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Putting Place Back Into Displacement: Reevaluating Diaspora In the Contemporary Literature of Migration

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PUTTING PLACE BACK INTO DISPLACEMENT: REEVALUATING DIASPORA IN
THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE OF MIGRATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that marries cultural geography and literary criticism to reevaluate traditional notions of what has been described as displacement or diaspora by shifting focus onto emplacement and locality. Responding to the thematic preoccupation with spatiality and movement in representative twenty-first-century texts like Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (*Strange Stars Stare toward the Earth*), Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, and Teju Cole's *Open City*, I claim that these literary works envision radically new possibilities for migrants to attach meanings and symbolism to their everyday lived space. Specifically, I argue that migrants construct a sense of belonging in their new environment that manifests in affective or cognitive terms: as a sense of home and comfort and/or as a way of knowing. Employing a critical geographical conceptualization of "place" this dissertation analyzes examples from the German and Anglo-American context, concentrating in particular on intimate places like dwellings, parks, and neighborhoods, as well as on the city as a larger cultural construct. The last two chapters further develop the idea that new media—as represented in Nell Freudenberger's novel *The Newlyweds* and by Teju Cole's Twitter feed—produce new forms of community and interconnectedness. These bring the multiple homelands closer together than before and drastically alter traditional experiences of migration.

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INTRODUCTION

Place matters.

Migration is a spatial phenomenon. Migrants move through this world and with them they bring a sense of the places of their past. They carry past experiences, memories, and knowledges; and they have the ability to deeply affect and change the places through which they pass or to which they relocate. Narratives by and about migrants are inherently spatial. They tell of the relocation from one place to another, of multiple destinations, multiple stops, and potential returns; and they tell of how these individual places are experienced and negotiated, and how they shape migrant subjectivities. These processes are often framed in terms of diaspora, exile, or immigration—concepts that traditionally evoke feelings of loss and longing, suggesting that migrants have left behind their home for good, belong neither here nor there, and are forever uprooted and displaced. There have been attempts to theorize this position in more creative and productive terms, emphasizing how migrants uphold ties to the homeland or underscoring how they forge connections to other diasporic communities or local subjects. However, the concrete spatial dimensions and the role of particular locales as an important medium for emplacement or re-emplacement have been underexplored by scholarship of diaspora and migration. There has been a particular dearth of work on how such places and the relationship between migrants and places have been imagined in the contemporary literature of migration.

In this dissertation I want therefore to reevaluate what has traditionally been described as *displacement* or *diaspora* by shifting the focus onto *emplacement* and *locality*. Responding to the thematic preoccupation with physical and metaphorical spaces in such representative texts of the recent literature of migration as Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (*Strange Stars Stare toward the Earth*), and Teju Cole's *Open City*, I claim that these literary works envision radically new possibilities for migrants to attach meanings and symbolism to their everyday lived space. My dissertation is structured around two interrelated key arguments. First, I argue that migrants construct a sense of belonging to their new environment that—reflecting the various connotations associated with the concept of belonging—manifests in varying degrees of attachment either as a sense of home and comfort and as a predominantly affective category; or as a way of knowing—of getting to know or already knowing one's new cultural context—hence, belonging as a sense of mental ownership and a cognitive category. Second, I claim that using a critical conceptualization of “place,” as espoused by Doreen Massey, Michael Keith, Steve Pile, and other theorists from human geography, a focus on such often very complex places of belonging can serve as an analytical tool to read literary texts and better understand the local circumstances and day-to-day realities of migrant identities as represented in the contemporary literature of migration. By approaching the question of emplacement from these two angles, I hope to show how migrants may feel temporarily out of place or displaced but are never without a place. This perspective offers a new framework through which to examine the relationship between migrants and their environments and therefore

emerges as an important paradigm shift away from conventional theorizations of displacement.

According to the International Organization of Migration, the estimated number of international migrants worldwide in 2013 is 214 million. 27.5 million are internally displaced migrants; 15.4 are million refugees. In other words, “one of out of every 33 persons in the world today is a migrant” (International Organization for Migration). Numbers, of course, vary from country to country. There has also been a trend that the top countries of destination today actually receive smaller shares of migrants than top countries did in the year 2000. Yet with the continuing unrest in the Middle East, a civil war in Syria, and other geopolitical shifts, these trends may be about to change again, and the number of international migrants is projected to rise. In addition, what these international statistics fail to account for is the number of second- or third-generation immigrants, naturalized citizens who are foreign-born, citizens who have one foreign parent, and other migratory circumstances or positionalities for which the German context has invented a convenient though problematic term that is often too generously used: “Migrationshintergrund” (“migration background”).¹

The United States, Britain, and Germany are three contexts that have been decisively shaped by migration. While the United States is a country that is famously founded on immigration—accountable for concepts like the “melting pot” and the “salad

¹ “Migrationshintergrund” is a term used to describe everyone who defies a straightforward identification as German regardless of citizenship status or country of origin. The German writer and public intellectual Zafer Şenocak who was himself born in Turkey but has lived in Germany for over forty years has written prolifically about the debate surrounding this term—in conjunction with questions of integration and Germanness—first in his 1992 essay collection *Atlas des tropischen Deutschlands* (translated into English as *Atlas of a Tropical Germany*) and most recently in the 2011 *Deutschsein: Eine Aufklärungsschrift* (*Germanness: A Manifesto*, my translation). See also Maria Stehle’s and Beverly M. Weber’s article in the February 2013 issue of *German Studies Review* titled “German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup, and Multicultural Belonging.”

bowl” as metaphors for assimilation and multiculturalism—Germany and Britain stand out as nations with unique histories of migration and diversity. Britain, once the world’s largest empire, can look back on a long history of colonial and postcolonial migration, with London being the major hub for such movements. Germany, on the other hand, where immigration is mainly a result of the guest worker program established after WWII, is still haunted by its national socialist past and has never defined itself as a country of immigration—even though statistics paint a very different picture. Berlin—like London—is a multicultural city although for quite different reasons and migratory entanglements.² The late twentieth- and early twenty-first century is furthermore a time at which migration and related phenomena have not only been continuously shaping and reshaping the demographic make-up but have also had significant effects on the various economic, political, and cultural discourses in these three cultural contexts. The public media present us on a daily basis with examples of the various and often competing discourses surrounding migration, immigration, or asylum. In the United States, for instance, immigration and minority populations have become a major subject of debate with both political camps eager to appeal to the “minority vote,” tackle illegal immigration, and reach a new consensus on how to bring in skilled workers and foreign students.³ In 2010 and 2011 both German chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron pronounced multiculturalism a failed project, with Cameron

² The historical conditions of each respective national context are also reflected in the literature coming out of these countries: a long-standing tradition of immigrant literature in the United States, postcolonial literature in the United Kingdom, and guest worker literature, foreigner literature, or minority literature in Germany.

³ Some of these issues were hotly debated during the presidential debates in 2012 but are perhaps even more urgent today, in particular as the Republican Party is trying to refashion their public image after losing to the Democrats.

even declaring a “war on multiculturalism.”⁴ Since then Britain has seen the Tottenham Riots in August 2011 and in November of the same year Germany uncovered the shocking truths behind the heinous crimes of the National Socialist Underground (NSU), a group of far-right extremists who had systematically targeted and killed several immigrants between 2000 and 2006. Issues that presently dominate the media in Britain are forced marriages and honor crimes, which have been steadily on the rise for the last few years; while Germany is alive with ongoing debates about integration and xenophobia, all of which are fueled by the continuing economic crisis of the Eurozone.⁵

Place matters in contemporary politics, economics, and cultural production. It does not require an expert to look at new releases in film, literature, and the other arts to recognize that global migratory patterns have also significantly altered this field of everyday life. Although this trend is not new, it is becoming ever more visible, spotlighting remote settings and global entanglements, and also providing new perspectives on distinctive localities within each respective national context. In June 2010 *The New Yorker* celebrated the “20 under 40” most successful young writers in the

⁴ Both Merkel and Cameron took a public stance on multiculturalism and failed integration in 2010 and 2011. Most major newspapers reported about this. See Oliver Wright and Jerome Taylor for *The Independent*, Tristana Moore for *Time*, and *Die Zeit* (“Merkel: Ansatz für Multikulti absolut gescheitert”).

⁵ According to recent articles in the British *Guardian*, for instance by Rachel Williams and Sayeeda Warsi in 2011 and 2012, forced marriages account for up to 8000 marriages a year, honor killings tally over 2800—and these are only the cases that are reported. In Germany, on the other hand, public discourse has been shaped by controversial public figures such as Thilo Sarrazin, a politician and former executive of the Deutsche Bundesbank who in 2010 published his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (“*Germany is Doing Away with Itself*”) in which he blames Germany’s Muslim population for Germany’s economic and cultural decline. Other debates, for instance about circumcision or the multiethnic make-up of the national soccer team play into this discourse on integration and national belonging. Again, see Stehle’s and Weber’s recent article in *German Studies Review*.

United States, almost all of whom were of “migration background.”⁶ In 2012 Germanist Karin Yeşilada pronounced the new “Muslim Turn”—following Leslie Adelson’s *Turkish Turn*—as a call for both a reorientation within German Studies and a more effective response to controversial public figures like Thilo Sarrazin. Yeşilada’s invocation of this turn coincides with the increasing numbers of novelists and playwrights of Muslim background, as well as other writers focusing on Islam in Germany. This trend is also visible in the United Kingdom where critics have equally lauded the arrival of a new generation of Muslim writers, in addition to already established first-, second-, or third-generation migrant writers in each country.⁷

Place also matters because of a recent shift in the humanities that has come to be termed the “spatial turn.”⁸ Following other shifts or turns in intellectual thought, such as the “linguistic turn,” the “cultural turn,” or the “postcolonial turn,” scholars tend to place the “spatial” or “geographical turn” into the 1980s and 1990s and frame it as a critical reorientation toward spatiality across the disciplines. While the nineteenth century is generally considered the century of history, historicism, and “time,” starting with the 1920s—according to Barney Warf and Santa Arias in their introduction to *The Spatial*

⁶ Included in *The New Yorker* “20 under 40” fiction issue are, for instance: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Téa Obreht, Gary Shteyngart, Daniel Alarcón, David Bezmozgis, and Yiyun Li, all of whom were born outside of the United States.

⁷ Mike Phillips in his review of Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* for *The Guardian* speaks of “a new genre of contemporary English fiction” that has “emerged in the form of a series of novels by Muslim writers that explore the fault lines between various Islamic cultures and the way of life flourishing in the US and western Europe.”

⁸ See Richard Rorty’s *The Linguistic Turn* and Frederic Jameson’s *The Cultural Turn*. In *Cultural Turns* Doris Bachmann-Medick further identifies seven turns specific to cultural studies, among them the “interpretive turn,” “postcolonial turn,” and “spatial turn.” Also compare Clifford Geertz’s ideas of “thick description” and “blurred genres” and the intellectual trend toward increasingly interdisciplinary approaches to culture and society.

Turn—space was reinserted into “modern consciousness” (3).⁹ It is, however, not until the 1980s with Marxist thinkers like David Harvey and Fredric Jameson—who tie the contemporary age of postmodernity to a stage of late capitalism—that space and spatiality genuinely move to the center of critical thought. Harvey’s groundbreaking formulation that space is not given but socially constructed, constantly producing and reproducing means of production, power structures, and social relations, in conjunction with a shift in new landscapes and new geographies as a result of globalization and the international division of labor, opens up a new perspective from which to look at spatiality.¹⁰ And although Harvey also coined the concept of “space-time compression” which indicates a disappearance of space, a new interest in spatiality is sparked. Postmodernity and postmodern thought also notoriously coincide with a notion of placelessness and depthlessness—compare for instance Jean Baudrillard’s ideas of simulation and simulacrum and Jameson’s famous analysis of the Westin Bonaventure hotel in Los Angeles as a new kind of hyperspace—but they nevertheless champion a critical attention to space. Jameson, in particular, describes the late 1980s as shifting from a vertical/temporal to a horizontal/spatial outlook on modern life suggesting that instead of the imperative to “always historicize!” (9), put forward in his 1982 *The Political Unconscious*, the imperative of *Postmodernism* (1990) is to “always spatialize” (130) as Susan Stanford Friedman posits in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*. Yet it is mostly because of Edward Soja that spatiality and human existence

⁹ The idea that the nineteenth century and modernist thought were dedicated to time, while in particular the second half of the twentieth century and postmodern theory is marked by its increased attention to space is not only put forward by Warf and Arias. Rather, this stance is a commonplace in all central works of the authors mentioned in this introduction such as Harvey, Jameson, Soja, Massey, or Cresswell, and it is also the key vantage point for anthologies or encyclopedic textbooks that chronicle the spatial turn.

¹⁰ See in particular Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

can no longer be considered separately. In *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Soja insists on adding spatiality to the traditional dialectic of being that until then had consisted of the established categories of sociality and historicity. He further emphasizes the intersectionality and simultaneity of these three ontological categories, thereby dictating that history, society, and spatiality are not only interrelated but interdependent.¹¹ As Tim Cresswell puts it in *Place: A Critical Introduction*: “to be human is to be ‘in place’” (23).

It is critical to note at this point that despite the “spatial turn,” scholars of the humanities have been slow to use space as a category of investigation. The spatial turn, which has only retroactively come to describe a trend that started in the 1980s, began in geography, which is a discipline that is by definition already dedicated to the study of spatiality. Here it materialized as a shift away from the discipline’s positivist origins toward a more heterogeneous and fluid understanding of society and space, which geographers also understand in terms of a poststructural or postmodern turn. This turn gradually transformed geography into “one of the most dynamic, innovative and influential of the social sciences” (Warf and Arias 1), so that today, geography is not only a field that merely imports ideas from other disciplines—above all from philosophy, cultural and literary studies, which are often perceived as being on the forefront of progressive thinking—but is now also an exporter of ideas. Starting in the 1990s, scholars in history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and literary and cultural studies set

¹¹ While space may have gained new critical attention in the late 1980s, it needs to be noted, however, that Soja’s ideas are not new. He builds his theory on Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space as firstspace (material objective, physical), secondspace (imaginary, subjective, mental), and lived space (space in its lived materiality, social) that for him also intersect and cannot be viewed separately. See Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, first published in French as *Production de l’Espace* in 1974. Yet also in the German context, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer had been thinking critically about space as early as 1900 and are often referred to as early “Raumdenker” (“thinkers of space”; Bachmann-Medick 286).

out to incorporate spatiality into their research agendas, a trend that has continued ever since. The last few years specifically have seen an increasing attention to spatiality across the humanities, in addition to the publication of several anthologies, such as *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Warf and Arias, 2009) and *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* (Fisher and Mennel, 2010). This development shows that a spatial approach to literary studies is still a relatively new field of inquiry in which many possibilities remain unexplored, especially when it comes to marrying the subject of migration with literary texts. Here a focus on spatiality promises a new and highly innovative strategy to examine how literature represents the diverse experiences of migration. I therefore see this dissertation not only as an important contribution to the study of migration as embraced by diaspora studies and related fields insofar as they have tried to come to terms with the phenomenon of migration in literary texts, but also as continuing the conversation about the spatial turn in the humanities.

That said, the topic of migration and the much more wide-ranging discourses of exile and diaspora are by no means new in literature, literary criticism, and the social sciences. Exile, movement, and displacement have been common themes since Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *The Poems of Exile*, and even the Bible. *The Odyssey* and *The Poems of Exile* have for a long time served as the primary literary models of exile in Western literary history.¹² Exile, and especially the intellectual in exile, further regains significance in the first half of the twentieth century—in particular between 1933 and

¹² Compare, for instance, Claudion Guillén's seminal article "On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile" published in 1976 in which he distinguishes between Ovid's literature of exile and Homer's literature of counter-exile. While in Ovid's case exile is the primary condition and subject matter of literature, *The Odyssey* also thematizes displacement and loss but does not require exile as an actual condition. Homer's mode allows for hope and the possibility of homecoming, while Ovid's poetry represents hopelessness and the impossibility of return.

1945 for the German context—but also in the aftermath of WWII and during struggles of independence and efforts of decolonization in the Global South.¹³ Scholars have written prolifically about such types of displacement. Perhaps one of the most prominent critics to theorize this state is Edward Said, for whom being *Out of Place*—the title of his memoir—was a scholarly and a personal subject matter throughout his lifetime. In his 1993 essay “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals,” Said, following Theodor Adorno, pronounces exile as “one of the saddest fates” (369), transposing the exile into a “median state . . . beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (370-71). Yet he also understands exile as a metaphorical condition. According to him, “[you] cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation” (373), a statement that underlines exile as a temporal as well as a spatial disposition.¹⁴ Finally, Said also points toward advantages of this position, crediting the exile with what he calls a “double or exile perspective” (378) that arises out of the constant comparison of several contexts.¹⁵ Furthermore, he claims that exile might at times even be the positive alternative to staying behind.

¹³ See also Harry Levin’s chapter on “Literature and Exile” in *Refraction* that focuses specifically on intellectual writers in exile such as Boris Pasternak, Vladimir Nabokov, Heinrich Heine, Henry James, and Thomas Mann.

¹⁴ Compare Adorno’s positum in *Minima Moralia* that in a post-war world home has become a futile and impossible concept. Similarly, as a consequence of postmodernity, it is often assumed that today everyone lives in a state of exile as the postmodern condition is generally perceived as alienating.

¹⁵ Said’s “double perspective that never sees things in isolation” (378) resonates with a variety of similar concepts throughout the disciplines, such as bell hooks’s “space at the margin,” Patricia Hill Collins’s concept of the “outsider within,” W. E. B. DuBois’s “double consciousness,” or Uma Narayan’s “double vision.” All of these approaches focus on the specific situatedness of marginalized groups. They have managed to shift the vantage point from a Western standpoint to a non-Western or oppressed view from below that they consider privileged and that can allow for a resignification of this position as an active location of struggle and change.

Said thus uses exile as a term to describe various types of movement, displacement, and exilic communities and individuals which he classifies as “exilic types:” “exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés” (“Reflections on Exile” 181). In recent years, however, the concept of diaspora—though by no means a new term either—and the corresponding field of diaspora studies have come to slowly replace the focus on exile. Moreover, scholars of diaspora agree that the last thirty years, in particular, have seen an explosion of displaced people(s), as Jana Evans Braziel points out in *Diaspora: An Introduction* (2008), and have produced what Bruce Robbins in the 1998 introduction to *Cosmopolitics* calls a whole “new cast of characters” and a “change in personnel [that also] implies a change of definition” (1) of diaspora and related terms. Processes of globalization and the international division of labor, in conjunction with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and the geopolitical reorientation after September 11, topped off by the most recent events of the “Arab Spring”—not to mention migratory patterns set off by natural disasters that are only going to multiply in the face of global warming—mean that the number of displaced persons has perhaps reached a new apogee in history and has severely complicated the concepts of exile and diaspora.¹⁶ Exile—which in its most basic definition and historical actualities denotes being away from home and prevented from returning as a consequence of political persecution or punishment—can no longer serve as an adequate concept to aptly theorize modern-day migration. Similarly, diaspora—etymologically referring to “scattered

¹⁶ Braziel, in particular, defines 1989–90 and 2001 as two significant benchmarks that affect global migratory patterns producing different types of migrants and refugees, in particular. She gives a concise overview of various flows of migration on a global scale in her preface and introduction. Here she also traces the conceptualization and history of the refugee and other types of migrants. Published in 2008, her study, however, cannot yet take into account the most recent developments and the events surrounding the Arab Spring which are likely to constitute another pivotal date in the history of migration.

colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile” and only then to “the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland” such as the “black diaspora,” according to Merriam-Webster dictionary online—needs to be reconceptualized. The reasons for movement—voluntary or involuntary—the routes taken, and the destinations chosen have become more varied and multifaceted, with people from multiple origins, communities and individuals, often not only passing through just one place and not necessarily ending their journey in one particular place either. Subsequently—as Braziel and Anita Mannur note in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (2003)—the study of diaspora, migration, or exile has exploded across the disciplines with diaspora risking becoming “a catch-all phrase to speak of and for all movements, however privileged, and for all dislocations, even symbolic ones” (Braziel and Mannur 3).¹⁷

“Etymologically derived from the Greek *diasperieren*, from *dia-*, ‘across’ and –*sperieren*, ‘to sow or scatter seeds’” as Braziel and Mannur explain, the concept of diaspora implies movement across space. In the authors’ words, “diaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile” (1).¹⁸ In *Diaspora* Braziel cites the Jewish diaspora, the African diaspora, and the post-abolition European migration to the Americas as such early historical forms of diaspora, which she distinguishes from subsequent patterns of

¹⁷ Until now Braziel’s and Mannur’s collection is the only anthology that brings together the most influential articles within what is now commonly referred to as diaspora studies in one single volume (from various contexts and various scholarly disciplines). Diaspora studies emerged as an academic field in the late twentieth century. Braziel and Mannur locate its beginnings with the inauguration of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991.

¹⁸ It should be noted that Said’s and other early efforts focusing on exile could also be interpreted as a way of theorizing the other and examining difference.

migration in the twentieth century. She also differentiates various approaches to diaspora. She mentions, for instance William Safran's and Robin Cohen's attempts to categorize diasporas before, referring back to her work with Mannur, articulating her own goal as relocating diasporas within "contemporary critical moments of postcolonialism, postmodernity, and late capitalism" (25). She further distinguishes between diaspora as a term and diaspora as migratory formations, and argues that diaspora as a theoretical concept should function as a critique of nation and globalization. She also stipulates that diaspora as the actual flow of ideas, goods, and people implies a connection between the remote homelands and new cultural contexts and therefore renders the idea of diaspora as inevitably cut-off and uprooted less accurate. Finally, she insists that, as opposed to related theories of transnationalism or global capitalism, diaspora is a primarily human phenomenon. Diaspora is lived and experienced, and it is key to historicize diaspora and consider the unique trajectories of individual diasporic journeys in tandem with other aspects of lived experience and identity such as race, class, and gender, as well as the specific diasporic locations and local circumstances of migration.

While Braziel's monograph represents an important overview of diaspora studies—just like Braziel's and Mannur's anthology is a key work of reference for this field—there are myriad other scholars whose original contributions have established and advanced this field in the first place. Space will not allow a detailed discussion here but in the following I will give a brief overview of key authors and relevant trends and terms within diaspora studies and related fields before I move on to the discipline of human geography.

One distinguished scholar who has done extensive work in particular with regards to the black diaspora in the Caribbean is Stuart Hall. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1990) he theorizes the cultural identity of black diasporic subjects as constructed in two different ways. The first assumes identity as a stable and unchanging form of being, as “one, shared culture, a sort of collective” (223), a powerful imaginative construct that can be found in *Négritude* and in most postcolonial struggles. The second conceptualizes identity as becoming, as fluid and heterogeneous, and as a process of ruptures, transformations, and difference; and is, according to Hall, more accurate although also more unsettling. In the Caribbean, then, this diasporic identity arises out of the interplay between several traces or presences—*présence Africaine*, *présence Européene*, and *présence Americaine*—and between the forces of history, culture, power, and difference that produce the Caribbean as “the space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretism [are] negotiated” (234).

Creolization here emerges as a concept out of the Caribbean but has in the meantime also been applied to other contexts. Perhaps most renowned for theorizing “creolization” is Edouard Glissant who, like Hall, defines the Caribbean as a product of creolization and focuses specifically on the creative possibilities of this process, turning the Caribbean islands into a space where identities and languages not merely mix but create something new and open, a “limitless métissage” (*Poetics of Relation* 34). Glissant uses the specific geography of the Caribbean Sea with its myriad islands, states, overseas departments, and other dependencies to illustrate the chaotic and non-programmatic nature of Creole that is also reflected in his writings.

Another frequently cited scholar working on the black diaspora, but also the Jewish diaspora and diaspora in more general terms, is historian James Clifford. In his influential essay “Diasporas” (1994), he distinguishes between diaspora as a theoretical construct, discourses of diaspora, and historically specific experiences of diaspora. He criticizes attempts to classify diaspora according to fixed characteristics, above all Safran’s insistence on an “‘ideal type’ of the Jewish diaspora” (305), and instead describes diasporas as “multiple communities of a dispersed population” (304) that have access to multiple homes and homelands, and thrive on decentered “lateral connections” (306) rather than on the horizontal connections retained within one community in the host country. Furthermore, in lieu of trying to come up with specific definitions he advises that we categorize diaspora by articulating what diaspora is working against, which, according to him, is the nation, travel, and what he calls “claims by ‘tribal’ people” (307). However, taking into account Aihwa Ong’s idea of flexible citizenship, which allows for the possibility of identification with the host country as an economic strategy, Clifford concedes that even these boundaries are not clear-cut.¹⁹

Perhaps the most prominent theorist within the field of African or black diaspora studies is Paul Gilroy, who in his highly influential monograph *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) construes the “Black Atlantic” as a “new topography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and presuppositions of the nation state have been left behind because they are seen to be outmoded” (16).

Comparing this contact zone to “the image of a ship in motion” (4), he imagines a

¹⁹ Ong’s idea put forward in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* refers to the possibility of choosing a citizenship that complies with global cultural and economic forces, a cosmopolitan ideal that allows the migrant—in Ong’s example the Chinese—to identify as American, Canadian, or Australian rather than Chinese, or only Chinese, if that is the country to which they relocated.

transnational or postnational diasporic space of traversal, cultural exchange, production, and belonging where black cultural elements from the African and American continent, from the United Kingdom and the Caribbean (Jamaica in particular) meet and creatively syncretize.²⁰

Barnor Hesse, in the introduction to the edited volume *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (2000), on the other hand declares Britain itself as a “diaspora-space” (11), marked by its “unresolved post-colonial condition” (13) due to incomplete decolonization and residual as well as newly emergent “multicultural transruptions” (16).²¹ He further coins the term “diasporicity” to capture how diasporas always generate “by their own specifically internal rules of explication, forms of enunciation and relations of representation which designate their identities and constitutive outsides” (113).

Lastly, Michelle Wright in *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004) examines the production of blackness across various spaces in the United States, Britain, and Europe. Starting with the transplantation of West Africans to the West, she critically compares specific discourses working together in the production of black subjectivities—for instance Enlightenment, nationalist, postcolonial, urban, and provincial discourses—that vary across geographical spaces. Wright understands diaspora as a spatial and temporal term that refers to all black subjects—and in some

²⁰ Gilroy had already tackled similar issues in one of his chapters of *Ain't no Black in the Union Jack: Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987): “Diaspora, Utopia and the Critique of Capitalism.”

²¹ Hesse adopts the term “diaspora space” from Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996). Included in *Un/Settled Multiculturalism* is furthermore Hesse’s chapter “Diasporicity: Black Britain’s Post-Colonial Formations” in which he gives an expansive synopsis of black migration to and black communities in Britain.

contexts, for instance in Germany, also encompasses other minority identities—living in the diaspora.

Beyond the fields of Jewish diaspora and African or black diaspora studies, there is furthermore a vast body of scholarship dealing with the Asian (South Asian, South East Asian, or Chinese) diaspora. Avtar Brah has produced a comprehensive study of the Asian diaspora in Britain.²² In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), Lisa Lowe examines the Asian diaspora in the United States yet advises caution in the usage of terms like Asian-American or Asian diaspora.²³ R. Radhakrishnan, meanwhile, in his essay “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” defines ethnicity and identity as fluid and in flux, undergoing changes due to interactions with local American culture and subjects but also remaining connected to the homeland. He also broaches the topic of authenticity, hypothesizing that Indian-Americans—and for that matter other hyphenated identities as well—though separated from their native context, can nevertheless visit, stay in touch with friends and family, and do their own research so that it is possible for them to be more knowledgeable about India than an “authentic” Indian living there.

Approaching authenticity from yet another perspective, Rey Chow in her essay “Against the Lures of Diaspora: Minority Discourse, Chinese Women, and Intellectual Hegemony”

²² Brah, who was herself born in India but grew up in Uganda, attended university in the United States, and eventually relocated to Britain, develops what she calls “cartographies of intersectionality” (10) to think through the specific experiences, realities, and constructions of Asianness in Britain. In the United States, Brah participated in the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Flower Power Movements, and documented Idi Amin’s politics of exclusion and violent expulsion of South Asians in Uganda. When she came to Britain in the 1970s she witnessed the tensions between the Conservative government and the left, the women’s movement, the concerns of the working class, and experiences of racism. Following from these personal experiences, Brah advocates a radically contextualized perspective that takes into account the specific political, socio-economic, and cultural coordinates to frame questions of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and identity politics—with regard to the Asian diaspora—in Britain from the 1950s to the 1990s.

²³ Following Hall’s and other poststructural theorists’ dictum of identity as becoming and positioning, she insists on the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Asian communities and individual Asian immigrants. She also moves away from the common trope of immigration as grief and loss by highlighting the opportunities and changes offered by the relocation to a different cultural context.

warns of the dangers of taking for granted immigrant and minority intellectuals as native informants. She points up how the academy tends to present migration, diaspora, and minority discourses as gendered and therefore frequently renders women doubly marginalized as they belong not only to a minority group but also to a patriarchal social system, a position which Chow identifies as a masculinist trend within the academy.²⁴ Calling attention to gender and sexuality, other theorists have focused specifically on the queer diaspora.²⁵

Apparent in the works of these last theorists, and in these cases also with regard to the Asian diaspora but not limited to it, is thus also a shift from historically specific diasporic communities and the subject of race—a term more widely used when theorizing the black diaspora—to ethnicity and to the diversity, heterogeneity, and fluidity of diasporic communities and individual identities. Another trend that has to do with migratory patterns and migrant populations comes with processes of increased globalization and global interconnectedness. The economic migrant or labor migrant—by no means a new type of migrant but a category that has undergone significant reconceptualizations since it first emerged—has led Chow to question once more the concept of ethnicity, fleshing out how economic migrants often remain identified as migrants even after they have become citizens. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) Chow refers to this process as “*ethnicization of labor*” (34, italics in orig.) and shows how diaspora and ethnicity are also labels imposed by local non-

²⁴ Both Radhakrishnan’s and Chow’s essays are included in Braziel’s and Mannur’s anthology.

²⁵ Gayatri Gopinath and David Eng for the Asian diaspora and Lisa Duggan for migrant minorities in the United States focus on gay and lesbian migrant identities and ties across national boundaries or ethnicities to the (white) gay community or other queer identities. Other topics they tackle are transnational or diasporic queerness and the power of activism.

diasporic citizens on subjects perceived as other in a process that folds social class into presumptions about ethnicity and migration.

Another main player whose work builds specifically on globalization is Arjun Appadurai. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) Appadurai introduces the idea of new imagined worldsapes. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, he proposes five new dimensions of transnational or postnational cultural flows—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes—that are interdependent with the spread of mass media and deterritorialization.²⁶ Appadurai further insists that while movement and diaphora are by no means new phenomena, what is new is that the world itself and specific localities have also become increasingly unstable and in flux, creating new kinds of global relations and “tragedies of displacement” (38).

These theorists represent the core of the field of diaspora studies. Yet they are perhaps more closely affiliated with other overlapping fields such as postcolonial theory, history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural and literary studies. Postcolonial theory, in particular, is one field that has mobilized a variety of ideas and concepts that have considerably shaped diaspora studies. As an interdisciplinary area of inquiry, postcolonial theory focuses on knowledge, power, colonialism, imperialism, decolonization, resistance, and literature, and interrelated issues of nation, language, difference, and identity and so necessarily broaches upon migration and displacement. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a key postcolonial theorist who provides a powerful critique of representation and of the construction of the subaltern in her pivotal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988). More important for my project, however, is Homi Bhabha, who

²⁶ Deterritorialization is a concept that originated in literary studies via Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

in *The Location of Culture* (1994) examines the actual interactions between colonizer and colonized, and what he calls “border lives” (1) and “interstices” (2) of culture and difference not only in the postcolonial world but also in the West. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Bhabha uses the concepts of mimicry and hybridity as crucial tools to theorize not only the interaction between colonizer and colonized but also the mutual construction of subjectivities and the “articulation of cultural difference,” which he also refers to as a “Third Space of enunciations” (28).²⁷ In his chapter on “How Newness Enters the World” he concentrates exclusively on the figure of the migrant—a paragon of which is Saladin Chamcha in Salman Rushdie’s 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses*—as “the ‘borderline’ figure of a massive historical displacement—postcolonial migration—that is not only a ‘transitional’ reality but also a translational phenomenon” (224). Rushdie himself has written extensively about migration, and not only in his literary texts. In his essay collection *Imaginary Homelands* he describes the past as always gone and always imaginary, and envisions himself and other migrants as caught in an in-between state, straddling two cultures as “translated men” (17), and haunted by feelings of loss and guilt. Nonetheless Rushdie acknowledges that this “is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (15). Likening the memory of the past to a broken mirror, he insists that this broken glass can be “a useful tool with which to work with the present” (12) thereby foregrounding the positive and productive qualities of diaspora.

As a result of the more recent conceptualizations of memory as fluid, shared, and collective in contexts that are increasingly transnational, transcultural, and global,

²⁷ Soja, too, introduces the concept of thirdspace as a multifaceted model to overcome traditional ways of thinking and open up the binaries that have dominated Western thought. See *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*.

memory studies have not only enriched but also begun to transform diaspora studies.²⁸ As Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser, and Yolande Jansen note in their introduction to the edited volume *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics* (2007), memory used to be traditionally defined as incomplete and cut-off from the past, a definition they identify as the crucial link between memory studies and diaspora studies. Yet they insist that instead of viewing both memory and diaspora as place-bound—restricted to a place and therefore always running the risk of being severed from it—they should be seen as place-based, which is a pivotal reorientation that opens up the possibility for the formation of new memories based on new experiences. This also entails that memories are not confined to places of the past or places left behind but travel with the migrant and inform how he or she reacts to new contexts encountered on their journeys.²⁹

There is one last strand of diaspora studies that I want to highlight here that is located primarily in literary studies, and instead of theorizing diaspora foregrounds the concept of migration. Working within the field of Turkish-German literature, Adelson in her seminal work *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (2005), though not necessarily finding fault with the concept of diaspora, advocates “a new critical grammar for understanding the configuration of cultural contact and [migrant] presence” (5)—in her case Turkish—in contemporary German literature. Critiquing precisely the idea of displacement and the

²⁸ Andreas Huyssen locates the reorientation of memory studies as starting in 1989/90 with “the emergence of a transnational or global memory culture” (“Diaspora and Nation” 147).

²⁹ The collection, for instance, includes Andreas Huyssen’s “Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts,” Marianne Hirsch’s and Leo Spitzer’s “Testimonial Objects. Memory, Gender, and Transmission,” and other essays similarly concerned with examining displacement and memory in a newly globalized context.

position of the migrant as “in-between” or “between two worlds” or “two cultures,” Adelson demands that research today go beyond such dualisms and depart from notions of betweenness or “happy hybridity” (5) in favor of new and more innovative ideas. Building on Appadurai, she claims that migrants and locals, their cultural contexts and stories, touch and overlap or clash in often unpredictable ways, consciously or unconsciously, and can no longer be described as two separate homogeneous worlds between which the migrant is forever suspended. To explain this condition Adelson introduces the concepts of “opposing oppositions” and “touching tales” (20), and establishes the spatial metaphor of “complex cultural positionalities” (“Opposing Oppositions” 321).

Adelson also pioneers the term “literature of migration” (*Turkish Turn* 23)—that has since been adopted by scholars beyond the German context—to distinguish this new concept of migration in literature from other conceptualizations of exile or diaspora.³⁰ While previous scholarship had already started to address the plurality and difficulties of this field—calling for a shift away from according individuals a “‘privileged’ status as in-betweens [or] mediators between two cultures” (Mardorossian 16), and calling instead for a theory of migration not as a static condition of being but as a process, a becoming, or a “migrancy” (16)—it is Adelson’s “literature of migration” that emerges as a genuine solution to the fragmented and often vague attempts at categorizing the kind of literature that tackles issues of migration.³¹ Literature of exile, diasporic literature, migrant

³⁰ See Rebecca Walkowitz, *Immigrant Fictions: Contemporary Literature in an Age of Globalization* who adopts the term “literature of migration” not only to categorize texts that thematize migration but also to talk about the circulation or migration of texts.

³¹ Mardorossian here draws heavily on the collection of essays included in *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Migration* (1995) edited by Russell King et al., another influential yet somewhat dated work

literature, guest worker, and minority literature are only some of the labels that have been applied over the years. But “literature of migration” presents itself as a more distinct yet also more elastic concept that opens up this category of literature to include writers irrespective of their national or cultural contexts; first-, second-, or third-generation migrant writers; postcolonial literature; and finally writers who might not be migrants themselves but write about migration and related topics. The term “migration” is thus also used as a more inclusive concept that is neither restricted to “immigration,” which seems to imply the intention to stay in the host country and, ideally, obtain citizenship, nor to exile or specific diasporas and diasporic communities, but allows for a discussion of the complexities and particularities of such phenomena that include movement, multiple destinations, and a possible return.³²

There is a trend in literary studies that might characterize this position as transnational, and stress how migrant writers and their protagonists cannot be represented in terms of clear-cut national belongings.³³ Yet while I deem “transnational,” or Appadurai’s “postnational,” to be useful adjectives to describe certain processes that transcend national borders, I side with Braziel above in thinking that transnational might be used to define flows of ideas, images, goods, money, or other material items, but is not necessarily sufficient for flows of people. Moreover, I fear that the prefix trans- or post-,

in the field of migration. Not Mardorossian but King starts using the terms “migrancy” as a systematic concept. The expression itself, however, goes further back and has been used across a variety of fields.

³² Naturally, I am leaving out a great body of scholarship within various fields, in particular a whole range of feminist thinkers within the areas of black feminism and transnational feminism—though considerably overlapping with postcolonial and diaspora studies—such as bell hooks, Uma Narayan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and others who have focused on the space of the margin and the specific situatedness of women in national and transnational contexts.

³³ See for instance Susan Strehle’s *Transnational Women’s Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008).

similarly to dis-placement or dis-location, perpetuates an in-between reality and vague hybridity which is precisely what I want to avoid. In this dissertation, then, I use the term “migration,” and the corresponding “migrant” and “literature of migration” unless I am referring to a specific context, a specific space, or a specific type of diaspora or im/migration.³⁴

In short, the position of the migrant and the experience of migration have been subject to extensive criticism across the disciplines and have spawned a variety of intersecting discourses. These discourses prove that while diaspora on the one hand accrues as a catch-all phrase—as Braziel and Mannur caution—it has on the other hand also been used very discreetly either as a theoretical concept, discourse, critique, or as a term to refer to specific diasporic movements, people, communities, or individuals, as well as diasporic spaces. I have illustrated how diaspora shares characteristics with related and equally contentious concepts such as multiculturalism, globalization, identity, home, belonging, and memory, as well as the identity categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and others which intersect but are not interchangeable. What I have also shown is that scholarship often relies on spatial metaphors emphasizing “cartographies” of diaspora, specific “diaspora spaces,” “contact zones,” the specific position, location, or situatedness of the migrant as “thirdspace” or “positionalities,” the crossing of borders or border conditions, and above all “dislocation” and “displacement.” Theorists of diaspora studies are further concerned with specific contexts, locations, and spaces, routes and roots: the United States, Britain, or Germany; the Black Atlantic, the

³⁴ I am however not suggesting that terms like diaspora, exile, transnational, or postnational be jettisoned in their entirety. Diaspora in particular remains a powerful conceptual category that is able to unite scholarship under the auspices of diaspora studies and is productive as it can connote a specific spatial location, while migration, derived from the Latin *migrare*, places more emphasis on movement. What I am advocating here is that such concepts be used more carefully and more specifically.

Middle Passage, the African diaspora, the Jewish diaspora, and other settler communities; the Caribbean islands, and additional postcolonial contexts and migratory patterns. Yet what is lacking in all these scholarly endeavors is a critical attention to such forms of spatiality and concrete locales.

Space as it has been theorized by human geographers over the past three decades—its meanings, implications, and possibilities—has not yet been fully explored by scholars of diaspora studies and of the literature of migration. Furthermore, there has been too much emphasis on displacement as a foundational ontological condition of exile, diaspora, and migration which, despite several creative efforts, remains rooted in the term. My goal in this dissertation is therefore to redefine this term by putting place back into displacement, or, in other words, by advocating a critical focus on the concrete spatial dimensions of this condition. This is not to say that I want to downplay the significance of this concept for certain types of diaspora. But just as an uncritical use of “diaspora” can be misleading, I would argue that displacement should not be used as an *a priori* term to describe the experience of migration in general. Migrants may feel temporarily out of place or displaced but they are never without a place. On the contrary, migrants attach meanings and symbolism to places. They rely on strategies—conscious or unconscious—to connect to their new environment and establish a sense of belonging that plays out in many different ways either as a sense of home or a “homing desire” (177) in Brah’s words, a sense of comfort and attachment, or as a way of knowing their new contexts. Migrants also forge bonds to other migrants or locals—the “lateral connections” Clifford has pointed out—but those social ties are similarly forged in specific places.

Drawing on theorists within the field of human geography, I am building my analysis upon a specific critical conceptualization of spatiality as it has emerged over the last forty years and been theorized by scholars like Harvey, Massey, Cresswell, Keith, Pile, Karen Till, and others. And although the following paragraphs are intended precisely at explaining the various geographical concepts I will be and have already been using, I would note here that while spatiality, space, and place are related and can be used interchangeably, I propose that for an analysis of literary texts it is useful to emphasize the slight nuances between these concepts. Spatiality as a more general term is derived from space and the adjective spatial, and refers to everything relating to and the conditions and implications of space (and place) at large. Space, on the other hand, denotes a larger geographical area such as a region, a city or a specific district, or suburb; whereas place tends to be located not necessarily on a smaller yet on a more personal scale signifying a specific moment or point of intersections within greater spatial relations such as a specific neighborhood, street corner, building, or a bench in a park—as it is personally meaningful to individuals.

Cresswell in *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004)—one of the key reference works for the study of place—locates the discovery of and new critical interest in place in the field of humanistic geography in the 1970s. As a result of the work of geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, place no longer merely denotes a passive location but comes to be seen as a human category, filtered through human perception and shaped by

human experiences.³⁵ Deeply indebted to phenomenological philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, humanistic geographers understand human existence as being inevitably tied to place, and define place as a primary category indicating a pause and affective bonds between humans and specific locations, while space is viewed as a secondary category and as denoting movement.

Perhaps a by-product of those early humanistic and phenomenological approaches are the ideas of an essence of place and place as home. From Heidegger's notion of dwelling—the spiritual and philosophical being in place—to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (in which he focuses specifically on the childhood home as a place of comfort, belonging, and safety that remains imprinted in our memory and shapes our future) places of home are often defined in terms of rootedness and rest. I will spend more time on these ideas in my first chapter when I talk specifically about dwelling places, but suffice it to say here that Heidegger's and Bachelard's ideas represent a rather romantic notion of home and place that has also been contested, in particular by feminist and poststructural thinkers. How places are experienced varies according to individual circumstances. Places can be safe or harmful; they can articulate inclusions and exclusions; and they are embedded within complex relations of power.

Places are not natural, passive, or pre-given. This is a theoretical position that becomes more tangible with the arrival of radical or critical geography, in particular in the 1980s and with the influence of Marxism, feminism, and eventually poststructuralism,

³⁵ Cresswell distinguishes three approaches to place: a “descriptive approach” that merely views place as location; a “social constructionist approach” as represented by most of the theorists above—Harvey, Massey, Keith, Pile, and others; and finally a “phenomenological approach” (51) in the sense of Heidegger, Bachelard, Tuan and others such as Edward Casey, Steven Feld, or Keith Basso that perceives of place as a way of being in the world. In this dissertation I will draw on both social constructionist and phenomenological approaches.

postmodernism, and postcolonial theory.³⁶ What distinguishes radical geography from previous approaches is that it understands the world as socially constructed. Already Said in his 1978 *Orientalism* had called attention to the power of imagined geographies, and in the same vein, the work of Harvey—although he is not the first one to think about spatiality as constructed—emphasizes the social constructedness of places, landscapes, and geographies. He calls attention to the way places are produced by society, the media, and individuals, and how places and identities are situated within specific contexts and layers of class relations, oppression, and resistance. In her highly innovative study of Vancouver’s Chinatown, Kay Anderson points toward similar issues, claiming that places are never the result of natural settlement and community-building, and only appear to be indigenous. Places are contingent, multi-layered, and do not have essential qualities. Nor does the membership, affiliation, or sense of belonging experienced in particular places come naturally.

Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar equally call attention to the hierarchical and hence potentially dangerous qualities of spatiality. Although they focus mostly on gender, claiming that gender is the most effective principle to organize spaces and human actions, they do not insist on gender as the only axis of power that “operates simultaneously on multiple *spatial* and *social* scales” (445). Human beings are situated in complex social locations, and spatiality as a social, cultural, political, economic, historical, and geographical construct is organized around the intersections and

³⁶ Radical geography—which is also known as critical (human) geography—refers to approaches that started in the 1960s and 1970s. Building on critical theory as espoused by the Frankfurt School, Marxism, and feminism, radical geography advocated a more just approach by considering issues of power, oppression, race, class, and gender and promoting political activism. Harvey especially helped advance this field which was also enriched by postcolonial theory and queer studies. All of this fed into the establishment of poststructural and postmodern approaches to geography. See *The Dictionary of Human Geography* for more detailed definitions.

hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, *and* gender.³⁷ Such organizing principles are often covert, and it is only when entering an unfamiliar or a potentially threatening and dangerous space that we may become aware of the dynamics of a certain location. Massey refers to this as complex networks of “power-geometry” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 149).

Massey is another key geographer whose essay “A Global Sense of Place” (1991) is frequently cited as one of the central works to call for a reconceptualization of place. Using Kilburn High Road in north-west London, the place where she used to live for many years of her life, as an example, Massey emphasizes the highly complex social differentiations found in place. Specifically, she illuminates the often diverging attitudes people have toward the same place, and the common tendency to view place as essentialist, fixed, and stable. As a result of this reactionary view, people tend to decry what they perceive as the loss of a sense of heritage and history—in particular in light of urban changes due to gentrification and migration—not recognizing that places are necessarily fluid and heterogeneous, and have always undergone changes. A postmodern sense of placelessness and Harvey’s concept of space-time compression further aggravates such “introverted obsessions” leading Massey to pronounce what she calls a “progressive sense of place” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 151):

In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. If one moves in from the satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one’s head, then each ‘place’ can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It

³⁷ bell hooks and other feminist thinkers have similarly theorized the specific social location of women and other marginalized groups. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of a hierarchical and potentially dangerous space imbricated in larger networks of power relations is Judith Halberstam’s “bathroom problem” (22) put forward in *Female Masculinity*.

is, indeed, a *meeting* place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. (154)

Here Massey highlights four characteristics of this progressive or global conceptualization of place. She insists that places are not static. Places may have boundaries but they also maintain links to other places. Places do not have essential qualities but are contested, internally conflicted, and layered. And finally, places are always specific and contingent, embedded within specific contexts, and representing specific moments in what she refers to as “space/time” (249) or “space-time” (*For Space* 23) since spatiality never exists in a vacuum but is always linked to history and society.

In *For Space* (2005) Massey further offers a slight distinction between space and place. Although she asserts that space and place cannot really be defined as separate concepts, it makes sense for me, in particular for my project here, to delineate how they can be used to explain specific phenomena. I have already pointed out above how Tuan describes space in terms of movement and place as pause. Yet Massey’s definitions are more concrete, and she spotlights three explicit characteristics of space: first as “the product of interrelations [and] as constituted through interactions;” second “as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; [and] therefore of coexisting heterogeneity;” and third “as always under construction . . . [and] as a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (9). Hence, space materializes as a larger set of processes within which place crystallizes as a specific moment or articulation, “as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories,” and as an expression of “throwntogetherness” (151). Places determine how we live together. They are collective achievements, and they are practiced.

Massey herself then gives an example of how such “space-places” (155) can be envisaged. She cites London as a world city, former capital of empire, and hub for migration that “has gathered into itself a huge constellation of financial and associated functions” (155). Massey’s choice of words describes the city as a process, as a larger set of relations and intersecting trajectories that produce while at the same time being a product of the city. This city is embedded in but also actively reaches out to other spaces across the globe. Yet how we live in the city, or rather how we live together, how we experience the city and specific places within it on a personally meaningful level—these are questions and trajectories that are located within the sphere of place rather than space.

Keith and Pile also argue that spatiality is not only socially constructed but that the social and the spatial are realized in one another and that society is constructed by or in space. Building on Lefebvre, Jameson, and Soja they claim that places are not only known through the individual but constitute the individual. Identity and spatiality are intricately intertwined and co-constitutive, and “society and space are simultaneously realized by thinking, feeling, doing individuals” (6). Keith and Pile further understand spatiality as an expression of concrete historical and geographical circumstances and envisage spatiality as a central theoretical location that takes into account the totality of these circumstances in what they refer to as the necessary “practice of radical contextualization” (30). Although they acknowledge space/place as an always incomplete process and a becoming, they claim that “[at] times, in order to make sense of a particular moment or a particular place this process is stopped to reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a race-horse in full gallop.” Such a photograph “represents a momentary stop in this gallop, simultaneously real and unreal, it is a moment at which

closure occurs” (28). Comparing place to a photograph opens up the possibility of place as an individual and personal snapshot that—though admittedly reductive—enables place to become meaningful and stable. Zeroing in on such a concrete place allows for the theorization of a temporary yet very personal and stable meaning for this one moment in space-time.

By the same token, Till in *The New Berlin – Memory, Politics, Place* (2005) underlines place as a tool that can make visible all kinds of dynamics and trajectories coalescing in place. Till here focuses specifically on the past and on memory and emotions. According to her places are not passive or empty containers but narrative constructs of stories told and untold, and of memory, desire, and longing. Examining complex public places of memory in today’s Berlin such as the Gestapo terrain, the Jewish Museum, the Holocaust Memorial, and other attempts to remember or warn of the national socialist past, Till envisions places as the last survivors or eyewitnesses of history, bearing the traces of past events, and offering a space for reflection and critical memory work in the present. Similarly, Cresswell speaks of place as “a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world. When we look at the world as places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience” (*Place* 11).

Taking all this into account I propose that a critical focus on place can help flesh out the complexities and particularities of experiences, practices, memories, and desires coinciding in specific spatialities. In particular with regard to literature—and especially when dealing with the contemporary literature of migration that is already inherently spatial and, as I argue, thematizes space, place, and movement—place can emerge as an

interpretive strategy. As an analytical tool it allows for a context-specific and critical perspective that is able to underscore—like Massey’s image of telescoping in from a satellite or Keith and Pile’s comparison to a photograph—the temporal, spatial, social, cultural and other particularities of migration and migrant subjectivities as intersecting and becoming visible in place.

Interlacing diaspora studies and related disciplines with theories of place from human geography, in my chapters I will consider a broad variety of texts from the German and Anglo-American context and concentrate specifically on how they represent complex places on various geographical scales as they are personally meaningful for the migrant protagonists. As indicated above, this approach comes as a response to what I perceive as a thematic preoccupation with space, place, and movement, and a focus on the lived space of individual migrants, intimate places of attachment and belonging, places of community and interaction, and places as mediators between the larger cultural context and individual identities, or between multiple global or local contexts and individuals, that I see emerging in the recent literature of migration. I claim that the protagonists—all of whom are migrants from varying cultural contexts confronted with divergent local circumstances of migration—construct a sense of belonging to their new cultural context via specific places—for instance places of comfort, attachment, affection, community, intimacy, knowledge, or interconnectedness—and through place-specific practices.

Belonging can be conceptualized in many different ways, for instance as a category of membership in a group or as the ownership of certain possessions or belongings. Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort further point out the two constituents of

belonging as “‘being’ in one place, and ‘longing’ for another” (vii) and, instead of an absolute idea of belonging, argue for a “feeling” or a “sense” of belonging, which I also use in this dissertation.³⁸ For my purposes, geographer Richard Schein provides the most complete and compelling definitions of belonging. According to him:

There are a number of questions begged in the assumption of belonging: questions of whom, belonging to what, and on whose terms. A short answer suggests that belonging comprises both individuals and social group categories, belonging to a place, to a community, to a citizenry; and the issue underlying each of these is how to relate an understanding of the deessentialized individual, whose ‘sense of belonging’ may be fluid and multiple, with the reality of power relations and power struggles entailed in imposed definitions of belonging which work through ontologically assumed racial, class, gender, and ethnic categories. (813)

Schein also illuminates the tensions between a self-defined sense of belonging and belonging as an imposed category, as well as questions of inside and outside, center and periphery, and manifold positions in between. He calls attention to belonging as a political tool and as an expression of power relations. Finally, he suggests a return to critical geography to arrive at a definition of belonging that is able to go beyond such normative categories by focusing on “human meanings and processes of place—such as belonging; processes which valorize the individual and alternative ways of knowing, and the place of human existence and understanding” (813). Consequently, I also understand belonging in terms of feelings and claims of belonging, and as ways of knowing that are human, contingent, multiple, and contested, and always coalesce and become visible in place.

My dissertation is therefore organized according to such places on varying scales. My first chapter takes a closer look at Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Mrs. Sen’s,” Monica Ali’s *Brick*

³⁸ Others who have theorized belonging include geographer Lynn A. Staeheli and sociologist Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal who have focused specifically on citizenship and the limits of citizenship and political belonging.

Lane, and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, and highlights the interplay between female migrancy and the dwelling space which, as I argue, is imagined as a space that transcends the traditional boundaries between individual rooms, inside and outside, and past and present. Specifically, I claim that in these texts the apartment emerges as an intimate place that, while complicating traditional conceptualizations of the home, at the same time firmly anchors the protagonists in their immediate environment. In my second chapter I turn toward Senait G. Mehari's memoir *Feuerherz (Heart of Fire)* and Emine Sevgi Özdamar's short story "Der Hof im Spiegel" ("The Courtyard in the Mirror"), texts that emphasize movement and foreground the significance of the "personal city map" (an idea mentioned in Özdamar but recalling Walter Benjamin's writings on Berlin) and public spaces as important tools for connecting to and establishing roots in one's new cultural context. I also revisit Aboulela's *Minaret* to assert the notion that migrants carve out personally meaningful places of comfort, community, and attachment outside of the home. Carrying on the discussion about such public places, my third chapter moves on to the city—New York and Berlin as represented by Teju Cole's *Open City* and Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*—to investigate how migrants connect to and get to know or already know the culturally specific context of a city. Building on Benjamin's interpretation of Baudelaire's *flâneur* and incorporating studies of walking and memory, I claim that migrants can inhabit and forge personal ties to historically resonant public sites such as Ground Zero or the Berlin Wall as well as other buildings, neighborhoods, or landmarks. They incorporate the city by walking and thereby establish a sense of belonging that manifests as a way of knowing. The last two chapters trace the idea of how new media have significantly changed—and continue to change—the experience of

migration. In my fourth chapter I consider the impact of old, new, and popular media—cell phones, email, dating platforms, photo sharing, and other online services as well as products of popular culture such as Starbucks or Netflix—as represented in Nell Freudenberger’s 2012 novel *The Newlyweds*. Here I argue that the protagonist establishes a dual sense of belonging that brings the multiple homelands and neighborhoods closer together and is on all levels significantly informed by these various types of media. Finally, in my fifth chapter I develop the idea that social media and Twitter, in particular—as employed by Teju Cole in his “small fates” project—need to be seen as a space not only for the production and sharing of content but also for community-building. Via Twitter users can perform certain identities, interact with each other in real time, and put forward ideas that could have tangible effects on the real world. I end this dissertation with the argument that through Twitter, Cole is able to connect various local and global contexts, real lives, and real places, a practice that at the same time anchors him firmly within in his very local American environment. Cole thus emerges as a radically different type of migrant: as someone who owns his adopted context on multiple levels and therefore challenges traditional conceptualizations of migration, diaspora, and displacement.

Using a critical geographical approach will allow me to highlight precisely the many different ways in which migrants connect to their new environment and to reevaluate migration, diaspora, and displacement. Places are products of society and are therefore organized around complex hierarchies of race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality and other social categories. Migrants experience places differently. They avoid certain places while consciously seeking out others for reasons that reflect the

larger networks of power relations intersecting and the personal emotions experienced in place. Above all, migrants attach meanings and symbolism to places and construct a sense of belonging that emerges in affective or cognitive terms: as a sense of home and comfort and/or a way knowing. A critical focus on places as they are personally meaningful to migrants can therefore help flesh out the complex emotions, memories, desires, and other experiences coalescing in place, thereby offering a new perspective from which to examine and understand the day-to-day realities of migrant identities.

CHAPTER 1

INHABITING “A PLACE IN THE WORLD” IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

In thinking through the question of how migrants construct a sense of home and belonging in their newly adopted environment, the actual space of the home—the dwelling space, the house, the apartment, the bedsit, the individual room—is inevitably one of the first spaces that comes to mind. The dwelling space is often automatically assumed to be a space of home without further investigating what “home” really means to each individual, what it means when and why we refer to our living arrangements this way, or why it might be important to have a place that we can call home. More than a mere physical structure, home is a highly complex concept that can refer to the actual living arrangements, the homeland, the nation, the attachment to a time and place, and the feeling of or longing for “being at home,” and it is precisely this idea of attachment and “feeling at home” that is at stake in this chapter.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “Mrs. Sen’s” (1999), Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003), and Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005) are three texts within the contemporary literature of migration that focus specifically on the phenomenon of female migrancy and the interconnections between migration and the dwelling space. What they have in common, apart from their widespread success in critical and popular circles, is that they take the actual living spaces of the protagonists—which in *Minaret* equates to the living space of another family—as their central setting; they prioritize these spaces and foreground the home as a central arena for the characters’ identity formation; and they

emphasize the seemingly domestic qualities of the home. While not all three texts are set solely in the kitchen—in fact, it is not always clear how the living space is structured and in which room the action is taking place at any given moment—this particular room and the practices associated with it (like housework, preparing food, eating, and drinking) are mentioned repeatedly. Mrs. Sen and her husband, both immigrants from India, live in a small American coastal town where Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university while his wife spends most of her time in their apartment preparing food, cooking, and taking care of Eliot, a young American boy. Set in London, *Brick Lane* tells the story of Nazneen from Bangladesh who finds herself in an arranged marriage and, like Mrs. Sen, spends most of her time in her apartment doing housework, preparing traditional Bengali dishes, and caring for her husband and daughters. Finally—and again in London—in *Minaret*, Najwa, a single woman and Sudanese refugee, works as a maid in another immigrant household.

Yet a definition of the home and/or the kitchen as the realm of domestic practices and domesticity only obscures the more subtle processes at play in these literary texts. The questions that need to be asked here are: What is the relationship between the home left behind and the new dwelling space? Are there ways for traditional household tasks like cooking, cleaning, or parenting to be conceptualized in terms other than domestic labor? And what role do these and other practices, as well as the dwelling place itself, play in the construction of home? Answering these questions, I claim that in the literary texts discussed in this chapter the dwelling space emerges as a heterogeneous, open, and fluid space that complicates traditional conceptualizations of the home. The kitchen, in particular, manifests as a space that is able to transcend while at the same time

accentuating the boundaries between single rooms and between inside and outside, past and present, here and there. Without risking mere suspension between these categories, the home materializes as a place of comfort and stability that empowers the protagonists in their new locales and enables them to negotiate their very different identities and conflicts, navigate homesickness and longing, and construct a sense of home and belonging.

Home is a problematic concept. It has been the subject of discussions about race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity; and it is probably one of the most widely discussed concepts in intellectual history. Home is never ideologically neutral. Closely linked to domesticity and frequently used interchangeably with the private sphere and the household, it is often envisioned as a place of rootedness and safety, the domain of the family and of intimacy “where identities are shaped and memories are rooted” (Madanipour 73). Sometimes the home is conflated with the childhood home; and it is most commonly assumed to be the natural domain of the woman. In his groundbreaking *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard, for instance, defines the home as “our corner of the world” (4), a place of shelter, dreams, “enveloping warmth,” and other “maternal features” (7), where the being that is cast into the world finds well-being and comfort. The home is always already an idealized idea of itself, real and imagined, and intricately intertwined with memories, dreams, longings, loss, and a certain kind of nostalgia for an innocent notion of the home or the homeland.

Such a romanticized and uncritical idea of home is not without its shortcomings. As Alison Blunt in her study of collective memory and nostalgia points out, such idealized discourses locate “spaces of home . . . in the past rather than in the present, in

imaginative terms rather than in material terms, and as points of imagined authenticity rather than as lived experience” (721). I would further add that such traditional conceptualizations also neglect the fact that not everyone has such a stable and idyllic place to look back to, return to, or imagine. The attributes associated with this imaginative idea of home—shelter, warmth, comfort, attachment, authenticity, nostalgia, memory, ownership, and belonging—may inform how we think about the world. Yet as Blunt posits, we need to move away from an orientation toward the past and the realm of the purely imaginary, and focus on the present and the future. Concentrating on the interplay between ideas of home, lived experiences, and actual practices of homemaking, it becomes possible to consider alternative and multiple places of home and, in the context of migration, flesh out the complex relationship between the home left behind and the new cultural context.

Marxism and feminism were among the first and most effective strands of criticism to complicate, challenge, and deconstruct an idealized conceptualization of the dwelling space as the private space of the family, of home and domesticity, and of safety and rootedness. Marxists criticized the idea of private property and unequal relations of capital, while feminists early on, relying heavily on Marxist criticism, called attention to the unequal power relations between men and women, unpaid domestic labor, and the potential dangers women face at home.³⁹ Feminist geographer Gillian Rose, for example, criticizes what she perceives as a very “masculinist notion of home/place” (53) as a natural area of safety and belonging, emphasizing that the home is “not only not self-evidently innocent, but also bound into various and diverse social and psychic dynamics of subjectivity and power” (37). It can be the space of neglect and abuse where race,

³⁹ See Nancy Hartsock and Dorothy E. Smith for early alliances of feminism with Marxism.

class, gender, and sexuality are regulated, and thus everything but conflict-free and nurturing. In particular for female migrants who are frequently assigned as the bearers of cultural identity and difference, the home can be a highly controlled and oppressive space that also serves larger cultural and national interests.⁴⁰ Another reconceptualization of the home comes with postmodernity and postmodern criticism. New dimensions of globalization, technology, and mobility have led thinkers like Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard to describe the world in terms of homelessness and placelessness, as places become ever more interchangeable and meaningless. With a postmodern questioning of traditional meanings, gender roles, and identity categories, the home also becomes uncoupled from the ideas of the family and domesticity. New lifestyles and forms of cohabitation co-evolve with new trends in architecture, floor plans, and interior design showing that the home has become a field of varying meanings that is no longer the space of the single-family home.

What is often neglected in such theoretical explorations of the home is that the dwelling space is also a material space that is embedded within larger structures—neighborhoods, cities, regions—and internally differentiated. People get attached to houses or apartments for all kinds of romantic, emotional, practical, or aesthetic reasons, and some invest a lot of time and money to find the right location and the right place to “call home.” Architects help build and plan houses, and interior designers and decorators

⁴⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti, for instance, explores how elements of national identity and cultural difference are articulated as forms of control over women in newly postcolonial societies where women are presumed to be the bearers of tradition and boundary markers of their communities. Similarly, in contexts of migration, women are often envisioned as the keepers and visual markers of their national identity. They are expected to uphold traditions, wear traditional garments, cook traditional dishes, and pass on rituals and beliefs for generations to come. This tendency often leads to a divergence of cultures with migrant communities, for fear of losing their identity, holding on to reified notions of culture in the host country, while local communities in the homeland are more flexible and open for change. See Keya Ganguly for a discussion of related experiences of postcolonial immigrants in the United States and Rita Chin for Turkish immigrants in Germany.

assist in furnishing and decorating. People want to feel good in their houses, a desire that Michel de Certeau identifies as a particular form of a “spatial practice” (108). Moving to a new place is commonly perceived as an inconvenient—albeit potentially exciting—step, as it frequently signifies a drastic change in one’s life and is as such understood as a highly stressful and anxiety-laden process. We tend to block out how uncomfortable we felt when we had to move, and we tend to forget how important the living space is for us.

Unlike any other room, the kitchen stands out as the fundamental signifier of the home, comfort, and domesticity, and is freighted with meaning and cultural implications. It is the kitchen that is traditionally associated with housework, cooking, and caring for the family, and imagined as the “natural” space of the family and the woman. Food preparation, in particular, is frequently conceptualized as a powerful symbol of comfort and nurturing. As a practice that is often passed on for generations, cooking is not only specific to the kitchen but also to certain national and cultural contexts, turning the kitchen into a space where such contexts can be reproduced. While the kitchen is therefore to some extent representative of the home and the domestic sphere, it can also transcend those categorizations and serve other functions and purposes. As Janet Floyd points out, the tendency to consume more meals in restaurants and get food to go takes away from the importance and centrality of the kitchen. The kitchen is divested of its traditional characteristics, leading some scholars to speak of Western society as a “kitchenless society” (Floyd 62). Other trends such as new lifestyles, open floor plans, and new cooking technologies contribute to this process and weaken the impact the kitchen has traditionally had on the dwelling space.

The kitchen is also often envisaged as a space of community, solidarity, and activism. For black feminists like bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, the kitchen is above all an opportunity for female bonding. Against the white feminist view that the kitchen and the family are the central sites for women's oppression, for black feminists, the home—although situated in a context of domination and potentially dangerous—can be empowering.⁴¹ It is the space of counter-hegemonic practices, feminist solidarity, sisterhood, community, dialogue, and caring. Based on poetry readings happening around the actual kitchen table, in 1980 Audre Lorde and a group of fellow feminist activists started *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, an effort to make visible the experiences, history, and culture of women of color, and fight for the liberation of all people.⁴² Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat coined the powerful term “kitchen poets” to describe “women who both cook and write” (219). It was in the kitchen, among other spaces like bars or universities, where women of West Germany's New Left met in the 1960s and 70s, reclaiming it as a space of resistance and activism.⁴³ And it is in the kitchen and the home where the female protagonists I discuss in this chapter reenvision and resignify their experiences of female migrancy.

Jhumpa Lahiri's short story “Mrs. Sen's” is part of the 1999 short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* for which Lahiri received the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. It is the sixth out of the nine stories, set alternately in the United States and in India, that explore the

⁴¹ Compare Hazel V. Carby for a detailed discussion of black feminism, sisterhood, and the disparities between black and white feminism.

⁴² For more information on *Kitchen Table Press* see Barbara Smith.

⁴³ The edited volume *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* by Belinda Davis et al. gives a comprehensive overview of women and the New Left in West Germany. The kitchen and private homes, however, were a meeting and organizing place for activism not only in Germany but also in other cultural contexts all over Europe, Latin America, or the Middle East.

fate of a variety of characters from the South Asian subcontinent. Common topics of the collection include Lahiri's focus on relationships—between families and across distances and differences—home, and homesickness. Laura Anh Williams, Anita Mannur, and others further underscore the significance of food, foodways, and identity in the volume. The collection seems to be lacking a unifying theme that connects the individual stories, but critics agree that they all examine feelings of “profound loneliness” (Mitra 193), displacement, and isolation, which is most certainly the case for “Mrs. Sen’s.” Noelle Brada-Williams points out Lahiri's focus on “barriers to and opportunities for human communication” (451), and Susan Koshy coins the concept of “minority cosmopolitanism” to describe the “the predicament of diasporic citizenship” (597) that on the one hand opens up “possibilities of connections across differences” but at the same time also always entails “the possibilities of estrangement in sameness” (598), creating barriers that become impossible to surmount and prevent Lahiri's diasporic subjects from being at home in the world.⁴⁴ It is precisely the possibility of feeling and being at home, perhaps not in the world but in the immediate environment of one's own living space, that I want to examine here. Mrs. Sen may have difficulties adapting to her new

⁴⁴ Koshy introduces the concept of minority cosmopolitanism as a tool to reevaluate the concepts of “minority” and “cosmopolitanism.” According to her, “the frequent conflation of the minority with the subnational and the cosmopolitan with the global misconceives the complexity of both” (592). The minority and the cosmopolitan are interconnected, resulting in a non-Western cosmopolitanism that consists of translocal affiliations grounded in the experience of minority subjects. Although these affiliations are local, they strive toward the cosmopolitan and are oriented toward an interconnected and shared world. These affiliations and attachments do not, however, imply the old cosmopolitan ideal of being at home in the world. They signify boundaries and constraints. Migrants move through this world leaving behind one cultural context in favor of another, but they are still attached to and bound by their diasporic communities, families, religion, race, or nation, she argues, making it impossible for them to feel comfortably at home in the world. Koshy concludes: “The feeling of not being at home is a marker of diasporic citizenship, an effect of attachments that position such minority subjects inside the nation formally but between nations culturally” (601). It is precisely such a position that I am arguing against in the present study.

environment, and may at times feel homesick and nostalgic.⁴⁵ But I argue that these feelings do not prevent her from carving out a successful existence for herself in her everyday lived space.

Mrs. Sen is a thirty-year old woman from Calcutta who has moved to the United States—presumably to a small, unnamed coastal town in the American Northeast—with her husband, who “teaches mathematics at the university” (112). The couple lives in a “university apartment located on the fringes of the campus” (112) where Mrs. Sen, because of her inability to drive, takes care of Eliot, an eleven-year old American boy whose single mother is busy with her full-time job and whose previous baby-sitters have either moved away or proved to be unreliable. Told by a third-person narrator who adopts the perspective of Eliot, the story focuses mainly on the relationship between Mrs. Sen and the boy. The reader accompanies the two of them across several months of shared moments of caring, intimacy, and evolving friendship until the narrative concludes with Mrs. Sen getting into a minor car accident. Eliot is in the car with her and although no one comes away with serious injuries, the incident inevitably ends the employer-employee relationship between Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother, and the relationship of caregiving between Mrs. Sen and Eliot.

What is predominantly interpreted as the crux of the story is Mrs. Sen’s inability to drive. Many critics, above all Koshy, view driving as the ultimate barrier that prevents Mrs. Sen from feeling at home in the world.⁴⁶ Koshy defines driving as a

⁴⁵ Brada-Williams, Koshy, and Madhupurna Mitra interpret the lack of a driver’s license as the failure to adapt to the United States and the inability to create a successful Bengali-American identity.

⁴⁶ Driving is understood as an absolute necessity and none of the adult characters seem to be able to empathize with Mrs. Sen and understand her fears and anxieties. Although the narrative reveals several reasons for Mrs. Sen’s aversion to driving—above all that there was simply no need for her to be able to

“quintessentially American form of independence and a recurring trope for the promises of the New World [and] possibilities of adventure, opportunity, control, and new horizons, which Mrs. Sen refuses” (606). It is, however, important to note here that Mrs. Sen does not refuse driving in its entirety. While she is scared to drive by herself, she does practice with her husband and does not hesitate to take the bus if she needs to go someplace.⁴⁷ It is not mobility she rejects, but a particular form of mobility and the pressure to learn how to drive imposed upon her by American society. Through this thematic setup Lahiri exposes the constructed nature of such American values by strategically undermining the equation of American independence and driving, revealing it as a logical fallacy and postcolonial trap. She shows that driving is in fact not absolutely necessary for Mrs. Sen to navigate her everyday life and that it should not be the dominant criterion for whether someone can adapt to the American context. Rather than being the fundamental obstacle that prevents Mrs. Sen from creating a successful Bengali-American self, her inability to drive allows Mrs. Sen to make different choices and alliances, to negotiate *her own* new cultural context. The lack of a driver’s license serves as the prerequisite for Mrs. Sen’s relationship with Eliot, bringing into reach the opportunity of creating a home for someone else that in turn also makes Mrs. Sen feel more at home.

In her study of collective memory and nostalgia, Blunt coins the concept of “productive nostalgia” to rewrite nostalgia as “the desire for home [that] is oriented

drive in India—it remains the decisive skill that everyone assumes anyone living in the United States needs to have.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Sen is not afraid to leave the apartment. She enjoys going out and is quite resourceful in getting from one place to another. She masters the bus schedule and has no concerns riding on a bus with complete strangers—although they seem to be bothered by her, or rather by the smell emanating from the plastic bag in which she carries the fresh fish she has just purchased.

towards the present and the future as well as towards the past” (722). Instead of understanding nostalgia as a temporal signifier that mourns an unattainable past, she refocuses on its productive and liberatory potentials and allows for the possibility to create more proximate homes that are nevertheless intricately connected to the past. Blunt’s framework is useful for an interpretation of “Mrs. Sen’s” where the desire for home, for herself and for Eliot, lies at the heart of the story. Mrs. Sen misses Calcutta and the reader is told that every time “home” is mentioned in the story, every time “Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables” (116). Her homesickness does not, however, preclude the possibility of alternative places of belonging. Rather than giving in to her grief, in the course of the narrative, Mrs. Sen comes to embody an idea of home that is personally meaningful, reflective, and elastic. She engages in practices that recall memories of her past but she also actively generates new memories. Through the daily ritual of chopping vegetables, a practice that she secretly shares with Eliot, in addition to the purchase and consumption of food, Mrs. Sen reinscribes an idea of the home she left behind and succeeds in homemaking in the present.

The tools that stand out in this process are the blade Mrs. Sen brought from India and the fresh fish she buys at the market, both of which function as spatial and temporal signifiers of memory, comfort, and belonging. Although the story is saturated with descriptions of food items, smells, and tastes, it is the image of Mrs. Sen chopping vegetables or fish on the living room floor, with the help of the gigantic blade, that remains imprinted in the reader’s mind long after finishing the story. It is, however, key to understand that this procedure and the objects involved, though related to food

preparation, do not merely signify domestic labor. Mrs. Sen performs this ritual on the living room floor and not in the kitchen, a crucial distinction that gives way to a fluid and possibly non-Western conceptualization of the living space where the traditional boundaries between rooms are suspended and where these rooms take on different functions and meanings. The procedure is furthermore a particular form of spectacle, display, and magic, transforming the apartment into a theater where Mrs. Sen takes center stage.

The knife-like *bonti*, “a blade that curved like the prow of a Viking Ship, sailing to battle in distant seas” (114), is a material object that has traveled with Mrs. Sen all the way from Calcutta. It is a tool used for specific rituals, and it is a physical reminder of India and as such an object of memory that functions on a collective as well as on a personal level. When Mrs. Sen chops vegetables, the living room is turned into a place of adventure, excitement, and even danger. She spreads out newspapers on the floor and gives Eliot specific instructions not to come near. She “would have roped off the area if she could” (115). Then, with skilled expertise, she locks the blade into place and starts her “daily procedure” (115).

Facing the sharp edge without ever touching it, she took whole vegetables into her hands and hacked them apart: cauliflower, cabbage, butternut squash. She split things in half, then quarters, speedily producing florets, cubes, slices, and shreds. She could peel a potato in seconds. At times she sat cross-legged, at times with legs splayed, surrounded by an array of colanders and shallow bowls of water in which she immersed her chopped ingredients. (114)

The lively and fast-paced depiction of Mrs. Sen’s performance conveys Eliot’s excitement and enables the reader to vividly picture this spectacle. The living room is transformed into an exotic place where, together with Eliot, we are privy to a personal and beloved ritual. The objects described in this passage are everyday objects, common

vegetables, bowls, and colanders, but the blade defamiliarizes them and turns them into something magical. Mrs. Sen is fully immersed and takes pleasure in this routine, and yet “[w]hile she worked she kept an eye on the television and an eye on Eliot, but she never seemed to keep an eye on the blade” (114). Rather than being transported to her past she performs this time and place on the living room floor. Chopping vegetables this way is specific to a site of origin, but the practice can be reenacted by means of the right tools and skills. The blade symbolizes an authentic and personal idea of India animated and made visible by Mrs. Sen.

Chopping vegetables is an observable enactment of home that Mrs. Sen shares with Eliot. She educates Eliot about the shape and functions of the blade, and explains the traditional contexts in which the blade is typically used, inviting Eliot to join her in these collective and deeply personal memories and spatial stories.

“Whenever there is a wedding in the family,” she told Eliot one day, “or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.” (115)

The deictic signifier, “this one,” contextualizes the present of the living room and interlaces it with the past and continuing present of her native homeland. The blade in her hand is a storytelling device that helps her remember and perform certain moments, rituals, and practices. It conjures up an image of a specific place, of a rooftop where women sit and chat together, making their voices and smiling faces felt in the present. The blade is never just a kitchen knife, neither in its original context nor in the here and now. Mitra describes it as “the symbolic center of a community of women” (194), and also in Mrs. Sen’s apartment, it becomes the center of a new community that consists of

Eliot and Mrs. Sen. Through the shared moments of remembering and the secrecy and danger surrounding the blade, Mrs. Sen forges a strong bond to Eliot anchoring both of them firmly in the space of the living room.

The fresh fish Mrs. Sen buys at the fish market serves as another instrument of memory and emplacement. Again, it is an object—this time an actual food item—related to food consumption and domesticity, but it is heavily imbued with meanings that extend beyond its domestic or culinary qualities. The prospect of fresh fish reminds Mrs. Sen of Calcutta where “she had grown up eating fish twice a day” (123). It symbolizes a longing and a desire that is often unattainable but when the fish *is* available it initiates another exciting spectacle. Eliot learns another lesson of Indian traditions and gets to know more intimate details of Mrs. Sen’s personality. Again, newspapers are spread out and the living room is one more time transformed into a space that does not resemble a conventional Western apartment. The fish are taken apart, heads sawed off, fins clipped, and bellies prodded. Blood splatters, and the reader stands by and watches. Through such daily rituals, Mrs. Sen constructs what Lisa Law in her study of Filipino immigrants in Hong Kong has called a “sensory landscape” (235) and a “dislocation of place” (324). She transforms the living space into a personal place of embodied sense memories which she recreates so that Eliot, too, can experience these practices with his senses and therefore with his whole body. The living room turns into a place that is able to suspend the boundaries between past and present but is nevertheless firmly located in the small university town in the Northeast.

The prospect of fresh fish also causes Mrs. Sen to venture outside of her apartment. Initially Mrs. Sen urges her husband to drive her to the fish market.⁴⁸ But Mr. Sen is not always available and so Mrs. Sen and Eliot take the bus, and, eventually, she drives herself, a decision that leads to the unfortunate car accident at which the reader has to depart. Nonetheless, Mrs. Sen's forays into the outskirts of town boost her self-confidence and reveal a character that is not as passive and shiftless as a cursory reading might have us believe. Not afraid to go out, she is rather skillful in figuring out the bus schedule and has no difficulties interacting with strangers. She is very well able to navigate her surroundings and feel comfortable where she lives, slowly extending the boundaries of her living space, rendering them porous, and filling her home with new personal stories.

The argument that Mrs. Sen is unable to feel comfortable or at home—in the world or in her apartment—further loses ground in the juxtaposition of Mrs. Sen and Eliot's mother, and the relationships Eliot has with both of these women. Compared to that of Eliot's mother, Mrs. Sen's life seems to be full of positive energy and vigor. Her apartment is described as warm and cozy, as opposed to the barren beach house where Eliot lives with his mother. Moreover, when Eliot first enters Mrs. Sen's apartment—and from then on every time—he feels as if he had stepped into a different world where suddenly “it was his mother [...] who looked odd” (112).⁴⁹ Mrs. Sen's clothing, her endless supply of saris, make-up, jewelry, the crushed vermilion on her braided hair,

⁴⁸ This pattern could also be interpreted as a means to test the husband's commitment to her. After all, Mr. Sen has to go out of his way and even interrupt his workday for his wife, which he does willingly most of the time.

⁴⁹ When Eliot is with the Sens everything feels different and is transformed. Even a familiar car ride suddenly “seemed unfamiliar, and took longer than usual” (126).

colorful fabrics, drapes, sounds, and smells, make Eliot feel as if he had crossed over into a strange and foreign world—another instance of a “sensory landscape.”⁵⁰ Yet the time spent with Mrs. Sen renders this place familiar. She makes him feel welcome and materializes as the maternal caregiver while Eliot’s mother, whose name is never mentioned, metamorphoses into a lonely and careless stranger. The two women are further differentiated by their attitudes toward food and culinary differences. Like Eliot’s babysitters before him, the mother’s diet is depicted as monotonous, unhealthy, and thoughtless, and is therefore the complete opposite of Mrs. Sen’s wide-ranging, wholesome, and meticulous efforts to prepare food. She only ever gives Eliot peanut butter, crackers, and popsicles—another argument against Mrs. Sen’s alleged inability to construct a Bengali-American identity as she clearly knows about the taste preferences of this America boy. But she does try to serve the mother small Indian delicacies: “a glass of bright pink yogurt with rose syrup, breaded mincemeat with raisins, a bowl of semolina halvah” (118), only to be refused by Eliot’s mother, whose reaction hints at vague ethnic stereotypes.⁵¹ Meanwhile Mrs. Sen is not opposed to American food, as the reader can see from the snacks she provides for Eliot. She even takes Eliot to the cafeteria where

⁵⁰ But within this miniature world, there are certain things that do not quite fit. Of particular interest here are the lampshades that “were still wrapped in the manufacturer’s plastic” (112). Like the television and many other pieces of furniture in the apartment they are carefully covered in plastic or cloth signifying an instance of temporariness or of a threshold, as if Mrs. Sen had not yet fully arrived or as if she were suspended somewhere in between two worlds, the typical trope of displacement. On the other hand, it suggests a kind of tasteless or petty bourgeois English carefulness with things which seems to be at odds with Mrs. Sen’s lavish saris and thoughtful and precise behavior. Unlike her personal belongings that she brought with her and the objects that remind her of India, she seems to have no interest in the American furniture. Sometimes Eliot catches her drifting off as if she would “[notice] in the lampshades, the teapot, in the shadows frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not” (113), implying a longing for home and a faint and personal idea of India that the others cannot see but that she will later share with Eliot.

⁵¹ In the short story food is the foundation for every relationship. Even Eliot’s previous babysitters whom the reader never gets to know are characterized by means of food. Abby, a university student, “refused to prepare any food for Eliot containing meat” (111), and “Mrs. Linden’s thermos contained more whiskey than coffee” (111).

she, too, eats french fries, though not without the obligatory cup of tea, illustrating that she does not reject all aspects of American culture.⁵²

The relationship between Eliot and Mrs. Sen represents an interesting reversal of the host-guest relationship, or what Patricia Hill Collins has termed the “outsider-within,” and unites the two characters across different experiences of loneliness. Traditionally used to describe the position of women of color in white elitist households, in this story it is Eliot who comes to the Sens’ apartment as an outsider-within, and Mrs. Sen’s homesickness, loneliness, and isolation are routed and reiterated through this character’s privileged position. Yet my caution here is against an uncritical acceptance of Eliot’s observations. The seemingly neutral account of Mrs. Sen’s habits and emotions relies after all on the subjective perception of an eleven-year old child who is not without his own cultural presuppositions.⁵³ Instead of hinging on Eliot’s incomplete and subjective perspective that invites an interpretation of Mrs. Sen as a character consumed by homesickness, the reader needs to shift focus onto the more subtle dynamics of the story and begin to appreciate the responsibility Mr. and Mrs. Sen take on by offering hospitality to a boy they hardly know. Because of this kindness and the conscious effort to accept a stranger into their house, Mrs. Sen’s and Eliot’s lives intersect and create a possibility for both characters to recognize and overcome feelings of emptiness and

⁵² Again, the interaction with Eliot over food indicates that overall Mrs. Sen copes quite successfully with the new challenges of her environment, a detail that can easily be overlooked if one focuses on driving as the main and perhaps the only representative aspect of American culture.

⁵³ In particular the subtle and tender relationship between husband and wife may elude Eliot as culturally specific. The boy’s descriptions have led Williams and others to interpret the relationship between husband and wife as distant and dispassionate. They also accuse Mr. Sen of being careless and unaffectionate. Mr. and Mrs. Sen barely touch each other and never kiss. Yet such readings seem to ignore that Eliot is not always present, and they also remain opaque about the patience and silent dedication and support with which Mr. Sen practices driving with his wife, leaves work to pick up fish, and takes Mrs. Sen and Eliot on a trip to the seaside.

loneliness and feel comfortable with each other. For Mrs. Sen it is the opportunity to offer care and comfort to someone else's child, and for Eliot it is the promise of precisely this care and comfort and of Mrs. Sen's apartment as a space of warmth and food that allows for a reciprocal sense of belonging that anchors both in place. This sense of belonging is only temporary. But for Mrs. Sen it is a personal achievement and an important step in coming to terms with her new life.⁵⁴

By creating a home away from home for Eliot, in an interesting parallel to her own life, Mrs. Sen is able to also create a sense of home and belonging for herself. Despite her homesickness, the enormous difficulties getting used or adapting to the American lifestyle, and fleeting moments of despair, Mrs. Sen never gives up and does not fail in her diligence and perseverance. As Kwame Anthony Appiah points out, cosmopolitanism is always “an adventure and an ideal” (xx) and is as such inherently unattainable. The question is thus not whether Mrs. Sen is able to feel at home in the world but whether she succeeds in feeling comfortable in her own immediate context and her small circle of family and acquaintances. She may have left her native home behind but she embodies this home and carries it with her. She wears traditional attire and visibly recreates her personal idea of home on her living room floor, a practice she happily shares with Eliot, and an example of how nostalgia and memory can be productive. As Doreen Massey puts it: “[p]laces are collective achievements as they are personal.” Places can change us “not through some visceral belonging . . . but through the *practising* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories” (*For Space* 154). Mrs. Sen may not

⁵⁴ The story's abrupt ending leaves it up to the reader to imagine whose situation seems more promising. Mrs. Sen's who can still learn how to drive and become the nanny of another child, or Eliot's, who may be left with his mother and a key “which he wore on a string around his neck” (135) but who has gotten a glimpse of another way of life that consists of comfort and care.

be the positive, ambitious, and determined character the reader is willing her to be. But she struggles and through specific practices is able to carve out moments of belonging, comfort, and stability for herself as well as for Eliot.

Like Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, Monica Ali's debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) was instantly successful. In the year of its publication it was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize and garnered Ali the title of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists, among numerous other nominations and awards.⁵⁵ Ali's novel is often read in conjunction with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000)—an equally ambitious first novel turned international bestseller—comparing the different forms of immigrant settlement, migrant identities, and the possibilities of a postcolonial reading within the context of Black British literature.⁵⁶ Surprisingly, critics have not drawn the comparison to Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's," despite the rather striking parallels as both texts explore facets of the South Asian diaspora, female migrancy, marriage, and domesticity.

While Lahiri's short story represents a very short period of Mrs. Sen's life in an unknown coastal town in the United States, Ali's *Brick Lane* is more nuanced and accompanies the main protagonist Nazneen, an immigrant from rural Bangladesh, across many years of struggles and accomplishments in the area surrounding London's Brick Lane. The title of the novel refers to a street located in the East End of London within the Borough of Tower Hamlets known for its large and mostly Bangladeshi immigrant community and ethnic restaurants. What the two texts have in common is that they are set

⁵⁵ *Brick Lane* also received the 2003 Discover Award for fiction. It was nominated for the Los Angeles Times book awards and shortlisted for the Guardian book prize. See the "author" page on the publisher's website (Simon & Schuster) for Ali's work and biography.

⁵⁶ See Peter Preston and Sara Upstone for comparisons of Ali and Smith. *Brick Lane* has also been compared to other novels such as V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*, Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Lahiri's *The Namesake*, and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

mainly in the protagonists' living spaces. Like Mrs. Sen, Nazneen spends most of her time in her small apartment where, in a similar blurring of rooms and functions, she seems to be reduced to the daily tasks of housework, cooking traditional Bengali dishes, and caring for her husband. But despite this apparent confinement to the domestic space and domestic labor, the apartment and the kitchen also offer new possibilities in this literary text. It is here where Nazneen negotiates her daily chores, wishes, memories, and choices, and comes to enjoy the company of her daughters and her best friend Razia. Within these four walls she later takes up sewing, thereby adding to the family's income, and takes a younger lover. Through these processes Nazneen transforms and resignifies the domestic sphere.

Brick Lane's emphasis on its protagonist's growth and development has led most critics to categorize the novel as a postcolonial bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel (Cormack, Poon, and Perfect, among others). Nazneen is, to use her husband's words, "a girl from the village: totally unspoilt" (11), who comes to London in 1985 to join Chanu, a man several years her senior. Unable to make a decent living and integrate into British society, Chanu had calculatingly looked for a wife from Bangladesh and arranged for Nazneen's relocation. Set mostly in London, the novel follows Nazneen for almost twenty years, tracing her development from a shy and submissive young girl into an independent woman who makes her own decisions and takes life into her own hands. Like "Mrs. Sen's," the text is filled with a profound sense of loneliness and homesickness, and is not without personal tragedy. Nazneen spends most of her time by herself in their small apartment, thinking of home, contemplating her loneliness, and resenting her husband. Memories of her childhood and accounts of her sister Hasina's

parallel life in Bangladesh are interwoven with events taking place in London and reiterated through flashbacks, dreams, stories, and Hasina's letters. These letters even take over the function of narration when the main narrative comes to a traumatic standstill after the death of Nazneen's and Chanu's firstborn child and is not resumed until the births of their daughters—almost thirteen years later. The novel ends in 2002 when Nazneen, now a woman in her mid-thirties, breaks up both the affair with her younger lover and the relationship with her husband, and decides to remain in Britain with her teenage daughters instead of joining her husband who, recognizing that he will never be successful in British society, returns to Bangladesh.

Given the novel's remarkable success a large amount of research on it has been conducted since its publication. The gaps between tradition and modernity, Bangladesh and England, Nazneen's development, her final choice of the West over her home country, and the separation from her husband have been read through the lenses of postcolonial theory and postmodernism, calling attention to the migrant perspective, the heterogeneity of both Bengali and English society, and processes of inclusion, exclusion, assimilation, and multiculturalism.⁵⁷ Critics have also pointed toward the spatial dimensions of the novel. Irene Pérez Fernández, for instance, employs Bhabha's concept of thirdspace to analyze the immigrant community of Tower Hamlets, and Angelica Poon

⁵⁷ See Devon Campbell-Hall, Michaela Canepari Labib, Françoise Kral, Sabine Lauret, Sunita Manian, Angelica Poon, and Sara Upstone, among others. Other readings have focused on genre and style of the novel, for instance comparing Ali's social realist technique to Salman Rushdie's magical realism (Cormack) or thinking through the text in terms of a "multicultural Bildungsroman" (Perfect). The popularity and controversy surrounding the novel—ensuing from what many believed to be an inaccurate portrayal of the Bengali community—have also triggered critical analyses of reception and readership (Benwell et al.), and of the effects the novel has had on Brick Lane as an actual geographical location (Brouillette). Another heated controversy followed when filming on an adaptation of the novel first began in 2006, and again after the first screenings of the short film, directed by Paul Makkar and Sarah Gavron in 2007, and the full-length feature film, directed by Sarah Gavron in 2008. See Matthew Taylor for controversial reactions to the novel, Monica Ali's comment after the release of the film, and Paul Lewis for a brief discussion of Rushdie's reaction and support of Ali (all in the British *Guardian*).

draws on Walter Benjamin's interpretation of the *flâneur* to examine Nazneen's practices of walking, observing, and getting to know the city, bringing forth "alternative forms of knowing and meaning" (427).⁵⁸ Poon suggests that Nazneen's progress directly corresponds to her having access to a larger range of spaces. Finally, Susan Alice Fischer employs space as a metaphor for personal progress and freedom by relating Nazneen's spatial experience to the experience of her body and linking the physical boundaries of Brick Lane and the domestic sphere—and the ultimate crossing of these boundaries—to Nazneen's sexual limitations and liberation. While all of these readings touch upon the interconnections between migration and spatiality, invoking an idea of an abstract postcolonial or diasporic space, a critical analysis of everyday spaces like Nazneen's and Chanu's apartment that also assigns agency to this particular form of spatiality is remarkably absent. Nazneen's forays outside of her home are important as they help her get to know and adapt to her new environment which, together with the television and radio broadcasts she tunes in to, contribute to her decision to stay. But it is in the physical space of her apartment that she negotiates these and other experiences, as well as her growth and development. Externally, this process is represented by the move into a larger flat and Nazneen's resolution to remain in London. Internally, I argue that in the course of the novel Nazneen is able to appropriate and claim the space of her apartment as her own, transforming it from an unknown and detached "box" into a personal place of belonging.

⁵⁸ I make a similar argument in my third chapter in which I theorize belonging as a cognitive category and as a way of knowing and getting to know one's environment, in this case the city. However while Nazneen's surroundings and her interactions with the larger space of the city are of tremendous importance, she spends most of her time in her apartment and in the neighboring area. Getting to know her larger environment by walking and familiarizing herself with elements of British culture via radio and television plays into her sense of belonging. But it is in the apartment where she negotiates all these diverse impressions and experiences.

Nazneen's transplantation to London comes with several difficulties and novelties. Not only does Nazneen not speak English, she has not met her husband before, and has never even been out of Bangladesh or left the village of Gouripur.⁵⁹ Arriving in London, everything is startlingly new for her: the language, the customs, the people, her husband, the streets, buildings, and living arrangements, but also the circumstances of being in a city and having for the first time to experience privacy and anonymity, conditions unknown to a protagonist who grew up in a tight-knit community of friends and family in rural Bangladesh. Yet akin to the narrative's traumatic halt after the death of their firstborn son, the reader is left to wonder what the first months of Nazneen's and Chanu's marriage are like, how Nazneen experiences the parting from her family, and how she initially reacts to London. After a brief snapshot of idyllic village life, Nazneen's complicated birth and her mother's indifference to it—afterwards commonly referred to as the “story of How You Were Left to Your Fate” (4), a euphemism to conceal her mother's passivity—the novel immediately relocates to London, six months after Nazneen's departure from her family.⁶⁰

⁵⁹At the time of Nazneen's birth in 1967, Bangladesh was still East Pakistan. The first page of the novel also refers to the geographical area as such. But historical details about Pakistan and Bangladesh are surprisingly absent in this novel. Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan is also never mentioned.

⁶⁰ The “story of How You Were Left to Your Fate” (4) plays a major role throughout the narrative, serving as the unfaltering ontological justification for Nazneen's actions and her belief in fate. Alistair Cormack draws a parallel here to Bhabha's double narrative of pedagogy and performance that construes Nazneen as “the object of this discourse, central yet entirely exterior to its enunciation” (Cormack 701). Nazneen's husband, her lover, her sister, and other Bengali characters as well are subject to this discourse, having to perform the double structure of the nation and providing Nazneen with different versions of its pedagogy. Early on, Ali foreshadows the ambivalence and fissures of such a seemingly fixed and coherent narrative, indicating that in due time Nazneen will be able to break away from its limitations:

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 at the age of thirty-four, when 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. (5)

The first pages reveal some of the deeper concerns of the novel and introduce a female protagonist who is threatened and unsettled by homesickness, loneliness, anonymity, and privacy. These feelings are braided in with the descriptions of spatiality and Nazneen's physical environment that Fischer identifies as the main arena for Nazneen's identity formation. For Fischer, Nazneen's "existence in London hinges upon the hegemonic notion that [she does] not belong" (36), and, indeed, initially Nazneen has no personal connection to and no control over her surroundings—the apartment, the neighborhood, and London at large. In particular the immediate community—consisting of a large square that is on three sides surrounded by tall blocks of apartments—is perceived as a foreign particle, unpleasant, and even hostile, and stands in stark contrast to the idyllic and almost mythical village of Nazneen's childhood. Chanu's and Nazneen's apartment is located within this desolate housing development with "dead grass and broken paving stones to the block opposite" where most residences are hidden behind heavy curtains "and the life behind was all shapes and shadows" (6). Numerous signs written in "stiff English capitals" (6) above Bengali curlicues prohibit certain behaviors, a visual reminder of the controlling body of the estate, and even the air itself is perceived as unwelcoming as "[the] breeze on Nazneen's face was thick with the smell from the overflowing communal bins" (6).

Nazneen also experiences her own apartment as a detached element, though perhaps not as outright hostile as the estate. While it is surrounded by other accommodations and people she perceives it as a closed-off zone of privacy. She had never been by herself before and feels isolated, useless, and out of place having "to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sounds of

private lives sealed away above, below, and around her” (12). Furthermore, it is Chanu’s apartment rather than Nazneen’s. It is crammed with his belongings, projects, and all kinds of knick-knacks, resembling a storage room and a workspace, and nothing like a living space. Nazneen has no personal connection to these objects. Pieces of furniture, among them a sofa, and a large number of chairs “the color of dried cow dung” (9), tables and cupboards, are joined by newspapers, books, files, folders, pottery animals, china figures, plastic fruit, and not to forget, the countless certificates Chanu keeps accumulating. But no personal possessions, memories or experiences tie Nazneen to this place.

For Paul J. Pennartz the atmosphere of the home—made up equally of location, interior objects, social interactions, experiences, memories, feelings, and practices—is crucial in determining whether the home is experienced as pleasant or unpleasant, and whether it is possible to feel comfortable at home.⁶¹ The home is experienced as a whole, and disorderliness, crowdedness, and other unpleasant experiences can prevent feelings of wellbeing and belonging. Yet it is not until later that Nazneen is able to recognize and judge the overall disarray and absurdity of Chanu’s belongings. Initially, Nazneen is in fact pleasantly surprised and proud. “Nobody in Gouripur had anything like it. . . . All these beautiful things” (9). But after several months in London during which she becomes acquainted with how others live their lives and how others furnish their apartments—via television and the apartments she visits—she becomes aware of the clutter that has taken a hold of the apartment and of the overall cheerlessness and neglect. The furniture and interior objects are no longer beautiful but shabby and useless. In particular when she

⁶¹ The essays by Pennartz and by Moira Munro and Ruth Madigan are included in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, edited by Irene Cieraad, a volume that gives a comprehensive overview of domestic space: single rooms, furniture, layout, atmosphere, interior objects, family, and domestic life.

comes back from the hospital after the birth of their first son—a physically and mentally challenging experience due to the tremendous complications—she feels as if she “walked into a lunatic’s room. Signs of madness everywhere” (110). Bearing the stamp of Chanu’s personality, the apartment is sloppy and messy, and Nazneen literally has no space to move. “To get to the far end of the room she had to climb over the glass-topped, orange-legged coffee table,” and she cannot even sit down as “[the] cane-backed chair had had its bottom removed” (111). In line with Moira Munro’s and Ruth Madigan’s claim that women have often internalized specific standards of cleanliness and orderliness, the deceiving sense of newness has worn off and Nazneen now feels utterly uncomfortable, if not repelled, in her own living space.

Chanu’s decision to get married to a Bengali woman adds another layer to the apartment. Making up for his lack of success in the real world—he is constantly coming up with new business ideas and projects, none of which succeed—Chanu desires a wife and children, symbolic of his longing for his native culture and of his wish to at least find stability in the home. This compensation technique ties in directly with Sunita Manian’s argument that male immigrants often demand that “their female counterparts represent and bolster their identity, with the female becoming the embodiment of ‘home’” (136).⁶² Linked to domestic labor, to housework and cooking, in addition to culturally specific values and norms, this signification of Nazneen as the exemplary Bengali housewife is a particularly heavy burden to bear. In compliance with Bengali customs Nazneen mainly stays at home where her days consist of repetitive routines. She cooks, cleans, prays, and cuts her husband’s corns. Radio and television offer distraction but the programs are only

⁶² But not only Chanu, the husband, also Karim, the lover, perceives of Nazneen as “[an] idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her” (382), and the idea of an untainted Bangladesh, a place he never visited.

gratifying to some extent, as Amina cannot speak English and Chanu refuses to teach her and brushes aside her suggestion of taking a language course. Amina plays the role of the docile housewife and suppresses her own needs and desires. The apartment becomes a domestic space and eventually, after the birth of their children, a space of the family.

Very early on, however, Nazneen begins to transform the apartment, first from the outside then from within. She discovers that “[s]taying on the estate did not count as going out” (31). Step by step she explores the grounds of the estate and strikes up new acquaintances, personally meaningful and empowering experiences that bestow her with a sense of agency. She enjoys the company of the neighbors and is particularly cheerful about Razia’s friendship. Just like Mrs. Sen’s forays to the fish market, Nazneen widens the boundaries of her home. She explores her surroundings and brings back personal memories and stories. One day for instance, not long after her arrival, she receives a dispiriting letter from her sister, compelling her to leave the apartment. She walks and walks until she hits Brick Lane, the first time the reader encounters the street that lends the novel its title. Here she notices that she is lost. She also has to use a bathroom but manages to stay calm. She goes into a pub to use the toilet and asks for directions in a Bangladeshi restaurant, none of which she mentions to Chanu. She gains momentum from this incident, feels empowered, and carries her pride and newfound self-confidence, the feeling of Brick Lane, into the apartment. Secretly carving out such small spaces of success helps her get to know her environment more intimately and makes her feel in place and more stable and rooted.

Inside, Nazneen gradually replaces traditional tasks of domestic labor with personally meaningful and even subversive practices. When Chanu is at work, the kitchen

and the bedroom become a retreat. She watches television and listens to the radio, treasured habits through which she is able to connect to British culture and pick up the language. She also starts to alter her daily chores, spicing up the soothing practice of praying with quality time spent with her best friend so that her days now consist of “[r]egular prayer, regular housework, regular visits with Razia” (35). Echoing a Foucauldian idea of resistance, also this routine soon yields to more variations. “Unwashed socks were paired and put back in [Chanu’s] drawer. . . . Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within” (45) that unfortunately go unnoticed by Chanu and seem to bother no one else than Nazneen herself. These inchoate rebellions, however, may well be envisioned as the testing ground for future acts of resistance, like taking on a job as a seamstress and starting an affair with a younger lover—equally unnoticed or deliberately ignored by Chanu—and her final decision to stay in London.

Another change takes place with the births of their children. The demands of their first-born son, Raqib, distract Nazneen from the monotony of her own life and promise new responsibilities. “[H]is life was full of needs: actual and urgent needs, which she could supply” (62), and also later the reader senses that Nazneen receives a similar gratification from the company of her daughters. The domestic sphere becomes a playground and a safe and educational space for her children to grow up in, a transfiguration that also makes Nazneen feel at ease and more fulfilled. After a relaxing evening with the family, the daughters go to bed and the apartment turns quiet. The sounds coming from the other apartments die down and Nazneen confirms that “[w]hen she had come she had first learnt about loneliness, then about privacy, and finally she learned a new kind of community” (145). “Community” in this instance refers mainly to

the neighbors living in the apartments around her, who Nazneen perceives as “her unknown intimates” (145). But the idea of community also includes Razia who has become an intimate friend, and perhaps even the larger diasporic community of Bangladeshis in the housing development or the imagined community of the nation, as the ethnoscape of Tower Hamlets also represents a changing idea of British society. But Nazneen’s mentioning of this concept as she is trimming Chanu’s nose hair also indicates that she has made her peace with him and is glad to have a family of her own. She has adapted to and feels more comfortable in her surroundings, a development that is physically represented by the relocation to a bigger apartment, a new beginning for the small family and a space that is not from the beginning marked as Chanu’s. In line with Massey’s conceptualization of place as a *practicing* and *negotiation*, Nazneen’s daily efforts, positive and negative experiences, struggles and rebellions, and the everyday moments she shares with her daughters emerge as place-specific practices that tie her to Tower Hamlets and to her home.

Other practices reinforce this process. Nazneen may represent the embodiment of home for Chanu, but over the course of the novel she manages to transform and resignify this image. Close reading shows that although Nazneen grows more sympathetic to Chanu and starts to appreciate him as a caring husband, she does not always reciprocate his utterances or displays of affection. They may watch television together, but for Nazneen the moving images offer a private world and enjoyment that goes beyond the small space of their apartment.⁶³ She also rarely joins her husband for dinner but prefers

⁶³ She is specifically intrigued by ice skating which makes her feel “whole and pure” (27). Cormack identifies this scene as a gold-medal winning ice dance broadcast in the 1980s, well known to British or European readers familiar with that time period and an echo of Anderson’s concept of imagined communities.

to eat by herself or with her daughters. The practice of solitary eating is of particular interest here. Geographers David Bell and Gill Valentine claim that “the meal in domestic life can articulate not only the identity of the ‘family’ and ‘the home’ but also gender roles, identities and power relations between different members of the household” (75). Hence, what starts out as an act of self-denial and passivity, the refusal to share a meal, materializes as an act of resistance, similar to but more effective than the other small rebellions discussed above. Cooking and eating are uncoupled from their domestic signification. “It became a habit, then a pleasure, taking solace in midnight meals” (58). Nazneen still cooks for Chanu and shares some of the meals with him. But at the same she manages to create a distance between husband and wife which endows her with a sense of privacy and ownership in her own home. The shared meals with the daughters, in addition to other intimate moments that exclude Chanu, contribute to this process by transforming the apartment into a space of female solidarity.

The ability to claim the apartment as her own is complemented by Nazneen’s job as a seamstress and by the secret rendezvous with Karim. The new employment that temporarily even turns her into the sole breadwinner of the family offers an opportunity of self-fulfillment and agency. It also introduces her to Karim who instead of merely dropping off and picking up items of clothing, starts spending more and more time in the apartment. Their affair helps shed light on Nazneen’s current situation and her expectations for the future. Unlike her husband, Karim looks up to her and “ma[kes] her feel as if she had said a weighty piece, as if she had stated a new truth” (214). Nazneen grows fond of him, longing for the days when he will stop by, wanting him to stay. When Karim is over, she feels “as if he were taking possession of the room, marking each item

as his own” (215). “Each time he came now he inhabited the flat a little more” (235), and eventually, he also comes to inhabit the bedroom. Here for the first time Nazneen feels attractive and desirable, and although the disloyalty to her husband does take a psychological toll on her, Nazneen again and again gives in to the pleasure and excitement. Gradually undermining the traditional structure of the family and the domestic sphere, the apartment—and the bedroom in particular—becomes a space of adventure and secret indulgences. Karim’s charisma and self-confidence further make Nazneen point out and desire “what he had that she and Hasina and Chanu sought but could not find. The thing that he had and inhabited so easily. A place in the world” (216): certainty, self-confidence, and independence.

These subversive practices reach a climax in Nazneen’s final decision to stay in London, a development that is furthermore overshadowed by two larger historical and political events: 9/11 and the outbreak of riots on Brick Lane. For Chanu, these events add to the urgency of his departure. London is no longer a safe space as he fears the backlash of 9/11 and the ensuing violence against Muslims. Nazneen, on the other hand, feels “as though they have survived something together, as a family” (306). As she paces back and forth between living room and kitchen, she is mobilized by the dramatic pictures she sees on television, realizing that “hope and despair are nothing against the world and what it holds for you” (306). Her everyday troubles suddenly seem minor in light of the bigger events happening around her, an insight that lends her courage and urges her to finally confront her problems.

Nazneen’s sister plays a pivotal role in this development. Neither souvenir nor memorabilia, yet carrying memories and symbolizing an authentic connection to

Bangladesh and to the sisters' shared past, Hasina's letters signify a break between past and present, and here and there, and somewhere in between this break and in the intervals between letters and responses surfaces a story of loss and displacement and of gain and survival. The letters are testimonial objects that carry powerful personal and symbolic meanings and are of a particular emotional value for Nazneen.⁶⁴ Hidden under the furniture, in drawers, or tucked away in her sari, they accompany Nazneen throughout the novel and sometimes even blend in with the dwelling place. Comparable to Mrs. Sen's restaging of home on her living room floor, Hasina's letters render a far-away place close. Through the letters, Hasina is always present, lends constant support and comfort, and even takes over as the symbolic narrator of the story after the death of Nazneen's son. Hasina's stories of the plight but also of the courage of women in Bangladesh and the final revelation of the mother's suicide mark the final step towards Nazneen's self-determination and independence. The letters initially represent Nazneen's homesickness, but as the novel progresses they become a point of orientation and expose Nazneen's feelings of loss and longing as the impossible desires of the nostalgic, "a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values" (Boym 8). Nazneen realizes that "[i]t was not even going home. She had never been there. Hasina was in Dhaka, but the city of her letters was an ugly place, full of dangers" (358), and so Nazneen accepts the idea of her new environment as home.

⁶⁴ Hasina's letters here resemble the objects of memories (books, recipes, paintings, and other personal relicts) Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer examine in "Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission." Building on Roland Barthes's idea of *punctum*—which I will also take up in my third chapter—Hirsch and Spitzer argue that material remnants from concentration camps carry memory traces from the past. A careful analysis of such remnants and the specific circumstances of their production can help recreate the past—in particular the living conditions in the camps. They carry powerful personal, historical, and cultural and symbolic meanings such as the will to survive and a commitment to community and collaboration.

In the end “Nazneen embraces a performance of her identity without the stable compass points that her national and religious backgrounds have created” (Cormack 706). Nazneen’s apartment has evolved from a “large box” into her very own personal place. What started out as Chanu’s space—a storage room, workspace, and a place of staged domesticity—has evolved into a place of subversive practices, secret pleasures, personal stories, and female bonding. Nazneen realizes that her daughters’ home—born and raised in London—has also become her home away from her native home.⁶⁵ Surprisingly, it is an utterance by Chanu that manages to describe exactly how Nazneen arrives at these insights. He mistakes Nazneen’s hesitation to leave London behind as her fear for their children, and tries to convince her that “[c]hildren can adjust to anything. The place is immaterial. They will make their own place *within* the place” (309). This quote reveals that Chanu may believe in place-making and in establishing personal attachments to specific places. Yet he pronounces the larger cultural contexts—represented by London and Dhaka—as interchangeable. He does not realize or understand that the daughters especially, but also Nazneen, are attached to London and perceive of this city as their home. Nazneen, on the other hand, recognizes that places are not interchangeable. She knows that she has made her “own place *within* the place,” and that she has made a home for herself in Britain and specifically in the lived space of the apartment where she was

⁶⁵ In her study of “Young British South Asian Muslim Women,” Claire Dwyer, building on Stuart Hall’s conceptualizations of identity and diaspora, describes the children—and in her case especially the daughters—of immigrants, born and raised in Britain, as representing a new kind of diaspora and inhabiting a particular diasporic space. While acknowledging their fused identities as British and Asian, these identities are not fixed but emerge in particular places. To use *Brick Lane* as an example, the daughters learn about Bangladesh at home, reciting Tagore and speaking Bangla. But outside of the home, they overwhelmingly embrace symbols of British culture. They speak English, wear short skirts, and understand London as their home, convincing Nazneen to stay and similarly embrace London as her home in the present. According to Dwyer, it is the second generation of immigrants that positions itself as predominantly British. They may not deny the home their parents left behind, gaining access to it via stories, music, film, and other culturally specific products, but Britain is the place that endows them with a subject position from where to speak with cultural authority.

able to endure, challenge, and overcome her everyday difficulties—continuously reclaiming this space as her own and claiming her own place in the world.

Poon downplays the physical materiality of the apartment when she describes Nazneen's place in the world as "less a physical place, an originary point, or even a memory but . . . a state of epistemological certainty and full knowledge" (428), unable to see that this place is very much interdependent with the real spaces of the novel. All of Nazneen's emotions, desires, memories, social interactions, and place-specific practices come to the fore in the physical materiality of the apartment emplacing her firmly in her environment. The search for her missing daughter who runs away from home to escape the return to Bangladesh is the most dramatic illustration of that. Despite the riots on Brick Lane, Nazneen does not hesitate to get her daughter back. She now knows this part of London very well and even flouts police barriers to get there. Again, she gains strength from this incident and comes to embody the subversive and adventurous qualities associated with Brick Lane. Backed by Razia's nonchalance, "[i]f everything back home is so wonderful, what are all these crazy people doing queuing up for a visa" (359), Nazneen is now able to distinguish between her husband's failure to gain ground in London, his succumbing to what he himself had called "Going Home Syndrome" (18), and the uncompromising realities of Hasina's letters. She also recognizes Karim as an insecure and impulsive young man who did "not have his place in the world" (377) after all. Rather, it is Nazneen herself who is now inhabiting and owning what she had desired most.

Also set in present-day London, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) tells the story of Najwa, a political refugee who comes to London in 1985 after political upheavals in her

home country of Sudan. *Minaret* is Aboulela's second novel after her successful 1999 debut *The Translator* and her 2000 short story "The Museum," for which she was awarded the Caine Prize for African Writing.⁶⁶ Yet despite Aboulela's success as a writer and unlike the previous texts discussed here, scholarly research on *Minaret* remains thin. The novel received overwhelmingly positive reviews and was well-received in critical circles. But so far few articles have been published on the subject matter. Critics have focused mainly on the religious and spiritual dimensions of the text. Sadia Abbas, for instance, in trying to answer what a contemporary religious novel should look like, explores the representation of Islam, arguing that the novel's predominantly domestic settings intertwined with the protagonist's personal problems produce religion merely as a social practice rather than offering a critical discussion of Islam. Comparing *Minaret* to Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*, Christine W. Sizemore focuses on the hijab. Laying out how the novel lacks political ambitions, she describes this particular form of dress as representative of the creation of a personal alternative and spiritual identity, yet insists that this identity marks a separation from British society and London culture—a claim I will take up and complicate in my next chapter. An article relevant for this chapter is Marta Cariello's "Searching for Room to Move: Producing and Negotiating Space in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*." Although the domestic space and the kitchen take up only a small part of her rather short essay, Cariello succeeds in fleshing out the production of space as the central theme of the novel. According to her, Najwa's forced migration and the physical dislocation from the homeland result in the creation of spaces like the kitchen, greater London, and the more abstract spaces of religion and the novel, as personal places of "a renewed spiritual identity" (340). Cariello thus innovatively

⁶⁶ "The Museum" is included in Aboulela's short story collection *Coloured Lights* (2001).

highlights processes that I consider crucial for the novel, but does not go beyond a cursory reading. She abandons a detailed analysis of the material spaces like the kitchen/workspace, the park, and the mosque, which are precisely the spaces around which my analysis centers—here but also in my next chapter.

Najwa, born in Khartoum into an upper-class family, moves to London when she is nineteen years old—in 1985—after a successful coup has overthrown the Sudanese government. Her father, a high government official, has been arrested and executed. Soon Najwa’s mother dies, her brother is arrested on drug charges, and she starts taking on jobs as a domestic worker in other immigrant households. Like “Mrs. Sen’s” and *Brick Lane*, this novel also focuses heavily on the domestic sphere. Yet while in the previous texts the domestic sphere stands out as a primary space, in this text the living space—which is not even the protagonist’s own space of home but the residence of another family—makes up only one of many spaces that in their interaction constitute the arena where Najwa negotiates feelings of guilt, trauma, loneliness, and belonging. These spaces—the home/workspace, the mosque, and Regent’s Park—emerge as personally meaningful places where Najwa can navigate different yet intersecting parts of her identity. I will dedicate more time on the interplay between these places in my next chapter in which I concentrate on the mosque, the park, and the role of religion, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and trauma. But for this chapter, in which I examine issues of family, class, domestic labor, home, and comfort as they become visible in the workspace, it is important to be aware of the unique local circumstances of Najwa’s migration—circumstances that have forced her to become a domestic worker in order to secure her financial survival and emotional wellbeing. After her relocation to London, her mother’s

death, and the arrest of her brother, Najwa's social location drastically differs from the life she used to know. The shock of losing her parents and the experience of forced migration in conjunction with the violence of her father's execution, is traumatic. The powerful concoction of guilt, fear, and sorrow—combined with a new set of personal problems arising out of her financial destitution and a brief romantic relationship with an ex-boyfriend that causes her to question Western sexual liberties—poses a deep ontological crisis for Najwa. One way out of this crisis is the turn toward the mosque, as I will show in the next chapter. But for now I will focus on the domestic space of another family which manifests as a temporary space of comfort and relief and as an escape and distraction from her difficult life.

Just like in the previous texts, locality in *Minaret* does not merely constitute the background for the events taking place but is represented as co-evolving with the protagonist, changing with and being changed by Najwa. The London the reader gets to know here is a much larger and more complex space than Nazneen's London. The novel abounds with references to places names and locations. There is the family's vacation home, Najwa's own apartment, Doctora Zeinab's apartment—Najwa's workspace—Regent's Park mosque, and Regent's Park—places between which Najwa crosses back and forth and which thus become personally meaningful to her. Other places deployed throughout the narrative are, not in any particular order, Oxford Street, Leicester Square, Lancaster Gate, St. John's Wood High Street, Humana Wellington Hospital, Harrods, Knightsbridge, Shaftesbury Avenue, Queensway, Edgware Road, Marble Arch station and other tube stations, Speaker's Corner, Gloucester Road, Notting Hill Gate, the Zoo,

Church Street, Queen Mary's Rose Garden, Wellington Road, and numerous restaurants and parks unfolding in front of the reader like an underground map of the tube.

Since Najwa's family owns an apartment in London—they had used it as a summer vacation home—Najwa had visited London many times before and knows the city well. After leaving Khartoum, they move into this very apartment, and their permanent relocation thus starts out like any other summer.

Our first weeks in London were OK. We didn't notice that we were falling. . . . We had never been there before in April and the first thing we did was to go to Oxford Street and buy clothes. It was fun to do all the things we never did back home; grocery shopping, pushing the Hoover around, cooking frozen food. It was fun to do all the things we usually did in the summer. (56)

But soon Najwa has to realize that their stay in London is not a visit. It is not a retreat or escape from home and from life in Sudan, but constitutes a new permanent home and a new life altogether. The London of her adulthood is not the same as the London of her youth and requires reconceptualization and reorientation. This is a good illustration of Massey's claim that spaces and places are constructed out of particular constellations of social and other relations, "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (*For Space* 9). Space-places are never static but change constantly depending on one's own personal circumstances, motives, and desires. The passage quoted above provides a glance into Najwa's life that is already turned upside down, except that Najwa can still allow herself to deny this fact, a temporary illusion that is no longer available when her mother dies.

In London, Najwa loses what Anthony Giddens has described as "ontological security" (92): members of her family and with them financial and emotional stability, as well as the physical space of home as Najwa soon has to abandon the familiar apartment and find a new place to live. Najwa transforms from a Westernized carefree young girl

who goes on expensive shopping adventures and dines in fine restaurants into a serious and spiritual woman who seeks faith in Allah and starts to wear the headscarf—drastic changes that are reflected in the places she visits and the places she feels comfortable in, above all the mosque. London here emerges as the narrator’s very own personal place where all strands of the narrative—past, present, and future—memories, experiences, dreams, wishes, and practices intersect. Massey claims that “[p]lace as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories poses the question of our throwntogetherness” (151), and also here, London is more than just a backdrop. It is the arena where every facet of Najwa’s hectic life plays out. At times hostile, at other times soothing—reminiscent of Nazneen’s initial perception of her surroundings in London—the city becomes her home, a place that she will get to know intimately, and a personal place of comfort within which more and more places begin to materialize and take on personal significance.

Minaret starts out with a view of Regent’s Park and Regent’s Park mosque, foreshadowing the interconnectedness of these two distinctive places and their importance not only as the starting points for the novel but as visible landmarks that anchor and guide Najwa in and through London. Both of these places are further connected to Doctora Zeinab’s apartment (Najwa’s workplace) from where she is able to clearly “see the minaret of Regent’s Park mosque high and visible above the trees” (1). It is no coincidence that the minaret is also the title of the novel. In the course of the narrative it will become a fixed point in Najwa’s life. As an indispensable part of the mosque, it is firmly anchored within the cityscape. It is conceptualized as a point of orientation and as a symbol of Najwa’s need for peace and stability; and it is through the

search for these values that Najwa co-constructs places where ontological security becomes feasible.⁶⁷

After her mother's death and the slow transgression into lower-class life, Najwa notices that she has "come down in the world to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move" (3), the exact opposite of the mosque and the minaret. This downward movement has put her in a place where her everyday problems are not language—unlike *Brick Lane*'s Nazneen she speaks English fluently—or displacement. She looks back to her past, to Khartoum and London, "but it is not possessions that I miss. I do not want a new coat but wish I could dry-clean my old one more often. Wish that not so many doors have closed in my face; the doors of taxis and education, beauty salons, travel agents to take me on Hajj. . ." (2). Najwa's main setback is that she misses the comforts of her old life, comforts that are not necessarily tied to a specific cultural context and that do not include certain objects or luxuries, but that encompass financial security, fresh starts, and an open future. Today Najwa lacks all these options. She lacks continuity in life, the familiarity of a home or a dwelling place, and the company of people close to her. After her mother's funeral she feels a "hollow place" (135) inside her, echoing the hollow place she would sense at the sound of the azan, the call to prayer in Khartoum, "[a] darkness that would suck me in and finish me" (31), hinting at more deep-rooted problems that go beyond the mourning of her mother's passing. "Perhaps that was where the longing for God was supposed to come from and I didn't really have it" (135). But more accurately, that hollow place symbolizes a longing for company, friendship, and a constant in her life. "Always new places and new people make [her]

⁶⁷ Religion plays a major role in this development but it is not until later in Najwa's life and in connection with the mosque that Najwa begins to realize the need for spirituality, another marker of stability and belonging.

tired” (74), and there are several instances in the novel when Najwa expresses discomfort, insecurity, and deep regrets about squandered possibilities: not going back to university and obtaining a decent education, and not being able to keep up with her intellectual and successful friends. She has no one to turn to and no hope that she will ever have a family of her own. She reminisces: “I would have liked to get married . . . I wanted to have children, a household to run” (124). But this future seems unattainable now and Najwa is willing and eager to settle with a substitute.

A temporary feeling of calmness and stability becomes graspable when Najwa starts helping out in her aunt’s household. Najwa notes:

To be with a family again, to be with one of my mother’s friends. Something opened up inside me. The need to be useful, the pleasure in being in her kitchen, in finding out where everything was kept, opening her fridge, putting the groceries away. She taught me that day how to stuff vine leaves, how to set a table, twist and fold a napkin just so. And when she went to shower and change, I put on Radio 1 loud, and enjoyed cleaning the kitchen. (141)

This passage shows how simply by being in the kitchen, by carrying out ordinary tasks and enjoying the company of her mother’s friend, Najwa experiences intense emotions and a strong sense of comfort that lingers even when that person leaves the room. In the aunt’s absence, Najwa takes over the kitchen. She turns up the radio and enjoys herself, able to briefly claim this room as her own.

Later Najwa tries to recreate this feeling by seeking work as a maid and nanny in other (immigrant) households. Because of the novel’s non-linear structure, it is on the first page that the reader meets Najwa—probably in 2003 as the second chapter heading (63) reveals—as she is on her way to interview for such a job on St. John’s Wood High Street. Here she is going to work for Lamyia, her “new employer” (65), although it may be more accurate to assign Doctora Zeinab—Lamyia’s mother—the role of the employer,

as it is with her that Najwa arranges the specifics of her responsibilities and other work-related issues. Soon it is revealed that this is not Najwa's first job as a maid. On the contrary, at this point in her life Najwa is an experienced domestic worker and has fully internalized the behavior that is expected from her.

I know how deferential a maid should be. I take off my shoes and leave them at the door. I take off my coat, fold it and put it over my shoes—it wouldn't be polite to hang it over the family's coats on the coat-rack. I know I must be careful in everything I do; I mustn't slip. The first day is crucial, the first hours. I will be watched and tested but, once I win [Lamya's] trust, she will forget me, take me for granted. This is my aim, to become the background to her life. (65)

Najwa's devotion, her precaution to do everything right, to not slip, shows how important this job is for her. She is determined to make a commitment to this family whose members are themselves immigrants from the Arab world—from Egypt and the Gulf states. Lamya is a Ph.D. student whose husband works in Oman and only comes to visit every six weeks for a short vacation. Tamer, Lamya's brother, is a few years younger than her—and at that time many years younger than Najwa who, analogous to the novels' timeline, should now be around 37—and also attends the university. The fourth member of the household is Mai, Lamya's two-year-old daughter. Taking care of her will be one of Najwa's main duties, besides cooking, cleaning, ironing, doing the laundry, and other typical household tasks.

For Cariello, Doctora Zeinab's apartment and the kitchen in particular—in addition to the more abstract spaces of religion and the narrative per se—are the most significant spaces in Najwa's life. According to her it is movement—in this case Najwa's forced migration—that produces places like the kitchen “that [ground] the negotiation of selfhood and identity” (339-40). Cariello further describes this room as a place of cleansing and purification where “the migrant, working class woman negotiates her sense

of ‘home,’ searching for her past [. . .] and finding a sliding space of substitution” (344). Moreover, it is “an interesting site for the articulation of class and cultural relations” (345). Here she refers specifically to the opposing characters of Najwa and Lamya: a conservative Muslim woman wearing the headscarf and a young Egyptian woman who rejects her religion and is free to pursue an education and to refuse cooking or any other kind of housework.

The kitchen does, however, not simply perpetuate the class and cultural relations Cariello emphasizes. Because of its specific constellation as a work and meeting place for people from various shifting worlds and sociocultural backgrounds, the kitchen—and in fact the apartment as a whole—not merely articulates but complicates class and cultural affiliations, and prevents a simple categorization of Najwa and Doctora Zeinab or Lamya in terms of a strict employer-employee relationship. While Lamya is described as looking down at Najwa, always putting her in her place as a maid, Doctora Zeinab and Najwa engage in more meaningful conversations during which Najwa’s role as a servant loses some of its negative and rigid connotations. Furthermore, once part of the upper class in Sudan, Najwa grew up having maids and other servants of her own, and neither she nor her mother ever had to cook or do housework. Now it is Najwa who works as a domestic for another family. But despite these newly imposed class differences, Najwa not only still considers herself upper class—she calls it “upper class without money” (252)—but is also able to transcend class boundaries through the friendship and brief romantic involvement with Tamer, Lamya’s brother and Doctora Zeinab’s son, thereby becoming a central part of this household and partaking in the family members’ private lives.

The kitchen also does not reiterate the stereotypical class or cultural boundaries between the Global North and Global South, as it is so often the case when it comes to the domestic work carried out by migrants. Najwa does not work for a British family, but in another immigrant household whose family members are hyphenated identities with ties to Egypt, Oman, Sudan, and Britain. Najwa also did not relocate to London because she wanted to work as a maid but ends up in this profession because of a series of unfortunate circumstances. Highlighting such complex social processes and intricate links between Najwa and the other members of the household, the kitchen is able to expose the divisions of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality as unstable and constructed, and demystifies common stereotypes about domestic workers.

The apartment on St. John's Wood High Street thus also debunks the binaries between Britain and the Arab world, West and non-West. It illustrates that immigrants are able to lead privileged lives in the West and furthermore shows that these lives are not cut-off from the everyday realities of the city. The windows of the apartment overlook the busy streets and Najwa can not only see the mosque and the minaret but a variety of buildings, stores, and people. The people frequenting the apartment bring in purchased goods, food, and smells from the streets, and other elements of London. Doctora Zeinab's family, their friends, and Najwa watch British and international programs on television, read the newspaper, and listen to radio shows from Egypt and other Arab or African regions. Events taking place outside or in more distant places are discussed inside and produce a space that is inextricably linked to other spaces and yet firmly located within London.

While I have so far focused mainly on the kitchen and the apartment as a whole, there are other rooms in this living space that take on a personal meaning for Najwa. Although a sense of the kitchen and practices associated with this room prevail, Najwa's duties are not restricted to this area. In the course of the novel, Najwa develops a crush on Tamer, and for this reason his room is of particular interest here. Najwa enjoys cleaning his room, smelling his clothes, and sifting through his books. She takes her time making his bed and starts saving his room for last. Like Nazneen before, Najwa is therefore able to resignify traditional tasks by turning them into an exciting distraction and secret pleasure. These small subversive acts do however not go completely unnoticed. One day Doctora Zeinab catches her cleaning Tamer's room at a rather unusual hour. Najwa's reaction: "I flush and have no adequate reply, only an apologetic mumble. She sighs at my stupidity" (206). Najwa also fosters a secret admiration for Lamya. In the morning, when she is alone in the apartment, she weighs herself on Lamya's bathroom scales, tries on her scarves, and puts on her necklace, in those moments perhaps fantasizing what it would be like to be to live Lamya's life or have her old life back. These secret practices also come to a stop when Lamya accuses Najwa of stealing said necklace. As they frantically search for it, the necklace suddenly turns up in Mai's hands. But the episode leaves a bitter taste and makes Najwa swear to herself that she will never try on Lamya's things and never daydream again. These examples further illustrate that there is a hierarchy of rooms, representative of what Massey refers to as a complex "power-geometry" (*Space, Place, and Gender* 149). They render transparent the restrictions and imposed class boundaries that shape the apartment, and show that Najwa's symbolic place is in the kitchen.

In addition to being a necessary means to ease her financial hardship and offering distraction and excitement, the apartment also emerges as a personal and intimate place for Najwa. Here she allows herself to give in to her emotions and memories, and, as Cariello posits, finds a “sliding,” and thus elusive, substitute for her own family and the home she lost. Being in the apartment conjures up both desirable and undesirable memories of the past, of certain rooms, smells, and feelings that Najwa learns to understand and consolidate in the calming atmosphere of the workplace. As Bachelard claims, “the house we were born in is physically inscribed on us” (14). Memories and practices are embodied and people carry those memories and places of the past with them all the time. Unlike Mrs. Sen, however, Najwa never cooked or did the dishes back in Khartoum, and does not reenact such tasks in order to recreate an idea of home. Rather, performing these domestic acts with and for Doctora Zeinab’s family *reminds* Najwa of home and of her childhood growing up in Khartoum, and produces a sense of being with a family while at the same time driving home the realization that Najwa will never be with her own family again. Najwa *dreams* of what it would be like to have a family and in doing so remembers her past. Doctora Zeinab’s accent reminds her of the Egyptian soap operas she used to watch with her mother, and looking after her granddaughter makes Najwa remember the emotionally charged relationship of care and nurture between mother and child generating feelings of comfort and attachment. The events taking place in the apartment also elicit negative memories. The episode with the necklace, for instance, prompts a memory of Najwa’s brother stealing their mother’s necklace. But the positive memories and experiences outweigh negative ones and illuminate that the apartment does not simply replace or succeed Najwa’s old home but helps Najwa

negotiate between past and present, dreams and realities, and construct a new and individual sense of place that is at the same time a continuation of and a break from her childhood home.

Place-specific practices play a major role in getting to know a place and establishing an intimate connection and a sense of belonging to it. On her second day at work Najwa describes her new job as comforting and uplifting:

I run the hot water over [the plates] a long time, until they become unstuck. I enjoy being in a home rather than cleaning offices and hotels. I like being part of a family, touching their things, knowing what they ate, what they threw in the bin. I know them in intimate ways while they hardly know me, as if I am invisible. (83)

Linking back to how she describes her first day at work, Najwa enjoys being in the background and invisible. She would rather be the “family’s concubine, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, with life-long security and a sense of belonging” (215) than going back to a life of loneliness, isolation, and insurmountable guilt. Repetitive acts like doing the dishes, cooking, washing, and ironing soothe her and make her feel in place. They reveal a character that takes comfort in routines and in being useful, a character who desires to be in the comforting presence of a family even if this means that she has to perform the role of a servant or a concubine. Performing those daily rituals bestow her with a sense of simplicity, stability, and reality. They carve out a space for daydreaming and reconnecting to old memories, and without relenting to the inertia of nostalgia, anchor her in the present. They help Najwa gain access to her old self, navigate past and present experiences, and ultimately get a clearer sense of who she is.

This promising sense of stability may well have lasted had Najwa not entered into an intimate relationship with Tamer. They only kiss once—during one of Lamya’s lavish parties—but Lamya happens to burst into Tamer’s room in this very moment, and Najwa

is given her notice. Despite this abrupt ending of her employment Najwa is able to draw strength from the short-lived romance. Not only did her infatuation with Tamer inspire her fantasies of having a family of her own, it also invigorated her job and made her endure Lamya's moods. Flattered by Tamer's reciprocal dedication to her, Najwa emerges as a stronger character with renewed self-confidence. Moreover, her new situation promises novel possibilities.⁶⁸ On the condition that Najwa break off the affair with Tamer, Doctora Zeinab writes her a generous check that will allow her to go on Hajj—an exciting opportunity that Najwa had previously pronounced impossible—and possibly even enroll in university. The comforting atmosphere of the domestic space is thus supplemented or replaced with the prospect of an equally balanced place of belonging in the future, a spiritual place of pilgrimage and cleansing, and another space of home.

The home can be many things: living space, workspace, cooking area, storage unit, playground, meeting place, or hiding place; the space of a family or of extra-marital desires; it can be oppressive, subversive, or empowering; a place of female bonding and solidarity, of hopes, dreams, and memories, or a symbol of domesticity. The living space is therefore never a natural space of home and belonging but is imbricated into larger constellations of constantly changing local circumstances that are experienced differently by individuals. Often it is as a result of daily routines and struggles that we attach meanings and symbolism to a certain place. But also personal stories and memories are

⁶⁸ Like the character Karim in *Brick Lane*, Tamer is a devout Muslim, and, like Karim, he is attracted to an older woman because she exudes a sense of maturity, home, and stability—something he does not have himself. For Karim, who had never been to Bangladesh, Nazneen inhabits a notion of rootedness and cultural legacy. For Tamer, who is appalled by his sister's Western ways, Najwa signifies a moral innocence and simplicity that makes him want “to go back in time. A time of horses and tents; swords and raids” (255), a time that he imagines was less complicated and contaminated than the London of their present.

able to tie us more closely to specific locations, anchor us in our environment, and make us feel comfortable and in place. In the literary texts I have discussed here, the home is above all an intimate place that lets us zero in on the protagonists' lives and makes us privy to their most private emotions, fears, memories, desires, and practices. But it is also the arena where these female migrants navigate past and present and negotiate their daily chores and struggles, thereby coming to terms with their individual circumstances of migration and constructing a sense of home and belonging in their new cultural contexts.

Places are never fixed or permanent. They change and are changed by their surroundings. They appear and disappear. They have the ability to shape our lives and we in turn, shape them. We pause in some places and leave others behind. But as indicated above, the physical relocation to a new place does not automatically erase all traces, all knowledge and memories of the past and does not preclude the possibility of alternative places of home. Places of the past are embodied and can be reenacted, as it is the case in "Mrs. Sen's," and migrants also remain connected to their past through objects they have brought with them and through personal memories and stories. Such connections in turn influence how places of the present are experienced and whether, where, and how migrants emplace in their new cultural environment.

The texts discussed here further focus on the experience of female migrancy and how it plays out in the domestic sphere. The centrality of the home and the kitchen, however, cannot be explained as a consequence of female migrancy and its assumed interdependence with domesticity alone. Neither the conceptualization of the home as an innocent place of rootedness and safety, nor as a space of oppression and control is fully able to grasp the significance of the home for these characters. The home in these texts is

more nuanced. It is a highly symbolic space where race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity are regulated but also complicated, questioned, and deconstructed. Their unique situations have put these women into a place where they seem to have to perform the role of the immigrant housewife or migrant domestic worker but that is not all they are doing and that role is also not necessarily experienced as inconvenient or oppressive but can represent an opportunity to create a sense of comfort and home. The protagonists do the dishes, clean, cook, and eat, either by themselves or with others, but do not necessarily experience these practices as a burden or carry out these practices against their will. They also engage in conversations, watch television, and listen to the radio. They go out for walks, explore their surroundings, meet friends, or buy groceries bringing in external elements and connecting their apartments with their immediate environment. The texts also thematize the multiple and often ambiguous facets of place-specific relationships between employer and employee, caregiver and receiver, husband and wife, friends, lovers, and family members; and the possibilities for feelings of comfort, attachment, and belonging arising out of such affiliations. The kitchen, the domestic space, and the home emerge as examples of a fluid and heterogeneous form of spatiality that transcends traditional conceptualizations of domesticity. It is here where the protagonists struggle and endure, and where they come to terms with their complicated pasts and presents. Through place-specific practices—some traditional, others more subversive—they attach new meanings and symbolism to the dwelling space and reinscribe ideas of home, shelter, warmth, and company. Doing so, they produce personally meaningful places that they can claim as their own.

CHAPTER 2

“I BELONG HERE . . . I AM NO LONGER OUTSIDE:” SPATIAL STORIES OF COMMUNITY AND MOBILITY

Everyday life is by no means restricted to the dwelling space alone. The living space—the house or the apartment—may in a sense be a primary or immediate space we tie to the notion of “home,” but it is not the only place where such a sense is graspable. On their daily routines people pass through or pause in many different places, the totality of which produces a distinct spatial network of their lived space. In her 2001 short story “Der Hof im Spiegel” (“The Courtyard in the Mirror”), the Turkish-German writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar refers to this network as a “personal city map” (Adelson “Courtyard” 6). The image recalls the suggestion made by Walter Benjamin in “Berliner Chronik” that we “[set] out the sphere of life—*bios*—on a map,” the result of which would give us “Paris *veçü*” or “lived Berlin” (*Reflections* 5).⁶⁹ The places constituting such individual maps are diverse and multiple: places where we live, work, or rest; universities, hospitals, churches, mosques, prisons, soccer stadiums, movie theaters, or shopping malls; and other public or private facilities and institutions, in addition to myriad other sites that can be historically, geographically, culturally, or socially specific, serve specific functions, and are embedded within larger networks of social, economic, political and other

⁶⁹ The translations from the short story “Der Hof im Spiegel” are taken from Leslie Adelson’s translation “The Courtyard in the Mirror” published in *TRANSIT* in 2005. “Der Hof im Spiegel” is the first story in Özdamar’s short story collection of the same name which is only available in German.

relations. Such places are furthermore experienced differently by individuals. Some people enjoy going to work while others dread every minute they have to spend at the office. Some places are experienced in positive terms—for instance as places of comfort, home, community, friendship, or leisure—others in negative terms as places of discomfort, stress, fear, or danger. These attitudes toward and emotions experienced in place also apply to migrants who equally negotiate their everyday lives passing back and forth between a variety of places trying to make a living and to adapt to their new environment. Yet what is it that makes certain places stand out as positive or comfortable and others as negative and unpleasant? What kinds of places are included on an individual's personal (city) map and on what grounds? And what is the relationship between such individual places and, in the context of migration, the home left behind and the new environment? These are some of the questions I consider in this chapter.

Moving away from the dwelling space, here I argue that migrants are able to construct a sense of home and belonging to what I call “alternative places of belonging”—places that are physically located outside and separate from one's house or apartment, but can nevertheless be intricately intertwined with or even an extension of such dwelling spaces. To do so I return to Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* for a more complete analysis of the protagonist's personal map of London that includes Regent's Park and Regent's Park mosque, two examples of personal and at the same time public places of belonging and community that are interdependent and co-constitutive. I further consider two representative texts from the German context, Özdamar's “Der Hof im Spiegel” and Senait G. Mehari's partly fictional memoir *Feuerherz* (“*Heart of Fire*”) (2004), two texts

that thematize movement and foreground the city, streets, and neighborhoods as alternative social spaces of belonging.⁷⁰

According to geographer Tim Cresswell, movement—by means of walking, running, traveling, or other more modern forms of transportation, such as going by train, car, or plane—is “a fundamental geographical fact of existence and, as such, provides a rich terrain from which narratives . . . can be, and have been, constructed” (*Move* 1). Migration, in particular, one of the most compound forms of movement, entails an infinite number of stories, unique accounts that begin with leaving and tell of the relocation from one place to another or to several places on a long and unpredictable journey, ceaselessly affecting and producing new spaces on varying scales: the new host country, arrival city, neighborhood, work environment, or living space. Places of the past are, however, not left behind in their entirety but travel with their subjects and often determine where they go. The past affects how migrants react to and think about their new present even as the places left behind become malleable and fluid, changing not only in the reality of their continuing present but also in the migrants’ memory.

That places of the past affect and potentially resurface in the present is integral to Cresswell’s argument that “[t]ime and space are both the context for movement (the environment of possibility for movement to occur) and a product of movement” (*Move* 4). What he means by this is that—similar to the critical conceptualization of spatiality I outline in the introduction—space and time should not be taken for granted or conceived of as natural or passive elements. Space and time do not exist prior to movement but are produced and constantly reshaped by human activity. It is because of migration from a country of origin to a new context that the host or destination country, arrival city,

⁷⁰ *Feuerherz* has not been translated into English. All translations here are mine.

homeland, and displacement come into existence as interdependent concepts resulting from movement.⁷¹ As a result of new means of transportation, communication, and global interconnectedness, distances are perceived as shrinking, a process directly linked to the interdependence of time, space, and movement. Cresswell further makes a distinction between movement and mobility, insisting that while movement denotes an abstract yet absolute idea of time and space—like a train that runs on schedule from A to B—mobility indicates a “thoroughly social facet of life imbued with meaning and power . . . composed of social time and social space” (4). Just like Michel de Certeau, who in his influential essay “Walking in the City” defines mobility—in the form of walking—as a speech act that “implies *relations* among differentiated positions” (98) and that “has the function of introducing an other” and will “initiate, maintain, or interrupt contact” (99), Cresswell theorizes mobility as a social category. It indicates movement in its place- and time-specific actualities, as well as individual possibilities and realizations of movement producing and at the same time a product of lived space and social interactions.

Concluding his discussion, Cresswell stakes out two opposing geographical imaginations, what he calls a “nomadic” and a “sedentary metaphysics” (26): two contrasting discourses that assume different stances on mobility and immobility, one privileging mobility—and therefore movement over stasis—the other immobility—or in other words rootedness over placelessness.⁷² The choice of terms here shows that these

⁷¹ Compare also David Harvey’s ideas of the social construction of space and space-time compression, and Arjun Appadurai’s new worldscapes: ever-shifting landscapes in a world that is constantly changing because of the impact of mass media and migration.

⁷² “Placelessness” here also recalls a particular postmodern conceptualization of this term. Both Jameson and Baudrillard have discussed the postmodern condition of placelessness as an inevitable result of space-time compression. Postmodern non-places such as shopping malls, hotels, airports, and other spaces of transit come to mind here. See also Jan Willem Duyvendak for a more detailed discussion of hotel chains, mobile homes, and other new dimensions of dwelling and mobility.

positions assign unequal values to more or less identical concepts, turning mobility into a contranym, a word with two opposite meanings. A nomadic metaphysics perceives of mobility/movement as positive, prioritizing routes over roots, whereas a sedentary metaphysics describes mobility/movement in negative terms, as resulting in the loss of roots and of a sense of heritage anchored in place. Doreen Massey points out similar tendencies in her 1991 essay “A Global Sense of Place,” where, using the example of Kilburn High Road, she observes that locals, especially, tend to lament the loss of an imagined essence of place—a sense of history or rootedness—that they attribute to urban change. Yet while some residents long for what they perceive as the “good old times,” others, new tenants or visitors, are drawn to the area precisely because of what they understand as an air of originality, quaint Englishness, and a sense of community. As Massey shows, people’s reactions to places are utterly subjective and often impulsive and erratic. Places are *perceived* as rooted or uprooted but these qualities are not natural or pre-given. Place are never static but, in Massey’s words, “a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 154). It is how people relate to places, in conjunction with their individual attitudes and presuppositions, that produce the effects of a sense of stasis or rootedness, change or uprootedness. Neither can the longing for rootedness be dismissed as reactionary and antiquated, nor does movement result in placelessness and uprootedness. Rather, as I will show in this chapter, the two discourses underscored by Cresswell are interdependent and vary depending on their contexts. Individual conditions of migration and mobility produce their own categories and trajectories in which movement can be perceived as threatening or soothing, just like places can be experienced as places of

rootedness or upheaval, inclusion or exclusion, or as thresholds for such places in the future.

As I have already pointed out, in *Minaret*, Aboulela constructs a very intricate web of London in the late 80s, the 90s, and the early 2000s; a web that consists of constant movement and different examples of mobility, and of streets, neighborhoods, parks, restaurants, buildings, and apartments, most of them mentioned by name and easily recognizable for a resident of London or a reader familiar with this city. In the course of the novel, this personal map changes significantly as the protagonist also undergoes massive changes. Upon arriving in London in 1985, Najwa's family—then consisting of herself, her mother, and her brother—moves into their old vacation home, a luxurious apartment in Lancaster Gate. During these early years Najwa spends most of her time in the district surrounding the apartment—Oxford Street, Bond Street, Leicester Square, Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, and Gloucester Road—before a second rupture, notably her mother's death and the brother's imprisonment, causes her to gravitate toward the area of Regent's Park. Here, she moves into a new place on Edgware Road, joins the religious community of Regent's Park mosque, and takes on a job in an apartment on St. John's Wood High Street at which point the reader reconnects with Najwa in the early 2000s. This physical shift also realigns her everyday lived space and places the minaret, the visual marker of the mosque and the park, at the physical and spiritual center of her life. As predicted by Cresswell's sedentary metaphysics, Najwa experiences this shift as being uprooted from her familiar environment, the exact opposite of the associations evoked by the minaret, the title of the novel.

Because of the non-linear structure of the narrative, it is, however, this image that the reader encounters on the very first page, “the minaret of Regent’s Park mosque visible above the trees” (1) foreshadowing the larger significance of this monument for the novel as a whole. The minaret, a cultural landmark of modern London, is a spatial signifier that represents both the mosque and the park, and to some extent even the workplace on St. John’s Wood High Street. Though an architectural feature of the mosque, it is clearly visible, perhaps even more impressive, from a distance: from deeper within the park and from the surrounding buildings, above all from Doctora Zeinab’s apartment. The minaret is furthermore a highly symbolic diacritic that represents specific cultural, social, religious, national or transnational, and even historical and political meanings. It is a physical and visual marker of the mosque that signifies elevation and mobility, and it also has unmistakable acoustic qualities. It is here where the calls to prayer are issued at prescribed times of the day, hence a temporal marker similar to the clock of a church tower and therefore a visible *and* audible element of this particular area. As a fixed point of orientation the minaret is firmly anchored in the real world of the text and never fails to bring Najwa back to reality. During her walks in the park with Tamer, her employer’s son and the secret object of her affection, the minaret materializes as a signal that prevents them from getting lost and as a reminder of the time and place and the rules imposed upon both of them by their families, society, and religion. It is a tangible presence throughout the novel, and for Najwa, in particular, it is a guide and stable compass point—firm amidst the wave of difficulties she has to face—that helps her navigate her complicated life in London.

Since the minaret is directly linked to Regent's Park mosque, the mosque stands out as one of the most central settings of the novel. As a "public sacred space" (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 165) it is a complex location of social belonging, a product of Islamic traditions and beliefs, and a visible sign of a Muslim community. Located in London, it is both a local and a diasporic space, a signifier of postcolonial and other forms of migration, but also a destination for permanent residents and citizens. In his study of mosques in the United Kingdom, Seán McLoughlin further describes the mosque as a sanctuary for marginalized groups. It is a place of safety for "those who have faced the dislocating experiences of migration" (McLoughlin 1048) and for those suffering from "the social exclusion of racism and unemployment" (1049), circumstances that also pertain to Najwa, who feels lonely, does not have a meaningful career, and lacks people who support her. A passage early in the novel shows that Najwa has also been the victim of racism, perhaps not just once. The reader witnesses how three young men harass Najwa on a public bus, calling her names and spitting on her. Already hinting at the interdependence of trauma and repression, the incident is not given much weight in this passage. Najwa quickly glosses over the unpleasant episode, merely worried that she will now have to wash her hair. Nonetheless this moment is consequential for the development of the plot as it determines how Najwa navigates around the city. The public space of the bus is antithetic to Regent's Park and the mosque, and "the feeling of being trapped" (80) in spaces like the bus reinforces Najwa's sense of protection and security in other equally public yet more intimate and personal places.

Sadia Abbas and Christine W. Sizemore also view the mosque as central to the novel. In their readings, however, it is not so much the mosque itself—as a physical

location and meeting place—than the mosque as synonymous with religion that takes on primary significance. Abbas regards the mosque merely as a symbol of Islam and religion, and as a space that offers *access* to these grand narratives and therefore to comfort, community, and identity. For her, it is not the mosque but religion that helps Najwa come to terms with “immigrant trauma” and “culture shock” (445), with religion offering a conservative antidote to Western values, Marxist philosophy (as represented by Anwar), sexual freedom, and similar problems she links to immigration. In Sizemore’s reading, the comforting and redemptive aspects of Islam and religion are represented by the headscarf or hijab. According to her, the headscarf as a visible marker of Islam and the mosque—making the wearer visible as a Muslim woman while at the same time promising invisibility—reiterates Najwa’s “separateness from London culture and her commitment to a Muslim identity” (80), in addition to representing “the women’s spaces in the mosque and the women friends she finds there” (80). Both authors disregard the fact that it is the physical space of the mosque that allows for such processes to take shape, for women and others to meet, and for certain practices—such as praying or wearing the headscarf—to take place, that it is a space of security, comfort, and community. In the same vein, Marta Cariello concentrates on religion as a space of identity formation thereby neglecting how the novel foregrounds the material spaces of everyday life—the mosque especially, but also the park—as the necessary prerequisites for the practice of religion, the emplacement in one’s environment, and the creation of a Muslim identity.

The mosque is therefore more than a religious facility. As a site of spiritual but also cultural and social practices, it offers a wide range of activities and events, not all of

which can be considered strictly religious in their scope and function. People come here for the celebrations of religious holidays and regular prayer services. But they also seek advice and social support, join homework groups, youth centers, communal gatherings, participate in fasting, and attend computer, language, and cooking classes—practices that often extend beyond the mosque.⁷³ In the novel, for instance, the men and women at the mosque celebrate Eid, pray, take classes, study the Qur'an, and fast together. The mosque is, however, also a highly regulated institution that prescribes norms and values inevitably aimed at the regulation of gender, sexuality, and religion. This is a characteristic inherent in many “religious” institutions and it can be experienced as both restraining and liberating, depending on one’s own personal beliefs and motives. In the text, this tendency is represented by the fact that men and women pray in separate rooms and by the traditional attire of its members.⁷⁴ Together, all of these attributes and functions produce the mosque as a specific public space that is at once a site of potential control and surveillance, as well as a source of support and therapy.

Najwa seeks out the mosque precisely because of both of these qualities—control, or rather regulation, order, and therefore stability, in addition to comfort and support—which she believes will help her come to terms with her complicated past and present. In their study of migrant workers Elizabeth Lee and Geraldine Pratt claim that “[an] ‘end’ to the migration journey is not afforded to all migrants; for some, pain, anxiety and desperation as a result of migration never quite subside” (233), and also in the novel the

⁷³ McLoughlin gives a comprehensive summary of the social functions and practices offered at the mosque in traditional and in Western contexts. Also refer to Synnove Bendixsen for a list of communal activities offered at a mosque in Berlin.

⁷⁴ See Shampa and Sanjoy Mazumdar for a discussion of the role of women in public spaces like mosques and shrines in traditional Muslim countries as well as in Europe and in the United States.

same feelings underscored by Pratt and Lee prevent Najwa from fully arriving and feeling comfortable in her environment. Although Najwa perceives of London as her “second home” (148), negative feelings and memories keep resurfacing, and the decision to reunite with a former boyfriend further impairs her situation. As Najwa is never quite able to articulate what it is that torments her so much, the reader can only conjecture about the silences or voids in Najwa’s memory that resonate with the gaps caused by trauma. The novel is permeated by a palpable feeling of unease and unrest, a constant sense of downward mobility or movement represented in the image of falling (for instance of pages 1, 53, 56, 61, and 216) so that the mosque—like the minaret—materializes as the exact opposite of these circumstances, promising upward mobility, distraction, community, and spiritual healing.

The strained relationship with her boyfriend during her first years in London helps shed light on the depth and complexities of Najwa’s situation.⁷⁵ In a conversation with Anwar in the relaxing atmosphere of an Ethiopian restaurant, Najwa dares to voice her private emotions. She explains to him that she feels insecure because of “who I was, whose daughter I was” (157)—hinting at a deep ontological crisis. She confesses that she avoids other Sudanese immigrants for fear that they might recognize her name, a name

⁷⁵ Anwar and Najwa have known each other for a long time. Back in Khartoum they attended the same school and, despite a gaping difference in attitudes and values, even engaged in a brief romantic relationship. In the novel, Anwar is represented as both Najwa’s short-term significant other and antagonist. His political beliefs as a Marxist and revolutionary are directly opposed to the views represented by Najwa’s family, in particular her father. Anwar is a fervent critic of the regime, of corruption and oppression, and also later, when he and Najwa reunite in London, he will not stop criticizing Najwa for her father’s crimes. Anwar’s ideas are however not motivated by a sense of equality and liberality but subject to similar flaws of character of which he accuses her father. He embraces certain “Western” values—if they serve his purposes—but looks down at Western music and Westerns dress. In Sudan he disparages Najwa for her “Western ways” (25). Meanwhile in London he considers Najwa’s qualms about their sexual relationship as laughable and her turn to religion as reactionary. Because of her infatuation with him and her relief at seeing a familiar face, Najwa is unable to see through Anwar’s own close-mindedness. She desperately wants to trust him and it is because of this trust that the reader is privy to Najwa’s personal concerns as she conveys them to Anwar.

that will always link her back to her “disgraced father” (134), as Anwar himself does not cease to remind her. During the same exchange Anwar further happens to broach the subject of displacement. He reiterates that “Sudan [has] the highest internally displaced population in the world.” Najwa, eager to point out something they have in common, something that would unite them in the present—a shared sense of displacement—rephrases Anwar’s statement as “you and I are displaced” (157), unable to foresee the problems inherent in this response. Najwa is momentarily unaware that their displacement issues from very different causes that also affect their present circumstances differently. Anwar, a former prisoner and victim of torture, was never part of the upper class and immediately reminds Najwa of her privileged position. But he also adds somewhat reassuringly, yet not without irony and sarcasm, that “here no one knows our background We are both niggers, equals” (157). With these statements, Anwar exposes how most Londoners may conflate race with ethnicity, assuming that Najwa and Anwar are black British, or simply black, African, or foreigner—note that Najwa is not wearing the headscarf yet. But more importantly, Anwar’s comments hint at the diverging experiences of male and female migrancy. A culmination of previous remarks about his discomfort in London, for instance the language barrier and his financial problems, the glib reference to race implies that, in fact, Anwar feels everything but equal in London—neither to other Londoners nor to Najwa. He attributes this feeling to the color of his skin and not to his cultural heritage or political background.⁷⁶ Najwa’s

⁷⁶ Compare Anwar’s situation and sense of inferiority to that of Chanu in *Brick Lane* or Senait’s father in *Feuerherz*. All three men are overtaken by the same fate. Removed from their native cultural context they feel deprived of their virility. Not unlike Gloria Anzaldúa’s “macho”—in her case a formerly strong and reliable man who feels inferior and powerless after having been transplanted to a new environment, notably because of racial shame—these men rely on their wives, girlfriends, and daughters, making them the bearers of cultural difference (Chanu), humiliating them to compensate for their own disenfranchisement (Anwar), or finally using them as an outlet for their rage and fear (Senait’s father).

problems, on the other hand, the assault on the bus and her general discomfort, originate from the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and religion rather than race, and are intricately intertwined with the trauma of forced migration.

As a female migrant of Muslim background, Najwa was born and raised in a society marked by conservative and patriarchal social relations. The subordination to men and the obligation to get married and have children were, and still are, the underpinning principles of this society that considers the family the nucleus of the community. Despite Najwa's secular-leaning family and her Westernized upbringing, she embodies these values that were once part of her everyday life. She feels "fuzzy" (128) when she is outside, self-conscious about the short skirts she is wearing, dizzy when she thinks of the opportunities and individual liberties the West has to offer, and sinful in light of her sexual emancipation. Najwa's tailspin of unbearable grief, trauma, and low self-esteem, climaxes in the guilt and shame washing over her after she loses her virginity to Anwar, whose comment that "[l]ike every other Arab girl ... you've been brainwashed about the importance of virginity" (175), humiliates her even more. These local circumstances, her particular social location within the power hierarchies of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality leave Najwa hopeless. When she realizes that Anwar will never marry her, the mosque manifests as the only way out of this crisis.

The reader may encounter Najwa on the first page of the novel as wearing a headscarf, but the turn to the mosque and to religion takes place over many years. Although religion has always been a part of Najwa's life she never actively participated in religious practices. Back in Khartoum, she used to feel at ease and took pleasure in the religious activities around her—the men and women in their traditional attires, the calls to

prayer, and the fasting—memories that she brought with her to London where, years later, she begins to miss the daily signs of Islam. It is in retrospect that she now starts to appreciate the reassuring effects of religion—an aspect of her everyday life she used to take for granted. She further realizes that it is her own carelessness and not the actual lack of religious signs that makes Islam seem absent in everyday London. Anwar and his roommate laugh at Najwa’s reaction to their “Ramadan breakfast” (230), and she is taken by surprise and at the same time utterly embarrassed and shocked “that Ramadan could happen, could come round and I would not know about it” (230). Islam is a prominent feature of modern-day London but it is a matter of perspective and perception, and it is not until Najwa’s world begins to crumble that she starts to actually look for religious elements and will find and recognize them. Only then does Najwa finally make the long overdue phone call to Wafaa, the woman who will introduce her to the mosque, “[t]he woman who had shrouded my mother. The woman who had phoned every now and then to speak to me across a gulf, my indifference making her voice faint, her pleas feeble” (240). As Najwa explains: “My guides chose me; I did not choose them” (240), and like the minaret “Wafaa materialize[s]” (240) as another fixed point of orientation as Najwa is searching for stability and belonging, and as a person to whom she “would always feel a connection . . . a kind of gratitude” (160).

Place-specific practices and relationships at the mosque produce a particular form of spatiality. Here Najwa encounters and co-constructs an open and communal space of comfort and security, in addition to embracing an opportunity for female bonding. Najwa observes that when the mosque is busy “sometimes there was hardly a place to sit and then we would all stand up to pray, and suddenly there was more space and the imam

would start to recite” (188). Here, for the first time in many years, Najwa feels at ease and allows herself to “let go” (177). She encounters a community of brothers and sisters, men and women, Westerners and non-Westerners, who are, to Najwa’s relief, separated during prayer. She grows extremely fond of Wafaa and her husband who, to Najwa’s surprise, “was English and blond” (24). She admires her Syrian teacher Um Waleed—the relationship with whom Najwa even describes in terms of “love” (78)—and adores Shahinaz and her baby. She prays, takes classes, fasts, and enjoys being with others who accept her for who she is and who she can look up to. She experiences a strong sense of community and solidarity with these women who will now serve as her role models, guides, and companions, and make up for the family and children she may never have. Their laughter and the casual conversations are therapeutic, reminiscent of what bell hooks and other black feminists have referred to as “sisterhood” (hooks *Feminist Theory* 43), strong emotional ties that are able to cut through lines of race, class, and ethnicity and go beyond the ideas of shared oppression or victimization as posited by white middle class feminists.

The mosque is thus a place of arrival, a longer stop on Najwa’s journey where she is able to claim a sense of rootedness and belonging. Tying in with the previous remark that “[always] new places and new people make [her] tired” (74), Najwa herself states, “I belong here. . . . I am no longer outside” (184), indicating that she no longer experiences the detrimental sense of falling, symbolic of her involuntary movement in the form of forced migration, trauma, and downward social mobility. Unlike Anwar who ridicules Islam and considers praying and the hijab as backward and fundamentalist, Najwa understands Islam and the people at the mosque as friendly, gentle, and tolerant, and

often leaves the mosque “refreshed, wide awake, almost happy” (243), intense bodily emotions. It is her personal choice to come here, to pray, and to wear the hijab, and she feels empowered by these decisions. Abbas may label the role of religion in the novel as “a brand of socio-psychic tranquilizer” (Abbas 453), but I would argue that religion as practiced at the mosque and by Najwa is more than a soothing or tranquilizing social practice. Rather, religion and the physical space of the mosque here take on functions comparable to those of the church in the black community.

Black feminist thought describes the family and the church as the two most powerful forms of social organizations. They give access to spirituality and sacredness and provide sanctuaries and sources of strength, thereby fostering the wellbeing and survival of black women and the black community. As political scientist Allison Calhoun-Brown claims, the “Christian religion provided a new basis of social cohesion for people denied even the most rudimentary associations of home and family” (427), a quote that resonates almost verbatim with McLoughlin’s definition of the mosque. It is here where Najwa can perform and embrace her diasporic identity in a place that is both diaspora and home, a place that is not so much a religious space but, like Calhoun-Brown insists in the case of the black church, a center for diverse types of communal practices, and a source of strength and empowerment.⁷⁷ After her constant sense of falling—a downward or regressive form of mobility, unpredictable and out of one’s own control, mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel—Najwa is now suffused with new feelings of upward or progressive mobility and freedom, expressed on a physical, emotional, and spiritual plane. She spends a lot of time at the mosque where the fact that she is a member

⁷⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the function of the church in the black community and black feminist thought see Patricia Hill Collins and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes.

of a community of women bestows her with newfound self-confidence, trust, and hope. She is also transformed by the privileges offered by religion, and is hopeful that Allah “will do wonderful things for you and open doors for you” (96), promising spiritual elevation and the prospect of going on Hajj, a pilgrimage that seems very well possible when Najwa receives money from her employer under the conditions that she will break off the affair with Tamer.

A discussion of the mosque and of personally meaningful places in the novel would however not be complete without an analysis of Regent’s Park as a space that lends comfort and stability and equally contributes to Najwa’s sense of belonging in London. Regent’s Park mosque is not just any mosque in London. Of the 345 mosques in London and 1,500 mosques listed within the United Kingdom, it stands out as “Britain’s first monumental landmark mosque . . . built to represent Islam in Britain on a world stage” (Saleem n. pag.), and therefore weaving together foreign and local elements and two divergent yet complementary narratives of the nation.⁷⁸ It is a signifier of postcolonial and other forms of migration, a physical reminder of an emergent Muslim presence that calls attention to what political scientist Barnor Hesse has called “multicultural transruptions” (15) within Britain’s modern history.⁷⁹ It would however be incorrect to dismiss the mosque as a sanctuary for immigrants, tourists, or other visitors only. As McLoughlin notes, the mosque is a place of refuge for people from all walks of life independent of social class, ethnicity, or place of origin. It is not unusual for white

⁷⁸ For a listing of mosques, prayer services, and prayer time tables see the UK Mosque directory (online) and the website *Muslims in Britain*.

⁷⁹ Hesse specifically refers to what he perceives as a public reconfiguration of British national identity as evident in, but not restricted to, a realignment of space and the collapse of geographical segregation.

British citizens to be a member—in the novel this is represented by Wafaa’s husband—and it is not unusual for non-white Muslims to be categorized as locals or citizens.

The royal park is equally ambivalent. It represents grandeur and leisure but also empire and colonialism, and therefore hints at Britain’s violent history and powerful processes of inclusion and exclusion.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the concept of “Regent’s Park mosque” is not an oxymoron. The two parts that make up this name are not mutually exclusive and also the two physical spaces of the park and the mosque overlap and blend into each other. Najwa enmeshes the park and the mosque on her daily walks and through the people she encounters and accompanies throughout the city. Both are indispensable parts of her lived space which indicates a balanced relationship between the park and the mosque and the cultural meanings they represent. In Najwa’s case, the specific constellation of the mosque and the park further calls attention to and potentially joins together the two conflicting strands of Najwa’s personality—Sudanese and British, secular and devout Muslim—reminiscent of Gillian Rose’s idea of “paradoxical space” (137), a space made up of seemingly opposing positions that are nevertheless occupied simultaneously.

Vis-à-vis the female bonds represented by the mosque, the public space of the park offers an opportunity for male friendship and romance. Under the auspices of the minaret, Najwa secretly meets with Tamer—her employer’s son and perhaps a temporary proxy for Anwar. Away from the constrictive space of the apartment, they go for long strolls and engage in intimate conversations, able to talk freely. Their meetings rapidly turn into a comforting routine. Like the soothing feeling of stability Najwa experiences

⁸⁰ For more information on the history and development of Regent’s Park see Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, eds., *The London Encyclopaedia*.

when she carries out household tasks in the kitchen on St. John's Wood High Street or when she is at the mosque, the innocuous practice of going to the park bestows Najwa with a similar sense of constancy and prompts her to imagine what it would be like to have a family, this time with Tamer. In Najwa's fantasies, "[they are] like a couple, a couple with a baby" (110). Tamer's mutual affection for her perpetuates such thoughts so that in the course of the novel, the park becomes *their* place, a place they claim as their own, a playground and meeting place for secret rendezvous and quiet conversations.

Because of these characteristics the park also becomes a productive place where Najwa is able to reconcile her troubled identity. As she did earlier with Anwar, Najwa confides in Tamer, tells him about her family, and even admits to the torn feelings toward her identity—confessions fueled by the intimacy and tranquility integral to the park. Yet the characteristics of the park are also empowering and similar to the processes taking place at the mosque, Najwa also undergoes a transformation here. Later in the novel it will be Tamer who confides in her and who tells her about his difficulties, everyday problems, dreams, and desires, while a newly self-confident Najwa gives advice to him—about his studies and their relationship—and remains firm that they cannot have a future together.

The park, then, emerges as another sanctuary parallel to the mosque. Najwa perceives of it as safe: a safe place for the meetings between her and Tamer, and safe for foreigners, Muslims in particular. In Najwa's words: "[Tamer] might not know it but it is safe for us in playgrounds, safe among children. There are other places in London that aren't safe, where our very presence irks people" (111). Najwa does not reveal what it is that makes the park safe. She does not mention the incident on the bus and remains silent about other occurrences in other places that the reader might be unaware of. Nonetheless

this passage clearly reverberates with the previous experience of racism or Islamophobia and is one of the rare scenes in which Najwa broaches the growing hostility towards Muslims in a post-9/11 world. The park is thus simultaneously embedded in and uncoupled from the overarching political and historical context. It becomes a place of inclusive exclusion, an idea developed by Giorgio Agamben, an exception to yet at the same time an integral part of the outside world.

For Najwa, the park is above all a location of an alternative social order where she can perform her diasporic identity and spend time with a man who is not her father, brother, or husband—circumstances prohibited by her religious and cultural background. The time spent here also makes for a comforting relief for the reader. Najwa feels calm and relaxed, seemingly untroubled by her beliefs and desires. She enjoys the normalcy of the park, the scenery and natural beauty, and takes comfort in watching other families and taking Mai to the playground. It is an anonymous place, accessible to the wider public but nevertheless sheltered and private with a multiplicity of other places to explore, pause in, or hide: gardens, streams, lakes, playgrounds, benches, and paths. Here Najwa allows herself to daydream and is unusually open about her own views and concerns. As Najwa and Tamer penetrate further into the park and discover new playgrounds, “larger, more adventurous” (208), the reader, too, discovers a new facet of Najwa’s unique character. It is here and not in the mosque where she articulates for the first time that instead of thinking of herself as Sudanese or British, she now thinks of herself predominantly as Muslim—an inclusive new and personal identity that is a product of her new cultural environment and goes beyond a monolithic idea of Islam. Akin to the narratives conjoined by the idea of Regent’s Park mosque, the previously mutually exclusive

narratives of Najwa's past and present, her religious and secular desires, blend together in the act of walking through and appreciating this particular park.

The novel thus shows how the material and imaginary aspects of the day-to-day shape spaces and places, and construct or reconstruct notions of selfhood and diaspora. The mosque and the park emerge as parallel structures that serve different functions but are part of the same trajectory. As a physical place the mosque is a fixed local point and serves as a vehicle for the “non-fixed, ‘displaced’ place” (Cariello 341) of religion that physically connects people to each other. Here the most central strands of the story—Najwa's dreams, memories, desires, and concerns—coalesce and become visible. But from here they also cut through to other spaces as Najwa moves through London and tries to reconcile the memories of her past and her present anxieties. Together, these spaces, in particular the mosque and the park, offer shelter and community, a substitute for a family, and a purpose and goal in life. They become personally meaningful and safe places where no one judges Najwa because of her past, race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, and where she can perform a meaningful and peaceful diaspora.⁸¹ They are also important thresholds for future possibilities, above all the prospect of going on Hajj that brings into reach the possibility to “forget, let go” (177). It is a symbol of peace, security, and stability, and of an imaginary homecoming.

Such an imaginary homecoming, within the limits of her own means, is also what Senait, the narrator and protagonist of *Feuerherz* and another political refugee, is trying to achieve in Hamburg. The memoir relates the daily struggles of Senait G. Mehari, a female migrant who had to flee her home country, Eritrea, and, after a long and eventful

⁸¹ In these spaces Najwa performs a diasporic identity but, more importantly, also learns to embrace her diaspora. She forges social bonds to other members of the diaspora or other diasporic groups, is able to accept her past and her new environment, and creates a new feeling of belonging in place.

journey through Eritrea and Sudan, eventually joins her family in Germany. Unlike Najwa's protected childhood, Senait's childhood (which takes up the first half of the novel) is described as a time of unprecedented terror, governed by the violent war between the neighboring states of Eritrea and Ethiopia and the relentless recruitment of child soldiers, one of them Senait herself.⁸² Senait thus never gets to know a real childhood home. Her youth is marked by constant upheavals and uprootedness. She never stays in one place too long and is constantly on the move. In Eritrea, she is being shepherded from one orphanage to another. There is only a brief period of time when she gets to stay with relatives and with her violent father who eventually coerces her and her sisters to join the Eritrean Liberation Front. After three or four years as a child soldier, when Senait is approximately nine years old, the three sisters manage to escape and live with an uncle in Khartoum. From there they move on to Hamburg where they reunite with their father who has in the meantime been granted asylum by the German government. The relocation to Hamburg takes place around 1990 when Senait is approximately thirteen years old.

As opposed to Najwa's London, Senait's personal map of Hamburg is less sophisticated and complex. The reader is given some place or street names but the text lacks the overall commitment to detail of *Minaret*. Senait's plane arrives in Hannover from where she and her sisters take a train to Hamburg Stellingen, a suburb of Hamburg. Later the family moves to Eidelstedt, and finally, after several weeks of being on the street and living in a shelter for women, Senait is able to rent her own apartment in the center of Hamburg. The narrative ends with her leaving for Berlin. Mehari is also a much

⁸² Mehari herself includes geopolitical and historical information about Eritrea in the memoir. She also gives information about child soldiers, the role of girls, and charitable organizations. See 351-59.

less well-known writer than Aboulela. Despite its overall popularity and translation into several languages, *Feuerherz* did not receive critical acclaim.⁸³ *Feuerherz* also differs from *Minaret* in that it is autobiographical. Despite evident inaccuracies and controversies, the story is at its core the personal life story of Senait G. Mehari, her struggles and emigration to Germany, and as such also a material product of these processes.⁸⁴

Senait's first impressions of Germany and the neighborhood where she is going to live with her father and two sisters offer a critical early insight into Senait's personality and the processes that will determine her general wellbeing. When the sisters finally arrive in Germany, their very first reactions to the new country are in many ways stereotypical. After a long flight they land in Hannover where the father is—according to Senait—the only man of color at the airport. It is also cold, a new kind of cold that is so often described by newcomers from warmer places. From Hannover they take the train to Hamburg Stellingen, a suburb a few miles outside of the main city but still considered a part of the metropolitan area and easily accessible via subway. Here Senait's account takes on a more personal and concrete form. This place, too, is initially perceived in negative terms. The neighborhood is grey and monotonous, an area that is among Germans commonly referred to as “Ausländerghetto” (“foreigners’ ghetto”; 245), a name

⁸³ Neither did the 2006 sequel *Wüstenlied (Desert Song)* in which she describes her travels back to Africa. In Germany Mehari is better known as a singer and songwriter, most notably for her performance under the name Senait in 2003 the Eurovision Song Contest.

⁸⁴ Critics claim that the concept of the child soldier as described in the memoir did not come into existence until much later. Others, while finding fault with the definition of the child soldier, raise doubts about Mehari's descriptions of the ELF and her own role within this organization. For more a comprehensive summary of these issues see the 2008 exposé by Hans-Jürgen Jakobs and Sarah Ehrmann and in the online issue of the German *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, “Senait Mehari und ihr ‘Feuerherz’ – Bestseller mit Brandschaden,” (“bestseller damaged by fire”). According to this article, Mehari admitted that some of her descriptions may be exaggerated.

the area owes to its reputation as a residential area mostly for non-Germans regardless of their country of origin and immigration status. Senait is, however, not disheartened by this first impression. The new environment may be perceived as strange and threatening, but Senait instantly decides to explore the “Hochhausstadt” (“city of high-rises”; 246). She walks past the buildings, explores little alleyways, and avoids getting lost by jotting down snippets of information on a piece of paper: visible landmarks, street names, and other exotic peculiarities, like the slaughtered animals displayed in a butcher’s shop or the neon signs of a supermarket. She also immediately makes a new friend, Bianca, a German child playing at a playground with whom she communicates easily in broken English and by using gestures and facial expressions. Later Senait will refer to this friend as a “Leuchtturm” (“light house”; 248) amidst the difficulties of her first days in Germany, a “light house” friend that becomes a point of orientation—similar to Najwa’s minaret and her friend Wafaa—and helps anchor Senait in Hamburg.

This early snapshot of Senait’s first days in Germany shows how already as a teenager Senait is quite independent. She has no inhibitions about immediately exploring her new environment and feels quite at ease doing so, a significant difference that distinguishes this protagonist—and her experience of migration—from the insecure Najwa who is prone to dependency. Senait adapts very quickly to her new context. The text neither problematizes alienation nor displacement, and language only becomes a fleeting problem when Senait starts writing songs and poetry and briefly wonders whether her songs should be composed in Tigrinya, English, or German. She eventually chooses German, combining the lyrics with African melodies and rhythms, a visible sign of hybridity in the text. The protagonist also claims that she is not confronted with racism

until she moves to Berlin.⁸⁵ She feels safe in the neighborhood and the city of Hamburg—much safer indeed than at home with her violent father. She only experiences intolerance and mockery at school, surprisingly coming from other foreigners and not from white Germans. Senait here confirms Leslie Adelson’s concept of “touching tales” (*Turkish Turn* 20) by refuting common stereotypes and deconstructing the binaries of foreigners and Germans. She shows that both foreigners—Eritreans, Turks, and others—and Germans are diverse communities intersecting within the fluid space of Hamburg and that the gaps within these groups are often wider than the gaps between Germans and foreigners.

Senait also reveals useful information about the larger Eritrean diaspora. Like other diasporic communities, Eritreans may be scattered all over the world, “aber sie haben einen engen Zusammenhalt und viele Kontakte untereinander, wie es bei kleinen Völkern üblich ist, die in der Diaspora leben” (“but the social cohesion among them is strong and they maintain close ties with each other, as it is common for small peoples living in the diaspora”; 255). According to Senait, the Eritrean community in Germany is large and well-organized, but she hardly gets to spend time with fellow Eritreans as her father who still supports the Eritrean Liberation Front intentionally shuns every kind of interaction. The community is aware of Senait and her family having relocated to Germany. But given the political situation in Eritrea most members disapprove of the father’s party affiliations. They also object to his treatment of his daughters. As the reader gets to know later, the father sends for Senait and her sisters precisely because of the

⁸⁵ Note that the text relates events that are taking place in the 1990s. The fact that Senait is not confronted with racism until she moves to Berlin may also be a temporal and not just a spatial effect. It could be interpreted as a consequence of the German reaction toward the new citizenship law that came into force on January 1, 2000 which makes it easier for foreigners to obtain citizenship status. It could also tie in with the events of September 11, 2001 that caused a new wave of anti-foreign sentiments throughout Europe.

pressure from the community but fails to keep up the feigned affection and the idea of the caring father once the daughters have safely arrived. Hence the father's double marginalization—socially and politically—within the diasporic community.

Reminiscent of Anwar's predicament in *Minaret*, the complex social location occupied by the father articulates the locally specific circumstances of migration and again shows how race, class, gender, and ethnicity affect individuals differently. The father is neither accepted by the Eritrean community, nor very successful at establishing himself within German society. When Senait arrives in Germany, the first impression of her father is that he is the only black man at the airport, "deutlich gealtert" ("visibly aged"; 243) and "unsicher" ("insecure"; 243), visibly set apart from the other people frequenting the airport. He hardly makes a living, is unable to uphold relationships, and cannot support his family so that eventually, when he can no longer make the payments for their apartment, they have to move to an even smaller apartment in another part of Hamburg, Eidelstedt.

On arriving in Eidelstedt, Senait is now able to see for herself that this is a neglected and run-down area of the city:

Ghetto: kaum Deutsche, viele Türken, Araber, Afrikaner. Dreckige Straßen, verlotterte Parks, beschmierte Wände, zerstörte Telefonzellen, verdreckte Einkaufszentren und jede Menge Jugendlicher, die zwischen alldem herumlungerten, ohne zu wissen, wo sie hingehörten. Abgesehen von den Zerstörungen sah vieles aus wie in Afrika. Dort war alles noch viel ärmllicher und älter, aber es gab niemanden, der mutwillig alles vernichtete.

Ghetto: hardly any Germans, a lot of Turks, Arabs, Africans. Filthy streets, run-down parks, soiled walls, shattered phone booths, seedy shopping malls, and a ton of loitering adolescents who don't know where they belonged. Apart from all the visible damage it looked a lot like Africa. There everything was much poorer and older but there was no one who would deliberately destroy it all. (248)

Like Stellingen before, Eidelstedt is mainly referred to as “ghetto.” But the place also reminds Senait of her native home, which she labels as “Africa” here instead of referring to Eritrea specifically. Close reading shows, however, that the neighborhood does not consist solely of foreign residents. Rather, Eidelstedt is emblematic of the complex networks of power relations intersecting in place. It may be a segregated area—for immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries but also for white Germans—but this segregation is the result of class relations and the intersections of class, race, and ethnicity, rather than of race and ethnicity alone. That the neighborhood is commonly referred to as “ghetto” further illustrates how such places are perceived differently by white Germans, foreigners, residents, and non-residents. What others may dismiss as “ghetto” can nevertheless be a sanctuary for people who have nowhere else to go and cannot afford to live in a better area, such as Senait’s father. Still, what seems to be a safe space for him, a place of arrival or of last resort, is the exact opposite for Senait. For her, this area is a no man’s land, a space that reminds her of the Africa she gratefully left behind, and a space of regression rather than progression. Add to this her father’s unpredictable outbursts of rage and violence, and running away emerges as the only option for Senait to leave this space behind.

Running away offers a temporary solution for Senait’s present situation. But by running away she also resignifies the upheavals of her childhood and reinscribes the journey and the places of her past in her everyday lived space. Like Najwa, she embodies the trauma of migration and instability, the difference being that in Senait’s case this embodiment is displayed by the compulsory need to be on the move—at first forcibly, later intentionally. Unlike Najwa, Senait experiences movement in itself as soothing and

uses it as a tool to cope with her past. Ontological security is precluded from the very beginning as Senait never gets to know a genuine childhood home, a stable family or community, and never establishes a real connection to her father and sisters. But there are other places that come close to a home or serve as a substitute for home, places that she carries with her and that determine how she relates to her new environment. Notable examples here are Asmara in Eritrea, where she spends a few short weeks at the house of her grandparents, and Khartoum, where she and her sisters stay with an uncle for several years before they move on to Germany.

Another place that stands out as imprinted on her memory is the city of Kassala, especially as the characteristics Senait will later describe as comforting and uplifting about the city of Hamburg reverberate almost verbatim with the characteristics of that border town in Sudan. For Senait the glimpse of this town from the distance is the first sign of civilization after her time as a child soldier.

Was war das für ein herrlicher Anblick, die Lichter dieser Stadt über den Horizont hinaufwachsen zu sehen. Das war Licht aus Fenstern, Licht von Straßenlaternen, Licht von Lampen, die über Marktständen baumelten. Mir wären fast die Tränen gekommen vor Glück—nicht nur weil wir endlich am Ziel waren, mit der Aussicht auf etwas zu essen, sondern weil ich seit Monaten keine Städte gesehen hatte. Gab es das wirklich noch? Beleuchtete Häuser, Menschen, die durch ihren Heimatort gingen, ohne sich gegenseitig zu erschießen oder abschlachten zu wollen?

What an incredible view to see the lights of this city rising above the horizon. That was real light coming from windows, light from streetlamps, light from lanterns dangling over market stalls. I was so lucky and happy; I almost burst into tears—not only because we had finally arrived at our destination and we would probably get something to eat very soon, but mainly because I had not seen a city for months. Was it true? Were there still cities? Lit up houses, people who went on walks through their hometown without wanting to shoot or slaughter each other? (202)

In this moment, not the promise of food or rest but an idea of the city itself, the lights shining from the streetlamps and market stalls, and the image of everyday practices—a testimony to the normalcy of a civilized life—flood Senait’s consciousness. After several years spent in a dull and monotonous desert where heat, hunger, thirst, and violence had become the norm, she experiences the view of this city as comforting and moving, almost too good to be true. Opposed to this dream-like city unfolding in front of her, Senait’s past as it is symbolized by the image of the desert becomes a nightmare, equally unreal yet for different reasons. The city and the desert are thus diametrically opposed to each other. They are actual places but because of their distinct characteristics they are experienced as unreal or fantastic and could be described as symbolic of Foucault’s idea of heterotopia, a concept he establishes as a counter-site to utopias:

places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (25)

The desert and the city are two divergent expressions of very specific facets of this society, a dystopian and a utopian space that will determine how Senait emplaces in Hamburg.

Senait’s first impressions of downtown Hamburg—in particular the light emanating from the “Leuchtschriften der Kaufhäuser” (“neon signs of the department stores”; 271)—resonate sharply with the first glimpse of Kassala gracing Hamburg with comparable heterotopian features. The *Jungfernstieg* and *Mönckebergstraße* are Hamburg’s top locations for tourism, shopping, leisure, exclusive hotels, restaurants, cafes, and designer boutiques. It is an impressive area with wide avenues, boulevards,

and vistas of grand hotels, antique facades, the canal, the river, and river boats. But it is also a maze of subway and streetcar stations, stairs, elevators, small deli shops, street vendors, musicians, artists, and underground passages, simultaneously echoing and opposing the erratic and volatile years of her childhood. Just like the mosque, or rather Wafaa who directs Najwa to the mosque, Hamburg's busy inner city materializes "wie von selbst" ("by itself"; 270) as Senait is getting on and off subway stops not sure where to go after she has left her father's house. Unlike the desert or the city of Kassala, the city is excitingly real, inviting and comforting as she is looking for a temporary place to stay.

For Senait, running away becomes in itself a space of belonging as well as a form of resistance and rebellion. In her study of Philippine migrants in Japan, geographer Lieba Faier describes running away as having the power to expose the complex network of power relations underlying a certain place and shaping an individual's experience. It is "one means through which transnational migrants negotiate the disappointing gaps that emerge between their dreams and expectations for their lives abroad and the demands and constraints that they experience in them" (633). Faier uses the term micromovement, a borrowing from Foucault, to explain how "microdimensions of people's everyday lives are imbricated in larger discourses of power" (634). It is a term that can also help illuminate how Senait negotiates the difficulties of her everyday life. Unable to stay with her violent father and unable to return to Eritrea, Senait has no other choice but to run away. Running emerges as a strategic practice through which she is able to eke out counter-spaces that are opposed to the patriarchal domain of her father and the dominant discourses of society.

The inner city of Hamburg is one example of such a counter-space. A multifaceted heterogeneous space, it serves a number of functions. People come here to shop, work, drink, eat, and stay in expensive hotels. But it is also a lived space for social outsiders, for the homeless, artists, punks, and other subcultures. Eventually, it also becomes Senait's very own alternative place of belonging:

Dorthin hatte es mich immer schon gezogen, wenn ich nicht wusste, wohin ich sollte. Hier gab es viele Menschen, die sich nicht darum kümmerten, wie man aussah, wie man dreinschaute und welche Probleme man hatte. Dafür waren hier jede Menge gestrandeter, heimatloser Menschen, die nicht wussten wo sie dazugehörten. Menschen, die keine Ahnung hatten, wo sie die nächste Nacht verbringen und was sie am nächsten Tag essen sollten. Menschen, zu denen ich nun gehören sollte. . .

I had always been drawn here when I didn't know where to go. There were many people here who didn't care what you looked like, what kind of impression you left, and what kind of problems you had. Instead, you could find a bunch of castaways, people without a home or family who did not know where they belonged. People who had no idea where they would spend the next night and what they would eat the next day. People, among whom I should belong now. . . (270)

Being on the street is liberating, and bestows Senait with a sense of safety and independence. What would conventionally be described as homelessness becomes a temporary home for her, a place of shelter where she can perform her diasporic and subversive identity. She finds a temporary place to sleep under a bridge where she is treated kindly by the local vagrants. The street resembles the mosque in *Minaret* in that it is a meeting place for people from various backgrounds where Senait finds a community of like-minded strangers who she now calls friends, and with whom she is able to forge strong social bonds. But here Senait is also confronted with difference. The social structures in place force her to reevaluate her choices, her past and present, and to make decisions for her future. She knows that she cannot stay here forever and she will

eventually make her way to a women's home. Nonetheless she forges a deep relationship to the street and to movement more generally. She later moves to Berlin—another example of a progressive sense of mobility—mainly for professional reasons, but she will continue to visit the homeless, and much later recreate the feeling of running away through constant traveling.

The theme of movement also significantly informs the last literary text I want to consider here—Özdamars's 2001 short story "Der Hof im Spiegel" ("The Courtyard in the Mirror")—in which the protagonist creates a personal map of her immediate environment that rests precisely on movement, by means of walking, and other forms of mobility. Özdamar is perhaps the most prominent and critically acclaimed female Turkish-German writer in Germany. Born in Turkey, she first came to Germany in 1965 with the German-Turkish guest worker program. She later returned to Turkey to study drama and acting in Istanbul before pursuing a career as an actress and writer back in Germany. She entered the national spotlight in 1991 when she was awarded the prestigious Ingeborg-Bachmann Preis.⁸⁶ Her texts have been used as a model of a minority literature, hyphenated literature, or even postcolonial literature in German, with Özdamar often being assigned the role of native informant or the subaltern.⁸⁷ Scholars have focused on Özdamar's alleged postcolonial motifs, her focus on cross-cultural encounters, multiple voices, hybridity, and her propensity for magical realism; and "Der

⁸⁶ For more information on Özdamar's biography see Adelson *The Turkish Turn* p. 40.

⁸⁷ See Venkat Mani's chapter "Slouching Histories, Lurking Memories – Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*" in his 2007 book *Cosmopolitical Claims* for a summary of dominant interpretations of Özdamar's work, and Adelson's chapter on "Dialogue and Storytelling" in *The Turkish Turn* for this short story specifically. Despite the ever-increasing attention to Özdamar—this story as well as her other works—Adelson's study remains the most in-depth analysis within this field.

Hof im Spiegel,” the title story of her eponymous 2001 short story collection, has also been read mainly through this lens.⁸⁸

Özdamar’s work, and this story in particular, has also been described as an attempt at a “[Dialog] mit der europäischen Literatur” (“dialogue with European literature”), a form of a literary “Grenzüberschreitung” (“border crossing”; Götsche 523), through which Özdamar writes herself into a European literary tradition.⁸⁹ Critics have, however, also underscored the heterogeneous and ambiguous space of the courtyard itself. Assuming a more global perspective than Dirk Götsche above, Adelson interprets the story and the courtyard, specifically, as an illustration of Appadurai’s “production of locality” (49), developed in *Modernity at Large*, where Turks and Germans occupy the same ethnoscape in a postnational world that is representative of a more loosely defined Germany at large. Adelson also points out the complex web of intertextual references—a strategy that David Herman refers to as “contextual anchoring” (qtd. in Adelson 49)—that constantly asks the reader to engage with the text beyond its textual realm and look for resemblances between the literary text and reality. Along the same lines and drawing on Bhabha’s concept of thirdspace, Götsche defines the courtyard as a heterogeneous space of cross-cultural encounters; and finally, Barbara Kosta envisages the square as an imaginary “Kontaktzone” (“contact zone”; 244), a transnational space of cultural exchange, production, and belonging. Without specifically mentioning it, all of these approaches thus implicitly describe the courtyard as a “meeting ground” (Adelson, *Turkish Turn* 49) in the sense of Massey’s “meeting place,” a place of

⁸⁸ For a postcolonial approach see Dirk Götsche.

⁸⁹ Corresponding to a postcolonial writing back to the center, perhaps even from the center, Özdamar inserts herself into the cultural landscape of modern Germany and Europe.

intersecting realities that firmly anchors and emplaces the protagonist and the author in the environments of the text and the real world. What is left out, however, is how the courtyard *becomes* such a place of intersecting trajectories, of foreigners and locals, stories, cultural references, memories, feelings, and sensual experiences. What are the axes along which Emine interacts with and relates to the courtyard, the neighbors, and her native home Turkey? How does the courtyard actively shape life in the neighborhood? And how does Emine insert herself into this multivalent space and become a resident of this particular kind of locality?

Emine's apartment occupies a central location in the story and on what she refers to as a "personal city map" (6). It is physically and formally located at the center and not at the margins of the story that begins and ends in the apartment and also always returns to this location in between. The very first sentence depicts Emine as standing by her window segueing into a series of seemingly unrelated and non-chronological scenes that are interdependent with the courtyard and the apartment. From here, Emine is able to observe, hear, smell, taste, and feel everything that is going on in the private enclosure, impressions that are intricately intertwined with her own feelings and memories. She is about to eat a cookie when she hears the "rattling of the sewing machine" (3) that literally causes the ceiling of her apartment and the plates in the kitchen cabinet to tremble. The same sound also triggers an early childhood memory of her mother, and Emine recalls how her mother used to sew back at Emine's childhood home in Turkey. Emine's daily routines are thus interconnected by means of entangled and sometimes absurd circumstances, ricocheting off each other. She, for instance, cooks and invites a neighbor over for dinner, Hartmut. This is the same neighbor who will later recite Baudelaire and

give her “rotten mushrooms and cauliflowers” (16) that make her hands smell, as she casually remarks when she is on the phone with the landlord who, in turn, complains to her about Hartmut. Emine also makes phone calls to her mother or her friend, Can, in Istanbul.⁹⁰ Again, those phone calls interlink the present of the speakers with voices, sounds, and images coming through the phone from both ends. Background noises and other secondary impressions are transferred into the foreground with the effect that everything happening in the story is perceived as taking place locally and simultaneously coalescing in Emine’s apartment overlooking the courtyard.

The central location of the apartment and the feelings of simultaneity are enhanced by the three mirrors Emine has mounted on her walls.⁹¹ In her study of the mirror motif, Angela Weber claims that the mirror is not only a basic commodity found in most homes but also a metaphor for eyes and vision. In the story the mirror permits a glimpse into Emine’s inner thoughts and memories and explores the possibilities of encounters between others.⁹² The mirror further links the apartment to the courtyard and the neighborhood. Because of the mirror Emine can see the courtyard not only from every room in her apartment but also from different angles while, in turn, the mirror catches Emine’s own reflection and renders her visible to the people outside. The mirror also connects past and present. According to Emine, the old butcher woman, the young butcher, the Jewish frame maker, Emine’s parents, and finally the old nun, “[all] the dead

⁹⁰ In her translation, Adelson translates “Can” as “Jon” in order to help English speakers emulate the Turkish pronunciation.

⁹¹ Although Emine specifically mentions that she has three mirrors in her apartment, she mainly talks about the large mirror over the kitchen table, her favorite, and refers to “the mirror” in the singular. I will adapt this convention here as well.

⁹² The mirror also reminds of Lacan’s mirror stage, an exploration of the relationship between self and other and the self and the world. It is a symbol of Emine’s relationship to others but also of her own identity and potential crisis of identity after the death of her parents.

live in this mirror” (9) and continue to live on in this bizarre residential space.⁹³ The mirror is therefore not only the medium through which every object and action is contemplated but also literally the dwelling place of the dead, located in the protagonist’s kitchen. Finally, the mirror is described as a “residential aesthetic of the orient” (9). It amplifies the apartment, making it stretch into the courtyard and transcending the boundaries between inside and outside and private and public. Recalling the idea of “porosity” (*Reflections* 166) that Benjamin developed in his essay on “Naples,” the “[building] and action interpenetrate into the courtyards, arcades, and stairways” (165-6) and, in this case, also into the neighborhood, neighboring buildings, and streets. Emine’s private life and lived space are porous, perpetually seeping into the communal space of the neighborhood and the other residents’ lives, while at the same time the neighbors’ lives saturate her living space. In Benjamin’s essay “the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth, and altar, so, only much more loudly, the street migrates into the living room” (171). Correspondingly, in Özdamar’s short story the courtyard also becomes one large interior. Neighbors enter and leave, and even Emine’s friends and family in Turkey, as well as the dead, make appearances through the telephone and the mirror, producing a large malleable frame held together by the specific constellation of the courtyard, the apartment, and the mirror—and, as I will show later, by walking.

The other types of media mentioned in the text are similarly employed to bundle and highlight the interactions among the living and between the living and the dead. The telephone, television, radio, photographs, cassette recorder, and books still mediate in a literal sense but instead of broadcasting news or disseminating impersonal information,

⁹³ Literary scholar Margaret Littler takes the shared moments of grief as a cue to emphasize bereavement as the underpinning theme of the story.

they provide the occasion for physical encounters. Not the televisions but the men who repair them, the “television news service” (8), circulate rumors and gossip from apartment to apartment. Uncoupled from their traditional functions, the radio becomes a commodity that is exchanged between people, and the cassette recorder becomes a device not to listen to but to record the stories Emine’s mother is relaying on the phone. Meanwhile the courtyard is equated to a photograph that functions as the mirror’s other. While the mirror is the residential space of the dead, the courtyard is the residential space of the living with the old nun pacing back and forth between them. “She had climbed out of the mirror just once to ring my doorbell. Then she had climbed back into the photograph of the courtyard” (13). Together, mirror and courtyard make up a complex dwelling space, a space that is a meeting place of imaginary and real social interactions, a place from which news stories are constructed, and a fixed location within the neighborhood.

Özdamar also employs other axes of collectivity and shared experiences. There are the cats, birds, or mice crisscrossing between apartments, and the other objects and commodities—books, pictures, or vegetables—changing ownership between the residents. Cultural products like television shows, poetry, and literature—Emine here mentions examples of the French, British, German, and Turkish context, high and low culture, (Heinrich) Heine and (Horst) Schimanski, a fictional policeman in the famous German television series *Tatort*—are shared among residents and among different ethnic groups and cultures. *Alice in Wonderland* may be the bedtime reading of the nun next door, but after her death it is Emine who continues reading the very same book on the page where the nun left off. Echoing Anderson’s imagined community of the nation or

Appadurai's communities of sentiments in a postnational world, such texts and the collective experience of reading connects people, as do other shared moments, objects, experiences, and emotions.

Emine does, however, not spend all of her time in the apartment. Outside, in the courtyard or in the neighborhood, walking replaces the mediating function of the mirror. De Certeau asserts that the paths of the walker "weave places together" (97), and Emine not only weaves together the various buildings, streets, and people she encounters, she also lends her voice to their stories and conjoins them with her own impressions and memories. Confronting different temporalities she merges past and present and also points out how past and present come together in the historical layers of place. She has, for instance, fond memories of the old bookstore and the handsome book dealer she used to know who has in the meantime moved to a different city, while the shop has been converted into a new store specializing in travel books. Walking here is described as an embodied act through which Emine physically connects to her environment. Like Najwa in *Minaret* and Senait in *Feuerherz*, she moves through the city, but unlike the other two protagonists Emine is unusually aware of the sensual impressions triggered by these walks. As she walks past the parrot shop, the bakery, the bookstore, the butcher shop, the cobbler, and the supermarket, she describes exactly what the shops and the streets look, feel, sound, smell, and even taste like, what the shops have on display, and what she buys or eats there. Her personal map thus resembles less and less a traditional Cartesian map. Instead of a two-dimensional projection it is an embodied map representing what anthropologist Tanya Richardson has called a "diffuse feeling" (15), a lingering and bundling of memories and impressions, concrete and yet intangible.

Through walking, Emine becomes a member of what Adelson describes as an example of Appadurai's concept of *ethnoscape*, a form of "newly diasporic modes of social interaction in a postnational world" (41). As a Turkish immigrant who is currently out of work Emine would traditionally occupy a doubly marginal position in German society, but because of the central location of her apartment and her time for leisure Emine walks herself out of this marginality. Like Benjamin's *flâneur*—borrowed from Baudelaire and developed in his *Arcades Project*—she becomes a "detective" or an "observer" (422) of space, a *flâneuse* who benefits from the "fruits of idleness" (453) of her unemployment and is able to fully explore the extensive space of the courtyard, awaiting hints and instructions. Similar to the *flâneur* in Benjamin's or Baudelaire's Paris the diasporic *flâneuse* "[transforms] [the courtyard] into one great interior—a house whose rooms are the *quartiers* [of the walker], no less clearly demarcated by thresholds than are real rooms" (422). The courtyard emerges as a fluid dwelling place without thresholds and boundaries.

Walking is therefore performative. It actively produces space but also reverberates with de Certeau's definition of walking as a speech act. According to him, walking constitutes a "spatial acting-out of the place" (98) that creates a "long poem of walking" (101), and also the story emphasizes speaking, writing, acting, and story-telling as co-constitutive with walking. Emine's personal city map can be rehearsed, recited, and acted out, and metamorphoses into a visceral sensual map reverberating with de Certeau's definitions of walking but also with Benjamin's idea of the buildings and the street as "animated theaters" (*Reflections* 167). Emine speaks, acts, and walks herself into the intertextual space of the courtyard and, like Özdamar herself, physically inserts

herself into the German cultural landscape. But Emine also assigns agency to the place itself. Through the mirror “[you] could make the room talk” (11) and through Emine the spatial stories of the courtyard become articulated. The courtyard is “a cultural process created through the articulation of movements between poles of foreground and background, place and space, inside and outside, and image and representation” (Richardson 15), an accumulation of texts, experiences, and memories producing a diffuse structure of feeling, and a complex personal place, similar to Najwa’s London and Senait’s Hamburg.⁹⁴

The courtyard thus emerges as a space of radical locality and simultaneity, and as an alternative place of belonging. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai describes locality as “a complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts.” He may insist on his view of locality “as primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial” (178), but it should be noted that Appadurai’s monograph was published in 1996, at the same time that Massey and other geographers established their relational and contextual models of spatiality. Appadurai merely points toward Harvey in a footnote, but his arguments about the production of the present and new worldscapes surely resonate with Harvey’s concept of “space-time compression,” the “simultaneity in the shifting dimensions of time and space” (*Postmodernity* vii) that also comes to the fore in Özdamar’s story. From her apartment overlooking an enclosure in what remains a nameless city in the story but is easily identifiable as Düsseldorf, the protagonist watches and gives voice to what is going on in the neighborhood, resulting in seemingly random

⁹⁴ The courtyard here is a product of a specific cultural process—or cultural processes. Richardson articulates a similar definition of landscape as cultural process, an idea Richardson borrows from the anthropologist Eric Hirsch.

fragments of sensual impressions, conversations, memories, stories, and experiences held together by the unifying space of the courtyard. Braided together with this complex web of immediate experiences are references to different kinds of media, cultural allusions, place names, and landmarks within the city, the totality of which makes up Emine's "personal city map" (6) and emplaces her within the textual reality of an imagined Düsseldorf.

All of the texts discussed in this chapter therefore envision new possibilities in which unique individual lives take shape in and are shaped by specific spatial settings. Everyday life consists of a vast number of intersecting places and experiences, the totality of which produces a "personal city map" that represents not only how individuals navigate their daily lives but also how they connect to place, manage to feel anchored in their immediate environment, and construct alternative places of home. Experiences of the past and previously encountered places play an active role here as the local circumstances of migration, exile, or diaspora are always the result of individual pasts that situate individuals differently in their new contexts and at the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. These unique local circumstances of migration determine how migrants perceive of migration, of mobility and movement, and of the new places they encounter, and thus coincide with what Cresswell describes as a sedentary or a nomadic metaphysics, or as a combination of both. In *Minaret*, Najwa tends to adhere to a form of sedentary metaphysics. She finds herself at a crossroads in her life where she is at risk to be consumed by the vexed relationship to her past and present and by the seeming incompatibility of her Muslim identity with the secular space of London. Irritated by movement—the physical ruptures caused by migration, personal

losses, and downward social mobility, co-constitutive of her sense of falling—the park and the mosque emerge as intimate places where Najwa can feel rooted again, draw strength, forge new social bonds, and reconcile her diasporic identity. At the same time these places also serve as a threshold for a new kind of spiritual mobility, the prospect of going on Hajj, an imaginary homecoming and means to leave her past behind. For Senait, mobility itself becomes such a space for new possibilities. Movement here is represented as a liberating and empowering act—in line with a nomadic conceptualization of mobility—by which Senait resignifies the upheavals of her past. Similar to Emine’s walks, Senait’s restlessness actively produces the physical location of Hamburg’s bustling inner city as a personal place of attachment and social cohesion, a diasporic space that makes Senait feel rooted in her new cultural context and prepares her for the move into her own apartment and finally to Berlin. Finally, the short story “Der Hof im Spiegel” explores the interplay and overlaps between sedentary and nomadic conceptualizations of place and contemplates the nature of place itself, its inherent temporal stratification, and the impact of proximity and shared experiences on one’s connections to one’s immediate environment. Through the interplay of place-based sensual impressions, emotions, stories, and memories—a diffuse structure of feelings—Emine shows what it is like to be a resident of a communal space and of a specific cultural and historical context. In this short story the courtyard is imagined as an extension of the living space with both spaces being described in terms of heterogeneity, fluidity, and movement that together constitute Emine’s complex local place of belonging.

CHAPTER 3

“MY OWN PART IN THESE STORIES:” CONSTRUCTING A SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE CITY

Moving away from the living quarters, the neighborhood, and other intimate places of community, in this chapter I consider place on a larger scale and delineate the role the city as a greater cultural, historical, and geographical context plays in creating a sense of belonging. The two twenty-first century novels I discuss thematize not only migration, space, and movement but also two very specific settings—New York City and Berlin—that are assigned cultural, historical, and geographical agency. They are lived, practiced, and embodied by the protagonists, who are imagined as residents of and participants in the stories making up these distinct locales. In this chapter I also want to move away from a more general conceptualization of belonging as a sense of home and comfort, and as such as a predominantly affective category, to belonging as a cognitive concept and as a way of knowing. Belonging commonly denotes membership and ownership, of a community, nation, or place, and is often associated with rootedness and a feeling of being anchored and safe. Belonging also refers to a sense of self and of one’s identity that materializes in and through place. But implicated in this assumption is also a claim to place that manifests as a way of knowing, as getting to know or already knowing a place and by doing so also getting to know oneself better. Hence belonging can be seen as a way of claiming mental ownership of and incorporating one’s environment while also establishing oneself as an integral part of it.

Although only a few years separate the publication of Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) and Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde* (*Strange Stars Stare toward the Earth*, 2003), the time frames of the two novels are exactly thirty years apart.⁹⁵ *Seltsame Sterne* is set in West and East Berlin, in *Wedding – Pankow 1976/77* as the novel's subtitle reveals, and *Open City* takes place in New York City in 2006/07. Despite the time lag and divergent setting, the two texts have a lot in common. Both are set in very specific historical and geographical locales, manifest in the numerous references to actual dates, events, people, and places; and they both emphasize the city as intricately intertwined with the protagonists' and first-person narrators' migrant identities. Both narrators are enthusiastic walkers, and I claim that on their walks, by passing through or dwelling in places, they excavate the stories making up the city, layer by layer, while at the same time tracing their own stories within it. Through the excavation and interlacing of these stories the protagonists are able to claim ownership of and know the city, and by doing so they come to inhabit and establish themselves as residents of the city and its specific cultural context, a reciprocal process that constructs their unique sense of belonging within it.

As Doreen Massey points out, the city is not a radically new or fundamentally different type of spatiality. Although it is often assumed that the city—a site of high population density, of increased mobility and transit, and always in flux—drastically exceeds common definitions of space, Massey insists that the very same processes that may be thought of as unique to the city are also taking place, although perhaps less obviously so, elsewhere. For Massey, “all spaces are transitory and one of the most

⁹⁵ I am using B. Venkat Mani's translation of the title of Özdamar's novel from his chapter “Slouching Histories, Lurking Memories – Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*” in *Cosmopolitical Claims*. All other translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

crucial things about spatiality is that it is always being made” (Lury, “Making Connections” 231).⁹⁶ What follows from this is that the concept of the “city” is not yet another term in addition to or separate from “space” and “place”—at least not in this dissertation and in the works of the theorists I am referring to here. Rather, in Massey’s words, cities are “particular forms of spatiality, but that particularity consists primarily in an intensification, a dramatic exaggeration, of characteristics which I would argue are intrinsic to ‘space’ more generally” (231). Massey’s definition recalls an earlier argument famously made by Georg Simmel in his foundational essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” Theorizing the turn-of-the-century city, he describes it as a space of “the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and external stimuli” and “the rapid telescoping of changing images” (24), a definition that, although written over a century ago, is still valid today and clearly reverberates with Massey’s view that the city produces a heightened sensibility of spatiality, a specific urban mentality, and an enhanced “possibility of the existence of multiplicity/difference” (Lury 231).

There is, however, another geographical concept that is useful in thinking through such particular forms of spatiality, and that is landscape. Landscape is another key to analyzing nature/culture and subject/object relations, and, like the conceptual transformation of space and place, has undergone equally significant changes since the poststructural or postmodern turn. First used to describe the physical appearance of the land, the countryside mainly as represented in landscape paintings, and to denote legal membership to a community or region—comparable to the suffix “-land” in “England,”

⁹⁶ “Making Connections” is an interview with Massey conducted by Karen Lury, a professor of theater, film, and television studies.

“Scotland” or “Deutschland” (“Germany”)—the concept of landscape today focuses on the interplay between the human and the natural world. It assumes both humans and non-humans are actors that constantly shape and reshape the landscape—the “natural” and cultural, rural and urban landscapes—and produce subjective, symbolic, and ideological meanings.⁹⁷ Building on Tim Cresswell’s understanding of place, landscape could be defined as another way of seeing the world; but anthropologist Tim Ingold goes further, suggesting that landscape has a phenomenological quality, and should be viewed as embodied practice and employed as a more concrete term—like ground or field—in lieu of the abstract space and place. Keeping with the visual metaphor yet retaining the concepts of space and place, geographer Kenneth R. Olwig concludes that landscape is a way of seeing with two eyes that enables the viewer or the walker to “experience[] the material depth of the proximate environment through binocular vision and through the effect of motion parallax created by the blurring of near objects to those farther away” (“Doing Landscape” 84). Olwig’s assumptions are of particular importance here as he deliberately designates the walker as the ideal user of and participant in constructing the landscape, as someone who is “doing the landscape with feet, body and both eyes” (87), thereby creating a sense of place and a sense of belonging that is embodied and stands in stark contrast to the objective and detached role of the viewer, spectator, or mere onlooker.

The city as a particular form of spatiality, as landscape and place, is furthermore subject to the same set of assumptions introduced in the previous chapters. It is layered and textured, co-constitutive with constantly shifting realities, narratives, memories,

⁹⁷ See *The Dictionary of Human Geography* for a more detailed definition of landscape, its etymology and changes in meaning.

historical, cultural, and political meanings, and intersecting social and power relations—staged, real, imagined, and contested.⁹⁸ Moreover, there is a tendency in literary studies as well as in the social sciences to consider the city as text. In *The City as a Work of Art* historian Donald J. Olsen, for instance, construes cities as “complex but legible documents that can tell us something about the values and aspirations of their rulers, designers, builders, owners, and inhabitants” (xi), and urban historian M. Christine Boyer in *The City of Collective Memory* similarly speaks of the city and its effects as a radical artifice, as representation and construction to be looked at, experienced, and interpreted. In a 2007 special topic issue of *PMLA*, Rachel Bowlby also defines the city as a text that can be read but also misread, misunderstood, or not understood at all, a process that further demands certain skills—above all reading and interpretive skills—to analyze the texts that make up the city (newspapers, billboards, signs, schedules), its signifiers (buildings, monument, streets), and figures (commuters, travelers, tourists, *flâneurs*, city dwellers, workers, beggars).⁹⁹ Taking a more postmodern stance, geographers Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan describe the city as embedded within a world that is inherently intertextual, a discursive framework that consists of constantly changing meanings and includes other cultural productions (literature, film, television, painting, maps, landscapes, social, economic, and political institutions).¹⁰⁰ Finally Andreas Huyssen extends the textual metaphor to describe the city as a palimpsest, a trope in

⁹⁸ See Lefebvre, Soja, Harvey, Massey, and Cresswell.

⁹⁹ Bowlby’s article “Readable City” was published in the *PMLA* special edition on cities. Her argument follows in the tradition of theorists like Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Peter Fritzsche, Rolf Goebel, and Brian Ladd, just to name a few. Space will not allow a detailed discussion of the rich territory of writings on cities. But good starting points for readers interested in this topic are *The City Reader* edited by Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout and Richard Lehan’s *The City in Literature*.

¹⁰⁰ See also Duncan’s *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyen Kingdom*.

critical theory that, although inherently tied to writing and reading, can also be used “to discuss configurations of urban spaces and their unfolding in time without making architecture and the city simply into text.” Huyssen demands that the city be embraced not merely as text but in its totality, its materiality and durability, overlapping and often competing temporalities, and its subjective qualities, traces of memories, stories, and personal attitudes that should be read “historically, intertextually, constructively, and deconstructively at the same time” (*Present Pasts* 7).

As a cultural, historical, and geographical discursive construct, the city is also always heavily fraught with meaning. In *The Country and the City*, for instance, Raymond Williams points out how certain strands of British national literature are prone to portraying the city as the hub of industrialization, progress, and modernity, and as such as a desolate place where the specific urban setting inevitably leads to isolation, crime, and moral depravity. In contrast, in an act of nostalgic longing, the country is envisaged as a place of rural innocence onto which a rooted sense of British identity is projected.¹⁰¹ Williams’s ultimate goal, of course, is to debunk these seemingly polar opposites, pointing out the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of such viewpoints and the illusory nature of the rural-urban divide. In line with Massey’s argument, Williams insists that the processes believed endemic to urban areas take place in the countryside too, and, inversely, that rural bliss can also be found in certain places in the city. Williams helps us appreciate that the city exists not only in its physicality but also through literature and stories, film and television, newspaper articles, and other images, ideas, and texts, that in

¹⁰¹ Williams specifically mentions Wordsworth and Blake as representatives of the nostalgic longing for a rural past, whereas Dickens epitomizes a more modern view that embraces the complexities and possibilities of the city.

their entirety produce the effects of the city and give us clues about a society's national and cultural self-understanding.

As evident from Williams, in the name of nation-building the city is portrayed in a certain light, with specific meanings and attitudes projected onto it, strategically useful narratives and pasts emphasized, and less useful ones erased and suppressed.¹⁰² Williams underscores the function of the idyllic English countryside as a prototypical symbol of British identity, and in a similar way geographer David Matless in *Landscape and Englishness* examines a wide range of cultural products—photography, architecture, nature guides, and literature—to show how they trace English national identity in specific rural and urban landscapes. So does Ian Baucom, whose object of study is the British empire and imperialism, and who equally claims that “Englishness has been *generally* understood to reside within some type of imaginary, abstract, or actual locale, and to mark itself upon that locale's familiars” (4). In “Places of Memory” Karen Till emphasizes the role of national symbols and monuments as a means for governments to claim or reclaim political control over space. Most poignantly though, Olwig describes landscape as the “natural national stage upon which the drama of individual and national development . . . takes form” and where a “total history” develops within and marks “a well-defined spatio-temporal area” (“Contested Topos” 104). Recalling my discussion of place earlier, all places are inevitably embedded in what Massey refers to as complex networks “power-geometry” (*Space, Place, and Gender* 149), but the city, perhaps more so than many other places, is co-constitutive not only with distinct cultural, historical, and political, but also clearly national meanings. Capitals or iconic cities like Berlin and New

¹⁰² Compare Edward Said's article “Invention, Memory, and Place” about Israel's national agenda and the competing narratives of Israel and Palestine, and “Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental” in *Orientalism*.

York City, in particular, and as employed in the two novels I will be discussing here, are representative of their specific historical and geographical contexts: a globalized post-9/11 United States in *Open City*, and a divided Cold-War Germany on its way toward unification in *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*.

Interwoven within such highly symbolic settings is thus a narrative of the nation or a form of national memory that sustains itself through architecture, monuments, street names, symbols, rituals, beliefs, festivals, literature, and art; elements of what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire*. Or, as historian of architecture Eleni Bastéa puts it, as citizens of a specific national context or city “we are taught, through literature, education, and other processes of socialization, to picture the past in certain terms” (13), further echoing Homi Bhabha’s distinction between the pedagogical and performative aspects of the nation that Bastéa portrays as interdependent with the built environment. Huyssen in his often-quoted article “Diaspora and Nation” takes the next step, and asks whether and how it is possible to migrate into national memory or “into other pasts” that, although based on forgetting and distortion, are able to draw clear lines of exclusion and inclusion.¹⁰³ Juxtaposing national with diasporic memory which, as Huyssen explains, is in its traditional sense “by definition cut-off, hybrid, displaced, split” (153), Huyssen advises that both terms learn from each other and recognize that memory, though aiming at cohesion and completeness, is always unreliable, fragmented, and cut off from the past. He suggests that migrants connect to national memory by what he calls “recherche,” an imaginative investigation and research of the past, rather than a “recuperation” of precise memories.

¹⁰³ Already in 1882 Ernest Renan called attention to the processes of forgetting in his groundbreaking essay “What is a Nation.”

In looking at *Open City* and *Seltsame Sterne*, I am interested in similar questions: How can the migrant connect to this environment and get to know, or already know, other pasts and presents? How does literature imagine the histories, memory discourses, and stories—personal or public, central or peripheral, widely-accepted or contested—that make up the larger cultural landscape of the city? And how do the protagonists as migrants get to know and relate to those stories and thus create a sense of belonging in their new cultural or national environment?

Open City and *Seltsame Sterne* go to great lengths to portray New York and Berlin in minute detail. They mention concrete buildings and places, street names, parks, monuments, and other symbols and historical events that make it easy to locate these cities in an exact time and place. Both authors are, in fact, so meticulous in their descriptions, interweaving plot and setting, the protagonists' identities and their unique locales, that the city materializes as a second protagonist and is assigned historical and geographical agency. Cole's novel takes place in a globalized and transnational, "open," New York in a post-9/11 world; a city that, corresponding to the protagonist's own background, is "a city of immigrants: Nigerians, Kenyans, Syrians, Lebanese, Malians, Haitians, Chinese, and others who have come to escape the sorrows of their own history or to pursue their versions of the American dream," as Michiko Kakutani sums it up in her review for *The New York Times*.¹⁰⁴ This is where Julius, the Nigerian-German protagonist and first-person narrator, is a psychiatrist in residency at a hospital in

¹⁰⁴ In the novel Julius never refers to New York City as an *Open City*. This phrase is only encountered once in the novel when Julius contemplates the history of Brussels—he spends a few weeks there on vacation—noting that the rulers of Brussels had surrendered and declared it an "open city" (97) during the Second World War, and have thereby saved it from bombardment. Nevertheless, given that it is the title of a novel that is set in New York City, and considering the novel's themes, the adjective "open" with all its implied meanings can also be applied to this American city.

Manhattan. Özdamar's city on the other hand would appear to be closed, an island that is somewhat separated from the rest of the world, marked by the larger geo-political realities of the Cold War, and divided by the Berlin Wall. Nevertheless, Özdamar's Berlin is just as colorful and diverse. East and West are filled with immigrants, and for Emine, Özdamar's Turkish protagonist and first-person narrator who works as an actress at the *Volksbühne* (the people's theater in East Berlin), the divided city is rather open, like Julius's New York. Both protagonists are seemingly unrestricted in their walks, free to wander and cross borders, which is also the means by which their stories progress. Encountering myriad people and places, Emine and Julius relate their experiences, thoughts, and impressions in an eclectic mix of narrative fragments, diary entries, notes, and drawings in *Seltsame Sterne*, and in a similar diary-style stream of consciousness in *Open City*.

Open City is Teju Cole's first novel. Published in 2011, it was received overwhelmingly positively by critics. It won, among others, the PEN/Hemingway Award and the New York City Book Award, and was shortlisted for several other prestigious literary prizes. Cole, born in the United States to Nigerian parents, was raised in Nigeria—like his protagonist—and returned to the United States in 1992. A self-described writer, art historian, and street photographer, he is a contributor to numerous high-profile magazines such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *Granta*, and currently Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College.¹⁰⁵ In their reviews of *Open City*, critics have called attention to the novel's focus on spatiality, history, culture, identity, memory, solitude, and alienation; and have drawn comparisons to the work of W.G. Sebald and to Baudelaire's *flâneur*. James Wood in *The New Yorker*,

¹⁰⁵ All this information can be found on Cole's website at <http://www.tejucole.com/>.

for instance, speaks of a “beautiful, subtle, and, finally, original novel . . . that moves in the shadow of W.G. Sebald’s work” and Giles Fodan, for *The Guardian*, ranks the protagonist among “at least three city walkers out of literary history: the ‘strolling spectator’ type . . .; the Baudelairean flâneur . . .; and the roving ‘I’ of European romantic modernism, which has found its most eloquent recent exponent in the work of WG Sebald.” Reviewers have also focused on the city that they describe as multicultural and as a site of “layers of sedimented historical suffering” (Wood). Cole broaches the subjects of the first settlers, Native Americans, colonialism, slavery, and above all 9/11. He writes about trauma, disaster, and death, the passing of time, and ageing, fleshing out not only the historical layers of the city but also its often overlooked non-human actors: animals and plants, and the sounds and other sensual aspects constitutive of a multiethnic, multispecies, and multisensory cityscape.

Julius’s identity—his Nigerian-German background, complex past, and migrant subjectivity—significantly shapes his perception of and everyday life in the city and transforms the city into an equally complex and labyrinthine place that should not be taken at face-value. Memories of Julius’s past are intertwined with his experiences of the city and gradually the reader is able to piece together a somewhat coherent if fragmented story. Julius’s account is highly selective. He relates certain details about his life, for instance about his mother and father, his childhood in Nigeria, and his grandmother; but forgets, represses, or deliberately remains silent about other events, especially his alleged rape of a former friend’s sister, the shocking revelation the reader has to face at the end of the novel. Other stories are sheer conjectures. Given the mother’s birth date, Julius suspects that the grandmother “had likely been one of the countless women raped by the

men of the Red Army that year in Berlin, that so extensive and thorough was that particular atrocity, she could have hardly escaped it” (80). After the grandfather’s death, the grandmother supposedly emigrated to Belgium, but although later in the novel Julius travels to Brussels precisely for that reason, he never finds his grandmother and this story-line remains unexplored. Because of his German background Julius feels like an outsider in Nigeria where “[the] name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and my skin color one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart” (78). This might be one motive, together with his career choice and the apparently vexed relationship with his mother, why he left for the United States. Cole thus constructs a narrator that is at the same time victim and perpetrator, a distorted reflection of his grandmother’s fate who is also both perpetrator and victim, a resident of Nazi Germany who was raped by Russian soldiers. Yet it is this strange and convoluted legacy that makes him feel in place and sensitive to equally complex stories of oppression, victimization, and terror in New York City where the majority of the people he encounters are immigrants like himself.

The city’s multiethnic residents are mainly of African, Asian, and Hispanic descent.¹⁰⁶ There are, for instance his old professor Saitu, a Japanese-American from the Pacific Northwest; his nurse Mary from St. Lucia; a Mexican or Central-American marathon runner; an African-American cab driver; a guard named Kenneth from Barbuda whom he meets at the World Trade Center site; Pierre from Haiti who works as a shoeshiner; Saidu from Liberia, an undocumented immigrant Julius meets at a detention facility, and an African-American postal worker, among many others. Julius is quite

¹⁰⁶ Cole’s description of New York City in the twenty-first century differs immensely from the demographic make-up of the first settlers or the Irish, Polish, and Russian, mainly Jewish, and other waves of predominantly Eastern European immigrants in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.

enthralled by the diversity of the city—New York City in particular but also Brussels—eager to pinpoint its residents’ exact ethnic identities, always inquiring where they come from but also prone to mistakes, as he, for instance, wrongly assumes a party of Rwandans are Congolese. Yet despite this fascination with difference, it hardly seems to matter where they are from. Cole’s New York City is rhizomatic but it is neither the diasporic space of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* nor an example of *métissage* in the sense of Edouard Glissant. For Julius, all of these people are unique individuals who may have nothing in common besides their shared residence. He frowns upon a cabdriver’s “Hey, I’m African just like you” (34) and a postal worker’s impulsive burst of poetic activism: “We are the ones who received the boot. We, who are used for loot, trampled underfoot” (187). He also scowls every time a stranger addresses him as “brother.” For him, ethnicity, race, nationality, or any other identity category, are not the basis upon which to build a friendship, and there is no presupposed solidarity or social cohesion between members of the African diaspora or immigrants in general.

Julius does not deny that friendship and community are possible but decries any essentializing claims. The city he portrays is at once local and global, and as Arjun Appadurai describes the United States, “only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (31). In the same vein, the people he encounters constitute a place-specific ethnoscape in Appadurai’s sense, “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals” (33) who, as Julius shows, do not necessarily forge bonds based on their diverse backgrounds. In the same vein as Leslie Adelson’s “touching tales” (*Turkish Turn* 20) or Mani’s “cosmopolitical claims,”

Cole's novel tells of "multiple and simultaneous affiliations and disaffiliations" (Mani 7) made possible by the proximity and openness of the city. One of the most poignant examples for such place-bound affiliations is Julius's relationship with the white married couple next door. Although it is only retroactively and for a fleeting moment, Julius feels an intimate closeness to them. He had talked to Carla and Seth only a few times since they had moved in. But one day Julius happens to run into Seth at the door and after some casual small talk finds out about his wife's death. Experiencing a "belated shock" (20), Julius is perturbed about how he could have gone on with his daily routine without noticing. "A woman had died in the room next to mine, she had died on the other side of the wall I was leaning against, and I had known nothing of it" (21). The novel is teeming with similar instances of a deeply felt—albeit short-lived—intimacy with people Julius hardly knows, in addition to the small number of friends and other acquaintances he introduces. Early on, Julius finds himself next to a marathon runner, walking "for two or three blocks, punctuating our silences with small talk about the weather and the crowds" (15). He meets people—men and women from various backgrounds—in shops, on planes, and in cafés, in New York City as well as in Brussels. There is Pierre, the Caribbean shoeshiner; Dr. Maillote, a Belgian woman on the plane; a Czech woman in a café; or Farouq from Morocco, the owner of an Internet shop. Sometimes they hardly talk at all. But sometimes they exchange stories and addresses, decide to meet again, or even engage in a romantic fling. Resulting from physical closeness, from being in the same place at the same time, and from shared moments or mutual interests, these relationships emerge from specific places. It is the open and fluid nature of New York City and Brussels alike that makes such diverse affiliations possible.

One metaphor for the open city in the shifting world is the “Internet and telephone shop” (101) Julius visits in Brussels where people from all over the world gather to send emails and make phone calls. The Internet café is a utopian space of true difference and coexistence, a heterotopia illustrative of the obsession of its owner, the Moroccan immigrant Farouq, with “the difference thing” and how “people can live together” (113) without blending together as melting pot, salad bowl, or multiculturalism. However, this “living together” does not necessarily imply friendship and community. In line with Anthony Kwame Appiah’s depiction of *Cosmopolitanism* as an “adventure and ideal” (xx) that can always only result in “partial cosmopolitanism” (xiii)—Julius recommends Appiah’s work to Farouq—the novel assumes a pragmatic worldview in which the world is intricately interconnected. Encounters and friendships are possible. But no necessary obligations ensue.¹⁰⁷

Another metaphor for the shifting landscape of the city is the image of the palimpsest. Walking across Ground Zero relatively early in the novel Julius remarks: “The site was a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten. . . I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories” (59). Here, the narrator finally admits that his walks serve a greater purpose than merely walking for pleasure or distraction. He indicates that, as he is exploring the city, he is also searching for himself and for the connections between himself and the city, and deliberately drops the idea of the palimpsest to point out how the city and the places within it are textured and constituted through stories. Already the individual place names he mentions throughout

¹⁰⁷ Julius furthermore complicates the idea of cosmopolitanism by describing the city, New York in particular, as a space of human and nonhuman actors, of birds, bedbugs, and trees, “invasive species” (179) that are part of the local biodiversity but subject to the same or even more drastic processes of exclusion and inclusion as their human counterparts.

the novel—Morningside Heights, Central Park, Wall Street, Times Square, Upper West Side, Brooklyn Bridge, and Chinatown—conjure up distinctive place-images. They ask the reader to ponder the unique history of such places and the role they play for the city at large. They activate the reader’s schema, ask them to investigate their own connections to the city, and trigger personal stories and associations—if available.

In the same spirit, as Julius walks through the city he is constantly aware of his surroundings. The individual boroughs, streets, buildings, shops, movie theaters, museums, and monuments—some of them iconic like the Statue of Liberty, others more obscure or seemingly ordinary—set off a wide range of thought processes. They have the power to spark a multiplicity of associations, even if sometimes those are only mildly related to the places themselves but rather arise out of the sensations and emotions experienced there; they trigger memories of Julius’s childhood in Nigeria or earlier days in the United States; and they urge him to reflect upon the past of such specific sites and on the multiple and diverse trajectories intersecting in such places. The following are some examples of these processes, in chronological order as they appear in the novel. At the American Folk Art Museum Julius delves deeper into the mysteries of the paintings by John Brewster and the early nineteenth century which prompts the memory of a “blind, wandering bard” (37) he once met in Lagos. At a detention facility in Queens, he talks to Saidu, an undocumented immigrant from Liberia. Although employing an objective tone, the narrator has to admit that he is so absorbed by Saidu’s story that he forgets the time and is perhaps indeed “the listener, the compassionate African” he pretends to be. At the International Center for Photography he explores the trajectory of the Holocaust via the photographs of Martin Munkácsi, Munkácsi’s own life story, and

the childhood memories of an elderly man who grew up in Berlin, causing Julius to think that “I was myself, in this distant sense, also a Berliner” (153), simply because he had visited this city many years ago.

In New York City, however, Julius is not a visitor but a resident. He is a local “New Yorker” who already knows this city very well, and has access to the diverse personal, collective, and other narratives making up the city. In her study of landscape, Patricia L. Price describes place “as a layered, shifting reality that is constituted, lived, and contested, in part, through narrative” (xiii). She argues that “[places] and the stories that compose them are deeply constitutive of our identities, both as individuals and as members of human collectives” (xxii), and the examples above show that Julius’s identity is intricately intertwined with the places and stories that compose the landscape and that he is connected to others who share the same or related stories. Already by pausing in or passing through a place, Julius becomes a part of it, a link that is reinforced by the narratives he articulates. The city he constructs is a city of voices and histories, some more audible than others, some silenced and repressed, but all place-specific. Where else could Julius have found a way to explore nineteenth-century art and life than in the American Folk Art Museum? Where else could he have listened to Saidu than in the detention facility, or to the old man from Berlin than at that specific exhibition? These stories tell of unique human experiences, and most often of arrival and departure, loss and longing, of far-away places, and new beginnings. They are a product of the city and also represent parts of Julius’s own life story in so far as he is able to personally relate to them.

How Julius gets to listen to these stories is by means of walking. The first sentence of the novel introduces the narrator as he ponders his walks and although he describes them quite modestly as “a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital” (3), there is more to walking than meets the eye. Julius claims that “New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace” (3). With each day the strolls become “steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway” (3). What starts out as a refreshing diversion soon becomes “therapy” (7) and routine. “[They] became the normal thing, and I forgot what life had been like before I started walking” (7). Julius enjoys that every decision, whether to turn left or right, or take the subway, is inconsequential and “for that reason a reminder of freedom” (7). His vision that “the subway stations served as recurring motives in my aimless progress” (7) further recalls de Certeau’s portrayal of walking as poetry. So does the construal of walking as a social practice, despite Julius’s claim that walking intensifies the solitude he feels being among “masses of people” and “thousands of others” (7).

In his overview of walking studies, Hayden Lorimer identifies four different categories of walking: “walks as the product of places, . . . as an ordinary feature of everyday life, . . . the reflections of the self-centred walker, and walkers who are wilful and artful” (20), all of which also apply to Julius’s favorite pastime. However, if movement, as Cresswell would have it, is not only a product of but also actively produces and modifies places, we can see Julius’s thoughts as well as the novel itself as products of his walks. Lorimer also describes walking as an “embodied act” (19) that connects the human body to the ground. It “is not just what a body *does*,” as Ingold and Jo Lee

Vergunst assert in their introduction to *Ways of Walking*, “it is what a body is” (2). For Julius, too, walking is a way of forging an intimate bond to and embodying the ground on which he is setting foot, leaving and tracing footprints, connecting to the city, knowing oneself and the world.

Through walking New York City works itself into his life, as Julius claims on the first page, but his life also works itself into the city. Memories of his childhood, his time in Madison, his friends, family, and ex-girlfriend are scattered throughout the text, triggered by seemingly random people, objects, and places. Memories of the city, too, are lying in wait at every corner for Julius to be discovered and reconstructed. Occasionally place functions as a tool to introduce Julius to other objects—books, film, music, paintings, or people—that do the memory work: a movie theater, a record store, or the American Folk Art Museum. At other times the place itself serves as a vehicle for memory. At the beginning, for instance, Julius enters a bookstore in order to kill some time before seeing a movie. In the store browsing replaces walking and as he leafs through the selection he picks up a book a patient of his wrote. In Sebaldian fashion this leads to a contemplation of the patient’s background before moving on the subject of the book, a historical biography of Cornelis van Tienhoven, a Dutch colonist. The quotes on the book jacket applaud it as “a forgotten chapter in colonial history” (26) which segues into a survey—Julius’s account via what he recalls from the sessions with his patient—about Manhattan’s previous residents, Native Americans, first settlers, and colonizers, violence and injustice, and the processes of actively trying to erase or suppress this violent chapter of history, rewritten in postcolonial fashion by his patient.

The scene in the bookstore is only one of Julius's many attempts of excavating and reconstructing marginalized voices; and as the narrative progresses, carried forward by Julius's "aimless wandering" (3), both reader and narrator get to know not only the city but also Julius more intimately. During his walks which mirror Julius's investigation of the city's as well as his own past by randomly layering and remembering the history of the city through individual places, the reader's attention is always drawn to that which is forgotten or left out. Because of this focus on the unreliability and constructedness of memory—historical and personal—there is one story that, although kept under wraps until the final pages of the novel, is absolutely central to an analysis of the text. This story so drastically alters our reading experience that, contrary to the novel's chronological order, it needs to lead rather than follow any arguments to be made about memory. That Julius forgets his pin number is inconsequential and innocuous but foreshadows the deceiving nature of appearances and representation, and the unreliability of memory that the reader has to confront when Julius finds himself accused of rape, an event that unfolds slowly and retroactively. The novel's structure here mimics the inherent belatedness of memory in that it leaves out the scene at the party when Moji—the sister of an old friend from Nigeria whom Julius had not seen for years and did not even recognize—levels an accusation that, as he phrases it, "I had forced myself on her" (244).¹⁰⁸ Calling attention to more potential gaps that the reader may have overlooked, to trauma, repression, and an unreliable narrator, this information is not revealed until the day after the party, when Julius, in retrospect, summons up what Moji had said to him. Yet even his short synopsis is immediately displaced by an anecdote of Nietzsche that, as

¹⁰⁸ In her study of *Memory, Narrative, Identity* Nicola King, drawing on Freud, describes memory as inherently belated. It is in retrospect that we fill in gaps, add new knowledge, and reconstruct what had been repressed, remained unnoticed, or was simply forgotten.

he finds out later, contains wrong information. Although Julius does not deny it, he does not confirm Moji's accusation either, but notes that "[she] had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy" (244), an "as if" that is unable to give closure. By reconstructing this specific story in the context of other stories and histories haunting the urban landscape, Cole shows that many events can only be grasped belatedly and can never be reconstructed in their entirety. He illustrates that the retelling of an event in the present inevitably produces a multiplicity of stories, ideas, and attitudes that may well be conflicting, inconclusive, and ambiguous. Temporal and spatial detachment both make it easier and more complicated to recall such stories because of the emotional disentanglement and processes of forgetting and reevaluation that have occurred in the meantime.

In conjunction with the idea of the palimpsest, the narrator's technique further suggests that the city is in itself structured like memory. As Boyer claims in *The City of Collective Memory*, the city exists through permanences, absences, illusions, and other effects. For her, permanences, such as buildings, monuments, or streets, mark the differences between the contemporary and the historical city, and are as such residues from bygone eras that attract our attention, stimulate our imagination, help us retrieve memories—our own or those of others—and invent new memories and traditions.¹⁰⁹ Cities constantly change; buildings or other forms disappear, deteriorate, or are intentionally demolished; and as residents, visitors, or walkers we are ceaselessly exposed to these processes urging us—like the narrator—to think about our own lives, our past, and our identity.

¹⁰⁹ Boyer specifically mentions the city as a work of art, as panorama, and as spectacle, all of which testify to a specific historical era and serve the purpose of educating or correcting its citizens, reminiscent of Foucault's ideas about governmentality.

The question remains, however, whether there is an underlying principle that drives Julius's thought processes other than his seemingly random walks. Given that the narrator is himself a critic, well-versed in the fields of critical theory, literature, history, arts, and culture, it is worth exploring some of the alleyways he lays out for the reader. Among the countless intellectual figures he mentions are Anthony Kwame Appiah, Benedict Anderson, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Gustav Mahler, Italo Calvino, and Primo Levi; and although Julius has proved himself an unreliable narrator and even a show-off at times, the references are not purely self-referential. One key theme that emerges in the places he visits and his reading material is visual representation in the form of photography and painting. Although Cole never quotes from it, Barthes's ideas of *studium* and *punctum*, developed in his 1980 *Camera Lucida*, loom large in the novel and can help shed light on how Julius perceives his surroundings. Trying to explain the process of "animation" (Barthes 20), the attraction and internal qualities that move or "animate" the viewer, and how, in turn, the viewer animates the photograph, Barthes coins the concept of *studium* to denote an "enthusiastic commitment" (26), the ability to appreciate and further investigate a photograph for its cultural and historical significance; and *punctum* to describe the little detail, the surprise or shock, that lingers long after we have put the photograph down.¹¹⁰ It is what personally interests us, makes us go back to the photograph, and lets the photograph speak; and in the same way, Julius is moved by what interests him and follows little details that tie in with his own distinct identity and memories. Potentially enriching Huyssen's model of *recherche* and *recuperation*, *studium* could be said to overlap with *recherche*, the imaginative investigation and

¹¹⁰ Also see my discussion of memorial objects as examined by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer in my first chapter. Hirsch's and Spitzer's assumption that objects carry powerful personal and symbolic meanings are equally based on Barthes's concept of *punctum*.

reconstruction of the host nation's past by the migrant, while the concept of *punctum* can illustrate the motives behind it.

If we consider Barthes's *punctum* as an organizing principle, Julius's labyrinthine walks take on a more concrete shape. Julius is motivated by his unique interests and personal circumstances and as a result the novel focuses specifically on the multiethnic make-up of the city, the multiple discourses of historical suffering, and the processes of remembering and forgetting, selection and erasure. Even the minutest details trigger elaborate histories of the first residents, colonialism, slavery, immigration, the Holocaust, and, most importantly, 9/11, all of which are accessed through place. I will spend the rest of my discussion highlighting some examples that corroborate this process. One afternoon, for instance, Julius passes by a shoeshine shop. No sooner does he enter it than he already feels the need to examine his motives in making the decision proclaiming that "it felt ridiculous to mount the elevated chairs in the shops and have someone kneel before me." But he goes in anyway and is immediately enthralled by the distinct atmosphere of the place. "The air was laced with lemon oil and turpentine" and the stories of Pierre, a former slave, told with the "faint trace of a Caribbean French accent" (71) transport Julius back to a different time and place. Pierre left Haiti "when things got bad there, when so many people were killed, blacks, whites" (71–72) suggesting that he is alluding to Haiti during the time of American occupation. Pierre's story is in many ways the typical immigrant's story: he follows his owner to New York City where he becomes a hairdresser and lives in one of the tenement buildings on the corner of Mott and Hester, door to door with other immigrants, mainly Irish, Italian, and later blacks. His story captures the specific feel of these earlier times, most likely the 1920s and 1930s, the

crowdedness and restlessness, his everyday struggles entwined with allusions to the Haitian Revolution and slavery. After the death of his masters, Pierre is a free man, gets married, and together with his wife opens a school for black children on Canal Street. After leaving the shop Julian remains entranced. “That afternoon, during which I flitted in and out of myself, when time became elastic and voices cut out of the past into the present, the heart of the city was gripped by what seemed to be a commotion from an earlier time” (75). His daydreaming turns a crowd of people handing out pamphlets into a draft riot, and he even pictures “the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree” (75), a frightening illusion that soon dissolves but is symbolic of the other stories and ghosts haunting the urban landscape.

Another time, Julius discovers an actual artifact of the past. Walking through lower Manhattan, close to Broadway and Brooklyn Bridge, past a restaurant that offers “comida latina” and a crowd of immigrants waiting in line in front of a federal building, he stumbles across an odd-shaped monument, “a memorial for the site of an African burial ground.”

The tiny plot was what had been set aside now to indicate the spot, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the site had been large, some six acres. . . . But most of the burial ground was now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government. (220)

From an examination of the ground on which he is standing, Julius then shifts his thoughts toward the people buried here. “Into this earth had been interred the bodies of some fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves, but then the land had been built over and the people and the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground” (220). Only when the site was dug up to make room for a building on Broadway did the city

come across human remains and started to excavate the site. The monument marking the site is designed by a Haitian artist but is closed for renovation and Julius is barred from further explorations. He concludes: “What I was steeped in, on that warm morning, was the echo across centuries, of slavery in New York” (221).

As an example of Till’s claim that place as “an authentic material site” is “the last survivor” (*The New Berlin* 211) of past events, the burial ground calls attention to the real and imagined geographies of remembering and forgetting, and of the erasure of certain histories in favor of others. This trend is even more transparent in the places and stories telling of the events surrounding 9/11. Here, there is no need for searching and excavation. Everything relating to the event is in plain sight driving out other narratives that, as shown above, Julius deems just as important. At the World Financial Center he passes a monument for the lost members of the police force. Their names are engraved on marble walls with “the expected, disheartening cluster in the fall of 2001” (57). Closer to Ground Zero he joins a throng of people flocking toward what has now become a major tourist attraction. He is the only one to pause at an overpass to think. “Everyone else went straight ahead, and nothing separated them, nothing separated us, from the people who had worked directly across the street on the day of disaster” (58). Yet instead of remaining with the subject of 9/11, Julius’s thoughts drift off again. Alluding to the atrocities of the Holocaust and genocide in general, in addition to cruelty against animals, Julius asserts that “atrociousness is nothing new, not to humans, not to animals” (58). He asks the reader to put 9/11 in context with other events and large-scale sufferings in human history, and urges them to question 9/11 as the dominant yardstick for violence and terror. He further adds that “[this] was not the first erasure on the site” (58):

There had been communities here before Columbus ever set sail, before Verrazano anchored his ships in the narrows, or the black Portuguese slave trader Esteban Gómez sailed up the Hudson; human beings had lived here, built homes, and quarreled with their neighbors long before the Dutch ever saw a business opportunity in the rich furs and timber of the island and its calm bay. Generations rushed through the eye of the needle, and I, one of the still legible crowd, entered the subway. (59)

Here Julius lends his voice to the previous settlers who used to attend to their daily routines right there on the site. He calls attention to the indefinite richness of this area, filled with layers and layers of individual stories and struggles, and again demands that these stories not be forgotten and not be erased or overpowered in the light of more recent and allegedly more momentous events.

Although 9/11 seems to be Julius's main point of reference, there are certain stories that he himself leaves out and that are not discussed until he is in Brussels. Here, in the calming atmosphere of a café over several bottles of Chimay, the narrator addresses contentious issues such as US politics, immigration, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, the Arab World, Islam, and Al-Qaeda—sensitive topics that gained new urgency and new meanings after 2001. Far removed from the United States, Europe seems to be a safer space for such discussions, where Julius and his two conversation partners, Farouq and Khalil—self-proclaimed Muslim Marxists—can talk freely. Khalil confronts Julius about US identity politics, “American blacks” (119), and the American attitude toward Muslims, and Julius finds himself defending the United States. He tries to explain the subtleties of American politics, validating his sensitivity to political correctness and further revealing his own fears of anti-Semitism and racism. But again, it seems that the scene in the café is more about the act of conversation in general than about specific topics. Distorted by linguistic misunderstandings, ideological gaps, biases, and subjective

viewpoints, the conversation is far from objective or balanced. Undermining the Holocaust, in their view the dominant narrative of present-day Europe, Khalil and Farouq argue for a reevaluation of Palestine and the superiority of Islam. They complain about racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia, but inversely undercut other stories in favor of their own causes. And they criticize the narrative surrounding 9/11, which they view as the cause for enmity against Muslims all over the world.

Compared to Khalil and Farouq, Julius seems to be one of the few characters in the novel who tries to remain politically neutral, at least on the surface. Although he is himself subject to biases, forgetting, and distortion, and although the secret revealed about him is equally sinister and shocking even if it lacks the proportions of other atrocities commented on in the text, he tries to practice the objectivity he is trained in as a psychiatrist. In a clinical manner, he listens to all the stories he overhears in New York and in Brussels, always probing, digging deeper, and analyzing the places, people, objects, and narratives he encounters. Places here are imagined as animated and “fluid mosaics” (Till, *New Berlin* 8) of a vivid history, witnesses of past events, and filled with stories of loss and agony, some of which are still too recent, too painful, and too controversial to discuss on American soil. Contextualizing these symptoms, Julius situates New York City within the whole spectrum of historical suffering, “with mass death, with plague, war, and famine” (200), concluding that the city is subject to a massive repression of such incidents, “so [that] we think of such historical realities only as footnotes” (201).

The novel ends with the image of the Statue of Liberty propped against the “two towers linked by the translucent atrium and lit blue by night lights” (258), and with the

almost absurd juxtaposition of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of migrating birds, “about twenty birds per night” (259) since the statue’s erection, with the casualties of 9/11. Like the preceding accusation of rape, the puzzling last page leaves the reader unsettled. But the image suggests that independent of ethnicity, nationality, or species, human and nonhuman actors have a right to live and dwell in the city and can claim membership therein.¹¹¹ The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and immigration, for inclusion rather than exclusion, and, accordingly, Julius’s meditation seems to be an appeal for a more sensitive and just treatment of the city’s histories and inhabitants, human and nonhuman, all of which belong to the city, just like Julius himself.

While Cole’s novel is set closer to the present, looking back in time, Özdamar’s *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*, although published only a few years before *Open City*, is set in a very different era—precisely thirty years before Cole’s protagonist wanders the streets of New York City. As any reader familiar with Özdamar’s work will know, there is an explicit reason for the novel being set in Cold-War Germany as *Seltsame Sterne* is the last installment of Özdamar’s so-called *Istanbul-Berlin Trilogie: Sonne auf halbem Weg* (*Istanbul Berlin Trilogy: Sun Halfway*). Starting with the 1992 *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei: hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus* and the 1998 *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*, the novels follow the protagonist and first-person narrator Emine on her journey from Turkey to Berlin.¹¹² Yet *Seltsame Sterne* is the only text that is set almost exclusively in Berlin and that does not thematize language,

¹¹¹ The claim Cole puts forward on the last pages of the novel recalls Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the “right to the city:” the right of its residents to live, work, dwell in the city, and the right to use all of its services and not be confined to ghettos. See *Writings on Cities*.

¹¹² Özdamar’s first two novels were translated as *Life is a Caravanserai: Has Two Doors, I Came in One, I Went out the Other* (2000) and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* (2007).

integration, or cultural differences between Turkey and Germany. The protagonist is no longer the Turkish child and young adult, or the Turkish guest worker who has just started to learn German and spends most of her time with fellow Siemens workers in a Berlin *Wonaym* (Emine's Turkish spelling for the German *Wohnheim*, an accommodation for factory workers), before returning to Istanbul in the midst of the turbulences of the 1960s. This is the protagonist in her late twenties who had been dreaming of returning to Berlin all along; who speaks German fluently; and whose love of Germany, Berlin, and theater turns Berlin and East Berlin, in particular, into the place where she wants to be, live, and work; a place where she already feels at home.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, Özdamar is the most prominent female Turkish-German writer, intellectual, and public figure in Germany today. Subsequently, just as they did with "Der Hof im Spiegel," critics have written extensively about her latest novel, highlighting a wide range of issues, above all German history, national identity, memory, ethnicity, gender, and Emine's subaltern perspective. In another attempt to answer Huyssen's question of whether it is possible to migrate into a host nation's past, and using the Holocaust as the equally defining historical moment for Germany and Europe, Konuk Kader, for instance, examines how Emine connects to the Nazi past and the memory of the Holocaust. Also concerned with history yet challenging the preoccupation with the Nazi period, Susanne Rinner focuses on the aftermath of 1968. Laura Bradley, John Pizer, and Margaret Littler foreground GDR history. They argue that Özdamar recreates lost or alternative memories of the GDR, "preserving for contemporary German culture the disappeared world of the GDR in the 1970s" (Littler "Cultural Memory" 183), or creating a "countermemory" (Pizer 135) to dominant

discourses that without relenting to *Ostalgie* (“nostalgia for Eastern Germany”) is able to take on a form of recuperation. Withold Bonner, too, concentrates on GDR history, but he also begins to touch on spatiality, claiming that the GDR is imagined as a safe space where the *Volksbühne* (people’s theater), a potential heterotopia, is the only place where an ideal socialism becomes possible. Other critics, such as Ottmar Ette and Silke Schade, have also focused on space in *Seltsame Sterne* but tackle it in conjunction with Özdamar’s preceding novels. Ette, who looks at Özdamar’s texts as one single unit, describes all of them as translingual, transcultural, and transareal, and argues that the settings in all three novels are areas of transit and oscillation between Turkey and Germany and East and West Berlin. In this analysis the Berlin Wall becomes a translation of the Bosphorus, and the two cities—Istanbul and Berlin—are written into one another in a form of “transcultural interlacing and traversal” (376). Schade, on the other hand, adapts a critical conceptualization of spatiality. Drawing on theorists from human geography such as Soja, Lefebvre, Massey, and Bachelard, she claims that the protagonist collects spaces and integrates them into her identity thus creating a personal topography of the city—reminiscent of the “personal city map” in “Der Hof im Spiegel”—and turning Berlin into her personal space of home. Last but not least, in his important and acclaimed 2007 monograph *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* B. Venkat Mani returns to the subjects of history and memory.¹¹³ Again expanding upon Huyssen, Mani suggests that the task of minority histories like Özdamar’s “is not only a recollection and narration of the subordinated pasts but also accounting for the difference between such pasts and those that have been ordinate” (91).

¹¹³ *Cosmopolitical Claims* is generally considered another milestone in the scholarship of Turkish-German literature in addition to Adelson’s and Azade Seyhan’s work.

Minority histories and diasporic memory have “the double responsibility of—borrowing from Huyssen—*recherché* [sic] *and* recuperation” (92) at which Emine ultimately fails.¹¹⁴ Building on Spivak, Mani describes history as merely inserted and rehearsed—fragmented and incomplete—placed before the reader and immediately replaced by a protagonist whose “memory work is marked by severance and dislocation from both nations” (117).

As evident from this short overview there is a trend in scholarship to view the novel as reconstructing the past. Clearly writing from a present moment, critics speak of the “recherche” and “recuperation” of memory. Yet as Bradley points out in another article, the narrator, too, is writing from a present moment in 1976/77 where “[her] attempts to recover the past [the Weimar Republic and the Holocaust] soon become intertwined with her efforts to capture the present” (“Recovering the Past” 283). Taking into account the time of publication, the text’s preoccupation with what we now perceive of as history, its focus on the Berlin Wall, and representation of a character that easily crosses back and forth between the two parts of the city, I further believe that the novel’s concern is also with German unification—another past that lies in the protagonist’s future. Surprisingly, however, Littler, who like Bradley has published several articles on Özdamar’s work, is the only one to assert that the novel retrospectively emphasizes the potential of unification arguing that the protagonist’s numerous border crossings foreshadow the end of a divided Germany and “give voice to multiple small narratives” (“Nonevent” 61) of the larger geopolitical reality. Building on these readings, I would claim that, just like Cole, Özdamar constructs an eclectic landscape that is haunted by

¹¹⁴ Note that in the original article Huyssen speaks of *recherche* without the acute accent which Mani converts into *recherché*.

stories, yet instead of reconstructing them, Emine actively co-constructs them. Özdamar retroactively inserts her protagonist into the past showing how Emine is an active resident of and participant in history, collective memory, and in the events leading up to unification.

As was the case with *Open City*, the protagonist's identity and the city are interdependent, and again, the novel's structure and narrative mode emulates the protagonist's experiences and spatial layout of the city. Opposed to the prolix stream of consciousness of Julius's labyrinthine walks, *Seltsame Sterne* is faster-paced and captures the rare energy of Berlin in the 1970s. Pizer argues that the novel is "marked by a factual prose style and does not come across as a work of fiction" (135). But although it lacks the magical realist elements so typical for Özdamar's style, the novel might still be more imaginative than other works. Like *Berlin*, it is divided into two clearly separated yet interrelated parts. Functioning as a sort of prelude to the novel, the first part comprises non-linear narrative fragments, sprinkled with literary quotations and newspaper headlines, detailing Emine's arrival in West Berlin, her apartment in Wedding, the events leading up to her departure in Turkey, and her first border crossings. The second part is conceptualized as a collection of diary entries, drawings, personal notes, and other texts chronicling Emine's time at the *Volksbühne* and other events taking place in East and West Berlin. The diary style lends the text authenticity and immediacy, relating events as they happen and thus perhaps compensating for the time lag between Emine's present and the publication of the novel. They also represent Emine's subjective perspective, a creative commentary on how she experiences her lived space, that makes up for the

freedom constrained by the Berlin Wall. The narrative is motivated by the people and places she encounters, and is driven forward by her walks through the city.

Emine's migrant perspective significantly shapes the narrative and her experiences in Berlin. Like Julius, her background makes her aware of the multiethnic make-up of both parts of the city, and memories of Turkey resurface on a daily basis, often triggered by the most common phenomena. However it is important to note that, as Adelson claims, "the national culture of Turkey is not a necessary or primary frame of reference" and that the author does not "represent a miniature of otherwise discrete Turkish worlds in Germany" (*Turkish Turn* 13). Emine is neither involved in any form of identity politics nor trying to reinscribe Istanbul onto Berlin—as Ette claims. As Mani further points out, Emine vividly recalls personal stories connected to her family, friends, and grandmother in particular, but distances herself from the authoritarian rule that has taken a hold of Turkey. Unlike Julius, Emine is not searching for herself using clues in the landscape. Rather, following Bastéa's argument in *Memory and Architecture*, Emine confirms that the hometown and other cities we used to live in are imprinted in our memory and become "the yardstick with which we measure all other cities" (4). When on Emine's first morning in East Berlin the "Morgenstimmung und der Geruch in den Straßen von Ostberlin" ("the atmosphere of the morning and the smell in the streets of East Berlin") remind her of her grandmother, and the "Geruch von Kohle und Autoabgasen" ("smell of coal and exhaust fumes"; 81) of Istanbul, she verifies that the hometown we once inhabited becomes memorialized and embodied, and keeps pervading the present moment. Such passages debunk the common notion of diasporic memory as

“cut off, hybrid, displaced, split” (Huysen 152), as well as Mani’s claim that Emine is severed from her homeland.

Compared to those personal memories, Emine’s depiction of the majority of fellow Turks and Kurds is factual at best. Most of the Turkish men are described as scheming to pick up German women, and the Kurd who engages Emine in a conversation at a party and confronts her about her Kurdish background is equally sleazy. Other Turks come across as more positive characters. In *Wedding* she watches Turks as they are repairing their cars, a pastime which her friend Peter describes as “Die Türken verwandeln sich in Deutsche” (“Turks . . . transforming into Germans”; 76); and there is Murat, the friendly bartender in one of the pubs. Littler describes Özdamar’s portrayal of fellow countrymen as a strategy to “[avoid] presenting Turks or Kurds as victims” (186), potentially of racism and genocide. Yet I believe it is more accurate to describe Emine’s attitude as another example of Adelson’s touching tales or of the practical cosmopolitanism Julius practices in *Open City*. Again, Emine confirms that relationships, friendships, or other attachments are not necessarily based on ethnicity or a shared background but are contingent and often unpredictable.

Immigrants of Turkish origin are not the only national group populating the ethnoscape of the novel. Apart from a few local Berliners, almost everyone Emine has a conversation with is from a place outside Berlin or outside Germany. Referring to them as African, Indian, English, or American, Emine lacks the precision of Cole’s introspective narrator, but like him manages to represent Berlin as a transnational and seemingly open and global place where in both parts immigrants have become an integral part of the cityscape. Pizer particularly highlights Özdamar’s portrayal of the East as a

“positive counter memorial vision of the East German capital” (145) that recuperates the tolerant attitude of the GDR toward their “socialist friends” (Göktürk 65), immigrants from other socialist countries and foreigners in general. Despite this seemingly open-minded attitude, the Eastern zone is, however, not spared from anti-Semitic undercurrents as Emine overhears racist comments in both parts of the city. Nevertheless, Emine is equally accepted on both sides, and even welcome at the border crossing, making it impossible to describe one part as more tolerant than the other. Initially, Emine may perceive the East as a place of “Sicherheit” (“security”; 224), job security, and equality as opposed to the upheaval and instability in the West—the constant threat of terrorism posed by the RAF (Red Army Faction) and ensuing police surveillance. She is assured by the fixity and permanence of the wall. “Das beruhigt mich” (“It puts me at ease”; 186). But the more she crosses back and forth, the more porous the wall becomes. Terrorism in the West is supplemented by terrorism in the East, police surveillance by the secret police. Filtered through Emine’s perspective, the two parts of the city seem to gradually overlap and blend into each other, as do its multinational and multiethnic inhabitants. Murat’s claim that in East Berlin “Der Türke gilt dort als Westler” (“The Turk passes as a Westerner there”; 69) matches Emine’s attempts at the *Volksbühne* to translate Brecht’s plays into Turkish, inevitably blurring the concepts of origin, ethnicity, and nationality, and perhaps suggesting that these concepts are no longer viable.¹¹⁵ The novel represents a city where immigrants and foreigners have become a part of everyday life, residents and locals in an already global city that anticipates Berlin’s future.

¹¹⁵ In *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Fatima El-Tayeb makes a similar argument about contemporary Europe exploring “a ‘postethnic’ understanding of identity that is not built around racial identification, but nevertheless challenges the European dogma of colorblindness” (xix).

Özdamar's representation of fellow Turks, other minorities, and Germans, and her seeming lack of empathy and specificity further suggest that Emine's allegiance is with the city and specific places within it rather than with its people. Most critics depict Emine as a detached observer, similar to Baudelaire's *flâneur*. Mani, for instance, describes her as a spectator, "interested, but not excited; disengaged and studiously detached, but not aloof" (103), failing to see that one of the *flâneur's* key attributes is that he, more so than others, understands and participates in the making of the city, a prototypical urban figure in Bowlby's sense. Emine is furthermore personally and emotionally attached to Berlin. She proclaims this attachment regularly: "Wie schön sind die Nächte in Berlin, wenn es schneit" ("How beautiful are the nights in Berlin when it's snowing"; 104), "Es lebe Berlin" ("Long live Berlin"; 110), "Berlin ist schön" ("Berlin is beautiful"; 138), or "Ich liebe die Wohnung" ("I love the apartment" 188); while her perceptive descriptions of streets, buildings, parks, and people, her sensitivity to the particular feel of the city and its scenery suggest a relationship to Berlin that is more than "interested" but rather cognitive and affective. She also constantly declares how much she loves theater and how much she enjoys the time spent at the *Volksbühne*. The expression "mein Theater" ("my theater"; 154) recalls an earlier short story titled "Mein Berlin" ("My Berlin") and resonates with "the personal city map" I discussed in the previous chapter.¹¹⁶ The possessive "mein" demonstrates Emine's claim of ownership of the city and of specific places within it. Emine also connects to people. But she meets her close friends and boyfriends by inhabiting particular places: the roommates in Wedding, one of them Peter becomes her short-time lover; Susanne and Gabi are her roommates in the East; Graham is a stage designer from England whom she meets at the *Volksbühne*; and finally Steve is

¹¹⁶ "Mein Berlin" was published in the 2001 short story collection "Der Hof im Spiegel."

an American whom she meets in Gabi's apartment, Emine's temporary dwelling space in East Berlin.

What distinguishes these places from the sites encountered in Cole's novel is that they could all be considered dwelling places, personally meaningful places Emine inhabits for longer periods of time.¹¹⁷ Moreover, she does not live or work in these places by herself. All the apartments or houses mentioned are *Wohngemeinschaften* or *WGs*, shared apartments where she lives together with other Germans; while the theater is a public meeting place for a specific group of people. Emine is thus not an observer or a spectator but a member of several communities and contributor to their shared lived space and everyday lives. In his influential essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" Heidegger conceptualizes dwelling as the essential way of being in the world, and in the same way Olwig, in his phenomenological study of landscape, speaks of dwelling as an embodied experience and of "the merging of body and senses that occurs in dwelling" and that creates the "woven material" ("Doing Landscape" 84) of landscape, an active "doing" instead of a removed "performing on" the landscape. Based on this assumption, by inhabiting specific places within the city Emine becomes a part of this "woven material" and actively takes part in the production of these places and the city as a whole.

Furthermore, in a novel in which the places encountered are also representative of German history, Emine establishes herself as a resident of this history and participant in its collective memory discourses. The first pages of the novel are crucial for this argument. They situate the protagonist in a particular historical, cultural, and geographical landscape and introduce Özdamar's technique of uncovering and

¹¹⁷ Technically, the *Volkstheater* is Emine's workspace, but given the amount of time she spends there and that she even sleeps in the sauna every time she is in between apartments, the *Volkstheater* shares attributes commonly associated with dwelling places.

participating in the memories of an active past—Emine’s present and more immediate past—which works through buildings encountered during Emine’s daily walks. The novel starts *in medias res*. Emine wakes up in a cold apartment to the sound of a barking dog which, as Schade points out, is the first of many intertextual references to German or European literature—to Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann’s story “Das Gebell” (“The Bark”).¹¹⁸ To block out the noise Emine recites a few lines from Else Lasker-Schüler’s poem “Liebessterne” (“love stars”) that she had memorized the night before, the first lines of which lend the novel its title. Mani interprets the reference to Lasker-Schüler as Emine’s search for or rehearsal of a subaltern past—Lasker-Schüler was Jewish and fascinated by Middle-Eastern culture—an effort to allude to German history that is incomplete and immediately aborted. What the two female writers whose ghosts Emine conjures up in the first paragraph have in common, however, is that they are canonical figures of German literature yet defy a simple classification as German, a detail apparently overlooked by critics.¹¹⁹ On the book jacket in the novel, Lasker-Schüler is even described as “die größte Lyrikerin, die Deutschland je hatte” (“the greatest poetess Germany has ever had”; 15). I read this double nod at two prominent non-German “German” writers as a first attempt toward pointing out the constructedness of a national narrative or of national memory in *Seltsame Sterne* and as a proposal that Özdamar and

¹¹⁸ A common interpretation of *Seltsame Sterne* is that Özdamar writes or inserts herself into a German literary tradition, as critics also argued in the case of “Der Hof im Spiegel.” Bachmann’s story was published in 1972, and, in a similar setup, tells the story of a woman and a barking dog that, as it turns out later, only exists in her imagination as the memory of a dog the woman used to have. For Littler, the barking in both Özdamar and Bachmann “represents the repressed knowledge of violence and guilt” (“Cultural Memory” 184) of the Holocaust that keeps resurfacing as Emine walks through the city.

¹¹⁹ Although she spent considerable parts of her life in Germany and Switzerland, Bachmann (1926-1973) should be classified as an Austrian author. Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945) on the other hand was born and spent most of her life in Germany. Yet her work is marked by the commitment to biblical themes and mystic eastern culture which she preferred over German culture. A Jewish-German representative of the avant-garde and expressionism, she fled Germany in 1933 after the Nazi took over the government. She emigrated first to Zurich and then to Jerusalem where she died in 1945.

Emine, too, can inhabit this space and be great writers of German literature and great chroniclers of German history.

Inserted into this already intertextual literary landscape are references to geography, history, politics, and culture coalescing in Emine's *Wohngemeinschaft* in West Berlin. In an approach reminiscent of Bachelard's often quoted chapter "The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut," Emine's account of the *WG* is not so much a description as it is an examination or a systematic excavation of layers of meaning—akin to the digging metaphor that is frequently used to describe the relationship to the past. As Till points out "[the] past is never settled, sedimented, neatly arranged in horizontal layers" (*New Berlin* 10) and, similarly, Emine's physical and imaginary expedition through the house (and later the streets of Berlin) is unstructured. Her thoughts and memories are not neatly arranged but drift off, guided by the objects she encounters and decodes, and by the spatial arrangement and texture of the building.¹²⁰ Located "in einem alten Berliner Arbeiterviertel" ("in an old working class neighborhood of Berlin"; 48) on a defunct factory floor on top of a shop for seamstresses and ironers, the flat where Emine lives is shared with seven roommates. These men and women are representatives of the German student and feminist movements of 1968, and echo Emine's own political background and extreme leftist leanings. During the time of the Weimar Republic, communists used to fight in this neighborhood, as Emine's friend Josef from Zurich tells her, and in the more recent past, the previous residents were members of the "AA-Kommune" ("AA-commune"; 10), followers of Otto Mühl, a

¹²⁰ Freud, too, describes memory as both spatial and textual, a methodological digging through a city in ruins, chaotic and fragmented, that's excavation also entails deciphering the objects retrieved, interpretation, and reconstruction. See King's *Narrative Memory Identity* for a detailed discussion of the digging metaphor as it was first introduced by Freud and later adopted and modified by Benjamin.

controversial activist and fervent critic of bourgeois family values. Emine refers to the lamp in the living room as “ein Denkmal der AA-Kommunezeit” (“a monument to the time of the AA commune”; 11), its crookedness and broken light bulbs forever testifying to the activities of the former inhabitants. Other objects she mentions are a “Bockwurst mit gefrorenem Ketchup” (“German sausage with frozen ketchup”; 13), a Christmas tree, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, and newspapers with headlines referring to events in Spain, Angola, Vietnam, Italy, and Germany. There is furthermore the “amerikanische Militärunterwäsche” (“American military underwear”; 12) left behind by the commune that, although it can be bought cheaply in the military shop across the street, alludes to the Allied Forces occupying Berlin after WWII. Emine mentions in passing that one roommate’s father was a Nazi, and that another roommate failed to prove that he was a pacifist when trying to avoid German military service. Interspersed with these seemingly random impressions are the number six million, Hitler, the Stauffenberg plot, and memories of Istanbul kindled by the clothes she finds in the closets. “In Istanbul hatte ich nie einen Mantel gebraucht” (“I never needed a coat in Istanbul”; 15). She then ascends to the rooftop terrace—allegedly a former meeting place for members of the RAF. From here she can see the moon and stars over Berlin, another flicker of Lasker-Schüler’s poem, and then in the distance the “Ostberliner Fernsehturm” (“television tower in East Berlin”) which immediately reminds her of the “Ostberliner Volksbühne” (“people’s theater in East Berlin”; 14) where she is a trainee.

As evident from the quotes above, Emine’s account of the *WG* is not so much an objective description as it is a self-reflexive commentary. Recalling Barthes’s idea of the *punctum*, a guiding principle for Julius, Emine’s perspective is contingent. She neither

catalogues facts nor simply reproduces someone else's stories and memories but communicates those stories as they are manifest in place and as they are personally meaningful for her. This process further resonates with Walter Benjamin's writings on memory, summarized by Till as follows:

For Benjamin memory is not just information that individuals recall or stories being retold in the present. It is not layered time situated in the landscape. Rather, memory is the self-reflexive act of contextualizing and continuously digging for the past through place. It is a process of continually making and re-membering the past in the present rather than a process of discovering objective historical 'facts.'
(*New Berlin* 11)

It is worth focusing at length on the first pages of this novel, as they set the tone for all that follows. Phenomenological approaches to geography and anthropology describe places as vehicles of knowledge. Edward S. Casey, for instance, understands place as intricately intertwined with the body. For Casey, "[there] is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it." He further claims that places "gather," rather than amass or accumulate, material and imaginary objects, experiences, histories, languages, thoughts, and memories that emerge as "local knowledge" ("How to Get from Space to Place" 18). This is precisely how the *WG* as well as other places employed in the text operate. Emine, by inhabiting the *WG* where she lives *together* with other Germans, and other places in Berlin, has access to and participates in such local knowledges. Keith H. Basso further argues that the relationship between places and individuals is reciprocal and dynamic, and that "places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring

thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become” (55). In a process that he refers to as “interanimation” (55)—note the similarities to Barthes’s idea of “animation”—places speak to and are at the same time animated by the thoughts and feelings of people passing through or inhabiting that place. This is an accurate characterization of what happens on Emine’s walks.

The effect of interanimation is already tangible in Emine’s description of the *WG* but even more evident after she leaves the apartment. Like a scene out of a fairy tale, every object she passes is awakened or animated by Emine’s gaze and touch. Down the street she first passes by a brothel. Turkish men are waiting outside, and the sign on the door reads “Milchladen” (“milk store”), either a remnant of an old shop that is now gone or the name of the current establishment. On the “S-Bahn” (“commuter train”; 16) that moves “wie ein Tier, das sich in der Landschaft mal zeigte, dann verschwand und sich wieder zeigte” (“like an animal that keeps showing itself, disappearing, and reappearing in the landscape”; 16) she slithers past several “Geisterbahnhöfe” (“discontinued train stations”; 16) which she lists by name. Recalling a memory of a previous train ride, she bestows the *S-Bahn* with a strange familiarity and individuality as she thinks back to an old woman she once saw on the train, a man masturbating, and fallen German soldiers and their widows. She picks up a newspaper only to discard it after she rips out a picture of Pasolini who, according to the headlines, has just been viciously killed. Finally, she crosses over to the East, pays for her visa—5 marks—and exchanges money for “Ostgeld” (“Eastern currency”; 18). Here the sense of interanimation is heightened. The items in the shop windows, the cars, and people remind her of a museum, quiet and sleepy, as if she had slipped into a different world or a different past, a “Märchen” (“fairy

tale"; 18). Again, she comments on people's faces, street names, the *Trabant*, the *Brechttheater*, and the *Spreebrücke*, and obsessively reads from signs and packaging she encounters.¹²¹ Eventually, she comes across a man with a dog. It is certainly not the same one she had heard barking earlier, but the encounter ties the narrative back in with the beginning, connecting East and West, which, although Emine at this point claims that she cannot imagine the two parts as one, are nevertheless connected through her walks and her experiences.

The *WG* in the West is complemented by similarly symbolic places in the East, above all Susanne's and Gabi Gysi's apartments and the *Volksbühne*. Replicating the historical and political undergirdings of the *WG*, the narratives Emine becomes acquainted with in those places are equally representative of the socio-cultural and political landscape of the GDR. Discussions of antifascism, communism, and activism displace similar conversations about politics in the West; and the *Volksbühne*, in particular, emerges as a contact zone between residents/actors, history, and current events. Indicative of the ambivalent double narrative of the nation as described by Bhabha, the plays performed lend historical depth, displaying a linear pedagogical narrative and idealized view of GDR history that is in line with the antifascist and anticapitalist agenda of GDR politics. At the same time they call attention to the performative and potentially subversive nature of daily life, and to censorship and criticism.¹²² Mani interprets the focus on performances as an example of how the novel

¹²¹ In particular the names of the different brands of cigarettes Emine smokes are interesting, first *Cabinet*, later *Sprachlos* which can be translated as both "speechless" and "without language."

¹²² For a detailed discussion of the role of theater and the *Volksbühne* see Bradley and Bonner. Bonner describes the *Volksbühne* in terms of a potential heterotopia, the only place where a utopian socialism is possible and where Emine can feel whole. Bradley, in both of her articles, calls attention to the subversive nature of theater as an "enlightened enclave" ("From Berlin to Prenzlau" 29), a public space where it is

records and stages history and also thematizes the “experience of staging history, captured in the narrator’s notes on rehearsals” (114). I would argue that this is the mechanism by which the novel emphasizes the constructedness of history, and shows how the actors actively contribute to this process by performing history as well as their own lives. Emine’s observations on her first day at the theater touch on this intersection:

‘Das also sind die Menschen’, dachte ich, ‘die hier auf die Welt gekommen sind, die durch die großen Alleen gelaufen sind und in den alten Häusern mit den Einschußlöchern aufgewachsen sind, die sich hier verliebt haben und am Morgen ihre Kinder in den Kindergarten gebracht haben und die jetzt hierhergekommen sind, um sich selbst zu spielen.’

‘So these are the people’, I thought, ‘who were born here, walked across the grand boulevards, and grew up in the old houses damaged by the war, who fell in love here and took their children to the kindergarten in the mornings, and who have now come here to play themselves.’ (81)

I thus read Emine’s work as an actress, her note-taking, and other forms of engagement with the *Volksbühne* as another way of connecting to the active past, co-constructing the *Volksbühne* as a lived space, and participating in the performance of everyday life in the GDR and Berlin—akin to the practice of excavating the past and contributing to the present by inhabiting specific buildings.

The references to acting and the stage are, however, not limited to the *Volksbühne*. The text is littered with theatrical allusions, so that in Bonner’s words, the theater is “auf die Straßen Ostberlins verlängert” (“extended onto the streets of East Berlin”; 268). Prior to working at the *Volksbühne* Emine went to acting school in Istanbul. Before she leaves for Germany, her friend Josef, who coordinates Emine’s

possible to stage performances and host political meetings and discussions aimed at covertly criticizing the regime. Besson’s comment, for instance, that “[im] Westen kann man alles schreiben und sagen, aber das Wort hat dort keine Wirkung” (“in the West you can write and say anything but language has no effect there”; 215) by which he tries to explain to Emine the audience’s comic reaction to Hamlet’s famous phrase “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,” points toward both censorship and revolt. In “Recovering the Past” Bradley further explains the strong political dimension of *Die Bauern (The Farmers)* that remains unnoticed by Emine.

living arrangements in West Berlin, advises her to think of the WG as a “Theaterbühne” (“theater stage”; 48), turning both parts of Berlin into one stage where Emine is at the same time the subject and object of her own narrative and history. Just as Boyer predicts in *The City of Collective Memory*, in which she relates to the city as “the theater of our memory” (31) where “[as] spectators, we travel through the city observing its architecture and constructed spaces, shifting contemporary scenes and reflections from the past until they thicken into a personalized vision” (32), we see Emine as a spectator, actress, walker and storyteller, and as an active participant in and producer of spatiality and history.

As the centerpiece of the novel and the city, the Wall occupies a special position in Emine’s travels through Berlin. Surprisingly, compared to other less historically relevant places, the Wall itself lacks historical depth. It is empty and functional in the novel, and there is no mention of the violence and the numerous deaths associated with the monument that in the GDR was known as “Antifaschistischer Schutzwall” (“Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart”), a barrier to “protect” its people. Instead, Emine fills what urban historian Brian Ladd so fittingly refers to as an “unintentional monument” (11) with her own stories of visa applications, accepted visas, train rides, wall acquaintances, smuggled goods, and flirtatious banter with the guards, thereby subverting the authority of the Wall and its dividing function by turning it into a point of intersections. Emine easily crosses back and forth and by doing so normalizes the Wall, according to her roommate. She talks to people, including the border guards, overhears conversations and, consciously or unconsciously, creates a dialogue between East and West, constantly comparing and pointing out inconsistencies between the two Berlins. Littler describes Emine as “one who has inhabited the border and integrated into her way of being in

Berlin” (“The Fall of the Wall as Nonevent” 60), which I argue makes more sense if we take into consideration walking as an embodied act that physically connects Emine to the city and compensates for the freedom constrained by the wall. The divided city becomes unified on her walks, similar to the Berlin that she can see from the rooftops, the Berlin covered under a layer of snow, or the Berlin seen from the stars of the novel’s title. Mani likens the crossing of the border to instant amnesia that causes Emine to forget West Berlin. But I would argue, in the spirit of Boyer and Benjamin, that the constant crossing results in radical and productive juxtapositions. According to Boyer

Benjamin felt that random historical objects from the past such as the debris to be found in flea markets or discrete historical events ... must be allowed to violently collide with others, so that the present may achieve insight and critical awareness into what once had been. (5)

In this spirit, Emine permits seemingly *random* spatial and temporal stories of East and West Berlin to collide at the Berlin Wall. A modern extension of the *flâneur*, the *flâneuse* becomes a “detective” and an “observer” (Benjamin, *Arcades* 422) of space and is able to see behind the curtain of Cold-War realities and predict the future of unification.

Making up the crux of the novel, the Wall joins the plethora of iconic places such as the *Karl-Marx-Allee* and bookstore, *Rosa-Luxemburg Platz*, Spandau and Stammheim prison, Weimar, Buchenwald, numerous “Kneipen” (“bars”), and other public places and parks, most of which could today be classified as examples of Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, “sites of memory” and substitutes for the lost “real environments of memory” (7) or *milieux de mémoire*.¹²³ For the protagonist, however, these places and memories are part

¹²³ On the basis of Nora’s work, in which he focused on France exclusively, the historians Etienne François and Hagen Schulze edited a similarly ambitious volume for the German context in which they describe most of these sites as *lieux de mémoire*. They also include Goethe, Schiller, and the German Mark, and they could have added the Eastern German currency, the German forest, the *Lindenbaum* (“linden tree”), the

of her lived space. Halbwachs distinguishes between historical, autobiographical, and collective memory, but in the novel the three types of memory considerably overlap. If historical memory “reaches the social actor only through written records and other types of records, such as photography” (Coser 23), in the novel it is represented by the buildings, street names, and other countless objects Emine is confronted with on a daily basis. Autobiographical memory, the “memory of events that we have personally experienced in the past” (24), is present throughout the narrative. Meanwhile collective memory—the active past and a structure of knowledge that forms the basis of a group identity and is buttressed by commemorative symbols, rituals, and representations—is epitomized in the novel by iconic places, literary quotes and plays, and conversation topics symbolic of German culture. Halbwachs further insists that memory is always social and that groups can pass on collective memory and produce memories in individuals that they never experienced themselves. This hypothesis resonates with Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, as well as Pascale R. Bos’s idea of adopted memory, and is clearly visible in the text where Emine is at the same time witness of events and mouthpiece of other stories that she gets to know in conversations, performs on stage, or overhears on the street. Emine is not an outsider to German memory discourses but firmly emplaced within them, lending her voice to the city, to the “*Sprache der Straße*” (“language of the street”; 105). Her observations and conversations are never banal or ordinary but always contain political, historical, and cultural undertones. The protagonist is at all times deeply involved in current events, and it is only in retrospect

Bockwurst (a type of typical German sausage), and German Christmas traditions as well, all of which can be found in Özdamar’s novel.

that we tend to describe the novel as a recuperation of memory, at a time when Emine's notes have themselves become historical records and historical memory.

Emine may not be the intellectual critic, the role Julius assumes or pretends to assume in *Open City*. But unlike Wim Wenders's male angels in his 1987 film *Der Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire)*, another hallmark cultural production *Seltsame Sterne* unmistakably invokes, or Baudelaire's male *flâneur*, Emine is not the disinterested and distant observer that the title of the novel implies and that is so often the focus of scholarship. Rather, Emine is a resident and as such an active participant in the continuing history of the city. Her knowledge of underlying historical circumstances and current events is not as massive as Julius's, but a result of everyday experiences and practices that nonetheless help her think about cultural perspectives and reach critical insights. She wants to learn and get to know her environment better, as evidenced in her conversations with Benno Besson and her roommates; and she compensates for her lack of intellectual engagement by excessive walking and repeatedly claiming the privileged position of the transnational border crosser. Being of Turkish nationality she can easily cross back and forth, blurring the lines between East and West, and between insider and outsider, or foreigner and local. As Bradley notices, "[as] a foreign *Grenzgänger* [border crosser], she is able to adopt the perspectives of her friends in both East and West" ("Recovering the Past" 288); in other words, she is able to reach a critical awareness of her sociopolitical environment that, although subtle, goes far beyond her outward appearance as a mere spectator and her seemingly happy-go-lucky personality. She is firmly embedded in a specific historical and geographical setting where she actively

witnesses and participates in events as they happen and comments on the more immediate past thereby actively contributing to the making of the present.

Julius on the other hand is a self-reflexive and highly perceptive walker who accesses his own past, stories, and memories via the places he encounters in the landscape, thereby also getting to know the historical layers and narratives making up New York City. Looking back in time, Julius renders transparent the processes of forgetting and remembering and how certain narratives are highlighted at the expense of others. This trend is visible in the city that is in itself structured like memory, a palimpsest that is constantly being rewritten, but it is also applicable to Julius's own experiences. Searching for his past and for the line that, as he puts it, will connect him to the part of himself that is already immanent in the texture of the city, his specific identity as Nigerian-German makes him sensitive to the multiethnic make-up of the city as well as the underlying stories of victimization, oppression, and suffering. On his walks he systematically excavates these stories and constructs a sense of belonging that is based on knowledge and critical engagement.

In a combination of Huyssen's *recherche*, a methodical search and studying, and Barthes's *punctum*, a unique interest, Julius is driven by his own motives and desires, and his walks and discoveries connect him to the city as well as to himself. Emine, on the other hand, connects to the city by means of active participation and by being a resident of a present that the reader now perceives of as history. Knowledge and memory are tied to local contexts and these contexts can be known, experienced, voiced, lived, and contested by consciously being in and sensing place. Animation (Barthes) and interanimation (Basso) are theoretical constructs that capture this symbiotic relationship

between places and individuals, and between the city and its residents. Such an understanding of the urban experience goes beyond an assumption of the city as text and the metaphor of reading; it implies a heightened awareness of one's surroundings, a seeing with two eyes, and a "doing [of] the landscape" (Olwig, "Doing Landscape" 87) that involves the whole body. Through walking, and in Emine's case also through dwelling, both protagonists do not just get to know or "read" the city as text but incorporate and produce the city in form of stories, impressions, and feelings encountered in specific places. They know and critically engage with the city thereby creating a reciprocal sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 4

“PARALLEL STREAMS:” INTERWEAVING MULTIPLE PLACES OF BELONGING THROUGH NEW AND OLD MEDIA

On May 13, 2011 NPR aired a story about a man and a woman who met and fell in love because of a typo in an email. Part of the program *StoryCorps*, which collects and disseminates personal stories from around the United States, the broadcast was called “A Typo Spells Romance for RP Salazars” and relayed to listeners the story of Ruben and Rachel Salazar. Today the Salazars are a happily married couple. But they already shared the same last name before they got married, and it is because of this coincidence that on January 10, 2007 Ruben Salazar from Waco, Texas, received an email intended for someone else. Ruben, a “Chicano cyclist-commuter and Community Artist” as he refers to himself in an email exchange reprinted on NPR’s website, then sent a quick message to the person who was supposed to receive the email. Her address was included in the email and from then on Ruben and Rachel Salazar, who is originally from the Philippines but was at that time living in Bangkok, started a vivid email exchange. They would also chat for hours until, finally, Rachel decided to visit Ruben. During that trip Ruben proposed to her and they got married on November 24, 2007.

The January 26, 2013 issue of *The Economist* featured an article about the trafficking of abducted children in China. “A Cruel Trade” is about a Chinese man, Xiao Chaohua, whose son was kidnapped in 2007. As a result of China’s one-child policy, thousands of children are abducted each year, and despite increased government attention

and multiple crackdowns on trafficking rings, the crime remains a serious issue. Taking matters into their own hands, many parents tour the country, like Mr. Chaohua, in cars or minivans covered with posters of their missing children. Recently, however, parents and activists have turned to a different strategy. Through the use of social media, websites, and blogs, they have been able to distribute information and pictures much faster and more widely, putting pressure on police and governments, and making it harder for criminals to remain undetected. Statistics show a decrease in the number of abducted children. Parents are looking up.

Stories like these are neither uncommon nor exceptionally new: people falling in love, parents eager to protect their children, and activists fighting for human rights. Scholars within the field of media studies further claim that the use of media in these and in similar contexts is not new. In *Radical Media*, John Downing cites the photographic cards Sojourner Truth would sell to support herself, thereby creating “something of a national mania in the 1860s” (vi); and Howard Rheingold in *Virtual Reality* even defines prehistoric cave paintings as early practices of creating and disseminating information. From such paintings to the emergence of what Benedict Anderson has called print capitalism, Rheingold claims that the need to communicate and to do so publicly has been central to human existence, and that we can see this in a variety of art forms and media products such as political pamphlets, flyers, or graffiti as well as newspapers, magazines, film, television, and, today, the Internet. What is new, however—in particular with regard to the examples mentioned above—is that although these people engage in seemingly commonplace activities, their use of “new” types of media allows them to communicate and interact much faster in a medium that reaches a larger group of people

and is more readily available than before.¹²⁴ Certainly, there is a possibility that the Salazars could have met without the avenues opened up by email, and that parents and activists in China could have found a different if less effective way to fight against child trafficking. But since the advent of the computer, new technologies of communication have changed how we live our lives and how we think of and interact with the world and with others, “offering potential for doing old things in new ways” (Graham 173). “[Folded] (and manifolded) into the physical as part of our world” (Crampton 11), the Internet and new media, in particular, have become intricately intertwined with our social and professional lives and are no longer a separate entity.

Unquestionably, the Internet as a structure that enables new forms of community, interactivity, and interconnectivity also alters the experience of migration. It affects the everyday lives and identities of migrants. It influences how authors write about migration and how they imagine migrants might connect to their new cultural context, grapple with the separation from the homeland, and stay in touch with those left behind. In this chapter I will look at such new possibilities and technological advances and examine their bearings on the contemporary literature of migration. Nell Freudenberger’s latest novel

¹²⁴ Stories like the ones above permeate our news. Providing a platform for public organizing and dissent, social media like Facebook and online blogs played a major role in the events surrounding the Arab Spring. Residents of Mexico and young people especially have resorted to social media and apps to organize protests against political power, as in the “Yo soy 132” movement, and to fight the drug war (see Guillermo Trejo). They upload photos via their smart phones and provide information about roadblocks, accidents, or gun shots thereby creating an instant messaging system and a virtual map of safe and unsafe places. An article for the *Texas Observer* by Priscila Mosqueda even displayed a picture of such a map generated by Retio, an app for apple devices that allows users to report crime related issues or tweet them @RetioDF. During hurricane Sandy, Twitter users in affected areas kept each other posted about fires and flooding, about which grocery stores and cafés were open, and which areas still had power (Gerry Shih). And finally, in an example from Nigeria where the Internet is not as pervasive as in the rest of the world, but where almost everyone owns a cell phone, aid workers launched a pilot project to combat the distribution of counterfeit malaria medicine (Will Ross). Users can now scratch off the code from their malaria packages and text it to a free phone number to verify whether the medication is genuine. A similar project is under way in Cambodia where malaria workers are handing out free cell phones in peripheral areas to achieve the same goal (Suy Se).

The Newlyweds (2012) tells the story of Amina, a Bangladeshi woman, who meets her American husband via a dating platform and consequently emigrates to the United States to join him. The text includes actual emails—set apart from the main body of the text—and mentions a multiplicity of websites and other online services (BBC News, Google, MSN, Netflix, and above all AsianEuro.com). It further engages a wide range of what could be classified as “old” or traditional types of media such as radio, television, and the telephone (landlines and cell phones), and makes frequent references to popular culture. Enmeshed within this larger framework of media and pop culture is the thematic focus on spatiality and movement, and a question that looms large throughout the novel is how these two aspects of migration are shaped and reshaped by new possibilities of communication and interconnectedness. Examining precisely the interconnections between new, old, and popular media and migration I claim that the novel’s protagonist constructs a dual sense of belonging to the United States and Bangladesh that is on all levels affected by such various types of media. This process mirrors her dual citizenship status and brings the home left behind and the new context closer together than before.

The terms “new media,” “social media,” and “radical media” have been used to describe processes like the ones mentioned above.¹²⁵ While these terms more or less refer to the same phenomena, the adjectives “new,” “social,” and “radical” are able to highlight a variety of different aspects that will be important distinctions for my argument—in this and in my next chapter. “New media,” as Martin Lister et al. in *New Media: A Critical Introduction* contend, signifies a shift in the world of media and communication that started in the late 1980s and continues to produce new technologies on a daily basis. It

¹²⁵ Other terms in use are “alternative media” (Downing), “community media” (Linda K. Fuller), and “citizens’ media” (Clemencia Rodriguez), similarly pointing out the different trajectories of various types of media.

refers to the Internet—as opposed to the previous types of media that, though global, were not yet digital—with all its open-ended possibilities of representation, communication, and interaction such as websites, email, blogs, shopping, games, chat rooms, dating websites, virtual classrooms, file sharing as well as photo and video sharing (Flickr, Instagram, Youtube etc.), wikis, apps, and finally online communities and professional networks such as MySpace, Friendster, Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. In particular these social networking services are often referred to as “social media” or Web 2.0, and represent a new dimension of what media scholar Henry Jenkins has labeled “participatory culture” (*Participatory Culture*), offering new possibilities of online affiliations, expressions, communities, and means of circulation. Downing, finally, coins the term “radical media” to refer to instances when media—and here he includes old media as well, such as newspapers, fanzines, or cartoons—are used to spread democracy, “to express opposition” and to “build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure” (xi).

In addition to the services and possibilities provided by the web, there are myriad technical devices that allow access to them. People use desktop computers, laptops, tablets, smart phones, game consoles, and other digital media receivers such as Apple TV to stream digital content, resulting in a collision of the boundaries between old and new media or what Jenkins refers to as a convergence of technologies and “convergence culture” (*Convergence Culture*). Today the use of media has become an embodied experience and a technological extension of the self. Scholars of media, geography, and the newly emerging field of media geography thus speak of “locative media” and “mediated localities” to describe how these new media are carried on the body and used

to locate and track bodies, in addition to how we get to know, perceive, and experience places via new media.¹²⁶ Because of the temporal constraints of the novel Freudenberg cannot yet include a lot of such newer devices. But the novel does call attention to the ways in which old and new media up until the mid-2000s locate or anchor people in their real worlds. As Paul C. Adams in *Geographies of Media and Communication: A Critical Introduction* further notes, discourses about the beginnings of the Internet “adopted one of two perspectives: euphoric and apocalyptic” (110). The latter entailed the perspective that the world wide web and its virtual reality would lead to alienation and a postmodern sense of placelessness producing merely the effects of reality or, in Baudrillard’s words, a simulation or hyperreality. Today, however, writers are returning to more optimistic views theorizing the Internet as a means for re-emplacement, co-constitutive with a generation of users that is newly aware of location and locality.

Lister et al. further identify four “wider kinds of social, economic, and cultural change with which new media are associated” (10): a shift from modernity to postmodernity, a shift from the industrial age to a post-industrial information age, intensifying processes of globalization, and a concomitant decentering of a previously established geopolitical order. Specifically, they insist that new media are both cause and effect of these permutations of our larger reality so that they are often understood as synonymous with these phenomena. Adams and Barney Warf point out another set of characteristics that distinguish new media (e.g. emails) from old media (e.g. letters),

¹²⁶ See for instance Greg Elmer’s, Michael Salmond’s, and Tristan Thielmann’s contributions to the online magazine *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography*. All three of them use the terms “locative media” and “mediated localities” calling attention to the interdependence between media and locality.

which they label multidirectional interactivity, instantaneity, and transnationalism.¹²⁷

New media are thus global and transnational, but, as the examples above show, they are also used in very unique and local ways. People around the globe can connect to and communicate with each other, but they are embedded in specific local contexts from which they access these technologies, using the Internet to facilitate physical meetings, discuss local topics, access local services, and respond to local events.¹²⁸

Nell Freudenberger is not a strictly speaking migrant writer. Born in 1975 in New York, Freudenberger, a Harvard graduate, has traveled extensively all over Asia, and her travel writings and pieces of fiction have been published in *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, *Salon*, and various other high-profile magazines. Before *The Newlyweds* she published a collection of short stories, *Lucky Girls*, in 2003, and her debut novel *The Dissident* in 2006. Both of these focus to a large extent on Asia and South Asia. In 2007 *Granta* named her one of the Best of Young American Novelists. She was included in *The New Yorker*'s "20 under 40" fiction issue in the summer of 2010, along with other rising stars, such as Junot Díaz, Jonathan Safran Foer, Téa Obreht, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Freudenberger holds a PEN/Malamud Award and a Whiting Writers' Award and is a recipient of a 2010 Guggenheim fellowship.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Adams establishes these criteria early on in an article co-authored with Warf titled "Cyberspace and Geographical Space," and introduction to the 1997 topic issue of *Geographical Review* entitled *Cyberspace and Geographical Space*.

¹²⁸ Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.) even further enhance the feeling of a global or transnational interconnectedness, much more so than the standard email conversations. In the novel—set between 2004 and 2006—these newer networking services are absent but I will discuss such services, and Twitter in particular, in my next chapter.

¹²⁹ See Shivani Vora's conversation with Freudenberger for *The New York Times*'s India blog and Mohsin Hamed's review of her novel also for *The New York Times* for further biographical information on Freudenberger and a more detailed summary of her novel.

That Freudenberg was born and raised in the United States does not disqualify her from being discussed alongside the more traditionally defined migrant writers included in this dissertation. On the contrary, as I pointed out in my introduction, I deliberately have chosen Leslie Adelson's term "literature of migration" as an elastic category that can include writers from various backgrounds, first- or second-generation migrants as well as non-migrants, as long as their works thematize the experience of migration. Moreover, as Rey Chow notes, migrant writers and their migrant protagonists often run the risk of being defined as the "native informant"—a term from ethnography and famously deployed by Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. This marks them as marginal and other and bestows them with a cultural authority and an "(im)possible perspective" (Spivak 49) that is rather problematic. Spivak, in fact, reappropriates this term and assigns the native informant a privileged position. But my concern here is not with a critical analysis of who is able to speak from the position of the migrant and the problems inherent in or working against such positions. I am reading the texts discussed here for how they imagine individual experiences of migration. I chose these texts because they imagine radically new ways for migrants to connect to their new environments and offer new visions of the interconnections between migration, migrant identities, and spatiality. Some of these texts are more self-aware of such topics. They represent or challenge traditional ideas of migration and offer a central critique of and/or first-hand insights into such experiences that might be read for generations to come. Others are more playful and perhaps short-lived. Freudenberg's novel may never become a canonical work within this field. Yet as Freudenberg has stated many times in interviews, she has always had a genuine interest in South Asia. Most of her texts focus

on individuals living in Asia or in the Asian diaspora.¹³⁰ She may not be a “native” but she is familiar with those geographical regions, and she is also aware of and tries to challenge the problems arising out of her position as an American writer.¹³¹ Because of this position, the novel offers a viewpoint—often synonymous with the perspective of the husband—from which it can portray the United States and mainstream American culture more accurately, and therefore provides a complement to the literary texts discussed previously.

The Newlyweds is easily summarized in a few sentences. Amina, a 24-year old Bangladeshi woman, single and an only child, who is living with her parents in Dhaka, meets George, an older American from Rochester, New York, via a dating website. They first message each other in 2004, soon proceed to private emails, and meet eleven months later when George comes to visit Amina in Bangladesh. As expected, they get along well, the parents approve, and the marriage is settled. Amina leaves her native country behind to live with George in Rochester. They start the Green Card application process and after two eventful years during which Amina will take up two different jobs, start community college, make a few friends, adjust to American culture, and eventually discover an affair

¹³⁰ Freudenberger’s first short story, “Lucky Girls,” published in *The New Yorker* in 2001, was inspired by one of her trips to India, and *The Newlyweds* is equally, though very loosely, based upon a true story. En route to Rochester to attend her grandmother’s funeral, Freudenberger happened to sit next to a woman from Bangladesh who relayed that she had met her American husband through a marriage website. After the plane had arrived they exchanged email addresses and Farah kept the author posted about her experiences and first impressions of Rochester. A year later they traveled to Bangladesh together and Freudenberger began working on her novel. Freudenberger discusses these real-world underpinnings of her novel in an interview with Lori Fradkin for the *Huffington Post*.

¹³¹ Perhaps one positive effect brought to light by the Rushdie affair is that it has driven home the necessity for a more careful and “non-literal” reading of literary texts. A similar issue came up in my discussion of Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*—discussed in Chapter 1. The novel was met with harsh criticism and outrage by the Muslim community in London that felt misrepresented by the text. Rushdie came to Ali’s defense precisely on the grounds of her artistic freedom, a freedom that again needs to be considered with respect to all the potential problems and constraints inherent in the term, but that should also be granted for a writer like Freudenberger.

that her husband had tried to keep a secret, Amina passes her citizenship exam and travels back to Bangladesh to arrange for her parents' relocation to America. The structure of the novel is akin to the structure of a bildungsroman in that the novel chronicles these developments and is divided into four sections that represent different stages in Amina's life. "An Arranged Marriage" describes how George and Amina meet and the first months of their marriage; "ESL" tells of Amina's struggles to balance a part-time job, college, and the problems they go through as a couple, ending with Amina obtaining her citizenship status in "Citizens" and finally, "A Proposal" records Amina's journey back to Bangladesh, the temptation of her childhood love, and the return to the United States with her parents.

Like the other literary texts included in this analysis, *The Newlyweds* thematizes spatiality and movement. Freudenberger's novel differs, however, first in that it is set in both the new and the old cultural context and second in that it focuses heavily on media, communication, and interconnectedness. These are two pivotal elements that bring the destination and the home left behind—the local and the global—closer together than in the previous texts. On the very first page of the novel, Amina orders a mailbox, a "heavy-duty rural model, in glossy black, for \$90" (3) from mailboxes.com, a strategic setup through which Freudenberger foreshadows the central theme of the novel and delicately juxtaposes old and new means of communication, the physical mailbox and the virtual world of the Internet. Throughout the novel, media will play a major role in George's and Amina's life. It saturates every facet of their day-to-day activities—they meet through an online dating platform, George's father used to work for Kodak, Amina's cousin is a website designer, and Amina herself will work for MediaWorks, just to name a few

instances—and will be used to point out the connections between the real and the virtual world, and the dual tendency toward localizing and globalizing effects.

Already in his 1996 *Modernity at Large* Arjun Appadurai projected that new means of electronic communication were about to “transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (3). For Appadurai, media and migration, both of which are co-constitutive with deterritorialization, are the driving forces of this stage of late capitalism. People are constantly on the move but, as opposed to previous forms of migration, the world, too, is in flux, and “the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media” (54), circumstances that not only affect individual subjectivities but also larger communities and neighborhoods. Amina’s life in Bangladesh, too, is infused by dreams from elsewhere. “[Ever] since she was a little girl, she had loved everything foreign” (25-26), a childhood fascination with the exotic other that is however not solely fueled by her Anglophone education and the remnants of British rule in the former colony. Rather, Amina is attracted to the United States and imagines a world in which she will leave Dhaka behind to live the American dream, a “social practice” (Appadurai 31) that significantly informs her everyday life.¹³² After she has to leave Maple Leaf International, a prestigious British school in Dhakha, for financial reasons, Amina studies for her O-levels on her own and once she passes she and her parents start looking into American universities. They regularly listen to the Voice of America, “a broadcast in Special English” (25), and tune in to the PBS show “This is

¹³² In his introduction Appadurai, too, refers to “the American bug” (2) that had bit him, launching him on a journey that would ultimately take him to the United States.

America.” Amina further mentions that she watches American television shows such as *Dallas*, *L.A. Law* and *The Fall Guy*, all of which bring America closer to her and fellow Bangladeshi viewers. When the family has to face the fact that Amina will not get a scholarship and will therefore not be able to afford the tuition for an American college, her mother voices the obvious conclusion: “Of course, the easiest way to come to America is to find an American and get married!” (25).

Enthralled by the effects of what is commonly described as Americanization, the “[process] by which American culture replaces a local culture” (Dittmer 134), Amina turns toward the Internet and the website AsianEuro.com where she meets George, her future husband. Via online communication she meticulously absorbs every detail about American culture and her potential future life in Rochester, as every email inevitably contains traces of George’s locale. From him she learns, for instance, about the existence of an animal called a “hamster” (10) and picks up certain American perceptions and colloquialisms. Yet the actual use of the computer and the newness and excitement of online courtship also reinforces already existing social bonds in her real world. Amina uses the computer not only at the British Council but also at her female cousin Ghaniyah’s and at one of her wealthy student’s houses—Amina is an English tutor—where the girls share Amina’s fantasies and have “a lot of fun, looking through the ‘male gallery’ after the lessons were finished” (11). Similarly, Amina and her mother are a “team, discussing every new development” (27) with George, and together Ghaniyah and Amina skim through the Indian women’s magazine *Femina* to giggle at an article about honeymoons and newlyweds. Furthermore, the prospect of going to America is not only attractive to Amina. The novel describes most Bangladeshis as dreaming of a better life

elsewhere, desiring, above all, an American education, and Amina, too, thrives on this collective sentiment which connects her to the imagined community of the nation.¹³³

The novel's AsianEuro.com is entirely fictitious. Typing AsianEuro.com into the search bar, however, redirects to a site called asiandating.com, and given the information used in the novel, there is reason to believe that Freudenberger used this site as a template or that the site may even be the actual follow-up for a discontinued AsianEuro.com. Like the site described in the text, it is free to sign up—Kim will later admit that this was the reason why she and George chose this service rather than any other site—and after initial registration the new user is asked to enter some basic information to “tell the men a little about you.” The basic details are grouped into three categories: appearance, lifestyle, and background/cultural values, and among other subcategories the consumers are asked to specify their hair color, eye color, ethnicity; how they consider their appearance; occupation and willingness to relocate; whether they drink, smoke, or have children; nationality, religion, education; and so forth. At the bottom of the page users can choose a profile heading and in their own words, limited to 50 characters, indicate what they are looking for in a partner, as well as tell the prospective partner a little about themselves. This is how Amina could tell immediately that George was “a thirty-four-year-old SWM who was looking for a wife” (4). Amina will later describe the information she had to enter as being of a “primitive nature. . . . *Name, age, languages spoken, physical appearance, hobbies, and interests*” (186, italics in orig.). But it served its purpose of attracting George and succeeded in arranging a marriage.

¹³³ The propensity for Bangladeshis to dream of a better life in the United States, in addition to the Westernized or Americanized ways of how Amina portrays herself online, talks with ease about the relationship with George, and deliberately seeks to immigrate to the United States must, however, be considered carefully. This might well be an American and biased vision of what Amina's family and her close relatives seem to want that ought not to be seen as speaking for all Bangladeshis.

Eric Freedman in his analysis of cyberdating describes this practice as a form of personal advertising. Users create an online persona or a “network(ed) self” (182) that is aimed at the “self-representation of everyday life” (178). One central aspect of this practice is the use of personal photographs, and Amina also takes a picture of herself and scans it in. It was her mother who had insisted “that Amina take off her glasses and wear a red sari she had inherited from her cousin Ghaniyah in the photograph” (12), but she subsequently prohibits her from posting it online. Yet while Amina had up until now been listening to her mother and given in to her conditions that the man could not be divorced, not have children, not drink alcohol, and had to have a dependable job and a bachelor’s degree, online dating presents itself as a potentially subversive space. The reader does not know if Amina tells her mother that George “liked to have a Heineken beer while he was watching football” (14), and it also remains opaque whether Amina admits that she did exchange the photograph with George after all, albeit via private emails and not on the site. In return, George, too, sends her a picture of himself and eventually a picture of the house they are going to live in, enabling Amina to create a place-image of where she is going to spend her future life.

While Amina’s marriage plans are thus an occasion for female bonding and emplace her within her social environment, the improving relationship with George and the practice of crafting a new online personality also cause Amina to slowly extract herself from the grips of her cultural responsibilities. In his early study of “cyberspace” Crampton identifies confession and resistance as two basic characteristics of online communities and communication, and in the same vein Amina consciously or unconsciously resignifies her correspondence with George into an outlet for her thoughts

and for a part of her identity that she cannot perform in her everyday life in Dhaka. Her mother warns her to be careful but “once she got started writing it was difficult to stop” and as she tells George intimate details about her childhood “[sometimes] she got so involved in remembering what had happened that she forgot the reader on the other end” (10). She also feels relieved “to have someone to confide in, someone she could trust not to gossip” (10) and surrenders to a new kind of freedom that eschews the cultural norms and traditional forms of dating prescribed by Bangladeshi society. Jenkins further lists “peer-to-peer learning” and “a more empowered conception of citizenship” (*Participatory Culture* xii) among the benefits of the new global media culture, and it seems that the email conversations afford Amina with both a sense of agency and of being a citizen of the world. Enmeshing the local and the global, to George she conveys a sense of herself and her country while at the same time she is exposed and susceptible to new Americanized or global ideas. On the flipside, her openness, naiveté, and trust in online communication may lend George an unfair advantage. Defying the father’s hunch about “the unreliability of computerized matchmaking” (13), Amina is happy to resume correspondence even after a ten-week hiatus on George’s side, unable to imagine what George might be going through in his reality and unaware that perhaps George too might be guided by dreams about elsewhere, indulging in a “colonial fantasy” that is actually quite similar to Amina’s fascination with the United States.¹³⁴

What this early correspondence also shows is that the technologies George and Amina rely on are socially and spatially constructed and reflect the needs, wishes, and

¹³⁴ Susanne Zantop coined the expression “colonial fantasy” in her 1997 *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*, to describe a colonialist subjectivity that rests precisely on the non-existence or short-lived existence of colonies and is therefore a desire for colonial possessions resulting in ersatz fantasies about the colonial other.

possibilities of each society. In this sense, as Graham argues, technologies “can even be used to represent the very nature of society itself” (167). In Amina’s Bangladesh not yet every household has a computer and access to the Internet at one’s own home is still considered a privilege and reserved for elites. Old media like television, radio, and cell phones prevail whereas George’s America is already on the verge of Web 2.0. Later in the novel, this “digital divide” will also be evident in the distribution of landlines in the United States versus the prevalence of cell phones in Bangladesh.¹³⁵ While promising more democracy and political participation for the average citizen, the services connected with the so-called “digital revolution” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 6) are unevenly distributed. Nevertheless both George and Amina benefit from the enhanced interactivity, relative instantaneity, and transnational accessibility, even if Amina has to go out of her way to use a computer. They both count on AsianEuro.com as a service that brings people closer together, connects the real and the virtual world, and potentially changes real lives. Via email they get to know each other and to interweave their two locales—the quiet suburban atmosphere of Pittsford and the bustling neighborhood of Mohammadpur, a district in Dhaka—as well as their individual lives and those of their families in a globe-spanning process that Appadurai has called “neighborliness” (29), a closeness with others in spite of the distance. As Doreen Massey’s model of a progressive sense of place would predict, Dhakha and Rochester, Mohammadpur and Pittsford, enter into a mutually constitutive relationship with each other. These individual places are not self-contained or bounded but become points of intersections that inform Amina’s and George’s lives.

¹³⁵ Adams, Adams and Warf, Crampton, Jenkins and others use the term “digital divide” to describe the uneven spatial distribution of new technologies. See also M. Christine Boyer’s 1996 *CyberCities*.

Amina has thus already established a sense of belonging to George—his family, his culture, and his locale—before she leaves for the United States. Her departure was well-planned. Nasir, her cousin, had even written down the name and Internet address of a local Muslim institution, the Islamic Center of Rochester, and Amina had done her own research about her future life. Upon arrival, however, she has to learn that there is a difference between the information conveyed by the media, by pictures, stories, and other types of representation, and the actual lived space and the impressions, emotions, and practices characteristic of lived experience. She could, for instance, not imagine “the kind of cold that got in through your mouth and your ears and freezes your insides” (86), or the different kinds of clothes she would wear. Cultural specifics like the thugs who smash their mailbox on the very first day after her arrival, George’s aunt Cathy who runs a company that washes dogs, and the fact that George’s adopted cousin Kim hardly speaks with her mother and that parents do not usually live with their children when they are old, are hard to grasp. So is the use of sarcasm. And yet Amina is determined to take it well. She is excited about the newness of everything but also has to realize that she had to see and experience these facets of daily life in Rochester for herself and with her whole body in order to fully understand what her new lived environment would be like.

The novel represents Rochester as—like Bangladesh—a globally connected and yet decisively local place representative of the new global ethnoscares and the “lived relationships between imagined lives and the webs of cosmopolitanism within which they unfold” (Appadurai 64). Close reading, however, shows that the elements that produce this sense of cosmopolitanism are largely stereotypical, unable to decenter but instead perpetuating a certain kind of geopolitical order. George’s aunt employs workers from

Cuba—perhaps even undocumented; a colleague is married to a woman from the Philippines; and George himself has visited Mexico on a college trip and has been to 45 out of 50 states, an obsession to which the refrigerator bears visible testimony as it is covered with magnets from each state. The first bra Amina buys is from the Gap but made in Bangladesh. Later in the novel Amina will accept a job with Starbucks, an international corporation. One place that does stand out as offering a more genuine and heterogeneous example of globalization and cosmopolitanism is Monroe Community College. Here Amina feels like “having the whole world in one room” (103) with her fellow students and teacher being from or having traveled to different countries all over the world, deterritorialized and yet interconnected in the classroom and via Amina. Most peculiar, however, is George’s cousin Kim who, at the time of Amina’s arrival, is in Costa Rica for a yoga certificate. When they meet for the first time Amina is amazed to notice that Kim is wearing Indian attire and even offers her Tulsi tea, a South Asian delicacy. Later Kim takes Amina to the Indian market where they sell traditional South Asian groceries as well as the latest Hindi movies, the titles of which she recognizes but, as she declares, “George’s interest in her part of the world didn’t extend to its cinema, and so she resisted the temptation” (120).¹³⁶ This statement, in particular, underscores how the text deliberately highlights certain cultural clichés and presuppositions—about the United States and Bangladesh—and voices a subtle critique especially of George’s position on issues pertaining to nationality, ethnicity, gender, and cultural differences.

¹³⁶ The Indian market represents an instance of what Appadurai calls “diasporic public spheres” (4), the accessibility and consumption of products from one’s native context that Appadurai envisages as facilitated by mass-mediated images. Here the Hindi movies would be such an example while the market itself is a more traditional example of a diasporic sphere.

Reflecting Amina's absorption of American culture via television, radio, and the Internet while still in Dhaka, Amina's new locality is mediated by popular culture and technology. They celebrate the bridal shower at Great Northern Pizza Kitchen and the wedding at Il Giorgiore's Trattoria in Brighton. They drive a Honda and go to Starbucks, to the mall, Bed Bath & Beyond, or Home Depot. Amina's first job is at MediaWorks, a store that sells "Books and CDs and all types of media" (60) as she proudly tells her father. George is a Dallas Cowboys fan, also known as "America's team," and his mother recommends Amina read *The Secret Life of Bees*.¹³⁷ Amina may not be concerned with the greater political or economic dimensions of this context. Details about the political situation in the United States, flashbacks to 9/11, or news about the conflict in Kosovo are merely mentioned in passing but, like the cultural references, situate the novel within an authentic spatial, temporal, and cultural setting, and place Amina's and George's local proceedings alongside broader global events that are monitored not only in the United States but also in Bangladesh, as Nasir's emails show. Amina does, however, read the headlines at MSN, Microsoft's portal that offers news, the weather, sports, and entertainment, and she watches television shows and movies. She reads books, engages with George and his family, talks to neighbors, and explores her neighborhood—seemingly banal activities that help her get a sense of her new cultural environment. George describes Amina's pastime activities, above all her interest in romantic comedies, as "cultural acclimatization" (55). Amina does not just passively consume these new

¹³⁷ In a recent article for *The New Yorker* titled "Southern Discomfort" George Packer unpacks the cultural DNA of what he calls "real America," part of which are the Dallas Cowboys. That George is a fan of the Dallas Cowboys—a team that has more fans throughout the country than any other team—and not of the local team, attests to the national and global tendencies of cultural phenomena as well as to George's mainstream sensibility, a character trait that keeps resurfacing and that the novel exposes through subtle irony.

cultural products, but uses the television shows, commercials, websites, stores, and other cultural entities as tools to make meaning of her surroundings and make connections.

Watching her neighbor with a stroller reminds her of a commercial “in which real people were eating in a cartoon house” (7) and the romantic comedies permit a glimpse into other American lives and circumstances, although she is quick to admit that, not unlike her relocation to the United States, “it was always different in real life” (55).

The global and local elements are thus intricately intertwined and interdependent. Together they constitute what Appadurai refers to as a “context . . . of what a neighborhood is produced from, against, in spite of, and in relation to” (184). They represent the complex networks of economic, political, social, and cultural relations intersecting in place that determine Amina’s lived space, locality, or, to use Massey’s words, “throwntogetherness.” Against the bleak perspective of a postmodern sense of placelessness and an estrangement from the real world, in the novel Rochester, Dhaka, and individual places within these larger spaces, such as George’s and Amina’s house and neighborhood, Kim’s apartment, or MediaWorks, emerge as very specific individual places that derive their meaning precisely from their relationship to other places and their positioning within Amina’s personal topography of migration. Amina’s neighborhood or lived space is culturally, technologically, as well as materially, socially, and emotionally constructed. Amina responds to her new locale, the buildings, streets, cars, the clean and modern airport, or the grocery stores, in bodily and affective terms. She is fascinated by the first snow, excited about the mollifying down comforter, and, after initial skepticism, enraptured by the field of corn at the end of their cul-de-sac “which reminded her of Haibatpur, her grandmother’s village” (8). She has a favorite house at the end of the

street, and she grows particularly fond of the red cardinal that starts coming to their yard and which in the form of a Christmas ornament she will give to Nasir when she returns to Bangladesh, a symbolic transnational transaction. She chats with the neighbors and with her colleagues and classmates, and takes the local bus—small steps that help her get to know and connect to her neighborhood on a cognitive as well as an affective level.

Together with George, Amina soon establishes a routine. They get up around the same time every day, eat breakfast together before they both go to work or Amina goes to school; they watch television at night, and go to George's mother's house for Sunday dinners. According to Appadurai

existing places and spaces, within a historically produced spatiotemporal neighborhood and with a series of localized rituals, social categories, expert practitioners, and informed audiences, are required in order for new members . . . to be made temporary or permanent local subjects. (185)

Such localized categories, as well as the locative media, both of which I have described above, produce a specific mediated locality and endow Amina with a sense of place and access to a collective imaginary that helps her construct an identity that is compatible with her new environment. Visible manifestations of this process are her Permanent Resident Card and finally her United States passport, products of, while at the same time producing and altering, her locale.

In line with Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities, the processes described above emplace Amina in an imagined relationship with the rest of the nation. The novel does not mention close friendships. But Amina now inhabits the same time zone as other Americans, consumes the same cultural products, is granted certain legal rights, and eventually becomes a citizen. The plural of the third section heading, "Citizens" (159), rather than "citizen" in the singular, could accordingly be read as

referring to all American citizens instead of Amina's citizenship status alone, and therefore symbolically embeds her within the imagined community of the nation. Yet many of the cultural products that comprise Amina's new locality also have a global trajectory, assuming a transnational or postnational dimension interlinked with processes of Americanization, globalization, and internationalization. In their 1991 *Spaces of Identity*, David Morley and Kevin Robins envisage what they call "reimagined communities" (26) in an age of new global media landscapes (or media- and technoscapes to use Appadurai's terms) where "emergent transformations in the accumulation and in the spatial disposition of cultural forms, do open up some new possibilities for reimagined solidarities" (41). The novel's usage of international companies, specific websites, and online services, such as Starbucks, Google, and Netflix are some of the most prominent examples of such trends. It must be noted, however, that the reason why the text relies heavily on these highly popular and successful cultural brands and not on others is because of George's uncritical mainstream sensibility and his personal preferences. George's attitude encourages Amina to assume a similar outlook and opposed to online dating—which emerged as a subversive practice and an example of alternative media—the cultural products consumed once in the United States reinforce rather than challenge traditional power structures. In describing such products and attitudes the novel assumes an ironic tone which is aimed at a critique of precisely such homogeneous mainstream expressions of globalization that are represented as the dominant cultural currency.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ In fact, Kim is the only character in the novel who could potentially offer an alternative perspective and alternative options to mainstream media, corporate culture, and consumer goods, that could dismantle the image of American society represented by George. But Kim and Amina never get close enough for Amina to really get to know a different side of American culture. Needless to say that Kim's obsession with Indian

The mentality put forward in the novel further invites an assumption that if Amina’s parents were more technologically savvy or if Amina had stayed in touch with her younger friends and cousins, in particular those living in urban areas, they could easily consume some of the same expressions of an Americanized global culture—if that was what they desired. On the other side, if Amina genuinely wanted to—and if George were more encouraging—she, too, could order the latest movies from her country via Netflix, if available, or purchase them, as well as other fashion items, at the Indian market or offline. Instead of just checking the latest updates about storms and cyclones, Amina could get an online subscription to the larger Bangladeshi newspapers or magazines if she deemed it necessary. In fact, the reader does not know how much Amina follows the news from home. The only example that confirms that she does keep up is the website created by her cousin’s brother. An expression of Appadurai’s “diasporic public sphere[.]” (4) the site displays 1,678 photographs of Ghaniyah’s wedding ceremony. “Amina had already heard the details about the food, her cousin’s various saris, and the yellow-and-gold bedroom set” (83), and is eager to fill in this information with actual pictures, yoking the faraway events in Bangladesh with her living room in Rochester.

Because of the global interconnectedness facilitated by various types of media, Amina’s parents, and unintentionally also her cousin Nasir, are able to follow up with news about Rochester and relate, at least to some extent, to Amina’s circumstances. Since the novel is set before the advent of Skype and video calling—and also a result of her parents not owning a personal computer—Amina talks to her parents on the phone. The

or South Asian culture and therefore with Amina, is also highly problematic and uncritical, assuming an almost antithetical position to George’s vision of the United States.

parents do, however, have sporadic access to the Internet. They check the weather on BBC, and her mother positively surprises Amina when she starts spending hours at the Easynet Cyber Café where she peruses British and American websites and magazines like the *Daily Star* but also ‘Trenz,’ apparently a column about fashion and new trends in Bangladesh. To Amina’s amazement her mother is quite skillful at navigating the sites.

[She] knew how to get to the Life Style page, with its features on ‘hot new restaurants’ and ‘splashy summer sandals,’ its recipes for French toast and beef bourguignonne, and its decorating tips (‘How about painting one wall of your living room a vibrant spring color?’) (24)

The parents take part in Amina’s life, keep up with her and George, and even start living vicariously through their daughter. Eventually they inform her that they will move back to the village to live with the grandmother, and Amina realizes that her parents’ dream of living life elsewhere has completely replaced their aspirations for making a decent life in Bangladesh. Encouraged by the ease of communication, they have set all their hopes on Amina getting her citizenship and then arranging for them to come join her in the United States.

Amina’s experience of migration is thus massively different from that of a Mrs. Sen or a Nazneen from *Brick Lane*. Granted that she has to go through a lot of processes that are to some degree identical for most migrants, such as the initial realization that the language she learned at school differs from its actual usage, the different tastes in food and clothing, the weather, and that certain practices she had seen on television are quite different in real life. But opposed to the wearisome letter writing of Mrs. Sen and Nazneen, often waiting for weeks or even months for a response from the loved ones, Amina talks to her parents on a daily basis, often several times a day. George takes it from a website—most of his “facts” stem from the Internet—that “[the] first two years

are the hardest” (133) to adjust, and the conversations with the parents provide comfort and company. On the phone, Dhaka, or more precisely Mohammadpur, Amina’s old neighborhood, is astoundingly close, as is evident in this passage:

Her father paused so long that she would have thought the call had been dropped, except that she could still hear the sound of hammering on the other end. It was morning in Mohammadpur: the sun behind the haze, the kids walking to school in twos and threes, the crows on the telephone wires, and the call of the vendors—Chilis! Eggs! Excellent Quality Feather Brooms!—or her favorite, the man who took your plastic jugs and gave sweet potatoes in exchange. Once again she had the disorienting feeling that her past was still happening, unfolding in a parallel stream right alongside her present. Only on the telephone did the stream ever cross. At the other end of the line, another Amina was hiding her head under the covers, stealing just a few more minutes before the cacophony outside forced her to put two feet on the cold, tiled floor. (42)

This quote is revealing in many ways. How Amina pictures her old neighborhood, replete with the sounds, smells, tastes, looks, and touch, shows once again that the hometown and the houses we once inhabited are embodied and imprinted in our memories. Amina can picture and even feel in minute detail what it would be like to wake up in Mohammadpur on a morning like this, anticipating the physical sensation of her feet on the cold floor.

Yet there is something new and different about Amina’s situation in this regard when compared to that of Nazneen or Mrs. Sen. Amina’s description of the street above, as well as the accounts of her childhood or other events in Bangladesh, are vivid and emotional but they lack the sense of unbearable loss, longing, or nostalgia that often accompanies stories of leaving. The novel mentions that Amina is homesick but those moments are scarce, and while the reader knows of Amina’s difficulties of coping, the text creates the illusion that Dhaka and Rochester are very close. This is reinforced by the websites Amina visits, for instance to view the pictures of her cousin’s wedding, the

emails she receives, and above all the conversations on the phone, all of which seem to produce a new form of community and connectedness that also changes the workings of memory, forgetting, or nostalgia. The telephone connection above conveys an immediate sense of Bangladesh and of her old life, what Amina refers to as a “parallel stream,” that is similar to the interactive, instantaneous, and transnational characteristics of online communication.¹³⁹ When she closes her eyes the exchange creates an impression of closeness and everyday life halfway around the world that she does not have to recall from the depths of her memory but is right there, instantaneously. On the flipside, this effect also makes explicit the harsh gap between relative and absolute distance and the realities of separation, perhaps one of the reasons why Amina sometimes believes that she is made up of two potentially separate identities, one located in Rochester, the other one continuing life in Bangladesh.

When Amina and George are not at home, the parents can leave messages on the answering machine which creates an even greater sense of availability than is possible in actual face-to-face interactions. It is also cheaper to make calls from Bangladesh via cell phone and phone cards than from the American landline, and the parents take advantage of this difference. The novel, however, complicates the idea of constant availability and interconnectedness. Despite the comforting sense of nearness, there comes a time when the constant presence of the parents turns from comforting into irritating, and when instead of anticipating their phone calls, Amina starts dreading them. Several reasons present themselves for this change in attitude. One of them is that Amina’s cultural immersion causes her to alter or adjust her perspective. Judging from Amina’s stories of

¹³⁹ I have shown this effect in previous chapters, in particular in my discussion of Özdamar’s novel (Chapter 3) and short story (Chapter 2). In the first case daily life in Berlin reminds Emine of Istanbul whereas in the second example I have described the telephone as a representation of radical simultaneity.

her childhood and adolescence, her parents have always been to some extent quirky and eccentric, but it is only now, in the safe distance and with the passing of time, that Amina starts to view the parents' behavior as illogical. Another reason for Amina's withdrawal is the social pressure imposed by her parents—the pressure to succeed and to arrange for them to join her—high expectations that are more palpable in daily conversations on the phone than in letters that take days or weeks to arrive.

Amina, miles away, cringes at the thought of the expectations she may not be able to meet, especially after she is laid off from her first job. But another part of her also recoils from her own flaws and carelessness. Her newfound freedom and personal liberties are incompatible with her parents' cultural beliefs. She had kept quiet about the premarital sex with her husband, and she also did not have the heart to confess that she and George had not, after all, had their wedding ceremony at a mosque. Amina had from the beginning resisted Nasir's suggestion of contacting the Islamic Center of Rochester, and they had only halfheartedly tried to reach out to other institutions. Despite the distance, Amina feels uneasy, for there is a tangible divergence between the life she pretends to live and her actual life, which confirms that enhanced means of interconnectedness can produce comforting closeness but also novel forms of separation. Another instance of doing old things in new ways, the novelty here lies not in the generational and cultural differences between Amina and her parents but in the perceived surveillance brought about by old and new media.

A concomitant effect of Amina's relocation from her homeland, the separation from her parents, and the inclusion in a society that is based on drastically different cultural values than her own, is that Amina often tends to view herself as having two

separate identities. Part of this stems from practical reasons. There is no private room at MediaWorks where she could pray, and she would feel embarrassed if she had to spread out her prayer mat in the middle of the stock room. It would also be unthinkable that she request not to be left alone in the same room with a man who is not her husband, a situation she faces every day with her co-worker. On top of this, Amina is distressed because she had not been honest with her parents about her marriage, her wedding ceremony, and other facts about her new life that, as banal as they may seem for other Americans, she fears might be shocking and disappointing for her family, as well as for her old self.

Yet for Amina, because

those things were unthinkable, there was a way in which they hadn't happened: they had happened only to her American self, a person about whom her Bangladeshi self was blissfully unaware. She asked forgiveness for these errors in her prayers, but if she failed to mention them to her parents, she didn't feel she was committing further sins. (96-97)

This split is also manifest on a linguistic level. In the section titled "ESL" (101), Amina indicates that she feels older and more mature in English, and she recalls that as a teenager she would think that there was "a person who existed beneath languages. . . . a deep part of herself" (105) that exists beyond signification. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha speaks of a similar effect when he theorizes "incommensurability in the midst of the everyday" (161), a sense of cultural difference that "faces us with a disposition of knowledges or a distribution of practices that exist beside each other, *abseits*, designating a form of social contradiction or antagonism that has to be negotiated rather than sublated" (162).

Working toward a dual sense of belonging, the feeling of incommensurability illustrates how Amina identifies with several variations of American and Bangladeshi cultural values, even if she conceives of them as oppositional and separate. The sense of two selves is strongest when Amina thinks of her parents or talks to them on the phone, and, as mentioned above, the telephone here operates as a medium that simultaneously connects and disconnects two related and yet very distinctive locales. But Amina's sense of two selves also points toward the clash between the imagination and the actual lived experience, as there is a difference between Amina's and her parents' dream about elsewhere and the real-world coordinates of this dream. The idea of two selves also links back to the time when Amina and George first got to know each other via their online personas. Another factor is that Amina is not fully honest to George either and hesitates to tell him about her intentions for her parents to come live with them. All of these examples show that serious negotiations—in Bhabha's sense—are in need for Amina to learn how to appreciate and reconcile these two selves. The first attempts of such negotiations are already palpable in the chapters set in the United States. But in the novel Amina has to make the final step of revisiting her home country in order to be able to critically evaluate the cultural differences between her new and old cultural context. A crucial part of this is that she will learn to correct or adjust her vision of what she thinks of as "another Amina" (42), an idea of a Bangladeshi self that has become reified and fixed during the time spent in the United States.

In their 2009 study of Indian immigrants in the United States, Emily Skop and Paul C. Adams equally contend that an immigrant's sense of their identity, in their case Indianness, varies with very local and individual circumstances of migration. Depending

on age, class, gender, religion, profession, and multiple other factors intersecting in place, they found that while some immigrants are intent on maintaining ties to the homeland and preserving traditions, others regard their Indianness as a highly personal and private identity and share more characteristics, practices, and cultural attitudes with fellow Americans. The Internet can operate as an important mediator in these processes as it can help facilitate physical gatherings with other migrants living in the diaspora, navigate the new cultural context, and keep up with developments at home where new ideas about what it means to be Indian or Bangladesh constantly emerge. Yet at the same time it can also be a means of control that permits family members who stayed behind to interfere in the lives of those who left. That individual stories of migration play out differently is also evident in the comparison between Amina's experience in Rochester and that of her cousin in London. While Nasir went to London to work in his cousin's restaurant, never met anyone outside of his workplace, and came back a devout Muslim, Amina neither seeks out other Bangladeshis nor tries to get in touch with the Muslim community. She also corresponds only with her parents and tries to avoid contact with Nasir so that she fails to recognize that had she stayed in Bangladesh her Bangladeshi self would not have been frozen in time as she wrongly assumes. She would have grown up in that country as well and would not be plagued by the feeling that she is older in English, making her "the parent to her parents" (105), while remaining a child in her native language.

Flying in the face of the topic of her ESL class, called "Migrations and Transformations" (121), Amina—although adapting to and learning about her new cultural context—spends the first months in the United States in a state of suspension and deferral. It is not until she discovers, or rather allows herself to discover, the truth about

George's and Kim's relationship that she begins to recognize that she has to confront and negotiate these and other issues. Only then does she start to seriously ponder the circumstances that brought her to the United States, and for the first time judge her marriage, friendships, and the relationship to her parents. The affair is therefore an important strategic development that forces Amina to face her reality. It is also the first trial she and her husband have to endure, supplemented later by George's unemployment. Realizing that it is impossible for her to go home, Amina is relocated by the affair. It re-places her within the real dimensions of the life they live together, and she uses it as leverage to press George to finally have their Muslim wedding ceremony and to finalize the plans of her parents leaving Bangladesh. Yet in order to fully apprehend and accept that she belongs with George and that Rochester is her new home, Amina first has to make the trip back to Bangladesh.

Amina's experience of return follows a script that has been examined comprehensively by researchers studying migration. Laura Morosanu, for instance, in her analysis of young Romanians in London, points out how the visit to the home country is often quite difficult and strenuous, commonly involving a series of social events, visits with friends and family, and other social calls. Amina, too, would have had to face these commitments, had her father, for reasons still obscure, not put her family at risk so that her arrival has to be kept a secret. Nonetheless, Amina must spend time with relatives, and travel the distance to her grandmother's village and back to Dhaka, although

[she] would have liked to continue south on a tour of her childhood: Tejgaon, Motijheel, Mirpur, and Mohammadpur, where they'd lived for various lengths of time; the genteel neighborhoods where she'd taught her students; and the university district where she'd gone with her mother to visit the British Council. (207)

Amina experiences her return in both positive and negative terms. The places she would like to visit are out of reach, and while she is happy to see all those familiar faces and revisit her idyllic childhood village, she also has to acknowledge that there is a “difference between thinking of home and being here” (205). Her parting has opened a quite new and different void of cultural disparities and hierarchies between her and the ones she was once so close with. This is particularly evident in the exchange with her cousin Micki, a conversation she had so often longed for in Rochester but that instead of bringing relief and comfort merely confirms that their lives have drifted apart. Morosanu, too, argues that home-based social relations tend to decline because of the distance, the time spent apart, and the growing social relations and personal experiences at the migrant’s new destination. As a result, the returnee frequently experiences a discrepancy of social norms and attitudes and comes to realize that the friends and family at home are often not able to picture and understand what her new life is like.

Deirdre McKay, in her study of Philippine migrants, similarly construes the return to a place that used to be home as a highly ambivalent experience that is repeatedly described negatively. It triggers “emotions of shame, anger, alienation, rejection and depression” (82) resulting from the complex interplay of social obligations, pride, jealousy, and a whole range of other emotions that cannot be concretely defined. Furthermore, returnees tend to view the place they left behind as “a landscape of sensual and aesthetic value, rather than a site of ‘underdevelopment’” (76), so that the actual re-emplacement is often experienced as a shocking wake-up call. The same holds true for Amina who has to concede that she cannot slip back into her old self and pick up life where she left off. While she is slow to accept that she may not be the same person who

left Bangladesh over two years ago, her transformation is, however, clearly visible to outsiders. Despite the traditional garments Amina had changed into on the plane, the taxi drivers calling out to her at the airport address her in English which, among other events, she comes to attribute as “the effect of her time spent in America” (214). For her family and relatives too, Amina is the wealthy relative who emigrated to the United States.

Having spent so much time abroad, Amina now has to navigate novel aspects of inclusion and exclusion, being at once a part of her old locale while simultaneously tangibly detached. Describing a similar effect, McKay draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* and *hexis* to explain how re-emplacement is emotional work that demands a compromise between a “‘local’ understanding of the ‘rules of place’ or *habitus* and a transnational habitus acquired overseas” (76 italics in orig.). Bourdieu’s terminology refers to the different aspects of embodied experience with *habitus* signifying everyday practices and *hexis* denoting the aspect of *habitus* that is embodied and visible. However, as McKay points out, migrants often feel out of place when they return to their old environment and are required to constantly readjust their *habitus*—a useful model that can also help think through Amina’s experiences in her home country.

Returning from the United States, which in many ways functioned as an “escape from the pressures of daily life and community expectations into a realm of self-actualisation” (81), to use McKay’s words, Amina frequently catches herself looking at her old life from an American-influenced perspective that is, however, neither synonymous with George’s view, nor fixed or static. Rather, echoing the idea of standpoint as developed in feminist theory, Amina’s lived experiences, activities, encounters, and struggles abroad now allow her to approach her homeland from a critical

distance, and also to practice self-reflexivity.¹⁴⁰ She notices that she does not automatically fit her old place any more and that she is unable to perform certain actions—such as bargaining with drivers or bribing hospital staff—that her old local self may have carried out quite skillfully. Moreover, in an uncanny echo of the pictures of her cousin’s wedding that she would look at while in Rochester, Amina now finds herself looking at her surroundings as if she were glancing through the lens of a camera. The scenery or mediated locality she takes in from the bus becomes “a picture to take back with her and own forever” (218) and on the phone George, too, asks her to take pictures for him. “I want to see what you’re seeing—once you finally get home” (286). Observer and participant at the same time, this specific viewpoint helps her critically compare the real events with her memories, her life in the United States with life in Bangladesh, and come to the conclusion that at the end of the day her return can only be a visit and not a homecoming.

Again, the novel calls attention to these negotiations via references to media, pictures in particular, and through the conversations on the phone. This time Amina calls George and not her parents, and although the conversations are strained at first as Amina has to process her jealousy of Kim and her own romantic encounter with her childhood crush, they become more intimate as also George and Amina gradually rework their difficulties despite or precisely because of their separation. While initially “the world in which George and Kim existed seemed so far from this one that she doubted that one

¹⁴⁰ Although feminist standpoint theory was developed by a wide range of feminist thinkers, the ideas of Sandra Harding and Alison Wylie stand out as some of the earliest examples. For Harding, standpoint is a collective effort, a struggle, and an achievement that starts with the everyday lives of oppressed groups and a critical examination of everyday experiences. Only then can standpoint be privileged, successful, and bring a possibility for liberation. Amina’s new perspective may not be a collective effort that she shares with a community, but standpoint as a way of knowing that allows for alternative views is a useful framework to think through Amina’s development.

could inhabit both” (280), at this point Amina has to admit that she had never felt so lonely in her life and that she feels a homesickness for a city that she never thought could be her own. In line with Morosanu’s argument above, it thus seems that the social bonds Amina forged in the United States are stronger than those in Bangladesh. Amina is now also able to overcome her romanticized views and recognize that she does not wish to return to the living standards here. Resisting Nasir’s covert confession that he is in love with her, Amina chooses George over a life in Dhaka, especially after her father’s accident. A climactic and shocking event that parallels Amina’s discovery of George’s and Kim’s affair, the incident again dictates that Amina reevaluate her life and that she let go of her old dreams and hesitations. When she calls George from the hospital his voice offers instant relief “as if it somehow carried America inside it” (314), and Amina decides for the second time that she needs to leave for the United States. In an email to Kim, who has in the meantime returned to India but feels unwelcome, Amina tells her that something she learned in Rochester was “that it’s hard for people to remember that you belong to one place when you look like you’re from another” (291) indicating that she has negotiated her sense of two selves, acknowledging both her Bangladeshi heritage and new American roots, and that the place she belongs to may well be Rochester, New York.

The novel is therefore an example of how the effects of old, new, and popular media, above all the Internet and the services it offers, have not resulted in a state of placelessness. Although the overpowering cultural branding inherent in leading global, or rather American, companies such as Google, Netflix, or Starbucks—representative of the homogenizing effects of globalization—suggests a loss or weakening of locality, the

novel complicates and reevaluates such ideas. Here, the products of a new global media culture do not alienate its users but affect and produce particular subjectivities and can help them navigate their cultural contexts and everyday lives. Such products enrich Amina's life in Bangladesh, infusing her with dreams from elsewhere and providing a reason for social bonding as well as an outlet for subversive practices. They allow Amina to carefully plan her departure, research her new destination context, and once there, stay in touch with friends and family in Bangladesh. The novel thus illustrates how new and old media are able to produce new dimensions of global communities and interconnectedness. They bring the multiple homelands, closer together than before and create radically new and different circumstances of migration.

CHAPTER 5

“WE WHO?” THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Located not far from Rochester—the setting of the novel discussed in the previous chapter—yet several years later and, indeed, in quite a different time and very different space and place, is Teju Cole’s Twitter project. Set as it is in the real world of contemporary New York City and the virtual world of Twitter, Cole’s unique project is an example of how Twitter can be used to build community and interconnect various social contexts, real and virtual, local and global. It allows Cole to forge multiple connections that bring the home left behind and his new context closer together while also anchoring him firmly in his very local American context. This chapter thus departs from previous chapters in that in lieu of a strictly literary analysis—although acknowledging the literary aspirations of Cole’s Twitter feed—I want to consider Cole’s work as a real-world illustration of such new kinds of links and attachments and of how migrant displacement is counteracted in the Twittersphere.

With over 86,000 followers and 6,300 tweets, as of April 2013, the author of *Open City* and contributor to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta*, and *The New Inquiry* is a reasonably popular figure on Twitter.¹⁴¹ Here he

¹⁴¹ For comparison: Justin Bieber has 34 million and Barack Obama 27 million followers. Popular news anchors like Anderson Cooper and Rachel Maddow pocket 3.7 and 2.4 million respectively while Lena Dunham, the director of HBO’s *Girls* and actress, has 770,000 followers. Alex Ross, music critic for the *New Yorker Magazine* has 30,000. A friend or neighbor more likely will have between 100 and 500 followers.

pursues a project he calls “small fates,” “‘small’ news” or “news of the weird” as he explains on his website. They are limited to 140 characters and tell “small” stories of Nigeria, the country where he is originally from, and more recently also of New York City. In the latter case the stories are taken from newspaper articles from precisely 100 years ago.¹⁴² On his website, Cole further describes himself as “writer, art historian, street photographer,” and accordingly on Twitter, in addition to his “small fates,” he tweets about current events—often in conjunction with allusions to literary texts—music, film, art, literature, history, culture, and politics. He also uses Twitter to promote his own work and happenings around town, and to post pictures and links to websites and articles he finds noteworthy. Most recently he has started to post what might be considered Twitter poetry. Here, I am predominantly interested in his “small fates” project. But I will also consider the role of his other tweets—especially his tweets about drones from January 2013—and the fact that they are being retweeted and promoted throughout the Twittersphere, to show how such ramifications afford Cole with a migrant perspective and position that differs from the ones inhabited by most of the other migrant protagonists or actors discussed here.

Twitter is one of the newer social networking services. After somewhat similar platforms like MySpace, Facebook, or Friendster—some more popular than others—Twitter was launched in 2006 and today has become one of the permanent fixtures in the world of social media, outdone in users and gross revenue only by Facebook, but slowly superseding its biggest competitor in monthly average users, accessibility, and

¹⁴² As I am writing this it has only been a few weeks since Cole announced on Twitter the end of “small fates” on February 1, 2013.

mobility.¹⁴³ On the “about” site, Twitter is marketed as “a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting. Simply find the accounts you find most compelling and follow the conversations.” In short, it is a service for which people can sign up without charge and create an account complete with profile picture, background design, short bio, username, and Twitter handle—the user’s address preceded by the @ symbol, for instance @tejucole. Similar to Facebook, users can post status updates called “tweets” that are limited to 140 characters. Within these posts it is possible to add links and embed pictures or videos. In order to foster social connectivity, users can then follow other users, which, if a user has set their privacy preferences to public, does not even require approval. Members get access to these status updates by logging into their Twitter account and looking at their personal homepage where the tweets of everyone being followed show up in reverse chronological order—the latest one up top—and keep constantly updating in real time. Tweets can also be consumed by visiting a user’s page or by downloading a variety of apps such as TweetDeck by Twitter, where the interface consists of several columns that can be modified according to individual preferences. It is also possible to send messages directly to another user, either through the *DirectMessage* function or by *replying* to or *mentioning* @tejucole which will then show up in the open feed and be publicly available. Other options include *retweeting* or marking a tweet as a *favorite*. Finally, probably one of the most innovative aspects of Twitter is the use of the # symbol as a means to annotate certain topics, such as #Election2012 or #Campaign2012 to refer

¹⁴³ According to a September 2012 article by Eric Jackson in *Forbes* magazine titled “Facebook’s MySpace Moment: Why Twitter is Already Bigger than Facebook,” in the long run Twitter promises to be more successful than Facebook.

to the 2012 presidential election or #DowntonPBS or #oscars for *Downton Abbey* and Academy Awards viewers.¹⁴⁴

Another aspect of Twitter, and a problem encountered during the research for this dissertation, is that although the sum of everyone's tweets is archived and accessible through the United States Library of Congress, Twitter does not store tweets indefinitely. While the hashtag #tjism (teju cole small fates) that Cole used briefly during a short period in 2011 prompts tweets that go back to September 2011, on individual users' pages like Cole's the oldest tweets accessible—as of April 2013—are from September 2012, which implies that Twitter will only retrieve a certain number of tweets over a certain period of time. In tandem with the tweets being limited to 140 characters, this regulatory feature is unique to Twitter and makes explicit the fleeting nature of this particular service and its conceptualization for the present moment.

More so than other services, Twitter, as a space of communication and creative expression, offers a platform where literary and non-literary content can be produced, published, shared, and made available to a large number of users all over the globe—effects of what Henry Jenkins has identified as “participatory culture” (*Participatory Culture*). Tweets are short-lived status updates, messages, stories, pieces of information, or entertainment—depending on the user, viewer, and context—that are generated in real time. They compress time-space and cost-space in that they can be instantaneously viewed, retweeted, or responded to by everyone with access to Twitter. As such they are more global and inclusive than other types of media discussed here and represent perhaps the innovative peak—so far—of Paul Adams's and Barney Warf's basic criteria of

¹⁴⁴ Most recently Julia Turner elaborated on the various functions of the hashtag in her *New York Times* article “#InPraiseOfTheHashtag.”

computer-mediated communication: multidirectional interactivity, instantaneity, and transnationalism. Twitter, though—although it can theoretically be accessed from everywhere and is therefore inherently transnational—is at the same time a medium that operates in specific contexts and not just in the cloud. It is decisively local as people tweet about local events or respond to specific local circumstances. At the last MLA annual meeting, conference organizers encouraged members to tweet about exciting papers, changes in the conference schedule, get-togethers, and other notable happenings using #MLA2013. During Hurricane Sandy Twitter users kept each other informed about power outages and flooding. And in Mexico an entirely new type of social movement has organized around Twitter through which users create an interactive map of safe and unsafe places related to the drug war.¹⁴⁵ One crucial element that reinforces such new trends is the rise of mobile wireless devices. Twitter can be accessed from one's home computer or laptop but also from smartphones and tablets that we carry on our body and that accompany us to the office and other places of our everyday lived space. In my previous chapter I have described this relatively new form of total interconnectedness in terms of embodied experience and as a technological extension of the self. This constant access to new media further changes how we perceive our environment. It shapes and reshapes our everyday lives as there are virtually no limits to when and where we can log on to Twitter. It produces highly mediated localities and media that have also become increasingly localized or localizing.

Cole's Twitter feed is certainly a general platform for the production and circulation of information and ideas, but in what follows I take a closer look especially at

¹⁴⁵ Here Twitter is used in combination with an app called Retio. Retio collects information through Twitter and then creates a constantly updated map based on that data.

three instances that, though interrelated and united in the Twittersphere, are unique and distinctive projects that also have distinctive effects: Cole’s “small fates” and its variation that brings his followers news from precisely 100 years ago, and the “seven short stories about drones” he tweeted on January 14, 2013. Given that Cole is from Nigeria, I am specifically interested in the spatial and temporal underpinnings of these projects, and I argue that Cole’s tweets merge time and space, and distance and proximity, while at the same time calling attention precisely to remoteness and separation. By doing so, I propose that Cole creates a multi-layered sense of belonging that brings together Cole and his followers, Lagos and New York/Brooklyn, as well as the past and present moment within the real-time developments of Twitter. I will show this by examining four different aspects of his Twitter stream, which I want to call community, rupture, affect, and local and global effects.

Cole began his “small fates” project on June 9, 2011.¹⁴⁶ On his website he explains that while doing research for a non-fiction book about Lagos and trying to get a sense of everyday life in the city mainly via newspapers—actual newspapers while in Lagos and online editions and Twitter when back in New York—he “found [himself] drawn to the ‘small’ news . . . life in the raw” that he would come across mainly in the metro or crime sections. Deciding that those types of news would not be suitable for his book he turned to Twitter as an outlet for such “incidents” or “various things,” terms he uses to refer to a related tradition in the Francophone context, called *fait divers*, a “compressed report of an unusual happening” that is both news coverage and literary endeavor. He further specifies that “[a] *fait divers* is not simply bad news. It is bad news of a certain kind, written in a

¹⁴⁶ This is according to his Facebook page. Twitter will not allow access to tweets that go that far back.

certain way,” such as the following example written in 1906 by the French journalist Félix Fénéon, cited on Cole’s website:

*Raoul G., of Ivry, an untactful husband, came home unexpectedly and stuck his blade in his wife, who was frolicking in the arms of a friend. (italics in orig.)*¹⁴⁷

Later Cole modifies his project by incorporating news briefs about New York City that he retrieves from the archives of the Library of Congress: news that happened on the very same day yet precisely 100 years ago. Cole, however, never mixes those two projects and always makes sure his followers know which mode he is in, as on September 18, 2012:

Going back to Nigerian small fates. Promise not to cry.

Perhaps unbeknownst to Cole, Huyssen has identified similar modernist forms for the German context. In “Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces,” a contribution to the 2007 special edition on cities of *PMLA*, Huyssen acknowledges the impact of French modernism, but coins the term “modernist miniature” to refer to a specifically German phenomenon that he locates between the wars. Building on Walter Benjamin’s claim that experience “is in an epochal crisis” (Huyssen 28) with “Erlebnis” replacing “Erfahrung,” which Peter Fritzsche translates as “discontinuous eventfulness” and “rooted experience” (Fritzsche 31), Huyssen claims that this distinctive aspect of modernity manifests as a tendency to write in *Bildern* (“pictures” or “expressions”) rather than in novels. Citing writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Siegfried Kracauer, Franz Kafka, and Benjamin, Huyssen posits that their literary snapshots of spaces focus in particular on the urban environment and therefore give their readers clues about the perception of this environment, novel forms of seeing and reading, as well as how the

¹⁴⁷ In the following, in order to represent the specific form of tweets, small fates, or *fait divers*, I will not incorporate tweets into the text but set them off from the main text by using italics, beginning a new line, indenting, and single-spacing—similar to how Cole represents his examples of a *fait divers* on his website. As of April 2013 there are no MLA guidelines for how to cite entire tweets.

city can be narrated, representing the ephemerality and restlessness but also the terror and insecurity of the time. As snapshots they are on the one hand reductive and arbitrary, a reification of reality, while at the same time being mysterious, opaque, and fluid and containing hidden meanings, very similar to Cole's tweets. For Huysen these modernist miniatures are co-constitutive of place- and time-specific circumstances, and in the same vein I want to read Cole's project as producing, while at the same time being a product of, the advances of technology, communication, and interconnectivity well into the twenty-first century.

Via Twitter, Cole illuminates how he composes his "small fates." He may have mentioned this before as every once in a while he reiterates what he is doing for newcomers, as for instance on March 9, 2012:

A warm welcome to new followers. I mostly use twitter for "small fates," about which you can read more here:<http://t.co/CcdqebUj>¹⁴⁸

On January 8, 2013, after he tweets the following fate, he explains:

Since his tenant Edith wouldn't volunteer to leave, Onukafor released a snake in her apartment to encourage her. In Ago-Okota.

. . . .

First I find a story in one of a dozen Nigerian newspapers, either via their Twitter feeds or through their websites.

Then I compose. In Word if I'm home, on email if I'm out. I use Helvetica Neue because I can estimate (from experience) the character count.

The last fate (snake in an apartment) went through 8 drafts and took about 15 minutes. That's about average for me.

The basic concept for this one came early, so my editing was for speed of the line, rhythm, and ironic inflection.

¹⁴⁸ The shortened url here links to his page about "small fates" also accessible via his website.

But often I'll start with one concept and completely change it halfway through. Some fates go to 20 drafts.

Three commas are slower than one. A rare word can help stretch a story's sense of time. But I wanted this particular story to zip along.

I chose late on to use Edith Ndu's first name instead of her last. When I got to "encourage her" instead of "help her decide," I was done.

Anatomy of a small fate. pic.twitter.com/6SY6kxtr¹⁴⁹

The last tweet links to a picture of his editing process that shows eight different versions of the original tweet.

Cole's explanation of how his tweets come about highlights several important issues. It illustrates that and how Cole interacts with his followers: he wants them to read his feed but he also asks them to understand the process. It shows that his tweets are actually quite unlike news briefs but highly stylized statements that might deviate considerably from the original. And finally, it fleshes out that Cole is aiming at particular aesthetic, cognitive, and emotional effects as he composes those tweets very meticulously, taking the time to edit and make changes, and pondering the impact of every single phrase, word, sound, and punctuation mark.

Followers are excited about Cole's tweets. They respond, retweet, or favorite. They follow Cole's work, read his articles, buy his books, listen to his interviews, and go to his readings. There are chances for actual encounters and conversations in both the virtual and the real world. They tell their friends about Cole's project and unlike other forms of fandom, it seems that Cole's "fans" have a more meaningful and embodied

¹⁴⁹ In this dissertation I am listing the tweets in chronological order so that they can be embedded in the text and read from top to bottom. On Cole's and everyone else's Twitter page the tweets would have to be read in reverse order with the latest one on top.

relationship to him which Cole personally encourages. On September 4, 2011, for instance, Cole comes up with an assignment for his followers:

It's your turn now. Today's assignments coming up. Tag your version #tcsf (Teju Cole Small Fates), and I'll retweet the best ones.

Until September 21, Cole keeps posting links to stories that he thinks well suited for “small fates,” leaving it up to his followers to come up with their own fates and interacting with the ones who participate. Cole’s commitment to “small fates” has also inspired similar projects such as @dronestream, “Every reported US drone strike, from 2002–2012,” which Cole himself promotes on January 8, 2013. Finally, when Cole announces the end of “small fates” he similarly reaches out to his community giving them credit for his accomplishments. On February 1, 2013 he posts:

Small fates was a weird project. But you got it, you helped me think through it, and made it interesting. Thank you.

Paradigmatic of what Jenkins refers to as “participatory culture” and “spreadable media” (*Spreadable Media*) these instances emphasize that Cole’s Twitter feed is not just random content that users consume passively. Rather they interact, share, and experience a certain degree of agency as Jenkins notes, “[in] a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection to each other” (*Participatory Culture* xi). The project brings together people from different contexts and places and spreads the news of Cole’s tweets and the tweets themselves throughout the Twittersphere.

While so far I have only examined the concept behind Twitter and the form of Cole’s tweets, in addition to the practices and possibilities they enable, Cole’s project also matters and connects because of its unique content. His poetic story fragments are

filled with riddles, inside jokes, local knowledges, and implied meanings. They urge people to not only complete these stories in their head but also acknowledge that they are different from the rest of the items showing up in their feed. Imagine for example the following “small fates” from December 2012 intermingled with the average news stream:

With a gloved nurse’s help, Reverend Oladejobi, principal of Ajuwon School, investigated the virtue of her female students.

On a condolence visit to Alhaji Maigari, of Gombe, whose daughter had died, Senator Goje’s speeding convoy knocked the man’s son dead.

With machetes, Uduzon and Donatus, in Ikotun and Meiran, respectively, gave Obi and Egwu new looks. Housing disputes.

One good probe deserves another. Ms Aladejobi, of Ajuwon, who tested her students for virginity, will herself be examined by psychiatrists.

Vivian, 24, hired in Lagos through Skilled Nanny Service Ltd, skillfully took her new madam’s N5 million for a stroll.

Causing a productive rupture, Cole’s tweets suspend the flow of news about current events by offering a space to pause and think. While everyone else may be tweeting about politics, television shows, movies, books, sports, their lunch, or other events, trying to incorporate as much information as possible, or trying to be funny, entertaining, or even using Twitter to vent anger, thereby providing “an ever-updating live image of our society” (Namaan 903), Cole’s tweets offer a refreshing focus. They bring us stories from other places (Nigeria) and from other times (100 years ago in New York City). They employ different personal and place names, concepts, and ideas, although sometimes—as shown in some of the examples above—Cole will deliberately use a person’s English or Christian name in favor of her Nigerian name, which similarly disrupts the experience of reading. It is also worth revisiting Benjamin’s distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* here. Providing a creative break, Cole’s tweets are a

variation of Huyssen's modernist miniatures in that they counteract rather than represent the "discontinuous eventfulness" that also marks the contemporary world. They might not offer "rooted experience" but promote a more profound and self-aware commitment to the present.

As Cole himself notes in an interview with NPR—entitled "Simple Tweets of Fate: Teju Cole's Condensed News"—enmeshing "small fates" with current events can have the most peculiar effects. Sometimes he is amazed at how similar his news are to the local news despite the spatial and temporal distance. On April 2, 2012, for instance, Cole posts the following tweet as part of his New York project:

Since Carter, the man he shot dead on 34th Street and 5th Avenue, was a negro, Plitt was at first not held. But he is now in custody.

When asked about this on NPR Cole says:

It was particularly striking, because this was something I read just on April 2nd, a few days ago. And all around me in my Twitter stream, what other people are talking about is a current event that is happening in April 2012 about somebody in the present who shot somebody who is black and has not been held for the crime. And I just thought, wow, there are these resonances. And our ancestors must be looking back at us and perhaps laughing grimly about how little progress we seem to have made.

Referring to the highly controversial Trayvon Martin case that had caused public outrage and dominated the media coverage for already more than one month at that time, as the moderator clarifies, Cole's tweet suggests that crimes, accidents, and other events repeat themselves. Temporally or spatially removed, his stories can thus provide a perspective on contemporary and very local events. They urge the reader to step back and reflect, commiserate, or recoil.

Another way to describe these reactions is by means of affect, "an energy or intensity that can be exchanged and subsequently embodied as emotion" (Adams

Geographies of Media and Communication 167–68). Small fates, though perhaps slightly modified and defamiliarized, are about real people in real places that cause the reader to experience a wide range of sensations and fully-fledged emotions. In a January 2013 article for *The New Inquiry*, Cole describes the allure of “Wicked Pictures”—photographs of “the aftermath of misadventure”—as “[drawing] us into the dark star of the human predicament rather than into contemplation of some specific injustice.” His “small fates” project has a similar appeal, providing “snapshots,” to use Huyssen’s term, of incidents that prompt a certain kind of fascination that cannot always be put into words. Perhaps only a simple gasp, acknowledgment, surprise, curiosity, or quick sense of delight when the tweets pop up in the stream, often times these reactions can cross over into more intense bodily responses. Some people will feel revolt at “some specific injustice” or heinous crime while at the same time being relieved that it did not happen to them but in the safe distance of Nigeria or in the past. For others, however, in particular his Nigerian followers living in Nigeria or in the diaspora, and self-aware New Yorkers, Cole’s tweets convey a more striking sense of immediacy. People may recognize or have come across the same piece of news in a different form. Or they might have been personally involved. Some may find themselves merely reminded of similar fates. Others are hooked because of the refreshing otherness of Cole’s tweets, reading them during their coffee break, integrating them into their daily routines: a comforting habit.

It is because of this otherness in tandem with the poetic form, often comprising rhymes, alliterations, or other stylistic devices, that the “small fates,” as fleeting as they may be, leave an impression. They can be easily remembered and instead of being recited they are retweeted in the Twittersphere. As Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of*

Emotion further suggests, “impression” should be regarded as “an affect that leaves its mark or trace” (6) and arises out of a relationship between subjects and contexts, creating a “sociality of emotions” (9): emotions as a social and cultural practice shared among Cole’s followers. In an October 12, 2011 article, titled “Death by Twitter,” Matt Pearce for *The New Inquiry* joins this discussion by taking the moral high ground. Is it okay, he asks, to be entertained by Cole’s tweets that often involve death? What kind of emotions should we feel? How much can we be involved? Thereby echoing precisely the same concerns Appiah utters in *Cosmopolitanism* and keeping the discussion about and interest in Cole’s tweets alive.

Currently, after he discontinued his project, Cole’s Twitter bio reads: “We who? Lagos/Brooklyn • tejucole.com.” Previously, he had a slightly different tagline that contained “small fates” and “1912.” But that bio is now lost in the Twittersphere, a buried testimony to the short-livedness of Twitter and its conceptualization for the present moment. Yet the spatial designation locating Cole or his Twitter feed, and therefore also his followers, simultaneously in Lagos and in Brooklyn remains. About his new caption Cole tweets on February 2, 2013:

Bio: ‘We’ who?

And this is as close as the reader gets to an explanation. Whatever he is referring to, it is, however interesting that he puts the personal pronoun “we” into quotation marks followed by the relative pronoun “who,” perhaps an invitation to his followers in Lagos, Brooklyn, and wherever else they may be located, to complete this fragment of a sentence for him. “We” might then refer to his followers or he might be thinking of the people in

this world in more general terms, living their daily lives, and touched by various fates, calling attention to the existence of a virtual or global community.

Cole's followers are indeed interconnected via his tweets that have for the most part focused on events in Lagos—and other places in Nigeria—and New York, daily life in the city as well as in the past. But Cole also tweets about United States politics, current affairs, music playlists, and everything else he deems newsworthy and that links him to all kinds of different places. As mentioned above, his posts have different effects on people. As a result of the interplay between proximity and remoteness, people identify, care, or laugh. On his website, Cole conjectures:

The small fates, I feel, bring news of a Nigerian modernity, full of conflict, tragedies, and narrow escapes. Similar to the French papers' *fait divers*, they work in part because whatever that strange thing was, it didn't happen to us. They are the destiny that befell some other poor soul, which we experience from a grateful distance.

Nevertheless, there is room for empathy, and in the end Cole's project comes down to storytelling. As a new genre of literature and a quite different variant of storytelling than the one Huysen and others have declared in decline after the turn of the century, the posts inspire our imagination in many different ways, even if they might not be able to move all of us deeply and personally. Another effect of stories, literature, and in particular world literature is, as David Damrosch building on Goethe's fondness of *Weltliteratur* argues, that they serve as "windows on the world" (16) and "upon other cultural phenomena" (19). Cole brings Nigeria closer and he also brings the past closer. He urges his followers to reflect about those strange incidents, in particular the bizarre place and personal names. They might look them up on a map or in Google. Or perhaps those names accompany them on a walk or to the office, or they pop up in a subway car

or in a crowded bar in Manhattan as someone is browsing through their Twitter feed on an iPhone: Ago-Okota, Aderibigbe, Ibadan, Adegbeha, Gwagwalada, Kano, Nasarawa, and Professor Ibeh, Ibrahim Akin, Sule, Mrs Okpara, or Pastor Ododa—just to name a few examples from the month of January 2013. Cole thus dissolves the boundaries between center and periphery, past and present, and creates a unique space for otherness where relative difference suspends absolute difference, another potential “diasporic public sphere” in Appadurai’s sense. In a way, he makes transparent what Doreen Massey has posited all along. Neither identities nor places are self-contained but stretch out, interact, and intersect; and, unlike a theoretical model, Twitter is able to bundle and highlight these structures and nodes of a global interconnectedness.

Adams claims that “[whether] visual, auditory, or multisensory, communications hold places together” (*Geographies of Media and Communication* 167). Cole’s tweets refer to specific moments in specific places and via the interactions between himself and his followers, as well as among his followers who are themselves located in specific places and contexts, he circulates knowledge about these very unique localities and pulls them together. His statements on Twitter are performative in that they have effects on real lives and on how we perceive reality. For followers in the United States and Brooklyn in particular, some of his tweets are part of their own experiences, such as these two tweets from January 25, 2013 that must sound quite exotic for his followers in other parts of the world:

A dolphin in the Gowanus Canal? And people say Brooklyn has no sense of porpoise.

The Gowanus dolphin died. That’s sad.

While the dolphin is a particularly local and immediate example that many people could personally relate to, other tweets are more national and global in nature. I am thinking specifically of Cole's drone tweets from January 14, 2013 that were reprinted in an essay he wrote for *The New Yorker* on February 11, titled "A Reader's War:"¹⁵⁰

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist's.

Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable.

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead bearing a bowl of lather. A bomb whistled in. Blood on the walls. Fire from heaven.

I am an invisible man. My name is unknown. My loves are a mystery. But an unmanned aerial vehicle from a secret location has come for me.

Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was killed by a Predator drone.

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His torso was found, not his head.

*Mother died today. The program saves American lives.*¹⁵¹

Interweaving the harsh realities of drone strikes with the first sentences of classic literary texts crescendoing into the simple line "The program saves American lives" is perhaps the creative and moral high point of Cole's tweets so far, again bringing together the local and the global, the past and the present, and diverse contexts, themes, and identities. Cole here further shows that he has the cultural knowledge and authority to speak about such a

¹⁵⁰ This is not the first time Cole entered the debate on drones. According to an interview with *Mother Jones* conducted by Sarah Zhang on March 6, 2013, Cole had already tweeted about drones over a year ago, comparing drone warfare to the IMF and the popularity of *Downton Abbey*: "the desire to watch those from a great height." This series of tweets did, however, not even come close to the widespread success of his most recent tweets. The older tweets can be accessed via alexismadrigal's Storify account.

¹⁵¹ The tweets refer to the following works and authors, in order of appearance: *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (1925), *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (1851), *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1922), *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (1952), *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (written in 1914/15, published in 1925), *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958), and *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (1942).

hotly debated issue. He comfortably inhabits this political terrain and is able to shape public opinion. More so than his other tweets, the “drone short stories” (Zhang) have been retweeted throughout the Twittersphere ad infinitum. They have been taken up by news commentators, bloggers, and magazines.

In “A Reader’s War,” Cole even goes one step further, this time voicing direct criticism—without the protection of the creative freedom with which his tweets may have bestowed him earlier—and urging his readers to wake up, to care, and to speak out against the drone warfare that has increased under the Obama Administration. His essay is titled “A Reader’s War” because he refers to the president as “a reader in chief, a man in the line of Jefferson and Lincoln.” According to Cole, he is a man who is often photographed with a book in his hand and who likes to quote his favorite authors—Cole mentions Toni Morrison and Herman Melville—yet a man who has nevertheless succumbed to aerial warfare. Cole asks: “What became of literature’s vaunted power to inspire empathy?” A few weeks later in an interview with Sarah Zhang for *Mother Jones* he adds the expression the “empathy gap” to describe the lack of compassion—and therefore covert acceptance of drone strikes—that he sees not only in the president. His literary tweets, as well as his “small fates” project could be read as a tool to counteract this gap and to resuscitate the readers’ capability for empathy and active involvement.

In another parallel to the “small fates” Cole interweaves the faraway attacks—events that, again, can be easily dismissed because they are not happening to us—with everyday life in New York City:

Of late, riding the subway in Brooklyn, I have been having a waking dream, or rather a daytime nightmare, in which the subway car ahead of mine explodes. My fellow riders and I look at one another, then look again at the burning car ahead, certain of our deaths. The fire comes closer, and what I feel is bitterness and

sorrow that it's all ending so soon: no more books, no more love, no more jokes, no more Schubert, no more Black Star. All this spins through my mind on tranquil mornings as the D train trundles between 36th Street and Atlantic Avenue and bored commuters check their phones. They just want to get to work. I sit rigid in my seat, thinking, I don't want to die, not here, not yet. I imagine those in northwest Pakistan or just outside Sana'a who go about their day thinking the same. The difference for some of them is that the plane is already hovering in the air, ready to strike. ("A Reader's War")

Yoking the aerial attacks carried out in Pakistan and Yemen with the present moment, Cole again compels his readers to acknowledge the realities of other places and to ponder what it would be like if drones were a part of their everyday experiences.

Cole here responds to and advances a pressing issue that is not only of local or national but of global importance. He does so not only on Twitter but in one of the most prestigious literary magazines in the world and thus enters a realm where he is not just an ordinary Twitter user, writer, or literary and cultural critic but a political commentator, public intellectual, and opinion maker. Whether writers and public figures like Cole should speak out for or against political causes—a debate that ensued after Cole's tweets—is another question. Yet what is important here is that Cole's engagement shows how he owns his newly adopted culture on so many levels. He claims a place within it and is firmly anchored in his very local American context—a position that radically differs from the more traditional spaces occupied by migrants.

As geographer Michael Salmond posits, there are various ways to think through "creative methods of social organization" (91) like blogs, Facebook, or Twitter. These new technologies offer not only new ways for virtual interaction but also for mobilizing large groups and therefore for political action, protest, and resistance which he refers to as the "power of momentary communities" (90). Jason Dittmer further defines such new media and especially blogs and Twitter as a "boon for subaltern voices" (143) enabling a

“new, more inclusive form of politics” (147) and disrupting hegemonic power structures. A visible expression of such practices that manifest in actual places—potentially all over the globe—are flash mobs and also some of the examples I gave in this and in my last chapter that establish a relationship between various local neighborhoods and events and virtual spaces on a national and increasingly global scale. Cole may not call out for actual protests or other forms of physical encounters. But his goal is to trigger individual kinds of reactions and stimulate conversations with his followers by urging them to ponder certain issues and compare his stories from Nigeria or the past to the other stories that make up their everyday life. With his tweets about drones, in particular, he utters a potentially subversive opinion—given that drone strikes are a rather taboo topic in contemporary United States politics—and calls for civic engagement and political participation. Twitter is where he can do that and where he can stake out a stable place for himself and his followers: a place where the local and the global can more visibly intersect, where new values and new frameworks can be put forward, where people can interact and interconnect, and where ideas can be formed that could have tangible consequences in the real world.

Cyberspace does not therefore replace local environments, nor the virtual world the real world. On the contrary, what I have shown here is that the Internet with its countless platforms to build communities could in itself be considered a space where users can perform particular identities, produce and share content, and circulate information within the parameters of the virtual world that is nevertheless connected to real places and real lives. Cole’s Twitter feed, in particular, is designed to call attention to the here and now. His tweets are able to merge time and space, distance and proximity,

creating a space to pause and think, a space for empathy or political action where he can interact with followers who he enables to also act or react. The Internet may not offer a virtual space of belonging in itself but it allows for constructing connections and attachments. These new possibilities drastically alter what we perceive of as traditional experiences of migration as being displaced, cut-off, or far removed from one's homeland. Online communities, communications, and other means to stay in touch with friends and family, and stay posted on current events cannot entirely replace actual interactions and actual emplacement in the country of origin. But they offer a space for interconnectedness and emplacement in one's new cultural context and bring the multiple homelands and multiple other contexts—local and global—closer together than before.

CONCLUSION

Unquestionably, migration and the related phenomena of diaspora, exile, and immigration are among the most complex concepts in human life and intellectual history. If we consider the historical mass displacements of the Jewish diaspora, the African diaspora, centuries-long migration to the United States, relocations due to colonial expansion, and subsequent postcolonial entanglements; the movement of people, the separation from the homeland, feelings of loss and longing, and other desires, as well as new beginnings and possibilities have sparked a massive amount of intellectual discourse. Those often mythical and symbolic journeys have provided a rich terrain from which to craft stories, myths, and legends. Others have led to a serious questioning of the enlightenment project and the progress of humanity. Some stories tell of violence, persecution, and oppression. And there are others that tell of new opportunities, freedom, and empowerment.

In this spirit I have tried to show that migration as a deeply human phenomenon is always contingent, multifaceted, and individual. Migrants move for a variety of reasons—voluntary or involuntary—but already the boundaries are hard to draw. For the Jewish diaspora—William Safran’s ideal type as it fits all of his established categories—one can agree on a forced dispersal; as one can for the transplantation of African slaves to the West. But moving through history, such explicit categorizations of forced displacement, generic conceptualizations of the homeland, as well as universally applicable explanations for how migrants move through this world and adapt to their new

environments are more difficult to assign. What if, as Said cautions, leaving is the healthy alternative to staying? What if the chances to make a decent living in one's home country or hometown are so meager that leaving is the only viable option? And what about more contemporary or middle-class scenarios such as someone getting a job offer they cannot refuse, moving abroad for study purposes, or falling in love with someone from a different country or continent? The decision to leave is never made fully voluntarily or involuntarily but grows out of a complex web of circumstances. Similarly, the actual relocation to the new cultural context is experienced differently by individuals and is accompanied by a wide range of feelings across the entire spectrum of human emotions.

Literature has been at the forefront of imaginatively portraying and problematizing such emotions, and representing migration in all its complexity, imagining a great variety of different situations and possibilities. And while I fully agree with Said that exile may well be one of the "saddest fates" ("Intellectual Exile" 369), I have argued here that this does not mean that sadness is the only choice for the migrant. On the contrary, the new destination may have much more to offer. Again, experiences may vary. But the displacement or dislocation from the homeland does not automatically entail displacement as an unchanging ontological condition. And it certainly does not preclude the migrant from creating new attachments, forging new bonds, and participating in or establishing new place-specific practices—individual experiences that coalesce and become visible in distinct places.

Literature, in particular, can envision radically new possibilities for migrants to attach meanings and symbolism to their everyday lived space. To illuminate this process, I have selected very recent texts from three different yet related cultural contexts: The

United States, Britain, and Germany. Jhumpa Lahiri's short story is the earliest one, published in 1999, while most of the other texts were written in the aughts of the twenty-first century with a few later examples such as Teju Cole's and Nell Freudenberger's novels—published in 2011 and 2012 respectively—and Cole's Twitter project which he just discontinued in February of 2013. I have limited my project to this time frame and geographical area because it seems to me that the trend now known as the “spatial turn” in the humanities—which also corresponds to an era of actually shifting borders and spaces, bearing witness to the end of the Cold War and new dimensions of globalization that further coincide with new and increased flows of migration—has also found its way into literary texts and other cultural products. The United States, Britain, and Germany are three main players in such recent geopolitical shifts. Over the years, they have observed steady flows of immigration for economic reasons, or due to colonial and postcolonial relationships, guest worker treaties, and other global developments. Their demographic composition today is made up to a large extent of immigrant populations and the descendants of these immigrants, and, accordingly, the literary texts coming out of these regions reflect this trend. The focus on spatiality is thus already inherent in many of the literary texts produced over the last twenty or thirty years, especially in the literature of migration, and yet I want to advise caution here as the thematic occupation with spatiality and/or movement is by no means restricted to this time frame, which I will explain later in this conclusion. Most certainly, spatiality and movement lie at the core of the examples I have chosen here, though.

In Chapter 1 I focused explicitly on the experiences of female migrants and issues of marriage and family, the emotional work of caring and nurturing, as well as domestic

work. With Lahiri's "Mrs Sen"—a short story included in her Pulitzer Prize-winning *Interpreter of Maladies*—Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, I chose three texts that are set predominantly in dwelling spaces—in spaces of home—and underscore the significance of these spaces for the development and well-being of their protagonists. Whether it is a small apartment in the United States, a crammed tenement building in the Northeast of London, or a posh flat in central London, it is here that the protagonists live out their daily lives, negotiate desires and personal struggles, and come to terms with their condition of migrancy. These experiences reflect to some extent the authors' personal backgrounds. But more than that, they illustrate the tensions between voluntary and involuntary migration and represent migration as inherently gendered and contingent. Mrs. Sen moves with her husband who accepted a job with the local university. Having no employment of her own, not to mention any friends or family, she feels lonely and is homesick for India. Yet by providing after-school care for an American boy she finds a means—albeit temporary—to cope with her situation. Nazneen comes to London because of her marriage with Chanu, a fellow Bangladeshi who turns toward marriage in order to compensate for his inability to make a decent living in British society. In London, Nazneen has to face her own personal struggles, her longings and desires, and live up to her husband's expectations of her as a good wife and a symbol of Bengali customs and home. In Najwa's case, her local circumstances of migration are characterized by personal losses, trauma, and guilt—feelings that arise out of the interplay of forced migration, the death of her parents, financial hardship, and her Muslim background. Here, Najwa's coping strategy is to turn toward the local mosque and take on jobs as a domestic worker in other immigrant households.

The reader follows these women as they negotiate issues of marriage and family, engage with their husbands, boyfriends, friends, lovers, and employers, and carry out domestic chores—all of which takes place in their homes or in the home of another family. Nevertheless, despite these almost stereotypical gendered experiences, the dwelling places neither materialize as traditional places of home nor as inherently oppressive—as has been theorized by feminist theory. Rather, the seemingly traditional tasks carried out in the home emerge as highly ambiguous and multivalent practices. On the one hand they put these women in their place as wives, caregivers, and domestic workers. On the other hand, these women resignify these practices and assign them soothing and empowering effects that help them establish a personal sense of home and belonging within the domestic sphere. The home thus manifests as a new concept and as a product of individual personal achievements, struggles, memories, and place-specific practices that anchor the protagonists in their new environment.

In Chapter 2, I similarly concentrated on the experiences of female migrants. Here, however, I focused on movement and pointed out the possibilities of alternative spaces of belonging that are located outside of the family home or the workplace. Revisiting Aboulela's novel for a more complete analysis of Najwa's life in London, one that takes into account the other intimate and personally meaningful places that make up her everyday lived space, I also considered two texts from the German context: Senait G. Mehari's partly fictional memoir *Feuerherz* (*Heart of Fire*) and a short story by a prominent Turkish-German writer, Emine Sevgi Özdamar's "Der Hof im Spiegel" ("The Courtyard in the Mirror"). In particular, I focused on spaces of community, friendship, romance, and neighborliness, and how such spaces are connected via movement and

walking. In *Minaret*, Najwa joins the Regent's Park mosque even before she starts working as a maid. As a social and religious institution and a place for female bonding, the mosque provides a space of comfort and relief. Together with Regent's Park, where Najwa takes her employer's grandchild for walks and secretly meets with Tamer, her employer's son, these two settings manifest as highly intimate and personal places that, despite their own embeddedness within hierarchical power relations, help Najwa come to terms with her difficult past and present, and carve out a meaningful future. *Feuerherz* similarly tells of a female refugee. Senait has fled the war in Somalia to reunite with her violent father in Germany. Here, however, the home is represented as a space of abuse and oppression so that, fearing for her own safety, Senait runs away and thereby recreates and resignifies the instability and upheavals of her childhood, and finds a temporary space of home in the streets of Hamburg's bustling inner city. As a Foucauldian heterotopia, downtown Hamburg is represented as a space of an alternative social order that helps Senait rewrite trauma by creating positive experiences in the present. Finally, Özdamar's story thematizes the neighborly space of a courtyard as a larger lived space that blends in with the dwelling place. Via sensual impressions, conversations, other shared experiences, and, above all, movement, Emine creates what she calls a "personal city map" turning the city and the courtyard—a smaller representation of the city or even the nation—into her personal place of home and belonging.

Walking plays an important role in these processes, yet it is in my third chapter that I fully fleshed out the idea of incorporating and getting to know one's environment—in this case the city—by walking. Moving away from rather specific and personal places of belonging as highlighted in the first two content chapters, in Chapter 3 I contemplated

the city not merely as a space of home but as representative of the larger historical, cultural, and political context. In Cole's *Open City* and Özdamar's *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*, the protagonists are already at home in the city. They are practical cosmopolitans who have moved to New York and Berlin for work purposes, and it is on their daily walks and by passing through and inhabiting particular locales—historically resonant places as well as ordinary streets and buildings—that they excavate and personally connect to the larger historical, political, and cultural narratives making up the city. Doing so, they are able to distinguish between dominant memory discourses and stories that have been repressed or forgotten. Julius's walks through New York in *Open City* are guided by what Andreas Huyssen refers to as “recherche,” a creative exploration of the past, that together with Roland Barthes's *punctum*—the little details of a picture or a scene that touch the protagonist intimately and personally—helps him form a relationship with the city as well as trace his own past. Emine in *Seltsame Sterne*, on the other hand, gets to know the divided Berlin of the late 1970s by actively witnessing and participating in the memory discourses that make up the city and by establishing herself as a resident of what we now perceive of as the past.

Finally, in my last two chapters I explored the avenues opened up by new and old media. Looking at two very recent examples—Freudenberger's *The Newlyweds* and Cole's Twitter project—I argued that the Internet and social media, in particular, can provide metaphorical spaces for “networked selves” and can serve as important mediators between real lives and real places. In Chapter 4, I developed the idea of how the Internet—and the more traditional services it offers such as email, access to news, photo sharing and online dating—can bring the multiple homelands and neighborhoods closer

together. In Freudenberger's novel, these services enable the protagonist to explore possibilities that go beyond her own cultural boundaries: to find an American husband and join him in the United States. As a medium marked by interactivity, instantaneity, and transnationalism, the Internet helps Amina explore her new cultural context, a process that is reinforced by the access to popular culture. Once in the United States, the very same processes work in the opposite direction. Here she can keep up with developments in Bangladesh by navigating the web and talking to her parents on the phone, thereby constructing a dual sense of belonging that is decisively informed by the use of old, new, and popular media.

Cole's Twitter project, on the other hand, which I explore in Chapter 5, is an example from the real world that, despite its literary aspirations, brings together actual events and real locations. Theorizing Twitter as a platform for the production and circulation of information and ideas, here I argued that Cole creates a multidirectional and multi-layered sense of belonging that brings together Cole and his followers, Lagos and New York, as well as past and present events within the real-time developments of Twitter. Specifically, I focused on four interdependent aspects of his Twitter stream which I identified as community, rupture, affect, and local and global effects. As a medium of participatory culture, Twitter allows Cole to engage with his followers, address them directly and respond to or retweet their tweets. Because of the unique form and content of Cole's tweets—news briefs from Nigeria or news from New York City from 100 years ago—Cole's "small fates" are unique in the Twitter stream, causing a rupture in people's feeds and everyday lives by urging them to pause and reflect. A concomitant effect of this rupture is the emotional response triggered by his tweets.

People are surprised, shocked, or moved. They smile or laugh, and they are eager to hear more, reactions that can be theorized in terms of affect. Finally, because of Cole's unique position as a Nigerian migrant living in New York, in combination with the referents of his tweets and the locations of his followers, Cole interweaves the local and the global, the past and the present, staking out a unique place where such diverse elements can more visibly intersect. Cole's tweets further respond to issues that anchor him firmly in his very local American context. With his tweets on drones he shows how he has the cultural knowledge and authority to engage in urgent and potentially subversive political issues, thereby shaping and making opinions, and owning his new cultural context on multiple levels.

In this vein, the texts or projects I have examined thematize not only spatiality but also the relationship between migrants and place. More explicitly, I have argued that in these texts, the migrant protagonists construct a sense of belonging to their new cultural contexts which works through particular places on varying geographical scales. This sense of belonging can materialize either as an affective category—as a sense of home, comfort, and stability—or as a cognitive category and therefore as a way of knowing, in addition to feelings of being in place that fit both categories. In each possible constellation, the sense of belonging is based upon specific places that help these migrants feel comfortable and/or help them get to know their new surroundings—the underlying historical, cultural, political, and other dimensions. It is in such places that migrants forge social bonds, friendships, and communities. And it is here that they navigate their daily lives, negotiate homesickness, longings, and desires, and create new personal memories that contribute to place-making and anchor them firmly in their new

environments. Place-making can be an individual or collective achievement, a result of daily routines and practices, as well as of hard-fought struggles. In some instances, it means that migrants reinscribe their homeland into their new cultural context. In others, they bring the homeland left behind closer because of the possibilities opened up by new media. Places can be pre-given, co-constructed, or newly created. Yet in all these cases, place materializes not only as a primary location in individual migrants' lives, but also as a lens of reading that can flesh out precisely these individual experiences and identities as they coalesce and become transparent in place.

This is, however, not to say that place as an analytical category could not prove fruitful in an analysis of earlier texts. Neither would it be accurate to assume that earlier texts did not thematize spatiality or movement, or that it was only as a result of the spatial turn that cultural geographers, as well as theorists from other fields, began to think critically about spatiality. As I have made it clear, human existence inevitably takes place in space, and although it is Edward Soja who is by and large credited with adding spatiality as a third category to the traditional dialectic of being, Henri Lefebvre and others had made similar claims before him. As Doris Bachmann-Medick in *Cultural Turns* asserts, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and others had been concerned with spatiality as an analytical category as early as 1900. One only needs to think of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, devoted to Paris, in which he describes the material as well as the imaginative qualities of this complex city, in addition to introducing prototypical city types such as the collector or the *flâneur*. In his *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, he conjures up images of another city—this time the city of his youth—images, or rather impressions, not of the city as a whole but of specific moments in specific places, and of

the unique feel of such moments in space-time: a cold winter morning longing to sleep in, butterfly hunting in the zoological garden, Christmas time in the family apartment, or the glow of the gas lights on the streets. Similarly, Kracauer in his famous essay on the hotel lobby, included in *The Mass Ornament*, theorizes the hotel lobby as a city within the city, a place that has its own rules and is at same time a part of and clearly separate from the rest of the city—in this case Berlin. Benjamin and Kracauer therefore already foreshadow what Massey will later refer to as a progressive sense of place: an idea of place as a process, as constructed in while at the same time co-constructing society, as inextricably tied to memory and other personal experiences and emotions, as unique and contested, offering a variety of possibilities for diverse individuals, and by no means self-contained but always related to other places.

Literary texts, too, are always to some extent concerned with spatiality. Therefore I am not the first one to bring place or spatiality as a category to an analysis of such texts. As literary critics we are used to talking about Baudelaire's or Balzac's Paris, Dickens's London, Joyce's Dublin, or Döblin's Berlin. By doing so we refer to the city as a literary setting or a character in the texts written by these authors, but also to the actual city that sets the conditions for the production of such texts, influencing as well as being influenced by such canonical works of literature. We also read these writers as giving us clues about the perception of and attitudes toward the city at that time, about its inhabitants, and society in general. Most importantly, the city lends these works their specificity and local color. Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* would be an entirely different novel were it not set in Berlin. The same holds true for most other cultural productions around the globe—Western and non-Western, canonical and non-canonical. In “Acting

Bits/Identity Talk” Spivak corroborates this assumption and the significance of what I call place, setting, or a specific locale, and what she refers to as a “context” and “origin.” In this essay she discusses, among other issues, the Lebanese-Canadian artist Jamelie Hassan’s adaptation of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. In Hassan’s media show Egypt replaces India, a disconcerting effect for Spivak who describes watching the show as stripping her of her identity and historical belonging.

In his 2010 monograph *Romanzo Mondo (The World Novel)* Italian literary critic Vittorio Coletti puts forward a quite contrasting view. He explores the idea of how homogenizing trends in Europe, mainly the progress toward the European Union, have also resulted in a homogenization of the European novel, and he claims that “the moment was approaching when a story told in Berlin wouldn’t be very different from one set in Lisbon” (qtd. in Parks n. pag.).¹⁵² Nonetheless, even such a generic novel has to rely on a setting that is identifiable as urban or European, and therefore has to adhere to rules of place. Moreover, as theories of globalization have shown, the global village and the homogenization of culture remains a myth for a variety of reasons. A certain degree of locality will always prevail. While for certain cultural products locality or place matters and has always mattered, others produce the effect of a specific locale. Yet in both cases locality and place remain always-important categories.

In this dissertation I have intentionally chosen texts that are either set in very specific locales (London, New York, Berlin, Rochester, Dhaka) and/or in other distinct places (the home, a park, a neighborhood, or a mosque): texts that thematize spatiality, movement, the relocation from one place to another, and other spatial categories, and which I therefore read as demanding precisely the kind of reading I am doing. What is

¹⁵² As of May 2013 Coletti’s work is only available in its original Italian.

new here is thus not the focus on space per se—as a literary setting, a place of origin, historical belonging, or specific locale—but the focus on the various scales of place as a primary category and an analysis of such places that further draws on cultural geography as a field that is by definition concerned with spatiality. To my knowledge, there has only been one other study that is comparable to this, which is James Procter’s 2003 *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*, a highly ambitious work that equally shifts focus onto places on smaller scales—basements, bedsits, streets, cafés, suburbs, but also the city and provincial settings—and “examines the limits of a dislocated diaspora poetics and the possibilities of a situated reading of postwar black British writing” (3). Procter, however, refrains from a close reading of such places as they are employed in one specific text, and he also does not bring in cultural geography. Rather, his analysis is a profile of how such places have been employed *throughout* the Black British canon of cultural productions from the 1950s up until the 1990s, and how they tie in with or represent actual historical and political developments. He examines, for instance, the concept of “loitering” (which takes place on the street), how loitering became coded as a criminal act, and how loitering is represented in a variety of texts. But he does not read the street as a place in its own right, as having agency and wielding power over passers-by and residents. He does not explore the whole range of meanings, possibilities, and practices the street—and for that matter specific streets, as there is a difference between a small alleyway, a street in one’s immediate neighborhood, or a large shopping mile—has to offer, or how the street is constructed and reconstructed through people’s mobility through and between other places. There are many other questions that Procter’s reading cannot address, for example the role of a distinctive street or other place for the totality of

a protagonist's lived space, or how place is necessary not only for the production but also for a more complete understanding of identity. For him place serves less as a lens of reading or a conceptual tool than a mere structural principle upon which he bases his analysis.

While Procter's book highlights the strategic possibilities of a focus on dwelling places—which in his analysis far exceeds a narrow idea of dwelling—in the black British context, the home and other everyday lived spaces have been the subject of analysis in other contexts as well. Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* (1925) is generally read as a novel in which dwelling spaces represent the social status of immigrants—here Jewish immigrants from Poland. In Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) the idea of property and home ownership is threaded throughout the novel and, again, in many ways represents the typical immigrant story—this time coming from Barbados. Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* (1945) take place on the street, in bars, restaurants, salons, rented rooms, and other assorted spaces of pre-1933 Berlin. These are examples of texts that could also be classified as belonging to the literature of migration, as they are concerned with migration, movement, and relocation. But the focus on spatiality or movement is by no means restricted to this genre alone, as writers like the ones mentioned above (Baudelaire, Balzac, Dickens, Joyce, Döblin, and others) confirm. I have limited my analysis to cultural productions of the last fifteen years and to texts representative of the literature of migration because migration is an inherently spatial phenomenon and because I am concerned with contemporary forms of migration and interrelated issues of race, class, gender, nationality, and ethnicity. I further link contemporary flows of migration to the spatial turn and the trends of ever-shifting

borders after 1989/90 and 2001. Yet an analysis of the earlier literature of migration or texts—old and new—that are not concerned with migration at all, and of course film and other expressions of relevant experiences, would have been equally rewarding and is something I would like to see addressed in the future.

Place in its critical geographical conceptualization can serve as a strategy of reading that can grant access to a variety of texts. Adding to the catalog of feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, psychoanalytical, deconstructionist and other kinds of reading, spatial approaches to literature may well be included in future anthologies of literary theory, as spatial thinkers from geography (Lefebvre, Soja, Tuan, Massey, Harvey, Cresswell, Keith, Pile, Till, Boyer, and others) are increasingly read in graduate English or comparative literature classes. These thinkers have to offer an as-of-yet underexplored wealth of ideas for the study of literature and culture—only some of which I adopted, customized, and reevaluated here. Literature, indeed, can be the vehicle to render transparent and legible some of the more complex ideas such as Massey's progressive sense of place, Basso's interanimation, or Till's notion of places as the last survivors and witnesses of history, and can also potentially supplement and expand upon such ideas.

Literature and other expressions of culture can imagine scenarios and constellations that might not be possible, or radically transform what we think possible, in the real world. Massey's sense of place theorizes how places stretch outside and are situated within larger networks of places. But Massey may not have anticipated the scope of her argument as this also entails the relationship between places of the past and places of the present, imagined and material places, and how places left behind and passed through keep informing each other and change how places are perceived in the present—

ideas that come to fore in most of the texts discussed here. Furthermore, such networks of places, one's lived space or the "personal city map," can assume myriad personal forms and dimensions that are impulsive and unpredictable and cannot be fathomed by any theoretical model. Places are further embodied, which is an issue phenomenological approaches to geography highlight, and we constantly carry places with us, channelling knowledges, experiences, and other emotions that tie us to certain places.

Places are socially constructed but they also differ for each individual. Massey indicates the various subjective attitudes toward place. But the examples of Kilburn High Road or the London Docklands leave out individual communities, discrete identities, memories, experiences, and emotions, trauma, or forced migration. Till and Boyer focus on memory. But memory in its newer conceptualizations as transcultural, translocal, or cosmopolitan is a field that could inspire cultural geography indefinitely. It is here that the infinite resources of literature and new trends in memory studies can advance the study of this subject in geography. Cresswell speaks of movement as producing while at the same time being a product of spatiality. But what I suggest in my second chapter is that movement can in itself offer a space of comfort, a mobile space that is not merely an extension of other places, like the street or the home, but a new space entirely, and it would be interesting to see geographers take up this issue in the future.

A direction literary studies could take is to consider spatiality beyond its textual realm and to look at the specific spatial conditions of production, distribution, and reception. Another approach would be to read texts themselves as a space where certain identities and practices can be performed but also as taking up space in the cultural landscape of a national context, as a mobile space that circulates, or quite literally as

taking up space in a bookstore, a library, on a kindle, or in a literary canon. Finally, as I have suggested in my second chapter during my discussion of Senait G. Mehari's *Feuerherz*, when it comes to memoirs, autobiography, and life writing, there is a trend to describe texts and literature as creating metaphorical homes in writing. A task I want to take on myself in the future is to explore the possibilities of such a material and imagined home, the desires, emotions, and other processes that accompany or produce the act of writing, and how writing then might be viewed as another spatial practice.

Again, a focus on spatiality and place is mandatory for such projects. Zeroing in on particular places on varying scales—physical and metaphorical—as they are personally meaningful to individuals allows for scholarship that illuminates the intersecting and often competing trajectories, stories, and meanings coming together in place. This strategy sheds light on the attitudes, feelings, and relationships experienced in place; on the causes and effects of these experiences; and on how these causes, effects, and individual experiences tie in with other places that make up an individual's lived space. Not only with regard to migration, a focus on place helps distinguish between the multifaceted, individual, and contingent experiences of discrete identities. It allows for the broad categories of diaspora, exile, and immigration, or home and belonging to take on tangible meanings not as universally applicable categories but as locally specific conditions experienced in particular places, which is precisely the goal of this project. But place can also serve as a conceptual approach to critique other concepts, ideas, and discourses. Place matters. And place, as I have shown here, can be used as a strategy to redefine displacement and reevaluate diaspora.

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- . "A warm welcome to new followers. I mostly use twitter for "small fates," about which you can read more here:<http://t.co/CcdqebUj>." 9 Mar. 2012, 2:52 p.m. Tweet.
- . "Anatomy of a small fate. pic.twitter.com/6SY6kxtr." 8 Jan. 2013, 1:25 p.m. Tweet.
- . "The basic concept for this one came early, so my editing was for speed of the line, rhythm, and ironic inflection." 8 Jan. 2013, 1:21 p.m. Tweet.
- . "Bio: 'We' who?" 2 Feb. 2013, 1:56 p.m. Tweet.
- . "But often I'll start with one concept and completely change it halfway through. Some fates go to 20 drafts." 8 Jan. 2013, 1:22 p.m. Tweet.
- . "Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable." 14 Jan. 2013, 12:06 p.m. Tweet.
- . "The end of small fates." 1 Feb. 2013, 1:28 p.m. Tweet.

- . First I find a story in one of a dozen Nigerian newspapers, either via their twitter feeds or through their websites.” 8 Jan. 2013, 1:16 p.m. Tweet.
- . “Going back to Nigerian small fates. Promise not to cry.” 18 Sep. 2012, 9:23 a.m. Tweet.
- . “The Gowanus dolphin died. That’s sad.” 25 Jan. 2013, 6:49 p.m. Tweet.
- . “I am an invisible man. My name is unknown. My loves are a mystery. But an unmanned aerial vehicle from a secret location has come for me.” 14 Jan. 2013, 12:11 p.m. Tweet.
- . “I chose late on to use Edith Ndu’s first name instead of her last. When I got to ‘encourage her’ instead of ‘help her decide,’ I was done.” 8 Jan. 2013, 1:24 p.m. Tweet.
- . “It’s your turn now. Today’s assignments coming up. Tag your version #tcsf (Teju Cole Small Fates), and I’ll retweet the best ones.” 4 Sep. 2011, 10:13 a.m. Tweet.
- . “The last fate (snake in an apartment) went through 8 drafts and took about 15 minutes. That’s about average for me.” 8 Jan. 2013, 1:19 p.m. Tweet.
- . “Mother died today. The program saves American lives.” 14 Jan. 2013, 12:16 p.m. Tweet.
- . “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist’s.” 14 Jan. 2013, 12:04 p.m. Tweet.
- . “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His torso was found, not his head.” 14 Jan. 2013, 12:15 p.m. Tweet.
- . “On a condolence visit to Alhaji Maigari, of Gombe, whose daughter had died, Senator Goje’s speeding convoy knocked the man’s son dead.” 20 Dec. 2012, 4:58 a.m. Tweet.
- . “One good probe deserves another. Ms Aladeojebi, of Ajuwon, who tested her students for virginity, will herself be examined by psychiatrists.” 21 Dec. 2012, 9:01 p.m. Tweet.
- . *Open City*. New York: Random House, 2011. Print.
- . “Since Carter, the man he shot dead on 34th Street and 5th Avenue, was a negro, Plitt was at first not held. But he is now in custody.” 2 Apr. 2012, 9:21 p.m. Tweet.
- . “Since his tenant Edith wouldn’t volunteer to leave, Onukafor released a snake in her apartment to encourage her. In Ago-Okota.” 8 Jan. 2013, 12:41 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Small fates was a weird project. But you got it, you helped me think through it, and made it interesting. Thank you." 1 Feb. 2013, 1:30 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was killed by a Predator drone." 14 Jan. 2013, 12:13 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead bearing a bowl of lather. A bomb whistled in. Blood on the walls. Fire from heaven." 14 Jan. 2013, 12:08 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Teju Cole." Web. 9 Apr. 2013.

---. "Teju Cole." *Facebook*. Web. 26 Feb. 2013.

---. "Teju Cole (@tejucole)." *Twitter*. Web. 26 Feb. 2013.

---. "Then I compose. In Word if I'm home, on email if I'm out. I use Helvetica Neue because I can estimate (from experience) the character count." 8 Jan. 2013, 1:18 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Three commas are slower than one. A rare word can help stretch a story's sense of time. But I wanted this particular story to zip along." 8 Jan. 2013, 1:23 p.m. Tweet.

---. "Vivian, 24, hired in Lagos through Skilled Nanny Service Ltd, skillfully took her new madam's N5 million for a stroll." 22 Dec. 2012, 5:15 a.m. Tweet.

---. "Wicked Pictures." *The New Inquiry*. 18 Jan. 2013, Web. 26 Feb. 2013.

---. "With a gloved nurse's help, Reverend Oladejobi, principal of Ajuwon School, investigated the virtue of her female students." 19 Dec. 2012, 10:20 p.m. Tweet.

---. "With machetes, Uduzon and Donatus, in Ikotun and Meiran, respectively, gave Obi and Egwu new looks. Housing disputes." 20 Dec. 2012, 1:27 p.m. Tweet.

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