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Azade Seyhan: Writing Outside the Nation

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INTRODUCTION

Neither Here/Nor There: The Culture of Exile

There [in the homeland] nature appears more human and understanding, a dim memory reflects, through the transparent present, sharply outlined images of the world, and so one enjoys through memory a double world, free of all cruelty and violence, a world that is the magical, poetic, fable-like projection of our senses.

Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

The words of the eighteenth-century German Romantic poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) resonate beyond the boundaries of their history and geography and are poignantly rearticulated by a contemporary master of the arts of memory. Salman Rushdie's critical sentiment stands as a testimony to the labor of remembrance that reclaims the lost experience of another time and place in language and imagination. The work of

commemoration is often the only means of releasing our (hi)stories from subjugation to official or institutionalized regimes of forgetting. Remembering is an act of lending coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss. We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators or storytellers. In narrative, we may be able to redress forcibly forgotten experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word, and imagine alternative scripts of the past.¹ Our understanding of the present is invariably predicated on actual or imagined links to, or ruptures from, a recalled past.

This is a narrative about narratives, more specifically, it is an investigation of stories and histories that recuperate losses incurred in migration, dislocation, and translation, those deeply felt signs and markers of our age. The recent history of forced or voluntary migrations, massive transfers of population, and traveling and transplanted cultures is seen as part and parcel of the postwar, postindustrial, and postcolonial experience. Understandably, narratives that originate at border crossings cannot be bound by national borders, languages, and literary and critical traditions. Born of crisis and change, suffering alternately from amnesia and too much remembering, and precariously positioned at the interstices of different spaces, histories, and languages, they seek to name and configure cultural and literary production in their own terms and to enter novel forms of inter/transcultural dialogue. This is not an easy task, since the heterogeneity of culture is not a given but is predicated on interaction, contestation, and possibly confrontation. In the chaotic dynamics of a world constantly on the move, “Culture . . . shifts from being some sort of inert, local substance to being a rather more volatile form of difference,”² and “Intercultural dialogue unleashes the demons of history.”³ Although the contemporary tales of migration, exile, and displacement are often seen as mirroring the fragmented consciousness of postmodern culture itself and certainly participate in many of the aesthetic and literary legacies of the latter, they part company with it in terms of certain historical and geographical boundaries. For if the postmodern is to be defined either as a sociohistorical epoch or a philosophical or aesthetic school of the late-twentieth-century Western world, then it would be impossible to contain the culturally and temporally diverse articulations of diasporic experience in the postmodern syntax.

Emily Apter considers exilic consciousness, in its successive generational articulations, “a deeply engrained constant of the field [comparative literature], shaping its critical paradigms and providing a kind of overarching historical paradigm for the ontology of the discipline.” For Apter,

postcolonial theory, as an expression of exilic experience, has inherited “the mantle of comparative literature’s historical legacy” by politicizing postwar criticism and investing it with a critical idiom synthesized from a host of cultural languages.⁴ In reference to Homi Bhabha’s turn to fictional texts to articulate such theoretical notions as hybridity and in-betweenness, she correctly observes that “[t]he task of translating nuanced modalities of split, interiorized exilic ontology into a curricular mandate would appear reductive and caricatural at best” (92). Although Bhabha instrumentalizes fictional texts to perform theoretical tasks, he does not always engage them in a genuine dialogue. Notwithstanding the power and ubiquitousness of the image, fictional texts still remain a forceful medium in understanding the turbulent global culture at the end of the millennium. However, when they are abstracted away from the specificity of historical and political contexts to serve as theoretical fictions, their capital of cultural nuance disappears in the haze of totalizing concepts. The idea of hybridity as a constant of all modes of cultural expression and as the “third space” that enables the emergence of multiple positions, for example, forgoes an analysis of actual social spaces where cultures interact and literature as an institution of cultural memory intervenes. Similarly, the highly productive investigation of textual constructions and cultural affiliations that shape the notion of nation and the transformation of the losses incurred in displacement and migration “into the language of metaphor”⁵ calls for a more nuanced historical understanding of literary texts. Without a story and actors/characters to flesh out the skeletal abstraction of such statements as, “The perplexity of the living must not be understood as some existential, ethical anguish of the empiricism of everyday life in ‘the eternal living present,’ that gives liberal discourse a rich social reference in moral and cultural relativism,”⁶ theoretical enunciations can lose their footing on conceptual ground and turn into their own parodies. Literary expressions of contemporary sociopolitical formations offer critical insights into the manifold meanings of history and take us to galaxies of experience where no theory has gone before.

Mexican critic and performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña defines his role as a border artist in terms of a context-specific hermeneutic practice that supersedes Hans-Georg Gadamer’s theory of intersubjective understanding. For Gadamer, understanding takes place in the common ground of language. The world exists not as an impersonal object but as a structure of shared understanding, and the medium that makes this understanding possible is language. Language embodies and enacts the totality of our experience of the world: “[I]n language, the world represents itself.”⁷

This experience of the world transcends all temporalities and relationships and envelops us within a horizon of language. We participate in human experience through a dialogue sustained by shared tradition. Gadamer argues against the naïveté of “so-called historicism” (283) that does not reflect on its own historicity, that is, does not recognize in its object (history) its own otherness and, therefore, fails to understand the elemental relation of identity to alterity. Although Gadamer maintains that the desire for understanding originates in the self’s experience of its otherness (283), and understanding is always the interpretation of the other, the realization of historical understanding takes place in the fusion of familiarity and foreignness. And this fusion comes very close to consuming the foreign. The ontological ground of understanding in language, the fusion of horizons in interpretation, cannot explain other, vastly different cultures that do not share our histories. By the same token, Emmanuel Lévinas’s new ontology, which stresses not the contemplation of being, but being engaged with “the dramatic event of being-in-the-world,”⁸ and whose ethical dimension resides in the relation to the other, being face to face with the other, does not relate to the real social situation. Lévinas’s ethics of the relation to the other, which makes forgetting, forgiving, sympathy, and love possible, is also predicated on language, on speaking to the other. “To understand a person is already to speak to him,” Lévinas writes. “Speech delineates an original relation. The point is to see the function of language not as subordinate to the *consciousness* we have of the presence of the other, or of his proximity, or of our community with him, but as a condition of that conscious realization” (6). By inscribing into the structure of speech the ethical code of opening oneself to the other’s experience, Lévinas prevents the assimilation of the other’s horizon into one’s own. Iain Chambers maintains that the ethical determinant of Lévinas’s concept of dialogue acknowledges the impossibility of speaking for the other and urges that we—that I—inscribe that impossibility, that limit, into my discourse and . . . recognise my being not for itself but for being with and for the other. . . . Lévinas proposes the open web of language.”⁹ The ennobling character of dialogue, however, remains a philosophical abstraction when the content and nuance of dialogue(s) with others are not embodied, witnessed, or recorded in social and political spaces.

To resist the danger of solipsism that threatens the idea of “dialogue” as universal equalizer, Gómez-Peña propogates a brand of border art that focuses on “the need to generate a binational dialogue, the need to create cultural spaces for others.”¹⁰ He radically (though not reflectively) politicizes the notion of intercultural dialogue when he defines it as “a

two-way, ongoing communication between peoples and communities that enjoy equal negotiating powers.” The proof of any real celebration of difference is the right of the other to participate fully in defining the terms of the dialogue. The realization of a dialogue between cultures involves real tasks, such as learning the languages, literatures, histories, and political systems of others. It encourages travels “south and east, with frequency and humility, not as cultural tourists but as civilian ambassadors” (48). By advocating a genuine engagement with the concrete forms of expression of other cultures, Gómez-Peña counters a hermeneutic approach where neither the anatomy nor the economy of a rhetoric of otherness has changed much since romanticism. As cultures collide, unite, and are reconfigured in real and virtual space in unprecedented ways, postcolonial, migrant, and border-crossing theorists and artists fine-tune received critical traditions in order to safeguard historical and cultural specificities. Ultimately, every theory of postcolonial, transnational, or diasporic literature and art is most convincingly articulated and performed by works of literature and art themselves. Literature as an institution and literary fiction as an expression of human experience predate their theoretical articulation, a truism perhaps best exemplified by Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Literature as social document resists the erasure of geographical, historical, and cultural differences. Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Walter Benjamin’s enduring insights into memory, mourning, history, language, and translation gain in critical astuteness through the stories of diasporic and exilic experience. Arjun Appadurai convincingly argues that a cultural study of globalization and “new cosmopolitanisms” requires an understanding of how imagination functions as a major social force in the contemporary world, creating alternative prescriptions for identity, agency, and solidarity.¹¹ “Like the myths of small-scale society as rendered in the anthropological classics of the past,” he writes, “contemporary literary fantasies tell us something about displacement, disorientation, and agency in the contemporary world” (58).

“Two moves amount to a fire,” a Turkish saying goes. Multiple migrations end in the loss of our homes, possessions, and memorabilia. When the smoke clears, we are faced with charred pieces of identification, shards of language, burned tongues, and cultural fragments. However, from the site of this fire, the phoenix of a transnational, bi- and multilingual literature has arisen. Some of the best contemporary literary works are published by writers writing in a language not their own. Michael Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient* and Booker Prize recipient, is a Sri Lankan-Dutch resident of Canada. Writers born into Spanish, such as Pu-

litzer Prize winner Oscar Hijuelos, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Castillo have emerged as brilliant voices of American English. This trend in bilingual poetics is not confined to the English-speaking world. Major European literatures are no longer under the monopoly of monolingual writing. Some of the most innovative artists of the German language are native speakers of Turkish, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, or Czech. Arabic is the mother tongue of many prominent French writers (e.g., Assia Djebar, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Amin Maalouf). And modern Italian literature is enriched by the work of italophone writers from Ethiopia, Morocco, Tunisia, and Senegal.¹² Today's writing erupts at unexpected junctures and represents new linkages of disparate and distant places and identities. Novel constellations of writing flourish, as Cuban writers move to Paris, Jamaican writers to the States, and Japanese writers emerge in Germany. Hélène Cixous, herself a multilingual writer, sees the very position of writing analogous to writing in a foreign country. Writing is a "journey toward strange sources of art that are foreign to us. 'The thing' does not happen here, it happens somewhere else, in a strange and foreign country."¹³ Writing between borders and languages, many writers plot complex strategies of translating in an effort to negotiate their loyalties to nation, language, ethnicity, class, and gender.

If language is the single most important determinant of national identity, as many have argued, and narratives (specifically, epics and novels) institute and support national myths and shape national consciousness (e.g., the Finnish epic *Kalevala*), what happens when the domain of national language is occupied by nonnative writers, writers whose native, mother, home, or community language is not the one they write in? Etienne Balibar maintains that the national language unites people of different classes or people who were never in direct communication and connects them up "with an origin which may at any moment be actualized and which has as its content the *common act* of their own exchanges, of their discursive communication, using the instruments of spoken language."¹⁴ This language offers its speakers a framework of reality and identity they can appropriate in their own way. There is no contradiction between the institution of one national language and the practice of other languages, for example, "class languages," in the nation, asserts Balibar, since they are all projected back to "the mother tongue," the idea of a common origin that becomes a metaphor for the loving ties between fellow nationals. Nevertheless, Balibar states that although "the linguistic community induces a terribly constraining ethnic memory," the construction of identity in language "is by definition *open*" (98). The linguistic community as collective memory naturalizes new idioms and glosses over their

origins. Thus, “‘the second generation’ immigrant . . . inhabits the national language (and through it the nation itself) in a manner as spontaneous, as ‘hereditary’ and as imperious, so far as affectivity and the imaginary are concerned,” as the native (99). Although the national language community appears as if it had always existed, it cannot script the destiny of future generations or assimilate them.

Once we accept the loss of stable communities and the inevitability of exile, then the interdependency of linguistic and cultural experiences both at the local and the global level becomes self-evident. Thus, despite coercively manufactured and enforced national antinomies and fortified borders, history and geography are transfigured in new maps and new types of dialogic links. However, our critical terms for literary study are not adequate for an exploration and explanation of these transfigurations. The emergent literatures of deterritorialized peoples and literary studies beyond the confines of national literature paradigms have as yet have no name or configuration. In fact, as Appadurai has noted, even “postnational formations,” that is, contemporary forms of complex nonterritorial and transnational alliances and allegiances, cannot be defined within the lexicon of available political languages.¹⁵ “[N]o idiom has yet emerged,” he writes, “to capture the collective interests of many groups in translocal solidarities, cross-border mobilizations, and postnational identities” (166). Descriptions such as *exilic*, *ethnic*, *migrant*, or *diasporic* cannot do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies, and cultural practices. Although as critics we do not have the language commensurate with our task, we have the responsibility to reflect, problematize, and preface the terms we employ. In this study, I do not use the terms *exilic*, *diasporic*, or *ethnic writing* in a strictly technical sense, but as signifiers of texts conceived in and operative between two or more languages and cultural heritages. The subjects of this study speak with varying degrees of accents indicating national, ethnic, geographical, and historical origins and the transitions that have shaped the memory of these origins. The field of investigation of such scholarly journals as *MELUS* (*Multiethnic Literatures of the United States*) or *Diaspora* is not limited to strictly “ethnic,” “migrant,” or “diasporic” texts; these descriptive categories are often collapsed. The texts of my investigation are mostly written in a language that is not the writer’s own. Their idiomatic status is bi- or multilingual. They are the voices of transplanted and translated subjects. As the bilingual Puerto Rican author Rosario Ferré states, “Only a writer who has experienced the historical fabric, the inventory of felt moral and cultural existence embedded in a given language, can be said to be a bilingual writer.”¹⁶ Ferré cor-

rectly observes that bilingual writers imagine translation not only as a literary but also as a historical project, as an interpretive task that attempts to explain a complex cultural equation subject to the changing fortunes of time and place.

In spite of the difficulty involved in finding a language to discuss literatures written in a second language or bilingually and literary phenomena that have parted ways with national literature paradigms, I have tried to distinguish between a few strictly technical definitions. Following Appadurai's usage of the term *transnational*, I understand transnational literature as a genre of writing that operates outside the national canon, addresses issues facing deterritorialized cultures, and speaks for those in what I call "paranational" communities and alliances. These are communities that exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture. *Ethnic* is a loaded and contested term. Ethnicity, as understood for the purposes of this discussion, does not refer to a stable ethnic identity but rather to a culturally constructed concept regulated by specific historical conditions. For example, the first-generation Turkish-German writers of Germany, who immigrated to Germany in the sixties and began publishing shortly thereafter, are technically (im)migrant writers. However, since Turks have, in effect, been transformed from a migrant population into an ethnic minority, the second-generation Turkish-German writers, who were born and educated in Germany, can be considered producers of an ethnic culture. Chicano/a writers of the United States who have never had Mexican citizenship would technically be writing ethnic literature. In art and literature, ethnicity is often a self-proclaimed form of cultural identification. In literary texts, ethnicity is recognizable as a linguistic mode, cultural idiom, or discursive practice. Nevertheless, the term *ethnic literature* implies that its signified is not an integral or natural part of a land's literary history. The same is true of immigrant literature. Although many writers of this study such as Eva Hoffman, Rafik Schami, or Emine Sevgi Özdamar have actually *immigrated* to the countries where they now publish and are permanent residents or citizens of the country of immigration, to call their work immigrant writing (the term *MigrantInnenliteratur* [migrants' literature] is routinely used in German), though technically correct, would suggest that this body of cultural production constitutes a transitory tradition in national literary history. Cathy N. Davidson notes that English writers "have rarely been called 'immigrants.' The term needs to be used circumspectly, with an awareness that who or who is not an 'immigrant' often

changes with a group's increasing assimilation to dominant cultural norms."¹⁷ Therefore, I prefer the terms *diasporic*, *exilic* (the stress here is on voluntary not forced), or *transnational* literature, except in the case of texts that represent a conscious ethnic allegiance.

In current usage, the term *diaspora* has moved into a broadly conceived semantic realm. Although it originally designated the forced dispersion of major religious and ethnic groups, such as the Jews and the Armenians, a dispersion "precipitated by a disaster often of a political nature,"¹⁸ in the modern age, greatly diversified exile and ethnic communities, expatriates, refugees, "guest" workers, and other dispossessed groups sharing a common heritage have moved into the semantic domain of the term. In their discussion of the problems concerning the conditions and limits of terminology, Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau state that although in reference to the Jewish people the term *diaspora* is unequivocal, it gets contested when applied to other religious, ethnic, or minority groups. In an attempt to define the larger context and modern uses of the term, they suggest the following criteria that "constitute the specific fact of a diaspora" (xiv). These are, in addition to forced dispersion from a center to foreign regions, "the role played by *collective memory, which transmits both the historical facts that precipitated the dispersion and a cultural heritage (broadly understood)*—the latter being often religious" (xv) and "*the will to survive as a minority by transmitting a heritage*" (xvi). The final criterion in defining a group as a diaspora is "*the time factor*" (xvii) that bears testimony to the survival and adaptation of a group possessing the above characteristics. In a comprehensive study on global diasporas, Robin Cohen also sets similar criteria and adds that the memory of the single traumatic event that caused the dispersion binds the members of the exiled group together by continuously reminding them of the great historic injustice they suffered. Cohen also asserts that diasporic communities are committed not only to the restoration and maintenance of the homeland but to its very creation. The latter refers to the notion of imagined homelands that only resemble "the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way." In this context Cohen cites Kurds and Sikhs for whom "a homeland is clearly an *ex post facto* construction."¹⁹

Cohen emphasizes that globalization has radically expanded the scope of the study of modern diasporas. In the contemporary world, diasporas have the historic opportunity to create tolerance for plurality in host countries. Globalization has in many ways created opportunities for diasporas to emerge, survive, and thrive. Since global economic, political, and media powers are located in the major metropolises of the world,

where diasporas are concentrated, the latter, by virtue of their own transnationalism, can benefit from the cosmopolitan character of these forces: “Deterritorialized, multilingual and capable of bridging the gap between global and local tendencies, diasporas are able to take advantage of the economic and cultural opportunities on offer.”²⁰ Still other critics, writers, and artists explore the metaphoric designations and implications of the term. In his *First Diasporist Manifesto*, renowned painter R.B. Kitaj visualizes diasporist painting as a vigilant guardian of its memory of origin, a contemplation of passages, “a *Midrash* (exposition, exegesis of non-literal meaning) in paint,” and a secular response to the sense of uprootedness, homelessness, and transience that has our time in its grip.²¹ In this sense, all “diasporist” art becomes a link that insures a form of continuity between different times—past, present, and future—rootedness and dispersion, and “rupture and momentum” and negotiates the stresses these transitions deploy (19).

In the broadest sense, then, “diasporic narratives” discussed in this study represent a conscious effort to transmit a linguistic and cultural heritage that is articulated through acts of personal and collective memory. In this way, writers become chroniclers of the histories of the displaced whose stories will otherwise go unrecorded. Literature tends to record what history and public memory often forget. Furthermore, it can narrate both obliquely and allegorically, thereby preserving what can be censored and encouraging interpretation and commentary in the public sphere. Through the lens of personal recollection and interpretation, the specificity of class, ethnic, and gender experiences gains a stature that is often erased, forgotten, or ignored in the larger management of public memory. I believe that paradigms of transnational and multiethnic writing in the American literary landscape provide critical clues for a better understanding of the nature and significance of new cultural identities in contemporary Europe. As Rushdie has correctly observed, “America, a nation of immigrants, has created great literature out of the phenomenon of cultural transplantation, out of examining the ways in which people cope with a new world.”²²

Since the United States and, more recently, Germany have come to represent the destination of choice for large and heterogeneous populations of immigrants, exiles, and transnational subjects, this study focuses mostly on nonnative writers living in these countries and writing in English and German, respectively. In this context, it is important to note that these writers’ mastery of their literary languages is not the result of colonial experience but of migration, resettlement, and redefinition of identity. Therefore, the questions that inform the present project differ, to some extent, from the concerns of postcolonial studies. In this case, the diasporic

writers and their compatriots do not share with their hosts the kind of historical, cultural, and linguistic intimacy (however problematic) that exists between the colonizer and the colonized. Nevertheless, voices of post-colonial theory are in ample evidence here. There are also distinct differences between writing in the American cultural mosaic and writing in the fairly homogeneous German cultural scene. Partly because of their temporal proximity to their cultures of origin and partly out of a determination to achieve intellectual legitimacy and to legitimize cultural difference, the works of the nonnative writers of Germany tend to be linguistically and historically more nuanced than those of their American counterparts. The German reading public and critics still categorize the work of non-German writers and artists as ethnic and minority literature and art and do not regard it as an integral part of the national culture.

Although the diversity of diasporic writing does not lend itself to abstract categorization, which would effectively erase or neutralize differences, the works discussed here share the common feature of being both creative and experimental and self-reflexive and theoretical. In other words, questions of speech and writing, fiction versus nonfiction, history and story, and official history and communal memory themselves become subjects of “fiction.” This metanarrative impulse has taken diasporic and transnational writing to a high level of aesthetic experimentation and critical transformation. As important social documents of the culture(s) of dislocation and exile, literary and critical texts of diasporas serve as condensed archives of national, ethnic, and linguistic memories. In order to balance the specificity of individual accounts of exilic experience with an existential understanding of displacement, expatriation, and marginality, I have tried to discuss selected texts in conceptual frameworks of contiguity that link them to larger issues of identity, exclusion (from real or imagined communities), memory, language politics, translation, and the psychology of loss. The irreducible untranslatability of one’s language and cultural idiom marks for many writers the space of exile and defines what I call diasporic pathos.

What are the implications and consequences of writing between national paradigms, “bilingually” or “multilingually”? Transnational writing can potentially redress the ruptures in history and collective memory caused by the unavailability of sources, archives, and recorded narratives. By uncovering obscure poetic traditions, discovering forgotten idioms and grammars, and restoring neglected individual and collective stories to literary history, it introduces the riches of hitherto neglected cultures into modern literary consciousness. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said suggests that we read the major works of the Western literary canon and

perhaps even all the cultural productions of the Western world “with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling’s Indian characters) in such works.”²³ Imagining and filling in omitted references to cross-cultural contexts and silences of history in the text—for example, the absence of French colonial history in Albert Camus’s *L’Etranger* (67)—is an instance of “contrapuntal reading” (66). In an earlier piece on exile, Said writes that an exile’s plurality of cultural experience gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions. Borrowing a phrase from music, Said terms this awareness *contrapuntal*. In Said’s view, “for an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.”²⁴

Texts that sensitize the reader to the power of language, its capacity to mark cultural difference, and its responsibility to respond creatively to cultural difference contribute new structures of knowledge to the body of criticism. Furthermore, the participation of the diasporic subject in the cultural life of the host country registers the moment when other literary and artistic forms of expression enter (Western) history. Through this dialectic (in its original sense as dialogue), the distance between the ports of departure and arrival appears to collapse; the migrant, exile, or voyager not only crosses the threshold into another history and geography but also steps into the role of an itinerant cultural visionary. In Salman Rushdie’s words,

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to defend themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.²⁵

The literary productions of diasporic communities represent both a celebration and an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit. In sharing their experiences of multiple—linguistic, geographical, historical—dislocations, the writers of the modern diaspora invite their

readers to see culture not as a fundamental model but in its interaction with other cultures. They ask their readers to experience life “on the hyphen,” to use Cuban-American critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s metaphor.²⁶ A hyphen simultaneously separates and connects, contests and agrees. It creates new dialect(ic)s, such as Chicano-Spanish, Turkish-German, and Algerian-French. As Rushdie has clearly seen, the human product of mass migrations cannot find a place to call home on any map. Almost all the writers discussed in this study express the sentiment that neither a return to the homeland left behind nor being at home in the host country is an option. They need an alternative space, a third geography. This is the space of memory, of language, of translation. In fact, this alternative geography can now be figured as a terrain (of) writing, as the Greek roots of its two syllables suggest.

The first part of this study establishes the conceptual framework for a critical reading of migrant, transnational, or diasporic literatures of the United States and Germany through an understanding of notions of linguistic and cultural memory and of textual strategies operative in the “nongeneric” genre under discussion. These strategies inhere in the predominantly testimonial nature of the works, their self-presentation as “translated” or “bilingual” texts, and the “collective” authorship that reflects the conflicting interests and politics of the groups they speak for. Social ruptures caused by displacement, migrancy, and exile lead to an impoverishment of communal life and shared cultural histories. This loss requires the restorative work of cultural memory to accord meaning, purpose, and integrity to the past. I use the term *cultural memory* to describe an intentional remembering through actual records and experiences or symbolic interpretations thereof by any community that shares a common “culture.” This culture could be linguistic, religious, institutional, migrant, diasporic, ethnic, or some combination of these. However, since “culture” itself is often understood as a diachronic development, as a composite of texts, institutions, superstitions, beliefs, and other intellectual and material products of human expression transmitted in time, it is difficult to clearly demarcate the line between culture and the memory of that culture. Yuri Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, for example define culture as “the *nonhereditary memory of the community*, a memory expressing itself in a system of constraints and prescriptions.”²⁷ The very existence of culture, Lotman and Uspensky argue, presupposes a system for translating experience into text. As the long-term memory of a community, culture houses knowledge in the form of texts. The activity in the memory archive of culture involves both a

recoding and rearrangement of these texts, depending on hierarchic evaluations, and also the forgetting and exclusion of certain texts. Although culture is “by its very essence” against forgetting, “[i]t overcomes forgetting, turning it into one of the mechanisms of memory” (216). These insights into the semiotic transformation of culture and memory are worth remembering, since in a world marked by widespread relocations, (symbolic) constructions of cultural memory are subject to political intervention, pedagogical prerogative, ancestral force, community contestation, and, most recently, pressures of global technology.

Insofar as culture is memory, it is embedded in the past and will have to be retrieved in symbolic action. Memory marks a loss. It is always a re-presentation, making present that which once was and no longer is. “Representation as remembrance foregrounds the fact that experience is always *other* than it *was*: inevitably and constitutively *historical*,” writes Richard Terdiman. “Such a construction situates memory as the most consistent agent of the transformations by which the referential world is made into a universe of signs.”²⁸ Similarly, Lotman and Uspensky argue that culture, as a record of community memory, is intimately tied to “*past* historical experience.”²⁹ Thus, culture and memory share an a posteriori structure. As culture experiences changes, memory is contested, repressed, or reconfigured. During times of social turbulence, we witness “a sharp increase in the degree of semiotic behavior” expressed in the changing of names, regulative metaphors, or societal myths, and “even the fight against the old rituals may itself be ritualized” (212). One of the most devastating forms of social oppression “is the obligatory demand to forget certain aspects of historical experience. Epochs of historical regression (the clearest example is the Nazi state culture in the twentieth century)” impose upon societies and communities “highly mythologized schemes of history” (216–17) and demand that they forget anything that does not conform to this manufactured and manipulated fiction of the collective past. In a moment of possibly intended irony—a censorship-resistant trope—Lotman and Uspensky silently evoke an analogy to the totalitarian Soviet regime that censored any reference to the present oppression at the time they wrote this essay.

Since the existence of a diaspora is so intimately connected to cultural memory, diasporic writing articulates a real or imagined past of a community in all its symbolic transformations. It provides a translation of the semiotic behavior of dislocation and resettlement. Writers of diasporas often employ linguistic forms of loss or dislocation, such as fragments

or elliptical recollections of ancestral languages, cross-lingual idioms, and mixed codes to create new definitions of community and community memory in exile. “Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives,” writes French social theorist Maurice Halbwachs, “but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that . . . we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.”³⁰ For the displaced populations of our age, parents’ biographies, autobiographies—veiled or revealed—autobiographical fictions, testimonies, and memoirs become the restorative institution of personal and group memory. Here memory is an intersection between personal recollection and historical account, and though self-consciously fragmentary, it intimates the virtual existence of a longer collective narrative of a nation, ethnic group, or class. Stories of these collectivities are never automatically available in the currency of memory. They have to be represented in terms of self-portraiture, group dynamics, and community and national history to become memory. However, in the process of recounting, the status of memory itself is often challenged, and its hidden baggage of nostalgia is dismantled and repackaged through irony, parody, and allegory, so as to prevent an uncritical examination of history and to keep alive the challenge of learning through remembrance.

The second part of the book introduces a specific comparative study of contemporary Chicano/a and Turkish-German literary productions as an example of two “minor” cultures operating within the larger “national culture” of the United States and Germany, respectively. However, these works are not analyzed in terms of similarity and contrast. Rather, my reading is predicated on a critical vision that involves what anthropologists George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer call “multiple-other cultural references.” Marcus and Fischer maintain that the expansion of the referential field in ethnographic discourse prevents “the basic dualistic character of ethnographic cultural criticism from becoming overpowered by simplistic better-worse judgments about two cultural situations being exposed.” They further contend that, at a very basic level, this form of cultural criticism participates in an enhanced mode of communication.³¹ The juxtaposed reading of Chicano/a and Turkish-German forms of cultural expression and intervention allows for a differentiated understanding of the critical linkages between local and global cultures and linguistic transposition, bilingualism, and reimagined nationalisms. I believe that comparative readings of texts of different cultural traditions offer an enhanced appreciation of their respective positions by allowing them to be

reflected through one another. This process of reflection and counterreflection also accentuates differences in historical course, critical agendas, and modes of expression. The objective of comparative literary and cultural studies is to investigate the imaginary as a mode of understanding both within a language area and between several linguistic and literary traditions without erasing cultural specificities.

The following chapter summaries offer an overview of the areas of inquiry this study addresses. Chapter 2, “Geographies of Memory,” begins with a brief discussion of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of “minor literature,” which focuses on a specific geography (Prague), linguistic history (use of German as a “paper” language by the Jews of Prague before the First World War), and writer (Kafka), to conceptualize the role of linguistic self-alienation in nonterritorial, paranational islands of literature. “Geographies of Memory” draws upon and synthesizes theoretical insights and formulations of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Julia Kristeva, Michel de Certeau, and others to provide a conceptual framework for the complex relationship between cultural displacement, memory, and language, where the nuances and inflections of a community’s experience of loss, trauma, and eventual recovery are recorded. These critical views live their “afterlife” (Benjamin) in literary translation. Syrian-German writer Rafik Schami’s *Erzähler der Nacht* (Storytellers of the night), told in a narrative frame characteristic of Arab storytelling traditions, reclaims, through the seasoned perspective of exilic memory, a chapter of modern Syrian history deleted from official records by state censorship. Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and Rosario Ferré’s *The House on the Lagoon*, two novels where memory speaks with a Caribbean accent, illustrate how island cultures, as compact archives of diverse (hi)stories, preserve, accommodate, and perform contesting ideologies and idioms.

Chapter 3, “Autobiographical Voices with an Accent,” is a discussion of parents’ biographies, autobiographical fictions, and cultural autobiographies by Oscar Hijuelos, Maxine Hong Kingston, Eva Hoffman, and Lubiše Moníková, all of which negotiate or reinvent the boundaries of the “out-law” genre of autobiography.³² For the displaced peoples of our age, family histories and testimonies as well as community memory offer a means of continuity with their pasts. The autobiographical works discussed in this chapter resonate beyond the protocols of self-representation, for they present the constitution of selfhood as the interlinkage of personal

experience and historical process and define culture not as a site of origins and ancestral roots, of birthrights and blood rites, but rather as one of transposition and translation.

When migration is necessitated by the poverty in the homeland, as in the case of Mexican and Turkish labor migrations to the United States and Germany, respectively, writers often show a conscious effort to resist the assimilation of their culture into the instrumentality of the economic life of the hostland. Like Mexico, modern Turkey is the borderland to affluent Western neighbors and supplies them with cheap migrant labor. Chapter 4, “At Different Borders/On Common Grounds,” introduces a comparative study of writers representing two “minor” literatures within the national culture of their host countries. Both Turkey and Mexico are heirs to ancient and multiethnic cultures and home to many languages and civilizations. The rich textures of Turkish and Mexican cultures are not visible in the toiling bodies of migrant laborers. It becomes the writer’s labor to salvage the cultural fabric from the dust of the fields and the fume of the factories and to repair its net of significations. Although the topos of border originated in an actual topography, at a geographical border, it has since traveled to sites where borders mark passages not only in space, but also in time, history, and memory. Here *borderlands* does not signify a line on the map but a historical condition for new critical form(ul)ations. The border, in Teresa McKenna’s words, “is an area that stands geographically, as well as politically and culturally as figure and metaphor for the transition between nations . . . a metaphor that underscores the dialectical tension between cultures.”³³ This tension informs the identity of the region, its people and culture. However, McKenna also warns that the metaphor, in inadvertently emphasizing the romance and adventure of crossing borders, could hide the real issues at stake. These real issues—the constant threat of detention and arrest at borders, exploitation of human labor, loss of dignity and money, imprisonment, and even death—are definitely not glossed over in symbolic transfiguration in Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa’s bilingual account *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Turkish-German actress and writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Mutterzunge* (Mother tongue). In a powerful poetic voice, these works not only portray the trials of border citizens, but also critically engage questions of bilingualism and interlinguality³⁴ and reflect on the relations of power and language. The steadily growing impact of Chicano/a and Turkish-German literatures shows that the two “majority minorities” of the United States and Germany, respectively, take their role in the “cultural citizenship” (Rosaldo) of their adopted

lands seriously. Their literary productions have entered a critically productive stage characterized by multiple voices, allegorical transfiguration, and inscriptions of new identities.

Issues of linguistic and cultural transposition implicitly and explicitly raise another set of questions about writing outside the nation. What happens to the memory of a nation outside (without) the nation? How is national identity transformed in the modern world that exists in a state of perpetual geopolitical shifts? When origins and heritages become recollections and merge into other histories, who guards and guarantees our national histories and the specificity of our pasts? Who claims that past and to what ends? In many Chicano/a works, the translation of the idea of nation into a linguistic and metaphysical idiom becomes an object of intense reflection, since as a quintessentially hybrid identity, the Chicano/a cannot return to a national origin. These works often represent the notion of the lost nation by perceiving Mexicanness as a state of mind and force of ancestral memory. Chapter 5, "Writing Outside the Nation," illustrates how fragments of a displaced national culture are re-membered in another language and idiom in Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Aysel Özakin's *Die blaue Maske* (The blue mask), and Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (Life is a caravansary). Though written by writers with very different voices and styles, these novels illustrate in comparable ways the act of writing the nation outside the nation. Castillo and Özakin explore unorthodox versions of a politics of "belonging" in their respective tales of travel and transit, which incorporate elements of the *Bildungsroman* yet transfigure this genre by foregrounding the theme of exile and issues of class and gender. Özdamar's personal and allegorical version of modern Turkish history implicitly argues that the necessary but hastened transition from empire (in this case, the Ottoman Empire), which, by its very nature, was multinational, multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious, to the modern nation-state (the Republic of Turkey), which for its belated arrival and survival had to propagate an essentialist unity of language, geography, and ethnicity, unhinged age-old loyalties and communities. When exile becomes a condition of critical reflection, its writers find the narrative and cultural coordinates to offer another version of their lands' history, a version free of official doctrine and rhetoric, a history of the actual human cost of transformation and migration.

Modern narratives of migrancy, exile, and displacement have generated new epistemologies of bilingualism, language change, and translation. The afterword, "Pedagogical Gains," is a discussion of the enormous potential of this supplement of imaginative knowledge in the classroom.

To access the many forms of knowledge produced by modern diasporic voices, we need to approach their cultural productions not as token representatives of a ghettoized aesthetics, but as complex signifying systems that demand for their comprehension a cultivated sense of cultural history and an understanding of theories of representation. In the interlinked spaces of language, memory, and imagination, these voices reclaim cultural heritages whose emotional and intellectual force had been suppressed by a monolingual and monocultural parochialism that masqueraded as successful acculturation.