CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5. 1. Overviews

In his famous, almost iconic 1981 song titled “America”, Neil Diamond sings about a ‘coming to America’ with “(f)reedom’s light burning warm”. Part of the lyrics goes thus:

Home, to a new and a shiny place
Make our bed, and we’ll say our grace
Freedom’s light burning warm
Freedom’s light burning warm…
Everywhere around the world
They’re coming to America
Every time that flag’s unfurled
They’re coming to America.

The song, with its obviously monocultural interpretation of the history of immigration in the United States, has become one of the most significant cultural texts in post-1980s America. It speaks, stanza by stanza, first of a long way’s travel to a saviour land (America) where freedom is for everyone, and home is not far away, (“a new and a shiny place”), and then of a common dream of success and prosperity that leads the traveller to that ‘promised’ land of liberty. There is, throughout the song, a subtly arranged Biblical strain, especially in the first stanza where the song speaks of travelling ‘not without a star’, an obvious reference to the
travels of the Magi following the direction of a particular star which was
destined to lead them to where the Messiah had been born. The star in
Diamond’s song may be taken to signify the guiding light of the Magi
definitely, as a parallel to all travels and quests which must survive in the
hope of a favourable destination. However, the star could also be taken
to connote the ‘Star-Spangled Banner’ of the United States which has
down the centuries attracted millions of immigrants from across
hemispheres and diverse cultural spaces to come to America in search of
better work prospects, better living conditions, or even a haven in exile.
The song ends with a rendition of Samuel Francis Smith’s song “My
Country, ‘Tis of Thee”, yet another cultural record of America’s
popularly known image as the ‘land of the free’, and ‘land of Liberty’.
Neil Diamond’s song is just one example of the pro-monocultural, pro-
American Dream celebration of ethnic diversity merging into the
framework of a nationalist culture within the United States in
contemporary times.

However, this aspect of American self-identification as first a ‘melting
pot’, and then as a ‘salad bowl’, or even as a ‘color wheel’ (as James
Baldwin saw it) where diverse races and cultures have arrived, met and
merged into has been in vogue since long, observable in the writings of
many poets and authors since when the idea of America as a multi-
cultural nation-space formed and was solidified in popular
consciousness. The earliest example of the ‘melting pot’ image is to be found in J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* where he writes about the formation of a new American race through a process of melting, as in the melting of different metals to forge new alloys. Crèvecoeur, himself a French immigrant to the ‘New World’, says “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.” (1997: 181) Then, in 1909, Israel Zangwill wrote the play *The Melting Pot* in which he used the figure of the ‘Crucible’ where “God is making the American” in order to signify contemporary America’s fast accelerating multicultural assimilation (Zangwill 1911: 37). The salad bowl image is yet another cultural perspective on multicultural America which suggests that in spite of the merging of different groups into the general population, each of the merging collectives, or cultures are juxtaposed — like salad ingredients — with each other but do not merge into a unified homogeneous culture. Each culture keeps its own distinct qualities. A passing example of how that image of America has been perpetuated since then would be Walt Whitman’s well-known “Song of Myself” where the poet writes of ‘multitudes’ within the ‘large’ nation. He also says about America that it is “(o)ne of the great nations, the nations of many nations - the smallest the same and the largest the same…” (2010: 22) and refers to the vast texture of diversity in it by speaking of “a knit of identity…always distinction…always a breed of life…” (2010: 9) However, in spite of the proliferation of different
theories of assimilation and acculturation, and early twentieth century
crusades for the perpetuation of such pro-monocultural, or even pro-
multicultural social trends (which were favourable for the European
ingmoid peoples of the United States
could not easily adapt and merge into that suggested great ‘mosaic’ of
cultures that certain views about America seemed to identify the nation
only as. As Flora Davies writes about multicultural America in the
context of second wave feminist movements:

"browning" of America provided some of the impetus, for whites were beginning to realize that in the future they might
no longer be the majority of the population. There was also
belated recognition that the old notion of the American
melting pot had done a great deal of damage. Europeans might
blend comfortably into an American stew, but other ethnic
groups did not, partly because of racial prejudice. More to the
point, it was naïve to assume that people of color would want
to give up their ethnic identities, and short-sighted not to
recognize the potential strength and richness of a truly
multicultural society. (Davies 1999: 356-57)

The figuration of the ethnie (the word itself being a descendant of the
Greek word ‘ethnos’ and the Latin word ‘ethnicus’) in the context of
multicultural America in the post-Civil Rights movements era was thus
primarily a figuration born out of a collective (within different cultural
spaces) desire towards a re-construction of a collective identity through a
re-narration of the past in the present. In this way it is almost a direct
connection that bridges the areas of ethnic studies in the American
color context and the interdisciplinary study of cultural memory since the latter
is also differently a reconstruction of the past in the context of the present, and also a multidimensional space where the interplay of many pasts and the present cohabits with the formulation of mediality. The proposition that ethnic formation and ethnic identity in America may be studied using theories of cultural memory as elaborated in the introduction is therefore justifiable by the case studies that have been employed in this research study. Since memory in culture, and cultural memory in the context of ethnic American identity is primarily associable with the processes of rememoration, commemoration and other modes of mnemonic production (such as memorialisation and monumentality), therefore it is understandable how the study of ethnic American literary narratives may aid in such a project.

Whereas, again reverting to Toni Morrison’s formulation of ‘rememoration’ as the act of commemoration against the imposition of a mandatory ‘silence’, the production of cultural memory involves distinct and multifarious modes of cultural production and performance through which a collective, ethnic past may be envisioned and restituted, one of the primary ways in which this may be brought to pass is through the articulation of ethnic identities and ethnic opinions about themselves through the recordation of those ethnic voices through the literary narrative. As it has been illustrated in the preceding case studies, it is the literary narrative, irrespective of generic conventions and strictures,
which assumes perhaps the most significant role in the reconstruction of the past in the present. This is so because literature is in a way culture’s memory, since what is remembered, and recalled in socio-cultural contexts, or even on the individual level, is what is being recorded in the present as the narrative of the present, or the narrative in the present. There may possibly exist limitations in the reconstruction of the past in the present in case of other modes of cultural production; in dance or theatre, for example, the onus of the reconstructed text of the past may be limited by concerns relating to performance strategy and audience reception, or the viability of composite representation (many pasts brought together in a symbolic mnemonic figure or trope), but in the case of the literary narrative, the extremely fluid boundaries of genre and emplotment that is evident in contemporary narrative practice may act as an accelerant, and a structural advantage to the representation of cultural memory.

How that occurs has already been elaborated on in the preceding chapters, and specifically in the “Introduction” to this dissertation. A reiteration of that may not be necessary after all at this point. However, it is essential for the purposes of a conclusion that a general examination be attempted of how the literary text in its role as a medium of cultural memory may serve its purposes even ‘outside’ the narrative through its reception and reading in cultural spaces that are directly linked to, and
are relatable by ethnic ties to a particular ethnic social space. Here, it is
more the consideration of the ‘collective text’ than the ‘cultural text’ that
will help us understand how the latter relates to the former’s post-
production performance. Astrid Erll says that “literary works of all
origins and quantities can produce and transmit images of the past…the
concept of ‘collective texts’ is therefore meant to describe literature’s
function as a circulation medium that disseminates and shapes cultural
memory”(2011: 164). The idea of the cultural text that the Assmanns
proposed is also a medium that perpetuates the transfer of cultural
knowledge, just the collective text is. But the primary difference is that
the cultural text functions in its perpetuating role within the text, or the
production whereas the collective text is the version of the text that is
constructed after the text has been received within particular reading
cultures. It is to this point that the narrative’s role as a medium of
cultural memory extends even after the construction of the past in the
present. Spaces, sites, objects, figures and cultures of memory as
represented in the memory narrative is not only configured within the
text, or the narrative but also outside of the writer-ly space when the act
of reading embodies a similar act of rememoration as the act of writing
did. The example which this conclusion opened with, Neil Diamond’s
lyric, is an illustration of how that happens, even if it is more a cultural
text that is performed than a literary text that is read. Diamond’s lyric
which aggrandises the migrant’s journey to America as an exodus to a
land of hope and new beginnings in the song is therefore a cultural text of commemoration. The reception of that lyric has more to do with it than its original production has had. The evidence to that is obvious when one looks at how the song has been received and used in a varying number of contexts, including as a theme song for Michael Dukakis’s 1988 presidential campaign and as part of the promotion of the 1996 Olympics besides being presented at the centennial rededication of the Statue of Liberty. The original text of the song has shifted its boundaries through revisions of it in different situations as well. For example, after the September 11 attacks at the World Trade Centre, Diamond modified the song to represent a call for mustering public strength and support against the act of terrorism that had been perpetrated. In a popular poll, however, the song became one of the most ‘inappropriate’ songs about the nation’s multicultural character since the consensus of anti-ethnic opinion projected America that had been betrayed by the migrant who sought shelter in its eaves, the reasons for that being obvious.

About the transference of pasts within the spectrum of cultural transmission and intergenerational memory within cultural spaces, Aleida Assmann says:

Cultures create a contract between the living, the dead, and the not yet living. In recalling, iterating, reading, commenting, criticizing, discussing what was deposited in the remote or recent past, humans participate in extended horizons of meaning-production. (2010: 97)
This premise has already been examined in the preceding discussion over and over again in the introduction to this study as well as in the case studies of multiethnic American memory narratives in it. These case studies from Gloria Naylor, N. Scott Momaday and Jhumpa Lahiri that have been incorporated in this study have been executed with primarily the following ideas in hand:

1) Cultural memory is primarily the re-enactment of the past in the present and that it is the interplay of different pasts within variegating or unitarily posited presents that produces the embodiment of cultural memory. As Walter Houston says in his examination of Jan Assmann’s work, “The past enters cultural memory, becomes myth, when it has meaning for the present and the future.” (2013: 139)

2) Cultural memory and the dynamics of its production are both primarily performed through mediums (texts, traces of the past in texts, cultural texts, literary narratives, or symbols.) And in this context, the primacy of the literary text, or the cultural text as mediums of cultural memory is significant. And to understand the embodiment of cultural memory in these media, it is important that attention is exerted on the ‘traces’ within the texts as well as to the production and the pasts of the text itself since ‘traces’ lend more to the specific understanding strategies
of narrative commemoration. As Aleida Assmann says, “While the text had extended memory into the past as well as into the future, traces provided a memory of the past alone.” (1996: 130)

3) Literary texts are among the most important mediums of cultural memory, and within literary narratives, the tracing of cultural memory may be concluded by the understanding and reading of different ‘narrative acts of memory’ like narrative commemoration (i.e. the commemoration of known and historical pasts), re-memoration (i.e. through an ‘un-silencing’ of pasts that have not been spoken of), memorialisation (through the figuration of mnemonic images, figures and sites) and mnemonic/ mnemic signification (through the reading of semantic strategies and semiotic orders of meaning). Aleida Assmann’s understanding of cultures contracting a structure of transmission/ transference between what has been, what is and what will be is thus perpetuated in a very specific manner through these strategies of reading a memory narrative in that the commemorated past and the rememorated past coalesce into different narrative symbols and strategies which produce ‘mnemonic presences’ within the production of narrative meaning. This is evident from the readings of the ethnic American fictional and nonfictional narratives in this study.
4) And conclusively, one of the most important constituents of the memory dispositif in case of ethnic cultural memory is the fact that literary emplotment and other narrative conventions provide for a remembering of that which has not been historically remembered, or that which has met with a strict ‘silencing’. Re-memoration is what this particular strategy can be read as, especially when, as it has been shown in the case study of Gloria Naylor’s fiction, it is a multifarious striation of pasts that has been represented in the literary narrative, the memory text in question. The story of Saphira Wade in Naylor’s novel Mama Day and how that myth (or story) which lies at the core of the entire novel’s narrative ushers what Jan Assmann would call a “retrospective contemplativeness” is achieved through mnemonic recall in the narrative would serve to illustrate the strategies of rememoration within a literary narrative, fictional or otherwise. Cultural memory is fixed in its horizon of time. As Jan Assmann says, “Cultural memory rests on fixed points in the past” (2011b: 19) But it is also vastly unseen and ambiguous in its nature as stored memory, but this sort of narrative recall is something that provides for the raising of the awareness of the silenced past from within the tumultuous and dense sebed of stored memory, collective or individual thereby leading to a concrete embodiment of identity realised through strategies of recall within the narrative. As Assmann says,

In the flow of everyday communications such festivals, rites, epics, poems, images, etc., form “islands of time,” islands of a completely different temporality suspended from time. In
cultural memory, such islands of time expand into memory spaces of “retrospective contemplativeness” [*retrospective Besonnenheit*] (1995: 129).

The island of the Days is a symbol indeed of the communitarian space that Naylor creates as the backdrop of the novel. But in the light of the above opinion by Jan Assmann, it is also pertinent to deliberate if that island in the novel may also not be considered a memory space within which an entire intergenerational recall of ‘pure black’ finds its ‘un-silencing’, or whether or not one can consider the apartment building in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* a similar memory space where through the character of Boori-ma, Lahiri effects a rememoration, and a commemoration of a distinct mnemonics of exile as explicated before.

As Jan Assmann says, again, in the dynamics of cultural memory, “What counts is not the past as it is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians but only the past as it is remembered.” (2011b: 19)

Considering the above summation of the reading strategies employed in this study and keeping in mind the wider ambit of ethnic American literary production, it may be imperative to comment, though not conclusively at all, about the importance of two particular aspects of this study, that of rememoration and commemoration as narrative acts of memory. Rememoration through the literary narrative is also commemoration of the past as it is, as commemoration is rememoration
of the past in media and practice, or ritual and performance. The literary narrative that *performs* the past as if it were part of the present thus becomes an all too important factor that insinuates itself within the dynamics of cultural memory, especially in the context of its mediality and its configuration. If memoration may be taken in its lexical meaning as a ‘transfer’ of the past to the present, then what would re-memoration involve—-an incarnation of the ‘transfer’ that is at the core of the act of memoration, or a narrating of the very act of memoration? One would be tempted to think that it is the same thing both ways; that it is, after all, a ‘mnemonic’ transfer that is being effectuated, whether it is ‘memoration’, or ‘commemoration’.

Re-memoration, then, would not sound too different from the other two ‘words’ here. However, the connexion between these three distinct categories of mnemonic formulation is not so interchangeable. Since ‘memoration’ intrinsically implies an act of recall which can be the reiteration of any past, singular and specific, especially those ‘pasts’ that continually impinge upon the present and are reiterative in nature, the recall which seeks to reconstruct ‘common pasts’ as I would like to call them; and these can be anything from intergenerational pasts to communicative, ‘recent’ pasts. Thus, memoration is the recollection of delineated aspects of individual (and even collective) past(s) that exist, but which have not been ‘spoken’ of prior to the act of memory in the
present, not at least in terms of mnemonic registers. Walter Benjamin thus speaks of memoration as a means of completion, an extension of the work that the ‘science of history’ does with the past. But at the same time, memoration may also lead from the completeness of the past to the ‘incomplete’. (1989: 61)

Commemoration, thus, being distinct from memoration, would involve a ‘monumentalisation’ of sorts, an architecture of embodiment that, in case of the literary narrative, takes on the form of a generic narrating of the past. Memoration ‘can modify’, as Benjamin concludes, and in that connect, commemoration as a mnemonic process can ‘crystallise’ the past into a somewhat defined ensemble of symbols, shapes, forms and presences within the present, as a trace of the past that speaks of the past, about the past as it is memorated. As Jan Assmann says:

Even in cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such but rather is galvanized in symbols, for they are represented in oral myths, conveyed in writings, and performed in feasts as they continually illuminate a changing present. (2011b: 19)

Commemoration thus is the constructing of media for the embodiment of cultural memory. Now, cultural memory, very broadly speaking, would be a past, one out of many, which is represented in the present, the past(s) (both the possible and the manifested) and the present interacting with each other within diverse socio-cultural contexts. As Richard Terdiman points out:
A content of some sort is registered, with whatever fidelity the registering system can manage. Time passes. A representation appears, responsive to the content previously registered. What has happened is memory. Whenever anything is conserved and reappears in a representation, we are in the presence of a memory effect. (1993b: 8, original emphasis.)

The ‘representation’ that Terdiman speaks of is the medial framework of memory. The ‘memory effect’ that is being spoken of here is the commemoration, the ‘registering’ being the memoration of the past. Where, then, and how does re-memorating occur? The scope of rememoration as a narrative act of memory, however, is more specific than the other two mnemonic processes of memoration and commemoration. Where memoration ‘modifies’ and commemoration edifies, rememoration would aim towards a specific un-silencing of things that have been key constituents of a variable past but have not been spoken of, again a palimpsest of narrated pasts and un-narrated ones. Rememoration, thus, is the memoration or even the commemoration of hitherto silenced pasts.

The re-memoration of the past on the level of a collective ethnic identity is pre-figured with a sense of participation, a sense of shared-ness, whereby the past(s) of the collective are re-constructed and re-enacted in the present on both the collective level (through community rituals, or social commemorative practices) as well as on the individual level (how the individual agent identifies with these on a personal level, through
memoir, through narrative fictionality or fictional narrativity, or through cultural renditions of memorialisation). The cultural memory of an ethnic group therefore is shaped, performed and represented in acts of memory through an interaction of the individual’s sense of their ethnic past(s), and their own individual past(s) along with the shadow of a ‘shared past’ of a collective. And thus, where the complexities of identity and its formation come into play, it is rememoration that assumes an elementary role in the entirety of the discourses of cultural memory, and becomes a significant application of force, or rather, of resistance against an amnesia-inducing ‘silence’ where the ethnic voice seeks to liberate extant notions of the external culture about its own, internal cultural space. Having said this, it would be useful to iterate here the fact that this study has proposed a number of derivative models for the study of literary texts as mediums of cultural memory in its theoretical propositions as well as in its case studies. Primary among those are the ideas of literary rememoration and commemoration in the context of ethnic American literary production which is why these two aspects especially demand attention at this end of the study.

The present dissertation with its case studies has attempted to present a model of how the rising saliency of cultural memory may shape our ways of reading culture, identity and ethnicity from the perspective of the pasts that shroud us and our cultural spaces in ways more than one.
This perspective of the past is not just what might be called the voice of the past that participates in and insinuates itself across socio-cultural spaces, ethnic communities through diverse sets of interrelated processes into an intricacy of medial and material representation. It is verily the past itself that constantly shadows the emergence of the present and the future through a revision that is not just reliant on historical recordation but also on that aspect of the past which history does not necessarily represent, and that is the body of the past as it was. History narrates how and what the past was like, but cultural memory re-births the past as embodied in the present. It is however not to say that cultural memory may then be the Other of history. It is not that, certainly. What cultural memory then is, very briefly saying so, is the embodied aspect of the past reconstructed in the present so that a textuality of the past may be read instead of a historical rendition of what it was like, of what happened and what did not, and of what happened and was not spoken of. The past, speaking then very simply, in cultural memory is not the past as it happened, but the past as it is remembered, and the past(s) whose ‘stories’ have not been narrated, or which are being ‘re-stored’.
NOTES

1 Bourne’s notion of nationality relates to the connectedness between a person and their “spiritual country”, and rejects the much quoted and discussed ‘melting pot’ theory which views the USA as a crucible where in many cultures and ethnicities have ‘merged’ to form a unified whole.

2 A portmanteau word that uses both ‘globalisation’ and ‘localisation’, the term ‘glocal’ first began to appear in the 1980s in articles published in the Harvard Business Review. Roland Robertson, who is credited with popularizing the term ‘glocalisation’, defines the ‘glocal’ as the co-presence of both universalising and particularising inclinations.

3 Not the same as Zygmunt Bauman’s idea of ‘fluid modernity’ or ‘liquid modernity’ with its features of increased ambivalence and apathetic uncertainty, but rather a later historical epoch as a chronological successor of the early modern era which persisted till midway across the Age of Revolutions in Europe and the New World.

4 A very diverse field of cultural analysis exploring the material and symbolic dimensions of culture, Kulturwissenschaft emerged in the late nineteenth century and is generally traced back to the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey, Wilhelm Windelband, and Heinrich Rickert.

5 The Rhetorica ad Herennium, one of the oldest surviving Latin texts on the art of rhetoric, was originally attributed to Cicero, but is actually of unknown authorship.

6 The three stages of interpretation of a narrative that Ricoeur calls mimesis1 (prefiguration of the action), mimesis2 (configuration of the action), and mimesis3 (re-figuration of the action). Mimesis1 describes the way in which the field of human acting is always already prefigured with certain basic competencies, for example, competency in the conceptual network of the semantics of action (expressed in the ability to raise questions of who, how, why, with whom, against whom, etc.); in the use of symbols (being able to grasp one thing as standing for something else); and competency in the temporal structures governing the syntagmatic order of narration (the “followability” of a narrative). Mimesis2 concerns the imaginative configuration of the elements given in the field of action at the level of mimesis1. Mimesis2 concerns narrative “emplotment.” Ricoeur describes this level as “the kingdom of the as if” Narrative emplotment brings the diverse elements of a situation into an imaginative order, in just the same way as does the plot of a story. Emplotment here has a mediating function. It configures events, agents and objects and renders those individual elements meaningful as part of a larger whole in
which each takes a place in the network that constitutes the narrative’s response to why, how, who, where, when, etc. By bringing together heterogeneous factors into its syntactical order emplotment creates a “concordant discordance,” a tensive unity which functions as a redescription of a situation in which the internal coherence of the constitutive elements endows them with an explanatory role. [Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Kim Atkins, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ISSN 2161-0002, at http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/#H5, 14 June 2013.]

7 One of the main ‘border states’ during the American Civil War, Tennessee was a ‘slave state’ that did not declare its secession from the United States until after the Battle of Fort Sumter in 1861. After the war, Tennessee adopted a constitutional amendment forbidding human property February 22, 1865 and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution on July 18, 1866. The Union census that Mattie mentions here could have happened only after 1866 when Tennessee was formally readmitted to the Union. Many white Tennesseans resisted efforts to expand suffrage and other civil rights to the freed African American ethnic population of the state since for generations, the WASP population of Tennessee had lived believing that slavery was justified and a part of economic and social behaviour. That their former slaves were now equal under the law was not something that a majority of the Tennessee white population could come to accept. But the Reconstruction in Tennessee continued unabated.

8 Blues’ music. A term used for both a musical form as well as a musical genre that originated among African-American communities of primarily the Deep South in America at around the middle to end of the nineteenth century. It grew from the music sung and practiced by the slaves and freedmen; from mostly spirituals, labour songs, field hollers, shouts, tribal chants, and narrative ballads. It is a cyclical form in which a repeated progression of chords mirrors the call and response (two distinct phrases usually played by different musicians, one uttering a phrase and the other responding to it with commentary) schema common in traditional African and in African-American music forms. The origin of the term ‘blues’ was most likely derived from mystic rituals involving the blue coloured indigo used by many West African cultures during funerary ceremonies where the mourners’ garments would have been dyed blue to indicate suffering. This mystical association towards the indigo plant, grown in many southern US slave plantations, combined with the West African slaves who sang of their suffering as they worked on the cotton that the indigo dyed eventually resulted in these expressed songs being known as "the Blues."
Michel Foucault, in his essay “Of Other Spaces. Heterotopias in Architecture”, says about ‘heterotopia’: “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.” (Foucault 1984: unnumbered page.)

Myth-ritual narrative segments in *The Journey of Tai-me* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* would be those relating to the instituting of the Sun Dance and the rituals surrounding the Tai-me bundle which again occur in *House Made of Dawn*. Mythic narratives on the other hand would be those narrative segments that deal specifically with cultural accounts devoid of any specific connection to the rituals that Momaday incorporates in his work.

About ‘cultural text’ in the context of cultural memory theories, Astrid Erll says: “the ‘cultural text’ as a prototypical instance of the Cultural Memory’s ‘reusable texts’…the term neither refers exclusively to literature, nor is it restricted to written media. An oral tale, a legal document, a holy scripture, or a political tract can…all be assigned the status of ‘cultural text’” (Erll 2011: 161).

Assmann refers to Halbwachs’ definition of memory figures in connection to collective memory by citing the latter’s statement that memory figures are “models, examples, and elements of teaching. They express the general attitude of the group; they not only reproduce its history, but also define its nature, its qualities and its weaknesses. (Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 59)” (J. Assmann 2011b: 25-26)

See “The African Multiethnic Narrative - Gloria Naylor’s Fictional Spaces” in this study.

The word ‘desi’ is a derivative of the Sanskrit word ‘Desh’ (meaning ‘country’, or ‘nation’). Associable are the neologisms ABCD (American Born Confused Desi) used for second generation Americans of Indian origin and FOB (Fresh off the Boat) for immigrants from India. Both terms are however culturally divisive in nature and implication, and they may be construed as derogatory given their usage to describe cultural limitations that each suggests. Vijay Prashad says: “…there are the new migrants who use the ponderous and overused acronym ABCD (American
Born Confused Desi) to emphasize to the accidental Americans that they are ‘confused’. The ‘homeland’ is wielded by all these people against the next generation, who are forced to feel culturally inadequate and unfinished.” (2000: 131)

15 Richard Terdiman uses this phrase in relation to Baudelaire’s poem “Le Cygne” (The Swan) and in connection with what he calls the “mnemonics of dispossession” which he defined as “the specific content and the conjunctural reference of the complex of themes” out of which the text constructs its mnemonics of dispossession. (1993a: 170) Relating this particular interpretative figuration to the idea of ‘exile’ in the context of the ethnic American narrative (one which is also ‘diasporic’), I have used the phrase “mnemonics of exile”, though probably not in the same way of constructing a ‘semiotics of signs’ as he does in his essay on Baudelaire’s “Le Cygne”.