

Between Nationalism and Transnationalism: Entanglements of History, Individual Narrative, and Memory in Diaspora Spaces in Selected Transnational Fiction.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers close readings and a comparative analysis of selected works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea. The selected primary texts used are Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2000) and *Gravel Heart* (2017), Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) and *The Refugees* (2017), and Urrea's *The Water Museum* (2015) and *The House of Broken Angels* (2018). Analyses are informed by a conceptual framework that draws on critical works by Avtar Brah, J. U. Jacobs, Sarah Nuttall, Homi K. Bhabha, Judith Butler, Stuart Hall, Paul Ricoeur, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Christopher B. Patterson. These theories are deployed to analyse how the selected works engage with the entanglements of history, individual narratives, and memory in the diaspora spaces they articulate. The thesis argues that the selected works indicate an emerging subgenre within the broader category of transnational literature. This subgenre rejects disempowering interpolations of transnational identities. Instead, it prioritises ethical forms of memory. These acknowledge that transnational subjects share at least partial accountability for the precarity they experience in diaspora spaces. The selected literature limns how this may be accomplished by rejecting the label of victim. In so doing, the selected literature also suggests that the elevation of transnationals to full ethical agency would enable them to exercise power in their diaspora spaces. All three authorial projects studied here also give rise to uncomfortable juxtapositions that suggest a mounting fear that, as nationalisms become more pronounced in the UK and the USA, transnationals may have to re-experience conditions from which they have already fled. The thesis concludes by identifying four additional areas of confluence amongst the selected literature worthy of future study.

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NOTES TO THE READER

This thesis and its bibliography have been formatted according to the Rhodes University Department of Literary Studies in English's *Style Sheet for Writers of MA and PHD Theses*. The sheet is available at <https://www.ru.ac.za/english/coursematerials>, under the section titled "Postgraduate Courses 2019."

Unless otherwise stated, in-line citations are provided to direct the reader to useful further reading of material that corroborates the argument.

While I have used UK English as the proofing language, I have retained US English spellings in direct quotes. I have also elected to use the US English spelling of "sympathizer" to ensure consistency between my spelling of the word and the title of Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel, *The Sympathizer*.

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PREFACE

The furore accompanying the electoral campaign of Donald J. Trump, and his eventual inauguration on 20 January 2017, seemed to present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as I prepared for my PhD. My social media feeds were flooded with posts about the socioeconomic horrors and other injustices to come. The predominant narrative, at least in the media I consume, was that America was being plunged into a crisis which was to be marked by flagrant bigotry, xenophobia, racism, sexism, classism, and even – as news from Charlottesville would terrifyingly confirm later – Nazism and white supremacy. In short, the mighty USA was going backwards, in much the same way as the UK had been appealing to retrograde nationalisms since June 2016, when it began to remove itself from the European Union. The US was portrayed as a space that was becoming increasingly and openly hostile towards transnationals, as various US nationalisms swelled to new heights.

This was devastating. But it also offered the chance to investigate how transnational authors who depict the experiences of transnationals trying to establish homes in countries like the USA and the UK would respond to sudden surges of nationalism. I was most interested in the ways in which transnational literature expresses the experiences of ostracism. After all, my newsfeeds were saturated with appeals to people from all walks of life to sign online petitions, or to mobilise in any way possible, against the impending mass victimisation of transnationals being orchestrated behind the doors of the Oval Office. President Trump, apparently influenced by Steve Bannon, began to issue several Executive Orders to counter those previously issued by former President Barack Obama. He specifically targeted issues of immigration. It appeared as though Trump intended to use his powers to institute Executive Orders to rule the US by decree (see Wolff 84–86). The resultant impression, at least in the social circles in South Africa from where I was observing these developments, was that transnationals were in desperate need of protection. I thought that as a South African literary scholar, my location in a post-colonial country would afford me an international perspective on the ways in which this need was expressed in transnational fiction.

But the literature I examined defied my expectations – although, admittedly, to varying degrees. Furthermore, it also stridently defied any interpretation of the vulnerability of transnationals as being a recent phenomenon. Rather, the transnational authors I eventually selected for my study use their works to compel readers to recognise various historical dimensions of the struggles that their transnational characters are made to face. While

ostracism certainly featured in several of the texts, it was figured in unexpected ways. Rather than articulating a sense that transnationals face impending ostracism within their new homes in the USA or the UK, fiction by Viet Thanh Nguyen, Luis Alberto Urrea, and Abdulrazak Gurnah, for instance, often shows its prevalence in the countries *from which* their transnational characters migrate. I found that ostracism was more frequently described as being one of the reasons transnationals *became* transnationals in the first place than it was portrayed as an inevitability in host countries.¹ This establishes a significant narrative patterning that invites readers to compare the inhospitable conditions in the homelands of transnational characters with those emerging in the USA and the UK.² Ostracism of transnationals, therefore, is portrayed as one of several potential consequences of the rise of nationalisms in host countries – but not as an inevitability. The tale of ostracism, then, serves as a cautionary one. It is made all the more powerful through the authors’ use of achronological narrative structures that present analeptic episodes focalised through the memories of transnational characters. Significantly, the patterning serves to undercut another of the assumptions implicit in my original research bias. If the selected fiction shows ostracism as being a cause of transnationalism, then perhaps it also suggests that migration to the USA and the UK is not necessarily the result of a desire for a better life *in a better place*. Perhaps, as the selected literature conveys, transnationals sometimes move purely out of necessity, without any expectations of a better life – just a desire for life *per se*. It became apparent that an investigation of the ways in which history, memories, and individual narratives are depicted in the selected literature should displace the centrality I originally intended to afford ostracism. After all, the literature depicts ostracism as merely one of many functions of the entanglement of histories, memories, and individual narratives.

Furthermore, when I started reading the primary material, I soon realised that my initial interest in ostracism was informed by an unfounded and indefensible supposition. I hope I can attribute this to the overwhelming impressions created by the media. Just like several of the commentators and other ‘social justice warriors’ active across social media, I had unabashedly assumed that transnationals are simply victims in need of help. Part of that assumption resulted from my own uncritical readings of personal accounts of victimisation

¹ All three of the authors are heterosexual males employed at universities. While they do make certain claims about the intersections of power, gender, and sexuality in the works selected for this study, my intention is to examine such representations in masculinist transnational discourses in a later study. As such, these are not discussed at length in this thesis.

² The term “homeland” is used in this thesis to refer to a transnational subject’s country of origin. Later, I shall use the term “host diaspora space” to refer to the diaspora space of the country to which the transnational characters have migrated.

and ostracism. Fortunately, what I have since discovered by studying the selected literature is that there is an authorial preoccupation with actively rejecting this view. Rather, the selected authors appeal to their readers to recognise that transnationals should be treated as fully ethical subjects. Both the rejection and appeal are richly nuanced. The selected literature does not claim that transnationals do not occasionally need help. However, it does show that transnationals are not necessarily powerless or helpless. Rather, the works reveal that transnationals make up diverse heterogeneous groups. These groups are represented as being resilient and resourceful, able to exercise various degrees of power in their diaspora spaces – provided that they also refuse to consider themselves as nothing more than victims. This was symptomatic of another characteristic I discovered in the works of all three of the selected authors. While it has long been accepted that transnational literature characteristically addresses and dismantles spurious boundaries, the selected authors significantly are also interested in contesting views that nationalisms and transnationalism function in opposition to one another. In their works, they do depict ways in which nationalisms operate to exclude transnationals. Nonetheless, they are equally interested in showing how some transnationals behave in ways that could understandably be deemed undesirable or even threatening to nationalists. Furthermore, they also articulate the view that transnationals themselves can be nationalists. As a result, what emerges in the literature is a portrayal of a nexus between nationalism and transnationalism, and authorial concerns that urge transnationals to accept at least partial accountability for the ways in which they are viewed in their diaspora spaces. The title of my study, “Between Nationalism and Transnationalism,” is thus intended to reflect the liminality inhabited by transnationals as a result of this nexus, rather than to signal any form of dichotomous or binary relationship between nationalism and transnationalism.

Other areas which I intended to research were greatly enriched by the above considerations. In the thesis that follows, I explore how transnational characters in the selected literature respond when their affiliations within the diaspora spaces of their host countries and homelands are destabilised. I detail the ways in which the selected literature represents the consequences of nationalism on the identities of transnationals, and also establish the extent to which the selected authors criticise and/or defend nationalism and transnationalism. My study also investigates thematic and stylistic similarities and differences among the selected literary works to describe an emerging transnational subgenre. As will be explained in greater detail at the end of Chapter One, this study comprises of five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter provides an overview of my central argument and considers the various theories deployed throughout the study. Chapters Two to Four each

focus on the works of a specific author – Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea, respectively. The fifth chapter presents a comparative analysis drawing from all three of the preceding chapters, as I consider the possibility that these three authors are representative of an aesthetic emerging from within the broader category of transnational literature. A separate conclusion serves to highlight the potential areas I have identified for postdoctoral studies.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Section One – The Argument: Authorial Concerns with Entanglements, Ethical Memory, and Precarity in Diaspora Spaces

“Between Nationalism and Transnationalism” argues that the selected works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea reveal increasing authorial concerns with the ethical subjectivities of their transnational characters. Their authorial projects are symptomatic of broader developments in contemporary transnational literature. As the analyses that follow in upcoming chapters will demonstrate, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s oeuvres consist of works that deliberately undermine views that transnationalism is necessarily creatively productive. Rather than promote migration as an inherently resistive process that results from the pursuit of a better life in a location that is assumed to be necessarily superior, like the US or the UK, these authors depict homelands and host nations as equally complex diaspora spaces. Both home and host diaspora spaces are marked by multi-axial power relations, and by the confluence of several social and political processes, as will be explained shortly. The selected literature also articulates ways in which powerful interests can manipulate the entanglements amongst histories, individual narratives, and memories in diaspora spaces to increase the precarity of those who do not belong in the idealised frame of the nation. Yet these authors do not depict transnationals as hapless victims in dire need of intervention, nor do they depict nationalists as necessarily cold-hearted, irrational, and villainous. Rather, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea reveal identities to be dynamic, fluid, and elective. Both nationalists and transnationals are shown to be the subjects of positive and negative stereotypes. Works by all three authors, as will be discussed in greater detail later, elevate transnational characters to the status of fully ethical subjects, able to act as agents with varying degrees of power in spite of their precarity in their home and host diaspora spaces. But while the authors’ works deliberately reject the ‘comforts’ of victimhood (see Nguyen, “Speak” 10) for their transnational characters, they nonetheless acknowledge that full ethical subjectivity does not mitigate the precarity transnationals may experience. A mounting scepticism of false binaries, and of the deliberately amnesiac discourses that support them, emerges as a result of this authorial preoccupation with the relationships between nationalists and transnationals in diaspora spaces. Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works also display a cynical view of the ways in which transnationals are

flaunted in multiculturalist discourses that originate in diaspora spaces that are becoming increasingly militarised (see Patterson 8–11).

This argument builds on Viet Thanh Nguyen’s examination of just memory in *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016). It also identifies similarities between tones in the selected literature and those Christopher Patterson describes in his *Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature of the Transpacific* (2018). These tones indicate a growing scepticism of the emphasis placed on identifiable cultural differences by the ideology of multiculturalism. While these two studies deal primarily in Vietnamese American and Anglophone Southeast Asian literatures respectively, this thesis explores selected works by three transnational authors. Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Zanzibari of Arabic descent living in the UK. Viet Thanh Nguyen is a Vietnamese American in the US. Luis Alberto Urrea is a Mexican American writer living in the United States. These authors’ works have been selected because they are transnational literature not only *by* authors from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America in turn, but also *about* characters from those regions. As later chapters will show, and as the argument outlined above has already stated, although these apparently disparate authors approach their materials idiosyncratically, there are several concerns that are common to the authorial projects of all three.

The current chapter unpacks the concepts used in formulating the above argument. It offers various perspectives on key ideas that will recur throughout the rest of the project. Section Three, for instance, describes why the project treats nationalism as a heterogeneous group of discursive practices, and why these practices are treated as frames. Theories by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Geoffrey Cubitt, and Ernest Renan are used to delineate what is meant by ‘nationalisms,’ while Judith Butler’s work informs the definition of frames. The section offers observations of the role of nationalism in post-colonial contexts, to justify a claim articulated in the selected literature: that it is important to discriminate between various forms of nationalisms. Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s literatures suggest that while some nationalisms may be implicated in the suffering of multitudes, others may be necessary, and contribute positively to the establishment of stability in former colonies. But the symbolic discourses of nationalism do not operate in a vacuum (Zeenat 168). Rather, they are often challenged and decentred by other forms of imaginative works – such as those, like the selected literature, that attempt to reconfigure symbolically the relationships between nationals and transnationals. Section Four delineates the meaning of ‘transnational.’ The definition offered suggests that transnationalism, like nationalism, should not be construed as a homogeneous, monolithic phenomenon. Just as there are advantageous and desirable forms

of nationalisms, so too are there dangerous forms of transnationalism. Reference is made throughout the section to works by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, and Kwame Appiah. These are not only used to describe transnationalism, but also to highlight how its presence could legitimately be construed as a threat by certain nationalist groups. The section also argues that the reductive frames nationalist discourses use to characterise transnationals enables what Christopher Patterson describes as “pluralist governmentality” (15). Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea all treat this neo-racist political strategy with cautious scepticism in their works.

Before Section Six describes the literature that emerges through attempts to reimagine conceptions of belonging, which this thesis calls transnational literature, Section Five offers a theoretical underpinning for the concept of hospitality. This thesis argues that hospitality is most frequently figured in the selected literature using the trope of family. Family, like the diaspora space, is a site marked by the entanglements of history, individual narratives, and memory, and so its prominence in the selected literature cannot be ignored. To conclude the chapter, Section Seven briefly describes the structure of the remaining thesis.

First, though, it is essential to discuss Avtar Brah’s concept of the diaspora space at length. It is central to the argument, and it is manifested in each of the texts selected for analysis. As Section Two below explains, this is a complex concept. On one hand, it could be used to describe an analytical grid. In this view, the diaspora space is a zone characterised by intersectionality and multi-axial power relations. On the other hand, the concept of the diaspora space could also refer to a physical, geographical location in which transnationals encounter other phenomena, individuals, and groups inherent to that space. As such, the diaspora space is also a physical site where hospitality can be extended, withheld, or withdrawn. It is a site of memory, and a space in which the multiculturalism of the global village is visible.

Section Two – The Diaspora Space as a Theoretical Concept, a Site of Memory, and an Invitation to Just Memory

Diaspora space refers to a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes (Brah 181). Avtar Brah describes it as the site where the theoretical concepts of diaspora, border, and the ‘politics of location’ are inherent (16, 181, 208, 242). In her formulation, Brah uses the term ‘diaspora’ to describe an “interpretative frame” that analyses the economic, political, and cultural modalities of “historically specific forms of migrancy”

(16). While ‘diaspora’ overlaps and resonates with the meanings of migrant, immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, and exile, it displaces rather than replaces each of these (16). It is therefore interchangeable with the term ‘transnational’ adopted by this current study, explained further below. For the current discussion, however, it is adequate to note that diaspora, as deployed in Brah’s formulation of the diaspora space, and transnationalism both refer to fields of identifications which are simultaneously “local and global” (196). As such, transnationalism offers a “critique of discourses of fixed origins” (180). It is a multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural, temporal, and psychic borders (197). Brah understands borders as social constructions with everyday effects on real lives (241). They demarcate and limit territorial, cultural, political, and psychic fields, and are closely tied to ideas of location – which in turn invoke questions of belonging and otherness (16, 241). Brah uses the phrase ‘politics of location’ to refer to the contestation or acceptance of the borders of inclusion and exclusion (209). Given this description, it is worth noting that the settings of each of the selected works in this study could be considered fictional representations of diaspora spaces. In these settings, transnational characters are shown as trying to interpolate themselves into a dominant culture, while nationalist characters are shown as championing their own ways of life. Abdulrazak Gurnah’s depiction of Zanzibar in *By the Sea*, for instance, is marked by a politics of location fraught with the racial intolerance and xenophobia intensified by the 1964 revolution. In *Gravel Heart*, his descriptions of diaspora spaces in the UK after the terror attacks on US soil in 2001 show how the political climate in America has influenced the hospitality extended to Muslim transnationals in other parts of the world.

The fictional diaspora spaces in the selected literature can also be considered as settings where other authorial concerns with inter-related concepts intersect to form nexuses. The intersection of diaspora, borders, and the politics of location within both fictional and real diaspora spaces, for instance, creates a grid that enables historicised analyses of contemporary national and transnational movements of merchandise, money, data, people, and cultures (Brah 181). As a conceptual category, then, the diaspora space is best understood as an area:

‘inhabited’, not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept [...] includes the entanglement [...] of the genealogies of dispersion, with those of ‘staying put’.

(Brah 209; original emphasis)

In other words, the diaspora space is a site in which nationalists and transnationals co-exist. As the above definition by Brah indicates, the diaspora space also refers to a physical realm in which the economic, political, and cultural effects of border crossings are encountered. As a real location, then, it should be considered a “site of experience” (242). This is where inhabitants – whether permanent residents, temporary visitors, or seasonal inhabitants – continuously test the limits of what is permitted, what is tolerated, and what is prohibited. This means that accepted and transgressive behaviours and ideologies mingle and coexist in diaspora spaces (208).

J. U. Jacobs argues that Brah’s definition of the diaspora space should be extended to encompass other analytical concepts such as the ‘Third Space’ and ‘entanglement’ (*Diaspora* 25–26). These concepts are more commonly used in literary studies than the concept of the diaspora space is, and this project therefore follows Jacobs’ recommendations to augment its use of the diaspora space in the upcoming analyses of the selected literature. Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’ posits that postcolonial cultural identities are formed in the interstices between cultural systems. This means that cultural identities are produced by individuals through a complex process of negotiation amongst the many cultural systems available in the spaces they inhabit (Bhabha 36–39). So, rather than being a “homogenizing, unifying force [...] kept alive by national tradition” (37), cultural identity is “a [conscious and dynamic] positioning” (Hall, “Cultural” 237). The diaspora space adequately describes the location where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, proclaimed, contested, and disavowed. It is where the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that “underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities” are immanent (Brah 208). Here, emergent identities may be surreptitiously avowed, disclaimed, or suppressed in the face of “constructed imperatives of ‘purity’” (208). The element of contestation that the previous statement implies will be considered in greater detail in a later discussion on the role of nationalism as a frame that confers varying degrees of precarity onto groups that are considered not to belong in a diaspora space.

Still following J. U. Jacobs’ suggestions, the next extension to Brah’s diaspora space adopted in this current argument is ‘entanglement.’ Sarah Nuttall describes entanglement as the condition of being “twisted together or entwined” (1). It gestures towards “a relationship or set of relationships that is complicated, ensnaring [and] in a tangle” (1). Although entanglement is concerned with issues of sameness and difference, it also includes “limits, predicaments and moments of complication” (1). While the concept may not have originated in Nuttall’s work, she is the first critic to make it central in her analytical methodology. By

centralising issues of entanglement, “Between Nationalism and Transnationalism” investigates points of intersection between history, individual narratives, and memory in the diaspora spaces described in the selected literature. Entanglement, as Nuttall explains, signals “largely unexplored terrains of mutuality, wrought from a common, though often coercive and confrontational, experience” (11). The analytical grid created by the intersection of transnationals, borders, and the politics of location in the diaspora space, figured in this argument as a nexus between nationalism and transnationalism, is one such underexplored terrain. Furthermore, entanglement also promotes the idea that the more racial, cultural, or other borders are erected, and the more often restrictive legislation is implemented, the more important it becomes for analysts to “look for the transgressions without which the everyday life of the oppressor and oppressed would be impossible” (12). This is not to contend that forms of material and epistemological separation and difference no longer matter, or that these do not have real negative effects on individuals. Rather, entanglement encourages critics to identify and study the Third Space, which this argument characterises as liminal, to fully appreciate the complexities manifest within diaspora spaces. It also ensures critical examination of the unexpected intersections between sites and spaces previously thought of as separate (20).

The interconnectedness of all things within diaspora spaces signalled by entanglement, the Third Space, and “the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion, with those of ‘staying put’” (Brah 209) is, as previously mentioned, especially relevant to this project. The diaspora space is a site in which social relations, difference, experience, subjectivity, and identity are “relational categories situated within multi-axial fields of power relations” (209). Through processes of decentring, new political and cultural formations continually challenge what is acceptable, thereby contesting the peripheries generated by the “impulses of the cultures of dominance” (210). Due to these specific politics of location and the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion, the diaspora space decentres the subject position of the native, immigrant, migrant, insider, and outsider (242). Every subjectivity is articulated with every other, like the cogs in the mechanism of an analogue watch. Similarities and disparities across several axes of differentiation articulate and disarticulate in the diaspora space at various times, “marking as well as being marked” by the “complex web of power” (209). Multi-axial configurations of power in the diaspora space arise from intersections of cultures, economies, and politics. They result in changing groups of people enjoying fluctuating amounts of power at distinctive times. In other words, power is not always already constituted. It is produced, reiterated, challenged, and exercised across

multiple sites, both in the realm of macro-structures – such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – and in inter- and intra-subjective relationships (242). This renders the diaspora space a nebulous zone in which individuals enjoy fluctuating amounts of power determined by the value placed on the separate constituent parts of their identities at various points in time. Power is therefore thoroughly implicated in the everyday lived experience within the diaspora space. It may be used as a tool of oppression, repression, or suppression; to control, to discipline, or to render certain subjectivities inferior; and to install and protect the hierarchies of domination (243). Yet it is also the very means used to challenge, contest, and dismantle “structures of injustice” (243). Certain characteristics are considered more desirable by dominant groups in diaspora spaces, and are thus afforded more power than others. While individuals may be transnationals, they may simultaneously possess other qualities – whether these are inherent, such as sex, or acquired, such as professional qualifications – that confer or remove power. What this implies is that it is highly unlikely that anyone is inherently and completely powerless, or inherently and completely empowered, unless a more powerful group has actively decided to make it so as the result of a power struggle.

One of the more important strategic resources in the struggle for power in diaspora spaces is memory, especially since it may be “abusively summoned” by those already in positions of authority (Ricoeur 57). As the selected literature by Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea indicates, struggles for the control of memory are most often low-intensity conflicts, but can escalate to violent confrontations (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 11). This potential for violence is most prominent in Nguyen’s depictions of the diaspora spaces in Vietnam, Gurnah’s representations of post-revolution Zanzibar, and the frequent clashes between various groups in the borderland between Mexico and the US described in Urrea’s fiction and non-fiction works. As future chapters will argue at length, Nguyen and Gurnah’s works, more frequently than Urrea’s, portray how members of a diaspora space – especially during a time of civil war or during a period of revolutionary upheaval – are called upon by those in power to remember very limited senses of identity (10). By controlling what is remembered, what is forgotten, and how these processes take place, the powerful are able to ensure that only a selected, narrowly defined collective of people are considered to legitimately belong within the diaspora space. At a later point in this discussion, this statement will be complicated by relating it to Judith Butler’s concept of the frame. It will also be shown to be a complex process frequently met by resistance, and informed by various nationalist discourses. For the sake of the current discussion, however, this simplified statement sufficiently illustrates the

entanglement of memory, individual narratives, and power in the diaspora space. This particular entanglement is central to the argument of this thesis. It provides the nexus from which full ethical subjectivity originates, as contemplated in the selected literature and analysed in future chapters. A closer look at the way in which memory is understood in this thesis will therefore clarify the relationship between memory and ethical subjectivity that emerges as a shared concern in the works by Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea.

One common understanding of memory posits that it can only be realised “by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers” (Funkenstein 6). In this view, remembering is simply an act through which an individual remains mindful of a past event or thing. Memories, as understood by theorists like Amos Funkenstein, are therefore considered to be the results of such acts (Stier 3). By definition, then, as remembering is a “mental act,” memories are “absolutely and completely personal” (Funkenstein 6). This understanding is useful to the extent that it characterises the desire for memory as an intensely personal quest for an individual narrative (see Stier 2). Furthermore, it also calls attention to the fact that memory is about the presentation and representation of past events, and not about the events themselves (2). This means that memory refers to the impact of historical events and their meaning in the present, while history is concerned with events in the past (2). Memory is thus the way in which the past is made to matter in the present. Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea’s works certainly reflect aspects of this understanding of memory. Nguyen, for instance, uses a first-person, diegetic narrator in *The Sympathizer* who recounts events from his childhood through extended analeptic episodes. Gurnah’s first-person narrators overtly express their desires for individual narratives. Their attempts at understanding their current situations through recounting and, often, repeating and revising analeptic episodes are characteristic of the narrative structures of Gurnah’s novels. But while the selected literature uses focalisation and first-person narrative voices to highlight the personal and private dimensions of memory, it also draws readers’ attention to another characteristic of memory. In Urrea’s *The House of Broken Angels*, focalisation shifts amongst various family members. Each character focalises different analeptic episodes that encourage reinterpretations of their common family history. In Gurnah’s *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud share their recollections with each other, and, together, negotiate new understandings and interpretations of events in each of their pasts. Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* is presented, at least in part, as a forced confession by the narrator in response to the demands of his captors. In other words, works by all three authors signal an awareness that memory is a construction that relies on social context.

The selected literature therefore resonates with theories of memory that also acknowledge its social dimensions. One prominent example of such theories is the concept of collective memory formulated by Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs' main thesis states that "[i]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories [and where] they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (38). This formulation suggests a reciprocal relationship between collective and individual memory. According to Halbwachs, on the individual level, people only remember when they think in reference to social frameworks. Social frameworks are not only the combination of recollections of several individual members of the same society, but also have a common characteristic that in turn lead to the formation of collective memories (see Halbwachs 38, 40, 45; see Stier 4). The frameworks for collective memories are therefore the "instruments used [...] to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (Halbwachs 40). Significantly, this characterisation indicates the mutability of collective memories. They can change with "each epoch" (40). This feature of collective memory is useful for the current argument, as it helps to understand how nationalist discourses dominant in diaspora spaces are susceptible to and can be altered by historical fluctuations of power. Halbwachs also argues that individual memories are located in the totality of thoughts common to a group, as they depend on discourses like language in order to be perceived, and discourse is by definition social (Halbwachs 52–53). After all, memories must be shared if they are to have more than a personal relevance (Stier 10).

Halbwachs argues that there is an additional social dimension to memories. As all memories depend on the present social milieu (or "each epoch," according to the earlier quote), collective memories are enforced by the authorities of social institutions. This assertion explains that collective memories of the past are reconstructions understood through the lens of contemporary collective frameworks. So, in simpler terms, each time a memory is recalled, it is mediated through the predominant framework of the present rather than through the framework that was originally applied, as there is an "incongruity in many respects between the constraints of yesterday and those of today" (Halbwachs 50). Social institutions such as popular media coerce members of society to abide by various collective frameworks by dictating what the prevailing and acceptable frameworks are. It is at this point that Halbwachs' concept of collective memory begins to diverge from the nature of the memories articulated by the selected literature.

The concept of collective memories glosses over the existence and circulation of counter-memories which contest them, although this opposition need not necessarily take the

form of a dialectic confrontation (see Stier 6). Furthermore, Halbwachs' emphasis on collective frameworks results in "a concept of collective consciousness curiously disconnected from the actual thought processes of any particular person" (Fentress and Wickham xi). His descriptions of individuals render them as automatons, "passively obeying the interiorized collective will" (xi). James Fentress and Chris Wickham suggest a revision to Halbwachs' work. Significantly, they theorise individual memories as active, embodied responses to mediations of the past in the present, rather than as passive expressions of a collective will. But while this theoretical standpoint indicates tensions between the individual and the collective embodiments of memory, it nonetheless also prioritises a *single* collective embodiment. As previously explained, though, all of the selected literature uses settings in social milieus that can best be understood as diaspora spaces. The authors deliberately foreground the entanglements amongst various relational categories and the multi-axial fields of power relations. Diaspora spaces depicted in the selected literature therefore represent sites of memory in which several collectives are integral and entangled. An even more useful revision to Halbwachs' theories can be found in the work of the influential commentator on Holocaust art and memorials, James E. Young. In *The Texture of Memory*, Young rejects the term "collective memory" in favour of "collected memory" (xi). Young's alternative term acknowledges that many discrete, multiple memories are collected in memorial spaces and assigned common meaning. According to Young's refined version of Halbwachs' original theory:

A society's memory [...] might be regarded as an aggregate collection of its members' many, often competing memories. If societies remember, it is only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents' memories.

(Young xi)

Young's comments on collected memories are apropos of how the concept of memory is understood in the argument presented in "Between Nationalism and Transnationalism". Like Halbwachs' theory, Young's describes a relationship between the memories of individuals and societies that is marked by entanglement. However, rather than reify a single, homogeneous collective memory that robs individuals of their agency, Young allows for the existence of multiple, heterogeneous, competing collective memories. Like Fentress and Wickham, Young avoids characterising individuals as passive slaves to an "interiorized collective will" (xi). While he acknowledges that social institutions and rituals could

influence individuals' memories, he nevertheless avoids attributing coercive power solely to inanimate institutions. Instead, he foregrounds the active roles of "those people who do the remembering" (xi). By highlighting the inextricability of human agency in the activities of social institutions, Young insinuates that there are also people who should be held accountable for those memories upheld and perpetuated in society's name. This characterisation intersects with the possibility of ethical accountability in acts of memory – a concern that resonates with all three authorial projects analysed in upcoming chapters.

Young's characterisation of collected memories suggests the possibility of continuous conflict between groups. But, as Nguyen argues, any potential dissent between heterogeneous groups and their memories is frequently tamed in the "reassuring style of American pluralism" (*Nothing* 10), through a process Sacvan Bercovitch describes as "a ritual of consensus" (see Bercovitch 19–22). Bercovitch's notion of consensus implies processes of negotiation and compromise amongst heterogeneous groups in a diaspora space. One impulse of the desire for memory within groups is to include more memories of one's own group at the expense of others, or even to include other groups but to frame them according to one's own perception of those groups. This leads to problems on both personal and political levels (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 10). Total memory, or memory that is completely inclusive of all collected and individual memories, is neither possible nor pragmatic. Something – whether that is a group, an individual, or an event – will always be forgotten. Sometimes, forgetting occurs despite an individual's best efforts to the contrary. Other times, things may be forgotten deliberately, such as avoiding the debilitating effects of a traumatic experience. After all, as Nguyen asserts, "we must forget if we are to remember and to live" (*Nothing* 17). But while all individuals and groups must be involved in a process of strategic forgetting, there are self-serving and powerful interests that actively suppress and manipulate the memories of and the memories held by certain groups. For Paul Ricoeur (57) and Viet Thanh Nguyen (see *Nothing* 10–19), the resultant struggles between the powerful and the less powerful signals the need for a

complex ethics of memory, a just memory that strives both to remember one's own and others, while at the same time drawing attention to the life cycle of memories and their industrial production, how they are fashioned and forgotten [...].

(Nguyen, *Nothing* 12)

Nguyen's above-mentioned description of just memory indicates the centrality of recognising the constructed nature of memories themselves. The various features of just memory mirror and call to mind the multi-axial articulations of power immanent in diaspora spaces. This suggests that groups recalling their own hardships, persecutions, and triumphs without acknowledging the many entanglements that exist amongst groups do so at the risk of being manipulated by those who control the production of those memories. Likewise, remembering others according to frames imposed on them by more powerful interests also renders groups susceptible to manipulation and control. By highlighting these constructed and industrial aspects of memories, Nguyen indicates that memories are not only personal or collected, but that they are also commodifiable and "fashioned" by those who seek to profit from them – whether this is ideologically or through material gains (16). Just memory, then, opposes the "remembering too much, or remembering the wrong things" that forms part of an identity politics "motivated by a feeling of victimization" (16). Rather than perpetuate dominant and excessive memories that characterise certain groups as perpetual victims – regardless of which groups hold these views – just memory recalls "the weak, the subjugated, the different, the enemy, and the forgotten" (17). Just memory thus implies that the response to abusively summoned, repetitive, manipulative memories should not be to stop remembering events (17). Rather, it encourages reassessments of how those events are remembered. Such reassessments should attempt to be inclusive (17). They should acknowledge both the good and bad actions of all involved and recognise that things have been both deliberately and accidentally forgotten (17). To be ethical, reassessments should also pose questions as to who controls the industries of memory, and try to identify any people who may abuse these (17).

The concerns Nguyen expresses in his formulation of his model of just memory are clearly addressed and contemplated in his fiction, as Chapter Three argues. But his theoretical concerns also seem commensurate with the ways in which Gurnah and Urrea figure memory in their respective fictions. The most important aspect of just memory that seems to find expression in all of the selected literature is the idea that just memory rejects and counters discourses and personal narratives that portray groups or individuals as purely victims. In so doing, the selected literature discourages disempowering individual narratives, and foregrounds ethical agency – that is, they allow that one is as likely to commit harm as one is of being harmed. That being said, this potential does not mean that groups who are victimised by others necessarily have the same amount of power available to them. Power relationships in the diaspora space, as have already been described, are often asymmetrical and unequal. But what the selected works refute is the notion that some groups or individuals should be

absolved of ethical responsibility, as this would constitute merely an expression of victimhood devoid of and inhibiting any ethical agency. Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea's selected texts all feature characters who discover their own ethical agency when they address the entanglement of their histories and individual narratives by examining their memories of events, as they try to make sense of the circumstances in which they find themselves in their diaspora spaces.

Section Three – Nationalisms, Frames, and Precarity

Benedict Anderson's landmark formulation of the nation-state as an "imagined political community" (6) is not only commensurate with Avtar Brah's conception of the diaspora space, but could also be considered immanent within it. This is an important consideration, as it allows for new articulations of power within that conceptual zone. "Imagined" in Anderson's definition does not imply that nations are characterised by any degree of falsity, nor that there are other forms of communities that are 'true' or 'real' that could be juxtaposed with them. Rather, it indicates that even though members of the smallest nation will never know, meet, or hear of most of the other members, they still entertain a notion of communion (6). Every nation-state is also imagined as limited and sovereign (6). Firstly, no nation-state – not even the most messianic – imagines itself as being coterminous with all of humanity (6). Each has finite territorial borders, even though these may be elastic and permeable, beyond which other nation-states are understood to exist (6). Secondly, because of their origins in the Enlightenment, when the legitimacy of divinely-ordained hierarchical dynastic realms was being undermined, each nation-state considers itself sovereign (6). Thirdly, members of every nation-state consider themselves entitled to freedom (6). And, finally, regardless of whatever real inequalities may exist within the imagined community, the nation-state is always conceived of as a "profound horizontal comradeship" (7).

Anderson's definition implies that the nation-state is more than a product of and contributor to the processes of history (P. Lewis 12). It is also the product of the work of a community of people. It enjoys a god-like command over their admirations and actions (12). As Ernest Gellner explains:

Durkheim taught that in religious worship society adores its own camouflaged image. In a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly, spurning the camouflage.

(Nations 56)

The nation-state can therefore be considered an extremely complex fetish (P. Lewis, 12). It is replete with heads of state, government, ministries, territories, citizens, as well as philosophic and literary traditions (12). To assert this does not dispute that modern nation-states resulted from a series of convergent historical facts. Neither does it ignore the violence that took place at the origin of all political formations (Renan 11–12). What it does indicate, though, is a large-scale solidarity premised on communal consent to continue a common life (19). According to general understandings, nationalism is what generates this consent, and it is expressed through a battery of discursive and representational practices which define, legitimise, and valorise specific nation-states (During 138). In Simon During's view, nationalism represents specific types of individuals as ideal members of these imagined communities (138). It also presupposes a history shared by those who belong in the nation-state, and presents this as a reason for the "clearly expressed desire to continue a common life" (Renan 19). In its appeal to a common and widespread ambition to realise the intrinsic essence of the nation-state, nationalism can be considered to have a metaphysical dimension (Deane 8). The metaphysics of nationalism speak to the entry of individuals equipped with certain highly determinate needs and desires, into a unitary subject known as "the people" (Eagleton, "Nationalism" 28). Establishment of such an anonymous and impersonal society, made up of mutually interchangeable atomised individuals, involves the inscription of a shared culture that binds them together (Gellner, *Nations* 56). But the corollary of these claims is that nationalism also encourages the exclusion of imagined communities who *do not* belong to the nation-state. This has led to an overwhelmingly negative conception of the operations of nationalism.

Tom Nairn, for instance, describes nationalism with the condescension Benedict Anderson identifies as characteristic of cosmopolitan intellectual commentary (Anderson 5). In Nairn's view, nationalism is at best understood as a "pathology of modern developmental history" (Nairn 359). Nationalism is the "built-in capacity for descent into dementia" resulting from the "helplessness thrust upon most of the world" (359). It is the social "equivalent of infantilism" (359). His view is not only dismissive, but also fails to explain why every successful revolution since the end of World War II – like those resulting in the People's Republic of China, or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam – has defined itself in nationalist terms (Anderson 2). Deriding the apparent emotional legitimacy of nationalism, or being contemptuously dismissive thereof, therefore ignores that belonging to a nation has been and still is one of the most universally legitimate values in contemporary political life (Anderson 3; Pichler 334, 335).

For Ernest Gellner, nationalism does not so much awaken “nations to self-consciousness” as it “invents nations where they do not exist” (*Thought*, 169). It is a system of thought that posits nation-states as “basic and natural units” (Cubitt 1). Nationalism is often characterised as a primarily political principle which states that the “political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner, *Nations* 1). Accordingly, political legitimacy requires that ethnic borders should coincide with political ones (*Nations* 1). To make nationalist demands, according to these commonplace understandings, is to assert that every nation-state is somehow irreducibly unique (Cubitt 13). In this sense, nationalism is used to exclude outsiders from becoming part of, and taking part in, the community circumscribed by a nation-state (Pichler 336). Carried to its logical extreme, then, nationalism – as characterised above – asserts that any territorial political unit only becomes legitimate once it is ethnically homogeneous. This is only possible if it kills, expels, or assimilates all non-nationals, including transnationals. Given the general unwillingness of transnationals to suffer such fates, the implementation of these types of nationalist principles is seldom peaceful (Gellner, *Nations* 2). Although the selected literature indicates that nationalism is not necessarily carried to such extremes in everyday life, it nonetheless reveals the abhorrent effects of such extreme nationalist fervour. Gurnah’s works, for instance, not only reveal the increased precarity of Islamic characters in the UK, but also depict the repercussions of the violence and genocide associated with the Zanzibar revolution in 1963. Similarly, Nguyen and Urrea both depict the hardships experienced by people of colour in the USA. Their works also expose and explore the mass displacements resulting from various historical civil wars. This being said, the aforementioned conceptions of nationalism tend to overlook an “impossible irony” implicit in such understandings (Eagleton, “Nationalism” 23). Like social class, nationalism is “a form of alienation” which cancels the “particularity of an individual life into collective anonymity” (“Nationalism” 23). Furthermore, national identity, like radical political movements, “stands and falls” with what it opposes (“Nationalism” 27). Perhaps counterintuitively, the previous statement also applies to nationalisms which claim multiculturalism as one of their foundational tenets, as will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion on pluralist governmentality that follows this current section. To eliminate the other against which nationalism defines itself is to attempt to live sheer irreducible difference, and to remove the fundamental need for nationalism in the first place (“Nationalism” 23). But nationalism, as Eagleton admits, is “not particularly notable for its self-irony” and continues unabated by such philosophical concerns (“Nationalism” 27). While irony is a favoured trope

of the literary individual, “it is hard to summon much of it when you have been blinded by a [...] rubber bullet” (“Nationalism” 27).

Furthermore, nationalism is significantly not confined to the political arena. It often informs notions of a “national distinctiveness” intrinsic to thinking and speaking about economics, art, climate, sports, diet, human character, and literature of nation-states (Cubitt 1). As a result, there is also a cultural dimension to nationalism which often advocates the general imposition of a “high culture on society” where, previously, “low culture had taken up the lives of the majority” (Gellner, *Nations* 56).

One reason that nationalism is so notoriously difficult to define is the tendency to hypostasise the existence of “Nationalism-with-a-big-N” (Anderson 5). It is subsequently classified as an ideology, like “Liberalism” or “Fascism” (5). Unlike most other “-isms,” though, nationalism has never produced its own great philosophers. This is then considered a sign of “emptiness” (5). Furthermore, as During contends, hypostasising also assumes that nationalism is monolithic and necessarily “nasty” (139). Nevertheless, modernity reproduces itself through the nation-state, as this is currently the political institution with the most efficacy and legitimacy. To reject nationalism absolutely, or to refuse to discriminate between nationalisms – acknowledging that some forms may be beneficial while others may be harmful – is to accept a way of thought that prevents effective political action. After all, nationalism can retain links with the idea of freedom. In this more positive formulation, nationalism enables newly formed nation-states to resist cultural and economic imperialism. It allows societies to choose whether to remain outside of the technologies of nuclear war which, along with information communication technologies, largely define internationalism today (139).¹ But perhaps more importantly, especially for former colonies, nationalism reminds nation-states that they are not simply “on the side of major” external powers or extra-national political interests (139). This suggests that nationalism could be considered a process through which individuals who share nothing but a common cultural heritage acknowledge their conditioning by historical circumstances and become aware of their collective ability to shape their own destinies (P. Lewis 2–3). Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s oeuvres comprise of descriptions that view nationalism as marked by this type of complexity. Rather than reductively attribute their transnational characters’ difficulties in their diaspora spaces to nationalism, each author presents a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. As

¹ “Internationalism” in this thesis refers to relationships and the transactions between governments and various organs of nation-states enacted across borders, whereas the agents in “transnational” activities do not operate as representatives of the government of their nation-states.

examples in later chapters will discuss at length, the selected literature reveals entanglements between transnational experiences and various forms of nationalisms. All three authors also reveal how nationalism frequently forms part of transnational identities. These may be nationalist views from home, or ones formed in their host diaspora spaces, or a combination of both. What the selected literature does reveal, however, is that the amount of threat posed by various nationalisms is largely dependent on the articulation of power in the diaspora space at any given time.

This observation indicates a useful resonance between Brah and Anderson's theories and the authorial projects identified in the selected literature. Each of the theories suggest entanglements between histories, individuals, politics, and power. The selected literature also considers entanglements between memories, histories, and power while it explores the effects of these on the ways in which individuals interpolate themselves in their diaspora spaces. Nationalisms, as outlined by the various considerations above, can be considered discursive and ideological tools used by collectives to interpolate themselves into diaspora spaces with reference to narratives of belonging. "Between Nationalism and Transnationalism" recognises this convergence between theory and the themes explored by the selected literature, and argues that this nexus can best be discussed with reference to Judith Butler's concept of the "frame."²

Butler describes frames as "operations of power" (*Frames* 1). They are imposed modes of recognition that control the perceptions of individuals by guiding their acts of interpretation, especially when these individuals encounter other individuals, different collectives, or specific events (8). Butler provides a useful analogy to explain the concept (8–9). Like an ornate border of a painting, the frame implicitly guides interpretations by limiting the visual field and creating a narrative about what can be perceived and how (xi, 8). The narratives of nationalisms, then, can be likened to the frames Butler describes. Nationalisms provide interpretative borders that delineate what may be included in the narrative construction of the imagined community, and what falls outside of those boundaries. This discriminatory act, which relies on the recognition of desirable and undesirable characteristics immanent within the diaspora space and expressed through the individual narratives of dynamic identities, is referred to as framing throughout the rest of this thesis.

² The notion of the frame does not originate in Butler's work. As early as 1974, Erving Goffman described frames as "schemata of interpretation" that confer meaning on individuals and events (20–21). George Lakoff similarly describes frames as "mental structures that shape the way we see the world" (xv). However, Butler's concern with the entanglement between being framed and precarity make her work better suited to this argument.

This being said, it is also imperative to recognise that the selected literature articulates identity formation as a result of fluid and elective processes, as later analyses will show. To consider framing to be a unilateral process, or to think of it as represented in the selected literature as uncontested by transnationals, is to overlook the entanglements in diaspora spaces and to underestimate the degree of nuanced consideration contained in each authorial project. It also unwittingly results in characterising certain groups as emblematic victims. The selected literature shows that transnationals have their own frames, which they apply as they try to incorporate their identities in such a way as to gain recognition from more powerful groups and to empower themselves in their diaspora spaces.³ As a result, there are several frames present in the diaspora space at any given time. However, as Butler argues, frames also serve as “editorial embellishments” (*Frames* 8). Needless to say, this implies that the more powerful the group constructing the frame, the more persuasive and pervasive that frame will be. So, while transnationals may be able to frame themselves in certain ways, their frames are not necessarily as powerful as those imposed on them by others.

Struggles for dominance amongst different frames results in increased Third Space. Framing inevitably gives rise to liminality. The frame never quite contains what it intends to render as reality, and there is always a degree of leakage and contamination (Butler, *Frames* 9). As Butler explains, “[s]omething exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things” (9). As the discussion in Section Four below will reveal, transnational identities destabilise reductive nationalist discourses as a result of the entanglements in the diaspora space. However, frames can render transnationals – or any other group that falls outside the dominant frame in a diaspora space – unrecognisable and incomprehensible by, or entirely other from, more powerful groups. This results in heightened precarity – a term this project uses to refer to the “degree of precariousness of life” (Butler, *Precarious* xvii). The apprehension of degrees of precarity is “based on an understanding of how easily life is annulled” (xvii). Precarity signals vulnerability to violence, aggression, humiliation, suffering, and dependence (see Butler, *Precarious* 131, 137, 149–50). As Nguyen’s considerations of the Vietnam War, Urrea’s description of the US-Mexican borderlands, and

³ The idea that transnationals construct their own frames rather than merely resist the frames imposed upon them by others is this thesis’ extension to Butler’s argument. To consider transnationals as either accepting or resisting frames imposed by others, without acknowledging that transnationals create their own frames, suggests that they are not capable of the same ‘othering’ processes used against them. Failure to recognise that transnationals are political subjects capable of this type of discrimination implies that transnationals are necessarily victims and never perpetrators of these practises, and does not allow for ethical memory.

Gurnah's depictions of the ostracism of Arabic transnationals in Zanzibar after the revolution all attest, heightened precarity gives rise to distorted memories that lead to transnationals identifying themselves as emblematic victims. However, their shared authorial preoccupations with just memory lead them to explore ways in which precarity can be mitigated, so that their transnational characters can insert themselves in diaspora spaces in ways that allow them to exercise changing amounts of power.

Section Four – Transnationalism, the Threat of Hybridity, and Pluralist Governmentality

'Transnational' has long been used to describe business interests and large corporations with major financial operations in more than one country (Schiller et al. 27). It gained momentum in the study of the implications of transnational corporation activity on international relations, particularly those between non-governmental bodies (Vertovec and Cohen xxi), and was first used to describe sectors of migrating populations by the American Academy of Political and Social Science in 1986 (Schiller et al. 27). When used in this sense, 'transnational' is interchangeable with 'diaspora', as expressed in Brah's formulation of the diaspora space. It is also often used in a general and all-embracing sense, as it frequently refers to the "problematics associated with [the] movements of people, capital, commodities and cultural iconographies" (Brah 196). Transnationalism, in its general usage, thus denotes a "matrix of economic, political and cultural inter-relationships" used to construct a sense of cohesion between various apparatuses of dispersed groups (196). The concept therefore serves to delineate a field of identifications where imagined communities are "forged within and out of a confluence of narratives" (196).

Transnational biographies, or what this thesis subsumes under the term 'individual narratives' – especially transnational characters' personal stories about their origins, and their attempts to interpolate themselves into the palimpsestic diaspora space – are centrally marked by "diasporic experiences" (15). Many first or subsequent generation transnationals can attribute their transnational positions to the "forced dispersal and reluctant scattering" caused by colonisation and the slave trade (Gilroy, "Diaspora" 293) – both of which entail processes of radical dispossession (Deane 10). In the case of forced transnationalism resulting from the historic processes of dispersal and fragmentation, practices through which the collective experience is remembered offer a way of imposing a sense of coherence by imagining a new kind of community – one in which transnationals are welcome (Hall, "Cultural" 300).

However, others may be voluntarily transnational (Gilroy, “Diaspora” 293). In such cases, it is often possible to observe a new kind of migrating population that follows the flow of capital (Schiller et al. 1). As Roy Sommer explains, the term has been applied to

all expatriate groups who chose, or were forced, to leave their native countries for a variety of reasons [...]. [These transnational] subjects form ethnic or cultural minorities while still retaining strong affiliations with their – and more often, their ancestors’ – homelands.

(Sommer 159)

The term ‘transnational’ therefore overlaps and resonates with the meanings of migrant, immigrant, expatriate, and guest worker, as much as it does with refugee, asylum seeker, and exile (Brah 16, 197). As such, the term can be used to describe individual subjects as well as groups.

Steven Vertovec provides a description of individuals who qualify as transnationals. He defines transnationalism as “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states” (2). It is a phenomenon facilitated but not caused by improved transportation and telecommunications (2). Furthermore, he limits the definition to exclude the formal interactions between governments of nation-states, such as diplomatic relations, formal agreements, and conflicts. He argues that these are more appropriately indicated by the term ‘internationalism’ and its variants. This exclusion also extends to the international travel of holiday makers and tourists, and the exchange of goods “from one nation-state context to another” (3). Transnationals can be unskilled labourers who cross borders in search of work; undocumented migrants; return migrants; retirement migrants; forced migrants (such as refugees and asylum seekers); or religious specialists who travel to a region to cater to the spiritual needs of other transnationals. They could be highly skilled workers or trained occupational specialists, drawn back from host diaspora spaces to their countries of origin to contribute to the development of their homelands (19). Such engagement can also vary amongst transnationals. Modes of transnational contact and exchange may be selective, or could ebb and flow, depending on a range of conditions and individual circumstances. They could develop differently (13). This indicates, as will be explored below, that transnational groups are not homogeneous and monolithic. Rather, like those who hold nationalist views, they are marked by difference. Furthermore, and as is made apparent by the selected literature, transnationals may themselves hold nationalist views. As

has been previously stated, to consider nationalism and transnationalism as binary or dialectical opposites is to underestimate the prevalence of entanglement in diaspora spaces.

That being said, one of the foremost hallmarks of transnationalism is the sustained and ongoing link between “non-state actors based across national borders” (Vertovec 3). This typology can be further refined with reference to the frequency and type of mobility which relates to those considered to be transnational. Transnationals can be people who travel regularly to a specific site; they may stay in one place where they have immigrated, but engage with people and resources from their places of origin; or they may be people that have never moved, but whose locality is significantly affected by the activities of others abroad (19). A second hallmark, subsumed by the first, is that transnationalism is grounded in deterritorialisation (Žižek 2). As an interpretative frame, then, transnationalism, like diaspora, offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins (Brah 180).

Transnational identities are at once local and global (196). They are multi-locational within and across territorial, cultural, and psychic borders (197). Like ethnic, cultural, and political identities, transnational identities are not settled (J. U. Jacobs 5). They are in constant flux (3). Subject to ongoing negotiations, positioning, affirmations, and reinterpretation resulting from what Bhabha calls “borderline engagements of cultural difference” (2), transnational identities arise from and give rise to unexpected articulations and new intersections in the entanglement within the diaspora space. They constantly engage with others – socially, culturally, and linguistically (*Location* 5) – albeit to varying degrees (Vertovec 13). So, transnationalism is characterised by degrees of mutability (see Hall, “Cultural” 299). Transnationals therefore cannot be conceived of as having a common historical experience or “shared, stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning,” despite the tendency of nationalist discourses to frame them in this way (“Cultural” 300). Rather, transnationals are the subjects of varying degrees of enforced and voluntary dispersal, dispossession, fragmentation, and displacement (“Cultural” 300). Not every influence is innate in every transnational, making their groups as heterogeneous as those of groups whose genealogies are “those of ‘staying put’” in the diaspora space (Brah 209). Although some transnationals may identify more with one community than another, they “seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Schiller et al. 11).

Despite this ambivalence in their identities, transnational groups are recognisable as social formations (Vertovec 4). They are globally dispersed, “collectively self-identified ethnic groups” characterised by dense and highly active cross-border networks that influence

their social, cultural, economic, and political relationships (4–5). Just as with nationalists, transnationals belong to imagined communities. Significantly, however, the “transnational public sphere” has rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete (Gupta and Ferguson 9). It has also enabled the formation of new forms of solidarity and identity that do not rely on the appropriation of space (9). Transnational groups are composite formations, and members of a single group are likely to be spread across several parts of the world. They are networks of transnational identifications that are both “imagined” and “encountered” communities (Brah 196). But these networks have arisen due to the loosening of “bonds between people, wealth, and territories” (Wakeman 86). The basis of many significant global interactions has been altered, and the traditional definition of the nation-state has been called into question (86). Indeed, the transformation of the nation-state into a political apparatus involving multiple and overlapping jurisdictions, multiple sets of identities and social orders no longer restricted or contained by borders, has resulted from a confluence of processes within the global political economy (Vertovec 86).

As imagined communities, groups of transnationals could be considered “deterritorialized nations” (94). But the lack of influence of physical territorial borders on the construction of transnational groups does not mean that there are no borders within the physical territory they inhabit. As Yosef Lapid argues:

Processes of collective identity formation invariably involve complex bordering issues. Likewise, acts of bordering [...] invariably carry momentous ramifications for political ordering at all levels [...]. Processes of identity, border and order construction are therefore mutually self-constituting.

(7)

Lapid’s description of identity formation and its entanglement with “border and order construction” resonates with Brah’s characterisation of the diaspora space as a conceptual grid formed by the intersection of “diaspora, border, and politics of location” (Brah 181). What Lapid significantly highlights in the above quote is the apparent inextricability between the creation of one identity and the othering of another. The presence of more than one set of identities within a diaspora space suggests the “conundrum of ‘mixing’” (Brah and Coombes 1), a conundrum which in turn mirrors the notion of “hybridity.”

Hybridity has become a key concept in debates about cultural contestation and appropriation (1). In contemporary understanding, the term has come to indicate the “productive emergence of new cultural forms” (9). These result from the seemingly mutual

borrowing, exchanges, and intersections across ethnic boundaries in diaspora spaces (9). Hybridity, then, provides a means for reflecting on the relationship between “the local” and “the global” (12). But it is often applied uncritically as a celebration of traces of cultural syncretism. Often, it assumes a symbiotic and mutual relationship regardless of the real economic, political, and social inequalities amongst groups (1). But while hybridity is often considered a contemporary concern, its conceptual origins can be traced back to the development of the natural sciences, where it is used to refer to the outcome of a cross between two separate species of plant or animal. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the obsessive impulse to divide the natural world into taxonomic categories was extended to include humans. Scientific racism and Social Darwinism, driven by western colonialism and imperialism’s need for moral legitimacy, saw the association of hybridity with miscegenation (3). Those under colonial rule were often not considered human, but were constructed and represented as prototypes of “the animal” (Mbembe 26). While their natural drives and instincts were recognised, scientific racism made it possible to claim that colonial subjects, arranged hierarchically according to their race and ethnicity, were void of human “capacities” (26). Nguyen and Urrea inscribe these histories of oppression and subjugation, and also counter and resist such racist views by using miscegenated identities, or mixed-race characters, as narrators in their works. All three authors also contemplate the ways in which the supposed genetic inferiority of mixed-race individuals was used to justify racist and xenophobic actions that increased their precarity. Significantly, each author’s engagement with the entanglement of histories and individual narratives reveal scepticism of the racial differentiation inherent in modern multicultural societies. Their works draw attention to the existence of a “pluralist governmentality” (see Patterson 15) through the juxtaposition of the diaspora spaces of their transnational characters’ places of origin and those of the UK and the USA. This juxtaposition exposes similarities between the ways in which multiculturalist discourses frame transnationals and the historical emergence of colonial administrative strategies. Despite the historical colonial directives to promote the assimilation of the colonised or to increase segregation, various serendipitous mutual, strategic, and subversive cross-cultural borrowings have occurred since the beginning of travel, exploration, and colonialism (Brah and Coombes 3, 10).

As Christopher Patterson points out, and as the selected literature articulates, there is ideological continuity between these colonial strategies, that relied on differential racialisation in diaspora spaces, and the pluralist governmentality found in contemporary multicultural societies (14–15). Nationalist discourses tend to frame transnational groups as a

monolithic, homogeneous mass within the diaspora space. As in traditional agrarian societies, where culture and ethnicity were used as social markers to distinguish privileged groups, contemporary mobile, anonymous, centralised mass society within a diaspora space is once again using ethnicity to understand how “difference” should figure into discourses of the nation-state (Gellner, *Nations* 98; Brah 15). Debates over the value of multiculturalism – used here to refer to the development of formal policies to promote hybridity (Brah and Coombes 2) – underscores the fraught history of the “Unmelting Pot” of culture (Brah 227). Since the rapid increase in migration of documented and undocumented migrants worldwide starting in the 1980s, power has found new articulations in transnational networks (179–180). Globalising tendencies set in motion hundreds of years ago by colonial conquest and expansion have led to a world characterised by the dominance of multinational capital and transnational relations (179). As Kwame Appiah explains, early trade in goods and slaves established connections between those locations that were exploited and those countries that exploited them, as trade is accompanied by travellers (102), a historical fact that features prominently in works by Abdulrazak Gurnah. But this globalisation has not necessarily diminished any of the power of national governments. Instead, the nation-state’s political and administrative apparatuses are being reconstituted and restructured to cater to the growing complexities of governance in a largely interconnected world (Held et al. 9). Increased cultural pluralism within the diaspora space over recent decades has led to a growth in the awareness of the presence of the Third Space – those liminal areas between cultures occupying the same geographical spaces (see Pichler 333). The “drastically shrinking world” that results from burgeoning multiculturalism and expanding global capitalism has led to a new awareness of cultural and ethnic identities, and created fresh insecurities about them (Eagleton, *Idea* 13). One seemingly paradoxical response to the new political and cultural formations that characterise the global village and its processes of decentring is a renewed assertion of difference – the demand by imagined communities to be recognised for their particularity as a “people” or community (Cubitt 13). Multiculturalism thus gives rise to an abstract governing strategy, one in which racial identities provide modes of recognition and communal belonging in diaspora spaces (see Patterson 13). Claiming membership to racial and ethnic groups recognised by those in power in the nation-state ensures that transnationals are granted access to privileges like citizenship entitlements, equality and protection under the rule of law, democratic suffrage, and historical and cultural representation in their diaspora spaces (13). By strategically interpolating themselves into recognised groups, then, transnationals may be able to mitigate or at least alleviate their precarity. Yet, according to

the theory of pluralist governmentality, this paradoxically produces racial types that hardly reflect the identities of their constituent identities (13–14). The diaspora space in which pluralist governmentality occurs valorises those cultural differences that are framed as tolerable by those in power (14). This is a dubious, neo-racist form of acceptance that results in the creation of racial divisions and hierarchies (see Balibar 22). Nguyen, Urrea, and Gurnah’s works, as will be argued in upcoming chapters – especially Chapter Five – show how their individual transnational characters have to negotiate and interpolate their identities amongst the myriad of groups immanent in their diaspora spaces to alleviate the precarity they experience. The works featuring mixed-race characters articulate the ways in which their hybridity compounds their displacement. But this complication is shown to be either confounding, in cases like Gurnah’s Salim, who fails to find a place where he believes he belongs, or empowering. The discussion in Chapter Four of Urrea’s explorations of the various identities adopted by Mexican Americans illustrates how some transnationals benefit from their abilities to interpolate themselves into several groups.

Another threat similar to genetic miscegenation that hybridity signals to those nationalists who espouse essentialist notions of pure, authentic origins, and cultural homogeneity, is that of contamination. Furthermore, the apparent dual political loyalties and affiliations amongst transnational groups raises fears of mobilised “fifth columns” (Vertovec 99). Such fears often result in increased tensions between groups of nationalists and groups of transnationals within a diaspora space. Transnationals could be perceived as enemies within a nation-state, like terrorist sleeper cells (100). Their potential continued interest in the political plights of their places of origin is not new. However, due to advances in communication technologies, the affordability of travel, and policy developments such as the extension of dual citizenship, transnationals are increasingly able to act on their political convictions (94). Pervasive rhetoric about extended nations abroad has emerged to explain the increasing engagement of overseas communities in the economic, social, and political life of their countries of origin (96). Politics of the homeland can take a variety of forms. These include exiles organising themselves for return; opposition groups campaigning or planning actions to effect political change in their homeland; and groups working to lobby their host nations to further the interests of their homelands (94). These transnational political engagements are often practiced by long-established, subsequent generations of transnationals who may never have lived in a ‘homeland’ to begin with (95). Transnational groups can also exercise political influence on their homelands from their diaspora spaces. This influence can find expression through buying into regimes; attempts to raise consciousness of conditions in their

countries of origin through mass protest; the provision of financial support to guerrilla movements and insurgents in their homelands; or the planning and execution of terrorist actions within their diaspora spaces (94). This last dimension has led the US Department of Defence in 1996 to use transnationalism as a catchall phrase for terrorists, insurgents, members of international criminal groups, and opposing factions in civil wars conducted outside of the territories of their own nation-states (Vertovec and Cohen xxiv). The World Bank has also released a report that warns that the risk of renewed conflict during the first few years after cessation of hostilities is far greater in nation-states associated with large transnational communities than in those without such associations (Vertovec 95).

Yet another perceived threat to essentialist ideologies resides in the multiple locationality of hybrid transnational identities (Brah 197). As described earlier, the presence of transnationals within the diaspora space decentres the subject position of the nationalist. As a result, the transnational is as much at home in the diaspora space as members of indigenous groups, although their subject positions are not unproblematically equivalent (209). Furthermore, emergent identities and social relations are constituted and performed across multiple dimensions of differentiation – such as sexuality, race, gender, and class. Given the nebulous articulation of different degrees of power afforded to each new identity formation, transnationals are neither necessarily peripheral nor minority identities, even though they may be represented as such by more powerful groups (210, 242). Rather, transnationals are able to mitigate their precarity in diaspora spaces by being “exemplars *par excellence*” of Hall’s claim that identity is always in process (Brah 197, original emphasis; Hall, “Cultural” 300). They undermine any simple and uncomplicated sense of traditions and linear movement (Schiller et al. 333). And in addition to their acknowledged and embraced multi-locationality, many transnational groups do not sustain an ideology of return to their homeland (Brah 197). As ‘home’ is understood to indicate a relationship between humankind and the natural environment, it confers a sense of belonging (Robertson 161). Transnationals identify both their host diaspora space and their place of origin as home, in a process called the “homing desire” (Brah 197). But as Brah contends, this apparent ambiguity could be solved by distinguishing between the state of “feeling at home” and declaring a place home (197). Transnationals want a space where they can experience a sense of belonging. The homing desire is the impulse of transnationals to feel at home within their diaspora spaces. It is a fallacious generalisation of nationalist discourses, like the Latino Threat Narrative that Urrea counters in his work, that transnationals want to usurp that territory from nationalists.

Problematically, nationalist discourses like this tend to homogenise transnationals. Yet there is great diversity within transnational groups. In any case of lobbying, charitable donations or supporting conflict, transnational groups themselves include opposing factions and dissenting voices (Vertovec 100). Usually the kind and degree of participation in homeland politics differs across a series of contextual factors, including the history and nature of migration of the transnational, and the political conditions in the diaspora space as well as the country of origin (95). It is therefore as counterproductive and reductive to treat transnationals as monolithic as it is not to discriminate between different forms of nationalisms. Uncritically valorising transnationalism fails to take this into account.

Section Five – Hospitality in the Diaspora Space

The concept of ‘hospitality’ provides additional assistance to explain the relations between groups within the diaspora space that result from the decentering of the subject position of indigenous and immigrant, exile, foreigner, refugee, and other displaced subjects. In the selected literature, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea explore ways in which hospitality is either extended or denied to their transnational characters as they migrate from one diaspora space to another. Hospitality is thus especially relevant to the argument presented earlier, given that, when extended, it provides those transnationals who are met hospitably with a sense of belonging, and mitigates their precarity. The converse is also true, in that an inhospitable reception, like those received by Gurnah’s Islamic transnationals in the UK, can render transnationals hypervisible, and increase their precarity. As the selected literature also reveals, hospitality is entangled with the prevailing political milieu in the diaspora space. Gurnah’s Muslim transnationals in *Gravel Heart*, for example, are shown to be keenly aware that their diaspora spaces are increasingly inhospitable due to the increased Islamophobia after the attacks of 11 September 2001. Hospitality in diaspora spaces is therefore apparently intricately entangled with history, individual narratives, and memories.

As a philosophical concept, the term ‘hospitality’ was first used by Immanuel Kant to contemplate how peace could be maintained between nations, especially when a foreigner enters the sovereign nation-state of another (Yeğenoğlu 450). For Kant, the key issue was how a foreigner could be responded to in a peaceful and respectful manner, without jeopardising national sovereignty. The starting point for the original formulation is rooted in

the beliefs that the nation-state should remain sovereign, and that war is the natural state of human relations:

The state of peace among men living in close proximity is [...] one of war [...]. The state of peace must therefore be *established*, [...] and unless the security is pledged by one neighbor to another [...], the latter from whom such security has been requested, can treat the former as an enemy.

(Kant 111; original emphasis)

Kant's concern with the peaceful regulation of relations between nation-states is engendered by the increasing mobility of citizens into each other's territories (Yeğenoğlu 451). As Kant insists that peaceful visitation by a stranger is impossible without some form of common law to regulate it, he conceives of hospitality as "the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country. If it can be done without destroying him, he can be turned away; but as long as he behaves peaceably, he cannot be treated as an enemy" (Kant 118). The welcome strangers could expect under Kant's conception of hospitality is therefore contingent on the behaviour of the guest. To enjoy hospitality, the visitor must respect the order and rules of the home, the nation-state, and the culture of the host. To this extent, the guest is invited and is expected not to alter the rule and order of the home, but to obey them. Sovereignty, possessions, and borders of the nation-state remain inviolable because hospitality offers no form of ethical imperative on the part of the host. It is an abstract and impersonal rule that allows visitors to be treated according to the legal and juridical regulations of the nation-states they visit (Yeğenoğlu 452–53). But by ascribing a guest the right to visit, locals appropriate a position of superiority for themselves to enable such an act (Derrida, *Adieu* 15–16). In other words, for nationals within the diaspora space to extend the conditional welcome required by the Kantian conception of hospitality to transnationals, they would have to position themselves as hosts to whom the territory belongs. If transnationals do not wish to be treated as enemies, then they should not violate this position of privilege, enjoyed by the host. But this construction is not commensurate with the characteristic multiple and fluctuating articulations of power generated by the entanglement and intersections of identity, borders, and the politics of location already described as immanent within diaspora spaces.

Emmanuel Levinas and, subsequently, Jacques Derrida have refined Kant's notion of hospitality. They transpose it from the constricting field of juridical rights into the field of ethics. Unlike Kant, Levinas starts from the notion of a non-natural but pre-originary peace rather than war as the natural state of humanity. He uses this to shift hospitality from the

domain of abstract impersonal laws to the field of ethical responsibility and imperatives. Derrida considers Levinas' ideas on hospitality as an indication that, far from the indifference with which Kant imbued the term, hospitality revolves around what it means to welcome or receive another, as it creates and sets into motion an inter-personal relationship between host and guest (Yeğenoğlu 453). These developments are pertinent because hospitality can now be used to understand and engage with issues of how transnationals and nationals behave and are treated. Derrida explains that:

Levinas oriented our gaze toward what is happening today [...]: everywhere that refugees of every kind, immigrants with or without citizenship, exiled or forced from their homes [...] call for change [...]. It is intensified [...] by the crimes against hospitality endured by the guests (*hôtes*) [...].

(Derrida, *Adieu* 70–71)

Levinasian and Derridean conceptions of hospitality, then, invite questions about the understandings of nationalism, transnationalism, the nation-state, citizenship, and rights. One of the most important changes to Kantian hospitality, which could be called 'conditional hospitality,' is the insistence that a host can only truly welcome the other if hospitality is extended without the imposition of any condition to a guest who is unexpected. A welcome can only be offered by not envisaging the nature of the guest – as doing so inherently requires that the host occupies a position of dominance. Unconditional hospitality therefore calls for a dramatic restructuring of the relationship between host and guest (Yeğenoğlu 455). It requires the deconstruction of the 'at-homeness' of hosts, meaning that they must be received into their own home. The home is only owned "in a very singular sense of this word, only in so far as it is already hospitable to its owner" (Derrida, *Adieu* 42–43). The only distinction between nationals and transnationals in the diaspora space, then, according to this understanding of hospitality, is that nationals are already "*received hôtes*" (Derrida, *Adieu* 43; original emphasis). The word "*hôtes*" means both host and guest, and Derrida uses this ambiguity to signal the destabilisation of power relationships in unconditional hospitality. However, Derrida acknowledges that unconditional hospitality cannot be reduced to concrete instances, or be enshrined as legal or juridical regulations. Rather, the concept invites nationals to be more tolerant of interruptions to their conceptions of their own sovereignty. It would be impractical and idealistic to demand that nations, cultures, or governments welcome strangers unconditionally because, just like justice, unconditional hospitality itself is unfeasible and idealistic in reality (Yeğenoğlu 458). Derrida argues that:

[i]t's impossible as a rule, I cannot regularly organise unconditional hospitality, and that's why, as a rule, I have a bad conscience [...]. I cannot make a determinate, a determining judgement [...]. That's why the realm of action, [...] is absolutely heterogeneous to theory [...].

(“Discussion” 15)

The disjunction between theory and the practical realm of actions, however, does not render a politics of hospitality impossible. Just as the concept of justice enables critics to deconstruct individual laws, so unconditional hospitality makes it possible to deconstruct and assess practices of conditional hospitality. Derrida advocates that constant aspiration to achieve unconditional hospitality enables improvements to conditional hospitality (Yeğenoğlu 458).

Derridean hospitality, as an ethical claim to responsibility, thus decentres and deconstructs the subject positions of nationalists and transnationals in such a way that the two become equals. But, as mentioned, while this may work in theory, it is unlikely to hold any sway in reality. Furthermore, it is important to note that while the decentring in unconditional hospitality results in equality, the same is not true of any decentring in the diaspora space, characterised by Brah. While it may be true that the diaspora space also decentres the subject position of the national, Brah notes unequivocally that this does not suggest an undifferentiated relativism between the transnational and the national. These subject positions are in no way unproblematically equivalent (Brah 242). What distinguishes the two is the amount of power available to each, should they choose to exercise it. The presence of transnationals within a diaspora space may be celebrated as indicative of a liberal, tolerant, and pluralistic society. It may be touted, as it frequently is by the discursive strategies of pluralist governmentality, as a sign of the interdependency created by the global village. But it is also possible that transnationals may be vilified and demonised as a threat to the integrity of the nation-state or to the purity of its people (243). As the upcoming analyses of the selected literature will demonstrate, the texts by Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea display an awareness of the ways in which hospitality varies. It is shown as malleable, and varies according to the prevailing political milieu, fluctuating in response to the ways in which transnationals are framed in their diaspora spaces. So, although the hospitality their transnational characters receive may confer a sense of belonging, it is as likely to result in their increased precarity. Yet the nature of the diaspora space renders encounters between nationalists and transnationals inevitable. Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea tend to be cynical about the likelihood of receiving real hospitality. After all, the disempowering and reductionist frames used in nationalist discourses will control how transnationals are received, unless there has been an attempt to remember histories ethically.

Section Six – The Emergence of a Literature

Needless to say, interactions between nationalists and transnationals do not necessarily result in increased precarity. Two of the lynchpins to the argument in this thesis are the views that intersections between nationalism and transnationalism can be creatively productive, and that these have given rise to new thematic concerns that contemplate the relationships between nationals and transnationals. Examples of representations of these intersections can be found in recent transnational novels by transnational authors in the United States of America, dealing with the memories of the so-called ‘Terror Attacks’ in New York. It is useful to consider these, as they provide a context for the forthcoming analyses of the selected works by Nguyen, Urrea, and Gurnah. While Nguyen and Urrea both write from and about diaspora spaces in the USA, it is Gurnah’s work that reveals increasing tensions in the UK since the declaration of the War on Terror. This is most notable in his depictions of the changes to the hospitality extended to transnationals of Islamic faith, or even simply to those of Islamic appearance. Despite writing in and about the USA, neither Nguyen nor Urrea make any overt reference to the attacks in New York. Rather, Urrea considers the impact of the subsequent war in Afghanistan on Mexican and Mexican American transnationals, often portraying these as similar to the historical, manipulative, and abusive relationships between the European settlers in North America and Native Americans. Nguyen likewise concentrates on the displacements resulting from a different historical conflict – the Vietnam War. So, all of the authors effectively displace the source of the nationalisms that they depict in their works in such a way as to emphasise the centrality of transnational entanglement. Gurnah considers nationalisms in the UK that are fuelled by events in the USA. Nguyen’s nationalisms originate from historic civil wars and subsequent US intervention. Urrea’s work is at pains to show the historical origins of the nationalisms held by both his Mexican and his American characters. All three authors also notably attempt to show how the nationalisms their transnational characters encounter in the USA and the UK are similar to those that they encounter in their diaspora spaces in Vietnam, Mexico, and Zanzibar. By briefly examining the types of concerns emanating from transnational writers in the USA following 2001, this section aims to show how Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea’s authorial projects indicate an emergent new subgenre in transnational literature.

Events of September 2001 led to heated debates between writers of the ‘First’ and ‘Third Worlds’ (Gray 85). On one hand, British novelist Martin Amis described the terrorist attacks as heralding a future in which “the west confronts an irrationalist, agonistic,

theocratic/ideocratic system which is essentially and unappeasably opposed to its existence” (“Fear” para. 15). But Amis did not call for revenge. Rather, he acknowledged that Americans were partly responsible for the attack, citing their “insidious geographical incuriosity” and its accompanying triumphalist insularity, and describing these as a threat to world peace as serious as Islamic fundamentalism (“Fear” para. 14). He pleaded that responses to the attacks be informed by a balanced viewpoint, rather than a discourse evoking “nationalisms, blocs, religions, ethnicities” (“Fear” para. 17). Instead, Amis called for “species consciousness” – an acknowledgement of the relationships between people (“Fear” para. 17). However, as time progressed, Amis’ calls for measured responses were jettisoned and replaced by prejudices. Nine months after the attack, Amis declared 11 September 2001 “a day of de-Enlightenment” which marks a war between the rational West, an exemplar of sound government, and the East, which he describes as “a landscape of ferocious anachronisms [epitomised by] the Bronze Age blunderings of the Middle East” (“Voice” para. 7). Four years later, Amis insisted that moderate Islam had surrendered to the “pathological cult” of Islamic fundamentalism, making it profoundly inimical and incomprehensible to the West (Gray 86; Amis, “Horrorism” para. 50).

On the other hand, and representative of another extreme, writers like Pankaj Mishra dismissed Western writers’ commentary on events outside the West as irrelevant (“Paranoia” 1). Even more extreme views were expressed by middle-class Turks in Istanbul. Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, who reported that several Turks felt that the perpetrators of the events of 9/11 had done “the right thing,” explained that such callousness resulted from the reverse of ignorance (qtd in Gray 87; also see Mishra, “End of Innocence”). He claims that citizens of the non-Western world are more conscious of their disadvantaged condition than ever before. While global communications systems, the internet, and faster movement of capital in the free global market may not have promoted knowledge of other cultures and countries in the United States, they have made people of the Third World “unwilling witnesses” to their own relative or absolute poverty (Gray 87).

But, as noted, these opinions are extreme. Nguyen, Gurnah, and Urrea’s oeuvres suggest that there is an increasing interest that is starting to emerge in transnational literature in identifying a middle ground. Several other writers have recognised that, in a world increasingly marked by entanglement, extremes need to be challenged, reimagined, and reconfigured. Writers have begun to attempt to deal with the entanglements between history, memory, and individual narratives. But in the case of post-9/11 fiction in America, bearing witness to the culturally other may remain a problem, especially for those struggling to

confront the trauma still marking post-9/11 American society. But bearing witness is at the heart of most fictions dealing with transnational experiences, especially those writing about and from the Third Space (Gray 88). A growing number of literary works have been concerned with personal and cultural identities, and with the experiences within diaspora spaces. Increasingly, works explore how various histories of displacement and the exercise of power are experienced and remembered across generations. They also examine the multiple effects travel and displacement have on transnationals (Jay 11). These novels weave a composite vision of the intersecting histories of overtly violent colonisation under imperialism, and the supposedly more benign displacements and exploitation resulting from contemporary economic globalisation (155).

The transnational novel's concern with mobility and displacement results in the reader being shifted between multiple locations, as storylines rehearse new models of migration involving the same back-and-forth flow of people and cultural forms characteristic of globalisation (3, 11). These works deploy critical and imaginative thinking to lay bare debilitating histories and to imagine new, contemporary relationships (195, 196). Most importantly for this thesis, however, is the centrality afforded to questions of agency and the new configurations and structures of power within diaspora spaces. The novels explore how colonisation, decolonisation, and globalisation have simultaneously disabled and enabled personal, cultural, and political agency (196).

Furthermore, these novels trouble received national narratives, especially crude or naïve nationalist discourses about culture, identity, national belonging, the homogenising threat of globalisation, and the relationship between materiality and culture. They also serve to confound the consent required to sustain nationalisms that are based on the ideals of purity and fixed origins (198). But they do not erase these national narratives (196). Rather, transnational novels tend to displace received national narratives by resituating them in broader, more complicated geographical and historical contexts (195), becoming an animated body of novels. These transnational novels provide a way of seeing place and placelessness together (Fallon 15). They provide representations of the ways the changing world has resulted in changing relationships. As Appiah argues, people feel that these changes threaten their identity. However, whatever difference is lost, there is a constant invention of new forms of difference – such as new forms of slang, new hairstyles and, in some cases, even new religions (Appiah 103). Multiculturalists hold that human variety is essential because people are entitled to the options they need to shape their lives in partnership with others. But there is an inherent danger in focussing on issues of difference. As Paul Gilroy has warned in

The Black Atlantic, concerted concentration on differences can lead to a hardening of those identity characteristics that divide groups from each other. Criticism of narratives of national belonging run the risk of creating new, absolutist categories of difference based on notions of ethnic belonging as narrow as those inherent in nationalist discourses. The selected literature by Gurnah, Urrea, and Nguyen not only intentionally seeks to find a way beyond such reductive categories, but expresses a growing cynicism towards the pluralist governmentality that these new categories enable and that tend to be valorised in transnational novels.

The authors also do not provide simple answers to complicated questions about identity, culture, and belonging (see Jay 200). Rather, they express and consider the multi-axial and nebulous configurations of power structures within diaspora spaces. Most transnational novels tend to reveal various forms of cultural imperialism under colonialism and globalisation. They also show how an insistence on or obsession with cultural purity and nationalism can be as debilitating as colonialism itself was (Jay 10). They reconfigure language, themes, and tropes of the writing prevalent in diaspora spaces in terms that extend beyond bipolar and biracial models. In the process, they become “lexical equivalents” (Gray 89) of the transnational encounter, describing various configurations of power, including those rooted in nationalisms, and encouraging readers to rethink these power relations. But Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works do not only do this. Rather, as the remainder of this thesis argues, they also show ways in which transnational characters maintain and perpetuate their own nationalisms. Through their authorial preoccupations with the entanglements of history, individual narrative, and memory in diaspora spaces, each author displays a concerted rejection of the idea that the precarity experienced by some transnationals renders them helpless victims. That being said, and as the remaining chapters will argue, the selected works articulate an emerging emphasis on the need for just memories and personal narratives that not only accept ethical agency, but also afford transnational characters the opportunity to exercise power and control over their own lives and destinies, no matter how limited these may be.

Section Seven – Structure of the Thesis

Although the selected literature reveals common authorial projects and preoccupations, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea produce works that are nonetheless marked by their own idiosyncrasies. So, the argument detailed above is presented in the remainder of this thesis by

adopting two methodologies. First, close readings of selected works by the three authors will be analysed, with the focus being how the experiences of transnational subjects are limned, and on how tensions between and amongst groups within diaspora spaces are depicted and characterised by the respective authors. Each analysis will be presented in a separate chapter. Although each chapter is dedicated to a single author, selected works by each will be analysed using a comparative methodology. In the fifth chapter, observations from each of the preceding chapters will be compared and contrasted, in order to illustrate the differences and similarities between each authorial project, and to test the central argument already presented above. This current section provides a brief overview of what the reader may expect as the thesis progresses.

Chapter Two presents an analysis of works by Zanzibari-born Abdulrazak Gurnah. While reference is made to several of his novels, the chapter concentrates on the 2001 novel *By the Sea* and the more recent *Gravel Heart* (2017). As the argument will show, there is a significant change in tone between the earlier novel and the later one. Salim Yahya serves as the focaliser for the majority of *Gravel Heart*. Unlike the transnational characters in the earlier novel, Salim experiences a protracted period of failure in the UK. Despite starting a new life in the home of his very successful diplomat uncle, Salim struggles to interpolate himself into his new diaspora space. He experiences intense alienation and heartache, and becomes increasingly aware of mounting hostility directed towards him because of his Islamic identity. Although both novels are preoccupied with the entanglement of memory and history, the personal narratives the characters are able to gain by interpolating themselves into their diaspora spaces vary in the amount of promise and hope they offer. Omar Saleh and Latif Mahmood manage to redefine their individual narratives in *By the Sea*. Gurnah's authorial concerns with the recuperation of lost histories, his consideration of how these modify memories, and his examinations of how these in turn influence the interpolation of individual identities are central concerns of the chapter.

Chapter Three presents close readings of Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) and a selection of the short stories collected in *The Refugees* (2017). Special attention is paid to the centrality of just memory in Nguyen's work. The argument is made that Nguyen has emerged as a forerunner of a growing trend by Vietnamese American authors to contemplate their own complicity in the ways in which they are framed by other groups in their diaspora spaces. The chapter draws on Derrida's concepts of the spectre and hauntology to analyse Nguyen's use of ghosts in his texts to represent that which may have been forgotten. The argument presented states that Nguyen uses the hauntology of spectres to

emphasise the need for ethical memory. *The Sympathizer* also reveals an authorial awareness that women Vietnamese transnationals have suffered greater precarity and more displacement than men. Nguyen's attempts at recognising this in his work, without exercising discursive control over women and unethically using them to suit his own agenda, is also considered.

This discussion is followed by a chapter that considers works by Luis Alberto Urrea. It is explained that his is the only selected fiction that limns the presence of a physical border, as it deliberately explores entanglements in the liminal space of the borderland between the USA and Mexico. Leo Chavez's concept of the Latino Threat Narrative is used to explore Urrea's representations of the increasing precarity of Mexican Americans and Mexicans in the US. Urrea's *The House of Broken Angels* (2018) is particularly useful in this regard, as it is set in Donald Trump's America. Chapter Four also considers Urrea's use of ghosts, which interestingly mirrors that of Nguyen's. Furthermore, the links Urrea makes between multiple historical discourses, especially those that are deliberately forgotten, by virtue of his interest in liminality and the Third Space, are shown to complicate the dominant frames of belonging in the US. Finally, the chapter also explores ways in which Urrea adopts and adapts the Chicano/a literary trope of the *familia de la Raza*, transforming it from a political and cultural tool initially used to instil Chicano nationalism into a new trope that allows him to extend hospitality to a broader spectrum of transnationals and nationalists.

Chapter Five adopts a comparative methodology, and draws from the arguments of all of the preceding chapters. In it, the selected literature is contrasted and compared in order to identify elements common to the projects of all three authors' works. The argument centres on four areas of interest. Firstly, it considers how Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea strategically undermine the supposed superiority and desirability of host diaspora spaces in their works. Secondly, it argues that even though each author appears interested in a different aspect of the industry of memory, they all nonetheless use intertextual strategies to engage with various sources of the stereotypes and discourses that their works show to confer precarity on their transnational characters. This is closely related to the third point of the argument, which examines how each author actively and conscientiously rejects the label of victim for the transnationals they depict in their narratives. Finally, the chapter offers remarks on the centrality afforded to the family in all of the selected literature. A consideration of future research concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: ENTANGLED HISTORIES IN SELECTED WORKS BY ABDULRAZAK GURNAH

Section One – A Preoccupation with Precarity and Entanglement

Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary oeuvre expresses the author's interest in and preoccupation with the sense of precarity transnationals encounter when they try to establish a home in a diaspora space. All but one of his nine novels are set in both England and Zanzibar (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 15).¹ Each poses profound questions about the difficulties experienced by transnationals, especially those of colour, and by their descendants, in "becoming *legally* English" (15; original emphasis). When his characters succeed in securing British passports, Gurnah then highlights the troubles they encounter in having their legal statuses acknowledged and recognised by others (15). An ordeal most of his protagonists undergo is the struggle to be recognised as having a right to establish a home in England at all (15). They are seldom welcomed, and Gurnah's works frequently explore and try to historicise the lack of hospitality his transnational characters encounter (16). Whether they are moving within countries, like in *Dottie* (1990) and *Paradise* (1994), or between them, as is the case in *By the Sea* (2001) and *Pilgrims Way* (1988), Gurnah's transnational characters find themselves caught between different diaspora spaces. Their precarity is especially pronounced, and is attributed to them being perceived as trespassers by nationalist and other transnational characters who share their diaspora spaces (see Ruberto 25–26). The complexity of subject formation – especially that of transnationals – is a central focus of Gurnah's fiction. His novels also signal an interest in the individual narratives his characters use to position themselves in relation to their pasts (Ruberto 27; Falk 25). As such, his oeuvre reveals an authorial preoccupation with the entanglements of history, individual narrative, and memory in the diaspora spaces he describes in his works.

Gurnah's habitual explorations of the nuances of modern displacement have become the centre of a body of criticism which often compares his works to those by other transnational writers. Amanda Seel pairs *By the Sea* with Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Weight of Whispers*. According to Seel, these novels are expressions of new concerns regarding African cultural identity and subjectivity. Both "open up liminal worlds of multiplicity, contingency and contradiction all of which undermine assumptions about the stability of

¹ *Paradise* is the only one of Gurnah's novels to date set entirely in East Africa.

identity, culture or indeed knowledge” (Seel 24). Gurnah’s protagonists and antagonists in *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, as the arguments in this chapter will illustrate, are adept at negotiating the multi-axial articulations of power in their diaspora spaces. Gurnah’s literature characteristically explores the ways in which individuals interpolate their identities into their diaspora spaces, using syncretism as they attempt to exercise control over their own destinies. Gareth Griffiths, in his study of African literatures, states that African writers like Jamal Mahjoub, Ben Okri, and Abdulrazak Gurnah “question the idea of national or even cultural boundaries and focus on the liminalities which define much modern experience in an increasingly dislocated and diasporic world” (308). Such questions are central to Gurnah’s most recent work, *Gravel Heart*. This novel describes the increasing liminality of Islamic transnationals in the UK in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks on the US. In so doing, the novel not only exposes the growing animosity and precarity faced by these transnationals, but also reveals the existence of transnational connections between Western powers. Often, Gurnah also engages with the dislocation Griffiths describes by depicting his characters as displaced and homeless. Robert Balfour, in a reading of *By the Sea* and V. S. Naipaul’s *Half a Life*, argues that the homelessness, displacement, and exile depicted in these two texts result from the “‘Othering’ practised on those who live on the periphery by those who see themselves as central within the global village” (321–2). Simon Lewis uses the term ‘apatrides’ to describe some of Gurnah’s characters (“Impossible” 222).² He argues that these characters show “a non-identity which renders their various flights ever away from, never towards (or even between) homes” rather than the dual identities frequently associated with transnationals (222). But while most of Gurnah’s work may be read as stories of transnationals who experience discomfort in their various British diaspora spaces (see Lewis, *Transnational* 16), it is reductive to read them as stories in which transnationals move “ever away from, never towards (or even between) homes” (Lewis, “Impossible” 222). Lewis’ description of this “Impossible Domestic Situation” (1999) assumes that the transnational experiences at the heart of Gurnah’s literary oeuvre involve a physical movement from a home to a diaspora space. In Lewis’ later works, however, he acknowledges that Gurnah brings “histories together in stories of *double* displacement” (*Transnational* 51; original emphasis). This chapter is most interested in the origin of such double displacement, and will argue that Gurnah shows this to be the result of contesting historical discourses.

² “Apatride” is a term denoting a person or thing without a nation-state (Macklin 333).

As Monika Fludernik's 2003 study on diasporic fiction argues, history plays a key role in the process of subject formation: "Identity operates through narrative, and narrative needs to start from the past and operate its way to a future that resolves the discrepancies between past and future" (xxix). Gurnah's treatment of East African societies throughout his oeuvre shows his keen awareness of the competing historical accounts of the region. In his description of the realist strand of the African novel, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes that "it pulls apart and it puts together; it is both analytic and synthetic" (Ngũgĩ qtd in Smith 12). This sophistication of simultaneous analysis and synthesis is a hallmark of Gurnah's treatment of competing histories. His novels amalgamate different and overlapping historical perspectives – whether these are histories of characters or of regions. By using multiple narrative voices and shifting focalisers, Gurnah produces novels that fuse these different and often competing histories into single narrative units. The resultant complexities not only call homogenised or uncontested colonial renditions of the past into question, but also probe the legitimacy of recast, postcolonial renderings thereof (Ruberto 26–28; S. Lewis, *Transnational* 50). Part of Gurnah's literary project, then, is to collapse the simple binary between colonial and postcolonial discourses. Gurnah's literary and scholarly works, informed by his local knowledge of Zanzibar, and by his scepticism of the discursive formations of 'Africa,' therefore test the widespread prejudice that the history of the world *is* the history of the West (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 53). His oeuvre reflects his critical awareness of the interplay between Arabic, European, and African cultural groups in the creation of the Swahili culture on the coast and islands of East Africa (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 53). *By the Sea*, for instance, offers a rich understanding of the historical processes that shaped the Indian Ocean world (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 57). Gurnah's novels describe the fluctuating "relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 203) during successive waves of colonisation and revolution. Gurnah therefore characteristically portrays Zanzibar as a "contact zone" or a social space "where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (203). Zanzibar is depicted as a point of confluence of cultural, economic, political, and psychic processes brought about by ancient transnational relationships such as the *musim* trade and the establishment of a British protectorate. It is also figured as a diaspora space in Gurnah's oeuvre, as is England.

Gurnah's East African Arab-descended protagonists are forcibly rendered into transnational subject positions before they leave Zanzibar in order for nationalist agendas to be furthered. May Joseph describes the "global displacement of East African Asians" during the "internationally volatile period of fervent nationalisms and Cold War realignment" as a

“minor history of East African–Asian migration forces” (10). Although Joseph’s interests lie primarily in the study of Indian migration patterns, her observation that studies of contemporary “metropolitan sites in the North such as Britain, Canada, and the United States” (10–11) open the discursive dilemma of studying the “neglected history of Asians in Africa” (10) could help explain why Gurnah’s novels portray transnationals who counter facile notions of hybridity (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 52). Gurnah’s protagonists exemplify situations in which their presence, like the transnationals of Indian descent in Joseph’s study, “accentuates the strategic essentialisms and hybrid pluralities of [First World] identity politics versus the messier realms of citizenship in the Second and Third Worlds” (Joseph 11). Works by Gurnah not only interrogate the social orders and racialised differentiation within the diaspora spaces into which his transnationals migrate, but they are also keenly aware of their characters’ original displacement in Zanzibar. His principal characters, especially in *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* (2017), are therefore depicted as being aware that their presence in East Africa was determined by Indian Ocean trade winds, and that the heightened precarity they experience in the wake of the 1964 revolution results from conflicting nationalisms inherent in Zanzibar.

Sophisticated and complex characterisation is a hallmark of Gurnah’s literary work. With the exception of *Dottie* – in which the characters are second-generation immigrants to England, and are thus British by birth – Gurnah’s protagonists are born in Zanzibar (Lewis, *Transnational* 50). Marco Ruberto suggests that Gurnah’s characterisation benefits from his characters’ tendency to find themselves caught in the Third Space between different and competing cultural groups (26). It is also further nuanced and informed by the author’s own transnational identity (26). Gurnah was born in Zanzibar in 1948, and he relocated to Britain at the age of eighteen via a bureaucratic deception. Having acquired a Tanzanian passport through a relative on the African mainland, he travelled to Britain on a tourist visa (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 62). Once there, he changed his visa status to ‘student,’ a category which permitted a longer stay. Eventually he settled in Canterbury, where he became an academic and novelist (62). Gurnah is a Muslim Zanzibari of Yemeni ethnic origin who migrated to Britain in the aftermath of the 1964 revolution, during which African nationalism gave rise to the persecution of Arabic Zanzibaris. Although Gurnah did not suffer any direct physical or political persecution, the illegality of the bureaucratic deception he used to enter England cut him off from his family until the mid-1980s, when he was able to return to Zanzibar due to the extension of a general amnesty (60). As a scholar, Gurnah has also written extensively on diasporic and exilic literature. Additionally, he has proven to be a novelist critically interested

in the nuances of modern displacement. These various elements of his biographical persona frequently enter Gurnah's fiction. For instance, Gurnah's transnationals tend to share both his interest in and his scepticism of English literature (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 50).

Gurnah's different personae inform his fiction in other ways too. He is cautious of claims that exilic discourses have inherent subversive power (Ruberto 26). For instance, even though Salman Rushdie is measured in his assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of migration and frequently writes about the exigencies of transnationalism, he nonetheless considers the potential for such subversion favourably:

To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target [...]. But the migrant [...] also transforms his new world. [It] is out of such hybridisation that newness can emerge.

(Rushdie, *Homelands* 210)

But Gurnah is even more cautious than Rushdie. Rather than embrace and exercise the transformative potential of the exilic perspective that Rushdie identifies in the above quote, Gurnah's works show that the liminal position of the transnational offers both "conservative and liberating potential" (Ruberto 26). In *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah presents a spectrum of transnational experiences. Shifts in the multi-axial articulations of power imminent in the diaspora space of Zanzibar are depicted as creating new ideological borders that separate those marked by "an underlying foreignness" from nationalists (Gurnah, *Gravel* 180). In his novels, Gurnah shows how transnationals are singled out through their affiliations "across the ocean" (180), regardless of whether these links are direct or generational, and are ostracised and excluded from the space they originally considered their home.

At this point, it may be helpful to present brief synopses of the selected works that will be analysed in this chapter. *By the Sea* recounts the experiences of 65-year-old Saleh Omar, a merchant refugee from Zanzibar who applies for asylum in England. Omar is fleeing the life-threatening precarity he faces in a land where he has been framed as undesirable. He has been targeted and victimised by larcenous government leaders. When he arrives at Gatwick Airport, Omar presents an invalid passport, made out to his distant cousin and most hated enemy, Rajab Shaaban Mahmud. When confronted by an immigration officer, Omar feigns incomprehension and pretends not to speak English. Rachel Howard is assigned as Omar's caseworker. She needs to assist him to move from a refugee halfway-home to a small English seaside town. Rachel contacts an expert on Kiswahili, Latif Mahmud, requesting

translation services. Mahmud happens to be the real Rajab Shaaban's son, and has several unpleasant memories of Omar. The two transnationals meet frequently after their initial contact. These meetings form a narrative frame through which Gurnah presents various extended analeptic episodes, with focalisation switching between Omar and Mahmud's diegetic, first-person, retrospective narrative voices. The alternation between the two narrators results in a narrative structure in which various episodes are retold from two different perspectives. As a result of their attempts to come to terms with their shared histories, the two men and Rachel form a surrogate family which provides both men a sense of belonging in the UK diaspora space.

Unlike either of the Zanzibari protagonists in *By the Sea*, the transnational character at the centre of the second novel, *Gravel Heart*, enjoys a position of social privilege when he first moves to the UK. However, the plot of the novel revolves around the secret events that lead to the disintegration of the first-person diegetic retrospective narrator Salim Yahya's family life. The novel is divided into three parts. In the first part, the narrator is still young and naïve, and recounts how confounded he was in the 1970s when his father inexplicably left the seemingly happy family home. When his uncle Amir, who has been increasingly successful in his political career, invites Salim to move in with him in London, it seems like a welcome escape. The second part of the novel, however, quickly dispels Salim's hopes. Although he is at first welcomed into Amir's family home, he soon recognises that his adoration of his uncle has been misplaced. The first-person narrative voice is frequently interrupted by increasingly pessimistic and sorrowful letters Salim writes to his mother Saida, but fails to send. While Salim feels increasingly cut off from the life he left behind in Zanzibar, the epistolary episodes of the novel also show that he is steadily gaining new insight into the nature of the fall-out between his parents, and that he is also unable to adjust to life in the UK. Salim experiences successive episodes of failure, is expelled from Amir's home, and finds a series of unrewarding jobs and unfulfilling relationships. After learning of his mother's death and discovering that he has missed her funeral, Salim returns to Zanzibar. In Part Three, Gurnah's interests in entangled narratives and memories become more pronounced. In this section, Salim's narrative voice is displaced by Masud's. Father and son meet in Zanzibar after several years apart. At this point in the novel, Salim's descriptions of events in Zanzibar act as a frame for Masud's first-person retrospective narrative in which he explains the events that led to his estrangement from Saida. The analeptic episodes Masud presents explains how Amir, accused of statutory rape, conspires with a powerful government official, Hakim, the Chief Protocol Officer and son of the Deputy President. Masud reveals

how Hakim coerced Saida into a sexual relationship to save Amir. However, the sudden success of Amir's political career, and his wedding to Asha, the girl he is alleged to have raped, strongly imply that Amir and Hakim had colluded at Masud's expense. The novel closes with Salim's reluctant decision to return to the UK.

As will be shown below, both of the selected works by Gurnah explore how shifts in the national political status quo and the rise of a new dispensation in Zanzibar enabled nationalists to vilify, victimise, and persecute transnationals with impunity. At one extreme, the "violent and punitive" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 180) political climate after the revolution that Gurnah describes in his novels allows transnationals to fall prey to nationalists settling personal vendettas, like in *By the Sea*, or to be ostracised by nationalists pursuing their own private ambitions, like in *Gravel Heart*. At the other extreme, Gurnah presents characters like Amir in *Gravel Heart* and Hussein in *By the Sea* that suggest transnationals are not necessarily hapless victims. Gurnah's works also consider ways in which less scrupulous transnationals utilise the greed and corruption of nationalist officials to guarantee their own advancement. Through cunning, some transnationals are able to use their links to nationalists to their benefit and to ensure, by satisfying a desire that intersects with power, that they are able to manipulate events in order to settle their own grudges against other transnationals in the process.

This chapter argues that Gurnah's authorial project asserts – like his frequent rendition of the spectrum of transnational experiences implies – that there should be a collapse of the binary between transnationals and nationalists. Yet his work also complicates too simple a dismissal of the terms as fallacious, given that each acknowledges the precarity their protagonists experience due to actions predicated on the binary. *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* will be analysed in the sections that follow. Section Two examines Gurnah's fiction as a form of historical discourse that dismantles the simple binaries between colonial and postcolonial discourses. The section that follows that explores the ways in which Gurnah's characterisation problematises simplistic assumptions that being a "colonized native" of a place guarantees a sense of national belonging in the postcolonial state (see S. Lewis, *Transnational* 56). Gurnah's use of symbolism to show how his transnational characters interpolate themselves and perform their identities within their diaspora spaces will be discussed in Section Four. The final section of this chapter will consider ways in which Gurnah represents his central concern with discourses by using intertexts that the characters are able to identify and use to position themselves within their diaspora spaces.

Section Two – Entangled Histories and Zanzibar as a Diaspora Space

Academic and political discourses on Africa tend to be fraught with habitual assumptions about the ‘traditional’ nature of African societies (Falk 13). Achille Mbembe argues that by persistently reproducing this view, scholars have historically perpetuated a sense that African societies are ruled by unchanging traditions (3–4). These traditions are frequently treated as timeless, rendering African societies virtually without history. This approach suggests to observers that African societies exist “outside the realm of history” (Falk 14). The most significant cause of these assumptions is that the social theories that inform them were developed to explain specifically European forms of modernity (Mbembe 10). When these theories are applied to Africa, Europe and Africa logically become each other’s opposites: Europe is cast as rational, historical, and modern, while Africa is inevitably portrayed as irrational, static, and traditional (Falk 14; see Mbembe 4). Such views were used to justify slavery and the colonial project. Existing cultural complexities in Zanzibar, for instance, were overlooked while the islands were under a British Protectorate (from 1890 to 1963), which shared administrative power with the Omani Sultan (see Middleton and Campbell 3; Lockwood 14; Samuelson 501; Clayton 4; Lofchie 56–59). Colonial administration placed a rigid racial grid upon Zanzibari society (Falk 29). There was a strict hierarchy between the three identified and recognised racial groups: Africans, Indians, and Arabs. Although Arabs were numerically few, they were politically powerful and influential due to their Omani origins, shared with the ruling Seyyid. The African majority, however, was politically silenced through constant underrepresentation and was also excluded from successful career paths (Middleton and Campbell 43–45; Lofchie 63–66; Falk 29). Gurnah’s works demonstrate the author’s awareness of the tendency of colonial discourses to present univocal representations of histories and racial and cultural identities (Ruberto 27). His narratives confirm his view that “[c]ontrolling the past is a condition of power” (Gurnah, “Idea” 16). Rather than offer readers simple revisions of the past, though, Gurnah describes early Zanzibar as a diaspora space. He depicts Zanzibar as a contact zone and offers readers a rich understanding of the way the Indian Ocean world was shaped (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 57).

Ironically, the reductive racial classifications imposed on Zanzibari society by the British and the Omanis not only misrepresented society, but also contributed to its transformation (Falk 29). The rise of nationalism and the 1964 revolution that closely followed independence in 1963 can both be seen as having been spurred by this enforced racial simplification (29). Three elections were held between 1957 and 1963 (Lockwood 20),

as Britain tried to prepare Zanzibar for independence. Each time, the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) polled the most votes (20). When vote-rigging schemes and general corruption marred results, it became clear that the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) had outmanoeuvred them (20). After the July 1963 election, it was apparent that Zanzibar would return to Arab rule after independence on 10 December 1963 (20). During the revolution in early 1964, the ASP seized power with the aid of the Umma Party (Falk 30). Soon after independence, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed the union of Tanzania, and its political structure, under local rule of Abeid Karume, was annexed to the mainland Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) led by President Julius Nyerere (Falk 30). The government set out to modernise the country through rural development, and its policies were formulated around self-reliance and socialism (30). TANU insisted that its members should subscribe to the (notably gendered) motto: “All men are my brothers and Africa is one” (Falk 30; Ingle 6; Maguire 321). Nyerere also held that “individualistic social attitudes” that accompany “selfishness and individual advancement” (qtd in Ingle 8) were introduced by colonial powers. The trade-based and commercial character of Swahili society in Zanzibar thus fell outside the Tanzanian conception of African unity (Falk 30). Nyerere’s socialist and rural-centred politics were exemplified by the 1967 nationalisation of banks, which plays an important role in Saleh Omar’s dispossession in *By the Sea*.

Gurnah’s work is as sceptical of homogenising post-colonial discourses such as Nyerere’s brand of African nationalism as it is of colonial ones. As he states in his scholarly work, “[p]ower forgets the past and constructs a new one” (Gurnah, “Idea” 16). Postcolonial powers, in other words, tend to write back to specific colonial accounts (Ruberto 27) in ways that are as simplistic and reductive as the colonial discourse they attempt to correct. *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* depict members of the post-independence government as corrupt leaders who betray their political mandates. Both novels exemplify Gurnah’s tendency throughout his work to critique African nationalism as well as other nationalisms. His narratives bear out the theoretical point made by Homi K. Bhabha that nationalisms are both performative and descriptive (145). Nationalisms discursively create the national subjects they refer to, and the positions from where they are formulated do not fully belong to the nations of which they conceive (145). In other words, every nationalism, whether colonial or postcolonial, establishes a set of criteria used to include and exclude individuals (Falk 32). Gurnah’s fiction thematises this tendency to homogenisation, and explores the homelessness and migration that result from it (32).

By the Sea and *Gravel Heart* exemplify the author's tendency to complicate simplistic assumptions that being a colonised native of a place guarantees a sense of national belonging in the postcolonial state. Gurnah's novels provide multiple and heterogeneous versions of history that are grounded in dialogue and social exchange (Ruberto 27). This narrative technique is significant. Gurnah's portrayals of the entanglements of discourses in Zanzibari society combine with his refusal to reduce its history to a simple colonial and post-colonial binary narrative to complicate his characters' ideas of Zanzibar as home. Unlike revisionist narratives, Gurnah's discursive use of history is not an attempt at "archaeological recovery" (27). Rather, his narratives renew "the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present," rendering it a Third Space (see Bhabha 7; 218). But this in-between, liminal quality of historical discourse is sometimes disabling, or at least the source of ambivalence, for some of Gurnah's characters.³

By the Sea offers a rich understanding of the way the Indian Ocean world was shaped (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 57). In it, Gurnah describes the historical importance of the monsoon (*musim*) trade winds that first brought traders from "Arabia, the Gulf, India and Sind, and the Horn of Africa" during the "last months of the year" (Gurnah, *Sea* 15). Fortuitously, the winds blow "across the Indian Ocean towards the coast of Africa" and routinely "turn around and blow in the opposite direction" during the early months of the following year, "ready to speed the traders home" (15). These winds and Zanzibar's geography made the islands important destinations along the ancient Indian Ocean trade routes.⁴ Before the winds turned, traders had to live among the locals. Hussein, the Persian trader whose dishonest dealings play a significant role as a catalyst to Omar's eventual victimisation, is hosted by Shaaban Mahmud before he is able to travel home. It is his stay with the Mahmud family during "the long months between the *musims* after he had disposed of his merchandise" while "waiting for the winds to charge" that affords Hussein the opportunity to "seduce the son" and stalk Mahmud's "beautiful wife, Asha" (31). The *musim* trade, then, is entangled with the individual narratives about the feud between Mahmud and Omar, given that it is responsible for Hussein's presence in the first place. Furthermore, historical trade is also shown to have enforced a transnational network and a "structure of connectedness" (Kaigai 197) between the East African coast and the hinterland, since not all

³ This will be explored further in Section Three below.

⁴ Zanzibar consists of two main islands – Unguja (1030 km²), the location of Zanzibar Stone Town, and Pemba (611 km²) which lies to the north – just off the east coast of the African continent, between 5° and 7° South of the Equator (Lockwood 14).

trade goods could be obtained from the coast. The entanglements and interactions between the original islanders, sailors, and traders from Arabia and the Near East give rise to a diaspora space marked by confusion. Those in the East African littoral “hardly knew who they were,” but clung “to what made them different from those they despised” (Gurnah, *Sea* 15). With characteristic cynicism, Gurnah highlights how the slave trade promoted awareness of intracontinental differences between various African ethnicities. Forced migrations of enslaved groups ensured that people living along the coast “knew enough” to value the differences “among themselves as well as among the outlying progeny of the human race in the interior of the continent” (15). Gurnah shows how those characteristics that prevented groups from being marked as slaves, normally Arabic or Persian ancestry, were framed as desirable, a practice that reinforced the ethnic hierarchies imposed during the period of the British Protectorate. As a result, Gurnah’s portrayal of Zanzibar, which he focalises through Saleh Omar’s retrospective narrative, shows that the relations between the islands and mainland Tanganyika were both beneficial and harmful (Kaigai 198).

Omar remarks that the coast was a space of convergence that consisted of a heterogeneous population comprising individuals from different cultural, moral, and religious spheres. While some transnationals, like Hussein, were itinerant and left with the *musim*, others relocated to the region permanently. As they settled, mixed, and hybridised with those groups previously living in the area, a new way of life emerged at the coast (198). As Omar states:

For centuries, intrepid traders and sailors, most of them barbarous and poor no doubt, made the annual journey to that stretch of coast on the eastern side of the continent, which had cusped so long ago to receive the *musim* winds. They brought with them their goods and their God and their new way of looking at the world[.]

(Gurnah, *Sea* 15)

Passages such as this acknowledge the historically multicultural society created by the *musim* trade. The religious and cultural influences described in the passage recognise the centrality of Islam “among the Swahili people and their mercantile culture” and the importance of transnational movement and contact that “was not just a cultural condition but an economic and material necessity” (Topan qtd in Mirmotahari 58). Coastal regions seem to be free from any centralising discourses because they are repositories “of a complex assortment of cultures and world-views” (Kaigai 199). But while Omar describes the benefits associated with the

“generosity of the monsoon” (Simpson 29), Gurnah’s narrative avoids endorsing the notion that the *musim* trade brought about an idyllic life (Kaigai 199). Although it does not deny that traders brought positive influences and contributed to a “distinctively multicultural coastal community” (Kearney 48), the narrative shows how traders impacted negatively on the coast. Traders also

[b]rought their hungers and greeds, their fantasies and lies and hatreds, leaving some among their numbers behind for whole life-times and taking away what they could buy, trade or snatch away with them, including people they bought or kidnapped and sold into labour and degradation in their own lands.
(Gurnah, *Sea* 15)

As Meg Samuelson argues, and the above extract illustrates, *By the Sea* refuses “the romanticism of nostalgic retrieval” (78). Gurnah habitually tempers positive historical accounts with contemplations of the negative, thus preventing his narratives from becoming homogenising sentimental descriptions. In this particular passage, Gurnah shows an awareness of several historical facts. As those characters who encounter Hussein learn, unscrupulous transnationals were willing to exploit those who inhabited Zanzibar in order to satisfy their “hungers and greeds,” regardless of the consequences of their actions. Hussein’s seduction of Asha results in a “falling-out with a hint of scandal” (Gurnah, *Sea* 21). The fact that Hassan returns as a rich man to Zanzibar after thirty-four years does not counter the shame that his homosexual affair with Hussein brought upon his family. The circular pattern of Gurnah’s narrative shows how this shame haunts Latif Mahmud, Hassan’s brother, throughout his remaining days in Zanzibar. Once they meet in London, Latif Mahmud recounts to Omar how his family’s social life degenerated due to the rumours that accompanied Hussein’s untrustworthiness:

The rumours started very quickly, I was taunted about them by the boys at school. They said our guest had eaten Hassan, had eaten honey there. It was a way of saying something cruder, and they said it crudely too. [...] They never left Hassan alone after that, the plunderers of the flesh.
(Gurnah, *Sea* 95)

One of the reasons such taunting and harassment could take place without censure has already been established through Gurnah’s earlier assertions of the centrality of Islam in pre-revolution Zanzibar. There is a historically entrenched code in Islam that once young Muslim

men have had same-sex intercourse, they may be freely used by other men (Falk 54). In this case, Hassan's precarity in Zanzibar is caused by social codes and protocols of his own culture, and his sense of shame and humiliation ultimately cause him to migrate (34). Yet despite bringing such devastation, Hussein is also responsible for giving Omar a rare commodity – the casket of ud-al-qamari which Omar cherishes until it is stolen from him at Gatwick airport. Historical transnational encounters, Gurnah's narrative suggests, were therefore ambivalent experiences that were simultaneously good and bad.

In *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah's narrative contemplates the ambiguities behind the apparently paternalistic establishment of the British Protectorate, although the bulk of the novel is interested in historical conditions after the revolution. Masud Yahya, Salim's father, simplifies the various attempts at *coups d'état* that "Omani princes felt compelled to [commit] whenever the opportunity presented itself" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 196). He describes how the British interfered "in the internecine mayhem" (196) that followed an upset in the succession to the sultanate and orchestrated the acceptance of their protectorate:

Exile this one, replace that one, hang the malcontents, even bombard the whole town [...]. It was necessary in order to establish who was superior [...] and who should do precisely what he was told.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 196)

Sultan Seyyid Barghash was placed on the throne through British intervention due to his sympathies towards them (Gurnah, *Gravel* 196). This, Yahya explains, indebted the Sultan to Britain. Despite the "paternalistic good intentions" of the Protectorate (4), Masud Yahya is aware that the British "had not [...] taken our little territory in hand for its own good" (196). Yahya is also aware of the fact that "[h]istorians can always be found later to offer weighty policy explanations" (196) to explain British interference in Zanzibari affairs. In his account, the British "wanted the world to run as they liked it" (196). Yahya is critical of Britain's imperialist and colonial motives, claiming that "to describe what [the sultan] did as *ruled* was to flatter him" (197; original emphasis). Nevertheless, Gurnah's narrative reveals that the period also benefitted certain characters with transnational Arabic ties because of the way these were framed in the rigid ethnic hierarchies in Zanzibari society.

By the Sea provides more frequent, multiple, and heterogeneous versions of historical events than *Gravel Heart*. Its narrative has a circular construction. Episodes are repeatedly retold and re-focalised through Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, with each revision completing previous ellipses. Nonetheless, the latter novel displays a similar sensibility. It

presents an extensive first-person narrative of Salim Yahya's series of disappointing experiences in England. But the narrative arc resembles a single circular construction that imitates the central character's growing awareness of the historical processes that lead to his displacement. The narrative is framed by Salim's recollection of what his mother once told him about his maternal grandparents, and a few scant observations of his paternal grandfather at the onset of the novel. The frame is complete when, at the end of the novel, the narrative perspective switches to Masud Yahya. His narrative of the family's history provides the reader with information missing from Salim's original recollections. Furthermore, through analeptic revision of major plot points such as the seduction of Salim's mother, the narrative structure of *Gravel Heart* ensures that readers are forced to revise their opinions of each character, and of Salim's transnational experiences in England, at the conclusion of the novel.

Both *Gravel Heart* and *By the Sea* use intersecting narratives to demonstrate the ways in which their protagonists translate their past experiences in ever changing and fluid scenarios (see Ruberto 205). In so doing, Gurnah's fictional discourse conveys the sense that the past is a "complex and multi-layered phenomenon" (205). His narratives reveal how history "interrupts the performance of the present" (Bhabha 7). Gurnah's characteristic complication of the binaries his narratives oppose, transforms history into a Third Space which, as the following section argues, exposes the difficulties of securing a sense of cultural belonging in the diaspora space of Zanzibar (see Falk 34).

Section Three – Challenging the Supremacy of Individual Narratives by Remembering Entanglements

Gurnah creates links between characterisation and his narrative structure as historical discourse to convey the idea that the difference between nationalist and transnational identities is contingent on shifting multi-axial articulations of power. The spectrum of experiences and subject formations his novels present to readers thus work to erode the essentialising binaries used in nationalist discourses, such as the one employed in Zanzibar after the 1964 revolution. Gurnah's depictions of the fluidity of heterogeneous historical discourses and their simultaneous immanence in diaspora spaces (whether in Zanzibar, continental Africa, Dubai, or England) help his works to challenge and dismantle the binary between nationalist and transnational subject positions. His works explore the key role history plays in the process of identity formation, and feature characters affected in various ways by the history of Zanzibar as a "repository of Indian Ocean cultural subjectivities

created through relations of trade” (Kaigai 156). Most notably, the structure of each of his novels characteristically reflects how the entanglement of identity and stories of the past interrupt the “performance of the present” (Bhabha 7). In Gurnah’s *Desertion*, for instance, the narrator specifically invokes the term “entanglement” to describe the power of stories. He comments that his narrative demonstrates “how one story contains many and how they belong not to us but are parts of the random currents of our time, and about how stories capture us and entangle us for all time” (Gurnah, *Desertion* 120). In Gurnah’s fiction, then, the narrative response to claims of supremacy by some personal anecdotes is to challenge them by highlighting the entanglement of stories (Falk 16).

These challenges give rise to ever more complicated stories that pull characters into previously uncharted directions (16). Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud’s attempts to represent and come to terms with their pasts through storytelling in *By the Sea*, for instance, show how each becomes embroiled in the other’s divergent memories of the same past (47). While material facts remain constant – such as Omar’s repossession of Mahmud’s family home – each character’s memory is deeply entwined with, framed by, and interpreted through different emotional realities and suspicions. Readers and characters alike are therefore constantly encouraged to revise their impressions of events and of characters each time a new account of the same event is presented. By employing this narrative strategy, Gurnah ensures that his characters operate reflexively. For example, Mahmud’s impressions of Omar as maliciously persecuting his family originate in Rajab Shaaban’s presentation of himself as a “defeated and humiliated man of God” (Gurnah, *Sea* 210). Shaaban says to Mahmud, as they stand in front of the house that would have been Mahmud’s inheritance, “those people stole it from us” (110). However, Omar’s recollection of these events show how Shaaban’s victimhood was partially an affectation. Omar’s story suggests that Shaaban deliberately adopted the identity of persecuted victim to hide from the shame of his wife’s infidelities. It also reveals that Shaaban refused Omar’s attempts at reconciliation, which would have prevented his loss of the house. As each character begins to understand the other through the revision of their memories of events, readers are also encouraged to see the links between historical narratives and identities. Gurnah’s novels therefore exemplify the ways in which, as Fludernik argues (xxix), identities operate through narrative. His characters and their ability to change the ways in which they interpolate themselves reveal strong affinities between Gurnah’s view of identity and those held by Stuart Hall. Hall argues that identities are “the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of our past” (“Cultural” 225). Given that Gurnah’s oeuvre in general depicts

history as a fluid palimpsest of intersecting and shifting discourses struggling for dominance, an over-arching position throughout his work is that identities are “constantly in the making” (Falk 16). Gurnah’s characters are therefore “processual subjects” whose identities are interpolated at “sights of converging social and discursive regimes,” and are influenced by “movements through and among those regimes” (16). This acknowledges the mutability inherent in identity formation.

In *By the Sea*, Gurnah shows how the post-independent government in Zanzibar targeted littoral multiculturalism to enforce its nationalist agendas by banning the Indian Ocean *musim* trade. However, Omar acknowledges that their attempts to reconfigure the ethnic hierarchies were entangled with shifting global commercial interests after the discovery of carbon fuel further east (Kaigai 159). Omar pointedly asks “[w]ho would choose to come hundreds of miles across the sea to sell us cloth and tobacco when they could live a life of luxury in the rich states of the Gulf?” (Gurnah, *Sea* 16). With this observation, Gurnah astutely shows readers how the post-independence government cannot be held solely responsible for the decline in trade in Zanzibar. Rather, transnational economic interests shifted in such a way that enabled nationalist discourses against multiculturalism to gain dominance in the diaspora space of Zanzibar. Different interests intersected in such a way that nationalists could enforce the false binary between themselves and transnationals, made possible by pluralist governmentality, and increase the precarity of transnationals living in Zanzibar. But Gurnah also shows how this shift simultaneously and paradoxically presented an opportunity for less scrupulous transnationals, like Asha Mahmud, to re-interpolate their identities by becoming affiliated with nationalists. After being dispossessed of everything he owns, Omar is remanded into custody by “two young soldiers armed with machine-guns” (216). He comments that:

There were witnesses, and I am not sure who is worse in such moments, the criminal or the innocents who stand by and watch and act as if nothing evil is taking place. There were witnesses outside, people walking by as if nothing was happening, strolling to their favourite cafés for a chat or to call on family and friends.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 216–17)

The willed ignorance of those surrounding Omar at the time of his arrest stands in stark opposition to the president’s “impromptu speech” on “the need for unity and hard work” for the nation to “grow stronger” (219) delivered during his visit to the prisons. Gurnah shows how the president’s own behaviour undermines his rhetoric of unity as he “stopped at the

gateway out of the central yard and surveyed [the prisoners] with satisfaction, his body rippling with low rumbling laughter” (219). Detention centres had been “filling [...] up from the day after independence” (217). After an extended period in solitary confinement, surrounded by “punishments, beatings and abuse” which included “being made to walk barefoot on broken glass” (218), Omar learns that his crime is supposedly having been “found in possession of state papers” with the intention “to commit fraud” (223). This “very dubious charge” (Falk 31) reveals the moral bankruptcy of the political and juridical systems. It also shows ways in which transnationals were able to take advantage of the current dominant discourses to re-interpolate their identities surreptitiously by shifting their affiliations in order to settle personal vendettas against other transnationals. Asha, for instance, capitalises on her sexual relationship with the “Minister of Development and Resources” (Gurnah, *Sea* 214). The reader is left with no doubt that she orchestrates Omar’s arrest. Yet Gurnah complicates even Asha’s culpability in Omar’s increased precarity. Omar acknowledges that the outcome is not Asha’s responsibility (Falk 48). Rather, he notes that matters are “out of everyone’s hands once the machinery of terror began to grind” (Gurnah, *Sea* 211). Instead, Gurnah shows the results to be the compound effect of a corrupt legal system malleable to the will of the political elite, a political regime that fails to distinguish between private vendettas and political governance, and the nexus of emotions of hurt and historical disenfranchisement that fuel these actions (Falk 48). The emotions and affectations of each character not only result from the links between history and identity, but are also paradoxically driving forces thereof. Gurnah’s novels depict the multiaxial configurations of power available to characters who adopt identities that intersect with nationalist interests. Gurnah’s novels therefore suggest that, while being transnational certainly increases characters’ precarity, victimisation need not be a given. This idea is common to Urrea, Gurnah, and Nguyen’s oeuvres, and features more prominently in the upcoming discussion of Nguyen’s works.

In *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah reveals the dangers associated with the acts of performing a specific identity. The author shows that, for a transnational to successfully navigate through the palimpsestic and multi-layered convergences of social and discursive regimes, they need to be aware of those discourses favoured by the nationalists in power. Ahmed Musa Ibrahim, Salim’s maternal grandfather, like Hussein and Omar in *By the Sea*, enjoys a privileged position in pre-revolution Zanzibar. He had “once been well off” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 14) enough to have owned “a piece of farming land” and a house in a neighbourhood of Stone Town favoured by “grandeers” and “by European colonial officials” (15). Ibrahim represents a

population group descended from transnationals within the Zanzibari diaspora space. His Arabic heritage ensures that the Protectorate government affords him opportunities denied to other Zanzibaris. Through the colonial education system, he is able to study abroad. Other Zanzibaris call him “Doctor and consulted him about their ailments” as, according to Saida, Ibrahim “worked in the laboratories of the Department of Health” (15). Although Ibrahim “laughed them off” and told them that he “knew nothing about hernias [...] and fevers” (15), it is later revealed that his apparently good-natured humility is a posturing.

Gurnah exposes that Ibrahim, despite his apparently affable nature, is sensitive to the treatment he receives by other transnationals, especially those more powerful than him. Ibrahim becomes involved with “anti-colonial intellectuals” (16) and perceives how the British act towards “*over-educated natives* like him” (17; original emphasis). While imagining how they “chuckled over [...] their natives and their Empire-Seth-like aspirations to modernity,” Ibrahim reveals a likely cause for his acute sensitivity: he failed his Diploma in Public Health (17). Gurnah’s depiction of Ibrahim reveals how the nexus of emotions and affectations reinforce the links between history and identity in *Gravel Heart*. Through Salim’s accounts, Gurnah describes how Ibrahim’s sense of shame at his failure and sense of indignity at the perceived slights by the British motivate him to identify himself as an anti-colonial, nationalist intellectual. Later in the text, Gurnah also reveals Salim’s mother’s propensity for keeping secrets and lying in order to save face. This character trait suggests that she has manipulated Salim’s memories of his grandfather. Just as Mahmud’s perceptions of Omar were distorted by Shaaban’s interpretation of historical events, so Salim’s understanding of his grandfather is distorted by Saida’s stories. Gurnah’s presentation of Salim’s account of his grandfather once again shows the author’s sensibility that narratives of the past are constantly open to revision.

Franz Fanon argues that “[c]olonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (*Wretched* 170). Rather, through the aid of colonial education systems – such as the one that permits Ibrahim the transnational experiences of which he is so proud – colonial powers distort the self-perceptions of the colonised. Aimeé Césaire and Leopold Senghor use the metaphor of *Présence Européenne* to describe how colonial powers are “endlessly speaking” the colonised (qtd in Hall, “Cultural” 232–33). While Césaire and Senghor coined the term to refer specifically to European colonial encounters, the concept can readily be extended to include the socio-political context of Zanzibar during the British Protectorate. *Présence Européenne*, as Hall explains, is about “exclusion, imposition and expropriation” and

therefore creates the impression that “power is wholly external” to the colonised (“Cultural” 233). However, the ambiguity of being reviled and simultaneously desired by the colonial power leads to colonial perceptions being internalised and becoming constitutive in the way the colonised view themselves (“Cultural” 233; see Fanon, *Black* 109). Ibrahim has internalised the colonial view of his own people. He accepts the ethnic hierarchies that facilitate pluralist governmentality in the diaspora space. Colonial and Sultanate dispensations towards those of Arabic descent enable him to own a piece of farming land. With the threat of imprisonment for sedition should he be discovered plotting against the “colonial government” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 18), Ibrahim leaves his government job to grow “vegetables for the market” (18). However, he stands “nearby with arms akimbo” while he orders “others to do the hardest work” (18). His affiliation with the British, and his internalised perception of his higher social standing and privilege, lead him to tell his family that “if he were not there the work would immediately stop” because “[w]e have no discipline” (18). Gurnah uses an inclusive personal pronoun to reveal that Ibrahim is ignorant of the power relations from which he is benefiting. Ibrahim becomes increasingly involved in “voter-registration” drives and “the literary-classes movement” as “an informal advisor to one of the political parties” (18), presumably the ZNP. He gains a reputation as “an activist” who may win “a junior ministerial post” (18). Yet his failure to recognise how his identity has been influenced by the colonial powers blinds him to the general impression held by 270 000 African and Shirazi Zanzibaris that the ZNP would merely further the oppression they had already experienced under colonialism (see Sanger 8). Arabs, as Ibrahim’s behaviour demonstrates, considered themselves the ruling group (Middleton and Campbell 65). Unlike Maalim Yahya, Salim’s paternal grandfather who is able to predict his precarity under the revolutionary government and take evasive action, Ibrahim’s direct involvement in politics results in him “being killed during the revolution” by members of the ASP “because he did all that he did for the wrong political party” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 18). In his attempts to oust a transnational power from the Zanzibar diaspora space, Ibrahim’s own nationalist views prevented his recognition that he too is transnational, and is part of the “rot” that needs to be “cut prune[d] incinerate[d]” (179; lack of punctuation in original). Through this ironic development, Gurnah shows that there were several different discursive regimes and understandings of what it meant to be a nationalist living in post-revolution Zanzibar.

The various experiences of characters in *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* reveal an overarching artistic position that can be found throughout Gurnah’s oeuvre. His characters’ identities are constantly in the making, and are as fluid as the social and discursive regimes in

which they interpolate themselves. By emphasising that his characters are “processual subjects” (Falk 16), Gurnah suggests that the difference between nationalist and transnational identities is dependent on the discursive regime prevalent within the diaspora space. Neither identity is fixed and, as Asha in *By the Sea* and Amir and Ibrahim in *Gravel Heart* attest, characters are able to actively change the way in which they are interpolated in the shifting multi-axial articulations of power. The spectrum of experiences and subject formations these novels present to readers thus suggests that essentialising binaries used in nationalist discourses are, at best, misleading. Even so, Gurnah’s novels show a keen awareness that the dangers of belonging to a group excluded from the discursive ‘nation’ are real, as histories of bloody revolution attest. Being framed as transnational in a diaspora space dominated by nationalist discourses increases individuals’ precarity in that space. Gurnah is therefore characteristically cynical of assertions that transnationals could simply re-interpolate their identities to toe the party line, as Ibrahim’s fate attests.

Section Four – The Appropriation of Symbols in Individual Narratives

Gurnah’s novels describe the multiple intersections of discourses and social regimes immanent in diaspora spaces as being fluid and dynamic. He highlights that the identities interpolated in diaspora spaces are therefore also in constant flux and elective, by showing how his characters choose to affiliate themselves with various causes and groups. One of the most notable ways in which they perform their identities is by signalling their affiliations through their appropriation of symbols. In his analysis of the intersection of emerging national subjects and time, Benedict Anderson argues that the circulation of various cultural representations is one of the ways in which the anonymous individual members of an imagined community like the nation are held together (37–46). Gurnah often explores the various symbols his characters use to signal the ways in which they interpolate their identities in order to erode simplistic binaries between national and transnational identity formations and between colonial and postcolonial discourses. Be that as it may, Anderson’s account has been criticised by scholars like Homi Bhabha and Simon Gikandi for overlooking the exclusions and margins proscribed by national consciousness (Bhabha 140; Gikandi 55–56). “Nationness,” as Bhabha calls it, necessarily excludes and differentiates amongst people as much as it unifies a narrowly defined group (*Location* 140). Hybrid and migrant characters

who fall outside the frames of national belonging rather than securely within them thus tend to be excluded (Bhabha 152; Falk 11).

In the opening episodes of *Gravel Heart*, Salim attends the same school where his paternal grandfather, Maalim, once taught. In the headmaster's office, he sees his grandfather photographed amongst "unsmiling men in buttoned-down long-sleeved white shirts or kanzus and jackets" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 10). Maalim may be of Arabic descent, and he may be uninterested in the affairs of Europeans and people of other religions, but he is nonetheless prepared to illustrate his affiliation "towards his government-school role" (13). His transnational identity is syncretic. In the photograph in the headmaster's office, dated December 1963 (14), which "would have been the end of the school year just before the revolution" (14), Maalim is pictured "wearing a jacket over his kanzu" (13). Gurnah uses Maalim to represent a generation still in touch with the heterogeneous palimpsest nature of the multinational Zanzibar of the *musim* trade period. But Gurnah also shows that, despite appropriating the jacket, Maalim remains aware of what Hall describes as "forms of power-relations [that] were always displaced and decentred by [...] the transverse linkages between and across nation-state frontiers" ("Post-Colonial" 250). His use of the jacket serves to indicate an awareness of the privilege he enjoys as a result of the rigid ethnic and racial classifications imposed by the British Protectorate. But when conditions in Zanzibar for those of Arabic descent "became harder and the humiliations and dangers mounted" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 180), Gurnah shows Maalim's awareness that the hybridity of his identity increases his precarity as the dominant discourse changes. President Karume became displeased with Zanzibari intellectuals of the time and had several teaching posts "liquidated" (24). But such euphemisms, according to Masud's recollection of Maalim's responses, failed to deceive Maalim. Gurnah shows readers that both Masud and Maalim are aware that, in the halls of power, the new government and its allies "probably used muscular and cruel words like purge the system and excise the rot, cut prune incinerate" (179; lack of punctuation in original). There is a disjuncture between the violent, malevolent, and vengeful intentions of the government and its public posturing. By allowing his characters this insight and cynicism, Gurnah shows that the nationalists in control of Zanzibar at the time were as able to interpolate and perform their identities in order to further their agendas as the transnationals were.

Salim has also seen photographs of Ibrahim, his maternal grandfather. Like Maalim, Ibrahim makes syncretic use of clothing to signal the various identities with which he chooses to be affiliated. He is apparently self-conscious of how he "play-act[s] his modernity" (16).

His “jaunty, cheering pose,” Salim perceives, is an affectation to portray himself as “a cosmopolitan traveller” (16). Having visited “the world’s great metropolises” (16), Ibrahim revels in people’s perceptions of his transnationalism. He wears a “white linen suit” which could serve as an “ambiguous [...] salute to Europe,” or whose colour could represent “purity and devotion” to his Islamic faith (16). He also wears “a red tarbush at a dashing angle” (16). This hat signals his affiliations with “nationalist leaders” such as “Saad Zaghloul Pasha, the Egyptian statesman [...], and Gandhi and Nehru, and Habib Bourguiba, the Tunisian insurrectionist, and Marshal Tito” (16). The tarbush symbolises “nationalist leaders who had refused to be cowed and crushed by imperial bullies of different political shades” (16). It represents a transnational network of “nationalists” that the anti-colonial intellectuals in Zanzibar “admired” (17). Ibrahim also considers it a “sign of sophisticated Islamic modernity, secular and practical” (16). But Ibrahim’s perceptions of the tarbush, Salim sardonically comments, are outdated. By the 1950s in “Atatürk’s Turkish Republic” and in “Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia,” the tarbush had “been abolished as backward” (16). Furthermore, it was increasingly identified as “an emblem of corrupt bashas and beys and the defeated armies of Arab nationalism” (16). While Maalim’s jacket shows his affiliation to the colonial education system, Ibrahim’s tarbush represents an “anti-colonial” (16) stance that leads to him becoming “involved in politics” (17). But Ibrahim’s constant posturing, Gurnah suggests, misleads him more than it fools anyone around him. He fails to recognise that there are various forms of nationalism, and that he is part of the “rot” that the dominant discourse needs to be “cut” (179).

Gurnah also uses symbols in his writing to show the entanglement amongst history, personal narratives, and migration. Early in *By the Sea*, Gurnah shows the persistence of the colonial mindset during the exchange between customs officer Kevin Edelman and Saleh Omar (Kearney 54). The only visible marker of Omar’s individual identity and, as Ruberto argues, possibly the “only way his history could be traced” (199) can be found amongst his “little bits of jumbled luggage” (Gurnah, *Sea* 4): a small mahogany casket that immediately attracts Edelman’s full attention. Edelman’s inspection of Omar’s luggage “provides the authorising trigger” (Ruberto 200) for Omar’s story of early Zanzibar:

He went back and took out the casket. As he had done before, he opened it and sniffed. [...] I didn’t tell him that it was ud-al-qamari of the best quality, all that remained of a consignment I had acquired more than thirty years ago [...]. The ud was a resin which only an aloe tree infected by fungus produced.
(Gurnah, *Sea* 13–14)

This passage illustrates how the ud-al-qamari reveals the palimpsestic nature of the historical and social conditions that have resulted in Omar's displacement from Zanzibar. The protagonist's accounts of various episodes throughout the narrative connect different temporalities, showing how his current situation could be seen as the consequence of the persistence of multiple historical processes. Umberto Eco refers to this elementary act of signification as "ostension" (225). Ostension describes the process in which an object is "disregarded as a token and becomes, instead of the immediate possible referent of a mention, the expression of a more general content" (225). As Ruberto comments, the story triggered by the perfume of the ud-al-qamari not only describes Omar's personal history, but also hints at "much of the pre- and post-colonial history of Tanzania" (201). Between the moment Omar acquires the box and when Edelman steals it, the narrative briefly touches on the long history of Zanzibar and the Indian Ocean trades. It also reveals the ambivalences brought by the multiculturalism of the coast. Although it was beneficial, international trade in the region paradoxically enabled various types of exploitation, as Gurnah shows through his characterisation of Hussein (Kaigai 196).

But the box of incense is not only a symbolic frame for "reading the possibilities that the *musim* trade opened up" (Kaigai 198). One of the striking features of the fragrance of the incense is that it is not created from the purest wood. Rather, the ud "was a resin which only an aloe tree infected by a fungus produced. A healthy aloe tree was useless, but the infected one produced this beautiful fragrance" (Gurnah, *Sea* 14). Gurnah thus uses the ud to comment on the advantages of the cultural contamination and hybridity that the Indian Ocean trade made possible (Kaigai 197). But the beneficial entanglement of histories and the movement of strangers as contaminants necessitated by trade is nonetheless framed by narratives of dispossession and exclusion – it is introduced into the story because Omar has fled for fear of his life; Edelman steals the casket.

The symbols Gurnah uses in *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* serve, like his circular narrative structures and sophisticated characterisations, to complicate simplistic interpretations of identities and historical discourses. Just as readers and characters are constantly encouraged to renegotiate their interpretations of events and character traits, so too are symbols shown to have multivalent and varied interpretations. In the process, Gurnah uses these symbols to erode simple binaries. A red tarbush, for instance, symbolises hybridity, nationalist sympathies, and the failure of nationalism simultaneously. While one individual sees it as a marker of his dedication to nationalism, others perceive it as being a signal of historical privilege that justifies Ibrahim's eventual execution. Gurnah uses

multivalences such as these to explore the fluid ways transnationals interpolate their identities in diaspora spaces during periods of increased nationalist fervour.

Section Five – The Entanglement of Stories, Memory, and Hospitality

Simon Lewis argues that rather than fitting into any narrowly national or “broadly continental tradition” (*Transnational* 59), Gurnah’s novels fit into the category of the immigrant novel (59). According to Rosemary George’s description, immigrant novels do not portray the nation from its ambivalent margins. Rather, each novel “*unwrites* nation and national projects because it flagrantly displays a rejection of one national space for another more desirable location” (George 289; original emphasis). A consideration of Gurnah’s use of intertexts in *Gravel Heart* and *By the Sea*, however, dismisses this description of his work. Lewis’ categorisation of Gurnah’s work is too simple and fails to take into account the complex, nuanced metatextual commentary that uses canonical intertexts to reveal how transnationals have been framed in historical and colonial discourses. The racist perceptions that Gurnah shows to result from these historical frames give rise to questions about the desirability or superiority of the diaspora spaces from which such discourses emanated. Furthermore, George’s category suggests that Gurnah’s characters show nomadic, multiple diasporic identities that make them “generations of wanderers” (299) who have “a shared sense of homelessness” (S. Lewis, *Transnational* 60) rather than “a shared sense of home” (60). This statement is useful only to the extent that Gurnah’s novels complicate the “assumption that being a colonized native of a place implies a state/sense of national belonging in the postcolonial state” (61). But it fails to account for how the double displacement his characters experience (Steiner, “Mimicry” 302) leads them to “tell stories in order to construct a liveable present for themselves” (“Mimicry” 304). It is through storytelling and translating their positions in society that transnationals attempt to satisfy their homing impulse. Storytelling functions both as a “site of enunciation” (Steiner, “Mimicry” 304) and as an expression of memory where the

temporary reinscriptions, which are formed in the contestation between departure and arrival, are the signs with which [transnational] communities enunciate themselves.

(Papastergiadis 139)

In both *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah uses Western canonical texts as intertexts to describe the experiences of his transnational protagonists. The use of Western texts as sites of enunciation for transnationals from Zanzibar is “a code” (Cooper 91) for the need for syncretism and assimilation, as transnationals attempt to integrate into European diaspora spaces. In *By the Sea*, Gurnah uses Herman Melville’s character Bartleby as an image of “wily postcolonial resistance through language” (Cooper 91). Just as Omar “journeys from mute invisibility to possessing his own tale” (Jaggi 3), Melville’s short story, “Bartleby the Scrivener,” is used in Gurnah’s novel to chart the process by which Omar frees himself. Using Latif Mahmud as “shriver,” Omar relies on storytelling in the hope that it will “explain and redeem the folly and malice” of his “younger years” in Zanzibar (Gurnah, *Sea* 145).

Latif Mahmud, the son of Rajab Shaaban Mahmud, is a more successful transnational than Omar. He abandons Zanzibar when he is seventeen after disgrace befalls his family due to Hussein’s seduction of his mother and brother, as well as to escape the shameful displays of his dishonoured father. He studies in East Germany before becoming an English professor and poet in England. Unlike Omar, Mahmud attempts to forget the past. He tries to distance himself from his former life in Zanzibar. During his first encounters with Omar, Mahmud recognises the need to reconcile himself with his former life. He also acknowledges that his memories of home have been deliberately and accidentally selective, and thus distorted:

‘I’d forgotten so much,’ he said, frowning, unfrowning, brightening up, trying. ‘Wilfully, I suspect. I mean that I wilfully forgot so much. [...] All that bickering and pettiness. [...] Old people with all their unending grudges and malice. [...] Well, I remember now that you remind me [...]’
(Gurnah, *Sea* 193–94)

Together, Mahmud and Omar eventually find in each other the source and reason for breaking the silence about their previous lives “to fill the incomplete and limited accounts of their shared history” (Ruberto 210). Mahmud’s silence and deliberate amnesia of life in Zanzibar has the same effect as the passively evasive phrase adopted by Bartleby in Melville’s tale: it renders his past inaccessible to the reader.

Mahmud finds reading “Bartleby the Scrivener” liberating, as it presents alternatives to British arrogance (Cooper 91). His first encounters with the haughtiness of Zanzibar’s former protectors occur at the library of the English Club, which is “strictly for members only, with wire grilles on the windows and a doorkeeper sitting at a desk by the entrance who granted or withheld admission” (Gurnah, *Sea* 105). After independence and “the departure of

the Rulers of the Waves” (105), the library is sealed. Mahmud finds an accessible facility at the “United States Information Service” (106), where he can read newspapers, magazines, and even borrow books. Mahmud enthusiastically reads “Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Frederick Douglass, [and] Edgar Allan Poe” (106). These new world authors excite “a noble curiosity because they [are] not contaminated by a discourse of tutelage and hierarchy” (106). But the Americans soon fall out of favour with the revolutionary President “because of the swelling chorus of discontent with the United States across Africa at the time” (106). They show “their hand too openly in the murder of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo” (106). After their departure, Karume becomes an “exemplar of a variant of socialism all his own” (107) and introduces works by authors from socialist countries. Mahmud recalls the loss of access to American texts, which showed him that events could be framed using discourses that countered those of colonial powers, with sadness. His most disturbing encounter with British racism, which Gurnah reveals to have been preserved in canonical discourses, occurs once he resides in England. Trying to avoid a collision with another pedestrian along “the north side of Bedford Square,” Mahmud steps aside, “taking a little side-step” (71). As the two men pass each other, the Englishman makes “a strange, menacing and medieval sound” (72) before calling Mahmud a “grinning blackamoor” (72). The insult strikes Mahmud as “bookish abuse” (72). He is unsettled by the “*a* between black and moor” (72; original emphasis). Out of habit, he starts

thinking about when it came into use, whether it was in use in ordinary parole, to the extent that people wandered down the street and accosted a strolling darkie with it, or whether it was a literary re-invention as a way of constructing the speech of an earlier time.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 72)

As if confirming his later assertion that British texts are “contaminated by a discourse of [...] hierarchy” (106), he learns that the racist slur has “been in print since 1501” (73). It has “slipped from the pen of [...] the humane Sidney, the incomparable W. Shakespeare [...] and a host of other luminaries” (73). His search through various dictionaries reveals a list of constructions involving the word “black” and shows the “hatred invested in such terminology” (Steiner, “Mimicry” 318). As a linguist and transnational with British citizenship, Mahmud feels “alienated by the language that offers these terms” (“Mimicry” 318). English is “a language which barks and scorns at [him] behind every third corner” (Gurnah, *Sea* 73). But Gurnah prevents readers from viewing Mahmud as a helpless victim of abuse. Unexpectedly, Mahmud is not disheartened by this discovery. Instead, it lifts his

spirits as he realises that he has “been present in all those strenuous ages, not forgotten, [...] but right there, grinning through the canon for centuries” (73). The cherished texts of the canon have always provided a “house” (73) to live in for those who, like Mahmud, are from the periphery of Empire. Works by the new world authors, especially Melville, offer Mahmud “an escape from the contamination of British racism, exclusion and cultural imperialism” (Cooper 91).

In the main intertext in *By the Sea*, “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Bartleby is a law-copyist (Melville 962). Initially, he begins reproducing legal documents and case notes for his employer, but the “extraordinary quantity of writing” (969) he produces gradually decreases as he increasingly refuses to copy or submit to the law. Gurnah’s descriptions of Saleh Omar when he arrives as an asylum seeker at Gatwick Airport echo those of Bartleby, whom Melville describes as “pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn” (968). Although there are several allusions to the story throughout *By the Sea*, Bartleby’s appeal to Gurnah’s transnationals only becomes explicit when Omar suggests to Mahmud that it is perhaps “inevitable” (Gurnah, *Sea* 156) that Mahmud would want “to quarrel” (156) with him. Mahmud responds with Bartleby’s refrain, “I would prefer not to” (156; Melville 969).

As Brenda Cooper argues, both Mahmud and Omar identify with this “line of passive resistance” (91). Readers of *By the Sea* need to suspend their disbelief that “Bartleby the Scrivener” is so meaningful to both Omar and Mahmud (Cooper 91):

“‘Bartleby the Scrivener’,’ [Latif] said, grinning all over his face, the skin round his eyes creased in lines of surprised pleasure, suddenly happy. ‘You know the story! It’s a beautiful story. Do you like it? You like it too, I can tell. I love the *impassive authority of that man’s defeat*, the noble futility of his life.’

(Gurnah, *Sea* 156; emphasis added)

Gilles Deleuze suggests that Bartleby is “a pure outsider [...] to whom no social position can be attributed” (73). Cooper uses this assertion to suggest that another reason for Bartleby’s appeal to Gurnah’s transnationals may be that he is “the parvenu, the nomad, the postcolonial migrant” (91). But the form of resistance Bartleby represents – effectively a muteness that resembles Omar’s pretence of not being able to speak English when he arrives in England – is dangerous, and makes his defeat inevitable. Bartleby’s refrain, “I would prefer not to” (Melville 971), is a “passive resistance” (972) that “aggravates an earnest person” (972). This could account for – but not excuse – the xenophobic, fascist, and racist rant Kevin Edelman directs at Omar:

It saddens me to say this to you, because you won't understand it and I wish you bloody well did. People like you come pouring in here without any thought of the damage they cause. You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things we value [...], and we don't want you here. We'll make you suffer indignities, perhaps even commit violence on you.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 12)

Despite his proviso to the contrary, Edelman would probably not have made these assertions had he known that Omar understood him. Even so, the above passage reveals one of the attitudes towards transnationals in diaspora spaces in England – if transnationals do not understand English, they frustrate attempts to extend conditional hospitality, which increases their precarity. As Mahmud later remarks on Omar's silence: "Without English you are even more a stranger, a refugee, I suppose, more convincing" (143). Rachel, whose job it is to settle and integrate refugees into English society, dislikes "Bartleby the Scrivener." In her opinion, the story has "too much gloom and resignation in it" (198). She sees Bartleby as "someone dangerous, someone capable of small, sustained cruelties on himself and others weaker than himself, an abuser" (198). Significantly, Rachel's opinion on Bartleby and her rejection of what she calls Omar's "Bartleby act" (198) brings about an important shift in Omar (Cooper 92). Whereas Bartleby slowly declines and eventually dies after being imprisoned for vagrancy and being known as "the silent man" (Melville 992), Omar realises the importance of developing an alternative form of expression. Through his acquaintance with Mahmud, whom he uses as shriver, and Rachel's dismissal of Bartleby, Omar slowly realises that Bartleby's "desire to efface himself is indeed a meagre and soul-less absence" (Cooper 92). There is a noticeable shift in his language when he speaks to Mahmud towards the end of the novel:

'You must get a telephone,' [Mahmud] said [...].

'I have no urge to do so,' I said, and saw him smile. I thought I knew what he was thinking. He would have preferred me to say, *I prefer not to*. But I had been thinking of what Rachel said, and thought I would read 'Bartleby' again before speaking his words as the utterings of an admired desperado.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 244)

Omar's rejection of Bartleby as role model is necessary for him to recover language in order to be initiated into society (Cooper 92). It also reveals a potential rejection of Melville's figuring of the stranger as an unfathomable, incomprehensible victim. Through his diction, Gurnah reveals that Omar is gradually revising his interpretation of Melville's story. Just as

his exchange of stories with Mahmud encourages Omar to reinterpret his understanding of the past, so his interactions in England and with Rachel encourage him to reconsider his position within his new diaspora space. The image of “an admired desperado” (244) reminds readers of the value both Omar and Mahmud place in American literary discourses. Part of their appeal is their vilification of England and their heroic rebellion against its former colonial power. By showing that Omar begins to reassess this opinion, Gurnah reveals that Omar has begun to interpolate himself in his new diaspora space by negotiating between different historical discourses. As the catalyst of this process, Rachel symbolically fulfils her function of integrating Omar into English society. Through his use of stories and his relationship with Mahmud, Omar manages to “redeem the folly and malice” of his earlier years and to “give redress and receive understanding” (Gurnah, *Sea* 145). By doing this, Omar resists the “melodrama and self-pity of Melville’s *Bartleby*” (Steiner, “Mimicry” 320) to concentrate on possibilities and human connections. *Bartleby*’s “complex vulnerability” (“Mimicry” 320) is a metaphor for Omar and Mahmud’s precarity in their new diaspora space. Omar recognises that *Bartleby* is “someone with a secret and burdensome history who sought to expatiate it with silence” (Gurnah, *Sea* 198). By referring to *Bartleby*, Gurnah shows that the narrators’ storytelling in *By the Sea* is not merely a pastime, but is intricately “linked to their survival” (Steiner, “Mimicry” 320) as transnationals. It is crucial for the characters to translate “their stories from Africa into this New World” (“Mimicry” 320) so that they can negotiate their transnational identities in a place where they are unwanted and may be forced to “suffer indignities” (Gurnah, *Sea* 12).

“*Bartleby the Scrivener*” provides a further metatextual commentary on Gurnah’s displaced transnationals. Gurnah’s novel ultimately suggests that it is by empowering and defining himself through his own storytelling that Omar eventually finds tentative welcome in England:

Latif waited for me while I packed [...]. I was to go and stay with him for a few days. He would show me [...] all the places every visitor wanted to see [...]. Then when I had seen enough, he would put me on the train and Rachel would meet me at the other end, as if I was a decrepit old father that they shared between them.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 244)

Rachel and Mahmud become surrogate family members, providing Omar with a substitute for the family he lost while incarcerated. Gurnah shows how Omar manages to create an “imaginative and conciliatory family” (Falk 51) motivated on pragmatic grounds: “we are in

a strange land. That would more or less naturally make us related” (Gurnah, *Sea* 195). This new family is conceived in direct opposition to the Islamic kinship codes that gave rise to the feud that endangered Omar’s life in Zanzibar (see Falk 51).

But while Omar’s gradual shifts in the ways in which his identity is interpolated makes refuge in England seem possible in *By the Sea*, the main Western intertext in *Gravel Heart*, William Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, only serves to elucidate the darkness at the heart of Salim’s family. It also shows how, with the increased nationalistic sentiments in places such as England since “those killings in New York,” Muslim transnationals, framed by UK nationalists as “fanatics and terrorists,” find themselves the targets of a “familiar language of freedom” that will be enforced “with violence” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 150). The diaspora space of England, which held hope for the transnationals of *By the Sea*, has become as volatile and threatening as the diaspora space of early post-revolution Zanzibar.

Measure for Measure was originally classed in the First Folio as a comedy (Bawcutt 42). But although the play ends in forgiveness and reconciliation, there is very little else that could be considered conventional comedy (42). After all, two of its most famous speeches are contemplations of death.⁵ Salim confides in Masud that when he “first read the play [he] heard an echo which made [him] think of Mama” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 254). Despite Salim’s recognition of the similarities between his personal history and the play, he claims that he was “not convinced about the perfidious brother who tried to persuade his sister to submit to Lord Angelo whose heart was sick with a bullying lust” (254). Intrigued, Masud asks Salim to tell him about the play, which Salim summarises, accentuating the elements of the “sexual blackmail story” (Bawcutt 56) that form the most obvious links between the play and *Gravel Heart*.

The title of *Measure for Measure* shows that the play is as deeply concerned with the same “major intellectual issues” (Lever lxiii) as Gurnah’s novel, which could explain why Gurnah opted to use it as an intertext. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ told his disciples: “with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7: 1–12). This biblical allusion is echoed in the title, and indicates the play’s concern with the idea that divine justice is meted out to all regardless of rank or station, a doctrine as widely accepted as was that of divine redemption by Elizabethan audiences (Lever lxiii). Gurnah’s intertextual use of the play in *Gravel Heart*

⁵ These speeches are: “Be absolute for death” (Shakespeare 3.1.5), and “Ay, but to die, and go we know not where [...] To what we fear of death” (3.1.118–32).

therefore creates an ironic relationship between the ideas of justice and mercy as explored by Shakespeare and as Gurnah shows them at their most perverse in Zanzibar. While Shakespeare's work ends with all parties reconciled and justice restored to the body politic, *Gravel Heart* only tentatively approaches reconciliation. For Salim and Masud, this reconciliation can only be reached by accepting that there was no "role for [Masud] in the play" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 256) because the power-structures that had come to be as a result of colonial meddling and their ousting by nationalist dissidents "had already reserved" (256) and dictated how events should unfold. Gurnah metatextually creates a sense that transnationals like Salim and Masud are rejected and ousted from this story by using a Christian analogue to explore how Islamic characters suffer at the hands of corrupt officials and unscrupulous social climbers. In so doing, the author emphasises the displacement these transnational characters experience.

Measure for Measure is set in a Vienna crafted into an analogy for Jacobean England, but the social setting is also an analogue of relevance to the political unrest of Zanzibar leading up to the revolution. The play's opening scene shows a need for policies to be switched from over-indulgent laxity to a new severity (Lever lxxv). To avoid being seen as arbitrarily becoming a tyrant, the Duke delegates the task to his deputies, Angelo and Escalus (lxxv). In *Gravel Heart*, Hakim, the Chief Protocol Officer, similarly acts in the stead of his father, the Vice-President, while "he is out of the country on a tour of Asia" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 235). But unlike Angelo or Escalus, Hakim is unlikely to be overruled by the Vice-President "if his anger proved [...] implacable" (237). His power is not only afforded to him because he is a representative of the nationalist rulers, but also because of nepotism. Masud notes that "the children of the powerful" (225) are all "groomed to be powerful too" (225) because nepotism allows families "to ensure the security of their plunder" (225). Although Masud is speaking of his friend Yusuf, his words ring truer when he is faced by a nationalist who has neither sympathy nor empathy for him. Unlike Shakespeare's deputies, Gurnah's Hakim is afforded greater discretion over the punitive actions he metes out, safeguarded by the corruption and nepotism of the revolutionary government. Furthermore, Amir is "in jail or wherever he was held" (237) to answer for a personal affront against Hakim's family. As Masud notes, his brother-in-law is particularly vulnerable as there is no established course for justice to follow, given that the Zanzibari government is "not a government that bothered much with trials" (237). The Protocol Officer also seems to delight at the opportunity to "flex his muscles" (236), and his appointment secretary, Abdalla Haji, appears to revel in "the

excitement of participating in [the] cruelty” (236) of treating Saida and Masud as if they “are just curious bystanders” (235).

The nature of the law is probed and questioned throughout *Measure for Measure*. Characters frequently qualify the term with adjectives that suggest it can be harsh (Bawcutt 46): “strict statutes and most biting law” (Shakespeare 1.3.19); “the hideous law” (1.4.62); and “the angry law” (3.1.203). At other times, though, a series of striking and “faintly ludicrous images” (Bawcutt 46) show the law to be despised and ineffective. It is lampooned as “an o’ergrown lion in a cave / That goes not out to prey” (Shakespeare 1.3.22–23) or as ineffective as “threat’ning twigs of birch” (1.3.24) that become “more mocked than feared” (1.3.27) because overindulgent leaders, or “fond fathers” (1.3.24), have failed to use them on their children. At times, the law can be “drowsy” (1.2.158), but once “’tis awake” (2.2.95), the consequences are appalling.

In both the novel and its intertext, characters attempt to avoid those in power, trying to make their way “by the hideous law / As mice by lions” (Shakespeare 1.4.62–63). Bakari, the young man who tells Saida and Masud about Amir’s arrest, is reluctant to share his name or to tell Masud who took Amir, even though they “knew that a white Datsun with government plates meant the security service” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 221). In Gurnah’s Zanzibar, it is common for people to be “detained and released, or sometimes not” (221). Masud and other transnationals “had learnt to gratify the powerful with timorous obedience” (221). When abductions take place, Zanzibaris know to “wait for clarification from the authorities” (223) rather than to involve themselves and potentially expose themselves to victimisation.

Gurnah’s novel articulates how laws are used to safeguard the comfort of the rulers. Masud is aware that he may be “arrested for something” as arbitrary and random as “disturbing the peace, suspicious behaviour, audacity” (225) when he calls on his old friend Yusuf to learn more about the charges against Amir. But the surprising friendliness with which Yusuf, now the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, first greets him is tempered the following day. Their second meeting is marked by a sense of mistrust and suspicion, and Yusuf is “every inch a young diplomat” whose “faded” smile and “stern” face show that he is “displeased” (229) to be helping his old friend. The exchange ends with Yusuf “ushering” his old friend out of his office with a shrug that suggests that their friendship could not survive being pitted against the whims of Yusuf’s superior (230). Just like Zanzibaris of Arabic descent, even nationalists in power “had become cowed by [their] ruler’s willingness to be stern” (231). The reason for Yusuf’s reluctance becomes apparent when Masud describes his first encounter with Hakim in person:

In the meantime, the Chief Protocol Officer turned and walked towards us again. All this walking about was intended to demonstrate that he had complete mastery of the situation, that *we were powerless before him*. [...] When I glanced towards the appointments secretary I saw that his eyes were shining with laughter or mockery or relish.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 233; emphasis added)

Hakim is used to “receiving powerful visitors” and dresses to “look like a guerrilla” (233) rather than a statesman. In this episode, however, he already knows that his guests are “powerless” (233). In an attempt to evade the connection between her brother and her executed father, Saida announces herself as the sister of Amir Ahmed (232). The secretary, however, reveals that the familial connection has already been recognised by enquiring whether she means “Amir Ahmed Musa” (232). The secretary and Chief Protocol Officer both appear to “relish” the opportunity to subject family of a known enemy of the state and, now, of another offender to fresh “mockery” (233). Unfettered and unchecked in his father’s absence, Hakim is able to glut “his sense of injury and outrage at the degradation visited” (237) on his family by Amir’s statutory rape of Asha, the “underage schoolgirl” (229) whom Amir eventually marries.

When Hakim coerces Saida into a sexual relationship, he displays the same contempt for the law as Angelo in *Measure for Measure*. The Duke’s deputy’s hypocritical attempts to strongarm Isabella into an act of fornication are not unlike the very one for which he has sentenced her brother to death, yet he “bite[s] the law by th’ nose” (3.1.108) to “force it” (3.1.109) to work in his favour. Hakim similarly exploits his position of privilege and power over Saida to ensure complete control over her:

I want to remove that mtandio veil and undress you and take full command of your body. I want you to yield your body to me. [...] I will not harm you or cause you pain, do you understand? I want to make love to you, not just once, but to my satisfaction. That is how much I want you. In return, I will release your brother.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 240)

Saida resists Hakim’s proposal. Hakim uses her argument to applaud her as “a virtuous woman” (240), claiming that others would consider the lengths to which she is prepared to go to save her brother an act of heroism that would prevent her from being shamed. He then threatens Amir’s life, saying that “suspicion” of treachery “already hangs over” Amir’s head, “in addition to his abuse of a minor” (240). Both Angelo and Hakim abuse their power with impunity.

Shocked from her interview with Hakim, Saida visits Amir in prison, just as Isabella visits Claudio. The two exchanges between the siblings parallel each other almost identically, which reveals the truth about Amir's character that Salim only becomes prepared to accept after living with him in England. Amir proves to be "the perfidious brother" that Salim "was not convinced about" (254) the first time he had read *Measure for Measure*. The story of Uncle Amir abroad suggests to Salim that he may have been mistaken in thinking of his uncle as the "prince of [their] kingdom" (27) growing up. Just as Saleh Omar changes his opinion on Melville's *Bartleby* after Rachel encourages him to reread the story, so Salim is forced to reconsider and revise his original impression of his uncle. Similarly, Saida is devastated when, upon her visit, she learns that Amir has "a heart of stone" (243). She is shocked at the ease with which he pleads for her to relinquish her honour in order to save him. Just as in the case of Isabella, who is distressed when she discovers that two men she assumed to be honourable – Angelo and Claudio – are prepared to exploit her sexually in different ways, this crisis marks an impasse from which "no escape seems possible" (Bawcutt 50).

It is at this point in the story of the play (Shakespeare 3.1.155) that the Duke returns to take control of and guide events in the interests of justice and mercy. But in Gurnah's Zanzibar, there are no exemplars or luminaries of virtue and justice. As Salim says to Masud:

There was no Duke to put things right for this Isabella, no one to restrain the man of appetite who, once he had her in his grip, never let her slip away. Nor was there any role for you in the play, Baba, because Shakespeare had already reserved the heroine for the Duke.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 256)

Gurnah provides metatextual commentary on his use of a canonical frame by having Salim comment explicitly on how the novel and the intertext diverge. After Saida's sexual coercion, Masud is shamed and can no longer share his house with the man who, most likely, orchestrated the desecration of his marriage. Initially, the only transnational able to survive in the hostile diaspora space of Zanzibar is the one who has "no time for shame" (253) in his pursuit of personal advancement, Amir. After pressing his sister into submission to Hakim, "everything blossomed for him" as the "favours came his way" (247). Saida continues to love Masud, but eventually succumbs to the charms of the powerful Hakim when she falls pregnant with Munira (248). What Hakim had planned "as her humiliation turned into a passion" (247) neither of them wished "to give up" (247). But Salim and Masud, the two transnationals who are unable to assimilate into the new social dispensation, are expelled from the story.

By the time Gurnah has made the intertextual links between *Gravel Heart* and *Measure for Measure* explicit, almost at the end of the novel, he has presented readers with an extended depiction of England as a diaspora space in which Salim is unable to flourish. In an attempt to please Amir, who initially finances his travel and accommodates him with family, Salim begins to study a discipline that does not appeal to him. Unable to keep up appearances, Amir learns that Salim has been hiding the facts that he is failing to attend class and seldom passes exams. Salim is expelled from his family home and encounters various forms of victimisation, which make him aware of his increasing precarity in the diaspora space of the UK. For instance, he is prevented from acting in a play because the director is a British National Party “sympathiser” (Gurnah, *Gravel* 112); his Indian girlfriend leaves him because her family labels him “a nigger” (148); and he encounters “talk [...] about Muslim fanatics and terrorists” (150). Like Maalim and Masud during the period following the revolution in Zanzibar, Salim recognises that the language used by those in power is “a familiar language of freedom” that they “plan to enforce [...] with violence” (150). Like Omar in *By the Sea*, Salim forms an “imaginative and conciliatory family” (Falk 51) in England. In *By the Sea*, Gurnah makes it clear that Omar’s transnational experiences are “minor dramas” that are neither “exemplary” nor do they “illuminate our conditions and our times” through Omar’s first-person narrative remarks (*Sea* 2). Salim’s imaginative family consists of “three other men all of whom were African” and their Kenyan landlord, Mr Mgeni (Gurnah, *Gravel* 79), who lodge in a house they jokingly refer to as “the Organisation of African Unity” (85). Each of the men hails from different African countries and are transnationals for various reasons. By recounting Salim’s experiences and the squabbles within the household, Gurnah shows readers that transnationals, like nationalists, are not a homogeneous group, even when they originate from the same continent. Mgeni, who acts as a surrogate father to Salim, helps him illegally procure “a complete set of papers” (96) through his connections with “a Sudanese lawyer” (95) to secure Salim’s residence in England. Eventually the household is sold to a “businessman from Zaire” who converts it to “a family home” and resells it as part of a real estate venture (124). Unlike the imaginative family Omar forms, Salim’s is disrupted and displaced, contributing to a “sense of dissembling” (121) Salim laments in a letter that he writes to his mother, but fails to post.⁶ His precarity in

⁶ The significance of Gurnah’s subversion of the epistolary form is discussed at length in Chapter Five. For the sake of argument at this point, it is worth noting that by presenting readers with a series of unposted letters, Gurnah conveys an interesting insight into Salim’s personal experience of transnationalism. While he may not be happy or successful, the truth of his situation is too much to bear, and he feels too ashamed to acknowledge his failure to live up to his family’s expectations of him.

the diaspora space of England is similar to that experienced by both his father and grandfather in Zanzibar, and appears to confirm his later observation to Masud about the discourse of the main intertext. Both have been marginalised and excluded from their respective diaspora spaces.

Even so, during their parting conversation, Masud tells Salim that “sometimes you have to be forced to do things that are good for you, or force yourself” (260). Salim recalls his “struggles with [his] studies and Uncle Amir and Aunty Asha” when preparing for a visit to Zanzibar after missing his mother’s funeral, and declares that he “should have done better” (161). Shortly before deciding to return to England, Hakim offers him an opportunity to join the corrupt system that so benefited Amir. Salim admits that he dreaded he “would never be able to say to [Saida] that this torment” of living in England “is over” (161). However, he has found “little bits and pieces to string a life together” and recognises that “it’s not hopeless” (161).

But Gurnah’s tone during these episodes is far more cautious and restrained than it is in *By the Sea*. While Omar’s narrative starts with the observation that he sometimes feels that it is his “fate to live in the wreckage and confusion of crumbling houses” (Gurnah, *Sea* 1), this is counteracted by questioning the discourse represented by the novel’s main intertext. Omar manages to forge a liminal discourse in which he finds welcome through his imaginative family. Salim, on the other hand, recognises that he has not only been expelled from historical discourses, but that the discourses emerging in England resemble those of the Zanzibar revolution. The alternative to returning to England, however, would mean joining the corrupt nationalistic regime that led to the dismantling of his family. In *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah has become cynical of his own previous portrayals of the hospitality transnationals find in England. His representations of social conditions in England and Zanzibar have been tempered by even greater degrees of caution in light of the emergence of anti-migrant rhetoric and sentiments since 11 September 2001. While life in England is not “hopeless,” Gurnah remarks that it is “just not anything to make much of” (*Gravel* 161).

Section Six – Closing Remarks

The selected fiction by Abdulrazak Gurnah explores the nuances of modern displacement. It reveals the entanglements and intersections amongst various discourses, and considers how shifts in multi-axial articulations of power, historical discourses, and individual memories

imminent in diaspora spaces influence ways in which identities are interpolated. It presents a spectrum of transnational experiences that implies a collapse of reductive binaries between transnationals and nationalists.

Yet his work also complicates too simple a dismissal of the terms as illegitimate. *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, for instance, each acknowledge the precarity protagonists experience due to actions predicated on such binaries, regardless of how spurious they may be. Both novels show how the rise of a new dispensation in Zanzibar enabled Zanzibari nationalists to persecute transnationals with impunity. But despite their increased precarity, Gurnah does not depict transnationals as necessarily hapless victims. For instance, those less scrupulous transnationals, such as Amir and Hussein, could utilise the greed and corruption of nationalist officials to guarantee their own advancement.

Gurnah's fiction uses sophisticated, circular narrative structures that invite readers and characters alike to revise constantly their understanding of events in a way that dismantles the simple binaries between colonial and postcolonial discourses. Gurnah's use of repeated and embellished narrative episodes replicates the operations of individual memories, and invites readers to consider how these are influenced by dominant historical discourses. By presenting historical and social discourses as fluid palimpsests of different paradigms competing for dominance in a diaspora space, Gurnah is further able to question the links between history, memories, and identities through his characterisation. His fiction thus contemplates the ways that this entanglement troubles simplistic assumptions that being a "colonized native" of a place guarantees a sense of national belonging in the postcolonial state (see S. Lewis, *Transnational* 56).

There is a noticeable shift in authorial tone between *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, which can be seen in his treatment of intertextual allusions as structuring devices. The tonal shift may be slight. However, it noticeably signals a move from one of tentative optimism in *By the Sea* to one of trepidation in *Gravel Heart*, and ultimately reveals that there may be a revision in the desirability of an English home emerging in Gurnah's work. In the chapter that follows, analyses of the works of Viet Thanh Nguyen will reveal that Gurnah is not alone in questioning the desirability of host diaspora spaces. Like Gurnah's works, Nguyen's also complicate views that migration is a necessarily progressive act. Both authors are likewise notably preoccupied with the various roles that memory plays in the interpolation of identities. But, as will be demonstrated, Nguyen's concerns with the entanglements of history, individual narratives, and memory are more notably focussed on restoring his transnational characters to ethical agents who are accountable for their own actions.

CHAPTER THREE: ETHICAL MEMORY IN SELECTED WORKS BY VIET THANH NGUYEN

Section One – An Emerging Forerunner

Despite individual successes and increasing popularity, Vietnamese American authors do not have a representative “global Vietnamese writer” yet, like Asian Americans have Salman Rushdie or Jhumpa Lahiri (Nguyen in Phan 30). However, the popularity of Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* and his collection of short stories, *The Refugees*, makes him a likely contender for such a label. He is an Associate Professor of English and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, and his fiction reveals a creative impulse to produce work that reflects his scholarly concerns.¹ None of these concerns features as prominently as his attempts to recover full ethical subjectivity for Vietnamese transnationals in literary representations. To do so, his works explore Vietnamese transnationals’ potential to inflict harm on others as well as on themselves, and also expose transnationals’ ability to betray others, just as the Southern Vietnamese forces were betrayed by the United States in April 1975. His works, like Gurnah’s, display an authorial preoccupation with memories and how they are formed, as well as with the effects dominant discourses have on the interpolation of performative identities in diaspora spaces.

Having said that, it is the way in which his fiction puts into practice his academic injunction that minority discourses should not be solely about the damage done to minorities that is of most interest in this chapter (see Nguyen, “Speak” 15). If Asian American minorities wish to have an ethical claim to inclusion in their diaspora space, Nguyen argues, they must embrace what Taro Iwata has called a “problematic Asian American agency” (Iwata 181). This concept calls on minorities to reject the ‘comforts’ of victimhood. To frame oneself only as a victim is to over-simplify power (Nguyen, “Speak” 10). A failure to acknowledge that transnationals inflict damage on others as well as amongst themselves, while claiming that they are vulnerable to oppression by other nationalist groups, gives rise to a discourse that is as false and distorted as the dominant discourses used by nationalists to oppress transnationals (13–15). It overlooks the power-dynamics which work within a subgroup falsely characterised as homogeneous that, in truth, suppresses dissident voices and exercises domination in its own terrain. The Vietnamese American community has

¹ Nguyen’s faculty profile is available at www.dornsife.usc.edu.

historically used violence, intimidation, and protest to enforce anti-communism and to root out communist infiltrators in diaspora spaces in the US (Nguyen, “Just Memory” 149; Pelaud, *choose* 18). Furthermore, any group simply defined as victims is excused from the “obligations of ethical behaviour in relation to both political and other acts” (Nguyen, “Speak” 10) – including acts of representation. On one hand, Vietnamese Americans have historically been marginalised by mainstream US portrayals of the Vietnam War (Freeman 10). On the other hand, popular cultural narratives and mainstream media have foregrounded the successful integration of Vietnamese Americans, who have supposedly moved from a ‘life of horror’ in Vietnam to one of ‘prosperity’ in the US (Chattarji, “Made” 230). The practice of rendering transnationals hypervisible as emblematic success stories, as is argued in greater detail in Chapter Five, is neo-racist and paradoxically creates new divisions even as it purports to promote tolerance and social diversity. Nguyen’s work is noticeably critical of such discursive strategies. Like Mexican American author Luis Alberto Urrea, who will be discussed in Chapter Four, Nguyen frequently describes the power dynamics created by the differential racialisation that results from the discursive creation of new others. Similar to Gurnah and Urrea, Nguyen uses his fiction to suggest that one of the ways to counter this divisive strategy is to encourage the recuperation of forgotten memories and alternative (rather than revisionist) historical discourses. While Gurnah’s fiction frequently uses the revolution in Zanzibar as a catalyst to his narratives, Nguyen often turns to the memory of the Vietnam War.

Brenda Boyle describes the American corpus of Vietnam War stories as “melodramas of traumatized white manhood” (Boyle 17). This corpus tends to characterise Vietnamese from South Vietnam as either victims of evil communists (the stereotypical role reserved for North Vietnamese and the communist-aligned Vietcong from the South), or as “plucky and grateful” survivors benefitting from American magnanimity (Chattarji, “Made” 234). These works show how Americans have struggled with memories of the war (see Grice 945). But the fact remains that more Vietnamese Americans live with its material consequences (Grice 945). Their experiences of the war were, after all, far more complex than Americans acknowledge (Chattarji, “Made” 229). Rather than the simple binary that dominant American discourses project – that the conflict amounted to a Cold War anti-communist crusade – the war represented contending tides of colonialism and liberation, communism and nationalism, reform and revolution, and Northern revanchism and Southern regionalism for the Vietnamese (Chanoff and Doan xxi). Many scholars use Laurence Kirmayer’s concept of “strategic forgetting” (191) to describe the general amnesia regarding the United States’

military involvement in the Vietnam War (for examples, see Balaev 154 and Denham 399). Southeast Asians, Thomas DuBois argues, have been objectified as refugees, migrants, immigrants, or as ethnic or racial minorities, their passivity transforming them, even in academic discourses, into “emblematic victims” in need of “caring, counselling, or intervening” (“Constructions” 4). Nguyen, however, explores additional sources of this amnesiac discursive strategy to reveal that Vietnamese Americans are also guilty of acts of amnesia and of deliberately distorting memories of the war. His fiction reveals how Vietnamese American communities in the US have excluded those who do not fit into their refugee nationalism (“Just Memory” 158) – for example, the Hmong, the primarily ethnic Chinese “boat people,” Cambodians, and Laotians, who were also displaced by the war and its aftermath. While it is, as Susan Sontag says, “intolerable to have one’s own suffering twinned with anybody else’s” (113), both she and Nguyen argue that it is necessary to acknowledge that no group has any special claim on suffering (113; Nguyen, “Speak” 33). Such recognition insists that groups acknowledge their capacity to inflict pain (Nguyen, “Speak” 33). Nguyen argues that by introducing other groups into Vietnamese American literature about the Vietnam War and its aftermath, authors can elicit true empathy from readers for the “ignored others” (“Remembering” 152). His work avoids what Boyle describes as the compulsory empathy for beleaguered American soldiers (17) by highlighting the entanglements prevalent not only in the diaspora spaces in America after the war, but also in Vietnam itself – before, during, and after the conflict. Just as Gurnah describes Zanzibar as a diaspora space by exposing a long and ignored history, so too does Nguyen’s work recuperate histories of Vietnam frequently forgotten in US discourses, such as the 1954 partition, to reveal that it too is a diaspora space marked by entanglement and migration. One consequence of this strategy is that Nguyen describes the Vietnam War as part of a civil war fought amongst competing factions of Vietnamese with competing visions for the future of their nation (Chattarji, “Made” 229) and not merely as the spectacle US discourses describe. In so doing, Nguyen portrays Vietnamese transnationals as both victims and victimisers, returning them to the status of full ethical agents.

Isabelle Thuy Pelaud’s full length study of Vietnamese American literature, *this is all i choose to tell*, the first and, so far, only study of its kind, reveals that Viet Thanh Nguyen is by no means the first Vietnamese American author to attempt such a recovery.² But, as

² The title of Pelaud’s study is consistently referred to using only lowercase letters by Vietnamese American scholars and is therefore rendered as such here.

Pelaud argues, most Vietnamese American literature about the Vietnam War is characterised by a focus on diaspora, displacement, nostalgia, and emotional attachment to the homeland (109). However, Nguyen's debut novel, as this chapter will show, complicates and nuances these concerns. He is also the first Vietnamese American author to win a Pulitzer Prize and subsequent international acclaim for his fiction (see Kellogg; Dean; Phan). He is a leading voice amongst Vietnamese American writers. In 2007, he co-founded the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN) to "promote voices and stories of the Vietnamese diaspora through nurturing writers, poets and artists, and connecting their work to readers, audience, and diasporic communities all over the globe" (DVAN "Mission"). The group represents a second generation of Vietnamese American authors – the sons and daughters of refugees (Pelaud, *choose* 40). These writers are emotionally further removed from the refugee experience, and have greater access to certain resources, such as education and the internet, than their predecessors (40). Young emerging writers like Bich Minh Nguyen, Vi Khi Nao, Dao Storm, and Phang Nguyen no longer feel obliged to address issues surrounding the Vietnam War. They prefer to articulate new concepts of home and new notions of citizenship without having to justify their presence in the US (Pelaud, *choose* 36; Nguyen qtd in Phan 30). Some Vietnamese American writers, like Vu Tran, who writes detective novels, have ventured into genre fiction (Nguyen qtd in Phan 30). Others are still writing about the war and its aftermath, but have turned to new forms to do so, like the graphic novels by G.B. Tran and Thi Bui (30).

Yet despite the diversity of new subject matter amongst Vietnamese American writers, Nguyen's works still attempt to offer correctives to the deliberately amnesiac US discourses about the war, as well as to the narratives offered by earlier Vietnamese Americans. In his dissertation and first academic text, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*, Nguyen argues that Vietnamese American literary texts were not solely acts of resistance against oppression, but were often also "acts of accommodation" (qtd in Nguyen, "Just Memory" 147). By this he means that Vietnamese American authors used their works to attempt to justify their lives in exile (see Ha 470). Those who wrote in English tried to express a rapport with the US (470). By reaffirming anti-communist political affiliations, early Vietnamese American authors tried to strengthen the solidarity within their diaspora spaces while eliciting sympathy from the American public (470). One consequence of these strategies is that several early Vietnamese American authors unwittingly contributed to the retrospective justification of the Vietnam War by discursively erasing or minimising US involvement (Chattarji, "Made" 231).

The Sympathizer offers a literary response to these US-centric frames of the Vietnam War. At this stage, it is worthwhile offering a brief overview of the novel for the sake of the arguments that follow in the remainder of this chapter.³ Most of the novel is framed as a coerced confession by a political prisoner – the unnamed diegetic first-person narrator, who is a communist spy (or “sympathizer”) posing as an aide-de-camp to a South Vietnamese General, on whom he is spying. It opens with his description of escape operations during the fall of the South Vietnamese government on 30 April 1975. It then recounts life in a refugee camp, the narrator’s relocation to Los Angeles (where he lives with his best friend and blood-brother Bon, and re-establishes contact with the General he is spying on), his involvement in politically-motivated assassinations, his time as a film consultant in the Philippines, and, finally, his return to and subsequent imprisonment in Vietnam. At this point, the novel’s structure is reframed as a first-person, retrospective narrative by the same unnamed diegetic narrator who composed the confession, but the trope of confession has been abandoned. The narrator is brought to the camp’s commissar, who Nguyen reveals to be Man, another of the narrator’s blood-brothers and his Vietcong handler. As Man wishes to save both the narrator and Bon, he is paradoxically left no choice but to torture the narrator as part of his re-education. The narrator is forced to acknowledge his deliberate forgetting of his role in the torture and rape of a female communist sympathizer. He is then pressed to realise that he was complicit in the murder of his father, albeit unintentionally. Finally, Man forces him to realise a lesson: that nothingness itself is more precious than independence and freedom. The novel closes with the narrator and Bon among a crowd of Boat People, adrift at sea.

Nguyen’s novel deliberately complicates the reductive, essentialising, and amnesiac historical discourses about the Vietnam War popularised by Hollywood and US-centric media representations. Rather than present the confession that his communist comrades would like to hear, Nguyen’s narrator conscientiously refuses to present a one-sided, communist-biased document. Instead, he omits nothing – not even a humiliating account of his first experience with masturbation, or the traumatic memories of growing up without a father. He acknowledges his friendships with those who are supposedly his enemies, and he understands that all soldiers in the conflict believe that they are honourable and are defending their home.

Yet the narrator still considers himself a revolutionary and a communist, an interpolation the camp’s commandant considers to be so absurd that it could be considered a

³ Brief summaries of the short stories will be presented when appropriate.

betrayal. This chapter will discuss the ways in which betrayal and subversion are not only thematised in *The Sympathizer* but are also enacted by the narrative structure of the novel. The role of ethical memory and the importance of recognizing one's own inhumanity will be examined in relation to the ways in which Nguyen uses ghosts in *The Sympathizer* and the short story, "Black-Eyed Women," to further erode spurious binaries between 'victim' and 'victimiser.' Metatextual commentary Nguyen offers on his own use of intertexts will be examined in relation to the criticism he levels against American discourses on the Vietnam War. This is followed by a discussion on how Nguyen attempts to recover the one figure he believes to be deliberately overlooked by simplistic transnational and nationalist binaries – the Vietnamese woman – in the short story "The War Years" and in *The Sympathizer*.

Section Two – Remembering Betrayal

Betrayal is a prevalent thematic concern in Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*. But unlike previous Vietnamese American literature about the Vietnam War, the novel does not concentrate on the American betrayal of South Vietnam.⁴ Although he does acknowledge this betrayal, Nguyen painstakingly foregrounds the treachery, subversion, and betrayals committed by Vietnamese characters – both during and after the war. In so doing, he avoids depicting his transnationals as hapless victims defined only by their precarity in diaspora spaces. The novel therefore problematises the tendency to define minority groups displaced by conflict as smaller both in numbers and in terms of power (see Nguyen, "Speak" 9). To be a minority, Nguyen argues, is to be defined to some extent by wounds or by damage incurred as a result of social inferiority (11). But this contributes to minorities' perceptions of themselves only as victims, which elides their obligation to behave ethically (10). To counter dominant American discursive practices that exploit Vietnamese identities by portraying them as backdrops to displays of American military heroism and sacrifice (see Grice 944), Nguyen presents his readers with complex transnational characters who could be seen to embody the

⁴ For twenty-five years, the South Vietnamese and American governments allied against Northern forces in what was, until the early twenty-first century, the longest war in US military history (Pelaud, *choose* 8). South Vietnam believed that, as the world's strongest superpower, America would neither retreat nor lose (8). Yet on 30 April 1975, American forces withdrew from Vietnam as communist forces captured Saigon (9). Their Vietnamese allies – those who managed to evacuate and those left behind – felt abandoned and betrayed (9). In Vietnamese American literature, this sense of betrayal has been expressed in narratives that emphasise the "complexities and contradictions of abandonment and protection" (110), but fail to acknowledge any form of complicity on the part of the Vietnamese.

“problematic Asian American” agencies of Taro Iwata’s formulation (181). These characters cannot unproblematically claim to be victims given the activities in which they participate.

The unnamed first-person narrator of *The Sympathizer* is a displaced transnational in South Vietnam.⁵ His father used ladyfinger biscuits to lure his mother into a sexual liaison when she was only thirteen (197). From an early age, the narrator is frequently excluded and ostracised as a bastard of mixed-race – the only label he truly finds hurtful throughout the novel. In one analeptic episode, he recalls an incident in the schoolyard in which he and a group of children watch two dogs mating (200). “A dog and a bitch, that’s natural,” one of the boys says before pointing at the narrator and saying to the others:

But [...] he’s like what happens when a cat and a dog do that. Everyone’s attention turned to me. I stood there as if on a boat drifting away from the shore where they all waited, seeing myself through the eyes of others as a creature neither dog nor cat, neither human nor animal.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 200)

The above passage shows how the narrator has been marked as completely foreign – both inhuman and non-animal – as a result of his mixed-race parentage. Later in the novel, his communist colleagues describe his miscegenated identity as a “curse,” as the narrator’s “source is tainted” (301). Yet even from a young age, as the above passage illustrates, the narrator has been subjected to xenophobic and racist attacks that have reinforced a sense of himself as a “creature” that belongs nowhere. As the narrator reflects on this childhood memory, he recognises that his is a position of liminality – not belonging in South Vietnam, nor in the North, where he was born and where he is subjected to the above episode of exclusion, which is representative of several other episodes throughout the novel. The simile of drifting away on a boat in the passage refers to two of the three instances in which the narrator finds himself a refugee. It echoes an earlier episode in the novel, where the narrator describes how he and his mother fled Northern Vietnam “on a refugee barge in ’54” – when he and Claude first meet. While the observation recalls the narrator’s first experience of physical displacement across borders, it also foreshadows the end of the novel. Having survived re-education in a North Vietnamese concentration camp under the control of his childhood friend, blood brother, and communist handler, Man, the narrator is forced to

⁵ By the outbreak of the Vietnam War, South Vietnam was already a diaspora space for many transnationals who had been internally displaced after the country was officially split along the 17th parallel into North and South Vietnam in 1954 (Woodside 505; Pelaud, *choose* 9).

become a refugee for a third time as one of “the boat people” (366). Once more he finds himself part of a group that is “neither human nor animal” (200). The collective term “boat people,” he feels, “smacks of anthropological condescension” and evokes, like the offspring of a union between dog and cat, ideas of something that could best be described as monstrous: “some lost tribe of amphibians emerging from ocean mist, crowned with seaweed” (366). But even though the closing passages of the book portray the refugees from Vietnam in unflattering and inhumane terms, Nguyen’s narrator insists that they are “not primitives [and] are not to be pitied” (366). Instead, he states that it would “hardly be surprising” if, upon their arrival in a “safe harbour,” the boat people themselves “turn [their] backs on the unwanted, human nature being what we know of it” (366). This insight expresses Nguyen’s academic view that one’s own capacity to inflict harm must be recognised before any credible claim to just treatment can be made (“Speak” 13–15).

The novel opens with the narrator’s acknowledgement that he is “a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 1) – a communist intelligence agent planted as an aide-de-camp to a General of the South Vietnamese secret police. The first three chapters describe the chaotic and frantic preparations for evacuation via aircraft from the Saigon airport as the National Liberation Front closes in on the city. Amidst the panic, Nguyen’s characters express their distress at America’s treachery and betrayal of their cause. The narrator says that had “those thousands” killed in Da Nang and Nha Trang “still lived, they would not have believed how they had died” (3). Southern forces “could not believe that the Americans – our friends, our benefactors, our protectors” (3) had created dependence on US funding to maintain and arm the “weapons, planes, and tanks” that had been “bestowed [...] for free” (4). The General comments that nothing “is ever so expensive as what is offered for free” (4), referring to the escalating losses and injuries incurred by the South Vietnamese. He explains to the narrator that “Americans liked seeing people eye to eye [...] especially as they screwed them from behind” (8), crudely and bitterly voicing his belief in American treachery to the narrator, who is ironically a Vietnamese man constantly betraying the General to his enemies. While the narrator suggests that “[t]here are worse places” than America and that South Vietnam had been “foolish enough to think they would keep their word,” others long to return “to fight again,” even if “for now, [they were] well and truly fucked” (11). While preparing for “a suicide mission” to return to Vietnam, the narrator’s childhood friend Bon laments that the Americans emasculated the Vietnamese American community by rescuing them (215). In his opinion, they “cut off our balls and cut out our

tongues,” although he ultimately blames South Vietnam’s government for accommodating the Americans in Vietnam in the first place (215).

Nguyen’s narrative echoes Bon’s laments, and ensures that blame for America’s betrayal is not solely reserved for America. It briefly and rapidly describes the resignation of US supported President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu; “meetings at the Joint General Staff compound” (8); the annihilation of the “defenders of Xuan Loc;” the victory of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh; and the looting of the “nation’s gold” when the “ex-president secretly fled for Taiwan” (9). During these descriptions and those of the violent events that take place at the airport, which result in the deaths of Bon’s wife and son (34–49), Nguyen is at pains to expose the multicultural nature of the Vietnam War. He refers to Cambodia; Taiwan (9); Guam (42); the “demented Siberian scientist” (42) who invented Katyusha rockets; Soviet “AK-47” weapons; and American aircraft (47). The narrator and his fellow evacuees also struggle to determine who the shooters at the airport are: NLF cadres or the “hundreds of marines and soldiers and military cops and air force pilots and crewmen and mechanics, the air base’s staff and rear guard, refusing to be heroes or sacrificial goats” (46). By making specific reference to the various people excluded from the evacuation plans, the narrator ensures that readers are aware of the refugees’ complicity in the American betrayal. Nguyen’s darkly humorous and pithy description of the refusal of those left behind “to be heroes” foreshadows the ways in which those deliberately abandoned would be reframed in later accounts of the war in order to elide the responsibility of those who abandon them. By listing the groups that the Vietnamese refugees intentionally excluded, Nguyen also indicates how Vietnamese refugee stories have overshadowed those of other Southeast Asian refugees (“Speak” 33). By mentioning Cambodia and Laos, and by drawing specific attention to the conflicts with factions such as the Khmer Rouge, Nguyen recuperates Southeast Asian identities, other than the South Vietnamese, who also experienced forced displacement at the time (33). These groups, Nguyen argues, have been erased from discourses about the Vietnam War, often as a result of the misnomer of the name, which overlooks the historical fact that the conflict crossed several national borders (33). As a result, Vietnamese refugee memories have been treated as exceptional, which he believes should not be the case (32). Rather, it is necessary to recognise that they have no special claim on suffering (33; Sontag 113). The multiculturalism Nguyen’s novel highlights in its portrayal of the evacuation also reveals how the entanglement of various ethnic and social groups within the Vietnamese American diaspora spaces originated in South Vietnam.

Nguyen's presentation of the effects of America's diplomatic and military betrayal on the refugees' psyche provides a broad and historicised socio-political context in which he reveals the more personal acts of betrayal committed by his communist-aligned narrator. Before the evacuation, Claude tells him that "I got you out of the North then [in 1954], I'll get you out of the South now" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 31). The CIA provided the narrator with a liberal arts education and specialised intelligence training in the US between 1958 and 1964 (11). Unbeknownst to Claude, his protégé had already been recruited as a spy by Man, who becomes the narrator's Vietcong handler (11). The narrator uses his time as a student in America to "learn American ways of thinking" (11). During a meeting with supporters of the General's proposed return task team and a British intellectual, the narrator cryptically remarks that "one way to understand a person's character is to understand what he thinks of others" (242). By using dramatic irony – from the opening of the novel, the reader is aware that the narrator is a sympathizer and spy, even in the US – Nguyen ensures that dialogue between his narrator and those who view him as their political ally remains ambivalent. This reinforces the narrator's early assertion that, as "a man of two minds," he is "able to see any issue from both sides" (1). It also expresses the complex subject position of the transnational narrator. Throughout the novel, the narrator occupies a liminal Third Space, both personally and politically. He is neither a staunch Southern Vietnamese officer, nor a sympathizer without compassion for those on whom he spies. Rather, he attempts to unify two seemingly diametrically opposed worldviews by appealing to a common, shared sense of humanity.

The American diaspora space in which the narrator works as a South Vietnamese military operative, executing assignments in order to hide his true allegiances as he reports on the group's activities to the Vietcong (Lefferts para. 2), facilitates his covert activities – for both sides. Nguyen weaves details about what it was like to be Vietnamese in America after the war throughout his narrative (para. 3). Americans are shown to be disparaging or dismissive of the Vietnamese because of their "yellowness, [and] slightly smaller eyes" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 122–23). The narrator remarks that during his time as a foreign student, he had "never felt inferior because of his race" (123). However, as a "card-carrying American with a driver's license, Social Security card, and resident alien permit" he is constantly misrecognised as foreign, and no longer receives the courtesy he had been extended as a "guest" (123). This provides significant comment on the hospitality offered by Americans to racial others when it is believed that these racial others will, at some point, leave the United States. But the conditions accompanying hospitality become greater the more likely it seems that the guest will stay. Like Gurnah's characters, who try to legitimise

their presence in the UK through legal, bureaucratic means, or Urrea's Mexican characters who pride themselves on US naturalisation, Nguyen's transnational characters soon realise that gaining legal recognition in their diaspora spaces counterintuitively increases their precarity. Nguyen's depiction of the Vietnamese American ethnic enclave also emphasises the conflicts amongst the heterogeneous Vietnamese Americans themselves. These are rooted in contesting ideologies, ethnicities, different migration experiences, and perceived transnational ties to communist Vietnam (Gold 121–27). Hate crimes and random acts of violence against the Vietnamese American community, for instance, enable the narrator and Bon to escape suspicion after they assassinate the character simply known as “the crapulent major,” due to his overweight physique and predilection for alcohol (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 102–5). The entanglement of political allegiances and the continuation of home politics in the diaspora space allow the narrator, as is later revealed, to orchestrate this killing, which effectively executes a man involved in the brutal rape of another communist spy. While two of the Southern Vietnamese soldiers training for the general's militia acknowledge to the narrator that war has made Vietnam “hell,” they still consider it “better than this shithole [America]” (214). But despite the intrigue and drama of the war story in *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen prevents a reductive interpretation of the novel as a ‘spy story’ through his portrayal of the complex relationship between the narrator, his handler Man, and their friend, a Phoenix Program assassin, Bon. This friendship provides a significant pattern that critiques forms of novels premised on clear-cut affiliations.

Through the friendship of the three men, Nguyen shows that there are certain bonds that transcend political and ideological differences, although even this is tempered by a hint of betrayal. The narrator and Man are both Vietcong communist operatives planted in South Vietnam, a fact they never reveal to Bon, whose “flat nose bent hard right, like his politics” (10). Unlike his two friends, Bon is a conservative republican. As children, the three have “sworn undying loyalty to one another by slicing [their] adolescent palms and mingling [their] blood in ritual handshakes” (10). The narrator uses his position of trust to secure Bon and his family space aboard the General's evacuation plane (10). Bon is “a republican who had volunteered to fight [and] was sure to go Japanese and fight to the end or even put a gun to his own head” (14). His hatred of the communists started when “the local cadre” at his childhood village summarily executed his father (14). The narrator confesses to the reader that, although Bon and the other young soldiers of the South are framed as his enemies, he nonetheless “felt for them all” (16). Nguyen reveals the narrator as an empathetic figure who realises that while Bon's “beloved city [Saigon] was about to fall,” his own was “soon to be

liberated” (16). The narrator and Man both know that the men of the South “would be dead, or wounded, or imprisoned, or humiliated, or abandoned, or forgotten” once the NLF arrive. They therefore convince Bon to flee with his family (16). When the General orders Bon to return to Vietnam as part of a reconnaissance team, Bon is pleased to leave the US. Bon likens his experience in America to “hiding in someone else’s house,” prompting the narrator to note that Bon “had never assimilated” and is prone to “anti-American negativity and pessimism” (269). Despite admitting that there are things he “would miss about America” (269), the narrator disobeys a direct order from his Vietcong superiors, betraying their faith in his services, and returns to Vietnam with Bon. Nguyen attributes this decision to the narrator’s sense of responsibility toward his blood brother. By ignoring orders, the narrator acts on his belief that he can be responsible for Bon. But he fails to protect his friend, and both are captured and placed in a Northern re-education camp. Those in charge of the camp recognise the narrator as a sympathizer and segregate him from the rest of the inmates, and the reason for his isolation is not disclosed to the general population of the camp. As a result, Bon’s misunderstandings of the narrator’s allegiances are reinforced, and he believes the narrator is “singled out for extended isolation because of [his] ardent republicanism and [...] Special Branch credentials” (308). Ironically, Bon helps to create a “heroic reputation” (308) for his friend, although his trust is misplaced.

During the episodes at the re-education camp, Nguyen reveals that the narrator and Bon have only survived due to the efforts of Man (311). Man has risen through the Vietcong ranks and the communist regime has appointed him commissar of the camp (311). But as the character representative of the enemy of South Vietnam and the US, Man has been figuratively and literally effaced by “the very light of Western civilization” (322). Before discovering that his friend is the commissar, the narrator refers to the commissar as a “faceless” man (304). While the narrator means that the commissar’s identity is unknown, he later learns that his face has literally been burned from his body during a napalm attack. It is through Man’s efforts that the narrator and Bon are eventually able to escape as “boat people” (366), but not before he has tortured the narrator, using techniques detailed in the narrator’s own copy of a CIA manual titled “*KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation, 1963*” (331; original emphasis). Ironically, Man’s betrayal of the narrator’s safety is necessary in order to secure the safety of all three blood brothers.

Besides complicating the reductive binary of friend and foe, the final episodes of the novel also signal a structural betrayal and Nguyen’s metatextual sleight of hand in problematising the narrative voice of *The Sympathizer*. At the beginning of the novel, the

narrator describes the story as a “confession” and addresses his “dear Commandant” (1). Chapter Two reveals that the narrator’s retrospective, first person confession is written in a cell where a “baby-faced guard [...] comes to check on [him] every day [and] calls [the narrator] a bastard when he feels like it” (19). Chapter Three also opens with an address to the “dear Commandant,” thanking him “for the notes that you and the commissar have given me on my confession” (35). Later, the narrator makes a brief aside to state that he is “guilty of honesty” in his confession, claiming that he “will do no less than explain [himself], in a style of [his] own choosing, regardless of how [they] might consider [his] actions” (70). But the narrator’s cockiness and insistence on representing himself is undermined at the beginning of the episodes set in the camp. On page 296, the narrator describes how the commandant “laid the final sheet of [the narrator’s] confession on top of the 294 other pages that preceded it.” Nguyen signals that the narrator’s confession and the preceding narrative of *The Sympathizer*, up until that point, are the same document. The commandant is described as a “diligent editor, [...] always urging the [narrator] to delete, excise, reword, or add” (296). If the narrator is to be believed, then, none of the preceding narrative is presented “in a style” of his “own choosing” (70). Nguyen problematizes any claim to faithful representation that the novel may have by complicating the role of the author of the text the reader is reading. Readers have been exposed to a document that purports to have been created by the narrator, when in fact it is the result of an editorial and revisionist process in which the communist narrator, the communist commandant, and Man have all been involved. The novel therefore breaks down notions of authorship. It represents a composite of narrative voices and ideologies in which the recollection of events is called into question. Significantly, even though the various narrative and editorial voices represent different ideological and political stances, they are all distinctly Vietnamese. Much like American discourses on the Vietnam War, the discourse that creates the bulk of this novel is marked by deliberate distortions in order to achieve a specific political end – Man’s attempt to hide his connection to Bon and the narrator to ensure that they can leave the re-education camp alive. By doing this, Nguyen uses his novel to replicate the manipulation of discursive categories and multi-axial articulations of power by transnationals in their diaspora spaces. It also calls into question the ethics of memory.

Section Three – Nguyen’s Ghosts and Just Memory

Nguyen uses what he calls ghosts in *The Sympathizer* and in the short story “Black-Eyed Women” to negotiate the tenuous distinction between commemorating the dead and appropriating them for his own political agenda, and to examine the ethics of various forms of memory. In *The Sympathizer*, these ghosts are narrative devices that embody his protagonist’s capacity to perform inhumane actions. As spectral figures, his ghosts do not only represent the narrator’s conscience, but also serve as ethical injunctions that demand to be recognised. Interactions between Nguyen’s ghosts and his narrator result in an extradiegetic narrative level that accentuates the dislocation and liminal positions occupied by his Vietnamese characters in the USA. *The Sympathizer* also inverts the usual trajectory of migration in Vietnamese American literature about the war, in which characters either migrate from Vietnam to the US or leave the US to visit Vietnam only to return. Nguyen’s narrator migrates from Vietnam to the US and returns, before his ultimate exile, adrift in a boat on the ocean, en route to an undisclosed location. As the ethical injunctions represented by the ghosts are first encountered in the US milieu, but the narrator is only able to respond adequately to their demands once he has returned to Vietnam, *The Sympathizer* implies entanglement between a subject’s context and its capacity for just memory. Nguyen’s deployment of ghosts thus furthers his authorial interest in this entanglement.

According to sociologist Gordon Avery, the appearance of ghosts in oral and written narratives indicates a demand for justice. Hauntings in such narratives force audiences to ask themselves “how [they] can [...] be accountable to people who seemingly have not counted in the historical and public record” (Avery 187). Jacques Derrida similarly describes ghosts as “spectral” presences of that which is physically absent. In an article titled “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida explains that Western science and philosophy have been organised to privilege presence as what it means “to be” (Derrida, “Structure” 225). Spectres therefore present a “deconstructive logic” that tests Western metaphysics (Derrida and Stiegler 117). This logic undoes the “established boundaries and challenges foundational, presentist, and teleological modes of thinking” (Blanco and Peeren 33). As spectres are simultaneously present and absent, they disrupt the primacy of presence by troubling the boundaries that distinguish it from absence (Van der Wielen 27). The spectre is therefore “a wholly irrecoverable intrusion into our world” or, in the case of literature, an intrusion into a narrative (Davis 9). As it is incomprehensible within available intellectual frameworks but reliant on us to preserve its otherness, the spectre represents an ethical

injunction (9). Derrida calls the disruptions caused by the spectre “hauntology” (Derrida, *Spectres* 10). This is what posits the spectre as the ultimate other. It disrupts being by rupturing the ‘proper’ progress of time, epitomised in its return from the dead (10; Van der Wielen 29). Hauntology and the spectre are therefore both liminal and defy easy categorisations “other than just that – the unresolved, undetermined and uncertain Other” (Van der Wielen 29). Nguyen uses the indeterminacies associated with spectres in *The Sympathizer* to trouble the simple binaries between aggressor and victim, and to ultimately emphasise the liminality of his unnamed first-person narrator. Using these indeterminacies strategically, the novel also explores the possibilities of just memory.

There has been renewed emphasis on the role of memory and on questions of how to mourn the dead, remember the missing, and consider the place of survivors in Vietnamese American literature about the Vietnam War (Ha 467; Nguyen, “Speak” 8). In 1995, the Vietnamese government released the country’s official war-time death toll. Over three million civilian and combatant Vietnamese, from both South and North Vietnam, lost their lives (Ha 467). The imperative for literature about the war to convey ethical and just memories about the devastating losses experienced during the conflict requires that authors replace nostalgic narratives with a more rigorous and more inclusive strategy of commemoration. Nguyen-Vo Thu-Huong argues that commemoration is a “political and ethical act involving choice” as to what is recalled and what is forgotten (Thu-Huong 159). Vietnamese resettlement first occurred in the context of an overwhelming US desire to forget its failure in Vietnam – a discursive impulse toward amnesia that was accompanied by real violence and hostility against refugees, who were seen as embodiments of that failure (Cordell 385). Memories of the Vietnam War have, for the most part, been dominated by white American male voices (Chattarji, “New” 416). During the initial period following the influx of refugees to the US after 1975, Vietnamese American literature tended to embrace and affirm Americanisation and acculturation in order to reach wider audiences, to avoid ostracism, and to alleviate Vietnamese American precarity (416). Early Vietnamese American literature written in English was therefore inclined to support the dominant US discursive agenda of erasing American military actions in the Free Fire Zones, its use of Agent Orange and napalm, and its support of the Strategic Hamlet Program from public consciousness (416).⁶ In so doing, the United States’ contribution to the collapse of South

⁶ The Vietnamese peasantry was coerced into fortified encampments, or “strategic hamlets,” to isolate them from guerrilla fighters and to persuade them that the Republic of Vietnam had their best interests at heart. However, forcible removal from their ancestral farms and land not only resulted in massive internal

Vietnam's rural economy and its role in the impoverishment of its ally were gradually erased or modified as 'new histories' were generated to distract from and replace the older ones (413). Most early representations of the Vietnam War characterise members of the Vietnamese American community as either victims of evil communists, or as "plucky and grateful, [...] mordant" survivors benefitting from American magnanimity (Chattarji, "Made" 234). Vietnamese Americans have therefore been cast as what Thomas DuBois calls "emblematic victims" in need of "caring, counselling, or intervening" (4). Problematically, as previously mentioned, any group characterised solely as a collection of victims is excused from the "obligations of ethical behaviour in relation to both political and other acts" (Nguyen, "Speak" 10). This disenfranchises "emblematic victims" by preventing them from being perceived as full ethical agents. In Thu-Huong's view, Vietnamese American writers should counter deliberately amnesiac discourses about the war by concerning themselves with the question of how they should "remember rather than just appropriate the dead for [their] own agendas" (159). She argues that authors must recognise that simply recasting Vietnamese characters in opposition to how they are dominantly portrayed, without acknowledging historical complexities and entanglements, is exploitative.

Nguyen outlines an academic response to these challenges of representation – one that he deploys in *The Sympathizer* and that is inextricably related to his use of ghosts. In *Nothing Ever Dies*, Nguyen concurs with Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida's arguments that ethical memory should be oriented toward justice and the other, rather than justice and the self (Ricoeur 89; Nguyen, *Nothing* 73–74). He argues, however, that their "philosophical interventions [...] have not completely persuaded some Western artists, critics, and leftists to avoid *idealizing* the other" (Nguyen, *Nothing* 74; emphasis added). He states that only an ethics of recognition that acknowledges the othering practices of others can avoid utopianism (79). In an attempt to avoid this idealisation when considering acts of memory in times of war, Nguyen uses Ricoeur's model of ethical memory as a starting point for his own. Ricoeur's model is neither explicit about how justice should be adjudicated, nor is it clear on a related concern: whether the ethics of one memory necessarily render conflicting ones unethical (Nguyen, *Nothing* 73–74; "Just Memory" 150). Like Ricoeur, Nguyen argues that ethical memory must always be aware of its own processes of forgetting. While at times forgetting one's own suffering and trauma is necessary to continue leading a

displacement of the peasantry, it also contributed significantly to widespread resentment of the government and US forces. Ironically, these hamlets also provided concentrated centres for infiltration by guerrilla commandoes (see Chattarji, "New" 416; Nguyen, *Nothing* 41; and Hayslip 77–120).

normal life, it is the acknowledgement that something has been forgotten that is crucial. He recognises that most of the memory work undertaken by nations tends to commemorate their own suffering and overlooks the suffering they have inflicted (Nguyen, “Just Memory” 151). Originally, Nguyen dismissed this characteristic of memory work as “nationalist, patriotic ethnocentrism” premised on a strategic forgetting of others – the minority within, the enemy outside, the ideologically disagreeable, as well as women, children, civilians, the disabled, animals, and the environment (151). However, his experiences touring the reunified Vietnam suggested that practitioners of such nationalist memories regard themselves as ethical (152). To accommodate the apparent contradiction – that the self and the other may both consider themselves ethical – Nguyen’s model of ethical memory posits that just memories are those that recall both the injuries done to and those inflicted by the other as well as by one’s own (Nguyen, “Just Memory” 151; *Nothing* 4–19). The negotiation between remembering one’s own and remembering others demanded by this model “does not mean that competing memories can be reconciled” (Nguyen, *Nothing* 18). It does, however, mean that submitting to “only one ethical way of memory, at the exclusion of the other, will never suffice” (18). Nguyen’s depictions of the uneasy relationship between the narrator and the ghosts of the crapulent major and Sonny in *The Sympathizer* echo this academic concept of just memory.

The crapulent major is the first character the narrator and his friend Bon are ordered to assassinate after their arrival in the United States. Their orders are the direct result of the narrator identifying the major as a potential spy after the General’s suspicions have been aroused (see Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 55, 83). Initially, the narrator thinks that he has “scored a coup” by “throwing the blame onto a blameless man” (84). While the narrator is relieved that he has prevented the General’s suspicions from falling onto his own activities, it bothers him that he has had to use the major as a distraction. This suggests to readers that the narrator’s political ends and his ethics are at odds. While politically, his ruse will lead to the elimination of a high-ranking enemy (a major of the South Vietnamese), the narrator is ill at ease with the murder. The crapulent major could be read as an idealised other. Readers only have access to descriptions of his character focalised through the narrator. The narrator emphasises the innocence of the major whenever he considers how the misinformation he has provided has marked the major for death. The narrator’s conscience begins to plague him even before the assassination. He tries unsuccessfully to infer some sort of deceitfulness on the major’s part, wishing that he had “given the name of someone whose sins outweighed his flesh” (89). It is therefore significant that, shortly after the killing, the crapulent major returns as a spectre only visible to the narrator.

The liminality of the major's ghost – notably the question of whether he is absent or present – is highlighted by the ways in which the narrator interacts with this spectre. Nguyen uses the disruptive nature of the haunting to create an extradiegetic narrative level that reflects liminality. Here, Nguyen dismantles the borders between the living and the dead, and between the self and the other. In this sense, his ghosts could be considered ontological refugees “uprooted from home, which is to them a place where their memory can be settled” (Kwon 16). Furthermore, the appearance of Vietnamese casualties of the Vietnam War on American soil reverses the settings used in the trope of heterogeneous “ghosts of war” haunting the former battlefields of Vietnam common to Vietnamese American literature about the war (15).⁷ This accentuates the displacement of the narrator and of the group of military refugees on American soil, who continue performing their wartime roles beyond Vietnam's borders. Unlike in texts that only question American intervention in a foreign civil war, the extradiegetic narrative level of *The Sympathizer* is used to remind readers that this war was also transnational in another sense, as the exiles brought the political views and allegiances that originally led to the civil war with them when they crossed nation-state borders and fled Vietnam. After his politically motivated assassination, the major returns as a ghost visible only to the narrator, and this spectre's hauntology is manifested as images of a gunshot wound. The wound appears as a third eye, constantly weeping brain matter and blood “because of *what it could see about [the narrator]*” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 106; emphasis added). The spectre therefore disrupts and confuses the narrator's perceptions of presence. In one episode, the narrator suffers from an “emotional residue” (122) after sitting through a wedding reception at which he sees the crapulent major's severed head as the table's centrepiece (108–09). Nguyen's extradiegetic narrative level enables the narrator to hold a conversation with the ghost without being noticed by those around him. The crapulent major even provides the narrator with insights into how to deal with this affliction: “One simply must grin and drink unless one wants to sink to one's neck in the quicksands of contradiction,” (108) he says.

But ignoring the spectre, as the major implies, would mean that the disruptions represented by the ghost have been perceived as an inconvenience to the narrator's self rather than as an ethical injunction for justice toward the other. The novel reveals the inadequacy of this approach. The narrator unsuccessfully tries to placate the major's ghost in various ways.

⁷ Phan Huy Duong, for instance, lists these ghosts as “men women children old people Viets Laos Khmers Thais Koreans Australians New Zealanders French black white red yellow brown ... even a few Americans” (226; lack of punctuation in original).

When he is seriously injured by an explosion on the set of the movie-within-the-book, the narrator hears the “disembodied voice of the crapulent major” chuckling (174). This leads him to the conclusion that the ghost is motivated by revenge. To appease what he believes to be the major’s malevolence, and to ease his own conscience, he uses his dispensation from the studio’s law firm to provide the major’s wife a substantial sum of money to support her bereft family. On another occasion, in a desperate attempt for some privacy, the narrator leaves a copy of *Playboy* on the back seat of his car, in the hope that Miss June will distract the ghost from following him (214). The narrator’s responses to the hauntology he has experienced show that he has not perceived the spectre as an ethical injunction, but as a form of punishment. The disruptions, therefore, continue.

Later the crapulent major is joined by a second ghost. Unlike the major, Sonny is a character who has obviously wronged the narrator on various occasions. He has reported hearsay gleaned from the narrator’s conversations as facts – an act that almost exposes the narrator as a Vietcong sympathizer. He has also been involved in an illicit affair with the narrator’s lover. The narrator therefore agrees to gun down Sonny in a bid to secure the General’s permission to return to Vietnam as part of a reconnaissance team (264–65). After delivering the *coup de grace*, the narrator manages to flee the scene of his violent confrontation with Sonny. As he retreats, he walks directly past a potential witness who fails to look up as they pass each other. In so doing, he likens himself to “a ghost” (267) because of the anonymity his disguise grants him. By likening the narrator’s guilty self with a ghost, Nguyen creates a new relationship between the narrator and the ghosts of his victims. Both inhabit a liminal space in which they are neither fully present, nor completely absent. Nguyen foregrounds the liminality of the narrator as “a man of two faces” and “a man of two minds” (1). The narrator, who until now has merely created ghosts, has become one. Considering the conflict between his politics and his ethics, he cannot be neatly framed as sympathetic towards the Vietcong or towards the South Vietnamese, and, using Avery’s formulation, he has therefore become a figure that indicates a demand for justice. However, this demand is only fully recognised after his return to his homeland. Nguyen’s characterisation of the narrator as a living embodiment of a ghost occurs shortly before the reconnaissance team is captured during their incursion into Vietnam. It precedes the narrator being subjected to torture and forced to recount an event of which he claims to have no recollection. The episode that follows brings the nature of ghosts as ethical injunctions into sharp relief.

It is the spectre of the major who indicts the narrator by pointing out that “[p]lots take on a life of their own [...]. You gave birth to this plot. Now you’re the only one who can kill

it,” (240) he says. With this line, Nguyen indicates the true nature of the hauntology the narrator has been experiencing. When the two spectres disrupt the narrator’s interrogation in a North Vietnamese prison camp – a setting in which the Vietcong sympathizer should be at home and which involves psychological discomfort more than physical violence – their hauntology is equated with the actions of the narrator’s torturers, as they appear as part of that group. The ghosts’ heckling and the interrogation come to an abrupt halt when the inquisitors mention the horrific rape and torture of a female Vietcong sympathizer (334). The disruption of the spectres’ disruption of the narrative, by the narrative itself, signals that something of importance has at last been recognised, if not fully comprehended. In this configuration, the ghosts come to symbolise that which has been forgotten – an unrecognised history. During this episode, Nguyen’s ghosts – the crapulent major, Sonny, and the narrator himself – become metaphorical substitutes for the axes of aggressor and victim in his model of just memory.

When the narrator is forced to recall the rape, the experience proves too traumatic. There is a shift in the narrative perspective. The first person retrospective narrative voice of the rest of the novel is replaced by an impersonal third person narrator. An additional level of mediation is also introduced, as the commissar plays the narrator a recording of his answer, though the narrator “had no memory of the tape recorder’s presence” (335). Nguyen’s strategy repositions the narrator – locating him as an audience member – and renders him spectral. The narrator is both present and absent during the confession – both narrating and listening to it – and therefore occupies the extradiegetic narrative level inhabited by Nguyen’s ghosts. Not only does Nguyen’s displacement of the narrator reflect the traumatic experience of recalling what has been forgotten, it also suggests a metatextual commentary on the need for discourses to examine their own discursive practices.

It is during this episode that Nguyen problematises the narrator’s description of the crapulent major as “a relatively innocent man” (107). It is revealed that the narrator failed to recall that the crapulent major was one of the men who orchestrated the heinous rape. This suggests the dangers inherent in selective amnesia. The narrator has forgotten the episode entirely in order not to have to consider his own role in the event. Although Nguyen makes it clear that the narrator did not actively participate in the rape, he nevertheless indicts him for electing to do *nothing* in order to maintain his cover. Through his deliberate act of forgetting, the narrator has failed to recognise the female sympathizer. He has become complicit in protecting her assailants and in depriving her of justice. While the major’s ghost is the narrator’s less forgiving persecutor, Nguyen shows that the major has been misconstrued as

an innocent victim by virtue of the narrator's deliberate forgetting of the crimes he has committed. By finally recalling what he has forgotten, the narrator realises that he is "not being punished or re-educated for the things [he] had done, but for the thing [he] had not done" (342–43): he had failed to stop the torment of his fellow sympathizer. After this revelation, Sonny and the crapulent major share in the narrator's torture. Trapped in an all-white room, all three are subjected to the unbearable sound recording of a baby "shrieking [...] in torment" (351). The ghosts, including the narrator, no longer seem to be marked by absence. All three are present in the chamber. They are no longer immune to or removed from the narrative events on the diegetic level. Sonny and the crapulent major choose to "vanish" (351), suggesting that the axes of aggressor and victim have been collapsed by the narrator's traumatic recollection of his complicity in the rape, and by his recognition of the harm he has caused.

Nguyen's ghosts, then, are not spirits bent on vengeance and mayhem. Rather, they represent the twin axes of aggressor and victim in Nguyen's model of just memory. They embody the ethical imperatives of remembering the suffering of the self and the transgressions of the other as well as the suffering of the other and the transgressions of the self. They force the narrator to recall what he would prefer to forget. As narrative devices, the ghosts commemorate the dead by ensuring that their suffering is acknowledged. But Nguyen refuses to cast the ghosts as hapless victims to elicit sympathy from the reader. Instead, they are shown to be neither blameless nor entirely to blame for their conditions. Rather than exploit the ghosts, Nguyen uses them to embody ethical imperatives that demand the narrator acknowledge his own ability to inflict harm before the justice demanded by his own status as a ghost may be addressed.

Nguyen addresses similar concerns in his short story, "Black-Eyed Women." However, in this tale he addresses the importance of remembering, or at least recognising, personal traumas in order to claim full ethical subjectivity. Although Nguyen argues that it is crippling to claim that one is an emblematic victim, "Black-Eyed Women" appears to assert that it is equally disabling not to recognise that one has, at least to some extent, been victimised. This short story is recounted in the first-person diegetic narrative voice of a young writer who lives with her mother in the US. The narrator is a ghost writer who specialises in authoring the supposed autobiographies of survivors of tragedies. This is significant, as Nguyen's characterisation explicitly indicates ways in which Vietnamese American voices are subsumed by dominant discourses and are rendered silent. The narrator's voice is elided from her own work. In a sense, she therefore haunts the dominant discourse. While she is not

recognised for her contributions to survivor literature, her authorial voice is nonetheless detectable and recognisable in her work. Nguyen indicates this by showing how survivors approach the narrator's publicist to secure her as the ghost writer of their own stories. Victor Devoto, the "sole survivor of an airplane crash," identifies with the guilt the narrator articulates in one of her earlier books, and so commissions her to write his story (Nguyen, "Black-Eyed" 2). While working on Devoto's book, the narrator and her mother are visited by the ghost of her brother, who had been killed as the family attempted to escape Vietnam by boat. The story ends after the siblings discuss their experiences on the day the brother was killed. The ghost explicitly emphasises that the narrator, like him, is a liminal figure because she has not exercised ethical memory.

The ghost forces the narrator to recall an event that she and her mother have deliberately forgotten while they have "lived together politely" in their diaspora space (3): their family's trauma suffered on a "nameless blue boat" raided by "pirates [who] resembled [their] fathers and brothers" (14) over "twenty-five years" ago (4). During the narrator's conversation with her brother's ghost, she recalls how he attempted to save her from being raped by disguising her as a boy and attacking one of the pirates when their ruse is discovered (14–16). Her memory of his death is jogged by a bruise across his face – he was bludgeoned with the stock of a machine gun (15). But when she asks the ghost if the wound still hurts, he redirects the question and asks her about the wounds she incurred during her gang-rape (16). At first the narrator is taken aback. Soon, however, she recognises that she, her father, and her mother had "never utter[ed] another sound on this matter" (16). Even though the "silence" of her parents and her own "would cut [her] again and again" (16), the narrator admits that what hurt her the most was a sense of divine betrayal. She describes the sun as "the smoldering tip of God's cigarette, poised in the heavens the moment before it was pressed against [her] skin" (16). The narrator recalls a newspaper story about the invasion of a Vietnamese American home in the US. She conflates this horrific attack with her own. By comparing herself to the baby who had been burned with cigarettes to force its mother to reveal where the household's money was kept during the home invasion (7), the narrator conflates the victimisation of the boat people to the victimisation of Vietnamese Americans in their diaspora spaces. Even more significant, though, is her revelation that her brother had been killed while trying to protect her. This could account for the sense of complicity the narrator describes in her recollection of the events. This guilt is also shown to compound the need for her having to forget the trauma she experienced on that day. Her self-perceived guilt and complicity are revealed when the narrator asks her brother why he had died and she had

lived (17). The ghost responds: “You died too [...] You just don’t know it” (17). This statement suggests that the narrator herself has been living as though she were a ghost.

Her brother’s ghost subsequently forces the narrator to acknowledge that, since the day of his death and of her rape, she avoids the sun and lives like a recluse while she remains silent. She is therefore guilty of harming herself by withdrawing from ordinary life, and she must once again stand “blinking in the sun” (17). What the brother’s ghost reveals is that the narrator has accepted the label of victim and has failed to return herself to full ethical subjectivity. However, his hauntology in the story occurs unexpectedly “twenty-five years” after the traumas of their family’s escape (4). By emphasising the historicity of the events, Nguyen suggests that the narrator has necessarily had to allow sufficient time for herself to come to terms with her trauma before she can attempt to form an ethical memory.

After her conversation with her brother, she interviews Victor Devoto and learns that he too believes in ghosts (17). He tells her that, when his eyes are closed, his wife and children “appear just like they were alive” (17). When they are open, he sees his family in his peripheral vision (17). Nguyen’s narrator then realises that she has been mistaken to believe that she has a “special claim on suffering” (see Sontag 113). Once the narrator reaches this realisation, she decides to write a collection of ghost stories about the “quiet and shy ones like [her] brother” (Nguyen, “Black-Eyed” 19) – the ghosts “not bent on vengeance and mayhem” (19) but that demand self-recognition from those whom they visit. The ghosts in Nguyen’s short story therefore ensure that his narrator abandons her status as victim by recognising what she would rather forget. Once she has been able to do so, she is able to claim her own agency. Nguyen signals this symbolic resurrection – the narrator’s developmental arc from ghostly liminality to full ethical agency – by having his narrator decide to assert her right to be identified as the author of her own ghost stories. Like the narrator in *The Sympathizer*, the narrator of “Black-Eyed Women” has to be confronted by uncomfortable memories that she would rather forget in order to develop just memories about the past. In both works, Nguyen uses ghosts and their hauntologies to trouble the temporal settings of the plots to ensure that the narrators and readers are confronted by histories that demand recognition.

Section Four – They Cannot Represent Themselves

By excluding Vietnamese experiences and suffering from the main corpus of US films and books about the conflict, American writers and film makers have created “narcissistic myths of the war” as an American tragedy (Schwenkel 39). Representations of the war have largely been one-dimensional, depicting it as an American conflict, with American casualties, American lessons to learn, and American wounds to heal (Grice 942). Memoirs like Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977) and iconic films like Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) rely on racist stereotypes of the Vietnamese as “Charlie,” “Victor Charles,” or “Gooks” in their attempts to rationalise the political, social, and psychological legacies of the war on the American psyche (Grice 942). Discursive strategies in the past tend to depict the Vietnamese as “irrelevant details in an American-centred crisis” (P. Williams 234). In the US consciousness, Vietnam has thus become a confluence of images of conflict wherein the Vietnamese appear as backdrops to American heroism (Grice 941). They have been portrayed as feminised and weak, unable to survive without American military support and protection, in order to recast US imperial interference in Vietnam as a morally just war (Grice 943; P. Williams 234). One consequence of this discursive practise is that the “Vietnamese have been culturally undermined” (Melling 32). They have been cast as “figures of darkness and obscurity who live on the wrong side of history, the bearers of a primitive and fallible wisdom who have fallen prey to an atheistic mission and a communist myth” (32). Such representations serve the interests of the United States because it focuses the discourse on the just cause of the war (Nguyen, *Race* 111). Those American writers who did try to portray Vietnam as a country – with its own social structures, politics, and people – rather than simply as a war were relegated to the periphery and received very little critical attention (Ha 468; Melling 95). Dominant portrayals of the Vietnam War by Hollywood and American writers have, as a result of the wilful amnesia of a dominant culture intent on forgetting its own historical transgressions, become “the only time history has been written by the losers” (Nguyen qtd in Forna 37). Vietnamese and Vietnamese American experiences have been consistently subordinated to those of Americans – allegedly the “true victims of the war” (Forna 37).

Nguyen argues that there is a correlation between economics and the ethics of memory (“Just Memory” 155). The more expensive the medium, the less likely it will be concerned with recalling others (“Just Memory” 155). As a result of the disparities in economic and financial resources available to Vietnamese Americans compared to those of

Americans, US-centric stories about Vietnam are available internationally, made possible by Hollywood's international appeal and distribution channels ("Just Memory" 157). These perspectives, which tend to undermine and further erase the Vietnamese American experience from the dominant discourse, are not solely propagated by Americans, Nguyen argues, but are also perpetuated by the ways in which several Vietnamese Americans frame their own narratives in the hopes of justifying their presence in the US ("Just Memory" 157). As such, Nguyen categorises Hollywood as an ideological agent in the "industrialization of memory" (*Nothing* 13) that is a "component of the military-industrial complex" (14). In *The Sympathizer*, he presents a fictional account of the ideological and discursive warfare and violence Hollywood represents to support the more subtle intertextual commentaries he makes throughout the work. Hollywood, as is argued in greater detail in Chapter Five, forms one of the industries of memory that supports negative and positive stereotypes of transnationals, and perpetuates prejudicial ideologies that increase their precarity in their diaspora spaces.

The narrator of *The Sympathizer* is a highly educated man who Nguyen shows to have an extensive knowledge of American literature and film, and who often resorts to American representations for descriptions. For instance, the "earthy, quotidian scene" during which he breakfasts with "unrepentantly unassimilated Chinese and a few other assorted Asians" is characterised as "the kind Walt Whitman would have loved to write about" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 91). At this point, Nguyen's text temporarily adopts lengthy, whimsical sentences marked by an acute awareness of the finest descriptive minutiae, reminiscent of Whitman's poetic style: "Grease glazed the orange Formica tabletop, while chrysanthemum tea stood ready to be poured from a tin pot into chipped teacups the colour and texture of the enamel on human teeth" (91). Nguyen's brief and deliberate appropriation of the style of an American poet inverts the relationship between Vietnamese American and American discourses shortly after the war. The narrator uses an established American discourse to recount a Vietnamese American experience. In so doing, Nguyen signals cultural overlap between the American experiences captured in Whitmanesque poetry and in Vietnamese American experiences. He also reveals ways in which the transnational figure is able to appropriate an American discourse and, through hybridisation, is able to use that discourse to convey a transnational experience. In other words, Nguyen's transnational character is not rendered as a passive subject incapable of adopting and adapting dominant discursive practices. Rather, the narrator is able to interpolate himself into his diaspora space with reference to American discourses that are not necessarily disempowering. But this attempt to

situate the Vietnamese American within dominant discursive practices, the narrator realises, is relatively small, given the disproportionate amount of American representations available. The narrator's use of American intertexts, such as Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* – the text on which he wrote his undergraduate dissertation (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 97) – is criticised by the Commandant during his stay in the re-education camp. The Commandant scolds the narrator for not referring to “To Huu,” the “greatest revolutionary poet” (300). He considers the narrator's neglect of works by “Nguyen Du” and under-use of work by “Uncle Ho” (301) in his confession to indicate how he has been “contaminated by [the] decadence” (300) of the West. Ironically, though, the Commandant's criticisms of the narrator's confession and suggestions for reframing it within a discourse acceptable to the communist Vietnamese are in fact included in the narrative. Through this inclusion, Nguyen presents metatextual comment on the interchangeability of dominant discourses. The Commandant believes that the narrator's confession would be more acceptable simply by substituting American intertexts with Vietnamese ones. However, Nguyen is at pains to emphasise and privilege the liminality of his transnational narrator throughout the work. To substitute one form of nationalism for another would be to establish new binaries that are as reductive as the ones the novel has already complicated. Instead, Nguyen's narrator persists, throughout the several drafts of his confession, to refuse to write what his communist captors “want to hear” (300). He refuses to accept the disempowered identities of “puppet soldier, an imperialist lackey, a brainwashed stooge, a colonized comprador, or a treacherous henchman” (300), preferring instead to assert himself as a man who has lived his “life underground for the revolution” (303), even though his handlers consider him “contaminated by the West” (300).

The primary intertext of *The Sympathizer*, though, is the fictional Hollywood film “The Hamlet,” which serves as a reference to Vietnam War movie spectacles popularised by Francis Ford Coppola and Oliver Stone. When meeting with Violet, the assistant producer working on “The Hamlet,” the narrator realises that “in America it was all or nothing when it came to race” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 123). He comments that the stereotypical and racist portrayals of Asians in general in Hollywood movies have ensured that Americans would never recognise him as belonging in America:

The flawlessness of my English did not matter. Even if she could hear me, she still saw right through me, or perhaps saw someone else instead of me, her retinas burned with the images of all the castrati dreamed up by Hollywood to steal the place of real Asian men.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 123)

The narrator is aware that popular media and entertainment have undermined the legitimacy of anything that he could say to his American hosts, effectively silencing him. Rather than being recognised as an individual capable of expressing himself, with flawless English, his American hosts have been indoctrinated to see all Asians as a single, homogeneous – and laughably incompetent – group. While this bothers the “man of two minds” (*Sympathizer* 1) in the novel, Nguyen shows in his short story “The Transplant” how this racist nationalist tendency to unify all foreign cultures into broad descriptive categories in US diaspora spaces can be manipulated by transnationals. As will be shown in Chapter Four, Nguyen and Urrea both examine ways in which this type of nationalist discourse unwittingly presents transnationals with opportunities to re-interpolate themselves in their social surroundings. Works by both authors explore how, by emphasising desirable identity characteristics that can be misrecognised by the nationalists around them, transnational characters hybridise their identities in ways that afford them varying degrees of power in their diaspora spaces.

In Nguyen’s short story, a “bug in a hospital computer” results in several organ recipients learning the identities of their supposedly anonymous organ donors (Nguyen, “Transplant” 79). Arthur Arellano, a Mexican American recipient of a liver (77), learns that his donor, “Men Vu,” was “a widower and grandfather who got killed in a hit-and-run” (80). After sleuthing on the internet, Arellano learns that Vu was originally “from Vietnam” (80). Nguyen describes Arellano as “afflicted with a related, and very common, astigmatism wherein all Asians look the same” (80). Feeling compelled to contact Vu’s family to offer his thanks for the lifesaving liver, Arellano skims through the phonebook and contacts “every Vu listed in Orange County, of whom there were hundreds” (80–81). He eventually reaches Louis Vu, who listens to Arellano “without interruption” before saying “I’m the one you’re looking for” (81). Vu manipulates Arellano into allowing him to turn Arellano’s “modest garage into a warehouse, stacked with boxes upon boxes of counterfeit goods” (73). By the time Arellano discovers that Vu has taken advantage of him, he is too deeply implicated in black market activity to free himself from Vu’s hold on him. The reader learns that Louis is in fact not related to the donor, but that he took advantage of Arellano’s inability to distinguish between Vietnamese and Chinese Americans (93). Upon his discovery, Vu complicates his ethnicity even further by telling Arellano that he “was born in Vietnam, and [has] never been to China” (94). During the ensuing argument, Vu equates his taking advantage of Arellano’s “naïveté” (95) to Arellano’s brother’s employment of Mexican nationals “so long as they produced Social Security cards and driver’s licenses, either real or faked well enough to be mistaken for real” (95). Nguyen’s short story shows how

unscrupulous and criminal transnationals can take advantage of others within the diaspora space – even if their victims are also transnationals. This manipulation, Nguyen shows, is made possible through the “phantom identities” that are “easy to obtain” (95), which he represents through his intertextual allusion to the “phone book” (80).

The phone book represents a list of “phantom identities” (95). It presents a catalogue of names devoid of any markers of individual agency and obscures the true extent of multiculturalism and entanglement in the diaspora space. Nguyen also uses the phone book as an intertext during the filming of “The Hamlet” in *The Sympathizer*. Harry, the set designer, engraves “names from the Los Angeles phonebook and attached to people presumably still alive” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 174) on the tombstones in the film’s prop cemetery. The cemetery is earmarked for destruction. This episode reveals the callous indifference towards Vietnamese American names and the identities they represent, as well as the ease with which the set designer appropriates them and reduces them to mere decoration. Nguyen’s narrator also uses this episode to reveal how the ideological “behemoth” that is the film originates from the same “military-industrial complex” that creates the “technology used to actually obliterate natives” of the Vietnamese hamlets bombed during the war (172). The discursive violence involved in reducing and erasing the Vietnamese perspectives from the film are thus equated with the physical violence experienced during and after the war.

The narrator’s role on the film’s production team as a “technical consultant in charge of authenticity” (173) is the only one of his tasks on which both the Southern General and Man agree. Like the narrator, Man also conflates the ideological damage inflicted by Hollywood with actual violence, describing “Hollywood’s function as the launcher of the intercontinental ballistic missile of Americanization” (166). The narrator’s function on the film is seen by both of his leaders as the “*undermining [of] the enemy’s propaganda*” (137; original emphasis). Through this description, Nguyen gradually erodes the apparent binary between South Vietnamese forces, represented by the General, and the communist Vietcong, represented by Man. Discussing the film, for instance, the General quotes communist thinker Karl Marx: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (139). While he acknowledges that Marx “refers to peasants,” he claims that Marx “may as well refer to us. We cannot represent ourselves. Hollywood represents us. So we must do what we can to ensure that we are represented well” (139). But the narrator’s main attempt at ensuring that Vietnamese voices are represented “well” is superficial in its success.

The narrator manages to “alter the script here and there, and incite the creation of a few speaking parts” (172) for Vietnamese characters. However, the inclusion of Vietnamese

characters in “The Hamlet” only serves to accentuate the irrelevance of those characters except as devices against which American heroism is explored. Just as a play within a play traditionally echoes the themes of the framing narrative, Nguyen’s movie-in-the-book echoes the discursive practices of nationalistic USA. As Man informs the narrator, what matters is that audiences watch and love “the American story” until “the day that they themselves might be bombed by the planes they had seen in American movies” (166). Despite his efforts, though, the narrator realises that his inclusion of Vietnamese characters fails to “derail this behemoth” but makes “its path smoother” (172). To his dismay, he realises that the Americans “owned the means of production, and therefore the means of representation” (173). Excited by the inclusion of Vietnamese speaking roles, the narrator initially fails to realise that he “had simply assumed that once roles were created for Vietnamese people, Vietnamese actors would be found” (152). Violet, however, informs him that the Vietnamese actors who auditioned for roles “were amateurs and the handful of professionals overacted” (152). With this flippant remark, Violet effectively dismisses the Vietnamese’s ability to represent themselves. Nguyen once again draws readers’ attention to the multiculturalism of Asian Americans by introducing actors who are Filipino, American Korean, and “mixed-race” (154). But rather than reveal the racial and ethnic entanglements in the diaspora space, Nguyen shows how Hollywood recognises the heterogeneity of the Asian American group only to ensure that its own requirements for representation are met. While the producers of “The Hamlet” distinguish between the Vietnamese “amateurs” (152) and their pool of preferred Asian American actors, they nonetheless treat these sub-groups as interchangeable. The narrator notes that what the multiculturalism of the cast shows is that “we could not represent ourselves; we must be represented, in this case by other Asians” (152). This observation also indicates ways in which the stories Asian Americans tell themselves often serve to perpetuate the stereotypes created by the spectacles of Hollywood. This is reinforced toward the end of the novel, when the narrator and Bon watch the film in a movie theatre in Bangkok before their reconnaissance mission.

Bon remarks that “we weren’t even human” (277). He and the narrator appear to be the only members of the audience not “enjoy[ing] themselves thoroughly” (274). Even the narrator admits that he finds himself “caught up in the story and the sheer spectacle” (274). Bon’s indictment against his failure to ensure that Vietnamese “were going to [come] off well” reminds the narrator of his complicity in the elision of their wartime experiences. Furthermore, the narrator is stunned to see that his name – and, by extension, his contribution to the project – has been omitted from the credit roll (277). He considers this the Auteur’s

way of “murdering [him] in fiction, obliterating [him] utterly in a way that [he] was becoming more and more acquainted with” (277).

Nguyen’s descriptions of “The Hamlet” suggest that “Apocalypse Now” and, by extension, its primary intertext, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, also serve as intertexts to *The Sympathizer*. This observation is supported when considering the homophonic similarities between Kurtz’s dying words, “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad 75), and those of Shamus, “The whore! The whore!” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 171). By creating an intertextual link between *Heart of Darkness* and *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen recalls Chinua Achebe’s characterisation of the racism inherent in Conrad’s depiction of Africa as “racist slander” (Achebe 262), and conflates this with more recent Hollywood depictions of Vietnam. Furthermore, Nguyen also illustrates, through the narrator’s failed attempts at ensuring fair representation, that the “work of redressing” (262) such representations is a “daunting” (262) one. It also establishes a conflation between the ideological work of US industries of memory and “the evil of imperial exploitation” (262) that Conrad condemned during the height of European colonialism while, according to Achebe’s argument, inadvertently perpetuating the discourses that informed such exploitation. Nguyen shows that, just like the Belgians in Conrad’s Congo, the American movie crushes “victims in its path” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 168). Furthermore, in “The Hamlet,” Shamus’ dying epithets substitute Conrad’s metaphysical horror of death and the fear of an uncaring universe with the stereotypical role ascribed to what Nguyen calls “the ultimate Gook” (*Nothing* 64) – the Vietnamese woman. This figure, he argues, is the most terrifying in the American imaginative conception of Vietnam, as it represents simultaneously an object of intense desire and an enemy of incomprehensible brutality. As per the imperatives of remembering the other in service of just memories according to his own ethical model, Nguyen’s fiction therefore frequently attempts to recover the figure of the Vietnamese woman.

Section Five – Recovering the ‘Ultimate Gook’

Susan Sontag argues that the more “remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead or dying” (70). Her comment could easily be extended to include ways in which dominant representations of struggles appropriate and exploit disempowered and weak figures, in their attempts to encourage pursuit of various types of justice (Nguyen, “Speak” 31). For instance, graphic depictions of rape and murder are staple

tropes in Hollywood and popular Vietnam War films and memoirs – such as those in Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now*, Larry Heinemann’s memoir *Close Quarters*, and Le Ly Hayslip’s *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. Stories such as these are usually used by artists and authors to reveal “without compromise, the horror of war” (Nguyen, *Nothing* 64). But the experience of being represented in a particular way is as valid as historical experiences of victimisation. Jean Baudrillard’s comments on “Apocalypse Now” are revealing:

[T]he war in Vietnam “in itself” perhaps in fact never happened, it is a dream [...] that had the goal neither of a victory nor of a policy at stake, but, rather, the sacrificial, excessive deployment of a power already filming itself as it unfolded, perhaps waiting for nothing but consecration by a superfilm, which completes the mass-spectacle effect of this war.

(Baudrillard 59)

Baudrillard’s diction reveals the power of story and spectacle. Indeed, stories have the power “to obliterate as much as weapons” (Nguyen, *Nothing* 64), and can give rise to representations, like the “superfilm” (Baudrillard 59), that can detract from and eclipse the real horrors of historical events. Recognition of this is evident in the retaliation against Hayslip by the Vietnamese American community that accused her work of “contributing to the stereotype of Vietnamese women as prostitutes,” amongst other things (Pelaud, *choose* 26).

Viet Thanh Nguyen and Isabelle Thuy Pelaud both argue that the figure of the Vietnamese woman was most burdened by the stereotypes of the Vietnam War (see Nguyen, “Speak”; *Nothing* 64–66, 213–15; Pelaud, “War” 110). Nguyen attributes the discursive disremembering or omission of the Vietnamese woman to the fact that she is completely “different from the American soldier” (*Nothing* 64). Her difference stems from her gender, culture, language, and race (64). Most significantly, she has come to represent the “complete and threatening object of both rapacious desire and murderous fear” through her embodiment of the “mysterious, enticing, forbidding, and dangerous country of Vietnam” (64). There is thus profound symbolic significance to the fact that the sole survivor of Captain Willard’s sampan massacre in “Apocalypse Now,” and that the last person executed in that film and in its fictional equivalent “The Hamlet” (in Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 170–71), is a Vietnamese woman. Therefore, the Vietnamese woman is often considered to be “the ultimate Gook” (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 63–65). To subdue this figure enables an imaginative and discursive conquest of Vietnam itself.

But Vietnamese American women are not only subordinated by sexist rhetoric and gender-based violence from external groups. They also face sexism and gender-based violence from within the Vietnamese American community, predicated on the perceived emasculation of refugee men, and on shifts in traditional gender roles in the diaspora space (Pelaud, “War” 111). According to Pelaud, Vietnamese American women therefore encounter higher degrees of dislocation in American diaspora spaces than do men. As Pelaud argues, they tend to be rendered as either too visible (which this thesis refers to as ‘hypervisibility’), or invisible: as subjects to be desired or sacrificed (“War” 111). This makes the “participant-victim cusp” – the depiction of women as either victims or mordant survivors – the most accessible entry point into American discourses available to Vietnamese American women (Freeman 10; Chattarji, “Made” 234). If they style themselves to meet the expected characteristics of guests, they may receive a cordial, albeit conditional, welcome.

Nguyen’s model of ethical memory, with its strict tenets against accidental forgetting, therefore compels him to address the figure of the woman in his authorial project. She represents the “ultimate Gook” and tends to be “othered” in both the stereotypical, male-dominated American discourse and in American Vietnamese countermemories about the war. For Nguyen’s works to be considered ethical representations of Vietnamese American experiences according to the author’s own standards, then, they must acknowledge not only the harm inflicted on women, but also the harm inflicted by women. In so doing, Nguyen’s authorial project, in part, aims at the restoration of Vietnamese American women to full ethical subjectivity.

In “War Years,” Nguyen exposes ways in which transnationals, specifically women transnationals, in the diaspora space, exercise power to “suppress dissident voices” (Nguyen, “Just Memory” 149). The short story is set in “the summer of 1983” (Nguyen, “War Years” 49), which renders the title ironic, given that the war officially ended in 1975.⁸ Nguyen’s description of that summer as a continuation of the period of war suggests that the struggles and conflict extended, at least in the lives of his transnationals, well beyond its formally recognised timeframe. “War Years” is set during the first decade following the official cessation of hostilities. The story is told in a first-person, retrospective narrative voice, focalised through the diegetic character Long, a young boy whose parents are refugees who own a supermarket. Long is too young to recall life in Vietnam, and represents a Vietnamese

⁸ The title also expresses the idea that wars are fought twice – first on the battlefield and then in memory (Nguyen, *Nothing* 4).

American voice. In the story, Long is fascinated by Mrs Hoa, a character who moves throughout the Vietnamese American community collecting donations to support the “South Vietnamese soldiers organizing not only a guerrilla army in Thailand but also a secret front [...] in the United States” (55). Mrs Hoa approaches Long’s mother, requesting “five hundred dollars” (63). Long’s mother refuses to make a donation because she and her family have to “fight for each penny” (63) they have. Their profit margins on the goods they sell at their grocer, Little Saigon, are kept low so that the community can afford to shop there (63); their customers “haggle over everything” (51); and the family is paying for Long’s sister’s tuition at “Bryn Mawr” on the “East Coast” (62) as well as for Long’s education. Mrs Hoa responds:

“I struggle making ends meet, too.” Mrs. Hoa unclasped and clasped the silver latch on her purse. [...] “But people talk. Did you hear about Mrs. Binh? People say she’s a Communist sympathizer, and all because she’s too cheap to give anything. There’s even talk of boycotting her store.”

(Nguyen, “War Years” 52)

In the quoted passage, Mrs Hoa not only resorts to extortion but also signals the precarity of Long’s family, even within the Vietnamese American diaspora space. She threatens to deprive Long’s family of their only source of income by spreading rumours of possible communist collusion. There is also the latent potential that the boycott could be followed by violence. Long recalls how, “grimmer than rumours,” unknown assailants had “firebombed a Vietnamese newspaper editor’s office in Garden Grove” and shot another editor and his wife “in Virginia” (55). The killers “were never caught” (55). Long’s mother notes that the only reason they had been murdered was because they had said that “peace with the Communists might not be such a bad thing” (55). The volatility and potential violence immanent in the diaspora space, of which Mrs Hoa is no doubt aware, amplifies the severity of her threat.

Although she agrees that “Communists are evil” (56), Long’s mother refuses to fall victim to extortion, claiming that she has “dealt with worse” than Mrs Hoa (54). The narrator remembers an episode during which his family is robbed at home, at gunpoint, by “a white man” (58). Had the aggressor been “Vietnamese or Spanish” (58), he would not have been allowed into the house. However, his ethnicity and the trust Long places in white Americans enable the robber to manipulate him into opening the door, which facilitates the assault and robbery. Long’s mother refuses to “sink to her knees” (59), repeatedly yelling no in Vietnamese. She attacks the intruder, scaring him from the property. Her refusal to be victimised by an armed assailant and her resolve that she has “dealt with worse” (54) than Mrs Hoa imply that Long’s mother has been victimised before, most likely “in 1954” when

she and her husband fled as refugees to South Vietnam, “after the Communists had kicked out the French and seized the northern half of the country” (60). Nguyen, however, does not make this explicit, and therefore does not exploit Long’s mother as a victim of war. Rather, he allows the stereotypes dominant in popular portrayals of the Vietnam War to manipulate the assumptions of his readers.

When Long’s mother finally confronts Mrs Hoa in the latter’s home, however, she experiences a profound sense of shame. She and readers learn of Mrs Hoa’s losses during the war. Nguyen reveals that Mrs Hoa’s nationalism and urge to fund the guerrilla forces are informed by the loss of her husband and eldest son to communist forces, and her concern for her daughter, who still lives in Vietnam (69). Her youngest son, she explains, was part of a division sent into Laos by the Americans in 1972 and is missing in action (69). Mrs Hoa’s revelations move Long’s mother to an apology, and she donates what money she has to offer (70). The truth about the war proves more persuasive than Mrs Hoa’s threats. However, Mrs Hoa has tried not to depict herself as a helpless victim. Nguyen’s women characters in “War Years” therefore complicate the binary between victim and aggressor. At the onset, Mrs Hoa is characterised as villainous and heartless, driven by greed. Nguyen’s descriptions of her manicured nails, silver purse, and *ao dai* create the impression that the “donations” may in fact be misappropriated as she exploits weaker, more vulnerable women. However, as the story develops, Long’s mother progressively displays the ability to fend for herself, until she actively chooses to renounce the role of victim and confront her persecutor. It is during this confrontation that Nguyen, through his revelation of Mrs Hoa’s true motives, shows readers that Long’s mother has been unwittingly contributing to Mrs Hoa’s personal pain. Long’s mother is therefore also an aggressor. While the degrees of harm each woman inflicts on the other varies, the recognition of their mutual ability to hurt each other finally allows them to reach a compromise and to accommodate one another.

Problematically, however, Nguyen’s attempt to recover the Vietnamese woman in this short story perpetuates and replicates a central problem in dominant discourses. As a male Vietnamese American writer, Nguyen has appropriated the figure of the woman and presented it in such a way as to further his own agenda. For his authorial project to remain ethical according to his own model, Nguyen needs to acknowledge the potential harm that could result from the representations presented in his own writing. Minority authors need to recognise that their works are marked by selective amnesias, just as dominant discourses are (Nguyen, “Speak” 15). Nguyen does, however, engage with the omission and stereotyping of women in his novel during the climactic interrogation scene of *The Sympathizer*. As

explained in the previous section, during this episode, the narrator is forced to recall a woman sympathizer and his failure to save her from a brutal gang rape, committed by Claude, the crapulent major, and three Southern policemen under his own command.

The woman sympathizer, who was caught with “a list” of the identities of the Special Branch of police “being crammed into [her] mouth” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 9), is mentioned early in the novel. The narrator remembers that “she was younger” than him and has been locked away in an “interrogation cell” where “[e]veryone talked” (9). He recalls thinking that the woman “hated [him] for [being] the agent of an oppressive regime” (9). He regrets that he could not expose his own communist ties. She is alluded to another four times throughout the narrator’s confession, as Man later indicates (323). However, the narrator fails to provide readers with any further information about her. Man also reminds the narrator, and readers, that the narrator has commented on having “forgot something, but [that he] couldn’t remember what it was” (317).

Nguyen uses Man’s questions during the narrator’s interrogation to expose the fact that the woman has been omitted from his confession and, by extension, from Nguyen’s text. Man forces the narrator to recognise this failure of memory and to redress his omission of her from the story. But the experience is too traumatic for the narrator. The attempt to recover the woman sympathizer displaces the narrative voice that has dominated the novel, and that will return once the horrors of what happened to her are exposed. As previously argued, in Chapter 21 of the novel, the first person retrospective narrative voice of the rest of the novel is replaced by a third person narrator during this scene. The episode is also rendered as further mediated by the presence of a tape recorder of which the narrator has no recollection. Nguyen repositions the narrator, shifting his role from source of the story to an audience member. The narrator is exposed to his own narrative. Nguyen’s strategic displacement of the narrator suggests a metatextual commentary on the need for creators of discourses to examine their own discursive practices. This echoes the earlier scene in a Bangkok cinema, when the narrator and Bon, as well as the otherwise rowdy Thai audience, fall silent, shocked by the graphic rape of Mai in “The Hamlet” (275). The result is that the two discourses being represented – the spectacle of the Hollywood blockbuster and the narrator’s painful confession – become contiguous, as both force the narrator into self-reflection. This link is further strengthened by Nguyen’s description of the venue where the sympathizer is tortured: it is called the “movie theater” because, when not in use for torture, “the room is a movie theater” (334). Nguyen’s setting of a place normally associated with entertainment as a site of

torture and of self-reflection serves to highlight the entanglement amongst violence, forgetting, discursive manipulation, and the industries of memory.

The violent gang rape of the woman is grotesquely reminiscent of the scene in “The Hamlet.” By drawing parallels between the violence committed against the woman in “The Hamlet” and the woman sympathizer in the torture chamber, Nguyen indicates the ways in which dominant representations of Vietnam attempt to simplify power relations. While Nguyen shows that the stereotypical portrayals of the war in which male characters subjugate and brutalise Vietnamese women have their origins in historical fact, his substitution of stereotypically Vietcong rapists for Southern Vietnamese policemen operating under the orders of Claude, their CIA handler, acknowledges the harm caused by all parties. Nguyen not only recovers the figure of the Vietnamese woman to force his audience to confront the entanglement between discursive practices and real violence, but also to acknowledge the ways in which transnationals are as responsible for the subjugation of women as those whom they would prefer to blame.

Section Six – Closing Remarks

The transnational characters in Nguyen’s short stories and *The Sympathizer* illustrate how Vietnamese Americans rest at the “junction of various axes of power that contradict, coincide, silence or enhance” (Pelaud, *choose* 35) their ability to enter into American and other dominant discourses. But, like that of other Vietnamese American writers, Nguyen’s literary project refuses to enter the discursive arena via the participant-victim cusp (see Freeman 10), which threatens to reduce transnationals to either “victims [or] grateful [...] survivors in the American landscape” (Chattarji, “Made” 234).

Nguyen instead concentrates on ways to empower his transnationals by presenting them as fully ethical subjects. To do this, his authorial project explores just memories as defined in his own academic studies. For Nguyen, a minority discourse’s right to existence is premised upon the idea of ensuring that the minority is treated justly (“Speak” 33). While this right is granted to it by virtue of the damage inflicted upon minorities by the majority – represented in his work by American betrayal and various forms of violence committed against his characters in their diaspora spaces – the minority discourse can only rightfully claim justice if its own practices are ethical. To ensure that they are, minority discourses need to acknowledge that minorities are able to, and do, inflict harm (15).

Nguyen has addressed these issues by turning to representations of the Vietnam War, a topic he “felt had not been covered adequately. [He wanted] to make the case for how the end of the war extended well after the cease-fires” (qtd in Lefferts para. 1). Nguyen uses the war as a setting against which he frequently explores themes of betrayal and complicity. He describes South Vietnam as a diaspora space for many Vietnamese before their forced migration to the US. Nguyen also insists on representing the multiculturalism and heterogeneity of the Vietnamese American community, by exposing how historical entanglements and power-relations have been transplanted from Vietnamese into American diaspora spaces, compounding transnational dislocation. His works weave details about what it is like to be Vietnamese in America after the war into narratives that are relentless in their refusal to portray Vietnamese Americans as having a “special claim on suffering” (Nguyen, “Speak” 33). In so doing, his works erode the superficial boundaries between aggressor and victim by insisting on recuperating that which has been strategically forgotten. Nguyen writes about ghosts and describes their hauntologies in his narratives. He uses these devices to ensure that his concerns with histories that have been deliberately or accidentally forgotten are presented in his fiction. This furthers his authorial project of contemplating the role just memory serves in the formation of fully ethical subjects.

This particular preoccupation is mirrored in works by Luis Alberto Urrea. As the following chapter illustrates, Urrea shares Nguyen and Gurnah’s concerns with the entanglement of history, individual narrative, and memory. Like Nguyen and Gurnah, the diaspora spaces articulated in his fiction are palimpsestic. However, the histories he attempts to uncover not only reveal similarities shared by the host and home diaspora spaces – they also present a further complication that results from the presence of a physical national border.

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE MATRIX OF HUMANITY IN SELECTED WORKS BY
LUIS ALBERTO URREA**

Section One – Writing from the Borderland

Since 1993, the United States government has attempted to deter undocumented migrants from crossing its border with Mexico (Spener 296). During its early attempts, the government strategically amassed agents, surveillance equipment, and physical barriers along the urbanised stretches of the border (296). A two-thousand-mile fence that spans from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California, was later signed into law in 2006 by then-president George W. Bush (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 20; E. Jacobs 176). It is policed by the US Border Patrol (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 20; Urrea, *Highway* 21). Together, the fence and its custodians are meant to dissuade undocumented migrants from the south from entering the United States of America (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 20).

US policies for defending its boundaries have prioritised the militarisation of this southern border since the attacks on 11 September 2001 (20). But rather than prevent crossings, the extension of the fence and the growing military presence in the region have promoted the rise of organised international crime syndicates. These employ smugglers, commonly called *coyotes*, *pateros*, and *polleros*, to pass undocumented migrants from one side of the border to the other (Spener 298). So, as many studies have shown, the fence and its accoutrements – whether restricted to urban areas or stretched from the east to the west coasts – are proven failures as deterrents (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 20). Nonetheless, in an increasingly bordered but paradoxically globalised world, this fence still represents an impenetrable barrier and gives rise to a new category of human – the ‘illegal alien’ (20). Ideologically, then, the fence is a success, as it feeds the everyday conceptual practices that support the construction of the US nation (20; Auchter 295). As part of the process Jessica Auchter calls “statecraft,” the fence

is itself a symbol of the will to contain migration, to construct the identity of those situated on both sides, and to impose a will upon the landscape itself. The fence imposes upon the landscape the concept of sovereign territoriality. Before the fence, there is just desert, brush, and land. After the fence, there are citizens, ownership, geography, territory, governance, and enforcement.

(295)

In other words, the existence of the border nourishes the United States, which in truth needs “illegal crossers” (Ibarraran-Bigalondo 21) because “[t]he state is defined by its citizenry and by those who do not fit into the requirements for citizenship. The immigrant, documented or not, is that which is different from the citizen, the constitutive outside to the citizen, the other to the state” (Auchter 296). In a similar argument, Gloria Anzaldúa refers to *los atravesados* – transgressors and aliens – instead of using Auchter’s “immigrant.” Anzaldúa claims that their existence legitimates the power of “whites and those who align themselves with whites” (4). For Anzaldúa, the US-Mexico border region is a space that facilitates the mediation between and within cultures in dialectic tension. The border

es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before the scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.

(Anzaldúa 3; original emphasis)

Anzaldúa’s critical description of the border region uses essentializing, generalizing, and reductive terms to convey a sense of binary oppositions: us versus them; the third world versus the first world. It clearly defines two sides of a violent and bloody conflict.¹ But a “vague and undetermined place” lies between the opposing forces, created by the “unnatural” demarcation between the geo-political units of the United States and Mexico. In this place, which strongly resembles “the land in the middle” referred to by poet Pat Mora as “Nepantla” (5), inhabitants share a common character. Here, all inhabitants are “prohibited and forbidden.” As Juan Bruce-Novoa argues, while Anzaldúa’s ascription of a “state of transition” grants the area a sense of kinetic energy, her use of the word “constant” indicates the desire for some form of permanence (Bruce-Novoa, “US-Mexican” 33). Ultimately, Anzaldúa’s configuration of the US-Mexico borderland is reminiscent of the depictions of the diaspora spaces of Gurnah’s England and Zanzibar, and Nguyen’s Vietnam, Philippines, and US. The borderland is a “third country” with its own “border culture” (Anzaldúa 3) that has “survived possession and ill use by five powers” (90). It has “survived” and been shaped by “Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rape, [and] pillage” (90).

¹ The Spanish term “*herida abierta*” used to describe the border translates as “open wound” (Bruce-Novoa, “US-Mexican” 33).

Bruce-Novoa argues that the paradoxical quality of Anzaldúa's description is also evident in recent texts on the US-Mexican border. He claims that these texts convey the contradictory sense that the border region "actually functions as one homogeneous area," even though the border clearly separates two autonomous nation-states ("US-Mexican" 32). Bruce-Novoa's conclusion echoes Anzaldúa's notion that the "two worlds" merge to "form a third country" (3). But he argues that in spite of this, many border texts tend to describe the area as "homogeneous" (Bruce-Novoa, "US-Mexican" 32), which overlooks the complex entanglement of different cultures inherent within the spaces described in the fiction of so-called border writers. Rather than construct a monolithic location, border fiction about the region Anzaldúa calls the borderland (3) reveals it to be an area where individuals enjoy fluctuating amounts of power determined by the value placed on the heterogeneous constituent parts of their identities at different points in time (see Brah 209). So, far from being "one homogeneous area" (Bruce-Novoa, "US-Mexican" 32), the borderland is better understood as being a diaspora space characterised by complex socio-political and cultural entanglements and intersections. Nevertheless, and unlike the diaspora spaces inscribed by Gurnah and Nguyen's fictions discussed earlier, a growing body of fiction about the US-Mexican borderlands grapples with an additional complexity – the ideological problems posed by the presence of a border; a boundary that physically cuts through the diaspora space.

Luis Alberto Urrea is a Mexican American writer whose works consistently return to the diaspora space of the borderland. His first published work was an essay entitled "Father Returns from the Mountain" composed in 1977. The piece was a non-fiction attempt by the young Urrea to come to terms with his father's murder at the hands of Mexican police along the Mexican side of the border earlier that year. Urrea also describes, in that essay, the subsequent extortion of money from his bereaved family, after Mexican officials forced the Urreas to pay bail to secure the return of the corpse (Urrea qtd in Gross para. 74). "Father Returns from the Mountain" was mistaken by Ursula K. Le Guin for a creative writing piece, and she included it in an anthology. Since then, Urrea has produced works that span across nearly all genres: essays, poetry, long and short fiction, cartoons, and journalism. His work has also garnered several accolades. The non-fiction account of the deaths of the Wellton 14 titled *The Devil's Highway* was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, and won the Lannan Literary Award. He has since been inducted into the Latino Literature Hall of Fame, and currently serves as a distinguished professor of creative writing at the University of Illinois in Chicago (ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 6–9; 12–14).

Despite his constant thematic return to the borderland, Urrea explicitly rejects the label “border writer” in a 2010 interview with Chicana journalist Maria Hinojosa:

I call it “My Day at the Zoo” writing, where a ... some sort of manly man goes down and observes the crazy little brown people [for] a week or two, and then writes a book about crazy brown things crazy brown people do. And there’s ... There’s very little sensitivity or affection or knowledge or wisdom about the culture we are making a lot of books writing about.

(Urrea on Hinojosa 04:21)²

Urrea’s use of the diminutive to describe how border authors view “brown people” as “little” reveals that he views border writing as a form of condescending racist ethnography that authors use for self-aggrandisement and profiteering. His description delineates a masculinist discourse perpetuated by “manly men” hallmarked by lack of insight into the historic, economic, socio-political, and cultural milieus of the borderland. Border writers, as characterised by Urrea and argued by Bruce-Novoa, homogenise the complexities of the region to non-human problems. They are no more than observers at “the Zoo” – a space characterised by the rigid demarcations of areas where different animals belong, marked by physical boundaries such as fences. Although he does remark to Hinojosa shortly before this comment that perhaps she feels the same way about border writing (Hinojosa 04:18), Urrea’s comment problematically overlooks works by female writers like Cherríe Moraga, Pat Mora, Sandra Cisneros, Alma Villanueva, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Gloria Anzaldúa, as well as by Chicana journalists such as Hinojosa herself.³ Nevertheless, Urrea implicates himself in these practices when he says that “we are making a lot of books” (Urrea on Hinojosa 04:21; emphasis added). This statement suggests that a binary implicitly exists in his comment about border writing. While there are those authors who display an exploitative, patronizing, and condescending approach toward the “crazy little brown people” of the borderlands, there are also those who – like Urrea himself – display the “sensitivity[,] affection[,] knowledge[,] and] wisdom” the others lack. In order to separate himself from the first group, Urrea prefers to be called a “border writer more interested in bridges” (ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 1).

In Urrea’s debut non-fiction book, *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (1993), he depicts the Mexican side of the border region as a diaspora space

² Interview transcribed from YouTube on 23 August 2018. The timecode shown in the citation is as accurate as could be ascertained from the clip.

³ This observation is not intended to suggest that Urrea is deliberately chauvinistic. Rather, it reveals how deeply he has been influenced by the Chicano *machismo* of his upbringing. His novels reflect a conscientious attempt to subvert and redress sexist and patriarchal stereotypes. The success of such attempts, however, are questionable.

characterised by daily violence. This is compounded by the impunity with which the Mexican police arbitrarily abuse their powers, and by images of the abject poverty and of the desperation in which many live. As Bruce-Novoa observes, Urrea limns the border as “an unmistakable line between two diametrically opposed realities” (“US-Mexican” 47) in his early work. But the author’s early conception of the borderland as dichotomous has noticeably evolved as he has matured. In a *New York Times* opinion piece on President Donald Trump’s proposed border wall, Urrea describes the vista just south of the Otay Mesa border post:

Tijuana crashes into the actual border fence like a flood hitting a dam. We are often told that the city is an industrial wasteland – it’s important to the illusion that those people over there in Mexico are not fully human [...]. The Trump narrative needs Mexico to be a scary place, crawling with narcos and rapists.
(Urrea, *Beautiful* SR7)

The “Trump narrative” to which Urrea refers is a politically conservative one that the Republican president used throughout his electoral campaign. It draws extensively from a conceptual paradigm that Teresa Carrillo calls an “anachronistic nationalist framework of citizenship” (2). This is a discursive form of statecraft (see Auchter 295) that defines the identities of those who do and those who do not belong in the United States of America. This framework neglects the increasingly transnational nature of human affairs resulting from globalisation, historical migrations, and conquests. The political community Trump imagines as sovereign in the United States (see Anderson 6) explicitly excludes undocumented immigrants. The Trump Presidency’s attempts to dehumanise undocumented migrants have resulted in increased incidents of public xenophobia, racism, anti-migrant protests, and politically conservative backlashes.⁴

Urrea’s propensity for subversion is apparent as he retaliates against Trump’s narrative:

⁴ These do not only include policy actions such as the Administration’s attempts to cancel former President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA was introduced in 2012. It allows undocumented immigrants to the US who arrived as children, through no fault of their own, and who meet other requirements, renewable two-year reprieves from deportation as well as short-term work permits (S.M. para. 1–2). Trump’s narrative has also facilitated public displays of white nationalism, such as the Unite-the-Right neo-Nazi rally held in Charlottesville, Carolina, from the 11th to 12th August 2017 (see Fortin; Haag; Herreira; and Weiner for examples of news reports of the event). This is not to suggest that such racist and xenophobic sentiments did not exist before Trump’s inauguration, but that the political climate since his appointment is conducive to public expressions thereof.

Otay Mesa [...] was once inhabited by the Kumeyaay Indians. [...] Tribal historians say they lived there for 12,000 years.

Of course, that was before *undocumented immigrants* invaded, and brought with them parking lots, McDonald's and endless storage units to tame the land. A new border divided the Kumeyaay's land, and cavalry in white Border Patrol trucks took charge.

(Urrea, *Beautiful* SR7; emphasis added)

Urrea's opinion piece tries to historicise the borderland even as it inverts the label Trump uses to brand those imagined as not belonging – even threatening – to the US nation. In this case, Urrea uses “undocumented immigrants” ironically to refer to Trump's ideal citizen rather than to refer to Mexican immigrants. This serves as a reminder of the atrocities visited upon the Native American tribes during the formative years of the United States. It also highlights the increasing militarisation of the borderland, and the sense of unhomeliness that accompanies the omnipresent threat of force represented by the “cavalry” of the “Border Patrol.” Rhetorical tactics that undermine stereotypical views of the experiences of Mexican Americans, and that emphasise their precarity in US diaspora spaces, are characteristic of Urrea's work, regardless of genre.

This chapter will examine the ways in which Urrea's *The House of Broken Angels* (2018) and selected short stories from *The Water Museum* (2015) complicate the binary thinking that informs the current political climate for immigrants in the US. As Viet Thanh Nguyen writes, “Urrea rightfully does not care about legal status, given the doubtful legality and certain unjustness of many American policies aimed at Mexico, Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans” (1(L)). What is important in Urrea's works, however, is the experience of Mexican Americans as transnationals within a diaspora space in which people are “being confronted by good Americans spewing demented vitriol at them” (Urrea qtd in Gross para. 5). Rather than engage with political tactics that may prove to be no more than grandstanding, Urrea's authorial project closely questions “not the Mexican border [but] the human border” (Urrea on Hinojosa 04:18).⁵ In order to destabilise perceptions that people of Mexican origin are necessarily invasive “narcos and rapists” (Urrea, *Beautiful* SR7), Urrea uses ghosts in order to historicise the borderlands, and to unsettle nationalist claims of belonging. This strategy is further nuanced by Urrea's project to not misrepresent any of the real experiences

⁵ Despite President Trump's claims that DACA would be suspended immediately should he be elected, and Attorney General Jeff Session's later declaration that it would end on 5th March 2018, the motion was struck down by three US Federal Courts – California, New York, and the District of Columbia. Trump and Session's claims that DACA is unconstitutional have no factual basis, as no court has ever ruled it so (S.M. para.1 and 3). The political climate created by this motion, however, has allowed xenophobic and racist sentiments to flourish.

he fictionalises through his characters, regardless of the personal political views they are represented as having. Like Nguyen, Urrea accomplishes this by ensuring that his characters are confronted by the damage they inflict amongst their own communities as well as on others (see Iwata 181). His works depict how the heterogeneity of the diaspora space enables transnationals to construct their identities from a plethora of potential elective affinities. By portraying characters who are responsible for their own fluid expressions of identity, and who are confronted with their full ethical agency despite the exigencies of the diaspora space, Urrea avoids over-simplifying power and rejects the ‘comforts’ of victimisation (see Chapter 3; Nguyen, “Speak” 10, 13–15). As a result of these strategies, what emerges from Urrea’s works is an image of a “matrix of our humanity” (Urrea qtd in ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 23) that should unite everyone regardless of their origins. But this vision is not utopian. Violence perpetuated by both transnationals and nationals continues to complicate the diaspora space of the borderland.

Section Two – The Latino Threat Narrative

Leo Chavez describes a public discourse in the United States that connects a set of socio-political concerns about immigration, citizenship, and the power of media spectacles (1–2). This ‘Latino Threat Narrative’ posits that “Latinos are not like other immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation” (2).⁶ According to the assumptions implicit in this narrative, Latinos – especially Mexicans – are either unable or unwilling to integrate into the national community (2). It claims that the real motive for Mexican migration into the US is to reclaim the American Southwest (2). In public discourse in the US, then, Mexicans and other Latinos are cast as invasive forces from south of the border that threaten the American way of life (2). Narratives of this sort convert the US diaspora spaces available to Mexican transnationals into hostile sites of precarity. There has been a series of historical antecedents of this narrative in the US. Each has targeted a particular immigrant group and its children: the German language threat; the Catholic threat; the Chinese and Japanese immigration threat; and the southern and eastern European threats (3).⁷ Where the Latino Threat Narrative differs is in its recognition that Latinos, especially Mexicans, were present in what is now the

⁶ Chavez uses the term ‘Latino’ to indicate that the narrative is often applied to discussions of immigration from Latin American countries, and to US-born Americans of Latin American descent. However, he notes that Mexicans are most frequently the focus of such discourse (3).

⁷ See Anzaldúa’s description of the successive conquests of the Texas border area (90). There is a correlation between the prevalent threat narrative, and the group claiming to belong to the region.

American Southwest before the first Spanish colonies were established (Chavez 3; García 16; E. Jacobs 15–16). Mexican and other Latino immigration has historically waxed and waned since the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, but it has been on the rise since 1965 (Chavez 3; Vargas 385). Despite the parallels amongst this immigration pattern and the patterns of other immigrant groups, though, Mexican migrants (as well as people of Mexican origin born in the US) have been framed as the quintessential ‘illegal alien’ (Chavez 3). Overwhelming amounts of public discourse in the US represent them as criminals and “illegitimate members of society” (3) because of their alleged anti-social and anti-US proclivities. Such consequences of the Latino Threat Narrative are reinforced by popular entertainment and news media. These are further supported by the rhetoric emanating from the current White House administration, and the racist right-wing groups emboldened by its leadership. The desired result is that Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are framed as “undeserving of social benefits, including citizenship” (3). Moreover, the oppressive effects of the pervasiveness of this discourse of threat, and of widespread representations of Mexican inferiority, are internalised by those exposed to them (see Fanon, *Wretched* 176). As a result, the social identities of Mexican transnationals are “plagued by the mark of illegality” (Chavez 4).

Urrea’s works delineate various ways the ideologies expounded by the Latino Threat Narrative and similar discourses can be used by Americans to manipulate Mexican transnationals within US diaspora spaces. They also complicate that manipulation by showing the versatility with which transnationals are able to adapt their identities and reposition themselves within the dominant “discourses of history and culture” (Hall, “Cultural” 226), of which the Latino Threat Narrative is a consummate example. Through syncretisation and adaptation, transnationals negotiate the “multi-axial fields of power relations” within their diaspora spaces (Brah 209). What emerges from Urrea’s depictions of the interactions between transnationals and those who wish to manipulate them, then, is a crafty game of wits, the loss of which could potentially devastate a transnational way of life.

In *The House of Broken Angels* Urrea portrays what it means to be a first generation transnational who lives two lives across one border. The novel spans two consecutive days. On the first, the de La Cruz family gathers to bury Mamá América, until then the oldest de La Cruz. On the day following his mother’s funeral, Big Angel, the patriarch, celebrates what he and his family know to be his last birthday, as he is in the final stages of terminal cancer. Focalisation switches amongst various family members. Each passage presents a series of analeptic episodes as individual focalisers try to prepare themselves for Big Angel’s passing

by recalling the impact he has had on their lives. The narrative therefore develops into a complex history of the family's hopes, dreams, successes, and failures as it tries to flourish in the US.

During Mamá América's interment, Lalo, Big Angel's biological son, forces himself to look at the headstone of his dead stepbrother, Braulio. This event serves as a catalyst for a sequence of analepses that reveal Braulio and Lalo's individual struggles with "figur[ing] out the immigration thing" (Urrea, *Angels* 75). The pursuit of citizenship emerges as an important subplot during this episode, although Urrea reveals that it is the *sense of belonging* that accompanies citizenship that is important, and not the official, legal status itself. Lalo recalls Braulio's belief that he would "[g]et some meaning into his life along with those papers" (75). This desire contradicts the tenet of the Latino Threat Narrative that posits people of Mexican origin as unwilling to integrate with the US nation (see Chavez 2). It also renders Braulio vulnerable to manipulation by an army recruitment officer that the brothers meet during a trip to the mall in 1991. Even though Lalo recalls Braulio's attraction to the recruitment booth, Urrea uses Lalo's position as a retrospective focaliser to foreshadow the dishonesty with which Braulio and, later, Lalo himself will be baited. The conflation of the recruitment booth with stalls where "earnest characters [...] hawked 'magic-vision' 3-D posters" (75) equates the military service on offer with mass-produced, consumer goods. Lalo recalls "a plastic M14 mounted to the back wall" as well as a "seven-foot-tall poster" depicting a tank "rampant in mid-launch off some distant and foreign sand dune" (76). A "young blond soldier" who gives "the world a giddy thumbs-up" is foregrounded against this "action shot" (76). Lalo describes the model on the poster as the "Pet of the Month" (76), anachronistically revealing the cynicism and bitterness with which he eventually views the US Army. But the packaging of the product on offer attracts Braulio, who is drawn to the recruitment officer "as if by a tractor beam" (76). As he reflects on the events, Lalo describes how he "felt his brother slip out of the family in the fifty steps it took to be drawn into the US Army" (76). This observation combines with the reader's knowledge that Braulio is dead at the time of Lalo's narrative, and creates the expectation that Braulio will be killed as a result of his service. While this is later revealed to not have been the case, it is against this false expectation that Urrea shows how the nationalist recruiters exploit Braulio's precarity in his diaspora space.

When the "blocky-headed" (76) sergeant tells Braulio not to call him "sir" because he works for a living, Braulio fails to recognise the cliché. Instead, he misunderstands it as the sort of "profoundly badass" (77) statement that appeals to his rebellious "gangsta" (75)

identity. The sergeant's response to Braulio's "barrio bullshit" (77) exemplifies the racial profiling facilitated by the Latino Threat Narrative:

“By ‘beef,’ I am gonna assume you’re telling me you have some *gang-related* issues, what with you being *Hispanic* and all.” Ha-ha-ha-hah. “Lookit.” He aimed his bullet pen at Braulio’s skinny face. “Best boys I ever served with were goddamned taco benders, Son. No offense.”

(Urrea, *Angels* 77; original emphasis)

Racial profiling is a repressive social practice (Aguirre 928). It draws on generalised group characteristics in order to individualise “stereotypical behavior for minorities” (928). Despite claiming that he means no offense by it, the sergeant’s use of racist epithets and his xenophobic, reductive assumption that Braulio’s ethnicity necessarily implicates him in “*gang-related*” and illegal activities deliberately signals and asserts his authority over Braulio. Lalo describes the sergeant’s response as “very precisely broadcast” (Urrea, *Angels* 77), and, with the benefit of hindsight, he recognises the calculated nature of the exchange. Braulio’s precarity becomes even more apparent to the sergeant when he begins to explain that he does not have legal residence status. The sergeant’s response is to exploit the fear of deportation, by suggesting that service in the American armed forces guarantees citizenship. This is also more racist than his previous statement.

The exchange between Braulio and the sergeant serves as a powerful depiction of the relationship between transnationals and nationalists in US diaspora spaces. When Braulio raises the subject of immigration, the sergeant holds up his open hand, forming “a miniature border fence” (77). The sergeant’s hand symbolises a “fence” erected by the American to separate him from Braulio, the transnational. Each is located on either side of this symbolic border, where the nationalist believes they belong. While the image appears to contradict what the sergeant says about Uncle Sam not “giv[ing] a shit if you’re wet or dry” (77), neither Braulio nor Lalo notice the horrible truth masked by this racist statement. The sergeant uses repressive and xenophobic diction, indicating that he has profiled Braulio *before* being aware of his legal status. The racism and xenophobia of his discourse *after* ascertaining this fact differs only by degree. His claim that immigration status is irrelevant is therefore true, but not in any way that would benefit the two transnational characters. In the sergeant’s understanding of US discourse, neither legal nor illegal “*Hispanic[s]*” (77) are welcome. Lalo’s retrospective narration, though, reveals that he later realises that “Sarge lied” when he told Braulio that “[i]f you are willing to fight for your nation [...] your nation is willing to fight for you” (77). After this extended analeptic episode, Lalo describes how

Braulio returned from his military service addicted to heroin. This revelation is brief. By restricting it to a single sentence, Urrea dispels the false expectation of a military death established earlier in the text. It is later revealed that Braulio and his cousin Junior are gunned down in a drug-related assassination. This episode shows how Urrea's works frequently consider ways in which some transnationals do conform to and feed the stereotypes that perpetuate the Latino Threat Narrative.

Even so, Urrea nonetheless problematises any potentially angry responses to such episodes. Lalo's retrospective narrative condenses the period between Braulio's enlistment and his own, when he is twenty-six, by stating that "he got in trouble years later [...] just some minor 'gang-related' shenanigans" (78). Lalo reveals that these involve "[a] little weed, a knife in the pocket, a street fight" (78). In other words, Urrea uses Lalo to embody the stereotypical "*Hispanic*" (77) gangster fleeing from the law. This stereotypical identity informs and bolsters the Latino Threat Narrative, and to an extent justifies the racial profile the sergeant uses to manipulate Braulio. Unlike his stepbrother, though, Lalo is sent into active duty in Iraq. He is "blown up on his first tour in that alley smelling of burnt meat" (78). During his convalescence in the VA hospital, he is told that his military identity proves his citizenship. Yet when he is later stopped while crossing the border, knowingly trying to return to the United States with an undocumented friend from Tijuana in 2012, the border agent is unmoved by his "Purple Heart" (80). After a lengthy exchange, recalled in detail, Lalo prepares to leave. But as the agent turns from them, Lalo's friend mispronounces Michigan as "Michoacán" (80). This castilianised pronunciation renders both men hypervisible to the border guard by accentuating and alerting her to their Mexican ethnicity. The swiftness of the actions taken against them is mirrored by the brevity with which Lalo narrates the consequences. His detailed recollection ends abruptly with a heartfelt expression of his recognition of the trouble they have been unable to avoid: "Daaang" (80). Urrea's demotic rendering of a stereotypical Mexican exclamation adds a touch of sardonic comedy. The narrative that follows conveys Lalo's sense of bewilderment and persecution by an unstoppable power beyond his comprehension:

They were accompanied to the secondary inspection area and cuffed forthwith. He didn't see Moms and Pops until his trial for alien smuggling. He was as surprised as everyone else to find that, well, he was not actually a U.S. citizen. In spite of his best efforts, he brought more shame to the family when he was summarily deported.

(Urrea, *Angels* 80)

The agents of his arrest and details of his detention are omitted. Arrest, arraignment, trial, and deportation are condensed into four sentences. This narrative brevity not only conveys Lalo's sense of bemusement and shock at the time, but also signals the trauma and embarrassment he experiences as he remembers these events.

The passage is immediately followed by “[a]nd now he was living in his father’s garage after creeping and running across the Tijuana River in the dark like some friggin’ wetback” (80–81). This marks the end of the sequence of retrospective analepses and refocuses Lalo’s narrative on his grandmother’s interment. By juxtaposing Lalo’s extensive and detailed recollection of army recruitment against the brevity of his description of his illegal return to the US, Urrea notably says very little about the migrant experience. Sam Naidu and Andrea Thorpe argue that, in literary descriptions of migrant figures, what is *not* stated can be as significant as what is, especially when narrative gaps invite readers to infer “what might be omitted” (29). The lacunae in Lalo’s narrative, especially at the point where he compares himself to the racist concept of the “wetback” used earlier by the sergeant, suggests that the experience has been “psychologically and emotionally traumatic” (see Guignery 2). Even so, Urrea does not construct Lalo as a binary opposite to the nationalistic sergeant. Lalo’s understanding of the social inferiority of illegal immigrants in the US instils a sense of shame, but he does not construe himself as a “wetback” (Urrea, *Angels* 81). Rather, he is only “like” (80) one. As readers are aware that Lalo has crossed the Tijuana River and entered the US illegally – the activity specifically referred to by the racist slur – Urrea uses lexical semantics to trouble the binary between nationalist and illegal immigrant. Lalo’s comparison between himself and “some friggin’ wetback” (80–81) shows that he recognises the existence of the referent. However, Urrea shows that Lalo’s motives are unlike those of the illegal immigrant constructed by racial profiling and discourses like the Latino Threat Narrative. Lalo is not escaping the “industrial wasteland” of Tijuana (Urrea, *Beautiful SR7*), as asserted by the rhetoric used to justify claims that people of Mexican origin are invasive separatists. Although “[t]hings were okay in TJ,” Lalo returns to San Diego in order to meet his familial responsibilities (Urrea, *Angels* 81).

Pervasiveness of the Latino Threat Narrative and the extent of its internalisation by transnationals of Mexican origin are also indicated during the closing of the graveside episode. After the analeptic sequence catalysed by the sight of Braulio’s headstone, Lalo, lost

in thought, says “Chále” (81).⁸ Big Angel, overhearing this Chicano expostulation, confronts his son and challenges him to speak “Spanish” like “a human being” rather than “talking like a gangster” (81). The brief exchange that follows reveals the multiplicity of Mexican American identities within US diaspora spaces, especially across generations. It disrupts the monolithic, homogeneous, and reductive characterisation of the ‘Hispanic’ in the Latino Threat Narrative. Big Angel’s disdain of Lalo’s elected identity is clear when he dismisses the Chicano label as having its semantic origin in “chicanery” (81). Urrea reveals that Big Angel shares some of the views held by proponents of the Latino Threat Narrative. Like US nationalists, Big Angel considers the Chicano identity to be characterised by deceit, treachery, and criminality. Yet despite this common view, Big Angel disassociates himself from US nationalist groups by asserting that a “Mexican can’t be racist to a Mexican” (81) when Lalo challenges his position. By highlighting the fluidity of the identities of his characters, Urrea thus indicates that there are power dynamics at play within the Mexican American group that mirror the articulations of power in the diaspora space. The author characteristically addresses these power dynamics throughout his works. Doing so furthers his project of unsettling the spurious binaries constructed in diaspora spaces. This also allows him to examine ethical agency within Mexican American transnational communities.

Section Three – Nobody Liked Nobody

Urrea’s works depict the border as a site of multiple crossings. The nature of these crossings varies. They are multidirectional, and can be legal, illegal, contemporary, or historical migrations. As a result, the communities of the diaspora spaces portrayed in Urrea’s works are notably heterogeneous. His earliest fictionalised border is explicitly depicted as an “unmistakable line between two diametrically opposed realities” (Bruce-Novoa, “US-Mexican” 47). Nevertheless, Urrea later nuances the simple American/Mexican (or Latino) binary of the Latino Threat Narrative and other nationalistic discourses. His works show how the border is “experienced in dynamically different ways at different points in time” by “different people according to the specifics of the occasion of perception” (47). Furthermore, Urrea’s borders and the diaspora spaces along them are areas in which every type of

⁸ “Chále” is a Chicano interjection similar to slang phrases such as “hell no” or “yeah, right” (see *Collins Concise Spanish Dictionary*).

victimisation awaits would-be transnationals (47). In *Across the Wire*, Urrea describes the violence that characterises border life:

I, and the people with me, fought on a specific front. [...] We were fighting a nebulous, all-pervasive *It*. Call it hunger. Call it despair. Call it the Devil, the System, Capitalism, the Cycle of Poverty, the Fruits of the Mexican Malaise. It was a seemingly endless circle of disasters. Long after I'd left, the wheel kept on grinding.

(Urrea, *Wire* 9–11; original emphasis)

Urrea's description of the poverty that marked life on the Mexican side of the border during the early stages of his career conveys a sense of inescapable entrapment. Hunger, despair, and violence seem "endless" and cyclical. The "lack of a specific enemy" leads Urrea to question whether he and his friends might be complicit in their abjection. While considering the various referents for the "all-pervasive *It*," he even entertains the notion that "*It*" may be the results of a national "Mexican Malaise." This suggests that Mexican nationalism is a disease or condition with inevitable negative consequences. In an inversion of the image of the turning wheel of fortune, the passage ends with the image of a wheel that grinds, crushing those beneath it. Although it refers specifically to Urrea's early experiences along the Mexican side of the border as a Christian missionary, the sense of a "nebulous, all-pervasive" threat of violence in the passage is frequently expressed in his fiction. During episodes in which the precarity of transnationals in their diaspora spaces is pronounced, the source of violence is rarely obvious, like the multiheaded ineffable foe in the above passage.

Conflicts in Urrea's fiction often arise from the heterogeneity of the diaspora spaces. The performance of various identities gives rise to a multiplicity of power relations amongst transnationals in his fiction. When the paths of transnationals with different migration histories, or with different elective affinities, intersect, Urrea highlights the precarity of the lives of these transnationals along the border by exploring the lateral pressures to which they are susceptible (see Butler, *Precarious* 128–51 and Butler, *Frames* 1–5). He characteristically shows that transnationals of Mexican origin are not exclusively victimised by American nationalists, and that the border is not policed solely by the Border Patrol. Rather, his transnational characters are depicted to be as vulnerable to attacks from other Mexican Americans as they are from nationalists. Just as Viet Thanh Nguyen's fiction examines the harm caused by the Vietnamese American minority on others as well as amongst themselves, so Urrea's fiction also exposes the violence amongst different groups of transnationals of Mexican origin.

Urrea explicitly describes the racial stratifications and ethnic hierarchies of the San Diego/Tijuana diaspora space in “The Southside Raza Image Federation Corps of Discovery,” a short story collected in *The Water Museum* (33–47). The story is organised into a series of seven chronologically consecutive episodes, recounted by a third-person retrospective narrator. The first four episodes are set on “New Year’s Day” (33) and recount a violent confrontation between Junior and Shadow and two other transnationals at Silver Strand, a San Diego beach on the US side of the border. The next three describe a canoe trip along the US side of the border that Junior and Shadow take the following day, to celebrate Junior’s performance in the previous day’s fight. The final episode condenses several days, and describes how Shadow and his family are deported from the US.

During the trip to the American beach, Junior wears a printed T-shirt that contains “[l]ots of Chicano historical data” (35). Junior and Shadow are described as “homeboys” (35), but both admire and “respect” (35) the “veterano thing, where the old guys thought a lowrider car was the point, a zoot suit maybe, and a fine placa for the back window with a cool logo” (35). The narrative indicates a generational difference between the aspirations of the “veterano” or earlier Chicanos, and those of the younger “vatos” (33). By signalling that the vatos consider the veteranos’ goals as misplaced – none of these aspirations are “the point” in their opinion – Urrea reveals the fluidity of transnational identities over time. Junior and Shadow’s identities have evolved as their diaspora space has developed. The words “veterano,” “placa,” and “vatos” reveal how Urrea stylistically code-switches between English and Spanish in the short story. Such code-switching, as Gary Keller argues, creates a mixture of languages that “serves the special function of highlighting the theme, message, [and] ideology of the author” (172). It also serves as a “literary instrument in the pursuit of such goals as [...] characterisation [and] cross-cultural comparisons” (172). Urrea’s third-person narrator in this short story makes frequent use of slang. He speaks of “homeboys,” “lobo,” and “doobie” (Urrea, “Southside” 35). These three languages – English, Spanish, and ‘Spanglish’ – combine to create what Bruce-Novoa describes as an “interlingual” text (see “Spanish” 41–51). As English is the predominant language in the short story and the dominant language in the US, and the Spanish can be interpreted contextually, the Spanish and slang elements create “a sense of otherness” (see Bassnett 142) without alienating non-Spanish speaking readers. As the narrator uses the same slang as Junior and Shadow, the third-person narrative seems to be focalised through a persona that belongs to the same cultural group as the two protagonists.

It is through this focalising voice of the vato third-person extradiegetic narrator that Urrea makes the ethnic stratifications in the diaspora space explicit:

Fat moms and swabbies from the naval airbase and old farts in big Hawaiian shirts and all those wetbacks from Tijuana. The vatos didn't like the fuckin' wetbacks, that was for sure. Sureños from the south battled it out with Noreños from the north; Chicanos faced off against Mexicanos. Beaners versus rednecks. Everybody against the black brothers. And just forget about the Asians. It was natural selection [...]

(Urrea, "Southside" 36–37)

Urrea's description pits US military personnel and their families against "all those wetbacks from Tijuana." Just as the recruitment officer in *The House of Broken Angels* reduces all "*Hispanic[s]*" (77; original emphasis) into a monolithic alien threat to the integrity of the nation, so does the binary with which the above passage opens. But as the narrative is focalised through a vato perspective, Urrea's short story indicates the extent to which his characters have internalised the Latino Threat Narrative. The "us" versus "them" binary of the nationalistic discourse inherent in the threat narrative has resulted in Urrea's young transnationals profiling Americans – in this case, specifically those from the "naval air base" and the "old farts in big Hawaiian shirts" ("Southside" 37) – as prejudiced, anti-immigrant racists. The narrator then provides a growing list of identities that complicates the essentialising phrase "wetbacks from Tijuana." Ironically, though, just as the nationalists who promote the Latino Threat Narrative do, he relies on stereotypes to counter the view that the group "from Tijuana" is homogeneous. This nonetheless collapses the initial binary into a spectrum of racial stereotypes present in *Silver Strand*.

Government surveillance is also omnipresent. As Junior, Shadow, and the Sotomayor sisters (who accompany them) walk "to the tunnels under the roadway" (38), jet fighters and Border Patrol helicopters patrol the shoreline. Yet police presence is not a sufficient deterrent to prevent clashes within the diaspora space. "Two shadowy thugs" pass the group near the tunnels, and one slams his "shoulder into Shadow" (38). The "thug" hurls abuse at Shadow in Spanish, which leads the narrator to a single-word description uttered as an indictment: "Mexicans" (38). Shadow retaliates with physical violence. But he first stakes his claim to legitimacy in the US: "You come into *my country* and talk smack to me" (38; emphasis added). Ironically, Shadow's actions and bigotry mirror those of the US nationalists he loathes. Because of the use of the possessive pronoun, the opposing sides in the ensuing fight illustrate how transnationals navigate the multiaxial configurations of power. Shadow and

Junior construct a new binary. Their identities as Mexican American transnationals allow them to exercise control over more recent Mexican migrants who experience greater precarity in the differentially racialised diaspora space.

But establishing new binaries is inadequate if Urrea's authorial project is to depict a "matrix of our humanity" (Urrea qtd in *ucsdnews.ucsd.edu* para. 23). Urrea complicates even this binary by nuancing the power that Junior and Shadow exercise. He does so by highlighting the multi-locational nature of transnational identities. On the beach, for instance, Junior and Shadow are able to gain ascendancy in the hierarchy of the diaspora space and exercise power over other transnationals. Yet they are stripped of this power when they cross paths with the Border Patrol. After the fight, Junior is traumatised by his role in the conflict. He vomits when one of the Sotomayor sisters draws his attention to a tooth lodged in his shoe. Shadow, however, wants to "hang the Mexican's tooth on a thong so Junior [can] wear it like some Apache warrior" (Urrea, "Southside" 40). By comparing their actions with those of historical warriors of the Apache tribe, Shadow expresses how the boys' sense of legitimacy in their diaspora space is not contingent on modern political definitions of citizenship. Rather, it originates from the cultural make-up of the region predating the formation of the United States, drawing attention to the historical complexity of the diaspora space. When Junior and Shadow canoe along the border, Shadow asks Junior whether he is "a vato or a gabacho" (44).⁹ Urrea uses Shadow's diction to reveal that the boy's belief that "[i]f you ain't something, you're nothing" is informed by a rigid racial hierarchy. When the two stop to eat their sandwiches, a Border Patrol helicopter "roar[s] overhead, [makes] a sharp turn, and swoop[s] down upon them" (46). Although the narrative episode appears to close at this point, the final episode opens with a continuation of the scene, as "[w]hite trucks" – the cavalry of the Border Patrol – skid to a halt and order Shadow and Junior out of their canoe (46). The ellipsis between the two passages hardly seems necessary. Earlier breaks between narrative episodes signal a change in location as well as temporal shifts into the future, marking the omission of non-essential details from the story. Yet the position of this ellipsis appears misplaced in the order of events. The juxtaposition between the idyllic scene of two boys having a picnic and the violence of the Border Patrol conveys the unexpected interruption in everyday life by the authorities. Furthermore, it also foreshadows the brevity with which Shadow and his family are discovered to have "been in the USA illegally all this time" (47). Urrea highlights the precarity of the lives of transnationals by revealing that

⁹ "Gabacho" is a Mexican term used derogatorily to refer to a foreigner (*Collins Concise Spanish Dictionary*).

Shadow's "parents had snuck him over the border as an infant" (47). The bases of the identity he had constructed for himself as "a Chicano" and as a vato are summarily revoked. The configuration of power that Junior and Shadow used earlier to perpetuate anti-Mexican nationalism is rapidly dismantled as US authorities re-establish their superiority within the diaspora space. Urrea uses irony to accentuate the precarity of Junior and Shadow in the US. While the two adopt identities that align them with US nationalists on the beach, the encounter with the Border Patrol shows that US nationalists do not recognise their claims to belonging. Urrea uses irony to undercut Shadow's sense of belonging by showing that he has no legally acceptable claim to US citizenship. Even though Shadow instigates the violence on the beach, he is, in fact, guilty of the same transgressions of which he accuses the transnationals he assaults.

"The Southside Raza Image Federation Corps of Discovery" therefore illustrates how Urrea uses his fiction to explore "the discomfort that Mexican-Americans feel constantly, this cultural violence" they "feel all the time" (Urrea qtd in Kirch 38). Yet his transnationals do not allow the pervasive threat of violence or their precarity in the diaspora space to frame them as hapless victims. For instance, there is "no terror, there are no tears" (38) in *The House of Broken Angels* when the characters see a man holding up a sign demanding that the US government builds a wall along the border (Urrea, *Angels* 24), or when they are confronted by a racist woman in Target who wishes all Mexicans would be deported (202). Rather than embrace the 'comforts' of victimisation (see Chapter 3; Nguyen, "Speak" 10, 13–15), Urrea's transnationals navigate the multiple articulations of power in the diaspora space in order to empower themselves and to exercise their agency. Occasionally, they internalise their anger at the injustices they experience, and retaliate by targeting those with even less power than themselves. At times, they are able to use the syncretism of their identities and the fluidity of elective affinities to manipulate and use the racist perceptions of others to their advantage. In the short story immediately following "The Southside Raza Image Federation Corps of Discovery," "The National City Reparation Society," Junior returns to San Diego after several years at college, a "thousand miles" away (Urrea, "Reparation" 53). He meets Chango and other gang members who plan to pose as repossession agents. The team travels across the region, stealing from homes abandoned by people who defaulted on their mortgages during an economic recession. In order for the plan to work, Chango and others

adopt the identities of “Beaners” (61).¹⁰ By styling themselves according to racist perceptions, they render themselves as “invisible” as “the trashman” (65). Junior is fashioned as “Mr. Petrucci,” their “Italian” boss (61). The gang believes that “[a]s long as you got a suit and talk white, ain’t nobody lookin’ at you” (61). Events in the short story prove this perception to be well-founded. After several successful heists, the team crosses the state border from California into Arizona (66). Urrea reveals how the transnationals find themselves internally displaced in other US diaspora spaces. In Arizona, for instance, the arid landscape makes it harder for them to identify “abandoned houses” because of their uncertainty as to what “was a weed and what was that xeriscaping desert shit” (66). Here racial hierarchies also differ. The beaner identities they have mimicked draw attention to their foreignness. As a result of racial profiling by the police, they are stopped in an “SB ten-seventy” (69) traffic stop. In this episode, the police trace Chango’s address to “an abandoned gas station in San Diego” (70). Using dramatic irony, Urrea ensures that readers know that the address is legitimate, even though it reinforces the gangster stereotype the police and Border Patrol use to racially profile Chango and his accomplices.

Even as the encounter illustrates how the precarity of transnationals differs in different states within the US, it also shows that transnationals are as guilty of racial profiling as nationalists are. The gang has profiled law enforcement officers as racists, and it uses this stereotype to inform a contingency plan to be used should they be apprehended. Junior, dressed in a tie and jacket with a nametag and a clipboard, approaches the officers and introduces himself as “Mr. Petrucci, from Bowden Federal in Detroit” (68). It is ironic that the “Hispanic” (68) police officer misrecognises Junior’s ethnicity, signalling the arbitrariness used by those in power to identify their targets. Junior escapes victimisation and persecution because his assumed name frames him as an “Italian” (68). Although the transnational gang’s criminal activities are only discovered as a consequence of the belief that those “gennermen are illegals” (69), Junior escapes police suspicion and being implicated in the crimes because he “talks white” (69) and wears a suit. Urrea shows that the racist assumptions of the Arizona police and those of the transnationals had ambiguous success. While a group of criminals has been unwittingly apprehended due to racial profiling, another criminal has been unwittingly set free due to the same practice.

¹⁰ “Beaner” is derogatory slang, and refers to Mexicans or people of Mexican descent. The term alludes to the prevalence of pinto and other beans in Mexican cuisine.

The diaspora spaces described in these two short stories show how the heterogeneity of transnational groups and the multiaxial articulations of power within each space intersect. These intersections highlight the precarity of transnationals' lives by emphasising their vulnerability to the strategic exercise of power by dominant groups. However, as Urrea depicts transnational identities as fluid, hybrid, and syncretic, his fiction also explores various responses to this vulnerability. While it rejects the 'comforts' of victimhood, it also rejects valorising the criminal behaviour of characters like Junior, Chango, Lalo, and Braulio. As Lalo realises when he eventually confronts the gangster who killed Braulio in *The House of Broken Angels*, "This is not us. This is the story they tell about us, but it's not true" (Urrea, *Angels* 243). This realisation comes to Lalo as he stands with a loaded pistol aimed at the other Chicano vato. Urrea uses the image of one transnational poised in a killing stance across from another to present the reader with the issue of complicity. In this case, two people of Mexican origin are enacting the sort of "blood feuds" (Anzaldúa 90) and criminal identities used to fuel the nationalist narratives that potentially increase their precarity in the diaspora space. While Braulio's killer and Lalo personify racist stereotypes used in discourses like the Latino Threat Narrative, Urrea also uses the image to indicate a cycle of prophetic fulfilment of such stereotypes. Some transnationals are only able to escape racial oppression and to exercise power by adopting identities that resemble the stereotypes that are used to oppress them in the first place. Certain nationalists consider this behaviour evidence that the stereotypes are valid, leading to increased oppression and a prophetic fulfilment of racist ideologies. The solution Urrea proposes in his works is that transnationals and nationalists should recognise their ethical obligations toward one another.

Section Four – Lacunae and Memories

Transnationals of Mexican origin have experienced various forms of racial prejudice and oppression in the United States as a result of their ambivalent legal position since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Menchaca 583). Numerous settlements of Mexican residents were displaced in what would become California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas by the US acquisition of Mexico's northern frontier territories (584). At the end of the Mexican-American War, these newly formed American states were granted the power to determine citizenship eligibility by the US Constitution (see Hyman and Wiecek 517–31). Native

Americans and other racial minorities were barred from full citizenship (Menchaca 584).¹¹ But bureaucracy was unclear whether the Mexicans in the region – forcibly rendered transnational – “were to be accorded the citizenship rights of white citizens or were to be treated as Indian inhabitants” (Menchaca 584). Resultant uncertainties enabled government officials to use race to disenfranchise people of Mexican origin living in the US at various times. Mexicans of predominantly Native American descent were frequently cast as members of the “detrribalized American Indians” (584). In other words, the term “Mexican” refers to a group of heterogeneous identities. As Martha Menchaca argues, the mestizo identity of some Mexican transnationals – arising from miscegenation between Spanish and Native American ancestors – resulted in them being subjected to the “heightened racial discrimination” experienced by “people of colour” (583). Even so, they were paradoxically protected from the “full impact of the racial laws of the period” (583) because their Spanish heritage linked them to white Europeans. Mexican transnationals who were viewed as Native Americans therefore experienced greater precarity than those viewed as having mestizo identities. Diaspora spaces in the US are therefore characterised by the historical disenfranchisement of transnationals. Under historical laws, they were not considered citizens because they were “half-breeds” (Naturalization Act of 1790, ch. 3 sec. 1 qtd in Menchaca 584). Their indigenous links to the US are now also used to reinforce the Latino Threat Narrative, especially claims that the ‘true’ motive of Mexican and other Latino transnationals is to reclaim the American Southwest (Chavez 2). Transnational identities of Mexican Americans therefore tend to include varying degrees of “indigenous historical consciousness” (Menchaca 583).

This historical consciousness is evinced in Urrea’s works by his use of lacunae.¹² He uses these to draw his readers’ attention to forgotten versions of history in several of his texts. These specific textual omissions function in a similar way to the ghosts in Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* and indicate a demand for justice. The presence of Urrea’s lacunae gestures to something that is missing, and Urrea usually figures that which is missing by including spectres in his work. Urrea uses the indeterminacies associated with spectres and, by extension, his lacunae, to trouble the simple binaries of anachronistic nationalist frameworks of citizenship. He figures the spectres he uses as ghosts of Native Americans. These in turn draw his readers’ attention to lacunae in the dominant discourse of the history of the diaspora

¹¹ Whites who were indentured servants or criminals were also excluded from full citizenship by use of the term “free whites” in the definition of citizenship (Menchaca 384; see Hull 11, 12; Kansas 79, 80; and Konvitz 318).

¹² See Naidu and Thorpe 29.

space. His works thus complicate reductive understandings of who does and who does not belong in the US. They draw his readers' attention to histories that predate the formation of the US and that often fall foul to the "strategic forgetting" (Kirmayer 191) characteristic of amnesiac nationalist discourses. These forgotten histories and their hauntologies implicate all inhabitants of US diaspora spaces in historical transgressions that threaten to be repeated.

"Mountains Without Number" is a short story preoccupied with memory and, by extension, history. It tells the story of Frankie. She runs the only restaurant remaining in New Junction. The main storyline is narrated in the present tense by a third-person extradiegetic narrator. It describes Frankie's interactions with her clientele on the first of two days, as well as the relationships between the various townsfolk who patronise Frankie's Diner, and ends with Frankie's notable and unexplained absence the following day. Focalisation shifts amongst Frankie and her patrons. One subsidiary storyline, retrospectively narrated by a third-person narrator, describes a high school love-triangle between Frankie, Stick, and Son. The affair ends tragically when the two boys fall to their deaths. This storyline acts as a hypodiegetic level to the main narrative, and is focalised through Frankie. These memories play an explicative function, providing readers with insight into her behaviour in the main narrative. Another, parallel storyline which does not engage with the events of the main storyline directly, although it does provide context, offers an expansive description of the development and decline of New Junction. The narrative voice of the episodes ordered along this parallel storyline is markedly nostalgic and ominous, and effectively haunts the short story by interrupting and modifying observations presented in the main narrative trajectory.

In the first of a series of narrative disruptions, the hauntology of the parallel storyline is set "[a]top the butte," where the "spirits of the old ones are indistinguishable from the wind" (4). Urrea equates these ghosts with natural phenomenon. This creates a sense that the "old ones" and the environment are inextricably connected. Such imagery is reminiscent of the origin myth of Aztlán used to support the nationalist, separatist discourses found in the early literature and politics of the Chicano/a Movement.¹³ Urrea also reveals that the chronologies of the events of the main narrative and of the disruption are coterminous. Frankie's truck "pulls into a diagonal slot" (5) far below the windswept butte. Yet the events

¹³ Although the myth of Aztlán can be traced to the Aztláneca Mexica or Aztec people, its source as a literary trope in Chicano/a literature can be found in the 1969 political manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* by Juan Alurista. The manifesto advocates Chicano/a nationalism predicated on pro-indigenist ideologies. It also advocates self-determination for Mexican Americans. Aztlán is figured as the place of origin of pre-Columbian Mexican civilisation. Some, but not all, mestizo activists used Aztlán as a symbol of their primordial and legal rights to the American Southwest. Various Mexican nationalist movements have used it to support their call for the formation of a separate state, the *República del Norte* (see E. Jacobs 4–5, 20–21, 118–21, and 128–39).

of the main narrative are summarily dismissed: “It doesn’t matter” (5). The “Ford F-150 with 120,000 miles on it” (4) that preoccupies Frankie as she drives to work is rendered “as small as a pebble in a creek bed” (5) during Urrea’s description of the enormity of what “nobody below knows” (5) to be at the top of the butte.

At this point, the narrative focuses on the traces of a forgotten past, suggested by the presence of

ancient fire rings and small middens of deer bones and remnants of lodges where pack rats still gather twigs from the dead white trees. Scattered across the brow of the butte, hide scrapers and arrow heads and metates hollowed out in flat rocks where acorns and pine nuts were ground by ten thousand years of women smaller than the one below but with the same thick braid of hair.

(Urrea, “Mountains” 5)

These descriptions of “fire rings” and “lodges” suggest the identities of the “old ones” (4) whose spirits are “indistinguishable from the wind” (4). By describing the undiscovered remains of “scrapers and arrowheads and metates” (5), Urrea signals that the site was once inhabited by a group of Mesoamerican people. These historical inhabitants are entangled with the population below, as Frankie and the smaller women of “ten thousand years” ago share certain physical characteristics. All of them wear their hair in the “same thick braid” (5), which signals the continuity of the practice across the divide of time. Urrea’s description also creates a parallel between the area “[a]top the butte” (4) and the setting of New Junction. The remains are symbols of labour (“scrapers”), struggle (“arrow heads”), and survival (“flat rocks where [...] nuts were ground”) that lay forgotten. So, in this haunted and haunting space inhabited by ghosts, the present, the past, and the future coincide.

The fact that what happens below the butte “doesn’t matter” conveys a sense of inevitability. The dying town below seems doomed to meet the same fate as the once successful settlement above. Urrea signals this by referring to the children of the “few tourists” (5) to the area, who “may never know what [photographic] negatives are” (5). Already, artefacts from the culture below are becoming as obsolete as the “scrapers” and “arrow heads” of ten thousand years ago. By the end of the story, when the other townsfolk notice Frankie’s absence, the parallel narrative voice describes them as “the last people of New Junction” (28). This sense of impending calamity and desolation is foreshadowed in the main narrative, when Frankie “wishes there was still a town at all” (6). One effect of the passage of time acknowledged in this liminal space is the creation of an intricately entangled temporal palimpsest.

Those numbers on the face of the butte.

They're huge. Much bigger than the old red handprints painted on the rocks when gargantuan creatures walked the plain, hairy and regal and slow as clouds. Taller than the lines of antelope scratched into the rocks.

(Urrea, "Mountains" 11)

In the main narrative, the Professor explains that the annual tradition of marking the cliffs with the year began in "1923, after the last Indian died up on the butte" (17). However, the aloof narrator of the parallel storyline interrupts the main narrative as it details the Professor's "lecture about the numbers" (17). It describes the presence of "old red handprints" and "antelope scratched into the rocks" (11) that predate 1923. It also further undermines the Professor's credibility by establishing a comparison between his historical knowledge and that of the hills, which are anthropomorphised as the narrative voice uses them as focalisers:

The butte knew, if they didn't, that the top of the 23 was at the height where great sharks and whales once swam, and where the smoke of old Joe's last chimney fire hovered as he burned all his letters from his dead wife and his Bible before he lay himself down on the floor of the cabin to sleep forever. Now there is no trace of his house except for the bulbs that break from the ground every April and start to bloom.

(Urrea, "Mountains" 17)

Urrea's use of ghosts, in this case "old Joe" and "great sharks and whales," offers an alternative historical discourse to the ones presented in the main narrative. While the Professor's "lecture about the numbers" (17) is frequently rehearsed, the reliability of his version of history is undermined. The main narrator characterises the Professor as an old "duffer who knows everything and everybody, as long as they are dead" (12). This suggests that the validity of his knowledge could not be corroborated. His discourse is thus shown to strategically forget (see Kirmayer 191) facts and individuals that would challenge its version of events. This is made especially apparent in the narrative treatment of Joe. The narrative voice describes, briefly, how "some cowboy brought him down on a mule" (17). Joe's death made his "little valley" available to the Class of 1923 to "make their ascent" (17) and inaugurate the tradition of the painting of the numbers.

In the main storyline, Joe is depicted as hardly human. This is emphasised by the extended duration afforded to explaining the tradition of the numbers, and the brevity with which Joe is introduced and dismissed. But the main narrative is again disrupted by the parallel narrative voice. The immensity of the numbers painted against the rocks represents the impact the current residents of New Junction have had on the area. Furthermore, it also

reveals their myopic views of history. Although the impact of the tradition has been large and dramatic, it is fleeting and short-lived in the temporal scale of the parallel narrative focalised through the butte. The tradition of painting numbers on the butte started in 1923, and was first thought to be coming to an end in 1949, when GIs returned from service in Guadalcanal and Arles. Around the same time, nationalists began speaking of the “End of the Way Things Were Supposed to Be” (18). Yet the way of life to which this phrase refers is barely nascent compared to the “ten thousand years” (5) of history represented by “old Joe” (17). Despite the extensive temporal scope of the parallel narrative, it is here that Joe – the “last Indian [...] up on the butte” (17) – is humanised and remembered. Furthermore, this liminal space is also where the relationship between Joe and the other townsfolk implied in the main narrative is complicated. While the Professor’s focalisation suggests that Joe was remote and removed from the other residents, the parallel narrative contradicts this. It recalls traces of cultural contamination: Joe “burned [...] his Bible” (17) before his death.

This action may signal a rejection of the ideologies of those who displaced his people, or it may imply that Joe attempted to leave “no trace of his house” (17) on the land. Regardless of how it is interpreted, the presence of the Bible in the narrative focalised through the timeless butte, implicates the heterogeneous people of New Junction in the demise of those who lived on the butte. The Professor’s deliberately amnesiac recollection, which posits Joe as an outsider and “the last Indian” (17), is nuanced by the insinuation that Joe’s identity was syncretic. Just as the “huge” numbers overshadow and obfuscate the “old red handprints” on the side of the butte, the Professor’s lecture attempts to omit Joe’s true identity from the short story. Yet Joe’s true identity is absent from the memories of the other characters and is actually a lacuna in the main narrative. Nonetheless, interjections by the second narrative voice humanise Joe and recuperate his presence rather than obliterate it. In the parallel storyline, Joe is commemorated by “the bulbs that break from the ground every April and start to bloom” (17). This creates an association between Joe and the landscape, reminiscent of the “spirits of the old ones” (4). These blossoms are annual signifiers of the absence – or lacuna – of Joe, even if they are not noticed by the dominant main narrative.

The narrative voice of the main storyline is finally completely displaced by that of the parallel narrative during the closing episode of the short story. Townsfolk have their morning routines disrupted when Frankie fails to arrive at her usual time the following day. Readers, like the townsfolk, are offered no explanation for Frankie’s disappearance. Like Joe, Frankie becomes a lacuna. As Frankie’s connection with the “smaller” women of “ten thousand years” ago signalled by her “thick braid of hair” (5) indicates that she is a mestiza, her sudden

omission from the text suggests that Urrea presents readers with an image of the diaspora space from which transnationals have been expelled. Contrary to the notion that transnationals pose a threat to the American way of life, the short story concludes by depicting how this way of life is reliant on the presence of transnationals. Urrea troubles the main narrative's attempts to construct an amnesiac discourse by ensuring that readers are aware of its deliberate omissions. Rather than present any easy solutions, the short story indicts myopic views of history. Miracles might happen, it says, if "the last people of New Junction" (28) could say the "Shoshone word for the lost cool fog" (29). As "none of them know" (28) the word because of their nationalist dismissal of the histories of other people, Urrea's short story suggests that nationalists and transnationals are equally guilty of the destruction of the diaspora space depicted as the decaying town of New Junction.

Section Five – The *Familia de la Raza*

Urrea's authorial project of recuperating a past that has variously been forgotten, misrepresented by, or deliberately excluded from dominant narratives in US diaspora spaces intersects with his subversion of the Chicano literary trope of the *familia de la Raza*. Urrea is not the first writer to subvert the trope. Many Chicana writers working after the Chicano political movement (*el movimiento*) have also subverted it in order to address the masculinist, patriarchal ideologies reinforced by the *familia de la Raza*. Literature by writers like Sandra Cisneros countered the limited subject positions reserved for women characters as either *la madre abnegada* (the suffering mother or passive virgin) or *la puta* (whore). It also recast the family as a site of affirmation and replenishment for women, without depicting it as a space for erasure of the self (see E. Jacobs 123 and 131). Family was promoted as the vital force for the conservation and reproduction of cultural identity during the Chicano/a Movement (Saldívar-Hull 128). Ideologies of home and community overlapped throughout the movement. The role of the family in safeguarding Mexican American cultural identities against capitalist and American domination emerged as one of central importance in movement rhetoric (E. Jacobs 122–123). Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales, leader of the Crusade for Justice and one of the main articulators of cultural nationalism and advocates for Chicano political separatism, stated that "Nationalism becomes *la familia*. Nationalism comes first out of family" (qtd in Esquibel 40). Similarly, Item 6 of Juan Alurista's *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* outlines the political potential of family:

Cultural values of our people strengthen our identity and the moral background of the movement. Our culture unites and educates the family of *La Raza* towards liberation with one heart and one mind [...]. [T]he cultural values of life, family and home will serve as the powerful weapon to defeat the gringo dollar system and encourage the process of love and brotherhood.

(Alurista qtd in Anaya and Lomeli 3)

Alurista's conception of the family reveals an inherent belief in the hostility of American society. What is needed is a "powerful weapon," both to *protect* Mexican American culture and to *attack* American capitalism. This view is ironic, given the amount of migration spurred on by a need for the American dollar. It also shows that "family" and "the process of love" are predicated on a masculinist conception of Chicanoism. Male dominance and privilege are pronounced and favoured by the term "brotherhood." Alurista's notion of family is a Catholic and patriarchal one that clearly encourages resistance to American domination. It argues for the continuation of ethnic traditions by embracing and delineating a common Chicano identity similar to the tenets of Gonzales's separatist Chicano/a cultural nationalism (E. Jacobs 39). Both the *familia de la Raza* and Chicano nationalism are expressed in paternalistic terms that exclude women from their ideal imagined communities.

In line with the dogma and rhetoric of *el movimiento*, representations of family life in Chicano literature emerged as vital determinants of whether works were published by Chicano presses. According to Tomás Rivera, Chicano literature during the movement period is based on three simple images: *la casa* (the house); *el barrio* (the community and neighbourhood); and *la lucha* (the struggle) (439–52). Entanglement of these three images resulted in the emergence of representations of family as important indicators of a novel's social function. The ideal was to promote "*la familia*" as a "bastion of *raza* defence" (Saldívar-Hull 128; emphasis added). Besides this inherently political role in the promulgation of Chicano nationalism, families were also recognised for their function in establishing and facilitating transnational lifestyles. Families enabled Mexican transnationals to survive in discriminating and hostile US diaspora spaces (E. Jacobs 122). They also contributed greatly to the formation of a sense of community within those spaces (122). Literary and real emphases were thus placed on familial unity and solidarity. Multi-generational and extended households, as well as connections *between* families, enlarged the scope of the family and served as important strategies for cultural survival and resistance

(Segura and Pierce 73–74).¹⁴ The trope of the *familia de la Raza* that emerged because of representations of these revered characteristics of family served as a vehicle for “concentrated expressions of ethnic and cultural pride” (E. Jacobs 13). But the Chicano literature in which it developed mirrored external modes of repression (13). It perpetuated its own ideology of containing differences, only with selected Chicano rather than American identities.

In *The House of Broken Angels*, Urrea nuances the trope of the *familia de la Raza*. Through a series of analeptic episodes focused on the de La Cruz family’s history, Urrea reveals the various ways in which family unity and solidarity have enabled different family members to settle in the US. Of more significance, though, is that these analepses span across several generations. Big Angel, the dying patriarch, remembers how “the de La Cruz family has been around since before your grandparents were even born” (Urrea, *Angels* 8). The entanglement between family and history is foregrounded at the start of the novel, when Big Angel finds the ghost of his father sitting “beside him on the bed” (3). Given that Urrea’s use of the spectral in his works indicates the disruption of his narrative by unrecognised histories, this encounter emphasises the importance of the patriarchal lineage of the de La Cruz family. The ghost of Don Antonio, the novel’s representative of Mexican machismo, speaks English to Big Angel (3). Antonio’s pronunciation is described as having “gotten smoother, though he still pronounced ‘weight’ as *gweitt*” (3; original emphasis). Big Angel’s observation implies not only that the elocution exercises Don Antonio performed when he first learned English continue after death, but also that his Mexican accent – a cultural marker of difference in the diaspora space – is indelible and enduring.

Don Antonio’s appearance at the opening of the narrative foreshadows the novel’s thematic concern with family history. As a figure outside of time, the spectre also alerts readers to the thematic importance of time. The dying Big Angel, acutely aware of his own mortality, is worried about how “a man out of time [can] repair all that [is] broken” (3). His father’s ghost, however, dismisses his concerns as “a lot of weight to carry around” (3). But Urrea undermines this summary dismissal of Big Angel’s concerns as “mierda” (3).¹⁵ If they were so insignificant, Don Antonio’s obsession with pronouncing English words correctly would not have continued beyond the grave. Big Angel rebukes the ghost, once it has turned to smoke, and tells it to mind its language, indicating his ambivalence towards his father. While he does reprimand him, he is too afraid to do so in his presence. In an analeptic

¹⁴ For further details on these contributions, also see Sanchez; Gutiérrez; Ruiz; and Saldívar-Hull.

¹⁵ “Mierda” is Spanish for “shit” (*Collins Concise Spanish Dictionary*).

episode, focalised through Don Antonio, Urrea describes the brutality with which Big Angel was treated as a child:

As he lay twenty-five stripes across his boy's ass and back [...].

And he looked to see, for he knew that when he whipped naked men in the jail they sometimes became hard, rising like small branches as they screamed. His boy covered himself with his hand. Don Antonio suddenly lost his strength.

(Urrea, *Angels* 132–33)

This episode highlights the detrimental effects of machismo within the family. Rather than being disciplined, he is treated as if he were a criminal. Like “men in jail,” Big Angel is stripped naked. His beating therefore includes a sadistic element of deliberate humiliation. Don Antonio also tries to see whether his son has become erect. This memory is recounted shortly after Big Angel’s recollection of how proud he was, perched “behind the vast oaken back of his father” (126) as they rode on Antonio’s motorcycle. Urrea describes the “thrill” Big Angel experiences as he notices “people slow and pull aside” when they recognise his father as “the Jefe de Patrullas Motociclistas” (126). In this passage, Urrea uses long sentences with many subordinate clauses to stylistically imitate Big Angel’s breathless childish excitement. During the beating, Big Angel is subjected to the same machismo that results in the public’s fear and respect of Don Antonio that Angel so admires. As a result of his treatment, Angel “was pretty sure his father didn’t care for him much” (133). The patriarchal machismo to be nurtured by the *familia de la Raza* is therefore shown to be counterproductive to the formation of family bonds. Be that as it may, Urrea’s work still shows a continuity of the patriarchy across generations, and describes deep bonds between fathers and their sons.

While Urrea’s narrative celebrates extended familial ties, he also subverts the notion of the purity of the *familia de la Raza* by depicting it as a space of precarity, and of abuse and hypocrisy. After his father is revealed as a philanderer, Big Angel is sent to live with his aunt and her family so that he is not home when Don Antonio leaves Mexico and crosses into the US. It is with his uncle Chentebent and the rest of the Bent family that Big Angel feels most isolated. After he is masturbated by his cousin Tiki, “Big Angel was embarrassed to be alive. [...] His life was shame” (152). Urrea’s narrative makes it clear that Big Angel submitted to Tiki’s sexual overtures at a time of emotional vulnerability. After the act, he feels “[b]etrayed and abandoned by everything and everyone” (152). Later, Big Angel is repeatedly raped and beaten by Chentebent (152–53). Although the Bent family takes him in, Big Angel is

subjected to all forms of violent abuse which only ends when he kills Chentebent with a gaff, fending off another sexual assault onboard a fishing boat (154). The undiscovered killing of his uncle becomes another source of hauntology in the novel, as the “guilt and the lie burned steadily through all of [Big Angel’s] life” (156). After torching the boat, Big Angel flees across the border, finding refuge “at his father’s house and working as a donut cooker” (157). That his father takes him in undermines Big Angel’s earlier assumption that “his father didn’t care for him much” (133). The de La Cruz family, despite its internal conflicts, still plays a vital role in assisting its members in establishing and facilitating transnational lifestyles. The entanglement amongst the de La Cruz family, history, and violence is delineated early in the novel:

[Big Angel’s] grandfather Don Segundo had come to California after the Mexican Revolution [...]. [He tried] to enlist in World War I [...]. [He had] come to hate Germans because of the military advisors [...] teaching Profirio Díaz’s troops to use air-cooled machine guns on Yaqui villagers.
(Urrea, *Angels* 8–9)

Segundo capitalises on his military prowess in the hopes of legitimising himself, and, by extension, his family, in the US. This description of the de La Cruz family’s historical migration emphasises the historicity of transnational entanglements and conveys a sense of the historical complexities caused by multiple border crossings. Armed conflicts of various sorts – revolutions; genocides (of the Yaqui); World Wars; and, later, terrorist attacks – enable families, mostly through force, to establish themselves as transnational. Segundo’s migration, fuelled by the overtly machismo desire to rid the world of people he “had come to hate” but framed in heroic and noble terms, contrasts with the shameful flights of Don Antonio and Big Angel from Mexico later in the text. Through implication, Urrea comments on the nature of contemporary migration. Migrants move to the US in order to escape the “all-pervasive *It*” in Mexico that he describes in *Across the Wire* (11; original emphasis). In an early episode focalised through Perla, the narrative describes how Big Angel, despite having to fight off “his own family’s rebukes [...] snuck them [Perla and her children] into the United States” (Urrea, *Angels* 40). Perla and her children realised “that only hunger and dirt and rats and evil police waited for them in the poorest colonias where they could afford to live” (40). Despite the fact that Big Angel, his wife, and his stepsons’ migration is “illegal as hell” (158), the de La Cruz family is depicted as determinedly self-sufficient, even though “things weren’t always middle class for the family” (158). Urrea describes how, unlike the

illegal immigrants of the Latino Threat Narrative and contemporary Republican and US nationalist discourses, Big Angel and his family eke out a meagre living “not fifty yards from the border’s barbed wire” (158). They are not abusing welfare systems. The de La Cruz family refuses “government help[,] welfare [and] food stamps” (158), and gradually works its way up the economic strata of their diaspora space. The family’s resistance to the social pressures and economic hardships in the diaspora space may seem to signal an affinity to the trope of the *familia de la Raza* as a site of resistance to the “gringo dollar system” (Alurista qtd in Anaya and Lomelí 3). Yet Urrea has already revealed the pride with which Big Angel recognises that he is “[t]he beaner” who can call himself the American employees’ “boss” (Urrea, *Angels* 8). Rather than resist the capitalism of their US diaspora space, the de La Cruz family successfully inserts itself *into* that system.

Even though Urrea subverts the trope of the *familia de la Raza* as a site of resistance, portraying family instead as a social unit that seeks peaceful cohabitation and espouses assimilation, he retains the ideology that it is a sacred space. Perla expresses the idea that families “came apart and regrouped [...]. Like water. In this desert, families were the water” (40). Just as families enable their individual members to lead transnational lives across geopolitical borders, so they enable safe passage across the ultimate border between the living and the dead. The nexus created by Urrea’s use of family and the spectral is apparent during an analeptic episode describing Mamá América’s final moments. During what one of Mamá’s sisters-in-law considers real and what the other considers a “hallucination” (41), Mamá sees “dead relatives and angels and Jesus Christ, and she greeted them and extended her hand to them and laughed with them” (41). The presence of ghosts of family members, albeit members only perceived by Mamá América, echoes Big Angel’s encounter with the ghost of Don Antonio. The presence of the spectral family at Mamá América’s deathbed also foreshadows the third part of the novel, during which the family comes together to celebrate Big Angel’s final birthday and pay tribute to his life. By repeating the sense of familial acceptance and constantly asserting that, although it may not always be so, family generally creates a sense of security, Urrea mitigates Big Angel’s fear of his impending death. After his daughter surprises him with a performance by a mariachi band as part of his birthday celebration, Big Angel delivers a speech that encapsulates Urrea’s use of the family. He says, “Love is the answer. Nothing stops it. Not borders. Not death” (235).

Even so, Big Angel’s declaration is exposed as a hypocritical cliché by his own ostracism of his youngest stepson, Yndio. Just as women are subordinated in family life by the machismo of Chicanoism, so too are homosexuals and people who do not conform to

traditionally accepted expressions of gender. As Cherríe Moraga argues, the nationalist ideologues who propagated and promoted the ideal of the *familia de la Raza* drew

exclusively from those aspects of Mexican and native cultures that served the interests of male heterosexuals. At the same time, they took the worst of Mexican machismo and Aztec warrior bravado, combined it with some of the most oppressive male-conceived idealisations of “traditional” Mexican womanhood and called that cultural integrity.

(Moraga 156)

Urrea’s storyline of family is interrupted during the funeral and again during the party by Yndio, who inhabits a peripheral space separated from the events of the main narrative of the de La Cruz family (see Urrea, *Angels* 48–49; 296–97). Time once again imposes itself on the narrative, and constructs a metaphorical border between the family and the self-described “*non-cis gendered, non-heteronormative cultural liberation warrior*” (84; original emphasis). Each year of his absence is described as making “the wall between them feel higher, unscalable” (297). When Urrea pits Yndio against an armed assailant entering the de La Cruz party to shoot Lalo, Yndio is forced to re-enter the space of the family (299). Big Angel and his stepson are reunited through violence, as they fend off the gunman together (305). But due to his weakened state, Big Angel only distracts the gunman as Yndio takes on the role of Mexican macho and Aztec warrior, negating the homophobic views inherent in the *familia de la Raza*.

Although father and son are reconciled, the reconciliation does not displace the role of machismo. Rather, it takes place because Urrea shows that machismo need not solely be defined as the strict domain of heterosexual males. While this is one of the weaker subversions of the *familia de la Raza*, it nonetheless still subverts the exclusion of homosexuals inherent in the trope. Through the order of narrative events, this episode serves to test Big Angel’s declaration that “[l]ove is the answer” (235). Despite ten years of exclusion from the family, Yndio is welcomed back into the fold. By showing Big Angel’s willingness to accept his stepson, problematically only once Yndio has displayed suitable machismo, and Yndio’s recognition of his desire to “stride up to his father and forgive him. [...] And be forgiven” (297), Urrea describes the familial bond as one that crosses borders.

Section Six – Closing Remarks

Urrea's depictions of life in the borderlands in both his fiction and non-fiction works have resulted in an oeuvre that could be described as a "literature of witness" (Gross para. 1). But even though his works consistently return to the border, he refuses the label of "border writer" (Urrea on Hinojosa 04:21). Rather, examining his authorial project reveals that he is "more interested in bridges" (ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 1). His works attempt to dismantle binary, racist, xenophobic, and nationalist thinking that essentialises groups according to who does and who does not belong in the US. He describes US diaspora spaces, especially those along the US-Mexico border, as spaces that are simultaneously "wounding and healing" (Huang 15) for their transnational inhabitants, especially those of Mexican descent, as well as for the nationalists who live there.

The violence of daily life, the impunity of authorities, and images of utter poverty and desperation that characterise Urrea's depictions of the lives of Mexican transnationals on either side of the border transform his diaspora spaces into places of ever-present threat, and underscore the precarity of Mexican Americans in the US (Bruce-Novoa, "US-Mexican" 47–48). Yet his works refuse to cast transnationals of Mexican origin as helpless victims. Rather, he explores the complicity of Mexican American transnationals in their own precarity by revealing the ways in which they construct their own identities to support the nationalistic narratives immanent in their diaspora spaces.¹⁶ Urrea depicts the border as a site of multiple and multidirectional crossings. These result in the heterogeneity of the communities his transnational characters inhabit, and give rise to conflict. Urrea's works show that transnationals of Mexican origin are as vulnerable to potential attacks from *other* transnationals as they are from nationalists. In so doing, Urrea shows that transnationals' cultural encounters are not limited to Mexican-White racial binaries (see Cutler 17). Instead, the heterogeneity he inscribes calls attention to the lateral pressures that arise in the diaspora space when the paths of transnationals of different affiliations intersect (17).

By revealing the multiple identities adopted by Mexican Americans, Urrea's works complicate reductive binaries used in discourses designed to vilify people of Mexican origin, such as the Latino Threat Narrative. Through his use of syncretic characters whose identities evolve and develop in response to their surroundings, Urrea draws specific attention to the

¹⁶ Consider the narrator's definition of natural selection in "The Southside Raza Image Federation Corps of Discovery": "The vatos didn't like the fuckin' wetbacks [...]. Sureños from the south battled it out with Norteños from the north; Chicanos faced off against Mexicanos. Beaners versus rednecks. Everybody against the black brothers. And just forget about the Asians" (37).

entanglement of various groups and social hierarchies in the diaspora space. However, he also shows how opportunistic nationalists are able to capitalise on transnationals' aspirations, vulnerabilities, and fears when the occasion suits them, especially when they need "to get one more body on the firing line" (Urrea, *Angels* 78). Episodes such as these show the ways in which Urrea's transnationals occasionally fail to resist exploitative practices even if they reject practices that reproduce oppression (Ybarra 142). Urrea's works also show how transnationals use multi-axial articulations of power to their advantage. Often, this involves using racist perceptions of transnationals against those nationalists who subscribe to negative stereotypes. Most frequently, as in the case of Junior's posing as an Italian man in "The National City Reparation Society," Urrea's transnationals perform the stereotypical roles of *other* transnationals to avoid being racially profiled as being of Mexican origin, and thus to be perceived and treated as a threat.

Unlike the Chicano literature of *el movimiento*, Urrea's works do not embrace the nationalist strategy expounded in Juan Alurista's *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. Embracing Chicano nationalism would merely be revisionist. Instead, Urrea, like Nguyen, makes use of the figures of ghosts to recover and reveal a history that has either been forgotten or deliberately excluded from the dominant narratives of the United States. The historical consciousness evinced in Urrea's works create a hauntology that forces audiences to ask themselves "how [they] can [...] be accountable to people who seemingly have not counted in the historical and public record" (Avery 187). Ghosts in Urrea's works thus obfuscate anachronistic nationalist frameworks of citizenship. Urrea's deliberate recovery of forgotten histories implicate all inhabitants of the diaspora space in historical transgressions that threaten to be repeated.

In his most recent novel, Urrea's use of ghosts has intersected with his subversion of the Chicano nationalistic trope of the *familia de la Raza*. Through his depiction of the complicated history of the de La Cruz family's various migration trajectories and their enduring familial relationships, Urrea eschews the resistance of the *familia de la Raza* trope in favour of a position that seeks peaceful cohabitation. The various entanglements between 'legal' and 'illegal' migrants; macho and homosexual characters; law-abiding and criminal family members; and recent and historical arrivals create the image of the family as a palimpsest of multiple identities firmly rooted in the history of the area. The story of the de La Cruz family therefore problematises nationalist notions of belonging premised on nativism. As Big Angel notes, imagining that he is addressing the Americans at his work place, "the de La Cruz family has been around since before your grandparents were even

born” (Urrea, *Angels* 8). Urrea’s portrayal of the de La Cruzes reveals the familial bond as one that crosses all borders.

And it is familial love that Urrea’s works seem to posit as a potential resolution to the racially charged conflicts amongst American and Mexican nationalists as well as transnationals of Mexican origin. As a result of his various authorial strategies, an image of a “matrix of our humanity” (Urrea qtd in ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 23) emerges from Urrea’s oeuvre. But this vision is not utopian, as violence perpetuated by both transnationals and nationals continues to disrupt Urrea’s diaspora spaces along the borderland. In spite of this, as Ybarra notes about *The Devil’s Highway*, Urrea attempts to portray “all players in the drama [as] individuals with whom the reader can sympathize” (184). Through the act of humanising both transnationals and the nationalists who act against them, Urrea not only prevents his transnationals from being perceived as hapless victims, he also prevents readers from easily assigning blame. In this way, Urrea’s works, like those selected works by Nguyen and Gurnah discussed earlier, also dismantle the binary between national and transnational identities.

CHAPTER FIVE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GURNAH, NGUYEN, AND URREA'S AUTHORIAL PROJECTS

Section One – Complicating the Reverence for Transnationalism

Each of the previous three chapters has provided close readings of an individual author's works in order to trace their idiosyncratic styles and authorial projects in relation to the experiences of transnationals represented in their fictions. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of concerns that appear to be common to all three authors. In so doing, it argues that all of the works under consideration here challenge essentialising discourses that portray transnationalism and migrancy as "inherently resistant and creatively productive" (Newns 506). Selected works by these authors do so by dismantling binaries that support notions of belonging. There is a notable tendency to deliberately problematise negative stereotypical portrayals of transnationals as well as negative stereotypical portrayals of those opposed to their presence. Yet positive stereotypes are not presented as adequate correctives, and are treated with equal scepticism. These works, through their characteristic exploration of the entanglement of memory, forgetting, ethics, and agency, also insist that transnational characters should not be perceived as hapless victims who are in some way obligated to others in their diaspora spaces.

Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea avoid valorising transnational experiences. One of the most prominent ways in which they do so is by troubling racialised conceptions of home, regardless of whether these views are held by nationalists or transnationals. As Brah explains, these problematic conceptions of home posit that groups settled *in* a place are not necessarily *of* that place, irrespective of how long they have lived there (3–4). Such reasoning reinstates national categories (see Patterson 21). Conceptual frameworks like this are premised on ideas of home as a fixed place of origin, and give rise to the worrying claim that "culture equals nation equals home equals identity" (J. U. Jacobs 262). Problematically, these frameworks also risk the over-simplification of the complex political and cultural entanglements immanent in "homelands" (Patterson 21). Situations in transnationals' countries of origin risk being understood solely in terms of their relationship to situations in transnationals' host diaspora spaces (21). This is a relativistic view which leads to migration being perceived and portrayed as a necessarily progressive act, especially when the transnational moves to the West (21). The corollary is that the host country must, by comparison, be more desirable than

the homeland. As the verbal attack by the white woman who confronts La Gloriosa and Little Angel in a Target store illustrates – “You’ll be out of this country on your ass very soon” (Urrea, *Angels* 202) – if the relationship between the host country and homeland is dichotomous and hierarchical, the superiority of the Western power, in this case the US, is unquestioned. Besides conveying racist, xenophobic, and nationalistic views that, for Mexican transnationals, returning home equates to being “on your ass,” the utterance also reveals an implicit belief that the transnational is caught *between* a homeland and a host country (see Patterson 21).

But, as Iain Chambers argues, transnationalism involves movement “in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain” (5). Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works explore the various identities arising from constant mutability. Their literary projects limn identities that are interpolated and performed at the intersections of various imperial projects, contending postcolonial states, and different types of pluralist governance (see Patterson 11–18, 21). Significantly, all three authors show that these nexuses of intersecting forces exist not only in the diaspora spaces of homelands, but also in those of host countries. Their works therefore complicate views that transnational migration is necessarily progressive, by challenging nationalist narratives of the superiority and desirability of the host country. As the analyses presented in the previous chapters suggest, shared authorial interests in the processes of inclusion and exclusion in diaspora spaces, the importance of remembering histories that have been obscured by dominant narratives, and the recognition of what Brah describes as a “homing desire” (16, 176, 189) make it possible to designate Urrea, Nguyen, and Gurnah’s oeuvres as a body of literature that exposes the struggle for fluctuating amounts of power in diaspora spaces.

Section Two – “Go Back to Tollackee-Packee”¹: Undermining the Superiority of the Host Diaspora Space

The main transnational characters depicted in Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works are markedly transnational out of necessity rather than choice. Gurnah’s Saleh Omar (in *By the Sea*) and Salim Yahya (in *Gravel Heart*), for instance, travel to England to escape the persecution of ethnic Arabs in Zanzibar after the 1964 revolution. Similarly, Nguyen’s short stories and *The Sympathizer* are also populated by characters who live in the US after having

¹ This is how Dexter Bower derisively and deliberately mispronounces “Tlaquepaque” in “The Sous Chefs of Iogüa” (Urrea, “Chefs” 208).

fled from the war in Vietnam. Even though some of these figures continue their military duties to their home country while living in the US – such as the unnamed narrator of *The Sympathizer*, who is ordered to spy on and report the activities of the Southern Vietnamese General and his troops – while others flee potential victimisation and persecution by the Northern Vietnamese forces and their allies, their common desire is to “roam that beautiful country of [theirs] when it is at last peaceful and the sound of guns cannot be heard over the shouts of joy” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 227–28). Urrea’s characters likewise try to escape undesirable living conditions, in their case the widespread poverty in Mexico, by migrating to the US. Although his characters may not be fleeing a contemporary war, Urrea uses epic timeframes in stories such as “Mountains Without Number,” “Chametla,” and *The House of Broken Angels* to expose ways in which his contemporary concerns may be traced back to historical conflicts. While the narrative in *The House of Broken Angels*, for instance, depicts the de La Cruz family as having been in the US “since before your [American] grandparents were even born” (8), it also makes it clear that the family’s forebears were displaced from California as a result of war and persecution. In this regard, Urrea’s transnationals could be interpreted as closer to a return to their homeland than those of either of the other two authors. The assumptions underpinning this interpretation claim that being born into a space confers belonging to that space and inverts the nationalist discourses of who belongs in the US. Urrea’s fiction destabilises the security of white Americans by deploying the same logic used against Mexican Americans: groups settled in a place (in this case, white Americans in the US) are not necessarily of that place (as they drove the native Americans who would, through miscegenation, found the Mexican ‘race,’ to Mexico through various acts of violence and domination). Having said that, Urrea’s literature cannot accurately be interpreted as an expression of the threat transnationals are claimed to pose, identified in Leo Chavez’s formulation of the Latino Threat Narrative. While both posit the US as the geographical location of the Mexican homeland, Urrea’s literature neither calls for the exclusion or rejection of the American way of life, nor does it advocate any violence against US nationals. Instead, it evaluates and explores the plural, multicultural compositions of the US as a diaspora space.

All three authors reveal a critical awareness of this pluralism of multicultural compositions immanent in the diaspora spaces of their transnational characters’ host

countries.² They depict diaspora spaces as zones of confluence in which several imagined communities, to use Benedict Anderson's term, and "economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" intersect (Brah 181). Significantly, an understanding of how pluralism could be used as a form of imperialist strategy emerges throughout the oeuvres of all three writers. As Christopher Patterson argues, to speak of America as an empire has become a commonplace and "feels like adopting a trend only surpassed by speaking of the death of the American Dream" (18). Nonetheless, pluralism calls for a particular form of imagined community that organises and manages cultural differences by framing the nation as a "larger 'confederation', 'multi-national empire' or 'trans-nation'" (18). In this reimagined community, equalisation of cultural differences is emphasised, and pluralism is cast as "the ideal end of liberal democracy" (20). This ideology distracts from the real inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender, and class by depicting several populations as collectives that are equal, and that need to be managed by a supposedly neutral government (16–18). It also elides the fact that the imagined community of the US – and this also applies to that of the United Kingdom – can be perceived as a catalogue comprised of several distinct racial groups (16–18). Such catalogues are then not only used to boast about the diversity and harmony of the US and the UK, but are also used to identify and profile undesirable factions whose cultural practices and ways of life are inimical to the nation's supposed cohesion (18). Such diaspora spaces enable what Étienne Balibar and Patterson call 'neo-racism' in that racialised bodies are "fixed into insurmountable cultural differences" (Balibar 22; Patterson 14), as individuals are taxonomised based on their ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, and so on. But the conflation between individuals and their broader social groups is not the only racist practice enabled in the imperial context being described. There is also a valorisation of cultural qualities that are presented as "tolerable" in the diaspora space (see Balibar 22). Certain ethnic groups become hypervisible, as they are framed in nationalist discourses as ideal transnationals – a strategy of acceptance that paradoxically "divides, hierarchizes, and produces Others under consistent surveillance and repression" (Patterson 14). In other words, diaspora spaces that portray themselves as multicultural effectively mask what Brah describes as "differential racialisation" (15) behind a rhetoric of pluralism, which functions in a way similar to the neo-racist practices discussed in Chapter Three. Furthermore, multiculturalism, diversity, and tolerance have, especially since the declaration of the War on Terror, been

² There is more than one conception of multiculturalism that affects minority groups, as these are mutable and are influenced by the processes of inclusion and exclusion specific to each imagined community.

portrayed as a “domestic American product” (Patterson 6). US racial histories and multicultural exceptionalism are now used to signal the moral virtue and primacy of the West (7). From a nationalist perspective, multiculturalism allows the US and the UK to laud their moral superiority over more homogeneous nations, which are frequently framed as ‘backward’ and the reasons that the “supranational good” needs to be protected by US and UK military interventions (see Melamed 16). Multiculturalism – or, at least, this species of multiculturalism conveyed by the US and UK governments to justify their imperialist projects at home and abroad – thus enables the creation of new others by framing, for example, monocultural nation states or religious fundamentalists as intolerant, and thus morally inferior (Patterson 10). In this sense, discourses of multiculturalism and pluralism paradoxically serve to concretise those nations espousing them into monoliths that are recognisable through and ethically justified by their commitment to heterogeneity. Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works destabilise these conceptions of multiculturalism by emphasising episodes of differential racialisation that occur when the migration trajectories of multiple transnationals intersect in host diaspora spaces.

In Part Two of *Gravel Heart* (57–164), for instance, Gurnah blends the conventions of traditional narrative with those of the epistolary novel to convey Salim Yahya’s experiences in the diaspora space of England. Salim’s first-person narrative passages reveal his awareness of the diversity of other transnationals sharing his space, as well as his acuity of the differences between them. Observing a Chinese woman who lives downstairs from him speaking to her daughter, he realises that “words spoken by an unfamiliar voice in an unknown language sounded aggressive to an ignorant ear” (119). He describes working at a café where the “regulars spoke Arabic” and the owner, Mark, who grew up in Lebanon, does not like West Indians (108–09). Mark confesses to Salim that he originally profiled him as a West Indian, and was therefore not going to employ him, until he heard Salim’s name (109). This incident of self-professed racism serves as a contrapuntal episode to Salim’s perception of the British students with whom he studies:

It seemed that after all that going around the world their ancestors did and their descendants continue to do – all the effort and the carelessly inflicted misery – people in England now wanted to live a good life, to observe the decencies, to abhor hatred and violence, to give all that up and respect everyone’s humanity.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 108)

While this conveys a sense of pluralism and welcome that the UK may wish to be seen as extending, Gurnah complicates this description shortly after the above passage by labelling the students as “fortunate people who desired to own even the suffering of others” (108). With this comment, “humanity” is shown to have been commodified and rendered into an asset to be acquired and possessed by the patronising privileged, hinting that Salim is aware of the hierarchical relationships between differentially racialised groups veiled by multiculturalist rhetoric. Later, Salim encounters Dr Hobson, “a BNP [British National Party] sympathiser” who writes “material for their campaigns” (112). Hobson decides not to cast Salim in the play for which he auditions, and the narrative strongly implies that Salim believes he was not cast due to Hobson’s racist proclivities (111–12).

After leaving his Uncle Amir’s house – a space in which he enjoys a position of wealth and privilege as the family member of a Zanzibari diplomat – Salim moves to a tenement informally and ironically called “the OAU house, the Organisation of African Unity, because all the tenants were Africans” (85). In this setting, Salim befriends other transnationals from various countries in Africa. While each of these displays their own set of nationalist and racial prejudices, especially toward other Africans, the OAU also provides a space in which Salim and Mr Mgeni manage to bond through their mutual understanding of Kiswahili (80). It is this relationship that allows Salim, through the acquisition of fraudulent papers, to escape his dependence on Amir, who has to stand surety for him to remain in England. Within this context, readers are gradually exposed to Salim’s transformation into a hypervisible minority. During his second year at the OAU, Salim meets Amos, a quarrelsome Nigerian refugee who targets Salim for his vitriolic rants:

Whenever something about Islam came up on the news and I happened to be there, he turned to me as if I were the only Muslim in London and in some way responsible for what he disliked.

‘Muslims are fanatics, imperialists, racists,’ he said, eyes bulging with rage.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 100)

Unlike in his earlier novel, *By the Sea*, Gurnah portrays a new power dynamic entering the diaspora space of England in *Gravel Heart*. Amos’ Islamophobic sentiments are shown to find more public expression, especially after “those killings in New York” (150). Gurnah’s narrative construction reinforces the rise of this new threat. The novel is constructed in such a way that readers are made aware in those sections of the narrative focalised through Salim’s consciousness that he would prefer not to share the contents of the letters he wrote to his

mother, but never posted. Early in Part Two, Salim, as first-person narrator, states that he chose not to send the majority of his letters. Instead, readers are told that they are abandoned because Salim “had been too frank or homesick and unhappy” (66). The juxtaposition of standard narrative and epistolary forms in the novel therefore provides readers with insights into concerns and experiences that the first-person narrator would prefer to keep secret. But Gurnah subverts the epistolary form to convey a powerful sense of alienation. By granting access to letters that have been written but not posted, Gurnah presents readers with Salim’s personal account of his most intimate experiences of transnationalism. The fact that readers learn about Salim’s increased precarity in England as a result of the hypervisibility of Muslims after the incidents of 11 September 2001 through a letter signals explicit and implicit comment on the condition of the English diaspora space. Salim writes that:

the talk is all about Muslim fanatics and terrorists. They speak a familiar language of freedom but plan to enforce it with violence. [...] You would not recognise the way some of the bearded ones speak either, how it was all a plot by Kissinger and the Jews [...]. They are so full of rage and hatred and contemplate cruelties with such righteousness [.]

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 150)

Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in 2001 led to increased mutual suspicion in diaspora spaces inhabited by Muslims. As Salim writes, while the US framed the main targets of the War on Terror as members of the Islamic world, “some of the bearded ones” attempted to dismantle and unsettle these frames by claiming that these were the products of a racist, imperialist conspiracy between Jewish and American operatives. Gurnah uses Salim’s awareness that his hypervisibility as a target in the differentially racialised diaspora space of England results from events in the US to reveal the continued existence of “inter-imperial” connections (Kramer 1361). Transnational networks established through economic and military ties between these former architects of colonial rule allow them to ally with each other in times of need (Kramer 1361). When they rally together, it is usually at the expense of minorities that have been taxonomised as unruly. The resultant hypervisibility of differentially racialised groups reveals the superficiality of the frame which presents the US and the UK (and others) as stalwarts of multiculturalism and tolerance to the international community. By the end of the above passage, Salim appears disheartened by the “rage and hatred” and “righteousness” emanating from all sides. This accentuates the “sense of

dissembling” he describes in an earlier unsent letter to his father (Gurnah, *Gravel* 121), and confirms his increasing alienation and estrangement in the English diaspora space.

Unlike in *By the Sea*, where Gurnah’s transnationals manage to forge a surrogate family that provides both Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud a sense of security, UK diaspora spaces in *Gravel Heart* are described as a “wilderness” (121). Salim’s unposted letters clearly state that he “loathe[s] this life, this place, this cringing” although he never admits this in the main narrative (121). The promise of a satisfying life in the UK in *By the Sea* is replaced by an uncertain future in *Gravel Heart*. In its place, transnationals like Salim experience increased precarity. This can be detected in the inversion of the narrative trajectories between *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*. In the earlier of the two, episodes set in the diaspora space of the UK frame analeptic episodes set in Zanzibar. Gurnah thus presents readers with narrative episodes framed as memories, focalised through narrators situated in English locations. Omar and Mahmud are able to participate in vicarious homecomings through the mediation of memories. As these memories recall the catastrophic and traumatic feud between their families, as well as the political turmoil and persecution that result in each one opting to leave Zanzibar, the English diaspora space is rendered as a place of comfort and hospitality, which affords them opportunities to reminisce. The main narrative arc of *Gravel Heart*, however, bookends the episodes set in the UK with Salim’s experiences in Zanzibar. When Salim first leaves for England, his journey is presented as an opportunity for him to prosper. Still, by the end of Part Two, Gurnah’s strategic juxtaposition of traditional narrative and epistolary forms reveals the corrosion of the UK as a space of opportunity. Salim’s steadily increasing precarity and vulnerability are reminiscent of and mirror the precarious positions held by his grandparents, contemplated towards the end of Part One. His physical return to Zanzibar upon hearing of the death of his mother is therefore rendered as another flight to safety. Gurnah then switches between the narrative voices of Salim and his father, Masud, throughout Part Three. Over a period of two nights, Masud presents a different version of the conniving that led to Salim’s life abroad. Readers are forced to revise their initial perception of young Salim’s interpretation of the events presented in Part One. Through this strategy, Gurnah undermines his readers’ original understanding of the desirability of life in the UK: Salim’s migration is revealed to be a matter of political expediency couched in terms of familial benevolence. By the time Salim decides to return to the UK, it is obvious that he has made a choice between the lesser of two evils. Gurnah closes the novel with an explicitly pessimistic observation of hopelessness by Salim: “What use was someone like me to this England? [...] Some people have a use in the world, even if it is only to swell a crowd and

say yeah, and some people don't" (*Gravel* 261). The conclusion of the novel therefore leaves readers with an indelible sense of the alienation that results from the precarity of hypervisible minorities by racialised power configured into hierarchies within multicultural diaspora spaces.

A similar malaise to Salim's plagues the narrator of *The Sympathizer*. When invited to join the crew of the Hollywood movie on location in the Philippines, for instance, he notes that despite his being "underpaid," the "upshot" is that he would be granted "a respite from [his] American refuge" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 135). Besides being characteristic of Nguyen's idiosyncratic use of caustic humour, this epigrammatic witticism highlights the demands placed on his Vietnamese transnationals in the multicultural US diaspora space. On one hand, America is portrayed as the bearer of "great promise. The promise of the immigrant! The promise of the American Dream!" (114). Even so, an earlier list of the demeaning, low wage jobs held by men of former high social and military rank reveals the "metastasizing cancer called assimilation" (88) obfuscated by such rhetoric. The disillusion and humiliation experienced by transnationals due to the disjuncture between expectation and lived experience could therefore explain why the soldiers later decide that they would rather return to the "hell" of war than remain in the "shithole" that is America (214).

Notably, those characters that uphold, flaunt, and value 'the American Dream' in *The Sympathizer* are Americans. In the novel, this dream is used to advance specific political agendas. The Congressman who makes the aforementioned assertions, for instance, deploys his acceptance of Vietnamese refugees as a way to vilify his political opponents ideologically: "The Democrats. The media. The anti-war movement. The hippies. The college students. The radicals [and] the defeatists and communists and traitors infesting our universities, our newsrooms, and our Congress" (114). He claims moral superiority over the people on this list of opponents by condemning them for not being as committed to the US values of inclusion and diversity as he is. But like so many passages throughout the novel, this speech also proves ambiguous. The narrator admits that he and the audience could not possibly "get [...] even more excited" (115). Nevertheless, when the Congressman raises his arms to form a V, the narrator describes the action as "subliminally suggestive," possibly meaning "Vote for me" (115). By exploiting his acceptance of the Vietnamese, the Congressman deliberately exposes America's "own internal divisions" (114). The Congressman's discursive strategy paradoxically divides and creates new hierarchies within the diaspora space, rendering those who do not accept and tolerate Vietnamese refugees as others. By valorising and praising supposedly insurmountable cultural differences as tolerable

within the American diaspora space, the Congressman effectively relies on a neo-racist strategy to advance his own political agenda. Nguyen focalises encounters such as this through the perception of a highly educated, critical, self-aware, and reflective narrator. The text of the novel itself is imaged as the final revised draft of a “confession” written by the narrator and edited by a Vietcong commandant for a Vietcong commissar, who is later revealed to be Man, in a re-education “camp” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer 2*). By casting the novel in this way, Nguyen ensures that readers are aware of the ambiguous nature of his narrator’s observations of the US diaspora space. While the narrator could potentially be presenting observations of American society that mimic the stereotypes that North Vietnamese troops would expect of their enemies, Nguyen troubles this interpretation later in the novel. The commandant complains that the narrator “won’t tell [him] what [he] want[s] to hear” (299), adding credence to, but not confirming, a reading that the narrator has deliberately misrepresented the US diaspora space.

Just as Gurnah portrays hypervisibility of Muslim transnationals as a source of precarity for his transnational characters, so too does Nguyen identify hypervisibility as a source of vulnerability for his Vietnamese refugees. The narrator realises that the “majority of Americans” regard Vietnamese refugees with “ambivalence if not outright distaste” because they are “living reminders of [American] defeat” and trouble the symmetry of “white and black America whose yin and yang racial politics left no room for any other color” (113). Nguyen nonetheless problematises this description of a dichotomous racial profile of the US diaspora space during an episode in which the narrator is exoticised and valorised for his hybrid ethnicity. The Orientalist – the head of the university Department where the narrator finds work – praises the narrator as an “Amerasian” (61). He describes the narrator as “the symbiosis of Orient and Occident, the possibility that out of two can come one” (63). This observation is as indicative of neo-racism as the Congressman’s speech, and the narrator is left with “a sour taste, the gastric reflux” of his “confused Oriental and Occidental insides” (63). Even well-intended American characters in *The Sympathizer* thus reduce Nguyen’s transnational figures to mere embodiments of racialised cultural differences. Whether their hosts are attempting to accommodate them, or are deliberately victimising them, Nguyen’s transnational characters struggle to satisfy their homing desires in the US and dream of returning to their native Vietnam.

Nguyen’s interest in the numerous dislocations experienced by the mixed-race individuals in American diaspora spaces is shared by Urrea. The latter’s depictions of transnational experiences in US diaspora spaces, as analysed in detail in Chapter Four,

trouble assumptions that the act of migration is necessarily a progressive move to a more desirable location. Unlike either Gurnah or Nguyen, Urrea deliberately destabilises the nationalist claims of belonging by US Americans. Rather than describing migration trajectories from a homeland to a host country, Urrea's works use chronoschisms that condense epic timelines to historicise his transnational characters by rendering forgotten histories visible. In short stories like "Mountains Without Number" and "Taped to the Sky," for instance, Urrea deliberately foregrounds the presence of Native Americans who have been relegated to reserves, or violently exterminated, by those settlers who later fashion themselves as the American people. Through his narrative commitment to historicising the experiences he describes in his work, Urrea foregrounds genetic and cultural links between Mexicans and Native Americans. By doing this, Urrea's work exposes ancestries that predate the formation of the United States and the erection of any borders – walls or otherwise – between the US and Mexico. His US diaspora spaces are therefore rendered as a palimpsest in which ancestral homeland and the contemporary geopolitics, which posit the US as a host diaspora space to Mexican Americans, are coterminous. In this sense, Urrea's US diaspora spaces are paradoxically and simultaneously undesirable *and* desired. The US he figures in his fiction therefore resembles Gurnah's depictions of Zanzibar and Nguyen's Vietnam more closely than it does their depictions of the UK and US diaspora spaces respectively. Nguyen and Gurnah do depict second and third generation transnationals who strategically adopt hybrid identities (such as Vietnamese-American) to claim emerging identities that belong to their host diaspora spaces. Yet these characters do not exhibit the same primordial claims to belonging that Urrea's transnationals frequently make. As a result, the US diaspora spaces in his fiction could be read as zones of contestation where several imagined communities consider themselves native. But Urrea constantly reminds readers that the existence *and recognition* of Native Americans *within those spaces* challenges the validity of the claims made by the imagined community of the US. His works, like those by Gurnah and Nguyen, also problematise assumptions of the superiority of the host country. But this is not accomplished solely by tracing how transnationals "fluctuate among positions of power through mobility, history, and transition" (Patterson 22). Rather, Urrea historicises his transnationals in such a way that their memories and histories are used to collapse the binary logic that posits home and host diaspora spaces as necessarily separate locations. Having said that, it is significant that none of these authors present migration as a necessarily desirable or progressive act.

Section Three – Engaging with the Industry of Memory

Several power dynamics are revealed through the ambivalences raised by the selected literature towards the desirability of host diaspora spaces. The most notable of these is related to the representation of transnationals in dominant discourses. Such discourses, especially those that depict migration as a necessarily progressive act, reduce transnationals to racialised stereotypes. Altered memories, marked by deliberate amnesia and, at times, outright lies, are deployed by nationalists in diaspora spaces to historicise the presence of transnationals (see Kirmayer 191, Herzog 170, Chattarji, “Made” 230, Pelaud 64, and Steiner, “Conversation” 161). One of the most prevalent examples of such discursive practices is the characterisation of all transnationals as immigrants. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, Viet Thanh Nguyen offers a corrective to those critics who described *The Sympathizer* as an “immigrant story” by an “immigrant author,” describing the novel instead as a war story about refugees by an author who is himself a refugee (Nguyen, “Hidden Scars” A19). He argues that:

Immigrants are more reassuring than refugees because there is an end to their story; however they arrive, whether they are documented or not, their desires for a new life can be absorbed into the American dream or into the European narrative of civilization.

(Nguyen, “Hidden Scars” A19)

Nguyen claims that the most important distinction between immigrant and refugee is the recognition that refugees “remain scarred by their histories” (A19). Although refugees may wish to forget their past, which would allow the perpetuation of amnesiac discourses, Nguyen urges that the status of refugee must be claimed so that no one forgets “that there was a time when the world thought us to be less than human” (A19). His opinion is trenchant not only because it can easily be extended to describe transnational experiences depicted in Urrea and Gurnah’s works, but because it also signals a need for individuals to ensure that their identities are not subsumed by any nationalist discourse, regardless of whether that discourse is perpetuated in the homeland or in the diaspora space.

While individual identities may be invested with “ideologies and personal intimacies,” they nonetheless operate within the broader “optics of population and community” (Patterson 13). Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works evince a keen awareness of the presence of ideologies in diaspora spaces premised on differential racialisation and stereotypes promoted by dominant discourses. Louis Althusser argues that ideologies not only have material effects but also “a material existence” that ensures their promulgation

(155). Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea engage with this characteristic of ideology critically by creating intertextual links between their own works and cultural artefacts that represent the “material existence” of the stereotypes that facilitate the oppression of their transnational characters.

Be that as it may, the racist and xenophobic sentiments exposed in Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works are not attributed in their writing to simple isolated and individual prejudices. Rather, the authors are at pains to reveal ways in which these are framed and perpetuated by ideological apparatuses which operate within the diaspora spaces they describe. In so doing, they draw the reader’s attention to the existence of an industry of memory (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 106). This collective term refers to the set of technologies and cultural forms through which collected memories are fashioned; the networks of professionals and experts who create, design, and study memories; and the processes of individual and social memory within specific social contexts (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 106–08). These industries give rise to “structures of feeling” (R. Williams 131), and determine how, why, and which memories are produced, circulated, and emphasised (Nguyen, *Nothing* 107). Memories and the structures of feeling they produce in turn influence the formation of individual identities (Pelaud, *choose* 64). Nguyen, Urrea, and Gurnah’s literature thus suggests that transnationals need to negotiate and adopt identities that would grant them some form of recognition in their diaspora spaces if they are to acquire any degree of power (see Patterson 13). The novels articulate ways in which transnationals who engage with dominant representations of themselves are able to defy, affirm, or adapt the stereotypical behaviours their hosts expect to their advantage. These negotiated identities, though, are shown to accentuate the differences and, uncomfortably, similarities between lived transnational experiences and their stereotypes.

As argued in Chapter Two, Gurnah’s work engages with dominant representations of his transnational characters through a deliberate foregrounding of his narratives’ intertextual links with western canonical literature. In an interview with Tina Steiner, he provides a candid explanation of his narrative strategy:

[R]ecognition of intertextualities [...] provide[s] a very convenient echo or resonance [that] enriches the reader’s understanding of what’s going on [...]. [You] can make it interesting by reinventing it in a way so that it’s like but displaced in a particular way so that it’s not an obvious echo [...].

(Gurnah qtd in Steiner, “Conversation” 166)

In both *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah's main plot points develop along narrative trajectories similar to those of the plots of their primary intertexts. Protagonists of both novels explicitly recognise and remark on these similarities, providing a metatextual commentary on the author's use of canonical literary intertexts as structural frames for his own works. This self-reflexivity is complicated when Gurnah's characters decide to reject these intertextual frames, usually towards the end of the novel. Omar, for instance, reframes his interpretation of Bartleby's resistance from heroic to petulant after he discusses it with Rachel (Gurnah, *Sea* 198–99). Salim recognises that, despite the similarities between his family's story and *Measure for Measure*, not all of the characters of *Gravel Heart* neatly fit that frame (Gurnah, *Gravel* 256). By emphasising the divergence between the intertexts and his own works, Gurnah creates a liminal space between two different discourses. One of these belongs to the intertext, which guides the reader's interpretations of Gurnah's work in the same way that industries of memory influence the recognition of transnationals. The other belongs to the transnational who has attempted to assimilate and adapt this mode of recognition, but who has ultimately rejected it in order to find a less disempowering way to interpolate into the culture of their host diaspora spaces.

Just as Gurnah explores how western canonical literature perpetuates disempowering historical discourses about his transnational characters, so too does Viet Thanh Nguyen engage intertextually with one of the most successful and popular channels of the industry of memory following the war in Vietnam: the Hollywood blockbuster. As a result of his relocation to Los Angeles and his deliberately falsified involvement in the war, the narrator of *The Sympathizer* is hired as a consultant on a film called "The Hamlet." The film's story arcs described in the novel, as well as its supposed location of filming in the Philippines despite its Cambodian setting, strongly imply that this movie-within-the-book is based on Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now." As explained in Chapter Three, American films about the Vietnam War used racist stereotypes of the Vietnamese to rationalise the political, social, and psychological legacies of the war on American psyches (Grice 942). The dominant discursive strategy was to depict the Vietnamese as "irrelevant details in an American-centred crisis" (P. Williams 234). Vietnamese and Vietnamese American experiences were thus consistently subordinated to those of Americans – who were consequently portrayed as the "true victims of the war" (Forna 37). The narrator is assigned a "corrective" mission to ensure "more accurate portrayals of Southeast Asian combatants and civilians" (Schlund-Vials 2). He fails, despite a series of small but ultimately insignificant victories.

One of his minor victories is that he convinces the Auteur to use Vietnamese refugees as extras in the film (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 150).³ Despite this success, he soon recognises that “they would be forgotten. No one remembers the extras” (150). This recognition signals a way in which Nguyen’s use of ghosts as ethical imperatives to encourage just memory and his use of intertexts become entangled. To satisfy the bloodthirsty realism of the film’s closing scenes:

the script called for the deaths of several hundred Viet Cong and Laotians [...]. [But all] that was required for the shoot’s last days were twenty extras, a reduced population that left the hamlet a ghost town.

It was here that the living went to sleep but the undead awoke, as for three dawns the set rang to the cry, *Dead Vietnamese, take your places!*
(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 169; original emphasis)

In the above passage, Nguyen symbolically reveals how the dominant discourse demands the hauntology of the spectre as a remedy. Even though these characters are not really dead in the imaginary of the novel, this scene discursively links the Laotian and Vietnamese refugees with the “undead,” reminiscent of the ghosts or spectres that demand justice throughout *The Sympathizer*. This intertext thus provides an additional context against which Nguyen can express his authorial commitment to just memory.

Luis Alberto Urrea engages with the stereotypes created by the discursive practices of the industry of memory in less obvious ways than Nguyen and Gurnah. As argued in the previous chapter, the US diaspora spaces in Urrea’s fictions are marked by the presence of the Latino Threat Narrative and its multiple expressions (see Chavez 2008). His works therefore tend to reflect the prevailing political milieu of their time of composition. Notably, they increasingly explore the rise of anti-Mexican rhetoric in the United States of America. Urrea’s engagement with the stereotypes of Mexicans in American discursive practices has also become more critical as he has matured as an author. Despite the various successes of the American civil rights movement, its achievements seem compromised by the election of President Donald J. Trump. Trump’s appointment was openly endorsed by leaders of the racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic hate group, the Ku Klux Klan.⁴ The Latino Threat

³ Nguyen calls the writer/director of the film “the Auteur.” This elevates the character from an individual persona to an archetypal figure involved in the Hollywood film industry.

⁴ See Bethea (2017); Holley (2016); and Robb (2016). It should also be noted that this claim is factual. The statement does not serve to suggest that the White House is in any way in alliance with the KKK. Rather, it is meant to show that the KKK identified with and approved of what it perceived to be similarities between its ideologies and the views expressed during Trump’s campaign.

Narrative also gained new traction as Trump galvanised Republicans during his electoral campaign – especially as a result of his dehumanisation of Mexican immigrants, and his rendering of ‘illegal aliens’ into hypervisibility. Through sweeping generalisations, he cast all Mexicans as drug addicts, thieves, and rapists (Patterson 6). These and several other, older events have given rise to two seemingly conflicting discourses in the US – one of racial crisis and one of racial progress. Still, as Patterson argues, both discourses could be seen as “mutually reinforcing the panoptic gaze of the state” (6) and form two parts of a single ideology.

Urrea deliberately exposes the disjunction between these two discourses and, in *The House of Broken Angels*, directly references the schisms and rifts created by Trump’s rhetoric. The most notable expressions of these are the presence of a “guy on the overpass” who holds “a BUILD THE WALL sign, facing south” (Urrea, *Angels* 24; original capitalisation) and the xenophobic attack in the Target store, described earlier in this chapter (202). Urrea also highlights the precarity and anxiety Lily experiences after the Supreme Court’s decision to repeal the DREAM and DACA Acts, which could result in her deportation (267). The illogicality of the anti-Mexican rhetoric is also signalled in a short passage not unlike some of Trump’s more notorious Tweets:

People on the freeway five miles from the party missed it because they were battling traffic and hating the Mexicans because talk radio told them it was okay because of ISIS and the border wall and the Chargers had betrayed San Diego and evangelicals were howling that sodomy was the new law of the land and their favorite talk show hosts were unable to control any narrative anymore and the drought was going to continue until all of California burned and vanished in dust and rivers in the West had turned yellow or huge floods were on the way and nobody knew what to expect.

(Urrea, *Angels* 233)

With this breathless cacophony of fragmented and logically incoherent ideas, Urrea barrages his readers with a seemingly relentless verbal attack. This passage, as with that of the presence of the guy with the sign and the unprovoked incident in Target, intrudes into and disrupts the progress of the main narrative. Urrea uses this intrusion to elicit an emotive response from his readers. While it reminds them of the presence of discourses that encourage “hating the Mexicans,” it simultaneously replicates the apparent randomness of incidents of the hatred it describes. Furthermore, there are several intertextual allusions to real world events and news reports: Trump’s pursuit of the border wall; the continued perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalists; and the relocation of a football team from San

Diego to Los Angeles in 2017. The lack of logical coherence amongst these thoughts is accentuated by the introduction of emotive “evangelical” arguments and contradictory predictions as to whether there will be a “drought” or “huge floods.” As the logic cannot be parsed, the ultimate effect is to render the contents of the passage distracting from the main narrative. The disruption this passage represents results in those people who are distracted by such rhetoric missing a magical “it.” Urrea poetically describes this “it” as a moment of peace and serenity which allows everyone time for introspection. This moment is described shortly after the passage quoted above as the “minute given to every day that seems to create a golden bubble available to everyone” (233). It is a period of daily inclusive reflection, but it is not necessarily a space of joy, only of beauty. Urrea describes how Minnie recognises that she inexplicably “found the golden bubble in her own misery” and loneliness (234). Regardless of how this transcendental moment is experienced or understood, Urrea’s use of intertexts and his pastiche presentation of topical events on talk radio emphasise the disjunctions between people caused by such discourses.

Despite their concentration on different sources of dominant discourses, all three authors engage with various aspects of the industry of memory. This engagement manifests in their transnational characters’ thematic negotiation with and adoption of empowering identities. Moreover, their works also adopt intertextual strategies that result in their authorial concerns with the negative and positive effects of stereotypes becoming structurally encoded within their works. Gurnah deliberately undermines his readers’ responses to his stories by creating plots that deviate unexpectedly from their canonical intertexts to show the disjunction between how his transnationals are interpolated by society and how they see themselves. Nguyen similarly investigates how transnationals are perceived by those around them, by engaging with the narrative practices of the film industry. He also contemplates the need for acts of just memory necessitated by his transnationals’ inability to represent themselves, as movies “were America’s way of softening up the rest of the world [...] until the day that they themselves might be bombed by the same planes they had seen in American movies” (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 166). Unlike the other two authors, Urrea textually mimics the disruptive and distracting nature of racist and xenophobic rhetoric in his narratives. But while each author uses intertextuality to expose how dominant representations of their transnationals advance imperial projects immanent in host diaspora spaces, none of them advocate for a clearly oppositional alternative. Rather, to varying degrees, they use the stereotypical traits highlighted in dominant discourses to consider how their transnationals affect those around them, in order to elevate them from archetypal victims marked by

precarity to subjects capable of ethical agency able to exercise fluctuating degrees of control over their own lives.

Section Four – The Rejection of Victimhood

The industries of memory and their material manifestations provide the stereotypes and prejudicial ideologies present in the diaspora spaces described in Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works. Yet to engage with these alone would be to overlook the ethical agency and responsibility of individuals, a concern central to the authorial projects of each of these authors. Rather, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea explore how identities can be claimed in order to gain a degree of power – albeit asymmetrical when compared to other expressions of power within the diaspora space – and ethical agency. In so doing, their works present scenarios that counter discourses that objectify transnationals as passive refugees, migrants, immigrants, or as racial or ethnic minorities in need of “caring, counselling” or some other form of disempowering and patronising intervention (DuBois, “Constructions” 4).

Stuart Hall argues that identity is not only a process of being but also a “matter of becoming” (“Cultural” 225). In his conception, identities refer to “the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (225). The adoption of identities, then, is always a process of negotiation (Patterson 13). Like the stereotypes created by the industries of memory and disseminated by dominant discourses, identities also serve to categorise people. They equate “ethnicity, race, nation, sexuality, gender, and labor to produce racial types that hardly reflect the individual” to which they are applied (13–14). Yet despite the increased risk of falling victim to racial profiling and the increased precarity certain identities offer, these identities also present transnationals with recognition and a sense of communal belonging (13). State recognition is granted to specific identities (13). This often confers privileges such as equality under the law; citizenship; suffrage; and historical and cultural representation (13). As argued in previous chapters, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea emphasise the negotiated and performative aspects of their transnational characters’ identities in order to contemplate ways in which transnationals could possibly claim and exercise some degree of power in their diaspora spaces. In so doing, they reveal how elective multiple affiliations are negotiated to resist negative stereotypes. They also problematise dominant discourses by illustrating how transnationals may mimic and adapt stereotypes in order to gain advantage over those who, whether willingly or unwittingly,

perpetuate them. For instance, Louis Vu exploits Arthur Arellanos's tendency to homogenise Asians from the Orient in order to take advantage of the debt Arellanos erroneously believes he owes him (Nguyen, "Transplant"). Urrea's Junior evades arrest and avoids the consequences of racial profiling because a disguise constructed to mimic the stereotypical looks of an Italian results in him not being recognised as Mexican by the Border Patrol ("Reparation"). Saleh Omar manages to convince Kevin Edelman that he is unable to speak English simply by remaining silent, his silence mimicking the stereotypical refugee Edelman expects (Gurnah, *Sea* 8–11).

All three authors thus present readers with characters who illustrate that "identities are not simply framed by power" (Patterson 13). Rather, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea's transnationals emphasise that power can be claimed through the deliberate adoption of specific identities. Their works illustrate how individual transnationals "fluctuate among positions of power" (22) through the processes of association, migration, hybridity, syncretism, mimicry, and assimilation. The transnationals portrayed in their fiction empower themselves by strategically interpolating their identities at the intersection of shared histories, memories, languages, and cultural practices (13). By adopting these "lifestyles of empowerment" (Grewal 16), transnationals manage to earn those privileges associated with state recognition (Patterson 13). The narrator of *The Sympathizer*, for instance, holds a driver's licence and "a resident alien permit" (123). Amir Ahmed Musa enjoys the luxurious life of a diplomat in an affluent part of London, living in a house owned by the embassy (Gurnah, *Gravel* 58). Big Angel is so proud of his citizenship papers that he displays them "in a little frame on the wall for all to admire" (Urrea, *Angels* 101).

Even so, none of these authors presents these successes in heroic terms, regardless of how the characters may choose to frame their stories. This is uncharacteristic of writers from groups who see themselves as marginalised, exploited, oppressed, or excluded (see Nguyen, *Nothing* 43). Minorities more commonly tend to remember their histories in heroic modes because they can ill afford to seem weak to the powerful due to their precarity in a space where they are othered (43). Heroic modes allow weaker groups to express their longing for the past (43). They provide a discursive means for these groups to satisfy what Svetlana Boym calls "restorative nostalgia" – the desire to reproduce what once was (viii, 41–48). The antiheroic mode, however, evolves as less powerful groups either become empowered or become disillusioned by the promises of their hosts (Nguyen, *Nothing* 43). In this mode, stories about the morally flawed and the culturally inassimilable flourish (43). It allows

authors and storytellers to contemplate histories using the type of just memory described in Chapter Three.

Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea's oeuvres present antiheroic narratives in which their main characters – protagonists and antagonists – are revealed to have troubled pasts and ethically compromised presents. Nguyen's narrator, for instance, realises that the Americans regard him with "ambivalence if not outright distaste" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 113) because he is a reminder of "their cowardice and treachery" (114). He also assassinates two men to maintain his cover, and is finally revealed as party to the rape of a Vietcong woman. A similar capacity for violence plays a crucial role in Amir's advancement in *Gravel Heart*. By facilitating the sexual exploitation of his sister, Amir orchestrates his entry into Zanzibari politics. Urrea's Big Angel hides the fact that he came to the US to evade capture after he murdered his abusive uncle, and still feels compelled to deliberately subvert stereotypes such as his American colleagues' racist, although jocular, characterisation of "Mexican time" (Urrea, *Angels* 5). Furthermore, for every questionable and uncertain success the authors portray, readers are presented with several more failures. Arellanos, a Mexican American gardener, has his misplaced trust abused, and is made a party to the sale of counterfeit goods (Nguyen, "Transplant"). Perla, Big Angel's wife, finds "loneliness and worse hunger" in America than in Mexico, "because all around her people were rolling like pigs in huge piles of food" (Urrea, *Angels* 159). Despite his best efforts to gain his independence, and to find work and social acceptance, Salim Yahya realises that even to other transnational groups in England, a "nigger is a nigger although not to his face" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 148). Salim notes the duplicitous way in which other transnationals and nationalists treat him. By using and repeating a racist epithet, Gurnah signals the differential racialisation present in the England he portrays, which reductively casts Africans as a single, monolithic social group.

Furthermore, adoption of certain identities is presented neither as unproblematic to wider society nor without difficulty to the individual. Complications arise because of a sense of the double-consciousness characteristic of transnational identities. As W. E. B. DuBois states:

the Negro is [...] born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.

(DuBois, *Souls* 5)

Although DuBois's argument is specifically concerned with the experiences of African Americans, many minority groups have since also claimed double-consciousness for themselves (Nguyen, *Nothing* 53). In transnational terms, as DuBois's description indicates, and Hall advances later in "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," double-consciousness is experienced as a profoundly personal recognition that one is not part of a diaspora space's dominant group – a group that is imagined by Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea as predominantly white and Americanised (even in the UK, as can be seen in the anti-Islamic sentiments and discourses exposed in Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*). But the works of all three authors are also insistent on a further source of schism in their characters' consciousnesses – a dislocation created by being removed from their histories.

In *The Sympathizer*, a "craftsman in exile" produces clocks "carved from hardwood into the shape of our homeland" (Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 191). The dial and hands of this timepiece are positioned as "a halo around Saigon" (191). When he notices that the General has such a clock in the back office where the group plots its military incursion into Vietnam, the narrator explicitly signals the entanglement of geographical and temporal dislocations:

While the distance to return to our lost country was far but finite, the number of years it would take to close that distance was potentially infinite. [...] [We] did not simply live in two cultures, as celebrants of the great American melting pot imagined. Displaced people also lived in two time zones, the here and the there, the present and the past, being as we were reluctant time travellers.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 192)

Nguyen and Urrea figure the entanglements between the past and the present as ethical imperatives that demand recognition of events that their transnational characters would prefer to ignore. Both authors use their transnationals' traumatic pasts and historical infliction of pain or harm on others to disrupt the chronologies of their narratives. Both use the hauntology of ghosts and other spectral figures – like Urrea's ephemeral "spirits of the old ones" which are indistinguishable from forces of nature such as "the wind" ("Mountains" 4), or a dead refugee visiting his family (Nguyen, "Black-Eyed") – to ensure that their transnationals are confronted by the misdeeds that they have committed and would prefer to omit from their stories. In so doing, Nguyen and Urrea do not afford their transnationals the "strategic forgetting" (Kirmayer 191) that characterises dominant amnesiac discourses. Rather, the disruptive nature of the hauntologies presented appears to subside once narrators acknowledge their culpability in unheroic, ethically deplorable acts. The narrator of *The*

Sympathizer, as argued in Chapter Three, becomes conflated with the ghosts that torment him, and Nguyen renders him spectral and removed from the diegesis of the story until he finally acknowledges the harm he caused a fellow sympathizer.

Urrea uses spectres to similar ends. In *The House of Broken Angels*, for instance, Don Antonio's ghost climbs "in through the windshield" of the car Lalo and his son are driving after a particularly revealing narrative episode (Urrea, *Angels* 242). When Gio and Lalo arrive at the location of the "cartoon character in a Pendleton jacket [...] looking to be the baddest of the bad" (240) who killed Braulio and Guillermo, Urrea describes a set of realisations that prevent Lalo from enacting his revenge. Like the "reluctant time travellers" Nguyen describes above, Lalo suddenly inhabits a space in which "[a]ll time stops" (242). Urrea presents readers with a series of disjunctive perceptions of the events at "that garage" (238) focalised through Lalo's drug-fuelled and disoriented perspective. Four distinct events are interwoven, displacing the logical chronology of the narrative: Lalo and Gio fleeing after the encounter; the actual confrontation (in which Lalo deliberately discharges his weapon *over* the gangster's head); the confrontation as distorted by Lalo's narcotics (in which he kills the gangster); and Lalo's memories of being shot as a soldier in Iraq. Although the story is ostensibly about the two characters preparing to avenge the deaths of their family members, Urrea concentrates on Lalo's "feeling guilty that his son had grown up simmering with rage and plotting wicked paybacks" (238). By framing this story of revenge through a distorted lens that persistently returns the reader's attention to the issues of responsibility and guilt rather than anger, Urrea casts doubt on the justness of the two characters' motivations. Lalo's ultimate decision not to participate in the stereotypical "story they tell about us" (243) – the one of endless cycles of gang-related reprisal killings – highlights his active adoption of an identity that rejects and refutes the cultural identities given to Mexican Americans by those in power. Don Antonio's ghost enters the car as the episode reaches its climax, and the narrative immediately moves on to the next chapter. Given the nebulous and tumultuous character of the chronoschisms throughout this episode, Don Antonio's appearance at this stage and his foreclosure on the narrative events could be interpreted as an authorial comment on the need for stereotypical portrayals to be displaced by a more honest version of history.

Although Abdulrazak Gurnah does not notably use the figure of ghosts or spectres in his works, the recuperation of histories that acknowledge the points of view and agency of all parties affected by them is nonetheless still a central concern. This is encoded in the narrative structures of both *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart*. As explored in Chapter Two, *By the Sea* is presented as a series of recollections between Latif Mahmud and Saleh Omar. The final two

chapters of *Gravel Heart* similarly serve to complicate and disrupt readings of Salim's family history. In these final chapters of the novel, the narrative voice changes from Salim's to his father's. By introducing Masud's voice, Gurnah presents readers with information previously unknown to the dominant narrative voice. Continuous revision of salient plot points and the gradual recognition of other perspectives on these same plot points indicate Gurnah's authorial interest in recuperating histories that attempt to avoid "strategic forgetting" (Kirmayer 191). In both novels, this recuperation entails a process of negotiation in which narrators are forced to recognise their own culpability and complicity in their individual situations. Omar recognises the pettiness with which he refused to return the mahogany table; Mahmud acknowledges his misrecognition of Omar as malicious and is forced to admit his prejudices; Salim at first considers himself disgraceful because he is unable to succeed at his studies, but later comes to recognise that he has been an unwitting pawn in a family feud, too quick to condemn his father.

Guilt, culpability, complicity, and more significantly ethical accountability are all common concerns in the selected works by Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea. These emerge as the inevitable results of transnationals negotiating and strategically adopting identities that enable them to lead empowered lives. Consequently, the authorial projects also display a common interest in ensuring that transnational experiences not be subsumed by discourses that represent transnationals as minorities who are somehow beholden to others within their diaspora spaces. Rather, these authors vehemently refute the comforts of victimhood for their transnationals, to ensure that their characters are not freed from ethical responsibility and that the exercise of power is not over-simplified (see Nguyen, "Speak" 10; 13–15 and Iwata 181). Rather, the literature insists on transnationals' abilities to inflict harm, on other groups, on themselves, and on members of their own groups. In this way, even though each author is interested in a different history, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea equally insist on the importance of just memory, and on the elevation of transnationals to full ethical agency, albeit accomplished through the paradoxical acknowledgement of their ability to behave inhumanely.

Section Five – “A New Paradigm in Transborder Familial Dynamics”⁵

All three authors also notably reconfigure the trope of family in their oeuvres in order to create a discursive space in which they contemplate the formation of transnational identities and interrogate notions of home and belonging. In *The House of Broken Angels*, Urrea describes relationships in the de la Cruz family as “shifting” (113). Little Angel, who has busied himself throughout the novel by sketching a genealogy in his notebook so he can keep track of his place in the family tree, notes that there is a “new paradigm in transborder familial dynamics” emerging (113). Despite Little Angel’s efforts, though, Urrea gives Big Angel, the patriarch, insight into this change and the rest of the family only an inkling thereof. During the funeral scene in the first part of the novel, Urrea explicates one of the most crucial elements of the trope of family as it is figured throughout his oeuvre. As all of the siblings look at “Mamá’s urn” they simultaneously realise “the same thing”: “*We are now the oldest generation, and we are next to die*” (57; original emphasis). Don Antonio’s ghost nonetheless appears at Mamá América’s interment, waiting for her “so they could go dancing on Saturn” together (72). Big Angel notices the ghost and tells his son that “[d]eath is not the end” (72). In spite of the encouragement Big Angel intends his observation to offer his son, Lalo reflects on his dead relatives and fallen army comrades and concludes that his father’s viewpoint is “just some cosmic old Mexican bullshit” unless “you counted nightmares” (73). By juxtaposing the interiorities of the two de la Cruz men, Urrea signals a shift in worldviews. For the older, the ghost of Don Antonio represents a hauntology that demands recognition of his family’s history as well as a promise that death is indeed not the end. For the younger, who fails to see the ghost, “chatty dead dudes in nightmares” (73) serve only to remind him of his historical traumas and past suffering. It is therefore significant that Don Antonio’s ghost displaces Lalo’s trauma narratives with family history only once Lalo deliberately breaks the cycle of violent reprisals when he confronts Braulio’s killer much later in the novel (Urrea, *Angels* 237–44). Family, then, enables Urrea’s transnational characters to survive in discriminating, hostile US diaspora spaces (see E. Jacobs 122). It also provides Urrea with a site that transcends geo-political borders in which to contemplate just memory.

The transcendence of borders enables Urrea to investigate interpersonal dynamics amongst heterogeneous groups that occupy the same space while emphasising the importance

⁵ Urrea, *Angels* 113

of recuperating histories, as the family is also figured as a site in which memories are transferred, as argued in Chapter Four. By reconfiguring the importance of purity in the traditional Chicano *familia de la Raza* trope to include mestiza and American characters in the de la Cruz clan, Urrea portrays family as a form of imagined community that resembles the common trope of the “family as allegory of the nation” equally prominent in Gurnah’s fiction (Hand 84), as will be explored further below. Urrea therefore uses the trope of family to convey an idealised image of the nation as a “matrix of our humanity” (Urrea qtd in ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 23), with familial love being tentatively posited as the potential solution to the racially charged conflicts between those who consider themselves native and those who are transnational.

In the closing story of *The Water Museum*, “Bid Farewell to Her Many Horses” (237–56), Urrea reintroduces readers to Don Her Many Horses, the Sioux character from South Dakota who narrates half of an earlier story, “Taped to the Sky” (77–104).⁶ Urrea’s characteristic use of family as a trope features prominently in the latter of the two stories. The story is narrated by a white American, Bobby, who “married one of the local girls” (239), Don’s sister Joni, despite her family’s wishes to the contrary. She has died, and the narrative foregrounds the narrator’s sense of precarity as he visits her family ranch for the funeral. The story is set in Pine Ridge, a reservation where “[white men] listen for a whistling arrow” and “prepare for the mortal *thwack* when the shaft nails you between the shoulder blades” (239). Urrea’s setting inverts the expected host-guest relationship in the US diaspora space. Here, it is the white character who is transnational, entering a diaspora space *within* the US. As such, Bobby occupies the transnational subject position usually reserved for Urrea’s Mexican Americans. Like them, he is dislocated within what he considers to be his homeland, and this sense of dislocation is reinforced by the presence of a group with historical nationalist claims of belonging. The tone is one of overwhelming threat. The narrative opens by foregrounding Bobby’s sense of isolation and his recognition of his dislocation. Bobby notes that the “Indians weren’t talking” to him (239). Urrea’s choice to make Bobby use a pejorative and ethnically homogenising, racist label for those around him is historicised shortly after the opening section. Bobby listens to “KILI, ‘The Voice of the Lakota Nation’” (244) as he drives toward the ranch, waiting for the announcements of Joni’s burial that he knows are meant to be broadcast. Urrea shows that Bobby is familiar with the station, as he is aware that if he listens long enough, “they’d probably toss in some jazz and three Johnny Cash songs”

⁶ “Her Many Horses” is Don and Joni’s family name.

amongst the “Sioux music” (244). Bobby is able to recognise the Sioux group, The Porcupine Singers, and Urrea uses this recognition to suggest that his narrator is more familiar with the “[d]ammed Indians” (244) than his racial prejudices would suggest. Bobby is coldly greeted by Don, his brother-in-law, but is nonetheless provided a “trailer pulled around back” (246) where he sleeps. At night, on the land owned by the Joni’s family, Bobby is forced to acknowledge an uncomfortable historical fact:

They say that flying saucers visit the Sioux lands. Flying saucers and ghosts. [...] You can hear the grass sometimes like water. Like somebody whispering. [...] You get scared, and it’s for a reason [...]. It’s that *this is not your land. This is their land. And you don’t belong.* A thousand slaughtered warriors ride around your camp, and you think it’s the breeze.

(Urrea, “Farewell” 246; original emphasis)

It is significant that in this passage the transnational white American figure not only recognises the historical violence that led to the slaughter of Sioux warriors *on US soil*, but acknowledges that he does not belong on *their* land. Just like in “Mountains Without Number,” Urrea emphasises the relationship between native American communities and the land by equating them with natural phenomena. While this tendency appears in Urrea’s works regularly enough to be considered stereotypical, the combination of this stereotype and Urrea’s use of spectres prevents it from becoming a cliché. In this case, for instance, the ghosts of warriors and their spectral steeds are confused for the wind. Bobby thus recognises himself as an interloper who represents an historical aggressor. He is therefore keenly aware that these representatives of history that were victimised by others like him are justifiably suspicious of his motives.

But this simple inversion of historical victim and historical aggressor is insufficient for Urrea’s authorial project. Should Urrea render this construction of power dynamics as satisfactory, he would be undermining his own project by providing proponents of the Latino Threat Narrative and other discourses of American supremacy evidence of the ill intentions they claim that transnational groups harbour. Rather, readers are shown that, frequently, Don and his Sioux friends are also guilty of victimising Bobby and his white friends, whom they disparage as a group of “lowlife shit-lipped pud-pulling cow fuckers” (248). Urrea presents an extended analeptic episode in which the two groups clash in a savage street brawl (247–50). This brawl is presented as Bobby’s memory of the first time that he met Joni, who “looked like a wolf” (249), which not only describes Bobby’s impression of her but again

likens the Sioux with natural phenomena to convey a sense of their belonging. He remembers being smitten with her even though she wanted to beat him “with a tire iron” (249). During this episode, Don joins his sister and calls Bobby an “Indian lover” (249), forcing readers to recall an earlier memory, presented as an analepses before the episode of the street brawl, in which Bobby apologises to Don for having started a skirmish that resulted in Don being arrested (243). The earlier memory emphasises the asymmetrical power relations between the two characters, with Don being the victim of multiple oppressions. First, Bobby goads a reaction from Don by mimicking stereotypical “Indian” speech. He calls Don “Chief” and says “you got-um heap good medicine, huh” (241). Don knocks Bobby out, and is arrested for aggravated assault (241–42). Significantly, in response to Don’s insult in the later of the two analepses, Joni decides against harming Bobby, and she and Don instead drive him a short distance “to the side of the lot and put [him] out” in a place of relative safety (250). Urrea shows that Don is not above reproach. Don pettishly adopts an “arch-sounding accent” and asks Bobby to “[f]orgive us [...] if we shan’t stop in for tea” (250). In this episode, Urrea calls both parties’ motives into question, without sanitising the severity of their outcomes. Neither side is granted authorial favour, nor are readers invited to choose between the two factions.

Joni’s decision to protect Bobby, which is depicted as the point at which Joni begins to reciprocate Bobby’s attraction to her, is the result of her recognition of Bobby’s historical attempts to apologise to her brother and to acknowledge his own guilt. Urrea thus creates a causal link between the two mnemonic episodes. Joni is positioned as central to the events of the narrative: she decides not to harm Bobby and convinces Don to do the same; her death is the reason for Bobby returning to the reservation; she is the figure who unites Bobby and Don by establishing an elective familial bond through marriage. It is therefore also significant that after her funeral, Bobby vividly recalls making love to Joni in a small pond “perfectly matched to [his] memory, like a photo” (252). When Don passes him, leading Joni’s lame horse Stormy out to be euthanised, Don startles Bobby back into the chronology of the narrative. Bobby acknowledges that he “saw a ghost” (253). It is at this point, when both Bobby and Don acknowledge their bond through the mutual recognition of Joni’s spectral presence in the narrative, that Urrea asserts familial love as a potential source for the “matrix of [...] humanity” (Urrea qtd in ucsdnews.ucsd.edu para. 23). Don invites Bobby along, and after Stormy is killed, leads him in a song which becomes “a haunted sound, a cry from some place else” (Urrea, “Farewell” 255). Urrea’s collection of short stories thus ends on an image of two historical opponents singing in unison. However, while this image does suggest that

they have found a way to accommodate each other, Urrea makes it clear that both are lost and “would never find [their] way home” (255). The community imagined in “Bid Farewell to Her Many Horses” is therefore similar to the de la Cruz family, in which Urrea claims that “Love is the answer. Nothing stops it. Not borders. Not death” (Urrea, *Angels* 235). Family is the figure that Urrea uses to test these claims.

While Urrea’s families are used to rehearse processes of inclusion and forgiveness, Viet Thanh Nguyen figures families as a space of exclusion in *The Sympathizer*. Nguyen grants greater moral authority to surrogate, make-shift families that are predicated on an elective membership, which closely resembles the imagined community of the nation. In *Nothing Ever Dies*, Nguyen disagrees with Avishai Margalit’s claims that the “thick” relations of family are natural (55). While Nguyen acknowledges the complexity of familial bonds, he counters Margalit by arguing that the “idea of family” obscures their true nature: familial ties are “made by us with people who are originally other to us” (55). Bonds are strengthened through a historical process of telling ourselves stories “about our love for our family, friends, and countrymen” (55). In Nguyen’s view, “much evidence of alienation within families exists, from murder, abuse, violence and pedophilia to apathy, rivalry, and hatred” (55). He argues that “despite this alienation from others, the lucky among us discover that our family loves us, and we learn to love them in return” (55). Nevertheless, under the “sway of patriotism and nationalism, we forget that we have learned how to remember these others, that our love is acquired rather than spontaneous” (55). Families, then, are as entangled with the processes of just memory in Nguyen’s works as they are in Urrea’s. Notwithstanding this similarity, Nguyen’s families pose a further problematic by representing a nation that explicitly refuses to extend a sense of belonging to all its members.

The narrator of *The Sympathizer* describes his sense of dislocation as a child growing up in North Vietnam. He connects this to the rejection he experiences as a result of his hybrid Eurasian identity and the lack of social status afforded to him as a bastard (17). He describes his mother as “native” and his father as “foreign” (18). Nguyen considers the various ways in which the narrator’s mixed-race identity is rendered in language. The narrator’s “kind” is designated by “a portmanteau word” (19). From young, he is made acutely aware of his racial differences and how these render him liminal:

Our countrymen preferred euphemisms to acronyms, calling people like me the dust of life. [...] My mother called me her love child, but I do not like to dwell on that. In the end, my father had it right. He called me nothing at all.
(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 20)

Rather than celebrate or valorise the narrator for his racial hybridity or “portmanteau” identity, Nguyen exposes the stigmas and the social disdain the narrator experiences in Vietnam. His identity is revealed to be the source of his exclusion from society. Paternal abandonment by a French minister, and his father’s refusal to acknowledge him, is figured as part of a natural order. By sardonically inverting logic for satirical effect, the narrator suggests that his father was “right” in calling him “nothing at all,” as that is what the narrator amounts to in the opinion of those around him. As he explains earlier, strangers and friends alike remind him of his inferiority by “spitting on [him] and calling [him] bastard, although sometimes, for variety, they called [him] bastard before they sp[a]t on [him]” (18).

The hurt Nguyen implies in this witticism is thrown into sharper relief when, later in the novel, the ostracism the narrator experiences is explicitly entangled with his sense of himself as a victim, his attempt to acknowledge himself as an aggressor, and the figure of the family as a site of exclusion. When the narrator considers earning money so that he may assist the crapulent major’s children financially, he characterises them as “innocents to whom wrong had been done, as [he] had once been an innocent child to whom wrong was done” (135). His acknowledgement that wrong has been done to the major’s children deliberately avoids the question of *who committed* the wrong, and is notably set during the period when the narrator also refuses to acknowledge the ethical imperative represented by the hauntology of the major’s ghost.⁷ Furthermore, he embraces the comforts of victimhood by exploring an episode in which his family humiliates both him and his mother, and indulges in self-pity. At a family New Year celebration, the narrator feels excluded because his aunts “had not wanted [him] to play with [his] cousins at family gatherings and [...] shooed [him] away from the kitchen when there were treats” (135). He notes with understandable bitterness that New Year always reminds him of the “scars they inflicted” on him, although his cousins “remember [that time] with such fondness” (135):

I huddled with the other children [...]. Aunt Two did not grace me with a red envelope. [...] I do not have enough, this wicked witch said, towering above me. [...] [My] mother [...] said, Thank your aunt for her kindness in teaching you a lesson.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 135)

⁷ This is analysed at length in Chapter Three.

Those aunts and uncles who do present the narrator with a red envelope, readers are told, only include half the value of the traditional gift, to symbolise that the narrator is “half-blooded” (136). In the above episode, the narrator is singled out and forced to feel shame and remorse for his identity. Unbeknownst to him, his maternal family tree, figured as raptors, manipulatively recriminate him in such a way as to accentuate their ostracism of his mother, who expresses her own pain later. He is used as a pawn in a display of familial power dynamics that mirror his own social exclusion. Nguyen elaborates on the episode and explicitly links the family’s actions on that holiday to the political milieu of the diaspora space of Vietnam when the narrator remembers Man’s measured, “calm, analytical, and precociously dialectal-materialist” response when he heard the story (136):

The red envelope is a symbol [...] of all that’s wrong. [...] We succeed because we understand the way the world works and what we have to do. We fail because others understand this better than we do. [...] But you see the lie beneath those things because you never got to take part.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 136–37)

Just as the narrator’s mother realises that his identity requires him to work harder and she therefore encourages him to “be better than all of them” (136), Man also recognises an innate advantage to the narrator’s precarity. Because he is excluded from his *biological* family, he is able to “see the lie” inherent in their customs. Man’s argument signals an entanglement amongst family and belonging, both represented through sanguinary imagery, and revolution. It is therefore significant that the narrator elects to create a surrogate family, creating a blood tie between himself, Man, and Bon (10; 33). This surrogate family transcends the politics of the nation while paradoxically replicating it:

We believed we could, if called upon, sacrifice ourselves for our blood brothers and our nation [...]. I could not predict that Bon would one day join the Phoenix Project [and] good-hearted, sincere Bon did not know that Man and I would secretly come to believe that the only way to rescue our country was to become revolutionaries.

(Nguyen, *Sympathizer* 33–34)

The bond shared by Man, Bon, and the narrator proves to be stronger than any other presented in the narrative. It is catalytic to several major plot points, most notably the narrator’s return to Vietnam with an insurgent team to protect Bon. The above passage reveals another important characteristic of families as well as of Nguyen’s model of just

memory. While it is important to forget in order to untangle complex, competing memories, ethical memory nonetheless requires recognition that something is being forgotten (Nguyen, “Speak” 151; *Nothing* 73 – 74; Ricoeur 448–56). Man and the narrator deliberately withhold their political affiliations from Bon, not only for the sake of political and strategic expedience, but also to preserve their familial bonds. Both are aware of their deception, yet continue to protect Bon even though he is their ideological other and their enemy. In so doing, Nguyen’s characters create a “manipulated memory” (Ricoeur 448) for Bon that thickens their brotherly ties. Family, then, is rendered as an elective affiliation and a space in which Ricoeur’s forgiveness – no matter how difficult this may be – can be achieved, as one of its hallmarks is ethical forgetting (458).

Rifts within family groups and the feuds to which these give rise are central to Abdulrazak Gurnah’s oeuvre: they are germane to the narrative events of both *Gravel Heart* and *By the Sea*. As argued in Chapter Two, Gurnah creates “imaginative and conciliatory” (Falk 51) surrogate families for his transnationals, motivated on practical grounds: “we are in a strange land. That would more or less naturally make us related” (Gurnah, *Sea* 195). As Felicity Hand argues, the real and surrogate families in Gurnah’s works often mirror the political and social conditions immanent in their wider settings (84). By emphasising processes of inclusion and exclusion, Gurnah’s families also conform to the common trope of “the family as allegory of the nation” (84). However, there is an added religious dimension to Gurnah’s configurations of family. In *By the Sea*, Mahmud foregrounds that:

[t]he history of Islam is so tied up with family squabbles [...]. Have you noticed the incredible consequences of family squabbles in the history of Islamic societies? [In] our own time we have the children of Abdulaziz ibn Saud, sitting on a sea of black gold, on a territory they call Saudi Arabia, after their family name. I hate families.

(Gurnah, *Sea* 195)

Mahmud’s description of Islamic history highlights the role family squabbles play in the rise of transnationalism. Migrations central to the narratives of both *By the Sea* and *Gravel Heart* also result from dislocations caused by rifts within the main protagonists’ families. The above passage could be read as an indication of the ways in which family dynamics not only replicate history and serve as sites for the preservation of selected memories, but also replicate specifically *Islamic* history and memories. As readers encounter each novel through shifting focalisers and first-person narrative voices who are Muslim, Gurnah presents novels *through* an Islamic worldview that acts as a narrative lens and focaliser, rather than writing

about Islamic cultural modes (Hand 74). The vilification of Omar by the Mahmud family; community responses to the dejected Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's publicly vaunted piety; the accentuation of protecting family honour; and Hassan's vow to avenge his father's disgrace by annihilating Omar after several decades away from Zanzibar that ultimately leads to Omar fleeing for his life, can be traced back to the Sharia, which provides dictates on how "public and private lives" should be conducted (85).

But Gurnah does not simply use Islam as an additional source of dislocation. It also creates a space of inclusion throughout his oeuvre, and is instrumental in Gurnah's formulation of surrogate families. The notion of *umma* is a philosophical concept that posits a "community of Muslims" (Hand 86). In this community, racial and national differences are invalid identity markers: all that is crucial to ensure belonging is adherence to Islam (86). In this sense, Muslims have formed an imagined community that renders "political frontiers superfluous" and that "clashes with Western understandings of nation-states" (86). Furthermore, Islam therefore serves as an additional discourse immanent in Gurnah's diaspora spaces that facilitates, promotes, and influences his transnationals' abilities to forge surrogate families. Gurnah initially only attributes the surrogate paternal bond between Mr Mgeni and Salim in *Gravel Heart* to Mr Mgeni's "constantly making an effort" and their shared knowledge of "Kiswahili" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 80). Later, Gurnah problematises this simple sense of communion premised on language by revealing that Mr Mgeni had been Muslim:

Mr Mgeni died during my second year in Putney [...]. [His wife] asked me to read something that would remind us of Mr Mgeni's home [...] and I read the fatiha [...]. There was his family there [...]. That would have mattered more to him than if I had read Yasin for him.

(Gurnah, *Gravel* 131–32)

The importance of the bond between Mgeni and Salim is acknowledged in Marjorie's request for Salim to participate in the officiation of the funeral. That Salim responds to her request by reading Muslim prayers strongly implies that the two men had recognised the role *umma* had played in their relationship. Rather than present this Islamic dimension of the surrogate family to readers as a solution to the dislocations both men experience in England, Gurnah complicates it by revealing that, despite their communion, both men are dislocated from its religious roots. Neither is familiar with the funeral prayers. Salim also recognises that Mr Mgeni would have considered his family's presence sufficient, as he considered them to be

God's "blessing." Gurnah, then, deliberately subverts the hierarchical relationship between religious and familial affiliations in the diaspora space by depicting both as entangled in a Gordian knot. Significantly, the intimation of the role Islam may have played in the formation of the only space which Salim likens to "going home" (Gurnah, *Gravel* 103) is delayed in the order of the story. It is preceded by the passage in which Salim's increased precarity as a visually recognisable Muslim in the UK is presented during his confrontation with Amos. It is followed by his explicit rejection by his girlfriend, notably due to pressure from her transnational and culturally hybrid family, who oppose her relationship with a "Muslim nigger from Africa" (147). The hypervisibility of Muslims is then climactically revealed in the episode in which Salim exposes the "familiar language of freedom [...] enforce[d] with violence" (150) deployed by both pro- and anti-Muslim factions. By presenting a description of how Islam provides Salim with a sense of belonging in his surrogate family in the context of escalating Islamophobic sentiments, and by highlighting the dislocations his transnational characters feel in relation to their religious practices, Gurnah's narrative undermines the validity of using Islamic cultural identifiers as markers of belonging or non-belonging.

The trope of the family, then, is clearly an enduring one that is currently being reconfigured by Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea. It is a discursive space that enables these authors to contemplate issues of transnational identity and questions of belonging and exclusion through its conventional use as an allegory for the nation-state. Yet all three authors make use of the trope to further their own authorial projects. While the authors are all interested in the entanglements of families, histories, ethical memories, and full ethical agency, each addresses these concerns idiosyncratically. Urrea, for instance, deliberately adopts and subverts the Chicano *familia de la Raza* trope, and uses the extraterritorial nature of his transnational families as well as their histories to trouble nationalistic, anti-Mexican US claims of belonging. Gurnah and Nguyen are both interested in the opportunities presented by elective surrogate familial bonds. For Nguyen, these spaces allow rehearsals of and explorations of just memory, and offer the possibility, albeit a difficult one, of forgiveness. Gurnah's families, however, seem to be shifting – perhaps more so than Urrea's character, Little Angel, notes of his own. For Gurnah, the trope of family affords him an opportunity to write stories through Islam rather than about Islam. But this characteristic of his transnational families – as a site for the perpetuation of Muslim culture – increases the precarity of those transnationals that his surrogate families supposedly welcome, especially as this particular characteristic has become hypervisible since the declaration of the War on Terror.

Section Six – The Emergence of a Subgenre

Comparative analysis of works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea suggests that there are gradual developments to the projects broadly categorised as transnational literature. While it would be too daring to generalise the conclusions drawn here and ascribe them to an enormously heterogeneous body of works, these conclusions do appear to be at least symptomatic of broader developments in contemporary transnational literature.

Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea compose works that deliberately avoid or undermine the valorisation of both transnationals and of the diaspora space. Rather than laud displacement and migration as creatively productive and inherently resistive processes (see Newns 506), these works undermine clear-cut claims of superiority and desirability. They do so through active recuperation of deliberately forgotten histories, and by emphasising similarities between the home and the transnational diaspora spaces depicted in their work. Undermining the supposed superiority of diaspora spaces in the US and the UK is partly a function of their presentation of their transnationals as refugees rather than immigrants. Yet the authorial projects of elevating their transnationals to the status of ethical subjects able to exercise varying degrees of power in their diaspora spaces entail an explicit rejection of the comforts of victimhood invited by the label “refugee.”

Nonetheless, each of these authors present characters who do manipulate their hosts through various deceptions, or who do abuse what welcome they receive, or who capitalise on their status as refugees by exploiting the good intentions of some of their hosts, and thus conform to the characteristics often deployed by anti-immigrant and nationalist rhetoric. The works therefore do not fit comfortably the category of refugee literature. Rather, exposing and acknowledging negative and undesirable behaviour that leads to increased precarity forms part of an authorial project evidently common to all three writers. The authors’ acknowledgement of these wrongs serves as a recuperative act that recognises the transnational’s ability to inflict harm on others as well as on themselves, owing to the repercussions associated with these acts. Their works also engage intertextually and structurally with popular media presentations of their transnational characters. Doing so accentuates the differences and, uncomfortably, the similarities between lived transnational experiences and their stereotypes.

In the process, transnational identities are revealed as dynamic, fluid, and elective. Transnationals are thus revealed to be complex and flawed subjects. But Gurnah, Nguyen,

and Urrea reveal nationalists as equally complex, and also frequently stereotyped. In so doing, their works suggest that the distinction between nationalist and transnational is spurious, reductive, and supported only by deliberately amnesiac discourses. Even so, this does not mitigate the precarity and vulnerability of transnationals, especially those rendered hypervisible in their diaspora spaces. In the works, increased international tensions are shown to influence anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiments along historical “inter-imperial” transnational connections (Kramer 1361). As a result of the UK’s support of the US’s War on Terror, for instance, Gurnah’s Islamic transnationals in England experience the consequences of Islamophobia, and are stereotyped as terrorists in *Gravel Heart*. What emerges in Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea’s works is a mounting scepticism of the ways in which transnationals are touted and exploited in multiculturalist discourses in diaspora spaces that are becoming increasingly militarised. Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*, for instance, explores the effects of the neo-racist practices of liberals, who appear to flaunt their acceptance of the Vietnamese as another claim to the exceptionalism of being American. All three authorial projects of recuperating histories give rise to uncomfortable juxtapositions that suggest a mounting fear that transnationals may have to relive conditions from which they have already fled.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that the selected works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea are highly nuanced depictions of transnational experiences that complicate simplistic and reductive binaries. They trouble and reject beliefs that transnationals are emblematic victims. Instead, transnationals are shown to be resilient and resourceful, able to interpolate their identities in their diaspora spaces through processes that are dynamic, fluid, responsive, and elective. The authors also describe the need for transnationals to actively claim full ethical subjectivity by engaging with the industries of memory, and addressing the ways in which they are discursively constructed in their diaspora spaces. The selected literature also portrays the importance for their transnational characters to accept accountability and responsibility for their own actions as well as to recognise any harm they have suffered, through an attempt to formulate just memories. In so doing, Gurnah, Nguyen, and Urrea's works reveal a recognition that nationalists are as susceptible to stereotyping as transnationals are, but suggest that unequal power relations in diaspora spaces prevent nationalists from suffering the same precarity as transnationals. In the process of this authorial project, then, the authors reveal the creative potential to be found in entanglements.

This thesis has been predominantly interested in the entanglement of individual narratives, history, and memory. It has been specifically interested in just memory. The recovery of lost or deliberately suppressed histories has also been a central concern. It has argued that the selected literature reveals transnationals as being able to interpolate themselves into their diaspora spaces in unexpected and dynamic ways. The claim has been made that the selected authors do not consider UK and US diaspora spaces to be necessarily more desirable than the diaspora spaces of their transnational characters' home countries. The thesis has also considered the similarities and differences between the ways the selected literature uses the trope of family. But during the study, various other similarities amongst the works of the three authors have also been identified for future research. I wish to pursue postdoctoral studies in some of the following topics in greater detail, as I believe that these could contribute to a more holistic understanding of the emergence of a subgenre within transnational literature, as well as suggest points of confluence with other works that originate from seemingly disparate transnational groups. While I have identified these specifically in the literature selected for this current thesis, I do believe that the following areas will also find articulation in works by other authors.

Firstly, I wish to suggest a more thorough examination of the use of ghosts and spectres in Vietnamese and Mexican transnational literature. I am particularly interested in the ways in which authors use these textual constructs to recuperate lost histories that deviate from the dominant narratives in diaspora spaces. Furthermore, I believe that such an investigation could potentially reveal ways in which transnationalism has impacted on religious cultures, especially those associated with forms of ancestral worship which posit a fundamental relationship amongst families, the afterlife, and geographic location.

Secondly, all three authorial projects studied here reveal various degrees of prejudice towards specifically male homosexuality, which is noticeably limned to represent a permissiveness in host diaspora spaces that is absent from home diaspora spaces. In Nguyen's work, homosexuals are shown to disappoint his characters in that they are ordinary people, unlike what his transnational characters are shown to expect as a result of their cultural prejudices. Urrea reveals that male homosexuals can be accepted into his reconfiguration of the *familia de la Raza* trope. Problematically, however, his fiction suggests that this is only possible as long as those homosexuals who want to be accepted are capable of acts of chauvinistic machismo. In Gurnah's works, depictions of homosexuality intersect with his interests in representing Zanzibari society through an Islamic filter, and is thus closely related to the ways in which he figures religion in his work.

Thirdly, there is also a need to examine the ways in which women are depicted in the selected literature. As argued earlier, Viet Thanh Nguyen expresses an awareness in *The Sympathizer* that his novel has not adequately recognised the contributions of women to the Vietnam War efforts. He also acknowledges that women transnationals suffer greater precarity than do males, as their experiences are gendered and thus marked by more complicated experiences of subordination. Gurnah's fiction also points to the centrality of women figures in Zanzibar, yet they often appear to be used as the instigators of the troubles his male characters' experience. In *Gravel Heart*, for instance, Salim's mother is manipulated into an extramarital affair, and brings shame to the Yahya family home. Events in *By the Sea* are also depicted as being controlled as a result of Mahmud's mother's infidelities. Luis Alberto Urrea's works frequently articulate an authorial preoccupation with trying to capture female experiences of transnationalism, using women narrators and focalisers. Despite this, however, he problematically reinscribes the highly chauvinistic expectations and stereotypes of idealised women found in the machismo of Chicanoism. Indeed, while the selected material used in "Between Nationalism and Transnationalism" is representative of wider developments in transnational literature, it must be noted that the selected literature is also

representative of a masculinist transnational discourse, albeit one that attempts to address or at least recognise the experiences of female transnationals. It would thus be beneficial to compare the works by these novelists to those written by women authors, and later to extend that study to incorporate works by transnational authors of other genders.

Fourthly, and finally, I would propose that a more detailed study be conducted on the negative effects transnational characters are shown to have on nationalists, and the changes that necessarily occur as a result of their presence in the diaspora space. My suggestion would be that this study concentrate on transnationalism and its relationship to national conflicts. This would provide the opportunity to study the productive impact of the nexus amongst various forms of ethics that predominate in diaspora spaces during times of war and peace.

The selected works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea already used in this thesis would again be helpful in any of the future studies suggested above. Considered collectively, they reveal the emergence of a new sub-genre of transnational literature. This new aesthetic rejects disempowering narratives, prejudices, and pluralist governmental strategies. In their stead, the literature demonstrates new emphases being placed on accepting accountability; on the interpolation of individual identities that acknowledge their ethical obligations; and on rejecting victimhood in favour of identities that afford them the ability to exercise various amounts of power in their diaspora spaces. The works articulate the ways in which these new states are made possible when transnationals engage with the entanglements of history, individual narrative, and memory in their diaspora spaces.

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