

BIRCH ROOTS AND BRICKS: FINDING HOME IN THE PLURALISM OF VOICE
IN MIGRATION NOVELS OF CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Eric Berlatsky, Department of English and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.


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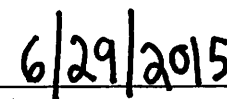

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ABSTRACT

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Through a comparative literary study of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Olga Grjasnova's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, this thesis concludes that although the migrant experience is heterogeneous and that integration is a difficult process that varies through the diversity of experiences, these experiences can be unified by the common way in which migrants learn to "belong" by connecting with voices of the past and present and by building and maintaining relationships that extend beyond the limits of place. In defending this argument, the thesis draws upon themes of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, nationalism and transnationalism, space, globalism, and migration.

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Karim Amir. *I am an Englishman born and bred*, almost.

-From *Buddha of Suburbia*, Hanif Kureishi

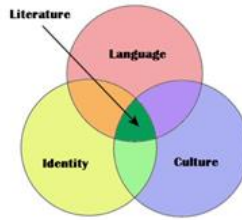
Few other lines of literature stick with me in the same way as Hanif Kureishi's opening line to *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In this statement, Karim claims a national identity in a way that I never could, but most that most people do as part of their tendency to "symboliz[e] parts of the complex of images that are likewise recognizable by others" (Adler). The opposition against an "other" is key to how we identify ourselves, even in a postmodern world. Most famously, Benedict Anderson explains this phenomenon in his book *Imagined Communities*. Part of our attachment to nationality, he says, has to do with the way nationality, "nation-ness," and nationalism command "powerful emotional legitimacy" (4). On the other hand, with the qualifier "almost" Kureishi undermines the security of the character's identity and opens up a literary conversation about identity, culture, language, and nationality, feeding into larger philosophical, theoretical, sociological and political discussions that have occupied me since I have started thinking about the world and the way it "works."

To begin with, language is the result of social relations; it is a social construct and a phenomenon which occurs because humans are social beings. Literature reflects this aspect of language most clearly. By studying German, English and Russian literature *in lingua* and in translation, I learned that to study literature is to study a myriad of factors which make up the human existence and makes literary interpretation far more than an

analysis of words, symbols, and metaphors. During these years, I also discovered that language is a strong unifying factor in culture and nationality, and aided by theorists like Lev Vygotsky, Walter Benjamin, and Noam Chomsky, I found better ways to describe the relationship between language and culture. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was especially important in convincing me that learning another language means learning another way of being. Subsequently, Benjamin's famous statement "the limits of my language are the limits of my world" meant that if I could only speak German or English, I would only know the German or English "world."

The Hypothesis, developed by socio-linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, is a theory of language relativity which supposes that language affects a person's perception of the external world. With language, we can enter an interactional space whereby language becomes an abstract system. Our ability to talk about language presupposes that it is concrete, but one must "focus on language as a set of symbolic resources that enter the constitution of social fabric and the individual representation of actual or possible world" (Duranti 3). Language is in constant flux based on relationships.

Therefore, language and culture are bound closely together. Different languages exist, not just because of the different morphemes, lexemes, and phonemes which make up a sentence, but because each group who uses the sentence is different. Also, since an utterance is intimately linked to the identity of the speaker, one has to consider the individual's relationship with his/her "group." Since literature is perhaps the best way to express identity, it will reflect the language and culture which make up that identity. Thus, I argue that one should understand literature at the intersection of language, culture, and identity:



(designed by D. Trotter)

On the other hand, postcolonial and poststructuralist theorists remind one that one must also learn to respect the possibilities within Benjamin's "limits," because the possibilities within a language are endless. Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Homi Bhabha, and Guattari Chakravorty Spivak help explain that there are thousands of overlapping voices in language, power structures that control what I can or cannot have access to, heterogeneity in its use, and that even the silences need to be examined for what is left unsaid. Thus, language is in a constant state of flux based on inter- and intralingual relationships.

When people explain why they continue their education beyond their compulsory education or desire to find better employment opportunities, they most often evoke the desire to understand how the world is organized. Those who chose to study literature usually recognize literature as a way of organizing the world, and they want to better understand how this is done by examining the transformations and travels of literary genres and texts across time. Yet the majority of literature students focus their studies on literature produced by a particular nation. By doing so, they obscure the influences and intersections between groups and what happens as literary texts and genres cross geo-political space. For me, a single language and national tradition are not enough to understand how the world is organized in literature. Like Paul James, I believe the

concept of globalization extends beyond the economic movement of capitalism and that global forces always have and will affect local relations. Because I see cultural difference and diversity as the rule in talking about literature and not the exception, I believe that a more successful understanding of how the world is organized calls for the comparative literary scope of study.

In this thinking, I not only align myself with postcolonial and cultural theorists, but also with theories about the migrant experience. Literary theorist Homi Bhabha explains in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) that he sees the postmodern ‘project’ as an attempt to explain the “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie” through historical/geographical conflict/contact (Bhabha 246). Bhabha outlines that theory has gone through several phases of poststructuralist discourse and that twenty years ago, postcolonialism, Marxist, and feminist studies were the leading fields. However, for Bhabha, postcolonial discourse needed to be primarily concerned with “widely scattered historical contingencies” (246). I believe that this is still the case, but that a further distinction must be made in consideration of contemporary literary movements. Literary theorist Søren Frank describes these in his book *Migration and Literature* (2008). “The growing number of authors belonging to two or more countries imposes upon us the task of clarifying the thematic and formal distinctiveness of migrant literature vis-a-vis nonmigrant literature” (Frank 2). One should recognize in contemporary times that our nations are not just defined by our borders, but by those who step over these borders, and I think our literatures reflect that. That is why I chose to study migration literature.¹

¹ Even though the term “migration literature” can be ascribed to literature by migrants as well as about them, in this thesis, I focus on migration literature about the migrant experience, “emphasizing [...] intratextual features such as content and form as well as extratextual forces such as social processes” (Frank 3).

In his 1959 essay “Literature and Exile,” Harry Levin makes the historical claim that the writer in exile is in a privileged position to witness contemporary human experience and to describe it. The extent of the truth of this statement has to do with how much access the writer actually has to human experience and whether the writer’s persona experience is truly all-encompassing enough to say that s/he has really witnessed human experience, and witnessed it better than others. More recently Frank² extends this privileged position to contemporary migrant writers who are in a similar position as exiles during the 20th century. A lot of the migrant writer’s privilege has to do with his/her experiences of pluralism, fragmentation, and displacement that represent the description of the broader experiences in the postmodern existence.

Jean-Francois Lyotard describes postmodernity as an age of heterogeneity. In his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard famously defines the postmodern as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (31). He criticizes national history for acting as a metanarrative in which the actions of a group of people are totalized or justified as contributing to some collective growth. Instead, people must accept that our states cannot be explained through one metanarrative, but through many particular narratives. ‘Being’ can only be defined by fragmentation and pluralism. Thus, if literature’s aim is to reflect reality,³ postmodern literature must describe fragmentation and pluralism.

² Frank provides contemporary theorists with some of the most convincing arguments for looking at migration and migration literature as defining states and representations of the 21st century.

³ There is an emphasis in Western literature to be a plausible representation or portrayal of human feelings and understandings. It is the constant walk of a line between truth and untruth/lie. A lot of the question of authenticity is bound with the oldest questions of literature, the extent to which they “accurately” portray the world around us. Mimesis, one of the earliest classifications for representation in Western literature, implies a mirroring, a copy. In this sense, copying is not a negative thing, since it is the only possibility when the very “real” things we touch and see are already copies. Even Plato, who criticizes literature as a copy of a copy in his Republic, acknowledges the value of literature despite its failure to be the “idea”

The migration novel is capable of capturing heterogeneity and pluralism, especially since doing so requires heterogeneous language. I think the form of the novel and the migrant's background in several languages allows for him/her to emphasize the role and status of such language. The novel is traditionally considered a literary form that allows for the use of many different styles, perspectives, and people's voices, both in dialogue or in monologue. Brit-Asian author and literary theorist Salman Rushdie describes the novel and how it "has always been about the way in which different languages, values, and narratives quarrel" (*Imaginary Homelands* 420). In his book *The English Novel*, Walter Allen introduces Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a work "that ha[s] the quality of novels as we know them today," even if it does not have the form (Allen 22). Chaucer's innovative use of colloquial language and different registers invokes this association and Jesse Matz reminds us in his book *The Modern Novel* that, "the novel has thrived by throwing different styles of expression together. High styles and low, big talk and small, native and foreign voices have come together within the novel" (Matz 59). In short, as Matz states, the novel traditionally "shows us language breaking up. What we might have presumed to be a single thing - the language shared by people of the same nation and culture - emerges as something plural, and discordantly so" (Matz 60). One can locate Frank's, Rushdie's, Allen's and Matz's arguments for the novel as stage for pluralistic language in Mikhail Bakhtin's famous theories of the novel.

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is remembered as an important Russian literary critic, essayist, and theorist. He was primarily interested in the relationships between

(only if that which is copied were good, moral deeds by good, moral men). The value of a work since then has often been bound to the extent to which the representation was "true," or most like the "reality" it is meant to represent.

language, popular culture, and the history of the novel as a literary genre. In his theories, Bakhtin touched on linguistics, psychology, theology, sociology, and poetics. His works are influenced by Marxist and Formalist thought and not only do his theories remain alive through the aforementioned theorists, he anticipated the concerns of theorists like Jacques Derrida, if not directly impacting them.

Although one does not normally consider Bakhtin as a staple of traditional postcolonial theory (likely because his work was not known to the West or translated into English until the 1970s), it is vital to consider his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia when discussing the heterogeneity of language and discourse. R.B. Kerhsner, a James Joyce scholar and Bakhtin defendant, summarizes heteroglossia as “a conflicting multiplicity of languages” and dialogism as:

the necessary mode of knowledge in such a world, a form of relationship between or among difference languages that, like dialects, defines a sort of knowledge. Because for Bakhtin consciousness is always language, and this unavoidably ideological, the linked processes of perception and interaction with the human world are always dialogical. (Kershner 16)

Kershner draws these definitions, as I do, from Bakhtin’s essays in translator Michael Holquist’s arrangement *The Dialogic Imagination* - primarily the essay “Discourse in the Novel.” In these essays, Bakhtin discusses dialogism and the complex nature of European literature in light of its many languages and contexts. As David Lodge, another Bakhtin scholar, explains, Bakhtin set himself apart from Russian Formalists (even if he is often associated with them) through his “alternative linguistics of language as speech (parole): language not as system, but as social activity, ‘dialogue’”

(Lodge 2). According to Bakhtin, an utterance “participates in [...] ‘unitary language’ ...and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia...” (Bakhtin 272). While people create parole - individual, subjective utterances - they are still included in a larger discourse. Bakhtin primarily locates the novel as the genre in which this complex relationship successfully plays out, and he believes that “[d]iscourse in the novel is structured on an uninterrupted mutual interaction with the discourse of life” (Bakhtin 383).

Bakhtin sees these individual, subjective utterances (often the quoted, verbal speech of characters) as being doubly-oriented. Not only does the utterance enter into dialogue with the author’s discourse when it is represented and in all the other utterances by other characters within the texts, *it also* participates with all other discourses outside the text. However, Bakhtin emphasizes in his theories that none of the discourses are granted primacy. It stands to reason that this trend of non-dominance would be favorably considered by the postcolonial theorists of the 1970s and 80s who rediscovered Bakhtin.

Theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in particular can appreciate the idea of discourses in equal dialogue, but she is also one of the most outspoken about denying its possibility. Spivak acknowledges that “the networks of power/desire/interest are [...] heterogeneous,” but that they are “so heterogeneous” that “their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive” (Spivak 66). According to Spivak, discourse is closely tied to interests, and as long as interests are controlled by relations between desire, power, and subjectivity, discourses will never be equal. She locates the conflict of the “self” vs. “other” as inherent in discourse and only considers the utterance of the individual as participating in the “ancient subterfuge” to implicitly define “the family

and other tongue as the ground level where culture and convention seem nature's own way of organizing 'her' own subversion" (Spivak 74). Even though Bhabha articulates similar theories about the self and other, he creates a bridge back to Bakhtin in his considerations of something that can arise from negotiating this conflict: the "intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (Bhabha 55). This is part of what he terms the "third Space" and through this term he evokes the geo-political concept to discuss cultural difference. I evoke this understanding when I state that the migrant experience relies on a relationship to space. Most obviously, the migrant's mere existence in a space marks it one of cultural difference and the migrant's opposition to the space s/he occupies is another important theme in migration literature.

Migrants have always had trouble with both space and place. In leaving their places of origin, they become displaced. Nico Israel wrote in his study of Conrad, Adorno, and Rushdie in *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*, "displacement begs the questions of emplacement" (15). When we speak of immigrant or exophonic writers, we usually attempt to recognize where they have come from and where they are now. Before determining emplacement, one must determine what is meant by "place."

Our ideas of place as fixed and non-interchangeable with another space came from the Greeks. Theorist and geographer John Agnew helps understand contemporary understandings of the terms and that ultimately, space is nowhere and everywhere; mentioning the word draws everything and nothing to mind. However, place usually has some kind of authority. That is, although home is a space unique to the associations an individual makes with it, place, such as the address "52 NW 23rd Street" is specific. In the 17th century, the term place (*chora*) developed to mean a rank - a temporary ordering,

or a position - such as in a social order. Yet because of this, places can always change when the relations between these positions change. Agnew explains the continued primacy of places by defining them as “milieux that exercise a mediating role on physical, social, and economic processes and thus affect how such processes operate” (Agnew). Of course, this includes the phenomenological understanding of places as distinctive coming together in space. Now, institutions of a place define that place. These institutions may be formal and informal: clubs, leagues, personal family, etc. and they participate in physical, social and economic processes. We see this in one way as when a church becomes a synagogue, and then a mosque, or the way that churches are being renovated into hotels or bars. The geo-political move to draw borders marks the extent of power of these institutions.

Bhabha has us ask where one draws the line between languages, cultures, disciplines, or people (85). As I mentioned earlier in my exploration of language, language use depends on shifting ways of being among different groups of people. Like place, it is relationally determined. In trying to understand this, one can see why migrants, who challenge these relationships in both instances, are key in recognizing the make-up of these relationships. In exploring sites in an advanced mobility across borders, migrants simultaneously render these borders obsolete. This could result in, as Paul Jay terms in his book *Global Matters* (2010) the “transnational turn in literary studies” (4). Jay tells us that we need to “turn our attention away from a simple preoccupation with how national literatures work in relation to historically homogenous cultures and toward an examination of how postnational literatures are instrumental in the formation of subjectivity in deterritorialized and diasporic contexts” (qt. in Matz 172). His assertion is

that through the novel we can imagine our lives beyond territories and go postnational. I wonder if we can.

In summary thus far, I noted the primacy of the migrant experience in postmodern, postcolonial literature and located this in the migrant's ability to recognize the "human condition in modernity," one of "*terra infirma* where the ground constantly trembles beneath our feet" (Frank 27). Also, I have argued that the migrant is particularly privileged to create this art that is "detached from any kind of cosmic integration" (27). This lack of a totalizing or universal integration is strongly related to arguments about globalism and transnationalism vs. multiculturalism within nationalism. That is, the migrant's experience, especially if s/he participates in diaspora,⁴ challenges the notions of nationalism and provides an example of functional transnationalism. At the same time, migrants confirm the pull of nation-building in their tendency, if not desire, to create "home" and integrate and/or assimilate into their new countries.

These tendencies fall into the two currents of discussing migration literature. On the one hand, stories of migration are described in terms of crossing borders or the elucidation of hybridity between two or more cultures. However, the opposite trend has been to characterize literature as transnational. This shifts literature from being nationally representative, as if migration is still written from within some sort of national borders, to being something that can be seen as representative and accessible to all nations.

Often, people talk of a borderless world as "globalist" or "cosmopolitan." Hence, philosophers like Diogenes in the 3rd century B.C. would answer the question "What

⁴ For this thesis, I consider the use of the word "diaspora" extended over time from its classical reference to the Jewish people and explained Rogers Brubaker. Its conceptual use focusses on how its participants are "firmly rooted in a conceptual 'homeland'" (2). This means that there is some idea of a starting point from which these people traveled as well as a cohesive community formed at their destination.

countryman he was” with “a citizen of the world” (Laërtius 240-1). However, as theorists like Susie O'Brian and Imre Szeman point out: “discussions of globalism and culture rarely deal with literature” (qt. in Matz 171). According to O'Brian and Szeman, globalism is too western. “Transnationalism” can be used as an alternative to “globalism” since globalism, while focusing on economic mobility, also often has the negative reputation of being “a spectacle of instantaneous electronic financial transfers, the deprivations of free-market capitalism, the homogenization of culture, and the expansion of Western, by which is usually meant American, political hegemony” (Gunn qt. in Matz 170). “Transnationalism,” on the other hand, refers more to the social shifts that challenged conventional boundaries of identities and cultures. It became recognized as a term after the post-war migration wave, when the tendency to describe economic and political refugees, exiles, and immigrants as moving from “second” and “third world” nations to “first world,” or industrially advanced states seemed too categorical. Instead, spaces needed to be defined independently of the countries' economies.

Difficulty with distinctions between nations relates strongly to what Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities*. According to Anderson, nations are cultural constructs (like language and place) designed by groups of people to help distinguish them from others. “Nation-states were constructed as classes and elite strata, striving to maintain or contend for state power, popularized memories of a shared past and used this historical narrative to authenticate and validate a commonality of purpose and national interests” (Anderson 51). However, when people begin to recognize the state of our “communities” as being in dialogue with others, as Bakhtin encouraged, where purposes and interests can be respected or affirmed, transnationalism becomes possible. At least,

one can argue this is what founders of the European Union believed. One can see this in their motto “*In varietate unitas!*”⁵ On the other hand, this same EU struggles to find a balance between supporting diversity and open borders while protecting national interests. In the EU States, one sees simultaneous counter movements against the EU’s policies to blur the lines between “citizen” and “foreigner.”

How borders are determined and whether they should be rigid or porous are the subject of countless political and social debates. In his essay on diaspora, Rogers Brubaker dedicates some space to challenging our notion of globalism and the valid counter movements against it. He describes trends of states “gain[ing] rather than los[ing] the capacity to monitor and control the movement of people by deploying increasingly sophisticated technologies of identification and control including citizenships, passports, visas, surveillance, integrated databases and biometric devices” (Brubaker 9). He refers to the infamously iconized “shock” of 9/11 and how border and explaining identity have only become more rigid since this event. Rather than migration becoming easier, as has become the accepted way of talking about it, “the world's poor who seek work or refuge in prosperous and peaceful countries encounter a tighter mesh of state regulation and have fewer opportunities for migration to prosperous and peaceful countries than they had a century ago” (Brubaker 9). Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton also assert that “[w]e are witnessing the simultaneous growth of globalizing processes and the preeminence of exclusive, bounded, essentialized nationalism” (Schiller et al. 52). They state that “the ‘age of transnationalism’ is [also] a time of continuing and even

⁵ “Unity in Diversity” is the English version of the EU motto, which exists in 24 other languages. In a rather Bakhtinian move, all 25 language versions are recognized together as the motto, performing heteroglossia and transnationalism with the motto and attempts to carry out the motto.

heightening nation-state building processes” (59). These two processes are happening simultaneously. Thus, while migrants account for many of the changes that make transnationalism possible, they also are most restricted when nations feel that their securities are threatened. This only points out one of the main challenges migrants face when trying to find a new home.

As I have laid the foundation to argue, what happens on the political and social level will affect and reflect the linguistic level. Both Anderson and Jay recognize the effect language has on perpetuating the idea of nation and community. Using the example of the status of Flemish language in Belgium, poet Carolina Bergvall also reminds us that nations can and will be divided along language lines. Mary Louise Pratt points out no matter how many boundaries are crossed, languages “as code and competence assume a unified and homogeneous social world” (Pratt 527). No matter how globalized the world becomes, literature will still be written in the language of that nation and somehow preserve the idea of national heritage and nation.

However, at the same time, language has no borders in the sense that children can grow up speaking a language that few people outside the immediate family share within a 3,000 mile radius. Still, they speak a different language than their neighbors or friends and make a difference between their language and their friends’, or how their way of being sometimes works better in a particular situation than in another. Migrants will always have “an acute sensibility toward language and an awareness of the world's high degree of constructedness” (Frank 20) that allows them to, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari say, “mov[e] beyond familiar territories, explor[e] unfamiliar localities, and challeng[e] the ideologies by which and through which our subjectivities are constructed”

(Radia 12). Since language and nation are intertwined, they will continue to challenge the ideas of national heritage and nation.

The nature of the migration, whether it leads to pluralist ethnocentrism or the idea of a cosmopolitan universalism, distinguishes whether the relationships within the group are called multicultural or transcultural (Jay 11). The expression of these relationships in literature and how individuals are depicted reflect our experiences of cultural interaction. Specifically, looking at discourse and keeping Bakhtin's theories in mind, one can see whether the society reflected in literature works in multicultural dynamics or transcultural ones. It is one thing to say that multiple languages are spoken by a multicultural group of people (EU), a different thing to say that one language is shared by a group of transnational people (English), and even more different to say that many languages are shared by a group of transnational people (ideal). I think that the migration novel will represent discourse in variations that express differences of cultural interaction, integration, and levels of nationalism.

It is within these premises of comparative literature, migration literature, postmodernism and language in the postmodern, migration novel that I complete a comparative study of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Olga Grjasnova's⁶ *Der Russe ist einer der Birken liebt*⁷ (2012). I am heavily influenced by my U.S. American education, but I am located firmly in a European context that is just as rigidly European

⁶ The name Grjasnova, transcribed from the original Azerbaijani (which in turn came from Russian) is written with a "j" and a "w" in German. In English, the "j" is usually transcribed in English with a "y" and the "w" with a "v." In English texts, the name appears with only the "w" replaced with a "v." The name is pronounced grjæəs'navə.

⁷ The English translation of the novel is *All Russians Love Birch Trees*. I refer to the German title throughout this thesis, and as *Birken* for brevity. In this thesis, I will provide all the English translations for German terms and quotes. These translations are my own (literary, faithful) translation and will sometimes be found in the interpretation if not in the footnotes.

(that is to say, not at all) as the heritage and ethnicities reflected in its citizens. I write about England and Germany, but also draw in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Armenia, and India. I utilize postcolonial, Russian Formalist, structuralist and deconstructionist theories as seem appropriate in the particular aspect I am discussing. Primarily, I rely on cultural studies theories in trying to articulate how I see the authors of these two novels participate in a larger discussion of what transnationalism means and the extent to which it is possible.

Brick Lane describes the move of a young Bangladeshi woman from a rural village to London, England after an arranged marriage. After initially knowing little English and nothing of English life, Nazneen develops into an independent individual who chooses to stay in England rather than return to Bangladesh. The second novel, *Birken* describes a young German-Azerbaijani woman with Jewish heritage who comes to Germany when she is eleven. During the course of the novel, Maria (Mascha) Kogan ends up in Israel, but she also chooses to return to Germany when the choice is presented. In *Brick Lane*, racism and Islam-phobia are stronger issues while in *Birken* war and political unrest are more foregrounded. Both authors describe “east meets west” encounters, but Nazneen of *Brick Lane* is an Asian “easterner,” while Mascha of *Birken* is an eastern European “easterner.” However, both novels describe multiple phases of migration and interactions with other migrants, and it is these interactions in the respective countries, described for these countries in their national languages, that justify comparing them. In particular, the depictions of the characters’ respective changes in language and discourse, as indicative of their experiences as immigrants, seem a strong point of comparison for these two novels.

Despite the differences amongst these types of exile and migration, it seems that the most common trait for migrant authors is a multiplicity of discourse within the dialogue of the text. This consideration of voices seems to extend beyond typical considerations of fabula, syuzhet, aesthetics and language. Their created worlds are composed of several types of dialogue, both inner and external, that the writer is exposed to every day. These writers seem to realize the possibilities of identity presentation in putting the multiple voices around and within them into dialogue in their works. Both novels feature a story-line of a woman with *migrationshintergrund* trying to find her voice. Voice is usually closely intertwined with identity, and a novel that explores the formation of voice will also show culture's influences. In looking at these influences, I hope to better understand the way novels from these contexts will reflect the level of integration and/or transnationalism possible in these contexts. Particularly, I hope to better understand nationalism and transnationalism in the German and English context.

Immigration and colonization define British history, affecting its culture and perception, but it is not until 2001 through 2011 that huge demographic shifts happen. The percentage in foreign-born citizens rose from 8-12% in those ten years ("A Summary History of Immigration to Britain"). Similar demographic shifts are occurring in Germany, which made political changes facilitating the process for foreigners to enter the country in the 1940s and 50s. Recently citizenship laws were updated to make obtaining citizenship as a second or third generation immigrant easier. The way the people of each nation accept or reject immigrants or engage in intercultural activity is constantly in flux, yet on the whole both have accepted themselves as *Einwanderungsländer*, or immigrant countries.

Both countries experienced challenges with discrimination and prejudice against ethnic groups, but since many of Germany's immigrants come from Turkey or Eastern Europe, with even a minority of these immigrants retaining German heritage from before World Wars I and II, racial differences are not made as often as ethnic ones. England's immigration history is more complicated as many of its immigrants come from Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and former African colonies. Thus, immigrants in England reflect more diverse races and ethnicities. Their status as "immigrants" is also more complicated, since while a large number of German immigrants came as "guest workers," called upon for employment and only expected to stay temporarily, most British immigrants are actually former nationals, or members of the British Empire. These migrants were established Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC) under the 1948 British Nationality Act and allowed to enter and leave the UK as national citizens. This lasted until 1971 legislation limited immigration. For several years after that, only British passport holders born overseas with a work permit *and* a parent or grandparent that had been born in the UK were freely admitted to the country. The 1971 Immigration Act arose from political and social pressures to respond to the rise of racial violence and prejudice since 1948 and is considered by many to be racist. In fact, race relations are a topic of ever-present concern in British media and politics. Of course, Germany has and continues to have similar concerns. However, its infamous history in regards to racial and ethnic politics causes policies and general attitude in society and the media to reflect different approaches.

However, more recently, Islamophobia has become an issue in both countries. Through many Southeast Asian migrants in Britain and many Turkish, Lebanese, and

Arabic migrants in Germany, a growing minority of the populations practice Islam. Of course, as was recently pointed out in the German media, less than 1000 people (including Germans without *migrationshintergrund*) are active in the Islamic fundamentalist scene (“BKA zählt...”). Similar statistics are proven in the United Kingdom. In spite of the relatively low threat, fear of Islamism and hate-crimes are concerns in both nations.

Besides racism and Islamphobia, most recently, the high volume of refugees entering both countries have called for overhaul in immigration reform. Germany, which currently officially accepts 29% of the world’s refugees, is especially affected (Thunert). To put this in perspective, political scientist Martin Thunert informs us that France, Sweden, and Great Britain accept less than 10%. Great Britain accepts 7%.⁸ Mascha and her family in *Birken* reflect this aspect of Germany to some extent, and their connection to Frankfurt am Main affirms the city as a space for intercultural relations outside of the novel (Thunert).⁹

In short, the two novels I examine for my thesis came out of these two different, though in many ways similar, contexts of migration. It quickly becomes clear while reading different kinds of migrant literature that the experience of migration varies across individual circumstances. Not only does the story of an immigrant coming from Azerbaijan to Germany differ from a Bangladeshi woman coming to England, but the story of one immigrant coming from Azerbaijan to Germany will be different than another Azerbaijani immigrant’s story of how s/he comes to Germany. A male’s

⁸ These numbers do not include the illegal or undocumented refugees to these countries.

⁹ According to EU law, refugees must seek asylum in the first “safe” country they reach. If refugees come by car or train, they will travel through many safe countries before they reach Germany, the Netherlands, or France. Thus, the airport is important

migration will differ from a female one and an educated man or woman will have a different experience than an uneducated one. This all seems obvious after it is already said, yet these differences (and others) significantly complicate the common summary of the “sense of rootlessness” and the “search for identity” which can result from “displacement and cultural diversity.” Not all migrants feel rootless and not all of them have a search for identity. The extent to which they do depends on the individual, but also on the level of integration and transnationalism possible in their situation.

Through a comparative literary study of *Brick Lane* and *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, this thesis concludes that although the migrant experience is heterogeneous and that integration is a difficult process that varies through the diversity of experiences, these experiences can be unified by the common way in which migrants learn to “belong” by connecting with voices of the past and present and by building and maintaining relationships that extend beyond the limits of place.

CHAPTER ONE

A LANE OF VOICES: INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION IN DIASPORIC SPACE

In 2003, Monica Ali was voted by *Granta* to the list of Best of Young British Novelists on the basis of an unpublished manuscript. When her book *Brick Lane* (2003) was actually published, it immediately garnered praise from different corners of the literary and social market for “deftly portray[ing] the immigrant experience with empathy and joy” (“*Brick Lane*”). On the other hand, it also incited controversy when the Sylhet population of London accused Ali of failing to portray the space accurately, depicting the actual location upon which the novel is based, Brick Lane, Tower Hamlets, East End London, and its occupants in an unfavorable light.¹⁰ Often, however, these critics fail to realize that the Brick Lane in the novel is an imaginary space. As John McLeod points out in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (2009), spaces like London do “not factually denote a given place or mark a stable location on a map” (McLeod 7). They emerge “at the intersection of the concrete and the noumenal, between the material conditions of metropolitan life and the imaginative representations made of it” (7). Both the praise and the criticism of *Brick Lane* recognize the primacy of place in their understanding of the novel. In short, London is an imagined space granted significance

¹⁰ Chanu is particularly unflattering in his depictions of the Sylhets: “You see [...] most of our people here are Sylhetis. They all stick together because they come from the same district. They know each other from the villages, and they come to Tower Hamlets and they think they are back in the village. [...] And when they jump ship and scuttle over here, then in a sense they are home again. And you see, to a white-person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan. But these people are peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition’ “(28).

and value based on one's orientation towards it and the others living in it. London often considers itself in terms of migration and sees itself as multiracial and multicultural. "The ancestry and present existence of both London and Londoners was most accurately conceived of in terms of multicultural diversity" (6). Thus, the space is largely determined by how these diverse people interact with one another. The overall impact of *Brick Lane* comes from its representation of the power of this space for transformation and the novel suggests that it is the heterogeneity of ideas in post-colonial spaces that create new, strong identities with powerful, persuasive individual voices. To some degree, the multiculturalism within these spaces is what leads to productive integration of migrants and the novel shows that diasporic London can provide the temporary space within which to transform. Migrants emerge from within this space before they are ready to cross the 'real' borders to England. Ultimately, the novel contributes to the conversation of integration and multiculturalism in London and perhaps, by extension, the rest of England.

"This is England, you can do whatever you like" (492). These lines, the novel's closing statement, become complicated by contemporary events in the United Kingdom, issues often commented on by Ali herself. In their desire to promote peaceful multicultural, multi-ethnic societies in England and the European Union, politicians face increasing pressure from theorists and the populace to provide better protection for migrants and ethnic minorities who face discrimination in various forms and types (Szabados 26). Often, this discrimination is done on a racial basis. More recently, discrimination against Islam has also been an issue. In 2006, the British government passed the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, legislation designed to prevent hate crimes.

Ali spoke out *against* this act because she saw it as censorship and an infringement on one's right to express oneself merely because someone *might* be offended. Even though her book *Brick Lane* discusses one individual's experience in London, England, Ali portrays the broader forms of free expression and in one woman's exploration of them, the possibility of multicultural spaces. As the novel shows, multicultural, multi-ethnic spaces are possible because people are allowed to speak their minds. Thus, as long as people tolerate each other's habits, mind-sets, and opinions, England can be a positive place where one is free to do "whatever [one] like[s]." On the other hand, as Benedict Anderson points out, people rarely deal with all the people of their country at once. The nation is only a "cultural artefact," something we have come to believe "in the modern world [that] everyone can, should, will 'have'" (Anderson 5). Thus, England cannot and should not be generalized like it is. Exploring *Brick Lane* helps us determine the extent and limits of our conception of England.

Ali's portrayal of successful immigrant integration in her main character, Nazneen, is a hopeful contribution to those who point out how far England has come since Enoch Powell's infamous "rivers of blood" (1968) speech that warned against the "unprecedented danger" of immigration (Julios 91), or a tacitly-racist 1972 Immigration Act allowing internationals with English heritage to enter the country, but making it difficult for "other" heritages. As Christina Julios writes in *Contemporary British Identity* (2008), "[h]ow societies deal with diversity can be said to reflect their particular perceptions of themselves, their national identity and that of their citizens" (140). If Ali's opinion is representative of many others, then England feels secure in its "Englishness" despite its cultural and ethnic diversity. On the other hand, the "individual right to be

different” is a constant threat against “the collective duty to integrate” (140). *Brick Lane* is the depiction of one woman finding her voice amidst many others. The result is a successful multicultural vision that extends beyond the imaginary space of the novel. However, the vision remains rather national in a world moving towards transnationalism and postculturalism. The potentials for these in England are both affirmed and denied in *Brick Lane*.

Part One: Individual in Plurality

What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge. So that when, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (Ali 16)

Ali’s prolepsis at the beginning of her novel fairly summarizes the events. The story has been told frequently since the beginning of industrialism: a young woman comes from a situation of suppression and bound by honor, tradition and religion to a Western metropolis, gains certain freedoms, independence, maybe even experiences “true” love, and transforms into a figure adapted to her new situation. Throughout this transformation she remains true to herself and always knows what she wants. The female immigrant’s novel following this paradigm is the 21st Century’s “Ugly Duckling” parable. However, *Brick Lane* leaves this status when Ali takes the Nazneen out of her

story and out of everyone's story, and performs the work needed to emphasize the individuality of Nazneen's situation, and remind readers that the situation of any immigrant will be individual.

Usually, a *Bildungsroman* type story of the personal transformation of one character such as Herman Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel* or James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* will reveal this transformation to the reader at the end. Stephen Dedalus has his final epiphany in the last pages and Hans Giebernath discovers the possibilities for life outside academia after experiencing many other things first. Their characters develop out of the diegesis. Nazneen spends most of the novel finding her place in the diegesis to return to the prolepsis. In this way, she represents the task of every migrant who comes to a new place: s/he must find his/her place in the new space. *Brick Lane* opens with the story of a woman connected so strongly to the narrative of her birth that she is double bound by the extradiegetic and intradiegetic discourse. Then, when the transformation summary comes a few pages into the opening, framing the character's transformation as a surprise for the character as much as for the reader, the reader is persuasively drawn into the fiction of the character's life as much as into the discourse of the story. Thus, through the movement out of this fiction and the character's transformation out of her formative discourse, by the time Ali's title character Nazneen declares "I don't feel like a story either," the narrative has developed to give this line its double meaning (458). Nazneen is tired of being bound by the discourse of her origin and any other discourse. Her exposure to other voices and other experiences within and without her new home slowly changes Nazneen and reminds the reader of the transformative power of multicultural spaces for migrants.

Near the end of *Brick Lane*, the reader sees the title character with four choices (five if one considers suicide as a choice, which is debatably an option): Nazneen, who has come to London through an arranged marriage and been there 16 years, can return to Bangladesh with her husband, return to Bangladesh and leave her husband,¹¹ stay in London with her lover and daughters, or leave her lover but stay in London with her daughters. At the beginning of the novel, these choices seem impossible. The only choice Nazneen can consider is doing what her husband wants, which is to return to Bangladesh. However, four-fifths of the way through the novel, Nazneen is a character who not only makes her own choices, but is able to enunciate these choices: “*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one*” (Ali 405). Nazneen decides to stay in London, independent and separated from her lover and her husband.

Still, there remains the issue that although Nazneen becomes a figure of feminist emancipation and independence through her choice, this representation seems too positive and feeds into hegemonic Western ideals. It is as if the transformation could not have been possible if it were not for the enlightenment of London’s tolerance, individualism, and rationality. On the other hand, the nuances of Nazneen’s experiences would not have been possible somewhere else. As Martina Deny writes in her chapter for *Lost in the Postmodern Metropolis*, Nazneen’s transformation happens in London „auf Grund der pluralistischen und hektischen Alltagsrealitaet des post-imperialen Londons,, (Deny 222).¹² This supports Georg Simmel, who in 1903 claimed that metropolitan life meant “an intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external stimuli” (qt. in McLeod 325). Interpersonal relationships form differently as

¹¹ though her sister Hasina's example shows what would happen if she did that

¹² “Because of the pluralistic and hectic every-day reality of post-imperial London”

people learn to rely on new modes of contact. Regardless of Nazneen's initial seclusion and the fact that she barely leaves her Tower Hamlets flat, the novel shows that the nature of the city makes pluralistic contact inevitable.

Nazneen's moments of discontent and crisis begin in London. At the same time, it is clear that the novel is carefully constructed to not perpetuate the "decolonizing nationalism's typical alignment of women with a pure and stable precolonial past" (Mardorossian 30). Through a close reading of the flashbacks and the way they are interspersed into Nazneen's daily life in London, one can see that this "stable precolonial past" is not so stable at all and a process that already began in her village in Bangladesh is brought to completion in London. On a superficial level, one can consider Nazneen's use of metaphors to see the way Nazneen interacts with her home discourse, but how this also begins to change. As some critics have pointed out, part of what lends a sense of "exoticism" to this novel is that many of the metaphors related something happening to Nazneen in Tower Hamlets to something that would have happened/happened at home (Mettler 165). The first part of the novel is filled with metaphors and similes, such as "a horn blared like an ancient muessin, ululating painfully, stretching his vocal cors to the limit" (Ali 54). These metaphors are later juxtaposed to clichéd examples from the English language, especially when Nazneen consummates her love with Karim: "into her recklessness she drew him like a moth to a flame" (299). The use of timeworn English metaphors implies a sort of taking on of the British discourse inherent in the language and learning to relate to the new space with the new language. This simple language metaphor shows a shift in the symbolic level through which Nazneen operates, and is indicative of one of the changes she undergoes as a migrant.

Brick Lane reminds us that successful migration requires change on the part of the migrant. Politicians promote this change in efforts to have immigrants integrate into their country and cause fewer tensions between foreigners and “natives.” They enforce policies to stimulate job opportunities and English as a foreign language acquisition. However, Ali prompts the reader to recognize that integration is catalyzed by the people with whom one comes in contact. The novel *Brick Lane* suggests that powerful, persuasive individual voices come from the individual’s ability to assert him/herself against the heteroglossia of post-colonial space. This reflects how an immigrant becomes able to operate in and thrive in new contemporary spaces. Whether the experience is always positive can be explored by looking at other works of migratio literature.

Part Two: Brick Lane as contact zone

At one point in the novel, Chanu says to Nazneen: “[A]nyway, if you were in Bangladesh, you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons” (Ali 45). In *Brick Lane*, London is immediately presented as a place of open horizons and implicitly, growth. Of course, the presentation does not equal reality for Nazneen right away, but as the novel continues, it becomes clear that coming to London “broaden[ed her] horizons.” When she first arrives in Tower Hamlets in 1985, Nazneen is young, a new bride, and strongly informed by an ethical framework based on fatalism, traditionalism, and holding on strongly to the customs of her native Bengali province. Nazneen begins as the “unspoilt girl [...] [f]rom the village” with “[e]yes [that] are a bit too close together” (23). Her status is a “better than” one, in which *being* is simply better than *not* being, and she initially accepts her role as “any wife is better than no wife” (23). However, despite remaining a woman about whom a conductor or anyone

could know everything “[a]t a half-glance” for a large part of the novel (285), she begins to resist these conceptions as she notices the other options available in life. These options are presented as she starts breaking down her ethical framework, often with the help of others. Brick Lane is more than just a street in London, it is a space where transformations of cultural identity have already occurred, but where the citizens are still strongly linked to their families, relatives, and spaces back home.

Nazneen’s immigrant experience is related to the Bengali diaspora, mass migration for more secure living situation and better job opportunities. Although Nazneen is not one of the thousands of Bangladeshi to leave the country due to civil war in Bangladesh, which eventually became recognized as the Bangladesh Liberation War after East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan in 1971, she is connected to diaspora through her husband. While Chanu is also not directly connected to the diasporic movement (according to the narrated sequence of events, Chanu had already been in England for 16 years before marrying Nazneen and therefore left for England already in 1969), he experienced the mass migration of thousands of Bangladeshi people to England in the 1970s. Chanu consistently juxtaposes himself to these thousands of immigrants throughout the course of the novel, and often they came from the Sylhet region in northeastern Bangladesh. Many of these immigrants settled in the east London borough of Tower Hamlets, and it is here that the novel takes place. *Brick Lane* represents Bengali diaspora and cultural interactions that work to develop the migrant voice.

Tower Hamlets is largely settled by Bangladeshi immigrants and their families. As a recent census points out, only ten percent of those living in the area are Indian, and few others are ethnically English. Yet the immigrants all experience varying levels of

integration and it is still a space in which many different cultures come together as people enter and leave Tower Hamlets into the rest of London. No one is left unaffected by intercultural interaction. One could even go so far as to label the space as a “contact zone,” or a “hybrid space,” to use the terms of Mary Louise Pratt and Homi Bhabha. In her famous 1990 keynote address to the MLA Literacy Conference about “The Art of the Contact Zone,” Pratt defines the contact zone as a social space where “peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (605). We see such contact during the Tower Hamlets “leaflet wars” between the fundamental nationalist Bengal Tigers and the English right-wing opposition group in Nazneen’s neighborhood, the Lion Hearts. Both groups struggle to protect their homogeneous identities when neither is actually able to claim one.¹³ Eventually, as these struggles come to a head on Brick Lane, one sees the physical enactment of ideological tensions as Brick Lane becomes a metonymy for Nazneen. Brick Lane as a contact zone and *Brick Lane* as an “autoethnographic text” allows for engagement with what “constitut[es] a marginalized group’s point of entry into the dominant circuit [...] of [British] print culture” (520). If we consider Nazneen’s individual voice and its eventual entry into the dominant discourses around her, then the beginnings of the novel’s relationship to nationalism can be established. However, first one must understand how Nazneen’s voice emerges.

Part Three: Nazneen and Bakhtin- Verbal contact zones

¹³ The members of the Bengal group have a Multicultural Liaison member who says Christian prayers when he feels his life is in danger, and the Lion Hearts claim to protect a reality of women owning their bodies when none of them are actually represented in the novel.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin terms a different kind of “contact zone” (decades before Pratt) in his theories of the novel (1918). According to Bakhtin, “zones of contact” are where the “struggles against various kinds and degrees of authority” take place (345). Bakhtin states that these struggles take place between authoritative and persuasive discourses. According to Bakhtin, authoritative discourse is language, voice, or perspective that has already been “acknowledged in the past” (342). Its semantic structure is “static” and “dead” and it permits no “play with the context framing it, no “spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it” (“Discourse” 581). It is usually opposed to the individual’s subjective, individual voice that Bakhtin terms “persuasive” discourse.

However, just as Bhabha encourages readers to look beyond the “self/other” dichotomy in identity,¹⁴ Bakhtin encourages one to look beyond this dichotomy in discourse. He believes that “everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole- there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others” (*Dialogic* 426). In dialogism one has a constant idea of one’s discourse in space of others, and this discourse is always changing based on how it is seen against the discourse of others.

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other

¹⁴ For more on this, see Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* 40-65

people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (*Dialogic* 294)

When writers and composition theorists discuss "voice" or "discourse," they usually refer to James Paul Gee's famous description of it as "a way of being in the world" (Gee 526). Grounded in linguistic, theoretical, and psychological theory, Gee believes that each person has access to multiple discourses and in order to receive the social, economic, and political goods she desires, that person must acquire the discourse controlled by those groups (these are secondary or authoritative discourses). Gee describes the tension which may occur when "languages from different discourses transfer into, interfere with, and otherwise influence each other" and how eventually this tension eases out into the person's ability to acquire the discourse and become a successful member of society (533). Bakhtin would call these tensions easing out the way in which "[o]ne's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of another's discourse" ("Discourse" 584). If anything, *Brick Lane* is an illumination of the way someone "liberates" herself "from the authority of another's discourse." I argue that such liberation also requires productive "contact zones," as we see in the novel.

Bhabha helps explain the way diasporic spaces can become "contact zones" and why *Brick Lane*'s action can only occur in Tower Hamlets, London. Perhaps it is because "[r]esistance develops within the interstices of culture" (Rajan) and works that "focus on those movements or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" reflect resistance and contact (Bhabha 2). Bhabha distinguishes the possibilities when cultures are thought about and when they are enunciated. These

possibilities seem validated in the London of *Brick Lane* in some respects, and invalidated in others.

If culture as epistemology focuses on function and intention, then culture as an enunciation focuses on signification and institutionalization; if the epistemological tends towards a *reflection* of its empirical referent or object, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to reinscribe and relocate the political claim to cultural priority and hierarchy [...] in the social institution of the signifying activity. The epistemological is locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality. The enunciative is a more dialogic process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations- subverting the rationales of the hegemonic moments and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation. (Bhabha 177-78)

Taking the novel as a representation of the enunciation of individual voice, Bhabha and Bakhtin set up the focus on the institutionalization of culture through epistemological forces. These forces are what make up the hermeneutic circle that “tend[s] towards” the totality Bhabha describes. The novel presents the “dialogic process” that attempts to “track displacements and realignments” and locate them at hybrid sites. These sites are the gap in Bakhtin’s process of the individual's becoming “an ideological process [...] characterized precisely by a sharp gap between [the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness]” (“Discourse” 580). Thus, by looking at the process of Nazneen’s individual becoming as stimulated by the discourse of those she comes into contact with, the representation of Nazneen’s liberation becomes one of the

strongest justifications possible for looking at London as heterotopic space and one of the “hybrid sites of cultural negotiation.”

Part Four: Words

Language holds a conspicuous position in *Brick Lane*. Ali highlights Nazneen’s acknowledgement of the variety of languages and the shifts of language use.¹⁵ In speaking about Dr. Azad, the narrator notes that “[h]is voice was soft, the words opened like flowers on his lips, and yet they had authority. Chanu spoke loudly. He weighed his words like gold and threw them about like a fool” (67). Not only do we see how others command language, we learn how Nazneen gains use of the English language and how her relationship to the nation of the language she speaks develops. When Nazneen learns new English words, she “stores” them for use in speaking to people like the “tattoo lady” who lives in an apartment opposite hers. It is significant that Nazneen wants these words to communicate, since it shows how knowing more words can help develop a way of being with which to interact with others better.

When she first comes to England, “Nazneen could say two things in English: sorry and thank you” (19). This lack of language meant that she would spend another day alone, and she reflects that “she could spend another day alone. It was only another day” (19). Words like “sorry” and “thank you” seem to characterize Nazneen as submissive or that she is ill-equipped to handle situations in which she takes authority. In fact, they belong to a discourse of exclusion to be used, for example, when accidentally

¹⁵ We see that Nazneen is sensitive to the possibility of languages when she considers the language of the Qur'an: “How would it sound in Arabic? More lovely even than Bengali, she supposed, for those were the actual words of God” (20). Nazneen is aware of how the meaning of something changes when in a different language. She is also apt to describe words as objects. “Mostly, he talked. Pub, pub, pub. Nazneen turned the word over in her mind. Another drop of English that she knew” (37).

coming into a situation that one immediately needs to leave again. We see this when Nazneen leaves her apartment for the first time alone and apologizes to a stranger for not understanding him. However, just as this moment seems like a retreat, it also reflects growing agency as Nazneen learns new words. “[I]n spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid [...] [s]he had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged” (Ali 61). This may reflect finding individual discourse (as Bakhtin would say) and parallels Nazneen finding other ways to interact in this space. As Nazneen becomes exposed to western culture and experiences in England, she learns new words. Slowly, words like “hospital and “ice-skating” interrupt her original strain of discourse to reflect increasingly wide spheres of being.

The motif of ice-skating in particular creates a metaphor for the migrant experience. Ice-skating is a form of expression; it is an artistic form of movement in which the female is often considered superior to the male performer in popular consciousness (we see this in ballet as well). The movement across the ice in rhythm and with supreme control of movement is akin to language use in an unpredictable world where one is constantly in danger of transgressing boundaries. The first time Nazneen sees it on the television in her flat, the experience shifts her from her previous state so that she is “no longer a collection of the hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties and selfish wants that made her” (41). This looks like magic to Nazneen. The word “ice-skating” first appears fairly early in the novel on page 36. Nazneen sees two figures on television and the situation is described as capturing Nazneen as the “screen [holds] her” and she tries to understand what they are doing. In her “mis-understanding” of the actions of the two ice-skaters, she creates her own understanding. It is one of the first

instances in which we see the formation of her individual voice. But then, when she wants to verbalize their act, she has difficulty.

“‘What is this called?’ Said Nazneen.

Chanu glanced at the screen. ‘Ice skating,’ he said, in English.

‘Ice e-skating’ said Nazneen.

‘Ice skating,’ said Chanu.

‘Ice e-skating.’

‘No, no. No *e*. Ice skating. Try it again.’

Nazneen hesitated” (37).

In this situation, the pronunciation of the word, rather than its role as motif, takes the forefront.

“Go on!”

“Ice es-kating,” she said, with deliberation.

Chanu smiled. “Don't worry about it. It's a common problem for Bengalis.

Two consonants together causes a difficulty. [sic]I have conquered this issue after a long time. But you are unlikely to need these words in any case.”

“I would like to learn some English,” said Nazneen.

Chanu puffed his cheeks and spat the air out in a *fluff*. “It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway?” He looked at his book and

Nazneen watched the screen. (37)

Underneath the structural level of the word we see in this passage all the major motifs that are returned to throughout the novel: television, words, language, desire, and

ice skating. In fact, learning English and ice-skating are usually in close proximity in the novel. When one is mentioned, the other usually appears as well. The final question “Where’s the need anyway?” brought up in this situation introduces one of the last authoritative discourse Nazneen must assert herself against: that of her husband. As Nazneen slowly moves through other layers of discourse, her relationship to the words “ice skating” and the experience it portrays changes.

The next mention of “ice skating” is when Nazneen sees it in a magazine during one of her moments of inactivity (93). The sexual expression in the action is even more pronounced here in the description of the woman's thigh: “She felt the rush of wind on her cheeks, and the muscles in her thighs flexing. The ice smelled of limes. The cold air made her flush with warmth from deep down” (93). The succeeding instance highlights even more desire in the language and a bit of stream of consciousness. Nazneen imagines ice-skating in her dream about Karim, “she moved without weight and there was someone at her side, her hand in another, and through her half-closed lashes she saw him. The fine gold chain around his neck” (220). The connection of ice, limes, and desire is developed into its own discourse by the time Nazneen says about Karim that he “smelled of limes” (449).¹⁶

Finally, by the end of the novel, the motif is carried through to satisfy the interpretation of the ice-skating rink that Nazneen is brought to by Razia, Shahana and Bibi. Nazneen’s new “way of being” becomes solidified in the image of the ice. Salman Rushdie writes in “Step Across this Line” that “[w]e become the frontiers we cross” (410). This rink serves as a metaphor for Nazneen. It symbolizes all the things Nazneen

¹⁶ Karim’s connection to limes deserves further exploration. The lime is a typical cultured fruit from the middle East and through this connection one can extend Karim’s role as the hybrid migrant.

has gone through and all the ways, and people, she has learned to communicate with without losing touch of who she is and what she wanted. “She looked at the ice and slowly it revealed itself. The criss-cross patterns of a thousand surface scars, the colours that shifted and changed in the lights, the unchanging nature of what lay beneath” (492). True, Nazneen has surface scars from the struggle in the “contact zone,” but she can have desire and multiplicity “colours that shift [...] and change” and still remain the individual she was. What changes is that she learns to express this subjectivity better.

Many would look at these passages and see Nazneen’s exposure to western culture and the English language as formative for her transformation. This is true, to some degree. However, something to consider is that Nazneen is exposed to these things from within the space of her apartment. She does not go to English school, like her friend Razia, nor does she have contact with people outside of the Bangladeshi migrant community. Even her lover Karim is an important, recognized member of this community, despite his hybrid identity.¹⁷ Instead, Nazneen experiences these changes internally. The limitations of Nazneen’s space in her transformation parallel the binds on her “way of being.”

Part Five: Brick-by-brick, moving through the layers of discourse

¹⁷ Karim is significant in helping Nazneen understand a migrant experience that results in and out of hybridity. “He knew about the world and his place in the world. That was how she liked to remember him. It was never so. Apart from where it mattered [important point, here], in her head. He was who he was. Question and answer. The same as her. Maybe not even that. Karim had never even been to Bangladesh. Nazneen felt a stab of pity. Karim was born a foreigner. When he spoke in Bengali, he stammered. Why had it puzzled her? She only saw what she wanted to see” (Ali 449). Via Karim, Nazneen’s realization of the complicated possibilities in integration prepare her for a difficult process.

When Nazneen first arrives in England, she is in a dream world: “those first few days when her head was still spinning and the days were all dreams and the real life came to her only at night” (28). Nazneen’s marked disassociation and displacement from the world around her reflects the incompatibility of her former way of being and her current one. This is characteristic of many people who first come to a new country and experience culture shock. Initially, Nazneen’s inner experiences consist of the memories of the etiquette and the discourse of her life in Bangladesh. When she thinks of her marriage, she thinks of the successful match in economic terms: “Nobody in Gouripur had anything like it. It made her proud. Her father was the second wealthiest man in the village and never had anything like it. He made a good marriage for her” (21). “She had everything here. All these beautiful things” (21). When Nazneen receives guests, Nazneen is bound by codes of hospitality: “They talked on and Nazneen made more tea and answered some queries about herself and about her husband and wondered all the while about supper and the impossibility of mentioning anything to her guests, who must be made welcome” (29). The notion that mentioning anything to her guests was “impossible” and that the guests “must” be made welcome are two indications of the world and rules Nazneen lives by. The discourses are made even more authoritative because Nazneen does not know that they order her life. They performed the work of guiding her daily actions even if “[s]he did not know what the words meant” (21).

At the same time, however, the reader is made aware of Nazneen's sharp mind and initial movements away from this discourse. She challenges conceptions of respectability and the ways in which people are allowed to move in this new space. “Nazneen wondered about Mrs. Islam. If she knew everybody’s business then she must

mix with everybody, peasant or not. And still she was respectable” (29). Bound in authoritative discourse, Nazneen should not have questioned Mrs. Islam’s respectability. However, doing so raises the tensions necessary for the eruption of her personal voice.

Nazneen’s meetings with Razia and Mrs. Islam help Nazneen discover discourses of power.¹⁸ Her relationship with Karim helps her discover new agency and gives her a reason to learn and practice a discourse of desire. These interactions change her. Finally, her bound husband, static because of his attachment to the dozens of authoritative voices found in books, institutions, and education, propels Nazneen forward to step across her boundaries and declare her own discourse.¹⁹ Until Nazneen recognizes, acknowledges, and challenges these discourses as authoritative, she remains in an observation phase-seeing, but not recognizing the binds to her way of being. Through the conflict introduced by the question of returning to Bangladesh, Nazneen is forced by the figures around her to challenge and then enunciate her way of being. She does this in respect to them, but also to the authoritative discourse of her mother whose motto is “Just wait and see” (Ali 46).

Nazneen’s mother (Rupban or Amma) shapes and perpetuates Nazneen’s conceptions of fate. The discourse of fate is the first authoritative discourse Nazneen

¹⁸ Mrs. Islam first introduces Nazneen to the discourse of woman’s power, and indirectly the discourse of desire. Through the story of Shenaz, the “disgraced” woman, Mrs. Islam reminds Nazneen that women’s bodies are their greatest commodity: “One labour we perform, and if we withdraw it that will be a discomfort only for the men” (65). “A man cannot live without water. He cannot live without it, but he can bear the thought of no water. A man can live without sex. He can live without it, but he cannot bear the thought of no sex” (65). Mrs. Islam tells Nazneen to help Nazneen realize that she has some power: “If you think you are powerless, then you are. Everything is within you, where God put it” (65).

¹⁹ For the sake of space and brevity, I am not able to include outlines of these figures and their specific presentation of discourse and influence. I chose to work specifically with Hasina and Rupban and the discourse of fate because this presents the strongest, most powerful discourse that Nazneen needs to overcome. But one should remember, as Bakhtin wrote, that “we cannot, when studying the various forms for transmitting another’s speech, treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framing” (579). All the characters play their part in developing Nazneen’s voice.

learns and one of the final discourses she must challenge in defence of her own, persuasive voice. Throughout Nazneen's adult life, the story of how her mother dies²⁰ haunts Nazneen in much the same way as the story of Nazneen's birth in "How You Were Left To Your Fate." Neither story really makes sense, but Nazneen stays and listens to both. She does not doubt the logic of the story of her birth until she thinks about her mother's fate, and soon thereafter that of her sister who runs away in a "love marriage." There is a trauma in the death of her mother that begins to unravel Nazneen's hold on this discourse of fate. Yet while she remains in Bangladesh, the stories of her aunt and Nazneen's loyalty to the discourse she was born out of keep the discourse authoritative. Once away from Bangladesh and in her arranged marriage, Nazneen becomes challenged by the compatibility of this discourse with London life. It no longer seems persuasive in Nazneen's own personal situation- a woman and immigrant abroad. Once in London, she is relocated from the space of her previous discourse and able to examine from the outside the validity of the discourse that had so long been her way of being.

The letters Nazneen and her sister, Hasina, exchange represent a physical manifestation of the distance Nazneen has crossed. Through their letters, Hasina and Nazneen cooperate in dialogue with one another and set up the dialogism of the discussion of the question of fate. Hasina's parallel situation of migration (intra-national) helps her to challenge Nazneen to further question fate and proposes "choice" as an alternative. There are more ways than just the one present in the one discourse. Without articulating it, Hasina sees her mother's suicide as a warning against an authoritative

²⁰ A few pages into the novel the reader finds out that Rupban took her own life, or had an accident that can be interpreted as such: "I don't know why those spears were in the store and wedged like that" and "Your mother was wearing her best sari [...] It's strange. It wasn't a special day, after all" (46). Later, this interpretation is confirmed.

discourse and an encouragement to escape it. This enables her to run away for a “love marriage” and test her fate. Hasina relates the story of Rupban’s death in her own discourse when she describes the suicide as a result of not being about to see another way: “She see no other way [sic]” (436).²¹ She reminds Nazneen about hope, stating at the end of the novel that she feels that she always has a choice, she “see[s] more clear the ways” (436). Hasina articulates a more productive discourse than determinism, and her accented articulation presents a clue for power of another’s individual discourse. Hasina’s words are more powerful than anything Nazneen could have heard from an Englishman and they remind the reader that changes in discourse often occur from contact within previous contexts, not necessarily new ones.

We see this by the end of the novel when Nazneen realizes her mother was not always right. To open up different “ways,” Nazneen needs to open herself up to the heteroglossia of other voices. To do this, she first needs to cast off her mother’s prescription of her actions; thus, during the novel’s moments of crisis, Nazneen places herself in relation to the authoritative discourse of her mother. She asserts her will through her choices to raise her children against the ethical framework of God and fate. At one drastic moment, Nazneen is challenged by the memory of her mother to admit that she “failed” her children (Raqib, specifically) in challenging God and fate. Her mother demands Nazneen to ‘Say it. Say it’ (432). In saying “no” to her mother, Nazneen says “no” to the framework. She refuses, three times, “No.” With this, one can see that

²¹ According to Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak,” suicide could be an articulation of rebellion in the only discourse available to a subaltern figure (102-104). One could argue that suicide was the only way Rupban could articulate her subjective self.

Nazneen refuses to use the words of her mother. This is her moment of asserting her own discourse against the others.

Throughout the rest of the novel, the word “no” becomes a speech act in the same way as “*ṭalāq*.” In the *ṭalāq* divorce, the husband pronounces the phrase “I divorce you” (in Arabic- ‘*ṭalāq*’) to his wife, three times. Usually, there is an intervening period between the “*ṭalāq*”s, and so the relationship between divorce and *Rupban* is not immediately clear. However, in saying “no” to two other people, the implication of the word becomes more powerful. “No” is both an expression of denial and denies something just shown in the text in its expression. In expressing the word, it becomes a speech act through which Nazneen exercises some degree of power or agency. The various ways in which she expresses “no” show the different levels of success she has in asserting her will and the level of comfort she attains for being on her own. Thus, Nazneen accomplishes a divorce of sorts from her mother, but she also, by the end, functionally divorces her husband Chanu. However, Nazneen accomplishes this emancipated act without being exposed to it in other ways. She is not inspired to do so by anyone within her surroundings and the only model she has is her sister who comes from the very context Nazneen “left.” Thus, unlike the assumed Western interpretation, the Western space is not what changes Nazneen even if she changes in this space.

One can explain the way Nazneen initiates an individual discourse through the process modeled by Bakhtin. It begins with “free stylistic variation on another’s discourse” when Nazneen “conducts experiments and gets solutions in the language of another’s discourse” (Bakhtin 583). We see this when the family is waiting to be ready for departure and Nazneen has to reassure her daughters and starts off with words that

remind the reader of her mother's words: "Sometimes things don't turn out so badly. Sometimes the bad things that you think are coming don't come at all. You just have to wait and see" (Ali 457). When Nazneen tells her daughter to be patient and have faith, she echoes the demand from her mother to "wait and see." However, this is only because Nazneen does not want her daughters to know that she has decided to stay in England until she has told Chanu. While still bound to her husband and her way of being in this space, Nazneen relies on her old form of discourse. She is not ready to step beyond her familiar bounds.

However, the way Nazneen says it is already a new expression in the way that Bakhtin describes it, a chemical union. According to Bakhtin, "another's discourse, when introduced into a speech context, enters the speech that frames it not in a mechanical bond but in a chemical union" ("Discourse" 579). A chemical reaction is a process that always results in the conversion of chemicals. The molecular structure of the substances involved changes. However, as Bakhtin points out, "[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated –overpopulated with the intentions of others" (*Dialogic* 294). He reminds us that the word "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent" (294). In comparing Nazneen's and Rupban's discourse, one can see that Nazneen assimilates the words, but the motivation is different. The words for Nazneen have become temporary placeholders.

Eventually, Nazneen casts off the words altogether. In the last words before what could be considered an epilogue to the novel - the "March 2002" heading - Nazneen tries

to reassure her daughters. The words begin similarly, but they change while she is saying them:

“Just wait and--“ Nazneen interrupted herself. She took more rice. She took more dal. She offered more to her daughters. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow, or later, and we’ll decide what to do. Staying or going, it’s up to us three.” (480)

Nazneen preserves the idea of patience. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow, or later.” However, she adds the notion of choice, or agency, creating a new accent for the request to her daughters. She is able to speak from a discourse created by the intersection of her authoritative discourse with London experience.

Part Six: The Significance of Space

We see the link between space and discourse most clearly around this time when Ali describes the space Nazneen creates for herself.

At times she found this dead space and rested within it. But then she was caught in a net of dreams and dragged up to the surface, and the sun hit the water and sliced her eyes and she saw everything in pieces as if in a smashed mirror, and she heard everything at once - the girls laughing, her son crying, Chanu humming, Dr. Azad talking, Karim groaning, Amma wailing - each sound as clear as a lone sitar string on a hot and drowsy afternoon. (Ali 324)

After the first “no” that Nazneen asserts against the memory of her mother, the reader sees her experience something that can be described as a mental breakdown. In this state, she is unable to perform even the simplest movements to take care of herself, yet the physical inertia belies the transformation within her. The way in which she hears all the voices around her, all together but each one individually recognized, parallel one of the

first steps of moving out of this discourse. In experiencing the different voices, Nazneen acknowledges them and the reader can see how “when someone else’s ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up” (“Discourse” 582).

The time Nazneen has to internally use the word “no” against her mother prepares her for the time she has to say it to Mrs. Islam (444). When it comes to Karim, Nazneen has more difficulty expressing the denial, or she creates a stylistic variation as the context expects, thus showing another side of her agency in the discourse: “‘We can’t get married.’ ‘Not ever.’ ‘I don’t want to marry you’ (451). On the other hand, as the example of “Just wait and see” explains, the final ‘No’ reveals the level of comfort and identity Nazneen found with the use of the word. She was able to “breathe” it, and this reflects the full control she has of using the word. It accomplishes its purpose without hurting Chanu more than necessary. It also extends beyond the word into the sensation itself, no longer merely denying but molded fully to context it was needed for.

In saying “no” to Mrs. Islam, Nazneen rejects the way the older lady takes advantage of the community structure taken from Bangladesh. In saying “no” to Karim, who represents a hybrid character lost in between English and Bangladeshi heritage, Nazneen denies a liaison with a figure who lives on the border of the diasporic community. In saying “No” to Chanu, Nazneen rejects returning to Bangladesh with her husband. The final “no” brings full-circle the process ignited by coming to London: finding place. Since arriving, Nazneen had felt temporarily placed, constantly remembering the space she had left and trying to feel placed. Most of the time, it because

she does not do enough to place herself. She looks at her house and sees what she should have done.

She should have bought plants and tended and loved them. All those years ago she should have bought seeds. She should have sewn new covers for the sofa and the armchairs. She should have thrown away the wardrobe, or at least painted it. She should have plastered the wall and painted that too. She should have put Chanu's certificates on the wall. She had left everything undone. For so many years, all the permanent fixtures of her life had felt so temporary. (342)

But she sees these things after being challenged to consider the alternative. At one point, Chanu asserts that "place is immaterial. [One] will make [one's] own place within the place" (371). Nazneen then asks herself "would we sit like this in Dhaka? In a room like this? *And would we sit like this and would it feel just like the same and would everything be the same but just in a different place?*" (372). In considering a move "back," Nazneen is forced to consider her family member's different relationships to the "here." This transition allows her to formulate the last "no" and confirms what she learned through the process of transition:

"No," she breathed. [...] "I can't go with you," she said.

"I can't stay," said Chanu, and they clung to each other in a sadness that went beyond words and tears, beyond that place, those causes and consequences, and became a part of their breath, their marrow, to travel with them from now to wherever they went. (Ali 478)

Ultimately, through the "no" that divorced her from one way of being, Nazneen moves into a space beyond place. At the same time, she affirms the primacy of place as she

transforms into the “ice-rink” at the end of the novel which promises a renewed finding of place.

You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved. (87)

At the end, Nazneen decides to stay with these bricks. Her ambiguous placement reflects the migrant situation that is so difficult to determinately describe. Thus, Ali constructs our awareness of temporarily and our relationships with space. In Nazneen's memories of her past, she is not only recalling an earlier consciousness who has not yet experienced the same things as the Nazneen doing the remembering, but also the space she filled while there. Her relationship to this space as she remembers it is part of what makes up Nazneen's identity. Ali encourages the reader to acknowledge that this is a prime factor in the migrant experience. Unlike other people who retain a sense of place in reconciling their past and present selves, migrants are always in the process of reconciling multiple dimensions.

Brick Lane is the delineated space defined by the title of the novel, but this is not where Nazneen lives. We get an idea that she does not live far from there, and we know she is in Tower Hamlets, but the complex where she lives is left to the imagination. Her building and a sketch of the surrounding buildings are given, but the only thing described with some measure of exactitude is the apartment itself, a space Nazneen never treats as permanent. However, in describing Nazneen's reaction to the physical materials that fill up the space in the novel, Ali uses materialism, bringing space back from the bare

essentials of thought and language, as they occur in her memories, to her physical space. at the same time most of the action of *Brick Lane* happens in the apartment as a way of focusing on the interplay of relationships. The apartment becomes, as Joseph Frank writes in *The Idea of Spatial Form*, an “immobilized time-area” (qt. in Matz 69).

By the end of *Brick Lane*, the reader sees Nazneen independently leave her apartment and enter the city on two separate occasions (Nazneen argues that visiting Razia does not count, as she remains on the estate). Most of the novel’s events happen in Nazneen and Chanu’s apartment. However, this makes the times Nazneen does leave to enter the space of London more significant. Brick Lane is the street in which she orients herself on both occasions.

Part Seven: Nationals

Brick Lane is a strictly defined place, but it is a moving, changing space. It is an imaginary space. This conception runs parallel with the idea of the homeland, which, as Salman Rushdie claims, is also always imaginary. It exists differently in memory than it does in the present, because all spaces are constantly changing. Rushdie writes “It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity” (“Imaginary Homelands” 12). We see this in *Brick Lane* best through the letter exchange of Hasina and Nazneen and the contrast they present to Chanu’s imagined Bangladesh. To Chanu, Dhaka is not liberal or enlightened. It is a place where a woman suffers if she refuses to sell her child or wants to work, unsupported by men. At the same time, in referring to Dhaka, London is also challenged, experiencing its own changes. Nazneen incites this parallel when she says “They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug” (59). Henceforth, Dhaka and

London are diametrically opposed as the spaces in which each sister moves, threatens to enter, but ultimately remains confined to, though the conception of being “confined” is challenged by the ways in which both figures move in both cities.

Movements of diaspora complicate the ideas of space and place. People who experience diaspora often hesitate to erase the lines between places of movement and places of home. Rogers Brubaker points out in his essay “The ‘diaspora’ Diaspora,” that people in diaspora are usually associated with the preoccupation with return both physically and in the imagination, relationships to other communities within the diaspora, and lack of integration. Chanu’s thinking, and thinking like his, preserves traditions of nationalism. There is a “tendency of today’s transmigrants to maintain, build, and reinforce multiple lineages with their countries of origin” (Schiller et al. 52). This leads Benedict Anderson to call it “long-distance nationalism.” We see this clearly in the Bangladeshi population in Tower Hamlets in *Brick Lane*. These people like Chanu or Razia’s husband believe in remaining connected to their homeland/villages by sending money to build up mosques, schools, and houses. While they do not perform the other kind of nationalism that Brubaker describes, such as support of “terrorist or ultra-nationalist movements” they do maintain “emotional and social ties with a homeland” (2). Yet we also see the potential for “terrorist or ultra-nationalist movements” in the Bengal Tigers, a group Karim leads and Nazneen becomes involved in.

On the other hand, “[a]lthough boundary-maintenance and the preservation of identity are ordinarily emphasized, a strong counter-current emphasizes hybridity, fluidity, creolization and syncretism” (Brubaker 6). Thus, diaspora is closely linked with the concepts of transnationalism even if it is, simultaneously, “long-distance

nationalism.” “Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders” (Schiller 48). In remaining connected to multiple locations, diasporic individuals resist things like assimilation and transculturation.

Pratt reminds us of the dangers in transculturation, a term coined by Fernando Ortiz often involving “overly reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation” (Pratt 612). One must also remember the dangers of assuming that Nazneen is a figure of the subaltern. After all, her father is the second wealthiest man in their village and Nazneen comes from a relatively stable background. Also, while Nazneen is uneducated, she is not unintelligent nor illiterate. We know this from the complexity of the associations she makes and her contemplations on the language, religion, and the world. Guattari Chakravorty Spivak would say it is dangerous anyway to assume that her “construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such [authenticity]” because it may “cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (Spivak 90). Yet Nazneen succeeds in navigating London society and culture, through being there but also because in Brick Lane, London, the marginal group holds the agency and London remains mutable. At the end of the novel, Nazneen negotiates her way of being with the action of “ice-skating” and the reader can see that Nazneen does not give up her experiences in Bangladesh, nor has she stopped wearing a sari or lost all the aspects of her discourse that she learns from her mother.²² In fact, we see Nazneen

²² This could be considered a hybrid experience. Bhabha, whose theories inform the current definition of the term in contemporary postcolonial theory, said that hybridity “is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of dominations through disavowal” (Bhabha 112). That is, while we talk of hybridity as a fusion of two or more things, the concept of two “originals,” and in turn “binaries,” must be eradicated through the

preserve a sort of hybrid identity that does not deny the “unchanged nature” of the ice rink, nor her ability to enunciate a subjective self.

Part Eight: Conclusion

When *Brick Lane* was published in 2003, London had not yet seen its “home-grown” terrorist attacks. Ali references the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States by showing how the family reacts to the news they see on the television. However, she could have predicted neither the July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, nor the shifts in media and public response to the British multiculturalism. “Suddenly, the “right to difference” that had been promoted with policies and public sentiment through the 2000s was criticized for “diluting the fundamental character of our nation and the Christian morality integral to it” (Julios 151). This is not to say that these arguments had ever died since the massive immigration to Britain began in the 40s, but now they were foregrounded again. Multiculturalism and nationalism seemed exclusive. Critics argued that Britain “has pursued a policy of multiculturalism - allowing people of different cultures to settle without expecting them to integrate into society [...] Often the authorities have seemed more concerned with encouraging the distinctive identities than with promoting common values of nationhood” (Davis qt. in Julios 151).

In 2006, the Prime Minister Tony Blair presented his vision of a “diverse, multicultural, yet socially cohesive British society” (Julios 153). The speech, entitled “The Duty to Integrate” argued that “no distinctive culture or religion supersedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom” (qt. in Julios 153). Had *Brick Lane* been written after these events and speeches, it would seem that Ali is arguing against

concept of hybridity. Tensions are kept sharp, but power relations are transformed when our attentions are drawn to the ways in which dominated figures interfere with power processes.

these ideas for individuality. Yet this interpretation is anachronistic. Instead, one should look at the situation Ali describes in a community that she illuminates like no one does before her,²³ one in which a foreign-born, non-White woman has the good fortune to marry an “educated man” who does not beat her (Ali 303), find employment within her community, and move out into London without experiencing verbal or physical violence targeted towards her because of her race or religion. One could say that this is because she never leaves the diasporic Bengali community and that everything Nazneen has, she gets through this community; however, as I have shown, Nazneen makes it out of the space mentally and physically. Thus, one can conclude that the immigrants experiences may be more positive when grounded in a stable community.

On the other hand, the reader does not see how an immigrant like Nazneen can succeed in an England where social cohesion and community integration are the goals. The novel does not address the way immigrants actually handle “our civic society's ‘essential values’ - namely, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all and respect for the community and its shared heritage” (Blair qt. in Julios 153) except to say that equal treatment means one can “do whatever [she] like[s].” In effect, Ali rewrites the fictions that cause the frictions in our society.²⁴ Although the novel effectively shows

²³ It must be noted that the credibility of Ali's representation can and has been discussed using Spivak. In her chapter, “Monica Ali and the Suspension of Disbelief,” Melanie Mettler locates the authenticity of the novel in three levels: textual authenticity (“the depiction of a particular setting and character in the novel”), authorial authenticity, and reader authenticity, “centering on the question of who is entitled to voice criticism” (164). According to Mettler, Ali's authorial authenticity is challenged by the fact that even though she is “BritAsian,” she is not from Sylhet, Bangladesh like the characters in her book. The reader authenticity is fueled by this lapse in authorial, and most of the negative reactions to *Brick Lane*, described as “violent” by Mettler, are because of this. Yet the textual authenticity seems sound and Mettler points out that the pressure on “authors of postcolonial background, particularly (young) women” to “qualify their writing by authenticity” is a bit much to expect (164).

²⁴ Nazneen's situation is imagined in a “situated and contested social fantasy” that “involves ongoing transformations in language and space of identity by creating affiliated representations of power, location, and subject... expressing the will to achieve new suturings of (national) wholeness within ‘the ideological

how immigrants handle some of the internal challenges of migration - displacement, changing ways of being with learning new languages - we see none of the external challenges. Perhaps it is because in the context of England, concerned with understanding the difficulties prompted by “race-related issues” and where efforts to be less racist often ignore “relevant differences” and often lead to “injustice and inequality,” theorists are still too focused on questions of nation (Julios 148). This, critics like Paul Gilroy argue, ignores the “fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation” of nation states like Great Britain (Gilroy qt. in Jay 83). Thus, we must look towards other literatures and other contexts that, for example, take “fracture” as their *Ansatzpunkte*²⁵ and go from there.

While *Brick Lane*'s conclusion supports multiculturalism and reveals the arguably successful integration of a migrant who preserves her individual voice and some degree of hybrid interactions, it does not answer questions about how migrants deal with the failure to remove deeper tensions between cultures and ways of being. For example, *Brick Lane* does not show us what happens when sexual identity or values go against that which Nazneen was used to in Bangladesh. Nor does it show us what happens at the institutional or broader social level between citizens and immigrants. For these tensions, we can look at contemporary novels like *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*. This novel deals with space and migration in different ways, and the presentation of migration shows us that it is often not a positive experience.

imaginary’ of a given culture” (Wilson qt. in Jay 75) for more on this, see Rob Wilson's essay “Imagining the ‘Asia-Pacific’ Today.”

²⁵ Søren Frank explains how Erich Auerbach uses this concept to explain the conceptual frameworks theorists take as their “assumed” or “established” knowledge before continuing with their theories (4).

CHAPTER TWO

CRACKING THE HAZELNUT AND LOOKING BEYOND THE SHELL: “ROOTLESSNESS,” DISCOURSE, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

Migration is often negative because it means displacement. It means that one leaves one’s “pot” or “plot” and tries to tear out the full length of one’s roots to transplant them somewhere else. The violence of the description is meant to emphasize the emotional and psychological violence this kind of move can have. Often, it is said that the roots are never safely removed from the earth and that pieces of oneself are always left behind. It is for this reason that the first generation migrants are rarely completely successful in their transplantation. One can argue that Nazneen’s “transplantation” in *Brick Lane* is somewhat successful. However, for Maria (Mascha)²⁶ Kogan in Olga Grjasnova’s *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012), the experience seems more negative. I argue that this is because in *Birken*, the transnational experience of rootlessness introduced in *Brick Lane* through diaspora has no redeeming qualities. What gives Nazneen stability in *Brick Lane* is incapacitating in other contexts.

“Heimat ist nicht Sicherheit”²⁷ Azerbaijani- German author Grjasnova states during an interview in response to statements that her first novel *Birken* has anti-national tendencies (Grjasnova). She asserts that the Eurocentric and U.S. American vision of safe homeland is continually proven false, a notion unfortunately confirmed by civil wars and genocides all over the world, before and after World War II. The Armenian pogrom in

²⁶ The common transliteration of this word into English is Masha, but I prefer “Mascha.”

²⁷ “Homeland does not mean security”

Baku, Azerbaijan, 1990 is the instance *Birken* reminds the reader of. But even if one can do without *Heimat*, as Grjasnova argues, everyone needs a *Heim*, home. At least, this is the idea that is bound in Western sub-consciousness with the prevailing Odysseus *Nostos* myth.²⁸ So when a migrant leaves her/his home, s/he is literally, and possibly also figuratively, twice unsettled.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen is twice unsettled in space and discourse by leaving her village in Bangladesh. In *Birken*, Grjasnova creates Mascha's story of triple loss - she loses her "homeland" when she is seven, her "way of being" when her boyfriend Elias dies, and her home when she leaves Germany and goes alone to Israel. In all three situations, the nature of Mascha's loss is different than for Nazneen since for Mascha, all three losses are related to trauma. Arguably, leaving her familiar space and the death of Nazneen's son are traumatic for Nazneen; however, the parallel events do not create the same active denial or changes in course of action that they do for Mascha.

Perhaps, some of this has to do with the lack of an identity connected with place to begin with. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen evokes memories of her childhood in her situations in England. Not only does Mascha repress her childhood, *Birken* shows a negative relationship between homeland and identity. A person with *migrationshintergrund* in Germany, Mascha is never able to say for herself what she "is" or where she belongs. She does not seem to know this herself, other than that she is unhappy where she is. Mascha is complicated. She comes from Azerbaijan (which has its own complicated history of

²⁸ That the significance of home originates and is nursed in ancient Greek myths is a thesis-worthy argument in itself, the connection of contemporary culture to ancient literature is explained by much of literary theory, most specifically one could look at Claude Levi-Strauss "The Structural Study of Myth." This significance of the Odysseus myth is explained in Søren Frank's introduction to *Migration and Literature* (2008).

empire [first Persian, then Russian, then Soviet] and oil), but has German/Russian heritage. She belongs to neither Germany nor Russia because she is Jewish, but she does not claim her Jewish identity. Her Jewish identity could potentially reach across all national lines since religion often is transnational, and the Jewish race in particular is often considered cosmopolitan, and this may explain Mascha's rootlessness, but Mascha denies her Jewish heritage. When she mentions that her family applied for a visa based on German laws granting asylum to Eastern European and Russian Jewish people, she explains that it was only a 'convenience': "Offiziell gehören wir zum Kontingent [...] Aber unsere Auswanderung hatte nichts mit dem Judentum, sondern mit Bergkarabach zu tun"²⁹ (44). Mascha changes her relationship with her Jewish heritage later, but her initial position is that the personal impact of war and loss are stronger than any national, religious, or ethnic identity or movement.

Throughout the novel, Mascha displays many of the transnational tendencies to see herself in forms of "other." We see her cross national, political, religious and linguistic borders with seeming ease. However, as the novel goes on, one sees that she does not do this easily. Even as Mascha rejects all forms of scripted identity, it becomes clear that while transnationalism blurs the primacy of self over "other," one cannot lose one's idea of "self." By the end of the novel, the reader discovers how Mascha looks for home when she realizes *Heim* is *Sicherheit*. It is not a particular place, occupation, or language one finds this in (the last one is left open to debate), but rather in those who accept one, whether they understand one or not. Grjasnova builds on the validity of a post- or transnational character by showing that even if Mascha rejects nation or identity

²⁹ "Officially we belonged to the [diasporic] group, but our migration had nothing to do with Jewishness. Rather, it had everything to do with Bergkarabach."

and its accompanying discourses, she needs people, love, and belonging - she still participates in discourse as Bakhtin describes is necessary for living. Even if she is a fictional character, Grjasnova paints Mascha as a figure who is “only human” and through Mascha, the novel shows us that we all need “Heim.” That what we all need can be found without scripted identities is a pleasant, according to Grjasnova, side-effect.

In the creation of Mascha’s character, we see that people are not only in constant dialogue with *everyone*, as we see in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, but also in dialogue with *everything*. Of course this dialogism is present in both novels, but the levels of discourse in politics, critical theory, trauma, sexual identity, and pain are emphasized in *Birken*. The contract of dialogic languages allows one, as Bakhtin states, to “delineat[e] the boundaries of languages, creat[e] a feeling for these boundaries, [and] compels one to sense physically the plastic forms of different languages” (*Dialogic* 364). These multiple discourses are necessary because they reveal the conflict inherent in Mascha’s self, her inability to “come to *terms*” with, or express her trauma. *Birken* shows us that dialogism is a vital part of our lives and that within and without the migrant experience, living life is a matter of navigating different ways of being.

Expressing trauma is a subjective enunciating act that mirrors Nazneen’s “No” and displays the role heteroglossia plays in the larger sphere of Mascha’s existence in a similar way: “It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naïve absence of conflict” (*Dialogic* 368). In illuminating the different discourses and how Mascha rejects their power and heteronormative standards, Grjasnova shows us the limits of these structures and then

how one can maneuver them to function in society. In this way, *Birken* explores deeper levels of the tensions in social contexts than *Brick Lane* did.

By choosing one language, which Bakhtin reminds us is not a national language or the “unity of a single, closed language system, but is rather a highly specific unity of several ‘languages’ that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other” (295), Mascha finally regains her sense of self and will to live. One cannot really function in society without participating in discourse, but if these discourses conflict, one has to choose one and develop one’s ability to work with them. In order to show this, Grjasnova centers Mascha in a linguistic web, and then extends it to the semiotic realm. Mascha eventually gives in to the transnational idea that she, like everyone, needs personal identity, home, security, and love, this is the discourse she will develop, and so she asks to return to it by the end. However, first, we see her reject everything else, including home, security, and love.

The first line of the novel is Mascha’s first rejection: a history, and in turn, her history: “Ich wollte nicht, dass dieser Tag begann” (Grjasnova 9). The novel begins with a negation, an implied wish that this day had not begun. The wish is not in the subjunctive, rather in the indicative mood, past tense. Thus, “did not want” is as much a fact, as “that the day began.” Mascha’s wish is appropriate in the present action of the book, since she had just woken up and she wants to continue lying in bed and sleep. But the wish also applies to the book as a whole, for it is on this day that Elias, Mascha’s boyfriend, has his soccer accident that turns out to be fatal to him. Elias’ death sets off the slow sequence of events that brings Mascha to Israel, and then to an unidentified field in Palestine where she calls her former boyfriend Sami to pick her up.

The negation of the past is similar to Nazneen's speech act "no" which propels her outside of the smaller Tower Hamlet community into larger London, and it occurs more obviously in Mascha's resistance to share her personal past with Elias. We find out that the main tension in Elias' and Mascha's relationship is her unwillingness to tell him what happened to her in Baku. She thinks he can live without knowing, maybe she wants to protect him, but she "hatte Eliaschas Drang, mich zu verstehen, unterschätzt"³⁰ (150). She did not understand his desire to try and understand her through her past. This is because she had not recognized the relationship of her identity- one that strongly cast off national tendencies, her anger and sometimes violence in response to moves to label her, her irony in regard to the prospects of post-identity politics- with her experiences of civil war in Azerbaijan. She learns to understand this by the end through her habit of connecting the things in her immediate past or present to things further back in her temporal space and conversations with others. This habit leads to the resolution of the conflict by the end of the novel where identity questions are not just tossed around, but answered in earnest.

Part One: The word as a foreign object

Another one of Mascha's habits is to treat words as objects, and the first mention of this is with the word "quiche."

Ich hatte versucht, eine Quiche zu Machen, weil ich das wort *Quiche* für meinen Sprachgebrauch anprobieren wollte. Als wäre ich eine Französische Schauspielerin, die eine französische Hausfrau spielte, die ihren französischen Liebhaber erwartet, der als Invalide aus dem Krieg zurückkehrt, und die für ihn

³⁰ "I had underestimated Elias' drive to understand me"

eine Quiche bäckt und nicht weiß, welches seiner Gliedmaßen er verloren hat.

Quiche lag gut auf meiner Zunge, und ich mochte ihr grammatikalisches

Geschlecht.³¹ (Grjasnova 11)

The treatment of the word *quiche*, and the final statement that Mascha liked the grammatical gender, evokes a perception of desire in the language. Not only is the language itself desired: “the word lay nicely on her tongue,” but the grammatical gender reflects the sexual gender that Mascha also likes. Grjasnova introduces us to this aspect of Mascha’s character in a double layered way, just as the role Mascha plays in baking and serving the quiche is triple layered. Mascha (nationally unlabeled) tries to prepare a quiche for her (also nationally unlabeled) boyfriend, but in doing so sees herself as a French actress playing a French housewife, baking a traditional French dish for her French lover who in this fictional role is a soldier recently invalidated from war. The housewife, who is actually an actress, who is actually just Mascha, wonders which of his limbs the lover has lost. This whole scenario plays in a single conjunctive sentence, and all of this is merely because Mascha wanted to “try out the word for her vocabulary.” The conceptual conflation of language, nationality, and desire overrides the subtext of war and injury that occupy subsequent action.

In *Brick Lane*, we saw Nazneen consider Chanu’s and Dr. Azad’s language like object. For her, it was just another stepping stone on the way to recognizing discourse.

For Mascha, Mascha and Elias are having breakfast the morning after this described

³¹ “I had tried to make a quiche because I wanted to establish a use for the word *quiche* in my daily vocabulary. As if I were a French actress playing a French housekeeper who was awaiting her French lover, returning from the war as an invalid, and bakes him a quiche while not knowing which of his limbs he had lost. The word *quiche* lay nicely on my tongue and I liked her grammatical gender.”

event, so it is from her memory. Yet in writing Mascha's memory this way, Grjasnova reveals several things that create the basis of Mascha's character:

- 1) She sees the absurdity of playing out stereotypes, and yet recognizes that we tend to act them out consciously, as the actress in Mascha's scenario becomes French in order to bake the traditional French dish.
- 2) When we do things that seem "exotic," we tend to associate ourselves as playing a role while doing them.
- 3) Mascha is bisexual and she is comfortable with it.
- 4) Mascha is comfortable with languages, however, in speaking different ones she recognizes herself as playing a role. This can be related to theories of language as ways of being, often in a national sense, that in speaking these other languages, Mascha experiences multiple ways of being. On the other hand, as it is later revealed, Mascha uses language to "escape" being.
- 5) Mascha has a subconscious preoccupation with war and the mutilated body

As the novel continues, the reader follows how many of these "facts" about Mascha are confirmed or explained, yet some of them, such as her use of language and her relationship with nationality (something that is also challenged when one criticizes stereotypes), become more complex as they become explained.

The particular shift of language from conduit to object reflects another point of Grjasnova's emphasis, the relation of language to nationality. As discussed in the introduction and in relation to *Brick Lane*, language and culture, or ways of being, are intertwined. Grjasnova strongly delineates this relationship to help show Mascha's

transnational tendencies by explaining the significance of another word as object, the Azerbaijani word *fundukh*:

Die Mörder konnten oft nicht zwischen Aserbaidtschanern und Armeniern unterscheiden, es gab keine vermeintlich ethnischen Merkmale, und die meisten Armenier sprachen ausgezeichnetes Aserbaidtschanisch. [...] Wir standen in der Schlange für Brot, und die Frau vor uns erzählte der anderen auf Russisch, sie hätten das Auto ihrer Freund angehalten, die Insassen aussteigen lassen und verlangt, dass jeder das aserbaidtschanische Wort für Haselnuss - *fundukh* - aufsagen sollte [...] Meine Mutter erklärte mir, Aserbaidtschaner und Armenier würden das Wort unterschiedlich aussprechen. Das war das einzige, was sie mir erklären konnten [sic].³² (Grjasnova 45)

In her essay “Language in Migration,” Marjorie Perloff explains the process in which language shifts from being a conduit, a means of communication, to an object, a thing with which to identify nationality. She uses the concept of the *shibboleth* as her point of departure. The word is both a Hebrew term referring to the part of a plant containing its grains as well as a device by which to test a speaker and perhaps distinguish him/her from someone who is not belonging to the group who can properly say the word. According to Perloff and the *OED*, *shibboleth* has come to mean “a word or sound used as a test for detecting foreigners, or persons from another district, by their pronunciation.” In *Birken*, *fundukh* is a shibboleth. Saying the word a certain way would

³² “The murderers often couldn’t differentiate between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, there were no assumed ethnic features and most Armenians spoke exceptional Azerbaijani. [...] We stood in line for bread and the woman in front of us told the other in Russian that they had stopped the car of her friend and ordered everyone to say the Azerbaijani word for hazelnut - *fundukh*. [...] My mother explained to me that Azerbaijani and Armenians would say the word differently. That was all she could explain to me”

mark one as Armenian or Azerbaijani, either saving or cursing them. Seeing the power of language outside of its use for expression creates a foundation for seeing all language as a sort of shibboleth, used to “discriminate against those perceived as outsiders” (Perloff 737). For Mascha, understanding became enforced when she came to Germany. Languages are linked to nations and nations will be evoked through language.

While we see in *Brick Lane* that Nazneen desires to learn the English language, these instances are not prompted by external experiences. Nazneen is stimulated by people like Razia or what she observes for herself, but it is not an active recognition of the power of language in social spaces.³³ Mascha’s desire to command German language well was the result of an early realization when she first came to the country and visited the municipal immigration office with her parents. She articulates that there she learned “dass Sprachen Macht bedeuteten. Wer kein Deutsch sprach, hatte keine Stimme, und wer bruchstückhaft sprach, wurde überhört. Anträge wurden entsprechend der Schwere der Akzente bewertet“ (37-8)³⁴. So, Mascha learned to speak excellent German. In fact, she learns four other languages (Russian, English, French, and Arabic) fluently with competence in a few others (including Italian, Polish, Azeri- the language of her childhood, and “Ballermann-Touristen Deutsch”³⁵ (40). It helps that Mascha was good at learning languages, and she locates these ease of language learning in her good memory and quickly being able to recognize structures (30); this is of course a metaphor for her memory and structure-sensitivity in general. However, at the same time, speaking many

³³ In thinking about the practical matters of immigration, I noticed that Monica Ali never brings Nazneen into the bureaucratic process of immigration. It is as though this world does not exist in *Brick Lane*. Grjasnova represents this aspect of immigrant life in *Birken* and uses it as a part of her work to show Mascha’s transnational tendencies.

³⁴ “Language means power. Those who speak no German have no voice. Those who speak broken German are ignored. Applications are processed according to the thickness of accents”

³⁵ “beach-local tourist German”

languages cannot mask the fact that one does not desire to express oneself fully in any. In this way, multilingualism becomes another form of homelessness.

Part Two: Translation/Interpretation

As seen in the quiche episode, the interpreter or translator takes on language as playing a role. She can use it to build distance between herself and that which she experiences. When Mascha is in the interpreting booth, she is concentrated, but does not have to function and think her own thoughts; she needs only to transport other people's thoughts into another language: "Ich redete, ohne einen einzigen Gedanken zu formulieren. Mein Gehirn funktionierte wie ein Automat"³⁶ (126)

Through interpreting, Mascha can also avoid her emotions. „Ich versuchte die Leere in mir mit Vokabeln zu füllen"³⁷ (126). Generally, Grjasnova never explicitly states the emotions of her characters. Rather they are revealed in the bodily states or actions of the figures. This keeps the reader active in his/her understanding of the character. For example, when she is in the hospital after finding out about Elias' soccer accident, her narration remains empty of the distress that she feels. One would not know what she is thinking if it were not for what she did with language or with her hands. She listens to the radio and translates the news into English and the commercials into French. The news about an explosion in Kabul, shots fired in Gaza, and woods burning in Portugal parallel the way Mascha feels, which becomes revealed by her irrational, systematic tearing of each individual page out of a magazine and putting it in her bag. Both actions are methodical and occupy her mind and hands. Mascha uses interpreting, or translating other people's words, to avoid thinking her own thoughts and to avoid facing her emotions.

³⁶ "I spoke without forming a single thought. My brain worked like a machine."

³⁷ "I tried to fill the emptiness within me with vocabulary."

Thus, her pluralist language use becomes a disassociating form of fragmentation. It also reflects the possible tension with national identification.

Part Three: Self-consciously national and adamantly not

Contemporary German novelist Terezia Mora shows us in *Day In Day Out* (2004) that the ability to learn languages quickly, accurately, and without accent does “not lead to social integration in the new place, as one might expect.” “[One] is capable of translation, border crossing, and transient living, but not settling and anchoring [one’s] identity in place” (Chronister). Border crossing and transient living are celebrated in transnationalism; however, for Mascha the tone is negative. This is not just due to external factors, but internal ones as well. Through her language skills, Mascha avoids the common way in which Germans (or any other group) qualify their immigrants. One ceases being labeled as foreigner or outsider once one can speak “akzentfreies Deutsch”³⁸ (von Radow et al.). But as contemporary reports show and Grjasnova’s novel argues, it takes a lot more than accent-free German to be considered German. In fact, Mascha is approached several times as a non-native. For example, when she is clearly in shock, a doctor approaches her and assumes that she cannot speak German when she has to ask him to repeat himself. Mascha is aware of the way in which he speaks slowly and overly articulate, and her response to his question is “Natürlich”³⁹ (14). The answer seems illogical, since she, or anyone, in the situation could easily not have spoken German, but her response places guilt on the doctor for too quickly ascribing her as “non-native” than a desire to answer logically.⁴⁰

³⁸ “Accent free German”

³⁹ “of course”

⁴⁰ Another instance in which Mascha is praised for her German, despite having barely said anything, could reflect what Zaimoglu expresses. He sees the discrimination inherent in German culture through

Part of the complication of Mascha's character comes from her keen self-awareness of her ascribed position in German society and her adamant rejection of this prescription. In this regard, Mascha is very different from Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, because she is much more aware of the determinism she faces from without. Most of the challenges Mascha faces are based on how others see and classify her, whereas Nazneen is more excluded from a judgmental world, and therefore less in danger from epistemic violence. In the use of this term, I recognize Spivak and Bhabha's definition as the inflection of harm through discourse. Of the two novels I examine for this project, *Birken* Grjasnova enunciates far more clearly the contemporary challenges of migration and acceptance in a foreign country, specifically in Germany. This is not to say that Nazneen is represented as free from epistemic violence (we see in the way she is treated by bus conductors and policemen that she is not), it is just more overtly challenged by Grjasnova.

Mascha often has to assert herself. When Daniel, a judophile and proamerican "antiGerman" approaches Mascha and declares that he fully supports "you all," "Du, ich steh voll hinter euch" (63), Mascha gets upset:

Daniel, lass mich mit dem Scheiß in Ruhe. Was willst du überhaupt von mir? Ich lebe in Deutschland, ich habe einen deutschen Pass. Ich bin nicht Israel. Ich lebe nicht dort. Ich wähle nicht fort, und ich habe auch keinen besonderen Draht zur israelischen Regierung.⁴¹ (63)

distinctions made in language use, and he would argue that it becomes linked to new formations of ethnic structure and determination as well: "Inmitten der mainstream Kultur entstehen die ersten rohen Entwuerfe fuer eine ethnizistische Struktur in Deutsch" (21).

⁴¹ "Daniel, leave me alone with this crap. What do you even want from me? I live in Germany and have a German passport. I am not Israel. I don't live there, I don't vote there, and I don't have a special attachment to the Israeli government."

This passage is significant on two levels. First, it is a clear rejection not just of ascribed identity, the patriotic declaring of equating self with state, but also of the factors and institutions that build up the nation against which she denies loyalty. Secondly, it is something to look back on once Mascha does go to Israel, experiences the down side of some of their politics and policies, and is rejected by them as much as she rejects them.

Part Four: Identity, Structures, Discourse- Germany

In her outburst against Daniel, Mascha does not identify with being German, but she acknowledges belonging to the country in ways that place and citizenship bind her to it. This acknowledgement is reluctant and supports her initial sentiments when first coming to the country. She sees her position in Germany as being a victim of the way people will decide to see her. In relaying a scene Mascha had at school in the eleventh grade, Mascha creates a parallel with herself and the teacher, who due to a medical condition causing hair loss, experiences constant commentary on this. Her teacher experiences the same kinds of exclusionary discourse that Mascha does and Mascha recognizes that “sie war genauso ein Opfer wie ich, aber im Gegenstaz zu ihr hatte ich beschlossen, mich zu wehren”⁴² (40). Mascha becomes aware of the structure of discourses based on making her a figure of “other,” usually to her deficit, and she rejects these forms. In her dissertation on contemporary multilingual literature, Kristina Foerster reminds readers to note Mascha’s bisexuality. In this and other aspects of her personality, Foerster argues, Grjasnova has Mascha resisting “clear-cut categories, be it [her] nationality, [her] linguistic status or [her] sexual preferences” (110).

⁴² “She was a victim, just like me. But unlike her I chose to defend myself.”

This stands in ironic contrast to the way Grjasnova titled her book, or how Mascha describes other characters. That there are a lot of birch trees in Russia may be statistically proven, but the title *All Russians Love Birch Trees* seems odd when one considers that the novel has nothing to do with birches and little to do with Russians. In titling her book this way, Grjasnova may be pointing out the absurdity of the clichés. Mascha's awareness is also often ironically driven by clichés. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Mascha reflects on Elias' "Germaneness" and puts this in relation to her family's "orientalism": "Dass du auch immer den mitfühlenden Deutschen geben musst"⁴³ (11). Elias has an intuitive "Höflichkeit" and he knew, somehow, "aus irgendeinem Grund [...] was sich in einer orientalischen Familie gehoert"⁴⁴ (10). These national ascriptions on her part seem playful and one knows they are not meant seriously due to her identification with "orientalism," an outdated term and quickly associated in the German context with ideas of the "far east" and politeness, neither of which apply to Mascha.

On the other hand, the reader knows from Mascha's experiences in Baku during her youth that she associates nationality with structured hate.

Der Hass war nichts Persönliches, er war strukturell. Sie Menschen hatten keine Gesichter, keine Augen, keine Namen und keine Berufe mehr - sie wurden zu Aserbaidshanern, Armeniern, Georgiern und Russen. Menschen, die sich ein

⁴³ "That you always have to play the sympathetic German"

⁴⁴ Elias has an "intuitive politeness" and "he, for some reason, knows what is appropriate in an oriental family."

Leben lang gekannt hatten, vergaßen alles über den anderen. Nur die vermeintliche Nationalität blieb.⁴⁵ (Grjasnova 46-47)

Mascha's early exposure to the way nationality could overshadow all other aspects of a person, or that national interests could result in the irrational hate of a person one knew as an individual, all one's life, affect her for the rest of her life. While in Germany, Mascha tries to forget the trauma she experiences as a result of seeing a young Azerbaijani woman die in front of her. It is relatively simple to do in Germany, because even as she faces racist or anti-migrant tendencies there, it is decidedly less violent. The causes of death there are also much less violent, like soccer games. However, when she goes to Israel, Mascha experiences something much different, both in terms of multiculturalism and national interest.

Every description of migration literature somehow references the themes of mobility and displacement which "shift the reader between multiple locations" or is "characterized by the back-and-forth movements of people across borders, at once insisting on the importance of location and deterritorializing the spaces in which their characters operate" (Jay 11). We see this in *Brick Lane* through the movement (or non-movement) of Nazneen, but in *Birken* we actually see the physical manifestation of these movements and what it is like to cross over into new spaces when Mascha moves from Germany into Israel, or Israel into Palestinian territory while Nazneen cannot even remember the journey to England in the "aeroplane" (Ali 342). On the other hand, both

⁴⁵ "The hate was nothing personal. It was structural. They had no face, no eyes, no names and no occupations anymore - they became Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians and Russians. People who had known each other life-long forgot everything about one another. Only the alleged nationality remained"

novels show us the relationship between language and space in how language can be used to describe multicultural space.

When Nazneen goes to a Bengal Tigers meeting in *Brick Lane*, she notices how “[d]ozens of voices peppered the air with Bengali and English” (Ali 279) and “the walls echoed in two languages” (283). The limit of pluralism in *Brick Lane* is to two languages, but the equality of these languages presents the possibly binary as positive. Although the sounds of these languages are fragmented, they unite in a common purpose. In *Birken*, the airport in Jerusalem is initially presented as a neutral, authentic multicultural space through the multiplicity of language: “in der Flughafenhalle vermischten sich die Sprachmelodien zu einem Klangteppich: Russische, Hebräisch, Englisch, Italienisch und Arabisch”⁴⁶ (161). The sounds, unified into a “carpet” despite their differentness, seem positive in the possibilities for multiculturalism. This adds to the impression that it is a safe space where families are reunited and many people from different backgrounds can cooperate with one another. However, a few lines later, it becomes an antagonistic space due to the policies of the Israeli security forces. For example, they shoot through Mascha’s computer merely because it has markings for the Arabic keys and they do not like the fact that her name is Maria (reminding of the Christian Virgin Mary), nor that she can speak Arabic, but not Hebrew” (163). Thus, in a subtle way, what was initially neutral, or even positive, becomes tainted by national interests and prejudice. The space becomes one power. The violence towards Mascha’s laptop was unnecessary, but generally all violence is. The fragments or “Überreste” of her laptop remind one of the fragments of Mascha’s identity. Coming to Israel exposes this more than ever.

⁴⁶ “The languages in the airport hall mixed the language melodies into a sound carpet of white noise: Russian, Hebraic, Russian, Italian and Arabic”

While in Israel, Mascha begins to have panic attacks as memories of her childhood become evoked by the images of war in the Gaza strip and violence between Palestinians and Israelis. She begins to take medicine and thinks she has solved her problem, “Ich wusste nun, dass das Problem konkret war, und für dieses konkrete Problem gab es eine konkrete chemische Lösung”⁴⁷ (224). However, it quickly becomes clear that her problem reaches beyond the physical state of her body (just as her identity is removed from her physical place). All Mascha accomplishes with the pills is numb the need to confront her issues that psychologically disturb her. This is similar to her use of interpreting and leaving Germany to go to Israel in the first place. Mascha runs away from her problems. Running seems like the only option when confronted with the incompatibility of ways of being.

Part Five: Discourse of Pain

In Israel, Mascha is reminded of all the different discourses she struggled against in Germany. The largest discourse, as hinted at with the opening line of the novel, is her past. It is also the main discourse Mascha denies. She is able to tell an Israeli guard that she had German boyfriend, and that he died. However, when asked “how?” she answers of a lung infection. Her attempts to live without a past leave her fairly empty, but carefree. Suddenly, on a trip with one of her lovers to a Palestinian demonstration in Gaza, she leaves the group and runs into Ishmael, a Palestinian Muslim who was once with the Hamas. He forces Mascha to articulate what she believes in: “An was glaubst du?” (276). At first, Mascha answers “An nichts.” But then:

“Gott?”

⁴⁷ “I knew now that the problem was concrete, and that for this concrete problem was a concrete chemical solution.”

„Nein.“

„Kultur?“

„Auch nicht.“

„Nation?“

„Weißt du, in meiner Kindheit gab es einen gepackten Koffer zu Hause, für den Fall der Fälle. In unserem Fall war es die ehemalige Aktentasche meines Großvaters, und darin waren frische Unterhosen, Familienfotos, Silberlöffel und Goldkronen, das Kapital, das sie unter dem kommunistischen Regime akkumulieren konnten. Die Armenier waren schon lange aus der Stadt fortgejagt worden, und nicht wenige von ihnen wurden exekutiert. Meine Oma, die die Shoah...“⁴⁸ (276).

She is about to say something about her grandmother, who had been interred in a concentration camp and survived, but here, Mascha is interrupted by Ismael: “Oh, Anspielungen!”⁴⁹ (276). When Mascha tries to “allude” to her heritage, it complicates the significance of Mascha speaking about her past when asked about her beliefs. The question remains why she chooses to reference her Jewish heritage, but also why she does this with Ishmael’s impetus. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that he is the only one who would understand her trauma. He experienced blood and death: “überall war dieser Geruch von geronnenem Blut. Alles was ich wahrnahm, war dieser Verwesungsgeruch, und obwohl ich selber nur eine Fleischwunde abbekommen hatte, fühlte ich mich tot”

⁴⁸ “What do you believe in?” “Nothing.” “God?” “No.” “Culture?” “Also no,” “Nation?” You know, during my childhood we had a packed suitcase at home, in case of emergency. In our case [the use of this homophone is not coincidental], it was my grandfather’s former briefcase. In it, we had fresh underwear, family photos, silver spoons, gold crown, the capital that they were able to accumulate under the communist regime. The Armenians had long been chased away from the city and not a few had been executed. My grandmother, who the Holocaust...”

⁴⁹ “Oh, allusions!”

(277) and in this way is able to talk with Mascha on the same level of experience. One could say, in the same discourse.

Grjasnova introduces this interpretation in the moment when Mascha approaches Elias the first time after he has had his accident: “‘Es geht mir nicht gut,’ sagte Elias so leise, dass es unmöglich mir gelten konnte, und mir fiel plötzlich ein, wie er vor langem festgestellt hatte, es gäbe nur zwei Schulen, die Alte und die Frankfurter”⁵⁰ (16).

Mascha’s connection to Elias’ opinion on two schools of critical thought seems anomalous until one considers that in evoking the idea of schools of critical theory, Mascha was evoking discourse.

Paul Jay summarizes the Frankfurt school in its understanding of “modernity as the triumph of rationality and technology over ‘divine permission’” (Jay 81). While Nazneen has to overthrow the authoritative discourse of fate and a “higher power,” we see Mascha challenged to recognize the limits of a different authoritative discourse. In the “sacrifice” of the rabbit, we see how Mascha attempts to work through her fear of losing Elias by fighting against the evocation of the Frankfurt School.

During Elias’ first hospital visit, Mascha performs the bizarre act of sacrificing a rabbit. It is done with very little explanation and through this we see how Mascha instinctively interacts with the world around her. Mascha narrates how she finds a rabbit that has been hit by a car, and she, in effect, murders the rabbit. She describes it as an exchange, “Ich würde mit Gott handeln” (23). Right before this, however, she shortly considers the only two prayers she knows, “Vaterunser” and “Höre Israel” (Grjasnova 23).

⁵⁰ “‘I’m not doing well, said Elias so quietly, that I was sure it wasn’t meant for me and suddenly the fact that he had long ago determined that there were only two schools, the Frankfurter and the old school, popped into my mind”

She says that the Lord's Prayer, the main prayer for Christianity, is useless and that the "Schma Yisrael" would not be enough on its own (23). She needs both the words and the action. She hopes that both together will save Elias, which they do, if only temporarily. When one also considers that Elias's statement later that made an enunciation of how he was feeling that "could not be meant for her," the relationship between pain and discourse is confirmed, resolved by Mascha's description of the woman's death in the resolution of her trauma.

Elaine Scarry explains some ways for thinking about pain and its aestheticism in literature, in her book *The Body in Pain*. In her chapter "Pain and Imagining," she states that

physical pain is exceptional in the whole fabric of psychic, somatic, and perceptual states for being the only one that has no object. Though the capacity to experience physical pain is as primal a fact about the human being as is the capacity to hear, to touch, to desire, to fear and to hunger, it differs from these events, and from every other bodily and psychic event, by not having an object in the external world. (Scarry 161)

Since pain does not have an object, it is difficult to express it. Scarry points out that pain cannot successfully be rendered into language other than "pre-language of cries and groans" (172). Mascha seems to hear Elias 'say' his pain, but it is not meant for her. Rather, it is him "rediscovering speech" and regaining "his powers of self-objectification" (172).

Grjasnova's description of the way Mascha experienced the death of the woman in Baku solidifies the literary connections of war, blood, and death to voices and vocal expression.

“Überall waren Schreie, polyphones Geschrei und eine langgezogene weibliche Stimme. Das Geräusch eines aufprallenden Körpers. Die Blutlache“⁵¹ (282). This description of one woman’s death amidst a chaos of anonymous cries is conceptually simple to relate to a violent death. However, the image of violence becomes excruciatingly apparent in Grjasnova’s narration of the sounds of the body dying. The location of the destruction is not in the bullet or a bomb, but rather in the body itself. The connection of blood to laughter is also striking and forces attention towards the way death is related.

Just as it takes the reader many moments of imagining to understand the nature of the woman’s death, it takes Mascha a long time to relate it to someone else. *Birken* shows us the difficulty of enunciating trauma. It is not her own body, or her death, but Mascha experiences a pain here that she spends most of the novel resisting to express. Speaking to Ishmael and articulating a connection with her past begins the process that allows her to articulate, for the reader and herself, what she experienced in Baku. The fact that Mascha should chose to participate in this discourse, rather than all others, lies perhaps in its universality. Pain as a universal sensation that all people are exposed to, at one time or another. As Elias’ nurse states so pithily, “Schmerzen gehören zum Leben dazu”⁵² (21). However, as Grjasnova points out, the experience is always individual. Elias has only his experience and Mascha experiences her individual pain of seeing his pain. Yet, through language one takes the bodily experience of pain outside of its self-contained loop within the body and “project[s] it into the external world. It is through this movement out into

⁵¹ “There were cries everywhere, polyphonic screaming, and one long, drawn out woman’s voice. The sound of an exploding body. Blood laughter.”

⁵² “Pain is a part of life.”

the world that the extreme privacy of the occurrence [...] begins to be sharable, that sentience becomes social and thus acquires its distinctly human form” (Scarry 170). Peter Adler extends this understanding in his essay on multiculturalism:

All human beings share a similar biology, universally limited by the rhythms of life. All individuals in all races and cultures must move through life's phases on a similar schedule: birth, infancy, adolescence, middle age, old age, and death. Similarly, humans everywhere embody the same physiological functions of ingestion, irritability, metabolic equilibrium, sexuality, growth, and decay. Yet the ultimate interpretation of human biology is a cultural phenomenon: that is, the meanings of human biological patterns are culturally derived. (Adler)

This statement opens up explaining all the things that are similar about us, those things that are transcultural and global. Yet then Adler determines that what is unique and can be given the sub-label of national identity (or any other sub-label) in this factor is the *interpretation*. It is the way that we chose to handle those physiological factors that determines whether or not we belong to a certain group. In consideration of this context, one can consider trauma a physiological function as well, especially since it incites nosebleed in Mascha in Baku as well as in Palestine. The nosebleed reflects a physiological connection with the trauma, but since blood is also a symbol of family and life, the reader can see how trauma is related to culture and heritage as well.

Mascha initially handles her trauma, both unique and universal, by calling on her heritage. However, it seems that what finally resolves Mascha's trauma is remembering the name of the woman who died- „Gajana war ihr Name”⁵³ (283). In affirming her life

⁵³ “Her name was Gayana”

through her name, Grjasnova calls on the relationship between memory and language that was introduced at the beginning of the novel. Ali performs similar work in *Brick Lane*. However, while Nazneen connects more firmly to place in her expressions, Mascha is more connected to the language. When Nazneen calls forth the paddy fields in relation to the bricks of London, Mascha calls forth names. In this respect, *Birken* emphasizes language more so than *Brick Lane* and by placing the weight of recognition and identity in language or heritage, *Birken* allows for an interpretation of favorable transnationalism since the possibilities for transnationalism in language are higher than for place. However, both novels illustrate the primacy of memory in the migrant experience.

Necia Chronister points out that much of the literature following the “Berlin Republic” era has an “aesthetic emphasis on the fragmentary and prosthetic nature of memory.” A lot of contemporary literary theory deals with the way German authors use language to express national trauma, usually through a personal mirror. Of course, this relates specifically to Germany’s history and the difficulty for Germans coming to terms with their National Socialist past. At first glance, it seems unreasonable to associate Mascha, whose grandmother suffered under said regime, with this past, but to some extent Mascha does this herself.

When Elias dies, Mascha feels guilty for not waking up in time to see that the wound was forming pus and beginning an infection. Thus, the pain of his loss is wound up with guilt in the way that one could say Germany experiences its past. World War I and II were horrible for the world, Europe, and Germany as well. However, the crimes instigated by the National Socialists have created a situation of guilt that extends many generations after the war. Quantitatively, the greatest victims of this war were the Jewish-

Germans, Russians, French, or Eastern Europeans. One can argue that they are used to the discourse of pain and loss. However, by mixing the pain of Elias' loss with the guilt that she may have prevented it Mascha aligns herself with German discourse of pain and guilt. This does not mean she is considering herself German, but in this way Grjasnova may be indicating that immigrants tend to integrate and take on the issues and discourse of the nations they become members of, and that this occurs subconsciously. Whether or not this is the case, in her instinct to connect to a group or traditions larger than herself, Mascha comes one step closer to a resolution

Part Six: Painful Roots

It begins with a reconnection to the idea of home and ends with her understanding of where this is located. "Ich wollte nach Hause. Zurück zu meiner Mutter, ich wollte, dass sie mich beschützt. Ich wollte zurück zu Elischa, mich an sein Hemd klammern und seinen Geruch einatmen"⁵⁴ (280). Mascha is at a turning point by this point in the novel where she realizes that she wants to go home. Her mother's protection and Elias' security and familiar smell make up a possible discourse of home. One could say that home is the discourse Mascha desires because it is a place that she does not have to sift through layers of being. The ultimate conclusion, however, is that this home is impossible, since Elias is dead. Instead, Mascha finds "home" in her friends who largely experienced the same things she has and in her memory and heritage. Thus, she fulfills the idea expressed by Adler, albeit more positively, that "[t]he multicultural personality can easily disintegrate into fragmented personalities that are unable to experience life along any dimension other

⁵⁴ "I wanted to go home. Back to my mother, I wanted her to protect me. I wanted to go back to Elias, hang onto his shirt and breath in his smell"

than that which is institutionalized and routinized by family, friends, and society” (Adler).

Despite opening with a negative tone, the novel ends optimistically. “Die Sonne ist schon fast untergegangen, aber es ist noch hell”⁵⁵ (Grjasnova 283). The book begins with a statement about a day- this day- “dieser Tag“ and ends with the sun going down on another day, many days apart from the one that opens the novel (Grjasnova 9). The sunset on the day of Mascha’s call to Sami is the one that closes the book. It is a circular motion that brings holism to a novel that otherwise has very little. The circularity is emphasized at the end with the saying “Alles wiederholt sich”⁵⁶ said three times (283) and the movement Mascha makes in the streets of Palestine- “Kreise.”⁵⁷ Through this, the reader is reminded of the Nazneen’s thrice said “no.” In fact, the work performed by both statements is opposite in each case. Nazneen’s “no” was an act of denial and divorce. Mascha’s recollection calls on a unified past and joins her with this past again. The fragmented nature is inevitable, but the end of the novel shows the significance of the past and its reminders in the present and the future. It also shows that one can come to terms with it and break the painfulness of the cycle for oneself. The ending is thus satisfying in an aesthetic sense, even if it does not seem satisfying in a thematic sense.

Elias effectively dies from playing soccer and one can see his death as representative of failure of Grjasnova’s vision. That is, soccer is considered Germany’s national pastime, a *Volkssport*. However, it is also a sport in which, in recent years, players with *Migrationshintergrund* have risen to prominence. Elias alludes to this on

⁵⁵ “The sun has almost set, but it is still light”

⁵⁶ “Everything repeats itself”

⁵⁷ “Circles”

page 12: "Brauche ich einen Migrationshintergrund, um Fussball zu spielen?"⁵⁸ In playing soccer, Elias completes the vision of soccer as a transcultural, transnational sport. However, in dying, the novel reflects that this vision is not ready. One further extension of this interpretation is that Elias dies from the poor advice of the nurse after his surgery to repair the injury, or the surgery itself. This may imply that present-day institutions meant to help people through the pains of this transnational/transcultural transition are unable to do this.

Part Seven: Conclusion

By the end of the novel, Grjasnova has led the reader through an extremely personal experience of migration in contemporary Germany and beyond, but she manages to create a platform to talk about these issues beyond the novel. Grjasnova takes center stage on this platform in her interviews by claiming

Egal wo sie hinkommt, die Strukturen ähneln sich. Egal ob Kaukasus oder Palästina. Dieses Wissen, dass von heute auf morgen jemand umgebracht werden kann oder als "der Andere" manifestiert wird. Egal, ob es sich um Palästinenser oder Juden, um Moslems oder um Christen handelt. Das beschäftigt mich persönlich auch sehr, diese Strukturen, die dazu führen, dass man jemanden als anders und fremd wahrnimmt und sich daraus dann sehr schnell gesellschaftliche Konsequenzen entwickeln. Das ist etwas, was ich immer noch nicht ganz verstehe und was mich antreibt. Und bei Mascha ist es das Trauma, das immer stärker wird

⁵⁸ "Do I need a migration background to play soccer?"

und das Wissen, dass es nicht gut ist und dass es auch nicht gut werden kann, dass es kein Happy End geben wird, weil sich nichts verändert.⁵⁹ (Grjasnova).

Grjasnova's view that German society is permeated with structures that alienate foreigners or anything „strange“ is negative and pessimistic, belying the faint optimism at the end of her novel. As we see from outspoken critics of Germany's current “multicultural” situation, Grjasnova is not alone in this sentiment nor are her fears unfounded. However, as her book already predicts, a lot of these fears have shifted from “migrant” as “other” to the Muslim.

In a recent study about how Germans feel about their country, many Germans stated that they like their country and the migrants; they just don't like the Muslims. Even if a strict Muslim believer speaks accent-free German, they are viewed with distrust. „Muslim zu sein, fällt offenbar aus der deutschen Selbstverständlichkeit heraus“⁶⁰ (Gero von Randow and Özlem Topçu). In *Birken*, Grjasnova portrays this trend through Mascha's friend Cem who is very verbal about what he thinks the government can do better vis à vis immigrants. He sees how his father returns from CDU campaign session „ein gebrochener Mann“⁶¹ due to the way the immigrants are considered in regards to their religion (137). It is a new form of discrimination that excludes the father on grounds of something he never even considered. Supposedly “spielt der Glaube und die darin wurzelnden sozialen und kulturellen Prägungen eine große Rolle”⁶²(137). It had not been

⁵⁹ “It doesn't matter where she goes, the structures are similar. Both in the Caucasus and in Palestine. This knowledge, that one can be killed from one day to the next, or be labeled as „the other“. It doesn't matter whether one is talking about Palestinians, Jews, Muslims or Christians. These structures occupy my time, the way that seeing someone as different and strange quickly evolves into larger social consequences. And with Mascha it is the trauma that always gets stronger and the knowledge, that nothing is good, it cannot get good, and there is no “Happy Ending” because nothing changes.”

⁶⁰ “Apparently, being Muslim excludes being German”

⁶¹ “a broken man”

⁶² “Belief and the roots it takes in social and cultural practices are taking a larger role”

so for Cem's father. Through Cem we see the political discourse surrounding immigration, Islamophobia, and integration.

In Mascha's status as asylum seeking immigrant, we see another contemporary issue in Germany: the PEGIDA (and other -GIDA) demonstrations in Germany. There, a large group of Germans come together against "the Islamization of the 'Evening Land.'" The term evening land (*Abendland*, "orient") is archaic, and one could say that the mindsets of the individuals who demonstrate are just as antiquated, but the popularity of the movement warns one not to underestimate this mindset.

Of course, as German politicians have noted, these anti-Islam sentiments can be found in many European countries, not just in Germany. But the reputation Germany earned in the 1930s and 40s as xenophobic is uncomfortably reassured through contemporary events.

Outside of current events, contemporary literature supports Grjasnova's fears. In "Kanak Sprak," Feridun Zaimoglu challenges "the fairytale of a [tolerant], multicultural community" (17) and as an example points toward the general attitude to look at the spoken innovations of multicultural, multilingual German youth⁶³ as "poetische Bereicherung [ihrer] 'Mutterzunge'"⁶⁴ (17). Zaimoglu argues that despite the idea of "Bereicherung," this is still a mode of marginalizing minorities like immigrants or people with migrant background. He mentions that seeing the innovation as positive ignores the difficulty people have within and outside of the language and its structure that can lead to self-muting, depression, and schizophrenia. Moves like these are the result of determinist

⁶³ In her description of the way young people talk to each other, Mascha notices the way the German language has been restructured "die Minderjährigen verabschiedeten sich von ihrem Mitschülern mit 'Also dann... bunun üzerine tshüs'" (44). Mascha leaves this uncommented, other than to express gladness that she was no longer their age. However, others may be quick to see this trend as a reflection of Germany's multiculturalism, and thus a positive trend.

⁶⁴ "Poetic enriching of the mother tongue"

ways of talking about multiculturalism. Other authors, such as the three journalists who wrote *Wir Neuen Deutschen* (2012), try to remind readers that the identity of the contemporary German migrant, or person with migration background is still one of brokenness “Die Verbindung von Biographie und Geographie ist zerissen⁶⁵” (51). In her dissertation on female modernist writers in exile, Pavlina Radia makes the argument that even though cross-cultural fluidity is often seen as a positive thing, in the female modernist literatures it can be shown that “dislocation can have a serious impact on one's sense of self and body” (Radia 3), and we see this see in Mascha, who loses her homes in Azerbaijan, Elias and in Germany. These authors want to emphasize that life for immigrants is not easy, but they seem to agree with Grjasnova that removing labels is a start to making it easier. This is the counter-movement to *Brick Lane* in which declaring oneself English, as Razia encourages, is viewed more positive.

In resisting nationality, Mascha also resists the labels that described relationships of nationality, such as “Migrationshintergrund.” She is hyper aware of the conversations about migration, and the terms “Migrationshintergrund” and “postmigrantisch” in particular cause “Gallenflüssigkeit hoch [zu kommen]”⁶⁶ (12). Yet, in Mascha’s disgusted rejection of these terms, Grjasnova fixes them in the reader’s awareness. One could say Grjasnova uses Mascha as an autobiographical voice to say that “Vor allem haste ich die damit zusammenhängenden Diskussionen, nicht nur in der Öffentlichkeit, sondern auch zwischen mir und Elias. In diesen Gesprächen wurde nie etwas neues gesagt”⁶⁷ (12), but the scene caused by stereotypical association with the word Migrationshintergrund and

⁶⁵ “The connection of biography to geography is torn”

⁶⁶ “bile to rise in her throat”

⁶⁷ “I hated above all the attached discussions, not only those in public but those between me and Elias. In these conversations nothing new was said.”

Mascha's mention of *postmigrantisch* immediately makes the reader associate these terms with Mascha, whether she wants it or not.

The term *Migrationshintergrund* is nothing new. According to Olaf Zimmermann, a writer for the German Kulturrat, a migrant or "Person mit Migrationshintergrund" is someone who came to the territory of Germany since 1949, someone who was born a foreigner, or all those born in Germany who have at least one parent who came to Germany after 1949. Today it can be used pejoratively, but more issues with the term come from that fact that it can be used for a wide variety of people who may or may not feel integrated or German, based on their individual circumstances and perception.

The adjective *postmigrantisch*, may be a reaction to the controversy of *Migrationshintergrund*. It is a recent term that sprang from U.S. literary and art criticism. Although the word means "after migration," the "post" refers less to the migrants and more to the country. That is, as social scientist Naika Foroutan explains: „Das heißt auch, dass über den 'Markenkern Deutschland' neu verhandelt wird.“⁶⁸ (Foroutan). Basically, the term is meant to describe a state in which the "other" is no longer defined as the migrant and that what it means to be "German" needs to be redefined. Inherent in the term is still a very strong sense of nationalism and perhaps that is why Mascha goes against it. On the other hand, the idea that the label "German" must be renegotiated, like Kureishi's "Englishness," seems reasonable in light of the possibilities of hybridity and

⁶⁸ The whole quote reads: "We do not want to say that the migration is complete, but we say that there are social and political transformations, conflict and identity formation processes that have occurred through migration ready to be examined. German society has changed dramatically through migration, and more and more people are taking a position to shape this transformation as a citizen of this country, even if their ancestors were not German, and they may not look like earlier presentations of Germans. This also means the brand 'German' must be renegotiated."

multiple identities. The complexity of the term *postmigrant* may have to do with the discourse it comes out of.

It seems Grjasnova locates these moves in things like intellectual discourse:

Mein Professor war mein Professor und hatte Patenkinder in Afrika und in Indien. Sein Multikulturalismus fand in Kongresshallen, Konferenzgebäuden und teuren Hotels statt. Integration war für ihn die Forderung nach weniger Kopftüchern und mehr Haut, die Suche nach einem exklusiven Wein oder einem ungewöhnlichen Reiseziel.⁶⁹(Grjasnova 33)

Mascha despises cultural relativism and *Birken* reminds us that multiculturalism extends beyond terms like “exotic” and that the experiences are not ones that can be adopted or easily identified with. The way Mascha criticizes her Professor is similar to E. San Juan Jr.’s (a prominent Indonesian postcolonial critical theorist) argument that those coming up with the terms *postmigrant* or multicultural are based in Europe and the U.S. and therefore are “little more than the pathetic ‘pseudoresistance’ of a cosmopolitan intellectual elite produced by global capitalism that had nothing critical to offer those still suffering from colonialism’s practices in either the present or the past” (McLeod 13). Both Mascha’s professor and the European and U.S. intellectual elite attempt to describe the current state of nations like Germany and England, but it seems that Grjasnova argues it is the people who make the nations multicultural that can and should be able to speak for themselves.

⁶⁹ “My professor was my professor. He had godchildren in Africa and India. His multiculturalism took place in congress hall, conference buildings, and expensive hotels. For him, integration meant less head covering and more skin, the search for exclusive wine or an unusual travel destination”

We see moments of this throughout the novel, especially between Mascha and Cem. Some of the actively critical conversations about migration in Germany occur between them, perhaps because he is gay and thus someone who, like Mascha, was once forced to question his sexual identity as they both question national and cultural ones. Ultimately, however, Cem illuminates that despite personally despising the label and the discourses surrounding multiculturalism, he recognizes that knowing them will allow him to talk with them and perhaps change this. Talking about a young child they see with mixed-racial parentage: “Aber der Kleine wird kein Scheiß machen, er wird alles lesen und alles verstehen: alle Klassiker der Post Colonial Studies, der Critical Whiteness Studies, der Rassismustheorien, Fanon, Said, Terkessidis“⁷⁰ (Grjasnowa 221). To some extent, Cem’s ideal migrant is one like Chanu, who learns the discourses and uses them to discuss things like the „immigrant tragedy“. However, unlike Chanu, it seems that Cem does not want this discourse to be used to fuel binary thinking. Instead, it should contribute to an understanding of the system so that it does not alienate one.

Cem’s observation is confirmed in the writings of many other theorists who locate multilingual and multicultural writers as valuable sources, not just of immigrant experience description, but contemporary social situations in general. Immigrants are naturally a challenge to the idea of the national subject, since immigrants ask one to differentiate between national and non-national subjects, and where the distinction lies. Furthermore, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, in reference to the use of other languages in the migration novel,

⁷⁰ „But he won’t get up to no-good, he will read everything and understand it all: all the classic of post-colonial studies, the critical whiteness studies, the race theories, Fanon, Said, Terkessidis“

The 'language' metaphor raises the question of cultural difference and incommensurability, not the consensual, ethnocentric notion of the pluralistic existence of cultural diversity. It represents the temporality of cultural meaning as 'multi-accentual', 'discursively rearticulated'. It is a time of the cultural sign that unsettled the liberal ethic of tolerance and the pluralist framework of multiculturalism. (Bhabha 177)

This returns to the position Bhabha defends throughout his essay on Frantz Fanon, that the use of "the other" in a text already challenges the reader to look more closely at his/her own identity. *Birken* and *Brick Lane* accomplish this despite having very few moments of different languages. As opposed to many novels in which many different languages are used, often with different typographical modes, *Brick Lane* and *Birken* remain firmly rooted in the primary language of their writing. And yet, somehow, the sense that many different languages are used is strongly carried over in the language and we get the feeling that the text is multilingual without being alienated from it. This reflects, perhaps, the work done by migrant writers in general to navigate the line between borderlessness (positive) and rootlessness (negative).

In describing a migrant character's experience, Katarzyna Marcianak explains that

[his] difficulty in anchoring his identity to a single space is not simply an invitation to deplore the perceived compromise of his native roots. But neither are we encouraged to sentimentalize the exile's often painful antimonies or to celebrate his hybridity as cosmopolitan. Rather, we are shown that his

‘homelessness’ opens up a space for questioning the logic of privileging one's origins. (72)

While this description is not as parallel as it first seems, the logic of privileging one's origins is a concept challenged by Grjasnova. Radia quotes in her dissertation that to “break with national and imposed profiles of identity” one must actually cultivate homelessness” (Konzetti qt. in Radia 4). This notion, of course, is complicated by Mascha’s reaction to homelessness, such as panic attacks and reliance on medicine; Grjasnova reminds us that homelessness is actually a very negative thing. To take “home” away from someone in exchange for the ideal of living free of national borders creates a negative taint for transnationalism and leaves Grjasnova’s answer open in this regard.

On the other hand, *Birken* shows us the ways in which we will never be homeless. To some extent, it is in the language, and even though Mascha describes speaking a language as playing a role and she does not have a language in Israel - resulting in some degree of displacement - she does not completely reject identity when it comes to the language. She recognizes the naturalness of birthplace or region appearing in the language and how it is spoken. When she has dinner with someone, she notices his accent-free, but sterile Italian. “Ich versuchte herauszuhören, in welcher Gegend Italiens er die Sprache gelernt hatte, aber es gelang mir nicht - sein Italienisch war klar und steril. Ohne die Spur eines Dialektes wirkte es seelenlos, als ob es in einem Labor gezüchtet worden wäre⁷¹ (132). Thus, even though Mascha values her job because she does not

⁷¹ “I tried to hear which region he had learned the language, but I couldn’t figure it out- his Italian was clear and sterile. Without the trace of a dialect it seemed soulless, as if it had been produced in a laboratory”

have to think or speak for herself, and only needs to serve as a medium for other's ideas, it is still important to her to have a soul in the language.

By the end of *Birken*, Mascha can claim, like Gloria Anzaldúa to be in the "borderlands." This is a sort of postnational state. Both Nazneen and Mascha occupy a sort of "borderland," but in *Birken*, Mascha's borderland is more like Gloria Anzaldúa's famous description: "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa qt. in Jay 78). To some extent, this is due to Mascha's unique migration situation. It is less "nationally" diasporic and more transnationally diasporic. That is, while other migrants identify with the places they leave, Mascha is an ethnic German, an ethnic Jew, and a resident of a country whose borders were crossed over several times. Her identity has never been bound to a single group.

In *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, Grjasnova shows us that we are not lost if we are homeless, and that we do not have to assimilate if we are different. Since labels and classifications are imaginary anyway, we also do not have to look for acceptance under these terms. Instead, we need to make sure we have a strong continuity with our past and that we build strong relationships with the people we come in contact with and participate in these discussions. Eventually, transnationalism works, the distinction between the self and other does disappear and we can create "a new value system with images and symbols that [better] connect us to each other and to the planet." In many ways, *Birken* is like *Brick Lane*, with the primary distinction that we cannot see clearly *Birken* where integration can happen, but that it should, and that it is more likely to occur in the presence of transnationalism.

CONCLUSION- NEITHER FICTION NOR VOICES REMAIN WITHIN THEIR BORDERS

In her review of German literature since World War II, Necia Chronister states that “one of the most striking shifts of the German literature scene since the fall of the Berlin Wall is its polyphonic, multi-perspectival, and multicultural nature.” One can extend Chronister’s observations to the English literary market and recognize that both authors I discuss in my exploration of contemporary literature are multicultural. Monica Ali was born in Bangladesh and raised in England while Olga Grjasnova is, much like her protagonist Maria Kogan, a German-heritage Russian Jew from Azerbaijan who came to Germany when she was young. Both authors directly address the experiences of migrants and immigration in their first novels while moving on to different, more subtle explorations of migration in their subsequent works. In *Brick Lane* and *Birken* the authors remind readers about the complex layers in understanding diaspora, migration, multiculturalism, national, and transnationalism, while simultaneously displaying the use of layered language that runs parallel to these themes.

The terms change just as much as the people change, and our communities are becoming more and more diverse,⁷² but not beyond a scale that we can manage. It only

⁷² As an exercise in futility, one can wonder whether immigration will ever cease. The forces of why people come or leave their countries are called “push” or “pull.” Factors that make a country more attractive for a potential immigrant, such as work-places or a secure life are called “pull” factors. Poverty and war are the alternative “pushes” that instigate people to emigrate. As long as the political, economic, and/or social situation seems better in another country than their own, and the benefits and opportunities outweigh the investment of moving and the risks, people will continue to migrate. Even if every country were politically, economically, and socially stable, the technological developments through the 21st century offer themselves to curious, interested people who want to work or study internationally or promote the exchange of ideas in person. Given these factors, if anything, migration will increase.

depends, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, on the “style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 15). It seems appropriate to evoke Anderson in light of new considerations of nation states and possibilities for transnationalism since much of these considerations occur in literature. According to Anderson, the print press and colonialism (as well as subsequent changes in language use and politics) led to the development of “nations.” I encourage readers to see the parallel relationship of migration and contemporary literary production in creating new community order.

Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall recognizes the common experiences of the migrant, specifically the diasporic individual, in the modern man. He discusses this with social anthropologist Pnina Werbner in an interview aptly named “Cosmopolitanism, Globalism, and Diaspora.” Throughout the interview, Hall often refers to the diasporic state as interchangeable with the migrant state, and he sees it as indicative of a sort of cosmopolitanism, as though retaining roots while living somewhere else, being “home” within very different borders, rejects the authority of nationhood. “Diasporas have always been seen as the archetypal, boundary-crossing strangers, and in that sense they are thought to epitomize cosmopolitanism” (Hall and Werbner 346). He extends this idea to describe most people as living in a sort of diaspora. Hall states that

every diaspora has its regrets. Although you can never go back to the past, you do have a sense of loss of an intimate connection with a history, a landscape, family, tradition, custom - the vernacular. In a sense, this is the fate of all modern people - we have to lose those connections, but we seem to require the myth, the illusion that we are going to back to them. (Hall and Werbner 350).

Hall incites several of the themes of migration literature and the experiences of the modern man. Our connections with the past are complicated by the fractured representations and the reminders of how much access we actually have to the past. Changes in social and familial structures have affected how we relate to tradition and home. Furthermore with the advent of the internet age, people move quickly between virtual and physical worlds, countries, perspectives and radical ideas. Our present is marked by a radical split between space and place. Unbound by the physical place we occupy, we have come to travel endless layers of space and the universal condition of people has become one explained by hybridity. All of these movements make us, to some extent, migrants.

Thus, when we ask ourselves why migration literature is increasingly popular by commercial standards in Germany, England, and the U.S., we must consider that:

- 1) we are in an age where time, space, and the chronicles of these times and spaces are becoming more and more threatened, and thus more and more interesting. As Peter Adler writes: “Communication and cultural exchange are the preeminent conditions of the twentieth century” (Adler).
- 2) transportation costs and safety have made travel between continents a more viable option for many people, allowing for the volume of transportation to, and back from, “foreign” places to increase dramatically since the turn of the 20th century
- 3) post-WWII immigration laws and political changes in relation to formations of the nation state have made immigration much more regulated and stable options.
- 4) these migrant experiences of trying to “find our niche” are reminiscent of the age-old search for the “myth” of belongingness

- 5) the works describing these migrant experiences provide new images and languages for exploring “belongingness.” These images and languages are present in the depiction of the “migrant,” and thus interesting for us to read.

If we consider these conditions as true, then the literature describing the diasporic situation is a double diaspora,⁷³ to some extent, in which the figures feel the first diaspora of their universal state and the second one in their personal situation of movement. The processes these figures undergo to answer the questions: “What is their position in relation to the places they find themselves in, or to the places they come from, and what do they make of the experience of displacement and of themselves?” (347)- universal questions- become models for all of us in navigating our changing world. Even if cosmopolitanism is something “yet to come, we do not know what it currently is” (Fardon qt. in Werbner 249), these literatures become archives of us trying to figure out what it is.

People often ask me why, as a student in the United States, I chose to study Anglophone, German, and Russian literature while remaining relatively ignorant of the U.S. literary tradition. It is natural to reply with aesthetic preferences and practical application, but the underlying reasons include a desire to study something “other” than that which I already know, and because in reading these other literatures I sometimes happen across perspectives of these “others” towards my “homeland” that help me better understand how I live here.

I am a German-American with Russian blood. Due to my bilingual and bicultural upbringing, I have often thought about the intersection of cultures and the postmodern,

⁷³ In his interview with Pnina Werbner, Stuart Hall states “I’m twice diaspora-ised!” (352) to explain the extent to which he feels “otherness and difference” and how he can experience movement.

postcolonial idea of the “third spaces;” I feel, like Gloria Anzaldúa famously describes, as though I am caught in the “Borderlands” “[...] straddling [...] cultures and their value systems” (Anzaldúa 1851). These are difficult to navigate and as a result of my early exposure to “conflicting information and points of view,” I have discovered that I am unable to “hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” (1851). This allows me to see how the US is a border or contact zone and acknowledge that it is also, to some extent, “an invention of Europe” (Jay 183). Germany and Britain have their own challenges of multicultural, multiethnic, *Einwanderungsland* contact zones that often parallel those of the United States.

However, while keeping my foci of reading and discussion in the European sphere, I fail to leave the “Western” perspective of these subjects. My perspectives of “difference” and “otherness” are from U.S. and European, usually white, Christian-based perspectives. If I were to complete a new comparative project, I would look at migration literature⁷⁴ from Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Brazil, China, and India, among many others, to see the further illumination of diversity in the field. I write “further” because in reading contemporary German and Anglophone literature, one notices that the “Western” perspective is anything but homogenous. This becomes true especially in the field of migration literature. Nevertheless, the challenges faced by migrants to South America, Africa or Asia are different due to different national trajectories, different ideas of community and nation, and contact with various kinds of ideas and frameworks. I think

⁷⁴ I would be interested to observe the trajectory of the genre of the novel and its primacy in displaying the themes and language inherent (debatably) to the representation of migration, but I recognize the diversity of genres that belong to migration literature such as Yoko Tawada’s German-Japanese poetry or Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus*. Even though *Maus* focusses on the story of a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor, it also illuminates the experience of immigration to the U.S. I also think that the growing considerations of film and multimedia representations of migrant experiences will be included in any further work I would do in the field.

that by looking at these literatures more closely and taking them as the primary sources of comparison, rather than being used as the secondary unit of consideration, I will be able to more clearly see the extent to which nationalism and transnationalism are supported by the narratives and whether or not these ideas really do stem from Western hegemonic thought.

In the meantime, my suggestion for continued work in migration literature once again illuminates the primacy of “nation” in distinguishing between literary groups. This occurs despite my increased pull by theorists like Søren Frank and Paul Jay to think beyond national groups in classifying literature. Mary Louise Pratt reminds us to ask the how these texts are located: Are they written from within the culture, or do they stand in opposition? Do they challenge from within (if within) or do they serve the “European industrial, intellectual and commercial interest?” (Pratt 605). These are questions we must continue to ask. I recognize that one must look for new ways to describe literature beyond “German,” “English,” “Russian,” “French.” The label “English” has always been difficult, since it could apply to both U.S. and British literature, but also Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Indian, Jamaican, South African, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani (among many others). Realistically, German-language literature, Francophone, or Spanish-language literary production are just as diverse. Throughout these considerations, it should soon become clear that in using “national” categories, one actually refers to groups of people who share a common language group based on the Indo-European language mapping.

The relationship between language and nation has always been significant and complex. Thus, one can think about the fragmentation of “nation” in the same way that Bakhtin fragments language with heteroglossia and explores the underlying social and

individual ideologies to which we lay claim. Rather than discussing language use as bound in national terms, Bakhtin reminds us of other ways to categorize language use: by profession, age group, generation, social class, geographical region, family, and hobbies, to name but a few possibilities. Through Bakhtin, it seems more reasonable to discuss literature beyond its borders. We can extend the transnationalism inherent in Bakhtin's language considerations to find more appropriate labels for our literature as well.

"Migration literature" is a better label, since the term describes universal conditions that can be seen in these literatures: alienation, discovery, home and journey, individualism and conformity, and be applied to a huge range of literatures from virtually any country.

The universalism of these literatures could prompt one to term them "cosmopolitan." "Cosmopolitanism," often seen as the philosophical or anthropological parallel to "globalism," derives from Immanuel Kant's vision of "Enlightenment" upon which many modern ideas of Western rationality are based. It can refer to the common conception of being a citizen of the world and the subsequent suggestions of belonging to the human community. Nevertheless, as philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah explains, it is not possible to take interest in the lives, practices and beliefs of others without making conversation to explore human possibilities (Appiah 72). Literature is a way of "making conversation" and one could argue that we should call literature dealing with the representation of different practices and beliefs "cosmopolitan."

At the same time, however, Stuart Hall challenges the "Western" orientation of our theories and terms for discussing the movement of people in our post-colonial world. He points out that the motivations behind cosmopolitanism were "built into" Enlightenment. It "represented itself as 'universal' [and] inevitably became harnessed

back to the West” (Hall and Werbner 349). Thus, in thinking about others, the “West” thinks about itself. This means that anyone “cosmopolitan” must give up something that makes him/her diverse to be considered as such. This explains why Appiah argues that “[y]ou can’t have any respect for human diversity and expect everyone to become cosmopolitan” (Appiah 72).

In a similar vein, as I wrote in Chapter One on *Brick Lane*, one cannot expect someone to become something s/he is not if one respects diversity. People need to think beyond their borders, and I believe that a country’s orientation towards its immigrants will reflect the people’s level of thinking beyond their borders. In reading *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and *Brick Lane*, one can look closely at the immigrant experience and how these immigrants interact with the nations of which they are residents. The extent to which migrants “belong” to a nation ranges between the two novels. How and why the range occurs depends on the individual story being depicted, but also on the perspective of how assimilation or integration is possible, based on the level of nationalism and transnationalism in nation.

In Ali’s England, the range of integration and nationalism is higher. At one point, two opposing viewpoints (Chanu’s and Mrs. Azad’s) discuss the immigrant experience. Chanu seems to set the tone by calling the immigrant story a “tragedy” (113).

“I’m talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity and heritage. I’m talking about children who don’t know what their identity is. I’m talking about the feeling of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I’m talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one’s sanity while

striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking –"
"Crap!"(113)

In her response to Chanu, Mrs. Azad points out several aspects of their existence: "Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like westerners. Fact: that's no bad thing [...]" (113).

In *Birken*, the second generation (or those who grow up in Germany) also "act more and more like westerners" and seem integrated, but we see more clearly the difficulty of integration for first generation immigrants. "Deutschland hatte für meinen Vater keine Verwendung"⁷⁵ (53). Nazneen in *Brick Lane* learns to find a meaningful existence in London, England. Mascha's father ceases to have one in Germany and Mascha herself seems less at ease in her "adopted" country than Bibi. In Chapter Two we show Mascha's situation is being less strictly devoted to assimilating due to a more transnational awareness.

Brick Lane shows us that integration may be easier coming from within a cohesive society (Tower Hamlets) within the larger space (London) than immediately entering the larger space, because it provides a reality of belonging in the space. *Birken* shows us that integration is not national and need not be based on a firm sense of place. Both books show us that immigrants should not have to take on ideas of nation or culture since these things are only fictions anyway. Instead, as the heterogeneity of voices already indicates to us, migrants should look for ways to "connect."⁷⁶ They do not have to find a home in one particular language or in a specific national space (though learning

⁷⁵ "My father had no use for Germany" (Grjasnova 53).

⁷⁶ In thinking about this further, consider E.M. Forster's *Howard's End* and *Passage to India* to see how the concept of "connection" between people can be used in literature.

the language may help them navigate the spaces). Rather, they can learn to belong or settle by building strong relationships with the people they come in contact with, connecting with their memories, and maintaining relationships that extend beyond the limits of place.

At the same time, these literatures help us challenge the possibilities of utopian spaces without borders, because they remind us of the difficulty in retaining identity and specificity if borders are too porous and lines between people, cultures, and histories become erased. They remind us that there is no such thing as rootlessness because we are bound by attachment, the act of having a connection to and preferring one thing over another. This does not mean that we must “belong” to something, which could imply owning or being owned, but rather that we are “self-conscious.” Looking at literature like *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and *Brick Lane* can help us to be aware of the way we incorporate the premises, values, definitions, and beliefs, in our day-to-day, largely unconscious, patterning of activities. It may not help us to become better “citizens of the world,” but, to return to Karim Amir’s statement “I am an Englishman born and bred, almost,” these studies provide a much larger pool to funnel into a word like “almost.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ In returning to Kureishi, I am reminded that while migration continues to occur, some of the first migrants who came to England and Germany in the mass immigration waves in the 50s-70s are now grandparents or great-grandparents. The rising trend in literature, as we see in *Wir Neuen Deutschen*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Kureishi’s novels, are explorations in the possibilities of integration for second and third-generation migrants. In fact, as one can see in Karim in *Brick Lane* or Cem in *Birken*, it is often second generation immigrants who experience more difficult struggles when they are excluded, discriminated by the land they grew up in and have little connections to the land(s) their parents came from. Their “hybrid” states and zones of contact within (or even on) their own bodies reflect more subtle points of consideration for research in this field.

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