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The "New Migration": Clashes, Connections, and Diasporic Women's Writing

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Have we survived the dangerous dance of two nuclear superpowers during the Cold War only to succumb to the "clash of civilizations" that Samuel Huntington predicted in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996)?¹ In the aftermath of 9/11, the Bush administration invaded Iraq, spied on thousands of Americans, and swept thousands of Muslims into U.S. detention and the prisons of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay in indiscriminate searches for links to Al Qaeda and the attack on U.S. soil that traumatized the nation. Europe became the site of repeated clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims. In November of 2004, for example, a gunman shot and stabbed Theo van Gogh in retaliation for his film protesting Islamic treatment of women. In the fall of 2005, Paris was burning – with Muslim youths torching cars and barricades in the heart of immigrant France. The September 2005 publication of twelve cartoons depicting Muhammad as a terrorist in a Danish newspaper led to boycotts of Danish goods and the burning of Danish embassies and American flags in many parts of the Muslim world. Nativist sentiment deeply impacted many elections in Europe and the United States. The Western media responded with sensationalist accounts of the "clash of civilizations," making Huntington's phrase a household term in many parts of the world.² As Robert Wright wrote in *The New York Times*, the Muslim world's response to the Danish cartoons was creating an astounding consensus in the United States: "The American left and right don't agree on much, but weeks of demonstrations and embassy burnings have pushed them toward convergence on one point: there is, if

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not a clash of civilizations, at least a very big gap between 'the Western world' and the 'Muslim world'" (A23).

What easily gets lost in the Manichaean rhetoric of clashing civilizations is how much the conflict in the West and elsewhere has to do with what Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (among others) call the Age of Migration: the intensified diasporic movements of peoples across national borders – documented and undocumented, voluntary and compelled – *and* the traffic of ideas and cultural forms and practices worldwide that accompany these migrations. We are living through a period of heightened interconnection, not separation as the "chasm theory" of contemporary conflict would have it. In a sense, Samuel Huntington understood this all too well. In [*The Clash of Civilizations*](#) he aims to make the chasm even wider. What most upsets him is not the opposition of competing civilizations, but the miscegenation between them produced by migration. He has the purist's paranoia about the pollution of too much mixing, about the invasion of outsiders into home turf to become the threat within the heart of the West – in Europe, from Muslim migrants; in the United States, primarily from Hispanic immigrants:

Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and to propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies. This phenomenon is most notable among Muslims in Europe, who are, however, a small minority. It is also manifest, in lesser degree, among Hispanics in the United States, who are a large minority. If assimilation fails in this case, the United States will become a cleft country, with all the potentials for internal strife and disunion that entails. In Europe, Western civilization could also be undermined by the weakening of its central component, Christianity. (305)

What Huntington decries is the phenomenon widely known as the "new migration," a term frequently invoked in the mass media and deployed by scholars in migration studies across the social sciences and humanities.³ This "new migration" typically signifies the waves of people pouring into the West from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean, and South America beginning after World War II and increasing dramatically, indeed explosively, by the century's end. Diasporics, exiles, refugees, asylum seekers, educated elites, labor migrants, guest workers, those scrambling for a better life: all are viewed as part of a "push/pull" dynamic in an asymmetrical world-system. Documented and undocumented alike are assumed to be drawn to the West as charismatic center of freedom and opportunity. Some commentators and scholars emphasize "pull" – that is, the West's magnetic attraction that leads people with initiative and dreams to leave the familiar for the possible; others stress the "push" – that is, the inequitable structures of global power that leave people outside the West with few options to stay in their homelands.⁴ Whether the migration model is predominantly liberal/voluntarist (emphasizing pull) or Marxist/systemic (emphasizing push), the prevailing assumption is that the "new migration" involves different racial and different religious groups entering the West's heartlands of whiteness and Christianity from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin American, and the Caribbean.

This consensual meaning for the "new migration" is initially problematic for two reasons. First, it functions ideologically to reify "the West" as civilizationally homogeneous, economically advanced, and democratic in opposition to the rest of the world, an assumption that ignores the indeterminate geographical boundaries of the West (what about Japan, the world's second largest economy? Or the expansions east and southward of "the West" into Turkey, Ukraine?), the explosive power of the new

Asian economies, and the power of oil from the Middle East, Venezuela, Nigeria, and Indonesia, all regions of the so-called "global South." The discourse of "the West" is based on a largely binarist view of the contemporary world-system. Migration on the complex global map of circulating and crisscrossing powers is more complicated than the magnetic pull of the West and the despotic or impoverished push of the Rest. Moreover, the phrase the "new migration," especially in the mass media and political circles, often encodes a racial and/or religious narrative that presumes the superiority of Western modernity and the backwardness of the unenlightened Rest.

Second, the rhetoric of the "new migration" overemphasizes the clash and ignores that blending that migration brings. Migration, of course, is not "new." Mobility has been a, if not *the*, defining trait of the human species – always already present in the global ecumene of human history. Heightened transcontinental contacts between civilizations – recurrent forms of globalization – are not new either. Indeed, some world historians claim that collisions between competing civilizations have always brought increased connection, migration, and integration. David Wilkinson calls this phenomenon "antagonistic bonding" and suggests that "conflict should be systematically treated, when found, as associative" (49) "Conflict *always* integrates," he continues; "Conflict is a form of association; internally connected, heterogeneous, divided, conflicted entities may and do exist" (49, 72).

What is *new* in the "new migration," however, is both material and rhetorical – that is, it combines some identifiable geohistorical changes in the post-1945 period and at the same time reflects an ideologically charged perception of the new that is more symptom than explanation of the times in which we live. The emphasis on the new and what is meant by it both illuminates the latest phase of global migration but also obscures significant aspects of it. What gets lost or muted, what is omitted, and what assumptions lie hidden within many formulations of the "new migration" are what interest me. It is here that women's diasporic writing can illuminate what has often been suppressed in the discussions of the "new migration." I will first review how material aspects of the "new migration" have intensified the diasporic dimension of migratory experience and complicated the issues of assimilation. Then, I will examine three dimensions of post-1945 migration obscured by the rhetoric of the "new migration": first, the existence of massive migration outside the West; second, the geohistorical and stratificational diversities of diasporic experience within the West; and third, the significance of transculturation, the process through which both migrant and host cultures change through interaction. Diasporic narratives by Jamila Hashmi, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Buchi Emecheta, Edwidge Danticat, and Leila Aboulela help pinpoint the significance of gender in exposing the misleading assumptions underlying the rhetoric of the "new migration."

► Diaspora and the "New Migration"

Elsewhere, I have used the term *migration* as the umbrella term, designating *diaspora* as one type of migration, as "migration plus loss, desire, and widely scattered communities held together by memory and a sense of history over a long period of time" (268). Such so-called "classic" diasporas as the Jewish, African, and Armenian diasporas based in traumatic victimization and dispersal have served as paradigms for diasporic loss, displacements, and ongoing resettlements, but the

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term *diaspora* has been adapted by and used by others in the post-1945 period to describe many other groups, including those who migrate for reasons other than communal victimization, as Robin Cohen argues in *Global Diasporas*. Theorists of diasporas in the broader sense of the term tend to focus on what Nikos Papastergiadis calls the "turbulence" of migration, the constant state of tension between different homes and the journeys from one to another (4). Having punned on the dialectical relationship between "roots" and "routes" in "Traveling Cultures" (36), James Clifford went on in "Diasporas" to reject nominal or typological approaches to diaspora, instead describing diasporic consciousness as a "lived tension" between "separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place," of "dwelling-in-displacement" (255, 254). Focusing on the fundamental contradiction of diasporas, Avtar Brah writes: "Paradoxically, diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, about putting roots 'elsewhere'" (182).

The geopolitical, economic, and postcolonial conditions that have shaped the postwar "new migration" in this latest phase of globalization are well known and need no further rehearsal here. But I do want to emphasize that the radically new technologies of travel and communication have heightened global interconnectedness in Wilkinson's sense of both conflictual and peaceful association. As such, they have increased diasporic consciousness among migrants because the old home or homes can be so much more present in the lives of migrating peoples. Migration lacks the permanence it once often had, and the borders between homeland and hostland have become much more porous and fluid. Arjun Appadurai calls this phenomenon the global ethnoscape of "modernity at large," alluding to the globe's rapidly shifting, fluid cultural landscapes enabled by migrating peoples, goods, practices, and representations. In positing turbulence as the central metaphor for the "new migration," Papastergiadis rejects the older, push/pull models as too mechanistic, too focused on a linear before and after to capture the dynamic on-goingness of mobile identities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Other social scientists have developed complex typologies of the "new migration," including such categories as seasonal, temporary nonseasonal, recurrent, continuous, permanent, yo-yo, commuter, shuttle, circular, loop, and "bright light" migrancy.⁵ In American literary and cultural studies, critics stress a major shift away from the earlier assimilationist narratives like Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) or Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1924). Instead, "new migration" narratives show more fluidity of identity, more heterogeneity, more resistance to assimilation, more bilingualism and hybridity, and less willingness on the part of American society in general to integrate these newly racialized immigrants.⁶ Identity in the "new migration" has become increasingly deterritorialized, a fact that fosters diasporic (as opposed to simply migrant) consciousness.

As tropes of migration, the airplane has replaced the ship; weeks and months of travel have become days or hours, available for temporary or recurrent returns. The telephone and the internet (email, listservs, blogs, skype, e-newsletters, and so forth) have supplanted letters as means of communication and ongoing connection. These and other ephemeral forms of cultural expression have made the ruptures of migration less fixed for many, especially the more affluent. Rosemary Marangoly George also sees a tropic fixation on the "baggage" of the past, the "cultural knapsacks," and the paraphernalia of objects – "albums, rosary beads, little boxes" and so forth – that often travel back and forth with the new migrants. The exponential increase in undocumented migration has produced other tropes of the "new migration": border patrols shooting fleeing bodies caught in the infrared lights of the night, leaky boats intercepted at sea, ship containers or car trunks filled with the dead bodies of the suffocated or roasted, trafficking in

human flesh, the more virgin the better, passport checks, interrogations and searches at customs, detention centers like prisons, and deportations that give new meaning to notions of circular or loop migration. In all, the "new migration" has blurred the boundaries between the old home and the new, a before and an after, a homeland and a hostland, a blurring that supplants the older forms of linear migration with newer forms of sedimented and multiply communal identities that have resulted in the proliferation of diasporic consciousness.

The increasingly diasporic consciousness associated with the "new migration" has reignited the issue of assimilation in migration studies, as well as in popular and political arenas. Much debated in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, *assimilation* as a term and concept became increasingly discredited for its association with deculturation, the loss of languages and cultures from the homeland, and the homogenization of culture in the hostland.⁷ But the rise of nativism in the face of the new migrants in the West has put the issue back on the table, as Huntington's assertion that migrants to the West "reject assimilation" indicates. Some in migration studies have recuperated the term *assimilation*, making nuanced distinctions between cultural assimilation or retention on the one hand and systemic or institutional assimilation on the other (Suárez-Orozco, "Everything"; Alba and Nee). Many others use terms such as *integration* and *incorporation* to examine the relation between migrants and host societies. Whatever the terms, however, the question remains. Are the new migrants more resistant to integration into their host societies than past generations, especially given the new technologies that facilitate cultural retention? Or, are the hostlands more resistant to accepting these new migrants from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean? For some, the existence of migrant enclaves that preserve homeland language and cultural practices signifies a refusal to "become" French, or American, or Danish, or: fill in the blank. But for others, the new migrants have been racialized and stigmatized, segregated from the mainstream of their new homelands and never fully accepted or given access to opportunity because of their racial or religious difference.

A brief look at the civil unrest in France in 2005 demonstrates vividly how these two different accounts of assimilation/integration/incorporation attest to the heightened interconnectedness engendered by the "new migration." The French Muslim youths who burned cars live in migrant ghettos where largely Muslim immigrants from Africa and the Middle East and their children are concentrated in suburbs with poor housing, terrible schools, high unemployment, and a lack of opportunity for social mobility. According to many, the youth's anger represents not so much an Islamic rejection of France but rather a fury born of France's resistance to the integration of its racial and religious migrant populations into the French mainstream. The young men burning cars and schools were angry not at French values but at the failure of the French to live up to the promise of their universalist Republican ideal – that all in France are "citizens" of the Republic, no matter what race, sex, class, religion, or nation of birth. This ideal is the rationale for the French government's refusal to collect social-economic statistics with ethnicity, religion, or immigrant heritage as variables. But the reality tells a different story: the failure of integration of Muslims into French society and the rise of nativist political parties and sentiment. As Olivier Roy, research director of the French National Center for Scientific Research, puts it in "Get French or Die Trying," "these riots are about Western culture, not Islam ... France's agony – the struggle to integrate an angry underclass – is one shared across the Western world."⁸

In my view, the "new migration" into Europe, and North America is far less about the so-called clash of

civilizations and far more about the failures of integration, especially into educational, economic, political, and cultural institutions. The diasporic consciousness of many migrants – facilitated by the new technologies of travel and communication – leads to increased levels of cultural retention at the same time that migrants push for greater access to educational, economic, and political integration. While these issues are critically important, they nonetheless leave out highly significant dimensions of diasporic experience in the post-1945 era of massive global migrations. Women's diasporic writing helps to highlight what is largely missing from the rhetorics of the "new migration."

► Diasporas Outside the West

The overwhelming assumption that post-1945 migration involves movement into the West from the rest of the world suppresses the significance of migration outside the West. Other parts of the world can serve as magnets of opportunity or freedom (e.g., Bangladesh for Asian Muslims; South Africa for Zimbabweans and other Africans; the Gulf States for Asians and Africans); other parts of the world become sites for struggles over assimilation, integration, and incorporation.

Recognition of such non-Western migrations helps to decenter the West from center/periphery models of global migration. As even more sobering corrective, Nicholas Van Hear's *New Diasporas* (1998) examines massive new migrations that have taken place entirely outside the West, particularly the global diasporas of refugees and others typically compelled to move by war, despotic governments, ethnic conflict, collapsed economies, and starvation in the post – World War II era.⁹

For an extended example, consider the double exodus of millions that opens the post – World War II period: namely, the Partition of India with the departure of the British that established the new nation-states of India and Pakistan. It was a bloody birth, unleashing sectarian violence among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in 1947–1948, especially in the northwest and northeast corners of the subcontinent.¹⁰ At least a million people died (the numbers vary), some 75,000 women are said to have been abducted and raped by men of different religions, and at least 12 million fled their homes to cross the newly constituted border into a diasporic existence in which the homeland was indeed forever lost by the continuing enmity between the two nations (Butalia 3). A holocaust of its own, Partition did not spawn many immediate histories or aesthetic renderings of the events. As collective trauma, its devastating effects registered in the written and oral records mostly in belated fashion, following upon long periods of silence and refusal to remember. There were exceptions of course – the brilliant short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955) began to appear in the 1950s. But the outpouring of Partition narratives – historical, literary, and filmic – and scholarship about the event did not really get underway until the 1980s and 1990s, the period most associated with the "new migration." The explosion of more communal violence in many parts of India has fueled the interest in revisiting Partition, particularly as it erupted in Mumbai, India's most cosmopolitan city, and Gujarat, the home of Gandhi, in the 1990s. As Alok Bhalla, one of India's leading scholars on Partition narratives, argues, at the center of all this collective remembering is "utter bewilderment" at the "unprecedented, unexpected and barbaric" violence among the different religious communities who had lived together, often sharing each others' cultural traditions and holidays, more or less peacefully for hundreds of years (xix, xvi).

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Gender figures centrally in Partition narratives – particularly in the slashing of women's wombs, the rapes and abductions, the mass suicides of women, the later efforts to recapture the stolen women, the refusal of many families to accept the "dishonored" women back, and the counter-refusal of many women to return home when given the choice. Manto's "Compassion," a short-short story/poem translated from the Urdu, condenses this matrix of issues with heavy irony:

"Please don't kill my young daughter before my eyes ..."

"Alright, let's do as he says ... Strip her and drag her away ..."

(Manto 118, ellipses in the original)

Irony of a different sort underlies "Exile," a story in Urdu by Jamila Hashmi (1929–1989), a Punjabi writer from Lahore whose first novel, *Talash-e-Baharan/In Search of Spring* won the Adamji Literary Prize. The story's narrator is suffused in longing for her lost brothers, home, and landscape on the other side of the border. Never had she been brought as a bride to her new family's home to be welcomed with rice and corn, her hair anointed with oil. Instead, she was stolen from her family, forced to abandon her religion, and given summarily to the man's mother as her slave. In her fatalism, doing everything she is told, she becomes the model of a dutiful wife and mother. Her husband and children cannot understand why she is so sad. "Can't you ever forget that incident?" her husband asks. "Those days were different. Times have changed" ([Hashmi 61](#)). No, she cannot forget. Memory keeps the wound alive. But the story's final irony resides in her admission that when the soldiers from the other side of the border came looking for abducted women, she hid. "For the first time in my life," she recalls, "my faith was shaken. The city of dreams, which I had built, crumbled into dust and vanished. My life had taken root in Sangraon, and the roots had spread wide and deep. Who wants life to wither and die? After all, every girl had to bid farewell to her parent's house and go to her husband's place" (64). What is the difference, she wonders finally, between abduction and marriage for women? Both involve migration from home tinged with diasporic loss.

Shauna Singh Baldwin, herself a migrant from India to Canada and then the United States, picks up on these gender-inflected ironies in [What the Body Remembers \(2001\)](#), a historical novel set in the Punjab between the 1920s and 1940s. Its narrative is all about borders that both join and separate, borders that form the shifting national imaginary and frontiers of touch that are both tender and violent. The first eight parts of the nine-part novel narrate the gradually increasing exclusive identification with the "quom" or communal group in the decades preceding Independence. The Sikhs play the role of the inbetween people, the ones used by the British to inflame the Muslims and Hindus against each other, and the ones forgotten in Gandhi's compromise with Jinnah's Muslim League, which allowed for the formation of Pakistan. Part 9 narrates Partition's devastating migration of millions in the aftermath of the hastily drawn borders, the parting "gift" of the British. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs – all groups suffered, and all participated in the violence as the body of Mother India was riven.

Touch, physical contact of body to body, is central to this migration narrative. For example, Baldwin highlights the complex play of touch with caste, religion, and migration in foregrounding the story of Roop's friendship with Huma in the village before the girls leave their families, where they are considered mere "guests," to migrate into their "real homes" of their future husbands. Roop is a Sikh, and

her best friend Huma is a Muslim. The girls are inseparable until one day, in the heat of their game, Huma unthinkingly follows Roop into her house, only to be met by shrieks from Roop's aunt: "You shameless girl *Chi!* Dirty girl. Don't you let your shadow come near!" (59). As a combination of Islam and Hinduism, Sikhism does not officially recognize caste, but in reality, the narrator informs us, Sikhs shared with Hindus the belief that the ancestors of Muslims in India were Untouchable converts who opted for Islam with the invasion of the Moguls in the sixteenth century as a way of escaping their outcast status. After Huma's expulsion from the house of her friend, the house must be purified from the results of her touch. Never again do the girls play together. Their migration from their childhood homes into the faraway families of their husbands reinforces a separation that began in the village with the laws of pollution and touch. Their fleeting reunion just before and during the bloody events of Partition emphasizes the borders that sever connections between individuals and communities.

The story of Roop's sister-in-law Kusum highlights the way in which women served as flashpoints for Partition's violence. Married to Roop's brother Jeevan, an officer in the Indian army, Kusum is the perfect Sita, the loving wife and daughter-in-law who does all that she is told and never causes any trouble. She lives in the village where Roop grew up, taking care of her father-in-law and her sons. When their Muslim neighbors begin the rioting attacks on the Sikh and Hindu inhabitants of the village, Papaji tells Kusum to ready herself for his knife. To preserve the family honor, he resolves to behead her, and she readies herself for the touch of the blade that affirms Papaji's love for his family and quom by preventing the rape of a still fertile woman they both assumed to be inevitable.

Baldwin's Partition novel is more complicated, however, than a tale of massive migration and rape as a weapon in the communal violence unleashed by the inept or perhaps deliberately inflammatory British withdrawal from India. For she shows how violation of women's sexual and reproductive body is built into the structure of Undivided India, how the cultural borders between men and women and between first wives and second wives predetermines a series of interlocking partitions: the daughter's partition from her birth family, the wife's partition from her husband, the mother's partition from her children, even the soul's descent into the reviled female body in the first place. The novel's Prologue and Epilogue are dated 1895 and 1965 respectively, that is, in colonial and postcolonial India. They are in the voice of a spirit about to be born into another round of life, into another period of time trapped in the body of a woman: the first is the spirit who becomes Satya, the first wife of the landowning irrigation engineer Sardarji; the second is Satya waiting to be born anew, despairing that "*men have not changed*, her body remembering "*that men who do not welcome girl-babies will not treasure me as I grow to woman*" (471). As she crosses the border into a new body, her fate has not changed in spite of Independence.

In her life as Sardarji's wife, Satya's love and accomplishments pale in the face of her childlessness. Furious with Sardarji's decision to marry again, she retaliates by forcing him to give her his children by Roop. The double marriage involves the violation of the bodies of both wives: Satya, because she is deemed worthless as a barren woman; Roop, because she has no claim on her own children. These violations occur *before* Partition, signaling that the fate of Kusum is not the only violence committed upon the bodies of women. Although Independence does not change women's status within the family, according to the novel, Baldwin shows through the complex border crossings of Satya and Roop that not all women bow down willingly before the knife as Kusum does. Satya and Roop are not only foes in the novel, but increasingly oddly bonded "sisters." Roop figures out how to get her children back, Satya

commits suicide by deliberately contracting TB, and subsequently Satya's forceful personality comes to inhabit Roop, who becomes ever more assertive during the chaos of Partition and eventually the backbone of strength in the family as Sardarji's world collapses around him. Partition, the novel ultimately shows, happened not just in 1947–1948, but exists in multiple levels of human existence: in the soul's migration into material bodies; in women's diasporic existence within the institutions of marriage; in the intersection of geopolitical and familial life; and in the simmering religious and cultural conflicts embedded within communities that appear to be thoroughly integrated.

▶ The West Which Is Not One

While rhetorics of the "new migration" obscure the global significance of Partition and other diasporas entirely outside the West, they also mute the differences among diasporas coming into the West. The past and current migrations into the United States, Canada, Britain, and parts of Europe differ radically. For Britain and some European countries, the migration of millions represents the implosion of former empires and a reversal of migrational direction. Whereas Europe had previously exported millions of its expendable people to settle in conquered lands and run its empires (from the poor and desperate to the educated elite), the post – World War II period brought massive reversals of demographic flow, fueled in part by labor shortages resulting from the war. Independence from the imperial European powers led millions to leave the newly formed and often struggling nation-states for the still dominant economies and presumed freedom of their former colonial rulers. In this context, migration into the West by those outside it has been thoroughly entangled with the complex political, economic, and psychological legacies of colonialism. "We are here, because you were there," a common activist refrain, captures this specific historical legacy ([Chuhan and Jolly](#)). The national imaginaries of European nation-states – based predominantly as they have been on illusions of homogeneity (with the exception of countries like Belgium and Switzerland) – are clashing with new realities: the multiracial, multilinguistic, multicultural, and multireligious nature of their newly constituted societies, with a particularly high percentage of Muslim populations. Nativist, anti-immigration political parties are widespread, gaining significant power by playing a racist and/or pro-Christian card that manipulates popular fears among predominantly white, Christian populations, often in situations with high unemployment and declining opportunities for advancement by the working classes.¹¹

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The Pig Soup movement in France is a case in point. In the fall of 2003, Odile Bonnard, a member of a small far-right nationalist movement called the Identity Bloc and allied with Le Pen's nativist party, organized soup kitchens in Paris that serve a complete French dinner featuring hot soup made with pork to the poor. She called it a "European solidarity feast," and defended its attempt to exclude the Muslims and Jews who don't eat pork by saying, "Other communities don't hesitate to help their own, so why can't we?" ([Smith A3](#)). This "Identity Soup" movement spread to Strasbourg and Nice as well as Belgium. In demonstrations, Bonnard's group chants: "We are all pig eaters! We are all pig eaters!" "Our freedom in France is being threatened," she explains. "If we prefer European civilization and Christian culture, that's our choice" ([Smith A3](#)). A woman who regularly eats at a pig-soup kitchen in Paris said, "At least here there are people who are of the same mind as me The French, and the Europeans in general, roll over

for foreigners, and particularly Islam" ([Smith A3](#)). An online interview with Bonnivard released on January 12, 2009 shows that the movement is still strong, having survived court challenges and operating under the motto "*Aider les Nôtres avant les autres/Help our own before the others*" (Solidarité Des Français). The Pork Soup movement's insistence on pork as French food represents a curious adaptation for nativist purposes of what Sneja Gunew has described as the dominant culture's ambivalent consumption of the ethnic/racial Other through food and the immigrant culture's use of food as "ethnic feast" to claim a distinctive identity ([229](#), [230](#), [233](#)).

The United States and Canada, in contrast, are nations built since the 1600s from succeeding waves of immigrants, alternately resisted and yet sought to build railroads and fill the newly conquered lands, sweatshops, and factories of new world industrialization. Consequently, they have a much longer history of integration, however conflictual it has been. While Canada's "new migration" is linked more directly to competing British and French colonial histories, the United States's "new migration" did not begin until the Immigration Act of 1965 lifted the racially based quota system in place since the Immigration Act of 1924 had slowed documented immigration to a trickle from mostly Britain and northern Europe. In the post-1965 period, rates of immigration into the United States have nearly matched the earlier period of massive immigration, the 1880s–1920s. In contrast to the new nativism of Europe, the rise of nativism in the United States today – the English-only movements, the anti-immigration legislation, the hysteria about the border with Mexico, and so forth – represents the reassertion of a pattern that has been part of the United States for centuries, along with the American penchant for forgetting the compelled migration of African slaves and the conquest of indigenous peoples.¹² The paranoid fear that underlies Huntington's "clash of civilizations" rhetoric is an updated version of the nativist cries to stop the immigration of Asians, as well as the Jews, Italians, Slavs, and other Mediterranean and Eastern Europeans before this flood of "darker races" destroyed the Anglo and Northern European racial heritage of the country. As Matthew Frye Jacobson argues in [Whiteness of a Different Color \(1998\)](#), many groups coming into the United States on earlier waves of immigration were not considered white at first – especially the Irish, Jews, Italians, and Slavs. However, they gradually acquired the privileged status of whiteness in opposition to black, native, and Asian populations, who remained racial others, perpetually marginalized, legally segregated, and not fully "American." The immigrants from the post-1965 wave, in contrast, have become "people of color" rather than becoming "white." Muslims and Arabs in general have been doubly stigmatized in the post-9/11 hysteria in both racial and religious terms. Countering such exclusionist views – then and now – are the rhetorics of American cosmopolitanism and pluralism – *e pluribus unum*, the melting pot, the glorious mosaic, the rainbow, the callaloo, the stir-fry, the quilt, and so forth. The national imaginary of the United States has always contained this contradiction, battled out in the politics of each succeeding generation and wave of immigration.

► Divisions within Diasporas in the West

Not only is the history of diasporic migration into the West heterogeneous, but also diasporic groups in the West are themselves heterogeneous, divisions that the "new migration" rhetoric typically ignores in its emphasis on religion, race, or national origin as *the* defining aspect of a particular diasporic community. I refer particularly to stratifications based on gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, age,

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embodiment, language, and so forth – in short, many of the factors dividing people in their original homelands as they meet up with different forms of these stratifications in the hostland. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah develops the relational and intersectional epistemologies of feminist theory to insist upon what she calls "cartographies of intersectionality," by which she means the necessity of diaspora studies to examine the heterogeneity and multiaxial structures of power within any given diaspora:

All diasporic journeys are composite ... They are embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities: modalities, for example, of gender, 'race', class, religion, language and generation. *As such all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common 'we.'* It is important, therefore, to be attentive to the nature and type of processes in and through which the collective 'we' is constituted. Who is empowered and who is disempowered in a specific construction of the 'we'? What is the relationship of this 'we' to its 'others'? Who are these others?

(184, my emphasis)

The relationship of this "we" to its disempowered "others" in the African diaspora comes sharply into focus in a juxtaposition of *The Family* (1989), by the Nigerian British writer Buchi Emecheta, and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), by the Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat. While both novels detail how central racism and the legacies of slavery and colonialism are for the migrating members of the African diaspora, the novels in juxtaposition show the inaccuracy of conflating all black migrations to the West, even from the West Indies. They also demonstrate the othering of women within the diaspora through acts of violence committed on their bodies by members of their own families. Like the narratives of Manto, Hashmi, and Baldwin, the novels turn on the gendered vulnerability of women within the multiaxial structures of power centered in sexuality and the family. Both Emecheta and Danticat challenge the oversimplification of diasporic longing for the imagined homeland and instead show the divisions *within* the home and the home nation as elements that migrants bring with them to the new land.

Emecheta triangulates the Africa diaspora to emphasize the multiple divisions within it. The novel's predominantly London setting blends the uneducated but ambitious Brillianton family from rural Jamaica with the higher class urban Nigerians (both Ibo and Yoruba) who migrate to London for university education. The plot turns on the cultural chasm between these two groups of the African diaspora, both of whom think the other is "uncivilized" (119–20). The Brillianton's Yoruban/ Nigerian landlord reads a telegram for the illiterate Brilliantons, softening the blow of Sonia's mother's death in Jamaica by telling her only that she is sick, a culturally appropriate lie that leads to disaster for all (119–20). Sonia frantically gathers expensive medicines and all the family's money for a return trip to Jamaica, only to find her mother dead; the shock unhinges her, forcing her to deal with the earlier shock of her emigration and the struggle of life in the unwelcoming racist environment of London. The two-year delay in Sonia's return to her family leads her husband Winston to sexually abuse his daughter Gwendolyn, an act which his Ibo/Nigerian friend attributes to the legacies of slavery (142–43). For Gwendolyn, however, her beloved father's betrayal of her trust repeats an earlier betrayal by her grandmother's friend, Uncle Johnny, who sexually abused her for years after Sonia and Winston left her behind when they went to London. Abuse within the home has traveled with her to her new home in London, to which she had migrated with such hope for safety and a real family, only to find herself in domestic servitude to her

overworked mother's needs and her father's sexual desire.

As the novel's main protagonist, Gwendolyn has experienced the turbulence of multiple homes, homelands, and migrations. Each home becomes the site of displacement and violation – first, her grandmother's dirt-floor home in Jamaica; then, her father's family home in Kingston, where she faces rejection because she (like her father) is too black for her lighter relatives; and finally to London. Pregnant with her father's child, she flees through the hostile streets of London, to find herself institutionalized in a mental asylum. Her friendship with the white boy Emmanuel, himself a Greek immigrant who does not fit in or meet his father's expectations for success, is partially healing. But empowerment comes not through the romance plot, but through the death of her father, a reconciliation of sorts with her mother, learning to read with Emmanuel's help, and the birth of her baby girl, whom she names Iyamide, for its Yoruba meaning: "my mother, my female friend, my female savior, my anything-you-can-think-of-as-nice-in-a-woman's-form" (236). What both Iyamide and Emmanuel signify for Gwendolyn is the potential for integration into London as an immigrant tied culturally to both African and Jamaican roots. In Clifford's terms, she is finally rooted through her routes, her journeys.

Breath, Eyes, Memory seems at first glance to be a typical *Bildungsroman* of immigration, the "coming to America" for the adolescent Sophie, a journey that produces generational strain, conflict with her mother, and the limbo of between worlds existence. A closer look, however, reveals a complex interrogation of home and homeland as overlapping sites for violence against the female body – in both Haiti and the United States. The novel revolves around what Danticat presents as the Haitian custom of "testing" – that is, mothers regularly inserting a finger into the vaginas of their teenage daughters, feeling for the hymen that will insure the family's honor until marriage. Danticat likens the custom to rape by setting up an uncanny parallel between the politics of the Haitian state and the politics of the Haitian home, wherever that home may be.

Sophie's migration to America results in less freedom, not more, especially in the realm of the body – a state rendered all the more difficult because Sophie must piece together the fragments of her mother's story, nightmares, and strange behavior to understand what is happening and to assert her own freedom from the past. Sophie has been happily living in Haiti with her beloved aunt when her mother suddenly insists on her daughter's migration north. Only gradually does she come to learn that her mother got relief from her own mother's nightly testing after she was raped by one of the vicious Ton Ton Macoutes, soldiers of the state in Haiti whose dictator had U.S. support. Half-crazed by nightmares still, her mother repeats on the body of Sophie the invasion of bodily space that produced Sophie in Haiti.

The *Bildung* plot unfolds as Sophie's perpetual flight to escape from her mother, from the Haitian custom of testing, and from the violence of the Haitian state. She flees to Providence with a man of her own choosing, but she cannot escape the effects of violence on her body. With the birth of her daughter, she is desperate to break the cycle of overlapping state, cultural, and family violence. The novel concludes with her trip back to Haiti to bury her mother and confront her grandmother, hoping to find a way out of the maze in which at every turn mothers rape their daughters in the service of men. Whether her hope is fulfilled is left an open question – more open than the ending of *The Family*. Like *What the Body Remembers*, Danticat's novel presents no simple resolution to the problem of violation of the body's borders, particularly the bodies of women. But like Roop's growing assertiveness in the midst of Partition, like Gwendolyn's empowerment in having and naming her daughter differently, Sophie's

reverse migration – her journey home to confront the source of her mother's violence against her daughter – represents the desire to take hold of her own destiny instead of being victimized by it. Danticat, like Emecheta, explodes simple notions of enclave migrant communities who either seek to or resist being integrated into their hostland. The complex story of diasporic incorporation into the United States is thoroughly mediated by the gendered politics of home and homeland in Haiti.¹³

▶ **Transculturation in Diaspora Space**

The discourse of the "new migration" devotes considerable attention to the competing claims to cultural difference and adaptive hybridity in migrant communities. But the focus tends to be on the migrant communities – on how much and in what way they resist assimilation but also adapt to their new environs. In the 1940s the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz coined the term *transculturación* to highlight the mutual hybridities engendered by intercultural contact in the colonial situation ([De Ferrari 12–15](#)). In anthropology and cultural studies, the term *transculturation* develops Ortiz's emphasis on reciprocal transformations to examine the cultural effects of interculturalism on both immigrants and their new hostlands. Immigrants, in short, change the societies into which they migrate as well as being changed by them. Avtar Brah coins her own term, "diaspora space," to name this phenomenon as a space "'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous" ([181](#)).

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Indeed, it is the power of immigrants to change their host societies that Huntington most fears because he wants to retain the purity of the West as a civilization utterly distinct from the rest of the world. In this regard, Huntington revives the debate in the early twentieth century over the melting pot. Israel Zangwill's play, *The Melting Pot* ([1909](#)), introduced a melting-pot metaphor for transculturation into the American idiom. Henry Pratt Fairchild, a leading sociologist and nativist, attacked Zangwill and the metaphor in both [Immigration \(1913\)](#) and [The Melting-Pot Mistake \(1926\)](#): "The traits of foreign nationalities can be neither merged nor interwoven They must be *abandoned* The whole idea of assimilation is that there should be one body, bringing other elements into conformity with its own character, and that body in this particular case of assimilation is and must be America" ([Immigration 430](#)). In his 1914 *Afterward* to his play, Zangwill challenged this concept of assimilation and used the image of the melting pot to assert the cosmopolitan vibrancy of a nation defined through the blend of the many distinct cultures of its immigrants.¹⁴

To explore transculturation as a phenomenon of intercultural mixing that affects all groups in the diaspora space formed by migration, I turn to Leila Aboulela, a writer who migrated from the Sudan to London in the late 1980s, lived in Aberdeen, Scotland, and now lives in Abu Dhabi (see Interview in this issue). Sammar, the protagonist of [The Translator \(1999\)](#), is a woman born in Scotland of Sudanese immigrant parents, who moves back and forth from Scotland to the Sudan and finally marries a white Scottish scholar of Islamic studies after he converts to Islam. As a love story about migration and intercultural courtship, marriage, and conversion, the novel is a subtle rewriting of *Season of Migration to the North* ([1967](#)), the postcolonial classic by fellow Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih, who rewrites

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and provides Aboulela with her novel's epigraph.

From the margins within Britain itself – namely Scotland – Aboulela writes with a sense of her male precursors but rewrites their intercultural tales of horror across the North/South binaries into a tale not of violence but of psychological isolation, love, and spiritual search, a tale of fraught but nonetheless fundamentally peaceful cultural, religious, and erotic engagement with the other, a tale in which religion and religious conversion figure centrally, not as the opposite of modernity but as its companion. Sammar's role as a translator at the University of Aberdeen metaphorizes migration as a form of ongoing cultural translation (see [Papastergiadis 123–45](#)). She loves the movement back and forth between languages and cultures as she translates English into Arabic and Arabic into English. She herself is a figure of both North and South, of fluid migration: at age six, she left the Scotland of her birth for Khartoum, grew up and married her cousin in the Sudan, and followed her husband back to Aberdeen, where he was a medical student until his sudden death interrupts this familiar tale of circular migration. Like Salih's two male protagonists, Sammar returns home to the Sudan, but to Khartoum – the postcolonial metropole, not the seemingly traditional village of Salih's novel. Instead of finding a safe haven, however, she is hounded unmercifully by her mother-in-law, who accuses her of causing the death of her son, Sammar's husband. Homeless in what she thought was her home, Sammar returns to Aberdeen, and lives a lonely life in a Scottish flat where her only pleasure is her job as a translator. No place is home for Sammar; she dwells in displacement in both Scotland and the Sudan, until she falls in love, quite unexpectedly, with Rae, a white Scottish professor of Islamic studies.

Their love story is difficult – filled with misunderstandings – but it is not based on the exoticization of the Other, the erotic underpinnings for both Salih and Conrad. Rather, the problem is first one of communication – how to communicate across the borders of North/South cultural and religious difference, a problem that they act out on the telephone, their primary means of contact and one that maintains Sammar's modesty. But even more centrally, the problem is Rae's continuing objectification of Sammar's cultural difference, specifically her religious belief. His approach to Islam is entirely intellectual and secular, recapitulating an Orientalist stance of superiority toward his object of study. The relationship between the two allegorizes the demand that immigrants give up their original culture and assimilate fully to the modernity of the West. Recognizing that the relationship would be based solely on her accommodation to him and not his to her, Sammar returns to the Sudan, accepting her homelessness at home and living in a state of numbness, unhappily performing the duties of mother and widow in the compound of her joint family. When he appears suddenly in Khartoum, having converted to Islam, she is ecstatic and agrees to marry him. They return together to Aberdeen, each changed by the other. The circular migrations of the novel are linguistic, geographical, psychological, erotic, and spiritual; they produce a hybridization in both characters that is the basis of their love and communication – differences of North and South not erased, but not fixed either. This parable of transculturation turns on the notion that cultural translation must go both ways. The host culture is as much changed by the presence of the migrants as the migrant culture is changed in its new homeland. Religious conversion is paradoxically the sign of a modern transculturation.



Conclusion

"The futures of the United States and of the West," writes Huntington

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"depend upon Americans reaffirming their commitment to Western civilization. Domestically this means rejecting the divisive siren calls of multiculturalism" (*Clash* 307). Those who join in the swelling chorus announcing the clash of civilizations on today's global landscape are misguided, I believe, whatever their particular political viewpoint. As I see it, this Age of (intensified) Migration, shaped profoundly by globalization and the new technologies of travel and communication, has brought about more contact and more integration of worlds, not less; more cultural mimesis and hybridity, not a widening chasm of difference. It has heightened a diasporic consciousness among migrant groups with the increasing deterritorialization and multiply constituted identities of migrant experience. And it has generated both new and old forms of nativism and debates about migrant assimilation/integration. Moreover, I have tried to show that we need to develop greater awareness of the unexamined assumptions that lie beneath the rhetoric of clashing civilizations and the "new migration." To get at the complexity of demographic and cultural flows on today's global landscape, we need to look beyond push/pull models of migration that tend to reinstate the center/periphery, West/Rest binaries of world-systems analysis. Instead, I ask that we recognize the existence of migration entirely outside the so-called West, that we acknowledge the heterogeneity and divisions within diasporic groups in the West (and elsewhere), and that we focus on the mutually transformative effects that migration has on both migrants and their new homelands.

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The diasporic narratives I have invoked – the texts of Hashmi, Baldwin, Emecheta, Danticat, and Aboulela – also highlight how gender – particularly the experience of women – is the flashpoint of complexity, exploding at every step reductionistic readings of the "new migration." Read in juxtaposition, the differently situated narratives of these writers posit the centrality of violence – especially violence against the female body and spirit – as core elements of migration's turbulence. They suggest that the displacement of diaspora begins *before* the journey from home to elsewhere, begins indeed within the home and homeland and travels with the women as they face the difficulties of negotiating between new ways and old ways of living. How fitting that the transnationally popular play *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) by Eve Ensler inspired Sahar Ullah, Zeennat Rahman, and Dan Morrison to create [The Hijabi Monologues \(2006\)](#) in Chicago, which in turn inspired a Danish Muslim version that explores the difficulties of some 80 Muslim women living in Denmark, distilled into 18 monologues that run the gamut from the prejudice faced by Iranian exiles to the anger at women who don the *hijab* to mark their religious difference.¹⁵ Contestations over women's bodies are parables – indeed metonyms – for the contestations over migration itself in the age of the "new migration."

Notes

¹ Huntington first used the phrase in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Clash of Civilizations?" (which also introduced the commonly used phrase "The West and the Rest"); his 1996 book eliminated the question mark. ↗

² See Shamsie on Pakistan and Wright. ↗

³ In the social sciences, see Castles and Miller; Friedman and Randeria; Suárez-Orozco et al.; Vertovec

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and Cohen; Willis and Yeoh. In literary and cultural studies, see Friedman, "Migration" and note 4. I use quotation marks around "new migration" to emphasize its discursive construction. [↑](#)

⁴ See Brettell and Hollifield; Papastergiadis; Meilaender. [↑](#)

⁵ See, for example, Brettell and Hollifield, 1–26; [Brettell, 97–135](#); [Alba and Nee, 35–66](#). [↑](#)

⁶ On American "new migration" narratives, see Heike; Kahn; Bruce King; Russell King et al.; Knippling; Lowe; Mardorossian; Mendoza and Shankar; Muller; Patton and Sánchez-Eppler; Payant and Rose; Simone; and Ty and Goellnicht. On Europe, see Ireland and Proulx; Mani; Ponzanezi and Merolla; Parmar and Somaia-Carten; Seyhan; Seigneurie. On Australia, see Corkhill. [↑](#)

⁷ On the meanings and history of the term *assimilation*, see [Rosaldo, 196–217](#); Kazal. [↑](#)

⁸ See also Social Science Research Council website, "Civil Unrest in the French Suburbs." [↑](#)

⁹ For the related literature of exile, see Aciman; Hanne; Israel; Kaminsky; and Said. [↑](#)

¹⁰ See Bhalla; Kaul; Menon and Bhasin; Pandey; and Saint. [↑](#)

¹¹ Muslims in Germany, brought in as guest workers, do not have the same colonial legacy as the Muslims in Europe (see Mani; Seyhan). [↑](#)

¹² See Behdad's treatment of repressed national memory in *A Forgetful Nation*, esp. 1–22. [↑](#)

¹³ See Danticat's novel [The Dew Breaker \(2004\)](#) for divisions within the Haitian American community based primarily on politics and the legacies of Ton Ton Macoute torture, rather than gender. [↑](#)

¹⁴ Ironically, Zangwill's melting pot metaphor came to signify the very homogenized assimilation he resisted; for discussion of the metaphor and attempts to recuperate it, see Jacoby. [↑](#)

¹⁵ See also Alan Cowell's *New York Times* account of *The Headscarf Monologues* in Copenhagen (A3). Like *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Hijabi Monologues* is an ongoing, fluid performance text using adaptable and interactive storytelling in different locations. [↑](#)

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