ARTS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE: THE TRANSNATIONAL POETICS OF ETEL ADNAN, AGHA SHAHID ALI, THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA, AND KISHWAR NAHEED

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

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by

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My dissertation debates whether in an ostensibly borderless world, poetry, as a cultural product, can counter the claims of capital and empire and deconstruct the borders around nations, languages, and bodies. American poets Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Pakistani poet Kishwar Naheed disseminate a poetics, alternately rooted in cosmopolitan or nation-based thinking, which translates these concerns within experimental and traditional permutations of the lyric. I propose that cross-pollination of multiple linguistic and literary traditions, heightened awareness of the national and cultural demarcations that bind and hold people apart, recognition of the embodied location of the poet in different locations, attention to local prosody and global rapport with other poets, and engagement with elements of textual production and reception are the distinct features of a transnational poetics.

In analyzing representative works from Adnan, Ali, Cha, and Naheed, I contend that their lyrical recollections of fragmented memories about a conflict-ridden, divided, or imagined homeland help them create counter-historical palimpsests. They challenge paradigms of citizenship, modes of exilic and domesticated living, and nominalizations of genres and canons. Their poetics is shaped as much by an active confrontation of empire as by a dynamic negotiation of the demands of belonging, nation, desire, and aesthetics.

An important discussion here is how translation becomes an apt metaphor for the transmission of the poet, the reader, and the text to unfamiliar realms across predetermined limits. Dwelling in multiple languages, these particular poets deal with the exigencies of gendered and racial codes in the various domains of contemporary American, Asian American, and Asian poetry.

I argue that in imagining a lyrical space where the subject is rendered legible and historical trauma can be witnessed, their transnational poetics is borne out of the detritus of physical dislocations and formal dissonances. The struggle of these poets is to keep alive cultural memory and the past while the world around them is violently restructured by economic and political forces. Their lyrics are ways of imagining the impossible, which is the creation of a transnational imaginary – the composition of a community of poets and readers.

Table of Contents

Page

Abstract iv

Introduction
"Confronting an Imagined Person" – Translating Language and Culture in Transnational Poetics 1

1. "All walls disappeared" – Locating Etel Adnan in There 31

2. Memory has a Homeland: Tropes of Exility in Agha Shahid Ali's The Country Without a Post Office 80

3. "Fossil trace of word": Fragmentation and Restitution in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's DICTEE 130

4. Across the Threshold: The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetting in Kishwar Naheed's Poetics 181

Conclusion
Imagining a Community of Poets 232

Appendix 235

Bibliography 237

Introduction
'Confronting an Imagined Person' – Translating Language and Culture in Transnational Poetics

Poetry is the art of the impossible, a visionary quest of the imagination that creates imaginary communities composed of the multiple locations of real worlds.[1] In their imaginative construction of alternative worlds, transnational poets create possibilities of a poetics that ventures past the imagined existence of a nation. Transnational poets such as Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Kishwar Naheed – in their composition of an impossible poetics that questions forms and canons – lyrically imagine alternative public spaces into being. For poets like Lebanese American Adnan, Kashmiri American Ali, Korean American Cha, and Pakistani Naheed, a globally-informed consciousness has always been a part of their poetics as they attempt to straddle more than a single national culture and literary tradition. Adnan's There: In the Light and Darkness of the Self and the Other, Ali's The Country Without a Post Office, Cha's DICTEE, and Naheed's *Khayāli Shakhs se Muqābala* / Confronting an Imagined Person prove that these poets have always maintained a transnational foundation in their interaction with multiple nations, languages, traditions, and forms.

A transnational poetics denotes a poetics based on an engagement with the equivocal challenges of an ostensibly borderless world, in which the poets manage to break free from nationally hermetic identities and fashion poetry as an imaginative product that counters the claims of capital. Poets Adnan, Ali, and Cha partake in nationalities and heritages of countries besides America, and collectively question the

[1] Adrienne Rich has suggested poetry as the art of the possible (Arts 167), while Charles Bernstein, in "A Poetics of the Americas," has suggested that a poetry that is in variance with the academic establishment is impossible and, for the very impossibility of its existence, exists (My Way 113).

terms of existence of a nation. They are first-generation immigrants from Asian countries that have been colonized and that have dealt with the aftermath of colonization in the form of partitions or civil wars. These poets struggle within their poetry with the freedom and demands of assimilating into American culture. On the one hand, they can challenge difference in their poetics in such a way that it ends up being radicalized. They can also choose to bridge cultures and languages to create a new kind of American poetics. In the same vein, as she faces the legacy of civil rights infringement and devaluation of women in Pakistan, Naheed attempts to provide voice to the disenfranchised and establishes linkages with like-minded poets from other countries.

Adnan, Ali, Cha, and Naheed complicate the meaning of belonging to a 'home.' They force their readers to mentally translate their words through their deliberately complex formal compositions. What I argue to be the transnational features of the work of these poets are the following interconnected themes: emphasis on formal permutations and inclusion of multiple literary and linguistic traditions; questioning the role of the poet's memory and consciousness in creating certain forms and structures; contesting the politics of location within national, local, and gendered borders; and a dynamic understanding of matters of audience, the production and reception of the poetry. In the public interrogation of how the nexus of personal, local, and global issues intersect, their work continues to be more multivocal, experimental, polylingual, multidisciplinary, and globally engaged than that of most American poets. If Naheed plays with the aesthetics of the threshold, handily configuring it into her poetics, the other writers also expand the linguistic boundaries of the American nation and canon – they expose the invisible

borders and build bridges to other cultures and languages. For all four poets, crossing borders, nevertheless, remains a dangerous task.

The spatial and imagined conception of a homeland becomes a recurring motif in the works of these transnational poets. While the conception of a transnational poetics suggests an expansion of spatial and mental faculties – attempts to cross constructed boundaries – it also simultaneously presupposes a liminal border zone between home and exile, belonging and alienation. Whether the poet is located within the boundaries of the nation or lives in exile, a transnational poetics, because of its very emphasis on limitlessness and breaching borders, also suggests the inability to leave home behind. The counterpart to the Freudian *Heimliche*, the homely and the familiar is the *Unheimliche*, the terrifyingly unfamiliar uncanny ("The Uncanny" 132, 134). With belonging, comes the uncanny, the effect of feeling estranged, alienated, or exiled. The division between here and there plays on familiarity and foreignness, on traces of home and alienation. The feeling of being unhomed also allows a transnational poet to empathize with the different demarcations of subjectivity and establish relations with others; in a poetics of relation, "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 11). This outsider/insider quandary is captured in <u>There</u> of Etel Adnan, a poet who feels moments of exile instead of the suspended state of regret and isolation in Agha Shahid Ali or Theresa Cha's mythopoetic motherland created from afar. Kishwar Naheed highlights the terms of admission and exclusion in the metonymic nation-home. Adnan and Naheed both partake in an outsiderness that is polemical and interactive. The trope of home is seen metaphorically as feminine at least in Ali, Cha and even Naheed, but

curiously not in Adnan for whom the whole universe is feminine, nature and cities vibrating with female energy.

These poets know that poetry follows its own compass, the impulse of the line, the image, the word. They also know that it is written in a world that weaves into the imagination, history and politics laying equal claims to their poetics. Although all three American poets produce their lyrics while based in America, they don't explicitly grant America the primary focus of nation in their work: their conception of home extends from the adoptive to the ancestral homeland, and beyond; of the three, Ali seems to be the only one to show the physical markings of writing in America. The primacy of the originating nation in their work indicates the poets' existential need for belonging. Yet, the privilege of being an American poet, even one with Asian roots, complicates the idea of being transnational as these are poets ensconced in the safety and largesse of America. As a poet writing outside the locus of America, Naheed imagines the Pakistani nation in a regional and transnational context, and also from a feminist angle. While Adnan locates herself beyond national trappings, for Ali, Cha, and Naheed their optimistic national imaginings are part of the fabric of their poetics. As their nations are fragmented by imperialism, nationalism, language, or gender, history becomes important for all these poets as the collective past of their communities.

The roots of tension in all these countries, remarkably, lie in the colonial legacy of the 1940s and 1950s: from the partition of India and Kashmir, to the partition of Korea and the Lebanese interstrife following decolonization. Though colonization has been an integral part of the national pasts of these poets, they also accept the fact of decolonization, and the violence rampant in their homelands is an aftermath of having

been colonized more than once. Despite all this, the poetics of these writers is shaped as much by an active confrontation of empire as by a dynamic negotiation of the demands of belonging, nation, desire, and aesthetics in an increasingly borderless world. The conundrum a politically engaged transnational poet faces is in fulfilling the demands of lyrical forms while making history legible for an audience:

> To the others, these accounts are about (one more)
> distant land, like (any other) distant land, without
> any discernible features in the narrative, (all the
> same) distant like any other. (Cha, DICTEE 32-33)

Since they spent their formative years in nations facing wars, conflicts, or partitions, these transnational poets challenge the official versions of History in the nation-state. In this sense, poetry is presented with an enormous task – the poet must not only fulfill the demands of poetic form and language, but also record the strong link between the past and the present. A transnational poetics is located in a critical stance towards the state apparatus and nationalist impulses, as the poet attempts to compose aspirations for the future over the fragments of the past and the present. Agha Shahid Ali, for instance, takes his job of poet as witness seriously in his poetry: as his own namesake, the 'Belovéd witness,' he attempts to give a human face to the suffering and atrocities committed in the subcontinental region of Kashmir occupied by both India and Pakistan. A recurring motif in his poetry is the recasting of history through subjective perceptions: "My memory keeps getting in the way of your history" (The Country 23). By including local details and incidents of past and present Kashmir, imaginatively reconstructing history, he manages to bring the tragedy home to readers in America. However, since

these transnational poets reside in America, their poetry also records an intense sense of individual cultural longing and loss for what they have left behind and what they fear is being lost. An additional element of sadness in their poetry is lent by their warning of the risk of collective cultural amnesia if history is not recorded. In her interrogation of the terms of existence in There, Etel Adnan constantly cautions of the very real possibility of annihilation of the self and its other, which is why there is a preponderance of the words "listen" and "hear" in the poem. Agha Shahid Ali's The Country Without a Post Office contains lyrical lamentations about the Kashmir region whose physical edifices and remnants are slowly being decimated so that there will be no speaker of a language left (30), while Theresa Cha's DICTEE is a challenge the speaker poses to herself to record the colonial and partitioned history of Korea before it is superseded by the demands of her new life in America. In Confronting an Imagined Person, Kishwar Naheed's proposition of salvaging even hateful objects as emblems of memory calls attention to the moral vacuum created in the present when past guilt is not acknowledged; her poetry is an attempt at re-membering Pakistani history to make space for the disregarded. The task of these poets is to carry the memory of space, compressing location in their poetics.

Memory, on the other hand, is also the ground of history (Hutton 96). It is interesting to note that, since they have posed themselves the job of re-imagining collective histories, how much of the personal memories of these poets figure into their poetry. Although Adnan tries to transcend the human bonds of space and time by posing an ungendered, non-nationalist speaker, her memories of Lebanon and her family still frequently seep through her poetry: "I threw my memories outside the window and they returned alien, beggars and witches, leaving me standing like a sword" (There 3-4). Ali

proposes that his private memories of his native city of Srinagar be taken as the collective memories of the Kashmiri nation. In fact, Ali's poetry is a comprehensive reconstruction of memory in a race against time and, at certain moments, he seems to give up and strongly evoke and trap himself in the past: he reinvents Kashmir as an "imaginary homeland, / filling it, closing it, shutting" his self in it (The Country 15). Cha's subjective recollections are also a big part of DICTEE and one of the facets of the volume is how a female subject's memory bleeds into that of a nation: "The memory is the entire. The longing in the face of the lost" (DICTEE 38). For these poets, recollection of their individual memories in poetry, away from a conflict-ridden, imagined, or divided homeland helps them lay the foundations of the cultural memory of a nation, creating a counter-historical palimpsest to the authorized versions of History. On the other hand, because their project of restoration of memory holds such primacy in their poetics, these poets also face the risk of entrapment in the past. For instance, the invocation of an idyllic, mythological past by Ali and Cha almost places them in a retrograde limbo. The urgency of the present and the immediate agency it requires are most resolutely captured in the poetry of Adnan and Naheed. Naheed seems to be the only poet among the four who imagines the narration of the nation to be an ongoing project for, if there is no effort made to transform the present, the possibility arises that "All the pasts of our history are turning into the present" (Distance 98). The creation or restoration of cultural memory by these poets becomes an alternative against the official versions of history; their attempts at recreating historical memory also translates into their efforts at creating a community of readers already present and participant in materiality.

Because transnational poetics prescribes a pushing beyond thresholds and boundaries of all kinds to create new space for poetry and subjectivity, I also analyze the poets' location in the body politic. In questioning the stipulations on which nationality are based, these poets may be said to partake in a performative cultural citizenship (M. Joseph 2). For Adnan, Ali, Cha, and Naheed, the conditions of pre-assigned, or chosen, membership of local and transnational groups are not definite, and it is not surprising that their poetry scrutinizes the provisions of being a citizen in different contexts. Sometimes these poets make the choice to defer American citizenship, as Adnan became a US citizen only after the Lebanese Civil War started, or to maintain the citizenships of many countries, as a Kashmiri American in Ali's case, the dual citizen of a nonexistent, hence imaginary, nation. This also suggests that a transnational poetics is not without borders, as certain restrictions apply when the homeland faces strife and a nationalist solidarity with former fellow citizens comes in. These transnational poets thus deal with the deep-rooted conflict in art between an individual and collective identity, which is exacerbated by a latent nationalism in the exilic and diasporic existence. Being transnational also accords them the privileged position of questioning the narratives and mythologies of a nation, distance liberating them to more clearly sort out the ambiguities of the past. For instance, while Ali asks whether Kashmir, a disputed region controlled by India and Pakistan, as 'a country without a map' really is a nation, Naheed contests the terms of excluding women from the public and legislative spheres of the Pakistani nation. Since Naheed is the only one among these poets who opts to remain within the boundaries of the originating homeland, she most vociferously confronts the tangled webs of nationalist rhetoric in which citizenship rights are entangled in the nascent nation-state.

These poets thus challenge the bases of nation-states in the same stride that Partha Chatterjee critiques Benedict Anderson's Western conception of the nation-state as colonizing even the imagination: if nations chose imagined communities from pre-supplied 'modular' forms, what is left to imagine (5)? Since these poets are concerned with imagining different possibilities of freedom in their natal nations, they suggest distinctive brands of anti-colonial nationalism. An analysis of their poetics provides me with the framework of imagining a nation through the local regional context. With her career spanning more than five decades and reflecting a profound maturity in her poetics of the world, Adnan seems to be able to transcend national boundaries, even as her poetry proposes a summons for pan-Arab unity. Ali's poetry, on the other hand, illustrates the firm pull of exilic nationalism in his articulation of the cause of Kashmiri sovereignty. Cha in her poetry seeks to make sense of being an immigrant in America, while dealing with fresh memories of a colonized and partitioned Korean nation ("If the words are to be uttered, they would be from behind the partition" DICTEE 132); in this way, her poetry questions both nationality and naturalization. In Naheed's lyrics we find a poet fashioning a new semantics to identify not only the gendered terms of national inclusion, but also to defend the developing nation against the geopolitical forces of transnational capitalism and neo-imperialism. Even when these poets are seen as part of a "community of sentiment," translocal imagined communities shaped by "a bewildering palimpsest of local and highly translocal considerations" (Appadurai 17, 198), the differences between them need to be examined.

I argue that a transnational poetics also contests the conceptual boundaries of forms and canons, that it is composed in a finely coded and mutable cultural space, such as the landscape of American poetry. While the pull of assimilation to American culture and literature had led earlier Asian American poets to either erase or accentuate racial identity, there is also a case to be made, as Shirley Lim argues, for an 'ethnopoetics' of Asian American poets who resist assimilation in their articulation of a "stubborn residual identity" that prevails beyond a shallow exotic or ethnocentric expression ("Reconstructing" 51). This brand of poetry resists translation into the assimilationist model of American nationhood, even as the subjective position of the poet is rendered complicated. Lim attests that this ethnopoetics exists on three identifiable levels in which Asian American poets borrow elements from a previous homeland (namely stylistic conventions), maintain linguistic knowledge of the original language, and exhibit a contextual or informed sociocultural approach. For instance, in the late nineteenth century, Symbolist poet Sadakichi Hartmann and prose poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran exemplify the spirit of experimentation with different forms and discernment of local knowledge and traditions beyond the national borders of America. During the earlier part of the twentieth century, José Garcia Villa's highly experimental lyrics are also a sign of a transnational Asian American poetics.

Profiting from the awareness created by the Civil Rights Movement, Asian American literature also went through major developments in challenging the confines of racial identity during the 1960s to the 1970s. While the poetry from that time shows more of an empowering, revolutionary phase, Asian American poetry went through a renaissance only during the late 1980s, a metamorphosis I analyze in the chapters on the

three American poets. Juliana Chang recounts that while poetry was certainly included in anthologies after the Civil Rights struggles, such as Asian American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry and Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writings focusing on the diversity of Asian American writers, these collections emphasized the poets' subject positions and their confessional modes, which were presented as easily translatable items (83). On the other hand, Timothy Yu, in his study of the concurrent evolution of Asian American poetry and the experimental Language tradition, argues that the hesitation that Language poets feel in tackling racial and gendered identity is brought on by an "anxiety of engagement" with the rhetoric and politics of ethnic identity (433). During the past three decades, not only have the Asian American poets dramatically breached the limitations of literary traditions and forms, but they have also received an increasingly cordial response from the publishing industry. My attempt at placing Adnan, Ali, and Cha beyond the nominal definition of Asian American literature (which like all racially-defined groups can end up in a compartmentalization and ghettoization of imagination) within a current transnational community of poets denotes just one of the many occurrences in American poetry.

By studying representative works of American poets Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, and Theresa Cha, I examine how these Asian American poets have re-invented the traditions of American poetry. The progressively transnational, border-crossing feature of engaging in issues of cultural production and language distinguishes their poetry from older brands of American poetry. On the one hand, the American rubric of multiculturalism facilitates the assimilation of a multilingual, formally complex poetry that resists casual absorption. Further than the quandary of determining ethnic identity,

these poets are interested in the challenge of crafting poetic permutations from the literary and cultural traditions they inherit, which augments my analysis of their attempt to create a public space within American poetry for themselves.

An obvious enrichment that these poets bring to American poetry is their use of American English. Not only do they freely import linguistic terms and forms, literary histories and mythologies, and local incidents from their previous homelands into English, they are also involved in innovative experiments with the very material and structure of poems. They breathe new life into an apolitical literary environment by their uncompromising engagement with political, social, and cultural matters, and their conscious allusions to the material reality with which they want to engage the reader. All three American poets also choose English as their language of poetic expression even though their linguist backgrounds are other than English: Adnan resorted to English when she couldn't access her Lebanese mother tongue of Arabic and couldn't bear the imperial nature of French; Cha's native connection to Korean was broken in her French schooling but she managed to incorporate Korean and French in the mainly English DICTEE; and Ali elected to use English at an early age despite his literary heritage of Urdu in Indian Kashmir. In this respect, English appears not to play the role of an imposed imperial language but that of a chosen language, selected primarily for adaptation to the American poetry scene. Naheed's poetry, on the other hand, as it is composed in Urdu, forms a bulwark against the imperializing tendencies inherent in the global English language of commerce and empire. She radically regenerates the Urdu poetry traditions by creating space for an uninhibited form of expression for women, and her translation of poetries from other languages into Urdu help extend the thresholds of Urdu literature.

Jacques Derrida's Monolinguism of the Other: or, the Prosthesis of Origin provides a theoretical underpinning to my analysis of the linguistic poetics and exigencies of the four poets. In this most lucid and lyrical of his texts, Derrida points out the fallibility and impossible possibility of inhabiting a mother tongue because of the estrangement inherent in acquiring any language; he paradoxically intones in the beginning of the book that "I have only one language and it is not mine; my 'own' language is, for me, a language that cannot be assimilated. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other" (25). Derrida posits that since colonization throttles all means of expression, the only way is an impossible translation, that of "inventing a language different enough to disallow its own *reappropriation* within the norms, the body, and the law of the given language…" (66). Conversely, Mutlu Blasing proposes that, for the poet, the mother tongue is "charged with individuating emotional histories, both personal and communal," which are experienced differently in translation and thus constitute an emotional loss (11, 62). Linguistic colonization for the three American poets has meant that each has grappled with the problem of an occupier's monolingual authority and either tried to uncannily make a home for himself, in the case of Ali, in the colonial language; tried to come to terms with a fifth adoptive, and normative, language in Adnan's case; or attempted to unseat the colonizers' languages by confronting the conception of the uncanny or collective identity in Cha's case. Naheed deals with the internal colonization that the state imposes on its female subjects by reappropriating figurative and vernacular language. These poets propose that only poetry can breach the horizon of the impossible and translate the ideas and emotions of the poets in the different homes of language. Although

a poet like Naheed may call herself at home in her native Urdu tongue, Derrida suggests that one can feel unhomely and alienated within one's mother language too – one of the recourses available to these poets then is to dwell in more than one language and its traditions.

An important debate here is how poets are translated and how poets translate themselves amid different languages and cultures. What complicates a transnational aesthetics is the reception of the poem: if a transnational American poet writes in English about the conditions in the originating homeland, the poetry itself may be inaccessible to the previous fellow citizens due to the impossibility of translation or the absence of literacy, one of the "many taxes levied on the frontier of languages" (Derrida 57). For the poet writing in English, the choice to defer accessibility is reflected in the use of clear or oblique diction and form, appreciation of which may be complicated by the poet's incorporation of multiple linguistic and literary sources. In fact, translation becomes an apt metaphor for the transmission of the poet, the reader, and the text to unfamiliar realms across predetermined limits. There are many definitions of translation that come up in my analysis: live event (Levertov 94), liminal stage between corporeality and ethereality (Frost 192), mistranslation as an 'aesthetics of infidelity' (Lowe 37), conversion, containment or uncovering "instability of the 'original'" (Niranjana 3), and "another name for the impossible" (Derrida 57). Though there is a built-in imperfection to any translation project, there is the hope of not just helping an object to be *borne across*, but also of delivering poetry *alive* to the other. This fulfils the true meaning of translation, of resuscitating a text into another language. Still, there is a fine line between crossing borders of languages and genres and a literary cross-dressing that appropriates traditions

and forms from those still struggling to establish a foothold on the global publishing stage. A transnational poetics is formed of multiple acts of translation – how does it become an art of creating possibilities?

In their transnational outlook, these poets belong to a contemporary community of poets who defy the given conceptions of belonging to a single nation and engage in a new kind of cosmopolitanism. Unlike a chic cosmopolitanism that ensures the writer a "convenient no-place" (Brennan 306), in Bruce Robbins' words, this kind of cosmopolitics, a domain of contested politics in multiculturalism, is "a name for genuine striving toward common norms and mutual translatability" (Cosmopolitics 12-13). A transnational poetics is also akin to James Clifford's discrepant cosmopolitanism that recovers "non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets – resources for a fraught coexistence" (Routes 277). These transnational poets belong to an imagined community of poets in the way that Benedict Anderson theorizes a nation with finite, elastic boundaries to be a community imagined into existence by a collective. It is Kishwar Naheed's placement within this group of poets that confounds the premise of a transnational poetics that would require the poet to dwell outside the boundaries of the originating homeland. In fact, if cosmopolitanism is an older brand of transnationalism and traveling while rooted – rooted errantry (Glissant 34) – is one of the criterion for such a poetics, Naheed can also be read as a transnational poet, a rooted cosmopolitan equally at home in the homeland and abroad, but especially in poetry. She fits in not only through her transnationally literate (Spivak, Critique 402) poetics of cross-pollination from different linguistic and literary sources, but also through her efforts at

rethinking the global at the local, national level. Her transnational poetics is not tied to physical mobility or migrant identity, nor delimited by a national space but her translocal practices of resistance and agency cut across national and generic lines. Naheed's cosmopolitan impulse of a deep humanism – a regard for a human subject unbound by geographical or gendered constraints (Apter 25-26),[2] one (as the poetics of Adnan, Ali, and Cha also show) in the ever-present danger of being annihilated or silenced – is compelled by the nation, as well as a critique of the nation. Naheed's regard for the nation apparently runs contrary to the idea of the transnational, yet interrogates the very bases of its defintion.

Yet there is also a price for being transnational and for being placed in the company of a borderless 'community of poets.' Cuban critic Antonio Benitez-Rojo is instrumental in establishing the idea of a transnational literature and poetics based on a new conceptual model of region and nationality – the archipelago – against the impossibility of transcending regional specificities (3-4). Cultures and languages have always intersected – it is the hope of unity beyond the boundaries of national literatures and languages that gives rise to a transnational poetics. Nevertheless, I question which exclusionary practices are brought into fray when the idea of unity and commonality is broached. In the American context, a move away from assimilation on the part of the immigrant poet may culturally marginalize the poet, but it also falls under the trend of rebirth and the restructuring of identity that is a part of American ethos. Either the suspension of identity by the immigrant poet to create new ones or the use of resistance as a way to legitimization in the poetic landscape of America opens channels for

[2] Apter's humanism, however, is fairly ambiguously defined and has a slippery form in her application and analyses of various theorists.

something new to enter the vacated space. Thus, in conjunction with Glissant's archipelago, we can place Charles Bernstein's view of a virtual collectivity. He proposes that instead of promoting a bogus universality among assorted American poets striving to make their poems transform social and cultural circumstances, there should be an attempt to pursue the collective and dialogic nature of poetry (My Way 115-116). However, for the transnational American poet, it would be interesting to note what the terms of admission to the American poetry tradition are, and what these poets contribute to it.

Whether American immigrants or a Pakistani resident poised in a transnational space, these four poets also deal with imagining a place for themselves within different canons and domains. In her introduction to Words Matter, King-Kok Cheung states how Asian American writers are expected to maintain political and social constructions of Asian American identity by their own community and to not articulate any protest or dissent by the mainstream; either way, they are expected to only convey ethnography (8). Interestingly, Ali attempts to solidify a position for himself within the American literary establishment by reworking earlier traditional forms. He also very consciously envisions a place for himself within Urdu literary tradition among masters such as Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Naheed rejuvenates lyrical forms promulgated by veteran male poets and creates a transnational rapport with writers and activists who share her radical concerns. Separated by time, Cha and Adnan share a similar San Francisco Bay Area sensibility in their penchant for formal experimentation. While Adnan has a solid name in the experimental American tradition and has a truly transnational and multifaceted reputation beyond the borders of America, she still longs for a full Arab response. Cha has a sound standing in both the experimental and feminist traditions, and has

posthumously enjoyed a renaissance in the Asian American canon. The imagined community for the poets is different from the social one and is consciously styled in reference to the readers. The poets imagine the possibility of this community in which readers are active participants in the production and dissemination of their poetics. Since they believe a traumatic history needs to be documented before it is relegated to the dustbins, the need to bear witness is a significant element of their poetics. Thus, these poets extend the ethics of witnessing to the reader, poetry creating readers as an alternate form of community.

While a direct connection between form and content in poetry is undeniable, I propose that a marked tension between the two is a feature of transnational poetics. A poet makes a distinct conscious choice to present a poem in one of the many forms available or in one that the poet invents. Consequently, the choice of form is political and cultural. Due to the very experimental nature of their work, the poetry of Etel Adnan and Theresa Cha constantly defies classification in genres but their work shows the choice of form as prose poem. Both poets eschew metrical and lyrical requirements: Cha's incorporation of hand-written journal entries, letters and diagrams, and Adnan's evocation of past Arabic literary influences makes their work less palatable for an easy marketing scheme. Their multidisciplinary interests in philosophy, photography and film theory, when added to the frequently cryptic rendering of the content, make their poetry even more complex. By dividing her long poem <u>There</u> into thirty-nine alternately short and long sections, Adnan might seem to adhere to some poetic regulations, but Cha

pretends to maintain the slightest of poetic principles in the eleven 'formless' sections in DICTEE which provide formal structure to the text.

Among these poets, Agha Shahid Ali's poems are the most anthologized and his poetry also faces the risk of being easily commodified. Unlike the other poets, Ali works in primarily classical forms, whether the sonnets, villanelles, and cantos from the English literary tradition or in his translation of the Urdu literary form of the *ghazal* into English. Ali manages to reinvent American English literature in many ways, while Adnan and Cha invent new forms of expression, and he wants to inscribe himself within the American canon by remaining solidly within the parameters of literary forms and traditions. Ali's work is also the most lyrically balanced in his maintenance of the demands of rhyme and refrain, metrical and syllabic intensity, as form for him is a way of generating beauty and perfection. Naheed's seemingly simple lyrics partake from the many traditions of free verse, prose poetry, and the ghazal within an Urdu poetry informed by western models. Not as experimental as Adnan or Cha, neither as adherent to classical forms as Ali, Naheed restructures the form of free verse in Urdu poetry and adds a female outlook to a mostly male literary establishment. While she shares Urdu literary traditions with Ali, unlike him, she rebels against the established norms and forms that Ali emulates.

Since the lyric figures so prominently in the poetics of all these poets, my analysis also highlights the permutations a lyric goes through in the works of these poets. I argue that all four poets use the subjective form of the lyric for addressing collective concerns and to disrupt the process of lyric identification by playing with what constitutes the texture of the poem: form, personae, length, address, etc. As the lyric takes its basis from aural modes, of verses recited to a listener or group of listeners, it is also significant that

all these poets come from solid oral literary traditions. Aurality is reflected in their poetry too – their poetics stem from an interlocutory endeavor they try to establish with their readers and with characters within their poems. On the other side of aurilty, the lower register of the lyric is silence, the space necessary to absorb the abstract and concrete images of the verses. The lyric poem is "a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world" and because of this very disconnect "becomes a very intense location to reflect on the world" (Alexander, Fault Lines 284). While the silent aspect of the lyric poem is heard in the pauses and fragments of the verse, it is configured visually in the blank spaces on the page, "the plenitude of the void" (Cha, DICTEE 161). As symbol, silence can be read as weapon; then again, the site of silence more often is the absence or failure within which history easily confines the silenced.

Here we must also bear in mind Theodor Adorno's pronouncement, building on his dialectic between culture and barbarity, that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric (Prisms 34), which he modified into lyric poetry ("Commitment" 188). American poet Jerome Rothenberg, for whom poetry is "the language of the dead" (Khurbn 9) where the dead are free to speak, the task of poetry is a reversal of Adorno's dictum: "no meaning after auschwitz / there is only poetry no hope / no other language left to heal / no language & no faces / because no faces left no names" (Khurbn 14).[3] In the hands of an engaged poet, poetry dwells on the "dream of the unimaginable: what is" (Scully 53). The lyric contains traces of the inexpressible and the

[3] Rothenberg clarifies his difference with Adorno: "an enormity that had robbed language […] of the power to meaningfully respond, had thus created a crisis of expression (no, of *meaning*, of *reality*), for which a poetics must be devised if we were to rise, again, beyond the level of a scream or of a silence more terrible than a scream" (1). Much later, Adorno amended his position too: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as the tortured have to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (Negative Dialectics 362).

ineffable, for even Adorno's earlier dictim of the lyric as barbaric may be read as that of the lyric containing the uncivilized and what is beyond logic. If these transnational poets have to deal with an aporia within language, a crisis of expression and representation in the face of unimaginable injustice and trauma, they strive to capture what is outside the bounds of language and make it an art of the impossible. For this reason, for some of these poets, their poetics hovers between lyric and antilyric, most obviously manifested in the prose poem form employed by Adnan and Cha. In imagining a lyrical space where trauma becomes audible and the subject is rendered legible, the poetry that may come across is disjunctive and paratactic. They have to make possible what is impossible, that is, naming the nameless, as I show in the section on Kishwar Naheed. For these poets suspended between languages, the silence out of which poetry arises has very real consequences. If the lyric does not encapsulate the barbaric, the uncanny which fragments existence, then there is the dangerous possibility, as Ali says, that "Words are nothing, / just rumors – like roses – to embellish a slaughter" (The Country 88). The poet, therefore, has to bring words back alive from the abyss of the impossible.

The lyric's ability to express violence and trauma suggests that traumatic knowledge can perhaps be best expressed in this form as the fragmentary nature of the lyric is more conducive for capturing painful trauma. Since the lyric might even be considered a popular oral form in most literary traditions because of its mellifluous and condensed nature, it is also perceived as more accessible in expressing and conveying traumatic history. On the other hand, the registering of trauma in a lyrical mode is offset by the professions of love these poets make in their volumes. Emerging from a private space of an impossible longing for the other, the translation of the erotic in the lyric is

sutured or ruptured by the poets' heightened awareness of the evanescence of time and memory. Particularly when coupled with love, the lyric in the poetics of Adnan, Ali, Cha, and Naheed traverses many different traditions and histories, garbed in older and ever-new forms. Where desire shapes the lyric by providing forward momentum and pushing towards a future consummation in their verse, their love poetry also shows linkages with the violence and trauma these poets have witnessed. In the poetics of Theresa Cha and Kishwar Naheed, the lyric – and also their representation of love – seems to fragment under the weight of trauma. Beyond the naturalizing tendencies of hetero-normative conceptions of love and desire, the queer poetics of Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali provide other alternatives of reading the embodied location of a subject.

In fact, the gendered self of the poet is highlighted in the poetry of these poets. While she pushes beyond all boundaries in her poetry, including those of gender, Adnan always seems to return to female embodiment in her book: gender is in-corporated even in the "sealed body of a poet" (There 37). Adnan is also strongly aware of how the body fits, or doesn't, to its surroundings. Even though he has a fairly egalitarian conception of gender relations, Ali seems to filter gender through patriarchal lenses: his mostly male speaker coolly places women on a pedestal as muses (such as Begum Akhtar, Hubba Khatun, and even the embodied nation of Kashmir) but does not grant them subjectivity. Complete patriarchal elision of female subjectivity forces Cha to adopt a fiercely feminist stance towards the female body in her poetry. In Naheed's poetics, corporeality also becomes the focus for the poet to foil its absence in public and legislative space. Because their transnational poetics questions the placement of the subject in different locations, it is also interesting to note how these poets treat subjectivity in the private and public

spheres. For Adnan, the distance between 'I' and 'you' changes into a collective 'we' that blurs the lines separating the private body and public; Ali's lyrical ego demarcates a private self as standing for the national collective; Cha's private subjectivity is shown to be tied to the Korean national collective too; and Naheed's attempts to empower the disenfranchised also means a reinforcement of the poet's voice as that of the collective.

Poetry may be termed a translation of the metaphysical relationship between the simultaneous corporeality and immanence of words and ideas. When there is an effort by the poet to capture a very specific reality in poetry, the question arises whether politics places a limit on language and imagination. A healthy interrogation of transnationality in poetry is essential because, as with anthologies promoting multiculturalism and diversity, a transnational poetics can also be easily commercialized. In its defanged form, the work of transnational poets can be considered the sole source of information about local cultures and literatures, a literary tourism for the armchair activist. In this variety of transnational poetry, the poem would be reduced to exportable generalities and superfluous universalizations in the effort to capture bigger, wider audiences. The language and form would also be similarly simplified and watered down for straightforward consumption and absorption in mainstream American poetry. The obverse effect of seeking universal, global truths and language on the poet's part can lead to an overemphasis of the local. On the one hand, this would mean the poets' token creation of representations of multiculturalism. Such a poetics, on the other hand, might also create a rigid and unnecessary tribal identification among the readers. In my analysis I argue that as it is borne out of the detritus of physical dislocations and formal

dissonances, a transnational poetics is an imaginative product that disrupts the seemingly benign flow of capital, individuals, and ideas across national and cultural borders.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, "'All walls disappeared' – Locating Etel Adnan in There," I analyze Etel Adnan's transcendence of external aspects of identity in her multifaceted poetry informed by her interests in language, philosophy, and art. In self-contained units, she uses an allusive language to ask existential questions about conflict, discourse and gender, grounded in the specificity of her native Lebanon, ravaged by civil war, and her adoptive California. In concretizing images of the usually untranslated aspects of reality, the local incidents of war and strife lost in the global context, Adnan hopes to validate life. Is the idiom of the dubious gender positioning of the text's speaker related to Adnan's intimations of a queer female sexuality? While her earlier creations were received as solely feminist objectives, I contrast that academic reception with the critique of the adopted marginality of third world women artists by Rey Chow, Trinh Minh-ha, and Lisa Suhair-Majaj. Adnan's quest for open forms of expression is marked in her employment of colors, lines and imagery from painting, calligraphy, and philosophy. Her movement between different worlds and revelation of a deep conflict with languages generate questions of what constitutes a native or national language, which I read next to Derrida's outlining of the territorialization of a mother language. On the other hand, her interrogation of the origins of language and employment of the form of prose poem with its roots in Arabic literature also becomes an occasion of return for her to a pan-Arab collective. Texts pertaining to Arabic prosody, cosmopolitanism, regional Lebanese and San Fransciscan poetry, and phenomenology

and Sufi theosophy help me in identifying Adnan's location within a transnational context.

In the second chapter, "Memory Has a Homeland – Tropes of Exility in Agha Shahid Ali's Country Without a Post Office," I look at the question of what it means for a poet to define himself as an exile in a world of constantly changing boundaries. In this chapter, I analyze the multiple levels of exility and dislocation that Agha Shahid Ali (a 'triple exile' by his own admission) addresses in his poetry. On the purely aesthetic level, Ali repeatedly refers to certain literary figures, metaphors, and forms through which he scrutinizes the dilemmas of a voluntary or forced migrancy faced by the subjects in his poems. Ali calls aesthetic terms into question as his lyrics copy the form, structure, and demands of traditional Urdu lyrics, metamorphosing into a hybrid genre in American poetry: the English ghazal. I study whether by dwelling in a past he cannot fully enter while simultaneously fashioning himself as a witness-poet in exile, Ali manages to create a space for himself and imagines the possibility of return to a 'Kashmir.' Earlier allusions to Kashmir in American literature, regional Kashmiri nationalism, and theories on exility provide the framework for this chapter.

In the third chapter, "'Fossil trace of word': Fragmentation and Restitution in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's DICTEE," I delve into the questions raised about form, history and nation. By analyzing Theresa Cha's poetry, I study what role female identity plays in the formal reconstruction of a nationalist or immigrant narrative. Theresa Cha's sole published volume deals with the intricacies of establishing a self in the aftermath of the partition of her native Korea and of Cha's own migration to America. Instead of just proclaiming a subjectivity marked by alterity, Cha challenges the existence of self by

progressively rendering problematic the authority of the poet. Cha materializes personal memories and redresses national wounds by a complex play of languages, forms, and images. I examine the case for lyricism in a work of prose poem that underscores the difficulty of expression by complicating the poet's memories, thoughts and sensations, and that seemingly lacks the lyricism of the honed nostalgia contained in diasporic poetry. What is the relationship between the shattered text and Cha's attempts at restoring private and national histories ruptured by the consecutive Chinese and Japanese cultural and linguistic invasion of Korea? Compared to another Korean American poet Myung-Mi Kim, how does poetry help Cha create an aesthetics of fragmentation, the splitting at the root, of memory and language? Thus I read DICTEE through the discourse of Korean American feminists, Cha's own film theory, and Korean nationalist theory pertaining to partition and unification.

The fourth chapter, "Across the Threshold: The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetting in Kishwar Naheed's Poetics," provides a non-American and non-Anglophone perspective to place transnational American poetics in a global context, for which I use Kishwar Naheed's *Khayāli Shakhs se Muqābala* / Confronting an Imagined Person. Since, in my analysis, Naheed is the only poet grounded in one particular locale and single nation, she offers a good comparison of rootedness to the themes of movement and transcendence of place brought up in the poetry of Adnan. Naheed's female subjects demonstrate a fair amount of mobility in crossing boundaries of decorum and patriarchy, with 'threshold' being a recurring motif in her work. She challenges the official version of Pakistani history that writes women out of existence and legal equality, while expressing the geopolitical anger of the developing countries against neo-imperialist

designs and globalization. Her subjective woman speaker represents a collective female voice that has been frequently suppressed and also articulates female desire and sexuality, largely taboo subjects. Comparable to Ali's job of imagining the Kashmiri nation, she tries to re-imagine the Pakistani nation from the perspective of a female citizen, and also tries to create a new female space even as she is ostracized *within* the thresholds of the nation. In fact, her project of imagining the nation through a woman's perspective, of gendering the nation, is fairly similar to the one Cha undertakes in inscribing Korean history with women's voices that had been lost earlier. A perusal of the history of women's legislative space in Pakistan, feminist theories about geography and location, and critical literature on contemporary Urdu prosody provide the framework for this chapter on Naheed.

The idea of a transnational imaginary comes into being from the seeds of 'imagined community' sown by Benedict Anderson's discourse. Adnan, Ali, and Cha create material for the transnational imaginary about their natal and imagined nation-states from diasporas outside the boundaries of the nation – a respectively pan Arabic, pan Kashmiri, pan Korean imaginary. This is a doubly engaging process of re-membering the nation from afar and within the American nation-state that might displace and delegitimize their poetics as insufficiently native. For a poet like Kishwar Naheed, this transnational imaginary works out by engaging in contact with feminist and politically activist discourses from outside the nation and also through the diasporic function of Urdu language poetry, building upon an imagined community of readers and writers. A concurrent argument that comes up in my analysis is the inequality of reception and location within a transnational poetics. The transnational poet who is based in America

may seem alive only to the realities of planetary displacement and the vicissitudes that exile brings in the form of capturing traces of homeland, language and memory, while reaping the benefits of publishing in an empire that is the locus of authority and capital. The transnational poet writing outside of America has to deal more significantly with the equivocal response of a transnational literary marketplace dominated by English which renders an unequal distribution of her labor of production.

These poets become transnational in their concerns for the appearance of memory, language, and body at the end of a millennium. Our responses to them are also shaped by the events after September 11, 2001, especially since the idea of the nation has become ambiguous, what with transnational networks of terror and empire that seem to consider all boundaries moot, while the corpus of the nation has also gained new prominence in the demands for recognition and sovereignty from those nations wronged by the neo-empire. The works of these poets alternately correspond to and contest the forces unleashed by the transnational desire created through the confluence of the market and empire. The collection by Kishwar Naheed, for instance, becomes a treatise in defense of the nation, the local, against the imperialistic designs of globalization. Here, the market impulse also comes into play with the renaissance of publishers' and readers' interest in literary texts (although the emphasis has been on the narrative and fictional variety) that offer information about Asian countries caught in the crossfire of empire.[4] The regions these poets hail from (Lebanon, Kashmir, Korea, and Pakistan) have transitioned from

[4] In writing about the reception of Naheed's The Distance of a Shout published immediately after September 11, 2001: "Indeed, it is tantalizing to think how Kishwar Naheed's poems in *The Distance of a Shout* could easily find a broad international audience at this crucial time – an audience more diverse than the usual Urdu aficionados coupled with intellectual circles in India and Pakistan. It is also interesting to speculate about how her words could enrich many of the discussions taking place today in English. This scenario is not beyond the realm of possibility – the book has been ordered by almost forty libraries in the United States, and Oxford University Press, Pakistan, does distribute about 20% of its titles in London" (Steel 337-338).

merely volatile areas to the axes of evil reconfigured in the global war on terror and their countries remain fragmented in the global imaginary.

The works I've chosen from these four poets – There, The Country without A Post Office, DICTEE, and Confronting an Imagined Person – were published in the last two decades of the twentieth century, making them *fin de síecle* works commenting on experiences on a particular threshold of time and of planetary consciousness. As such, the volumes of poetry by these transnational American and Asian poets become commentaries on the geopolitical situation of the world at the end of the millennium when American neo-imperialism was at its full bloom. There is a heightened urgency for community among the thinkers and poets across borders, to counter and understand the differences that hold people and nations apart. There is a new-found awareness of the fragility of places "which we inhabit as human beings, places that we make in order to be persons, in community, in communion, and how very easily that civil pact can be broken, the key to our co-existence tossed away" (Alexander, "Fragile Places" 5). The struggle of these poets is to keep alive memory and the past while the world around them is violently restructured by economic and political forces. If the overriding concern of these poets is to preserve cultural memory, that project becomes all the more imperative given the proof of the destruction of the Mesopotamian past and the contemporary culture of Iraq.

The boundless, free-form dialectic of Adnan; the exilic, tradition-bound hermeticism of Ali; Cha's fragmented, ecstatic Gestalt; and Naheed's gendered, challenging transgressions are ways of approaching the spatialization of body, language, and memory in the nation. None of these are perfect – their poetics are ways of imagining the impossible, translations hovering on the verge of possibilities. For these poets, the

impossible is the creation of a transnational imaginary (pan-Arab, pan-Mediterranean, San Franciscan cosmopolitanism of Adnan; Indo-Persian, Anglo-American formalism of Ali; Cha's uni-Korean, transcontinental, Asian American sublime; and Naheed's proto-feminist, globally engaged poetics) – the composition of a community of poets and readers.

CHAPTER 1
"All walls disappeared" – Locating Etel Adnan in There

Etel Adnan (b. 1925) manages to concretize in an open form of expression thoughts and images unimpeded by the constrictions of geography, culture, or discipline. I use Etel Adnan's 1997 volume of poetry There (whose subtitle is In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other) and her statements on language as example of a transnational poetics that explores the multiple hyphenated identities of a poet who refuses to be placed in formal, national, or linguistic boundaries. I analyze how she carries out projects of cultural translation in her work and renders problematic the salvaging endeavors of memory. Her project is truly transnational in its scope: Adnan meticulously confronts the demands of defining nation, history, and subjectivity, letting time and space continuously dissolve in her poetry. Adnan's poetry has equally been informed by her training in philosophy, art, and literature. Besides having written more than 14 books of poetry, prose, and fiction in English and French and having taught the philosophy of art in various universities, she creates oils, ceramics, tapestries, calligraphy, plays, and operettas. Writing and painting allow Adnan to escape the binds of self-expression and she manages to adhere to her root Arab culture through them.[5] A phenomenological interest in the world also helps her traverse the various domains and canons of art. Adnan's multifaceted examination of the strategies of representation of the self and the other leads her to develop a synthesis of the individual and the collective, the local and the universal. For her, the territory of creation is not a specific language or place but the entire canvas of human existence.

[5] In an essay, Adnan writes about her use of Arabic calligraphy in her work, "Abstract art was the equivalent of poetic expression; I didn't need to use words, but colors and lines. I didn't need to belong to a language-oriented culture but to an open form of expression" ("To Write," screen 6).

Etel Adnan's conception of domicile is shaped by the war-ravaged, yet cosmopolitan, nature of the city of Beirut, Lebanon, she was born and grew up in. While the idea of the nation as home is shattered for her because of the civil war that devastated Lebanon from 1975-1990, it is the gravity of war as it affects human existence that gives shape to her lyrics. Adnan's rumination on the self and other, and the symbiotic relationship between the two comes from an acknowledgment of the multiplicity of the self. Her perceptions are based on her experiences as an exile from Lebanon and are honed by her attempts to make sense of the personal implications of war and violence throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. The source of Adnan's voice is not exile, even though Lebanon is a virtual part of all her written work. In an interview she states: "How can I avoid the writing about the Lebanese Civil War when I lived it? For the Arabs, the 20th century was an apocalyptic century.[…] So there is a combination of the outer apocalypse and the inner apocalypse and my work reflects that along with issues of exile" (Saba, screens 3-4). I suggest that far from reading There as a reflection on exile, the poem should be read as the musings of a kind of cosmopolitanism in poetry that combines Arab, French, and American concerns. Unlike a chic cosmopolitanism that ensures the writer a "convenient no-place" (Brennan 306), this brand of cosmopolitics, a domain of contested politics in multiculturalism, is in Bruce Robbins' words, "a name for genuine striving toward common norms and mutual translatability" (Cosmopolitics 12-13). I also analyze how Adnan relentlessly tries to deal with the paradoxes of defining and classifying people, objects and emotions, for instance, how someone is branded the "other" and declared an enemy.[6] By posing a simultaneous local and universal subject in

[6] The book is dedicated to Khalil Hawi, the Lebanese poet who committed suicide when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982: "Khalil Hawi could not live conflict. Acute conflict killed him" (Saba, screen 3). Adnan

her transnational identity formation, Adnan inscribes a movement of the reader from the 'here' of America to the 'there' of the rest of the world.

There is a long prose poem and consists of a sequence of thirty-nine unnumbered poems, all of which are titled "There," except for the one that falls in the middle, called "Here." The text starts with a question: "Where are we? where? There is a *where*, because we are, stubbornly, and have been, and who are we, if not you and me?" (There 1), and the rest of the text consists of a series of questions that the speaker simultaneously asks her interlocutor and implicates herself in. The breathless series of questions she poses in the beginning of the text, especially in the first poem, become progressively longer lines and statements by the end of the book. At first, it seems that Adnan's poetry has no local base in its abstract investigation of existential subjectivity; however, her sociopolitical references are reflected in the series of statements and questions, never merely rhetorical, that she poses of the specific reality of existence in regions of war and conflict. According to Adnan, the suspension of the entrenched demarcations of identity allows differences to be recognized which allows new patterns to emerge; it also gives rise to faith that these differences can be surpassed. What generates a transnational effect in the work is that in posing "there" as both a figurative and real construct, Adnan makes problematic the concepts of belonging to an individual place and time. Since identity is not signified by a specific location, she also challenges the notion of being part of a single nation or history: "Who are we, us the children of History, whose, which period, which side of History, the wars or the poems, the queens or the strangers, on which side

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has stated that the book had its origins in the start of the Bosnian conflict, "What is conflict. What is this 'other.' This Europe that refuses the other, the different and why? I wanted to go into the other and see that the other is really us. If you have an enemy, and you are so obsessed by it, that enemy will occupy your head. It becomes you" (Saba, screen 2).

of whose History are we going to be?" (There 3). Once she deconstructs the dynamics of place, location ceases to be tied to the polarities of center or periphery and becomes multifocal for her. A distant 'there' in the calamities of Lebanon, Palestine, Bosnia, Vietnam ("there, on death's playground" There 16) can easily be the 'here' of America ("that private war waged within our boundaries…those of the heart" There 13) or Europe ("the one, negated shadow-Europe, the one close to me, to us, the one you know which produced shouting poets, stuttering exiles, heroic travelers" There 34), and vice versa. The "defined perimeters" between the speaker and the reader are also broken down in the speaker's self-indictment in the realization that she is complicit in confusing reality with metaphor: "I become a voracious animal, searching for self-affirmation on corpses – metaphorical for you and me – but real to those who left behind such decomposed traces" (There 38). This is also the poet's dual role, of witness and participant, ever mindful of confusing reality with metaphor. The obsession of the poet to consume historical tragedy in order to express material details for personal introspection is mitigated only by a brutally intense self-scrutiny, an analysis picked up further in the chapter. By the middle of the text, the distance between 'you' and 'I' is gradually converted into 'us,' and the singular entity disappears into the communal.

Adnan's quest in this poem is to initiate and preserve discourse in the backdrop of conflict.[7] The aim of her meditation is to show that the self constructs the other through the binary reflection of love and hate: the failure of love turns to hate ("Is destruction an inseparable component of love?" There 69). The sheer force of an emotion like hatred

[7] She says that There "was addressed immediately to the Arabs or the American or the Jewish Americans. But the poems are really a meditation on 'conflict,' particularly us *the Arab East* who live in a conflict since World War I. It is through a self-questioning and a dialogue with the West, with the enemy – with Israel – that a positive battle occurs, not with arms, but on an economic and cultural level" (Saba, screen 1).

can also lead to an intimate awareness of the texture of love – Adnan says that "I hated you for so long in the inner territory that we inhabited together that you're now the negative print of my identity (no, not a shadow), the unwanted companion who becomes, o tragedy!, love's very substance" (There 54). What is intriguing here is Adnan's self-reflexive turn in which the mythic (racial, national, gendered, or classed) other is part of the same self. This dissolution of the bodily boundaries between the self and its other also throws light on her composition of the subjective: the collapsing of the love-hate bond shows that the subject creates and encompasses the other, "In grey luminescence, on colored brain tracts, the hour is unsure, quivering there, over there, this time inside, or is it outside the core of one's being, as we always are *the other*?" (There 16). If there is a self that Adnan readily fashions for herself in this poem, it is not just that of a mediator trying to resolve conflict but the poet as challenger asking provocative questions about the reality of conflict-ridden nations. Her displacement from the basis of home allows Adnan to pose questions with equal candor about American imperialism and the corruption in Arab nations ("where are you, when I want you to be, be the people I see" There 1). Adnan complicates the distinct tension in subjectivity by inviting the reader to acknowledge empathy with the other: developing an understanding of the interconnectedness of the self and the other, the dialectic is made productive for existence. Instead of jumping abruptly from the self to the collective, she wants the reader to first pay attention to the imagined community formed by two interlocutors, which can then be utilized for a collective being (There 59). This then is the "brotherhood of telling" Adnan aims to create through her book where all walls disappear. Adnan ruminates on the community and solidarity rendered by imagination when political divisions fail, and

There may also be read in reference to what she has called "the Arab Apocalypse." The Arab Apocalypse, which is also the title of Adnan's 1980 book *L'Apocalypse Arabe*, signifies the destruction of Beirut, the cataclysmic *nakba* – the Palestinian tragedy, and the failure of the Arab leaders to fulfill the expectations of the Arab citizens. The only way, and even this Adnan throws into doubt, this political apocalypse is relieved is by love and kindness. This purging and ending of History is also a way of writing beyond the nation-state – Adnan suggests that from the abolition of a world confined by boundaries, a new order and new hope for creation will arise. In the following passage from poem # 31, Adnan sketches an impossible narrative of desire for harmony: she starts with delineation of a besieged fortress, connects it with "your desire for a deep sleep and my yearning for the end of this spilling of blood" (There 59), traipses from the Mediterranean to the Balkans in her questioning of zealous nationalism ("do I have to have a nationality in order to be human, and do you need to carry much paper on you if you wanted to dream, with open eyes, of mountains visited by birds" There 59), and binds the poem in her vision of collective being. In this landscape of Adnan's structure of possibilities, a step past straightforward material yearnings ("bread") is a universal acknowledgement of the desire for the imaginary ("roses") sited in an unspecified local time and place:

> It's already yesterday, I mean a second ago is as far back as
> an eternity of time, but over here, in the brotherhood of the
> telling, there's this hunger, those who need bread need roses
> too, and if I came to hear the music, I found the heart, little
> luminosities walked among us, from these valleys of tears is

rising a smile under the first season's first rain, oh yes!, the
over there and the over here belong to some continuum
which glows at night from that fortress, all windows lit, all
walls disappeared. (There 60)

This "brotherhood of telling" also generates the 'interzone' critic Eric Sellin observes in Adnan's poetry "in which the author and the reader must collaborate in the aesthetic experience" (31). He argues that in either "suggested reality or implied resonance, the strength of many of […] Adnan's most successful poems lies in their ability to create a kind of *mytheme* in the interzone – a mini-epic narrative that is neither metaphor nor symbol" (31). As structural units of myths, mythemes are the relations that bind meaning and in Adnan's imagining of human consciousness, these cultural memes and bundles of meaning are unbound together by the poet and the reader. In fact, all of the poems in There contain mythemes that require the reader to make connections between mythic narrative and history, such as this excerpt in which the speaker dances between the primordial self and the other. This latter dialectic, which Adnan locates in tandem to birth and extinction, is one she reiterates in the ending stanzas of the poems, more so in the second half of the text and especially in the last poem of There:

And you see we may go the way dinosaurs did, but
we're here, aren't we, and God has preceded us into divine
disappearance, aren't we reduced, suffering from too much
visibility, multiplying in order not to be here, one day, a day
like the first days, the stones being, being there, on the soil,
the stones are not the end, the end of what, of whom, of you

and me, and maybe only you and then only me, when

it wouldn't matter anymore, the stones are the beginning. (There 6)

In a way, Adnan's translation of history and place, the breaking through the boundaries between the self and its other, the poet and the reader, in There, leads to the creation of a space of possibilities. In contrast to Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of the negotiation of cultural identities in hybrid interstitial zones (Location 2), Adnan goes beyond the limited possibilities suggested by the language of metaphor, which merely "transfers the meaning of home and belonging" *across* distances (Location 291). Her constant movement between 'here' and 'there' deconstructs the metaphor of location itself, translation in this sense becomes the hope of not just helping an object to be *borne across*, but also of delivering poetry *alive* to the other. This conception of the poet as translator is similar to that proposed by Denise Levertov of translation not just from one language to another, but a process that empowers a reader into other worlds and modulates experience into other dimensions. Levertov states: "We must have an art that translates, conveys us to the heaven of that deepest reality which otherwise 'we might die without ever having known'; that *transmits* us there, not in the sense of bringing the information to the receiver but of putting the receiver in the place of the event – alive" (94).[8] Adnan's conception of the permeability of location, as filtered through her poetry, is similar to Edouard Glissant's *ici-là*: "This-here is the weave, and it weaves no boundaries. The right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of Relation in freedoms" (190).

[8] Levertov's reference here is to the original sense of 'translation' as a removal from heaven to earth without a physical death (OED 3382).

For Adnan, it is not that the enemy, the other, is ill-defined but that the terms on which this subjectivity is based (such as borders or conquest) are so capricious. She even undermines the authority and univocality of the speaker, whose gender and age aren't specified and who carries out a dialogue most often with a young man (possibly a soldier),[9] and with her lover. Just as the gender positioning of the speaker lends multivocality to the text, the gender of the speaker's listener shifts similarly. Adnan cautions "Roles are interchangeable" (There 11) because ultimately the identity of the other is irrelevant: "Anyway, who are you? Born under a female sign, a warrior, woman or man, and does it matter when desire rises before we know it, telling things unknown?" (There 10).[10] She places critical emphasis in the poems on creating an exchange of dialogue; for her, a conversation is "the beginning of civilization" (There 18) and "always a political thing" (There 34). For this reason, there is a frequency of the words "listen," "hear," and "talk" in the poem, but the note of hope gradually seems to give way to an overwhelming sense of despair and sadness. The gentle, chiding tone of the first half of the text wanes from the mid-section "Here," which itself ends with "here is the point of no return…" (There 39). After this middle poem, a tone of urgency dominates ("in an apocalyptic universe speech is doomed" There 55) and the last poem leads the speaker and the reader to an apprehensive knowledge of mortality.

The simplicity of Adnan's text implies a transparency of language but actually her use of concrete images, precise words and regional references points out the usually

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[9] The sections where the speaker seems to be addressing a male soldier carry echoes of Adnan's novel Sitt Marie-Rose (1978) about the abduction of a young teacher by militia-men.

[10] "For Adnan the mercurial nature of the pronoun does not prove that a person is an invention of culture and perspective, but instead shows that we each contain the evil and good deeds of all our ancestors--that they are us. You are a hater and a lover, a warrior and a woman. It is not a matter of relativity but of non-dualism" (Howe, screen 2).

untranslated aspects of reality, the local incidents of war and strife lost in the global context. There involves a deeply phenomenological and Sufi understanding of the real that most poets usually find too mundane to capture into poetry; Adnan's is a poetics that renders into words both the undefined, mysterious beyond and this sociopolitical world. In self-contained units of distinctively long verses, Adnan uses an allusive language to ask existential questions about war, dialogue, and gender, grounded in the specificity of her native Lebanon and her adoptive sunny California. Her quest for open forms of expression in poetry is marked in her employment of imagery, colors, and frequently stark graphic figures from the natural world, art, and philosophy.[11] Where language and philosophy seem to find a logical conflation in Adnan's poetry, she is equally comfortable breaking down the walls between genres and disciplines.[12] For instance, the book-cover consists of a monochromatic photograph by Adnan which is almost a still-life composition: the foreground depicts a writing table (containing a stylus-like pen and two ink-pots) placed in front of a back-lit window and in the opposite corner is a reed stool on top of a box containing a plate of pomegranates; the composition shows an interplay of light and shadow, as the title of the book suggests. I propose that due to the descriptive use of language, sections of the poem can also be read as extensions of painting into words. The pictorial quality of the images in the lines of There is courtesy of an artist first imagining the landscape on canvas and then shifting it on paper. In an essay "Notes on Unfolding Writing," Adnan articulates the aesthetic and philosophical synthesis of

[11] The lucid lines of There are redolent of abstract painting: "In front of the sea which is covered with blue meadows a line is trembling with fire" (There 19).

[12] Having received her degree in philosophy from Paris and taught philosophy at Berkeley, she says, "I considered philosophy, after Hölderlin and Heidegger, as finding its greatest expression in poetry" ("To Write," screen 5).

writing and art as calligraphy in her paintings, which also signifies her poetics of the world as an ongoing 'translation':

> perception is a translating of the object of that perception, and that any thought that we may think to be primordial, spontaneous, is already an interpretation of something which precedes it and may even be of another nature, another 'stuff' than thinking itself, a wavelength, an 'it' which remains unknown, a translation of this 'it' by an active filtering function we call the 'mind'. (screen 4)

This filtering of the world through the unconscious becomes obvious not only in her use of calligraphy, a marriage of word and image, but also in the poems of There, where she relies on the lyrical interpretation of images and thoughts into words and associative lines. The translation of lived reality into poetry is a difficult process to begin with since "almost all experience goes by too fast, too superficially for our apperception, what we most need is not to *re*-taste it (just as superficially) but really to taste *for the first time* the gratuitous, the autonomous identity of its essence" (Levertov 94). As Adnan muses in There, the struggle in the poet's subjectivity comes into play in this process of the mental screening of real and psychic entanglements: "There, in the wastes of the soul, within its repetitions, where we wonder if there are differences between the mind's inner chambers and the imagination's outer realms, lies the confrontation between the self and itself" (There 57). To translate historical experience into verse compounds the problem further. Given her vocation as a painter, the diffusion of images into language, which is always a strong element in poetry, insinuates the exploration of kinship between objects and subjects in There, that one of Adnan's reviewers points out: "Is there any way to make form and substance the same without dividing them? Where is color, if not both behind

and before the color beside it? How would you get from white to color and back to white again on one canvas without making them all the same? Only by relationship" (Howe, screen 2).

How does a poet like Adnan, suspended between nations and disciplines, initiate interrogation of the seemingly arbitrary but carefully constructed boundaries of definition? For an analysis of such a transnational poetics, we can refer to feminist critics such as Rey Chow and Trinh Minh-ha, who have both criticized the pressure of conformity and representation placed upon minority women writers by the politics of location which occasions a return to exoticism, compulsory difference, and self-victimization. Instead, Chow (Writing 30) and Minh-ha exhort that radical and real difference should be taken by women writers as merely the initial or transitional stage, and not as the end of selfhood and creativity. Chow also questions whether in the process of representing the ethnic, "is representation simply a matter of documenting the reality that is ethnicity, or should representation be understood as some kind of ontological performance-cum-resistance, bracketing all realist content, however historical that content may be?" (Protestant 52). Otherwise, it is entirely convenient for these artist to fall in the trap of difference and marginality, as Minh-ha states that the main challenge women artists face is the danger of being perceived as exotic ("the voice of difference") and as representing a 'native' culture that, no matter how different, serves as a mirror for the other more sophisticated culture to see its own picture (Woman 87-88). In addition, the 'politics of location' so famously propounded by Adrienne Rich that emphasizes the location from where an artist produces a work, also instigates a concurrent examination of the way texts are received in specific locations ("Notes" 212). Caren Kaplan criticizes

Rich's *specific* politics of location for blurring a "method of interrogating and deconstructing the position, identity and privilege of whiteness" (Scattered Hegemonies 139) and she is suspicious of "any use of the term to naturalize boundaries and margins under the guise of celebration, nostalgia, or inappropriate assumptions of intimacy" (Questions 187). Building on Kaplan's critique, editors Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh in Going Global also call for a thorough examination of the politics of reception in the transnational context in which global and local discourses intersect and collide, sometimes producing over-determined contexts of reception (14).

Etel Adnan's movement between different worlds gives rise to questions related to canonical placement. For instance, how different is Adnan's work from the homegrown 'ethnopoetics' Jerome Rothenberg specifies for ethnic American poets ("Ethnopoetics" 5) or the regional schools of poetry that construct or dismantle the nationalist narrative of America? I argue that there is a Steinian angle to Adnan's treatment of language, i.e. the way Gertrude Stein utilized the simplicity of words coupled with the density of ideas, which, in Adnan's case, places extreme emphasis on the words themselves, especially those related to "be-ing." Adnan's use of the form of prose poetry in There, which veers between fiction, essay, and poetry, places her in the company of contemporary American Language poets, such as Susan Howe, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, and Charles Bernstein, who experiment with language and form. Unlike most poets placed in that category, Adnan, like Theresa Cha later in my analysis, insists on including the reader within the text and, adamant on tackling social-political issues, does not get trapped in mere semantic innovation and wordplay. Her revelation of a deep conflict with language generates questions of what constitutes a mother or national

tongue. I argue that this also places her amongst American modernist poets from non-Anglophone backgrounds, such as Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, and William Carlos Williams, who while experimenting with language and form, according to Peter Quartermain, retained English as their second language.[13] Because of politico-cultural restrictions placed on Arabic and the supremacy of French in Lebanon, Adnan states elsewhere how she fell in love with American English (possibly her fifth language) later in her life since it freed her to express her thoughts in ways that other languages did not, which raises questions about the limitations of language too. Of her discovery and love of American English she writes that it allowed her to tell things she couldn't in the languages she knew because they seemed limited or too familiar:

> I was entering the English language like an explorer: each word came to life, expressions were creations, adverbs were immensely immense, verbs were shooting arrows, a simple preposition like 'in' and 'out' an adventure! Writing was a sport, sentences were like horses, opening space in front of them with their energies, and beautiful to ride. ("To Write," screens 6-7)

Ironically, Adnan's writing within American literature is read solely as that of a feminist woman writer from a multicultural background. It is interesting to note that hardly any attention is paid to Adnan's non-prose work in the American academy, where critical work on her does not extend beyond her placement in the feminist paradigm through her novel Sitt Marie-Rose, published in 1978; whereas in Arab and European print media, Adnan's poetry and painting is considered an integral part of her appeal as a

[13] With my citation of these particular American poets in Adnan's context, I suggest that this conception of the transnational is also non-traditional in some sense.

writer speaking in many different languages to diverse people.[14] The dismissive reception of Adnan in American literature is analogous to the lack of awareness and contextualization shown to the pioneering work of the earlier Al-Mahjar group of immigrant Arab American poets, to which Lebanese American Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) and Amin al-Rihani (1876-1940) belonged, and the indifference in the American canon towards this group of writers, even though they composed the first poetry of Arab migration in both English and Arabic.[15] Adnan's work, which is always grounded in specific political and literary cultures, also faces the danger of being conveniently placed on a pedestal of transcendental mysticism and dehistoricized obscurity somewhere outside the canon of texts ("the ancient realm of the absolutely uncertain" Howe, screen 2). For instance, Eric Sellin, in an otherwise fine essay on the use of imagery and rejection of metaphor in Adnan's poetry, ends up personifying Etel Adnan as "a sovereign siren, Erato, the Cosmic Mother with the glint of a stargraph in her eye" (35).

On the other hand is the reception of Adnan's written work within Arab literature: here, Adnan's use of English and French immediately places her in a privileged and somewhat suspicious category of writers for an Arabic-speaking audience. This would be true of most diasporic Francophone and Anglophone Arab writers and indicates that Arab

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[14] Adnan is regularly excluded from more traditional anthologies such as Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present and even from major experimental poetry anthologies such as From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960-1990. One of the few places Adnan's poetry is analyzed is in Maysa Abou-Youssef Hayward's "Communities at the Margins: Arab Poetry of the Desert," where Hayward comments on the symbolism of the desert as site of isolation and alienation in Arab poetry, specifically citing Adnan's The Arab Apocalypse.

[15] The significance of the Mahjari movement of 1921 in both an American context and in creating the first wave of modernity in twentieth century Arab literature is captured by, among others, Halim Barakat (304-320).

writers who write in languages other than Arabic risk losing critical and public attention from one of their core audiences.[16] Adnan recognizes this dilemma of linguistic restriction and documents how her facility in acquiring diverse languages at an early age in francophone Lebanon came at the high price of acute self-awareness and a deep internal conflict with language. While she was also conversant in the Turkish and Greek spoken at her home, the fragmentation of her self through inaccessibility to the Lebanese national language of Arabic and a love-hate relationship with French was only allayed by Adnan's decision to use a newly-acquired American English and a half-forgotten Arabic; as a result, she speaks French, writes in English and paints in Arabic. Meena Alexander marks the predicament of a poet caught between languages as the 'zone of radical illiteracy,' a fiery muteness in the house of language where words cannot yet happen and a terrible counter-memory swells up "out of which we translate our selves in order to appear, to be in place. A zone to which words do not attach, a realm syntax flees." The act of writing a poem itself becomes an act of translation, "an art of negativity" (Fault Lines 259-260). As a matter of translation between cultures and traditions, Adnan states that the calligraphic style of painting became for her the chance of an oblique re-acquaintance with Arabic: "They represent to me a coming to terms which I would never have expected until it happened, with the many threads that make up the tapestry of my life. I integrated myself in the cultural destiny of the Arabs by very indirect ways, and I

[16] In an essay on the celebrated Syrian poet Adonis, Adnan writes: "There is a growing number of Arab poets who write in 'foreign' languages, especially English, German, or French. They are neglected by the Arab poets who write in Arabic: their works are not included in Arab universities' curricula, they are not taught in contemporary Arab literature classes, and they are not seriously studied by the critics in Arab countries" ("On Adonis," screen 3).

hope that the search is not over" ("To Write," screen 7).[17] Alexander too cites the "forked power" of an acquired colonial language used for creative expression: "I truly believed that I could translate myself in and out of it, together with all the languages that welled up inside me. Perhaps there was also something else at stake, a greater fragility than I could acknowledge, a need to protect the quick of the self" (Fault Lines 119). Alexander goes on to say that writing poetry in English allowed her a certain kind of disembodiment, "a translation out of the boundaries of the actual, a dance of words that might free me from my own body," which later she had to strip away so that she "could learn to write the truth of the body, pitted, flawed, unfinished" (Fault Lines 121). Adnan invokes the same preservation of the self in imperial languages that are forever marked with loss but end up being the only ones available to render reality,

> War is our dialogue. It brings explosions at home, debris of
> human limbs, booby-trapped love letters. We're sorrow's old
> veterans, having written lamentations on too many bones.
> Always the writing, that recorded silent voice which jumps
> generations to claim eternity for blood. (There 58)

Adnan's oscillation between languages actually corresponds to her investigation of ontology and the dialectical relationship between the self and its other in There. In Monolinguism, Jacques Derrida refers to the paradoxical link between the mother tongue and the colonial language: "my 'own' language cannot be assimilated but my language,

[17] In her essay "To Write in a Foreign Language," Adnan scrupulously reconstructs her linguistic history: how speaking Arabic was equated with sin in occupied Beirut and so she learned French in school, Beirut became trilingual with the arrival of English during World War II; how her move in 1955 from France to Berkeley to teach philosophy of art helped her immerse in American English; how the Algerian war of independence threw her into a turmoil with French so she switched to painting in Arabic and then writing in English as her language of expression with the Vietnam war movement; how this new art form and the American language freed her; her move back to Lebanon and then return to California in 1975, traveling since then and interacting with the Arab world and artists in her constant movement.

the one I hear myself and agree to speak, is that of the other" (25). Addressing the estrangement inherent within any language, Derrida goes on to say that, "we only speak one language which exists asymmetrically, always for, from, kept by and returning to the other" (40).[18] The conundrum created by growing up between a 'native' and an imposed language negates the issue of being purely monolingual and blurs the distinction between local and imperial languages, challenging vexing issues of belonging and identity. Adnan's choice of English in her poetry, therefore, indicates a severing of the shackles of inherited and imposed languages. As her various statements demonstrate, her use of American English is not simply as the expedient language of expression in her adoptive country, and it further complicates the notion of locating the poet in a single language. Wen-chin Ouyang, in fact, prescribes Arabic as another symbol of Adnan's exile: "by repeatedly writing her exile Adnan arrives home. Homecoming here is not merely giving new meanings to the idea of home, but also reconstructing the self that was fragmented by exile. In Adnan's narratives there is a relationship between language and the self or between one's life story and the subject of that story" (86). It will be interesting to observe how her location within Arabic literature will be further modified with the forthcoming translation of <u>There</u> into Arabic. In fact, on the basis of Adnan's <u>Sitt Marie-Rose</u>, Miriam Cooke, in <u>War's Other Voices</u>, had already included Adnan in a group of women writers she called the Beirut Decentrists, including Ghada al-Saman, Hanan al-

[18] On the other hand, as Mutlu Blasing argues, the mother tongue is "charged with individuating emotional histories, both personal and communal, and poetic forms focus this charge by stylizing the distinguishing sonic and rhythmic qualities of a language" (11); for the poet who employs the mother tongue (as Kishwar Naheed clearly does), "the pain of the mother tongue is its intimate foreignness, its *constitutive* otherness" (63).

Sheikh, Emily Nasrallah, Laila Usairan, Daisy al-Amir, and Claire Gebeyli.[19] Cooke's categorization of these Lebanese women writers who were doubly decentered and wrote "alone and for themselves" (3) in a time of violent national strife gives another indication of the acute sense of dislocation that comes through Adnan's earlier work and with which Adnan has come to terms in her latter work.

Adnan's critical reception within American literature has also been enhanced by the publication of Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh's timely collection of essays, Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist. The crucial position and specific Lebanese context accorded her as an Arab American poet within Nathalie Handal's The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology and the rise in publication of Arab American writers in the last decade signifies another sort of homecoming. In reference to this renaissance of Arab American literature, Lisa Suhair Majaj maintains that while this literature is still in the process of being created, "Arab-American writers write out of their Arab identity, out of their American identity and of the identity produced when these two cultures come together. The art that results is Arab-American because it arises from the experience of Arab-Americans – personal or public, 'ethnic' or not" ("Hyphenated Author," screen 3). Where Majaj's categorization is based on an experiential criteria, a confluence that seems to exclude all other identities, Elmaz Abinader concurs that the themes of Arab-American writing are not limited to "issues of culture and identity" and go beyond the homeland and heritage: "Their expressions

[19] "They are a group of women who have shared Beirut as their home and the war as their experience. They have been decentered in a double sense: physically, they were scattered all over a self-destructing city; intellectually, they moved in separate spheres. They wrote alone and for themselves. They would not conceive of their writings, as related to those of others, yet their marginal perspective, which gave insight into the holistic aspect of the war, united them and allowed them discursively to undermine and restructure society around the image of a new center" (Cooke 3).

explore new vistas – related to years spent living in the United States – and domestic political and social issues that affect their everyday lives" (screen 6). On the other hand is the racialization of Arabs in the US subsequent to September 11, 2001, and the net effect of the hyphen as "political accommodation within the nation" (Hassan 4).

Adnan's own voice in There shows the defined evolution of a poet from her first attempt at poetry in the eco-centered *Le Livre de la Mer* / The Book of the Sea (1949), to the rupture of form in the amalgamation of visual iconography and poetry *L'Apocalypse Arabe* / The Arab Apocalypse (1980), to the compact free verse of The Indian Never Had a Horse (1985) and The Spring Flowers Own (1990), leading up to the exploration of language and form in There.[20] There proves to be a culmination of Adnan's desire to straddle more than one discipline and literary tradition. Reviewers of the book confer a timeless quality to it: "Adnan asks questions that she (thankfully) doesn't dare to answer…In the Psalms there is a similar vacillation between subjects (I-he-you) that puts this book, including its drawn desert face, into the ancient realm of the absolutely uncertain" (Howe, screen 2). Another critic, Ammiel Alcalay, suggests that the boundless aspect of Adnan's work denotes it is "a cross between the mysticism of such great medievals as Rabia and Hildegard of Bingen and the American lucidity of Emily Dickinson or Lorine Niedecker" ("Our Memory" 313).

Although Adnan does not identify with any 'movement' in poetics, she has stated that among the American writers she found most inspiring are Jalal Toufic, Robert Grenier, and Lyn Hejinian ("Etel Adnan," screen 3). Toufic seems to be the most incongruous influence in this triad: he is a Palestinian American video-artist and prolific

[20] A critic states, "her latest work encompasses…her earlier poetry and lyrical prose. The full, meandering, contemplative lines of There sketch in the shadows and lights of her earlier, leaner poetry" (Booth 857).

writer of essay-books composed of autobiographical details, commentary on the history of the present, film theory, and ruminations on death. One of his latest book, Undying Love, or Love Dies, however, can be easily classified as prose poem too and the allusive nature of his work is as intense as Adnan, but less condensed. Robert Grenier, a key figure in American Language poetry, emphasizes poetry as written work: his work, such as Sentences (printed on 500 boxed index cards) and the trilogy What I Believe. Transpiration/ Transpiring. Minnesota (published on 66 boxed pages), highlights design and typographical effects, and demonstrates a keen interest in the hand crafting of poetry. Lyn Hejinian is another leading Language poet, and also a translator of contemporary and concrete Russian poetry. Although her disjunctive prose poem sequences of My Life, because of their origin in personal narrative, differ from Adnan's poetry, her thoughts on the importance of form are significant in understanding the construction of There. In "The Rejection of Closure," Hejinian says that the progress of a line or sentence has spatial and temporal properties:

> The spatial density is both vertical and horizontal. The meaning of a word in its place derives both from the word's lateral reach, its contacts with its neighbors in a statement, and from its reach through and out of the text into the other world, the matrix of its contemporary and historical reference. The very idea of reference is spatial: over here is word, over there is thing at which word is shooting amiable love-arrows. (654)[21]

There, in its structurally distinct sections (intertwined with repetition of imagery, philosophical abstractions, and theme of existence and conflict), may seem symbiotically

[21] Published as "From 'The Rejection of Closure'" in Postmodern American Poetry. Excerpted from Bob Perelman's Writing/Talks.

compatible and whole with no palpable tension except that of the plentiful questions posed. While the structure of the book corresponds to Hejinian's injunctions on form as the harmonious relationship of words to other words and objects, this also creates a resolution of a kind usually missing from experimental projects of such magnitude. The recurrent questions and the unanswered but finely understood query the book concludes on present a voice confident enough to pose such universal questions. There is also a poet's book like the 'artist's books' that Adnan composes of poetry and painting on unfolding rolls of Japanese paper: each section contains multiple questions, and the sections and questions unravel into others. In his long poem of couplets of six word lines, Bob Perelman distinguishes the particular visual aspect of prose poems, in which these poems disobey the regulation of the flush left and irregular right margins of conventional free verse. According to Perelman, in a premise that is slightly dated because of the current prevalence of the prose poem form in American literature, "since they identify themselves as poems / through style and publication context," prose poems "become a marginal subset of poetry, / in other words, doubly marginal" (232).[22] This is also the 'new sentence' specified by Ron Silliman in 1995 of the American prose poem, a formal device that evolved through an entire poetic community based in the California Bay Area (63), to which Adnan and all the poets she is influenced by also belong. Silliman explores how the length of the sentence and the use of the period become wholly rhythmic, grammar becomes prosody, torque (i.e., the pressurization of syntax) is employed more frequently, there is an interior poetic and ordinary grammatical structure, and there is a double-relation of syllogistic movement (88-91). This, he says, is the poet's prose:

[22] As becomes clear later, prose poem is employed in one form or another by all three American poets, signifying the canonical admission of this form and the regularization of a once-radical form. For a critique of the prose poem, see Scully (120-122).

> The new sentence is the first prose technique to identify the signifier (even that of the blank space) as the locus of literary meaning. As such, it reverses the dynamics which have so long been associated with the tyranny of the signified, and is the first method capable of incorporating all the levels of language, both below the horizon of the sentence *and* above. (93)

Among the Arab writers Adnan has cited as influence are the Iraqi poets Bader Shaker al-Sayyab and Sargon Boulous, and the Egyptian modernist writer and intellectual-activist Louis Awad ("*Hiwar*" 2). Bader Shaker al-Sayyab (1926-1964), in particular, is known as an iconoclast in his capacity as one of the pioneers of the free verse form in Arabic poetry. The employment of the prose poem as form in There also places Adnan implicitly in the modern Arabic literary tradition. Salma Khadra Jayyusi records the emancipation of Arabic poetry from the inherited two-hemistich monorhymed form of the *qasīda* through free verse and, later, poetry-in-prose. Although it was being used since the turn of the nineteenth century, the most celebrated poets to experiment with poetry-in-prose were Gibran and al-Rihani in America, who helped revolutionize form in Arabic poetry. However, poetry-in-prose was essentially revived in Arabic literature only in the 1950s as *al-shir al-manthur* / prose poetry by renowned poets like the Palestinian poet Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and as the *qasīdat al-nathr* / prose poem championed by the Syrian poet Adonis. Jayyusi states that though there is always "a pronounced rhythm" to both prose poetry and a prose poem, the difference between the two is in the structure of the form itself, even though neither employs meter or rhyme:

> The readers of a prose poem pause only when there is a semantic necessity. Otherwise, they can read on at will, just as they would do when reading prose.

> Nevertheless, the prose poem differs from discursive prose in its density and tension, in its emotional base, in the type of its metaphoric representations and, quite importantly, in its rhythms. (153)

The fierce resistance the practitioners of the *qasīdat al-nathr* / prose poem faced, in what was contested as an imported form, has given way to relative acceptance and wide practice in all the Arab countries in the 1990s.[23] Her interrogation of the origins of language and her employment of the form of prose poem with its nascent roots in Arabic literature becomes an occasion of return for Adnan to a pan-Arab collective. In a cultural translation from Arabic and French into English, the prose poem form becomes evident in Adnan's poetry in the intricate, irregular rhythmic patterns and subtle lyricism inherent in the way Adnan uses language in the book. In most poems of <u>There</u>, an image or idea that has been presented in the beginning of the first stanza is repeated in the last stanza, creating a progressive movement of seamless quality. The form of prose poem also allows Adnan to create fully-sustained images not possible in the limitations of strict metrical verse and to suggest a sense of expansiveness imparted in the long lines that run into each other. The lines of the poem, however, are interrupted by cadences and caesuras, by the extensive use of punctuation, such as commas and dashes, and by the mode of address and interrogation used by the speaker. The multidisciplinarity inherent in her use of calligraphy elsewhere, so dear to Adnan because one "can surpass the borders through the visual combined with the textual" ("*Hiwar*" 1), also comes through in her conflation of universal imagery with the personal that pulls the reader in: "Such as two trees planted next to each other, under an ageing moon, we're prisoners of a

[23] See, for instance, Youssef Rakha's "Anatomy of Melancholy" on the debate of prose poem in Egyptian Arabic literature, or Adnan's own article on the issue of tradition versus modernity in Arabic poetry, "On Adonis: A Poet Responds."

circularity" (There 66). In fact, There indicates that Adnan is not merely interested in designing elaborate metaphors or conveying cultural meanings, but in suggesting implicit linkages and intuitive relationships between binary concepts of subjectivity and politics, from "here" to "there": "They're eating dry bread, over there, under Ra's auspices, and over here they're starving amidst opulence, and when you stand there, staring at them, they refuse to see that you're burning in a fire fed by stones" (There 21).

In her fusion of the numerous facets of American and Arabic poetics in There, Adnan also shows a proclivity for restructuring certain elements of the classical ode form of the *qasīda*.[24] The text of There resonates with the sensibility and rhythms of the *qasīda* even as Adnan amalgamates its features into another poetic form. Adnan partakes from the many genres of the *qasīda* if we take her book to be a love lyric, as I argue later: the desert imagery, a remembrance of a lost love, the physical dislocation or self-exile of the speaker, the quest undertaken to find the beloved, a circularity in the journey, the suspension of mortality, a final farewell on reaching the destination. The mournful tone that runs through Adnan's book and becomes more intense by the conclusion is similar to the one prevalent in a sub-genre of the *qasīda*, the elegiac *marsiya*.[25]

If there is a formal disjuncture visible in Adnan's There, it is between the consecutive demands of the lyric and the prose poem, that of compression and expansion. The individual prose poems in Adnan's text can be read as long lyrics, with the longest poem barely extending beyond a third page, even as it is broken apart by stanzas. The long lines of the poems spill over the page but the reader's desire for reaching their

[24] For a history of the *qasīda*, see DeYoung.

[25] For the permutations of the *marsiya*, see the chapter on Agha Shahid Ali.

conclusion is constantly interrupted by Adnan's deliberate pausing or extra clauses within the line. The requirement of compression and fragmentation of the lyric are met in the poems too, in that the shortest poem consists of two sentences or six lines, and There, as a whole, is also the briefest text in consideration in this dissertation. If Adnan can let contraction and expansiveness coincide formally in her book, it also begs the question of whether she really aspires towards limitlessness either.

In terms of an Asian American aesthetic, her placement still evokes nagging geopolitical issues: if Adnan is defined as a Middle Eastern poet, where exactly is the Middle East located? [26] Would Etel Adnan (born in pre-civil war Beirut) consider herself Asian when Lebanon is commonly categorized as part of the Middle East, Lebanese when most of the Arab Levant is part of a pan-Arab community, Syrian due to her father's birthplace or Mediterranean because of her maternal roots in the Turkish-Greek city of Izmir/Smyrna, or even American when she frequently dwells in France?[27] Perhaps Adnan should be located in her own words as an American with a pan-Arab identity; time and again, she maintains that even while living in America, the Arab world did not vanish from her consciousness. In an interview, Adnan has stated that her identity does not confine to being only Lebanese or Syrian, but Arab:

> when I write of course I have that question. For whom am I writing? For Americans I am an Arab. Arabs say why don't you write in Arabic? So, we have to solve that problem through translations, and also I think the notion of identity

[26] The designation of West Asia as Middle East fits into the imperialist fantasy, which located the Orient in relation to Europe.

[27] This is a question Ammiel Alcalay also evaluates in relation to the definition of Adnan's identity (311).

> should change. Identity is not a race. It is a culture and it is a commitment. I am committed to the Arab world and I am an Arab. (*Hiwar* 1)

This is indicative of living in a transnational world without boundaries and Adnan's claim for being beyond the nation also has to be situated in a regional Lebanese context. The tension between the transnational, the national, and the local, according to Evelyn Accad in Sexuality and War, also complicates the location of the Lebanese nation-state:

> If transnational rules the world, what impact can the national have? Is it not precisely transnationalism that brought the confrontation to its peak in Lebanon, feeding inside animosities of the various clans from the outside? […] In its political organization, Lebanon was not a real nation-state. There was a tribal layer between the state and the families. A culture going beyond ethnic borders grew. Even though the Lebanese state was not a nation-state as such, pluralism – acceptance of others' differences – developed. (17)

As Accad argues, transnationalism can be conducted on behalf of nationalism, or even imperialism. To mend the ruptures of conflict and remake the state, Accad argues that the concept of *Lebanism*, or Lebanese nationalism, needs to be revived, which "means electing to belong to a culture conceived as pluralistic, as accepting others' differences. The concept of *nation* thereby changes and becomes the popular claim for a political identity from which the state is born" (25). On the other hand is the phenomenon of pan-Arab nationalism, which again blurs the hyphen between nation and state, but creates possibilities for people to create relationships for sociability, economic advantage,

and political networking. According to Suad Joseph, the Arab nation, as part of the pan-Arabist movement, crossed state boundaries for decades and mobilized people:

> in practice, the nation was a moving set of identities crystallized periodically for specific purposes, then flowing again through the matrices of both situational and long-term relationalities. The fluidity of national identification allowed women, as well as men, to negotiate alliances, shift loyalties, and procure advantages as they needed. (176-177)

Next to this idealized version of cross-border movement which overlooks how the boundaries of the state chafe against the existence of a nation, Saree Makdisi collapses the categories of nations in the Arab Middle East to analyze the modern Arab "literature of crisis" that enables "the critical understanding or interrogation of the contemporary" by producing rupture and discontinuity (98).[28] There is, Makdisi argues, a powerful utopian impulse in Arab modernism, that of Arab unity: "This impulse develops out of a rejection of the boundaries imposed by, and on, the particular Arab states. […I]t specifically suggests a form of Arab unity that defies and transfigures inherited European concepts, including that of nationalism" (109). This is "a nonnationalism form of pan-Arabism," which contests the teleological narrative of nationalist modernization of the *Nahda* (an earlier movement towards European modernization) and the narratives of the pan-Islamicist or 'traditionalist' movements (109). This secular utopian impulse relies on

[28] According to Makdisi, what allows him to identify such literature as *Arab* is an implicit rejection of the tenuous borders between the Arab nations as originating from the European colonial powers that created putatively independent Arab states and "of the teleological formulation of modernity as a perpetually deferred future condition" (104). This Arab modernism differs from Eurocentric modernization and Islamic traditionalism in the "insistence on the historical present and on the need to confront problems in and for the present, rather than by the endless invocation of impossible and temporal alternatives ("posts" or "pasts"). Modernity itself is challenged, but also redefined as an undesirable present condition rather than as an ambiguous future one: *this*, in other words, *this* is modernity – we're already there, and this is it" (104-105).

language and "linguistically produces what are *simultaneously* and fluidly local and pan-Arab identities" which "enables to a very great extent the *linguistic* production in narrative of *multiple* and *simultaneous* identities produced in, and figured through, language itself" (109-110). If pan-Arab unity is based on the linguistic community accorded through the common use of Arabic, it also highlights the aspect of specific compound identities made possible in a space not based on national or political boundaries. This Arab imaginary is "the imagination – at moments, the utopian imagination – of a number of new forms of pan-Arabism and of pan-Arab identities that are based on, rather than defined against, the complex dynamics of the contemporary Arab world" (110). It must also be noted that even at the high point of pan-Arab nationalism, "defining Arabness was an elusive endeavor, complicated by regionalisms, petty nationalisms, and religious affiliations" (Hassan 4).

The transnational inception of Adnan's poetry in There also places her in a contemporary sphere of cosmopolitan community. Bruce Robbins articulates cosmopolitanisms as plural and particular, located and embodied (Cosmopolitics 2), and cosmopolitics as offering a domain of contested politics, an "effort to describe, from within multiculturalism, a name for genuine striving toward common norms and mutual translatability that is also part of multiculturalism" (Cosmopolitics 12-13). From an Arab perspective, Sami Zubaida defines cosmopolitanism as not simply the product of multicultural coexistence, but "the development of ways of living and thinking, styles of life which are deracinated from communities and cultures of origin, from conventional living, from family and home-centeredness, into a culturally promiscuous life, drawing on diverse ideas, traditions and innovations" (15-16). Similarly, Stéphane Yerasimos

analyzes cosmopolitanism as a process of alienation: in the first step, an ethnic community must live in isolation, alienating itself from its surroundings. In the second step, an individual alienates himself from communal bonds of his own group, meets like-minded people, and eclecticism and resistance to authenticity becomes the true basis of cosmopolitanism. The third form of alienation is more voluntary and solitary than the others, based on the cosmopolitan's attempt to leave the original society: "becoming everywhere an outsider in order to regard the whole world in the same way [and] to derive an itinerary based on the limits of the possible, based on considered actions, agreed to or submitted to voluntarily" (38). Despite being an elitist movement with all its shortcomings, superficiality and arrogance, cosmopolitanism operates in a concept of community which is simply changing its scale: "there is just as much chance for it to retain its capacity for synthesis, likewise stimulated by the new ways of acquiring information. Freed from the mental restrictions of nationalism, it may become indispensable in providing the concepts so urgently required in an age of globalised consumption" (39). In terms of literature, this is similar to Edward Said's 'worldly texts' that are "always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society" – 'worldly' becomes a form of reading and thinking that travels widely and makes broad connections, but never loses the immediate correspondence to a localized politics (The World 35). While cosmopolitanism values writers from elsewhere, it values only "those whose sympathies finally belong here," according to Timothy Brennan (At Home 39). Unlike a fashionable cosmopolitanism that becomes a "convenient no-place" (At Home 306), Brennan vociferously argues that cosmopolitanism can be looked at as the possibilities inherent in an imaginary, in the sense of a global cultural outlook that respects autonomy and

contestatory values. With such a cosmopolitan outlook, there should be an attempt at preserving the sense of a system of competing nation-states as a desired objective (At Home 309). On the other hand, Arjun Appadurai argues that a cultural study of globalization and "new cosmopolitanisms" (Modernity 49) requires an understanding of how imagination functions as a "space of contestation" in the post-national world, creating alternative strategies for identity, agency, and solidarity (Modernity 4). Similarly, James Clifford's conception of discrepant cosmopolitanism, which is instrumental in "recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets – resources for a fraught coexistence" (Routes 277), is the most hopeful towards retaining certain aspects of the nation-state, and also the most helpful in understanding Adnan's post-identity venture in There:

> These cosmopolitical contact zones are traversed by new social movements and global corporations, tribal activists and cultural tourists, migrant worker remittances and e-mail. Nothing is guaranteed, except contamination, messy politics and more translation. ("Mixed Feelings" 269)

If the tension between stasis and mobility is an obvious and crucial aspect of our current debate, it is even more palpable in the transnational imaginary. On a philosophical level, the transience of time and the mutability of space allow the subject to assume agency, suggests Adnan in There: "A street is territory borrowed from the past into which we engulf ourselves in search of transfiguration" (8). Her own suspension between cultures allows Adnan to compress the past into the present in a steady metamorphosis of identities, which reflects in her choice of subject, i.e. the multiple

geographic locations the speaker of There recognizes within the text and the poet's refusal to ground herself in a sole locality. In an essay written in 1986, she had written that she had become "used to standing between situations, to being a bit marginal and still a native, to getting acquainted with notions of truth which were relative and changed like the hours of the days and the passing of seasons" ("Growing Up" 11). The challenges of a life lived outside the bounds of nation, signified in her exploration of the dialectical opposition between the self and the other in There, help Adnan question the idea of belonging to a single identity or place and thus to become participant of a broader community or fellowship. On the other hand, the impermanence of a borderless life carries with it the risk of uncertainty and the stigma of being a tourist on a cultural journey. In exile, the poet appreciates the irony of dwelling as permanent ownership and the complications of constant mobility; this awareness leads the poet to a space beyond the dogma of nationalism and other codified aspects of subjectivity as gender and race. However, the pain of losing Lebanon, i.e., home, forms an indelible mark on Adnan's work. This also does not mean that in her transcendence of identity, Adnan disregards significant gender positionings as all of her texts originate from the poet's perceptions as a woman. Some of her texts are based solely on the lives and experiences of women in different countries: whether the first long poem she wrote in Lebanon about a feminized sea The Book of the Sea, her best-selling novel Sitt Marie-Rose recounting the life and death of a Lebanese teacher, her novel on her stay in France Paris, When It's Naked, or her epistolary collection Letters to Fawwaz: Of Cities and Women.[29] In fact, at the risk of

[29] In reference to the quasi-female character of the speaker of There, Adnan states that it's not that there are essential differences between men and women, but that women have a different relation and response towards world events: "we see tragedy in its details and in its sufferings in terms of a series of practicalities

reading a poet's work through the autobiographical material available, can the idiom of the dubious gender positioning of There's speaker be related to Adnan's intimations of a lesbian female sexuality within the text? In terms of the gender question, here connections can be drawn between Adnan's conception of subjectivity and Gloria Anzaldua's ground-breaking discussion of "*mestiza* consciousness," a consciousness that arises from living within multiple cultures and that has provided new space for understandings of lesbian subjectivity and cultural politics.[30] Some of the texts where Adnan publicly acknowledges her lesbian identity is in her ode to the nebulous nature of love, "First Passion," in the collection Queer 13: Lesbian and Gay Writers Recall Seventh Grade, and in the publication of a piece of short fiction in Blithe House Quarterly: A Site for Gay Short Fiction.[31]

In There, Adnan's transcendence of identity in its markers of gender or nationality should not be read as mere displacement of the poet's consciousness; rather, for her, subjectivity is simply not tied to a single place or time. From Adnan's identification of the paradoxes of difference and uniformity, arises the recognition that Linda McDowell

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[…] So for a woman, destroying a home is like murder. […] Women would cry tragedy while men are expected to fight for the idea that leads to war and perhaps die for it" (Saba, screens 7-8).

In the poems of There, Adnan constantly personifies and reveres nature in the poem as female, "primal is she" (There 41, and also 20, 22, 51, 52). Adnan (like Theresa Cha in DICTEE as I show later) also creates a metaphoric gynospace. Adnan seems to take her conception of woman from the theological philosophy of the Sufi thinker Ibn 'Arabi, about whom she has written elsewhere: "Everything is exalted by the woman; she traverses the signs of the zodiac at their highest point. She is the morning that rises into the sky, the rose that arises from tears. Her throne is a high mountain, for she transcends the world. And from there, the sky of light is under her feet, her diadem, beyond the spheres. She establishes – on the human, as well as mystic level – harmony and union" (Of Cities 51).

[30] Mestiza consciousness comes from "being on both shores at once…A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war" (Anzaldua 80).

[31] In passing, Adnan also mentions her childhood love for a little girl in her essay "Growing Up to be a Woman Writer in Lebanon" (13). One of her pieces, "In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country," has been republished in The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction. Her eight "Love Poems," addressed to a woman, have also been set to music by the composer Gavin Bryars in the Adnan Songbook.

specifies of moving beyond the concept of difference, "all identities are a fluid amalgam of memories of places and origins, constructed by and through fragments and nuances, journeys and rests, of movements between" (215). The speaker's traveling beyond national and generic frontiers in There requires that the reader critically assess the concept of monocultural and phallocentric positioning that feminist theorists also challenge: "Location need not be in relation to a center or a periphery, but may also be multifocal, with a kind of coalescence of movement…To overcome the tyranny of space, then, and the power of geographical exclusion, we need to apply the same antiessentialist interrogation of space…which takes us several steps toward the threshold of change" (Kobayashi 8). On a similar note, James Clifford describes location as "an itinerary rather than a bounded site – a series of encounters and translations" (Routes 11) and proposes the 'translocal,' i.e., neither global nor universal culture: "In diasporic experience, the co-presence of 'here' and 'there' is articulated with an antiteleological (sometimes messianic) temporality. Linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning" (Routes 264). In what is characteristic of Adnan's blurring of place as signifier in There, he says, "The empowering paradox is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there.* But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation" (Routes 269). Etel Adnan's is a rooted errantry with errantry as a poetics of relations, "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (Glissant 34). As my discussion of Adnan's poetics indicates, instead of dwelling in a single nation or

language, one of the possibilities in transnationality is exploring the different routes taken by poets as they tackle with the cartographies of literary forms and cultural translations.

Near the middle of There, Adnan invites the reader to contemplate the relationship between language, creation, and the subjectivity of the poet: "Is there a language for lovers which doesn't need the lovers? Should we exchange genealogies over a poet's sealed body?" (There 37). In the same way that Adnan rejects the tyranny of space and exclusion, she embraces the pleasures of embodiment and the possibility of love, even in a time of violence. In fact, the love the speaker frequently projects towards her partner is both disembodied and spiritual: "O devastated creation! Love of love, eyes filled with dust, the burned body's particles dispersed, end of end and end's ending brought about the by sun's decisions, o the resurrection of desire after the body's destruction! If you aren't, how can the soul not die?" (There 66). This love is also grounded in bodily desire, with a strong feminine resonance ("You filled my space for so long, snaked yourself in my waters, and I'm left with signs, and traces of you, exclusively" There 51). Note the intimate, highly erotic tone of these verses, reflecting the desire of the speaker for her lover. For a poet caught in the vicissitudes of migration, love becomes the absolute, the "homecoming" and end of separation between the self and its other, sexuality being implicitly refracted through love:

> We have experienced ecstasy in the dark (the one with the other), mostly in the night, in the here and now of cities of heat and sweat. We also did die many times, didn't we, of love and separation, so that when the end will come it will be a

> comfortable, though perverse, homecoming. We did reach the absolute, didn't we, for a handful of hours, somewhere in between, in between 'you' and 'I'. (There 67-68)

Adnan seems to conflate desire, especially bodily ecstasy, with mortality. This curious culmination of desire and death is one Adnan picks up from the Sufi teachings of the Andalusian theologian Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240). In his quest for *haqq* / ultimate truth, Ibn 'Arabi proclaimed that "My heart can take on / any form" (Sells 72) and promulgated the Unity of Being, the indivisible reality that simultaneously transcends and is manifested in the images of the world. After attending a lecture in Murcia on Ibn 'Arabi, Adnan had written

> The formidable questions he raised,with his clairvoyantly insane quest of the divine, the disquietutde that must have underlined his apparent certainties, seem close to our sensibilities and torments. Are we going to exist? Will our civilization survive? (Of Cities 52)

In his controversial treatise on love, *Turjuman al-Ashwaq* / The Translator of Desires, Ibn 'Arabi scandalously conflated the divine beloved with the feminine ideal: "Pasture between breastbone / and innards. / Marvel, / a garden among the flames!" (Sells 72). While conflating the divine and the profane, Ibn 'Arabi also proposed *fanā*, annihilation of the self in the quest for the beloved, as the anticipated culmination of love. This Sufi comprehension of love – one that leads towards annihilation of the self and fuses the lover with her other, the beloved, in an unbound space and time – is reflected strongly in Adnan's poetics. In Adnan, this erotic mysticism is captured in lines like

these: "why was your face so haggard during the spasms which were achieving a lingering oneness?" (There 63).

If there seems to be a lack of raw physicality in Adnan's depiction of sexuality, this reticence – the sealing off of the poet's body – can be read under the influence of the phenomenological philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). A spatial idea of our relationship to objects and the world, phenomenology emphasizes an examination of coming into being, how a consciousness dwells in the social and physical world. Adnan's conception of existence as being embedded in a physical, material world is taken from Heidegger's non-dualistic *Dasein* – Being-there, a being that understands its own being. Heidegger calls Dasein "an entity which in each case I myself am" (78) and being-in-the-world the "essential state" of the Being of Dasein (80).[32] From Heidegger, Adnan also takes the finitude of existence and the temporality of love. The problem with Heidegger's Dasein is that something can becomes meaningful to us only by withdrawing from us, becoming invisible into the background (Alweiss 165), and Adnan circumvents this obstacle by constantly locating embodied subjects in a real world of repercussions and pain. Adnan's foregrounds the speaker's embodied consciousness in a materiality in which she is equally culpable: "my curtains are of the best silk despite the poverty which radiates through the night and against which you invented rifles, you know what is well known, that we gather the poor behind the garbage then throw them with dustbins beyond the town's borders" (There 22).

[32] There is significant critique that Heidegger ignores the embodiment and materiality of the Dasein because of the threat the acknowledgement of our embodiment would present to Dasein's primordial freedom (Alweiss 87). One of the rare places where Heidegger addresses Dasein as a sexual being in one of his lectures Introduction to Philosophy: "However, this sexual relation is only possible because Dasein is already determined in its metaphysical neutrality through the with-one-other. If each Dasein, which is factically in each case male or female, were not essentially with-one-other, then the sexual relation as something human would be absolutely impossible" (qtd. in Schalow 40).

With the Heideggarean sense of language as the house of Being (Poetry 129), we can place Adnan's understanding of the liaison between language and the poet as a sexual being: "I wanted to be the room itself so you could know where to find me; you wanted to be a horse, but nothing was built for Arabia's poets" (There 62). Another option is provided by queer phenomenology, which might offer "an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking the place of the object in sexual desire; by attending to how the bodily direction 'towards' such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies" (Ahmed 23). The act of looking 'behind' normative orientations allows a queer politics to "look back to the conditions of arrival" (Ahmed 178) and find "other ways of gathering in space and time" (Ahmed 179). Adnan figures this by attenuating the dwelling of a lesbian subject and her lover; homoerotic desire becomes palpable in the fear of the loss of love:

> There, in front of me, without her, my amputated soul waits
> … are you me, a self exploded and scattered, always
> kept aside, out of it, out of your sight, your purpose
> crossing mine; you're maybe the hidden seed of the
> earth, and me, the moon
> … Oh how it hurts to witness the passage of time in terms of
> dead bodies and loves lost, and this distance, between us,
> unpassable, each knowing who is going to die first (There 34-35)

Desire (whether erotic, carnal, or spiritual) in the lyric here breaks the monotony of linear narrative and provides momentum and forward movement to an impossible culmination in the future.

Adnan's poems create a transnational imaginary by challenging the parameters defining the nation-state: since "folded maps push countries aside" (There 41), she asks, "do I have to have a nationality in order to be human" (There 59), a nation requiring the recognition of boundaries and demarcations from the other. The question that is repeated in the text is "Are we going to be?" When all hope seems to be lost, the speaker indicates that human existence hinges on the redeeming power of love and peace; even though this text is similar in theme and essay form to one of Adnan's previous works Journey to Mount Tamalpais (1986), in There the devastating sense of longing is quenched by love and the possibility of hope.[33] What I find most refreshing and liberating in Adnan's poetry is the self-assured voice, which, in contrast to most diasporic poetry, challenges identity, not from an ethnic, but from a universal and collective point of view. Unlike most diasporic poetry, There also renounces a fiercely lyrical voice confined in pure subjectivity. Adnan's poetics is in contrast to a younger Arab American poet, Naomi Shihab Nye, a more successful and conventional poet, one of whose latest collections Mint Snowball consists of 'paragraphs' of prose poems containing vignettes and character sketches of people the poet meets in the American landscape.

Adnan's transnational poetics in There allows her to imagine a diverse community of readers that extends beyond the boundaries of nation, gender, and language, creating the possibilities of a new world. The pan-Arab appeal of There also signifies a transnational foundation. This is a work that shows Adnan to be very receptive to a transnational world uninterrupted by real or virtual borders. In an essay "The Nomadization of Culture and the Electronic Page," she states on a more sanguine note

[33] Another earlier work There is similar to in form is Adnan's long poem "In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country" about life and death in Beirut; the poem, however, has different titles for each of its sections and ends on a strong note of mourning.

that we live in a nomadic society where things move instantly with no visible traces and a mesh encompasses the whole planet. In contrast to the critics of globalization, she nurtures the potential present in *mondialisation*, a world without borders, especially those of the nation-states:

> the world is breaking down (in a most fluid way), into 'groups,' 'cultural organizations,' 'communities,' which are not linked by cultural space but by a common 'network.' […A]ll the groups, some of them overlapping…to which we increasingly belong, become tribes of a new kind which gather periodically and disperse, each member joining other tribes, and this ad infinitum. (screens 3-4)

Even with the ever-hopeful note in the liberating gesture of breaking down the walls of self, gender, genre, or nation, what saves Adnan's work from a solipsistic drive for cloying affirmation is the acute knowledge of complicity and the risk of failure: "Regardless of the mobility of my surroundings, I notice that we're prisoners of love and hatred" (There 30). If the quest for identity is deemed a journey in There, Adnan reminds the reader of how this identity is rooted in a specific locale: "To go, be going, straight ahead, the world being round, to be coming back, to where, to what, to be a bouncing ball, where, on what, to be defeated by gravity" (There 2). No sooner does the speaker experience the tranquility of living in the company of her lover (in the early morning of the Bay, "Things seem possible, which have something to do with the thrust of living"), she immediately chides the lover, "You may claim the privilege to such an experience. How to assess your mind's clarity, its innocence?" (There 8). Later, Adnan merges innocence and ignorance: "You speak of poetry, as they do in Arabia – sometimes to undercover agents. If words are not in the streets they're obsolete, you said it to me and I

listened, while innocence was available" (There 14). Adnan also calls attention to the role language plays in a time of violence: "on the sacred roads of lost powers a conversation is always a confrontation. Words are particles of air disseminated by the wind. So much silence within one's arteries: we can't move for this eternal battle. We haven't given it name" (There 45). On the other hand, even though "it tortures the body out of its limits," she states "Love is subversion" (There 17), the one possibility that salvages the self and its other.

Adnan's translation of place means a reconfiguration of the topography of the real as shaped by human constructions of nation-states and the forces of empire. The harsh reality of global geopolitics and a particular sense of placement of the subject in a collective human network pervade her work, and yet her poetry is grounded in the local specificities of everyday life. For her, history is not a matter of official record-keeping, but the imaginative ways in which people hold on to memories. In a mode that is equally somber and commemorative, Adnan rhetorically suggests what happens when provocative questions are asked about the state of the world, connecting both the ancient history of the erasure of the Sumerian civilization to the first war on Iraq, which had occurred in 1991: "Could rivers be named after their disappearance? Questions arise in my blood since Sumer's destruction. For how long? Cities dead or alive weigh down the spine. Where is the fragrance of the myrtle tree, has it found a place?" (There 45). With the disappearance of the rivers comes the very palpable loss of organic life, the vanished fragrance of the myrtle trees that grow along the riverbanks. By questioning whether the fragrance of the myrtles has found a place, Adnan calls our attention to the abundance of the myrtle tree in the Middle East and also its significance in Hebrew traditions. If our

imagination liberates us to connect precise personal memories to larger indefinable issues of history, it also transforms, in its simplest attempts to 'translate,' reality. If not attentive to local details, in its refusal to acknowledge the dispossessed, imagination often has the power to wreak havoc too, as these terse lyrics indicate: "It rained blood. Holy cities caved in. Nobody watched the fires. Our imagination survived the onslaught; why it inflicted upon itself such terror we can't comprehend" (There 15).

While she travels even within a single section, for instance, from the crumbling empire of Russia, to the missing children in the US, to the issue of political prisoners, to her childhood in Lebanon, to napalm-torched Vietnam, to poetry in Arabia (There 13-14), Adnan also raises the question of what happens to a subject not bound to any location: "If we were not tied to a place what of us? […] Is place an illusion?" (There 47). Adnan renders place itself as liminal as she questions the invisible/real world in which the speaker has breakfast, the "no-place" preceding birth and the "very likely as illusory" place where death takes us (There 47). In this uneasy transition, there is little identifiable memory of Adnan's own, few instances where the speaker refers to her family, and rare indication of nostalgia (There 36). Nevertheless, the subjective 'I' is present in every poem of There to confront the reader, even though the voice of the text is not of the poet as first-person singular personified and the speaker conveys a kind of impatience in creating an embodied lyrical ego: "When water and the sky meet space starts rolling back, coming to terms with its origin, waiting to be reduced to duration, and later, following in that direction, to flesh, blood, skin and nails…where in my body is there any room for all this?" (There 26). Adnan vacillates in taking on personae, and the refusal of the poet to give in to authorial domination creates the possibility for the subject to cross

cultural and spatial boundaries. Scant autobiography is presented to the reader in spurts of memories hidden in stanzas of the poem and the speaker acknowledges a strong desire for living in the present, which is still shadowed with loss:

> Not too far from my house I used to play with the
> waves – where are they now? I was a child, then, the place is
> far away. They speak to me of other worlds, I care for this
> one, consisting of the chair I'm sitting on and the pain that
> tightens my heart, and the light falling right now outside the
> window. (There 54)

Perhaps this is because memory is transient ("Is memory divine presence made out of flesh, a mind-creation which lasts a few years" There 67), demands personal sacrifice ("Remembrance needs primeval forgiveness" There 66), or is simply immaterial ("I don't need to travel if I wanted to visit the disappeared streets of my hometown" There 8). This also ties in to the issue of collective memory that stubbornly endures and the amnesia that cannot be contained by official decrees or physical memorials to deter forgetfulness. For the poet, personal longing and cultural loss both originate from national mourning: "Do you, secretly, worship your father's framed picture or do I have to recall my mother's olive lamp, her icons over her bed, before the wars and the defeats which erased the sacred images, the sunlight which dried out – on the family papers – all the ink" (There 29). In the absence of a sense of history, Adnan implies that it doesn't take long for dire conflict to arise and destruction to happen, which is where the book seems to culminate, "Questions are getting old but terrible the days when there won't be any" (There 55).

Literature is "more than a witness to the passage of time and its shadows. It is a documentation of the experience of being human in times of adversity and resistance" (Agosin xix). Witnessing violence, or living with the threat of an apocalypse, fractures the ordinary conceptions of fellowship and relating to others, particularly of love and desire. A mood of catastrophe is present throughout the poem There, whether human evil is personified in the Beast of the Apocalypse (11), condensed in an ominous moment of the present (12), fear of the Day of Judgment (45), expectation of the Parousia or Second Visitation of Christ (55), "an ongoing Apocalypse within the simultaneity of collective being" (59), or in the all-pervading dark kingdom of the dead (65). In There, with the absence of everything else in the universe is the impossible possibility of love: "if there's not a somewhere what then, with no faith, no hope, there's maybe love, somewhere?" (There 5). Beyond an imagining of the apocalypse, Adnan conducts in There an ontological search for meaning in life and death which is provided again and again by love; this understanding of love is multifold and complex, however, because it is intricately connected with mortality and self-willed destruction – desire coupled with a death-wish (war "intensifies desire, the ultimate one, the one meant to annihilate what is and make happen what was not to be, turn the metaphysical enterprise of love into hate" There 58). In fact, even love seems to lose its potency after Poem # 20, "Here." Another way of reading the dialectic of subjectivity, of the relationship between the self and the other, is to scan the second half of the book as a parallel documentation of the lingering loss of love (especially in Poems # 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, and 39) but even then Adnan provides a "perverse" sort of saving grace ("We did reach the absolute, didn't we, for a handful of hours, somewhere in between, in between 'you' and 'I'" There 68). In

Adnan's rendition, witnessing unites both witness and victim, and war is closely linked with desire: the speaker watches, on American television, a Vietnamese peasant "on whose skin napalm on fire was closer than his wife" and muses that "war, which liberates and kills those it liberated, joined us forever" (There 69). This witnessing, that turns into writing, also enfolds Etel Adnan into a community of writers containing writers like Hoda Barakat who entrust writing with the same value:

> We write, I write in wars and civil wars because I have no power, no strength, no weapons and no soldiers…I write for myself and against myself, against my tribe and my memory, against my grandfather and my father so that I can bury them and remember them well. I write for the void, for forgetfulness, because I have chosen the proof– memory. I write because I am free, because I can never be free. Sometimes I write against what eyes witness.
>
> And I write against my hand. (46-47)

Against all despair and anguish, Adnan seems to generate an infinite array of hope in There: "we may go the way dinosaurs did, but we're here, aren't we, and God has preceded us into divine disappearance […] the stones are the beginning" (There 6). In her quasi-idealistic stance, she states, "anger dies while fires survive, and before my family tree produces the olives you'll eat, there, in the heat the anger and the dust, stones will turn into leaves" (There 14). The impression of hope, however, is tempered with the paradox of existence ("Absurdly absurd this absurdity" There 40), as one of her critics suggests of There: "We did enter paradise, didn't we? We did reverse the banishment,

haven't we. Such distances are short" (There 64).[34] Adnan's endeavor towards envisioning an end to conflict in the text is akin to the creative imaginary:

> in expressing his or her own individual vision, an author also suggests links to the collective 'imaginary.' […] A 'figment' of the imaginary is a response to a question that the society has asked itself, whether overtly or not. In all its modalities, the imaginary is an exploration of what is possible). (Accad 5)

Then again, the last poem of There bears another rendering of the imaginary: the section, a final interrogation of human history through elemental imagery, starts with a primordial, almost-Biblical marking of prehistoric origin: "From the primeval waters we arose – you and I, from the beginning we went on a search and when the gardens grew we looked together for a shade, didn't we?" (There 70).[35] Next, the paradox of existence is depicted as linked to the desire to construct boundaries ("From the desire to live we arose and built nations, didn't we?" There 70). The poem and There conclude with a last question, "then the trees stared at their own bareness and we didn't come to their aid, did we?" (There 70), which seemingly negates the confirmatory tone of the first two questions asked earlier but indicates a space beyond time and meaning. As with the rest of the book, the poet leaves us with no easy answers and rhetorically places the reader within the margins of the book. This final section suggests that, not out of the possibility of what may already exist and can be created, but, out of elemental despair of existence, an impossible hope can be fashioned – the impossible imaginary. Mary Layoun delineates this facet of the imaginary, a space provided by cultural and literary texts for

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[34] "Adnan plays with, and ironizes, different possibilities of collective being and shared identity" (Booth 857).

[35] This apocalyptic mood is present throughout the text, in brief or extended passages (There 10, 48, for instance), which leads up to the final poem of the book.

other propositions, communities, and gendered citizenships that are precisely impossible to articulate in the contemporary political or social sphere:

> It is those impossible fictions, in their very fictiveness and impossibility, that can suggest to us a story we might not have heard before, a dream we might not have dreamed. […] It is precisely in this impossible imaginary, or, if you like, in this splendidly figural aspect, that a literary or cultural text can articulate otherwise nationalism and gender, the state and the citizen, sexuality and honor. (94-95)

Simply asking the question "Could we talk across a border" (There 29) can generate the opportunity for "us the children of History" (There 3) to initiate the conversational mode despite our subjective and political misgivings. The dialectic creates hope from the very beginning of the book, "There is a *where*, because we are, stubbornly, and have been, and who are we, if not you and me?" (There 1). Beyond the basic impetus of the imaginary that ultimately unites the self and its other, the political utopian impulse of the imaginary in There is such that it gives sustenance to the possibilities inherent in rethinking the world and imagining seemingly impossible situations of community and solidarity beyond nation, gender, or language. Hence, I suggest that Adnan succeeds in creating a new transnational poetic imaginary in There.

The problem of There, from the perspective of canonical, gendered, and genre location, would be its very indefinability – the way Adnan refuses to expostulate the discourse of a singular fixed subject. A "self exploded and scattered" (There 34) might be reconstructed in the domain of memory but the speaker of There says, "I threw my memories outside the window and they came back, alien, beggars and witches, leaving me standing like a sword" (There 3-4). Adnan also rejects a narrative based on nationalist

desire, and suggests that even the actuality of existence is tied in with the ever-present possibility of annihilation of the self and its other (There 3). Adnan reworks identity as consciously constructed, fluid and multiple and, in her networking and communication with Arab and American artists and readers, conceives the possibility of creating further imagined communities. Despite its difficult nature, in a way, There seems to also be one of her most accessible works: because of the amorphous quality of Adnan's prose poems, any of the sections may be read out of sequence, but the poems after the middle fall into an ordered sequence leading up to the devastating conclusion of the last poem.

In interviews, Adnan has affirmed, "I do not consider myself a desperate exile like other people. Some in Lebanon had to leave – I was among those" (Saba, screen 4). She goes on to say that at first, being in America was not exile for her rather an aspect of liberation as a woman, but she felt in exile after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War; [36] in any case, she says, "There are exiles in one's own country" (Saba, screen 4). At present, in reference to the combination of her mixed heritage (Arab-Greek, Muslim-Christian), living in Lebanon and California, and on its relationship with her duality as writer and painter, she states: "I feel this duality in me, which is constantly in synthesis…Personally I never made it a problem, it is usually the others who make it a problem…I say I am both" (Saba, screen 6). In what is applicable to Adnan's There, Edward Said, in referring to the ordeal of writing in a constant state of exile in "Reflections on Exile," enumerates the contrapuntal awareness of the juxtaposition of simultaneous dimensions as one of the positive attributes of the exilic experience, which creates "a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be" (Reflections

[36] "My American friends were not involved in what I felt. It was for them a remote problem. I was emotionally alone. Therefore I felt in exile" (Saba, screen 5).

186). In Adnan, we have a poet who lyrically evokes the absence of home along with the idea of dwelling in more than one geographical place simultaneously – this is what gives her work essential hope and saves it from melancholy and self-pity. For her, the state of exile has existed for so long and goes so deep that it has become part of her nature:

> When the sun is strong and the sea is blue I can't close my windows and go in and 'study' anything. I am a person of the perpetual present. So I stayed 'outside'; Arabic remained a forbidden paradise. I am both a stranger and a native to the same land, to the same mother tongue. This century told us too many times to stay alone, to cut all ties, never to look back, to go and conquer the moon: and this is what I did. This is what I do. ("To Write," screen 8)

Adnan's play with image and word, a philosophical pre-occupation with the local realities of self and history, her innovative perspective on global political situations, her interrogation of the ethics of war, and a refusal to be pigeonholed in pre-marked categories of gender or nationality make her poetry a constructive addition to American and Arab poetry. In her poem There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and the Other, place, space, and time are re-imagined as inherently connected, permeable, and diffused. The dialogic mode that she promotes with the reader establishes new sites for the chance of dialogue to occur on issues and events that some writers find too sensitive to handle. Translation as a project, the carrying of the self and its other between widely separated spaces of cultures and languages, is one that the poet Etel Adnan suggests exists within the subject – "A location. A site. Breathing needs miles of territory" (There 44).

Chapter 2
Memory has a Homeland: Tropes of Exility in Agha Shahid Ali's The Country Without a Post Office

Poets in exile are a peculiar species: they enact cultural histories and personal memories in their lyrics, forever implicated in the moral discourse of the politics of remembering and forgetting. A triple exile by his own admission, the Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2000) writes verse redolent of his memories of Kashmir.[37] In the absence of his access to his homeland, Ali reconstructs Kashmir in exile, becoming a chronicler from afar and attempting to register a fleeting history and memory before it is erased. In The Country Without a Post Office (1997), Ali struggles to recover memories of his native city, Srinagar, by trying to authenticate concrete objects and texts. In this volume more so than others, he has been trying to act as witness to the culture and literature that he fears will be obliterated in the war-torn land of Kashmir. In my analysis of this work, I suggest that Ali ends up fulfilling the attributes of his own name, as the Belovéd witness of Kashmir: "They ask me to tell them what *Shahid* means – / Listen: It means 'The Belovéd' in Persian, 'witness' in Arabic" (The Country 74).

Agha Shahid Ali creates a transnational poetics in exile, one that is rooted in tropes and archetypes from multiple poetic traditions and languages and is seemingly driven by a pure nation-building impulse. Yet his poetry also captures universal themes of sorrow and anguish in his diffusion of aesthetic, cultural, linguistic, and national lines of control. Edward Said has said that "To see a poet in exile – as opposed to reading the poetry of exile – is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity" (Reflections 174). For an exilic poet like Ali, the tone of the personal memories

[37] Ali's multiple dislocation implies his self-referential exile from Kashmir, India, and the language of Urdu.

may still be nostalgic, nostalgia being a mournful yet peaceful remembrance of past events, but the violent trauma of the present keeps intruding into his reconstruction of the past. He has the option of conveniently deleting unwanted items from his memory but the need to give voice to the forgotten, the repressed, asserts itself continuously. I also analyze what it means for a poet to define himself as an exile in a world of constantly changing boundaries. I argue that Ali's self-fashioning as a poet is based on his reverence for canonical writers from both the English and Urdu language traditions. The importance of a community of poets in Ali's poetics may also reflect a potential closure provided by his homoerotic affiliation with particular American poetic antecedents.

Agha Shahid Ali, as compared to the other two transnational American poets Etel Adnan and Theresa Cha, writes verse that is the most traditional of the lot. He fits among this trio of poets by way of his introduction of, and quasi-experimentation, with forms and linguistic patterns imported from non-English sources into the American poetry tradition. His reformulation of the traditional poetic form of the Urdu *ghazal* (a poem of couplets bound formally, but not thematically, by distinct rhymes and refrains) based upon the observance of specific cultural and literary details thus defies the purists who would prefer to see a sincere conformity to tradition. Ali's poetry, the most formally convoluted yet also the most user-friendly (perhaps for the very melody and formalism of his verse) among the three chosen poets, risks being easily commodified and his poems are also the most anthologized.[38] This calls into question the tension between making a

[38] Besides being represented by the publishing powerhouse of Norton, Ali's work has been included in both mainstream and alternative American anthologies, such as Drive, They Said: Poems About Americans and Their Cars (1994), The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English (1996), Contours of the Heart: Asian American Poetry (1996), Night Out: Poems About Hotels, Motels, Restaurants and Bars (1997), The New Bread Loaf Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry (1999), The Best of the Nation: Selections from the Independent Magazine of Politics and Culture (2000), The Penguin Book of the Sonnet: 500 Years of a Classic Tradition in English (2001), From Totems to Hi p Hop: A Multicultural

poem accessible or deliberately untranslatable for a popular or esoteric audience. On the other hand, Ali's poetry is a good example of how the poet's political views interrupt the reading of the poem. This interruption makes the poem more intense as it serves to break up the reader's captivation by the classic rhyme structures, which might otherwise lull the reader into believing that the Asian American poet's mastery over formal structures matters more than what he has to say. The disruption of lyrical beauty by the demands of the real is also Ali's way of containing trauma in the structure of poetry. Ali's synthesis of ornate form and politically charged content underscores the perception that a formally complex poem can also be radically employed to question sociopolitical restrictions as, for instance, American poet Marilyn Hacker challenges conventions of gender and subjectivity in her classically composed Petrarchan sonnets. Ali's work as a translator of the Urdu poetry of the revolutionary Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, also creates a transnational and translational space for poetry from non-Anglophone cultures in America.

For a poet who so consciously situates himself in a state of permanent exile, it is relevant to question what norms of citizenship apply to him and which of these trappings he welcomes. Sometimes these transnational American poets make the choice to defer American citizenship, as Etel Adnan became a US citizen only after the Lebanese Civil War started, or to maintain the citizenships of many countries, as a Kashmiri American in Ali's case, the dual citizen of the American nation-state and the as-yet nonexistent, hence imaginary, country of Kashmir. Citizenship, or the space a subject occupies in the

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Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas, 1900-2002 (2003), Away: The Indian Writer As An Expatriate (2004). Also see, for instance, Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian American Poetry, Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present. A critical study guide to his poetry in The Country is also available by Gale's Poetry for Students.

national parameters, is a theme that runs through Ali's poetry as even a perusal of his book titles reveals: "A Walk Through the Yellow Pages," "A Nostalgist's map of America," "The Country without A Post Office," and "Rooms Are Never Finished." Ali seems to more comfortably partake in a "nomadic conditional citizenship," cultural citizenship as performed in transnational networks of migrancy (M. Joseph 2),[39] poetry becoming an act of claiming this multiple residency in a community beyond national borders. On the jacket of his collection, A Nostalgist's Map of America, Carolyn Forché puts Ali's placement into question when she calls him "not an American poet." As an Asian American poet who wasn't born in Kashmir but consciously positions himself as a Kashmiri, Ali can also be placed in the context of subcontinental writers in America. Ketu H. Katrak charts the categorization of 'South Asian American' as the need for such ethnic demarcations in a peculiar North American multiculturalism (122). In her analysis, Katruk argues that writers occupy a particular economic class and often privileged spaces within academia, which influences their particular "spill of memory" and how they recreate their past, and notions of home.[40] The category of South Asian American literature comes about in the wake of the identity movements, spawned by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, of other Asian American writers, but South Asian American literature really gained eminence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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[39] This transnational citizenship has been handily critiqued too: Aihwa Ong coins ''flexible citizenship'' to refer to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions (6). In her analysis of Asian-Pacific migration of the elite, Ong believes that far from being constructed only out of identity politics or agency, these cultural logics and interrelated economic rationalities are shaped by the nation-state, the market, and the family.

[40] "Often transferring into the same middle- and upper-class in the U.S., these South Asians can become insiders in terms of class status, though they remain outsiders in terms of ethnicity. […] Here, issues of the marketplace and publishing are important – how the market and publishers commodify a desire that is both racialized and gendered, and reinforce games of inclusion and exclusion" (Katrak 123).

If subjectivity itself is assumed to contain performative features (Butler 278), performance becomes a handy tool for examining the relationship of the transnational American poet to multiple cultures, languages, and poetry traditions for it is much more inclusive than the onus of representation. In the performative version, the poet wears different personae to identify the existential and material conditions that occur in the everyday world. There is, however, a slippery slope between performative personae and 'masks' worn to fit in. Ali's choice of the persona of a poet in exile, who nevertheless carries allegiance to an imagined nation and country and takes his job seriously of poet as witness, hence becomes the core of my analysis of his poetics. Although "housed in houselessness" (Ramazani 13), Ali's poetry also illustrates the pull of exilic nationalism in his articulation of the cause of Kashmiri sovereignty. I also discuss the confluence of the concepts of "*mulk*" – Urdu for homeland and country – and "*watan*" – Urdu for nation – in the ideology of Kashmiri history and regional nationalism.

Exile, as banishment from a site or culture, comes under scrutiny when it is of the self-proclaimed variety and not truly corporeal in nature. A strict partition also needs to be maintained between a poet's equivocal attempts at nation-building and a rabid nationalism that refuses to grant distinctions. Unlike the political exile of poets like the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish who also writes nationalist poetry, Ali was able to visit the Indian vale of Kashmir almost every summer, the last time to bury his mother. His exile was from the peaceful land of his memories, now increasingly seen as occupied by aggressors, exile becoming a constant state of mind and also final with his death and burial in America. As critics have noted, Ali takes Homi Bhabha's invocation of the Freudian *unheimliche*, unhomeliness that becomes the condition of extra-territorial and

cross-cultural initiations (Location 9), as a major element in his poetics.[41] The permanent state of being unhomed becomes the catalyst of the structure of exility in Ali's poetry. These tropes become stronger with the development of his poetry up to his posthumously published volume (where he assumes the figure of the exiled prophet – "Call me Ishmael tonight"), along with his employment of progressively more difficult forms of poetry. Ali's poetics suggests that the only way the tropology of exile can be encapsulated is in the more challenging forms of poetry – the very house of poetry itself.

There is a somewhat circular movement in the evolution of Ali's poetics. His earlier collections, Bone Sculpture (1972) and In Memory of Begum Akhtar and Other Poems (1979) published in India, belong to the phase of expressing the aesthetic emergence of the poet. The volumes published in America, The Half-Inch Himalayas (1987) and A Walk Through the Yellow Pages (1987), are a reflection of the experience of immigration and an awakening to the dilemmas of displacement. In the collections of his middle stage, there is a ripening of the subjectivity of exile in A Nostalgist's Map of America (1991), to the broadening of his scope from a nationalist view to a universal one in The Country Without a Post Office. Ali's final works demonstrate a return to the aesthetic project of containing mortality in complex forms in Rooms Are Never Finished (2001) and in his posthumous compendium of ghazals, Call Me Ishmael Tonight (2004). In contrast to the hybridity and freedom of choosing among cultures that immigrants supposedly partake in, in A Nostalgist's Map of America, the multiple binds of dislocation render the exilic subject unable to participate in any community, the state of

[41] See Roberts (603) and Ramazani (12).

the nomad.[42] This nomadic self endeavors to map the American space, rebuilding America in the memory of other cities while recording the traces of the vanished, the indigenous inhabitants of the American continents. As he encounters a "suddenly bare history" (A Nostalgist's Map 24) in his forays into America, he superimposes the landscape with his beloved Kashmir, a country "which has no map // but it has histories" (A Nostalgist's Map 44). There is the dread of being "the last speaker of a language" (A Nostalgist's Map 45), but, as with all writers, there is also the hope that the readers of his poems will be the next speakers of his language.

Whereas A Nostalgist's Map is associated with the creation of a new America, in The Country Without a Post Office Ali is concerned with the theme of boundless sorrow. Edward Said has argued that "what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both" and this "nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" awareness teaches evanescence to the rest of the non-exiled, to regard "experiences as if they were about to disappear" (Reflections 185). Agha Shahid Ali's exile in The Country and the subsequent volumes, though, is of a different kind. The vocabulary of 'evanescence,' that occurred frequently in A Nostalgist's Map, changes to the language of perpetual loss in The Country.[43] Now loss has become personal, collective and permanent, for home has been razed to the ground as if made of papier-mâché – this then is "that map of longings with no limit" (The Country 50). The

[42] It may be argued that the nomad isn't truly alone, but always part of a community that travels together – again, reflective of the community Ali acts as witness of and the assembly of poets Ali imagines himself in. In the "nomadic form of social organization," because of collective participation, spoken and artistic forms have "the ability to consolidate the community through ritual and performance" (Gabriel 396). These tribes and communities that the nomad participates in have the same elastic borders that Etel Adnan elaborates on in "The Nomadization of Culture and the Electronic Page."

[43] Earlier Ali had written, "I live in Evanescence / (I had to build it, for America / was without one)" (Nostalgist's Map 37).

volume is suffused with an apocalyptic tone, even from the epigraph from the Quran: "The Hour draws nigh and / the moon is rent asunder." There are mythic and actual exiled figures in the text: Ishmael, the venerated Kashmiri ruler Yusuf Shah, Orpheus, and the poets Osip Mandelstam, Charles Simic, Zbigniew Herbert, and Mahmoud Darwish. The dominant images in A Nostalgist's Map were those related to the desert, water, and drowning. The poems in this volume incorporate the colors of Kashmir, those of saffron of flowers and the pundits' robes, the green of *činār* / maple leaves and the Sufi shrines, the turquoise of women's saris, the deep-jade rivers feeding the glass-like Dal Lake, blue mountains, the Himalayan snow, the black-tinged gold of ashes and torched villages, and ultimately, images of blood.

Is "a country without a map" really a nation? – What are the stipulations of being a nation, a country? Ali writes about and for a nation but not with the righteous rhetoric of nationalism; his exile is not a physically permanent one either, but his is an exilic temperament of ultimate loss and desire. His exile is solitary too, yet he seems to be writing for a community, engaged in preserving a nation and culture. As with all exiles, Ali's self-professed triple exile seems to situate him in a diaspora of one, with the profound heartbreak of loss of home. Ali's skepticism of nationalism as an exile can be summed up in Said's differentiation between the dialectical connections of exile and nationalism: "Nationalisms are about groups, but in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation. […E]xile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being" (Reflections 178). The construction of nationhood needs to be qualified too. Benedict Anderson, in explicating the idea of the nation, suggests the term 'nation-

ness,' which conflates nation, nationality and nationalism, as the "most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Imagined Communities 12). Nationalism would incorporate the imagining of a community, a nation, on the basis of a shared culture and past, and the hopeful underpinning of a future. Anderson, on the other hand, has also critiqued "long-distance nationalism" executed by those no longer within the folds of the nation (Specters 74).[44] Ali expresses a reluctance to place himself in a purely nationalist paradigm. In an interview, he states that,

> [I]nterviewers and newspaper writers always want to put you into a slot: you are an Indian writing in English, therefore, you should write about India, Kashmir, Pakistan or whatever. The point is you are a universe, you are the product of immense historical forces. There is the Muslim in me, there is the Hindu in me, there is the Western in me. It is there because I have grown up in three cultures and various permutations of those cultures. (Ansari, screens 2-3)

Nevertheless, from instances in the text, it seems that Ali advocates the Kashmiri right for self-determination; in fact, the present volume is where he seems to despair of freedom within either the Indian or the Pakistani polity and where he most openly imagines his self as a Kashmiri subject. He writes alternately of "the blesséd word" of freedom that Kashmiris will truly pronounce one day for the first time (The Country 16) and of "Freedom's terrible thirst, flooding Kashmir" (The Country 91). He implicates most of all himself as a distant witness to the civil war in Kashmir. In another interview, Ali refers to the pull of home and his personal observation of the civil unrest in Kashmir that became the impetus for The Country:

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[44] Anderson calls this a "non-responsible" participation, a consequence of globalization made possible by migration and electronic communication, of those who try to influence the affairs of the country of their origin from a distance.

> I would go every summer and I'd be in my room and suddenly I'd hear gun fire. […] I had gone back home, never thinking I'd write another book about Kashmir, set in Kashmir that way. I just wanted to keep returning to Kashmir as a kind of privileged tourist. I didn't want to go back and witness this kind of savagery, this kind of destruction. (McKee 27)

The Country Without a Post Office is divided into five sections, with the first two and the last section carrying epigraphs from historical personages and poets, and most of the poems in the volume carrying epigraphs as well. Taking into account the title of the book, when not in the form of letters, poems in the book are addressed or dedicated to various individuals. The first two sections are stylistically indebted to Emily Dickinson, there are many poems on artifacts, and the last section opens with an epigraph from King Lear, again on the theme of apocalypse; on the whole, Ali is concerned in this book with the process of recovering messages. The middle section of the book consists of a sole whimsical poem whose speaker is one of the three Fates. It seems curious that Ali chooses to place it in the middle of a volume about violence in his homeland, as this is a poem in which he is preoccupied in abiding by literary conventions. This poem reveals the poet to be a traveler or interloper hovering on a plane above earth. However, the poem also shows Ali's marriage of Western and Urdu poetic traditions: the poem is in blank verse with a strict rhyming pattern and is full of allusions to classical writers; in its temperament, it also carries Urdu poetry's notion of a cruel destiny that overpowers all human affairs. The last lines of the poem as spoken by Clotho establish the theme of binding the reader with the implications of becoming witness in the act of reading:

"Don't forget this sight when by desolate chance / from your breath Belovéd! this evening fades" (The Country 62).

Ali gives intimations of his exilic nation-salvaging project even from the prose-poem of the Prologue of the book, "The Blesséd Word." According to the speaker, the promise of meeting someone again in Srinagar exists in a "black velvet Void" (The Country 15) because there is no guarantee of surviving the day in Kashmir and, therefore, of fulfilling the promise. He catalogues transliterations of 'Kashmir,' which end up becoming a list of empty signifiers, and, with a nod to Osip Mandelstam's lyrical evocation of Petersburg, says that he will write on that void:

> He reinvents Petersburg (I, Srinagar), an imaginary homeland,
> filling it, closing it, shutting himself (myself) in it. For there is
> the blessed word with no meaning, there are flowers that will
> never die, roses that will never fall, a night in which
> Mandelstam is not afraid and needs no pass. (The Country 15)

The day, incidentally, falls on Id-uz-zuha, Muslims' holy day of sacrifice when Ismail/Ishmael is saved by God from being sacrificed by Ibrahim/Abraham, but in Srinagar "Son after son – never to return from the night of torture – was taken away" (The Country 16). In this interchange of night and day, Ali proceeds to recount the legend of the peasant-queen of Kashmir, Habba Khatun, who defied the Mughal Emperor Akbar and incited the Kashmiris to a rebellion which was brutally crushed, and "ever / since then Kashmir has never been free" (The Country 16). He finishes with, "What is the blessed word? Mandelstam gives no clue. One day the Kashmiris will pronounce that word truly for the first time." The atrocities committed in Kashmir are alluded to

throughout the poem and sometimes appear with no warning exactly when the reader has started relishing a perfect lyrical moment. Ali copiously refers to Mandelstam's untitled Poem # 118, with the evocation of verses and details about a place in flux (Selected Poems 31), but elides over an earlier poem by Mandelstam, "Solominka," in which Mandelstam repeats the verse "I have learned you, blessed words" (Selected Poems 15). In the reinvention of the harrowing images and the haunting language in his poem, Ali captures the defiant and affirmative spirit of Mandelstam's poem and looks to a point in the future where the peaceful Kashmir that exists in Ali's memory will exist forever.

It is an integral part of Ali's poetics to employ lyricism in his poetry, to use delicate images and particularly melodic language to depict horror, whether in the logically tuneful ghazals or in verses such as these: "those smashed golds flying past those petrified / reds are autumn's last crimsoned spillage // rushing with wings down the mountainside / or flames clinging to a torched village" (The Country 34). Can the lyric, written in solitude to express the most private feelings of a poet, bear the weight of History and politics? As a matter of fact, the lyric holds a special place as a trope of the exilic experience. Historically, the taxonomy of the lyric is bound with that of exile, "a History that has carved Memory itself, that lover's love song, into its heart. This is the kind of History that embraces Memory even when it is made up of heartbreak" (Menocal 46). It becomes possible to tell History in the lyrical mode because both History and Memory are reconstituted in the fragmented narratives of lyricism, where "exile and the tugs of dispersal make us cling more fiercely to our poetry and to that scattering of kindred souls it brings into our hearts" (Menocal 51). As a song of unrequited or unhappy love, a lyric can become a love song about a city, written in the deep loneliness of exile in

a moment of great political crisis (Menocal 92). This is evident in Ali's poem, "The City of Daughters," a poem quite literally about Srinagar, the city "that is leaving / forever" (81). This is a long poem in twenty rhyming quatrains, whose enjambed stanzas are divided in four parts from the year 1990 to 1994, as if in continuation of torment and pain. The poem also carries echoes of Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy's "The God Abandons Antony," a poem that captures Cavafy's intense sensibility of exile and his nostalgia for the city of Alexandria. Ali repeats verses, phrases, and images throughout his poem in a bid to capture in poetry the razing of the city of Srinagar and its landmarks by troops, something the speaker can only imagine from afar through letters someone writes ("'Dear Shahid, they burned the Palladium'" The Country 82). Because it is bound with exile, there is also a "strongly antisocial ethos of the solipsism of the lyric" (Menocal 147), an undercurrent running in Ali's book that is cut by the virtually inclusive nature of his poetry. Later in the chapter, I refer to the likelihood of narcissism in the lyrical ego of Ali, which he virtually evades by involving the reader in his simultaneous cataloguing of cultural memory and national history.

Ali the poet, in his secular imagination and Sufi vision, which finds that "in the lake the arms of temples and mosques are locked / in each other's reflections" (The Country 22), gains comfort not from hiding behind the easy pieties of politics or religion. Instead, he investigates the hidden histories behind the eternal bliss of objects of art and beauty, to which he devotes the short third section and the entire fourth section of this volume. It is also suggestive that Ali uses the famous refrain from W. B. Yeats' "Easter 1916" ("Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn,… / A terrible beauty is born" Yeats 180) as epigraph for one of his poems, "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at

Midnight." Like Yeats, Ali's politics are cloaked in the garb of rhythm and intricate imagery, and he is as fond as Yeats of using classical allusions. Quite possibly also like Yeats, his ambivalent nation-building impulse will be read after his death as advocating nationalism. In the afore-mentioned poem, Ali imagines himself visiting, from five hundred miles away, the scenes of horror enacted upon friends and strangers in Kashmir. In this imagined witnessing, he is unable to console the ghost of a murdered friend, even while his hope of untying the green thread at a saint's shrine "when the atrocities / are stunned" (The Country 26) is mournfully dashed with the destruction of his homeland. If we take a nation to be built of the "imagined community" that Benedict Anderson invokes as based on a shared language, culture, and history generating feelings of national belonging, then the Kashmir that Ali tries to re-create in his poetry truly is a nation, but with the reader facing the extra challenge of reading it through the chosen, imagined alterity of an exile.

Compared to his earlier volumes, the tone of the poems in The Country Without a Post Office is angrier and there are traces of suppressed rage in the lyrics. Since the task of reconstituting a nation in poetry, while simultaneously creating a testimony to trauma, is enormous, in this volume there is also the fear of not just the insubstantiality of words, ("Words are nothing, / just rumors – like roses – to embellish a slaughter" The Country 88) but of not being able to represent suffering in language: "O, alibi of chronology, in what script / in your ledger will this narrative be lost?" (The Country 67-68). The poet is his own amanuensis because the archives of personal history – the defunct post-offices with their undelivered mail – and cultural memory – the defaced sites of cultural and religious significance – are no more. Poems in this volume relate the death of an

individual (especially poignant because news of his friends' deaths keeps arriving and makes him recall past deaths) to the agony of the Kashmiri nation and the poet increasingly confronts his own mortality. Ali's voice in these poems, as in "Dear Shahid," keeps changing from the subjective to the collective 'we' to accommodate those unable to articulate their own concerns from the disparate sites of strife in Bosnia, Chechnya, Armenia, and Palestine. The latter is a prose poem, written in the form of a letter, addressed by an unnamed friend to the poet and is one way of lending voice to those Kashmiris who live daily through the carnage. Ali is in exile and a letter might be the only way of collapsing distance through the words of a loved one, but as the beginning of the poem indicates, even the Kashmiri community feels in exile within its own land: "I am writing to you from your far-off country. Far even from us who live here. Where you no longer are. Everyone carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body will reach home" (The Country 43).

Since the figure of the exile holds such a symbolic place in the poetics of Agha Shahid Ali, the taxonomy of exile also needs to be examined critically. According to the critic Aijaz Ahmad, "exile, immigration and professional preference [become] synonyms and, indeed, mutually indistinguishable." However, through an ideological process of using the term exile as a metaphor and fully appropriated descriptive label for the existential condition of the immigrant, exile becomes a "condition of the social, unrelated to facts of material life" (86). In addition, Caren Kaplan has also critiqued Edward Said's conflation and simultaneous distinction of the refugee and the exile in his essay, "Reflections on Exile": "Said often abandons his reference to a global phenomenon and returns to a mystified figure – the solitary exile" (Questions 120). In his representation of

the two figures, "the refugee is a faceless political construct outside the sphere of literature and aesthetics. The exile, on the other hand, is a romantic figure that can be readily identified and positioned in an aestheticized world of creativity and loss" (Questions 120). She charts the ambivalence Said feels in the use of 'exile,' and his use of 'diaspora': "Said's predicament is that his position is more cosmopolitan than local, more closely connected to the perennial dispersions that comprise postmodern definitions of diaspora than to the modernist model of exile and return" (Questions 122). Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins have astutely dissected in their writings the displacements induced by various factors in the present age of transnationalism, in which a subject could be styled as an exile, émigré, expatriate, cosmopolitan, etc.[45] I don't take Ali to be a type of the expedient cosmopolitan hybrid that Timothy Brennan critiques in At Home in the World, but a poet aware of his ethno-national origins, who identifies himself distinctly as a Kashmiri national. From a literary perspective of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, Shaden M. Tageldin's analysis of the conceptions of 'home' in the postcolonial nation for the exiled subject sheds light on the dialectic of freedom and constraint that the condition of exile carries. For the exiled migrant, nostalgia for home reaches deeper into the past and farther into the future to retrieve or conjure up the longed-for object, the unattainable home (233). This condition of migrant nostalgia is

> the impetus for violent attempts to reverse the sentence of unrequited longing – violent because struggling to turn contiguities into substitutions, national metonyms into national metaphors. Twice convicted by colonization and displacement, the postcolonial migrant finds in being longing, rather than in belonging, her or his only reprieve. And that reprieve […] is more parole than

[45] See the introductions by Cheah and Robbins in Cosmopolitics.

freedom. (262)

So how does the exile gain access to the present and past history of a land he can only enter through second-hand knowledge acquired from letters of loved ones and from small-print news? He creates a parallel history and land from what he gleans from his memory and through references to a common Kashmiri store of mythology and legends which is also in the danger of being depleted – Isn't this the fear, and also the origin, of poetry, that it may be unable to capture a mutable reality before it vanishes from eyes and memory? Ali's invention of a parallel nation, his project of re-imagining Kashmir that superimposes his memories of a peaceful and untainted land ("O! / those days of peace when we were in love and the rain was / in our hands wherever we went" The Country 43) onto the present land that is fraught with violence, is interwoven with the quest of recording personal memory before it is erased. Poetry becomes the mirror with which he can see the serene Kashmir of his past, and whose refractions also allow him to see the nation's pain and document it. Since memory is the ground of history, the interior state of mind from which the exterior framework of history is drawn (Hutton 96), Ali's memory of Kashmir is both private and historical. In "Farewell," a poem addressed to a Brahmin pundit, Ali oscillates between the words "memory" and "history" to show how both are fused together: "My memory is again in the way of your history…Your history gets in the way of my memory…Your memory gets in the way of my memory" (The Country 21-22). In this manner, Ali's personal elegies on the themes of exile and loss become an archive of collective sorrow and dislocation. I propose that writing also becomes the occasion of return for the poet and the sole site where he can imagine himself integrated within a community of Kashmiris.

What is almost an imperceptible absence of linguistic memory in Ali's poems is the post-colonial status of English in Indian poetry. Poets such as Toru Dutt (1855-1876), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) are counted among the earliest Indian poets who used English to write impassioned poetry about liberation from the British colonizers. Since India's liberation in 1947, Indian English has developed from a colonial leftover to one of the major national languages of the country. However, according to critic John Oliver Perry, while 'nativist' critics dedicated to regional-language literary cultures characterize Indian English as 'the enemy's tongue,' associated with colonial oppression or neo-imperialist values, and incapable of authentically representing Indian experience (263),[46] there is also a rather limited reception of Indian English poetry within India:

> The highly specialized Indian audience for Indian English poetry […] comes from a politically dominating cultural elite that is also undeniably isolated socially, complacently overprivileged, and willing to exploit its neocolonialist power for consumerist values not sharable with eighty percent of the people, the poverty-impacted agricultural majority living in small villages. (266)

If Perry's is a harsh argument about authentication in the regional languages against perceived elitist representation in English of Indian culture, a related debate is about the imbalanced reception of Indian English writing by the writers based within India and those part of the diaspora, like Agha Shahid Ali. Perry's critique also ignores the

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[46] It is certainly not helped by Salman Rushdie's controversial introduction to Mirroworks: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947-1997, where he states that the prose produced by Indian writers working in English is "a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages,' during the same time" (Rushdie and West viii), yet while the rich poetic traditions of India flourish in many of the sub-continent's languages, "even the English-language poets, with a few distinguished exceptions," do not match the quality of their counterparts in prose" (Rushdie and West ix) .

burgeoning status of Indian writing in English.[47] The earliest poetry by South Asians in America appeared in the form of nationalist songs and poetry in the Punjabi language by members of the Gadar party (founded in 1913), which were collected later in a pamphlet *Gadar dī Gūnj* / Echoes of Mutiny published in San Francisco in 1913-1914.[48] Dhan Gopal Mukerjee (1890-1936) was the first Indian poet to publish a collection of poetry in English in America, Rajani, or Songs of the Night (1916). Lumping the youthful Ali with the expatriate Indian writers of an earlier generation, Neil Roberts assumes that the manifold cosmopolitanism of Indian poets in the first quarter-century after independence, in which Indian elements interacted with Western ones, is "rarified and aestheticized into a postmodernist internationalism from which national identities, nationalist concerns, and Indianness sometimes vanish altogether" (Roberts 274). Jahan Ramazani also echoes Roberts: "The postcolonial poem, like a postcard, risks miniaturizing, idealizing and ultimately displacing the remembered native landscape" (Ramazani 603). On the new cosmopolitics of expatriate Indian writers, Jasbir Jain says that their writings become an 'Introduction' to a translated text for the culture back home: "It sets out the parameters and the principles for interpreting the text, for decoding it, and as such it limits the text. It occupies the space between the text and the reader, a space which does not necessarily belong to it" (87).

What complicates the poet's avowed responsibility for a political aesthetics is the reception of the poem: if a transnational American poet writes in English about the conditions in his previous homeland, the poetry itself may be inaccessible to his former

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[47] See, for instance, Ram Krishna Singh's cataloguing of poets writing in English in India who are routinely ignored by mainstream Indian publishers.

[48] Cited in Jane Singh 176.

fellow citizens due to the impossibility of translation, one of the "many taxes levied on the frontier of languages" (Derrida 57).[49] Ali's earlier work might have showed the self-consciousness associated with trying to come to terms with the colonial burden of the English language in India, but, as he states in his introduction to The Rebel's Silhouette, he is fully aware of the legacy of coming from a postcolonial country: for him, the mother tongue is Urdu but the first language is English, and he is unequivocal in laying claim to both the language and canon of colonial legacy (xi). He states that, "Because of the new interest in the literatures of the world, some of us have a chance to do certain things for the first time with the English language. This of course is all connected with the history of colonialism" (Benvenuto 267). His latter work reveals the ease that he acquired with living with the language in America and naturalizing himself within the landscape, as the title A Nostalgist's Map of America indicates. It would not be wrong to state that all of Ali's latter work shows an eagerness to please those he considers the masters of the poetic form in America, such as James Merrill or W. S. Merwin, and also to claim a place for his self in the pantheon of the American English canon.[50] Even while the exile perpetually wants to figure a place for himself, the trope of exility also affords Ali the chance to reconfigure the topography of American poetry, the outsider status paradoxically helping him to translate the anxiety of influence into newer forms and contours of poetry.

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[49] For the inclusion and exclusion of Ali's work in Indian anthologies, see Bruce King's Modern Indian Poetry in English (273, 276, 278).

[50] For instance, on James Merrill, he says in an interview: "he's in some ways the formal spirit guiding me through The Country" (Benvenuto 264).

The land that comprises Kashmir occupies an indistinct status, given the performance of decolonized nations, in global politics in that it is simultaneously a part of the two postcolonial countries of India and Pakistan (with a small part dominated by China), with neither granting citizenship rights to their Kashmiri subjects. Its geopolitical form, as divided between the two countries across the artificial "Line of Control" (the LoC), also situates it as one of the last colonized places of the world. That it is also a flashpoint for tension between the two nuclearized countries and has been the subject of three wars between them makes it additionally important in the geopolitical structure of the sub-continent. In the colonial era, it was created a princely state by the British, subsequently divided and held by the two newly independent postcolonial nation-states of India and Pakistan; it thus made a progression from state into occupied nation but the idea of Kashmir as a nation and country has existed since the centuries of occupation by Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh rulers.[51]

To gain an understanding of what Ali's imagination of Kashmiri nationhood entails, we need to take a look at what nationalism means in the intricate historical composition of Kashmir and what space Kashmiriyat occupies in it. This lauded Kashmiriyat has been variously defined, but serves as an umbrella term for the regional spirit of secular harmony between the religious communities of Kashmir.[52] In terms of

[51] It is unclear whether "Kashmir," for the purposes of defining Agha Shahid Ali's imagination of his homeland, takes into consideration the area constituting both Jammu and Kashmir, just the Muslim-dominated Valley of Kashmir, or the original geographic region now controlled by India, Pakistan and China. Since Ali is not interested in a purely nationalist project and would rather delineate his persona poetically than politically, he makes no distinction on the basis of religion and his re-creation of the country of Kashmir is of a whole encompassing region.

[52] Victoria Schofield calls Kashmiriyat a "unique cultural heritage, established over centuries of co-existence between Hindus and Muslims" (288), while Sumit Ganguly calls Kashmiriyat "an ill-defined, almost ineffable concept of the confluence of Islamic, Hindu, and uniquely Kashmiri cultural strains in the region" (17-18).

Kashmir's political history, Patrick Colm Hogan describes a particular imagination of nationhood based on 'practical identity' against a categorical identity that is delimiting, vacuous, and reaches across geography and history ("Midnight's Children" 518).[53] While this practical identity is usually displaced by national modernity (i.e., the categorical identity of nationalism), it also serves "as one model for a different sort of national or seminational connectedness, a 'third way'" ("Midnight's Children" 528). Hogan asserts that pre-colonial tradition-bound Kashmir was non-communal, without any categorical identity, and entered modern history with the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Nationalism in Kashmir is "the development, the modernization, of Kashmiri tradition" and, had it been allowed, Kashmir could have formed "a pluralistic nation based on practical identity, escaping the authoritarian categorical identities of reactionary traditionalism, Muslim or Hindu" ("Midnight's Children" 538). Suranjan Das confirms Hogan's assessment: "the departing British Raj constructed boundaries for its two subcontinental successor states in a manner which did not represent a convergence between nation and state, or between ethnic and state identities." Thus, the state boundaries of the two countries failed to coincide with the boundaries of imagined communities and cross-border loyalties survived the artificially imposed international frontiers (97). Das suggests that the solution is "a restructuring of centre-state relations as a whole so that national identity becomes harmonized with subnational identities" (114).

A more comprehensive study of the evolution of Kashmiri nationhood over the centuries and a critical analysis of Kashmiriyat is provided by Chitralekha Zutshi, in

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[53] "Practical identity is the entire complex of habits, expectations, abilities, routines that integrate one's daily activities with those of a community…[P]ractical identity is insistently local and proximate.[…] However, even when it is transported to another region, practical identity always involves networks of direct interconnectedness" ("Midnight's Children" 518-19)

Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir, as the articulation of Kashmiri regional culture that accommodated but did not erase crucial religious differences. Zutshi deconstructs the myth of Kashmiriyat that locates pre-colonial Kashmir as an unspoiled paradise-garden of religious harmony and syncretism, and she instead situates pre-colonial Kashmir within its definition of "creative interaction between a variety of languages of belonging" to several social, religious and economic orders (16). Kashmiris were aware of belonging to different religious groups and sects but recognized the larger regional affiliation of belonging to a *mulk*, a homeland that was dominated by outsiders and needed to be rescued from oppressors of the Mughal, Afghan, Sikh, and British ilk. This narrative of belonging, played out against the structures of oppressive states, forms part of the Kashmiri identity from the seventeenth century onwards. During the time of decolonization, communalism became a threat in Kashmir, as with other places in pre-Partition India. Regional Kashmiri nationalists, however, resurrected the idea of Kashmiriyat, a homogenizing discourse of peaceful co-existence of religious communities, as a collusion of Kashmiri and Indian majoritarian nationalism, ignoring contradictions and conflicts within the communities (258). Burgeoning political consciousness among Kashmiris and dissatisfaction with the division of the region between the two postcolonial states, coupled with the continuation of Kashmiri regionalist movements of the early twentieth century, helped in the evolution of the conception of Kashmir as *mulk* to *watan*, a more territorial conception of the nation as defined by its boundaries (250). Zutshi even cites Ali's "Farewell" in the conclusion of her book: "Perhaps only a poet can capture the nexus of memory, history, narration, and conflict that defines Kashmir's position in postcolonial South Asia" (332). In the light of

Zutshi's research, I propose that Ali conflates *mulk* and *watan*, homeland-country and nation, in his depiction and reconstruction of Kashmir in The Country. He seldom, though evenly, utilizes the words "country" and "nation" in the book, but his repeated allusions are to Kashmir and the city of Srinagar, and he reiterates unregistered Kashmiri cultural and historical associations, to which he provides footnotes.

The question then is whether this re-membered, re-imagined history of an *exile* is equivalent to the very real experiences lived by the other Kashmiris who remained behind, a dilemma of class privilege faced by exiles and expatriates. Is an exile a credible witness? Or does his mere articulation make Ali the Belovéd witness?[54] This also complicates the ethics of witnessing, in Ali's case, that of attempting to represent trauma in poetry. Here, Theodor Adorno's famous invocation of the inability of verse to represent trauma serves as healthy reminder of the risk of making tragedy and violence delightful.[55] Apprehensive of the perpetual threat of acting as a voyeur for the sake of art, the committed poet is twice implicated when addressing political issues in a lyrical style. This is so because trauma itself cannot be understood in its full literality by those present until it is belated: "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth 17-18). For those already absent, as with Ali the distant witness, the inherent latency of trauma becomes trickier: it also acquires more power and urgency to

[54] Ali articulates this in his famous couplet: "They ask me to tell them what *Shahid* means – / Listen: It means 'The Belovéd' in Persian, 'witness' in Arabic" (The Country 74).

[55] Adorno had said, "The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite" ("Commitment" 189).

be expressed, one way to implicate yet others in the traumatic event, making them witnesses in the process. In poem after poem, Ali interrogates himself, "'See how your world has cracked. / Why aren't you here? Where are you? Come back. / Is history deaf, there, across the oceans?'" (The Country 45). However, his imagined return is to a desolate present ("Mirror after mirror, / textiled by dust, will blind us to our return" The Country 45) and futile for, as with all exiles, his ancestors had wished that he return forever and inherit "that to which we belong, not like this – / to get news of our death after the world's" (The Country 45). It seems that the telling of trauma – the testimony – succeeds only in reaching its resolution – the reader – if not in the resolution of conflict itself and, Ali is prudent to realize that this is all he can personally achieve; otherwise, trauma could silence him and the others. It is also important that Ali's is no mere documentation, but a witnessing (as we saw in the case of Etel Adnan) that emotionally binds the witness to trauma.

As Ali regards it, communication is essential for he states "no news / escapes the curfew" (The Country 26). The title poem, "The Country Without a Post Office" registers the silent voices of the dispossessed Kashmiris and consists of the speaker's conversations with the voices within the undelivered, abandoned letters and with the "mad guide," the self-appointed muezzin of a wrecked mosque. The poem starts with "Again, I've returned to this country / where a minaret has been entombed" (The Country 48) and the elegy goes on to recreate "that archive for letters with doomed / addresses, each house buried or empty" (The Country 48) with blank stamps, "no nation named on them" (The Country 49). The speaker of the poem even impugns himself as those who remained behind state that "We are faithful" (The Country 49) and the reader, that "my

answers, Calls to Prayer / to deaf worlds across continents" (The Country 51). Written in octaves, the poem contains imagery of papers and letters. The destruction of houses and post offices represents the basic breakdown of the state network: with the houses destroyed by the fires set by soldiers, each post office boarded up and bags of mail remaining undelivered, the speaker loses his sense of direction and says "I must force silence to be a mirror" (The Country 49). The poem is an attempt to establish a "map of the lost," those "who haunt / a country when it is ash" (The Country 49), and there is a note of urgency to impart the voices in the letters "'This is a shrine / of words. You'll find your letter to me. And mine / to you. Come soon and tear open these vanished envelopes'" (The Country 50). The poem candidly implicates the reader in the demand to become a witness ("In this dark rain, be faithful, Phantom heart, / this is your pain. Feel it. You must feel it") to "this world whose end was near, always near," and the poet lends a solemn autobiographical touch near the end: "I want to live forever. What else can I say?" (The Country 51). In this manner, the ethics of witnessing are extended to the reader, Ali's poetry creating readers as an alternate form of community. The speaker's grave despair ("It's raining as I write this. I have no prayer. / It's just a shout, held in, It's Us! It's Us! / whose letters are cries that break like bodies / in prisons") is gently answered with the last words of the poem, "Mad heart, be brave" (The Country 51).

Kashmir has always retained an iconic stature in Victorian Anglophone poetry. One of the earliest allusions to Kashmir, formed after British incursions of the foothills of the Himalayas, is by an Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779-1852) in his bestselling composition Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance.[56] Moore published this poem in 1817 about a fictional princess, the daughter of Aurangzeb, who is betrothed to the king of

[56] Qtd. in Schofield (xii-xiii).

imaginary Bukharia and her wedding takes place in Kashmir, which Moore had never visited: “Who has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere / With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave, / Its temples and grottos and fountains as clear / As the love-lightened eyes that hang over the wave!” (256). Kashmir was to become a utopia that Victorian writers romanticized from afar, akin to Shangri La. In American poetry, the verse of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) resonates with the word ‘Cashmere,’ but even she seems to invest Kashmir with the burden of pure metaphor. For the recluse poet, Cashmere is an exotic land of roses and paisleys remote from her native Amherst, Massachusetts, and as with the Sicilian volcanoes she had never been to, she imaginatively visits it and takes the reader along for the journey to, in Ali’s words, “her Faraway Nearby” (A Nostalgist’s Map 53). Cashmere/Kashmir entered Dickinson’s imagination from geography books read while at the Mt. Holyoke Seminary, her copy of Webster’s Dictionary, and from what was found in the popular press.[57] What is pertinent to our understanding of Dickinson’s imagination of Kashmir is that Dickinson’s desire for the beauteous ephemeral and fleeting is expressed in her references to foreign exotic lands she cannot visit physically but which exert great romantic pull over her, distance liberating her to express the passion she could not in the constraints of nearer designations. Where Cashmere for Dickinson is fixed and a colorful backdrop, Ali destabilizes the preconceptions about the land in his catalogue of nouns in “The Blesséd Word.”:

> Let me cry out in that void, say it as I can. I write on that void:
>
> Kashmir, Kaschmir, Cashmere, Qashmir, Cashmir, Cashmire,

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[57] Dickinson read Thomas Moore's The Epicurean when she came home sick from Mount Holyoke, and her brother Austin owned a copy of Lalla Rookh (Capp 17).

> Kashmere, Cachemire, Cushmeer, Cachmiere, Cašmir. Or
>
> *Cauchemar* in a sea of stories? Or: Kacmir, Kaschemir, Kasmere,
>
> Kachmire, Kasmir. Kerseymere? (The Country 15)

Ali echoes Dickinson's epigrammatic elliptical lyric in three consecutive poems (two prose poems and a ghazal) in The Country, but her seemingly romantic Cashmere as created in Amherst does not correspond to the brutal reality Ali records of physical torture and the agony of loss in Kashmir. The poems of Dickinson that Ali quotes from contain a language of violence woven with naturalistic images of desire,[58] which Ali ties in to contradictory lines of ultimately divine mercy and spiritual crisis, such as in the poem "Some Vision of the World Cashmere" (The Country 35-36). In fact, if Ali is a witness to the sublime Kashmiri tragedy, Dickinson can also be called a witness to the American sublime, the tragedy of the American Civil War in 1861-1865. From 1860 onwards to 1865, Dickinson wrote her most passionate love poetry and her most astute socially conscious ones too, around 800 poems during the war. The half a dozen poems where Dickinson employs the Cashmere tag were also written between 1859 to1864, a period that coincides not just with the Civil War but also with America's expansion of its frontiers, the empire coming into its own.[59] The connection of 'Cashmere' between Ali and Dickinson suggests an ineffable arc of crisis that stretches across the century, that of recording national trauma and destruction wrought by the instruments of power.

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[58] Dickinson's Poem # 64 "Some Rainbow coming from the Fair –/Some Vision of the World Cashmere," Poem # 110 "Artists wrestled here/Lo, A Tint Cashmere!/Lo, A Rose!," Poem # 179 "If I could bribe them by a Rose/I'd bring them every flower that grows/From Amherst to Cashmere!," and Poem # 473 "I'm ashamed – I hide –/What right have I – to be a Bride."

[59] On Dickinson's response to the expansionist ideology of the American nation-state, see Susan Howe's My Emily Dickinson.

The local history of Kashmiri poetry renders a prosperous and peaceful Kashmir that has always been a subject of adoration and longing. Because of the lack of full literacy in Kashmir, poetry was "a logical choice in a society that was largely unlettered, yet where community activities […] revolved around recitations of song and poetry" (Zutshi 149). Poetry thus becomes a powerful tool of dissemination of information and messages and a store of cultural memory. Medieval Kashmiri poetry, written or received orally in Persian or the local Kashmiri vernacular, seemingly consisted mostly of transcendental mysticism, and the blend of unique religious syncretism and tolerance that has been termed Kashmiriyat. Its leading luminaries were mystic poets such as Lal Ded (1335-87), Sheikh Nooruddin (1377-1438), and Habba Khatun (1554-1609). Chitralekha Zutshi, however, documents how the poetry of both Lal Ded and Nooruddin is immersed in a sense of place in their production of a regional Kashmiri culture and the historical memory of a society in transition "where social, political and religious affiliations were in a process of redefinition. Mystic poets, on the site of poetry and religious debate, were able to capture this fluidity most evocatively, providing Kashmiri nationalists with rich ammunition for the propagation of *Kashmiriyat*" (28). Incidentally, Habba Khatun, who figures so prominently in Ali's prologue "The Blesséd Word," is credited with introducing the romantic lyric set to melodies, mainly based on songs of the sorrow of separation, exile, and love, into the Kashmiri language (Wakhlu Habba Khatun 101). Later, Ghulam Muhammad Mahjoor (1895-1952) is acknowledged with introducing a modern form in Kashmiri poetry – he wrote songs of Kashmir's freedom, infusing poetry with revolutionary nationalist appeals. His contemporary poets writing immediately after

the Partition of India either took the path of romanticism or lent a social realist element to their verse.[60]

Recent Kashmiri poetry chronicles in verse the local incidents of carnage and destruction. In "Dead Poets' Society" and particularly in "Poetry in Commotion," Muzamil Jaleel, an eminent Kashmiri journalist and writer, writes about the changes wrought in the writing of Kashmiri poets through tragedy and violence. He states that the contours of Kashmir's poetry have changed and the stories of romance have been replaced by tales of bloodshed: "Kashmir no longer symbolizes paradise, but a heaven on fire. […] Here the tragedies have compelled ordinary young men, college students and farmers, to try their pen, as poetry becomes one of the safer tools of expression" ("Poetry," screen 2). He goes on to comment that "Much of this poetry revolves around Kashmir's yearning for peace, its politics of hatred, the censorship of free thought and even the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus, besides the uncertainties of life in Kashmir" (screen 4). Jaleel also cites Ali's The Country as one of Kashmir's pre-eminent records. In an obituary written for a local newspaper, Jaleel eloquently recounted Ali's popularity in his native Kashmir: "in his death, Kashmir has lost its most powerful voice, an emissary of its tragedy and pain" ("A Poet," screens 1-2). Jaleel's eulogy for Ali implies that Ali filled the vacuum of lack of international attention by creating witnesses in readers of his poetry about the tragedy in Kashmir.

Agha Shahid Ali is equally receptive to the physical or imagined landscape around him and to the inscape of form, sound, and voice in poetry, the American

[60] See the second half of S. N. Wakhlu's The Rich Heritage of Jammu and Kashmir: Studies in Art, Architecture, History, and Culture of the Region.

topography and poetry becoming sites of re-invention for him. By all accounts, Ali is a practitioner of the most formal literary conventions, his love for formal properties juxtaposed with his introduction of, and quasi-experimentation with, forms and linguistic patterns imported from non-English sources into the American poetry tradition. His poetry is permeated with the inflections, sensibility, and archetypes of traditional Urdu poetry. Exile is a recurring theme in Urdu poetry and Islamic tradition, with real and imagined individuals either banished or going into voluntary exile in pursuit of their ideal; going mad with passion in the process is manifested in the fabled romantic character of Majnoon. In Urdu poetry, two of Ali's favorite and venerated poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) and Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), revolutionized the conventionally erotic literary figure of *mahbūb,* the Belovéd, usually a female (though sometimes male) lover,[61] into the divine ideal and the nation, respectively. While the trope has been an integral part of Ali's poetics from the beginning, in The Country, the figure of the Belovéd appears with great frequency in almost every poem: if it is not present nominally in the poem, Ali indirectly alludes to it within the structure of the poem as the object of desire and longing. The Belovéd figures most prominently in Ali's three ghazals in the book, most fitting as it is such a significant element of the tradition of the ghazal too. It is the nature of desire not to be fully satisfied and there is a further connection here to be made of the Urdu archetype of the Lover. Ali seems to identify with this archetype, who is content with being in love with a Belovéd he cannot attain and eternally longs for the consummation of his ideal. Ali's major couplet ("They ask me to tell them what *Shahid*

[61] According to one critic, "questions about the beloved's gender didn't bother the poets of that time because they weren't practicing 'realism' or writing autobiographical poems. The beloved was, first and foremost, an idea, and that idea could be represented in one of many ways. The beloved's anthropomorphic character was often left vague, especially by poets inclined toward Sufism. The general literary feeling was, anyway, in favor of ambiguity and richness of interpretive potential" (Faruqi 17).

means – / Listen: It means 'The Belovéd' in Persian, 'witness' in Arabic" The Country 74) hints that he is Majnoon the possessed in pursuit of the impossible revolutionary ideal, becoming by turns the Lover and the Belovéd, taking on both the attributes of his name. His poetics reminds us that "the map of longings" has no limits (The Country 50), and for this reason the volume contains acute anguish at the political imbroglio in Kashmir along with faith in the restoration of the nation. Since the figure of desire also pushes constantly towards the future for consummation, its predominance in Ali's poetics also lends an element of hope and idealism to his poetry.

Ali's innovation consists of manipulating traditional forms, breaking them down to reveal the changing reality of the American cultural landscape. Ali re-writes the ghazal by copying the form, structure and demands of traditional Urdu lyrics into an English idiom, metamorphosing into a hybrid genre in American poetry: the English ghazal. His predilection for traditional literary structures from one language to another would validate him as an advocate for formalism; however, he proclaims himself not to be a neo-formalist, in his demonstration of the form of the ghazal in Ravishing Disunities : "Form has been associated […] with what holds truth back, especially political truth. But as Faiz said, there is nothing good or bad in any poetic form but the poet makes it so" ("Introduction" 12). Apart from minute poetic license taken here and there in the use of near or slant rhymes, his English ghazals show a strict adherence to the rules of the Urdu ghazal. Ali's various articles on the formal properties of the ghazal and his assembly of English ghazals by American poets in his edited anthology, Ravishing Disunities, helped disseminate and popularize this ancient Arabic form in American poetry. Ali's second "Ghazal" in the book briefly narrates the formal history of the ghazal while recounting

dissident practices carried out in poetics by different poets of the twentieth century, such as Mahmoud Darwish, Federico García Lorca, Anton Shamas, and Yehuda Amichai. This is an often anthologized ghazal with the refrain 'Arabic.' The poem becomes an observation on the Arabic language – "The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic." Ali immediately follows with the second line of the couplet, "These words were said to me in a language not Arabic," highlighting the irony of the exile who has to use any language but his own to articulate his heartache. The intonations of Arabic, in a ghazal written in English, translate Ali's engagement with themes of belonging, history, and memory into his very poetry, as he proclaims "Memory is no longer confused, it has a homeland" (The Country 73).

The play with challenging formal techniques and the appropriation from other poets allows Ali to create a space between his own self and the unfolding tragedy that he is trying to encapsulate in words. Some American reviewers choose to take the alterity of disengagement of the poet at face value and are more impressed with his exoticization of America: "the informing 'voice' of [Ali] is many-tongued, freed from any specific time and place. It speaks for rootlessness, for that fluid state where one can see with the accuracy of the uncommitted" (Kitchen 566-567). In the hands of a poet detached from the nation, the resulting poetry might come across as contrived and cold, but for Ali, who personalizes each incident he relates and makes passionate use of evocative language and imagery, the employment of strict traditional forms liberates him as a poet to portray tragedy in assorted aspects while providing him with the structure to rein in his ideas. Within the shackles of syllable count, rhyme, and repetition, Ali finds the space to finesse and clarify his thoughts on trauma and to reconstruct the Kashmiri nation; as I've stated

earlier, verse practices based on archaic forms can also often inform radical political consciousness. When he isn't successfully utilizing the form of prose poetry, Ali reconfigures the conventional patterns, whether of the metrical and syllabic structure of the ghazal or the regulations of the canzone and villanelle. It's only after you get lulled into the acoustics of the rhythm and the supple enjambment of the verse, do you pay attention to the unsettling ideas behind the words, with the enjambed lyrics often creating moments of minor disjunction. The eruption of Ali's humanist views, the startling infusions of lyrical rhythm and political acumen, make the poem richer in the process as it serves to break up the reader's absorption in the reconfigured classic metrical and syllabic rhyme structures, creating witnesses to a history. Syllabics, verse based on syllabic count rather than metrical arrangement, remain his favorite form of expressing his ideas and emotions. With the employment of forms which require the poet to replicate words and verses in every stanza or every other line, Ali not only forces the reader to reiterate the idea behind the lyrics, but also creates an elliptical passage for himself in the poems so that he reaffirms the lyric as his sole remaining abode. In the formal recurring of words and verses, the heightened use of poetic artifice to convey historical reality allows him a homecoming within poetry, if not Kashmir itself. In the last section of the volume he vigorously, and frenziedly, utilizes traditional forms, to call the reader's full attention to the content of the poem. The lyrical intensity of Ali's poetry here creates the conditions for a political lyric that is equally receptive to form as to content.

In most instances, Ali's verse captures the themes of exile, loss, and memory in elegiac patterns, with the distinction that, unlike elegies traditionally written only to capture personal grief, his elegies impart a collective tone in the articulation of national

and global concerns. This is one of the reasons why he loves the form of the ghazal, as he states in his introduction to Ravishing Disunities: "The ghazal's disconnectedness must not be mistaken for fragmentariness; that actually underscores a profound cultural connectedness. The ghazal is not an occasion for angst; it is an occasion for genuine grief" (13). A common misconception about the ghazal is the solipsistic mourning portrayed in it but, as with his use of the elegiac form of the *marsiya* (a poem traditionally mourning the martyrhood of Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet, at Karbala, Iraq), Ali employs the simultaneously universal and local notes of sorrow in the ghazal to provide voice to a community. Though a traditional *marsiya* has explicit religious overtones, Ali's *marsiyas* and elegies are also written on the traumatic loss of a city and a nation. I also read resonances in his poetry of another genre in Urdu poetry, that of the *shehr āshob* – an elegy written on the destruction of a city –in Ali's depictions of Srinagar.[62] This becomes most apparent in the afore-mentioned "The City of Daughters," that Ali recounts as epitaph on 'the world turned upside down.' The poem becomes an ode to the city that is being destroyed, the poet lamenting "Say farewell, cut // my heart loose, row its boat without me – / for I am leaving my world forever. / Say farewell, say farewell to the city / (O Sarajevo! O Srinagar!), // the Alexandria that is forever leaving" (The Country 80). Unlike the traditional *shehr āshob*, in Ali's poem, besides the universal lamentation on the burning of cities throughout history, there is a heightened pronouncement of sorrow at the loss of love. Earlier in the chapter, I had

[62] *Shehr āshob* in Persian referred to poems that "contained lists of 'city-despairing beloveds' belonging to various professions within the city – thus celebrating a city full of Love's affairs – in Urdu, the term now refers to poems which present a 'city of despair,' often indicated by listing various types of professional people, all of them lacking in their expected, essential qualities – 'the world turned upside down'" (Naim "A Note" 42). In Urdu, the term carries the following qualities: "poignant, indignant, or bitter, but very detailed, depictions of social decay and injustice, so closely observed that they constitute a form of sociological description or even political critique" (Pritchett 37).

written about echoes of Constantine Cavafy's poem "The God Abandons Antony" in Ali's evocation of Alexandria in "The City of Daughters."[63] Ali reverses the order of loss in his *shehr āshob* and keeps the gendered embodiment of the city from Cavafy's poem; yet another connection exists between Ali's lyrical re-creation of the past and the nostalgic portrayal of Hellenistic Alexandria by Cavafy (1863-1933). For Cavafy, this ancient Alexandria, and not the colonized Egyptian city of Alexandria where he wrote his Greek poetry, was "rooted in a physical reality that he once knew but that he actively reshaped, redefined as half real and half wrought by his own mind, in a way idealized, finally dramatized, and elevated to serve the purposes of art" (Keeley 67). In the same way, Ali superimposes the peaceful Kashmiri past of Srinagar onto the present of a fallen city, neither of which he can fully enter unless it is through his own lyrics. Furthermore, Cavafy's implicit homoerotic desire in his poetics is analogous to Ali's masked self-revelation of his homosexuality in his poetics of exility, which helps recreate "The City of Daughters" as a *shehr āshob* about 'city-despairing beloveds.'

A distinct Shi'a Muslim perception and choice of form also begins to infuse his poetry with this collection, as with the poem "Muharram in Srinagar, 1992," which becomes more evident with Rooms Are Never Finished, which has four *marsiyas*. An intense Shi'a identification with death and martyrdom, Catholic in flavor in its similarity to the Passion, has always been a part of Ali's poetics and its intensity partly has to do with the biographical occurrence of the poet's knowledge of his own impending mortality. Given the subject of death and violence as experienced by common Kashmiris

[63] In the poem, Cavafy recounts his version of the Roman emporer Antony's eventual demise in the city of Alexandria on the eve of the city's downfall, "As one long prepared, and graced with courage, / say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving. […] listen – your final delectation – to the voices, / to the exquisite music of that strange procession, / and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing" (33).

in The Country, it is understandable that Ali would equate the bloodshed at Karbala with the holocaust in Kashmir. Yet, a decadent meditation on death and excessive allusions to it show Ali's personal obsession with mortality and at times he almost seems to celebrate the presence of death in "the surreal, somewhat grotesque lyricism" (King 260) of his work. Decadence and ecstasy would seem to be tied together in Ali's poetics and if the tragedy of Kashmir were not the constant background of The Country, the tone of the rhyming quatrains in "The Last Saffron" would be roguish in Ali's recounting of his own death, "I will die, in autumn, in Kashmir." Yet Ali's attention to corpses and flayed bodies immediately interrupts the dark humor: "I will look for any sign of blood / in captions under the photos of boys, / those who by inches – after the April flood – / were killed in fluted waters, each voice // torn from its throat" (The Country 27).

The idea of creating excess in poetry, whether through the use of ornate forms or through the sheer pleasure of harnessing language, is not unusual for Ali since the ecstatic mode can be termed a feature of Urdu literary practices. His sensuous relationship with language and his rapture for formal and linguistic excess is also what ties him so dearly to the traditions of Faiz. Within Urdu literary tradition, he very consciously envisions a place for himself along masters such as Ghalib and Faiz. He kept stating in interviews that he believed in excess and that one should not apologize for excess (McKee 27), and, in American examples, constantly refers to the lush phraseology of Emily Dickinson and to Walt Whitman's unrestrained expressive style. There is also a patent New England sensibility reflected in the reference to Amherst within his poetry in The Country, the least of which is his citation of American antecedents like Emily Dickinson, as I show later. His poetics shows the influences of Emily Dickinson, James

Merrill, W. S. Merwin, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden. Ali attempts to solidify a position within the American literary establishment by reworking earlier traditional forms. This imagined community for Ali – that of other poets – is different from the social or political one, and is consciously styled in reference to elder poets. Ali's deference for these particular American poets – all of whom (save Merwin) may be argued to be either openly or suppressed queer – also reflects a desire of the closeted gay poet to acknowledge his own sexuality. By incorporating their verses into the body of his own work, Ali seeks acceptance in a poetic genealogy that engages the "erotics of pedagogy" (Guy-Bray 98), a way of accepting the anxiety of influence of the older poets.[64]

Ali's work as a translator of poetry from Urdu and Arabic (the latter with the help of an additional translator)[65] into English, is also a way of making a home in the language of English. The poets he chose for translation, Mirza Ghalib, Mahmoud Darwish, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz, are distinct in their own worldly poetics. From Ghalib, the nineteenth century Indian poet of unparalleled ghazals about love and a nation in transition, Ali translated a scant Urdu ghazal or two. One of the Arabic poems of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, rendered into translation by Ali as "Eleven Stars Over Andalusia" in his last volume Rooms Are Never Finished, becomes an incantation of exile, where Ali, led by Darwish, grieves over the impossibility of return. It is essentially Ali's translation of the Urdu poetry of the radical Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz in The Rebel's Silhouette that becomes the token of change in Ali's poetics as he incorporates the latter

[64] Stephen Guy-Bray reads the Bloomian anxiety of influence as homoerotic to begin with. According to him, the nature of the connection between the poets who assimilate the works of earlier queer poets is circular: "these texts are part of the internal world of the younger poets, something to which they always and even inevitably return. […T]his circularity is not pointless, but rather, endlessly productive" (100).

[65] Ali also translated the Hebrew poetry of Israeli poet Yehudit Heller into English with her help.

in his own work. Ali renders the poetry of Faiz, which (sometimes in the garb of love songs) directly refers to the political mess and censorship in Faiz's Pakistan of the 1950s-80s, into English in free verse forms, substituting the strict patterns of the ghazals for couplets or quatrains. Rather than being a literal translation of his poetry, Ali's rendition of Faiz's poetry captures the spirit of aesthetic innovation and political engagement in the latter's work. The turn from Ghalib to Faiz signals Ali's growing historical and political consciousness; from Faiz Ali "increasingly assumes in his poetry the role of witness" and from Faiz perhaps "discovers a model for employing tradition in startling and original ways" (Needham 71). This is evident in Ali's following statement about what happens when the voice in the poem transcends the voice of the poet, "It enables them to serve really the business of art. They're artists. It's not empty of emotion, it's empty of a narrow eye. It raises you into the mode which enables you to have grand emotions. It enables you to inhabit emotions without needing to apologize for them" (McKee 29). This ironic connection of empathy to grand emotions is eerily similar to what Faiz had also stated as the objective of poets:

> the role of the poet is not merely observation; he is also responsible for its struggle. To observe the restless drops with his eyes and also show it to others, depends on his artistic capability and to participate in its flow depends on the intensity of his zeal and the heat of his blood. (Faiz 12)

Ali's translations and incorporation of Urdu poetry into the neo-imperial idiom of American English serve the function of unhousing the mainstream American poetic traditions and discovering the difference that Bhabha suggests of literatures concerning "migrants, the colonized or political refugees" (Location 12). In addition, Ali transfers

the political act of witnessing from one culture to another, to new readers. As with Ali's poetry about the daily political chaos in Kashmir, the acts of translation and witnessing acquire the sacred function and divine status that the etymologies of the terms imply.[66] In this way, while Ali's past work had been criticized for the manner in which the trope of loss is expressed from his privileged cultural space and class position, the text under discussion is where the poet redeems himself.[67] If we take Ali's translation of poetry as political work, we can also see how this distinguishes Ali from many of his contemporaries who have taken advantage of categorization and tokenism within the rubrics of multiculturalism.

In more ways than one, Ali is postmodern in his skeptical yet tender evocation of the past and the nation he cannot truly return to, as in "A Pastoral," an ironic take on the signs of bucolic existence. He introduces representative symbols of pastorals such as larks and roses, only to invert them into gestures of death and disaster. The speaker's memory declines the charge of absolute return to "our last world, the first that vanished // in our absence from the broken city" (The Country 44) because when he lights a lamp, mirrors "textiled by dust" blind him to his return. However, Ali's tropology of exile is modernist in sensibility, form, and his conscious choice of literary antecedents. The influence of the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and more particularly of the modernist T. S. Eliot (1885-1965), is most palpable in his two earlier works published in India. In those earlier works, "the masking is a self-protective device, allowing the poet

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[66] An older definition of "witness" is that of someone who is present at the ascension or ressurection (read 'translation') of Jesus, and someone who attests to the truth about God (OED 3804).

[67] He has been critiqued "for shutting down certain painful aspects of the past, of essentializing home, especially for women within patriarchal cultures, fraught with cultural exclusions. […His] 'bag of memories' denotes a containment […] not an unruly spilling. It is a held together, ordered displacement," (Katrak 129).

to speak of loss and separation without revealing to himself and others the particulars of his history and the springs of his feelings" (Needham 65). Ali's work contains a Romantic temperament opposed by a modernist mood, which counterbalances any tendency to inertia: "Stylistically, the conflict often manifests itself in the juxtaposition of a startling, evocative image with a pared down, understated line" (Needham 66). In an interview, Ali credits Eliot and his fellow modernists with teaching him the fine art of literary appropriation: "I did learn this whole business of how to incorporate allusions and quotations into the fabric of your poetry" (Benvenuto 266). However, according to another reviewer, while Ali uses the sort of personalizing adjective of which Eliot was fond, "in Eliot, these are ironic and they are conceits, whereas in Ali they tend to be nonironic or predictable" (Hogan Philosophical Approaches 303).

In his doctoral thesis on T. S. Eliot's journal, The Criterion, Ali specifies that Classicism, and nostalgia for the aristocracy and the Church were central in the scheme of the journal (T. S. Eliot 18). One of Eliot's standards for the journal was his tendency to see everything in an ethical light, necessitated by the helplessness he felt at the state of Europe, but he also argued for a society of diverse opinion, for the salvation of the individual soul rather than all of society (T. S. Eliot 126). Ali's deference for Eliot results from the latter's attempts to include diversity in his editorship of the journal and Ali is most impressed by Eliot's 'catholicity':

> The criteria shifted, were qualified, while Eliot kept using his moral hammer. It is as if he had to keep asserting to himself the validity of his *Weltanschauung* at the very moment it was being challenged in practice. This explains the often desperate voice of the editor. (T. S. Eliot 147)

Ali suggests that, as an editor, Eliot had to make compromising choices in a time of political and ethical crisis when he thought a whole civilization was facing an apocalypse and being destroyed; the only order to be preserved and the only criterion to be established in such a crucial time was the one that Eliot could practice as editor of his journal. The criterion that Ali employs increasingly in The Country to avert apocalypse is to personally maintain order through use of stringent formal constraints that help him contain the chaos of despair and loss he faces at the situation in Kashmir. It seems that Ali believes that the only way it is possible for him to preserve the Kashmiri nation that is facing annihilation is by practicing poetry as witness. However, the formalist demand made by Eliot of the poem as an objective artifact is one that reflects in Ali's poetry too, but mainly it is Eliot's retrogressive concern for tradition and the past that Ali also risks emulating at the expense of the present.[68] The kind of transcendental ego promoted by Eliot, one that elevates order and classical tradition, is in contrast to the Wordsworthian egotistical sublime that consumes everything around it in service to the poet's subjectivity and which negates community in its appropriation of voice. Ali's lyrical ego in The Country also seems to circumscribe a private self as standing for the public national collective. Another aspect of the persona or lyrical ego of the poet is as the role of the subject in lyric poetry, observed in the fluid and negotiable relationship between the poet and the reader because in poetry, "the self is a relation between writer and reader that is triggered by what Jakobson called contact, the power of presence" (Silliman "Who Speaks" 373). Thus if the "speaking 'I,' whose position any reader occupies, is a radically social construct within a linguistic community" (Blasing 12), then Ali's lyrical

[68] According to Eliot: "The conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show" (39).

ego, a witness testifying to historical trauma in complex formal patterns, is also one occupied by the reader.

In poem after poem, Ali attempts to return to Kashmir – his pursuit is manifested in dreams about Kashmir and feverish visions of those long dead and of his own death in Kashmir. His is virtually a circular journey because letters addressed to him from Srinagar do reach him and his letters do reach Srinagar – though not directly their original destinations. The epistolary form of some of the poems raises questions about whom a letter, or poem, eventually belongs to and whether it ever reaches its destination: by reading the poems, the readers also become their intended receivers. If he has been dictated by a Kashmiri friend to "Each night put Kashmir into your dreams" (The Country 25), he takes the command to heart and in enchanting poems like "'Some Vision of the World Cashmere'" and "'Lo, A Tint Cashmere! Lo, A Rose," he relates the simultaneity of being present in Amherst and Kashmir, and of visiting the dream within dreams of his deceased grandmother. Notably, another recurring symbol in his work (especially in these two poems), that of mirrors, also becomes emblematic of the poetics of reiteration and the hopelessness of authentic return. The seemingly circular journeys of Ali are actually broken in their trajectory, signifying the impossibility of return – mirrors represent incomplete copies of the past, letters don't reach their original destinations but other readers, his speaker keeps going in circles in and out of entrances and doors; hence, his journeys become circuitous in course, almost but not quite reaching their destination of Kashmir. The mirror motif also becomes a representational technique in Ali's poetry – the funhouse of identity the poet returns to repetitively to try out new personae. The poet's self-mocking mode and negation of his own verses within the same poems show

his awareness of the contradictions of absolute reclamation. The narratives of impossibilities reveal the heartfelt torment of the poet of being unable to prevent bloodshed because of exile and the elusiveness of the homeland, and the attempt to instead create a palimpsest of memory and desire over the lost structures.

On the other hand, Ali's imagined nation and community is gender-based and hermetically solitary, at times more affiliated with the idea of recreating place then resuscitating a community. His exile hasn't reached the stage of identifying or assimilating with a diaspora of Kashmiris, though he did see himself in a diaspora of South Asian writers. Edward Said has said that the crucial question is that "is exile so extreme and private that any instrumental use of it is ultimately a trivialization?" because one of the characteristics of being in exile is the narcissistic masochism that results in the fetishizing of exility (Reflections 182-183). The poetics of exile and loss in Ali's volume is aestheticized to such a degree that occasionally Ali's poetry is in the danger of falling into the trap of artificiality that he is accused of by one of his reviewers.[69] His female muses of exile, such as most often the legendary ghazal-singer Begum Akhtar and then Kashmir itself personified as female, serve the purpose of exalting the women in his poetry to a distant, isolated pedestal. Similarly, while the trope of the Belovéd in his poetry alternately changes from the personal to public, it mostly remains female, trapped in the feminine paradigm from one tradition to another; in an adaptation of a ghazal by the poet Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Ali states, "Your legend now equals our thirst, Belovéd – / Your word has spread across broken nations" (The Country 78). Kashmir, as the Pakistani nation in the ghazals of Ali's much-loved Faiz, becomes the Belovéd and also

[69] "Ali often employs syllabic forms that jerk the unsettled reader around stanza and line breaks, and his language is at times densely symbolic and almost coded. Much seems artificial, even when naturalness is called for" (Flamm 23).

witness to his love and homecoming. It seems as if it is the poet's aggrandizement to consider himself the sole witness and savior of Kashmir. On the other hand, how else but in verse could a nation be recuperated when political institutions fail to intervene and pictures fail to capture reality and forestall carnage?

Interestingly, despite Ali's emulation of a poetics of excess as imported from the Urdu literary tradition, his poetry lacks the sensuous details and joys of the body evident even in the revolutionary poetry of his beloved Faiz: "I longed for your lips, dreamed of their roses" (Rebel's Silhouette 39). The disembodied persona most often employed as the speaker of his poems is singular and male. In the same vein, for a poet who so willfully celebrates the concept of excess in expression and passion in poetry, Ali inhibits his own queer subjectivity from becoming visible in his poetics, unlike the tender eroticism of the other queer transnational poet Etel Adnan, and this apparent lacuna can be read as occupied by lyrical disguises. Most critics have noted that regardless of Ali's cautious self-disclosure of his sexual identity in his earlier poetry, the poems in Nostalgist's Map are a clearer manifestation of his coming to terms with this aspect of his subjectivity.[70] "In some of his earlier poems […] the poet reveals his pain over losing love, but the gender of the lover remains unspecified. A common tactic among precontemporary homosexual poets in the West, this deliberate elision of gender specificity makes gay readings of the poems possible" (Summers 620). Traditionally, the gender of the figure of the Belovéd, the *mahbūb*, is deliberately left unspecified for both straight and queer male Urdu poets. Accordingly, every time the Belovéd appears in The

[70] Roberts refers to "Ali's longing for a male American lover" in Nostalgist's Map and according to Summers, "Ali appears less anxious to conceal his sexuality. 'A Nostalgist's Map of America,' written after learning about a close friend's AIDS diagnosis, is an exceptionally powerful rendering of personal anguish. Homoerotic overtones are even more evident in 'In Search of Evanescence,' a haunting meditation on the poet's relationship with Phil, the friend dying of AIDS" (620-21).

Country, or the speaker addresses an unnamed Other who obviously cannot respond within the parameters of the poem, it can be read to carry homoerotic tones of longing and desire, adding an extra dimension to the poetics of exile and loss in Ali's lyrics. Thus, the first poem in the book, "Farewell," is also a love poem of leave-taking and a final accounting of the failure of love. The poem, which consists of refrains, starts with "At a certain point I lost track of you" (The Country 21). Besides listing concrete details of bloodshed, the speaker complicates the demarcations between memory and history, and notes the impossibility of forgiveness by the beloved: "You needed me. You needed to perfect me: / In your absence you polished me into the Enemy. / Your history gets in the way of my memory. / I am everything you lost. You can't forgive me. / I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy. / Your memory gets in the way of my memory" (The Country 22). A direct homosexual reference can be found in the speaker's anguish over not being able to reveal his agony to anyone, barely acknowledging it himself, "I hid my pain even from myself; I revealed my pain only to myself" (The Country 23), the same expression of pain and longing for a lost love appearing in almost every poem of this collection. The last line, a slight variation of a line that appeared earlier, records the speaker's ultimate regret: "If only somehow you could have been mine, / what would not have been possible in the world?" (The Country 23).

In Ali's poetics, the topography of the erotic is mapped with the language of violence. His poetry reveals an aching homoerotic charge and anguish over a divided self that cannot be reconciled, which can also be found in Dickinson's unconsummated love for the women in her most intimate circle, most notably her sister-in-law Susan

Dickinson. This is seen in the letter-poems Dickinson addressed to her sister-in-law,[71] e.g. poem # 64: "Some Rainbow coming from the – Fair! / Some Vision of the World Cashmere –". Even though Dickinson builds lush romantic images in the poem, here too, the language of violence and empire insinuates itself in the discourse of love. While Ali's prose poem "Some Vision of the World Cashmere" recounts the speaker's panic at a relative's death and his inability to assuage grief, it is Ali's "Ghazal" from the same section that is similar to Dickinson's delineation of the spiritual[72] combined with her latent homoerotic love. Dickinson's Poem # 473, "I am ashamed – I hide – / What right have I – to be a bride –," from which Ali quotes in his "Ghazal," contains imagery of the speaker preparing her trousseau which is conflated with a contentious relationship with the divine. In the "Ghazal," Ali also fuses a Belovéd who is both mortal and divine in the rejection of love: "Who lies beneath your spell tonight / before you agonize him in farewell tonight? […] Whom else from rapture's road will you expel tonight? // Those 'Fabrics of Cashmere –' 'to make Me beautiful –' / 'Trinket' – to gem – 'Me to adorn – How – tell' – tonight?" (The Country 40). Eventually, Agha Shahid Ali and Emily Dickinson are poets separated by a century but marked by a series of cultural-national and personal losses, and exiled to live in words.

By including local details and incidents of past and present Kashmir, imaginatively reconstructing history, Agha Shahid Ali manages to bring the tragedy home to readers in America. Ali's poetry is a meticulous re-enactment of memory in a

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[71] See Hart, for instance.

[72] In an early letter to Higginson, Dickinson admitted, "My Business is Circumference" (Letters 2:408, cited in Gelpi), circumference signifying the extension and limit of spiritual ecstasy, "a complex symbol for those disrupted moments when in some sense time transcends time," connected with feelings of sublime fear or terror mingled with aesthetic perception (Gelpi 121).

race against time and, in the beginning of the book, he seems to give up and strongly evoke and trap himself in the past: he reinvents Kashmir as an "imaginary homeland, / filling it, closing it, shutting" his self in it (The Country 15). Despite the deeply autobiographical footnote to his poetics of loss, desire, and the impossible possibility of repossession, he is unable to believe in a truly authentic mythos of origin; he is a "translated" man, trying to construct fragments of an imaginary homeland from afar.[73] Particularly so, in Ali's reconstruction of Kashmir in a foreign land, the knowledge of the past, of history and language, becomes valuable. His personal nostalgic memories of national monuments and of cherished moments are juxtaposed with the trauma of the present, in neither of which he can fully partake because of his exiled state. Exile creates the urgency that he inventory and come to terms with loss, one reason why he cannot sentimentalize the past (Needham 68). In a transnational world that desires to erase borders and distinctions, Ali finds it imperative to re-create the nation of Kashmir by invoking cultural memories that help the poet imagine a better future for his country.

It seems that the only place in the text where Ali concedes affiliation with a Kashmiri diaspora, so potent is this conceit of a poet in exile, is in the canzone "After the August Wedding in Lahore, Pakistan." In this last poem of the volume, the tone of the poet is touchingly elegiac as the wedding festivities make him ruminate on the meaning of mortality, "Did they sing / just of love then, or was love witnessing / its departure for other thirsts" (The Country 89). The song of the chanteuse at the wedding takes him back

[73] Salman Rushdie in Imaginary Homelands said that exiled, emigrant or expatriate writers, in the process of looking back, "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10), and that "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (17).

to a moment after a concert in Kashmir when he is left alone and feels trapped in a hotel mirror:

Would someone glass

me in – from what? Filled, I emptied my glass,

lured by a stranger's eyes into their glass.

There, nothing melted, as in Lahore's night (Country 90)

As he has been appropriating Emily Dickinson's verses about Kashmir throughout the volume, he does so in this poem too where Dickinson's equating of Kashmir with Calvary ("Where Thou art – that – is Home – / Cashmere – // or Calvary – the same" Poem # 725) takes on immediate horrific tones. His "most menacing image of the End" is to be forgotten: "expelled from the glass / of someone's eyes as if no full-length glass / had held us, safe, from political storms?" The last stanza of this last poem of the volume leaves the poem rhetorically open to the reader, now the inheritor of the poet's words:

The century is ending. It is pain

from which love departs into all new pain:

Freedom's terrible thirst, flooding Kashmir,

is bringing love to its tormented glass.

Stranger, who will inherit the last night

of the past? Of what shall I not sing, and sing? (The Country 91)

What does Agha Shahid Ali find on the other side of the mirror through his poetry that forges an imaginary homeland and creates possibilities of return? The inner landscape of an exiled poet's memory becomes a translation of the topography of a

nation. On the other side of the mirror, his writing that captures a nation, his poetry – is the possibility of return, the imagining of peace and harmony and his intact family and nation – "Upstairs, the window, too, is a mirror; if I jump through it I / will fall into my arms" (The Country 47). In Rooms Are Never Finished, even this hope seems to be markedly lost in his translation of Mahmoud Darwish in "Eleven Stars Over Andalusia": "My heart alone is heavy, / so let it remain here, around your house, / barking, howling for a golden time. / It alone is my homeland" (Rooms 89). At least in the Kashmir resurrected to life by his words, he can return to his memories and his own self, in the promised future of a nation untarnished by violence: "We shall meet again, in Srinagar, / by the gates of the Villa of Peace," (The Country 44).

CHAPTER 3
"Fossil Trace of Word": Fragmentation and Restitution in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's DICTEE

How does poetry help a poet undertake an aesthetics of fragmentation, the splitting at the root, of memory and language? A Korean transplant to America, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982) is concerned with challenging the construction of subjectivity in nationalist discourses and recording the cost to memory in the experience of migration to another country. Cha expresses this concern in myriad art forms, such as mixed-media performances, video installations, and written works that incorporate elements of art and poetry. Her only published text DICTEE[74] (1982) represents a shattered collage of various artistic, lyrical and historical ingredients, in which she attempts to restore private and national histories ruptured by cultural and linguistics invasions of her homeland Korea and its violent partition into two separate geopolitical entities. The displacement of the immigrant and the fragmentation of memory are actualized in Cha's disruption of the reader's encounter with the book. Hence, the struggle of representing imaginative and concrete visual spaces becomes a structural concern for Cha. In my reading of DICTEE, I propose that the only way Cha can attempt to compose a unified Korea, and concurrently hope for an intact self, is at the site of her imagination by fusing together the fragments of memories, languages, and mythologies.

Among the three first-generation immigrant American poets, Theresa Cha arrived in America at the earliest age, and she also published her work at the young age of 32.

[74] The presentation of the opening of the text, the title, plays an important role in the evaluation and signification of Theresa Cha's work. See, for instance, Juliana Spahr's assessment of the issue of capitalization of the title as Dictee, Dictée or DICTEE. I use the full capitalization of the title as it appears on the front of the book and, henceforward, the preferred method of each reviewer.

DICTEE is Cha's sole lyrical volume that appeared as a complete text during her life. This highly experimental volume – in terms of the fusion of its aesthetic forms and personal and political contents – also proves Cha to be the only poet who really and radically experiments with form and various languages in her text, prose poem being just one of the formats used by Cha. Like Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali, the other two transnational American poets I am considering, her poetry captures the aspirations of a poet lodged in the stresses between the imagining of the natal nation and the claims of the assimilationist culture of her adopted land. Cha's poetry is autobiographical, also revealing the poet's basis in the artistic and Asian American communities. Indeed, Cha's poetry offers "Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other" (DICTEE 20), the third way alongside Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali in her fusion of word and image, lyricism and experimentation, nation and subject.[75] I argue that this third space of the transnational American poet is fluid, indeterminate, and impossible as Cha's poetry reflects the multiple disjunctures of the alternately failed and successful attempts at constructing being and community. This third space is also a state of in-betweeness, an endlessly mutable process that does not provide synthesis and only in the imagination is an impossible sense of wholeness realized.

Besides a collection of essays on film theory that she edited, Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings (1980), Cha's other written texts are rarely in print: "Exilee/Temps Mort," a piece created as a series of photographs and a long poem, is included in Hotel (1980), a collection of works by seven artists. Cha's own theoretical and creative contribution to Apparatus appears as "Commentaire," an exercise

[75] Elaine H. Kim states that in DICTEE, Cha "creates and celebrates a kind of third space, an exilic space" ("Poised" 8)

in monochromatic typography that becomes a complementary commentary on the school of apparatus film theory, of which Cha was an acolyte. The rest of Cha's oeuvre consists of various short video performance pieces and installations that incorporate Cha's concerns with language, nationality, and textuality. Her interest in film and performance is noticeably reflected in DICTEE, a mixed-media work of poetry. In her MFA thesis, "Paths," Cha describes the transformative processes of the artist acting as a medium between dream and reality by fusing elements and energy, and Cha concludes that the artist captures eternal wonder: "I cannot help but to express the overwhelming sensation that almost resembles a returning, an abandon, a salvation from the struggle of being human, to only the purest of pure" ("Paths" 5).[76] Elsewhere, Cha asserts her work to consist of "metaphors for the return, going back to a lost time and space, always in the imaginary" and "the realization of the imprint, the inscription etched from the experience of leaving" ("Personal Statement" 2). I suggest that Cha's poetics of return to "the purest of pure" is traced in DICTEE in her not-always-successful, fragmented, imagined spiritual homecoming to the mother, in which the poet-artist acts as a shamanistic mediator for reaching a stage of wholeness.

In poetry, as we've seen earlier, translation as a metaphor conveys the hope of not just helping an object to be *borne across* but also of delivering poetry *alive* to the other. When she incorporates more than one language into her work, a poet also tackles the task of resuscitating a text into another language – what if she resists the casual absorption of

[76] Cha's transfusion of the subject and object, the artist and viewer, dream and reality, especially in DICTEE, seems to have been influenced by Jean-Louis Baudry's influential essay, "The Apparatus," in which Baudry states that the spectators' inability to distinguish between hallucination of the cinematic apparatus and reality is informed by "the specific mode in which the dreamer identifies with his dream, a mode which is anterior to the mirror stage, to the formation of the self, and therefore founded on a permeability, a fusion of the interior with the exterior" (Baudry 311).

her multilingual and formally complex poetry and deliberately imperils the readers' sense of cultural and linguistic placement? I read Theresa Cha's DICTEE as presenting a way of using translation as a critique of globalization, of rebelling against the dictation of perfect translation. Cha's "aesthetics of infidelity" (Lowe 37) is indicative of her process of poetic selection that highlights omissions in historical narratives. Her project of untranslatability and mistranslation in DICTEE becomes manifest in the untranslated Hangul frontispiece, the apocryphal Greek translation presented in the beginning of the book, and the mistranslated French to English in the pedagogical exercises. Yet translation also becomes a site of transition in Cha's book for the liminal stage of creation between corporeality and spiritual attainment, shuttling between the inside and the outside, real and imagined space, where Cha struggles to retain, in what becomes evident later, an almost religious sense of ontological oneness of the human and spiritual world.

DICTEE tells the story of different women – Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo, the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, St. Thérèse of Liseux, Joan of Arc, an unidentified Laura Claxton, Demeter, and Persephone – in nine parts structured around the arts of the nine Greek muses. There are two untitled parts framing these nine sections, with the book's preamble unofficially starting on unnumbered pages before the actual written text. The frontispiece of the book is a grainy photograph of a wall containing Korean graffiti and DICTEE begins with an apocryphal aphorism attributed to the Greek poet Sappho. The title, 'dictée,' besides being a meditation on taking dictation or the act of writing from an oral source or from memory, additionally alludes to the dictatorial author-ity granted the writer as the privileged speaking voice of a text. The particular autobiographical dislocations of the poet are replicated in the emphasis on the different

processes of writing in different languages, in which the title, the contents of the poem and the actual existence of the poem become self-referential. In DICTEE, narratives of suffering and resistance that have been silenced have to be reconstructed from remembered details and are imparted from one person to another, an activity that Cha suggests is gender-based in origin. Cha's attempts to capture the untold history of the Korean nation and the immigrant self reflect how these very histories are written on the bodies of women, which is why her genealogy stretches back to these particular mythological and real women. Cha gives primacy to the female voice in her choice of the Diseuse, a female character introduced as the monologist in the beginning of the book (DICTEE 3). The Diseuse becomes a vessel for the muses and the teller of stories in the book, and like her counterpart in European mythology – the fortuneteller or witch, "*diseuse de bonne aventure*" (DICTEE 123) – acquires a somewhat dubious air in her reconstruction of narratives.

DICTEE is Cha's retelling of the history of the Korean peninsula in its successive territorial, cultural, and linguistic invasions by China, Japan, and the United States, and its later partition at the inception of the Cold War in 1953 into the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea/North Korea and the capitalist Republic of Korea/South Korea. The trauma of recording a bloody history creates the already alluded to strain between image and language in this volume. This is also the strain between form and content in DICTEE, which is indicated by the different styles that Cha employs: hand-written notes and journal entries, diagrams, pictures, film stills, typed letters, ideograms and inscriptions, dictation and grammar exercises, prose poem, fragmented poetry, etc. These styles are not harmonized or resolved because the nature of language itself is of

great consequence in the book, and the process of articulation and elocution of different languages (English, French, Chinese, and Korean) plays a major part in the organization of the disparate materials. Cha points out the rules of grammar, dictation, and translation that are supposed to be observed in any pedagogical exercise; at the same time, she encourages the student/speaker/reader to rebel against these conventions:

> if
>
> name be known if name only seen heard spoken
>
> read cannot be never she hide all essential
>
> words words link subject verb she writes hidden
>
> the essential words must be pretended invented
>
> she try on different images essential invisible (DICTEE 15)

The deliberate misspellings throughout the book and the grammatical errors incorporated within the linguistic dictation exercises are the "aesthetics of infidelity" that Lisa Lowe has identified in Cha's poetry as the colonial subject's disobedience of pedagogical, religious, and linguistic expectations ("Unfaithful" 37).

The fragmentation of form, language, and psyche that Cha depicts in DICTEE can be read as an aftermath of the partition of the Korean homeland and as response to Cha's migration and exile to the American nation-state. The fragmentary quality of Cha's book (the bricolage of lyrical interludes, prose poetry, letters, handwritten notes, diagrams, and calligraphy) is a reflection of the tension between imagined and actual space. This is evident at the end of the Calliope/Epic Poetry section where Cha consecutively reconstructs the processes of American naturalization ("Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph." DICTEE 56) and the return to South

Korea ("They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. You say who are but you begin to doubt." DICTEE 57), both of which result in negating her subjectivity. Cha's poetry seeks to make sense of being an immigrant in America, while dealing with fresh memories of a colonized and partitioned Korean nation ("If the words are to be uttered, they would be from behind the partition" 132); in this way, her poetry questions both nationality and naturalization. If she cannot be integrated into the American landscape, neither can she have a homecoming to a whole past and nation where she is spurned upon her return anyway as "not one of them": "Not a single word allowed to utter until the last station […] Near tears, nearly saying, I know you I know you, I have waited to see you for long this long. They check each article, question you on foreign articles, then dismiss you" (DICTEE 58). Hyun Yi Kang places Cha in the Korean American *il-chom o-se* or '1.5 generation,' those born in Korea but who emigrated to the U.S. as children at an age young enough to become acculturated but old enough to retain some memories of the Korean homeland, its language, and its history. Kang reads "their fragmented, halting, and intertextual composition as highlighting the very doubts and dilemmas that confront any attempt to grasp or re-present a homeland in the face of formidable separations" (252).

Not only does the rupture of nation and homeland become the background of the poems, but Cha also represents the division of the self as a microcosm of the split nation. The 38th Parallel dividing North and South Korea, the DMZ of "*Imaginary borders. Un imaginable boundaries*" (DICTEE 87), assumes a symbolic barrier of barbed wires that tear her psyche and her tongue to shreds. The continual repeated national and linguistic colonizations, and then the Korean bifurcation create self-alienation in the poet, "SHE

opposes Her. SHE against Her" (DICTEE 87). For instance, in the Melpomene/Tragedy segment, Cha captures the psychic repercussions of the division of Korea in the map of the divided nation prefacing the section, along with an unfinished letter she writes to her mother from Seoul, Korea. The letter consists of Cha's recollection of her brother's involvement in a crushed South Korean student revolt, which is fused into her present journey to the site ("I speak another tongue, a second tongue. This is how distant I am. From then. From that time." DICTEE 85), where her own memory becomes suspect since she finds no physical signs of the occurrence of the revolt. Physical exile from the homeland creates the conditions where return cannot satisfy the eternal loss and longing for wholeness in the poet, "Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile" (DICTEE 81). On the immediate personal level, the rupture also becomes apparent in the poet's body, elsewhere captured by Cha in figurations of the tongue: "Suffice Melpomene, to exorcise from this mouth the name the words the memory of severance through this act by this very act to utter one, *Her* once, Her to utter at once, *She* without the separate act of uttering" (DICTEE 89). Ultimately, the section is much more than an individual's traumatic account of exile or of the tragedy of partition of one nation: "There is no destination other than towards yet another refuge from yet another war. Many generations pass and many deceptions in the sequence in the chronology towards the destination" (DICTEE 80). An individual's psychic breakdown becomes a universal lament on the human capacity for inflicting war and causing emotional dismemberment: "Suffice that should diminish human breaths only too quickly. Suffice Melpomene. Nation against nation multiplied nations against nations

against themselves. Own. Repels her rejects her expels her from *her* own. Her own is, in, of, through, all others, *hers*" (DICTEE 88).

The linguistic colonization of Korea compels Cha to question issues of authority, ownership, and imposition of monolingual identity in her employment of different languages in the book. The colonial subject is already fragmented in the interrogation of monolinguism which is "impassable, indisputable" because the subject "cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence" in herself (Derrida 1). Even in this polyglot text, Cha's own mother tongue, the Korean Hangul, appears very few times in the book, once on the first page as an anonymous rune in the photograph carrying the untranslated inscription: "Mother, I miss you, I am hungry, I want to go home to my native place."[77] Korean characters that represent parents appear in calligraphic form, each to a page (DICTEE 26, 27, 54, 55), to provide the linguistic Korean lineage to the narratives of Yu Guan Soon ("She is born of one mother and one father" DICTEE 25) and Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo ("you come back to your one mother to your one father" DICTEE 53). In the Calliope/Epic Poetry portion, as Cha recounts her mother's forced tenure to Chinese Manchuria as an 18 year old away from her own parents and her linguistic exile as a teacher of Japanese forbidden to speak her native tongue, it becomes all the more crucial for Cha to establish this matrilineal linguistic Korean link as another form of domicile:

> The tongue that is for-
> bidden is your own mother tongue. You speak in the
> dark, in the secret. The one that is yours. Your own.
> You speak very softly, you speak in a whisper. In the

[77] Translated in Elaine Kim ("Poised" 10). Lowe also refers to the lack of Korean in DICTEE (41-42).

> dark, in secret. Mother tongue is your refuge. It is
> being home. Being who you are. Truly. To speak
> makes you sad. Yearning. To utter each word is a
> privilege you risk by death. Not only for you but for
> all. All of you who are one, who by law tongue tied
> forbidden of tongue. (DICTEE 45-46)

Korean calligraphy is again reproduced near the end of the book to depict the ten shamanic principles (DICTEE 154) but this time Cha provides the translation in the tenth section of the book (DICTEE 173). On the other hand, the dictation and language exercises that form such an integral part of the book are undertaken only in the colonizers' languages, i.e., from French into English. In this way, Cha refuses to furnish organic unity by providing translation into her mother tongue. Cha further disrupts the process of smooth translation even in the imperial languages by mistranslating the language primers and the French-English poems in the book. DICTEE's interruption of the process of gathering or retrieval of information, as in the mistranslated and untranslatable dictation exercises, is Cha's critique of representation (cultural, ethnic, or linguistic) and of mimetic genre boundaries. As I argue later, Cha attempts to go beyond the limits of language by utilizing the cinematic techniques she learnt during her film-making background, but the attempts are thwarted by the equal failure of images to capture history as much as words.

The lyric in DICTEE seems to break under the violence of the Korean partition, and this is also where the formal dissonance becomes most apparent. That this fragmentation is carried out also in the poetic form of the prose poem sections of the

book, points out an interesting lyrical disjuncture in Cha's text: the form of the prose poem allows for visual symmetry and continuity to develop even as Cha interrupts linear narration. Cha isolates forms and narratives, highlighting the processes of poetic selection, the deliberate omissions and inclusions in historical documentation and in her own poetry, which serves to create new spaces and new meanings. Yet, there is a flow here in the discontinuity and disjuncture. The experimental quality of the text also challenges the case for lyricism. Cha makes this clear when instead of using 'Euterpe' as the Greek muse for lyric poetry, she deliberately 'misspells' the word into 'Elitere,' who does not exist in Greek mythology.[78] While mnemonic rhymes are absent in the book, Cha renders the lyric in five significant places in the book. These particular poems are marked from the rhythmic quality of the prose poem sections and other brief passages by the heightened degree of their lyricism and their individual nature as singular, stand-alone poems. Three of the lyrics occur in the very beginning: the first is the apocryphal inscription of Sappho; the second is the invocation to the muses and its repetition (DICTEE 7 and 11); and the third is the short poem, "A Far" (DICTEE 20). In its latter two occurrences, Cha presents the lyric as considerably longer poems: "J'écoutais les cygnes / I heard the swans" (DICTEE 66), a side-by-side translation of a French poem into English in the Urania/Astronomy section; and "Aller / Retour," "Aller" and "Retour," poems in English containing brief French interludes in the Elitere/Lyric Poetry section (DICTEE 124, 128). It is important to note that, besides the epigraphs, all the lyrical poems contain parataxis: they consist of fragmented thoughts and phrases put together by their associative nature. This fragmentation of the lyric underscores the impossibility of unequivocal expression by complicating the poet's memories, thoughts

[78] For the muse mis-connection, see Wong 115.

and sensations, and seemingly lacks the lyricism of the honed nostalgia contained in diasporic and exilic poetry. Cha's loquaciousness is offset by her pausing – I propose that in Cha's work both these strains exist in tense harmony as yet another facet of the lyric.

In contrast to Theresa Cha, fellow Korean American poet Myung Mi Kim's copious use of negative space in her poetry indicates the impossibility of full translation of experience into language. Kim's subjectivity, as reflected in the form and content of her poetry, is as fragmented as Cha's: her verse, whose subject is also Korea's partition and neo-colonization by America, appears as long poems containing lines of short lyrical paratactic bursts. In Myung Mi Kim's first book, Under Flag, published in 1991 around the time of Cha's rediscovery, there are echoes of DICTEE in the spare idiom, often circling a refrain or variation of a phrase, and in the concern with issues of nationhood and language acquisition. However, the very length of Cha's DICTEE offers possible subjective and historical contexts that Kim's relatively shorter poems balk at and only provide subtle hints towards, and this is why Kim's latter poetry comes across as somewhat opaque. Another difference between the two poets, that "Kim's writing is more politically pointed, as her quest for witness is not tied to a haunted conversation with the 'homeland' but is involved in the urgency of contemporary life" (Stefans 57-58), also points to a possible shortcoming in Cha's poetics – being trapped in the past. Cha's recursive nostalgia seems to place her in lyrical stasis and, one way of avoiding this likelihood is to read DICTEE as radically revisionist poetics. All these transnational poets try to radically revise history by comprehensively recounting the past – however, entrapment in the past is a conundrum both Cha and Agha Shahid Ali face in their

recuperation of memory, but Cha at least leaves a way out for herself in the ending of her book.

Cha suggests that silence – in the self-enforced or imposed variety of dictation, internalization, and acculturation – produces another kind of fragmentation. In her attempts to bare the fissures in Korean and American history and to reconstruct the missing narratives, Cha reveals a void at the center of DICTEE and, here, the influence of Stephane Mallarmé and Samuel Beckett in both Cha's writing and performance (Lewallen 2) becomes apparent. Mallarmé's influence as an innovator of visual poetry, the transposition of word into image and the emphasis on the spatiality and materiality of the text, is palpable in Cha's amalgamation of graphics and language. In Beckettian mimicry, Cha highlights silence as an expressive tool for trauma, syntax strained to the last degree everywhere in the book. The semantics of silence require a subject that either accepts or breaks the cycle of enforced and accepted gagging. On the other hand, as profusion, silence is also indispensable as the lower register of poetry charged with potential meaning. In Cha's poetics, silence refers to a limitation of language and words to capture reality, either historical or present. Silence is a manifestation of psychic voids and physical wounds: that despite all the verbal ingenuity and loquaciousness, there is something that will and must remain unsaid and unspoken. Cha states this as the "plenitude of the void" (DICTEE 161) – this is the cohabitation of the full and the empty, excess and lacuna, polyphony and silence, most obvious in the Erato/Love Poetry section with the empty pages facing the full ones, the textually packed pages set off by the negative white space. The past remains opaque when seen through "stain glass" (132) and the truth of what historically happened in Korea is hidden behind a national veil of

secrecy in which "veiled voice under breath murmuration / render mute strike dumb voiceless tongueless" (DICTEE 127). Besides the obvious disjointed visual and aural pacing, Cha writes *in* the pauses in the book. Where they appear inside the dictation exercises, these pauses seem imperious and dictatorial. However, where they form part of the breathing process in the act of utterance, the pauses acquire dissenting connotations ("Can do without rests. Improper / to rest before begun even. Probation of rest. / Without them all. / Stop start. / Where proper pauses were expected. / But no more." DICTEE 75), and are pregnant with meaning for the Diseuse to speak in:

> At the pause. When the pause has already
> soon begun and has rested there still. She waits in-
> side the pause. Inside her. Now. This very moment.
> Now. (DICTEE 4)

In addition, the deliberate pausing of DICTEE creates the conditions of even further delaying the process of comprehension and digestion that reading a written text produces in the receiver, as opposed to the viewer's rapid identification with the cinematic apparatus. Cha lets the reader breathe in the implications that become apparent in disruptions created by these lacunae and fragments: "The text 'slows down' the process of signification so that, in a sense, the pieces become visible. Moreover, the pieces themselves reveal further pieces, and all must be read together in order to understand the whole" (S. Kim 161). It is also interesting to read Cha's poetry with the natural rhythms of breathing, speech, and silence – for all her attempts at capturing the visual and

pictorial elements of cinema and images, the book does become logocentric in its emphasis on words suspended in sterile space or pregnant silence.[79]

By complicating the various positionings of the poet, Cha problematizes the project of recording history and identity. History is shown as tightly enmeshed with the most intimate aspects of her private self and also with the collective aspirations and dynamic past of the community. Cha's poetry also brings the issue of American neoimperialism to the forefront, what with American intervention in Korea during the Cold War and the annexation of South Korea thereafter. As Cha's subjective recollections are a big part of DICTEE, one of the facets of the volume is how a female subject's memory bleeds into that of a nation: "The memory is the entire. The longing in the face of the lost" (DICTEE 38). This is comparable to Agha Shahid Ali's blending of memory and history and, as I show later, Pakistani poet Kishwar Naheed's project of imagining the nation through a woman's perspective, of gendering the nation, is fairly similar ideologically to the one Cha undertakes in inscribing Korean history with women's voices that had been lost earlier. Since Korea was partitioned before the poet's birth, so is Cha's memory in the way different female speakers take over the narrative of the poem and of the nation. For Cha, the multivocality is one way of letting the other narratives in, with the poet's controlling voice on top. Even as the poet's voice discreetly manages to contain the different narrative strands and polyvocality, Cha – via the Diseuse – threatens the secure fastening of the commanding voice through this female figure as the mere transmitter, she who "mimicks the speaking" and "allows others. In place of her" (DICTEE 3) and is seemingly a vessel for the muses. The oracular power of the Diseuse becomes apparent in the Elitere/Lyric Poetry section where Cha invokes her

[79] This harks back to the Derridean concept of language as primarily referential.

three times to change history. Cha had elsewhere written of the artist's role as that of a medium or alchemist who helps transform both herself and the audience: "Each viewer is an integral part of the artist's work […] in that S/he is the receptor as well as activator of the pieces. It is through the presence of the 'Other,' any form of communication is established, completed" ("Paths" 2). Building upon the connection between Imagination and Memory, Cha insists upon "a communication with the audience, to create a space where the audience are left free to imagine, to remember their own memories. […] In this way, the piece becomes an intimate sharing, a collective experience, of the collective memory and imagination…" ("Paths" 3). Yet the inconsistent authority of the Diseuse is fortified in the connections she establishes with the other female characters in the book and with the readers in the "Plurality of entrances, the opening of networks the infinity of languages" ("Paths" 4) that reciting others' histories provides. Yet another definition of the term *dictée* in French is "inspired": "The dictée's act of remembering by re-membering the dismembered fragments of memory scattered onto the void of the past and the attempt to create an ordered form out of the chaos are taken as an act inspired by the Muses" (Yun 181). Cha's attempts at reconstituting the dismemberment of language and memory are dictated by the chaotic history of the Korean peninsula. The fragmentariness of Cha's book allows her to let in the silenced and marginalized voices of others into her own work, the apparent cracks in her text are actually filled in by the erased narratives of women especially, one way to read her book as coherent.

The Diseuse, the directing voice of DICTEE, takes on the role of reciter and monologist for the Muses. She is entranced and inspired by the voices of others to break through the pain of silence and to allow speech to enter: "*Inside is the pain of speech the*

pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void" (DICTEE 3). The "pain that wishes it to speak" also becomes a spiritual quest of entrancement by the Muses as "She allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full" (DICTEE 3) and, in the process of telling others' stories, of becoming a monologist for others ("She allows herself caught in their threading, anonymously in their thick motion in the weight of their utterance" DICTEE 4), she finds the 'pause' to deliver her own story. The progression to her own voice, however, also means that delivery of her own subjecthood ("*She would become, herself, demarcations. Absorb it. Spill it. Seize upon the punctuation. Last air. Give her. Her. The relay. Voice*") leads her to an osmotic fusion with all the others, in one of the many images of fluidity in the book: "*Moisture. Begin to flood her. Dissolving her. Slow, slowed to deliberation. Slow and thick*" (DICTEE 4-5). Cha describes the whole process in stop-motion cinematic language and the description takes on both a metaphorically spiritual sheen and a corporal point of view, especially near the end of the monologue: "The deliver. She takes it. Slow. The invoking. All the time now. All the time there is. Always. And all times. The pause. Uttering. Hers now. Hers bare. The utter" (DICTEE 5).

Historiography, along with autobiography, is contested in DICTEE too. Unlike the persona adopted by Agha Shahid Ali as the Belovéd witness of Kashmir in The Country Without a Post Office, Cha does not position herself as the sole witness of Korea and this is another reason why she gives equal footing to other narratives and voices within her poetry. Cha is a witness to trauma, which is why taking dictation of others' stories is an integral part of the book – but she also questions the ethics of witnessing and

the desire for documentation and redemption through self-revelation: "Witness sees that which contains the witness in its view" (DICTEE 160). As with the other poets, Cha's poetics reveals that witnessing trauma is traumatic in itself but, unlike Ali's patriarchal presumptions, there is gender involved in Cha's conception of acting as witness. The violence of Korean partition and the latter South Korean autocratic crackdown are an ever-present part of the speaker's past and present and, therefore, the recounting cannot form a satisfying and cathartic end to trauma. Still, as a distant witness, Cha's historiographical dilemma as a Korean immigrant woman re-narrating out of the U.S. in 1982 is that she gains access to Korean history by way of previously written descriptions and historiographical treatments existing in English "in a *present* act of inscription, which is impelled precisely by inadequacy of preceding versions" (H. Kang 268). For instance, while Cha's inclusion of the petition from Korean Americans to President Roosevelt in the Clio/History segment stresses that Korea's struggle for independence from Japan's annexation (1910-1945) was supported and transnationally funded by the newly arrived Korean immigrants who first landed in America in 1903, the petition reveals that Cha "allies her separation from and abiding commitment to the Korean homeland with these early immigrants" (H. Kang 270). In Clio/History, the petition follows Cha's notations on passages from historian F. A. McKenzie's The Tragedy of Korea and, more significantly, the segment narrates the story of the revolutionary Yu Guan Soon who is generally ignored in the homonational accounts of Korean self-determination. By overlapping the narratives of the national and immigrant struggle for independence with that of a disregarded woman, Cha proposes that the reconstitution of the history of the Korean nation-state fails and her present attempts to depict the fragments of the past through

poetry are especially necessary: "Face to face with the memory, it misses. It's missing. […] The present form face to face reveals the missing, the absent. Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole" (DICTEE 37-38).

In DICTEE, Cha disrupts her representation of the body through segmentation, by listing body parts separately down to the clots of blood. Paradoxically, while DICTEE suggests the poet's disassociation from her body, the body is also the only corporeal object that helps her ground her self, nationality, language, and gender. Whether it is the sensuous illustration of the tongue in enunciating words, stressing the exclusion of women in the miracle of transubstantiation, or the depiction of corporeal desire tinged with violence, Cha's translation of the body into words is a manifestation of the painful process of embodiment. The grounding of the text in the body is evident from the apocryphal lyric from Sappho with which Cha begins the written text and which also reveals a sensuous acknowledgment of the organic nature of corporeality: "May I write words more naked than flesh, / stronger than bone, more resilient than / sinew, sensitive than nerve." The etymology of the term suggests that translation is the liminal stage between corporeality and ethereality[80] and Cha renders, figuratively and literally, the female body as the site of translation, where word and flesh reveal their disjunctive connections. Cha plays with the limits and possibilities inherent in the material process of translation. The paradox at the center of DICTEE is the urgency of Cha's attempts to render the body legible, even as the text repeatedly thwarts efforts to decode its material signs: "resistant in its very corporeality, the body is nonetheless radically contingent" (Frost 192). The dialectic of the translation of corporeal flesh into imagined words, the

[80] Theologically, the meaning of "translate" is "to carry or covey to heaven without death" (OED 3382), and suggests another kind of regeneration.

incorporation, in a constructed text like DICTEE makes the body a liminal zone and "raises the possibility of a 'bothness' of word and flesh that might negotiate between the empirical body and the constructed body, transparency and opacity, original and translation" which is symbolized in the tongue which, as "organ at the boundary of the body and the symbolic," retains a stubborn corporeality (Frost 189). While I have argued that the metaphor of translation carries geographic and linguistic overtones for Etel Adnan, has literal connotations in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali, and has real political consequences for Kishwar Naheed, for Theresa Cha it is the religious sense that becomes apparent – the marriage of the corporeal and the Divine, symbolized by Christ as the Bridegroom and the miracle of transubstantiation as narrated in the Erato/Love Poetry section. Among the three, Cha's work in DICTEE shows perhaps the most sensitivity to the poetics and politics of translation – the issue of appropriation, authorization, and cultural un-translatability.[81] Just as still shots of female mouths are such an important part of an installation such as Cha's "Mouth to Mouth" (1975),[82] descriptions of speech organs also figure largely in DICTEE, whether in the form of diagrams of the vocal

[81] See Tejaswani Niranjana, in Siting Translation (2-6, 173-186), and Alfred Arteaga, in the collection An Other Tongue (9-34), on the relationship of translation to imperialism and appropriation. Eric Cheyfitz, for instance, points to another association of translation as imperial apparatus: since among the definitions by the OED of translation is 'to transport with the strength of some feeling; to enrapture, entrance' and one of the fourteenth century definitions of translation is 'to carry or convey to heaven without death,' the latter would, as well, be "a primary definition of the word 'rapt,' which could also have the opposite meaning, that is, 'raped'" (Poetics 169).

On the deliberate untranslatability of Cha's work, Caroline Bergvall points out how Cha questions exile narratives when constructing her naturalized Asian American identity: "the very notion of sociocultural displacement can no longer be sustained by the parameters of exile literature or, for that matter, by the oft-uncritical and unspecific valorization of hybridity as a third, compensatory and translative term. Instead, they point to a positive reevaluation of untranslatability against a universalist translatability. […] In such a context, it is untranslatability, not translatability, that favors a recognition of the particularities of personal and collective experience" (217-18). In other words, the precise untranslatability of Cha's DICTEE, in the hurdles created in the reading of the fragmented text, not only is another aspect of cultural resistance by the Asian American subject, it is also a way of acknowledging differences.

[82] "Mouth to Mouth" is a videotape focusing on Cha's mouth as she attempts to pronounce the eight vowels of the Hangul alphabet before the screen whites out.

chords (DICTEE 74) or in stark accounts of the mouth ("Tongue inside the mouth inside / the throat inside / the lung organ alone. The only organ. / All assembled as one. Just one." DICTEE 67). In DICTEE, the translation to poetry of the cinematic still shot and jump cut effect serves to delineate each part of the vocal organs as broken and unconnected ("Cracked tongue. Broken tongue. / Pidgeon." DICTEE 75), and yet the rhythm of the words allows the reader to read the isolated parts as whole. This fluidity is even more apparent in a section right before the accounts of the speech organs, where Cha describes a scene of blood samples being collected of the speaker of DICTEE and compares the bloodletting to the act of writing memory: "Something of the ink that resembles the stain from the interior emptied into emptied upon this boundary this surface. […]Expel. Ne te cache pas. Révèle toi. Sang. Encre. Of its body's extention of its containment" (DICTEE 65). Here, body, blood, and ink are revealed to become one in the containment of Cha's words.

The elision of female subjectivity in Korean culture and the virtually patriarchal primacy in her adopted America forces Cha to adopt a fiercely feminist stance towards the female body in her poetry. In fact, among the three American poets, only Cha manages to give the body such eminence in her work and recognize sexuality as one of the realities in DICTEE. The libidinal current running in the book, however, seems to stall in the section of Erato/Love Poetry where Cha acknowledges the more convoluted aspects of love. Poignantly, Cha's acknowledgment of sexuality also shows the sinuous connections between the love lyric and violence. This is significant because this section forms the middle of the book and is also the most extensive. Although lyricism in this section is sustained, especially near the end of the section, Cha's definition of love itself

breaks down and fragments into its purely emotional and spiritual forms. Perhaps this is the reason why desire is emulated in the form of violence, and seeming acquiescence, in DICTEE. In the Erato/Love Poetry section, Cha subverts the reader's expectations to show the intertwining of desire, domestic submission, and religion. The section starts with a still from a movie and the written text itself starts with the frame-by-frame description of a woman entering a movie theater and finding another woman already sitting in the theater: the text describes the action as being repetitive and ritualized because it is part of a cinematic production too (DICTEE 94, 96).[83] Cha goes on to describe on verso pages the movie that the woman is watching as that of domestic violence, while on the facing recto pages she transcribes passages from the journal of St. Thérèse of Lisieux describing St. Thérèse going through the act of transubstantiation.[84] In both cases, whether of the portrayed domestic relationship or of the religious binding, the focus is on the possession of the female body by a male figure. In this way, Cha shows that desire itself is tainted in the depiction of the female body because of the denigrated location of the female body within a patriarchal national space. It seems that sexuality is translated in both the material and the divine world through the language of authority, i.e., the patriarch, and is fragmented consequently ("Her non-body her non-entity. His privilege possession his claim" (DICTEE 112). In the fragments on the recto pages, St. Thérèse describes moments of pure rapture and humility in her divine love for Jesus

[83] The description of the woman in the theater recurs elsewhere in the book, most specifically in the beginning of the Melpomene/Tragedy section, where the act of viewing images as illusive flickerings and replications on the cinema screen becomes a reflection of a partitioned Korea: "Break. Break, by all means. The illusion that the act of viewing is to make alteration of the visible. The expulsion is immediate. Not one second is lost to the replication of the totality. Total severance of the seen. Incision" (DICTEE 79).

[84] The Erato/Love Poetry section is the only part of DICTEE where Cha utilizes this technique of using different narratives on facing verso and recto pages – this serves to fragment the love lyric in its linear progression and disrupts any expected closure.

where Love chooses her "as a holocaust" and for it to be fully satisfied, "it is necessary that It lower itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into *fire*" (DICTEE 111). Cha identifies with this female madness and perversity (at least what the Church originally thought of heretics like St. Thérèse and Joan of Arc) and suggests that this absolute spiritual submission is purer than corporeal, if not heterosexual, relationships. There is no easy sexual union, and love only enters the frame when Cha blurs the line between desire and the need for appeasement in her near-identical consecutive stanzas on the interchangeable role of the mother and the wife:

> Mother you who take the child from your back to
> your breast you who unbare your breast to the child
> her hunger is your own the child takes away your
> pain with her nourishment
> Mother you you who take the husband from your
> back to your breast you who unbare your breast to
> the husband his hunger your own the husband takes
> away your pain with his nourishment (DICTEE 109)

In the dialectical interplay of light and darkness in the theater – and in the doubling that takes place between the two women in the theater, the wife and the husband, the mother and the child, the speaker and the reader, the two facing pages – Cha erases the boundaries between dichotomies: "In the enclosed darkness memory is fugitive. […] In the whiteness / no distinction her body invariable no dissonance / synonymous her body all the time de composes / eclipses to be come yours" (DICTEE

118). I suggest another way of reading the doubling of the narratives as that of fragmentation of love in the aftermath of the various partitions Cha has witnessed. The overwhelming sadness of the female character that tied her to an "apprenticeship to silence" (DICTEE 106), that "grew in her breath without destination" (DICTEE 108), and which was marked in the mist filling the screen, becomes ponderous in the blank verso page preceding the end of the Erato section and is finally embodied in the "weightless slow" snow falling at night (DICTEE 118).[85]

The strongest evocation of sexuality occurs in Cha's depiction of the act of enthusiastic articulation which can be read as unmistakably erotic, illuminating the different climactic couplings of desire and speech. This is illustrated in the following excerpts from the very beginning of DICTEE:

She waits in-

side the pause. Inside her. Now. This very moment.
Now. She takes rapidly the air, in gulfs, in prepara-
tion for the distances to come. The pause ends. The
voice wraps another layer. Thicker now even. From
the waiting. The wait from pain to say. To not to.
Say.

… Now the weight begins from the uppermost back of
her head, pressing downward. It stretches evenly, the

[85] Alternatively, the narrative of the suffering woman trapped in an unloving and abusive relationship on the verso pages can also be read as Cha's shamanistic discovery of subjecthood through the speaker's encounter with her double and the projection of the spectral uncanny, "a metaphorical journey into the underworld, emphasized even further by the blinding white of the screen that is associated with Korean images of death" (Lee 43). The rebirth of the female subject in DICTEE reverses cultural connotations and norms associated with mortality and desire. This discovery of subjectivity in the other woman as not-self, or dead, this death "is actually a spiritual (re)joining with the repressed self beyond the barriers of death/life and I/non-I. It is in this union that the Freudian uncanny appears as a primitive, spectral truth" (Lee 43).

entire skull expanding tightly all sides toward the
front of her head. She gasps from its pressure, its
contracting motion.

… Begins imperceptibly, near-perceptible. (Just once.
Just one time and it will take.) She takes. She takes
the pause. Slowly. From the thick. The thickness.
From weighted motion upwards. Slowed. To deliber-
ation even when it passed upward through her mouth
again. The delivery. She takes it. Slow. The invoke-
ing. All the time now. All the time there is. Always.
And all times. The pause. Uttering. Hers now. Hers
bare. The utter. (DICTEE 4-5)

Cha's fusion of bodily desire with oscillations between speech and silence brings together the scattered "Speech morsels" (DICTEE 56) of the book, providing a sort of coherence through fragmentation. If the fragment cannot be recuperated by the notion of totalizing whole, "then fragmentation is a way of living with differences without turning them into opposites, nor trying to assimilate them out of insecurity" (Minh-ha Framed 156). Cha suggests that fragmentation, whether of the immigrant self or the native daughter, seems to be a potentially desirable way of living. This attempted reconstitution through fragmentation by Cha creates discernible cleavages in the cultural fabric of the immigrant subject and in the prescribed readings of a literary text. Cha's paratactic practice of leaving streams of words and phrases can also end up meaning that a rhythm becomes apparent in the fragmentation; here, parataxis is the associative quality of the

juxtaposed, compressed lists of words. It is the violence of fragmentation, partition, and uprooting that allows Cha her radical questioning of identity as related to nation, language, religion, gender, and sexuality – renewal or re-memberment after fragmentation or dismemberment. These lacunae also become the location of paratactic composition, productive as a technique in the eventual reassembly where something new is born, the possibilities of an impossible fragmented self. This is where Cha creates a new language (for women, for displaced Korean Americans like herself, a language formed of different media and other colonial and forgotten languages), a new self, a new nation (composite of the partitioned and now re-membered Koreas and the adoptive United States). Her poetics and stylistics of re-memberment is, however, different from a modernist collage that offers a whole picture. Anne Anlin Cheng criticizes the desire for the documentary – the desire to know and to bear witness as some kind of redemptive act – in minority literature, that makes both the writer and reader embark on a journey in search of a 'whole' narrative (141): "Dictée deters us from reading the fragment as either reified value or pure disconnection. Rather Cha suggests that the collection and erasure that is the 'fragment' may be the only kind of history that can memorialize without reappropriation" (Cheng 144-146). Instead of creating a conclusive narrative or solely deifying the fragment, Cha indicates that fragmented reconstitution creates witnesses to history too. Cha believes writing will sustain her, the act of re-membering the past ("*She says to herself if she were able to write she could continue to live*" DICTEE 141) save her from absolute silence. This silence has to be broken even if it is extremely painful to do so: "*It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger*

still. Greater than is the pain not to say. […] it festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void" (DICTEE 3). She posits that this project is essential in itself:

> Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History,
> the old wound. The past emotions all over again. To
> confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as
> not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each
> fragment by each fragment from the word from the
> image another word another image the reply that will
> not repeat history in oblivion. (DICTEE 33)

Unlike Agha Shahid Ali's hemming in by the repetition of mirror images in The Country without a Post Office, the seemingly entrapping tautology of the mirroring and circular dictation in DICTEE can be read as political resistance which helps the reader imagine the *in*discrimination of the regulated reproduction that transfers the individual into a subject of discourse (Cheng 159-160). Here Cha points out that the transformation from object to subject might also be one undertaken at the behest of the status quo, something that requires strong vigilance by the new subjects. As a poetics of fragmented recitation and episodic non-identity, Cha's "repetition more often marks the incommensurability of forms to their referents" (Lowe 37), but the traces of referents still linger in the text. Cha makes a plea for communication that "The other end must/see the other end feel" (DICTEE 15) but there is also the acknowledgement that if the words are to be uttered, they would have to be from behind an unaccountable distance: "If words are to be sounded, impress through the partition in ever slight measure to the other side the other signature the other hearing the other speech the other grasp" (DICTEE 132).

Yet, Cha states that all that is needed is the desire to communicate: "Something / takes only one to start. / Say, say so. / and it would be the word. Induce it to speak to take / to take it / takes" (DICTEE 130).

Theresa Cha's endeavor of recuperating suppressed voices and fragmented narratives must also be read in the background of the national ideology of partitioned Korea. Cha experienced firsthand the exigencies of the modernization project the South Korean military regimes carried out in the 1950s as her family went into hiding and then in exile to Hawaii in 1961. The Korean state treated women as metaphors for an uncontaminated, uninterrupted masculine national identity, obsessively disciplining and regulating women's bodies. The hyperbolic nationalism helped the state claim spiritual superiority and masculine integrity, while imposing the ideology of chastity and self-censorship upon its women (C. Choi 12-13). For instance, the South Korean handling of the issue of 'comfort women,' who broke their silence over their sexual subjugation by colonizing Japanese forces but were labeled 'promiscuous' for doing so, signifies a nomenclature that constructs Korean men as the victims of the emasculation of the Korean nation: "All Korean women, as the discourse of homogeneous single-nation (*tanil minjok*) mandates, are expected to be chaste and vigilant against foreign males and, by extension, masculine foreign power" (C. Choi 14). In the narrative of the patriarchally constructed postcolonial nation, women are considered outcasts waiting at the boundary of the nation for admission and acknowledgement. Thus, Cha's attempt at salvaging the fragmented narratives of Korean female subjects who are not given their due in the nation-state is also a subversive attempt at creating decolonization discourses that dethrone the universalizing hegemonic discourse. The way the overlooked narrative of

the nationalist leader Yu Guan Soon feminizes the patriarchal nationalist Korean narrative is emblematic of Cha's attempt to create a palimpsestic structure over the already existing history. According to Helena Grice, while official Korean identity is alien, changeable and out of reach for the poet, it also exerts alien and impossible pressures for national identification; this fundamental alienation is reflected textually through rupture and also figured lexically. "Possession and non-possession of national identity are indicated in turn through pronoun shifts […] It ultimately depicts a resistant and resilient female subject: in writing her self, Cha also writes her nation" (51).

When Cha's focus shifts to the shores of America in her undertaking to recapture the experiences of an immigrant Korean American woman, she has to deal with multiple cultural challenges. The Korean American woman's quest for cultural identity in America is compounded by the gendered and racial oppression she faces on two fronts. On the one hand, she must struggle with cultural nationalists who place all other political progress over gender equality and cling fiercely to sentimentalized notions of Korean women as symbols of some traditional essence, as martyrs of colonial domination, as the sacred mothers of male leaders and warriors, and as repositories of the Korean past (E. Kim "Men's Talk" 106). On the other hand, for the Korean American woman, "relinquishing her identification with 'Korea,' however patriarchal, means abandonment to other oppressions, such as the West's eager embrace of her victimization by Asian patriarchy as a concrete demonstration of western cultural superiority" (E. Kim "Men's Talk" 107). This is a concern repeatedly brought up by minority women writers in America as they deal with the exasperating twin desires of their originating and adopted cultures, the expectations to belong or to assimilate. Cha denotes the challenges and strains of

assimilation in the passages of translation exercises as in the literal list of imperatives regarding speech and writing (DICTEE 8). In contrast to the nationalist American discourse that requires a monolingual subject, the mistranslations of Cha's speaker mean that she is "unfaithful to the original" (Lowe 39). By re-narrating the neo-colonialist American discourse ("We are severed in Two by an abstract enemy an invisible enemy under the title of liberators who have conveniently named the severance, Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate" DICTEE 81, and "Arrest the machine that purports to employ democracy but rather causes the successive refraction of her none other than her own" 89), Cha aims to release the silence and amnesia surrounding the American role in the bifurcation of Korea. Her very complexity and opacity though can also help in the obfuscation of an imperial history that is ignored in American discourse.

Cha applies a similar feminist schema to her representation of the authority of organized religion. As the history of religious conversions in Korea through Catholic missionaries and her own missionary education is part of the book's background,[86] Cha subverts the official language of the church in her confessionals in the first section of the text: "*Acquiesce, to and for the complot in the Hieratic tongue. Theirs. Into Their tongue, the counterscript, my confession in Theirs. Into Theirs. To scribe to make hear the words, to make sound the words, the words, the words made flesh*" (DICTEE 18). Cha takes on ecclesiastical archetypes in DICTEE but, rather than mocking them, shows the church narratives as bound with female energy from the very beginning of the book. In fragments from the Catholic liturgy, Cha equates her suffering with that of Christ, "The Host Wafer (His Body. His Blood)…(Wine to Blood. Bread to Flesh.) […] Crucifixion to follow," yet she stresses that authority resides in a male figure: "He the one who

[86] Lowe draws a biographical link between Cha and French Catholic missionaries (39, 64).

deciphers he the one who invokes in the Name. He the one who becomes He. Man-God" (DICTEE 13). The Erato/Love Poetry section depicts the heretic marriage of St. Thérèse of Lisieux with Christ the Bridegroom. Cha presents St. Thérèse's Passion without judgment and empathizes with her ecstatic experience, rather than with the female disassociation in the Eucharist earlier in the book. This emphasis on the petite narrative of the woman instead of the master narrative of the Catholic Church allows Cha to not only challenge yet another male dominion, but also to provide a blissful and ecstatic aspect of love to counter the rupture in love depicted earlier.

Despite all the trauma of partition and the agony caused by naturalization, Cha exudes almost a strong faith in spirituality and while a note of eternal loss lingers throughout the book, Cha's faith in restoration to spiritual wholeness becomes progressively stronger too. The spiritual features of DICTEE become most noticeable in the motifs, images, and narratives from Korean folk traditions, as in Cha's showcasing of a narrative incorporating the *kut* (Korean shamanic ritual) near the end of the book in the Polymnia/Sacred Poetry segment. This segment contains a story of a female shaman helping a girl-child take medicine to her ailing mother – the only complete narrative arc in DICTEE – with the narrative alternating between actions and perspectives of the shaman and the child. The shaman here acts like the afore-mentioned Diseuse whose instructions must be obeyed for the healing to be completed. Although the narrative of Polymnia/Sacred Poetry ends on the child reaching (but not passing) the threshold of her house, Cha provides a sense of fullness and continuity to the segment by referring to the shaman's gift of a tenth medicinal packet and bowl, images that are recycled by the end of the book. By acknowledging the Korean religious history that precedes Cha's Catholic

faith, we can read "the shamanistic polyphony of ancestral voices woven through her text – not as disembodied reflections of her postmodern identity, but as Cha's real family – her Korean ancestors erupting through her art and writing" (Busto 23). Although as part of national Korean identity mostly female shamanism is an essential element of the mythic and folkloric Korean past, it is also despised and stigmatized as superstition (Chongho Kim 71). Cha's conducting speech with the spirits in languages derelict and unknown about matters discarded and erased is a perverse and sublime female madness.[87] As "indigenous Korean shamanism, in both its ecstatic, woman-centered form and its more gnostic masculine form, involves the invocation of ancestral voices and the grievances of wronged spirits" (Fenkl xiii), Cha's summoning of the spirits of neglected matriarchs – a communion she holds with the dead – denotes Cha as a shamanistic medium, performing another sort of healing.

Korean folklore, as with the folksong *Bong Sun Hwa* (E. Kim "Poised" 4), becomes metonym of an undivided national culture that Cha feels needs to be preserved because cultural memory is in danger of being lost ("Forget and would be forgotten close eyes and would be forgotten not say and they are forgotten not admit and they are forgotten" DICTEE 15). For a performance artist utilizing cinematic forms and photography, Cha reveals an almost spiritual understanding of the passage of time and of the immutable: "Some will not know age. Some not age. Time stops. Time will stop for some. For them especially. Eternal time." This passage occurs in the Clio/History section, which is bracketed by a picture of Yu Guan Soon and of Korean rebels being executed,

[87] "Shamans are, in a sense, experts in dealing with cultural nonsense – the cultural problems which cannot be solved within the framework of Korean public culture. Shamanic healing is a kind of paradoxical healing because irrationality is dealt with irrationality" (Chongho Kim 224).

and Cha doubts the ability of pictures to capture the essence of the martyred Korean revolutionaries:

> Their image, the
> memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike
> the captured image that extracts from the soul pre-
> cisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their coun-
> tenance evokes not the hallowed beauty, beauty from
> seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death,
> but the dy-ing. (DICTEE 37)

Cha's concern for being is similar to Etel Adnan's preoccupation with mortality. The phenomenological and spiritual engagement of both Cha and Adnan with the evanescence of word and image is the same, similar even to that of Agha Shahid Ali. Indeed, in Cha's spirit-heart – the Mah-Uhm – is the belief that leaves its traces and gives her hope in exile and loss: "The mark of belonging. Mark of cause. Mark of retrieval. By birth. By death. By blood" (DICTEE 46).

As with Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Cha's placement as an Asian American poet calls into question the rubric of 'Asian American.' At least until the 1990s, the publishing industry only identified the immigrants from specific East Asian countries as Asian American.[88] The Asian American designation stems from the identity movements of the 1960s, a product themselves of the Civil Rights Movement, through

[88] While Asian-American Authors (1972) contains works from Japanese, Chinese and Filipino American authors, in another seminal anthology of Asian American literature published in 1974, Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers, the editors again list only Japanese, Chinese and Filipino American writers; the second edition of the anthology clarifies the regional affiliation in the title The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature.

which Asian-born immigrants and descendents tried to express their ethnic and cultural heritage as a matter of pride and solidarity. While the field of Asian American literature may have exploded with the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior (1974), Korean American literature was not an undeveloped terrain either. In the conclusion of Surfacing Sadness, "Korean Literature in the United States: At the Centennial," Yearn Hong Choi documents the growth of Korean American literature, especially poetry, from the first wave of Korean immigrants to arrive in Honolulu between 1903-1905 and the second wave of immigration starting in the 1960s (209-210). As with most analysts of Korean American literature, Choi cites Younghill Kang's The Grass Roof (1931), along with Richard E. Kim's The Martyred (1964), as the first novels to crossover into mainstream publishing and then the renaissance in Korean American literature spurred by second generation writers like Chang-Rae Lee. Choi marks the in-between period of the 1970s and 1980s as an "intellectual void" that was filled by Korean poets and writers publishing in their native language in Korean language newspapers and organizing Korean literary societies in major metropolitan areas (210). Writing in Korean, a group of Korean poets published resistance poetry denouncing the military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, most specifically *Bitu Bada /* Sea of Rays in 1980 by seven Korean poets protesting South Korean General Doo-hwan Chun's killing of protestors in Kwongju (Y. Choi 213).

Korean American poetry in English really begins with Jaihium Kim's Wall in 1968 and Ko Won's The Turn of Zero in 1974, with sparse Korean American poetic productions along the way until Chungmi Kim's Chungmi: Selected Poems and Theresa Cha's DICTEE, both appearing in 1982 (Solberg 519). DICTEE was published in a

lacuna of Korean American writing and was mostly ignored by the Korean American and Asian American diaspora because of its very avant-garde complexity.[89] Since then, DICTEE has been reincarnated in terms of its critical acclaim and has been embraced by the community of Asian American critics and readers as part of the Asian American canon.[90] Rob Wilson, for instance, refers to "the individuated sublime in the American cultural polity, specifically as read through the newly theorized struggles to map and give expression within the Korean (American) Uncanny in the work of Theresa Cha." (280).

In the two decades since its publication, the text of DICTEE has become somewhat of a fetish in academic and art circles, which tend to elide the national and gendered quality of Cha's book. Even a cursory look through DICTEE demonstrates that the book resists convenient placement into a specific genre and discipline. As a transnational product, Cha's written work also defies easy classification into the ethnic minority slot in which Asian American texts are generally identified: it reaches beyond the racial and national confines of America to the deconstructionist, feminist, and avant-garde cinematic modes of France, and crosses the Pacific Rim regions of both the San Francisco Bay area and the Korean peninsula. Initially, the book was published in 1982 by a small press, Tanam Press, where Cha had been working as editor; it was later reissued in 1994 by a university press, Third Woman Press; and its latest incarnation is through the University of California Press in 2000. Kaori Takee and Yueni Zhong discuss

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[89] DICTEE was reviewed sparsely at its publication: by Donald Richie in Japan Times (1983), Michael Stephens in The Dramaturgy of Style: Voice in Short Fiction (1986), and Susan Wolf in Afterimage (1986); as chronicled by the writers of Writing Self, Writing Nation, it was largely ignored and considered suspicious by Asian American critics for its complex form and content.

[90] For a list of American reviewers of DICTEE, see the compilation of HOW(ever) at http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/print_archive/alerts1088.html (Screen 5-6). For the critical evolution of Cha as an Asian American writer, see Cheng 141; for the repackaging of the book, see Spahr (124).

the metamorphosis of Cha's book in terms of Asian American literature that revolves around the generational gap between Asian females. The original cover designed by Cha "purposely features an obscure landscape atypical on Asian American books" (screen 8). The equally obscure original back cover features a cropped picture of nine girls without any textual explanation, "a purposeful attempt to decontexualize the book to bring up the notion of indeterminacy" (screen 8). However, in the repackaged edition by the University of California Press, the new cover of DICTEE features a picture of Cha's mother, "signifying loudly that Dictee is an Asian American novel that follows the trite dominant immigrant narrative of generational conflicts between Asian American women. […This change] makes us question the way we tend to fetishize the authenticity of the artist, comparable to the fetishization of the authentic 'other' experience" (screen 8-9). This metamorphosis also calls into question whether the earlier, more indeterminate cover corresponds more to cosmopolitan concerns for exotica than the latter, more racially specific one. The story of the evolution of DICTEE demonstrates the displacement of a poet through several racial and literary turns. The loss of origin in DICTEE speaks of desire and a critique of that desire, "the impossibility of origin as an empty sign that is always set up as something devoutly to be wished for" (Cheng 168). Cha's own poetics of longing for return sets up DICTEE as an impossible project of recovering what has been irrevocably divided and fragmented.

When placed in the context of its contemporary American poetry scene, I suggest that Cha's poetry can also be scanned through the distinction Charles Bernstein makes between the dialect verse of American modernist poets and "a dialectical poetry that refuses allegiance to Standard English without necessarily basing its claim on an

affiliation with a definable group's speaking practice." Placing Cha's "multiplicitous chartings of American identity" in the latter group, Bernstein calls this an 'idiolectical' nonstandard poetry in which the poet performs a parallel project of cultural resistance and dialogical self-questioning (My Way 117), the linkage emphasizing "the common ground of linguistic exploration, the invention of new syntaxes as akin to the invention of new Americas, or possibilities for America" (My Way 120).[91] As idiolectical verse, Cha's work defies ethnic categorization and straddles Korean and American national histories, accentuating the collusion of both. Theresa Cha's DICTEE is a challenge the speaker poses to herself to record the colonial and partitioned history of Korea before it is superseded by the demands of her new life in America.

Cha's proclivity for experimentation is borne out of the time she spent as a student in Berkeley, California. In terms of an American community of artists and poets, Cha partook in both the East and West Coast performance art scene. The transcontinental nodes in her work occur from her training as a student of comparative literature at the UC Berkeley campus and then her postgraduate stint in Paris. Attention should be given to whether partaking in the aesthetic and transnational avant garde is a sophisticated way for the Asian American poet to pass; in this way, their verse infiltrates American poetry by the stress placed upon formal experimentation. While initial anthologies of Asian American poetry reveal "an editorial aversion to poetry characterized by formal experimentation" (Lew 576), there is a history of early Asian American poets engaging in experiments with form and language, such as the symbolist poetry of Carl Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944) in the 1890s, the highly experimental lyrics of José Garcia Villa

[91] Susan Vanderborg states that "[t]he ultimate ideolect becomes incomprehensible to anyone but the writer, a point that Bernstein concedes" (99).

(1908-1997) during the1940s, or the formally innovative work of the Al-Mahjar group referenced earlier in the analysis of Etel Adnan. Whether a work is read as experimental (as opposed to the mainstream) is also a question of representation, a politico-cultural query about the state of the American literary canon and of the always shifting role of poetry in the American state.

As with most writers of color in America who employ experimental writing, Asian American poets have to negotiate a two-way street. These poets have to manage their membership in a racially defined community that emphasizes identity, with their own proclivity for postmodern experimental traditions that glorify desubjectification and dehistoricization. In the Asian American lyric, 'I' is cleaved, "neither fully dissolved, nor resolved" (Chang 97). In the range of Asian American writing, "the 'subjective I' is site of negotiations that rely on no stable paradigm for its enactment but that, on the other hand, must engage in a state of covert action because of the panoptic gaze of discourse that utilizes its terms for alternative ends" (Stefans 71). Especially for poets involved in experimental stylistics who fall under an ethnic label, a lyrical consciousness may be expressed at the risk of the theoretical gains of the mainstream at their expense and the legitimization of exotic difference. The tenuous relationship between Asian American poets and experimental trends, especially Language poetry, is reflected in the parallel development of Asian American and Language poetry through the 1970s and 1980s. The two key tensions in Language theory, centering on the individual and on interpretation, are manifestations of the question of how to write a poetry of political commitment while dealing with the anxiety of engagement: "while Language writers are willing to disrupt notions of voice, self, and content in their poems, they reserve the right to step back into

identity, into the realm of political, individual speech" (Yu 433). Asian American poetry, by infusing explicitly Asian American themes and voices into poetry, exposes the mainstream voice as white. Through a politicized emphasis on personal history and by appealing to a naturalized conception of poetic art, "contemporary Asian American poets risk simple absorption in the mainstream aesthetic" (Yu 435). Among these poets, Cha aims to blur the divide between subjectivity and politics, poetry and politics, form and content through her work in DICTEE. However, in a more recent review by a Korean American writer, Cha does not fare any better. In comparing Cha's obsession with speech and language to that of fellow Korean Americans Myung Mi Kim and Chang-Rae Lee, Ed Park intones that for all of DICTEE's self-consciousness, "the actual writing often mistakes sloppiness for intensity. […] Korean American writing has been clutching its throat, feeling the words come out. […] But such language about language may have run its course; those hands, so sensitive to the tragedy of sound, begin to choke" (screen 2). Without any other lyric publication by Cha, the onus falls on DICTEE as Cha's only letter to the world; yet Cha's lyrical ego, though set in language, is also one inflected by her work in performance art and apparatus film theory. It is Cha's work in performance art that, because of its magnitude, shows an even fuller engagement with the themes of DICTEE.

Theresa Cha's familiarity with film techniques such as stills and jump-shots allows her to capture the violent dismemberment of nation-state, body, and spirit on page as "Speech morsels" (DICTEE 56). Since Cha is also a filmmaker, the role of apparatus theory becomes apparent in the critique of representation provided in her book, and in the various placements offered the reader through the dialectical positioning of visual,

cinematic, and written text in DICTEE. Cha's fondness for apparatus theory stems from her postgraduate work in film theory at the Centre d'Etudes Américaine du Cinéma à Paris with Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel, and her editorship of Apparatus (1980), which included essays by the afore-mentioned critics and others. Apparatus theory, an outcome of semiotics and psychoanalytic theory, interrogates the ideological implications of cinematic conventions as modes of communication and power, how the artwork as an apparatus is established in the consciousness of the artist and the spectator. Since the framework of apparatus theory rests on questioning the process of editing and camera placement, the influence of apparatus theory in DICTEE is obvious not only in the jump cuts mirrored in Cha's disjointed lines and words, but also in Cha's framing of characters through long stills which serves to fragment and interrupt narrativity. In terms of the overall structure of the text, the idealized imaginary space Cha delineates of Korea in DICTEE also reveals a desire to return to her mother, whether in highlighting maternity narratives or in the numerous references to the mother's body sprinkled throughout the book. This is similar to the dream-theater posed by the apparatus theorist Jean-Louis Baudry, where the regression to a lost bodily union with the pre-Oedipal mother (314) is actually the desire for a return to coherence and oneness.[92]

Critiques of apparatus theory suggest, however, that the supposition of a passive subject-viewer liberated only by the filmmaker's disruption of the cinematic process leads to another kind of aesthetic formalism that focuses purely on privileging forms of the avant-garde over those of mimetic realism at the expense of the actual content of the

[92] The cinematic apparatus, according to Baudry, fulfils "the desire to return to that [former] state along with the kind of satisfaction associated with it […] It is indeed desire as such, i.e., the desire for desire, the nostalgia for a state in which desire has been satisfied" (314).

work (S. Kim 152-153).[93] In fact, Cha's ambivalence towards tenets of apparatus theory is reflected in DICTEE in the sections set in theaters: "Break. Break, by all means. The illusion that the act of viewing is to make alteration of the visible. The expulsion is immediate. Not one second is lost to the replication of the totality. Total severance of the seen. Incision" (DICTEE 79). As she did in "Commentaire," her contribution to Apparatus as an improvisational concrete poetry text, Cha contradicts aspects of apparatus theory that posit passive spectatorship in her description of the woman's reactions to what appears on the screen. DICTEE creates situations for the writer and the reader to question different enunciating positions that the book as an aesthetic and cultural product invokes and interpolates. In her preface to Apparatus, Cha says: "I hope that this book in its totality will serve as an object not merely enveloping its contents, but as a 'plural text' making active the participating viewer/reader, making visible his/her position in the apparatus" (i). As Diseuse of DICTEE, Cha offers poetic and linguistic authority to the reader through her aspirations towards sheer collectivity. Cha's poetry decolonizes the act of reading for the reader and engenders reciprocal and communal connective reading, individual responses creating a community between reader and author (Spahr 126). Cha demands so much more from the reader than mere passivity and also anticipates the multiplicity the audience may bring to the text.

Due to the very experimental nature of their work and their similar vocations as artist-poets, the poetry of Etel Adnan and Theresa Cha defies classification in genres, yet provides many interesting contrasts. Both poets use the form of prose poetry prolifically, are heavily indebted to theory and philosophy, and have achieved fringe cult status

[93] Also see Allen (129-133, 135-137) for citation of critiques of apparatus theory.

through small-press publications. By dividing her long poem There into 39 alternately short and long sections, Adnan may seem to adhere to some poetic regulations, but Cha pretends to maintain the slightest of poetic principles in the nine 'formless' sections devoted to the muses in DICTEE, even while the eleven actual sections of the text provide formal structure. While both belong to artist communities of the San Francisco Bay area and use monochromatic colors in their artistic media, the difference that is immediately apparent between the poetics of Etel Adnan and Theresa Cha is the role of the visual arts in their books. The stationary lens of a photographer and the canvas of an artist allow Adnan the time to lend her poetry the fully-sustained images and the openness of the long line of the prose poem. Cha's poetry replicates the cinematic qualities of the mixed-media video installations she worked on. Cha's work as cinematographer and performance artist gives her composition the fragmentary quality of editing jump shots and stills; yet her poetry also carries the fluidity that a carefully crafted performance piece gives the artist. Adnan's project of rethinking Being, of bringing together the dialectic self and the other, here and there, is rather similar to Cha's constant blending of binaries which is very strongly evoked in Erato/Love Poetry and the two switched passages of bodily desire (as I argue later, this is also apparent in the switch between mother and daughter/Persephone-Demeter). Like Adnan, Cha also erases boundaries between dichotomies but where Adnan creates a seamless structure, Cha calls deliberate attention to the ruptures and sutures through textual and linguistic dissonance.

While for the exilic poet Agha Shahid Ali the tangible signs of homeland are in a past that he cannot fully enter and a present he can ostensibly visit physically, exile for Theresa Cha creates the conditions for imagining a homeland based purely in an ethereal

context. For Cha, the nation is not bodily accessible and, therefore, her concentration on the female body itself and its demarcations is one way of marking the ephemeral, fragmented, and bifurcated topography of the homeland. Paradoxically, while the text seems to show that the poet disassociates herself from her body, the body is also the only corporeal object that helps her ground her self, nationality, language, and gender. Citizenship for all these poets is an occasion for trauma and can be established only in the mind; except that, for Cha, the imaginary is in tandem with the body, cleaving in and to it. While she deliberately imperils the readers' sense of cultural and linguistic placement, Cha inscribes the gendered body as an extension of the body politic of the nation. Like Adnan and Ali, Cha is rooted in her errantry, her circular nomadism (Glissant 29). Unlike Adnan and Ali, Cha's main subject in DICTEE is the partition of the nation and her perpetual search for home, her destination, is fated, fixed, to always lead her to perpetual exile (DICTEE 81). Cha's poetics problematizes the imagining of nation – i.e., of an intact Korea – as an impossible task because her identity, along with her sense of belonging to a territory, has been shattered. When she re-imagines Korea lyrically, she has to return to a mythic past that did not even exist, by misnaming one of the muses, and even then her idea of home is a dwelling in the mother, which is why I next turn to the Elitere/Lyric Poetry section of DICTEE.

The imagined space and time that Cha constructs for Elitere/Lyric Poetry is one that presupposes Korea as trace or absence that cannot be named, and even then can the unnamable and impossible only be resurrected as Eleusis: "*Dust the exposed layer and reveal the / unfathomable / well beneath. […] Let the one who is diseuse dust / breathe away the distance of the well. Let the one / who is diseuse again sit upon the stone nine*

days / and nine nights. Thus. Making stand again, Eleusis" (DICTEE 130).[94] The unnamable metonymic mother-homeland is in contrast to the nationalist patriarchy, "in nomine patris" (DICTEE 86), named earlier in the text. Cha's creation of utopia hovers between the desire for a Korea she can never fully return to, hence an imagined land, and Eleusis, the mythological city created out of maternal longing for a lost child. Eleusis becomes the resurrected Korea of Cha's memory and projected hope, the place in her imagination acquiring the signification it can not possess in reality, an inverted subjective mythology created out of girl-children's longing for absent mothers (Cha's and her own mother Huo's). This gynospace that exists in her imagination is also created at the site of the female body. It is the body that retains memory and by grounding the increasingly poetic rest of DICTEE in corporeal imagery, Cha concretizes an abstraction of space, in effect particularizing and historicizing what can be disregarded as merely ephemeral. The body, specifically the mother's, is also significantly absent and unnamed in Elitere/Lyric Poetry, the shortest segment of DICTEE but one packed with cinematic motifs of screens, which recalls the positing of apparatus theory of the desire for unification with the body of the mother. If Korea and the mother are seemingly unnamed in this section, Cha's poetics of the imaginary locates their physical trace in the myth of Demeter and Persephone (recounted repetitively in the text and especially here) and in the parenthetical artwork: the photograph of Korean demonstrators prefacing the section and a copy of a handprint enclosing the section.

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[94] The city of Eleusis was devoted to the cult of the Greek goddess Demeter and was site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, secret initiation rites providing an understanding of the eternal regeneration of the spirit, a reenactment of the abduction and renewal myth. Eleusis itself refers to the underworld in a favorable sense and is translated as "the place of happy arrival" and also refers to Elysion, the realm of the blessed: "The name of Eleusis appealed to the throngs of those who strove for a happy arrival and gave itself to be recognized as the goal of human life" (Kerényi 23).

The section begins with invocation to the goddess Demeter to help release time and memory: "*Let her call forth. Let her break open the spell cast upon time upon time again and again. With her voice, penetrate earth's floor, the walls of Tartaurus to circle and scratch the bowl's surface. Let the sound enter from without, the bowl's hollow its sleep. Until"* (DICTEE 123). However, this section devoted to the misappropriated muse of lyrical poetry, Elitere, belongs to the poems uttered by the Diseuse called forth by Demeter. In the three French-English poems, "Aller/Retour," "Aller" and "Retour," Cha dances between the dialectic of day and night, light and darkness, speech and muteness; the lyric itself veers between prose poem and disintegration into single word compounds. The emphasis here is on the Diseuse to reclaim speech from voicelessness, to "Secrete saliva the words / Saliva secrete the words / Secretion of words flow liquid form / Salivate the words" (DICTEE 130). Cha binds the two images of fluidity and whiteness that have been recurring motifs in the text to show that something new can only be born from an "unattainably pure" formlessness: "The memory stain attaches itself and darkens on the pale formless sheet […] until it assimilates the boundaries and becomes itself formless. […] If within its white shadow-shroud, all stain should / vanish, all past all memory of having been cast, left, through the absolution and power of / these words" (DICTEE 131-32).[95] The section reminds us that these are muses of imaginary acts – especially Elitere, an imaginary muse to begin with – and are the progeny of Mnemosyne, memory and, here, a traumatic memory whose fragments are shrouded in forgetfulness:

[95] Not only is the memory stain alluded to earlier in the text ("*Stain begins to absorb the material spilled on*" DICTEE 65) in the translation made possible in the fusion of blood and ink, but the lyrics of the miswritten Elitere/Lyric Poetry hark back to the French/English poem in the Urania/Astronomy segment: "J'écoutais les cynes / I heard the swans" (owing more to Mallarmé than Baudelaire in style and tone) resurrects the specter of an exiled language that is almost impossible to articulate in the "Broken speech. One to one. At a time. / Cracked tongue. Broken tongue. / Pidgeon. Semblance of speech" (DICTEE 75).

"*Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in Time's memory. Unemployed. Unspoken. History. Past*" (DICTEE 133).

In this and the next two sections, Thalia/Comedy and Terpsichore/Choral Dance, Cha seemingly re-enacts the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries in the attempts to resurrect life and memory. The poems of Elitere/Lyric Poetry are burdened with images of sheaths and veils, whose spell is broken only by the commands of the Diseuse to lift the silence: "*Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth*." Yet the section ends with the ominous "*The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all*" (DICTEE 133). In Thalia/Comedy, Cha ruminates about the threshold between life and death, and the liminal state is reflected in the cinematic account of a woman's unrequited love and in the frenzied narratives of the letters addressed to an unidentified Mrs. Laura Claxton about her sister losing her sanity and hope. Between the "arrestation of memory in oblivion" and the wish to re-vive "The forgotten. To survive the forgotten supercede the forgotten," Cha returns to "the very first death" from which resurrection will take place only by returning to language: "She returns to word, its silence. If only once. Once inside. Moving" (DICTEE 150-51). Terpsichore/Choral Dance is connected to where the diseuse in Elitere/Lyric Poetry leaves off and takes the painful process of rebirth moment by moment. The longing in DICTEE, the desire for wholeness and defragmentation, becomes stronger as Cha nears the ending of the text.

At the end of the book, Cha endeavors to perform another act of wholeness in completing the concentric tenth circle of the text. The number ten in Chinese cosmology

signifies a "completion or a reunion" (Shih 162). The promise of regeneration comes after the emphasis on the "Unending series of nines, / or nine points linked together" (DICTEE 173) in the text: the nine legendary muses, the nine-day mythological severance of Demeter and Persephone, the liturgical recitation of the novena for nine consecutive days for the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the shamanistic nine medicine packets supplied to the daughter, with the tenth packet for herself. In a way, this tenth untitled section also belongs to the Diseuse, the tenth muse whose voice has been becoming stronger from the middle of the text. Read as fulfilling a maternity narrative that challenges paternalistic aspects of colonialism and nationalism, DICTEE is about rebirth and regeneration after death and exile: "From the maternal sign of concentric circles, the fragmented narrative, the broken tongue, and the severance of motherland are unified" (Li 15). Cha presents the conclusion as a synesthetic structure of sound and image: a child asking her mother[96] to lift her up to the window so she can watch the last hushed vestiges of sunset ("In vigilance of lifting the immobile silence" DICTEE 179) through panes of glass. As the child repeats her request the third time, the action unleashes suppressed sound and the ropes tied to weights of stone finally ring the bells to break the stillness. By concluding DICTEE on "a peal to the sky," Cha brings in not only a note of spirituality, but also gives final release to all the energy caught in the lacunae and adds breadth to an already expansive text. Cha also predicts this elevation from the very beginning of the book with the monologue of the Diseuse ("From weighted motion upwards. Slowed. To deliberation even when it passed upward through her mouth again" DICTEE 5) ending on the delivery of her voice. Not only that, but "the bell can be seen as an inverted womb and the rope a naval string. The unleashing of the rope, thus,

[96] This is the only place in the text where Americanism creeps in through the use of "mom."

symbolizes the process of childbirth. In this sense, 'a peal to the sky' is actually the birth of a voicing subject" (Li 9). Cha ends the text on a positive note, a sense of calm and restitution ascending in a crescendo to "a peal to" the sky. Cha had already prepared the reader for this final image of sound and release at the end of Terpsichore/Choral Dance ("For the next phase. Next to last. Before the last. Before completing." DICTEE 162). Cha begins this section by describing Communion and fuses it into a primal scene of sacrifice and eventual rebirth. As earth, "a blue-black stone" (159), becomes porous and prepares to absorb water ("Water on the surface of the stone captures the light in motion and appeals for entry" DICTEE 162), Cha suggests that water is transformed into dye and then blood, the blending of fluids being the ultimate stage of sacrifice. As elsewhere in the book, Cha's reiteration of this fluid imagery evokes liberation and ties the following images to the release at the end of the book:

> All rise. At once. One by one. Voices absorbed into
> the bowl of sound. Rise voices shifting upwards circ-
> ling the bowl's hollow. In deep metal voice spiraling
> up wards to pools no visible light lighter no
> audible higher quicken shiver the air in pool's waves
> to raise all else where all memory all echo (DICTEE 162)

Cha's invocation of voices unfettered in the metal "bowl of sound" promises the reader the sound unleashed by the bells at the conclusion, with the last image already being an "echo" of the one in Terpsichore/Choral Dance and a "memory" of something happening in the speaker's childhood. Yet, the echoes, fossil traces, and marks of memory and language ("If it should impress, make fossil trace of word, / residue of word, stand as a

ruin stands, / simply, as mark / having relinquished itself to time to distance" DICTEE 177) can only mean that the tenth circle cannot be completed by Cha alone and the final authority rests with the reader. Indeed, Cha destabilizes the act of completion by choosing to end the text on an appeal to the sky where the child is left again at a threshold (as was the child hovering at the doorstep at the end of Terpsichore/Choral Dance, and actually as are the conclusions of each segment with the speaker on the verge of speech or the edge of subjecthood), without full vision and waiting for her mother to enter the frame and help her unleash the ropes which will ultimately break the stillness. As always, Cha's destination is fixed in "the perpetual motion of search" for her mother/homeland, the *desire* for completion and finality, but not definite completion itself.

According to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poetics of the imaginary in DICTEE, what can only exist and imagined on the page is allowed to enter the reader's mind, creating a community of the imagined. Desire – free of bodily constraints – becomes collective through the communicative model of Cha that seeks to transgress national, linguistic, cultural, and generic boundaries. The ending of DICTEE reveals Cha's desire for recovery from exile since return itself is impossible – she is always leaving, coming back "to the shell left empty all this time. To claim reclaim the space" (DICTEE 57). DICTEE also becomes the locus of Cha's desire to complete her self. As with the lyrical recreations of Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali, the only place a unified, complete motherland Korea can exist is in Cha's imagination and recreated in her writing. Unlike the temporal distance of Adnan and Ali from the diaspora, Cha attempts to also establish a sense of community with an earlier diasporic Korean population. Though the impossibility of this translation becomes apparent because of temporal lapses, the

impossible community of unified, pre-partition Koreans becomes possible only through her writing. The communion Theresa Cha wishes to establish is not fragmented but she wishes to leave the reader

> At the fulcrum. At which point in one's own time
> flashback are possible and
> anticipation.
> Of the event that occurs once and only once.
> Imagination harbors the desire of the object to
> unlimited répétition at each point from the
> beginning to the middle to the end.
> Rehearses the desire repeatedly, In preparation.
> Of the final performance. (DICTEE 144-45)

The nation for Theresa Hak Kyung Cha will always remain fragmentary and ruptured and disjunction in poetry, both visually and orally, also does not allow the poetic piece to be read as 'whole', i.e. as not complete. DICTEE exposes the danger of the aesthetics of the whole and, for this reason, Cha makes an appeal for a haven ("a peal to the sky" DICTEE 179) rather than offer the solace of a happy ending in her book. Theresa Cha's is the third way after Etel Adnan and Agha Shahid Ali. Like Adnan and Ali, Cha tries to identify the displacement accorded to multiple migrants disoriented from their originating nation and language. Cha's mythopoesis shuttles between shamanic influences and imperialist demands of assimilation; her poetics shows the struggle between word and image, of trying to break through the hold of the cinematic apparatus. She focuses on the ruptures wrought within language, form, nation, and body, and

proposes ways of mending within the fabric of her lyrics. As I show next with my analysis of Kishwar Naheed, there is yet another way of dealing with the disembodiment of language from reality and historical memory.

Chapter 4
Across the Threshold: The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetting in Kishwar Naheed's Poetics

Among the poets I have chosen for the transnational content of their lyrics read in the context of globalization, the Pakistani poet Kishwar Naheed (*née* Kishwar Jahan, 1940) also contravenes the bounds of gender, political settings, and language. She has done so through her politically engaged poetry and public ventures in defense of the unprivileged, which have often earned her the wrath of the state authorities in Pakistan. In contrast to Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Naheed has chosen to remain behind in the originating sphere of the nation-state and has attempted to establish transnational rapport with other contemporary poets while based in Pakistan.[97] Kishwar Naheed is an example of the poet whose poetry becomes a chronicle of the evolution of a nation-state because the poet herself is a participant in history as an engaged citizen – her poetics embodies her principled political thinking in tandem with her immersion in praxis. To contrast the transnational poetics of poets like Adnan, Ali, and Cha who contemplate the themes of movement and the transcendence of place, I look at the tension between rootedness and mobility offered by the poetry of Kishwar Naheed, the only poet in the study grounded in one particular locale and a single nation. Her poetry brings to the forefront questions related to geography, history, and form, especially in relation to women. Naheed maintains a localized sense of cultural identity and national belonging even while she is cosmopolitan in her frequent global traipsing. Her poetics is transnational in her translocal solidarity with other poets equally cognizant of practices of resistance and agency, and in her cosmopolitan regard for a human subject

[97] My purpose here is not to privilege the autochthon over the exile, but to highlight the distinct and indeterminate spaces between the two.

unbound by geographical or gendered constraints (Apter 25-26), one in the ever-present danger of being annihilated or silenced. I argue that Naheed's poetry also reveals how a female subject can feel ostracized and exiled within the nation-state because of the laws that negate her subjectivity; thus her poetics also articulates the struggle of women for subjecthood within the nation-state which attempts to render even citizenship insolvent.

Kishwar Naheed's volume *Khayāli Shakhs se Muqābala* / Confronting an Imagined Person) [98] was published in 1992 after a period of immense political turmoil in Pakistan. The volume is dedicated to the Burmese freedom fighter Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest in Burma since July 1990. The structure of the book itself is different from Naheed's other poetry collections as its five sections, commence with prints and etchings of androgynous faces by an American artist, Walter Rusty Crump, which are then captioned with aphorisms by the poet herself. The cover of the book has a reproduction of Frida Kahlo's "The Little Deer" (1946), a bloody self-portrait of Kahlo as a deer in the woods struck by arrows. Naheed's choice of this painting from Kahlo's most productive period suggests Naheed's identification with the simple graphic lines, bold colors, and nationalist themes of the artist who tried to document the cultural history of Mexico in her self-portraits. Whether the painting is Kahlo's personal reflection over her turbulent marriage with the artist Diego Rivera or an expression of her fiercely defiant spirit, it shows the artist's triumph over physical pain and her emotional rejection in the piercing, deadpan gaze of the deer. As with all of her self-portraits, Kahlo in this painting looks directly at the viewer who, in this case, is also

[98] All the volumes and poems by Naheed will be referred to by their translated English titles. Although her work has started becoming available in English, unless otherwise indicated, I have translated some of the poems by Naheed cited in this dissertation and the full body of this translation appears in the Appendix.

the reader of Naheed's book. The title of the book, which is above the painting, suggests that the poet 'confronts' the female or male reader, the 'imagined person' of the title.[99]

Kishwar Naheed's published work has ranged from eight volumes of poetry, two memoirs, travel narratives, collections of prose and criticism, edited anthologies and journals, collections of short stories for children, translations, and character-sketches; she also regularly contributes articles to the popular daily Urdu newspaper *Jang*. Her first volume of poetry, *Lab-e Goyā* / Lips that Speak published in 1969, is a compendium of refined ghazals written from a woman's point of view, this in a literary tradition where women constituted the objects of poetry and few women poets had taken to pen before. Women poets who wrote Urdu poetry as ghazals or couplets during the eighteenth and nineteenth century remain mostly unpublished and unnamed.[100] The only classical genre of Urdu poetry in that time that popularly contained a female voice was *rēkhtī*, but this was a genre in which male poets donned 'feminine' personae and language.[101] While most of the Urdu literature written by women in the first half of the twentieth century was under the label of fiction and only the rarest of poems were published during the anti-colonial era of the 1940s, women only started publishing poetry (at least in Pakistan) in the latter half of the twentieth century and Kishwar Naheed is among the first to do so. Naheed's next volumes, *Bēnām Musāfat* / Unnamed Journey (1971), *Galyāñ, Dhūp, Darvāzē* / Alleys, Sunshine, Doors (1978), and *Siyāh Hashiyē meñ Gulābī Rang* / Pink in

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[99] '*Shakhs*' in the original Urdu is not as gender-neutral as the translation "person." In the singular form, the word refers usually to men, but for this poem and volume, I applied the more neutral term of "person."

[100] See Oesterheld (100-101) and Pietrangelo (156-57).

[101] *Rēkhtī* consisted of poetry supposedly penned by courtesans, in which male poets employed eroticized vernacular and exaggerated experiences that women purportedly underwent. See Naim ("Transvestic Words?") and Petievich ("*Rēkhtī*") for a discussion on *rēkhtī*, and Vanita and Kidwai for a more favorable view of this genre (191-194, 220-221).

a Black Border (1986) consist of *āzād nazm* / free verse and *nasrī nazm* / prose poetry, genres in which Naheed tested social and literary conventions and stereotypes. Her publication in Rukhsana Ahmad's We Sinful Women (1991) might consign Naheed to a 'feminist collective' of Pakistani women poets like Fahmida Riaz, Sara Shugufta, Zehra Nigah, Ishrat Aafreen, Saeeda Gazdar, and Neelma Sarwar, yet all these poets write in dissimilar personae and styles. Kishwar Naheed employs colloquial and literate language in poems that appear spontaneous yet are interrupted by their explosive content. In her latter works, such as her 1998 volume *Maiñ Pehlē Janam meñ Rāt thī* / In My First Life I Was Night and *Sokhta Sāmānī-ĕ Dil* / Composition of A Scorched Heart (2002), Naheed evokes a more matured voice determined to take on the limits and coded silences surrounding the subject in the local and global spheres. While Pink in a Black Border was personal and intimate in tone, her latest collections of poetry seem to be more abstract in expression and there are more writing metaphors; Naheed's recurring themes still are justice, women and freedom, motherhood, aging, and most importantly the act of writing and creation.

It is in Confronting an Imagined Person that Naheed increasingly turns to the task of retrieving language from the abuses made in the name of law by autocratic states in Pakistan; thus, poetry in her hands becomes a project of resuscitating an exploited vocabulary through the application of figurative, concrete, and vernacular language. While the actual Urdu used in her poems is deceptively simple, Naheed uses dates and events as signifiers to history for the reader,[102] and uses simple terms to highlight the

[102] For instance, in the footnote of her poem "24 October, 1990," Kishwar Naheed reminds the reader that this was the day of rigged public elections in Pakistan after an elected government was abruptly dismissed (Exit 9 73). The poem itself is about the incubation of fear in the life of an ordinary mother, brought on by the klashnikov culture of the martial law in Pakistan in the 1980s. The mother finds herself living a

lacunae in public language for describing a woman's experiences. In attempting to salvage the collective and individual past, Naheed endeavors to imagine the possibilities of re-membering voices forgotten in the discourses of power, those of marginalized women and the disenfranchised silent majority. Naheed confronts the ironies and ambiguities inherent in this articulation – the apostrophic imagined other of Naheed's title is not just the patriarchy or imperialism, but also herself. I argue that Naheed's poetics of incorporating the politics of forgetting and remembrance also suggests a debate over presence, of which groups become visible and which invisible, essentially about who gets to occupy space and what can be said and left unsaid.

Kishwar Naheed's poem "Speedy Trial" [103] is a rendition of the material dispossession the poet fights against in her poetry: the poem is delivered by a speaker confined in a house but wishing to gain access to the public and poetic world. As with all of Kishwar Naheed's poems, in "Speedy Trial," the speaker is a woman and attests to the constrictions of insidious legislatures. According to the Hudood Ordinance (1979) legislated under the 11-year military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, the Law of Evidence (1980) dictated that a woman's testimony is equal only to half that of a man.[104] Additionally, a woman claiming *zinā bi'l-jabr* / rape had to produce four pious male witnesses to prove her innocence; otherwise, she could be tried for *zinā* / adultery and

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Kafkaesque nightmare in which her children are inculcated into the culture of violence, the doors of her house are bolted and the bullets of the rifle have been forced down her throat.

[103] Appendix.

[104] A constitutional amendment to the Hudood Ordinance was made in November, 2006, by the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf but, without repealing it and tackling the core issue of the ordinance itself, the amendment also served as smokescreen.

fornication, punishable by death or lashings.[105] In regulating dress codes for women, officially endorsing *čādar*[106] and secluding them in *čār-dīwārīs*,[107] the new Islamic order of Zia equated female visibility with obscenity and dictated that the only manner in which the deterioration of society could be checked was "by eradicating the presence of women altogether, by locking them up in the strict confines of heavily guarded homes from which they could only venture forth in emergency situations, and then only as unrecognizable masses of dark cloth" (Mumtaz and Shaheed 82-83). In defiance of such moments of further powerlessness imposed as *čādar* and *čār-dīwārī*, the female speakers of Naheed's poems constantly cross thresholds.

In this poem, Naheed connects the female speaker's elimination of the space between thresholds, *čār-dīwārīs*, and the outside world ("I have erased the difference between / threshold, door and yard") to the symbolic emergence from the codified boundaries of the home by Pakistani women during demonstrations against military rule in the 1980s and state-sanctioned misogynist laws in the early 1990s. The speaker takes the next step forward from standing on "the threshold of truth" to coming out in the yard of her house and sneers at the impotence of a law that criminalizes, but cannot regulate her desire for freedom. By erasing the lines defining the spheres of dwelling, absurdity and neutrality, she also forces her adversary to come out in the '*sahan*' or the open ("To

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[105] "By applying the same set of principles to cases of zina-bil-jabr, the Ordinance effectively blurred the distinction between rape and adultery.[…] In another convenient oversight, the Ordinance did not address itself to the problem of an unmarried women subjected to rape, but whose pregnancy could incriminate her of adultery" (Jalal 102).

[106] A '*čādar*' is an encompassing piece of protective cloth worn as a cloak or veil by women in Pakistan. See Mumtaz and Shaheed's categorizations of purdah in Pakistan in Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?

[107] '*Čār-dīwārī*' literally means protective four walls (Urdu), and figuratively speaking, are the four walls of a house in which women should remain.

shoot me they will have to come in the yard") so that the pretense of being concealed and secure from the reach of laws and the police is gone and if she is visible to be attacked, so is the adversary: "In an open field there is no room for hiding / I couldn't even hide earlier / now you can't hide either" (Confronting 60).[108]

As a woman poet, Kishwar Naheed explores the ramifications of stepping outside the circles prescribed by male authorities with their harsh interpretations of religion and tradition. The female speaker of the poem, in confronting the authority of socially and judicially placed barriers, conducts an interrogation of location and the symbolism of spatial metaphors, especially those related to the domestic sphere. The poem reveals that the promoted belief in equality between the genders is an illusion for when she wants to step through the doors of perception to the world outside, the woman is prohibited from doing so and told that her meager domain consists of whatever lies within the boundary of the house. Naheed's woman speaker further defies conventions by emerging from the house and publicly challenging the intimidating laws and firearms, "I at least have purposes / What do you have, / merely an ordinance!" The ordinance may very well refer to Section 144-b of the law that prohibited assembly of more than five people in a public space.[109] Beyond the imagery of weaponry and the absurd laws that apply to everyone (the "blackout in our city" which is "an impossible thing / but impossibilities do happen in life"), the poem carries a strong tone of anger against the persecution the speaker faces

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[108] '*Sahan*' in Urdu means the "courtyard" or "lawn" of a house, so the antagonist would actually have to enter the territory of the home. Since in lower middle class and rural houses, there is no visible boundary or fence signifying the borders of a courtyard and since the following line ("In an open field there is no room for hiding") suggests an open space in front of the speaker's house, I interpret the verse to mean that the speaker is also leaving the territory of the home to come out in the open.

[109] In an earlier poem, "Section 144," Naheed had written: "We seek blindness / Where the limits of discernment disappear / and we become merely a touch / Touch which is a mirror of apology and entreaty." Later in the poem, she asks how it is possible that the mute can at least scream (Distance 20).

as a female citizen of the nation-state. Here, Naheed challenges the institutions of the state, while simultaneously creating solidarity with the other members of the national community in her movement from the personal 'I' to the collective 'we' ("my colleagues," "Our life").

Naheed uses the threshold and the doorstep interchangeably as recurring metaphors in her poetry. For her, threshold is the space where poetry occurs. Here, Naheed's use of space can be read as the dream-like zone invested with the subjective power of imagination that Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space prescribed for the people who occupy it. Bachelard, in intimate and absolute terms, describes a (mostly male-occupied) space that is imagined and depends on a subjective interpretation by the resident living within it, who may invest it with protective value and imagined values:

> Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within the limits that protect. (10)

Thresholds seem to be the gray, indeterminate liminal areas, which are full of dread, apprehension, and great possibilities. Naheed's use of threshold as metaphor can be related to Homi K. Bhabha's conception of liminality. For Bhabha, the "liminal" space is the hybrid site between nations where the *exilic* subjects produce cultural meaning and negotiate cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions: "It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community

interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Location 2). The boundary thus becomes the territory where reality, and even identity, is suspended: "Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks...The bridge gathers as a passage that crosses" (Location 5).

Although these interstices disrupt any kind of identity formed on spatial demarcations and provide a relative facility of movement to their subjects, liminality in itself can be a limited space, which can be utilized only by those disengaged from the material conditions of the nation-state, such as exiles. How can this rupturing of space by a privileged singular consciousness (more pronounced in the poetics of Adnan, Ali, and Cha) help the craft of a poet like Naheed trying to enact a complicated process of collective social transformation in the nation-state? This pertains especially to Naheed as a Pakistani poet who writes about traversing limits of decorum, gender, and genre, and tries to create transnational awareness of local issues related to human and women's rights. However, as Frederic Jameson has so forcefully argued, this apparent derealization of space is actually a reterritorialization of subjectivity by the transnational capital and cultural network that is liable to circumscribe the agency and expressions of activist poets like Naheed. Jameson states, "Economic dependency and political subalternity […] also signify the emergence of a new kind of desire for the Other – a longing for First World acknowledgment and international recognition – alongside that dialectic of internal publics that […] now finds itself reduced and forcibly devalued into the regional and the nativist" (Geo-Political 111). Instead of reveling in the marginality accorded by subject-positioning in the borders, Trinh Minh-ha suggests that we complicate the site of the margin itself and conduct an interrogation of space:

> *They* accept the margins; so do *we*. […] The margins, our sites of survival, become our fighting grounds and their site for pilgrimage. Thus, while we turn around and reclaim them as our exclusive territory, they happily approve, for the divisions between margin and center should be preserved, and as clearly demarcated as possible, if the two positions are to remain intact in their power relations. ("Cotton" 330)

If the threshold is only read as the space between communities, between politics and poetry, then Carolyn Forché's suggestion of a third term, as an alternative to dealing with the dialectic of the personal safe haven and the institutions of political reproduction in poetry, can be seen as equally erroneous,

> the demarcation of a space called 'the social' […] can save us from the fatalism of claiming that all is ideology and the false promise of the dreams of a pure subjectivity. The social is a place of resistance and struggle, where books are published, poems read, and protest disseminated. (142-43)

Although more inclusive, Forché's civic third space between the personal and the political exists in a privileged Anglocentric hemisphere and might also entail that the poet doesn't step beyond the essentialism of pre-conceptualized differentiated spaces. In Naheed's poetry, the threshold acts as metaphor where the dichotomy of binary constructions is problematized and where multiple domains intersect. "*Dahlīz*," the threshold as doorstep or doorsill, is technically and physically still part of the architecture of a house, but since the very positioning also places it on the edges of the street, it signifies the relationship of one space to another. While imagery of houses abounds in Naheed's volume Confronting an Imagined Person so that more than half of the forty-

seven poems contain symbolism related to houses, the image of *dahlīz* / threshold appears in only fourteen of the poems. Yet, while the house imagery is related basically to physical houses, thresholds are used as complex material metaphors. If houses and their thresholds act as markers of social and aesthetic space in Naheed's poetry, in Etel Adnan's There, they are the harbingers of the boundaries between past memories and the present reality. Actually, unbound places consisting of natural topography, such as mountains, deserts, and bodies of water, hold more interest for Adnan but she also acknowledges the politics of fitting natural topography onto a schema of territory and possession. The irony is magnified when Adnan refers to gardens and orchards in the poem, because although they consist of groves of trees, their cultivation makes them objects of human ownership: "Under my fingers a slight stream is running to gardens and I wonder whose they are, and should we know by whom the orchards are owned? Can one possess the transient shimmering of the spring?" (There 29). Instead of esteeming houses as structures of dwelling, Adnan talks of specific, detailed rooms where the ocean enters through her windows (There 26) and her own words become the place which house her being and her lover ("I wanted to be the room itself so you could know where to find me" There 62). Thresholds and boundaries, when they exist in There, are edifices to be overcome by the subject. In Naheed's Confronting, the vocabulary of landscape indicates that the lyric is stilted when space between people is cramped and full of apprehension, and expansive when space is inanimate and occupied by no one.

When read as margins between internal and external space for women in Naheed's poems, thresholds are spaces of great potential and anxiety: should the woman stay, she has the opportunity of being the protected resident and occupier of a material

building; should she step over, she assumes her own identity, independent of the custody of *čār-dīwārī* of home and family; either way, space becomes metaphorical. In a reversal of archetypal symbolism, Naheed's manifestation of the themes of leaving or entering enclosed spaces is in contrast to the Freudian objectification of enclosed, womb-like sites as 'female.'[110] The speakers of her poems are always looking outwards from the door and when there is mention of someone's entering a house, it is almost always unwanted and forcibly. This material translation between home and street is powerfully imagined in one of Naheed's earlier poem, "We Sinful Women," in which when women come out on the street carrying "banners of truth," and on every threshold "find stories of persecution" and "the tongues which could speak have been severed," their declaration is to never be defeated (Sinful 31). The threshold becomes a symbolic mark that women sinfully transgress repeatedly, even when warning signs have been placed on doorsteps to deter them. Thresholds are also the transitional present, allowing the speakers to look both at the past and the future, which becomes clearer in the analysis of threshold as metaphor for aging in Naheed's "*Threshold of Today's Passing*" (Exit 9 75). Her collapsing of categorizations, such as those having to do with the conduct expected of women, can be seen in this poem about women at the menopausal stage. This multilingual and multireferential poem[111]calls attention to the unorthodox – hence inexpressible – desire and passion that a mother at her prime might feel after her grown (male) children have

[110] One of Freud's definition of a female topography is that "the female genitalia are symbolically represented by all such objects as share with them the property of enclosing a space or are capable of acting as receptacles: such as *pits, hollows and caves*, and also *jars and bottles*, and *boxes* of all sorts and sizes, *chests, coffers and pockets,* and so forth…Room symbolism here links up with that of houses, whilst *doors and gates* represent the genital opening" (General Introduction 139).

[111] The title and last line of the poem are in Farsi, while "menopause" is transliterated into Urdu. The ninth line ("saints of Haram, saints of Sinjar, saints of Ajam") refers to sites in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran, such as those dear to the Sunni and Shi'a sects of Islam and also to some that may be imaginary.

left her alone. Since the word menopause does not exist in Urdu and Naheed transliterates it from English, she also points out the limits of language in illustrating the developmental stages in a woman's life. Thus, as the boundary of time, the threshold becomes the space for the speaker to pose a language for expressing dissent against a patriarchal system. The poem becomes a quest for the poet and the reader to establish answers that are rhetorically implied and are too shocking to even formulate, not because they are literally beyond belief but because "*the tongue trembles for the meaning is twisted!*" (Exit 9 75).

To further problematize the threshold, home or enclosed space can also be read as haven, place of safety, contentment and power that is inbound. According to Linda McDowell, "a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the 'merely' domestic of the private sphere" (72-73). In addition, critics Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes define the metaphor of home as the contrast between belonging and exile:

> We all must write from somewhere, but that place's stability is often illusory. Home is therefore not an endpoint, but a constant movement towards or reconfiguration of the self in a place. If exile is to be in flight from, then home is to move towards. In the continuum of home and exile, if exile contains dislocation, isolation and individualism, then home incorporates connection, relocation, and community. (xvi)

The threshold then incorporates a contested and fluid nature, the boundary between in and out, where transcendence of identity and location is possible. Threshold is also the

space where poetry occurs as psychic reflection on external events. At the threshold, poetry can become the occasion of transposition between the past and future possibilities, between different states of being. In Naheed's poetry, threshold acts as bridge, the transitional space leading into another sphere, whether of canon, acceptance, new possibilities or risks, or the translation perhaps to a more comprehensive version. This also becomes the place for Naheed where the difference between metaphor – language – and materiality – reality – is contested, for the threshold may act as a fitting metaphor when needed but is also a very physical presence so that the metaphor becomes material when applied to the women in question. The translation from fact to metaphor and back to fact, the oscillation between reality and figuration, intensifies the agency I argue Naheed wishes to impart to her readers.[112] It should be borne in mind, however, that metaphors by themselves are neither radical, nor conservative, and gain ideological slant only as they are read; with any metaphor, we must read it and ourselves closely to reach its radical potential (Delaney 163).

Do Naheed's speakers really stay at or cross the threshold? A related quandary is that of reading threshold only as the representational strategy of metaphor and ignoring the material situational strategies involved in placing women poets or non-western poets always at the threshold, waiting for admission in a ghettoized margin. Timothy Brennan has attacked the aspect of promoting literature from developing countries solely for its political content, at the risk of ignoring the quality of its form and style. Then again, on the transnational level, I would argue that most of Naheed's very "political" material,

[112] This is akin to the 'legibility' Peter Hitchcock proposes that metaphors instantiate and should lead to in radical discourses, despite the will to abstraction and "the constitutive logic of articulation in materialism's passage from the real to the conceptual" (24).

such as that critiquing the neo-imperialist policies of the US, and most formally complex poetry never gets translated into the global language of English.[113] Naheed seems to be translated first and foremost as a feminist poet who meticulously analyzes women's place in personal relationships and in the domestic sphere. After this initial reading, Naheed is given attention as a poet writing about civil unrest in Pakistan, but not as a poet who is also commenting on the global phenomenology of injustice. In a reflection of transnational publishing standards, those poems left on the cutting board by the translators are the politically specific ones in which Naheed attempts to comprehend the offenses of former Pakistani rulers and more importantly acts of American aggression, or employs seemingly cryptic, highly allusive literary expressions in simple lines. In Confronting an Imagined Person and her latter volumes, Naheed increasingly interlaces issues of global, transnational import into expressions of a local, national subjectivity. Poems from the second and third section of Confronting an Imagined Person contain references in which an English-speaking audience would presumably have no interest because they destabilize the received image of empire, such as poems critical of Western imperialism during the first Iraq War, poetry bemoaning the continuation of military tactics during democracy and the flawed Pakistani electoral system, or elegies on the death of the dissident Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. For those who read her poetry in Urdu or in translation, Naheed wishes to create the "critical intimacy" that Gayatri Spivak calls for in "transnational literacy." This, Spivak argues, is "a training in a literary habit

[113] Besides the translations in We Sinful Women, this is true of all the versions in which Naheed's poetry has been translated, from Anis Nagi's anthology Modern Urdu Poems from Pakistan, to Baidar Bakht and Derek N. Cohen's The Price of Looking Back, to further translations by Baidar Bakht, Derek N. Cohen and Leslie Lavigne in Scream of an Illegitimate Voice, to inclusion in the anthology Aurat Darbar, to the latest translations in Asif Farrukhi's The Distance of a Shout. While the editor of the latest, The Distance of a Shout, had conceded the inclusion of only four poems related to the issues stated above in an earlier version, the second edition of The Distance contains even more politically relevant poems.

of reading the world" that can put a curb on "superpower triumphalism only if it does not perceive acknowledgement of complicity as an inconvenience" (Critique xii) and means rethinking "globality away from the US melting pot" (Critique 402).

Ultimately, as a poet located in the base of home and still configuring the place of women in an evolving nation, Kishwar Naheed's poetry in Confronting an Imagined Person reflects an acute sensitivity to the limits and walls placed between subjects and their attainment of full agency. Etel Adnan's There shows a diffusion of the space-time continuum in the interrogation of the location of being in specific global contexts and the ontological quest of identity that the subject follows throughout her life in different spheres of existence. For this reason, the level of abstraction that Adnan aspires towards in her poetry is one Naheed demurs from in the favor of simplicity and specificity in her verse. In terms of the distinction between metaphor and translation in poetry written either in a transnational zone or in the homeland, since "meta" and "trans" denote going "across" and "through" some space or object, I argue that these concepts are as important and problematic in Kishwar Naheed's work as they are in the poetry of Etel Adnan.

For the poet Kishwar Naheed, being at the threshold is not a displacement of her agency as a poet or of the characters in her poems, but an active choice that leaves the agent open to possibilities. Moreover, she steps off the threshold to re-chart older parameters and create new dimensions of thinking to create a space for the next generation. This translation too is not an absolutely alchemical transmutation – metaphors about location and how women reconceive their translation in specific places work in different ways in Naheed's poetry and help her navigate different material and literary spheres.

In Confronting an Imagined Person, Kishwar Naheed highlights the issues of political silence, sexual repression, and the seeming unavailability of a public medium for expression that force citizens of the nation-state of Pakistan, especially women, to feel excluded from the cultural and political fabric of the country. She challenges the official version of Pakistani history that writes women out of legal existence, while expressing the discontent of citizens of the developing countries against neo-imperialist designs and globalization. Where Agha Shahid Ali articulates his poetics of loss and longing from the distance of an exile, the poetry of Kishwar Naheed suggests that an individual can be an exile while *within* the folds of the nation. Comparable to Ali's job of imagining the Kashmiri nation, Naheed tries to re-imagine the Pakistani nation from the perspective of a female citizen. In addition, as one of the initiators of new literary forms that create encouragement for newer poets, she is at the intersection of classical and modernist Urdu poetry in Pakistan. Naheed manages to question political authority and established social institutions in a straightforward form that is quite unusual and startling in Urdu poetry.

To demonstrate the challenges Naheed faces in her project of imagining the nation, I focus on Naheed's "Charge Sheet 1990," where Naheed rewrites the national narrative from the perspective of a woman, and also tries to create a new female space even as she is ostracized within the nation. In "Charge Sheet 1990," Naheed refers to the winds of social change that seemed to pass over the country with the coming of younger and liberal elements into power in the form of Benazir Bhutto (1953-2007). In 1988, following the grisly death of General Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash and an opportune end to the protracted martial law in Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was popularly elected as the Prime

Minister of Pakistan, the first female head of state of a Muslim country. Bhutto was the only Pakistani woman who apparently cracked the gender code and managed to reach the highest seat of power. Bhutto's election generated feelings of goodwill among the public and a sense of genuine hope flourished that the machinery of democracy, justice, and peace would begin to work in Pakistan. In 1990, however, her government was dismissed on charges of incompetence and corruption. In October 1993, Bhutto was re-elected as Prime Minister, but was again discharged on charges of widespread corruption and autocracy in 1996. During both of her brief tenures from 1998-90 and from 1993-96, Bhutto made promises of legal and social reform even while particular infamous laws passed into effect by Zia's military regime, such as those related to adultery and the half testimony of women, were still upheld. This is ironically referred to by Naheed in the relative autonomy women had acquired in democracy and Naheed accuses Bhutto of being reluctant to end gender inequality.[114] The inclusion of the transliterated word "charge sheet" in the title of the poem, besides ironically referring to the nominal freedom women had acquired in democracy ("A crown on my head and shackles on my feet" connect 63), can also be an indictment of Bhutto's inability to grant equal opportunities to women. Here the context is the political legal structure of Pakistan, which had become a farce because of the judicial obstructions produced in the life of the common citizen, especially women, and the poem becomes testimonial against the state.

In the poem, Naheed imagines the nation as a house that had become a jail ("The bolt fastened on my door has been opened / but the door is still closed") and, at least until the ninth line, recreates the atmosphere of fear, amnesia, and self-censorship that living under the shadow of martial law induced in common Pakistani citizens, both men and

[114] Ironically, Bhutto never presented herself as an advocate for women's rights (Jalal 107).

women. The word "*čādar*" works as a mark of gender from the ninth line onwards and the poet juxtaposes both private and public emotions to show the female speaker's anger at her degradation. Naheed identifies the state-created sanctions and restrictions against female subjects that negate the joy that women might feel in the new-found liberty delivered to them with the initiation of democracy. Naheed lists a litany of ironies according to which the speaker finds no physical pleasure in partaking in her freedom:

> The bandage tied on my eyes has been removed
>
> but nothing can be seen
>
> The seals on my lips have been lifted
>
> but I have forgotten the art of talking
>
> Am I free or imprisoned
>
> happy or sad
>
> There is a chaddar on my head and my body is naked.
>
> A crown on my head and shackles on my feet. (connect 63)

The woman in the poem reflects on how she has been granted freedom, but the laws curbing her freedom of expression and movement are still in place: "Am I free or imprisoned / From Adultery to Half Testimony! / My charge sheet is very long" (connect 63). With its scornful tone, the poem is a narration of the lack of hope for women, especially those from unprivileged backgrounds, and of the way patriarchal society encourages women to disassociate from their bodies, a theme I return to later in the chapter. The poem builds on a series of contradictions in which the speaker recounts how she has lost control or volition over various parts of her body; yet, her imagination provides her with the freedom to create a public charge sheet of specific and unnamed

complaints against those holding her back. Ultimately, Naheed is also concerned with breaking down the fixed ideologies of social spheres as gendered, in which the public stage of free expression and politics belongs solely to men and the private dominion of silence and domesticity to women, even as women are absent from the legislative space of the nation. Naheed's poetry shows that mere infiltration of the codified spheres is a major concern, but thorough suspension of these spheres is also not so uncomplicated. For the poet, especially, there is a high risk of catering as a puppet to the pre-established hierarchic models within the apparatus of the state, capital, or literature. Naheed suggests that to re-imagine the present and design the future of the nation-state, the poet must resist complacency and configure new forms of expression, as structures of subjugation and discrimination have not yet been eradicated. Her poetry stems from the "almost transpersonal optimism" that flows from the understanding that there are no truths that are not historically conditioned (Scully 73).

If Agha Shahid Ali, the exiled poet, faces the conundrum of assuming the mantle of witnessing from afar, "Charge Sheet 1990" calls into question Naheed's endeavors at authenticating factual events in poetry and shows the near impossibility of being absolutely faithful to the materiality of life. The poem becomes an expression of Naheed not just bearing first-hand witness to and confronting collective national trauma, but also of experiencing and defying estrangement inside the temporal and spatial borders of the homeland. Naheed's poetics of confrontation suggests that there are possibilities of weathering banishment if the subject resides within the nation, if only through a re-imagination of the terms of national and cultural belonging to home. Naheed's endeavor, beyond this poem, is a re-imagining, from the gendered perspective of a woman, of the

nation-state of Pakistan. This is also one of the links among poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Cha, Etel Adnan, and Kishwar Naheed, in their writing for a lost, fragmented, or endangered homeland – which, therefore, needs to be imagined.

Naheed's attempts at restoration of the nation in an era of transnationality should not be translated as parochial or retrograde. For most critics, the rhetoric of the nation carries a tainted and contentious history. For instance, Homi K. Bhabha, in the introduction to Nation and Narration, points out "the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force [despite] the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress" (1). Through the "act of narration" there is an attempt to fill out the empty space of the nation, but according to Bhabha, the ambivalence of narration lies exactly in the "conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies" (2). Nationalist discourses do leave out Other subjects because of an "*unheimliche* terror" of the space they occupy (2), most evident in the patriarchal national narratives that suppress women but figuratively elevate them as the inviolable motherland. However, with the historical context of a poem like "Charge Sheet 1990" in mind, I suggest that it is essential to retain an idea of 'nationness.' This is so that these gaps within the national narratives can be filled by those left out and those racialized, classed, or gendered others be allowed to fulfill their sense of social belonging, resolve inequalities, and partake in the powers of political agency. Actually, the task of restoring the nation becomes even more urgent when the designation of the nation is purportedly becoming obsolete, and national, cultural, and linguistic borders change everyday. The nation becomes one of the sites of challenging the wrongs of globalization, such as acts of homogenizing differences and silencing local voices of

dissent, and also of contesting the neo-imperial machinations of more developed countries.[115] Particularly in the ongoing histories of decolonization and of the social reorganization of previously colonized states, we must be careful that "[a]ny analytical separation between an oppressive, hierarchical nationalism and a good, demotic nationalism needs to account for the common element or continuity between these two forms. It is this continuity that allows nationalism as such to modulate between its good and bad faces without any sharp transition" (Cheah 238). Naheed's discourse of nationalism actually implies that what matters is how the nation is imagined, with all its subjects.

In terms of the kind of language Naheed uses in her poetry, the poems in Urdu appear to be transparent because the level of language employed is colloquial and lines are whittled down to the basic word and grammar with repetitive refrains. Naheed's preference for words that stand as abstract concepts (such as truth, justice, history, freedom) lends clarity to the verses, the words serving both as touchstones for the Pakistani Urdu reader and carrying universal connotations accessible to any audience for whom the poem is translated. These abstractions interrupt the lilting reading of Naheed's infuriatingly simple lines, which can be contrasted with the intrusion by history upon Ali's poetics of beauty. The finer poems, in which Naheed successfully combines political insight with a heightened sensitivity to form, with an allusive attitude towards particularly literate composite words from Farsi and Urdu, fall into the danger of being read as opaque. In the same way, Naheed has been charged with "shoddiness" in her

[115] For instance, Slavoj Zizek, in his writings on the Yugoslavian debacle in "Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself," has warned of how narratives can be lost in the changing global politics. In the same essay, Zizek also analyzes the mythos of the nation from a psychoanalytic perspective (201-202).

work, which may be read in the regular repetition of words and phrases in her poems.[116] However, repetition in her poems, mostly in forms of address, personal pronouns, and verbs, creates a natural rhythm and the refrains serve to catch the reader's attention. Sometimes the poems can be read as interior monologues to which the reader becomes privy, but the addition of concrete references to events and dates lend it experiential detail, to fully enjoy which, the reader also needs to be aware of the historical contexts. In terms of the depiction of the nature of these relationships, the speaker is always a woman; some of the poems personify the speaker as an old mother, and are mostly addressed to male children. On the biographical level, autumnal metaphors seem to be a basic, sustaining matrix of her verse in Naheed's later volumes, depicting "a sense of entrapment, not only in relationships, social mores, a country with a dubious political situation, but in one's human body as well, especially as one ages" (Coppola 155). The female figures in her poetry, when represented in the role of the nation and as a mother, must not therefore be read as pure allegory of the nationalist narrative.[117] Instead, as I argue later, Naheed's poems may be read as the gendered translation of the narrative that Naheed is trying to reconstruct by supplementing the marginalized woman in the nation with a Pakistani woman cognizant of the forms in which her identity intersects with history.

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[116] "Kishwar's free verse and style have been criticised for lack of polish, for 'shoddiness,' but what is missing in terms of poetic craft is compensated for adequately by her enormous range, boundless energy and uninhibited, honest exploration of themes" (R. Ahmad 22). Asif Farrukhi, in his Introduction to Distance of a Shout states, "In her not infrequent weaker moments, she manages to give the impression of a poem put together rather than completed," but qualifies it by saying later that Naheed's tense and brittle texture and "sense of ill-ease could also be the result of these poems venturing deeper into unfamiliar zones of experience" (xiii).

[117] Fredric Jameson ("Third World Literature") and Barbara Harlow (Resistance Literature 33) have suggested that all literature, including poetry, written in the Third World serves as a reflection only of nationalist and collective sentiments, and that there is no split between public and private selves.

The question of form, the aesthetic choices that a socially engaged poet like Naheed employs, is of the utmost importance. Should a poem that is already taking so many risks be clearly stated or should it disregard formal rules? Trinh Minh-ha refers to the "norms of well-behaved writing: principles of composition, style, genre, correction, and improvement" that come into play when a female poet takes up her pen and which Minh-ha suggests the poet should ignore because they lock her into the hegemony of language:

> To write it to communicate, express, witness, impose, instruct, redeem, or save---at any rate to mean and to send out an unambiguous message. Writing thus reduced to a mere vehicle of thought may be used to orient toward a goal or to sustain an act, but it does not constitute an act in itself. […] Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order. (Woman 16-17)

Naheed has written both thinly veiled criticisms of the present regimes and draconian laws, and also highly complex structured poems employing various styles, tropes, and metaphors. Not as adherent to classical forms as Agha Shahid Ali, Naheed restructures the form of free verse in Urdu poetry and adds a female outlook to a mostly male literary establishment. While she shares Urdu literary traditions with Ali, unlike him, she rebels against the established norms and forms that Ali emulates. In Naheed's writing, the *āzād nazm* / free verse poem and *nasrī nazm* / prose poetry seem to easily sustain the genre of the political poem. This is so because the free verse poem is easier to understand, even by the semi-literate or illiterate than the traditional *ghazal* form used by

Pakistani poets and so prolifically used by Naheed herself.[118] A ghazal employs numerous cultural and literary references, which makes it complicated for the uninitiated. For Naheed, a free verse poem would be a form more suitable for a smooth transmission of messages. K.C. Kanda in Masterpieces of Urdu Nazm, classifies Urdu poetry into the subjective and objective, to which the ghazal and *nazm* correspond:

> the poet of the nazm is free to adopt any metrical arrangement that suits his subject or mood. […] The poet of the nazm thus enjoys a greater measure of freedom in the choice of rhyme scheme and length of the poem, as against the practitioner of the ghazal, and this enables him to match his style with the subject, and adjust the tone and pace of his verse to reflect the undulations of mood and situation. (2)

The evolution of Urdu poetry in post-Partition Pakistan is closely tied to the All India Progressive Writers' Association started in the 1930s, whose architects, writers like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, sought to rescue literature from obscurantism and to bring it closer to reality. After 1947, these Progressive writers in Pakistan split into the 'Progressives,' poets like Faiz who continued to espouse a socialist-tinged poetry concerned with social amelioration, and the 'moderns' under a group headed by N. M. Rashid (1910-75) and Sana Allaha Sani Daar Miraji (1912-49), who emphasized literary experimentation with form and techniques such as symbolism and stream-of-consciousness. Male poets like Rashid and Miraji are mostly recognized as the pioneers of the free verse form, *āzād*

[118] Even the fifth section of Confronting an Imagined Person consists of nine ghazals, and many of her poetry volumes contain ghazal sections.

nazm.[119] Rashid and Faiz managed to incorporate elements of socio-political dissent in their poetry and took the genre a step further. The radical women poets who started writing after Rashid and Faiz, found models in these earlier male poets to project the experiences of women in free verse poetry. Since male poets drastically reconstructed the parameters of symbolism but still employed a patriarchal gendered language, women poets wanted to breach the romantic rhetoric and imagery associated with the classical form of ghazals and wanted to use a vernacular that could capture the daily experiences of women. In the same vein, *nasrī nazm* (a genre of the *nazm* that, like the *āzād nazm*, does not contains any rhyme and meter, and even rhythm, according to its critics) is the next popular innovation in Urdu poetry after free verse and, though much derided by the critics, is used prolifically by poets in the regional languages of Pakistan too. Naheed, in her choice to write about material and social conditions – including sexuality – that common women deal with, is derided for passing the limits of feminine decorum and the submissive role of women customary in Urdu poetry. Naheed's employment of free verse, prose poetry, and colloquial language for her politically charged poems are an attempt to reach those strata of society that normally wouldn't pay attention to a highly allusive ghazal. Since these forms of poetry also lends the poet greater freedom of expression and diction than a tightly compressed ghazal, it is interesting to note that Naheed's poems are compact enough in imagery and allusions to not extend to more than three pages.

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[119] Kanda considers Rashid to be the first practitioner of the free verse form in Urdu poetry (320-21), while Muhammad Sadiq says that Tasaduk Hasain Khalid (1901-73) was known to be the first Urdu poet to employ free verse during his stay in England from 1932-34 (537). Whichever the case, according to Sadiq "Despite several similarities with the old forms, *vers libre* was not welcome at first, and aroused a storm of opposition among the old-fashioned […] that in advocating it the new poets were simply rationalizing their inability to use the old mediums unsuccessfully" (536).

Naheed's blending of political imagination into forms that are read as fairly 'modern' in the canon of classical Urdu literature also places her in a generation of Urdu poets who may be labeled postmodernist. While the difference between the Progressives and the Modernists is that of the political and the non-political, that between the latter and the Postmodernists is theoretical and not as diametrically opposed (Narang 275, 276).[120] Naheed is credited with having created a novel forum for the articulation of women's voices in Urdu language. Her translation endeavors of poetry from Chilean, Greek, Senegalese, Romanian, Chinese, Russian, and Bulgarian poets (forming a curious reverse parallel with Ali), also introduced the poetics of radical poets into Urdu during military rule when censorship prevailed and there were limits on what could be written.[121] The postmodernist element in her poetics is the lyrical appropriation and rendition in her poetry of the works of other poets such as Adrienne Rich or Emily Dickinson. She sees her poetry as a continuation of the classical Urdu traditions established by writers before her, not making a clean break with the past, while embracing the modern contemporary elements and forms of literature. Naheed identifies her latest collection in terms of "free verse," and "prose poetry," along with a requisite section on ghazals, and one of her

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[120] *Taraqqī Pasandī, Jadīdīat, Mābaa'd Jadīdīat: Gopi Chand Narang kē Muntakhab Mazāmīn /* Progressivism, Modernism, Postmodernism: Selected Essays of Gopi Chand Narang. My translation.

[121] Naheed says so in her autobiography, Saga of a Bad Woman: "During Martial Law when words too were in fetters, we had no recourse except for translation. In adorning our words with the anger of Palestinian poets and the challenges of African writers, we were content that at least some message was delivered to the people" (93; my translation). In the earlier part of her career, Naheed had translated the poetry of Pablo Neruda, Andrey Voznesensky, George Seferis, Kenneth Patchen, Léopold Senghor, Forough Farokhzad, Lucian Blaga, Nichita Stânescu, Radoy Ralin, Alexander Bloc, among others, in *Nazmeñ* / Poems (1976); in In My First Life I Was Night (1998) and Composition of A Scorched Heart (2002), she has further translated the poetry of South African, South Korean, Greek, Jordanian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Japanese poets.

translators also classifies the full body of her work as prose poetry, not free verse.[122] It must be noted that though western models influenced the development of Urdu poetry, poets writing in Urdu did not completely accept them: "Urdu adopted the idea of the inequality of verses and the commonality of unrhyming in its free verse, but the way different rhythms are combined or verses can even be absent of rhythm and meter in the west, Urdu did not accept either. […] Verses can be of different length in Urdu but rhythm is prime" (Narang 334). While a casual perusal of her poetry, at least in Confronting an Imagined Person, would suggest no visible similarity to the prose poetry form, the feature to be borne in mind is that of Arabic *al-shir al-manthur* / prose poetry as discussed in the chapter on Etel Adnan. All of Naheed's poems have salient line breaks and longer lines are sometimes alternately followed by shorter ones, and like, prose poetry, they are distinctive in the pronounced internal rhythm of the verses. In fact, in her latter collections and sometimes even in her translations of other poets, Naheed seems to increasingly favor the prose poetry form.

Although Naheed's poetry is written in Urdu, which is the officially declared national language of Pakistan, the language is not fully enforced in all regions of Pakistan and there are many other regional languages with equally rich and solid histories but not as strong publication records. Still, on the local national level, Naheed's poetry is an attempt to challenge the national narratives in which the legal terms of the citizenship of both men and women were rewritten, and women in particular were written off the public stage. The choice of Urdu also allows Naheed to critique geo-political structures of power

[122] Farrukhi states, "some of her best work in recent years is prose-poetry, the choice of form being determined by her themes" (xii), presumably of enlightening her readers.

outside the state as Urdu has cross-border appeal in the Urdu-speaking communities settled in India and as part of the diaspora settled in the Western hemisphere.

Naheed thus tries to make visible the demands and histories of the silenced in the nation-state and through the strong subjective element in her poetry tries to make the readers imagine the life of an ordinary woman. For instance, the frequency with which collective pronouns, such as "*ham*" / "we" and "*hamārā*" / "our" were used in her earlier volumes, is absent in this volume. This also signifies that the poems appearing in this volume, because of the presence of a resiliently subjective and ruminative voice, can be read as true lyrics. In Naheed's poetry, violent events are translated into a lyric and her work shows the kinds of transmutations the lyric goes through in times of crisis. Given the cultural memory that her poetry carries and the historical facts that are challenged, Naheed's lyrics are alternately compressed or expansive with the undulating lengths of the lines and the complexity of the words, so that at times the seams of the lyric become obvious and the lyric is used beyond its solipsistic element for collective concerns. Compared to the lyrical compositions of Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, and Theresa Cha, the texture of Naheed's lyrics in Confronting is more pungent because the voice of the poet is more enraged and more strident.

What would be the appropriate way of articulating these concerns on a global level without losing the social power they can unleash? A related question is whether the element of a plainspoken language bound to feminist ideals in Naheed's poetry would be prized and even highlighted in an English-speaking audience. The policies of remembering and forgetting that determine national narratives are challenged by Naheed, who aims to construct and reinvigorate a national identity, gendered or not, in poetic

forms that also challenge the hierarchies of literary models. On the other hand, the incarnations that a lyric goes through (as free verse or prose poetry) in a nation in transition, might not get fully translated to a non-native reader, particularly if the poet also attempts to hold up the mirror to the assumptions of a transnational audience. Naheed's poetics suggests that if the poet is made to feel exiled and alienated within the nation-state, she makes herself a dynamic home within language, as she says so in her autobiography *Burī Aurat kī Kathā* / Saga of a Bad Woman (1997). Poetry, while making her the object of much personal sorrow, allows her to feel the whole country and the whole world her natal home, providing her with so much fostering that she feels "the chaddar of all the relations of companionship is pulled taut over my head" (99). She states,

> That same bounty that in the form of poetry became my nature, gave life such a gift of humility and contentment that in solitude I myself would be inebriated with its scent. Because of this humility and contentment, I learnt the etiquette of talking bluntly with courage with everyone in life and at work […] I searched for the future not in sacks of money but in the composition of those words that would also become testimony for the next generation. (Saga 85)

According to Naheed, the discontinuity between history and reality, because of the continuous oppression faced by the citizens, can be reversed when all those who are ostracized are housed within the nation. Her imaginative interpretation of the homeland is an attempt to provide a foundational model for the nation in an unstable world. Unlike Agha Shahid Ali, Naheed's invocation of cultural memory is that of the immediate present, not of a peaceful past, and her poetics of establishing testimonials is an attempt

to register trauma before it falls prey to amnesia, censorship, or apathy. Her poetry provides a site for re-enacting traumatic events so that they may be preserved in collective memory and the project of nation building is carried out by the community. The readers of her lyrics are forced to go beyond mere description of the formal properties of her poetry to understand the cultural politics implied by social elision and political displacement in the parameters of the nation-state. Kishwar Naheed advocates that women can truly inhabit the nation-state and the global arena when obsolete tenets are unhoused and the process of achieving consciousness is fulfilled in the imaginary.

If Theresa Hak Kyung Cha attempts to restore her sense of subjective and national wholeness by suturing language and history in DICTEE, Kishwar Naheed's project in Confronting is to reclaim language and memory so the national imaginary can be restored. Naheed's "*Girtī hū'i Dīwār-e Berlin, Günter Grass aur Maiñ* / The Falling Berlin Wall, Günter Grass and I" and "*Jangal meñ Žāla-bāri kā Manzar* / Scene of Hailstorm in the Jungle"[123] illustrate her use of poetry to restore language and memory despite all efforts of the state apparatus to occlude national culture. Naheed serves to remind the reader of half-forgotten political dates and events that have been suppressed not only by time but also by the intense state censorship that still prevails in Pakistan. "The Falling Berlin Wall, Günter Grass and I" is similar to Cha's endeavor of resurrecting narratives expunged from national consciousness. Naheed's poem highlights the position of the witness in relation to physical objects that are emblems of historical and cultural memory but which, as Agha Shahid Ali has also cautioned in his lyrics, may also face the danger of being eradicated. The Berlin Wall came down in 1989 amid great

[123] Appendix.

rejoicing among East and West Germans, the same time that democracy was returning to Pakistan in the form of the elected government of Benazir Bhutto. The immediate aftermath of both Bhutto's governance and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall induced a period of apprehension and dashing of hopes: while Bhutto's government was sacked in 1990 on charges of corruption, reunification failed to bear prosperity or equality for East Germans.[124]

Naheed uses Günter Grass in the title of her poem for good measure because Grass had unpopularly objected to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany as he feared the rise of the extreme right and that the experience of the Holocaust had not fully been undertaken. Grass had indicated that the wall kept alive the memory of German guilt: "Anyone thinking about Germany these days and looking for an answer to the German question must include Auschwitz in his thoughts. That place of terror, that permanent wound, makes a future unified German state impossible" (Two States 6). Ironically, Grass himself ended up getting caught in the rhetorical net of amnesia and guilt when he conveniently 'remembered' in his seventh decade that he had briefly been a young member of Hitler's police force.[125] In this poem, Naheed takes the symbol of the Berlin Wall and applies it to the amnesia that comes of oppression, fear, and the absence of hated physical objects which, if not registered in

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[124] In a 1985 speech, Grass had referred to reunification as a form of 'annexation' of East Germany (Preece 175). He also stated in a November 1989 interview that "The internal process of democratization should have been pushed further, before the opening of the [East German state's] borders was announced" (Two States 10).

[125] On his recent confession of being part of Hitler's elite Waffen-SS in his book Peeling the Onion, Grass stated in an interview: "My silence over all these years is one of the reasons why I decided to write this book" (Loewenberg 17). Even Grass's friendliest critics, dismayed at "his near lifetime of silence," state that "Grass treated himself with the indulgence he did not hesitate to describe as a moral defect in others" (Birnbaum, screen 8).

language, are cleanly wiped out of the collective memory of a nation. The Wall, which became symbolic of oppression and division in the Cold War, becomes a metonym for Naheed to explore the pathology of amnesia within her own country. Just as Naheed inverts conventional tropes from Urdu and Persian literature, here she also inverts the symbolism of the wall. The speaker of this poem, who is female, identifies with the wall that jubilant people are breaking down as a mark of division, but which holds other memories for her:

> In moments of doubt, this wall was my sanctuary
>
> it was my cover, was witness to my unadornment
>
> it was my portion of the past. (Confronting 80)

For the speaker who lacks a home, the wall provides "sanctuary" and "cover" – as we have seen earlier in the chapter, Kishwar Naheed uses the concept of home and shelter interchangeably in her poetry and shows the equivocal association of an abode that can become shelter or prison. Here, instead of the private "*čār-dīwārī*," the four walls of the home, Naheed employs the trope of the wall, which occupies public space, to connote sanctuary. What is remarkable is that Naheed uses the term "*satr*" twice in the poem,[126] but does not employ the word "*čādar*," which carries the double connotation of veil and shelter, as I've shown in reference to Naheed's other poems earlier. In this instance, the wall provides the cover and refuge that the speaker does not have otherwise. In fact, my own original mistranslation of Naheed's poem (connect 61) had missed the link between

[126] "*Satr*" means a cover or curtain (screen) of clothing, and the second time Naheed uses it in the poem by stating its absence in "*bēsatr*," unclothed and naked, exposed.

the images of the female speaker being uncovered, without clothes and jewelry.[127] By repeating the imagery of a stripped body, Naheed emphasizes the absence of refuge, clothes, or jewelry, that the adornment she lacks is not just material but also consists of human dignity and freedom. Naheed's utilization of terms such as "*satr*" and "*gahnē*" serve to feminize the public masculine space of the wall and lend a quotidian note to an abstraction. Her longing for a freedom that protects her body is contrasted with the precarious solidity of the wall, that those already free and those who have freedom in their grasp have broken the wall as if it were made of sand and melted the *āhan* / iron of this wall.

If in Naheed's work, just like the poetry of Theresa Cha, there is "the preoccupation with daring to speak, with writing, and with the message getting out" (Steele 344), what is also worth noting is the tone of this particular poem. While the title of the poem places the speaker in juxtaposition with the writer Günter Grass and the inanimate Wall, Naheed plays with different forms of address in the poem. In the beginning Naheed uses the second-person form of address ("I was standing very near the wall / that you were breaking" Confronting 80), but switches to the indirect relative pronoun by the end of the first stanza: "Those gaining freedom / and those wishing to be free" have razed the wall and "they are happy and I am sad" (Confronting 80-81). Later in the second stanza, the speaker, in an allusion to personal liberty and peace, calls herself "of the species of birds" whose legacy is to fly and gains solace from the memory of the falling wall: "Those who walk in the dark with candles have no names / but people never forget them" (Confronting 81). The wall makes its appearance as the fourth actor of the

[127] My initial mistranslation was "witness to my innocence" (connect 61) instead of "witness to my unadornment." "*Bēgahnī*" implies another absence, the state of not being bejeweled or adorned.

poem only in this stanza where Naheed again switches pronouns, from the anthropomorphized wall's communication with the speaker ("as long as the taste of the promises made in my name / remains on your tongue / you will not be uncovered" Confronting 81) to the wall's hortatory mandate to the speaker ("Those who walk in the dark…").[128] By alternating between 'I,' 'you' and 'they,' Naheed plays with the identification of the reader with the characters in the poem. Not only does the simple rhetorical device seem to distance the speaker from her goal, it also becomes a form of establishing communication. Naheed emphatically proposes the presence of an interlocutor in her poetics and this poem is no different: the direct, conversational style of the poet pulls in the reader and evokes response. Unlike Cha's linguistic meanderings, Naheed does not seem to have the time to detract her readers' attention away from her pithy lyrics. In contrast to the palpable noise of the jubilation and the demolition of the wall is the quiet recitation and admonishing of the speaker. Starting the poem with a note of sorrow and disappointment in being unable to stop the euphoric majority, Naheed ends the poem, as she does all of her poems, on a confrontational note and leaves the speaker with the not-as-yet fulfilled possibilities of the redemption of her labor.

With Naheed's poem, we come full circle in the cold war poetics of transnational poetry: from the inception of the cold war in the Korean peninsula to its European denouement and its fruition in the birth of the New World Order. These particular four poets are bracketed by a Cold War built up at the behest of the American empire, and this also suggests that a transnational poetics is restrained by the demands of a capital-

[128] As leftist writers, both Grass and Naheed might have also felt the slightest twinge of nostalgia for the experiments of socialism that failed at the end of the Cold War, both believing in grassroots, revolutionary democracy instead of the administering of a capitalist structure.

controlling nation-state. The dismay of the speaker of "The Falling Berlin Wall" is compounded at the correlation of the demolition of the Wall to the beginning of the Gulf War; in fact, the end of the cold war is when neo-imperial forces of transnationalism gather momentum in various parts of the Asian continent.[129] Naheed's poem, like Theresa Cha's DICTEE with its repressed voices of pre-partition Korea, also goes further back in time to buried national traumas. As a trope of partition, the figure of the wall recalls national partitions of various orders that have figured in the poetics of all these poets and Naheed too calls attention to the partitions Pakistan has witnessed. With the lyrical accent on the lack of mourning in the poem, Naheed distills the silence about the submerged tragedies of the sub-continental partition that gave birth to the nation-states of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the latter division of the Pakistani federation into the states of Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971. That the trauma of these partitions was enacted on the bodies of women is knowledge repressed in the patriarchal nationalist narrative of Pakistan – the first silence imposed is about the cross-border abduction and raping of women during the sub-continental partition, and the second one is engineered about the sexual violence carried out by the Pakistani military against Bangladeshi women.[130] Since the patriarchal nationalist rhetoric of Pakistan institutionalizes memory by ensuring that only the triumphs and the martyred are remembered, the narratives of the abducted and assaulted women are rendered to amnesia. With the disappearance of these women from national memory is added the constitutional disappearance of women from the Pakistani public discourse in the more recent past and the steady erasure of human rights for those

[129] In fact, the Gulf War becomes a major theme in the second half of Naheed's Confronting an Imagined Person in which this poem is included.

[130] See Butalia, Menon, and Saikia.

already marginalized. Though unnamed here, laws reducing the subjectivity of women, such as the infamous Hudood Ordinance, also leave their trace in the poem. Thus, Naheed's correspondence with Grass ("in the names of those kinships and sorrows / that I had built of my own will to defend my life") suggests that the inability to mourn and to acknowledge guilt leads to gashes in memory and wounds in the collective imaginary, a legacy of terror and horror that is not fully dealt with in either country.

If a moral vacuum (German, Korean, American, or Pakistani) is filled with silence and denial about trauma, it still remains a vacuum. Besides being a physical barrier, the Wall solidifies guilt and amnesia on both sides. The unseen and unspoken guilt that the Wall represents to the speaker and to Günter Grass means that the Wall too is figuratively a mistranslation to the celebrants of unification, something they wish to break down because they disidentify with it. The wall occupies a real-unreal heterotopic space that undermines the language of signification and representation.[131] If the Wall was a hypostatization of guilt and thus occupied both a spatial and imaginary site, its destruction can only mean the disappearance of a disappearance – the poem too is then composed in a void of private amnesia and public apathy. Where Theresa Cha desires to recreate the Korea of her past as an imaginary Eleusis, Naheed has to remap the sordid imagination of local Pakistani and global post-Cold War politics by marking a negative Elysium, a dystopia that exists in moments of impossibilities. Just as Theresa Cha proves

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[131] According to Foucault, a heterotopia is a counter-site, "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" and is capable of "juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible" ("Of Other Spaces" 24-25). Elsewhere, Foucault calls heterotopias disturbing "because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name *this* or that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (Order xviii).

the hollowness of the assertion that women cannot be the subject of history, Naheed too succeeds in bringing the female speaker center stage. Collective history, as these poets have shown ("A street is territory borrowed from the past into which we engulf ourselves in search of transfiguration" Adnan There 8), is undeniably enmeshed with personal history. If in Agha Shahid Ali's poetry memory finds a homeland in his lyrics, for Kishwar Naheed it is forever on a threshold; memory is solidified as a fraught wall but is also a fault line in danger of being erased. Yet the wall also configures into Naheed's poetics of the threshold: as the boundary is erased, the speaker is left again in a liminal state where she is told that "Those who walk in the dark with candles have no names / but people never forget them" (Confronting 81). The voiding of her identity, that might have become a reality with the disappearance of the wall, is filled by Naheed with reassurance of restoration. Naheed replaces the absence of the material spatialization of memory, the void at the center of language, with an imaginary and figurative structure of remembrance in the cultural landscape.

In Naheed's poetry, the concreteness and specificity of dates, events and legal terms serve as writing against the erasure engineered by the state apparatus and from collective amnesia. When Naheed takes the language of violence and law to turn it upside down, to show the other side of the language that rubs against the ordinary lives of women and men, the tone of the poems becomes fiercely and defiantly hopeful. However, can Naheed's assumption – contrary to the words of Audre Lorde –of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house (i.e., use of the loathsome dates and laws) serve to legitimize and immortalize them in poetry?[132] That is, if we fail to question the

[132] In this oft-quoted passage, Lorde says survival is "learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in

construction of ideology, patriarchal or our own, then we are borrowing the master's toolbox and restoring the master's house. Though Lorde's injunction serves as vigilant reminder, Naheed's use of legalese and references to historical facts is not a method of giving the poetic, hence public, seal of approval to offensive acts; rather, Naheed challenges the legitimacy of laws by which the state attempts to legislate basic freedoms of existence. The Urdu reader of the poems would have access to both the legalistic and literary allusions of the poem, in which Naheed effectively creates a nexus of dissension. In fact, language related to legalese is liberally sprinkled throughout Naheed's poems, which her Pakistani audience can readily understand. Global dissemination of her poetry would necessitate translation of Naheed's national and transnational concerns to a receptive audience, with the caveat that such translation is easily lost if the language is too confrontational and the truth too harsh for the cosmopolitan ear. When dissent is silenced through coercion, self-serving laws of sedition and, ultimately, self-censorship, even control over vocabulary is lost – the words a person uses in public can be used against her or him, and all the channels of communication are taken over by state or imperial powers. This becomes no more evident than in the military rule in Pakistan, when writers were jailed, flogged, exiled, or rendered to publishing oblivion if they dared to voice opposition against the military state, which Naheed memorializes in her poetry persistently ("How many of my colleagues / were shot / for the crime of standing on the threshold of truth" Confronting 59). Naheed's references to legal terms and historical

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order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may temporarily allow us to beat him down at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (99).

events are a way for her to destabilize the language of authority and, by reterritorializing the semantics of material life, to create a vocabulary of resistance.

Through her politically charged verse, Kishwar Naheed seeks to disseminate forcibly suppressed information to the less-informed members of a culture. She tells the stories of people who defy stereotypes and, as she says in one of her poems, pay "the price of looking back" (Pink 44). The act of looking back is actually a way of remembering and documenting injustices committed with such impunity from the ruling powers that sometimes words are not sufficient to capture a fleeting moment of anger and dissent. If looking back is the practice of challenging stereotypes and re-imagining history, in the hand of women poets, it becomes a perversely female act that knows no cultural boundaries: "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. [...T]here is the challenge and promise of a new whole psychic geography to be explored" (Rich "Dead" 167-68). For Naheed, this "re-visioning" also means membership in a global community of poets who lyrically express the social struggle for freedom and justice. Whether she established this solidarity through translating into Urdu the works of other revolutionary poets during the periods of martial law when there were rigid laws of censorship, or through extensively reading the works of Vladimir Mayakovsky or Osip Mendalstam, she retains a special proclivity toward women poets.[133] The transnational thread that runs in Naheed's work and the

[133] Farrukhi states: "Naheed has translated consistently from the works of other internationally known writers, and through her own translation as well as by publishing translation by other writers in *Māh-e Nau*, a magazine she edited, she helped create a new climate of opinion. [According to another critic,] Naheed has made a significant contribution (unlike any other contemporary writer) because of the encouragement and support she has lent to young writers" (x).

writings of women artists she admires is the concern for the domestic and public aspects of ordinary women's lives. In the same vein, Naheed attempts to establish dialogue with poets who share her concerns, like American poet Adrienne Rich. Naheed and Rich form obvious comparisons for their activism both on and off the page. Both writers question the socially gendered, political, sexual, and personal roles that women are assigned.[134] However, Naheed's speakers would face more immediate repercussions than Rich's, and her poetry is more locally specified and grounded in political experiences than Rich's generalizations about historical injustices. Whereas for Adrienne Rich, as in most of her poetry, the main anxiety is the appropriation of her desires and language while she enjoys basic civil rights, for Naheed merely the act of questioning in a *nā-jā'iz* / illegitimate manner is enough to land her in prison. Both poets use the subjective voice to filter their concerns, but because of its context, Naheed's subjective tone takes on collective weight, isn't purely anecdotal, and she more often employs the plural personal perspective. Naheed does indeed pay a price for the act of looking back: she has been hounded by successive Pakistani governments for interrogating the patriarchal bases of official institutions.[135] In what can be termed her "*lived* poetics," Naheed realizes "a poetry conscious of living social context: what it is becoming and what it is coming up against" (Scully 73).

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[134] Naheed's poetry resonates with the metaphors and ideas used by Rich; in fact, the (English) title of one of Naheed's earlier poems, "The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice," is taken from a verse of Rich's poem "Cartographies of Silence."

[135] While the editor of the monthly literary journal, *Māh-e Nau /* New Time, Naheed endured, and successfully contested, charges of obscenity for publishing an abridged version of Simon de Beauvoir's The Second Sex in 1983. She was regularly demoted at her workplace and faced state surveillance. Naheed was also discharged as the head of the prestigious government institution of the National Council of Arts in Pakistan in 1998 because of her criticism of official policies.

Co-option by the state is a real concern in reading the political activism and poetry of Naheed in the context of the history of women's rights in Pakistan. The "convenience of subservience" (Jalal 18), a reluctance to challenge prescribed roles by educated urban middle and upper class women because of a subjective consideration of the stability of the family unit and the social order itself, leads to "a gap between individual awareness and collective action" (Jalal 17). The historical development of women's organizations in Pakistan and the passing of conservative laws by successive governments hinged on the initial relationship between women and the state, in which women extracted concessions from the state while ignoring their class accommodations with a number of administrations. Though a vocal minority of women in organizations called local and global attention to the disastrous legislature promulgated by General Zia's regime, it was unable to repeal the said legislature and achieve better opportunities for all classes of women. What gives Naheed's writing clarity of focus is the eleven-year martial law rule of General Zia, during which the rights of ordinary citizens, especially women, were curtailed and legitimated by the passing of obscurantist regulations. These constitutional changes were mainly undertaken to court reactionary orthodox elements and legitimize the authority of military rule, which successive Pakistani governments, whether transitional democratic regimes or dictatorship, have not revoked and which is why the state apparatus are often Naheed's target. Women's organizations in Pakistan, composed of women from well-off sectors, have concentrated mostly on addressing the political aspects of women's existence and not on the social construction of the female gender on the level of the family or workplace. They "have as yet to initiate collective support mechanisms for dealing with personal oppression even for their own class of

women" (Shaheed 94). The history of women's rights in Pakistan shows the tenuous relationship between women and the state, and the state's attempts to regulate spaces and spheres of women's existence. Naheed attempts to bridge the gap between individual and collective consciousness by lyrically giving voice to the voided histories of those less fortunate and stratified by gender or class. For instance, in "The Silent Volcano" from Confronting an Imagined Person, which she starts with, "All the pasts of our history are turning into the present," Naheed finds similarities between the Phillipines under Marcos and Pakistan in the politics, the condition of loyalty, and "the number / Of people swallowed in the lanes." She ends the poem with,

> Then the small history of my country
>
> Becomes a part of the larger past
>
> In which when slaves are buried alive in the sand
>
> You need not mark their graves. (Distance 98)

Naheed's poetry becomes the manifestation of resistance that disrupts the discourse of male power and deterritorializes a language that caters to the needs of the select. Earlier in the chapter, I have shown how Naheed questions the legal control of the state apparatus over public and private space, the extension of which control is the indiscriminate sexualization of space. If "The Falling Berlin Wall…" is a reminder of how silence over guilt and complicity can taint the cultural fabric of a nation, Naheed's "Scene of Hailstorm in the Jungle" points out the psychic repercussions of internalization of silence on the personal level. In this poem, she talks of the absence of a language that would be open to the female experience of living in a society that scrutinizes all the actions and expression of feelings: "The language in which I dream / I do not write in that

language" (Confronting 39). The poem features a female speaker who questions the self-censorship she is encouraged to undertake regarding the space she occupies in the private and public realms as a thinking, sexual being. Fearful of the speaker's burgeoning sexuality, society binds her in the dictates of marriage and sets parameters on her communication with others so that the speaker cannot fully articulate her desires. To suppress her bodily desires, she does what is expected of her, to make herself attractive to the others and present herself for consumption: "The body that I feel / around it, I wrap a sari / like wrapping paper" (Confronting 39). The woman is entrapped in social strictures placed only around her gender according to which "good girls" cannot be in close proximity to a man or even laugh out loud. There are sexual demarcations set around her to protect her from her own sexuality and she is legitimate only if she is married to a man, carrying the title of "*bēgam*"[136] or "*mankūha*."[137]

Unlike Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali and Theresa Cha, Kishwar Naheed does not have to give up her language because it is linked to her land and is employed daily – her dilemma, instead, is of not being alienated from language because it is at odds with her material reality. To honor basic civil rights and to resist censorship, she has to transform language from within and flood it with memory and history. For Naheed, writing is an act of survival, of fashioning subjectivity against the odds of multiple marginalizations and a language that voids her existence and desires. Her poetry suggests that in order to confront the totalizing of the state and social apparatuses she has to radically imagine a

[136] "*Bēgam*" would colloquially be the title of any married woman of a higher rank, but the woman in the poem is further enmeshed in a tight upper-middle class structure where although she seemingly might enjoy relatively more freedom that affluence affords her, she is expected to behave according to her status of a begum.

[137] *Mankūha*: one who has had her *nikkāh* (religious ceremony); lawfully married woman

self interactive in the material world. “In naming her experiences, the modern Asian woman writer is an existentialist. To write is to inscribe original identity […] and the self, which is always already in exile, is also always already in birth” (Lim “Semiotics” 173), just as Naheed’s real-imagined female subjectivity is constantly engaged in unresolved experiences in the real world. As a poet, Naheed absorbs the “material reality of consciousness” (Lim “Semiotics” 170) by breaching the multiple marginalizations of a circumstanced physical self and creating a public expressive self, disrupting the linearity of singular aesthetics and traditional reception, and professing agency for her female speakers and readers. The male literary establishment in Pakistan, conservative and dismissive of works it cannot empathize with, reacts to women poets such as Naheed “as a special case,” claiming that they “achieve publication and, sometimes, celebrity, because they are women rather than because they are poets” (Ahmad 1). Naheed confounds the canonical perceptions of many of her contemporaries because her “poetic abilities and literary sensibilities match, and in some instances exceed, those of many of her male counterparts” (Coppola 156). On the other hand, the spatial transformation of Pakistan, that is the “militarization and masculinisation of public space” and “public control over (private) morality” during the last three decades (Rouse 148-149) is another element Naheed has to deal with, as shown in the experiences of the characters of her poems. This divisive blurring of the public and private sphere with the simultaneous sociopolitical solidification of masculine ideals portends the reduction of women to ciphers, which is why Naheed has to lyrically render the legible presence of women in the symbolic and the material world.

Curiously, or perhaps not, Naheed finds no space for love in this abrasive context, suggesting that love cannot be located in an oppressive environment and that the language of

love is not yet sufficient to express all its vagaries. For instance, in "Signatures," another poem from Confronting, Naheed creates interlocking images of words, flowers, and embroidery. Sent a perfumed letter by her beloved, the speaker plants the "jasmine of this letter" in her mind and figuratively embroiders the signatures of the beloved on paper, her body, and her wrinkles. With the passing of time, love turns sour: the beloved discards the speaker and demands dissolution of their marital union with divorce, which the speaker refuses to authorize. In an ironic twist, instead of signing divorce papers, the speaker signs the beloved's death claim, asserting that, "Every proclamation demands / A signature!" (Distance 90). Responding to a reviewer who had said that love is dying within her poetry, Naheed has said,

> I started thinking that that bedecked, coy love in which the twirling of the dupatta in teeth would be included, did not pass by me. In all my initial poetry there is traditional love and for traditional poetry, it is not necessary to fall in love. In that traditional poetry there is only one being that has walked holding me by hand and that is the being of woman, her emotions and her voice. My initial poetry, which can also be called love poetry, is from my college days. It's a good thing I destroyed it myself otherwise critics of another time would present it as my picture. (Saga 87)

In "Scene of Hailstorm," though the woman internalizes society's dictums, she still possesses consciousness that helps her break the surface of decorum, that "these evidences do not work" in the language of her dreams (Confronting 40). In several of Naheed's poems, dreams with sexual content "often terrify and confuse young girls and even grown married women" (Coppola 154). Confronted by her bodily desires that are

manifested in her dreams but cannot be expressed in her waking moments, the woman in the poem is faced with an aporia. To counter the ventriloquizing tendencies of the patriarchal authorities that posit marriage as the answer for her erotic needs, the woman has to invent a new language to describe her desires. Even if she hasn't yet found this language of expression, the speaker is aware enough that social decrees have no control on her dream domain: only in her dreams is she able to escape the fear inculcated in her through religion and patriarchal society ("the amulet of fear remained on my neck / until I started dreaming" Confronting 40). Though free of fear unconsciously, she is unable to translate her freedom to reality as she lacks the language to articulate her desires: "Where will I find the dictionary to define my dreams?" (Confronting 40). Naheed fuses the threshold between dreams and reality as the woman struggles for speech in the dialectic between night and day: "Sometimes before the sun sets / I put some dreams in its platter. / Maybe next morning that language will be found / in which I can define my dreams" (Confronting 40-41). Her vocabulary remains incomplete and fissured and her muteness and loneliness indefinite as Naheed ends the poem with the ironic refrain of the woman's body wrapped in a sari-like wrapping paper. The speaker's grief cannot be assuaged until her longings are satisfied and she escapes the bounds of security. It is the woman's body that becomes the locus of desire and restrictions, as in most of Naheed's poetry, and her ever-prevailing concern is how to free it in the national imaginary. The sari, like the appellations of marriage, merely becomes a sign of the absence of speech and fulfillment, handy to hide the trauma of the woman's disintegration.

Naheed asks questions from herself and the reader in almost every poem, holding everyone accountable, with many of the poems ending, as here, on either questions or

accusations. Since the woman in the poem has not discovered the means to render her desires in a public medium of expression, Naheed's language in the poem also remains guarded and ascetic, provocative yet reserved. Naheed's use of language and her portrayal of the body can be contrasted with the willful lyricism and the neo-classical elements in the work of Naheed's contemporary, Fahmida Riaz. According to a critic, more than any other poet's of her generation, Riaz's work "depends on the harmonious calibration of sound and image, elliptical syntax and direct statement" (Hussein xv).[138] Riaz's poetics is composed in more of a classical literary milieu, and hence is more nuanced, than the sociopolitical environment with which Naheed's poems engage. In her elegant, spiritually-inclined compositions, Riaz more often conveys a conciliatory tone than Naheed's confrontational, disjunctive lyrics in which women speakers attempt to articulate their own existence. Because of the social and political climate she is situated in, the speaker of Naheed's poem faces as much psychic fragmentation as that of Theresa Cha's DICTEE. Since her consciousness cannot interact with the public persona she is expected to maintain, the bodily image of the woman in Naheed's poem is fragmented and she is forced to suppress her sexuality by wrapping herself in a cocoon of respectability. Naheed's prevailing concern with how a woman fits or does not fit into the public sphere and the national imaginary is again evident here as the woman in the poem retains memory of her longings but cannot translate it into a flawed historical present because, to the men in her public and private spheres, she is visible in social discourse only when objectified, not as a subject.

[138] For instance, in "Rain God," Riaz celebrates carnal love: "Eyes closed, arms outstretched, I run, / I run, touching his blue body to mine. // I am the daughter of Longing! my separateness so strong, / My thirst so unquenched, oneness is otherness still. // Drenched in rain's nectar, I pant." (16).

The female poet who comes from a non-Western country has to endure the challenge of presenting her work and female characters without exoticizing the women she presents in her work. Not only that, she herself faces the danger of being perceived as exotic and as representing a 'native' culture that, no matter how different, serves as a mirror for the other more sophisticated culture to see its own picture in. Naheed objects to the double standards that traditional feminism, with its privileged Anglocentric roots and its tentative replication of phallocentric mentality, imposes on women from underdeveloped backgrounds. On the other hand, she also has to beware of the politics of representation and perhaps the most pertinent reference here to be made is that of Gayatri Spivak's casting of doubt on the ideology of representation in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this oft-misunderstood essay, Spivak had questioned how decontextualized theory can also serve neo-colonial interests in erasing cultural differences and appropriating the concerns of the subordinated ("Subaltern" 90-91).[139] The referential power accorded the poet because of the authority her words yield is one Naheed has to disrupt continuously by employing a straightforward form of address and by transforming the cartography of silence in creating dialogue with her readers.

There also seems to be reluctance in Naheed's writing of being read only as a woman poet; as with any poet, she wants her poetry to be read for itself, which consists of gendered themes, nationalist flavor, and aesthetic content. There is also the danger that, when not handled properly, as Spivak has stated above, these issues can be exploited by a purely academic feminist approach to silence a woman further in, for instance, how

[139] In later writings, Spivak has underscored her critique of representation in transnationality: not only are women "the super-dominated, the super-exploited, but *not in the same way*" ("Diasporas" 91), but "elite, upwardly mobile (generally academic) women of the new diasporas join hands with similar women in the so-called developing world to celebrate a new global public or private 'culture,' often in the name of the underclass" ("Diasporas" 92).

western feminisms appropriates the production of "third world woman as a singular monolithic subject," for a "discursive colonization" (Mohanty 51). Critic Sara Suleri too problematizes the ahistorical reading of women writers who are given voice as the postcolonial and celebrated as the oppressed (758). Critical of the fetish of authenticity, Suleri suggests that further attention be paid to how "realism locates its language within the postcolonial condition," for lived experience achieves its articulation "through that other third-person narrative known as the law," and it is the limit of the law which must be opposed and written against (766). In referring to Naheed's poetry and the limits it literally tries to cross, Suleri contrasts the reality of the local implications of the Hudood Ordinance for women, with the academic hand-wringing over issues of identity: "If we allow the identity formation of postcolonialism to construe itself only in terms of nationalism and parochialism, or of gender politics at its most narcissistically ahistorical, then let us assume that the media has won its battle, and the law of the limit is upon us" (769). Naheed's engagement with the historical material of politics is in stark contrast to the invocation of aesthetics and opacity in the poetry of Adnan, Ali, and Cha. Symptomatic of the transnational condition of the unequal division of the fruits of poetic labor, this creates a schism between Naheed's sociological poetics and the aesthetics of the other poets, one not so easy to bridge. In addition, this translates also into the reception of such a poetics on the academic and publishing levels.

Throughout her writing, Kishwar Naheed has refused to wear the veil of victimization and has been irked at the perception that Pakistani women are unable to ameliorate their material and personal situations. She resolves to impart in her lyrics a message of hope and determination, salvaging the erasures in history and documenting

the traces in memory. This poetic interplay between the real and imaginary, where the borders are so porous that the two seem to fuse together, is Naheed's attempt to register into words those real events of a country that seem unreal in the actuality and frequency of their occurrence. Her poetics consists of daring to confront global, national, social, and canonical norms in a lyrical manner that imagines a new threshold of being. If Theresa Cha has to deploy a Diseuse in her poetry to articulate strangulated voices, Naheed is a Diseuse whose oracular power is enhanced by being tinged with a conversational voice. In fact, since most of Naheed's poetry can be read as composed of interior monologues, as the Diseuse (whom I've defined as a monologist in my analysis of Theresa Cha), she tells the stories of others without speech in a very distinct personal voice.

For more than thirty years, Kishwar Naheed has committed herself to lyrically encapsulating an inchoate world in words, trying to imagine the impossible as possible. Naheed exposes the politics of forgetting as based in guilt and complicity. She suggests that by the eruption of memory in poetry, remembrance of past traumas, a transformative present can be achieved. According to Naheed, this palimpsest of the present is where the re-membered remains of the past can be translated into a reclaimed language for all – an unceasingly difficult but always necessary task.

Conclusion
Imagining a Community of Poets

In certain ways, poetry – the basic fact and feeling – can always cross borders and break through boundaries: readers perceive that little kernel of truth in their own or another language. In that way, poetry is always constant translation already. The development of a transnational poetics suggests a translation beyond various affiliations and paradigms in an attempt to think beyond the confines of the nation. There is a higher stake for those poets who were always already transnational in their outlook and response, to recover language and imagery from the clutches of those who have the power to manipulate them for their own gains. This imagined existence of a community of poets, let alone nations, seems improbable – but not impossible.

In my dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate through the process of interrogating the bases of a transnational poetics that transnational poets, who are engaged in the poetics of a borderless world and imagination, are successful in cases where even words might fail to represent reality. Taking Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community, I have argued whether the condition of transnationality, while purportedly erasing barriers of borders, cultures and languages between people, also builds communities and affiliations between poets from diverse backgrounds. That is, are the bonds of aesthetic and ideological dissonance enough to bypass significant national and cultural placements? No matter how polyglot and multivalent the structure and expression of their poetry, these transnational poets can also fall into the trap of professing to represent the struggles and experiences of those at a less privileged level than themselves. If even the subject in transnationality might be a contradiction in terms,

the dissertation has posed an argument of whether it is possible to identify transnational poetics as a credible critique of globalization. Whether a transnational group of poets is only, as Giorgio Agamben would say, a 'coming community' whose readers exist in the future, I also ponder what Jacques Derrida's challenging of the total recovery of linguistic and cultural identity suggests of the philosophical nature of a transnational poetics. My analysis of the poetry of Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Cha, and Kishwar Naheed demonstrates that the possibility of a transnational community of poetry exists also through the readers who enter into new worlds and 'imagi-nations' through the lyrics of these poets.

The crises of belonging recounted by all these poets – of the idea of home in jeopardy and of exploding the narratives of nation and citizenship – would give the lie to this utopian ideal of a community. This is why Adnan's statement on subjectivities situated on transnational plane is meaningful:

> I tell myself that we are terrorists, not terrorists in the political and ordinary sense of the word, but because we carry inside of our bodies –like explosives– all the deep troubles that befall our countries...and travelling doesn't change anything in any way. We are the scribes of a scattered self, living fragments, as if parts of the self were writing down the bits and ends of a perception never complete. (Of Cities 54)

The concept of a community of poets and readers plays with the tension of belonging and estrangement, a basic human dissonance – being homed or unhomely – that these poets articulate. As my analysis of their poetry has shown, this quest becomes metaphysical beyond the confines of a nation-state, the task of trying to come to terms

with one's self, attaining an abode within. This is the quest for human existence for an unavowable (Blanchot) or inoperative (Nancy) community which, for these poets, takes place on the threshold of poetry, not on the borders of nations or identities. These seemingly undeterminable collectivities are possible in the process of articulation, "the essential words must be pretended invented" (Cha, DICTEE 15).[140] It has been my contention throughout my analysis that poetry, in its lyrical intensity, brevity, and complexity, is perhaps most suitable for transnational communities. This is most profoundly understood by Adnan, Ali, Cha, and Naheed in their understanding of gendered and classed human existence.

Poetry, perhaps, is most suitable for creating linkages and 'transnational literacy' beyond the confines of dwelling in a single homeland, language, or gender. It can help liberate the imagination in conditions when the imagination faces the danger of being fettered, and imperil it when it falls into complacency. A transnational poetics – as exemplified in the lyrics of Etel Adnan, Agha Shahid Ali, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Kishwar Naheed – suggests that a profound sensitivity to human constructions of nations, languages, and genders, can lead to a fellowship in a community which is taken up by choice, beyond the demands of identity and belonging. This is the dream of creating arts of the impossible, the unimaginable that needs to be imagined into existence.

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[140] Here we can look at some theoretical renditions of community too. Gayatri Spivak suggests that collectivities are possible through *poiesis*, a spatially and temporally distant imaginative making. Spivak states that this is "imagining yourself, really letting yourself be imagined (experience that impossibility) without guarantees, by and in another culture, perhaps" (Death 52). Jean Luc Nancy argues against the operationalizing of community, that the very definition of sharing or community refers to the impossibility of, or rather the resistance to, communion or fusion; singularity appears only by and through exposure to outside (29). Maurice Blanchot also finds the concept of community problematic. Instead, he invokes the notion of a "literary communism," a community of readers that recognizes the speech of the other (23). In an optimistic vein, Agamben projects a coming into being of a community of identity-free individuals, a community not based on belonging: "*There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this is not an essence nor properly a thing:* It is the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality..." (11).

Appendix

Speedy Trial

Now there is a blackout in our city even at day
this is an impossible thing
but impossibilities do happen in life
Our life in which there has been less addition
and more division
in which success
is the name of death more than life,
what would the gun of purposes do there
A gun is not for protection now
but for malice
People – malice for many people
malice for feeling
How many of my colleagues
were shot
for the crime of standing on the threshold of truth
I have erased the difference between
threshold, door and yard
To shoot me they will have to come in the yard
In an open field there is no room for hiding
I couldn't even hide earlier
now you can't hide either
I at least have purposes
What do you have,
merely an ordinance! (Confronting 59-60)

The Falling Berlin Wall, Günter Grass and I

I was standing very near the wall
that you were breaking
In moments of doubt, this wall was my sanctuary
it was my cover, was witness to my unadornment
it was portion of my past, was my trust
in the name of those kinships and sorrows
that I had built of my own will to defend my life.
Those gaining freedom
and those wishing to be free have,
like a wall of sand,
melted the iron of this wall:
they are happy and I am sad

I am of the species of birds
and flying is my heritage
but this wall falling says to me

as long as the taste of the promises made in my name
remains on your tongue
you will not be uncovered
Those who walk in the dark with candles have no names
but people never forget them (Confronting 80-81)

Scene of hailstorm in the jungle
The language in which I dream
I do not write in that language
The body that I feel
around it, I wrap a
sari like wrapping paper.
I was told that good girls
do not laugh in loud voices
do not shake hands with strangers
putting the title of begum with their names,
bear evidence
that they are mankuha.

The language in which I dream
these evidences do not work in that language.
I was first made afraid of god, then man
I was never trained to consider anyone a friend
the amulet of fear remained on my neck
until I started dreaming.
Where will I find the dictionary to define my dreams?
Sometimes before the sun sets
I put some dreams in its platter.
Maybe the next morning that language will be found
in which I can define my dreams.
With my dreams the sun
shortens the loneliness of the night.
But not mine.
I wrap a sari
around my body
like wrapping paper. (Confronting 39-41)

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