virtue of this sense of filiation, Hani feels that it is his right to belong to Egypt as well as that Egypt belongs to him. Therefore, when Hani decides to return to Egypt with his American wife, Nancy, he insists on using his Egyptian passport "to officially reclaim his identity" (147-8). However, upon his arrival, despite his Egyptian passport, the Customs officer asks Hani: "Why are you back?" "*Is this your country* or the great America? Haven't you forgotten *us*?" (148 emphasis added). This conversation demarcates a moment of disillusionment for Hani, in the sense that it dismantles his assumption that when he returns to Egypt, he will re-integrate unproblematically. The officer, by the same token, draws a distinct line between Hani (who has lived outside Egypt for twenty years) and "us" (Egyptians who have not migrated). This moment, as well, exemplifies what Caitríona Ní Laoire, in "Return Migrants and Boundaries of Belonging" (2011), describes as "a disjuncture between 'home' as dream and 'home' as actually experienced" (21). I argue that the non-national moment in this story lies at this point of disjuncture, where the spatial imaginary of Egypt and the U.S. is re-configured.

Hani compares Egypt to the U.S. in terms of roots and family affiliations. In Egypt, “you were *grounded on the foundation of your family*”; in the U.S. people “built themselves out of thin air *with nothing to attach them to their origins*” (145 emphasis added). Though this distinction perpetuates the stereotypical Orientalist binary between the “Western” person as free individual versus the Arab who is tied to his/her kin<sup>56</sup>, Hani’s return with his wife to Egypt to “reclaim his identity” shatters that binary as well as the stereotype.

When Hani returns to Egypt and starts re-connecting with his family members, his relatives and acquaintances look different from the images he has of them. In addition, Hani feels unable to catch up with their conversations when they turn to “people he [doesn’t] know, events he [has] not been there for, or politics he [doesn’t] fully grasp” (153). That is, although physically present in Egypt, Hani feels alienated from the lives of his family members. Not only does Hani feel alienated among his family but also among his peers in the company he works for. At work, Hani has “sensed an *odd distance* from his new colleagues” (152 emphasis added). This spatial description of Hani’s feelings of estrangement from his colleagues is heightened when his director explains how the work is handled in the company: demarcating differences between Egypt and the U.S.—“Egypt is not America”—and referring to the U.S. as “your [Hani’s] America” (154). This explicit assumption that Hani belongs to the U.S. and the U.S. belongs to Hani clashes with the opening lines of the story which highlight Hani’s sense of filiation to Egypt. Nevertheless, it re-emphasizes a social distance between migrants and stayers. Thus, Hani

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<sup>56</sup> Suad Joseph in “Against the Grain of the Nation—the Arab-” (1999) holds that an Arab-American is perceived as “not quite American” due to a variety of discourses—specially mainstream media—that present the Arab “as essentially different from the Western, the American” on the bases of the perception of the Arab “as a not-independent, not-autonomous, not individual, not-free person” (257-8).

occupies a liminal position between being a migrant coming back and being a newcomer. What problematizes Hani's liminal position even more is that unlike Hani, Nancy, his American wife, with great success, comes to terms with the language, cooking, daily duties and routine, Hani's relatives, and her colleagues in school. The enduring distinction drawn in "Egypt is not America" is challenged when Nancy insists on not leaving Egypt, creating a form of spatiality defined in terms of integration rather than a shared place of birth.

At the end of the story, Hani leaves his wife in Egypt, does not seek family ties, and switches to his American passport in the airport. Brettell and Hollifield assert that "dual nationality" means maintaining "a presence abroad as well as attachment to home". Elaborating on Brettell and Hollifield, I add that switching passports (and implicitly national affiliations) in this story signifies not only an interstitial moment, but also implies a moment of "rediasporization," as Anders Stefansson holds in "Homecomings to the Future: From Diasporic Mythographies to Social Projects of Return" (2004). Stefansson underlines that homecomings have unsettling consequences which returnees confront because of transformations of their homelands, which may lead to their rediasporization in their native countries (4). The diasporization of Hani in both the U.S. and Egypt and the decision of his wife, Nancy, to stay in Egypt re-frame the migration story as a cyclical narrative rather than a linear one.

The final part of *The Time between Places* is entitled "The Silence of Memory" and it comes before the fifth and final phone call between the daughter and her mother. As I have clarified earlier, the five phone calls can be considered a pithy migrant story with a linear plot that starts with resisting the mainstream traditions of the host country

and ends with a sense of compromising between mainstream cultural tradition and ethno-cultural heritage. I have also mentioned earlier that the four parts of the book too follow a linear plot. Thus, one can consider the fourth part to be the final segment of *The Time between Places*. However, unlike the phone calls and unlike the preceding three parts where the characters imagine U.S./Egypt retrospectively or prospectively, this part depicts characters that are neither *looking back* to an old place nor *forward* to a new place. In all stories of this part, memories of Egypt have receded; an aura of silence, repression, and/or sorrow dominates the general atmosphere of these stories. Characters in these stories are second generation immigrants who, as Kaldas says in an interview, try “to create a solid place” for themselves in American culture. In the preface for the book, Kaldas describes this last set of stories as about “the lives of the next generation as they negotiate the paths between their two worlds” (ix). Rather than negotiating the paths between two worlds, I argue that in this part, what is portrayed are individual stories each with a different dilemma, not necessarily the dilemma of the clash of cultures. What these stories share is that they all end with a feeling or a moment of uncertainty and emptiness.

For example, the story *Bluebird* is about Sonya—second-generation Egyptian-American—and her husband, Rick who have decided to postpone having children because they are burdened with mortgage payments. Though they have managed to pay off their home loan, they cannot manage to have a child. The continuous failed attempts to have a child mark Sonya’s feeling of loneliness which is echoed in the description of the house she and Rick live in:

The house [grows] larger . . . . There [are] too many rooms that [sit] still, unused, except for the kitchen and the bed room . . . . It [is] a

large colonial house ... white with slender columns in the front, giving it a kind of miniature mansion appearance. But the pillars were too thin for its large structure, making it seem like the house would tip over if they were removed. The inside [is] room after room painted in clean white strokes with straight angled walls.

Sharp lines, no nooks or crannies; nothing [distracts] the eye (198).

Sonya and Rick's house is described in terms of its physical structure: precise angles, lines, colors. Furthermore, this portrayal focuses on the size of the house which conveys the diminishing intimacy between Sonya and Rick. In this sense, the portrayal of the house resonates with Strehle's distinction between houses and homes, which I have pointed out earlier. While *houses* are "tangible", *homes* are "loaded with emotional ... investment." In other words, this portrayal reveals Sonya's lack of feeling at home. By the same token, calling on Massey's definition of place as "a particular moment in networks of social relations and understandings", I argue that Sonya and Rick's house reflects a troubled marital relationship and that Sonya and Rick occupy different social spaces. The metaphor of the bluebird versus the basement in the story accentuates the incongruent spaces that Sonya and Rick occupy. While Sonya chases a bluebird to feed it, Rick spends most of his time in the basement, renovating. Whereas the bluebird never finds a nest to land so that Sonya can feed it, the basement always looks the same, despite Rick's renovations. One can draw an analogy between Sonya's yearning for the warmth of a home and the missing nest. In a similar sense, one can also draw a correlation between the confinement of the basement and the fact that Rick spends most of his time in that limited space.

In conclusion, *The Time between Places* disrupts the homeleaving-homecoming migrant narrative as I have previously pointed out. This creates new spatialities formed by virtue of shifting belongings between home and host countries. Within these new spatialities problematic feelings of at-homeness, belonging, and not belonging emerge.

### *The Namesake*

*The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is a migration narrative, portraying two generations of Indian migrants—Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli and their American-born children, Gogol and Sonali. Though, as the title suggests, the novel revolves around Gogol who is dissatisfied with his name that is neither Indian nor American (but Russian), the novel is also about Ashima who has joined her husband in the U.S. after they were married. In the thirty two years that Ashima has spent in the U.S., she adjusts to living in the U.S. and approximates Indian cultural tradition to feel at home in the U.S. Like *The Time between Places*, setting in *The Namesake* reveals the characters' problematic feelings of at-homeness.

Unlike Kaldas's *The Time between Places*, Lahiri's *The Namesake* is widely acclaimed (and was made into a motion picture in 2006). Many reviews, such as those by Himadri Lahiri, Lavina Dhingra, and Floyd Cheung, address one or more of the following themes: generational conflict between the migrant parents and their American-born children; the tension between Bengali and mainstream American cultural traditions; the analogies between Lahiri's own predicament and the dilemma of second generation Indian-Americans who identify as neither fully Indian nor fully American. By the same token, some reviews discuss why *The Namesake* is an appealing text for a wide range of

readers. As Lavina Shankar puts it, Lahiri's fiction is attractive because it is "intriguingly spicy, yet not too hot" (32). Unlike many of the characters in *The Time between Places* whose dreams of a better life in the U.S. are disappointed, the Indian families portrayed in *The Namesake* are middle-class, professional Indian-American families.

The novel's first chapter entitled "1968" opens with Ashima feeling the weight of her pregnancy and preparing a snack for lunch. Ashima's lunch is a "*concoction ... a humble approximation* of the snack sold for pennies on *Calcutta sidewalks* and on railway platforms *throughout India*" (1 emphasis added). Heaviness, vulnerability, loss, and approximation describe Ashima in the kitchen in the apartment in Central Square, Cambridge, and simultaneously conjure up what buying this snack is like throughout India. The daily routine frustrates Ashima; the approximated Indian lunch is never like the original because "as usual, there's something missing" (1). Ashima's daily efforts complicate Homi Bhabha's argument in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1990) that "[t]he scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture" (297). For one, Ashima's lunches are to counteract her feelings of homesickness, but there is always "something missing." In that sense, Ashima echoes the migrant daughter in *The Time between Places* and the phone calls between the daughter and her mother where there is always a time lag between the mother and the daughter and a lack of immediate access to what transpires in Egypt/U.S. This suggests that the daily life of Ashima becomes a sign of a "missed" national culture that she tries to replicate but with no satisfying outcomes.

The first scene is followed by Ashima giving birth to her son in the hospital. Ashima's sense of loneliness during delivery is another moment of a "missed" national

culture. Like the kitchen scene, in the hospital, Ashima pictures this moment if she were in Calcutta, where she would be surrounded and comforted by many women of her family. In both scenes there is a subtext, an alternative imagined scene for what it would be like had she been in India. Both the story and the sub-story do not coincide and are set in opposition. This fissure between Ashima's feelings of pain and loneliness in the hospital and what it could possibly be if she were in India is a non-national moment. It is not a liminal, interstitial moment but rather a moment of grief and loss that highlights the perception of the U.S as a "foreign land" (6). Thus, pregnancy and motherhood become a trope for demarcating (non)-national spaces. Ashima "is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one" (6), "alone" (33), "unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved" (6). Ashima's fear to raise her son alone unfolds her conflation of home and homeland to suggest her resistance to raise her child in a "foreign land" and consequently reveals the fissure between the national and the foreign, formed because of the absence of her family members in the U.S. Alternatively, being an immigrant is described in terms of a "*lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts*. It is an *ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis* in what had once been ordinary, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding" (49 emphasis added). This description evokes a paradoxical sense of continuity (lifelong, perpetual, constant, continuous, ongoing) and interruption (parenthesis, waiting), which echoes the contradiction between the national (the continued "ordinary," "previous" life) and the foreign (that interrupts that continuity and renders it "complicated and demanding"). The heaviness of pregnancy and the burden of being a foreigner are individual experiences that are characterized by a

feeling of solitude. Such moments of spatial or emotional solitude are what I argue to be non-national moments in *The Namesake*.

Throughout the novel, there are specific details about where the Gangulis live. The physical descriptions of their first rented apartment in Central Square as well as their house in the suburbs of Cambridge highlight their sense of belonging (or lack thereof) to where they live as well as to their surrounding. The Gangulis' first apartment is in a house "covered with *salmon-colored* shingles, surrounded by a *waist-high chain-link* fence. The *gray of the roof*, the gray of cigarette ashes, *matches the pavement of the sidewalk* and *the street*. A row of cars parked at meters *perpetually lines one side* of the curb" (29 emphasis added). All the houses in the neighborhood are shingled, same shape and size, and "in the same state of mild decrepitude, painted mint, or lilac, or powder blue" (30). The shingles, together with the gray roof, are reminiscent of the early settlers from Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which re-emphasizes the notion of the U.S. as a "nation of immigrants" and recalls the fantasy of America/the new world as an open and expansive geography that fascinated early migrants to explore and settle in this landscape. This description also evokes a sense of symmetry, order, and coherence: the gray roof matches the grayness of the sidewalk, the buildings comply with a certain range of colors (salmon and gray), and they have a similar architecture. This uniformity suggests lack of variety. In addition, the "waist-high chain-link fence" implies a sense of both containment and confinement. That is to say, Central Square, the neighborhood that has witnessed different waves of migration and anti-war protests has, paradoxically, become the site of homogeneity and confinement<sup>57</sup>. By the same token,

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<sup>57</sup> It is noteworthy that despite the detailed descriptions of the buildings in Central Square, Lahiri does not give any description for any activities, events, or incidents taking place in the neighborhood, despite the

there is also a contradiction between Ashima's perception of their apartment and the houses which she has watched in movies such as *Gone with the Wind* or *The Seven-Year Itch* in movie theatres in India. The apartment in Central Square is small, gloomy, dreary, too old, and not well-maintained. In a similar sense, the description of the Gangulis' first house in the suburbs of Cambridge evokes a sense of order and confinement. Ashoke and Ashima's neighbors are all "Americans": the Johnsons, the Metrons, the Aspris, the Hills; and their ways of living are almost the same: "plastic wading pools and baseball bats are left out on the lawns. ... Shoes are worn inside, trays of cat litter are placed in the kitchens, dogs bark and jump when Ashima and Ashoke ring the bell" (51). The implications here are: Ashima and Ashoke are the only Gangulis (Bengali family) in the neighborhood; and consequently, they feel they are foreigners rather than neighbors. In addition, their house is described as "erected on a *quarter acre* of land. This is the *small patch* of America to which they [Ashoke and Ashima] lay claim" (51 emphasis added). Contrary to the classical image of expansion and vastness, "quarter acre" and "small patch" imply enclosure and boundaries.

Despite Ashima's feelings of disappointment and estrangement, when she writes to her parents, she still writes about the advantages of living in the U.S.: powerful cooking gas, four-burner stove, abundant hot and cold tap water (30). Ashima's repetition of the familiar perceptual images of the U.S. as a place with better living conditions heightens her feelings of loneliness and creates two paradoxical senses of ambivalence.

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fact that during the 1960s (the same time period that Ashima and Ashoke moved to the U.S.) Central Square witnessed several protests against the war in Vietnam and after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. For the history of Central Square, I am relying on Sarah Boyer's study, *Crossroads: Stories of Central Square Cambridge, Massachusetts 1912-2000* (2001). Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung in *Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies* (2011) term this absence of political edge in Lahiri's works "deracination" of characters and "depoliticizing of the historical events" (xvii).

On the one hand, Ashima is reluctant to raise her son in the U.S. and pities him “entering the world so alone, so deprived” (25). On the other hand, Ashima is reluctant to share her feelings of disappointment with her parents. This double ambivalence suggests a third realm that Ashima occupies that is neither part of her social space in Central Square/Pemberton Road, nor a part of her parents’ cultural space.

This third realm, the site of Ashima’s double ambivalence, is also the site for what I call “compensatory homes”<sup>58</sup>. Ashima relies on a network of Bengali families to replicate cultural heritage: living within walking distance of other Indian families, meeting every weekend, participating in and attending different ceremonies. A case in point is the “rice ceremony” that marks Gogol’s first bite of solid food. Approximating all the rituals, Ashima and Ashoke’s Bengali acquaintances play the same roles that Gogol’s grandparents and uncles would traditionally play had they been in Calcutta. Similarly, Ashima adopts American cultural traditions of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter: roasting turkey with Indian spices, nailing a wreath on Christmas, coloring eggs on Easter (64). In that sense, the idea of “compensatory homes” reverberates with classic migrant narratives and the linear plot of resistance, adjustments, and ultimately mixing the old with the new. However, Ashima’s frustration in her attempts to approximate and adapt Bengali and American cultural traditions make them signs, not of reconciliation, but of a “missed” national culture. This is emphasized even more when Gogol and Sonali resist adopting their Bengali heritage. Gogol and Sonali are not interested in learning the

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<sup>58</sup> I draw on Rosemary George’s argument in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-century Fiction* (1996). She holds that in migrant narratives that foreground family history, stories of family history do not “replicate a ‘national culture’ [but] compensate for the lack of other filiations” in the host country. These stories are neither “a microcosmic or allegorical version of the nation” (190).

Bengali alphabet; they are more excited about American cultural occasions than the gatherings to worship Bengali deities or birthday parties for other Bengali children. Symbolically in the novel, in the “rice ceremony”, Gogol does not pick any of the three options that foretell his future and his career (a landowner, a scholar, or a businessman). That is to say, Gogol occupies a different social space.

Gogol’s undetermined social space is intertwined with the confusion about giving him a name. The fact that the baby boy is not given a name right after his birth, waiting for the grandmother’s letter with suggested names—a letter that never arrives—suggests a *time lag* in entering the Bengali world of his parents and will ultimately lead to his shaky entry into the white mainstream cultural space. That confusion takes place when the baby boy’s “pet” name becomes his “good” name. In the Bengali tradition, “good” names “represent dignified and enlightened qualities.” In contrast, “pet” names “are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, even onomatopoeic” (26). Thus, whereas pet names are used in the private family realm among family members and friends, good names are what the person is known by outside the family circle. Gogol’s lost name is the *elliptical* space in which Gogol’s good name and pet name have been conflated. That is to say, the name “Gogol” blurs that distinction between the intimate family network and the formal, outside of the family social space. “Gogol” is a name that does not anchor its owner in either the Bengali cultural tradition or the American mainstream cultural tradition; it is neither an Indian Bengali name nor a common white American name. As a pet name it is a foreign name among Bengalis, and as a good name it is a foreign name among his classmates and co-workers. Unlike his parents, who by virtue of owning a house lay claim over a “small patch of America,” Gogol is unable to

lay claim over a place that physically exists. Early on, at the age of ten in the school fieldtrip to the graveyard, Gogol realizes that “his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country [U.S.] will bear his name beyond life” because he will be cremated not buried (69). As Himadri Lahiri underscores in “Individual-Family Interface in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*”, in the cemetery, Gogol is aware that he “does not have any ancestral history in the land that would connect him to any tradition in the national space; he is so different that his social and religious rite will be incompatible with those of the new country” (15). The act of burial and resting-places *per se* as Anthony D. Smith underlines in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999) are essential to ethnic groups in their acquired homelands. Smith explains that there is an intertwined relation between places and rooting memories in these places, and terms this process “territorialization of memories” (151). In *Chosen Peoples* (2003), Smith elaborates that

after a few generations, the acquired homeland became ‘ancestral,’  
the place of home and work, family and burial, for the community  
and its members. (148)

Gogol’s realization that there will be no burial place for him that would mark his *place, home, work, family* suggests the *de-territorialization* of his memories and that they are not rooted in a singular place and are not associated with a chain of generations who belong to the same place. Gogol’s inability to mark a place to locate himself can be interpreted in light of Michel de Certeau’s theory about names, places and meanings in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Certeau suggests two ways to locate oneself: naming a particular place and hence “giving it a meaning” (102); and telling stories about this place, so that they “tell us what one can do in it and make out of it” (122). Gogol’s

lost good name symbolically mean his present and future dislocation. Unlike his parents who manage living outside their home country and own a “small patch of America,” Gogol cannot imagine his place in America.

Throughout the novel, not only is there a direct correlation between Gogol’s name and his problematic affiliation with a social/national space, but also between his name and his failed romantic relationship. In college, Gogol decides to use the good name his father has chosen for him as a formal name in school: Nikhil. It resembles the first name of Gogol (the writer), Nicholai and is not difficult to pronounce. In kindergarten, Gogol has insisted on keeping his name because this is what his parents, acquaintances, and friends call him. In college, Gogol decides to be Nikhil to symbolically exit from his parents’ “traditional” life. When Gogol meets his first girlfriend—Ruth—as Nikhil, ironically, his only problem is that “he does not feel like Nikhil. Not yet” (105). Nevertheless, he is reluctant to introduce Ruth to his family, where “he is still Gogol” (115). Gogol as such occupies an interstitial space between being Gogol and being Nikhil: “‘I’m *Nikhil* now,’ *Gogol* says” (119 emphasis added). This conflicted/confused *double consciousness* marks Gogol’s temporary settlement in the dorm room, the shared apartment with college mates, as well as his apartment in New York.

Gogol roots himself, spatially in his dorm room as Nikhil and calls it *home*, a place which ironically he cannot occupy for long. After the dorm room, Gogol/Nikhil moves to an apartment shared with his friends. In this part of the novel, where his relationship with Ruth is about to be over, there is no description of the apartment or a reference to his name. Except for one sentence which describes “Gogol” spending his summer in Pemberton Road, the rest of this part uses the third person “he” to describe his

break up with Ruth (119-120). The ambiguity of the space “he” occupies as well as the name associated with that space reveals a spatial non-national moment, emptied from any sense of affiliation. Similarly, when Gogol moves to New York to work for a midtown firm, he lives in a small building in a noisy street. The apartment does not reflect his settlement in any sense. There is a tea kettle that Gogol has never filled with water and a toaster he has never plugged in (126). Gogol’s life in this apartment is one of anonymity; his walls are bare and his mailbox does not have his name on it. During the times when Gogol/Nikhil struggles with emotional frustration, he, like Ashima during pregnancy and in the hospital, conjures up the warmth of an imaginary home-space. Like the hospital and the apartment in Central Square, Gogol’s dorm room and two apartments are social spaces that evoke a “missed” feeling of at-homeness.

In different parts of the novel, the spatial description of Gogol is in terms of either entering the “world,” detaching himself from his parents’ “world,” or trying to create his own “world”. As I have pointed out earlier, Ashima pities her son “entering the world so alone. So deprived” (25). Ashoke, however, happily writes to his family and relatives in India “Gogol enters the world” (29). When Gogol gets a job in New York, he stops going to his parents’ house on weekends and being a part of “their world” (126). With Maxine (another girlfriend), Gogol is relieved to be “in her world” (150). Unlike Gogol, his sister, Sonia, is described as a “citizen of the world” (62) and as the “true American” (63) when in her “rice ceremony” she picks up the plates with soil and the dollar bill (symbols that foretell that she can become a real-estate agent or a businesswoman). Initially her name is Sonali, Gogol’s sister is nicknamed and known as Sonia—a name that does not have as strong an ethnic resonance as do Gogol, Nikhil, Ashima, Ashoke, or Ganguli. This

implies that mobility (the circulation of persons) and emphasis on ethnic identity are incongruent. In every attempt Gogol makes to discard his cultural heritage, he realizes that he is an outsider in the world of mainstream America that he strives to enter. For example, echoing the school fieldtrip to the graveyard, in the Ratliffs' [Maxine's family] graveyard, Gogol is aware that neither he nor his parents possess a similar place that will bear their names. While Maxine has a place to be buried (i.e. among her ancestors), Gogol cannot imagine his parents or himself buried in the U.S. Gogol does not imagine his parents growing old in Pemberton Road, despite the fact that they actually do; he is unable to connect his parents past that is lingering in Calcutta to their present and future in Pemberton Road. Sonia does not encounter the same dilemma. Paradoxically, however, both Gogol and Sonia share the same "modern malaise called placelessness," to borrow Leonard Lutwack's term. Lutwack in *The Role of Place in Literature* (1994) holds that due to the growing economic process and the development of transportation and communication in the twentieth-century, the importance of place has diminished and the importance of mobility has increased. As a result of increasing mobility and common technologies, "every part of the world is beginning to look like every other part" (183). Along the same lines Edward Ralph defines placelessness as "the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places." It "[cuts] roots, [erodes] symbols, [and replaces] diversity with uniformity" (qtd. in Lutwack 183). Gogol looks for a place to be his, to mark it with his own existence but in vain. Sonia, though is not pre-occupied with a spatial configuration of her own existence, does not really occupy a specific place, hence her flat characterization, so to speak, evokes a sense of "placelessness".

Thus far, social spaces in the novel—such as kitchen, hospital, apartments, neighborhoods—allegorize a spatial configuration of the non-national, which is tied to the experience of migration and creating a home-space in the U.S. This raises a question about India as a home country: how does returning to the home country re-configure the perception of India as a (non)-national space? When they move to Calcutta, during Ashoke's sabbatical year, the Gangulis stay in Ashima's mother flat. The sense of collectivity and family ties is stronger in India. Thus, instead of having an apartment of their own, the Gangulis stay with different members of their family. Therefore, "[e]very few weeks there is a different bed to sleep in, another family to live with, a new schedule to learn" (83). Despite the fact that Ashima and Ashoke are among their large family in India, moving between houses implies a sense of unsettlement and becomes as well part of the *parenthetical* status of being foreigners even in India. In their trip to Delhi and Agra, the Gangulis "are tourists, staying at a hotel with a swimming pool, sipping bottled water, eating in restaurants with forks and spoon, paying by credit cards. Ashima and Ashoke speak in broken Hindi" and Gogol and Sonia speak only in English. By the same token, the Gangulis visit touristic places and take pictures to commemorate their visit (84-5). They are received and welcomed as visiting rather than resident family members. For example, Ashima does not set a foot in the kitchen for eight months. Although the Gangulis do not face the same dilemma of un-belonging that the Egyptian returnee—Hani—encounters in *The Time between Places*, the description of their time in India echoes the demarcation made in *He Had Dreamed of Returning* between those who have migrated and those who have never left and stay put. Migration problematizes the

correlation between filiation and national culture, and unfolds the migrants' occupation of a third space in-between the national and the foreign.

The non-national spaces between the national and the foreign are moments of spatial and/or emotional solitude that underscore the binary of national-foreign. In the kitchen scene, approximating an Indian snack, Ashima's frustration provokes this sense of occupying a non-national space as I have clarified earlier. Gogol, although born and raised in the U.S., occupies a similar space when he, paradoxically, embraces his Bengali heritage, especially after his father's sudden death. Gogol revives his affiliation with his parents' Bengali tradition in two ways: emulating his father's rituals and marrying a wife with a Bengali lineage.

In the apartment which his father has rented during his temporary stay in Cleveland, Ohio, Gogol imagines his father occupying the space of his apartment before he drives to the emergency room. Gogol pictures his deceased father moving around the apartment in the same way he has known him. Imagining the daily routine of his father echoes the scene where Ashima imagines having an Indian snack or giving birth in Calcutta. Ashima's frustration resonates with Gogol's grief; they both share feelings of alienation and homesickness. That is to say, Ashoke's daily routine is precisely what Gogol misses and provokes feelings of nostalgia and vulnerability. This echoes Ashima's feelings of vulnerability and nostalgia at the opening of the novel. To "compensate," Gogol, in addition to performing some of his father's tasks (such as paying the bills for his mother and shoveling the snow), decides to marry an American-born Bengali wife: Moushumi. Every time Gogol sees Moushumi, he recalls an image/incident from their childhood. However, although Gogol looks for his Bengali heritage in his marriage to

Moushumi, what their relationship emphasizes is the fact that they both occupy a third space that does not fit in the either-or categories of national or foreign. Like Gogol's name that is neither Bengali nor mainstream American, Moushumi immerses "herself in a third language [French], a third culture . . . . It was easier to turn her back on the two countries [India-U.S.] that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever" (214). Gogol admires Moushumi for her capacity to have a "separate life" in a different country (neither India nor the U.S.) (233); and Moushumi admires Gogol for changing his name to Nikhil. That is to say, what they share is precisely what they do not want to acknowledge sharing: their reluctance to adopt their Bengali heritage. This ambivalence, paradoxically, has led to their marriage to fulfill "a collective, deep-seated desire—*because they're both Bengali*" (224 emphasis added). Are they? Nikhil and Moushumi's apartment problematizes the notion of home as a sign of national culture. Though small like the Gangulis' first apartment in Central Square, it is "luxurious" and in the heart of New York city. It is artistic rather than practical: built-in mahogany bookcases, stainless-steel appliances, marble floors and walls in the bathroom, and a Juliet balcony off the bedroom (228). They furnish it with brand-name imitations. Nikhil and Moushumi's lifestyle is like their apartment: eclectic, with no glimpse of approximating Bengali tradition. Instead of replicating a specific national culture, Nikhil and Moushumi's apartment signifies an ambiguous non-national space.

The closing of the story blurs the national and the foreign in two contradictory ways when Ashima decides to sell their house in Pemberton Road and when Nikhil decides to give a new turn in his life in which he re-embraces his forsaken name (Gogol). In a way, echoing Kaldas's story *A Conversation* in *The Time between Places*, India is

imagined from Ashima's perspective as a prospective home. The *dialogic* spatial imagination of the U.S. and Egypt in *A Conversation* recurs in *The Namesake*. On the one hand, the home in Pemberton is the one "she has created" though "she still does not feel fully at home within [its] walls" (280). On the other hand, Ashima is returning to Calcutta "the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign" (278). However, unlike *A Conversation*, Ashima does not perceive home country and host country in a binary opposition but rather encompasses both the U.S. and India as *hom(es)* when she decides to spend six months in India and six months in the U.S. Although, the binary between home country and host country in *A Conversation* has unfolded the couple's lack of full belonging to either the U.S. or Egypt, Ashima's decision to be a part time resident in both India and the U.S. ultimately implies lack of full belonging in either place. Ashima "will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (276). Ashima's "placelessness" dismantles a spatial imagination of the nation based on the national-foreign dichotomy. Whereas Ashima goes beyond the boundaries of a singular sense of belonging, Nikhil re-roots himself in his old forsaken self: Gogol. In the last scene of the novel, Nikhil takes refuge in his room and "starts to read" *The Overcoat* by Nicholai Gogol (291). Imagining his mother interrupting him, Gogol turns over a small corner of a page "to mark his place" (290). Gogol/Nikhil strives to root himself. Ironically, where he decides to root himself is the same third space marked by his name that is neither Indian nor mainstream American. That is to say, both Gogol's and Ashima's perceptions of *home* are two faces for the dynamics between residing *anywhere* and *nowhere*.

In conclusion, *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* though they portray the pain and hardships of migrating and the ups and downs of pursuing better living conditions in the U.S., they de-politicize the narratives. To clarify, the time frame for both texts is the 1960s. Although there were crucial political events taking place in the 1960s (such as the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movements), neither text highlights any political realities that the characters might have encountered. On the contrary, in one of the early scenes in *The Namesake* when Ashima decides to be independent and venture exploring Central Square on her own accompanied by her baby boy Gogol, the scene reveals passersby who are curious about her son and are warm to her and her son. In the same sense, Kaldas, although she accentuates the impact of Nasser's rule on the lives of different families in Egypt, there is no mention whatsoever of any political realities in the U.S. that might have influenced the characters' lives. The characters' political disengagement is a form of un-belonging, which I interpret as non-national. In "He Had Dreamed of Returning", Kaldas describes how Hani's family follow up with the news of the war in Egypt in 1973, then continue "with their lives the next morning" (151). Likewise, Lahiri describes how Ashoke and Ashima, along with other Bengali/Indian families, spend hours arguing about the politics of America, "a country in which none of them is eligible to vote" (38). That is to say, home in *The Time between Places* and *The Namesake* reveal that home and nation are separate spheres.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**Transnational Allegories and the Non-national Subject in *The Agüero Sisters* and  
*The Night Counter***

The stories of migration in the narratives that I have discussed in the previous three chapters underline three aspects of the non-national in contemporary narratives by American women of color. These aspects have revisited notions of unified national consciousness, linear national time, and a homogenous sense of belonging to a singular national space. My analysis in the earlier chapters reveal a different sense of the nation that is formed beyond geographical boundaries and mediated by locating home(land) cognitively and spatially rather than solely perceived as a place of roots and belonging. That is to say, the non-national disrupts the idea of successive generations handing down the nation as if it is an invariant substance, inherited from one generation to the next. In addition, the non-national re-configures the nation spatially as an open, un-confining space. This provokes a question about how to interpret the story of the nation in migrant narratives if the perception of the nation is not confined to national territories or geographical boundaries. In this chapter I analyze *The Night Counter* by Alia Yunis vis-à-vis *The Agüero Sisters* by Cristina García to suggest reading these texts as national and transnational allegories and to pose a hypothesis about the non-national subject as a possible space for allegory.

The question about allegorizing the nation conjures up multiple implications for allegory. Walter Benjamin's critical study of German plays of mourning, the *Trauerspiels*, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1985) restores the literary significance of allegory, which was replaced by symbolism especially by the Romantics. Benjamin elaborates that allegory originates in melancholy and mourning induced by

historical crises. Allegorists, as Benjamin explains, see death and decay in both nature and history. They go beyond the beauty of nature—unlike the Romantics who celebrate nature—seek its contradictions, and view death as an essential part of nature (178).

Benjamin underscores that allegorists seek “the particular from the general” and “the particular serves only as an instance or example of the general” (161). Katherine Sugg, deploying Benjamin’s theory re-emphasizes in *Gender and Allegory in Transamerican Fiction and Performance* (2008) that allegory is closely connected to historical crises. She elaborates that while postmodernity is the historical crises of late capitalism, post 9/11 is the historical crises of contemporary times (33). Craig Owens’ analysis of allegory as a narrative form in “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” (1980) also aligns allegory with postmodernism in the sense that “[t]he allegorical work is synthetic, it crosses aesthetic boundaries” producing a “confusion of genres” (1055).

Building on the interlocked relation between the *particular* and the *general* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frederic Jameson focus on the political dimension that allegories in fiction can convey. On the one hand, Spivak analyzes *Jane Eyre* in “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (1985), and holds that the novel can be read as “an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism” (251). On the other hand, Jameson in “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), analyzes novels in third world literature (exemplified by Chinese and Cuban novels) to argue that these novels are political, specifically in their portrayal of the battle against the imposition of capitalism on their nations and hence should be read as “national allegories”. Allegory in Jameson’s essay is a “signifying process, which might only be set

in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences [figures and personifications] are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text” (73). Focusing on third world literature, Jameson holds, “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society”. Thus, all third-world texts “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (69). In Jameson’s essay, allegory addresses the problem of “narrative closure” (76) and the absence of a specific form of closure in third world literatures, produced after independence. This problem is evoked by the political dilemma of realizing that post-independence is not necessarily a better era, economically or politically, than the colonial era. Thus the individual subject is unable to grasp his/her whole situation. He suggests that reading allegorically generates “a range of distinct meanings or messages, simultaneously, as the allegorical tenor and vehicle change places” (74). Building on Jameson, I argue that *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* are allegories in the sense that they generate “a range of distinct meanings or messages, simultaneously.” In each text the individuals’ stories are open stories and are tied to a “national situation”: post 9/11 in *The Night Counter*, and post-1952 socialist Cuba in *The Agüero Sisters*.

Although Jameson’s concept of national allegory is a useful analytical tool, it is also controversial. A case in point is Aijaz Ahmed’s criticism in “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” (1987). Ahmed criticizes the definitional limitations of “national allegory”, especially the first-world—third-world binary on which Jameson’s argument is founded. Ahmed holds that minorities in the U.S. form “pockets” of the third world in the U.S. Ahmed, in addition, replaces the notion of the “nation” with

“the larger, less restrictive idea of ‘collectivity’” (88). In light of Ahmed’s argument, “allegorizing” individual experience is not necessarily nationalistic (referring to the experience of colonialism and imperialism and the struggle for liberation); and is not specific to first or third world literature. Ian Buchanan, in “National Allegory Today: A Return to Jameson” (2005), takes the “national” in Jameson’s essay to mean “national situation” rather than “nationalist ideology” (174). In light of Buchanan’s interpretation, I argue that Jameson’s concept does not account for a complex, problematic relationship between the individual and the nation where the individual is dis-placed from one nation, relocates in another, and adapts to/adopts the new nation as an alternative homeland. In other words, Jameson’s concept of “national allegory” does not take into account the question of assimilation or integration for migrants, hence does not include the non-national subject or problematic “national situations.” Similarly, although Ahmed replaces the notion of the nation with “collectivity,” Ahmed does not count for conflicted collectivities. For instance, as I discuss in *The Night Counter*, members of the same family show difficult alliances in the aftermath of 9/11. Some family members emphasize their religious identity and even become conservative Muslims; while other members assist the FBI agents interrogating terrorist suspects. Furthermore, “time-space” compression that characterizes the formation of “imagined (transnational) communities” unsettles a homogenous perception of the nation/collectivities. Therefore, I argue that stories in *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* are open-ended, because they are not situated within a singular nation but rather reveal intertwined political and economic histories between the U.S. and the Arab region, as in *The Night Counter*, or the U.S. and

Cuba, as in *The Agüero Sisters*, that is to say, the nation in these narratives is not limited by geographical boundaries.

My argument here resonates with Jean Franco's proposition in "The Nation as Imagined Community" (1997) about "whether the term 'national allegory' can be any longer usefully applied to a literature in which 'nation' is either a contested term or... a mere reminder of a vanished body" (131). Imre Szeman points out in "Who's Afraid of National Allegory?" (2005) that the nation in Jameson is conflated with the political whereas it should be put into question (198). That is to say, Jameson's concept of "national allegory" does not consider transnational relationships, specifically formed as a result of economic unevenness and asymmetries that create third world economic conditions within the U.S. As Buchanan says, "the Third World loses all geographic specificity and becomes instead a term designating something like a new class or indeed caste system within the First World itself" (178). Building on Buchanan, I re-situate the third world within the U.S., especially in my discussion of economic unevenness, in *The Night Counter*, between Arab-Gulf states that produce oil and invest in the U.S., and Arab migrants who live at the margins of that economic luxury. Elaborating on Jameson, I argue that *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* are transnational allegories, in the sense that they are political critiques of monolithicizing Arab-Americans in the U.S. and of economic disparities caused by global capitalism. I also extend Jameson's concept of "national allegory" and argue that the non-national subject can be read allegorically, generating multiple meanings, and specifically in *The Night Counter*, it can be read as a critique of systematic erasures of the ethnic subject in the U.S.

*The Night Counter* depicts three generations of the same family, born and raised in the U.S.; yet despite their long presence in the U.S., members of this family struggle to be acknowledged as fellow American citizens (rather than potential terrorists), especially after 9-11. *The Agüero Sisters* portrays three generations of Cuban and Cuban-American families who upon moving to the U.S. are accepted within mainstream society—unlike Arab-Americans—largely because Cuban exiles oppose the Castro regime, which several American administrations have condemned as a threat to the U.S. In both texts, families are divided along the lines of political and economic interests that can facilitate and/or hinder their integration as American citizens in the U.S. In Yunis’s text, family members are divided because of the Patriot Act and Homeland Security measures that the American administration has taken against individuals of special interests (i.e. suspected terrorists). Thus, while some family members are under surveillance by the FBI, other members of the same family are helping the FBI to investigate other Arabs and Arab-Americans in the U.S. In *The Agüero Sisters* members of the family are dispersed between Cuba and the U.S. because of their belief in either the capitalist world of the U.S. or the communist revolution in Cuba.

I argue that while *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* can be interpreted as national allegories; they also problematize the notion of the nation as an economic and political territory. That is to say, my analysis of *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* places the notion of the nation in Jameson’s concept of “national allegory” into question. To that end I will start with an analysis of *The Agüero Sisters* which can be read as a national allegory in the Jamesonian sense, but with a glimpse of some aspects of the

non-national, before analyzing *The Night Counter* as an example of what I term “trans-national” allegory.

### *The Agüero Sisters*

Cristina García is a renowned Cuban-American writer mostly known for her first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), which is more critically acclaimed than her second novel, *The Agüero Sisters* (1997). Most scholarly work on García addresses the correlation between family histories and the history of Cuba since the early twentieth century; the tension between Cuban exiles in Florida and Cubans (provoked by the 1959 revolution); the diversity of Cubans and Cuban-Americans; and the influence of Afro-Cuban traditions on García’s novels<sup>59</sup>. In his survey of Cuban-American literary history—*One Island, Many Voices: Conversations with Cuban-American Writers* (2008)—Eduardo R. Del Rio proposes that Cuban-American literature since the 1980s continues to describe the conflict between Cubans and Cuban-Americans but also depicts the U.S. economic system as an exploiter of Cuban workers (5). Along the same lines, Teresa Derrickson in her critical study, *Politicizing Globalization* (2002), suggests that *The Agüero Sisters* not only depicts the historically contentious relationship between Cuba and America, but also “makes clear that the female body is a site where state and global politics play themselves out” (157). I expand on these critical studies by situating *The Agüero Sisters* within and against Jameson’s theoretical concept of national allegory.

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<sup>59</sup> I am referring here to studies by Isabel Alvarez-Borland’s *Cuban-American Literature in Exile* (1998); María Cristina García *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida* (1996); and Teresa Derrickson’s *Politicizing Globalization: Transnational Conflict and Change in the Contemporary Novel* (2002).

As I have mentioned earlier, *The Agüero Sisters* portrays three generations of Cuban and Cuban-American families. There are three story lines in this novel: the story of Ignacio and Blanca Agüero; the story of Constanica and her family who have migrated to the U.S. after the 1959 revolution in Cuba; and the story of her younger sister, Reina and her daughter, Dulce, who stayed in Cuba, yet eventually leave for the U.S. The incidents of the novel take place in both Cuba and the U.S. and are narrated from the perspectives of Ignacio Agüero, Constanica and her children Isabel and Silvestre, Reina and her daughter Dulce. The framing story is Ignacio's diary which recounts his Spanish father's quest to the New World—Cuba in the late nineteenth century—and the circumstances of his wife's—Blanca—murder. Ignacio's life—from the early to the mid twentieth century—as narrated in his diary alternates with Constanica's and Reina's stories in Cuba and the U.S. in the early 1990s. These alternating perspectives reveal the political and economic changes that have taken place within Cuba and with American involvement with Cuba.

Ignacio and Blanca are naturalists who share an interest in Cuba's flora and fauna. Constanica tells her story in New York, then in Miami; and Reina describes her life in Havana then in Miami. In addition, there are sub-stories—Silvestre's, Isabel's, and Dulce's—that resonate with these three main story lines. At the center of the novel is Blanca's enigmatic death. The prologue alludes to her death and to the fact that Ignacio lies about her death. In the very last page of the novel, the mystery of Blanca's death is explained and Ignacio is revealed as her killer. Ignacio's diary, as well as his academic legacy, cause tension between the two sisters, Constanica and Reina. Constanica is jealous that Reina has more access to their father's books by virtue of staying in Cuba,

and Reina is jealous that Constanca knows more about their mother and the circumstances of her untimely death at the age of thirty five. The death of Blanca that is mentioned without details in the prologue is narrated in fragments throughout the novel.

The novel draws analogies between Blanca and Cuba's birds, botany, indigenous creatures, and natural resources throughout. When Ignacio first sees Blanca, he compares her to a bird: "slight" and "delicately boned as certain birds", with "distinctive camouflages of her subjects" and "versatile physiognomies" (183). Her green eyes take a yellowish tint when she works with sulfur, and when she works with phosphorous, she vibrates with "its unearthly glow." Like "lead", Blanca appears "heavy and malleable and gray" (182-3). Blanca appeals to and intrigues a naturalist like Ignacio, and she makes him curious to explore his "object" of study. Ignacio's character echoes the Spanish naturalists and their expeditions to the Caribbean Islands and Latin America that started in the mid eighteenth century, which used scientific knowledge to impose their dominance over these territories and peoples. As Stuart George McCook puts it in *States of Nature* (2002), "The Spanish imperial government ... used science to nationalize nature, to extend state power over the natural world" (11). Ignacio's interest in Blanca can be interpreted in light of his interests as a naturalist during the colonial era in Cuba. Blanca's name means white or blank, which metaphorically suggests Blanca is a new horizon for Ignacio to pursue. That is to say, Blanca and Cuba are both open for colonial exploration as well as exploitation. In the prologue, Ignacio says: "Long ago, Cuba had been a naturalist's dream" (4). Later in his diaries in a moment of reflection on Cuba's nature, Ignacio writes:

I thought of what the *first explorers* must have felt at *the sight of a new horizon*, at *the roar of possibilities* in their heads. How they imagined the vast riches that awaited them, all there for the *taking* with a *musket* and a *strong pair of hands*. (92 emphasis added)

The passage expresses the novelty, the abundance of possibilities and potential wealth the land offers, as well as the “right” to take them by force, “with a musket and a strong pair of hands” on the other hand. One can draw a parallel between Ignacio’s fascination with and desire to capture this new horizon and his fascination with Blanca and his desire to control her. Ignacio’s failure to control Blanca frustrates him and led to her murder. Her murder is described as a mistake, when Ignacio tries to shoot “the most extraordinary bird” hovering above Blanca’s head (299). Ignacio describes his shooting of Blanca as “a necessity of nature” where the bird/Blanca itself/herself invited him to capture it/her (299). The “untimely” death of Blanca is a “sorrowful” incident, caused by Ignacio that shatters the unity between Blanca and Cuba’s indigenous birds. Ignacio’s books/articles about Cuban plants and creatures include: *Cuba’s Dying Birds* (155); *Cuba: Flora and Fauna; A Naturalist’s Guide to the Pearl of the Antilles* (11); “The Lost Reptiles of Cuba” (185). These titles stand for a sense of nationhood formed, not through specific political/ideological views but by virtue of claiming knowledge and hence power over Cuba’s flora and fauna.

The correlation between Cuba’s indigenous birds and the nation in *The Agüero Sisters* is also present in the details Ignacio gives about the day of his own birth (1904, two years after the independence of Cuba in 1902). The day Ignacio is born is jinxed by the appearance of an ill-omen, an owl that plucks the placenta of Ignacio’s mother and

spreads birthing blood over the crowd gathering for the presidential inauguration (29). Despite the implications of the ill-omen owl, birth blood can also mean the birth of the new Republic after independence and the beginning of a new era. However, it is not a very promising birth, because despite Cuba's independence from the Spanish, the Platt Amendment signed in 1901 between the U.S. and Cuba (a Spanish colony at the time) was still in effect. This Amendment defined the geographical boundaries of Cuba, facilitated leasing the Guantanamo Bay as a naval base for the U.S., and controlled Cuban trade (specially opening new markets in Cuba for U.S. products in exchange for exporting Cuban sugar to the U.S.). This means that Cuba's *national project* of independence was curtailed from the very beginning. Cuba's independence ended Spanish colonialism, but not American imperialism. Despite the dominance of the tobacco industry in Cuba in the early twentieth century, the sugar boom took over and many cigar workers lost their jobs "to the modern cigar-rolling machines from American" (113). Cuba's political independence in 1902 opened more Cuban markets to the expansion of American capitalism. This direct correlation between the jinxed birth of Ignacio and the political independence of Cuba—but not its economic sovereignty due to the Platt Amendment—can be read as a national allegory in the Jamesonian sense: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society". The embattled situation in Cuba was the false hope of independence which provoked the 1959 revolution and a new national project, namely, the transformation from capitalism and the free market to socialism and state ownership.

There is a hint in the novel that the Agüero house is a big house owned by the family. Yet after the revolution its eight rooms were redistributed among many families, indicating that the new regime after the revolution in Cuba has affected negatively the economic status of the Agüero family. That is to say, the economic changes that have taken place in Cuba after the revolution were not in the best interest of the Agüero family. Thus, Constanica leaves for the U.S., while Reina stays on. Whereas Reina is tolerant of the communist regime, Constanica cannot live under its grip and hopes it will end. The novel as such depicts two different Cuban nationalisms from the perspectives of Cubans and from the perspectives of Cuban-Americans. For example, Reina works under the communist regime in Cuba and does not mind it, while Constanica despises it and lives in self-exile in the U.S.

Though Reina and Constanica disagree on what is for the nation, they agree on de-valoring patriotism and nationalism. For example, Constanica criticizes her husband's enthusiasm for the exile group, La Brigada Caimón, that aims at deposing the communist regime in Cuba. She says: "Men always confuse *patriotism* with self-love! ... war should be strictly personal, like philosophy or sexual preference" (77 emphasis added). By the same token, Reina reiterates that "*patriotism* is the least discerning of passions" and is sarcastic about the kind of Cuban nationalism propagated over exile stations in Miami: "[it is] *parading nationalism*, like a bunch of roosters in the make" (196 emphasis added). While Constanica speaks harshly about Cuban patriotism among the Cuban exiles, she is considered not Cuban enough by other Cuban exiles because she once voted for a Democratic president. Cuban exiles are perceived by their compatriots in

Cuba as either traitors because they have left the country, or the real heroes because they have made it to the U.S.

In *The Agüero Sisters* there are two stories/perspectives of the nation—mediated from inside Cuba and from the U.S. Both stories are initially set in opposition within the framework of the eternal conflict between communism and capitalism. The clash between conservative and liberal economic systems in Cuba, together with the failure of the Cuban regime to deliver its promises, leads me to read this novel as a “national allegory”. Dulce’s unconcealed frustration because of the living conditions in Cuba “unravel[s] the revolution” (68). Instead of equal jobs and equal income, there are no decent jobs and not enough money. Cubans are “sick of picking potatoes and building dormitories, only to find no meaningful work in the careers [they have] trained for. . . . Sick of having nothing to do, period” (52). In addition, Dulce compares Cuba to “an evil stepmother, abusive and unrewarding of effort. More, more, and more for more nothing” (52-3). Reina, later in the novel, echoes Dulce, when she laments the lost beauty of Cuba and compares the times she used to walk with her mother by the Almendares river with what she and her daughter Dulce now see: “filthy, shimmering with mosquitoes and algae, the trail clotted with garbage and rotting fruit” (99). This description of the Almendares river stands in stark contrast to Ignacio’s description of Cuba’s exhilarating wildlife. In addition, Dulce’s description of the social/economic conditions overshadows the gains and benefits that her mother’s generation reaped after the revolution, especially its women. Unlike her mother who is denied a job because she is pregnant, Reina has a government job as an electrician. Reina has her daughter out of wedlock with José Luis Fuerte, one of the revolution’s heroes. Never married, Reina is a long term mistress of a married

governmental official, Pepín Beltrán. All this shows that Cuban women after the revolution had a sense of independence and equality with their male peers. These benefits of the revolution are hardly highlighted in the novel. Except when Reina criticizes the exile stations in Miami for telling “outrageous lies on the air” about the Cuban regime and repudiating even the achievements of the revolution, these accomplishments are subsumed by Dulce’s narrative voice and her jobs as a teacher and a prostitute to make ends meet.

In contrast, Constanica is portrayed in her first appearance in the novel in the heart of New York, making twelve hundred dollars in sales in the first half hour of the day (20). Since the circulation of money does not see color/language/geographical boundaries, Constanica’s business booms even more when she founds her own factory of beauty products—Cuerpo de Cuba (body of Cuba)—in South Miami. Although the circulation of capital may cross color, language, and national boundaries, ironically it is these three factors that help Constanica’s sales to rise. Constanica makes twelve hundred dollars in half an hour by virtue of the way she looks and talks:

her skin is *soft* and *white*. Her dark hair is arranged in a *French bun*, and nails are lacquered to match her carnelian lips. ... she completes every ensemble with a short strand of pearls. Her *foreign accent* and *precise* manner *intimidate* clients into buying whatever she suggests.

(20 emphasis added)

The detailed description of Constanica’s appearance reflects contradictory implications. Constanica’s accent does not detract from her appeal to her customers. On the contrary, Constanica’s accent renders her products exotic, and hence attractive by virtue of her

difference. To recall Rutherford's *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, from the first chapter, "capital has fallen in love with difference" (11). Constancia's intriguing *difference*, though marks her as *ethnic*, her skin color renders her *ethnic* but *not quite*. That is to say, what helps Constancia to be appealing is not only her confidence as a seller, but rather her "white" skin and her fashionable attire that intrigue some women to emulate her and attracts men as well.

Constancia manipulates "Cuba" to expand her business. Echoing the titles of her father's books in which Cuba is at the center, Constancia's beauty products include: "Ojos de Cuba" (an eye repair cream); "Pies de Cuba" (foot bath); "Cuello de Cuba" (neck cream); "Senos de Cuba" (breast lotion); "Codos de Cuba" (elbow moisturizer); "Muslos de Cuba" (thigh cream) (129, 131). These names echo Ignacio's book titles in the sense that Constancia *nationalizes* Cuba through her beauty products, which create "an imagined community" formed around these products in New York and Miami. Not only does Constancia *nationalize* Cuba but also *engenders* it by correlating Cuba to a woman's body: "Cuerpo de Cuba". Nevertheless, metaphorically fragmenting the Cuban body into eyes, foot, neck, breast, elbow, and thighs renders "Cuerpo de Cuba" a trope for *reifying* "Cuba" as an object circulating to facilitate marketing beauty products. In addition, Constancia's line of perfumes is "Flor del Destierro" (flower of exile) publicized by echoing some verses from José Martí's poem "Flores del Destierro"<sup>60</sup>:

Que en blanca fuente una niña cara,  
 Flor del destierro, candida me brinda,  
 Naranja es, y vino de naranjo. (271)

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<sup>60</sup> Martí wrote "Flores del Destierro" between 1882-1891 and was published posthumously in 1933.

[In a white fountain, a child's face,  
 An exiled flower, it toasts to me simply,  
 'It is orange and orange wine']

Both Ignacio's books and Constancia's beauty products produce Cuba as a fragmented woman/national body. That is to say, the fragmented woman's body becomes what Kristeva calls, a "symbolic denominator" for Cuba. Analyzing the intertwined relation between women's bodies and the national, Kristeva in "Women's Time" defines the "symbolic denominator" as "the cultural...memory forged by the interweaving of history and geography" (188). Hence, many Cuban women admit that "they feel more *Cubana* after using her [Constancia's] products." "Cuerpo de Cuba" products make Cuban women recall "long-forgotten details of their childhood in Sagua la Grande, Remedios, Media Luna, or Santa Cruz del sur. ...Politics may have betrayed Constancia's customers, geography overlooked them, but *Cuerpo de Cuba products still manage to touch the pink roots of their sadness*" (132 emphasis added). Constancia's products bring specific memories to their users of specific provinces in Cuba. What Constancia is successful at, here, is evoking a feeling of national affiliation through a circulation of nostalgic *affect*. Bringing together beauty products and national sentiments has double meanings. First, it shows Constancia manipulating the Cuban exiles' feelings of nostalgia and as a skilful seller, she addresses those feelings. Second, what Constancia is trading is not only beauty products but also "Cuba" as a national *affect*. This interconnection between circulation of money (through the circulation of beauty products) and targeting Cuban exiles' nostalgia and homesickness resonates with Sara Ahmed's notion of "affective economy" in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). Ahmed, borrowing from

Marx's theory of the movement of commodities and money, draws an analogy between emotions and capital. She says: "emotions work as a form of capital: affect...is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (120). Thus, "Cuerpo de Cuba" beauty line is not only a purveyor of beauty and femininity, but also of nostalgia and national affiliations.

The circulation of a nostalgic-national affect does not lead to a homogenous collectivity. As I have mentioned earlier, Constanica feels that she does not fit among the Cuban exiles in Miami and despite the fact that Constanica's business booms in Miami by virtue of her compatriot consumers, she does not feel comfortable with their excessive feelings of nostalgia. To Constanica, Miami is "disquieting" and its air is "thickly charged with *expiring dreams*" (46 emphasis added). When Reina joins Constanica in Miami, Reina thinks of Constanica in the same exact way Constanica thinks of the Cuban exiles in Miami: "[Constanica] sounds like the past. A flash-frozen language, replete with outmoded words and fifties expressions" (236). On the one hand, among the Cuban exiles Constanica feels a "foreigner" (45). On the other hand, Reina's perception of Constanica is as a Cuban exile haunted by the past. Constanica's character can be read as an allegory of "imagined (transnational) communities" mediating between Cuba and the U.S. rather than an allegory of a single nation.

The Manichean representation of the communist and capitalist worlds in the novel highlights dire conditions in Cuba (and the failure of its economic systems) and the feverish pursuit of money and wealth in the U.S. In Cuba, people appreciate a roll of toilet paper or a bar of soap over leaflets inciting an uprising (239). In the U.S. people are too busy accumulating money and wealth (199). The economic and political conflicts between both worlds is metaphorically represented in Silvestre's and Dulce's bodies.

Silvestre is a deaf young man who sorts out news for a news-magazine in New York. Silvestre is Constancia's eldest child from her first marriage to Gonzalo Cruz (who is also the brother of her second husband, Heberto). Silvestre's considers his deafness as a good thing for his job because it "filters out distractions" (23). In the second chapter of Constancia's story, Silvestre's disability is described from Constancia's perspective as "[a]nother causality of that *dichosa* [prosperous] revolution" (44). He has been the victim of the political conflict between the U.S. and Russia. Constancia, hearing a rumor that the Cuban government intended to send Cuban children to boarding schools in Ukraine, decides to send Silvestre to an orphanage that hosted other Latino/a children in Denver, Colorado. Silvestre, however, could not stand the severe cold, got a fever and lost his hearing senses (82). Silvestre is a victim of the conflict between communism in Russia and capitalism in the U.S., each superpower wanting to exploit other nations to serve its interests. Before the 1959 revolution, the tobacco industry waned and was replaced by the sugar industry, which the U.S. encouraged. The communist revolution tried to manage its own economy but to no avail. Silvestre's disability is an allegorical critique of both capitalism and communism. Is it the revolution that caused Silvestre's deafness or the weather in Colorado? Imitating his mother's voice, ironically, Silvestre enunciates: "*Be a little man and don't cry, Silvestre. This is* [leaving Cuba for the orphanage in Colorado] *much better than becoming a communist*" (82). His mockery renders her decision meaningless. In allegorical terms, Silvestre's story can stand for the *embattled situation* in Cuba and the failure of the revolution to fulfill all its promises, but Silvestre does not live or grow up in Cuba; he becomes deaf and grows up in the U.S. Silvestre lives at the heart of one of the most powerful capitalist centers in the world. If we read his deafness

allegorically, working on *sorting* news, vis-à-vis Constancia *sorting* what she sells, and Reina's comment about people in the U.S., "too busy *sorting* through the hysteria of what to purchase next" (199 emphasis added), one can read Silvestre and Constancia as two faces of an obliviousness to capitalist exploitation. Silvestre is literally deaf within the system he works for and Constancia's booming sales depersonalizes labor by concealing the abuses of a capitalist economic system.

The foil for Silvestre's and Constancia's bodies is Dulce's body. The chapters dedicated to Dulce's story are narrated from the first person point of view, like Ignacio's chapters which are mainly his diary, and unlike the rest of the chapters which are narrated from the third person perspective. Dulce's story can be read as the counter-perspective for Ignacio's story. Unlike Ignacio's fascination with Cuba's wildlife that is every "naturalist's dream", as I have previously pointed out, Dulce is frustrated with the deplorable living conditions in Cuba. When Dulce thinks of a dream place, she thinks of New York: cold weather, skating, fur clothes, and frozen lakes, and daydreams of herself skating in circles. Dulce does not see any promise in Cuba and "the future is frozen" (54). Instead of details about Cuba's birds, turtles, fauna, lizards, owls, Iguanas, Dulce describes the economic hardships that hit Cuba and have made many Cubans desperate for "leaving and dollars" (54). A volleyball coach in José Martí High school, to make ends meet Dulce wanders Cuban touristic areas to earn "pocket money" (52). Dulce's body, hence, becomes an economic resource and this parallels Constancia's use of "Cuba" as a body to sell her beauty products. While Constancia fragments "Cuba" into eyes/hands/feet/face rejuvenating products, Dulce de-sensitizes her body. When Dulce moves to Madrid with her sixty-four year old boyfriend, Abelardo, she becomes a maid, a

baby-sitter, and a prostitute. In Madrid, Dulce thinks of “each bed as a desk, a place of calculation, each body as a collection of unrelated parts. ... Again and again I [Dulce] soldered myself into those deadening men, approximating lust” (285). A prostitute, Dulce’s body becomes a sexual commodity in Miami, Havana, and Madrid. This complicates the question of the nation in the text. If women are alienated from their bodies to facilitate the mobility of the capital between nations, Dulce’s story in that sense will echo Constancia’s story, allegorizing transnational transactions to critique both communism and capitalism. Dislocation and involvement in oppressive and complex situations like Dulce’s makes her story an allegory for the feminization of transnational labor that complicates national belonging.

Sections of the novel that take place in Cuba are marked by the years 1990-1991, which have been crucial in terms of the economic transformations in Cuba. One of Dulce’s chapters (51-58) portrays the harsh years of the 1990s in Cuba. During these years Cuba was denied the support of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as the opportunity to trade in American markets. In addition, the disintegration of the Soviet Union had decreased its economic support to Cuba. As part of making some market reforms, in the early 1990s, the Cuban government encouraged a sex industry by targeting tourists and promoting Cuba as AIDS-free. By the same token, despite the Cuban government’s banning of public religious rituals, Santería rituals became more tolerated, specifically for foreigners “who want an authentic initiation” (56). Meanwhile, the Cuban government started to allow Cuban exiles to return to visit their family members. They bring “crammed suitcases” full of “photographs of ranch homes and Cadillacs, leather shoes ... watches ... extra-strength aspirin” (68). The

abundance of this wide range of goods and everyday needs heightens the feeling of deprivation that Cuban citizens feel. Thus the novel highlights economic and developmental stagnation in Cuba compared to the thriving economy which Cuban exiles enjoy in the U.S. While the human cost of global capitalism is made visible in Cuba (Dulce is an example), it is totally invisible in Miami/New York where Constanica sells her *Cuerpo de Cuba* products. Despite the detailed description of the products, the factory, and the *Santería* rituals that Constanica resorts to for blessings, there is no reference to the workers, who works, working conditions, or even any reference to poverty or inequitable distribution of wealth in Miami/New York. As such, García draws a clear binary between first world capitalism and third world undeveloped nations. This in turn re-emphasizes the one-way flow of monetary remittance from the sender (first World/U.S.) to the receiver (third world/Cuba). This binary makes the text resonate with Jameson's definition of a "national allegory" that invites interpreting the nation in terms of first world versus third world.

Unlike *West of the Jordan* in the first chapter where the monetary remittance (sent from the U.S. to Nawara in the West Bank) suggest an equal exchange with what Peggy Levitt calls "social" remittance (sent from Nawara to the U.S.) and unsettles the center-margin binary, *The Agüero Sisters* highlights that sender-receiver division. Although *Santería* rituals function as "social" remittance from Cuba and could balance the exchange of remittance between Cuba and the U.S., these rituals are exploited in Miami and become part of an "affective economy", an emotional capital that circulates. Although readers do not have details, there is a glimpse of the *Santero's* "canary-yellow Buick" (192) and the aura of respect that accompanies his presence, which indicate that

he is a public figure. This stands in contrast to the description of Santería rituals in Cuba where readers do not even have a description of a Santero figure. The metaphysical and the exotic render Santería more marketable not only among Cuban exiles but also within Cuba when it markets Santería beliefs for tourists, as I have mentioned earlier. Thus the social remittance acquires a monetary value that circulates back to Cuba through tourists and foreign currency.

*The Agüero Sisters* has an element of magical realism, produced by the incorporation of Santería traditions and magical incidents such as Reina's survival of a fire accident and the changes that took place and changed Constancia's face to look exactly like her mother. Throughout the novel these magical incidents revive the past in the characters' minds and emotionally connect them to Cuba. For instance, despite the tension between Reina and Constancia, both deeply believe in miracles and the metaphysical powers of Santería beliefs. The source of the tension between the two sisters is that each has a different version of how their mother died. Reina believes that it is an accident, and Constancia knows that it is Ignacio's revenge for Blanca's infidelity. In addition, as I have mentioned earlier, Constancia feels jealous that Reina has more access to their father's works and Reina feels jealous because she believes that Constancia knows what happens to their mother. These conflicts over the past reveal a desire for claiming ownership of the family's history in Cuba and by extension Cuba's cultural legacy (since the father's stories go back to Cuba in the nineteenth century). In a clear correlation between the magical and re-claiming the past, the Santero asks Constancia—as part of the blessings of the factory in Miami—to swim to Cuba and get hold of what is left of her father's legacy. This capture of the past is a clear signal in the

text that their past/legacy and connection to the island brings Cubans together. Though this connection is essential, it is painful and hence repressed. In a confrontational scene between Reina and Constanica, when Reina wants to talk about their mother, Constanica covers her ears and “hum[s] the national anthem” (158). Constanica avoids feeling the burden of the past and the death of her mother, by covering her ears. Nevertheless, humming the national anthem stands for her deep involvement with that history of their mother.

García’s use of magical realism as a narrative tool in *The Agüero Sisters* can be situated within the postcolonial approach to magical realism<sup>61</sup> which defines the genre to be inherently historical, allegorizing and reflecting a historical crisis, precisely depicting colonial encounters and post-independence social dilemmas. García’s text can be positioned within the colonial and postcolonial crisis of Cuba, without dismantling the third-world—first-world binary between Cuba and the U.S. that frames the novel.

### *The Night Counter*

*The Night Counter* is the only full length first novel by Alia Yunis, published in 2009. In 2011, Yunis published a short story entitled “Girls on Ice” in the online literary magazine *Guernica*. Though *The Night Counter* has not been discussed in scholarly reviews and studies, it has been critically acclaimed by the press as “captivating,” “comedic,” and “rich in characterization”. Kathryn Kysar writes in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*: “‘*The Night Counter*,’ Alia Yunis’ first novel, mixes equal parts of magical

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<sup>61</sup> Postcolonial critical studies of magic realism can be exemplified by Frederic Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*, Kumkum Sangari’s *Politics of the Possible*, and Stephen Slemon’s “Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse”, to name only a few.

realism, social commentary, family drama and lighthearted humor to create a delicious and intriguing indulgence worth savoring” (August 2009).

In the novel’s magical framework, Scheherazade reveals her presence to Fatima Abdullah for nine hundred ninety-two nights. Fatima knows that once she completes one thousand nights of telling stories to Scheherazade she will die the night after; so she has to prepare for her death in ten days. In a role reversal, Scheherazade does not tell stories to Fatima but rather listens to Fatima’s stories about her two marriages, her children, and her grandchildren. Throughout the novel, Scheherazade travels, following almost all members of Fatima’s big family either in the U.S., Lebanon, or Gaza. The title of the novel on the cover page looks like Hindi letters rather than English or even Arabic. This Pan-Asian aura of the narrative is intensified by the images of mosaic patterns on the title page. In addition, the copyright page acknowledges citing parts of *The Arabian Nights*. Right after introducing the family tree of Fatima, some verses from *The Arabian Nights* are cited. These verses in *The Arabian Nights* are cited from Mu’allaqat (suspended Odes) Labid Ibn Rabia<sup>62</sup>. Written in the poetic tradition of the time, the Odes start with description of deserted dwellings and what is left of them. In light of Benjamin’s insights about the form of allegory mediated through melancholia (where the subject feels the emptiness not only of nature but also its own ego, sees the face of death in nature rather than its beauty), one can infer that Jahilya poets, like Ibn Rabia, may be allegorists. In addition, not only are Ibn Rabia’s poems allegorical but *The Arabian Nights* itself is an allegory in which stories of animals and human virtues and sins are all narrated to stand

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<sup>62</sup> Labid Ibn Rabia is a pre-Islamic poet known for his odes in the Jahilya era. The Mu’allaqat are very long poems which address various themes; they always start with lamenting deserted dwellings, followed by a description of their ruins, then to courtship, then a description of the desert (and tribal battles), and ends with the poet valorizing his kinfolk.

for something else beyond their surface meaning<sup>63</sup>. Benjamin's as well as Jameson's explanations of allegory speak to this text. Yunis by conjuring up *The Arabian Nights* at the opening of her book, specifically these verses, is following a literary tradition of starting by lamenting emptied homes and their ruins. Yet for an American audience this can situate the novel within the realm of exotic adventures and storytelling associated with the circulation of *The Arabian Nights* in Europe and America from the eighteenth century<sup>64</sup>. The cited verses are a plea to God to bring back those who have long left their dwellings. Hence, there is an implicit sense of loss, dispersal, and yearning for re-connecting in the opening of the novel.

The first chapter of the novel opens with Fatima going home after attending the funeral of Selma Haddad, an acquaintance. Since Fatima has moved to Los Angeles to stay with her grandson, Amir, and spend her last ten days with him, she decides to attend funerals of Arab acquaintances she knows in Los Angeles. This will help Fatima arrange her own funeral, leaving all the instructions for Amir. Fatima not only wants Amir to take care of all the details of her funeral, but also wants to find him a wife so that she can give him the keys to her house in Deir Zeitoun, in Lebanon. Fatima's persistent desires to find Amir a wife and to save the key of her house in Lebanon are odd, because on the one hand, Amir tells her that he is gay and he is not getting married, and on the other hand, Fatima has not been to Lebanon, or her alleged home, in decades. Thus, the Deir Zeitoun house is a deserted home, empty of its residents. Since Yunis does not give details of

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<sup>63</sup> For example, the story where Ibn Rabi'a's verses first appear in *The Arabian Nights* is the story of *The Third Dervish*, told in the fifty-sixth night which stands for the inevitability of facing one's destiny (from the 1990 Norton edition translated by Husain Haddawy).

<sup>64</sup> Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context* (2008) explain that the first translation for the *Nights* was by Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century and by 1800 there were numerous English editions of its tales (2-3).

Fatima's house in Lebanon and does not depict any characters nostalgic to return to that house, it is a logical inference, then, that the house no longer exists after decades of living abroad. Such a conclusion is reached by almost all of Fatima's family as well as by Scheherazade; only Fatima believes that her house is still standing in Deir Zeitoon. At the end of the novel her granddaughter, Dina, goes to Lebanon and starts looking for Fatima's house but she finds out that the house no longer exists and the whole village has drastically changed. Dina calls Fatima and almost all her family members witness that phone call. When Fatima is asked by her daughter, Nadia, what her niece, Dina, is looking for, Decimal—Fatima's great granddaughter—answers on Fatima's behalf that Dina is "looking for the house with the terra-cotta roof, wood-burning stove, the cedar closets, and the four marble steps that lead to the top. ... And the garden with lavender and jasmine and the fig trees all with figs" (353). Though she has never seen Deir Zeitoon's house, Decimal gives a full account of its beauty: lavender, jasmine, fig trees. Nevertheless, the house is gone. In addition, all the landmark houses and shops as well as the families who used to live in Deir Zeitoon are no longer there. For example, "The black-smith closed his shop *fifty years ago*, when all his sons went to America [...] ... They own a hot dog shop in Cleveland" (354 emphasis added). The specific time reference in this quote alludes to—in Jameson's terms—the "embattled situation" in Lebanon that led to the migration of many Lebanese, namely, the colonial wars between the British and the French on the one hand and the Ottoman empire on the other hand. In the early twentieth century, the three colonial powers—Ottoman, British, and French—divided the Levant region. Initially under Ottoman rule, the Levant region (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories) fell to the British and the French. Thus

Syria and Lebanon became French mandates, while the rest of the Levant became a British mandate. The French and the British were at war with the Turks. Fatima's father was killed in 1919 because he refused to join the army when the Turkish army used to put "Arabs" on the front line in wars. Marwan, Fatima's first husband, was born when "Lebanon was *starving* because *Britain* and *France* had blockaded [Lebanese] harbors to defeat the *Turks*" (34 emphasis added). A puppet in the hands of colonial powers, Lebanon—as a nation—did not have any sort of sovereignty. Marwan was born at the time of the blockade, and Fatima was orphaned because of the Turks. Marwan and Fatima got married and left for the U.S just before World War II. There is, hence, a correlation between Fatima's story of escaping death in Lebanon and the story of Lebanon, struggling for independence as a nascent nation.

However, Fatima's story is too complex to be simply read as a story allegorizing Lebanon, because Fatima's story is also intertwined with stories of all her family members, who either live in the U.S. or live between the U.S. and Lebanon/Gaza. Fatima is the narrator of these stories and the central character. These stories are not arranged as chapters but as nights. For example, "The 998<sup>th</sup> Night" includes stories about Dina, Scheherazade, Amir, Fatima, and Decimal. The nights are chronological but the stories included in each night are not. Yet these stories are closely connected. Stories within stories is the narrative structure of *The Night Counter*, and it echoes the structure of *The Arabian Nights*: every night Scheherazade tells a story that she deliberately does not finish and resumes the next night. *The Arabian Nights* itself is an allegory in which stories of animals and human virtues and sins are all narrated to stand for something else beyond their surface meaning. By emulating the narrative form of *The Arabian Nights*,

Yunis's story invites interpretation as an allegory, in which multiple individuals' stories reveal intricate political and economic relationships in the U.S., and problematize the full integration of Arab-Americans as American citizens.

I, therefore, argue that the non-national subject is a space of allegory. The two contradictory and contrasting stories of Randa (Fatima's daughter) and Amir (Fatima's grandson) bear this out. Despite their long presence, Arab-Americans are still invisible, politically. Randa and her husband have helped the FBI to interrogate Arab-Americans in Houston. Randa wants to show her neighbors that she and her husband are not terrorists. However, Randa realizes that "by offering to help them [FBI] I would let the neighbors find out that we were *Arabs*, and that just was worse than offering to be *patriotic*" (350 emphasis added). Amir is an amateur actor who despite the fact that he looks for different roles to play, is always asked to wear a long beard to play the role of a terrorist or an Arab. Because of his costume beard he is under surveillance, following the attacks of 9/11. Fatima is under surveillance as well because she wears a headscarf. Had the FBI agent, Sheri Hazad seen beyond the beard and the headscarf, she would have known that the beard is false and Fatima is too old to be a national threat. In this sense, Amir and Fatima fit into what Leti Volpp calls in "The Citizen and the Terrorist" (2002) the "new identity category that groups together persons who appear 'Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim.'" As she elaborates, "members of this group are *identified* as terrorists, and are *dis-identified* as citizens" (1576 emphasis added). The FBI agent "identifies" Amir and Fatima in light of their appearance and "dis-identifies" their rights as American citizens by violating their privacy. Furthermore, had the agent seen beyond religious symbols, she would have known that Amir is gay and that homosexuality is abhorred among orthodox

Muslims. Randa, Fatima, and Amir reveal that Arab and/or Muslim citizens are perceived as the foreigners or enemies within, threatening America's security. The Patriot Act renders Arab-Americans and/or Muslims non-nationals. By virtue of its name, The Patriot Act, defines patriotism in terms of enacting measures such as surveillance, detention, and in some cases deportation of individuals who are suspected to be a threat to the U.S. Thus, the Act by its very definition is an exclusive act that turns individuals against each other to perform the role of "protectors of U.S. politics," as Donald Pease's points out (2009, 31). The Patriot Act aims at bringing together Americans, yet the only means to stand together as Americans is to exclude other Americans who look, sound, or seem, Arab/Muslim. Randa and Amir, though born in the U.S. are outsiders in the dominant American national discourse.

Like the Patriot Act, the war in Iraq generates paradoxical meanings of patriotism. The war in Iraq, allegedly a war on terror, implies the ultimate sense of patriotism: sacrificing one's life for the sake of one's nation. Rock, Miriam's son, decides to go to Iraq and before him, Joseph, his father, served in Vietnam. Miriam, however, is reluctant to let her son go to Iraq, because she does not want to face the devastating consequences of a war. Miriam's mixed feelings are shared by the congregation of her church where they start what might seem paradoxical charitable acts, yet humanitarian in a universal sense. Miriam has started a clothes' drive for Iraqi orphans, and simultaneously raises funds to help with college fees for U.S. soldiers' children (256). Amir's and Rock's stories complicate the meaning of collectivity within the Patriot Act and the war on terror.

The meaning of a *collectivity* as a *community* is likewise problematic in Yunis's text. *The Night Counter* offers a series of collective identities rather than a collective identity for Arab-Americans in the U.S. Katherine Sugg observes that many U.S. ethnic and minority literary texts function "allegorically with a protagonist-narrator who embodies ... the history and collective subject of the community" and the "nation" (30). Arab-American collective identities in *The Night Counter* differ from Sugg's position. While it is true that Amir's dilemma may allegorically stand for the political status of Arab-Americans within the U.S., the story of Sheri Hazad (the FBI agent) does not. On the contrary, Sheri Hazad's story shows full integration of an Arab-American within the U.S. to the extent of bearing the responsibility of maintaining U.S. security. It is only when we read Amir's experience together with Sheri's experience that we can see that neither character stands for all Arab-Americans. In the same way, neither Randa's cooperation with the FBI nor Rock's decision to join the American troops in Iraq stand for all Arab-Americans. I, therefore, pluralize the collective subjectivities in Sugg's proposition. Amir, Sheri Hazade, Randa, and Rock complicate the possibility of a singular collective subjectivity for Arab-Americans. Rock, Randa, and Sheri stand for what the American administration would count as "good Muslims." Mahmood Mamdani in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (2004) analyzes the distinction that President Bush made between good Muslims and bad Muslims after 9/11: "'good Muslims' were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support 'us' in a war against 'them.'" As Mamdani concludes, "[j]udgments of 'good' and 'bad' refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones" (15). Miriam's character, however, de-

politicizes Islam and disrupts the good Muslim-bad Muslim binary. On the one hand, despite raising funds to help with college fees for U.S. soldiers' children, she has also started a clothes' drive for Iraqi orphans (256). On the other hand, Miriam is a Muslim married to a Christian man and is involved in the congregation of his church. That is to say, Miriam's double allegiance crosses political boundaries and religious differences for the sake of humanitarian goals.

Not only does the FBI agent see Amir as a potential terrorist, but Hollywood also perpetuates the stereotypical representations of Arabs on its screens. In the phone call between Amir and his agent talking about a future audition, the agent calls Amir "Osama" (26). In addition, though asked to play the role of a cab driver in New York, not a terrorist, he is asked to wear his long beard. In Hollywood, Amir is not only marked by his beard but also has to conceal his sexuality. If producers in Hollywood know he is gay, "they'll never let you [Amir] audition for the terrorist parts" (26). In this sense, Amir is reduced to his beard. On the one hand, Amir's beard is a national threat, so he is targeted to sustain the nation's security. On the other hand, in Hollywood, his beard fulfills the demand for actors with Middle Eastern features but he has to conceal his sexuality to be convincing as a terrorist.

The fetishization of the Muslim beard and headscarf by the FBI agents and Hollywood producers is a reflection of perceiving Amir and Fatima as "objects of fear"(65), as Sara Ahmed would say. Analyzing the "affective politics of fear" in general and specifically within the context of the war on terror Ahmed holds that the security measures that were taken in the aftermath of the September attacks allowed unjustified detentions, deportations, and wars on other nations, a narrative which Ahmed calls a

“could-be terrorist” narrative. This narrative, as she elaborates, “relies on the structural possibility that the terrorist ‘could be’ anyone and anywhere” (79)—evoked by the “could-be [terrorists]” narrative that has circulated after 9/11 attacks about Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans. The “could-be” narrative is a paradoxical narrative in which the potential terrorist could be anywhere but not in one specific place. Ahmed argues that the “affective politics” of fear aim at preserving “through announcing a threat to life itself” (64). This fear is paradoxical because as Ahmed argues, it “involves relationships of proximity” but it “re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface” and “involves the repetition of stereotypes” (63). Despite her proximity to Amir and Fatima, the FBI agent does not see beyond the stereotypical correlation between Islam and terrorism. In that sense, Amir and Fatima are, in terms of Brian Massumi, “shadowy figure[s]” (qtd. in Ahmed 79), associated with terrorism. These paradoxical dynamics of fetishizing the terrorist body are also accompanied by paradoxical dynamics of racializing the terrorist figure. Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) holds that not only the terrorist figure is racialized as either Middle Eastern or Arab but also the terrorist body “must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize as a terrorist in the first place” (38). Thus, in light of Puar’s argument about the interrelationship between U.S. national citizenship and heteronormativity that implicitly excludes lesbian, gay, and queer bodies, Amir’s homosexuality re-emphasizes his exclusion. The stories of Fatima, Amir, Randa, Rock, Sheri Hazad, and Miriam are allegorical stories of the non-national subject formed at the nexus of *dis-identification* and the *could-be terrorist narrative*.

*The Night Counter* does not necessarily foreground double allegiance, like *The Agüero Sisters*, but rather dismantles the conflation of Arabs and Muslims. For example, Zade, Fatima's grandson, owns an international dating business called "Scheherazade's Diwan Café". He and his partner, Giselle, started this business as a hookah place and then they expanded their business to add an international dating business, Aladdin and Jasmine, Inc. The dating business grows internationally to include Muslims worldwide: Afghani, South Asian, Turkish, Bosnian, Lebanese and Syrian Armenians, and Black Muslims (60). This expansion demonstrates that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. The questionnaire about the perfect partner is comprehensive in a sense that makes it possible to include all sorts of Arabs/Muslims, yet in the attempt to be inclusive and comprehensive the questionnaire shows that being Arab or Muslim is not solely regional or racial, but rather hinges on cultural traditions, political views or simply personal preferences. For example, a Qatari man, though already married, is looking for a second wife who ideally should be "a nice Arab-American bilingual highly educated virgin not opposed to wearing the *abaya* and conversant in French cuisine" (46). Though Zade wants to dismiss the profile of the Qatari man, he does not want to reject his business. Hence, Zade simply adds another question to the questionnaire: "How do you feel about being a second wife? a) abhorrent b) mildly abhorrent c) acceptable if there is no other option and I still want to get married" (48). A girl who is bilingual, highly educated, virgin, conversant in French cuisine need not be necessarily Arab or Muslim. Likewise, accepting polygamy is not intrinsically Muslim, because many Muslim women are against polygamy. Along the same lines the questionnaire asks about voting, the war in Iraq, helping in-laws to migrate to the U.S., eating pork, and/or wearing

hijab/abaya/niqab or using sunscreen instead of wearing hijab. Comparing hijab to using sunscreen takes away the religious meaning and symbolism of hijab and renders it merely an extra layer which can be replaced by sunscreen. The question makes fun of Muslim men and women who believe in hijab yet use sunscreen as a substitute. In the same way, the question about pork and alcohol makes fun of Muslims who eat pork in secret or do not mind eating one specific form of pork. Though both questions address Muslims sticking to Muslim teachings without questioning them, these questions are also addressing mainstream discourse about Muslims that represent them as a unified, fixed, homogenous collectivity.

The questionnaire for dating Arab men and women is not only a critique of the homogenization of Arab men and women, but it also reveals that there is no consensus among Arabs themselves on what is authentically Arab/Muslim; it varies, changes, and transforms according to cultural context. One of the questions asks what type of Arab the applicant is interested in dating: “Mediterranean – Egyptian – Persian Gulf – North African – East African” (48). The obvious fact that there are no clear cut bases for these distinctions among Arabs means that it is not reasonable to put all the Arabs in one box as one homogenous group. Decimal—Fatima’s great granddaughter—is an example; she is a mix of an Arab-American mother and a Brazilian father. Her Brazilian father is from Syria; he migrated to Brazil, married a Brazilian wife, and hence became Brazilian. Decimal describes herself as “one-fourth Muslim.. 50 percent Christian and 25 percent Taoist” (303-4). Decimal does not identify as solely Arab or Muslim (even though she is perceived as only Arab). Mocking racial classification in the U.S., Decimal says: “if Paolo’s [her boyfriend] Syrian and I’m one quarter Lebanese, my baby’s going to be

three-eighth more Arab than me and just three eight less Arab than you [Amir]" (291). The name Decimal itself is metaphoric. A decimal number is two digits, implicitly, then, the name Decimal suggests openness to numerous combinations. Yunis's portrayal of a wide range of Arab-Americans disrupts the monolithicization of Arab-American as an ethnic group, which can be read as a counter-argument to the demonization of Islam in the aftermath of the attacks in September 2001.

Intertwined with the political axis in the novel is the economic axis that renders *The Night Counter* a trans-national allegory. Like *The Agüero Sisters*, *The Night Counter* portrays some aspects of capitalism in the U.S. Yet *The Night Counter* depicts economic inequalities within the U.S., rather than within post-independence nations, like Cuba that suffer the brutality of capitalism, which devours their economic systems.

Fatima's arrival scene in New York in the 1930s reveals an economic imbalance between those who own means of production and those who work for the owners. Upon her arrival in New York, Fatima was amazed by its extremely tall buildings, thinking that "something so far up could not stand by itself for so long, and I [Fatima] kept covering my head, anticipating one to fall" (81). Fatima's anticipation of danger is tied to her witnessing the hardships of living during the depression years. She says:

When I finally opened my eyes and looked *ahead instead of up*,  
people stood in long lines for bread that was hard and thick, and  
shop clerks chased kids in rags for stealing apples. (81 emphasis  
added)

The contrast between what Fatima sees when she looks up (the illusionary sense of luxury which New York skyscrapers evoke) and what she sees when she looks ahead (the

dire living conditions which most people struggle with in order to survive) calls attention to an economic imbalance between laborers and those who own means of production. This economic imbalance has expanded outside the U.S., especially after the discovery of oil in the 1970s in the Arab Gulf states and the circulation of “petrodollars”. Ibrahim Oweiss in “Petrodollar Surplus: Trends and Economic Impact” (1984) coined the terms “petrodollar” and “petrodollar recycling” in his analysis of the economic investments between the U.S., the UK and oil exporting Arab nations. He explains that oil is priced in U.S. dollars, so “petrodollars” are U.S. dollars earned through international oil trade (177). Recycling petrodollar flows means Arab Gulf states that produce oil and export oil own a surplus of dollars which they reinvest back in the U.S. (179). Consequently “petrodollar” investing nations become richer, which leads to a global economic disequilibrium between oil-investing nations and nations without oil resources.

Scheherazade’s Diwan Café, Aladdin and Jasmine, Inc., and Arab tourism in Las Vegas are the sites in the novel for recycling petrodollars. The contradiction between looking up and looking ahead, which Fatima has seen in New York is echoed in Vegas. While Saudis spend their money on alcohol, gambling, belly dancers, and prostitutes, other Arabs who are not from Arab Gulf states work as cab drivers. The novel includes the stories of Bassam, Hossam, Nassim, and Wissam who live at the margin of Vegas’s luxurious nightlife. Bassam could not be an engineer as his parents wished. Hossam’s family left Lebanon because of wars and he could not finish his law degree in the University of Jordan. Nassim was an engineer in Tunisia but could not find a suitable job in the U.S. Wissam was a doctor in Algeria who left for the U.S. to pursue the American Dream. Rather than sharing their success stories, they share their “geopolitical sob

stories” and how they were professionals in their home countries (310, 306).

Furthermore, after 9/11 and in order to fit in, all the Samirs, Wissams, Osamas, Hossams, and Nassims shortened their names to Sam. Thus, Bassam is Sam; Hossam is Sam #2; Nassim is Sam #6; Wissam is Sam #17. In allegorical terms, the story (ies) of Sam (s) replace that of Uncle Sam—America’s national symbol. The new Sam does not stand for American ideals of freedom, equality, and justice, but rather for disappointment and frustration. Unlike Constancia’s business that conceals the human cost of her business, stories of cabbies in Vegas point out the economic imbalance between the Saudis who spend their money in Vegas and the cabbies who work for the Saudis *in* the U.S.

Zade and Giselle’s Scheherazade’s Diwan Café and Aladdin and Jasmine Inc. started with borrowed money from Giselle’s brother who works in Saudi Arabia and from Zade’s Qatari brother-in-law. After 9/11 both businesses boomed as more Arab men and women started looking for Arab partners. Nevertheless, that was not the sole reason for that business to boom. Another reason, as Zade’s partner—Giselle—puts it, is that a hookah/ dating place, named Scheherazade in D.C. is “catching a trend,” meeting a need (52). It is a place where “love cashes the checks” (55). Zade’s business expands and grows into an international business that is not only for Arab men and women in the U.S., as I have clarified earlier. In the light of Giselle’s reasoning, Zade’s business relies on the circulation of the figure of Scheherazade.

The expansion of Zade’s dating business beyond the geographical boundaries of the U.S. is intertwined with orientalizing this business by adding the name “Scheherazade”. The interest in “creating and maintaining a sense of radical difference between West and East” re-emerges especially after the September attacks, as Saree

Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum point out in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (6). On one level, orientalizing a business in the era of global capitalism echoes the stereotypical implications of the orient as exotic, erotic, as well as traditional and backward. The novel partially resonates with these stereotypes. On the walls of the café, Scheherazade is portrayed as a half-naked belly dancer. In Vegas, belly dancers are named after Scheherazade: “the scintillating Scheherazade” (313). On another level, I would like to interpret Scheherazade as a non-national figure. Quoting André Gunder Frank, Susan Friedman in “Unthinking Manifest Destiny: Muslim Modernities on Three Continents” (2007), underlines that the rise of the West was enabled by “borrowing from other cultures” and the “influx of gold and silver” which allowed Europe to “compete in the global market” (70). Friedman concludes that the modern West is “derivative,” “depending for its rise...on global factors and the long-standing transcontinental exchange of goods, technology, peoples, and cultures” (71). Scheherazade is a mobile character in the novel, travelling between the U.S., Lebanon, and Gaza. In a similar sense, the café that is named after her is global, symbolizing her mobility beyond geographical boundaries and unfolding several political and economic exchanges in the novel. No fixed origins is precisely what *The Arabian Nights* as a cluster of stories evokes; it is Arab, Indian, Persian. Hence, Scheherazade is not confined to specific national territories, a non-national figure in this particular sense, and can be read as a *signifier* with multiple meanings.

Though the novel acknowledges Scheherazade, the erudite woman, by citing some verses from *The Arabian Nights*, the rest of the novel shows Scheherazade travelling between the U.S. and the Arab region, not telling stories but listening to

Fatima's stories, eye witnessing different stories and incidents in the lives of Fatima's children, grandchildren, and grand grandchildren. Scheherazade's character can be read allegorically for the conflict between the old and the new, East and West. Scheherazade's re-appearance to Fatima, renders the novel an allegorical interpretation, representing the clash between the East, where Scheherazade belongs (read: pre-capitalist, old, and magical) and the West, where she moves to (read: capitalist, new, and real). The outcome of this clash is the *death* of Scheherazade, symbolized in the novel by Fatima's impending death. Scheherazade is the one who is listening to Fatima's stories, not the one telling them. The *Arabian Nights'* witty, sharp, charming storyteller is visible only to Fatima, the other characters only see images of Scheherazade as a half-naked belly dancer on the walls of Zade's café. Zade manipulates the old to catch up with the benefits of the new, hence fragmenting Schehera/Zade and transforming her intellectual legacy—which appears on the first page of the novel before the story starts—into a sex symbol. What is more significant about *The Night Counter* is that it generates a complex “signifying process” that blurs boundaries between nations, and hence opens the novel to multiple meanings and interpretations.

To conclude, reading together *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters I* interpret both texts as national and transnational allegories and suggest the possibility of interpreting the non-national subject allegorically. Both texts, written in the U.S., demonstrate three historical crises which the U.S. has engaged with—the rise and fall of communism, the conflicts caused by capitalism, and the 9/11 attacks—which reveal the overlapping histories of the U.S. nation-state and the Arab/Muslim countries, and Cuba.

This overlap of national destinies is present in Yunis's and García's texts, but produces two different effects. A point of convergence between *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* is the circulation of capital (Zade's dating business and Constancia's cosmetic products) that blurs geographical boundaries: New York is the site of devastating consequences of capitalism (*The Night Counter*); and Havana and Madrid are the exploitative territories of women's labor (*The Agüero Sisters*). Nonetheless, while *The Night Counter* dismantles national boundaries, *The Agüero Sisters* recapitulates the economic boundaries (and possibly advantages) between the U.S. and third world nations that struggle within neoliberal economic systems.

### Afterword

In my dissertation I focus on the implications of the non-national in narratives by Arab-American, Chicana, South Asian-American, and Cuban-American women writers. As I mentioned earlier in the introduction for this study, the non-national subject reconfigures implications of home-country and host-country in the migrant stories I have discussed. The non-national, however, should not be confused or conflated with the transnational; it is rather a specific moment within the transnational that complicates meanings of national consciousness, national time, national space, and national belonging as the earlier chapters suggest. That is to say, the non-national subject contests and questions unproblematic assimilation and integration into the U.S. (as the examples of *The Language of Baklava* and *An American Brat*); and resists singular belongings and binaries between first-world and third-world; home and abroad (as the examples of *The Night Counter* and *The Agüero Sisters* clarify). As I have mentioned earlier, I expand the meaning and use of the non-national in American Studies. The analysis of the texts in this study shows that the non-national opens up narratives to multiple interpretations to rethink Americanness in light of intricate U.S. domestic and foreign policies.

Texts in my dissertation share themes of migration and/or problematic belongings. However, themes of food and uneven economies also recur, which open up the possibility of comparing these texts from multiple angles. For example, *The Language of Baklava* and *The Namesake* can be read together as they share the theme of food as a cultural symbol that problematizes national affiliations. Similarly, *An American Brat* and *The Agüero Sisters* can be analyzed in light of the consequences of capitalism in Third World countries such as Pakistan and Cuba. That is to say, though the writers in my

dissertation have different histories in the U.S., a contrapuntal reading brings them together, yet maintains the uniqueness of each text rather than seeking their similarities. A contrapuntal reading gives a way of understanding the moving between different spaces—U.S., Jordan, Pakistan, the West Bank, Mexico, Egypt, India, Lebanon, and Cuba—to contest monolithic understandings of Americanness and assimilation. Reading contrapuntally, offers a broader perspective to analyze the notion of the nation, national consciousness, national time, national space, and national belonging not only in the U.S. but also in the native countries of the writers in my dissertation. Furthermore, this particular way of reading brings out the full diversity of Arab-American women's writing.

The goal of my study is not merely drawing attention to Arab-American women's writing and demanding their inclusion in more literary anthologies. My aim is twofold. First, I expand, complicate, and open new questions about the meanings and use of the term "non-national" within new Americanists' studies. Second, in my study I have emblematically used narratives by Chicana, South Asian-American, and Cuban-American women writers to underline what Arab-American women writers share and do not share with these writers. By comparing Arab-American texts to the Pakistani-American, Chicana, Indian-American, and Cuban-American texts I underline that Arab-American narratives can potentially expand the meanings of the non-national without essentializations of or generalizations about both terms, Arab American and non-national.

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### Education

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**Dissertation Title:** *The Non-national Subject: Ambivalent "Americans" in Contemporary Narratives by Women Writers in the U.S.*

### Publications

"Latina/o Literature in the Arab Region." *Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. 124-130.

"Transhistorical Perspectives, Interlingual Assonance, and Dissolving Poems: A Conversation with Maurice Kilwein Guevara, Brenda Cardenas, and Juan Felipe Herrera." Interview. *Cream City Review*. Spring 2008, 32.1. 206-225.

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Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

- *English 101: Introduction to College Writing* (fall 2006 to fall 2008, fall 2011)
- *English 102: College Writing and Research* (spring 2009 to the present, summer 2011)
- *English 215: Introduction to English Studies* (fall 2008, fall 2009, spring 2011)
- *English 243: Introduction to Women's Literature: American women of color* (spring 2009, spring 2012)
- *English 278: Introduction to World Literature in English: literature from the Middle East* (fall 2010)

English Tutor, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

- Upward Bound: *English Grammar* (summer 2006, summer 2008)
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## Language Instructor

### University of Cairo

- College of Arts and Liberal Science, Department of English: *Freshmen Composition* (fall 2000 to spring 2006)
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- School of Mass Media: *English Literature* (fall 1996 to fall 1998)
- School of Archeology: *English Literature* (1996–1997)
- School of Economics and Political Science: *ESL and English for Special Purposes* (fall 1996 to fall 1999)
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### ESL and TOEFL Instructor,

- Arab Council for Scientific Research, Giza, 2001–2002
- Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, Cairo, 2000–2001
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## Conference papers, presentations and workshops

“Home and Abroad: Re-visiting National Belonging in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” Re-visiting the “Nation” in Contemporary Narratives by American Women of Color, North East Modern Language Association, Boston, Massachusetts, March 2013. (Proposed).

“Latina/o Literature in the Arab World.” Dimensions of Empire and Resistance: Past, Present and Future, American Studies Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 2012.

“(An)other Origin Story of the U.S.” The Future of American Studies Institute, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, June 18–24, 2012.

“Ways of Reading Lesbianism in Arab and Arab-American Fiction.” Gender in a Postnational Context, North East Modern Language Association, Rochester, New York, March 2012.

“Food as a Trope for Arab-American Identity in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *The Language of Baklava*.” Southwest Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Associations conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Feb. 2012.

“‘Politics of Location’: A Comparative Reading of Women’s Sexuality in *Loving in the War Years* (Cherrie Moraga) and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (Mohja Kahf).” Women and Girls of Color: History, Heritage, Heterogeneity, Women’s Studies Conference, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, Connecticut, April 2010.

“The Role of the Teacher’s Authority in Classroom ‘Collaborative Learning.’” Those Who Can, Teach! Exploring Theory/Practice Intersections in the Teaching of Composition Conference, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dec. 2006.

“‘He was the Cortés of every vagina he crossed’: Re-writing the Chicana body in Ana Castillo’s *Sapogonia*.” Latina Letters Conference, St. Mary University, San Antonio, Texas, July 2004.

### **Workshop Participant**

“State(s) of American Studies.” The Future of American Studies Summer Institute, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, June 18–24, 2012.

“Milwaukee Area Academic Alliance in English.” University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Feb. 2007.

“Personal Thoughts on ‘Performing Neutrality.’” Feminist and Queer Pedagogies Professional Development Workshop, First-Year Composition Forum. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 2007.

“Text as Artifact: An Exploration of Contemporary American Literature from an Area Studies Perspective.” American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt, Nov. 2005.

### **Fellowships and awards**

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Fulbright Visiting Scholar, Bi-national Fulbright Commission, spent an academic year in University of Illinois at Chicago, 2003–2004.

### **Academic Service**

- Research Assistant for Professor Kumkum Sangari, Vilas Professor of English and the Humanities, 2010-2013.
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- Northeast Modern Language Association, (Dec. 2011 to the present)
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