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Homemade Language, Conservative Fro-yo, and Sci-fi Sloths

**How speculative migration fiction confronts the ends of worlds by challenging the
nation-state**

Zoe Roos Scheuerman

Department of English

Prof. Michael Prior and Prof. David C. Moore

4/29/2024

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Introduction

Migration launched, sustains, and advances human history. First, we migrated out of Africa. Next, we crossed the Bering strait, took boats to Oceania, and eventually adapted to every terrestrial environment on Earth, as well as to the skies and deep oceans. Interplanetary migration also barrels toward us as technological development accelerates and billionaires evaluate additional streams of income. In the innovative 2020 narrative science book *The Next Great Migration: the Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move*, science journalist Sonia Shah describes migration's power over human history by likening human migration to animal migrations. Beyond illuminating migration's persistence across time, this comparison also connects human migration to a global, multispecies network where all "life is on the move" and migration is natural (Shah 31). Seasons change as Earth circumnavigates the sun, mountains rise like stony scar tissue as tectonic plates collide, monarch butterflies dart across yards in the American midwest on their way to Mexico, and humans move through towns, countries, and continents for necessity or pleasure. Because migration is natural, it is also normal: migration is intrinsic to life, not an abnormality in it.

Nevertheless, recent, unprecedented environmental, technological, and geopolitical change has thrown the world into flux like never before. In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, overseen by the United Nations, predicted that "the gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration" (IPCC 103). Thirty-four years later, escalating fires in the American West, rising sea levels' encroachment on island nations, and anxieties about water access in dry regions provokes displacement which supports the IPCC's prognosis. Moreover, in September 2023, NASA announced hopes to send manned missions to Mars "as early as the 2030s," and since February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed millions of people to

leave the country (“Humans to Mars”). The world has always been in motion, but never before so intensely.

Nor has the world’s motion been so inescapable. By linking human migrations to nonhuman ones, Shah not only confronts policies which treat migrants as problematic outliers in stationary societies, but also connects people across national borders. Comparing human migrants, whose movements nation-states regulate, to animal migrants’ unfettered journeys frames borders as unnatural obstacles to natural migrations. Consequently, international migrations also shed light on the nation-state’s constructed nature. If the border is artificial, then the nation-state it contains is also not an exclusive, cohesive community. The political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson famously identifies the nation as an “imagined community,” where although “members... will never know most of their fellow-members,” the nation’s alleged “subjective antiquity,” and “cultural artefacts” compose a shared national identity (Anderson 4, 6-7). In turn, national identity subsequently reinforces a nation-state. Despite nation-states’ “subjective antiquity,” however, they are relatively young. Antique civilizations like Rome, the Aztec empire, or Babylon were not nation-states. More recently, nation-states such as Italy or Germany were fractured principalities who shared languages and cultural elements, meaning food, values, etc., before they shared a national identity, only becoming nation-states in the late 19th century. This gap between national narrative and historical evidence invokes French philosopher Ernest Renan’s assertion that “historical error... is an essential factor in creation of the nation” (Renan and Giglioli 251). By selectively remembering the past, nation-states invent long-established national unity. However, migration is a far older force in human history. Therefore, migration challenges the nation-state by introducing newcomers who interrogate their exclusion from imagined communities, consequently undermining the

nation-state's alleged cultural cohesion. As intensifying future migrations unsettle national narratives and communities, national borders may mutate or disappear. How, exactly, do future migrations alter nation-states? How do these changes occur? What, if any, alternate communities or identities emerge through borders' mutations and/or erasures?

Many disciplines could engage these questions. Anderson and Renan demonstrate that political theory or history might come to mind first. However, literary analysis is especially insightful. Depicting people, places and events real and imagined makes literature interdisciplinary by nature. Literary analysis employs everything from symbolic logic to historicism, allowing literature to comprehensively explore complex phenomena like migration from both a single character's individual perspective and a cast's collective experience. Other disciplines do not have this multifaceted analytical potential.

Novels, which might first come to mind when reading the word "literature," are singularly penetrating because of the novel's bond to, and critique of, nationhood and citizenship. I conceptualize the novel as "extended works of fiction" which consequently has "a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motives than do the shorter, more concentrated modes" such as short stories (Abrams and Harpham 252). When Anderson tracks the nation-state's rise, he focuses on mass-printed media, e.g. novels or newspapers, building national communities by standardizing language and disseminating shared narratives (Anderson 32-36). Twenty-two years after *Imagined Communities*'s first edition, literary critic Nancy Armstrong links the British novel's emergence to individualism's rise in *How Novels Think*, noting that, in the years before the Victorian era, the novel's figure of the individual also becomes the figure of the national citizen. Amidst empire- and nation-building, Armstrong

describes the novel's mission as balancing a protagonist "[overcoming] the limits set by family, class, or nation without either destroying that collectivity or placing himself permanently outside of it" (Armstrong 61). Armstrong also argues that the 19th-century British novel "drained away desire from the bad," or overly individualistic, "subject in order to reinvest it in the imaginary nation" (Armstrong 63). So, the novel and nationality are linked in both form and content.

Contemporary migration novels also warrant attention because they develop Armstrong's points. Just as the 19th-century protagonist tries to navigate the nation-state without facing its rejection, migrants in migration narratives seek to move between nation-states without expulsion from all nation-states. Contemporary migration fiction also critiques, rather than reinforces, prioritizing the imaginary national community over an individual. So, contemporary migration novels explore nationality's contradictions and limitations in an upheaved world, and literary analysis becomes key to understanding future migrations' effects on the nation-state.

However, as the nation-state disintegrates in contemporary migration fiction, likewise departing from the novel to consider other literary forms becomes key to imagining futures beyond the nation-state. One especially useful form is the afrofuturist novella. Afrofuturist novellas such as Samuel Delany's "The Star Pit" explore the farthest horizons of human migration in form and content. In her article "The Novella as Technology: A Media Story," literature and media scholar Kate Marshall argues that the novella's brevity enables, rather than limits, rich explorations of time and mobility. Marshall observes that the novella's short length offers a ready portability and consumability. These features make novellas "the contemporary version of the 'commute read'" for readers in motion, suggesting that the novella is uniquely well-suited for migrating readers (Anders qtd. in Marshall 99). Moreover, the novella's shortness emphasizes its story's scale as "a subtle and distinct sense of limitation" which renders a

narrative “far less limited” (Marshall 100). This last point especially resonates for science-fiction novellas, which may imagine futures hundreds or thousands of years ahead of a reader’s world within about a hundred pages, enticing readers to imagine sprawling futures by explicating intriguing details about futures worlds. The science fiction novella’s mobility and unexpectedly large setting, plot, and themes therefore describe future migrations’ motion and, potentially intergalactic, scale in both form and content. Whether the science fiction novella is an ultimate migration form is a separate question which would require comparing novellas to other mobile literary forms such as audiobooks or podcasts, and doing this question justice in this thesis would go beyond my project’s scope. For my purposes, the novella’s mobility and scope render it an ideal form to study future migrations while still having enough formal similarity to novels to maintain this project’s cohesion.

Within science fiction novellas, the Afrofuturist novella additionally enriches imagined, mobile futures by engaging with Black authors and readers’ (non-)belonging to nation-states. Many industrialized nation-states have historically refused Black residents the full citizenship rights which the nation-state affords white members, and like the United States, continue to disenfranchise and underfund Black communities while exploiting underdeveloped countries. Afrofuturism responds to exclusion by centering Black experiences in imagined futures, platforming “countermemories that contest the colonial archive” which created the current unequal relationships within and between nation-states (Eshun 288). For example, the genre’s experimentation with aliens and space travel metaphorize Black people’s alienation in their current countries. While often not utopic, Afrofuturist stories therefore critique the nation-state by imagining the future in a way which the novel form may not. So an Afrofuturist novella is uniquely well-suited to explore a future beyond the nation-state.

To ground this thesis's discussions, I will now define several of this project's key terms: the nation-state, migrant, and speculative migration fiction. First, I employ Britannica's definition of a nation-state, meaning "a territorially bounded sovereign polity... that is ruled in the name of a community of citizens who identify themselves as a nation" (Feinstein). The adjective "national," as in "national culture," "national identity," or "national border," refers to a nation-state, not a nation, since I consider "nation" a cultural unit that does not have a nation-state's sovereignty, e.g. Native American nations. However, while I differentiate between "nation" and "nation-state," the authors I engage with, including my theoretical sources, sometimes do not, and they speak on "nations" or "countries" instead of "nation-states." For my purposes, I assume that "country," "nation," and "nation-state" are synonymous in my secondary sources because they often use "country" and "nation" to discuss a nation-state's political and cultural communities. Additionally, while I do not use "nation" and "nation-state" interchangeably, I will use "country" and "nation-state" as rough synonyms insofar that "country" is a more informal way to refer to a nation-state while "nation-state" underscores a country's alleged cultural cohesion and draws attention to its administrative structures.

Likewise, where I use the term "migrant," this term encompasses people who some might also call "refugees." The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines "refugee" as:

...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. ("Convention and Protocol" 14)

In contrast, “migrant” does not have a common accepted definition under international law. Outside legal discourse, “migrant” is generally understood as “someone who changes his or her country of usual residence” (“Definitions: Refugees and Migrants”). “Refugee” is therefore a subcategory of migrants, and “migrant” is an umbrella term: all refugees are migrants, but not all migrants are refugees. The above definition implies that being a refugee means that migration is unwanted, a last resort out of fear of persecution, but when is persecution or fear great enough to warrant refugee status? For example, if someone migrates because the job prospects and compensation in their home country are not enough to support themselves or their family, are they a migrant, or could we call them an economic refugee? The line between forced and voluntary migration smudges. Finding the line between the two also obscures the experience. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, acclaimed Indian author Amitav Ghosh reflects on generational memory and historical disaster by stating that his “ancestors were ecological refugees long before the term was invented” (Ghosh 3). Although Ghosh doesn’t directly critique migration terminology in this passage, he does gesture to the gap between relatively young post-World War Two legal definitions and displacement’s ancient presence throughout human history, suggesting that trying to attach the new term to an ancient phenomenon may not be necessary to understand the phenomenon itself. Using the catch-all “migrant” instead of trying to police the border between “migrant” and “refugee” allows me to focus on the process of border-crossing without obstructing analysis by scrutinizing whether, and why, a character has the refugee’s legal right to cross borders.

The final key definition to clarify is the subgenre with which I will work. Central to this entire thesis is a relatively new literary genre which I will name speculative migration fiction. Novels about migrants’ experiences are not new. They include titles such as Upton Sinclair’s *The*

Jungle (1905), Grace Ogot's Kenyan classic *The Promised Land* (1990), and Cameroonian-American author Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016). However, an emerging, global migration novel subgenre explores how future politics, climate, and technologies create and affect migrants. Some of these texts are also considered speculative fiction, science fiction, climate fiction (cli-fi), or apocalypse literature. However, they also fit a category which, in the absence of a critical consensus about this subgenre's name, I call speculative migration fiction. Speculative migration fiction encompasses many acclaimed novels from the past thirty years, including *Locust Girl* by Merlinda Bobis (2015), *Unity* by Elly Bangs (2021), *Tropic of Orange* by Karen Tei Yamashita (1997), *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler (1998), and *A Children's Bible* by Lydia Millet (2020). For this project, I chose one afrofuturist novella and three speculative migration novels to analyze: "The Star Pit" by Samuel Delany (1967), *Scattered All Over the Earth* by Yōko Tawada (original Japanese 2018, English translation by Margaret Mitsutani 2022), *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid (2017), and *2 A.M. in Little America* by Ken Kalfus (2022).

For clarity later in this project, I want to briefly describe each selected text's plot. Regarding the selected novels, in *Scattered*, rising seas swallow Japan, stranding a Japanese woman, Hiruko, in Denmark. There, she has a job teaching children Panska, a pan-scandinavian language she invented. As Japan's land mass disappears, so does global knowledge about the country, Japanese language, and Japanese culture. Dishes, words, etc. which people previously considered Japanese become associated with other countries and languages, turning Hiruko into the sole person amongst her peers who retains Japan's memory. Hiruko confronts this loneliness by seeking out other Japanese people. The experiences she has with friends whom she meets during her journey reveal to her how slippery the idea of being "Japanese," or any nationality, is

at the same time that they make her more at peace with that complex reality. *Scattered* is unique among my selected texts in that I read the novel in translation. So, my close readings, especially readings of syntax or particular words, build on Margaret Mitsutani's translation choices, and they may not apply to the Japanese text or to other translations. As I will argue in this project's first and second chapters, this caveat is also actually opportune for this project: Translation in *Scattered* is both a tool for border crossing and a border crossing itself.

In my second chosen text, *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid (2017), a couple, Nadia and Saeed, flee political unrest in an unnamed city based on Lahore, Pakistan (Brice). They migrate first to Mykonos and then to London through decentralized portal technology inspired by Hamid's experiences "teleporting through black rectangles," AKA webcams, televisions, and phone screens (Hamid qtd. In Brice). As the portals proliferate and people become increasingly mobile, Nadia and Saeed navigate tensions between newcomers in London and hostile longtime residents, as well as tensions caused by cultural and linguistic differences between fellow migrants. At the end of *Exit West*, nation-states give up on policing their borders, the world becomes hypermobile, and nationality becomes a relic of the past. Finally, in *2 A.M.* by Ken Kalfus, Americans, fleeing civil war, become refugees, running from unnamed country to unnamed country as xenophobia in host countries makes finding asylum increasingly difficult. The protagonist, Ron, eventually finds an American enclave, the titular Little America. Although "American" could mean Brazilian or Canadian as much as someone from the United States, Kalfus uses "American" only to describe people from the United States. So, for clarity's sake, I follow his lead in this project. Ron's haven destabilizes when other Americans bring their political animosity and competing narratives about the civil war in the United States, threatening to recreate the conflict far from home. At the same time, local officials wait in the wings to use

any political violence as an excuse to crack down on migrants whom they assume to be criminals. I will argue that these novels exemplify how speculative migration fiction is distinct from a wider body of migration literature in that they render the transnational *postnational*. Their characters and forms not only move between nation-states, but migrate outside of them entirely.

In addition to the novels, the already classic, but understudied, Afrofuturist novella “The Star Pit” by Samuel Delany depicts a terrifying, far-future world where humans’ migratory capabilities have hit a wall: Although space travel is the norm, and Earth is considered a primitive backwater in a technologically advanced, interplanetary world, there is a hard limit to how far humans can migrate. Only a select few, called “goldens,” can survive deep space. The main character, Vyme, is a restless mechanic at a galactic port the Star Pit, constantly tortured watching goldens leave for journeys he will never be able to make - until one golden reveals to him that goldens have also found a point in the universe which they cannot travel beyond. Governments in “The Star Pit” are nebulous and more akin to private companies than nation-states, but “The Star Pit” warns that a world without nation-states is not a borderless utopia. Instead, “The Star Pit” depicts borders that could not have been previously imagined. The novella ultimately enriches and qualifies this project by acting as a counterpoint as well as an extension to the earthbound futures in the selected speculative migration novels.

Of all the possible speculative migration novels and Afrofuturist novellas, I chose *Scattered*, *Exit West*, *2 A.M.*, and “The Star Pit” for two reasons. First, they offer futures which, while not guaranteed, are not fantastical. For one, rising sea levels will render many small islands uninhabitable. *Scattered* applies that impending reality to Japan, which is not among experts’ specific predictions but which draws awareness to lower-lying, less well-known islands’ predicament. Likewise, while *Exit West*’s portal technology seems fanciful, technology

progresses at an exponential rate. Considering emerging technologies like sand batteries, AI image generation, mind-controlled robots, and lab-grown meat, portals, while unrealized, are not impossible. Moreover, maybe most alarmingly for Americans reading Kalfus's novel, civil war is not outlandish — extreme, yes, but so was January 6th. And despite being the farthest set in the future, recent private rocket launches suggest that the “The Star Pit” presents, at least arguably, the most tangible future of the four texts. These four futures are uncertain, but they are close enough to the present, and to our present knowledge of the future, to be possible. Imaginable communities therefore connect these divergent texts and separate them from other novellas and speculative migration novels.

Second, the *trans* in transnational migration necessitates characters, settings, and authors that come from multiple national backgrounds. Are novels transnational if their authors come from one nation-state? Yōko Tawada, who writes in German and Japanese, was born in Japan and lives in Germany, and Ken Kalfus is an American who has lived in Paris, Dublin, Belgrade, and Moscow (Garner). Mohsin Hamid is British-Pakistani by citizenship, but he has also attended undergraduate and graduate school in the U.S., worked as a consultant in New York, and has lived in the Bay area, including during formative childhood years (Brice). So, his life spans not only multiple countries, but also both sides of the Atlantic. Samuel Delany is also American, but Delany's position as an American, and what it means to call Delany “American” has very different connotations than Kalfus's American-ness because Delany is a Black, gay man, historically not always considered “American” by a predominantly white, heterosexual government which has historically disenfranchised Black citizens and minimized queer inclusion in its definition of “American.” This complex vantage point, and his striking, rich short story, warrant his inclusion. Because “The Star Pit” lacks recognizable, if increasingly unstable,

nation-states, I turn to Delany only in my third chapter. Putting Delany into conversation with the other three authors in the first and second chapters would only invite forced comparisons. However, “The Star Pit’s” imagined, alien world is a perfect setting for speculating on migration’s frontiers in this thesis’s last chapter.

Together, *Scattered All Over The Earth*, *2 A.M. in Little America*, *Exit West*, and “The Star Pit” depict fraught, but hopeful, worlds where nation-states’ disrupted borders break down. These breakdowns create global communities that are not organized by nationality and wherein all people become migrants throughout their lives. To explore these new communities, I will do three things in the following chapters. First, I examine the novels’ physical border crossings, where migrants circumvent intense border control measures. Second, I interrogate migration’s ensuing cultural exchanges, which complicate how, and whether, national identities are cohesive. Third and finally, nonlinear time and limitless migration break down the nation-state altogether, leaving a world both wracked with loss and, potentially, able to construct an optimistic future. As I employ “The Star Pit” to argue, this optimism is not guaranteed, and slippage between migration and expansion could create a dystopia, not a hopeful future beyond the nation-state.

I: I Came to a Strange City, Without Belongings: Dodging the Border

Even before characters in the selected speculative migration narratives explore a host country, their border crossings challenge the nation-state. To establish the conception and purpose of the border I will apply to my close readings of *Scattered*, *Exit West*, and *2 A.M.* in this chapter, I turn to the political theorist Wendy Brown. Brown's influential 2010 book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, which identifies walls at national borders as tools to "define nation-state boundaries" because "territoriality" is a key aspect of nation-state sovereignty (Brown 21-22). While Brown specifically analyzes border walls, her theory could also apply to other border control methods such as checkpoints, road designs, lines on maps and natural features, e.g. rivers or mountain ranges, which become border topography. Like walls, these other border control measures guard a nation-state's territory by controlling migration's volume or, in the case of maps, deepening others' awareness of the border by marking it. Brown's illuminating theory could also be deepened by emphasizing that borders are man-made obstacles. Either a government's staff or contractors create walls, checkpoints, etc., or humans decide to incorporate natural landmarks into their design of the border. Borders could also be man-made obstacles in ways which don't immediately, physically hinder one's progress the way that walls do. Can we think of tools like legislation or surveillance technology as part of the national border? Yes, when legislation distinguishes between allowed or disallowed migration and when surveillance enforces legislation. So, the border is sometimes not immediately tangible.

The border is also changeable over time and from one location to another. Google Maps, for example, alters disputed borders based on the country a user is based in. American Google Maps might show Kashmir simply as disputed territory, as designated by a dotted border line. Meanwhile, as a friend living in India showed our introductory international studies class via

screensharing in fall 2020, Kashmir is counted as part of India on India's Google Maps. This relativity of borders recalls Brown's claims that, while border walls epitomize state sovereignty, they also symbolize nation-states' "tremulousness, vulnerability, dubiousness, or instability," as various phenomena, especially migration, threaten state sovereignty (Brown 24). So, the marked border becomes a site of insecurity precisely because the nation-state attempts to secure it. This contradiction implies that borders are spaces for nation-state's paranoia about their sovereignty and identity. Why would a country go so far as to, in some parts of the world, militarize the border if the nation-state felt secure in its ability to weather the cultural and political change that can occur when migrants encounter borders?

With Brown's theory as a framework, I will now explore border crossings in the plots of *Scattered*, *Exit West*, and *2 A.M.*, as well as the forms of the novels themselves. The characters in *Exit West*, *2 A.M.*, and *Scattered* all encounter escalated border control measures in response to escalating migrations. However, as Brown notes, these newly intense border controls are as ineffective as they are intimidating, signaling the national border's breakdown in the face of future migrations. In my selected novels, absurd contrasts between seemingly impregnable borders and characters' easy crossings, as well as multilingualism, the narrator's perspective, and genre blending, circumvent national borders. To first address *Scattered*, the novel provides an interesting case study because most of Hiruko's search for fellow Japanese people takes place within Denmark, Luxembourg, Germany, and France, all European Union countries. As an EU resident, border crossings in the Schengen area should be relatively painless for Hiruko. However when Hiruko at one point travels to Oslo, she finds the border between Denmark and Norway is, for once, guarded. Exactly why is unclear. Two pages later, we are told that "there had been an explosion" in Oslo, but the passive formulation and the lack of additional details

leaves the explosion's cause, and relevance to the heightened border control, unclear, potentially pointing to the kind of paranoia which Brown discusses (Tawada, *Scattered* 115). *Scattered* gleefully heckles border bureaucratic border security with this almost kafkaesque exchange between the border guard, who speaks first, and Hiruko:

“Your passport has expired”

“renewal impossible.”

“Why?”

“country vanished. residence permit for denmark have.”

(...) He must have gotten fed up listening to my explanation, because he turned away and loudly stamped my passport. (Tawada, *Scattered* 113)

The varying syntax and capitalization patterns between the guard's dialogue and Hiruko's signal that the characters speak two different languages. Which language the guard speaks is not specified, but Hiruko clarifies that she speaks Panksa, her homemade language synthesized from the preestablished Scandinavian languages, in this scene. So, she might be responding to the guard speaking Norwegian. Through Panksa, Hiruko crosses the border in two ways. First, speaking Panska with the guard allows her to communicate her impossible situation enough to satisfy, or confound, him enough to let her in, enabling a physical border crossing. Second, and more fundamentally, Hiruko crosses the physical border because Panska crosses a linguistic border. As an amalgamation of Scandinavian languages, Panksa dissolves linguistic and national borders between Danish, Norwegian, etc. Although many Scandinavian languages are related, their corresponding nation-states monopolize them. In breaking down the linguistic borders between Scandinavian languages, Hiruko therefore also draws attention to the languages' relatedness despite the geopolitical borders between them. Consequently, Panska suggests that

borders between Scandinavian countries are, and even should be, more permeable than the border guard's presence insinuates. So, Panska's linguistic border crossing is also a national border crossing which, in turn, facilitates Hiruko's border crossing. It is also notable that Hiruko came up with Panska herself. Nation-states may use languages to regulate their borders through things such as by requiring language competency tests for residency or citizenship. These tests imply that there is a "right" or "wrong" way to use a language, and nation-states determine a language's rules within their borders. The "incorrect" syntax and capitalization in Hiruko's dialogue compared to the "correct" syntax and grammar in the guard's indicates that Hiruko created Panska by breaking down and rebuilding its precursor languages, defying national language norms to defy borders. This independent, creative linguistic work defies national borders by defying national language monopolies.

This exchange's absurdity also highlights how fruitless heightened border security is in *Scattered*. Imagine that the border guard decided to arrest, detain, and deport Hiruko for traveling on an expired passport. Where could he deport her to? Which embassy or consulate should he call about her? Hiruko's Japanese passport expires because the country disappears. Neither Japan nor Japanese embassies exist. Hiruko doesn't note any reaction from the guard when she describes her country as "vanished," and his apathy is a jab at immigration bureaucracy's ridiculous, impotent inflexibility in the novel. That the guard becomes "fed up" also implies that the guard is frustrated or stunned into allowing Hiruko passage. He doesn't stamp the passport because Hiruko's Panska explanation validates it or because a law changes, he stamps it because there's nothing else he can do. Allowing Hiruko across the border is Hiruko's, the guard's, and, ultimately, Norway's only option as Japan's disappearance defies international travel's familiar

regulations. The nation-state's attempt to assert its power with a new border guard who draws attention to the expired passport is exactly what highlights the border's futility.

To turn to form in *Scattered*, *Scattered's* point of view also contradicts and reworks literary borders. A narrator's perspective is conventionally separated into first-person, second-person, third-person limited, and third-person omniscient. Tawada's choice to divide the novel's chapters into first-person chapters written from alternating perspectives plays with the line between a first-person narrator who can speak intimately to a reader about their own experiences, but say nothing to other characters' internal lives, and an omniscient narrator who can offer insights into every character's thoughts. The result is a limited omniscience. In her monograph *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, formalist literary scholar Alice Kornbluh describes omniscience as "an unlocalized space," like the unlocalized space of a person in transit between nation-states (Kornbluh 39). Although Kornbluh does not speak to first-person narration, if an omniscient narrator is unlocalized space in a novel, first-person narration is localized space, bounded and grounded, invoking someone within the nation-state. *Scattered's* multi-perspective first-person text blends movement between perspectives with situating narration within the borders of a particular character's mind, crossing borders in form as well as in content.

While the Norwegian border in *Scattered* marks a negative space between Norway and Denmark, space *is* the border in *Exit West*. This conflation erases migration regulations and, in *Scattered*, exposes the border's futility through absurdity. Migration in *Exit West* occurs through portals, described as "doorways," that appear in random places around the world, including bedrooms, back rooms, and alleyways. *Exit West* never explains what, if any, conditions give rise to portals or what limits the portals' abilities may have. One of their few clear features is that

someone can travel great distances in a heartbeat. For example, when Saeed and Nadia travel from their city to the Greek islands, the couple finds themselves in “the room at the other side” of the portal within one sentence (Hamid 104). Neither character does not specify how long the journey takes, but the movement’s linguistic length suggests that the journey might take less than a minute - however long it takes a reader to finish reading the description. Hamid also imagines a border that doesn’t require crossers to declare goods, show visas, or submit to searches and questioning. During their first border crossing, Saeed and Nadia walk to a “converted house next to a market,” in the city, not a marked border, and “stepped through,” a cabinet “without a word,” meaning both no conversation between each other and without any exchange with a guard (Hamid 102-104). Neither this entry point or their exit portal are guarded. The couple exits into “the bathroom of some public place,” and when they step outside, they are “merely” on a beach (Hamid 104-105). Casual, vague descriptors like “merely,” or “some,” as well as the bathroom setting, emphasize their exit point’s ordinariness.

Absurdity emerges when *Exit West* invokes a restroom as a nation-state’s entry point. *Exit West* irreverently critiques strict border checkpoints by suggesting toilet humor, disarming a potentially frightening border. In a vignette in San Diego, *Exit West*’s narrator describes an elderly man’s picturesque house on the sea where, at odds with the peaceful geography, the military “established a perimeter” around the home with enough manpower to have to “divert cars” from the area in order to monitor a portal (Hamid 50). If a portal took Saeed and Nadia, or other migrants, to this house, and they faced the United States’ multi-billion dollar arsenal, the scene would speak to the absolute, devastating violence that the nation-state is willing to inflict on migrants challenging its borders. At the same time, the scene would show a level of border control overkill that, like *Scattered*’s by-the-book border guard, invites mockery. If the restroom

Nadia and Saeed travel through was so heavily monitored, the image of a platoon of soldiers with heavy artillery trained on a public restroom on a Greek island would be laughable. Imagine a stereotypical officer ordering their troops to invade a toilet. The American government's response to portals in *Exit West* also is not just disproportionate because Saeed and Nadia are unarmed, but also because it reads as a response to helplessness. The portals leave the U.S. to play whack-a-mole, chasing migrants who very possibly will not emerge at the crossings that the government expends considerable resources to control. In the process, the American military in *Exit West's* San Diego also militarizes their country's interior, not just its borderlands, put on the defensive by a technology which forces them to reconsider where their borders physically exist. *Exit West's* implication that a national border can be inside of a nation-state rather than on its edges challenges the idea of nation-states as neatly enclosed parcels of land which can be completely separated from one another on a map, further exacerbating border control's futility. The palpable violence summons a darker humor than *Scattered* does, but *Exit West* similarly taunts ineffective borders.

Portal technology in *Exit West* not only deregulates the border, but also silences it. Nadia and Saeed have no conversations with border guards. However, language nevertheless deconstructs borders once they exit the portal and find themselves on Mykonos. Nadia and Saeed establish themselves in a camp of fellow migrants who speak "in a cacophony that was the languages of the world, what one might hear if one were a communications satellite, or a spymaster tapping into a fiber-optic cable under the sea" (Hamid 106). Multilingualism, then, facilitates a safe border crossing by allowing the migrants to exchange information, warnings, and goods amongst themselves. Furthermore, although the migrants live on Mykonos, their conversation is global in scale when the narrator invokes satellites in outer space, outside of any

one nation-state's jurisdiction, and undersea cables carrying messages through international waters. The switch from "a cacophony that was," singular, to "languages of the world," plural, likewise dilates language's reach on a semantic level as the satellite/undersea cable similes figuratively expand localized conversations to global ones. The conversations' presence on Mykonos, an island separated from other landmasses, also contrasts with their international reach across land, sea, and air. In being a global-scale, multi-language conversation, the migrants' speech expands not only past the borders of the camp, but also past the borders of Greece and the other nation-states whose languages may be included in the camp. Consequently, languages become detached from the national borders which are usually associated with them. Moreover, although Greek is not explicitly included in this "cacophony," the broad wording of "languages of the world," suggests that Greek could be one of the camp's many languages. So, even if border control officers do not interrogate migrants at portal doorways, interlinguistic communication with the local language, as well as many others, becomes a tool for migrants to cross the border despite heightened border security, undermining both linguistic and, by extension, national gatekeeping.

On a formal level, Hamid's text is a third-person story that offers readers a more distanced, but more omniscient, view of its characters' actions than *Scattered* does. *Exit West*'s narration also explores how the border measures which (unsuccessfully) regulate Nadia and Saeed regulate migrants as a wider group. When *Scattered* switches between first-person perspectives from one character to another, the narrative stays within Hiruko's band of friends, focusing on fleshing out the primary characters as much as possible to gain insight into their journeys. Hamid takes a different strategy. Hamid nests localized, limited perspectives within an unlocalized, omniscient one, which allows the narrator to portal between perspectives as his

characters portal between cities and countries. While *Scattered's* multi-first-person narration marks the borders between characters by noting the speaker's name at the beginning of each chapter, Hamid steps between Nadia, Saeed, and various, unnamed secondary characters without a similar formal pause to transition. The seamless movement mimics his characters' portaling between countries, and the vignettes about other, unnamed, migrants transform a story about love in the face of adversity into a case study about a wider migration trend which *Scattered's* characters speak about but do not embody on the same massive scale.

2 A.M. likewise employs absurdism and multilingualism, as well as an unreliable first-person narrator, to evade borders. About a third of the way through *2 A.M.*, Ron finds the titular Little America. Like the migrating protagonists in *Scattered* and *Exit*, Ron reaches the enclave despite imposing border security. In *2 Am*, this security manifests as surveillance technology so advanced and comprehensive that, according to Ron, "unsanctioned migration had become virtually impossible" (Kalfus 64). His latest host country only "tolerated" Little America and kept it "outside the capital city" (Kalfus 65). At first glance, the town's location on the city's outskirts points to a successful rebuff of migration: Although the host country allowed Americans inside the country, that the country isolates and contains Americans in Little America questions whether Ron and his fellow Americans have really been allowed to cross the border. As far as absurdity goes, Ron claims that hypersurveillance makes it possible for a national government to "know the identity... of every last person within its borders" even though he later acknowledges that many people in Little America are partisans living under assumed identities (Kalfus 64). Ron resolves this contradiction by assuming that the host country is aware of but "ignored" Americans with fake identities, "seemingly content with its limited writ" in Little America as long as conflict does not spill out of the enclave and affect the country's citizens

(Kalfus 69). Even if the host country is aware of the Americans, rather than blindsided despite their advanced border security, the hypocrisy of allowing potentially unwanted people to cross the hypersecure border invites cynicism, as it suggests that the government, like migrants, understand the border as more porous than they present it as.

Language's involvement in border crossing becomes evident when Ron describes Little America upon his arrival:

Some effort had been expended to make the neighborhood more home-like, even if the style of the buildings and the materials used in paving the streets and sidewalks were utterly native to this country. Unofficial signage was posted in English alongside the local nondifferentiable squiggles. (...) The enclave was usually identified by a torturously anglicized rendering of its original, unpronounceable name. (Kalfus 66)

Moving from describing hybrid American/local buildings to street signs that list English names alongside the local name emphasizes that the community is literally built on the mixing of English and the local language. In fact, the unofficial English signs indicate how the American community is reshaping geography, creating new maps by renaming streets. Altering the names and orientation of the land they inhabit suggests that the migrants may also influence the nation-state's borders. Their enclave does not represent a country, the U.S.A., within a country so much as it is a breakdown of the border between the U.S. and the unnamed country. Although the specific local language goes unnamed, if "local nondifferentiable squiggles" references a language like Mandarin, Arabic, or Amharic, the migrants cross a border between America and a country across the Atlantic or Pacific ocean. So, *2 A.M.* constructs a profound collapse in borders and geography. The novel therefore not only demonstrates advanced border control measures'

impotence, but also interrogates the nation-state's claim to and presence on a particular piece of land which predates the nation-state and may outlive it.

Kalfus also writes a disturbing silence and anonymity into *2 A.M.* that creates a border crossing between the explicit and implicit. *2 A.M.* is formally unique among the three selected novels in that it is the only one written in a first-person perspective which does not switch between multiple characters. Ron is the text's sole first-person narrator. Per Kornbluh, if omnipotence can be a border crossing between countries, an unchanging first-person narrative could suggest a less mobile voice situated in a particular nation-state. Ron is, in some ways, anchored in the U.S. more than *Scattered's* or *Exit West's* characters are anchored in any one country: In *2 A.M.*, the United States is the only named country until the very end of the novel, and Ron describes locations only with terms such as "the city," "the government," and "the.. country in which I was living" (Kalfus 1, 17, 32). Ron never even calls Little America Little America. The title implies the name, but no character ever uses it. In this way, even as he moves through countless countries, the United States remains a defining part of his identity and a kind of psychic anchor that resists relegation to the past. Ron explains how other Americans dislike speaking about their experiences during the nation-state's breakdown not necessarily because their experiences were traumatic, although that might also be true, but because they were complicit in crimes which they do not want to discuss. Ron does not prove that he didn't participate in atrocities himself, and the specter of his unreliability, even danger, haunts the text. When reminiscing about his experience in high school during conflict's outbreak, Ron notes that "even those of us who affected obliviousness, like me, knew with which side we were affiliated" (Kalfus 26). Later, when he encounters a fellow migrant who he realizes is being dishonest about her identity, he reflects on the fact that "untruthfulness" about people's identities and past

experiences “was not unusual” (Kalfus 40). Between his acceptance of others’ lies and acknowledgement that he participated in partisanship, it becomes possible that Ron was involved in atrocities, or at least was affiliated with those who were. However, he also deflects any recognition of his involvement in anything heinous by leaning into passive voice, talking about how, during the conflict, “potential sympathizers had to be interrogated,” and “some people had to be punished” by some unknown vigilante (Kalfus 111-112). That Ron’s perspective is a first-person one invites trust, but he removes “I” in the preceding statements. Ron’s unreliability obscures his identity and distances him from the United States even as he remembers it, which suggests that a first-person perspective may not necessarily be more grounded than a third-person one and placing him both inside and outside national borders.

Ron also loses track of other characters’ identities. Ron misidentifies people from the United States, recognizing them as strangers in foreign countries. At the beginning of the novel, Ron spots a woman whom he sees in various locations, from a city square to a cafe window to a reading room in a library and in an office, building, before he first realizes that “this was clearly not the individual” he thought he recognized her as (Kalfus 20). Then, he recognizes her as “Amanda” from his high school before, a page later, noticing that she actually “looked nothing like Amanda Keller” (Kalfus 20-21). Later, approached by the same woman, Ron asserts that “I didn’t recognize this person” (Kalfus 28). Is the woman from the city square also the van driver? Or also the woman from the reading room? A reader trying to visualize Ron’s interactions might picture either one woman or six, let alone a face, given the nonexistent physical descriptions for the women. As Ron calls his own identity, as well as others’ identities, into question, guessing who and where Ron and other characters are turns *2 A.M.* into a story more about migration as a phenomenon than a personal narrative about a migrant. Ron’s character becomes the storytelling

medium, and *2 A.M.* is a window into American migration larger than Ron's single journey. A single migration that acts as an anecdote for many migrations becomes a border crossing, both case study and general survey.

As a more general note about form, all three novels also work as border crossings in that they cross genres, which themselves arise from divergent regions of the world. In *Scattered*, for example, the (relative) ease with which Hiruko crosses the border is also written into the novel's smooth genre-crossing and genre-blending. *Scattered* employs magical realism, developed in Germany and Latin America and now embraced by contemporary Japanese fiction. At the end of *Scattered*, a character "floated to his feet like a weightless ghost" in a moment reminiscent of Remedios' levitation in Gabriel García Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude* (Tawada, *Scattered* 218). *Scattered* also blends science fiction, which emerged in the Global North in Britain (or Switzerland, since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in Geneva) but also dates back to ancient China, with travel narratives, which developed in medieval Europe, China, and Caliphates (e.g. *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, Yuan Hongdao's travel poetry, and *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*). Given that Hiruko and her friends are also students, pursuing personal development as well as their education, *Scattered* is also a German, climate-fiction *Bildungsroman* about personal change as much as large-scale global upheaval. In blending international genres, *Scattered* synthesizes a new literary form at the same time that Hiruko's invalid, unrenewable passport unsettles the political form of the state. In *Exit West*, although Hamid was inspired to imagine migrating through portals after his experiences with virtual communication technologies like video calls, the portals themselves behave like magic more than technology, having no known power source, controls, or man-made components. Consequently, the characters' travels in *Exit West* mirror science fiction's aforementioned international influences as well as fantasy's, which

arises in part from magical stories, e.g. myths and fables, throughout the world. *2 A.M.*, in contrast, largely forgoes science fiction and fantastical elements but does operate as dystopian fiction, which arises in France (*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley), and Britain (*1984* by George Orwell) in the early 20th century. Notably, labeling *Exit West*, *Scattered All Over the Earth*, and *2 A.M. in Little America* as speculative migration fiction does not invalidate their placement in other genres, and multiple labels could simultaneously apply to one book. By extension, one book can simultaneously travel through different regional influences, migrating as their characters do.

The various perspectives and genres therefore explore the borders between characters and the countries they move through on a formal level. Within narratives, the ridiculous contrast between intense borders' intended effectiveness and migrants' successful crossings highlights migration's inevitability even in the face of destructive obstacles. Notably, migrants in the selected speculative migration novels do not only overcome obstacles at borders because they are resourceful and resilient, but also because the border is fundamentally unsustainable, whether because it tries to regulate passports that cannot be regulated in *Scattered* or because the authorities which maintain the border themselves in *2 A.M.* acknowledge that the border can be more fluid than it is presented as. Creating, combining, and cohabitating languages likewise defy borders. As I will discuss in the next chapter, language continues to be a powerful tool after an initial border crossing, and translation on both a contextual and structural level works alongside other cultural elements, especially food, to destabilize the nation-state.

II. Dachtest du, der Wind in Washington würde anders duften als Berlin: Undermining Origin and Authenticity in the Host Country

Once characters in the selected speculative migration novels enter a host country, their observations of, and exclusion from, the host community begin to blur the cultural and linguistic elements, not just physical borders, which separate nation-states. During this process, multilingualism and translation, which facilitated border crossings in the previous chapter, continue undermining narratives of national cultural and linguistic cohesion. Before analyzing passages from my selected novels, I want to turn to Benedict Anderson and the literary theorist Caroline Levine to establish what mechanisms and elements scaffold the national cultures which migrants interrogate as well as, consequently, how my selected speculative migration novels interrogate authenticity and embrace multiplicity to undermine these scaffoldings. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson links the rise of nationalism to the rise of print culture, including fiction: storytelling, not just mass-printed news or other media, spreads a particular depiction of the nation to reading citizens (Anderson 32-36). Mass print media also works to standardize language, facilitating communication within the national community and providing a barrier to communication between national communities. Anderson argues that “nothing connects us affectively” to our imagined national community “more than language,” even though “no one can give the date for the birth of any language,” and nothing dictates that borders between linguistic communities must match national borders (Anderson 144-145). As prominent critics such as Partha Chatterjee have noted, Anderson’s model of nationalism overgeneralizes nationalism’s emergence around the world, especially by flattening postcolonial nationalist

movements into “...certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas” which equate postcolonial nationalisms in the Global South with the colonial nationalisms they respond to (Chatterjee 216). Nevertheless, Anderson’s examination of print media, storytelling, and, more fundamentally, standardized language is valuable for its conception of the nation-state as a project to build and reinforce a cohesive cultural and historical narrative.

Considering the nation-state as a narrative additionally brings to mind Caroline Levine’s exploration of narrative in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, especially because Levine’s work underscores how the nation-state’s (allegedly) homogenous cultural and historical narrative is actually one competing narrative among many. Levine acknowledges that “form” can be “generalizing and abstract, or highly particular,” “historical” or “ahistorical” (Levine 2). Consequently, she most easily defines forms as what they are not: “fissures,” “boundary-crossing,” and “dissolution” (Levine 9). Levine’s study centrally holds that forms can be “multiple and colliding,” sometimes undermining one another as they interact (Levine 74). The nation-state is a form itself as well as itself the consequence of various forms. Wholeness manifests as borders, rhythm can be found in annual national holidays, hierarchies support social and economic systems, and networks, either between states and neighbors or immigrants and emigrants, are endemic. Levine agrees with Anderson that narratives are an opportune medium for exploring forms, either in the nation-state or elsewhere, but not because, in contrast to Anderson, narratives and the nation-state have a causal relationship. Rather, narratives “present causality metonymically, through sequences of events” where causality can stem from many competing, combined, or parallel forces (Levine 19). Levine invokes Anderson to point out that, at least in the young, 18th-century United States, “multiple print, postal, economic, and regional

networks” undermined a universal national culture (Levine 121). Levine’s critiques of Anderson, and her conception of form in narrative as pluralistic, are exactly what make Anderson useful for this project when synthesized with Levine: I read Anderson’s arguments as describing the unsuccessful attempts to construct a homogenizing national identity in *Scattered*, *Exit West*, and *2 A.M.*, whereas Levine’s work helps explain why, namely through contradiction, fluidity, and multiplicity, migrations undermine a rigidly defined national community.

Levine problematizes the conception of forms as whole by pointing out that as much as wholeness is problematic for its “willingness to impose boundaries, to imprison,” such as within strictly controlled borders, it would also be problematic to annihilate wholeness because doing so would “reinforce the idea that bounded wholes are always and necessarily dangerous” (Levine 25, 29). I would add that destroying wholeness, e.g. destroying the idea of the nation-state completely, reinforces the idea that there is a “right” or “wrong” way to adhere to a national community, which contradicts positive multiplicity by enforcing strict definitions. Levine lists boundary-crossing as a non-form, but she does not argue that non-forms destroy forms they come into contact with. I argue that boundary-crossing collides multiple wholes, meaning different national identities, and both preserves and changes them by fracturing them: A cultural identity becomes separate from a national identity, and the nation-state becomes incoherent while characters retain their cultural identity.

Turning to close readings reveals how migration, especially through questioning translation and cultural authenticity, in *Scattered*, *2 A.M.*, and *Exit West* can disrupt the nation-state by resisting homogeneity in favor of embracing multiplicity. To begin with *Scattered*, the novel delights in scrambling the meaning of origin and authenticity. For example, in a bizarre moment toward the beginning of the novel, where Hiruko and two friends stop at an

Indian restaurant with a name that, according to Hiruko, is actually Japanese, and encounter an Italian-Indian fusion menu that includes dishes like “meditation pizza,” so named because the “toppings bore some resemblance to a mandala” (Tawada, *Scattered* 52). Like Hiruko is often confronted with people who misunderstand or misattribute Japanese culture, one of her friends, Akash, who identifies himself as Indian, is confronted with an almost offensively warped interpretation of Indian cuisine. Trying to comfort him, another friend, Knut, offers,

“Italian or Indian — it doesn’t really matter. After all, don’t they say Marco Polo brought the idea for pasta back to Europe from Asia? That makes Italian pasta a kind of Asian food.” (Tawada, *Scattered* 52)

By conflating Marco Polo’s thirteenth-century Venice with modern Italy, Italy with wider Europe, India with Asia, and invoking a massive, uniform “Asia,” and “pasta,” Knut highlights the incoherence of a rigid national cuisine. This is also without adding that the tomatoes in pizza sauce and pasta dishes originated in South America, so European-Asian food is actually European-Asian-South-American food. Marco Polo would not have considered himself “Italian” as modern readers understand Italy, and Europe and Asia, especially Asia, are diverse continents with an array of unique cultures. Knut moves from speaking about “Indian” food to “Asian food,” but Asia is massive, and Indian cuisine diverges from many other cuisines on the continent. Additionally, even within India instead of between India and other countries, “Indian food” is a blanket term for a variety of regional and class-based cuisines. Indeed, when Akash questions the waiter about whether the food is actually Indian, the waiter explains that the restaurant’s dishes are all popular at a resort in India. The food may exist within India, but Akash does not recognize it as Indian, raising the question of what foods do or do not become part of national cuisine even before addressing slippage between cuisines. When Knut collapses time

and space to connect a medieval state, Venice, to modern India and equates each with claims about their wider continents, he therefore creates errors in his reasoning which showcase the impossibility of maintaining cultural, national borders: the only way to explain the menu is to invoke border-crossing and cultural exchange, and an explanation which tries to adhere to borders between nation-states is also an explanation rife with historical misrepresentation. *Scattered* therefore interrogates authenticity, emphasizing that even “traditional” or “authentic” cultural artifacts, like Italian pasta, cannot exist within national borders, especially within borders which they predate.

Moreover, the languages in this exchange act as multi-layered translation, again undermining the idea that culture originates solely in one nation-state. In this project’s first chapter, when Hiruko uses Panska to cross the Norwegian border, Mitsutani transcribes Hiruko’s interaction with the guard in English. Readers notice Panska because its English grammar is different from the guard’s, but Panska never appears. The exchange in the restaurant likewise occurs both in English and in multiple languages. That “Knut, who could understand German” follows along to the conversation between Akash and the waiter indicates that the exchange in the restaurant occurs at least partially in German, while Hiruko subsequently urging Knut “to translate for her” suggests that part of the scene also occurs in Danish or English, their common languages (Tawada, *Scattered* 51-52). However, Mitsutani does not transcribe Danish or German in the text. No German version of the novels exist, either. Tawada wrote *Scattered* in Japanese, translating what she frames as a German and Danish/English conversation for a Japanese-reading audience, before Mitsutani translated the text into English. So, the novel is not only about migration, but has also migrated itself as it adapts, through translation, to different markets. In the process, different, coexisting and overriding linguistic forms collide, and overlap. In her

essay collection *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte* (*Language Police and Play-polyglots*)

Tawada describes translation as “ein weiteres Leben eines literarischen Werkes... und keine Reduzierung des originals,” or “a further life of a literary work... and not a reduction of the original” (Tawada, *Sprachpolizei* 85). Setting the irony of translating *Sprachpolizei* aside, in summoning three different languages — Japanese, English, and German — to construct *Scattered*’s world and dialogue, and to communicate *Scattered* to an international audience, Tawada lets writing travel much as pasta travels in Akash’s quote, taking on new lives in different national contexts. Moreover, translation’s plurality means that translation is not synthesis, as Tawada describes translation as a “Verwandlung” or “transformation,” not a transcription, in *Sprachpolizei* (Tawada, *Sprachpolizei* 50). Instead, translation creates multiple meanings which, according to Levine, coexist to enrich the text. Multiplicity in language obscures authenticity and origin. One could argue that the conversation is “originally” in German, Danish, and English, but Tawada also never wrote any German or Danish text in the manuscript, and the text appears in English only after translation from Japanese, so the conversation’s “original” meaning never existed. Is the Japanese form of *Scattered*, *Chikyū ni chiribame rarete* the “original” text, or one among several translations of the characters’ conversation? Much like meditation pizza doesn’t replace the margarita, one language does not override or substitute another. Conversing in a language that the book is neither written nor translated into further convolutes the boundaries between countries, overturning authenticity and single origins.

Translation and cultural exchange in *Scattered* further scrambles authenticity when one character, who goes by either Tenzo or Nanook, adopts Japanese culture. Tenzo is from Greenland, and his birth name is Nanook. Working in a Danish sushi restaurant as a student,

Nanook adopted the Japanese name Tenzo after Danes, unfamiliar with Inuit people, assume he must be from the lost Japan because he is Asian and works in a sushi restaurant. As customers and acquaintances constantly ask him to answer questions about Japanese culture and language, assuming he is an expert, Nanook allows customers to believe he is Japanese to protect himself from constantly having to confront unintentional microaggressions. As he commits to his Japanese persona, Tenzo/Nanook catalogs and studies information about Japan to better answer questions, developing a sense of stewardship as information about Japan disappears and his journals full of notes on Japanese food, language, history, and culture increasingly seem like one of the few remaining sources of information about the country despite never setting foot in Japan or meeting a Japanese person. The chapters in *Scattered* which he narrates list his name in the heading as “Tenzo/Nanook” instead of simply “Nanook,” suggesting that both his Japanese persona and his Inuit identity are equally real parts of him, parallel characters coexisting more than one character playing another. When Tenzo/Nanook furthers his research by asking the chef at his sushi restaurant where he learned his technique, the chef explains that he learned while working at a hotel in Paris. “When the original no longer exists,” the chef explains, “there’s nothing you can do except look for the best copy” (Tawada, *Scattered* 101). As the chef copies old recipes to produce “authentic” sushi, Tenzo/Nanook likewise performs authenticity by archiving and sharing the information about Japan he has learned from now-disappeared articles, books, and internet forums. Claiming authority on sushi preparation techniques and Japanese phrases becomes genuine authority as Tenzo/Nanook becomes the only source of knowledge about the country, turning a “copy” of a body of information into a new original body.

Applying Levine’s constructive, if tense, multiplicity to Tenzo/Nanook’s character is uncomfortable for two reasons, inviting critiques of homogenizing national identities in

Scattered. First, the name “Nanook” recalls the 1922 American ethnographic documentary “Nanook of the North,” which presented itself as a true account of Inuit life although “scenes of everyday Quebec Inuit life were reconstructed to enhance the film’s... impact,” including giving the main protagonist, Allakariallak, the false name “Nanook” because it “sounded Inuit” to American and European audiences fascinated by portrayals of an “authentic Primitive man” (Rony 99-100, 104). So, Nanook’s birth name, which could be considered his “authentic” identity compared to his Tenzo character, is a name associated with a racist stereotype akin to the racist stereotypes which non-malicious, but presumptive, Danish customers perpetuate when they assume the Asian waiter in a sushi restaurant must be Japanese. In choosing a name associated with performed authenticity and constructed origin for Tenzo/Nanook, Tawada therefore further unsettles readers looking for an authentic Inuit character underneath the Japanese performance.

Second, if multiple linguistic and cultural bodies do not need to contradict or invalidate each other, does *Scattered* equate Tenzo/Nanook’s assumed Japanese identity with Hiruko’s, seemingly more authentic, one? This question echoes Akash’s discomfort with meditation pizza, which the restaurant claims is Indian and yet strikes him as so inaccurate that the dish nearly insults him. After realizing that Tenzo/Nanook is not a native Japanese speaker, Hiruko laughingly says that he is “the real thing” anyways (Tawada, *Scattered* 125). If Hiruko’s status as an authentic Japanese person, as in someone born in Japan and a native Japanese speaker, puts her in a position of cultural authority, what does it mean that she accepts and even, by labeling him “real,” validate Tenzo/Nanook’s impression of Japaneseness?. Commenting on his understandable, but outdated, language, she notes that “the textbook you’re using must be awfully old” (Tawada, *Scattered* 124). His language might be grammatically correct, but in using words and phrases which Hiruko says “had fallen out of fashion,” Tenzo/Nanook is also socially

incorrect (Tawada, *Scattered* 122). Hiruko also notes that Tenzo/Nanook's "rhythm," one of Levine's four key forms "was completely different" from her own speech or from the speech of Japanese friends who came from various regions of the country (Tawada, *Scattered* 122).

Comparing Tenzo/Nanook's correct-yet-incorrect Japanese's rhythm to several other rhythms suggests that Hiruko rationalizes Tenzo/Nanook as a "real" Japanese person because his identity is one personification of Japanese among many forms of Japanese, not because he adheres to a conception of Japanese which demands evasive authenticity. What if factors like first languages, birthplaces, and cultural "authenticity" cannot determine who does or does not belong to a national community? It is true that many people around the world become citizens of countries they were not born into and adopt local languages and cultures until they master the language and become cultural authorities. How is Tenzo/Nanook's situation different? He is provocative because his behavior seems appropriative, but where is the line between appropriation and adoption? *Scattered* asks all of these questions and threatens to dissect the nation-state in the process: Where's the border between "Japanese," or any other nationality, having divergent meanings and "Japanese" losing all meaning? Given how important it is for Hiruko to find other Japanese people, this last possibility that her identity is meaningless is disturbing. However, this last possibility also perpetuates the problems which Levine identifies in her observations of form by rejecting multiplicity. Although Tenzo/Nanook's behavior is uncomfortable, reading his relationship with Hiruko as meaning "Japanese" is meaningless further enforces that there is a "right" or "wrong" way to be Japanese which can be destructive if not enforced. An either/or choice supports the nation-state's dictation of its identity even as it breaks down. Rather, accepting Hiruko's allowance that both she and Tenzo/Nanook can be Japanese fully embodies the fact that nation-states are not monolithic.

Like in *Scattered*, nation-states' monopolies on language and culture also break down in *Exit West* as migrants create global, multilingual communities. About halfway through the novel, Saeed and Nadia take a door which brings them from Mykonos to a large, empty luxury house in London which they share with other migrants who have taken the same door. Either because of this door or other nearby ones, Nadia and Saeed's new neighborhood becomes a global enclave uneasily existing within a city which becomes increasingly hostile to the migrants. As British nativists and the police clash with migrants, *Exit West* offsets moments of turmoil and scarcity with scenes of the migrants cooperating to build communities across national and linguistic borders. The migrants, mutually wary of each other after the hardships they endured in order to reach London and searching for a community reminiscent of lost homes, such as, in Saeed's case, "the familiar smell of the cooking" originally do organize themselves along national lines (Hamid 151). Nadia and Saeed, for example, become the only non-Nigerians in their house. The Nigerians regularly gather to speak together in the house's garden, and Nadia eventually crosses reconstructed national borders by braving the conversation despite anticipating a language barrier. The narrator describes crossing the language barrier similarly to how she and Saeed earlier describe portaling: "Initially Nadia did not follow much of what was being said, just snippets here and there, but over time she understood more" (Hamid 148). Nadia's initial non-understanding mimics the empty "blackness" of the space between doors, and the quick, although not effortless, progression from non-understanding to understanding within a single sentence recalls the sentence-long journey from the blackness to "a gasping struggle as she fought to exit" the door (Hamid 104). The parallel descriptions consequently explicate language's border crossing.

The parallel between moving through languages and moving through doors echoes the flimsy national distinctions Nadia notices once she speaks with the Nigerians. Unlike Tawada, Hamid doesn't render any dialogue in this scene. Hamid also does not specify which Nigerian language the group speaks together. However, similar to the languages spoken on Mykonos, the scene's relatively vague description enables many languages to be possibly spoken, reinforcing Nadia's realization that the Nigerians are not as monolithic as she originally assumed. As Nadia understands more and more of the conversation, she realizes that:

“...the Nigerians were in fact not all Nigerians, some were half Nigerians, or from places that bordered Nigeria, from families that spanned both sides of a border... they conversed in a language that was built in large part from English, but not solely from English... Also, they spoke different variations of English, different Englishes, and so when Nadia gave voice to an idea or an opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for her English was like theirs, one among many.” (Hamid 148)

While Tenzo/Nanook's adoption of Japanese resists a monolithic nation-state because he disrupts Japan's (in)famous ethnic and cultural homogeneity, Nadia's interactions with the “Nigerians” complicate the definition of Nigerian because it exposes its multiplicity: The latest version of the CIA World Factbook lists Nigeria as having “more than 250 ethnic groups” and over 500 languages in addition to English, the official language (“Nigeria”). Including “families that spanned both sides of a border” might reference this ethnic diversity, which does not map itself along national lines. That English is Nigeria's sole official language is also striking because of the description that the Nigerians “spoke different variations of English.” This detail implies that, in addition to diversity between languages, even individual languages within Nigeria are not

monolithic. Moreover, although Nadia speaks English with the group, it is never clear which other languages she speaks. Even if her home city is based on Lahore, Pakistan's own linguistic diversity makes it difficult to assume which languages she may speak beyond English. And the conversation in the garden is only partially in English. So, the meeting is a process of characters translating their thoughts into a few international *lingua francas* which everyone in the garden understands at least one of, creating a dialogue with multiple origins.

In *2 A.M. in Little America*, translation, or rather a lack of translation, picks apart American exceptionalism and highlights cultural stereotypes to undermine homogenizing cultural narratives. To first study American exceptionalism, *2 A.M.*'s premise flips the United States' current geopolitical standing on its head: Americans have become beggars, seeking asylum elsewhere as others once sought asylum in the United States. While Americans today enjoy one of the most powerful passports in the world, Ron laments that his American passport now "would not allow me ashore in most ports," and people look at news about the United States with the detached, actionless "pity" with which some Americans today might view other countries consumed by conflict they cannot imagine themselves facing (Kalfus 64). Likewise, where American cultural dominance might have once meant that they might expect many people abroad to speak at least a little English, in the city outside of Little America "very few local people spoke English" outside of "linguistic specialists at the university," forcing Americans to adopt the difficult local language (Kalfus 65). In the book's exchanges, Americans either speak the local language or locals use English. When characters do use English to speak to Americans, the usage is often demeaning. For example, policemen may speak accented English to make sure American characters can follow orders. Initially, *2 A.M.*'s focus on reversing hierarchies between nationalities more than muddling the hierarchies altogether seems to mean that the book lacks the

explicitly multilingual exchanges of *Scattered* or *Exit West*. However, like *Scattered*, Kalfus still transcribes scenes in *2 A.M.* where English-speaking characters have dialogue in a language other than English in English. In this way, the text itself accommodates English-speaking American characters even if other characters do not. Consequently, *2 A.M.* places characters of different nationalities on equal footing: Americans accommodate non-American characters by speaking local languages, and the book translates the conversation back to English for English-speaking readers. Translation transforms meaning, and the first edition's "original" text does not depict an original conversation.

While *Scattered* and *Exit* showcase how cultural exchange can build new communities across national borders, *2 A.M.* conversely explores how failing to synthesize new identities can destroy communities. As Ron becomes accustomed to life in Little America, he also begins to notice tensions rising in the community as the host country's government allows unsavory figures to slip through the cracks in the otherwise, by Ron's account, airtight border. Partisans import political tensions, splitting every American cultural element across party lines. Adherence to one group or another requires choosing a set of cultural components (i.e. dress this way for X party and that way for Y party). This partisanship consequently tears the community apart, reinforcing that attempting to assert a universal, one-size-fits-all national culture can destroy the nation-state by attempting to homogenize it. For example, when Ron first arrives in Little America, he notices that one street "was lined with hamburger shops and frozen yogurt stores, some of which assumed vintage American brand names" unrelated to what the restaurant sells (Kalfus 66). Shortly afterward, speaking about retail in Little America more generally, Ron explains that "...in America, one might have assigned a specific character to a person... by the brands he or she valued. You could probably tell how he or she voted" (Kalfus 66, 68). Reading

between the lines suggests that certain hamburgers or frozen yogurt stores actually represent one political allegiance or another depending on which seemingly unrelated brand's name or logo design they use. That the specific foods Ron describes are hamburgers and frozen yogurt, two of the most stereotypical, not actually universally consumed, American foods, is an early sign that it is ridiculous to flatten Americans into one national identity. Later, *2 A.M.* further critiques homogenizing identities when tensions in Little America build. Adherence to one store or another again becomes a sign of political affiliation, and seemingly simple choices like which hamburger restaurant to eat at also become linked to political choices in rigid ways which destroy choice. That is, if someone likes X hamburgers, partisans assume that they also like X denim brand that the hamburger store is named after. Even if a customer only likes the hamburger or only likes the jeans, they become associated with both and with particular political views. If someone does not like eating the hamburgers associated with a party, adherence to the party still dictates that they patronize the hamburger restaurant or risk association with the opposing party. Such unyielding, linked choices ignores the multiplicity of national identities which characters in *Scattered* and *Exit West* acknowledge and affirm. The plurality which Levine advocates for becomes impossible, and because national identities cannot coexist, the two competing identities trying to claim authenticity lead to the community's downfall.

A migration narrative is often a narrative about alienation as migrants attempt to either conform to a new national identity, hold on to an old one, or some degree of both. This struggle costs the full complexity of someone's experiences and identities. Moments like Akash's negative reaction to meditation pizza in *Scattered*, Nadia's assumptions about the "Nigerians" in *Exit West*, a choice between frozen yogurt shops becoming a life-and-death political decision in *2 A.M.*, and the necessity of translation throughout all three novels indicate how migrants in the

selected speculative migration fiction novels grapple with a homogenous cultural identity as unprecedented migrations, and subsequent challenges to the nation-state's homogeneity, break down artificial cultural and linguistic barriers without denying difference. Subsequently, it is not that national identity becomes meaningless per se, but rather that national identity ceases to be a predominant way to group people from one country or another. Cultural identities which nation-states synonymize with national identity become uncoupled from national borders. Tenzo/Nanook, for example, doesn't demonstrate that Hiruko's Japanese identity is meaningless, only that "Japanese" is a flexible term. "Japanese" is no longer necessarily connected to a nation-state in that Tenzo/Nanook is not a Japanese citizen and has never visited the country. Transforming identities across borders suggests that the selected novels' challenge to homogenous national identities creates a separation between a nation-state and a cultural identity which they have tried to monopolize as national identities. If national identity becomes a more flexible cultural identity which renders authenticity irrelevant and suggests that an origin can simultaneously be many places, it follows that migration in *Exit West*, *2 A.M.*, and *Scattered* becomes nonlinear. As I will argue in the next chapter, the novels' endings do present migration as nonlinear and unending, a characterization which "The Star Pit" subsequently confronts and qualifies.

III: The Widening Gyre: Migration at the End of a World

In this final chapter, understanding limitless endings and nonlinear migrations requires a theoretical shift. In the previous two chapters, I draw on political science, history, cultural studies, and literary formalism with work from Brown, Anderson, and Levine. As cultural identities become distinct from national identities and nation-state borders buckle under multiple, coexisting cultural identities, Brown and Anderson become less useful. Kornbluh's literary formalism also lends itself better to this chapter than Levine's because Kornbluh, in studying novels' literal and figurative architecture, employs mathematics and symbolic logic. Because limitlessness and nonlinearity are mathematical, explaining Kornbluh's mathematical analogies, especially her comparison between mathematical limits and literary limits, provides otherwise abstract concepts with a concrete framework. That mathematical limits are graphable additionally allows me to conceptualize time's direction as a line which can create directions. In turn, mathematical limits enable conceptualizing time as nonlinear, e.g. as cyclical. Grounding literary limits with a brief overview of mathematical limits will therefore frame my subsequent discussion of open-ended endings in *Scattered*, *2 A.M.*, and *Exit West*, where ambiguous endings enable readers to imagine how each character's migration might continue more than the endings suggest that a character's journey ends. I will then draw on Wai Chee Dimock's conception of nonlinear deep time to argue that ambiguous endings and nonending migration turn tumultuous, even apocalyptic worlds into sites for hope and community-building after the nation-state. Next, traveling deeper into the future, I will use Samuel Delany's dystopic "The Star Pit" as a counterpoint to the three novels' optimistic, limitless futures. Ultimately, Delany critiques limitless migration by connecting infinite forward movement to capitalist and colonial

expansionism's rhetoric. Delany cautions endless expansion into space, not advocating for stationary life but also not glorifying an intergalactic migration society.

This final chapter is also about my sources' final chapters. On a material level, texts are finite. A book has only so much ink printed on so many pages, and a reader must eventually close a text, whether that means turning a physical copy to its back cover or X-ing out of a PDF. Editions may go out of print or become otherwise unavailable. However, even as narratives reach their final word, the selected speculative migration novels' endings are actually exactly what opens the door to speculative migration fiction's most transformed worlds. Kornbluh draws on mathematics to illustrate this ending/beginning paradox. When discussing possibility in Dickens' *Bleak House*, Kornbluh turns to mathematical limits, asserting that "a limit wrests something finite from something infinite," not to reduce the limited object but rather to render the otherwise unrenderable and expand the "bounds of what was possible to think and to know" (Kornbluh 85). Kornbluh illustrates this argument with the expression $1 \div \infty$, where infinity innately "cannot be calculated or expressed" because calculating or expressing infinity would mean infinity is finite: Even if we imagine a number so large that it is difficult to conceptualize, such as 1 trillion, we can still count to 1 trillion. Infinity must remain the abstract idea of moving toward increasingly large numbers. However, conceptualizing $1 \div \infty$ as 1 divided by increasingly large numbers makes it possible to imagine that "the function tends toward zero," since a number divided by infinity, or increasingly large numbers, will have an increasingly small dividend even if we cannot calculate the solution at any one point (Kornbluh 85). Similarly, if an existent text is 1 or any other integer, in that it is finite and knowable, and whatever plot continues after a text's last line is unknowable, with multiple, infinite possibilities, the plot becomes $1 + \infty$. The limit of characters' possible futures approaches ∞ as a finite number, or the existent text, is added to an

increasingly large number, or the possible endings beyond the existent text. Or, the end of a book affirms that it does not end, and the last step in a character's migration becomes the first step in their journey's next stage.

Scattered All Over the Earth, Exit West, and 2 A.M. in Little America have ambiguous endings, each of which emphasizes this unending migration. For example, in *Scattered*, the story ends with Hiruko assessing that "travel so continues" (Tawada, *Scattered* 219). As travel continues, so does the nation-state's unraveling. After spending the book searching for someone who can share her Japanese identity, Hiruko seems as far from Japan as ever. She meets a man from Japan named Susanoo, but denies her the Japanese-language communion she seeks by speaking "his own language" instead of Japanese (Tawada, *Scattered* 219). And yet, Hiruko doesn't seem frustrated. She reflects on her own realizations that the national Japanese community is no longer the uniform unit she believes it was and becomes open to encountering diverse versions of "Japanese" with Tenzo/Nanook, who has quickly become her friend. When Hiruko announces her journey's continuation, she speaks "happily" (Tawada, *Scattered* 219). Her joy signals an embrace of the questions about nationality's roots and value which Tenzo/Nanook's complex, provocative performance of identity, as well as moments from her journey like the Indian/Italian restaurant, invoke. Accepting the journey's continuation is choosing migration over a nation-state.

In *2 A.M.*, Ron's departure from Little America is less optimistic, but it similarly points to continuous migration. As Little American breaks down under its inability to accept multiple versions of "American," several American strangers offer Ron safe passage to a new country if he supports their political goals. The novel ends with Ron getting into an "airport shuttle... waiting on the curb" (Kalfus 234). The moment is heavy not only with uncertainty, but also with

motion. The word “waiting” versus “sitting” or other options likewise suggests that the shuttle’s stillness is temporary, and motion is its natural state. The vehicle is an airport shuttle to carry Ron to another vehicle which will continue to carry him, not a journey’s final end point. So, Ron’s journey has a point A from his current location to a point B at the airport, but then also a point C from the airport to wherever the plane takes him, and it is unclear whether there is a point D, E, F, and so on. The catch is that it’s unclear what motivates his saviors, who position themselves as middle-of-the-road agents working “to find a new way forward... for all Americans, abroad or at home” (Kalfus 231). That Ron aligns himself with people who want *a*, as in single, way forward for *all* Americans is interesting, and potentially frustrating, because, whether in Kalfus’s text, *Exit West*, or *Scattered*, or Levine’s theory, a one-size-fits-all approach has so far failed time and time again to sustainably build communities. “Home” is also a loaded word, as it assumes the American diaspora can, and will, return to the United States eventually. Ron’s new patrons therefore seem to believe in a unitary, if undefined, American identity and that Americans’ migrations are temporary, which Little America’s fracturing and Ron’s continued migration at the end of the novel contradicts.

One of the most striking details in this scene is that, when Ron receives falsified travel documents and sees where he’ll be headed, *2 A.M.* finally names locations other than the United States: “Canada?” Ron asks (Kalfus 233). “Toronto,” his alleged protector replies (Kalfus 233). Not only is Canada the second country, after the U.S., to be named in *2 A.M.*, but Toronto is the only named city in the text. Even when Ron reminisces about his life before he fled the United States, he never names his hometown or state. If having the U.S. as the only named country in the text has turned it into a kind of anchor or reference point for Ron as he moves through other countries, then naming Canada could indicate that he latches onto the country as a

concrete place to rest, maybe even a place to build a home in. That the reader gets both a country and a city name further emphasizes the hope Ron attaches to Canada, even if he is skeptical about the woman passing him the plane ticket. This might seem like a contradiction to what previously seemed like a continuous migration: If Ron sees the future, Canada as concrete as the unchangeable past, the United States, then maybe there won't be a point L, M, N, etc. in his journey. However, Ron's helper also recalls Ron's earlier comments' about impenetrable borders when she warns him that his fake passport may not work, saying only that he will "find out at passport control" whether he can board his flight or risk detention (Kalfus 233). If detained, Ron's migration would lose a concrete end point to detention limbo. Between this risk and the suggestion that Ron's maybe-allies might be doomed from the start if they want to return to a home which may no longer exist, Ron's migration still remains open-ended, if in a way which might be dangerous to him.

Nowhere is the nation-state's breakdown, and migration's continuation, more explicit than in *Exit West*. Nadia and Saeed split up in the last third of the novel and reunite for the final scene, where they speak amicably and make plans to convene again in the future - although they "did not know, then, if that evening would ever come" (Hamid 231). This open-ended conclusion is at once both an end and a beginning. During the conversation, the couple becomes reacquainted after their breakup, both of them much changed and meeting new versions of each other for the first time. At the same time, reuniting as friends reminds readers that, although close, Nadia and Saeed will not have the same intimacy that they had earlier in the book. A chapter in their lives is over. At the same time, making plans to meet again without setting a date or suggesting a meeting place opens a door to a possible continuation of their friendship even if that continuation's details remain unconfirmed.

After Nadia and Saeed move to London and, like their migrant neighbors, maintain their space in the community despite locals' attempts to push them out, Nadia observes that "Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory," an explicit, global departure from the nation-state even as the word "somewhat" nods to the importance the nation-state might have for many (former?) citizens (Hamid 158). Regarding the previous observation, Nadia also notices that "everyone was coming together" as migration forms new, multilingual, multinational communities even as "everyone was also moving apart" (Hamid 158). "Moving apart" could reference characters' physical movement through portals and new parts of the world. However, it could also be figurative. Nadia's immersion in her new London community brings her to set aside her country of origin as a place whose "time for her had passed" like an old car that cannot take her farther into her future (Hamid 159). Migration in *Exit West* therefore links a nation-state's cultural and physical disunion to a new, emerging unified community whose members might be influenced by nation-states, but who do not wish to replace one nation-state with another. Rather than set aside one nation-state for another, which Saeed and Nadia originally seek to do when they flee their city at the beginning of the novel, the novel ends with a movement out of the nation-state entirely.

The selected novels' open endings, especially *Exit West's* ending, suggest that apocalypse fiction is yet another genre the texts move through. However, although apocalypse is stereotypically destructive, I will apply Paula Guerrero's concept of critical nostalgia and Wai Chee Dimock's theory of deep time to argue that apocalypse, along with the novels' open endings, actually produces hope in the selected novels. In one striking passage from *Exit West*, Nadia describes moving past the nation-state as "the apocalypse... and yet it was not apocalyptic... life went on" (Hamid 217). Her reflection draws attention to the fact that this new

world is also the end of *a* world organized into nation-states, but not the end of *the* world. This distinction characterizes apocalypse as generative, not destructive. Loss becomes an opportunity to rebuild a world without nation-states. Nadia's words recall P.B. Guerrero's "critical nostalgia" in "Post-Apocalyptic Memory Sites: Damaged Space, Nostalgia, and Refuge in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*." Guerrero characterizes apocalypse as a space where nostalgia, rather than purely romanticizing and mourning a lost lifestyle or community, can be a tool to critically reflect on loss during watershed historical moments. One explicit example is that critical nostalgia can "lay bare the nation's violent foundations" and reconfigure new spaces (Guerrero 31). Critical nostalgia therefore allows Nadia and other characters to parse their experiences for what to leave in the past or bring into the future, ultimately constructing a post-apocalyptic life without the nation-state's sometimes harmful partitions between people. So, an apocalypse which is not an apocalypse, such as in *Exit West*, becomes a door to improve the world, not destroy it.

Critical nostalgia's idea of drawing on what existed in the past and does not exist in the present in order to inform the future, as well as apocalypse being another point in time rather than the end of time, create space to reconceptualize the nation-state's space and time. Apocalypse's existence suggests that time has a linear end, but the selected novels' optimism, and Nadia's nostalgia, suggests that apocalypse can signal a new offshooting timeline or a new time cycle's start. Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time*, solidifies this suggestion by contextualizing the nation-state's end in wider human history. Dimock implies that linear time is also the time of the nation-state, which can segment its beginnings and endings within a wider world history which contains multitudes of different calendars and conceptions of time. Dimock dubs this much more complex, global understanding of time as "deep time," or "a set of longitudinal frames, at once both projective and recessionary,

with input going both ways, and binding continents and millenia in many loops of relations” (Dimock 3). In *Scattered*, for example, interrogating the relationship between a nation-state and deep time becomes a tool to normalize and conceptualize the end of the nation-state. At the beginning of the novel, when Hiruko goes on a talk show to talk about her experience losing her country, another guest on the show mentions that “The ‘German Democratic Republic,’ where she was born and raised, was now extinct” (Tawada, *Scattered* 4). If the nation-state wants to be its own microcosm, its own world, then, as *Scattered* highlights, the world has ended many times over — not only within the novel but for us, readers who live in a world that once had a GDR. The nation-state, like the people and other living creatures which migrate through it, has historically had a life cycle in *Scattered*, with the nation-state, and worlds, ending and reemerging many times over. At the moment, the comment could seem callous to a character whose family, birthplace, mother tongue, and original culture seem to have suddenly disappeared, but invoking the GDR also rejects the idea that Japan’s disappearance is a historical anomaly.

Like the aforementioned example from *Scattered*, Hamid likewise reflects on migration’s place in global cycles with the following description of Nadia and Saeed’s life in London, which characterizes life and recalls Sonia Shah’s reflection on human migration’s naturalness:

“[Their life was filled with] moments of tension, with tension ebbing and flowing, and when the tension receded there was a calm, the calm that is called the calm before the storm, but is in reality the foundation of a human life, waiting there for us between the steps of our march to our mortality... (Hamid 138)

Tensions’ ebb, flow, and receding mimics water’s movement, especially tidal cycles, which may destroy sandcastles and strand animals in tidepools, but also transport valuable nutrients through

the oceans, enable ships to steer on necessary voyages, and can be harnessed to produce sustainable hydropower. The tides also keep a rhythm similar to the rhythm which migration keeps when it punctuates “steps of our march to our mortality.” The narrator therefore ties Nadia and Saeed’s migration to a powerful, but normal, not necessarily harmful system of global migrations.

The above passage’s nod to tension in migration also speaks to the fact that migration’s naturalness and universality do not mean that it is not painful. Critical nostalgia and (re)generative apocalypse suggest that the apocalypse, at least in my selected speculative migration novels, is a site for hope and optimism. When the limit approaches infinity, that hope is possible. However, what is possible is not guaranteed, and the ambiguity of the novels’ endings also indicates that none of them are ultimately projects in utopia. I mean “utopia” both in the sense that these novels represent actual locations, not futures which exist nowhere, and in the colloquial sense that “utopia” may be used as a synonym for “paradise.” Loss and destruction accompany community-building and hope, whether that means Hiruko losing her childhood home and family, Nadia and Saeed separating from each other, or Ron losing his home in Little America at the end of the novel. Moving into the future doesn’t mean moving away from potentially harmful hierarchies. In the spirit of deep time, human communities were hierarchical, exclusionary, xenophobic, etc. before they were organized into nation-states. What’s to say that the same would not hold true after nation-states?

Samuel Delany’s understudied 1967 short story “The Star Pit” is a perfect example of how moving beyond the nation state does not eliminate confining or exclusionary borders. In “The Star Pit,” a mechanic, Vyme, struggles with his frustration that the universe is infinitely larger than he will ever be able to explore. As a non-golden, unable to avoid physiological and

psychological breakdown past the galaxy's outer edge, Vyme is caged even though he can travel between planets on starships. His existential frustration perpetuates a loop of self-destructive behaviors, including alcoholism. At the end of the novel, an argument with a golden leads him to realize that goldens may feel as trapped as non-goldens, a seemingly horrifying revelation that, I argue, is actually a hopeful blueprint for the future.

"The Star Pit" was a 1968 Hugo finalist and could be the subject of its own thesis, but for the purposes of this project, I want to focus on how it serves as both a cautionary tale and a blueprint for future migrations, as well as the way it connects this chapter's threads about nonlinear time, space, and the infinite. "The Star Pit" is a speculative migration novella, and it plays with the line between present and future much like speculative migration novels do. While the novels' regenerative apocalypses describe worlds understood on deep times' massive scales, "The Star Pit" embodies deep time in its form. "The Star Pit" is the oldest text in this project. Written in 1967, it predates the next-oldest source, *Exit West*, by half a century. However, this distance is what makes the novella especially pertinent to this project, not detached from it. Delany wrote "The Star Pit" three years after the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, two years after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, in the midst of the Vietnam War, and two years before the Stonewall Riots. This context not only indicates that "The Star Pit" emerges from a period where "American" identity was interrogated, expanded, and reworked, but also that the novella, despite its age, developed in a period echoed by current battles over voting rights, critical race theory, LGBTQ+ laws, and American military involvement abroad. Moreover, Delany's inspiration for "The Star Pit" came in part from his contemporary experiences trying, and failing, to court publishers with Afrofuturist science fiction. One possible reading of "The Star Pit" is therefore to understand it as "an allegory for life under the legal and

customary segregation known as white supremacy” wherein goldens, humans who can survive journeys beyond the galaxy’s rim and into deep space, represent the elevated, arbitrary privilege of white-presenting people (Canavan 49). As both the oldest text and the most distant future, “The Star Pit” links the present, past, and the future to explore a world where border-crossing regulations outlive nation-states, epitomizing a migration society which tempers *Scattered’s*, *Exit West’s*, and *2 A.M.’s* optimism.

For example, to turn to close reading, whether one is golden, instead of nationality or national governments, limits migration in “The Star Pit”. Goldenness is determined by genetic tests and the subsequent receipt of a golden belt, but the sources of goldenness are slippery. When one character undergoes testing to determine whether she’s a golden, the test happens off screen, the event documented instead when she says another character has “gone off to Carson Labs” to pick up her results (Delany 38). The test result itself is never read by any of the characters, so both the testing lab and the test go unseen. Additionally, the lab can issue belts to people who test positive as golden, but goldens can also simply give their belts to each other. The boundary between golden and non-golden seems rigid, i.e. either your genetics make you golden or they don’t, but the forces (literally) gatekeeping it are obscure, and the boundary consequently becomes less clearly regulated than it initially appears in the story. At the end of the novella, one character even describes that people can be made golden through exposure to certain, unspecified stressors during their psychological development. Not only does the lack of specificity about what kind of developmental issues create goldens lead to a certain amount of permeability, but the idea that goldens aren’t born golden at all indicates that being golden is at least somewhat changeable and acquirable. So, hierarchies both persist after the nation-state and exemplify the same false rigidity as nation-state borders. As a result, “The Star Pit” limits *Scattered’s*, *Exit*

West's and *2 A.M.'s* liberatory potential. The end of a world is not the end of the world, and the end of a migration hierarchy is not the end of the migration hierarchy. At the same time, though, the permeability of goldenness suggests "The Star Pit's" world has similarly flexible, crossable borders to those in speculative migration fiction.

At the very end of the novel, one golden reveals to the main character, Vyme, that, although goldens seem to be able to survive the galaxy's deadly boundary, they've found another point deeper in the universe which they also cannot survive crossing, limiting their ability to migrate. There is one being which can cross this boundary: a species of alien sloths, "small," "furry," and "soft" as babies (Delany 68). The reveal mocks already-absurd border crossings in *Scattered*, *Exit West*, and *2 A.M.*: That a famously slow-moving, stereotypically slow-moving animal could also be one of the most mobile in the cosmos is a slap in the face of physically and technologically faster humans. The story ends soon after the reveal, and at first glance, the sloths seem to be a cynical joke rebuking the kinds of hopeful, endless migration that we see in *2 A.M.*, *Scattered*, and *Exit West*. Human history might be migration history, but eventually, we'll hit a hard limit. In Delany's story, that could mean being trapped in a brutal universe where warring corporations with government-esque military powers level entire worlds in their disputes over resources. However, the sloths could be a rebuke to a certain type of migration rather than to migration itself. In "Far Beyond the Star Pit," Gerry Canavan links the need for expansion in the short story to "late-capitalist American ideology of the frontier," which is "a process of permanent growth" (Canavan 54). By this logic, it makes sense that even goldens eventually cannot travel farther into the universe: of course endless growth is impossible, and human reach has to end somewhere. Focusing on the scale of the universe beyond human boundaries ignores the vastness of what humans can travel through. One character, desperate to be golden and

explore, describes the current human domain as a “cramped little cluster of a few billion stars off in a corner” (Delany 38). The juxtaposition of “little” and “billion” bring back into perspective that as vast as the cosmos may be, what humans can command is vast even when dwarfed by what’s unattainable. Just like linear time cannot contain migrations in the three selected speculative migration novels, linear migration is not sustainable for humans. Nonlinear migration — that is, to planets in all directions within the habitable solar system — remains possible. So, even as “The Star Pit” functions as a cautionary tale, it is also a blueprint. Although the novella’s final reminder that human migration has limits could be existentially horrifying, it reconceptualizes movement rather than dissuades it.

Because *Scattered*, *Exit West*, and *2 A.M.* focus on the transition from a transnational world to a postnational one rather than flesh out postnational societies, and because “The Star Pit” extends far into an dystopian future, exactly how the world avoids or becomes “The Star Pit” remains unclear. So, “The Star Pit’s” blueprint is partial. However, critiquing capitalist, colonialist rhetoric could suggest that the key, at least for Delany, to a sustainable postnational community is to build a non- or anti-capitalist one. However, Kornbluh’s mathematical and literary limits, Dimock’s posit that there is no single end in human history, and Guerrero’s critical nostalgia suggests that there is no single correct or incorrect way to organize the future, only new opportunities to learn how to confront enduring challenges. Once again, not unlike nonlinear time, this project’s themes return to tension and duality between multiple narratives, here meaning multiple narratives of the future. The time gap between the novels and the novella suggest that Delany’s future may be a counterpoint to the novels without contradicting their possibility. Or, thinking of Levine, both forms may coexist even as they collide. Indeed, theorizing the novels’ hope enables exploring Delany’s future. Ultimately, what might enable

hopeful futures is following characters' leads in *Scattered*, *Exit West*, *2 A.M.*, and "The Star Pit" to embrace the tensions between forms, whether that means languages or other parts of cultures, and to be receptive to the change which arises from those collisions.

Final Considerations

The tradeoff of working with such rich texts is that there is always more material to work with, and it is not hyperbole to say that every claim and conclusion in this project could be built on, re-interpreted, and qualified by analyzing more evidence than a project of this scope can hold. Similarly, scope limitations mean that a few running themes in the selected novels, and in secondary literature about migration and borderlands, goes unaddressed here. For one, the gendered experience of migration is not included in this project, but Nadia and Saeed experience migration differently in *Exit West*: The reason why Saeed does not join Nadia in the garden with the “Nigerians” is that he is intimidated not just by the number of people in the house who he perceives as “other” because of their unfamiliar national background, but more specifically because the number of young Nigerian men who seem to be in community with each other and not with him leaves him feeling emasculated. Likewise, sexuality goes unexplored in this project when Ron notices the women he confuses for each other because he is attracted to them, the lines between platonic and non-platonic relationships sometimes blur in *Scattered*, and many of the relationships characters in “The Star Pit” mention from their pasts are queer.

Ultimately, though, *Scattered All Over the Earth*, *Exit West*, *2 A.M. in Little America*, and “The Star Pit” exemplify how literature can at once heal, warn, teach, document, and dream. The idea that a border’s failure is written into its existence because it operates as a totem to national insecurity could be cathartic or validating to those frustrated or victimized by border security that examines tired newcomers with a sometimes dehumanizing degree of scrutiny. The selected speculative migration novels act as parables for what might happen if certain climate disasters or conflicts come to pass, as well as reminders of current conflicts, disasters, and technologies.

Ultimately, migration is unending not only because characters' individual journeys continue at the end of their respective stories, but also because migration continues to be what it has been throughout human, and natural, history: a survival strategy. Even in the face of unprecedented upheaval, being migrants offers characters a lens to rationalize and navigate otherwise bizarre, sometimes horrifying, new worlds. Characters cannot outrun their problems, and migration can mean swapping one problem for another. However, when the whole world seems unmoored, migration's unmooring is a way to ride the wave instead of drowning, e.g. continuing a "normal" life within the nation-state which does not exist. Navigating colliding languages and cultures, as well as their spillover across increasingly flimsy borders is not another facet of the adversity which characters face in tumultuous, apocalyptic worlds. Rather, they are the key to (re)-building sustainable communities.

In *Scattered*, *Exit West*, *2 A.M.*, and "The Star Pit," identity and belonging are very individualistic experiences even as characters live in communities, whether that community is Hiruko's friend group, Little America, or somewhere else. As migration increasingly confronts the nation-state with its contradictions, it is possible that the imagined community's successor is a global migration community, where divergent experiences and identities are united by parties' mutual efforts to understand and engage with one another through, not in spite of, linguistic and cultural differences which nevertheless have common threads, even if those common threads are that they both latch on to differences between them. People build new cultural identities, potentially by, as Tenzo does, separating a culture from its former borders.

In applying Levine's theory to migration narratives to imagine a world of "former borders," as well as coexisting linguistic and cultural forms, it is necessary to touch on Levine's critique of formalist border and migration studies. Early in *Forms*, Levine draws attention to

work which explores possible formlessness, e.g. “indeterminate spaces and identities,” explicitly naming work on migration and borders as part of this body of work (Levine 9). Levine cautions that although works exploring formal breakdowns are “compelling and politically important,” we should remember that:

...while it may be possible to rid ourselves of particular unjust totalities or binaries, it is impossible to imagine a society altogether free of organizing principles. And too strong an emphasis on forms’ dissolution has prevented us from attending to the complex ways that power operates in a world dense with functioning forms. (Levine 9)

My argument does not clash with this critique. In my selected texts, worlds beyond “particular totalities,” here meaning nation-states, still have “organizing principles.” Dissolving national borders does not dissolve societies’ organization, whether that means Nadia forms an egalitarian community with her “Nigerian” neighbors, Ron agrees to work for a shadowy American group, or Vyme continues to live in an interplanetary society where goldens and non-goldens alike are subject to corporations’ wars. Moreover, I agree with Levine’s point that pressing for forms’ dissolution can obliterate a nuanced understanding of our world’s power structures. For example, reading Tenzo/Nanook’s Japanese identity as dissolving “Japanese” would obscure the questions which he raises about how, and by whom, identities are defined. Reading Tenzo/Nanook as problematizing, but not destroying, “Japanese” is powerful because it both exposes an unjust totality, AKA a unitary “Japanese,” while also drawing attention to the political power, the nation-state, behind that unitary identity. This project therefore both affirms Levine’s point that total formlessness is counterproductive and indicates that migration *reforms* more than it *deforms*, offering a formalist reading of migration narratives which does not lead to formlessness.

The futility of borders, uncoupling of culture from nationality, and nonlinearity of time and motion which this project seeks to realize also, after emerging, potentially turn around and interrogate some of the premises they are built on. For example, how much does drawing on authors from a variety of national backgrounds matter if the borders between those backgrounds are more fluid than nation-states present them as? Terminology like “Global North” versus “Global South,” distinctions such as “Europe” versus “Asia,” and slippage like using “American” to describe people in the United States even if you make a point to use “United States” instead of “America” likewise become problematic when used to articulate worlds which confront their meanings. I would say that these problems indicate both the versatility of language and stories to change the contexts they arise from and how evasive a good translation from our current vocabulary to a future vocabulary might be. This difficulty is also why investigating recent and/or understudied literature which draws attention to our vocabulary’s limitations is crucial. Part of my goal for this project has been to work with inventive, living, underrecognized authors. Tawada, for example, is acclaimed in Germany and Japan, but not well known in the U.S., which seems tragically ironic for an author so fascinated by travel and internationalism. Likewise, Delany’s achievements are still often underrecognized although stories like “The Star Pit,” which draw on his experiences as an underrepresented writer, won Hugo and Nebula awards. If nothing else, I hope that this thesis draws attention to these texts and authors’ richness, subsequently creating a more multifaceted, postnational literary future.

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