

Anna Savitskaya

Being as Inheritance

Identity, Trauma, and Mourning
in Contemporary Transcultural Narratives



Universitätsverlag Göttingen

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To my family,
To my being

Introduction

Although modern societies are increasingly dynamic and complex, cultural backgrounds continue to retain their solid role in shaping identities and social perceptions. Cultural identity, while not strictly tied to nationality, often involves negotiating fragments of cultural and historical past. Particularly interesting are ancestral legacies, such as losses, trauma, or responsibilities that influence identity across generations. This work explores how identity is shaped by various forms of inheritance – whether accepted, repressed, or interwoven with other cultural forms. By analysing contemporary transcultural fiction, I examine the mediation between inherited cultural forms, memories, and tragedies, and how these elements contribute to identity formation through socialisation. My aim is to uncover the intricacy of identity formation, particularly how one's cultural and historical past may play a role in displacement, identity crises, and ethnic clashes.

Drawing on a close study of the concept of transculturality, combined with insights from large-group psychology, trauma studies, and theories of implication and primary human vulnerability, I will analyse a set of identity (trans)formation processes I will further refer to as forms of “inheritance” in selected works of fiction. Focusing primarily on characters with migration backgrounds in transcultural narratives, my work explores how large-group psychology and transgenerational trauma transmission can provide a better understanding of displacement and identity crises. I have chosen the term “inheritance” to describe a connection between

past and present. Inheritance in this context goes beyond property rights and privileges. It is also not limited to genetics as some of the narratives I will analyse here offer a critique of the idea that cultures are transmitted through bloodlines. In this work, I redefine inheritance as a term that includes the transmission of trauma, tasks of mourning, culture, privilege, or implication. Whether direct or indirect, personal or collective, genetic or transmitted through cultural memory, the links across generations shape who we are in many ways.

By approaching the questions of cultural identity through the lens of the inheritance of culture, I investigate transcultural identity formations, with particular attention to collective trauma. Examining the intricate ways in which transcultural identity transcends inherited and adopted cultures, I look into the issues of displacement, rootlessness, cultural trauma, and identity crises in literature to understand the challenges transcultural identities face not only through personal displacement but also through societal alienation of cultural hybrids.

The narratives I analyse through this interdisciplinary theoretical prism portray characters who challenge the belief that culture is an existing rigid construct passed down through generations. While some narratives address displacement by depicting rejection of cultural and historical pasts, leading to identity crises, others explore the potential for transforming cultural identities by interweaving cultural inheritance and social learning. These narratives not only depict in-betweenness and fluidity of transcultural identities in literature but also trace the roots of displacement and ethnic conflicts in the contemporary world. Therefore, the goal of this work is to unpack different forms of inheritance involved in identity formation and examine how reflecting on the past can provide deeper insights into present-day identity issues and ethnic conflicts.

This work begins with a discussion of the different forms of inheritance that constitute identity formation and can help unravel the roots of identity issues. I will first discuss cultural transmission processes within the field of cultural anthropology and move on to a specific type of transmission emerging in the narratives that have shaped this work: transgenerational trauma transmission. The first chapter also explores the role of spaces in conveying different forms of transmission and touches upon the topics of cultural memory, cultural haunting, large-group psychology, primary human vulnerability, grievability of lives, and implication to examine the various ways in which identity crises may be linked to one's cultural ancestry. In chapter 2, I will analyse three novels – Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*, and Poro-chista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* – all of which deal with the problem of embodying certain cultural, religious, or ethnic prejudice or beliefs. I will examine how the characters in these narratives either transcend or attempt to overcome the notion that cultural traits are inherited. In chapter 3, I will explore Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* and Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*, two narratives that vividly depict inexplicable bonds between different cultures, the past and the present, and reality and imagination within heterotopic spaces. In the final part of my analysis of contemporary

narratives, I will examine Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* to explore how cultural trauma and loss manifest as cultural inheritance, transforming both collective and personal identities. My work investigates contemporary transcultural narratives that portray identities often compelled to navigate the complexities between history and present, family and country, faith and nationality. I will conclude this work with chapter 5 by summarising my investigation of the above-mentioned narratives and highlighting the parallels and common threads between them. Complementing the final chapter with an overview of a few other works of contemporary fiction which can be conceived as narratives of inheritance – narratives of loss, mourning, haunting, implication, and trauma. I will conclude the chapter and this work with reflections on the theoretical amplifications of employing large-group psychology, trauma transmission, and implication in the analysis of transcultural fiction.

1. Inheriting Culture: Ethnicity, Trauma, Implication

“That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not.”

— Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

As I delved deeper into the study of personal identity conflicts in literary narratives, I found it impossible to ignore the profound impact of collective identity on the individual. Cultural identity, in its collective form, is often preserved and transmitted through generations, shaping individual narratives in significant ways. Therefore, this chapter addresses the connection between the personal and the collective. I do not intend to argue that cultural past and a strong sense of collective identity are solely responsible for cultural conflicts or personal identity crises, as that would be an oversimplification. Rather, the perspective on inheritance here highlights the importance of acknowledging complex cultural histories and their effects on the present. In this way, I seek to illustrate the intricate and nuanced nature of inheritance and its impacts. Providing insights into the relationships between one's personal and large-group identity, cultural memory, trauma, and the psychological

implications of cultural conflicts, this work seeks to enhance understanding of these processes and challenge prevailing critical views on the role of cultural pasts.

1.1 Nations, Genes, Ethnicities

Cultures and Genes

In response to whether inheriting ancestral culture is possible, I would assert that this inheritance is not only possible, but also integral to our identity formations. However, the inheritance of culture differs significantly from the genetic transmission of physical characteristics. It also does not allow us to jump to the conclusion that there are direct connections between one's ethnic background and behaviour. On the contrary, genetics has very little to do with cultural inheritance.

To understand whether cultural transmission is possible between generations, it is essential to first define what is implied by culture from an anthropological perspective. In the definition of the cultural anthropologists Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, culture is understood "as information acquired by imitating or learning from other individuals and able to affect an individual's phenotype, usually behaviour" ("Natural Selection and Culture" 430). Even though they refer to culture's ability to affect one's phenotype, i.e., one's traits, this definition points to the fact that such traits are not genetically inherited. There are, however, certain similarities between cultural transmission and genetic transmission. For example, certain personal qualities or skills developed during early childhood may form patterns of behaviour that are hard to separate from patterns determined by genetics in empirical studies (430). For a deeper understanding of how certain patterns, attitudes, or beliefs are acquired during childhood, I will later turn to the perspective of psychology as it offers insights significant for my further analyses of literary narratives. For now, however, I would like to mention another important point that cultural anthropologists arrive at, namely that cultural transmission is not limited to family upbringing, which also makes empirical observations of them more difficult. Certain traits believed to be culture-specific are transmitted through observation of others or through learning from more experienced individuals (430). At times "[n]onparental individuals" serve as more effective role models as they may possess greater skills or knowledge (432). Similarly, in cases of adoption, children "grow up with beliefs, values, and attitudes of the culture in which they are raised" (*Not by Genes Alone* 39). Sociologists also link identity formation to socialisation processes, which are strongly framed by one's belonging to a social group (Genner and Süss 6). Cultural transmission, which significantly affects identity formation, can occur between children and their non-biological parents or other role models. This is important when considering that cultural transmission also occurs collectively within a given cultural group. Parallel to personal identity development, political leaders may exert a powerful influence on their group, which may become particularly critical in times of

crisis (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 48). Cultural traits are not transmitted in the same manner as genes. Unlike genetics, acquiring culture is an active process, one in which an individual makes decisions. As Richerson and Boyd sum it up, “we choose what traits we learn from others, but a zygote cannot choose its genes” (“Natural Selection and Culture” 430).

What is curious about the concept of inheritance is the widespread belief that genes determine one’s identity. In their book on cultural evolution *Not by Genes Alone*, Richerson and Boyd very clearly define the differences between genes and culture:

Biology is about nature; culture is about nurture. Some things, like whether you have sickle-cell anemia, are determined by genes – nature. Other things, like whether you speak English or Chinese, are determined by the environment – nurture. ... Since most human behaviour is learned, [evolutionary biologists] conclude evolutionary theory has little to contribute toward shaping or understanding it. (*Not by Genes Alone* 9)

Genetics does not define culture. Furthermore, research shows that different social or cultural environments can result in different behavioural patterns among genetically identical individuals (10). This implies that “environmental differences are immediate causes of behaviour” (10). Thus, behavioural patterns are not in-born and neither are cultures. If one’s social or cultural environments change throughout their lives, and these changes can be hardly avoided in today’s globalised world, one’s cultural identity will keep evolving as well.

Natural experiments in behavioural science show that the behavioural differences which can be observed among the nations and cultures in today’s world are not directly related to or explained through genetic variations (35). What is more, individuals of different cultural backgrounds “behave differently in the same environment” (27). Hence, anthropologists agree that “neither genes nor transmissible environment is likely to be sufficient to explain the variation between human societies, leaving culture as the most likely suspect” (21). As genetics has little effect on cultural development, let me turn my attention to the role of learning and imitation in cultural evolution.

Richerson and Boyd argue that “the ability to imitate can generate the cumulative cultural evolution of new adaptations at blinding speed compared with organic evolution” (13). Culture is transmitted from one person to another “by way of a variety of social learning processes” (61). Beliefs and ideologies are adopted by individuals easily when they are shared by other individuals in their group (13), which points to the link between personal and collective identity. The tendency to follow the beliefs and attitudes of one’s group – whether a social circle, a diaspora, or a whole nation – has a direct impact on one’s identity formation and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. “People resemble those from whom they have acquired ideas, values, and skills” (13), which may result from a shared environment or language. Consequently, these adopted beliefs become rooted in the cultural

group. Over time and generations, the roots begin to run so deep that it is often assumed that the culture is built into the genetic code of the given group. This assumption, commonly held by cultural groups about themselves and opposing groups, is simply false. The key question, however, is why this assumption persists and why it seems so challenging to refute with compelling arguments.

Many evolutionary psychologists argue that culture is evoked, meaning that it is not transmitted or learned, it is gene-based instead (44). While decades of clinical studies in cultural psychology and case studies in cultural anthropology show that this cannot be entirely true, the aspect of this argument that attracts most interest is that learning requires a variety of preconceptions about the biological, physical, or social worlds. According to the cultural evolutionist Alex Mesoudi, “people reconstruct what they learn from others according to their preexisting knowledge, cognitive or perceptual biases, or other factors” (7857). Nevertheless, cognitive biases cannot fully account for how one’s cultural identity is shaped as there are underlying attitudes and beliefs that people may “naturally” attribute to their culture and others as well. These unconscious forces have also been studied by psychologists for many decades, but before moving on to the psychological perspective, I would like to offer more insights into the different forms of social learning.

One of the reasons the belief that genetics hides behind the mask of the inheritance of culture is so widespread outside of academic context is its simplicity compared to the complexity of social learning processes. Social learning, also referred to as cultural transmission, can produce observable population-level effects and introduce biases that influence genetic evolution. Biased cultural transmission, which is one of cultural evolutionary forces, “occurs when people tend to acquire some cultural variants rather than others”, which can be explained by “innate” or “cultural preferences acquired in an earlier episode of social learning” (Richerson and Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone* 66). Initially, children acquire beliefs and values from their parents, but as they grow up and become exposed to attitudes and ideas of others, they can choose among them (67–69), autonomously developing their identity. The disciplines of psychology and cultural studies mirror these observations when it comes to individual cultural identity development.

The model developed by Richerson and Boyd identifies content-based, frequency-based, and model-based biases that underlie social learning. The content-based (or direct) bias may occur because some values are easier to learn or they appear more beneficial (69). The frequency-based bias suggests that some cultural traits are easily adopted because of their commonness (69). Lastly, the model-based bias indicates that “choice of trait [is] based on the observative attributes of the individuals who exhibit the trait”; this model implies “a predisposition to imitate successful or prestigious individuals, and a predisposition to imitate individuals similar to oneself” (69). In the process of cultural transmission, these biases become closely intertwined. Cultural traits that appear common and, hence, also beneficial to possess may appear so because we observe them in the family, in the cultural group we belong to, or among the powerful individuals we strive to resemble. The

latter may imply parents, celebrities, religious or national leaders. Ideas, beliefs or cultural traits are not shared intact from one person to another. The processes of social learning, which we may refer to as imitation, transmission, or inheritance, involved in one's cultural identity construction are much more complex.

If we are to say that genetic evolution influences the shaping of an individual's or group's cultural identity, this is not merely a straightforward process of cultural transmission involving genetics, as many might rush to claim to justify their personal prejudices. Natural selection has "shaped the developmental process of the organism so that it responds to the environment as it does" (10). Learning processes of a group or an individual use the structures "built into the genes" (10) but are not fully predetermined by the genes which allows me to focus on the processes of cultural transmission as forms of non-genetic inheritance. Although cultural transmission encompasses a wide array of processes, one specific form involves the transfer of mental images through communication and learning, occurring not only within families but also among groups, and this is transgenerational trauma transmission. However, it presents some critical aspects that will be discussed on the following pages. To further examine how group psychology affects our sense of self and sense of belonging in cultural, ethnic, or religious groups, I will now turn my attention to the psychology behind individual and collective identities.

Psychology of Cultural Differences: Individual and Collective Identities

I will begin by addressing the question of cultural differences from the perspective of psychology. While the prerequisite for cultural differences is the existence of different cultural groups, be it nations or ethnicities, I would like to refer to the way the psychologist Erik H. Erikson describes such cultural groups. Essentially claiming that ethnicity is a man-made concept, he refers to ethnic groups as "pseudospecies":

Man as a species has survived by being divided into what I have called *pseudospecies*. First each horde or tribe, class and nation, but then also every religious association has become *the* human species, considering all the others a freakish and gratuitous invention of some irrelevant deity. To reinforce the illusion of being chosen, every tribe recognizes a creation of its own, a mythology and later a history: thus was loyalty to a particular ecology and morality secured. (qtd. in Stein 64)

Erikson refers to the very origins of collective identity and the concept of ethnicity and, while this is far from a conventional definition, it is certainly one to keep in mind when discussing the origins of cultural differences. The psychoanalytic anthropologist Howard Stein also argues that "[w]hat we see as cultural *differences* are the result of an ongoing process of *differentiation*" (115). This process of differentiation, as he describes it, "becomes 'time-frozen' between cultural boundaries and identified as differences" (115). Scholars like Nancy Stepan, Noel Ignatieff, or

Benedict Anderson have also addressed the issue of conventionally assumed national groups (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 24). Despite the fact that these groups and borders are invented, most people perceive their own and others' collective identities through these categories (24). Since people experience their existence as members of ethnicities, nations, races, or religions, these categories cannot be dismissed when examining personal or group identities and how they are shaped by cultural differences.

As Erikson defined in his essay "The Problem of Ego Identity", one's identity comprises many different elements – "all significant identifications" – but instead of assuming them as part of the self, it "alters them in order to make a unique and a reasonably coherent whole of them" (68). From the perspective of psychoanalysis, identity formation:

... arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration, which, in turn, is dependent on the process by which a society (often through subsocieties) identifies the young individual, recognizing him as somebody who had to become the way he is, and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted. (68)

Erikson also emphasises the ever-evolving aspect of identity, stating that identity formation "is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society" (69). The "roots" of identity formation trace back to "the first self-recognition: in the baby's earliest exchange of smiles there is something of a self-realization coupled with a mutual recognition" (69). A child first learns to recognise the difference between self and others – specifically, family members. While the process of learning to trust unfolds through several stages in the early childhood, this circle of familiar "others" expands quickly as the child learns to recognise mutual characteristics that define people of their cultural group. This stage of identity development is the foundation of human relations with individuals from own and other communities or nations.

The political theorist Bhikhu Parekh also addressed the importance of recognising the role of one's cultural or national belonging when examining an individual identity. In his work *A New Politics of Identity*, he defines a three-dimensional approach to identity. The first dimension is personal identity – it includes one's sense of self and inner world (Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity* 9). The second component, social identity, refers to one's ethnic, cultural, religious, or national affiliation, while the third dimension concerns belonging to the human species and understanding one's place in the world (9). Parekh argues that these three dimensions are "inseparable", they exist in connection with each other and together form one's individual identity (9). Social identity, which is of interest to this project, encompasses different components. These may include gender, nationality, religion, and culture. All these components interact with each other, and while they all are essential parts of one's whole identity, as Parekh puts it, "we retain some degree of independence from our various identities and do not become their helpless bearers" (24). Having plural

social identities and keeping balance between them helps us to understand “the inescapable complexity of human life” (24). However, the relative independence from one’s many identities may be shattered if one of the social identities becomes prevalent, causing the individual to almost develop a fixation on a singular identity and consequently a singular world perspective (24). This may occur under rare circumstances and, as the conditions for the healthy existence of the plurality of identities must be provided and supported by the society (25), to better understand the causes and the psychology behind this kind of identity crisis, it is worthwhile looking into the question of collective identity.

As previously discussed, an individual’s identity often holds a strong connection to their group, be it a diaspora, a small village community, a culture, or an entire nation. In psychoanalytic theory, identity is understood as “as a persistent sameness within oneself ... [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (Erikson qtd. in Volkan, “Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas” [TTCT] 81). In his research on identity, the cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah also lays a strong focus on background, reminding us that:

Each person’s sense of self is bound to be shaped by his or her own background, beginning with family but spreading out in many directions – to nationality, which binds us to places; to gender, which connects each of us with roughly half the species; and to such categories as class, sexuality, race, and religion, which all transcend our local affiliations. (*The Lies that Bind* xii–xiii)

He believes that to understand how identity is shaped, it is crucial to keep in mind that identity is shared (3). Since elements of identity, and cultural identity in particular, are shared among individuals belonging to the same cultural group, I find it essential for my further arguments to provide a definition of a collective identity. Vamik Volkan defines “large-group identity – whether it refers to religion, nationality or ethnicity – as the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked by a persistent sense of sameness while also sharing numerous characteristics with others in foreign groups” (“TTCT” 81). The sense of belonging to a large community may be complicated if an individual’s parents are “from different large groups” or “if a person becomes an immigrant voluntarily or is forcibly relocated to a country or region dominated by a different large group” (81). As a result, an individual’s sense of collective identity may be confused, which, in turn, influences his/her sense of personal identity.

The connection between one’s personal identity and collective cultural identity is strengthened during times of crisis, international or interethnic conflicts. Among his many important observations in psychopolitical dialogues between conflicting national or ethnic groups, Volkan reflects on the following experience: when discussing large-group conflicts, “the issues pertaining to each side’s ethnic, national or religious identity assume primary importance and their personal identity fades into the background” (83). Each individual takes the accusations against their group as a “personal attack” and assumes the role of a spokesperson of their group (83).

There is a psychological explanation of why this happens. When facing dangers or conflicts, an individual activates defence mechanisms, one of which can be regression. On the personal level, regression implies a return to “the psychological expectations, wishes, fears” that belong in the earlier stages of human development (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 12). Sensing that an integral part of their identity, namely collective identity, is under attack, an individual will naturally attempt to protect it, succumbing to often irrational and inhumane decisions reinforced by regression.

When a crisis hits a nation or a group of people, it produces shared fears and anxiety and “may lead to a societal regression among the members of the large group” (12). The members of the group or nation in crisis begin to put their group affiliation or cultural identity first, foregoing all the other connections or beliefs and values they may have in common with the “enemy”. One of the reasons why a distinction between collective identities may be strengthened is the “failure to appreciate overlapping identities” (Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity* 39). Two groups may belong to different nations but have a common religion and similar or same cultural customs. If they engage in an international conflict, the political rhetoric may forego the relatedness or sameness between the groups. A strong oppositional view might even require questioning their similarities and attempting to integrate this into the differentiation. Although ideological markers may not be as influential as ethnic affiliation in thickening the skin of collective identity, in this case, ideological differences can also contribute to maintaining the illusion of cultural differences.

Such conflicts that originate from ethnic differences arise not only between nations. Multiethnic nations are found in every part of today’s world. Ethnic-based conflicts that we could observe in the past decades in Myanmar, Georgia, or Greece and currently in Ukraine, Armenia, or Gaza among others, show that as ideal as a multi-ethnic society may seem, a distinct division between ethnic groups even in one society may come with certain dangers. In their essay “Limits of Ethnicity” published in 1978, Howard Stein and Robert F. Hill addresses the existence of the divide between ethnic groups in multi-ethnic nations, arguing that the presence of culturally homogeneous neighbourhoods in the United States serves as an indicator of this divide (24). The geographical separation enhances the sense of belonging with one ethnicity and desire to live with one’s ‘own kind’. However, when it comes to second or third-generations immigrants, the idea of their ethnicity is “abstract” and “idealised”, often based purely on the nostalgic conversations about their ancestral homeland (24). Their need to strengthen their sense of affiliation with ethnic roots is one of the ways, the authors continue, to “heal the wounds” inflicted upon their ancestors (24). Their parents’ fear of moving to a new country, their struggle and humiliation, the discrimination they may have faced – all these later become the foundation of their new identity. The new identity, this way, can encompass unresolved elements of their cultural past that may help maintain the resistance to the influence of dominant culture of their new nation. Therefore, the sense of collective

cultural identity can be nourished by the past – namely through cultural memories and trauma.

Transcending the Past through Transculturality

There are many complexities to the role of collective identity and inheritance in personal identity formations but for a moment, I will focus on one particular type of identity formation that I have come across in most of the narratives I will discuss later in this work. While my focus remains on cultures and roots, I wish to discuss the possibility of transcending cultural past and subsequently arriving at transcultural identity formations. The discussion of transculturality takes the approach of my work beyond inheritance yet it does not deny the influence of the past. It allows me to analyse the process of mediating the past and the present and negotiating cultural and religious extremes.

Cultures of the world have always been interwoven in certain ways, and this has only increased with the rapidly growing mobility of people and information. Identity formation has become “a process of integrating both global contents and local cultural tradition (language, religion, ethnicity)” (Genner and Süss 6). As a result, people today “constitute their cultural identities by drawing on more than one culture” (Schulze-Engler et al. xii). The process of identity formation has always been about integrating different elements and while it might have been possible to do so by still adhering to the norms of one single culture, remaining indifferent to globalisation has become impossible now.

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines identity formation as a process rather than a static construct. He argues that identity is not “the bit of the self which remains always-already ‘the same’, identical to itself across time” (3). Moreover, identity, in a cultural sense, is not established by “superficial of artificially imposed ‘selves’ which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (4). Stuart Hall acknowledges the importance of the individuals’ cultural or historical past in their identity formations. However, he underscores the importance of examining identities in a process, as they use “resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” (4). Identity formation involves integrating elements of shared cultures and histories, yet identities are not entirely determined by the past. Viewing identity as a process involves integrating the past into the present, and merging one’s cultural past – the past inherited through various means – with socialisation elements is also essential for transcultural identity formation.

The philosopher Wolfgang Iser defines transculturality as “a consequence of the *inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures*” (196). The concept of transculturality assumes that “there is no longer anything absolutely foreign” (197). At the same time, this implies that “there is no longer anything exclusively ‘own’ either” (197). When applied to identity formation, this concept suggests that transcultural identity lacks a foundation in collective cultural identity. It involves the ability to

overcome the collective pressure to perceive the world as divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Transculturality accepts that the conventional cultural divide is synthetic in nature. The existence of transculture does not necessitate the creation of the foreign.

Welsch argues that nowadays, it is not only outstanding writers like Montaigne, Whitman or Nietzsche, who were influenced by different cultural and social worlds, but we all are “cultural hybrids” (197). In today’s world, an individual’s identity is simultaneously shaped by various cultures, whether consciously or not, and this process is inherently transcultural. Transcultural identity goes beyond identification with national status and involves a formation process that is free from nationally determined values and attitudes.

Transcultural identity exists beyond the diverse cultural elements that compose one’s identity. Transculturality does not entail abandoning one’s roots, culture, and ethnicity, “it does not abolish but radically transforms and enriches our cultural bodies” (Epstein 342). Hence, there is a recognition of one’s roots without a focus on the inherited culture. As Epstein defines it, “[t]ransculture dissolves these rigid, naturalized features of culture and gives flexibility and new compatibility to elements of different cultures” (343). He argues that transculturality is not about choosing between one’s inherited and adopted culture, nationality and religion, or the past and the present:

To be a representative of one’s origins, or not to have any at all? This dilemma is, however, a false one. Origins are essential, but the purpose of culture is not to affirm them, but to go away from them, to become a river and not a dam. Origins must be inscribed in the history of their overcoming. (341)

Transculturality can be understood as a process of crossing into the beyond of “the entire cultural realm” (332). This way, transcultural identities are actively shaped by individuals in the process of transcending boundaries between different cultures and between the past and the present.

When drawing on the above-mentioned definitions, it is important to underscore that the form of transcultural identity described there is a somewhat ‘healthy’, perfect form that can be achieved if the identity formation process occurs under normal circumstances. If an individual lives through the times of a national or ethnic identity conflict, if he/she suffers from a culture-related traumatic experience or uncovers his/her cultural past or background under traumatic circumstances, the psychological effects of these struggles will have influence on the cultural identity formation. Apart from obvious influences such as international conflicts or massive traumatic events, in which trauma itself can be accompanied by the derealisation of human losses and lives, there can also be a subtle family pressure to follow one’s roots or a social expectation to be an ideal national of one’s country. All these influences, each in some ways drawing on different forms of inheritance, do not only play a role in identity formation but may also hinder one’s potential for transculturality. In spite of the world being seemingly oriented towards mobility and

cosmopolitanism nowadays, I argue that the conflicts within one's cultural identity caused by collective influences prevail over the freedoms transculturality promises.

The concept of transculturality may seem appealing to those who have the freedom to adopt it, who can perceive the world as transcultural from the comfort of the nations where they are allowed to fully belong, where they are accepted for who they are and strive to be. While this may be the case for some, this perspective does not represent the world as it really is. Apart from the influence of the collective or national identity on one's core identity, there is another layer of conflicting elements that may arise in individuals born into an ethnically or racially mixed family or experiencing migration at an early age. If an individual's parents have different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, they are likely to struggle with identification in childhood, grappling with which ethnicity or culture they really belong to and often having to choose between the two. Psychologists refer to these struggles as the phenomenon of cultural homelessness, a significant psychological aspect of transcultural identity.

In their article on existential risks of multicultural identities published in 1999, the psychologists Vivero and Jenkins proposed the term "cultural homelessness" to describe the condition of "certain individuals of mixed ethnic and/or cultural background living within a framework of experiences, feelings, and thoughts that do not belong to any single racial, ethnic, or cultural reference group" (11–12). Such individuals, the authors continue, are deprived of a "coherent sense of having a cultural home" (12). Unlike migrants who willingly or forcibly leave their cultural home, culturally homeless people do not have such a home. If they grow up in a country populated by one or several clear ethnic groups, and this ethnic division is "encouraged", as children, they may feel "confused" about their belonging with a large group (12). Hence, their sense of collective identity will not be the same as that of the persons whose ethnic background positions them within a defined ethnic, cultural, or national group.

Among the main experiences of culturally homeless individuals, the authors list rejection, confusion, and isolation (13). Such people suffer from "the largely pre-verbal experience of lacking something subtle and indescribable that most people seem to have but which they cannot find for themselves, or even identify, much less understand how others acquired it" (14). The feeling of loss and deficit for culturally homeless individuals is strong and often "chronic" (14). While being born into a mono-ethnic family almost always guarantees unconditional acceptance in their given ethnic group, cultural homelessness excludes the possibility of this experience. If we claim that transculturality implies freedom from one's roots and ability to perceive one's self as existing beyond limited cultural realms, it must be taken into account that there are individuals who do not experience this as freedom. I argue that under unfavourable conditions in the social or cultural environment or depending on the individual's psychological well-being, transculturality may take the form of cultural homelessness. Culturally homeless individuals are inclined to experience internal identity conflicts already at early stages of their development, depending on how their family approaches the issue of their cultural or ethnic uniqueness. Similar

to shaping one's identity around one single culture, I view cultural rootlessness as an extreme form of this process. I also see the transcultural perspective as a path towards understanding and accepting one's cultural homelessness and finding one's meaning and place in the world despite the impossibility of belonging to a single culture. The concept of cultural homelessness can be useful for exploring the identity struggles in some of the narratives in the subsequent chapters. Before delving into the novels, however, I will examine the roles of memory and trauma in cultural identity formation.

1.2 Identities Shaped by Trauma

Trauma and the Self

Among the many factors influencing one's identity formation, perhaps the most difficult one to dismiss, should it happen to an individual, is trauma. As the internationally known psychiatrist Vamik Volkan describes it, trauma results from "an external event or an accumulation of a series of events [that] crowd and burden an individual's mind" (*Killing in the Name of Identity* [KNI] 49). Following the psychoanalytic research referenced in this work, I use the term "trauma" not to refer to the traumatic event but rather to the consequences that follow. When a traumatic event occurs, "the individual's mind is either flooded with intense anxiety; or just the opposite occurs, and the person senses the mind as paralyzed" (49). Freud described trauma as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (qtd. in Caruth 3). Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and others used this term to describe "wounding of the mind caused by unexpected emotional shock" (Adami 9). In her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth highlights the difficulty of understanding the roots and nature of trauma by stating that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). The repetition of the traumatic experience occurs in the mind of the survivor against their will (2). The act of repetition was defined by Freud as "traumatic neurosis" (2). The traumatic neurosis is not a direct reaction to the event but, rather, the puzzling experience of surviving it (60).

It is not merely a memory of the traumatic event that is so haunting to the survivor, but rather the inexplicability of the traumatic experience and its impact on the psyche, as Caruth writes: "What returns to haunt the victim ... is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). The mind struggles to comprehend the experience because "the response to the event occurs in the often delayed uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). Therefore, "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent

event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flash-backs, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91).

Trauma cannot be simply forgotten, as it forces the mind to seize the traumatic event, "preventing it from slipping back into its proper chronological place in the past" (K. Erikson qtd. in Adami 3). This experience of trauma disturbs the survivor's "mental schemes" and leads to "a disjunction between experiencing, understanding and verbalizing, because the experience of trauma cannot be integrated into prior frameworks of knowledge" (Adami 6). Trauma is "an event which is experienced too unexpectedly to be fully understood, and is therefore not available to consciousness" (11). In her work *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys argues that the mind is split as the result of a traumatic experience. Unable to "integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness", the victim "is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories" (2). The experience, "fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (Leys, *Trauma* 2). It is not the traumatic experience itself that is so damaging to the psyche, but its delayed and continuing repetition, which cannot be avoided. It is the traumatic neuroses that stun the survivor over and over again, continuously causing damage to the survivor's identity. This return of trauma is extremely important to my further analyses of trauma in the narratives, for it is precisely this experience of its return through haunting that creates a conversation with the past and provides insights into the past that asks to be mourned, acknowledged, or transcended.

Caruth, however, argues that even if the tragic event is not experienced by an individual personally, missing it can also "bear the impact of a trauma" (40). She refers to it as the "ethical relation to the real" (92). The traumatic repetition is thus filled with the ethical burden of the survival. As an example, she recounts Freud's account of the dream, in which he fails to save his child from dying. While it represents the real tragic event, namely Freud's absence during his child's real death, in this dream, the child commands his father to wake up from his dream to "survive to tell the story of my burning" (105). At the same time, this dream comes to him repeatedly, and Freud is torn between staying in the dream with his child who no longer lives and waking up to face the reality. By staying in the dream and reliving the traumatic event, he embodies the identity of the father he failed to be in the real life. This embodiment of the identity that did not suffer trauma in itself implies reliving the trauma again. It can even be suggested that in this case an individual is not only haunted by but also, in a sense, attached to one's trauma. This shows how trauma can have a strong hold over a person, which is an aspect many of the narratives analysed in this work attempt to emphasise.

For Freud to come back to the dream and relive the tragedy over and over again is the only way to embrace his identity as a father. Accepting his failure and mourning the loss of his child would help to move past the anxiety and horror of experiencing the event again. It is complicated for an individual. However, I would argue that, without avoiding generalisations, of course, this observation can also be

applied to collective identity. Failing to be there for their family or social group when a tragic, disastrous event strikes the nation may have a traumatic impact on the group and individual psyche alike. What individuals cannot fully grasp or comprehend in the tragedy that falls upon their culture disrupts their collective sense of self yet also becomes the foundation of their cultural identity. However, it is crucial to remember to avoid generalisations when examining the effects of trauma on one's mind. As Volkan argues, "each individual's inborn potentials and previous experiences prepare or sensitize the person, and therefore every reaction to drastic events is different" (*KNI* 50).

A traumatic experience delivers a long-term impact on one's identity. Rather than perceiving it as an element that takes part in shaping one's identity, we must see how trauma damages the self instead. Psychologists Thompson and Walsh take an existential approach to analyse traumatic experiences in their clinical cases. Drawing on the studies of the psychologists J. H. Harvey and J. P. Wilson, they conclude that a traumatic experience is "an assault on the self, insofar as a common reaction to a trauma is severe disorientation, often to the point of losing a sense of who we are" (Thompson and Walsh 378). The injury inflicted by trauma results in "the damage to self and self-concept", as the traumatic experience distorts the sense of reality and the survivor's perception of their place in the world, their career and relationships (Nader qtd. in Thompson and Walsh 378). Trauma alters the way in which "the psyche responds inwardly" and can be understood as "the wound to the spirit, essence, or true self" of the person (378–79). Hence, trauma can be studied "as an existential injury", "as it can damage, distort or even destroy our sense of the self and how we fit into the wider world" (Thompson and Walsh 379). A traumatic experience "undermines the basis of our existence" and distorts our perception of the world – "in effect, destabilising or even shattering our frameworks of meaning, our spiritual and existential foundations" (379). The effect of trauma, if not dealt with, will fester in the unconscious mind. If the memory of the traumatic event is repressed or forgotten, its damaging impact on one's identity will pertain. Trauma troubles "the integrity of the self" (Adami 9). The pain and anxiety caused by trauma undermine our sense of security with our identity (Thompson and Walsh 379). As Thompson and Walsh argue, identity is "a linking thread" between our past and the future, and trauma destabilises or erases that link and, thus, shatters our sense of who we are and our "ontological security" (380). Everything that has been taken for granted is reshaped or destroyed by trauma. Depending on the severity of the traumatic event, the experience may result in a loss of identity and be perceived as an existential death (381–82). The disruption of the self can be severe. Carrying on living with the unhealed existential wound so inexplicable that it feels unknown, may feel like foreignness within the self.

It is precisely this aspect of one's identity, namely the repressed and unknown within that reveals itself in fear, humiliation, and anxiety that I will investigate in the selected transcultural narratives in this work. I will focus on cultural traumas and, as clinical studies are outside of the scope of my research or expertise, I will adopt

this approach to my study of the contemporary novels. Narratives, even fictional, I believe, can provide an insight into mental processes. Before I move on to my analysis of the novels, however, I will discuss the phenomenon of transgenerational trauma and the connection between personal and collective trauma as well.

Transgenerational Trauma: Collective Trauma and Collective Identity

Each person deals with their trauma differently. Psychoanalytic work has shown that some people express their trauma in creativity, others relive it, developing traumatic symptoms or even new traits (*KNI* 50). Yet, Volkan argues, some “separate and put their traumatized selves, in a sense, in an envelope (this is called dissociation) and go about behaving as if nothing has happened” (50). A traumatic experience and the need for recovery from a tragic event may turn one’s view towards their social environment. According to Heidegger’s concept of being-towards-others, “each person’s existence is premised on an orientation towards other people and the social world” (qtd. in Thompson and Walsh 383). When trauma shatters one’s identity, being part of a cultural group or a social community becomes essential for one’s existence, especially because the in-group connections may aid in rebuilding “a sense of trust” in one’s environment (Thompson and Walsh 384). The strengthening of the sense of community becomes especially extreme if the group has suffered from a massive trauma, for example, an international, national or inter-ethnic conflict.

Working with traumatised individuals is an extremely complex process. The signs of a trauma, also referred to as the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in psychological literature, do not reveal anything about the victim’s “intimate stories, such as the intertwining of the images of external disaster with the internal images of their past experiences, struggles with mourning over losses and the meanings of what has been lost” (Volkan, *KNI* 107). Essentially the symptoms may indicate that an individual suffered from a traumatic experience, but they cannot reveal the nature of trauma. To attempt to fully understand the affected person’s trauma and struggles over it, a personal approach is required.

Apart from PTSD that can be observed among the individuals affected by national or ethnic identity conflicts, according to Volkan, collective or group traumas can cause four different types of responses among the ethnic group or nation as a whole. These reactions are: “(1) new societal preoccupations; (2) a modification of the existing cultural customs; (3) the building of monuments as shared linking objects; and (4) transgenerational transmissions of trauma” (108). As Volkan continues, “[o]nly through studying these societal responses can we understand how sufferers’ medical and psychological problems following a shared trauma can be connected or can evolve into societal, political, and historical movements” (108). Returning to the existential approach of the psychologists Thompson and Walsh, the power of collective identity in dealing with a traumatic experience can be beneficial. Nevertheless, as the literary scholar Valentina Adami notes, “culture may make

terror and loss heroically meaningful and so diminish its damage, but a culture may also contribute to psychic ruin” for the reason that “trauma can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited” (4). Traumatic events that are cultural, ethnic, or national do not only enhance the sense of collective identity but can also be deployed as tools for political manipulations. In “The Politics of Identity”, Kwame Appiah also points out that politicians have the power to mobilise identities, motivating them to collectively respond to conflicts (22). Through political narratives, collective trauma can become closely entangled in identity politics.

In his essay “Notes on Trauma and Community”, the sociologist Kai Erikson argues that “[o]therwise unconnected individuals who share a traumatic experience can seek one another out and develop a form of communality on that basis” (461). These people “know one another in ways that the most intimate of friends never will” (461). They begin to perceive their shared trauma “almost like a common culture” (461). What brings such individuals together is “a shared set of perspectives and rhythms and moods that derive from the sense of being apart” (466). If a traumatic event is experienced by a cultural group, it will only intensify their need to seek one another and strengthen their cultural identity.

Similar to cultural anthropologists, psychologists also believe that being members of nations and cultures, people follow their leaders and their national ideologies or cultural beliefs. When the group’s collective identity is under threat from another group (nation, ethnicity), people are inclined to humiliate or even desire to kill members of the other group “for the enhancement, protection, or survival of [their] own large-group identity” (Volkan, *KNI* 69). When one’s self is threatened, it may be described as a natural reaction, but I would not claim that this violent response occurs simply because there is an evil side to every being. This response is perceived as the right one because people feel entitled to protect themselves and, as their collective identity is an integral part of their personal identity, they feel the need to protect their group as well (70). The political philosopher Judith Butler also points out that a shared social identity can create “a moral justification for violence” (*The Force of Nonviolence* 55). Psychologists explain this by referring to a shared “subjective sense of sameness” among people in the group, even though most of them have never met (Volkan, *KNI* 70). The only exception here could be a religious cult or a small-scale organisation that shares goals, attitudes, and beliefs. As cults do not tend to exist for hundreds of years like nations, in the short time of their activity, their sense of collective identity might even be stronger than that of a culture.

I find it important to mention here that Volkan, who also point this out several times in each of his works, presents a generalised analysis of large-group psychology, which by no means can reflect the attitudes and beliefs of every single individual in the groups. However, decades of Volkan and his colleagues’ clinical studies show patterns that are observed among many individuals in the group. The thoughts and assessments conveyed by Volkan and other psychoanalysts in the field of group psychology are not a mere theory, but rather the results of numerous case studies, participations in national conflict negotiations, and decades of work with trauma

victims. The theoretical framework of this work relies largely on the results of those clinical observations.

To provide a better understanding of how massive trauma may affect a large community over generations, I will first describe the concept of individual transgenerational trauma. Even though parents cannot directly transmit their memories to their children, “an adult may ‘deposit’ his own injured self-images within a child along with images of others who were involved in the traumatic event” (Volkan, *Animal Killer* xii). Then, the adult fills these mental images with “psychological tasks” that carry the purpose of clearing “the pain and terror of the original trauma” (xii). Vamik Volkan argues that this process is linked to identification. Identification involves assimilation of “an adult’s images, and owning the person’s ego and superego functions” (xii). In the process of depositing, the person “actively plants his specific images into the developing self-representation of the child”, this using the child “as a permanent reservoir for certain self- and other images belonging to himself” (xii). Hence, the traumatic experience itself or clear memories of the event are not known or accessible to the child (xii). Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that social learning, or inheritance of cultural values, is an active process, and as adults, people can choose to accept, reject, or blend certain cultural beliefs and ideas. Nevertheless, the fact that trauma can be transmitted suggests that not all cultural images are actively and consciously received by people. Moreover, I argue that transgenerational trauma is one of the cognitive biases that may affect one’s social or cultural learning processes.

Psychoanalysts have shown that mental representations of trauma can be “transferred through parents’ behavior patterns, physical gestures, other nonverbal communications, and the granting or withholding of affection when a child behaves in certain ways” (Volkan, *KNI* 154). Thus, this form of transmission occurs “mostly unconsciously within the child-parent (or-caretaker) relationship” (154). In other words, children may inherit trauma from their parents. Even though each person possesses their own unique identity, if a group experiences a massive traumatic event “the children of ensuing generation(s) are given similar primary tasks: complete the mourning over the losses, reverse shame and humiliation, and turn passivity into assertion” (154). These tasks and the mental representations linked to them are able to “connect the members of the group in an invisible way” (154). Over time, this inherited massive or cultural trauma contributes to strengthening the identity of the group.

This way, when a group, a nation, or ethnicity lives through a massive trauma, all members of the group will share a similar image of the trauma. If the children of trauma victims “cannot effectively fulfil their shared tasks—and this is usually the case—they will pass them on to the third generation, and so on” (Volkan, *Immigrants and Refugees* 88). According to Vamik Volkan, these psychological tasks “create a powerful unseen network among thousands, sometimes millions, of people”, and as years go by, “the mental image of the ancestors’ historical event with references to heroes, martyrs, victimization, and other feelings continues to link all the

individuals in the large group” (88). If the group fails to mourn their losses, the mental representations of trauma will continue to live and impact the group identity through what will be described later in this chapter as cultural memory.

The traumatic event that continues to live within cultural memory is a form of inherited trauma. The historical facts behind the event lose their importance with time, but the links connecting the people of the same culture together are only becoming stronger (Volkan, *KNI* 155). While the actual memories of the traumatic event can only belong to the people who experience the trauma, the traumatised images can be externalised into another person (159). This person may be the child who, as Volkan puts it, becomes “a reservoir” who receives a “psychological gene” (160). This way, the child inherits the trauma. Traces of trauma in the offspring of trauma survivors have been studied by scholars in various areas of research. In his study of the testimonies provided by the families of the prisoners of the secret camp in Tazmamart in Morocco, Brahim El Guabli also attempted to investigate generational effects of trauma. His work has demonstrated that the implications of trauma can “transcend the direct victims. In fact, they are trans- and inter-generational traumas that resist any facile attempts to limit the impact of Tazmamart (and the Years of Lead) to one generation alone” (El Guabli 128). In her exploration of fiction and art representing long-term effects of trauma, Marianne Hirsch also concludes that “[l]oss of family, home, of a sense of belonging and safety in the world ‘bleed’ from one generation to the next” (*The Generation of Postmemory* 34). Her theory of postmemory – the studies of the continuity of historical trauma – focuses on the transmission of memory. Hirsch’s work highlights how the memories of personal, collective, and cultural trauma are transmitted to next generations and what effects this may have on the offspring of trauma survivors: “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors” (5). As already discussed in the present chapter, identity formation is a process of integrating different elements, including historical past. This means that memories of trauma and their indirect transmission are no exception. Indirectly receiving mental representations of loss is bound to have an effect on one’s identity formation, whether personal or collective.

The connection of massive trauma to the concept of cultural memory is extremely important because it allows the nation, culture, or, most commonly, their leader to institutionalise and exploit the traumatic experience, even if it lies far in the past. In many of his works, Volkan argues that cultural trauma may be used by the leaders to not only enhance the collective identity but also to generate fears, anxiety, and hatreds towards their neighbouring cultures that they may grow to see as enemies. Is it indeed possible to expect to be attacked or harmed by people from a certain different culture even if there is no actual threat? If in the past, a nation, ethnic group, or their predecessors experienced a traumatic event, if they engaged in a conflict with another nation, the mental images of that conflict might have stayed within their cultural memory. Hence, the reason for this anxiety and fear of

another culture does not necessarily lie in the acts or words of their chosen 'enemy' but it comes from within. The sense of anxiety and need to attack first to protect their life, their personal and group identity, develops within the community, however large the community may be.

As Kai Erikson writes, once individuals who have been traumatised "begin to look around them, evidence that the world is a place of unremitting danger seems to appear everywhere" (467). They begin to expect to be harmed. However, what if these individuals have not been traumatised personally? What if neither they nor their parents had to live through wars, genocide, national or ethnical conflicts? According to Vamik Volkan, the trauma that may feel recent and lead to consequent anxiety and aggression towards the enemy may be even centuries old. What I have earlier described as an inherited trauma, Volkan refers to as a chosen trauma. He argues that almost every nation or culture possesses in some form a mental representation of a trauma in which they endured losses, "helplessness, shame and humiliation in a conflict with another large group" (Volkan, "TTCT" 87). If the past generation is unable "to mourn losses of people, land or prestige" or reverse the injury inflicted upon their group identity, the traumatic event is transmitted to the next generation (87). Such traumas, to a degree, influence identity formation of each person that belongs to the traumatised culture or group. The danger lies in the fact that these traumas may "often initiate unconscious societal or political processes" (87), as nation or group leaders have the power "to reactivate a chosen trauma" (88), to make people perceive a past traumatic event, one that may have happened decades or even centuries ago, as a fresh societal wound. On the outside, it may seem like the subject of the past is addressed to commemorate the historical event on the day of its anniversary, an occasion that brings the community together and strengthens the sense of their group identity, national or ethnic. However, if the circumstances are not peaceful, a time collapse may occur. The anxieties, fears, violent responses, and defence mechanisms associated with an inherited trauma may be evoked "when both conscious and unconscious connections are made between mental representation of the past trauma and a contemporary threat" (89). When this happens the historical event that took place decades or even centuries ago will be perceived "as if it happened only yesterday" (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 51). In their new "enemy", the group (nation, ethnic group) will begin to see the ancient enemy and attempt to protect or return what was lost centuries ago. I would like to point out, just as Volkan does in many of his works, that the re-activation of a chosen trauma cannot be a sole reason for a violent inter-ethnic or international conflict. However, the group leaders who revive the traumatic event with its anxiety and fear-inducing powers are often responsible for causing the violent and unthinkable acts committed by the group members.

Therefore, an inherited trauma, if evoked, can strengthen the sense of collective identity. As Volkan describes it, in the process of regression, the individuals "lose their individuality to one degree or another" and are more inclined to "follow the leader(s) blindly, and become prone to taking in (internalizing) political propaganda

without really questioning its validity” (*KNI* 84), which may lead to dangerous outcomes, from political tensions between the groups to violence and bloodshed. This chosen or inherited trauma can live on while the group (diaspora, ethnicity, nation) resists abandoning the mental representation of the traumatic event. Erasing, forgiving, or leaving this trauma in the past will also affect the collective identity and, perhaps, even destroy the links to the past or between the group members.

While dealing with a traumatic experience or an inherited trauma is an extremely difficult process, one of the factors that may complicate it is cultural homelessness. If an individual is born to an immigrant family, this person can have connections to at least two different collective identities. Should the culture of the person’s family be in conflict with the dominant culture of the country they live in, the cultural conflict will also be occurring within the self. This can be seen as a clash of loyalties, cultures, or identities within. It cannot be argued that one of the identities (national, religious, cultures) must come first. As I mentioned before, drawing on Parekh’s three-dimensional model of intertwining identities, one’s psychological health would require a context, an environment where all the aspects of one’s identity can be accepted. However, when the clash occurs between one’s cultural and national parts of identity, or nationality and religion, it may cause an identity crisis harmful to one’s sense of self.

Memory and Identity: Inheriting Displacement

Whether we are dealing with personal or collective identity, cultural memory plays an extremely important role in shaping identities. The unconscious mechanisms in which memory lives on and affects our sense of self have been examined by neuropsychologists for decades, proving that memory has the ability to “determine how we behave and what we are” (Rosenfield 202). What is often implied by memory is an act of remembering, in other words, thinking about the experiences, people, or places that are not part of our present. This may naturally mean that memories must exist within the individual’s mind for them to be retrieved. Yet the representations of memories can also be confined to physical objects, such as pictures, journals, keepsakes, altars, or houses, and engaging with such objects may trigger the process of remembering.

What is important to keep in mind is that there is a certain degree of unreliability in the process of remembering (Baddeley 6). Retrieved memories can be altered in specific details and do not represent the past with full accuracy. However, this does not lessen their value for one’s sense of self. One of the reasons to exaggerate the details of the past event may lie in the importance of those details and the need to draw attention to them. As one’s identity exists in the process of changing and evolving through the encounters, environments, and events we experience, our memories are also reshaped through those external experiences (Rosenfield 200). Similar to identity, memory is “a set of ever-evolving procedures” (202). It adapts to the external environment and develops together with our sense of selfhood.

As Sydney Shoemaker notes, “memory and personal identity are not logically independent” (869). Still, even if memory is a component of personal identity formation, it is not the only criterion in identity making (873). Although it helps to shape who we are, memory does not have full control of identity formation. As an element of identity formation, it interacts with other components. The perspective one has on personal memories of the past may, thus, be influenced by cultural values or social affiliations. Memory and culture interact and take part in personal and also collective identity formation. If we consider how large-group psychology comes into play in this interaction, we may see that it is precisely through collective memory that chosen traumas become such an important part of identity formation. Massive traumatic events, as Volkan notes, “may remain dormant in a group’s ‘collective memory’ over many generations” (*Blind Trust* 49). They may continue to shape collective identities, invisibly and in different ways through narratives, art, or architecture. It can even be said that through such loci of collective memory, chosen trauma may have a space of belonging.

A sense of belonging is another important aspect of identity that can be shattered by personal loss or collective trauma. Objects or spaces of collective memory can play a role in healing. Even fluid and transcultural identities, which strive to exist beyond cultural boundaries, can still long for a sense of belonging. This does not merely imply that they wish to go back to the past or be attached to their roots. Sometimes they simply seek places of emotional security. Whether these are real locations or keepsakes, they may have a symbolic meaning for one’s sense of self, acting as a link to a part of one’s identity. Through this link, one may achieve a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness in memories or spaces of memory, real or imagined. This sense of belonging may also be found in the sense of collective identity, strengthened by common cultural memory.

Drawing on Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory, Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as collective memory that is experienced by a group of people and contributes to shaping their collective cultural identity (110). Assmann sees cultural memory as “a kind of institution”, “exteriorized” and “stored away in symbolic forms” (110). These forms act as “carriers of memory” that may be “transmitted from one generation to another” (111). These objects or spaces may not have any cultural meaning of their own. Instead, people invest their memories into them. On the collective level (national, ethnic), such objects may be created and infused with cultural memories, or rather, institutionalised, to “be reembodyed in the sequence of generations” (111). Cultural anthropologists also believe that the ideas and values possessed by cultures are “encoded” in material objects (Richerson and Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone* 61). This way, they can be preserved and passed on to further generations. While personal or cultural memories are not such entities that can be directly “transmitted” to other people (Volkan, *Animal Killer* xii), objects of externalisation can be shared with others, for example, in the ethnic group or nation or passed on from one generation to another. Hence, personal memory is an important component of identity formation, and a person may have material objects for preserving

these memories not only within the self but in the external world as well. A similar process occurs on the level of collective identity, although in this case, one must consider the influence of the institutions that support the preservation of cultural memories and their reembodiment. The question at this stage is what meanings and memories are projected onto such spaces of cultural memory and how they aid in enhancing the sense of cultural identity and its connection to the cultural past.

In his book *Developmental Time, Cultural Space*, the psychoanalytical anthropologist Howard Stein discusses how places reflect inner struggles, conflicts, and anxieties of the individuals or groups that occupy them. Places, and this includes spaces symbolic and important to a group's collective memory, should be studied from the perspective of individuals who shape it and project their cultural values or beliefs onto it. Though published several decades ago, his work studies a tendency that has not abandoned the human psyche today, namely the disposition to merge the sense of place with the sense of self: "Human beings insist upon, psychogeographically speaking, possessing a mistaken identity. We first confuse our "whoness" with our "whereness", then invest that whereness in our very definition of whoness" (Stein 22). While this seems like an almost obvious observation on the micro-level of identity analysis, its importance for the large-scale identity notion must not be underestimated. Recent years have seen national and ethnic conflicts leading to violence and bloodshed in different parts of the world. War conflicts and refugee crises leave not only individuals but whole nations and ethnicities deprived of that integral part of their identity. I do not mean to deny that one's homeland is an essential element of identity construction. What I wish to emphasise is that it is the perspective, the way we understand cultural spaces, that makes them so significant. The importance we attribute to them may have dangerous consequences for one's sense of personal or collective self. Should the cultural space be destroyed, altered, or taken away, it can be perceived as an attack on identity.

Another kind of problem arises when by projecting a positive cultural identity on the places we inhabit, we also direct negative attributes to the world outside of our cultural group: "[w]e project psychic contents outward onto the social and physical world and act as though what is projected is in fact an attribute of the other or outer" (15). While this projection is an active process, it is one in which the whole group is involved. Moreover, this process is continuous – it lasts for generations, each strengthening not only the protective layers of the cultural space and the collective cultural identity but also the otherness of everyone and everything outside the borders of that space.

Therefore, institutionalisation of cultural objects and spaces is yet another active, external process that influences identity making. Astrid Erll also argues that historic events are often commemorated with "a site of memory", which, in turn, refers not to the event itself but rather "to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives, images and myths circulating in a memory culture" (111). Appearing as a way to preserve memories, cultural spaces may sometimes have little to do with the actual process of remembering. Over generations, monuments, myths,

films, or songs created as spaces for safeguarding cultural memories may carry mental representations imposed not purely by cultural values but by national institutions, too, and they may be commonly perceived as histories fundamental to the cultural identity of the group.

The cultural value of spaces of memory may be intensified if the culture of the group is under threat. It may also be perceived especially strongly if an individual or a group should lose the physical connection to that space. The limits of the collective identity are set “by a psychogeography of place”, and if “uprooted”, “one may well have a lucrative, even stable, job but feel as though he or she has gained the world but lost the soul” (Stein 88). This applies to migration, whether it is forced or not. Even if moving to a different place comes with advantages and security, the loss of one’s cultural home may feel as a loss of an integral part of one’s identity. According to Howard Stein, this loss of place can be compared to the experience of “object loss” (90), and must be followed by the process of mourning, accepting the inevitability of the loss, and letting go.

Following Melanie Klein’s research, the psychoanalysts Rebecca and Leon Grinberg showed that “guilt over loss of parts of the self”, in other words, the immigrant’s “previous identity”, may complicate the process of mourning (qtd. in Volkan, *KNI* 76). Moreover, Volkan argues that people sometimes do not need to be physically displaced to be considered refugees: they may keep on living in the same place, but “what is ‘exiled’ is familiar surroundings” (82). If the houses and cities are burned and destroyed, those people who stay still lose part of their identity. They lose cultural spaces that used to connect them to the past and each other. Losing the places or objects that carry within themselves the roots of the culture and promise a safe sense of belonging may be perceived as a loss of the cultural self.

Creating new spaces – new homes, museums, memorials – or replacing the cultural spaces that have been destroyed is one of the ways to “plant” cultural roots that have been annihilated. This way, collective memory can be deposited into new places that symbolise the respective collective identity. By continuing to inhabit a physical reality, cultural memories can offer a safe haven to not only the collective identity that they restore but also to the individuals whose sense of self is strongly or even partly linked to their culture.

Cultural spaces or objects of personal cultural meaning may also be important to individuals with transcultural identities. They can provide a sense of connection to cultural roots and a sense of belonging, even if it is not essential to their existence. In a world divided into nations, religions, and cultures, the belief that an individual belongs to something larger than they are, can offer a sense of emotional security. Without having the physical or psychological need to be with their cultural group or without even having any single cultural group they can see as their home, transcultural individuals may still need to have that connection, and one of the ways to keep the link to their culture(s) is by creating or inheriting an object or space of cultural belonging.

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned regression as one of the defence mechanisms that can be activated on the personal as well as on the group level, should the person or the group in question feel a threat towards their identity or existence. Vulnerability may, though it does not necessarily have to, take the person to the earlier stages of development and cause them to experience primal fears and anxieties. One of the threats to the collective cultural identity may result from forced migration. As Stein describes it, “[s]ince one of the principal, if not the dominant, purposes of culture is to rectify (make restitution for) the vulnerabilities and pains of childhood, to be deprived of one’s culture through migration or otherwise is to be exposed to those ineffable dangers all over again” (106). To defend oneself against such dangers, one turns to the past to create “symbolic ties” that attempt to obliterate the feeling of loss and pain, foregoing the process of mourning (106). As a result, Stein writes, “[m]yth triumphs over memory: or, myth is the only acceptable form of remembering” (106). Neglecting the need to mourn and heal may also lead to the construction of unreliable memories. This issue is closely related to the traumatic nature of migration or exile.

Whether it is personal or collective loss, mourning is an important process. It allows one to accept the past and instead of repressing traumatic memories, aggravating their effect, and transmitting them to further generations, acknowledge the past as part of the self. This way, it can be a way of moving forward in one’s identity development. Mourning is part of transcending the past, whether personal or cultural, and it will be revisited in the final section of this chapter but for now I will turn to the last key aspect in analysing spaces within narratives.

Remembering the Past in Heterotopic Spaces

Having highlighted the importance of spaces and places in analysing the relationship between inheritance and identity, there remains one more aspect to cover, and it relates to the nature of spaces I will primarily tackle in the third chapter. As this work deals with literary narratives and literary representations of spaces, the perspective I will deploy in my analysis draws on Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. The first mention of heterotopia can be found in the preface to Foucault’s book *The Order of Things*, which was published in English in 1970. The idea for this book appeared, as Foucault claims, when he came across a passage from Jorge Luis Borges citing a Chinese encyclopaedia and was stunned by its disregard of the common understanding of the order of things. The passage offers an extremely odd classification of animals, and some of the groups include:

- (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’. (Foucault, *The Order of Things* xvi)

It strikes Foucault that a classification like this is even conceivable, for it offers an unrealistic combination of categories that do not belong together. Yet, he realises that such a juxtaposition is only conceivable in the imagination. Amused by the passage, he wonders:

[...] where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space. (xviii)

It is this “unthinkable space” that Foucault proposes to define as a heterotopic space. A space “without law or geometry” (xix), heterotopia can combine elements that cannot be normally combined and imagine juxtapositions unimaginable outside of its space.

Later in his lecture, which was published posthumously as an essay titled “Of Other Spaces” (1984), Foucault determined the main principles of heterotopia and thus opened limitless possibilities for the concept’s application. The principle most interesting in the context of the work at hand is the fourth principle which links heterotopias “to slices in time” and implies an “absolute break” with the common perception of time (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 26). This category includes “heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time”, such as museums or libraries, or those related “to time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival”, such as fairgrounds, for example (26). In the essay, he also argues that it is possible for these two opposite types of heterotopias to blend into one. An example would be a museum that offers an interactive experience of a fair to its visitors, thus allowing them to dive into the past where time stands still yet also experience the entirety of history in a single fixed place.

Although Foucault’s concept is famous for its endless interpretations, Kevin T. Knight argued for the concept’s return to its original birthplace – to the realm of language, the unthinkable and limitless world of literature able to conceive juxtapositions that seem impossible in real life. In the context of my work which explores literary narratives, I will follow Knight’s proposition in focusing on the “fictional representations of those [real] sites, and of their simultaneously mythic and real dimensions” (Knight 147), thus returning to Foucault’s original idea to locate heterotopias “in the realm of language, in which, as we have seen, the simultaneous presence of incompatibilities is entirely possible” (147). My approach will draw on the idea of heterotopic spaces created with “a set of literary motifs used by writers to present an alternative configuration of space” (147). It will focus on spaces created by authors in their narratives to reflect both the identity crises their characters undergo and the bigger cultural, social, or political issues their literary works attempt to address. These alternative compositions of real spaces, which I will mainly cover in the chapter 3 discussing Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* and Salman Rushdie’s *The Golden House*, can generate links between the past and the present that allow

us, the readers, to most intensely perceive the significance of the past and inheritance for the personal or collective sense of self. The aspect of imagination is crucial for establishing and perceiving these connections. These spaces may be fictional and seem impossible yet, they sharpen our understanding of reality and, even more importantly, they can unveil how contemporary selfhood, even if it strives to seem rootless, is connected to the inheritance of the past.

1.3 The Past: Imagined Ghosts or Real Responsibilities?

In times of international or inter-ethnic conflicts, being part of a collective group involved in the tensions comes with not only collective fears and threats but also with collective responsibilities, and often without one noticing it, these responsibilities can extend to peaceful times as well. In the previous parts of this chapter, I discussed how trauma and cultural memory can be reactivated in the times of threat to strengthen the sense of collective identity and increase the sense of responsibility for collective identity. While many contemporary narratives directly employ tropes of manipulations of collective national or religious identity by group leaders and subsequent regression of the group to depict and criticise how one's blood ties or national affiliation are abused to justify violence, there are also other forms through which narratives can illustrate the impact of inheritance. In this last part of the chapter, I will discuss three aspects that are significant to my analysis of the role of inheritance, namely haunting, mourning, and implication.

Although ghosts may not appear in every novel I set out to examine here, I will begin with the topic of haunting, for it offers an explanation of the importance of mourning and neglected responsibilities. Ghosts have been studied as agents of cultural haunting in literature by various scholars in the last two decades, yet the foundations of the study of haunting in literary, film, and cultural studies can be largely credited to Jacques Derrida and his investigations of the *Spectres of Marx*. It is precisely in this work that Derrida defines the connection between haunting, inheritance, and the self. Being for Derrida is in itself inheritance and “[a]ll the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance” (Derrida 54). The questions of inheritance, as he posits, are thus raised by the apparitions of the past: “Addressed by the specter, caught in its visor gaze, the self is the inheritor, deprived of an absolute autonomy, unable to return this gaze” (Derrida & Stiegler qtd. in Burke 372). The appearance of ghosts in narratives symbolises a direct contact with the past, or rather a request from the past to be seen, to be remembered, to be acknowledged:

The spectral gaze displaces the self insofar as we are looked at before and beyond any possibility of a reciprocal exchange. The ghost sees me without answering or responding to me; rather, I am selected and chosen to respond. In this regard, to be haunted is to be called upon. (Burke 372)

Drawing on Derrida's inquiries into the spectre, Michael Burke concludes that "the ghost serves as more than just an intruder exercising a disruptive impact but acting also as a guest which reminds us of our duty of hospitality; to enter into relation with it (inviting it in, inviting the past into us)" (373). This conversation with the past compelled by the ghosts haunting the self in the present is, in a way, a form of our responsibility for the history, a negotiation between different elements of identity, inherited and adopted. Haunting reveals that inheritance, much like identity, is a process: "Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task" (Derrida 54). Rather than understanding inheritance as a received responsibility for the past, Derrida's perspective allows us to perceive inheritance as a practice of continuously integrating the past into the present.

While acknowledging inheritance as part of the self may be an obvious demand of the ghosts, there are also other tasks the trope of haunting can represent in literary narratives. The importance of the elements of haunting in contemporary works of fiction can be attributed to migration movements occurring globally on an unprecedented scale (Goldman and Saul 648). In a sense, as Goldman and Saul argue, the displaced nature of ghosts has become familiar to many living through the experience of migration: "The sense of 'neither here nor there' experienced (albeit in profoundly different ways) by the traveller, immigrant, migrant, and refugee can all be related to the in-between space of the ghost" (648–49). These experiences have made the figure of "the internally haunted self" (Brogan, "American Stories of Cultural Haunting" [ASCH] 152) significant in many contemporary narratives. Thus, the characters are haunted by the projections of their own unconscious minds, which is done to arguably illustrate their displaced selves, repressed and struggling within. As Kathleen Brogan put it, the contemporary stories of haunting deploy "supernaturalism as the hallucinatory projections of the self" (151). It can be argued that to depict the crises within – be it identity crisis caused by inheritance, personal or cultural trauma, or exile – literary texts employ haunting to conjure the repressed part of the self, the part that pleads to be accepted, resolved, or transcended.

Kathleen Brogan also links the tropes of haunting in literary narratives to memory and displacement: "Stories of cultural haunting attempt to remap an often fragmented and inevitably changed memory to its new coordinates by conjuring ghosts who pass from the past into the present, from the old territory into the new" (*Cultural Haunting* 130). Through the elements of cultural haunting, she continues, these stories show "that ethnicity is a function of memory, yet it also testifies repeatedly to memory's instability and capriciousness" (131). A ghost in a narrative "becomes more than an externalization of one character's longing and guilt"; instead, this perspective reveals how a single return symbolises the return of a whole ethnic group (Brogan, "ASCH" 152). This way, ghosts in literary narrative can represent the invisible link between the past and the present; but they can also stand for the conflicting relationship between personal and collective identities.

I would also argue that haunting in narratives directly corresponds with the way traumatic experiences return to the survivor. Coming for their survivor, traumatic

flashbacks appear unexpectedly, without warning. As projections of the unconscious self, they break the laws of time and space and destroy one's understanding of what is real or imagined. While such flashbacks in works of fiction may focus on single characters, as my analysis will further show, they often represent traumatic experiences of large groups. Ghosts can, this way, be analysed as agents of memory and trauma and thus also as agents of inheritance and identity. They represent the parts of identity buried in the past and roots that one may attempt to repress or has to leave behind but can never completely tear off.

While it is clear that ghosts represent an unbreakable bond with the past, it is also significant for my analysis to determine the tasks and demands of ghostly figures in literary narratives. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon argues that the task the appearance of ghosts symbolises in narratives "is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had" (183). This idea of reckoning implies that spirits of the dead in narratives put the narratives in the context of the problem of mourning. As Brogan also argued, in their focus on the past, "stories of cultural haunting are always invested in, and in some cases are organized by, rituals of mourning" (*Cultural Haunting* 134). Their appearance can signify that the task of mourning has not been completed: "As restless or invasive spirits, the ghosts propel characters toward the completion of a mourning that, if properly accomplished, allows the past to be in some sense revised and incorporated into the present" (134). Whether characters deal with the loss of family members, home or material objects, citizenship or native language, their inability to mourn these losses is connected to the impossibility of achieving a meaningful sense of self and living fully in the present, and this can be illustrated with the figures of ghosts.

The task of mourning can also go beyond personal loss and, like haunting, represent collective experiences of ethnic groups or nations. On the personal level, one's inability "to mourn the losses associated with the trauma" can be transmitted to the developing personal identities of the children of trauma survivors (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 49). For an ethnic group that survived a massive trauma, for example, a war, an inter-ethnic conflict, or a terrorist attack where the group was the target, the task of mourning becomes collective and, in the same way, it can be passed on to further generations. Unlike grief, which may include "a sense of being in shock or pain" and "denial of the loss, bargaining with God or fate to bring back what is lost", mourning can be seen as "a more silent and internal phenomenon" (Volkan, *KNI* 51). The internal process of mourning involves not only an acceptance of the physical loss, but also internalising "some characteristics and functions that belong to the lost person or thing" (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 78). As Volkan describes it, "when a person loses a loved one in the real world, the mourner unconsciously keeps aspects of that loved one as part of his or her personality" (78). Mourning, therefore, as Judith Butler reminds us, implies understanding the ties we have with one another and through these ties we understand what we are (*Precarious Life* 22). Undergoing mourning involves "submitting to a transformation" (21). On the personal level, this

transformation of the self is a complex internal process, and it is often this individual process that I will draw my attention to in the narratives I set out to analyse in this work. Yet, in her idea for egalitarian mourning, Butler argues that understanding the significance of mourning is also essential “for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (22). This perspective may also help us understand the greater issues mourning and failure to mourn can represent in literary texts.

Failure to mourn the losses of certain lives is directly linked to the failure to appreciate these lives and a common human vulnerability. The “common human vulnerability” is a condition that “precedes the formation of I”, and it “means that we are vulnerable to those we are too young to know and to judge and, hence vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other” (31). Failure to recognise this vulnerability is a form of violence and it can be conceived as a form of *derealisation* of other human lives:

[...] on the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized, that they fit no dominant frame for the human, and that their dehumanization occurs first, at this level, and that this level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization that is already at work in the culture. (34)

The failure to mourn the losses of human lives is thus a failure to see the ties we have to one another. Most importantly, however, a failure to mourn death is a failure to appreciate life. This inability to recognise the vulnerability of others and mourn their passing implies the incapability to acknowledge their lives as real and perceive them as meaningful as one’s own. In her more recent work *The Force of Nonviolence*, Butler advanced her contributions to framing a political imaginary of egalitarian mourning. To fully understand the meaning of mourning in this context, as it applies directly and indirectly to my explorations of literary texts, I would like to elaborate on the difference between deaths being grieved and lives being grievable. The latter, in Butler’s theory, must be interpreted as “lives worth mourning” (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 75), and grief is to be understood as conditional rather than personal. This means that “those who are grievable *would be* mourned if their lives *were* lost; the ungrievable are those whose loss would leave no trace” (75). In her argument, this way, “grieving takes a different form, even an impersonal form, when the loss is not proximate, when it is loss at a distance or when, in fact, it is nameless” (75). If a human life is grievable and loss is “feared”, then that life is valued and protected “from harm and destruction” (75). If an other’s loss is mourned, then that other’s life, too, is conceived as real. The grievability of lives concerns not only the lives of marginalised groups in the context of the narratives I will investigate in this work, but also the relationships with the past that complicate the achievement of a meaningful sense of identity. While many of the narratives I will analyse here deal with mediating between the ghosts of the past and identity issues or ethnic conflicts in the present, the inability to mourn the past they portray, which often

involves losses of lives and homes, has to be perceived as a demand to recognise not only losses, but also primary human vulnerability and human lives.

Inheritance as a Form of Responsibility

Last but not least, I would like to discuss the position that characters haunted by the past adopt regarding traumatic events and other individuals who share that history. Much of the discussion in this chapter has focused on the strength of collective identity. Yet, when we discuss collective trauma or, for example, ethnic conflicts, we often deal with subjects who, although they share the collective identity with a traumatised group, are neither victims nor perpetrators themselves. We also often deal with narratives set decades after traumatic events that clearly demonstrate how the traces of these events linger in the collective unconscious. These stories depict characters haunted by a sense of moral responsibility – or lack thereof – for events that occurred before their birth or during their lives but without their direct involvement. To better understand the meaning of these characters and the issues the authors address through their ambiguous positions, I will refer to the figure of the implicated subject as theorised by Michael Rothberg in his work *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*.

An implicated subject is “a figure who is neither the criminally responsible agent nor a mere bystander to violence” (Rothberg 7). Belonging to neither victimhood nor perpetration, this in-between category allows us to bring into focus the subjects who have no direct involvement in violent crimes yet cannot or rather should not distance themselves from these crimes completely. Such subjects, as Rothberg claims, “possess multiple political, economic, and moral linkages to allegedly far-away injustices (as well as those closer to home)” (32). What is especially important about this category in the context of my work is that implication can include more than witnesses or bystanders since “implication is produced and reproduced diachronically and synchronically” (11). This points to the idea that indirect responsibility that comes with implication can also be inherited. Implication is not a form of identity, yet it explains the sort of responsibility that is entailed within a shared, collective identity:

Implicated subjects neither possess an identity nor arise from a process of identification (“we are all X”). Rather, to be an implicated subject is to occupy a particular type of *subject position* in a history of injustice or structure of inequality – a history or structure one may enter, like an immigrant, long after the injustice at issue has been initiated or, like a beneficiary of global capitalism, far from its epicenter of exploitation. (48)

This position, although not necessarily inherited, is also not chosen. Similar to one’s many social identities, implication is also shared. It can be shared within a nation, an ethnicity, or even across generations.

Precisely because the focus of this work is on the traces of the past and different forms of inheritance in the present, it is important to keep in mind that “what we consider the present is itself the outcome of historical processes that have created the world in which we live” (9). The category of the implicated subject does not focus on wars, conflicts, or forms of violence in the present alone; instead, “implication emerges from the ongoing, uneven, and destabilizing intrusion of irrevocable pasts into an unredeemed present” (9). It is also important to take into account that this is “a position that we occupy in particular, dynamic, and at times clashing structures and histories of power; it is not an ontological identity that freezes us forever in proximity to power and privilege” (8). Hence, implication can also be understood as an on-going process, and “because it involves negotiating with the past, the confrontation with historical violence is ongoing, its expiration date uncertain” (19). Implication is not a problem that can be resolved but a category that may help understand one’s involvement in different forms of injustice.

It is especially important to keep this theoretical perspective in mind when dealing with literary texts that cover ethnic conflicts, religious clashes, or other collective traumatic events that occur seemingly far away and to groups of people we, readers and scholars, seem to have no links to. Not only is fiction a means to connect with deeply personal stories that may be unavailable to outsiders, but in their characters, some of the narratives also strive to represent the absence of understanding one’s implication. Awareness of one’s indirect responsibilities is not necessarily part of implication. As Rothberg’s theory shows, “implication does not require consciousness of one’s entanglement in injustice – in fact, implication is often unconscious or denied” (11), and some of the narratives I will analyse in the next chapters, such as Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* or Padma Viswanathan’s *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, also address the problem of denying implication.

It may even be less obvious or more difficult to unveil how one is implicated in diachronic injustices. Unlike “the ideal victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of humanitarian and human rights dramas”, implicated subjects occupy a role that is “morally compromised and most definitely attached – often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent – to consequential political and economic dynamics” (33). While my focus here is on inheritance and identities in many ways shaped by different forms of inheritance, the influence of the past extends beyond present-day identity crises. The transgenerational effects of trauma and diachronic implication significantly shape the present; yet, for this very reason it is essential to remember that these effects may continue to expand in the future.

The analysis of collective trauma, as further chapters will illustrate, often touches upon subjects that have neither directly suffered trauma, nor personally inflicted violence on others. Yet, many narratives that draw on past ethnic conflicts or tensions create a sense of awareness of implication in the characters that seem to be haunted by the past they believe they could not influence. The analysis of the elements of haunting can shine light not only on trauma and violence that have

occurred in the past to persons or groups and continue to have their effect on a personal and collective level, but also on diachronic implication.

From Personal to Collective: Inheritance in the Literary Imaginary

From personal identity crises to collective cultural trauma, the narratives I set out to analyse in this work tackle complicated and often emotionally challenging topics. Yet even though they are works of fiction, they can help us deepen our understanding of the effects of cultural trauma on personal and collective identities. Literature does not strive to create coherent trauma stories (Richardson 104). Instead, one can argue that the author “takes on the task of translation, shifting history, politics, and violence into the literary imaginary” (105). As Michael Richardson notes, “[u]nconstrained by facticity or the necessity of a restorative narrative, literature can imagine into the unknown and its complex relation to the known” (104). While literary texts cannot take the place of the direct narratives of victims, perpetrators, or implicated subjects, they can offer a different perspective, one that may connect these subject positions for the reader to get a better understanding of the whole picture.

Although my analysis of large-group psychology or psychological effects of chosen trauma offers one possible perspective on identity crises, this approach cannot be generalised even in the context of this work. Each of the novels selected for this work provides insights into different experiences of different conflicts. This suggests the significance of considering social and cultural factors of the conflicts, too: “Examining the cultural context of an individual or collective group’s experience of trauma enables greater attention to representations of extreme experience” (Balaev 367). Moreover, some of the works only slightly touch on remembering traumatic experiences and offer a more pronounced representation of the issue of implication.

The theories explained on the previous pages, from transcultural formations and transgenerational trauma transmission to implication and cultural haunting, are complex enough to each offer a sufficient perspective for understanding crises and conflicts related to cultural identity. Yet, as the analysis of the selected works of fiction will further show, it is hardly possible to break the novels into clear categories, each offering one perspective, for many, if not all, of the theories may be relevant for the analysis of identity issues in these works. While these theories belong to different fields of research and provide different perspectives, there is a prevailing aspect that brings them together, and it is inheritance. The central process in my analysis of the narratives in this work is various forms of inheritance affecting modern identity formations. To illustrate how inheritance in its different manifestations influences identity formations and, when neglected, can even cause a sense of loss of the self, I will draw on the different theories highlighted in this chapter.

While I will not make a sharp distinction between my approaches to each work of fiction, I have organised my analyses of the novels into three chapters. Chapter 2, which follows this theoretical exploration of inheritance that provides an introduction and foundation to the whole work, discusses Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire*

(2017), Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018), and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007). In this chapter, the focus is on the characters whose identities may carry a potential for transcultural identity formations yet are hindered by the outside exploitation of their ancestral past, from family histories to collective grief experienced by their ethnic or religious groups. The first subchapter of this chapter covers Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* (2017), longlisted for the 2017 Booker Prize and the winner of the 2018 Women's Prize for Fiction. Shamsie's novel is a modern-day tragedy inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone* which involves two very different British Muslim families and represents the issues all Muslims can face in contemporary Britain. With the focus on Parvaiz, a young man radicalised to join the ISIS, and his family caught up between their loyalty to Britain and collective Muslim identity, the chapter discusses the roles of transgenerational trauma transmission, blind trust in one's leader, and collective identity on one's sense of self. It seeks to examine how one's cultural past can be used to impose often unwanted identifications or images that, instead of allowing one's identity to develop and evolve, may lead to identity crises. This analysis is followed by a subchapter on Guy Gunaratne's debut novel *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2017), longlisted for the 2018 Booker Prize and the winner of the International Dylan Thomas Prize 2019. Gunaratne's narrative follows an ethnic conflict unfolding in London and raising complicated feelings in the young men who see London as their home yet are forced to acknowledge their cultural roots that demand to be seen. The chapter investigates the nature of the conflict by looking at the relationship between personal and collective identities. By studying the perspectives of the characters of a different generation, the chapter also considers a possibility of transgenerational trauma inheritance and analyses the role of large-group psychology in ethnic conflicts. The final narrative examined in this chapter is Porochista Khakpour's debut novel *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007), longlisted for the 2008 Dylan Thomas Prize and the winner of the California Book Award in 2007. Depicting an Iranian family struggling to create a new life in the United States after their immigration following the Iranian Revolution, Khakpour's narrative deals with issues of inheritance and their effect on identity formations. The chapter studies the role of cultural past and trauma on migrant identities and attempts to highlight the problem of extremes by analysing how both neglecting the roots and living in the past may lead to identity crises. Thus, drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Vamik Volkan's studies on the blind trust and trauma transmission in individuals and groups, Bhikhu Parekh's research on the politics of identity, and Kwame Anthony Appiah's studies of identity, chapter 2 brings identity crises of Shamsie, Gunaratne, and Khakpour's characters into the centre of discussion and seeks to understand how these narratives depict different forms of inheritance and their roles in shaping identities or causing identity crises.

In chapter 3, the focus shifts slightly towards the role of spaces in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House* (2017). In this chapter, I draw on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to uncover the

power of spaces in literary fiction in depicting the depth of the connection between the past and the present. I begin with my analysis of *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth Ozeki's novel shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2013. The novel's protagonist Ruth discovers the diary of a teenage Japanese girl Nao and gets drawn not only into Nao's story-world but also into the past. My analysis focuses on the connection between two continents, two cultures, and multiple generations that becomes possible in the imaginary heterotopic space created by the author. It attempts to provide a better understanding of the strong hold inheritance, whether personal or cultural, can have on the present. This subchapter is followed by the exploration of rootless identities in Salman Rushdie's 2017 novel *The Golden House*. Starting their new lives in the United States as exiles from nowhere, Rushdie's characters construct rootless identities. Here, I examine rootless heterotopic spaces inhabited by the ghosts of the past to provide an insight into the identities in this narrative and analyse the nature of their identity crises. Apart from finding inspiration in Foucault's heterotopias, this chapter deals with the issues of cultural haunting and implication to unveil the powers of the past that, through trauma or implication, continues to have control over the present.

The central focus in chapter 4 turns to trauma. With attention directed to the works of fiction that depict different ethnic conflicts, in this chapter, I analyse Kiran Desai's 2006 novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* (2014), and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019). The Winner of the 2006 Booker Prize, Desai's acclaimed novel is set during the ethnic conflict between the Gorkha Liberation Front and the Indian Army in 1986 that brings up the issues of loss and displacement preceding the Indian Independence. By exploring the impact of inherited displacement on personal and collective identities in this novel, and informed by the theory of implication, my analysis seeks to illustrate the intricate yet unbreakable links between the trauma of displacement and the sense of self. This subchapter is followed by my study of trauma, loss, grief, and implication in Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*. Shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2014, the novel deals with the personal and collective aftermaths of the Air India Bombing of 1985. In my analysis of Viswanathan's narrative, I discuss grievable lives, personal and collective trauma, mourning, and implication and attempt to define collective trauma as a part of collective identity and a form of inheritance passed on from one generation to the next. To conclude the chapter, I continue with Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. This powerful story of loss rooted in the Vietnam war and persisting through generations and borders offers an exploration of the possibility of transcending inheritance. The final analysis thus examines how Vuong's poetic narrative takes on the task of mourning by bringing inheritance – of loss, trauma, and pain – into being.

Last but not least, chapter 5 offers a summary of this work, illustrating in more detail what brings the selected narratives together. Establishing parallels between these different works of contemporary fiction, it once again attempts to emphasise the role of inheritance in personal and collective identity issues, ethnic conflicts, and

implication. In this chapter, I provide a conclusion to this work, while also reviewing the different angles and theories that I employ to bring inheritance as part of identity to the centre of discussion. The chapter also offers an outlook for further research and discusses a few other works of contemporary literary fiction that touch upon the questions of the power of inheritance and can provide an interesting discourse for further exploration of the powers of inheritance beyond the scope of this work.

2. Identities Shaped by Inheritance

2.1 Unmourned and UnBritish: Transcending Cultural Past in Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017)

“It didn’t matter if they were on this or that side of the political spectrum, or whether the fathers were absent or present, or if someone else had loved them better, loved them more: in the end they were always their fathers’ sons.”

– Kamila Shamsie, *Home Fire*

Influenced by Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Kamila Shamsie’s modern-day tragedy *Home Fire* (2017) tells the story of two British Muslim families caught up in a conflict that unfolds on a national and international scale. The lives of the Pasha sisters are shattered as their brother Parvaiz is recruited by a group of jihadists and leaves for Raqqa, Syria to continue the work of their father Adil Pasha, a jihadi fighter who died during his transfer from Bagram to Guantanamo. Understanding her uncertain position created by the history of her family, the oldest sister Isma informs the police, for which her younger sister and Parvaiz’s twin Aneeka labels her a traitor. The divide between the two sisters is pronounced in the difference in their loyalties that force them to choose between the family and the state. In an attempt to return her

brother home, Aneeka begins an affair with Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary Karamat Lone. What starts as a deceitful scheme eventually evolves into love, pulling Eamonn into the emotional and political turmoil of the Pasha family and forcing his father to face his inescapable cultural past. Consumed by the conflict that develops to a national scale, the characters of Shamsie's novel are pressured to negotiate between their identities – social, political, religious, cultural, and national. Confined to the boundaries of their histories, they are limited to choose between different extremes – family, religion, or state, each leading to a trauma of loss of the loved ones or loss of the self and thus involving existential or physical deaths.

This timely narrative raises a number of important issues that have been addressed by different scholars. Amina Yaqin, for example, offers a reading of the novel informed by Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* – a perspective that defines this tragedy as the result of inequality, enmity, and racism in the modern British society. Claire Chambers highlights the role of sounds as weapons and sounds as forms of expression in *Home Fire*, arguing that literary analysis can also assist in understanding terror and radicalisation. In Rehana Ahmed's work, the focus is on exploring how Kamila Shamsie's novel facilitates an ethical reading of British Muslims, while Lisa Lau and Ana Christina Mendes provide insights into re-orientalisms in *Home Fire*. As the aim of this work is to examine the power of inheritance over contemporary selfhood, in my analysis, I will focus on the instrumentalisation of inheritance – cultural transmission and trauma transmission – of the characters of Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. To analyse the identities in her novel and the struggles and choices they face, I will draw on Vamik Volkan's theorisations of large-group psychology and Judith Butler's concept of primary human vulnerability. In this analysis of Shamsie's novel, I seek to define the role of inheritance and mourning in both personal identity formation and the collective perception of second-generation immigrants in Britain.

Existing Between Extremes

From the very first pages of the novel, it becomes clear that identity politics lies at the centre of *Home Fire*. The narrative begins with a scene in an airport interrogation room, where a customs officer inquires of Isma: "Do you consider yourself British?" (Shamsie 5), to which she replies: "I am British" (5). By playing out this dialogue already at the outset of the novel, the author brings the issue of citizenship into focus. Isma's Britishness as a part of her identity is under question as she is asked again: "But do you consider yourself British?" (5) While so little is voiced in this dialogue, it gives away a lot about how this character's cultural identity stands in the way of her being perceived as a British citizen. It even seems that the officer in this scene represents a common disbelief in the possibility of Muslims being British, which hints at the continuous presence of the old Herderian understanding of culture in Britain. This encounter also reflects the widespread post-9/11 anxieties about Muslims and questions of whether Muslims can be loyal to the British

political values instead of “transnational Muslim leaders and causes” (Modood and Ahmad 188). Taking this problematic example as a starting point for my analysis, I would like to further dive into this cultural divide in *Home Fire* and the issues the author highlights with it. I will explore why in spite of the inner complexity and diversity of modern Britain this cultural conflict within still exists, how this hinders transcultural processes, and how inherited psychological biases, the instrumentalisation of personal and collective trauma, and the political dehumanisation of British Muslims contribute to radicalisation.

All of the main characters in *Home Fire* have a migration background but I will begin with the two sisters – Isma and Aneeka – at the centre of the conflict. Despite their identical ethnic, religious, and national identities – both having been born in the UK and both Muslims – these characters create a sharp contrast in the way they negotiate different elements of their identities. Isma is clear about her British national identity: “there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part” (Shamsie 5). Her mother was from Karachi, while her father was a second-generation British citizen, whose parents came from Gujranwala, Pakistan. Born in the UK and clear about her sense of belonging in the country of her birth, this character also possesses a strong religious identity. The words of the verses from Quran have been “her companions since childhood, passed on to her within her grandmother’s embrace when no one thought she was yet old enough to learn them” (43). In this instance, the narrative establishes a link between religion and inheritance for this character. Through cultural transmission or, in other words, by learning and also subconsciously through mental representations, she inherited this part of herself. It cannot be said that this character simply adopts religion as part of her identity. The narrative illustrates that for Isma, being a British Muslim is a process of continuous negotiation between the inheritance and her future. For years, she keeps a verse from Quran handwritten by her grandmother as a keepsake, an inherited object that connects Isma with her ancestors. Religion for her is more than a belief in the divine power, more than practice. It shaped her childhood and remained an integral part of her identity. It is her way of staying connected to the roots, to the ancestors who are no longer around.

In the character of Isma, Kamila Shamsie creates an awareness and acceptance of the roots yet also a certain freedom from being confined to the limits of the past. This recognition of cultural roots without being completely determined by them suggests a potential for a transcultural identity formation (Epstein 342). Yet, there are limitations to this character’s transcultural potential that lie, as the narrative shows, outside of her control. While she keeps a strong connection to her roots, her family history also puts her national identity under question since Isma’s British-born father joined the jihad army when she was a child. The fear that the British government would suspect the family of “siding with the terrorists” (Shamsie 49) has forced Isma to wipe out the memory of their father from the family’s lives.

When Isma’s younger brother Parvaiz, too, leaves Britain to join the jihad, she informs the police, since she cannot allow the state to question her or her sister’s

“loyalties” (42). On the opposite side of the spectrum of loyalties, there is Aneeka, who, like Antigone, does everything to bring her brother home. In contrast to her sister and other British Muslim characters in this novel, Aneeka openly criticises the state. To the idea that Britain is the place of opportunities for immigrants, she adds that “among the things this country will let you achieve if you’re Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogations, spies in your mosques” (91). Although offered as a passive aggressive critique of one character, with this statement, the novel addresses general mistrust generated towards and within Muslim communities. Commenting on the idea of spying alone, Parekh argued that such approaches “alienate Muslim communities and also destroy the trust and cohesion that those communities need to carry moral authority with their youth” (“Feeling at Home” 80). Through this character, the novel thus criticises the British approach to multiculturalism and the attempt of the politicians to force immigrants to completely assimilate into the British culture.

The problem of assimilation or integration of second-generation immigrants is not about living in a secular country, and the narrative expresses this through Aneeka who does not show attachment to her ancestral home either. She recalls how Pakistan is “a country teeming with relatives who thought blood ties gave them the right to interrogate and lecture and point to the sisters’ hijabs as proof that British Pakistanis were ‘caught in the past’ and then point to their jeans to prove they were ‘mixed up’” (Shamsie 202). It is clear that through Aneeka’s character Shamsie highlights the problem of displacement as well. Too westernised for Pakistan yet too Muslim for Britain, this character does not represent the problem of a certain national identity construct. Her identity conflict rather questions the very expectation to fully embody a single cultural or national identity construct.

Aneeka’s loyalty to her family is defined as problematic even outside of the British political context. When she comes to Karachi to claim her brother’s body, her cousin refuses to help her:

My sister lives in America – she’s about to have a child there – did you or your bhenchod brother stop to think about those of us with passports that look like toilet paper to the rest of the world, who spend our whole lives being so careful we don’t give anyone a reason to reject our visa applications. Don’t stand next to this guy, don’t follow this guy on Twitter, don’t download that Noam Chomsky book. (209)

This critique created through non-British Muslim characters is reasonable since in spite of racism and discrimination British Muslims face, their citizenship still makes them more privileged in the eyes of the West. Yet, since the narrative reveals the interest in the West that Aneeka’s Pakistani relatives have, it becomes clear that they adopt the perspective of the British state in their refusal to mourn Parvaiz’s death: “your government thinks this country can be a dumping ground for its unwanted corpses and our family just expects us to jump up and organise a funeral for this week’s face of terrorism” (209). As Lau and Mendes point out, here Kamila Shamsie

weaves personal crises into “public, political tragedies by representing the rejection of diasporic family members to safeguard those not in such good standing legally with the authorities who are forcing this wrenching apart of family ties and devastating re-orientalizing” (59). As Parvaiz and Aneeka are both dehumanised by the British state and the media, Shamsie illustrates the power of this collective influence by making the Pakistani relatives of the Pasha family adopt this dehumanised perspective, thus criticising the persisting colonial influence in the modern world.

These two characters, Isma and Aneeka, seemingly have the potential to be the transcultural identities Wolfgang Welsch wrote about in his essay on transculturality. Their identity formations involve integrating elements “of different cultural origin” (Welsch, “Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today” 198). Yet, when it comes to experiencing freedom in their cultural formation, the state appears to have the upper hand. Despite their hybrid cultural identities, they cannot avoid experiencing discrimination and undergoing consequent identity conflicts. What stands in their way is not the inner inability to combine various elements of different cultures that have shaped them, it is the failure of their society to acknowledge the complexity of their identities. Bhikhu Parekh describes this as one of the dangers of the politics of collective identity, namely the “failure to appreciate over-lapping identities” (*A New Politics of Identity* 39). This problem of accepting the overlapping commonalities is also expressed as a direct critique in the narrative. Having personally experienced inequality in Britain, Isma expresses the “suppressed anger” (Shamsie 39) she feels towards her country when she points out to her Kashmiri lecturer that the word “British” is never used towards British terrorists: “[e]ven when the word ‘British’ was used it was always ‘British of Pakistani descent’ or ‘British Muslim’ or, my favourite, ‘British passport-holders’, always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism” (39). Making a valid point, Shamsie demonstrates the vast distance that still lies between the (real) British and the British whose identity incorporates some other cultures or far-away places inherited. This example “underlines the colonial state’s disregard of the law in its colonies, and Shamsie’s reference to a Kashmiri lecturer hints at another place where the law does not serve its citizens” (Yaqin 245). This way, the narrative highlights the existing similarities “between colonial law and anti-terror legislation in a free democracy that withholds citizenship rights” (246). Following this scene, the lecturer also encourages Isma to use academia to assert her voice by writing about the secularisation of Muslims because “textuality offers something that oral communication does not: an opportunity to challenge the dominant public discourse through sustained research and argumentation” (Chambers 216). In the same way, sharing her academic view supported by personal experience can allow Isma to challenge the existing political narrative imbued with prejudice and fear of Muslims, the challenge that Shamsie also takes on with this novel.

As Rehana Ahmed points out, by focusing “on failed encounters”, “the novel seems to suggest the difficulty of moving beyond the frames which constrain British Muslims, at least in the present” (1156). It does so by focusing on British Muslim

characters seemingly similar yet sharply contrasting each other with their attitudes to the state, family, and religion. In doing so, the novel guides the reader “to a cast of British Muslims, while at the same time denying the reader an appropriative consumption of their ‘Muslimness’ through an increasingly exaggerated, melodramatic style which disturbs a reading of the characters as ‘authentic’” (1159). In a way, the novel challenges and distorts the reader’s pre-existing biases towards British Muslims. This allows Shamsie to turn “the reader’s attention towards their own readerly gaze, encouraging a more self-conscious way of reading” (1148). With the contrasting British Muslim characters in the novel, Shamsie also supports Bhikhu Parekh’s critique of European anxieties about Muslims that often “homogenize Muslims and treat them as an undifferentiated mass” (“Feeling at Home” 71). At the same time, the novel shines light on the difficulty of achieving transcultural formations and mediating between the past and the present amid immense political pressure to embody rigid identity constructs. Complex identity issues caused by inheriting or rejecting one’s cultural past are also addressed through the other characters that I will now move on to.

Transcending Inheritance: Father and Son

In the centre of the main conflict in this narrative we find Parvaiz, Aneeka’s twin brother, who leaves Britain to go to Syria to become a sound engineer for the media unit of the jihadist army. The decision he makes appears to be largely shaped by his inheritance. What may seem like a form of transmission of radical beliefs from his father Adil Pasha is actually a more complex interplay of trauma and politics. The novel makes it clear that Parvaiz has never met his father, which almost naturally creates an idea that taking the same path in life has always been an option for the young man who most probably has the jihadist ideology in his blood. Yet, by demonstrating how the idea of inheritance is instrumentalised in the case of Parvaiz, Shamsie offers a critique of this way of thinking. While the father has always been physically absent from his life, the novel hints at the power of his mental presence through Parvaiz’s memory of his father’s photographs: “Adil Pasha [...] always smiling, always with a gun slung over his shoulder or cradled in his lap. *When you’re old enough, my son*, his father had inscribed inside it, which made Parvaiz’s mother furious for reasons he didn’t then understand” (Shamsie 124). Although the photo album is taken away by the MI5 agents, its use in the text forms an image of the father seeking ways to connect with his son but being prevented from doing so by the government. This not only underlies Parvaiz’s vulnerability but also indicates the enemy for him: it was the British state that broke his family.

Since there is secrecy surrounding the family past, it is easy for Parvaiz to buy into the story of “the great warrior Abu Parvaiz” (124). Abu Parvaiz was Adil Pasha’s chosen jihadi name that meant “Father of Parvaiz” and “was his way of keeping [his son] close” (125). Hearing this from the recruiter Farooq, a man who claims to have fought alongside his father, clearly enhances Parvaiz’s susceptibility to the

recruiter's manipulations. When he meets Farooq, he discovers in him a false opportunity to be closer to his father or at least to the memory of him that he has been denied all his life:

Farooq would talk and Parvaiz would listen to those stories of his father for which he'd always yearned – not a footloose boy or feckless husband, but a man of courage who fought injustice, saw beyond the lie of national boundaries, kept his comrades' spirits up through times of darkness. (128)

These stories “clearly evoked the father he'd never known”, portraying him as [t]he father every son wishes he had” (128). To convince him to leave his sisters behind, Farooq tells Parvaiz to be a man, to stop being controlled by his sisters like he is “a child in need of a mother” (130). Having already cultivated the belief that it is partially his mother's fault that Parvaiz has never learnt anything about the great Adil Pasha, Farooq strikes the right chord. As Claire Chambers points out, Parvaiz's vulnerability to radicalisation is “due to feelings of camaraderie with his new friend Farooq — despite, or in part because of, the latter's violence — and a concomitant sense of emasculation around his sisters” (Chambers 208). Moving the focus towards inheritance and cultural past, I would like to highlight the role of transgenerational trauma in Parvaiz's radicalisation as well. While there may be nothing to suggest the possibility of genetic transmission in this narrative, the trauma experienced by Parvaiz's father is successfully exploited by Farooq to convince the young man that he, not only as a Muslim, but also genetically is obligated to join the jihad.

The religious identity becomes central to his character. First described as inseparable, the two twins – Parvaiz and Aneeka – acquire contrasting features when Parvaiz is radicalised. As a British Muslim girl, she receives a scholarship to study law because, as Parvaiz believes, she ticks “their ‘inclusive’ and ‘diverse’ boxes” (132). As a British Muslim man, he is not as lucky because “Muslim men need to be detained, harassed, pressed against the ground with a heel on our throat” (132). The recruiter's persuasion is supported by the fact that Parvaiz has been stopped and searched by the police twice. His feeling of sameness with the Muslim men mistreated by the police appears as Parvaiz begins to feel acutely as part of the collective Muslim identity. The narrative portrays how his anger comes from the pains suffered by others, for now they are his pains, too. This way, the reader follows Parvaiz's gradual transformation in which his personal identity becomes replaced with a collective Muslim identity.

The final and crucial step in his transformation is a physical experience of the past. Parvaiz is put through intense physical torture the aim of which is to let him experience the pain his father endured. The emotion that is used to describe Parvaiz's feeling about neglecting this truth about his father is shame (138), which is the main feeling associated with traumatic experiences (Leys, “Image and Trauma” 147). The use of this emotion at the time when Parvaiz experiences his father's trauma may be suggesting the transmission of trauma. It is important to note, however, that transgenerational transmission of trauma in the case of Parvaiz is not a

natural psychological process. The novel emphasises the character's vulnerability yet also the outside influences and actions of his recruiters that cause the transmission of trauma. In the first moments of torture, Parvaiz's gaze falls upon the photograph of his father on the wall in Farooq's apartment. This positioning of objects, clearly staged for the sake of manipulation, creates the connection to his roots blurred with pain. Through suffering, Parvaiz believes to be embodying his father's spirit: "and there was this understanding, *I am you, for the first time*" (Shamsie 140). The desire to connect with his father prevails over pain and he returns to Farooq, asking to be tied up, tortured again, retraumatised. Parvaiz's embodiment of his father and inheritance of his father's trauma constitute a synthetically created process that involves forcing this character to repeat his father's trauma.

The narrative also demonstrates how in the process of radicalisation, IS recruiters deploy the existing problems of migrants in Britain to create a contrasting utopian idea of jihad. Parvaiz is forced to choose between two extremes: the Caliphate or the people who "tortured [his] father in the name of freedom" (145). There is nothing in-between as Farooq describes the Caliphate to Parvaiz as the complete opposite of what his life in Britain is and could ever be:

A place where migrants coming in to join are treated like kings [...] A place where skin colour doesn't matter. Where schools and hospitals are free, and rich and poor have the same facilities. Where men are men. Where no one has to enter haram gambling shops to earn a living, but can provide for his family with dignity. Where someone like you would find himself working in a state-of-the-art studio, living like a prince. You own villa, your own car. Where you could speak openly about your father, with pride, not shame. (144)

This utopian image of the world Adil Pasha fought for is deprived of any mention of the countless lives that have and will be lost in the wars for it but more importantly, it contains everything that Parvaiz and Muslim men like him strive for but cannot achieve in Britain. However unrealistic, this image is born out of the immigrant struggles and inequality that are very much real. Offering the extremes as the only available choices eliminates any possibility of transcending the past for this character, and with these extremes the novel highlights the existing problems Muslims face in the British society.

The power of personal trauma exploited by his recruiter brings to the surface the shame and fear of his Muslim identity that have been following Parvaiz for a long time, which again points at the author's critique of the fear to be Muslim disseminated in the British society. He has been noticing "the black-and-white flag" but always tried to look away from it quickly "so no one would think the Muslim boy looked too interested" (145). Now "fate" has brought him to Farooq who is opening this long-feared world to him, the world of "moral power" that needs to be protected "with blood", "eliminating all enemies, internal and external, that threatened the new Utopia" (147). He is tempted by "[a] land of order and beauty

and life and youth. A Kalashnikov resting on one shoulder, a brother's arm around the other" (147). The tactics of Farooq here represent a form of what the psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan describes as a time collapse. The centuries-long cultural history, the wars fought not only by Parvaiz's father but by whole generations of Muslim people are felt and perceived as intensely fresh and one's own to young men like Parvaiz. Exploiting a collective trauma in this way may lead to irrational acts and "destructive behaviour" (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 51), the tactic applied in radicalisation to keep a certain group in the state of regression and convince them of the necessity of the eradication of their enemy.

On the personal level, Parvaiz's radicalisation is represented as a form of transgenerational transmission of trauma. During childhood, the confusing "mental images are pushed into the child, without the experiential/contextual framework that created them" (Volkan, *Animal Killer* xii). Yet, it is the manipulation of his recruiter that helps Parvaiz interpret these conflicting feelings and invest them into regressive actions. At the same time, while the abuse of Parvaiz's personal trauma of loss and the forced transmission of his father's trauma are important for the analysis of his radicalisation, there is another side of the coin that the novel stresses by depicting this character as a displaced individual in the British society. As Lau and Mendes argue, "Parvaiz and all the Parvaizes of the world who run the risk of having their citizenship rights revoked based on the suspicion that they have joined the enemies of the state [...] are in part the creation of 9/11, of Bagram, of Guantanamo, and of US-Islam relations" (64). By viewing this character as the result of this politics representing thousands of men radicalised through the simple instrumentalisation of prejudice and fear created and practically fed to the recruiters by the West and by considering their lives before radicalisation, we can see that by making them un-British, the post-9/11 politics has normalised derealisation and dehumanisation of Muslim lives. On the opposite side of the grim life under suspicion and in the state of uncertainty in their own country, there is a chance for them to achieve a meaningful sense of identity somewhere else – a prospect impossible in Britain. As Parekh recaps this contrast between Britain and the jihad in relation to the sense of self and belonging. Their engagement with "global causes" provides them with "a sense of power, a purpose, a thrill, a sense of belonging [...]. Western foreign policies, the invasion of Iraq, and the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prison abuses give their anger a moral edge and intensify their sense of victimhood" ("Feeling at Home" 78). While the utopian idea of the Caliphate presented by recruiters like Farooq may be fictional, very real examples of torture deployed by recruiters help to enhance the sense of collective trauma and convince men like Parvaiz to turn their back on everything Britain may have to offer in return for destroying their collective and thus partly also personal identity.

In this character, Shamsie most intensely depicts the power of inheritance as Parvaiz succumbs to the fate predetermined for him by the hundreds of years of wars and losses: "the dead made their own demands, impossible to refuse" (Shamsie 152). Every change seems to be shaped by the influence of the past. Joining the

jihadists, he is given a new name that defines this act as a form of inheritance – Mohammad bin Bagram, as a tribute to his father's suffering: "this new Parvaiz was born out of vengeance and justice" (158). Even as he faces disillusionment, the feeling is formed by the idea of his father rather than by his own actions: "he finally saw that he was his father's son in his abandonment of a family who had always deserved better than him" (167). There is an awareness that his attachment to Farooq and the desire to be with the strong jihadist fighters are born out of "his own need for an approving father figure" (168). His inheritance of his father's hopes and beliefs has come full circle. Following the aspiration to (re)connect with his inheritance, Parvaiz ends up embodying the image of "the terrorist son of a terrorist father" (171). The past his family has so strongly attempted to repress has fully absorbed him: "[h]e didn't know how to break out of these currents of history, how to shake free of the demons he had attached to his own heels" (171). While the tragic end for Parvaiz is closely linked to his father and can be believed to be pre-determined by his inheritance, his story depicts radicalisation as a result of not only personal trauma but also the continuing dehumanisation of Muslim lives by the British state.

Inheritance Lost, Inheritance Found

Another character whose identity seems to be shaped by the inheritance of his father's beliefs is Eamonn, the son of the British Muslim Home Secretary Karamat Lone. We are first introduced to Eamonn in Isma's narrative, which remarks on the man's amusing name from the perspective of other British Muslims: "an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name – Ayman became Eamonn so that people would know the father had integrated" (Shamsie 15–16). The fact that Karamat Lone has an Irish-American wife points to his "integrationist posing rather than an explanation for the son's name" (16). This also suggests that Eamonn's image is in many ways shaped by his powerful father, and predicts that Karamat's complicated relationship with his cultural roots has been passed on to his offspring.

Eamonn's exploration of his own cultural roots follows his accidental connection to the Pasha sisters. His acquaintance with Isma brings Eamonn back to his childhood, when he visited his father's family "every Eid" (28), the holiday so important to Muslims and so insignificant in Eamonn's present life. His culture-infused memories evoked by Isma's world are informed by "recognition rather than pleasure" (29), and while Isma awakens "familiar feelings" and a sense of being "home" in him (60), these characters still establish a strong contrast that again challenges the reader's expectation of what British Muslim characters should be like. Hence, with this contrast Isma represents the part of Eamonn's identity that has been missing or rather been repressed.

It is when their conversation touches on Eamonn's father that it becomes clear how this character's inner conflict is formed by his inheritance. When pointed to the critical attitudes of Muslims towards Karamat Lone's politics, Eamonn turns

into “a man carrying all the wounds that his father was almost certainly too thick-skinned to feel as anything more than pinpricks” (36–37). The depiction of Eamonn having seemingly received the wounds intended for his father is meant to suggest that Karamat’s pain or, possibly, trauma of having to transform himself for the sake of his career has been passed on to his son.

The unbridgeable distance between Eamonn and Isma becomes even more intense when he learns about her terrorist father. He looks “clearly offended in a way that told her he saw the state as part of himself, something that had never been possible for anyone in her family” (49). Eamonn tries to imagine what it is like for Isma but his “attempt was defeated by his simple inability to know how such a man as Adil Pasha could have existed in Britain to begin with” (58). A similar conflict is created between Eamonn and Aneeka. In a sense, this distance between Eamonn and the Pasha sisters echoes his separation from his cultural past. Having possibly inherited his father’s sacrifice of having to repress part of the self, he now has to face the side of his identity that has been buried in the past without his conscious knowledge.

When Eamonn visits East London, the streets reveal “the distance” between his and his father’s lives (60). Passing by “a Jewish bakery beside an Islamic bookshop beside a Romanian butcher”, he is “unable to let go of the feeling that behind these doors there existed a piece of his childhood – a piece of his father” (61). Being in Isma’s house brings back the memories of his childhood, “and with it the shameful memory of his own embarrassment about it” (61). Being exposed to this world reveals Eamonn’s embarrassment of the ease with which he ignored his father’s past and his cultural roots. He feels that he came there to look for “a lost piece of his father” (66), for the inheritance of culture that has been hidden from him. Since his cultural past is denied to him, the identity conflict within this character is gradually unveiled through his connection to the Pasha family, which can also be seen as Eamonn’s attempt to acknowledge and transcend his cultural past. His obsession with Aneeka almost suggests his attempt to compensate for the shame of rejecting his roots and to rediscover parts of his identity.

Let me turn my attention to the roots of Eamonn’s identity conflict, namely to his father Karamat Lone, yet another British Muslim character who stands in contrast to all the other British Muslim characters in Shamsie’s novel. The new Home Secretary Karamat Lone is described in one of the newspaper articles about him “as a man ‘from a Muslim background’, which is what they always said about him, as though Muslimness was something he had boldly stridden away from” (33–34). Karamat’s choice to join and thus support the system that does not accept his religion forces him to justify his cultural roots. When seen entering a mosque, he claims that “he had been there only for his uncle’s funeral prayers, and would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space” (35). From a British Muslim man, he gradually grows into a representation of the system designed to disadvantage those like him. The Muslim perspective is voiced here through Aneeka’s remark: “[h]e has to

prove he's one of them, not one of us" (34). The political identity Karamat Lone creates for himself is thus supposed to oppose his inheritance.

It is his career choice that discloses the unbridgeable distinction between Britishness and Muslimness for Karamat and requires him to separate himself into two selves – the past and the present. Because of his background "he had to be more careful than any other MP" (51). When Karamat's cultural past is addressed in the narrative, it is coated with secrecy and shame. Every Eid, the whole family would visit Eamonn's great-uncle's house, and "[o]n that one day of the year, his father became someone else, and it was this he knew that his mother hated as much as he did" (58). In these rare moments, Karamat turns into someone different, someone unknown to his British family: "[s]urrounded by his extended family, Karamat Lone disappeared into another language, with its own gestures and intonations – even when he was speaking English" (58). He admits that in the "moments of stress", he still recites the prayer "Ayat al-Kursi as a kind of reflex" (107). When the present Karamat meets Isma, to him, just like to his son, she appears as "a reminder of a world he'd lost" (238). She becomes a mirror of the past, of his repressed inheritance he is unwilling to face, for as their interaction illustrates, the multicultural Britain is not ready for non-British roots to be part of people's cultural identity.

Despite the expectation that a figure like Karamat Lone can establish an effective dialogue between the state and its marginalised communities, he betrays the values of the majority of British Muslims. Instead of looking for the middle ground, "he expressed a completely enlightened preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque, and spoke of the need for British Muslims to lift themselves out of the Dark Ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect" (59). His take on the integration of Muslims in Britain can be described by the following excerpt from the speech he gives at a predominantly Muslim school:

"There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve – Olympic medals, captaincy of the cricket team, pop stardom, reality TV crowns. And if none of that works out, you can settle for being Home Secretary. You are, we are, British. Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: don't set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently – not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out because of it." (87–88)

This speech is taken as an attack on "the isolationist culture of the community he'd grown up in" (88), and thus partly as an attack on his past self. While he refers to Britain as a "multi-ethnic, multi-religious" place, he explicitly advises against remaining loyal to one's religion or ethnic customs as long as those are not practiced by the majority of the population. This way, Karamat expresses his recognition "that

the dominant culture is unwilling to change in order to acknowledge and recognize the Other, so they should—must—be the ones coming around” (Lau and Mendes 63). This character becomes the embodiment of the state, unwilling to hear the concerns of its people and understand the heterogeneous cultural nature of its modern society.

The critical perception of Karamat Lone by British Muslims echoes the problems Parekh outlined in his essay “Is Islam a Threat to Europe’s Multicultural Democracies?”. Along with hopes for fruitful multicultural dialogues, he discusses problems of commitment to the British national identity and difficulty of accepting parliamentary decisions (Parekh, “Is Islam a Threat to Europe’s Multicultural Democracies?”), which is what we can see in Isma and Aneeka’s perspectives on Karamat. Despite the positive outlook one takes from Parekh’s arguments, Karamat adopts the idea that the only way forward is to completely eradicate one’s cultural roots, which is what he himself had to do. When he finds out that Aneeka is only nineteen, he is relieved because she can still “be persuaded out of the hijab” (107). He also sees Parvaiz’s jihadist sympathies as inherited and created solely within Muslim communities without any influence of the Western politics: “Terrorism as family trade. Illustrative of how much you need to do to root out this kind of thing. I mean, literally, grab by the roots and pull. Pull the children out of those environments before they’re old enough for the poison to seep in” (108). Shamsie stresses that his Western hatred towards his ancestral home is intense:

‘She’s going to look for justice in *Pakistan*?’ That final word spoken with all the disgust of a child of migrants who understands how much his parents gave up – family, context, language, familiarity – because the nation to which they first belonged had proven itself inadequate to the task of allowing them to live with dignity. (215)

In this example, the author illustrates how Karamat’s past life in the marginalised community developed into the feeling of shame for his own self, for his roots and religion. The intensity of his attempts to prove how different he is from all other British Muslims and the hate he expresses towards Pakistan is the hate he feels towards his past self. As Volkan argues in his research, “the individual cannot truly escape the fundamental childhood emotional investment in his or her original large-group identity, but can only repress or deny it” (*Blind Trust* 43). The reason for this repression of Karamat’s emotional investment in his own culture comes from negative projections of his society towards his culture. Describing this process on the collective level, Volkan claims that with time, groups grow to absorb the negative elements projected onto them by others or, for instance, by a dominant culture (44). As a result, he continues, “the recipient group may experience anxiety over this large-group marker and may develop defensive signs and symptoms to conceal it” (44). In a sense, the character of Karamat Lone stands for a marginalised group that develops a defence mechanism supposed to protect them from the oppression of the dominant culture. Hence, it is the shame of his own self, his true but repressed

and rejected cultural identity that makes Karamat Lone embody the image of his own oppressor.

Similar to the case of Parvaiz, in Eamonn, Shamsie illustrates how there is no running away from one's cultural past, no matter how well-hidden or repressed it is. It is the secrecy and shame that surround their cultural past that is damaging and, in the end, responsible for these characters' identity crises portrayed through their family conflicts and their inevitable deaths. While this represents personal stories of two men forced to negotiate the knowledge of the roots they have repressed, they reflect the problem of collective attitudes towards one's cultural past that has been addressed by Tariq Modood in his many essays. As he put it:

The past is central to the sense of nationhood today, we have to be able to see it as our past, as how it has formed us, but equally we must appreciate the country we are becoming. It is a story in which the white or ethnic majority is central, but it is a developing story, and one in which new minorities too are characters and not just replicas of the majority or mere 'add-ons'. (Modood 311)

Hence, this problem of multiculturalism includes the personal and collective failure to transcend the cultural past and achieve a meaningful sense of personal and collective identity that we can see in the male characters in this novel. Their attempt to negotiate between the extremes within their identities meets a dead end, which is illustrated by Shamsie through their horrific, cruel deaths. The problem of mediating between the past that involves losses, of the loved ones or the self, and the future also initiates a very important conversation about mourning these losses. Mourning can be a significant step towards transcending the past and developing a dialogue not only between generations but also among cultures, and this is the topic I will address in the last part of my analysis.

Unmourned, Unreal, UnBritish

The burial of family memories or the secrecy surrounding the family past, which I briefly addressed on the previous pages discussing the character of the deceased Adil Pasha, is an important aspect in this narrative as it not only underlies the conflict but also problematises the impossibility of mourning the dead. This denial of mourning is not a completely personal decision of Adil Pasha's children. The Pasha family is warned that any inquiries into the whereabouts of their father's body may complicate their lives as they can be interpreted as a sign of "siding with the terrorists" (Shamsie 49). The exact circumstances of his death are not revealed to Adil Pasha's family, but since the CIA interrogation techniques have long become public knowledge and the narrative indicates his failed transfer from the Bagram air base in Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay, it can be suggested that his death was a consequence of torture. Although he was a British citizen, not only is his loss not mourned in Britain – whether the loss of his life or the loss of Adil Pasha to IS –

but the mourning is also not allowed to his family, and the narrative directly links this failure to mourn their relative to the young Parvaiz's vulnerability to the recruiter's influence. Already with the references to their family past that overshadows the existence of Isma, Aneeka, and Parvaiz, Shamsie positions her novel as a critique of the derealisation of human lives. In this way, the novel calls attention to the failure to recognise human vulnerability. The lives of those who, like Adil Pasha, joined the jihad, thus, "cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were,' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 33). If we follow Judith Butler's reasoning, it is clear that those subjects whose lives are not considered real or grievable "already suffered the violence of derealization" (33). As I further discuss in this chapter, the problem of derealisation concerns British Muslim characters like Adil Pasha, Parvaiz, and Aneeka as they represent British Muslims deemed not British enough to be considered real in life and grievable in death.

The idea of the failure to recognise life and thus also to mourn the dead is crucial to understanding the significance of inheritance in this narrative. The task of mourning the losses of family members, citizens, or simply humans is not completed in *Home Fire*. Instead, the narrative depicts how the characters are forced to repress and neglect their trauma of loss. In Isma, Shamsie portrays this repression of loss, while in Aneeka's attempt to bring Parvaiz home, we can see a desperate, although illegal, fight for justice, a fight for acknowledging death as well as life. When it comes to their father, to the Pasha children he "was a shameful secret, one that must be kept from the world outside or else posters would appear around Preston Road with the line DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR NEIGHBOURS ARE? and rocks would be thrown through windows" (Shamsie 126). Both Isma and their mother are said to feel "an anger towards Adil Pasha too immense for words", while Aneeka had a "complete lack of feeling or curiosity about their father" (126). Since the father is erased from their lives, the failure to mourn his loss and acknowledge his life implies that their family past cannot be transcended and accepted. As a result, it is the trauma of not only Adil Pasha's radicalisation that follows his children but also the trauma of his dehumanisation by their government that is transmitted to them. By being treated by their state as persons existing between Britain and exile, persons who can easily be made unBritish should their loyalty be called into question, they exist in a state of uncertainty.

The narrative criticises the ease with which the state decides whose lives are worth grieving and by making Parvaiz follow in his father's footsteps, join the IS, and be killed by them, it also creates a sombre vision of the consequences of the inequality when it comes to human lives. Precisely because the life of Adil Pasha was deemed not grievable, the (possible) fictions the jihadi recruiter deploys to radicalise Parvaiz function well. Since Parvaiz and others like him are denied truth, it is easy to inject their unknowing with lies. This is not to argue that Parvaiz is only fed fictions. It is hardly possible to deny that his father – or any actual jihadi fighter detained in Bagram – was tortured. Instead, the story Shamsie offers here draws the

reader's attention to the consequences of considering certain British lives unBritish, inhuman, ungrievable, unworthy. This institutional and unfortunately universal failure does not end there as we see in the case of Parvaiz. When Eamonn asks his father, the Home Secretary, to help Aneeka and her brother, Karamat not only rejects the request, but also forbids Parvaiz's family to bring his body to Britain: "We will not let those who turn against the soil of Britain in their lifetime sully that very soil in death" (188). By this decision, he also reminds British citizens – clearly directing his statement to British Muslims – that their "citizenship is a privilege not a right or birthright" (198). The life and death of Parvaiz are affected by the same fate his father suffered – to be considered unworthy of mourning by (his) state. This critique reflects the problem of the power of the state to regulate whose lives can be mourned. As Judith Butler writes, public mourning has always been a significant political issue: "It has been since at least the time of Antigone, when she chose openly to mourn the death of one of her brothers even though it went against the sovereign law to do so" (*Frames of War* 38). The denial of mourning is thus another way to ensure the continuing dehumanisation of lives.

The inability to mourn the past carries responsibility for the tragedy in *Home Fire*, and the intensity of the detrimental consequences of an inherited trauma are demonstrated most vividly through Parvaiz. As Amina Yaqin argued, this character's "state of exception is determined by necropower of both the British state and the Islamic State" (247). Parvaiz becomes the figure "outside the law, a *homo sacer*", and the same state of exception is later applied to his sister Aneeka attempting to bring him home (247). This figure of a *homo sacer* is important when it comes to defining the identities of Adil Pasha and his children Parvaiz and Aneeka. The status of this figure can also be described as a "bare life":

He has been excluded from the religious community and from all political life: he cannot participate in the rites of his *gens*, nor (if he has been declared *infamis et intestabilis*) can he perform any juridically valid act. What is more, his entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide; he can save himself only in perpetual flight or a foreign land. And yet he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat of death. (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 103)

Since any social identity, and in this case a national identity, is shared, the British state erases not only the citizen status of the siblings Parvaiz and Aneeka but also the invisible link between them and other British citizens, thus allowing the media to easily destroy their images in their narratives. As the media turns all attention to Aneeka, she is portrayed as an "accomplice" of her terrorist brother (204), a "Slag, terrorist-spawn, enemy-of-Britain" (229). In contrast to her, Isma is "playing the good citizen", which for Aneeka is a traitorous, "shameful act" (199). In a sense, a terrorist becomes the opposite of a citizen here.

Becoming a *homo sacer* may be the fate of Adil Pasha but “[t]he necropolitical trauma of his father’s world continues to haunt Parvaiz” (Yaqin 248). Adil Pasha’s actions put his children on the path of being banished from their country. By including the ghost of Adil Pasha in her novel through references to the unknown or repressed past in Parvaiz and Aneeka’s narratives, Shamsie defines this tragedy as the problem of inheritance. Yet, in this idea of inheritance, the weight of responsibility does not lie on the shoulders of the ancestors alone since the novel clearly criticises the role of the state in creating the state of exception for the offspring, or inheritors, of those who are disloyal to their country.

Inspired by yet also predicting the story of Shamima Begum, who left the UK to become an IS bride at 15, whose citizenship was revoked by the first British Muslim Home Secretary Sajid Javid, and who lost the appeal against Javid’s decision in 2020 and 2023, Shamsie creates a breath-taking narrative that feels real and urges the reader to question the meaning of citizenship. Analysing Begum’s case alongside Shamsie’s narrative, Urszula Rutkowska points out that similar to Karamat Lone, the real Home Secretaries “Javid, May, and Patel have refused to acknowledge that distinctly English problems may be to blame for the radicalisation of Parvaiz or Begum” (885). By revoking his citizenship, Karamat seals Parvaiz’s doom, making him a *homo sacer*, and Aneeka follows her brother’s fate. Concentrating on this radical step and its even more radical consequences, as it leads to the horrific deaths of both Aneeka and Karamat’s son Eamonn, is an important aspect of reading Shamsie’s novel. It allows the reader to not only see the displacement of figures unwanted by both their ancestral and birth countries, but also to understand that citizenship in modern Britain equals to the value of life. By revoking the citizenship, the state defines the lives of *homo sacer* figures as unreal. At the same time, the state also posits that citizenship is a privilege and, hence, so is life. To have one’s life supported and death mourned is thus defined as a form of privilege both within and beyond this fictional narrative.

Conclusion

Throughout this novel, Shamsie employs the ideas of roots and background, the past and its ghosts. Her characters are tied by these notions, each in a different way, and even if the past is just a memory living in their subconscious mind, it eventually finds its way into the present. At the first glimpse, it may seem like a story in which the children of a terrorist father are doomed to repeat his mistake and betray their country because beliefs are inherited. Instead, it is precisely this view that Shamsie criticises with her novel. She demonstrates that the cultural past, violence, or radicalism are not inherited and draws attention to the interplay of the exploitation of personal and cultural trauma by the IS, identity politics in the UK, and the failure to recognise the vulnerability of British Muslim lives. While politicians like Karamat Lone continue to draw on differences within their country thus enhancing the traumas and conflicts of the past, the strong sense of the collective threat, the “us-

against-them” prevails. Instead of acknowledging and mourning its losses, the state then continues to warn its citizens against the monsters it itself continues to create.

The identities of the main characters in *Home Fire* are shaped by inheritance in its various forms – from personal trauma that forms their family history to the collective power that transcends the boundaries of their diasporic group and falls into the influence of the necropolitics of the involved States. The tragedy that the novel’s characters endure is, thus, neither an accident nor fate since this narrative highlights the interconnectedness of personal trauma, religious prejudice, and political inequality. With this work, Shamsie urges her reader to understand radicalisation not as an act of treason but rather as a process that involves exploitation of personal and collective trauma and beliefs already imbued into the collective British unconscious.

In the next subchapter, the focus will remain on the UK as a setting for the conflicts and crises experienced by second-generation immigrants in London. In a no-less-tragic story of a conflict unfolding within 48 hours, Guy Gunaratne poses questions similar to those highlighted in my analysis of Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* – from the Britishness of migrant identities and the importance of their cultural past to personal trauma and mourning.

2.2 Blood Ties and the Power of Collective Identity in Guy Gunaratne’s *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018)¹

“It was as if the past had wandered into the present.”

– Guy Gunaratne, *In Our Mad and Furious City*

Guy Gunaratne’s debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018), depicts a cultural conflict unfolding in contemporary London. Set off as the result of a killing of a white soldier by a black Muslim boy, violent riots force young men at the centre of the narrative to recognise their migrant background and doubt their sense of self and belonging in the city. At the same time, for Nelson and Caroline, immigrants of a different time, the events evoke memories of the past that haunts them and prove that the cultural divide they witnessed decades ago still prevails. By following the narratives of these characters and depicting violent ethnic clashes, the novel captures the driving forces of blind ethnic brutality on the one hand and the loss of a meaningful sense of self on the other. Drawing on Vamik Volkan’s studies on large-group psychology and collective trauma, I will analyse the role of inheritance, personal and collective, in times of crisis and examine its influence on a personal sense of self. *In Our Mad and Furious City* illustrates the many ways in which the

¹ This subchapter expands on ideas first published in my article “Ethnic Conflicts and the Power of Collective Identity in Guy Gunaratne’s *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018).” *Literature Compass* 19.12 (2022): e12681. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12681>

impact of shared blood ties not only generates cultural conflicts but can also lead to trauma and displacement that can live in the collective and personal unconscious through generations. This chapter explores the intricate ways in which Gunaratne's transcultural narrative depicts these age-old yet contemporary issues.

Narrated through the voices of first and second-generation immigrants, the events unfolding in Gunaratne's novel transform the lives of those with "elsewhere in [their] blood" (Gunaratne, *In our Mad and Furious City* [IMFC] 3), forcing them to look within, recognise their cultural differences, and reflect on their belonging in the city. Influenced by the real story of the killing of a British soldier, Lee Rigby, by two converted Britons in a brutal Islamist attack in 2013, which led to protests and an increase in anti-Muslim incidents in Britain, Gunaratne's novel serves as a mirror reflecting contemporary British society, revealing how traumatic experiences shatter individual lives. This chapter thus attempts to shed light on the nature of cultural identity crises by analysing three characters from different generations of migrants – Caroline, Nelson, and Yusuf – and examining the power of blood ties in this narrative. The idea of inheritance in this novel comes through in the concept of blood ties, which the author employs to convey the importance of personal and collective transmission of culture and trauma. The idea of blood ties is also deployed to reveal the exploitation of collective bonds to inflame conflicts and inflict harm on perceived enemies. I seek to demonstrate that the power of collective identity not only brings people together based on their shared culture, but also exploits inheritance and instrumentalises culture, religion, and trauma as biologically transmittable traits and tropes and allows conflicts to progress from one generation to the next.

Generational Bounds of Trauma

Before I move on to the analysis of the characters' perception of the conflict, I would like to outline two different perspectives that can aid in understanding the transmission of trauma, namely epigenetics and psychoanalysis. As Marianne Hirsch argued in *The Generation of Postmemory*, children of those who survived collective trauma live with an awareness that their "existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss", be it loss of family or sense of belonging (34). Psychoanalytical work by Vamik Volkan has also shown that even though parents cannot directly transmit their memories to their children, they may "deposit" their traumatised "self-images within a child" (*Animal Killer* xii). This form of inheritance occurs mostly unconsciously between a parent and a child, and a child whose parent experiences trauma may become, as Volkan puts it, "a reservoir" who receives a "psychological gene" (KNI 160), a term he employs to describe inherited trauma without, however, implying any changes in DNA sequences. In the last decade, Hirsch's research interests have moved from postmemory to epi-memory, a concept based on epigenetic research. At her keynote lecture at the University College Dublin in 2016, Hirsch explored the idea of further examining inherited trauma through

epigenetics. Drawing on the research conducted by Rachel Yehuda and Eva Jablonka, she discussed the role of epigenetic tags that are “transmitted with DNA sequences” resulting in the transmission of trauma (Hirsch, *Epi-Memory, Art and Action*). While it is interesting how multidimensional inheritance systems interact with each other and how epigenetics may complement cultural trauma studies, in her work, Hirsch also argued that transgenerational transmission of trauma also relies on other cultural and environmental factors and it may be precarious to attribute trauma predispositions across generations to epigenetics alone (*Epi-Memory, Art and Action*).

Although epigenetics may provide answers to the questions of transmission of massive trauma of war or genocide, psychological studies of large-group conflicts also address the transmission of trauma within a collective identity (Volkan, *KNI* 173). With time, the collective trauma may become an unconscious yet significant part of the collective identity (173), and although it does not cause wars on its own, it may be used by the group leaders who follow their own, usually political, interests to “inflare a [new] conflict” (155), which is a political move that appears to be one of the driving forces in the novel *In Our Mad and Furious City*.

Anthropologist Kevin Avruch explains that cultural differences do not cause conflicts (29). It is actually “socially constructed and politically motivated ethnic difference” that we often mistake for culture (29). These differences and conflicts, as I argue in this chapter, are able to reshape and, sometimes, wreck one’s sense of self resulting in a personal cultural identity crisis. The driving force behind such ethnic conflicts can be explained by large-group psychology. It is this attempt to make the political feel personal to the group members that may cause even more damage to the sense of personal identity than an individual transmission of trauma. While this analysis focuses on the traces of trauma transmission in Gunaratne’s narrative, it also appears crucial to study how collective identity can be strengthened through collective trauma, grief, or shame and instrumentalised to generate large-group conflicts, subsequently causing personal identity crises.

In Gunaratne’s novel, the most distinct signs of transgenerational transmission of trauma are revealed in the stories of Caroline and Nelson, whose identity crises I will now explore. Having gone through violent ethno-nationalist conflicts and having lost their sense of belonging within their ethnic groups, both characters exhibit an inability to openly pass their story on to their children. Caroline’s response to trauma is to shut down and display disinterest to the conflict yet there is an understanding that it will not prevent her son from inheriting it: “Sadness should be ours to bear, the parents, not the child. But we pass it along all the same [...] It’s not up to us” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 279). At the same time, having witnessed similar violence, she recognises a familiar strength in her son Ardan: “Like he’ll see now what it takes to survive here. His eyes like his da, his hands like mine, and something of his nan in him, too. His blood is stern, I’ll tell him. He needn’t know why” (279–80). Here, she alludes to her mother’s sternness and ties to the IRA, believing this inheritance will help Ardan cope with the loss of his dear friend. Possibly, he will

continue to find strength in “a sense of agency” he finds in Grime (Pereira Martins 79). Although it is ‘blood’ that Caroline believes has ultimately shaped her son’s character, the narrative allows us to only speculate on the possibility of parent-child transmission of traumatic mental representations.

Unlike Caroline, Nelson wishes he could tell his son Selvon, whose name hints at Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, about the violence he witnessed in his youth, why the city “feel[s] familiar in only the worse ways” author name (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 34), and how “all of this is nothing new. All this tension, all this low tide” (35). Nelson is hindered from sharing his story by the paralysis and inability to speak. He is “confined to a wheelchair”, which “symbolises the restraints placed on the Windrush generation – treated appallingly by successive UK governments – in an ever-contracting world” (Bromley 137). He silently observes his son, a young and determined man as every day Selvon runs ‘for’ something, which echoes his father’s rebellious act of running away from his immigrant brothers and sisters amid violent race riots in his time. At the same time, Nelson ponders over his responsibility for the city and life his son has inherited: “Maybe London would be less of a burden for Selvon if I had helped fight for it” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 238). There is an awareness of indirect personal and collective responsibility for the offspring in Nelson’s words. There is also a desire to warn Selvon of the repeating nature of the violence in their city: “I wish I could tell my son what I know. All that I know about how the city raise a young man’s fury. How it bend him back, beat him down” (37). Here, Nelson reflects on his own experience as a newcomer in London and his fear that all he has endured is also bound to impact Selvon. The conflict reinforces his and the reader’s perception of London as “a city which keeps migrant groups hidden away beneath towers of estate housing, refusing to acknowledge them as its own” (Pereira Martins 81).

Although personal generational parallels suggest the possibility of trauma inheritance and may make the case for epigenetics, the narrative also challenges this understanding and exposes the danger of trauma transmission within a group by delving into how ethnic ties and collective trauma can be exploited to intensify conflicts. What this novel conveys, I argue, is that an essential amount of power to motivate ethnic and inner conflicts can be attributed to the psychology behind the collective identity depicted in the text.

One’s sense of personal identity is in constant interaction with one’s collective identity since different components – such as religion, nationality, ethnicity – are essential parts of one’s identity (Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity* 9). If one of the shared social identities becomes prevalent, it may cause one to develop a fixation on a singular identity and consequently a singular world perspective (24). As the novel shows, this fixation can lead to irreversible damage to the sense of self and belonging. Such damaging impact may occur when conflicts arise between different cultural groups, creating pressure among people to seek strength in their own group, be it a nation, ethnicity or diasporic community, become part of something bigger, and act in the interest of “enhancement, protection, or survival” of the collective

identity (Volkan, *KNI* 69). If one's cultural identity does not imply belonging within a single cultural group, which is often the case for immigrants, a clash between two groups can also lead to an inner identity conflict. Ethnic conflicts generate pressure to embody and support the values of the collective identity, which can prevent transcultural individuals from achieving a strong, meaningful sense of self – creating a complex inner struggle Guy Gunaratne depicts in their characters. This novel shows how collective identity and leaders of large groups can generate cultural conflicts and cause trauma and irreversible damage to one's sense of self.

Ghosts of the Past

One of the characters through whom Gunaratne takes the reader to the past to witness the struggles of displacement within their collective identity is Caroline, who grew up in Belfast during the Troubles, an ethno-nationalist conflict between the unionists and the Irish Republic Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland that went on from the late 1960s to the late 90s. To Caroline, the protests starting all over London are “another nonsense” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 16), but even though she attempts to act indifferent, this conflict triggers her past trauma, causing anxiety she is only able to calm down with alcohol. All the talk about the killing of the soldier evokes the memory of her teenage years in Belfast. It is not so much the destroyed shops and restaurants that set off her traumatic memory, but the attitude of the people and ethnic hate that remind her of what “was in the eyes of people and the way [they] spoke with embers in [their] mouths” (83). What she witnessed there was the same strong sense of community, the same idea of “own flesh and blood” (83) that she sees permeating the city now. What the author points at here is a strong sense of collective identity that is achieved through grief and hate and seen as essential for survival in a difficult time.

A suddenly perceptible ethnic divide brings Caroline back to the time when she first had to acknowledge that her identity goes beyond her as a person and implies belonging within a larger entity – the IRA. When her cousin Eily was attacked, beaten, raped, and left to die by the loyalists, she was told that “[s]oldiers did this” (88). This utterance delivered by her mother becomes the idea that haunts Caroline through decades: “She wanted to pin something onto me so she did, something I wouldn't soon forget” (88). As this memory of her mother returns to Caroline now, there is a sense of a conversation happening across time: “My hands shake as I remember her say it so steady” (88), while she “looked off ways and kept speaking to me as if I were her past” (88). Her mother's words become pinned onto her as a form of inheritance, religious and ideological. The collective anger of the IRA became personal to her at that moment, but the language employed is especially important here.

The novel opens with the news about a soldier killed on the streets of London and it is implied to be a hate crime but the readers do not know the background of the victim. We see an angered black Muslim boy, the killer, and immediately and

almost naturally project the image of innocence onto the soldier, his victim. However, by referring to the abusers as soldiers in Caroline's story, the author creates an echo of the image of the killed soldier-boy and reshapes it, making the reader question the violence and the innocence, the right and the wrong. The author urges us to recognise the hate crime not as a single act of violence but, perhaps, as an incident in a chain of violent events. This forces us to acknowledge that we see human vulnerability differently across the world (Butler, *Precarious Life* 31) and allow derealisation of the loss of certain lives (37), including the lives of those perceived as enemies. One might suggest that this way, we can reflect on the fact that there are also victims of the British military in the Middle East, which the real killers of Lee Rigby used to justify their unjustifiable actions as "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Dodd and Halliday). This critique that implicitly runs through Gunaratne's novel points to a significant societal issue, namely to "the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others – even if it means taking those latter lives" (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). Through each figure in this novel who condones violence, the author addresses the problem of failing to acknowledge the losses of the people perceived as enemies and, this way, the problem of justifying the violence against them, and refusing to recognise their vulnerability.

Caroline's narrative reveals that the nature of her past trauma lies in the detachment of her personal identity from the collective IRA identity that comes through her realisation of implication in collective violence. What makes this mental displacement so traumatic is that she considered herself to be part of the IRA not because of the collective cause but because of inheriting the ideology, having it in her blood: "[W]hat would it matter how far they'd send me? What good would distance do if something like that is in my blood? I suppose I was IRA too, wasn't I? Because of whose daughter I was and sister, more than anything?" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 121). With emphases on the blood ties here, the narrative acknowledges the supremacy of the idea of inheriting cultural traits and collective trauma, taking us back to the epigenetic perspective. However, in the following example, the author criticises this belief by demonstrating how Caroline was not born with the sense of collective hate but was rather impelled to believe that her belonging was necessarily linked to the IRA. At an IRA gathering, she felt the collective grief that united the IRA and truly believed it was in her genes: "He spoke of our blood" (155), "the violent blood", "the very same blood that rushed through my brothers and Ma" (197–98). What the narrative shows here is how ethnic and religious ties are instrumentalised with the purpose of inflicting harm on the 'enemy' group. This is the condition that was defined by Volkan as "large-group psychology" (*KNI* 23). When conflicts between groups escalate, they open a path for regression. In a state of regression, ensuring own and group's safety becomes the primary aim and the perception of threats, real or sometimes even imagined, can blur (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 13). In this condition, individuals belonging to the group under threat, real or

imagined, can be manipulated by their leaders to “respond with violence in order to erase the threats” and “regress into the humiliating and killing of ‘others’” (Volkan, *KNI* 23). Convinced by the idea of the shared cause based on the shared blood, Caroline succumbed to the power of hate in the state of collective regression and anger. From the IRA Caroline learnt that hers “were a people crushed by cruelty, and now [they]’d be feared” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 201). By employing this proclamation in the narrative, the author demonstrates that this group is united not only by their ethnic ties but also through their collective trauma which, in their mind, gives them the green light to violence.

Although at first Caroline appears to perceive the pain of her cousin as her own and believe in the necessity of a violent response to support her family and ‘blood’, she is unable to identify with the IRA for too long: “that was them. It was not me” (201). The exact shift in her understanding of own and collective identity occurs through the act of humanisation or of acknowledging the shared human or shared female identity of the potential victim of her brothers. The dehumanisation of the enemy groups is one of the tactics that is used to normalise violence against them (Volkan, *KNI* 121). By thinking of her brothers’ victim as a human being “alone and asleep with her skin and thighs and hair and fears of her own. The soldier’s sister” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 202), Caroline perceives this girl as real and vulnerable and her life as grievable. The depiction of this mental shift can be seen as a literary example of “a practice of resistance that becomes possible [...] precisely at the moment when doing violence seems most justified and obvious”, namely an example of nonviolence (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 27). As Caroline humanises the enemy, she chooses nonviolence, at the same time escaping the state of regression. The incident becomes a traumatic event that separates her from the shared IRA identity and with it from her family, resulting not only in trauma but also in displacement, emotional and physical, as her family sends her away to London.

Although this character is not personally involved in her group’s violent actions, the author’s use of Caroline’s struggle to understand her place and side in this conflict also unveils the problem of implication. While at the moment of escape, she seems to decide that she does not want to be part of her brother’s revenge on the soldiers, the trauma flashbacks also suggest that in spite of her escape Caroline will always be part of what happened and can never truly separate her existence from the haunting memories: “After all these years I can still remember how it felt to dig my nails into the dirt as I did. And it never will go, will it? I’ll join Ma, and Damian and Da, and everyone else whose violence follows them” (244–45). By acknowledging the strength of these ties, she confirms her implication in the actions of her family and many other members of the IRA. As Rothberg argues, implication encompasses “forms of belonging to a context of injustice that cannot be grasped immediately or directly because they seem to involve spatial, temporal, or social distances or complex causal mechanisms” (8). In this story, the author illustrates the complexity of implication and the impossibility to escape it when the implication is determined by one’s inheritance. There is a strong influence of the family in

Caroline's story yet also her realisation that the traumatic separation from them goes beyond the familial context and is caused by their involvement in the IRA. In this case, ethnicity, religion, and place shape the character's sense of belonging. With this traumatic incident, the narrative creates Caroline's realisation of the implication in the crimes of not only her family, but also her ethnic group. The inner conflict caused by her inability to comply with their violence inevitably leads to displacement yet does not free her from being an implicated subject.

This way, in Caroline, Gunaratne illustrates a traumatic experience that is personal and cultural as well. It is not the memory of the traumatic event itself but its representations that live in the subconscious mind and come back to haunt her (Caruth 4). She believes that she will always carry the past of her family with her: "Family history sort of seeps in under the skin" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 121). In this character, inheritance is inescapable. The flashbacks triggered by the history repeating in new yet old ways reveal to Caroline that she will always be haunted by the ghosts of her past: "In death as in life I'm sure, Ma will stand there in the shadows and watch" (18). This sort of haunting, which is created by the projections of her own "tortured mind" acting in this narrative as a "metaphor for the complexities of cultural transmission" (Brogan, "ASCH" 152, 164), arguably points at Caroline's need to transcend her past and, perhaps, to her inability to forgive herself for betraying her family, their beliefs, and the IRA identity.

Another character whose traumatic memories are triggered by the events unfolding in the present is Nelson, who came to Britain from the Montserrat island in the Caribbean. Arguably representing the Windrush generation, from the very first day of his arrival in the "Mother Country" he finds himself among the only people he can instantly trust – immigrants like him: "They was from black after all, so who else I cling to fresh from boat but my own likeness?" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 73). He soon learns about the power of collective identity as he notices the three big letters painted on a wall – KBW, Keep Britain White, and discovers how unwelcoming the 'Mother Country' is to people like him. The graffiti along with the mob that attack Nelson and other immigrants point to the tensions that return or rather remain to define Britain a generation later when Nelson's son is there to witness it. Decades later, it is the "skinheads" who march, "holding signs giving the name of that soldier-boy and saying *Britain First*" (254). These parallels in the text can also be read as Gunaratne's critique of the nationalistic attitudes around the Brexit campaign and the conflicts surrounding it. This realisation leaves Nelson feeling shame, the "shame the Lord give you when you love a wretched thing" (79). The way he refers to Britain here creates an echo of Franz Fanon's infamous work *The Wretched of the Earth*, urging the reader to think of the dehumanising effects of colonisation yet also see how Nelson's understanding that "[i]t was the people bad mind here" (79), points to the destructive effects of colonisation on the mentality of British people.

To emphasise the repeating nature of the racist attitudes he is faced with, Gunaratne employs a figure that is distinctly associated with fascism and ethnic violence. The group that threatens young Nelson and his friends finds their leader in

the face of the disgraced fascist politician Oswald Mosley, who reappears on the political scene to unite racist British people against migrants. Reflecting on it now, Nelson understands the meaning of their racism as the fear of the threat of difference: “the British native think that a tide bring a flood and they do everything they can to push away we, the difference” (79). Here, the author uses tide as a compelling metaphor for the inevitability and reoccurrence of cultural conflicts. Gunaratne demonstrates that, like the real tide, to single individuals, it seems that cultural conflicts are brought about by the powers outside of their control. Even more so, the magnitude of large-group conflicts makes one realise one’s helplessness in the face of the conflict and yield to the larger powers, be it the laws of physics, politics, nature, or God one uses to justify one’s actions.

To highlight the growing strength and exclusion of ethnic groups, the author draws attention to the physical difference by employing the descriptions of uniforms. Military uniforms or markers of membership help to create a feeling of a single collective entity, a sense of belonging (Hunt and Benford 439). When the threat became real, it was not just the colour of the skin that separated young Nelson and his friends from the locals, but they also wore pins and caps of the Association, they were “uniformed and charged” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 126), ready to defend their group: “I was a true recruit now, wearing my pin with pride and anger” (127). He went door-knocking, heard stories, saw bruises, and the rage in him rose, the helplessness and anger dissolved inside, obscuring all hopes and dreams that drove him to come to Britain and justifying he need to “get armed” and “be ready to fight” (129). Being part of this fight gave Nelson “a certain pride” (129). The sense of pride is used here to create a contrast to the shame he feels when he realises how unwelcoming his new home is. This emotion is, however, illusory, for it is created by the temporary belonging within the collective identity in which he loses his personal self.

Similar to Caroline’s story, there is a turning point that opens Nelson’s eyes to the nature of violence that blinds his group and forces him to realise that these people are not his “blood” (185). The violence he witnesses as his friends hang the dog that used to belong to the racist Teddy boys creates a shift in his sense of belonging again: “Lord, I thought, there was people cheering at it. Throwing stones at the body and holding them fist in the air like the sight of a dead dog was a victory. All I saw was the animal’s fixed black, bulging eyes swinging in the air above me” (183). What happens to Nelson here is the process of finding links – connecting through the shared identity as a human being – with their enemy: “A dog under the leash of everything we hate. Yet all I could think about was the little dog I kept when I was young, the dog I played with and loved when I was a boy” (183–84). Although Nelson discusses an animal, namely one of the animals that the racist mob deployed when they attacked his friend, the sickening images that he recalls in his narrative show his understanding of the vulnerability of their enemy. This deep perception of the consequences of their violence allows this character to better see the

primary vulnerability of others and acknowledge them as real human beings, similar to the change that Caroline experiences in Belfast.

In the same instance, Nelson feels shame again, now for unbelonging among his own people and his inability to share the sense of hate with them: "And I feel shame as a man for not hating the dog as much the other men did" (184). Through the perspective of Nelson, the novel reveals and criticises the signs of regression in the actions of other immigrants: "After all that we give for the cause, when the riot come, it was just the same as any other human collapse, the same loose and pointless frenzy. [...] For what?" (212). He sees how "unthinking and hollow" his "brothers and sisters" become in this conflict (212) and chooses displacement over violence. It is the inhumane actions of his own people that he refuses to abide by. Their actions reflect the negative qualities projected onto them by the racist mob, and the narrative points this out: "Them madmen like Mosley, the violent stories, them images of torn faces in the tabloid paper. It suffocate we own sense and have it replace with some lower code" (212). The racism they face thus has an impact on their sense of collective identity, it changes the people for the worse, and Nelson is unable to be part of it.

Another parallel with Caroline's story can be seen in the problem of implication that is revealed in Nelson's inability to take part in the violent actions of his group. When the time comes to act, Nelson displays the same numbness that we can see in Caroline's narrative: "I did not know whether to run or help my brother burn the bastards in the streets" (211). He chooses the former but is never able to forget his involvement in the Association: "No matter how much I want put it behind me, that club-fisted madness what colour the heart, it never disappear for long. I was angry with myself" (235). Although Nelson never returns to his friends and their cause and chooses his own purpose instead, the memories that come to him reveal his regret of his involvement with the Association, although their actions were outside of his personal control. What starts as a fight for justice turns to violence, and here again Gunaratne depicts a character able to comprehend his own position as an implicated subject in that violence.

In these two characters, Caroline and Nelson, Gunaratne depicts personal identity crises during violent ethnic conflicts. What causes a sense of inner displacement is the separation of individual identity from the collective mind during the collective traumatic events. The unresolved trauma returns to haunt them in memory flashbacks triggered by the current conflict, as it surely does to many others who share their experiences. In both characters the author arguably depicts the realisation of one's implication in ethnic conflicts, which can also be defined as the generator of their ever-living memories. Both are unable to leave the past behind or be left in peace by their memories not only because of sharing their identity, ethnicity or religion, with those who inflict harm on others, but also because of their awareness of the violence involved and their inability to stop it.

In both stories, we also see a strong critique of people's inability to acknowledge the primary vulnerability of their perceived enemy. Precisely the realisation that in

times of conflict being part of a collective identity involves the dehumanisation of others is what generates their identity crises. Their narratives also suggest that it is an “endless fight” (130) that will be passed on to the next generations, and all this violence is bound to repeat across history, geography, and different ethnic and religious groups, and Gunaratne demonstrates this in the narratives of their offspring.

Who Is the West?

What is different about the new generation in the novel and their attitude towards the unfolding ethnic conflict is that they belong to a “young nation of mongrels” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 3), in other words, of transcultural individuals. This form of cultural identity was defined by Wolfgang Welsch as identity that implies “the integration of components of differing cultural origin” and the ability to transcend cultural boundaries (“Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today” 198). These transcultural characters hear “ancient callings” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 3) and “the whispers of [their] older roots” (4) but exist with a peaceful awareness of their cultural differences and aspire to live in the present. Their sense of belonging is not linked to one culture or nation in particular: “To have been moulded out of one thing and not of many? There was nothing more foreign to us than that” (4), as the author writes. There is rejection of singularity of cultures in these young characters. Nevertheless, as the violent conflict brings the question of belonging to the surface, it also poses complications for their sense of self. It causes a serious identity crisis in Yusuf – a young man whose Pakistani father was an imam, yet a great deal of provocation of his inner conflicts comes from his environment.

The death of Yusuf’s father marks a shift in the Muslim community in London. The new imam’s followers, who call themselves the Muhajiroun, are seen near the mosque looking “militant”, like an “army”, “standing around on guard duty” (45). The comparison of the guards to the army hints at almost military-like readiness to defend the collective Muslim identity that feels vulnerable and shattered by the imam’s passing. In the description of this group, the author yet again employs uniforms to emphasise the distinction of a single religious group, constructing a parallel with Nelson’s experience of adopting uniforms to enhance the sense of togetherness in the Association.

The way the so-called guards surround the mosque creates a sense of the borders that need to be protected against a collective threat, which may be a subtle reference to the current crises at the European borders. Here, the presence of the guards furthers and defines the existing divide within the Ends: “That means no-one goes near Mosque unless they go through us” (45). This makes the reader pay attention to the seriousness of the collective divide. The Muhajiroun appear in the text as a single entity, as we read in Selvon’s narrative: “It was suttan about how they all looked alike, dressed the same and stood in the same manner” (46). However, the frightening, uncanny atmosphere illustrated through these characters creates fear that goes beyond their appearance. There is an understanding of sameness

disturbed by a strong sense of difference: "They all spoke like they were from Ends but as if they were repping suttan bigger than the Ends, bigger than Estate or borough even" (46). Their conflict exists beyond the current tensions of the city. Rather, it is about the age-old clash between the West and the Muslim world.

Through Yusuf's narrative, we see changes in one person's life enforced by the power of the Muhajiroun, the power they can exercise based on his culture, which is yet another way how inheritance can shape one's existence. As he writes, "[our] lives were not our own" (26), he reveals the loss of personal freedom to the collective identity. Now, as he has to be kept under the watch of the Muhajiroun at all times, he is no longer simply a member of the Muslim community, a Londoner, a friend to the Irish boy from the Estate, or a football player, but his identity is completely determined by his inheritance. He is expected to fully devote himself to the fight against the decay brought to the Muslim world by the West.

Yusuf is the character through which Gunaratne most profoundly depicts the conflict of identity. His religious background and his father's status in the Muslim community did not matter to his friends, as Selvon convinces us in his narrative: "Yoos was just Yoos to us" (43). Unlike young people, Selvon's mother would "act like Yoos was on some Islamic recruitment hype" (43), which again shows the new generation's changed perspective on inherited culture. Although he has a Pakistani background and a rather strong connection to his family's religion, Yusuf does not possess a sense of togetherness with first-generation immigrants from Pakistan. The inability of other immigrants to comprehend the difference between them unveils "the gulf between [them]" (29). In spite of sharing religion with Pakistani immigrants, he sees their culture as foreign: "Bollywood music, Pakistani cricket, earwarmers and international phone cards. That shit had nothing to do with me, mate. Home for me was Estate. Pakistan was some place in fragmented memory, involuntary smells and misplaced colours. A world away" (29–30). While Yusuf does not deny his religion, his idea of ancestral home is partly formed by a Western perspective: "I thought of Pakistan as being stuck in dusty rooms, mounds of strange food, vague relatives, mosquito bites and half-understood Urdu, proper periphery" (30). Similar to his friends, Yusuf's sense of belonging is shaped by the environment he has grown up in. Yet, it is Estate he calls home, and not Britain. Nationality appears to have lost its importance for his generation. This character resists being shaped by his inheritance and strives towards transculturality instead.

The problem of displacement highlighted by the ethnic conflict is also illustrated through Yusuf. He claims he belongs in the Ends, which makes him conclude he is closer to the racist mob than to the immigrants: "I had more in common with the goons that broke his window in truth" (30). These conflicting realisations hint at the author's "critique of narrow identitarian labeling" (Esposito qtd. in Dagnino 12) that still prevails in the modern society. In Yusuf's attempts to be independent from his many identities, the author captures existence "beyond" cultural realms (Epstein 332). It is not the culture and religion that unite him with immigrants, it is the violence directed against them and the hatred that first and second-generation

immigrants equally face in the city, where they all are perceived as foreign: “That was how we were really linked, ennet, by the threat of smashed-up windows and pictures of our mums crying in the *Guardian*” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 31). In this character, Gunaratne illustrates that despite his transculturality, despite belonging rooted in the city and the future, the outside perception of his cultural background cannot be erased. Moreover, it can be violently used against him to exaggerate the difference he cannot be responsible for and provoke hatred. By directing the focus to Yusuf’s inner displacement, his rejection of Pakistani culture yet also unbelonging in Britain and by defining what he is not rather than what he is, the author makes him embody the transcultural paradox: he embraces different identities yet exists in the “realm of the ‘cultural’ beyond any specific culture or cultural identity” (Epstein 332).

The transcultural aspect of his identity is what makes his experience of the ethnic conflict more intense. Being forced to choose a side and join the Muhajiroun crushes Yusuf’s sense of self and belonging: “I was being torn away from the road where I had found refuge and was being forced back into the one place that held all the misery in the world. A place next to my brother, at the mercy of others” (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 98). As Yusuf’s brother is suffering from a mental disorder and the city is in chaos, the new imam attempts to use the racist attacks as proof of God’s punishment for accepting the British culture and diverging from the one true faith, Islam:

This is what happens when you bathe among non-believers. The infidel does not believe what you believe, you understand? That is their abyss. Their filth. In Irfan you can see this, this heresy. This is the result of your father’s ways. You cannot see that? When he was alive he wanted us to live side by side. Abide by our way and same time, theirs. But this is *bid’ah*. You cannot be both. (148)

These words seem to encourage his brother to accept the idea that his sins are the fault of the West but Yusuf sees it differently: “It weren’t the West bruv. We are the fuckin West Irfan” (179). Here, yet again he angrily expresses that he belongs in London, in the West, despite his religious identity. Displaying strong inner resistance, he still accepts the Muhaji uniform. As the despair gradually overpowers Yusuf, he seems to give the control over himself to the Muhajiroun: “It was as if I were being carried home, back to Estate on a benign wind, toward walls that would provide a sanctuary, toward Muhajiroun who would offer me brotherhood, and into an embrace that would finally make sure no harm would come to me” (216). The words of the imam continue to echo in his mind: “*His blood is your blood*” (149), convincing Yusuf of being culturally indebted to join their fight. By the use of the blood ties here, the author creates a parallel with Caroline’s experience in the IRA where blood defines belonging within a collective identity and sharpens the divide between two groups involved in the ethno-national conflict. The term “Mother Country” also returns in the text in the words of the imam (150). This time it is not

young Nelson's Britain that is implied. It is Pakistan where Yusuf must 'return' with his brother to continue their education, free from the Western influence. Gunaratne arguably applies this repetition to illustrate how the idea of belonging shifts in times of crisis. Recognising how displacement has long become fundamental to our existence, this narrative manifests how the power of collective identity, so intensely perceived in the time of conflict, constructs the idea of having a culture in one's blood and makes inheritance carry the responsibility for one's belonging.

The escalation of the conflict in the narrative is epitomised in the burning of the mosque. Although it is the deed of Yusuf's brother, who sought to rebel against the new imam's oppression and free himself, the act symbolises an attack on the collective Muslim identity by the West. This allows the imam to unite his followers through "the sadness and outrage" (248) and convince them that "[t]he white menace" avenging the white soldier "should be hanged" (251). Here, the narrative leads us to believe that identities can really become "the enemies of human solidarity, the sources of war" (Appiah, *The Lies that Bind* xvi). By blaming Muslims for "witnessing everything around them splinter and crumble" and doing "nothing to prevent it" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 251), the imam instils the crowd with a sense of shame for their generational oppression in the Western society, exploiting the trauma of their shared identity. Traumatic events endured by large groups, as Volkan warns, "are always contaminated with shame and humiliation" (*KNI* 50) and "may become the fuel for new infernos that are deliberately started by people in the name of identity" (17). This way, his followers acquire a "blind trust" in the imam, a form of regression in which people follow their leader's destructive directions without questioning the necessity of their violence (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 14). As the imam leads his angered people to face the enemy, he becomes "the tip of a spilling crowd with [their] anger like a tide at his feet" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 250). Comprehending their vulnerability in the violent city, his followers blindly consent to his demands and follow them by burning the flag of the UK – the smoke rising into the air sending "a thick dark message to the white faces at the gates, watching from the blocks, in the streets, on screens around the city" (262), ominously signalling the destruction to come. At these moments, the group appears most united: it takes a common enemy to create a most profound, albeit illusory, sense of togetherness and belonging, for after all, as Achille Mbembe reminds us, "the contemporary era is, undeniably, one of separation, hate movements, hostility, and, above all, struggle against an enemy" (42). With the smoke, the uniforms, and the marching crowds of the Muslims against the racist mob, the narrative paints the picture of a city ready for a war and echoes the violence depicted in Nelson's story.

The manipulative tactics of the imam and his followers force Yusuf to join 'his' people: "The Muhaji led the surge forward. It was as if the chorus of anger around me moved toward the enemy" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 262). In these words, we see the passivity of this character: he is an observer hoping to find his brother in the crowd rather than showing interest in the cause of his group, despite very obviously sharing the same hate towards the racists. He is overwhelmed by the Muhajiroun and unable

to stand alone against their collective power. Yusuf is first hit by a bottle, which creates another repetition of the racist conflict in the past, when Nelson's friends threw bottle-bombs at the racist group from the windows. In the end, as the marching groups clash, Yusuf is killed by the panicking, angry crowd. By convincing Yusuf that he "cannot be both" (148), the imam diverts his potential for transculturality to the crisis of displacement instead. Yusuf is depicted as being torn away from his place of belonging and forced to reject his transcultural identity, and to express the intensity of this personal crisis the novel illustrates his violent death. The death of this character also symbolises his existential death, namely the loss of his personal identity to the collective fight, and, I would argue, represents the many lives lost because of blind trust in the collective power.

At the end of the novel, Ardan breaks down in tears, falling into his mother's arms, covered in Yusuf's blood. The image of this episode mimics his mother Caroline's tearful and bloody breakdown when she ran away from her brothers as they were about resort to violence. The author creates a similar traumatic experience for Ardan, at a similar age. He is expected to be on the other side of this conflict and told to "grab a sign" to join the racist group provoked by the death of the soldier (255). At this possibly pivoting point in his life, Ardan cries for Yusuf who is considered the enemy to the city, just like his mother did in her time when she cried for the soldiers' sister. By creating this generational parallel, Gunaratne constructs an example of transgenerational trauma, showing how Caroline's inability to heal from her trauma results in the passing of this task to her son, who is destined to live through a similar traumatic experience. At the same time, by displaying how the conflict unfolds on the collective level and narrating the complex inner negotiations between personal and collective will, the author suggests that this parallel is beyond personal inheritance of trauma and rather represents the inability of the society to overcome its age-old divides.

Conclusion

In his novel *In Our Mad and Furious City*, Gunaratne creates multiple analogies between conflicts in different times. The destroyed shop windows, racist graffiti on the walls, victims that become martyrs to their groups – the images preceding deadly attacks reappear in the narrative of the present, decades after the events shared in Nelson and Caroline's stories. Tempting the reader with Nelson and Caroline's possible transmission of trauma to their offspring, the author compels us to recognise the repeating nature of ethnic conflicts and the relevance of inheritance. At the same time, by drawing attention to the collective identity, they also challenge the ideas of epigenetics and transmission of trauma and instead reveal the exploitation of the idea of shared cultural trauma with the purpose of sharpening the divide between groups. Criticising the belief in the myth of blood through Caroline's experience with the IRA and the imam's attempt to deploy collective trauma of his people to intensify the conflict, the novel exposes how such beliefs are potentially complicit

in generating new conflicts instead and preventing transcultural individuals from achieving a meaningful sense of self.

The generational parallels constructed in this novel also help to define the issue of implication. Nelson's worries about his actions or lack thereof in the past are directly linked to the kind of London his son Selvon has inherited. Describing his son as "a young man against another tide" (Gunaratne, *IMFC* 238), he compares his struggles to the problems Nelson himself faced in his youth. A similar generational responsibility for the offspring is also strongly addressed in Caroline's narrative, yet in her case, the accountability lies outside of her control. It is familial and collective rather than personal. While the traumatic experiences of Nelson and Caroline address their personal implication in group conflicts and their struggle to understand their position in those conflicts, they represent a much bigger issue of collective implication, symbolising all the other Nelsons and Carolines refusing to participate in and witness the injustice brought by their people even as a form of defence. With the use of generational repetitions of personal trauma and collective clashes, the author also hints at the issue of diachronic implication on the collective level, showing how further generations are bound to inherit the unresolved ethnic issues.

The focus on the younger generation in this novel, on Selvon, Ardan, and Yusuf, also illustrates a complex picture of implication. While the young men belong in Britain, the migrant background places them in the same category with the terrorists: "Why it was that when we saw the eyes of the black boy with the dripping blade, we felt closer to him than that soldier-boy slain in the street" (4). A brutal ethnic clash like this one seems to open the portal into the past and bring to the surface the angers and fears that have seemed to be buried yet instead existed in the collective unconscious.

Although the author designs characters able to transcend the power of the collective identity and, thus, recognises the potential for a peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities, they show how traumatising this separation of personal self from the collective can be in the times of the conflict when personal selves tend to vanish in the collective struggle. They also reveal the deadly extent of this collective influence and fixation on the struggle against an enemy. In the grim vision of Yusuf's death, they express the consequences of abusing the ideas of blood ties and inherited collective grief to justify inhumane violence. The analysis of the novel points out that ethnic violence cannot be explained through cultural differences and makes the case for incorporating the perspective of large-group psychology in examining narratives of ethnic and religious conflicts. By urging the reader to remember past conflicts, Gunaratne shows that culture and ethnicity are not in one's blood. They answer to the power of a larger collective identity and different forms of inheritance can be instrumentalised to trigger violence, leading to identity crises in those who are unable to replace their sense of self with a blind trust in the collective.

An inheritance of parents' migrant trauma is also a topic in Porochista Khapour's novel *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, which I will analyse in the final part

of this chapter. This time, the focus turns to the United States and the story of a family who, having fled from Iran, learn to navigate their existence in the new world amid the tragedy that seems to refuse to stay buried in the past.

2.3. Exile Within: Mixing Worlds in Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007)

“It was the only story of my youth he had and suddenly it took on the burden of everything. Everything that was wrong with me, my history, my past. And I think for sons, they transfer that.”

– Porochista Khakpour, *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*

Named after great Persian rulers, Darius Adam and Xerxes Adam, a father and his son in the centre of Porochista Khakpour's narrative *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, have a difficult relationship exacerbated by their stubbornness to exist in two different worlds. Darius, who fled from Iran to America with his wife Lala and their little boy following the Islamic revolution, resists assimilation and instead fantasises about travelling back home and taking his son with him. His son Xerxes, on the contrary, strives to be an American. For him, embodying this identity eliminates any hints of Persian ancestry in his current life. This obsession with detachment from different essential aspects of their reality develops into physical alienation between the two men. While Darius is absorbed by his dreams in LA, his son Xerxes is suffering from depression and insomnia in New York. Khakpour defines this as “a miraculous act of reverse genetics” (168), the act that seems to define the existence of the two men who are shaped by their determination to be what the other is not. In these two characters, Porochista Khakpour depicts the intricacies of migrant identity with its constant negotiation of the past and the present. In this chapter, I set out to examine the characters of Khakpour's novel – Darius, Lala, and Xerxes Adam – in an attempt to analyse the impact their cultural inheritance has on the validity of their existence and efforts to achieve a meaningful sense of self. Influenced by Vamik Volkan's work on migration trauma, this analysis seeks to explore the impact of trauma transmission – or inheritance of trauma, culture, and history – on the characters' personal identity crises and, perhaps, also to understand if the inherited cultural past is complicit in withholding transculturality.

On the Names

From the beginning of their life in the US, Darius Adam has been consumed by the importance of their name. His greatest fear, it seems, is that their name gets confused with an American name: “*Odd-damn*, Xerxes. It is not an American name. You must remember that. You are Persian. If not Persian, then Iranian. Two choices”

(Khakpour 40). In a sense, Darius Adam represents the idea of separation, alienation, of the loyalty to the single-culture ideals: “Not everything is linked. You are what you are; they are what they are” (41). He refuses to see any connection between his last name and the name Adams, which his name – Adam – is often confused with. He has the same attitude to Adam and Eve; instead of giving Americans the pleasure of seeing the connection, he insists on the differences, seeing their “Adam” as “another way in which the West had robbed his East, taken his Adam as their Adam” (41). This kind of pettiness infused with pride in his ancestry allows Darius to retain his difference. Through this quality, the author makes Darius a symbol of the past, a character of one extreme that attempts to have complete control over his son Xerxes.

As Darius’s wife, adding to the contrast created by Xerxes, prefers to let the past stay in the past, she decides to prove a point to Darius who cannot believe that assimilating may be an option. To break away from the past completely and to prevent Darius from mocking her acculturation and from insisting on her Iranian-ness, his wife Laleh officially changes her name to Lala. To Darius, this change is unacceptable, for a name *Lala* could not exist in his ‘kingdom’, and she nags him for this stubborn loyalty to his Persian past:

Oh, *Laleh*-the-Persian-flower-that-does-not-exist-in-America is fine, but *Lala*-the-sound-of-happy-children-singing-who-maybe-aren’t-paralyzed-by-their-family-tragedies-for-whom-not-everything-has-to-be-ancestral-and-plagued-and-deep, *that* Lala, no, it cannot exist. (63)

Here, we can recognise that the name issue reflects the conflict between the past and the present. It is ‘ancestral’ pain that the name Laleh transmits – the birthname, the name given by her parents and thus the inherited name, the name she carried for years of her life in Iran. Adopting a new name for Lala symbolises her rejection of that past identity shaped by inheritance. Leaving her birthname behind is a symbolic way of leaving the country of birth in the past. It is very significant that even in this instance, the narrative points out that an adaptation of her name symbolises distancing from an ‘ancestral’, family-linked identity. Darius, on the other hand, clings to his name – a marker of his Iranian identity. Vamik Volkan’s work with refugees has shown that “[t]o be subjected to humiliation and other hardships paradoxically increases victims’ investments in their societal or large-group identities” (KNI 40). Traumatic events that affect large groups in a time of crisis may involve not only the loss of a “sense of security and dignity”, but also material losses, such as a loss of a home, for example (50). Their escape from Iran and subsequent, though partly unsuccessful, assimilation in a “*suffocating cultureless California life*” (Khakpour 18), both processes evidently rather unkind to one’s sense of self, may offer an explanation of why Darius appears so attached to the past and his Iranian identity. His name becomes a symbol of inheritance and while many parts of himself become lost in the process of exile, from physical belongings to the opportunity to speak his mother tongue, the importance of the name increases for it now has to

compensate for all the lost parts of his family's identity. Although names act as important markers of one's ethnic and national identity and indicate this character's unhealthy devotion to his inheritance, the novel also draws attention to the other ways in which Darius hinders his own identity development.

Belonging in the Past

As it has already been suggested, Darius Adam is the character through whom Khakpour illustrates the dangers of clinging to the past. Decades may go by but the thought that he is in "exile" does not vanish (Khakpour 317). Darius believes that there is "no other home but his original home" (317–18). Even after years in the United States, he does not lose the hope to constantly stumble upon reminders of his homeland. Iran is everywhere, and if it is not, he creates it out of his illusions, as the novel suggests through his tendency to ask "any man who was ethnic-looking to him, possibly Persian-looking, with a strong accent and a service job", if he is Iranian (27). Xerxes, irritated by his father, is not surprised: "...of course his father would ask that – he had already asked three cabbies (one Bangladeshi, one Tunisian, one Israeli – his father claimed all three were lying)" (27). Even though the reality contradicts his expectations of it, Darius simply refuses to accept it and allow it to alter his perception of it.

While Darius practically embodies the past in the narrative, he also symbolises it for his son Xerxes, who sums up his perception of the Iranians this way:

The Iranians, Xerxes thought, it's like they were made for tragedy, always trapped in some dramatic past, generational pain, familial anguish, personal turmoil, a collective tragic disposition, an almost genetic mass pessimism. Tragedy everywhere; blood always in the air. (59–60)

The Iranian culture as Xerxes knows it is conveyed to him through Darius's horrific stories, Xerxes's own embarrassment of his family's difference, and his childhood memories of death amid Iranians' passion-filled protests against injustice. This one-sided perspective creates a problem, as the image of the collective Iranian identity and with it the idea of the ancestral past are shaped primarily by Darius. The conflicts and defeats Persians survived historically, from the Median Empire in the 10th century BC to the Iranian Revolution and the invasion of Iran by Iraq in the 1980s, are undeniably part of their collective identity. It is possible to assume that Darius's Iranian identity is far from being deprived of the ancestral trauma of loss. With time, as the psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan claims in his works on collective trauma, a "large group unconsciously 'chooses' to consider the mental representation of the ancestor's traumatic event as a significant element in their contemporary large-group identity" (KNI 173). While, although significant, this cultural collective trauma does not fully shape collective identity, it is precisely the part of their collective identity that Darius attempts to pass on to his son and precisely this aspect that causes resistance in Xerxes.

Lala's view of their past contrasts that of Darius: "she had no comment on her old homeland" (Khakpour 61). With her parents dead and her only brother gone without any traces of his whereabouts, losing all contact with her relatives seems almost uncomplicated to her. Eventually, the physical move to the US helps to complete Lala's mental separation from the past:

She wanted to break away from it, pretend that when they fled, all the everything that they left – a child's nursery full of toys, their books, their clothes, their furniture, their lease, their families and friends, everything but two suitcases mostly full of photo albums and letters and some winter items for who knew where they would end up – all the loss helped make it over for her. (61)

In this character, Khakpour demonstrates a realisation of the weight of the generational pain, personal and collective. Understanding this weight but preferring to let go of it may be a form of mourning. The past does not matter to Lala anymore because "[y]ou cannot change it, you can't even understand it, talk and thought doesn't help, what's done is done" (61). At the same time, through Lala's desire for freedom, the author seems to represent a collective appeal:

[...] all I and my people want [...] is a chance to live again, start our lives from where they were cut off midlife really, early life really, because with all that loss, I tell you, if I were to really spend my days facing that hell I would in a second put an ax to my neck. I'll give you Iranian tragedy. It's all there... (61)

In this statement, the author expresses the character's awareness that the identity she possesses, together with the struggles, hopes, and aspirations that come with it, is shared with others, as any social identity as we understand it (Appiah, *The Lies that Bind* 3). This implies that not knowing other immigrants in the US does not eliminate a sense of togetherness one Iranian person in exile can have with others like her. The author shows that the loss this character experiences is collective and shared with over a hundred thousand other Iranians forced to migrate to the States following the Islamic Revolution (Tianjian and Batalova). What Lala claims to enjoy about America is that it is "a fresh starting point for people *to lose their minds?*" (Khakpour 61). What she really means by this is that the US is the place "to forget their pasts" (62) and, perhaps, create their own identities not shaped by the weight of their inheritance. This is exactly the way she tries to live, with the only anchor holding her in the generational Iranian tragedy – her husband Darius. By creating these characters, Lala and Darius, with such opposing views towards their cultural past, Khakpour highlights a collective problem most migrants face, namely the problem of negotiating between the inheritance and the adopted cultural environment.

The major conflict based on the different attitudes towards the past and collective Iranian identity occurs not between Darius and Lala, but between the father and the son. This opposition towards his father is something Xerxes unconsciously understands already as a child, as in this example: "[h]is better judgement – his *self* self – told him that since it was so adamantly endorsed by his father it could very

well be something he would not like” (127). Their differences become more distinctly perceived by Xerxes when Darius brings his son to a demonstration. As much as Darius strives for shaping some sense of Persian pride in Xerxes, his attempts tend to fail. At the protests, among a crowd of Iranian people, Xerxes ends up feeling alienated: “For two hours they stood among screaming dark-haired people that, yes, looked like him, maybe even sounded like him, but were strangers and *strange* strangers as that” (128). Xerxes is embarrassed by his father’s pride as Darius feels one with the protesting crowd: “These people are more like you than anyone on this earth. These people are *us!*” (128). Overcome with pride of being with his people, in this instance, Darius sees the crowd, the collective migrant Iranian identity in the US, as one entity. Not only is he an inseparable part of it, but he also wants Xerxes to blend into this single body. He is certain that Xerxes belongs with them. This is an example of the danger of fixating on one of the social identities one possesses – in this case, the Persian identity. When one of them takes over completely, as Parekh warns, it creates a threat of losing one’s sense of self to that social identity (24). In this novel, Darius evidently becomes an example of losing one’s self in the past Iranian identity, unfit for the world he actually resides in.

Amid the strange crowd, Xerxes indeed discovers a sense of closeness, but in spite of Darius’s pride, he achieves it with those as lost as he is: “clueless, numb, suddenly mute children and the precarious English doggerel of ‘Uni-ted Na-tions / pay more atten-tion,’ were doomed to a counterfeit feeling, like uninvited ghosts, extras, like real people interrupting a world of Technicolor animation. This was not theirs” (129). This scene at the demonstration illustrates a sharp difference between Darius and Xerxes and between their different attitudes towards Iran and Iranians, between togetherness and alienation. Clearly depicting how children of migrants do not quite belong in the same world of struggle and pain that their parents inhabit and are instead bound to face their own, similar yet different, struggles and pains, Khakpour captures not merely a personal conflict between the father and his son but a cultural abyss that lies between different generations of immigrants.

Mixing Worlds

The most striking and, at the same time, traumatic feature of Xerxes lies in his efforts to redirect the course of his identity formation by completely separating himself from his roots. Although the narrative appears to show that this attempt to artificially navigate between his different identities leads to an acute depression and identity crisis, the conflict between the different cultural identities within Xerxes is not perceived as an inner conflict by this character: “Xerxes Adam believed he lived in two worlds and part of the dual-citizenship agreement was that he could not allow those worlds to mix” (Khakpour 136). Instead, the conflicting parts of his inner self are projected onto the outside world, one of which is represented by America, the other – by his family and his father in particular.

In an attempt to strengthen the divide between the American and Iranian worlds in his life – and, as I seek to prove here, within himself – Xerxes decides to move to New York after school. In these actions, the character displays incomprehension of the effect of his childhood, memories, and histories inherited from his family. He seems to truly believe that what crushes his life and his relationship with the parents is a mere visit from his father, filled with horrific stories from Darius's past: "He had let his father come to him, he had brought his city to his father; he had done the one thing that as a child he had learned never to do: he had let the worlds mix" (34). This mixing of his two worlds or two identities leaves Xerxes feeling "cold" and "numbed", "as if a ghost had taken residence in his body" (34). The 'ghost' metaphor the author employs here suggests the unfamiliarity of his rejected Iranian culture that attempts to fill his mind through his father's stories about the past.

Darius can see what Xerxes is doing, removing himself from the parents, from their past, their culture and home. He insists that Xerxes "came out of it, from [him], from [his] life", was "built of [his] past" but "decided to be of no past", which is simply not possible (33). It is not merely Xerxes's attempt to erase his own cultural past, but rather his derealisation of Darius and everything before him that arouses his father's protest: "Think you can come here and pretend there was nothing and I was nothing and everything of Xerxes-before-he-came-to-New-York is nothing? You think you can cut it all off, eh?! But it doesn't work, I am telling you!" (33). While Darius acts as an angry weighty anchor that tries to pull Xerxes into the turmoil of their cultural past where Darius himself is stranded, his statement constitutes a very significant point in the narrative in relation to the importance of the past. Even when we discuss Xerxes's identity in the context of transculturality, which implies a sense of freedom from culture, there must be a certain recognition of the "roots in a certain cultural ground" without, however, a necessity "to cling to them" (Epstein 342). Xerxes, on the other hand, seeks to cut off the roots completely, generating a premise for his own identity crisis.

Interestingly enough, when illustrating Xerxes's childhood, the author appears to inject it with efforts to actually mix worlds or even completely replace one with the other in his childish fantasies generated by a deep psychological conflict. Growing up in the US, Xerxes Adam learns about Iran through American eyes by watching the famous American sitcom TV series *I Dream of Jeannie*, starring Barbara Eden as a blond and blue-eyed 2000-year-old genie. His obsession with the TV series is never understood by his parents: "they with their alleged Persian nationalism not even bothering to ask the right questions, not even bothering to probe whether the interest could be, in part, a young boy's investigation into an American rendering of a Middle Eastern myth, the genie" (Khakpour 94). At the same time, "[w]hat Xerxes did not attempt to point out was that his love of her also involved what she was *not*. For instance, dark, doom-loving, heaving with the weight of history, harrowing to a western community" (94). To him, the fictional Jeannie is "an escape" from the actual reality of what the Middle East is to him, she is "an impossibility,

an out from the realm of heartache and sighs and moans and bawls and screams and breast-beatings and hair-tearings” (94). A promise of peace and happiness, the sitcom character appears to be a complete opposite of the tensions and anger he observes in the parents and even more strikingly different from everything he remembers or learns about his parents’ past:

...the yellow-and-black 1970s photographs of dusty tanks and soldiers, and emaciated palm trees against flashy murals of turbaned prophets and machine guns, and mustached men whose dirt-powered faces looked lined with ancient secrets as they guarded their women who, like black-draped ghosts, had the appearance of mourners on eternal parade, the negative space of their dead olive faces speckling the blackened city streets like holes that have long riddled a conscience. (95)

This sharp contrast between the beautiful American Jeannie, the utterly fictional version of the Middle East, and the actual reality of Iran is created by Khakpour, on the one hand, perhaps, to offer a critique of the Western appropriation of Islamic mythology and, on the other hand, to reflect the scale of confusion and conflicts building up in Xerxes already in his childhood and following him throughout his life.

Although he is separated from his parents in New York, Xerxes takes an unconscious step towards mixing worlds when he encounters Suzanne – a girl he is almost instantly drawn to, a girl who is “*almost* half Persian” (186). Suzanne, who in spite of her ethnic background cannot quite understand his struggles as a Middle Eastern man in the US post 9/11, also does not fully comprehend why Xerxes refuses to speak to his father. It seems that the whole depth of his inner conflict remains unknown to her, and possibly to Xerxes himself; so she makes a mistake that not only ruins their idyllic relationship but also serves as a pivotal point in the novel: she books a trip to Iran for the two of them. To Suzanne, it carries a personal meaning, a way to get to know her ancestral homeland, but, she believes, it is an even greater gesture for Xerxes: “she had just moved a mountain, had just given him something even God couldn’t: his and partially hers, a homeland” (276). With this act, she reminds Xerxes of his father who is always thinking of going to Iran. Not only does he refuse to go, but the resentment Xerxes feels towards his father now spreads to her as well, forcing her to join “the cast of characters that Xerxes Adam was one by one banishing from his brain and now ingeniously clumping together” (289). The desire to hurt his father now expands to her, and “with a grin so despicable, so cynical, so hateful on his face” Xerxes tells her to “[g]o to the homeland” (289), the place otherwise understood by him as Hell.

Intended as a present for Xerxes, the planned trip puts his relationship on thin ice: “[s]he had betrayed him by essentially giving him a gift that was sending him back to his blood country, which she knew, had to know, had ruined his life, both by birth and by escape. She had mixed the worlds” (293). The mixing of the worlds defines Xerxes’s greatest dilemma and fear throughout the narrative: “She had given

him the gift of Iran and nothing could possibly threaten him more” (295), because Iran “was not only not his home – it was, in fact, his anti-home, if such a thing could be said to exist” (296). Although often used to define the place of one’s origin, home to Xerxes carries no such meaning. By highlighting this troubled relationship with the notion of home, Khakpour depicts a conflict with the past and thus also with the sense of self.

Another argument Xerxes has against the trip is that Iran “was a dangerous place” and going there “was like deciding to honeymoon in Hades” (296). Here, the author creates an image completely opposite to his family home in LA – the Eden Gardens – to sharply emphasise the extent of the different emotions Xerxes associates with these places. At the same time, Darius imagines Iran as “heaven” in his anticipation of the same trip (320). It is also curious that both ‘places’ – Hades and Eden – relate to rather intermediate states between the existence on Earth. To Xerxes, neither Iran nor LA bring a sense of home and rootedness. It can, however, also be argued that his issue is not with the places *per se*, but rather with the inner rejection of a part of his identity – the part that was his even before his birth.

The only twist one might expect from the story at this point is Darius Adam joining them for the trip to Iran, and this is exactly the direction the narrative takes. His father and Suzanne, who now has also joined this identity war against Xerxes, are insisting on the trip, “telling him it was his home, but [were] essentially deporting him” (297), forcing him to leave the life he had in the US, even for a short time, and face the life he wishes he never had. The idea of going home is not enticing for Xerxes in any way, for he does not feel a longing towards Iran as his home: “It was just not his home, less than New York or Eden Gardens was. He did not miss it. It existed only in his barely born first vision of the pad pink light of anti-aircraft missiles, the news, their fights. Not only was it not his home, but it was the birthplace of his nightmares” (297). Everything Xerxes has ever despised – his father, strangers at the protest, the strange name he is mocked for at school – originated in Iran. By outlining this negative image of Iran in Xerxes’s perspective throughout the text, the author points to the complexity of the idea of inheritance. It is not a culture in itself that is rejected by this character but rather the personal discomfort caused by people associated with it. At the same time, this also illustrates how profoundly one’s cultural past permeates different spheres of one’s life.

The Lost Daughter

To compensate for the son failing him by turning away from his culture and history, Darius looks for fulfilment of his desires in his dreams. All that is missing in his conscious life he projects onto an imaginary figure of a daughter who is described as “Xerxes’s phantom younger sister” and “a nonbeing never contemplated by Darius or his wife because, especially in a life postexile, who could go [...] put another being through that, even more so when this child’s – a foreigner’s – future would be even more unknowable to them than their own” (Khakpour 22). In this

imaginary daughter he names Shireen, Darius finds everything that Xerxes rejected or lacked. On the other side of the continent, struggling with his insomnia, in a brief moment of sleep, Xerxes dreams of her too: “the young girl in the sundress leading him down into an Afghan cave – *for the answer, for the retribution*” (179). The image of the girl who has just entered his real life comes to lure him in his dream. What he dreams about is, however, a “younger version of her but the same desert-sunbaked skin, the wispy insufficient sundress, the feral corkscrew name, and the eyes” (179). Tormenting her characters in their dreams with this image of a girl, Khakpour suggests that despite their different nature and conflicting aspirations, they are both striving for the same thing. While Darius dreams of an ideal daughter who, unlike his son, accepts and even embodies the beauty of his ancestral home and its culture, Xerxes, without realising it, may be seeking a connection to Iran, too. However, he searches for a different Iran than the one he remembers from his childhood and his parents’ stories and struggles.

This juxtaposition of the dream figures Darius and Xerxes both unconsciously pursue is slightly echoed in the story of Lala Adam. Amid the turmoil of the head-strong father-son conflict she cannot resolve, Xerxes’s mother attempts to find her long-lost brother. She imagines that he and Xerxes “would be nearly identical” (301). However, in her mind, “her brother would be a Xerxes in the pure, a Xerxes without the Adam, a Xerxes who possessed a past that was entirely hers” (301). To Lala, it is Darius’s fault that Xerxes rejected his parents and disappeared in New York, and she unconsciously perfects the image of her own son in her hopeful vision of the lost brother.

The dream figures in this novel do not simply represent the hopes of Khakpour’s characters, they also epitomise their deepest fears and traumas. In his sleep, Darius encounters “his imaginary daughter and her many imaginary deaths” (23), which poses the question of why even this fake perfect child of his is constantly killed by his unconscious mind. Darius’s dreams call to mind Freud’s account of his own trauma repetition, where in a dream he over and over again witnesses the death of his child whom he could not save in reality. For Freud, the unconscious desire to come back to the dream and relive the trauma is the only way to witness the child still alive, though it also involves witnessing the child’s death. To him, the dream is “an act of homage to the missed reality” (Freud qtd. in Caruth 105). For Khakpour’s character there, too, seems to be a missed reality – an unfulfilled desire to have the child who grew up in and with love for Iranian culture. It can be argued that in the case of Darius these dreams are provoked by the feeling of guilt about not being able to pass on his feeling of appreciation of one’s cultural history and instead transferring the pain of exile to his son. Just like Freud’s child who forces the father to awaken to “*tell the story*” (Caruth 105), Shireen, dying and “crying for parents who would always arrive too late”, would let out a “final cry, the last thing for a father’s ears” to wake him (Khakpour 23), to let him live to, perhaps, settle the conflict with his real son. As Cyrus Amiri and Mahdijeh Govah argue, these dreams represent Darius’s “traumatic memory of the Revolution in 1979 which he regards as a re-

enactment of the Arab Conquest of Persia in 651 A.D” (446). They consequently reveal his “fear of Islamic associations and influences,” which hinders him from being truly open to his son and leads to Xerxes’s identity crisis (447).

Still, Darius’s mind creates infinite scenarios, each cruel in its own way, of her death. The violence he subconsciously possesses towards his child is, as I argue, inherited. Khakpour’s narrative offers a clue to the imaginary deaths of the imaginary Shireen as well as Darius’s hatred towards his real son Xerxes by illustrating an incident from Darius’s childhood. One of his most striking memories from his childhood is of his father telling to his guests, in front of his own children, how much he loves his wife and doing that in the most cruel form imaginable: “*I would take the deaths of my very own children before my wife’s – it is true, that is how strong our love is!*” (Khakpour 51). Khakpour’s narrative also overtly tempts the reader with the idea of inheritance at this point: “Many decades later the old man’s sentiment, by the powers of some cruel genetic osmosis perhaps, made its way organically into Darius’s own heart” (51). What the narrative refers to as “genetic osmosis” may be a narrative example of trauma transmission. Hearing his father indirectly accept the death of his own children or essentially kill them in his unconscious mind with a strange ease is undeniably a traumatising incident for Darius. This unacceptable and irrepressible memory without doubt continues to exist in Darius’s unconscious and, perhaps, even offers an explanation for the fact that he eventually ceases all communication with his son. Although there are two men involved in this father-son conflict, through his stubbornness and the incredible strictness of the pressure to be Iranian, Darius essentially removes his son from his life or, metaphorically, kills him. This thought of inheriting the cruel attitude of his father comes back to him when Darius reflects on his last evening with Xerxes in New York: “all evening I waited for him and waited and waited. At one point I got worried – what if he *had* died? [...] What if I had killed him? What if he was gone?” (208). Once again, this assumption strikes not just with its brutally lethal wording but rather with the way Darius believes in his fate to destroy his son. With parallels like this, the novel reflects the almost conventional ordinariness of assuming repetitions of significant qualities between generations – in other words, we are faced with the idea of the inheritance of unconscious desires.

During their courtship, Lala and Darius promised each other “that if they ever had a child it would be miserable, untalented, ugly, uninspired, a nothing of an offspring, the end they would both deserve: an error even, at best” (56). Although when Xerxes became part of their life, they denounced this pledge, it is apparent that Khakpour employs it as a provenance for the demise to come to Adam’s family. The idea of death traces every relationship in Khakpour’s narrative. Even as a child, Xerxes expresses his inner protests with a desire for death. His attempt to separate himself from the parents as a child is epitomised through his “*I wish you would die*” addressed to his mother (118). In his adulthood, this cruel remark evolves into “his refusal to reach out”, which is another way of saying to them “*I wish I was dead, so as not to have existed by you*” (119). His parents’ constant references to death, even in a

metaphoric sense, or, for instance, actual witnessing of a man's suicide at the Iranian demonstration create an assumption in Xerxes's mind that death is a cultural trait. He concludes that his people "*were always wishing things dead, imagining death, wondering about the dead, ready to curse everything with dead-stuff. Death was everywhere*" (52). It is a trait he inherits, too, in his attempt to erase his parents from his life. The idea of death is, this way, transmitted or inherited to create a generational link between Khakpour's characters.

On the other side of the continent, Darius Adam is haunted by the vision of Shireen, a non-existent daughter who arguably serves as a form of compensation for the traumatic loss of his home and, subsequently, for the loss of his child to America. This dream figure becomes, in a way, his 'replacement child'. Although his son is alive, Darius experiences their conflict and consequent complete separation as a loss. In psychological literature, the process of modelling a child on his or her dead sibling is known as the "replacement child" and involves influencing a child's identity because of one's inability to mourn the loss (Volkan, "ITCT" 86). A rather similar phenomenon invades Darius's narrative. Since Darius is unable to mourn his pretended yet still significant loss of Xerxes, it can be assumed that he projects the missing child onto Shireen – his perfect daughter who resides in his imagination.

As Darius's dreams comprise a significant part of his narrative, I would argue that the idea of Shireen in this novel represents this character's uncompleted task of mourning. Traveling from the depth of his unconscious mind, Shireen enters Darius's consciousness almost like a ghost. Ghostly figures in narratives can suggest the necessity to complete the task of mourning (Brogan, *Cultural Haunting* 134). This appearance of the ghost of a perfect Iranian daughter represents the character's failure to mourn the loss of not only his son but a bigger concept that his son fails to stand for – his homeland. In a sense, with this image of Shireen that comes to haunt Darius in his dreams, the author creates a symbol of a bigger dream that follows most exiles – the idea of what their life could have been if it were not for the loss and displacement.

The replacement strategy is brought to reality when Darius meets his son's girlfriend Suzanne: "It wasn't just that it was *her*, that he had found her, his son's woman [...] but it was just that it, she, she was . . . the impossible. She was . . . *Shireen!*" (Khakpour 365). Darius finally and instantly discovers his long-coveted perfect child in "Suzanne, a girl who resembled the fake daughter who existed in the fake reality of his dreams" (389). He experiences a reversed displacement as he is (re)united with "his long-long-lost, his always-destined-to-be-lost-but-somehow-here-found, his imaginary-girl-now-gone-real, *his* Shireen!" (365). Without realising that she embodies the impossible dream, so deeply engraved on his unconscious mind that Darius passed his unfulfilled task onto his son who, in turn, found her, Suzanne does not resist their instant connection. Only some hours later, when Xerxes calls her, he hears from Suzanne that she is with "Dad" (373). What seems like a warm and almost natural sentiment to her is an absolute nightmare to Xerxes:

It had always been my dream that my child and I would one day return to Iran, Xerxes imagined his father had said dozens, if not hundreds, of times when he was a child, and now there they were, his son and his son's girlfriend, both his children, apparently – as if he was God! Fuck! – suddenly stuck in his dream, suddenly left there to act out as characters in his oldest, most impossible dream. (374)

The idea of his father winning and going back to Iran with his, now, two children is unacceptable to Xerxes. To show the intensity of his resistance to the mixing of their two worlds, of his life and his father's, of America and Iran, of the present and the past, the author makes Xerxes disappear from the sight of his parents, Suzanne, and the reader. In the end, he returns to his mother, which may be suggesting that he is ready to reunite with his family.

Origins

It has become clear that Xerxes Adam goes through an intense identity conflict that forces him to fight his father's extreme devotion to the past with complete obliteration of inheritance. This conflict suggests that there is an important identity question to be addressed. While with every action and every effort he tries to prove that his cultural identity is not inherited and he is free, it is difficult to argue that in Xerxes Adam Khakpour creates a transcultural identity. This character does not rise above his identities and cultures – he obsesses with one while being constantly pulled by the weight of fear and embarrassment of the other. He claims to reject everything Persian yet falls in love with a woman who only brings him closer to Iran. He separates the US and Iran into two different worlds and eventually arrives at a depressive state because of his inability to contain them within. Nothing about Xerxes's identity implies living in the world of "unity of all cultures and noncultures" (Epstein 333). Instead, his identity is a constant conflicting negotiation between its two main parts: "ethnicity wanted to duel with nationality and often would win – it was hard to escape his birthplace even stateside" (Khakpour 297). The pressure to accept his rejected ethnicity coming from his father and later his girlfriend exacerbates or, in the case of Suzanne, spawns his resentment towards them, although in fact it is he – his own self – that he grows to resent in the process. When pondering on the era of transculturality, Epstein defines a common issue that seems to reflect the predicament Xerxes faces here:

To be a representative of one's origins, or not to have any at all? This dilemma is, however, a false one. Origins are essential, but the purpose of culture is not to affirm them, but to go away from them [...]. Origins must be inscribed in the history of their overcoming. (Epstein 341)

Although his father's attitudes towards the past in no way offer an optimal solution to his inner conflict, an absolute rejection of the origins is not the right path to take

either, as it appears. Xerxes only knows these two extremes, and neither one of them is helping him form a fulfilling identity he can live with.

To emphasise how similar Xerxes is to the father he feels different from, in his newly found hatred towards Suzanne, the author produces a certain likeness of the hate Darius feels towards his wife. Despite rejecting the influence of the past, “Xerxes had become his father” (Khakpour 291). He can see in himself the “irreconcilable ignorance, stone-dumb stubbornness” that used to irritate him in his father (291). This parallel tempts the reader again with the idea of inheritance.

In a conversation Darius Adam allows his subconscious mind to play out before dialling Xerxes, his son confesses: “I still am not at peace with you, my past, your past, where I come from, who I come from . . . [...] All my life I have looked for [...] a wholeness that can’t exist – because it’s not only not in my countrymen, it’s not even in my country. My blood is fucked” (321). The projection of Darius’s mind reveals the nature of the crisis: because of his inability to accept and transcend his cultural past, Xerxes is convinced that it is his blood – meaning his cultural background – that prevents him from achieving a meaningful sense of self. I would even suggest that the pressure imposed by Darius on his son is so intense that it acts as a demand that comes from the collective Iranian identity. Since Xerxes distances himself from everything related to his original homeland, the only representation of that place to him is his own family, and everything that is personal to them may also appear cultural to him.

Although the question of death has already been addressed in the context of associating it with the culture and its inheritance, there is one more way in which the author employs the idea of death in the narrative that appears worthwhile mentioning in the context of identity crisis. Since Xerxes associates the Iranian identity mostly with his family and almost entirely with his father’s peculiar identity grounded in history, his efforts to deny that part within his inner self involve a separation from his family. To show how extreme this undoubtedly traumatic process of rejecting a part of one’s self can be, the narrative manifests it through the idea of killing. For instance, when Darius finds out that his son is going to Iran, something he has been hoping for but doubting at the same time, he is “at a loss”, for “[h]is son once again had managed to kill him without even thinking of him” (317). When reaching the peak of his identity crisis, desperate to avoid the trip to Iran, Xerxes tries to convince the ticket office at the airport that he has to go back to the US because, he lies, “[his] father has . . . *died!*” (384), all the while the father waiting for him just some meters away. These words come out so easily that “Xerxes cried, amazed that there he was, really, really and truly, moved to beyond tears even” (384). I would argue that here he voices the unconscious desire to kill not his father but that part of himself that holds him back because he is incapable of transcending it.

This constant struggle to keep two worlds, two cultures, apart in his life and his mind results, as the narrative shows, in an identity crisis that reaches its apogee when

Xerxes is about to meet his father and Suzanne at the Frankfurt airport for a joint trip to Iran:

Suddenly the limbo of Frankfurt appealed to him. In an alternative universe [...] he was simply *missing* – in two countries, two groups of countrymen were minus him, two countries far far away from each other, as different from each other as they were alike, both Xerxes-free. He was back to that feeling of [...] wanting to let himself dissolve to something void of that ugly word *identity* [...]. (377)

Overwhelmed by the idea of having to go to Iran, he avoids the trip by pretending to be and eventually feeling lost at the Frankfurt airport: “He was as lost in the moment as he was lost in life” (377). This peak of Xerxes’s identity crisis exposes his cultural homelessness caused by living among people and in a world not equipped to open or show him the transcultural path. Although these inner complexities of this character seem inexplicable to him and, since his struggles are focalised through his narration only, to the reader as well, he eventually reveals to the reader what he would have said to his father:

I later dreamed all night of shooting stars and how they had blinded me from your blows, and then the day you told me about making stars out of the bloody burning feathers of living helpless beings, I thought of that, how you had made stars out of me, how you could do that, with a brandish of your fist force me into a place, a place I didn’t want to be, to a whole past that reverberated with another past, every layer deeper and more painful, from my past to your past to our people’s past... (211)

During their last physical encounter, Darius tells his son a story from his childhood – the last story that allows the unpronounced conflict between them reach its climax. It involves a brutal activity Darius and his friends would engage in: they used to catch doves, cage them, splash them with kerosine and light the fire so it would catch and spread slowly (31). They would then let the birds fly away, “*and the thing would go flying, madly, wildly, desperately, like all hell, like a star [...] – we called those shooting stars*” (31). In his confession, Xerxes compares himself to those birds, desperate to live in freedom yet destroyed by his father. His words stress the intensity of being forced into the past and highlight the issue that underlies the whole narrative: the struggle of being forced to give away one’s existence to the control of generations of people he does not want to belong to – or, as I would define it, the struggle to allow his identity to be inherited. Yet, like those birds, Xerxes seems to have no choice – his roots are part of him, they form the multi-generational Iranian identity that helps to shape his personal self.

The cultural history that Darius attempts to inject into Xerxes’s life is too much for his son to take; he sees his father as “*the agent of ghosts*” who is “*reek[ing] of history*” (211) and blames him for the way his proud father approaches the son’s cultural education: “*It was always you, [...] taking your family out on a weekend drive to a protest for your child to see a man burning out of nationalistic passion, a passion that I was supposed to*

understand, you wanted to tell me, a darkness that I was supposed to own, you were trying to instill in me" (211). The nationalistic attitudes here are related to the forces of collective identity, the sense of togetherness strengthened through the collective trauma (KNI 173). Although it could be expected, especially by Darius, that Xerxes inherits this collective passion, growing up in the US, going to an American school, and infatuating over American TV series evidently affect his identity formation, and the collective trauma that represents for Xerxes his inherited cultural identity becomes less important to him. Socialisation processes weaken the grip the collective identity could have on his identity formation and instead help his identity evolve. Trying to pull his son into the very depth of their shared culture instead of allowing him to negotiate between the Iranianness and Americanness within, the process Darius himself never goes through, Darius forces his son into a state of in-betweenness: "You didn't want me to belong to this country, but yet you wouldn't let me have the ease and clear conscience to belong to you" (211). Even by escaping his family, he cannot escape the memories and trauma that are part of him:

I ran away and, fine, the irony, even here the instability and turmoil got me: 2001! The worlds mix again, the horrible foreignness I fought to escape, crashing right into the phony Americanness I failed to pull off, the fear bringing me back full circle to my first fear, the nightmare born in a baby watching supposed enemy planes in the Tebran sky [...] . . .
(211)

The irony of the circumstances created in this narrative may be meant to suggest that such deep-rooted elements of one's identity as trauma cannot be escaped. The mistake, if there is such a thing in negotiating one's identity formation, is that Xerxes tries to replace his roots with 'phony Americanness' in an effort to discover himself outside and beyond the past. He writes: "I'm trying to break the circle, [...] to find myself, an identity outside yours, outside nationality, outside ethnicity, outside family, outside history, foreign to them and to you and to everything, wholly my own lone person" (211). However, identity does not exist on its own, independently from one's ethnicity, nationality, family, and history. Instead, it is a sum of various components coming together to create one unique, meaningful self. It is precisely the dangerous yet common failing to accept the complexity of the intersectionality of identities (Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity* 39) that Khakpour portrays in his inner conflict.

In the course of the narrative, Darius grows to understand the nature of the generational identity conflict that divides the two men. After realising that Xerxes is avoiding him on purpose – the purpose being his gradual alienation from his roots – Darius confesses that he accepts it as their end: "I left thinking my son was lost – like a father whose son is really lost – and he made me leave like that" (Khakpour 208–09). He also admits that his now lost son's identity has always been a mystery to him: "All I've ever wanted to know since he was a little kid – and unknowable even then – all I ever wanted to know was *him*, what *he* was thinking, what did *he* make of it all" (210). A man of a different time and a different culture, however strongly he may believe that they are supposed to be the same, deep inside Darius

understands and fears that growing up in the US made Xerxes a different man. In his reflection on their conflict, Darius comes to the realisation that their separation is not the result of a single horrific story about shooting stars, it is about the burden of inheriting it all: "It was the only story of my youth he had and suddenly it took on the burden of everything. Everything that was wrong with me, my history, my past. And I think for sons, they transfer that" (209). The language used here allows us to link the conflicts and crises within the narrative to the idea of inheritance.

The identity Xerxes 'inherits' is the identity of struggle, trauma, exile – the kind that is bound to cultivate a crisis within:

[...] it was all about a different place, a different past, the land where he was supposed to be from, and all he ever knew of that place, all he ever knew of those nightmares, [...] that we real living humans could confirm for him over and over . . . and it was the first time I felt, I wanted to, to tell him that I was sorry for how hard we had made it [...] (209)

Here, Darius realises what it is that he passed on to his son. What for Darius is cultural transmission is in fact transmission of trauma. The Iranian identity in Xerxes is rooted in their collective nightmares and trauma. Instead of allowing his son to evolve and transcend his roots, he has tried to confine his son to them. This also defines the problem of exile. The idea of culture for exiles like Darius is shaped by the past that stands still rather than the culture that continued to grow and change after their departure. Giving a voice to the source of Xerxes's inheritance in this realisation of Darius, Khakpour offers a satisfying explanation to his identity crisis.

Conclusion

In Darius and Xerxes, Porochista Khakpour forms two extremes of a migrant identity. Darius with an unshakable sense of rootedness and belonging in his homeland is consumed by his efforts to cling on to the past and stuck in endless fictional scenarios his subconscious mind creates to compensate for everything his reality lacks. Ruined by his inability to comprehend the crisis his son goes through by being brought up in the US yet too stubborn to accept it, he becomes closer to reaching his Eden – his one and only home – Iran. Yet the narrative never really allows him to get on the plane to Iran. Darius finds a sense of home in his fictional idea of a daughter he projects onto Suzanne. This kind of ending arguably seeks to prove that a sense of belonging is not necessarily tied to a place.

His attempt to erase and reject his ancestral past, filled with nightmares of injustice and pain, damages Xerxes's sense of self. At the same time, his separation from the cultural past is not perpetual for the hatred towards his father, and with him towards Iran, that continues to be cultivated within him throughout the narrative strengthens his unconscious connection with the past. In his efforts to find himself, this character keeps unconsciously reaching out to the culture he seeks to

avoid. This is illustrated through the appearance of Suzanne in his life and their planned trip to Iran that awakens the ghosts of the past he is unable to defy. I would argue that this inner conflict between rejecting the cultural past yet unconsciously trying to seize it withholds the potential for transcultural development of this character. There can be no going beyond the identity parts that one despises and tries to repress. This way, the novel depicts the paradoxical role of the past in the formation of identity. Identity cannot be completely reduced to inheritance but cannot evolve without accepting it either. Even though Darius attempts to limit his existence to his cultural past, what actually happens is that his existence becomes illusory, and his constant dreaming of a different life with a different child represents this perfectly.

The novel revolves around the idea of inheritance – inheritance of collective trauma, refusal to inherit a cultural past, or struggling to pass on a culture, a story, a pain, an Iran, a different kind of Iran to the next generation. Constructing parallels between Xerxes and Darius in their imaginary and metaphorical killings, in their stubbornness and painful existence yet at the same time creating a sharp contrast in their attitude towards their collective Iranian identity and the struggles inherited from generations of their ancestors, the author not only echoes different ways of personal and collective trauma transmission, but also depicts the intensity of a personal identity crisis in a character who attempts to defy it.

With her debut novel, Khakpour urges us to recognise the importance of one's cultural past, attempting to encapsulate "the history of an entire people in the history of a single family" (Amiri and Govah 449). By untangling Xerxes's identity crisis caused by the complicated relationship with his father and his cultural history, the author, at the same time, suggests that it is trauma, not culture, that is inherited. The inability to transcend the trauma rooted in the family and cultural past prevents Xerxes from achieving a meaningful sense of self and leaves him lost in in-betweenness.

The problem of achieving a sense of self amid displacement – whether by choice or circumstance – remains central to the next chapter. Whether grounded in an inability to let go or a reluctance to suppress personal and cultural histories, the relationship with the past is inherently tied to the dimensions of time and space. As literary texts can obscure clear perceptions of time and space, I will turn my focus to heterotopic spaces created by Ruth Ozeki and Salman Rushdie in their narratives to underscore the presence of the past.

3. Spaces of Belonging and Uninvited Pasts

3.1 Inheriting and Inhabiting the Tale in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013)

“They were speaking to us across time, but we didn’t listen.”
– Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*

Shortlisted for the Booker Prize 2013, Ruth Ozeki’s novel *A Tale for the Time Being* interweaves two different stories that seem to connect by chance, fate, or imagination. Nao, short for Naoko Yasutani, lives in Tokyo with her parents and writes a diary about her life with the initial intention and promise to tell the story of her one-hundred-and-four-year-old great-grandmother Jiko Yasutani, a nun residing in a temple in Miyagi. Allegedly as a result of the 2011 tsunami and the consequent nuclear plant disaster, Nao’s diary along with a watch, a stack of letters, and a lunchbox finds its way to a coastline in Canada, where Ruth, a novelist, picks it up on the beach. What starts as a matter of curiosity evolves into attachment and creates an almost mystic connection between the two stories, gradually prompting Ruth to reflect on her cultural past, involve herself in the lives of the people living on the other side of the world, and, possibly, assume the role of the author of Nao’s story.

While there is an impressive array of works that offer postmodernist, ecocritical and posthuman readings of Ozeki's third novel (Fernandez; Fachinger; Zong; Lovell; Starr; Krevel), this chapter attempts to look at her narrative from a different angle. By diving into the issues of identity and implication as a generational responsibility, I seek to analyse the role of spaces, fictional written spaces in particular, in understanding one's identity as part of inheritance and in forming connections through time and space. To deal with the issue of spaces in this fictional context, I will draw on Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopia, a concept conceived for understanding imaginary spaces in literature. I will explore how Foucault's concept can aid in understanding the connection between the self, space, and time. Through the material reality containing a space of language – Nao's English-and-Japanese diary and her great-uncle Haruki's Japanese and French letters, Ozeki's novel opens up a different perspective on belonging, one that allows us to think beyond the usual boundaries of personal space. While delving into the issues of displacement, massive trauma, and implication, this analysis will keep the focus on inheritance, namely on how the novel urges one to learn to see the signs of inheritance in oneself and understand how the past shapes the present. As the two story-worlds in this novel gradually interweave and the personal inheritance of Nao enters the life of her reader Ruth, what seems to be a personal inheritance of trauma and displacement of one person begins to find resonance in the other. Making this perception of the past transform from personal to collective, the author asks us, the readers, to see the self through our relation to others across countries and generations.

Connecting through Displacement

The purpose of Nao's diary, as she promises her reader embodied by Ruth "is to tell someone the fascinating life story of my hundred-and-four-year-old great-grandmother, who is a Zen Buddhist nun" (Ozeki 5). Concealed in the book cover supposed to coat a copy of Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, her diary is written in English "with some Japanese characters scattered here and there" (12). For Ruth, who is half-Japanese, it is not the language that is so striking, as if it was written for her, it is more of a sensation that she cannot let go of: "her eye wasn't really taking in their meaning as much as a *felt* sense, murky and emotional, of the writer's presence" (12). This "sense of touch", as Bella Adams argues, "undermine[s] the presumed separation of writer-character-reader and, by extension, human from nonhuman" (248). At the same time, as Ruth has to translate and clarify some of the *kanji* characters used by Nao, she does it for the reader as well. This also blurs the "separation between Ruth (the character) and Ozeki (the author)" (Fusco 13). Nao's presence, thus, enters Ruth's real world: "even after putting the book aside, she was aware of an odd and lingering sense of urgency to ... what?" (Ozeki 29). The privacy of Nao's narrative is disclosed so openly to her reader as if she calls for help, and Ruth is eager to respond: "her discomfort was more on behalf of the girl. She was feeling protective" (35). At this point when Ruth begins to feel

the vulnerability of another person and her worries intensified by emotionality are not understood by other characters, the author arguably alludes to the problem of understanding vulnerability as a common human characteristic that tends to be ignored when we deal with issues and people outside of our local environment.

However, more than Nao herself, it is her old great-grandmother Jiko that Ruth is captivated by, eager to learn all there is about her, not just the fragmented details from Nao's diary. She experiences a "sense of kinship with this woman from another time and place, engaged in self-revelatory, self-concealing, and self-effacing acts" (150). This connection extends beyond her attachment to Nao as a writer. She develops an interest in the characters of Nao's story. She is not a detached reader of Nao's diary who fully comprehends her physical and temporal distance from Nao and considers the fictionality of Nao's existence. Instead, by crossing these limits of reality, Ruth "couldn't help but feel a strong sense of almost karmic connection with the girl and her father. The diary had washed up on Ruth's shoreline, after all" (311). In this instance, Ruth insists on the powers beyond simple coincidences, and while this may be a good place to argue for a discussion of powers of nature or human-caused disasters, the author reminds us: "Fiction had its own time and logic. That was its power" (314). In a way asking her reader not to instantly investigate the possibility of plastic containers traveling from Japan across the Pacific Ocean to the Canadian shores, Ozeki urges us to trust our imagination that may eventually have a secret way of clarifying our understanding of reality.

The space of Nao's diary becomes a locus of the narrative of her displacement which she then shares with her reader – Ruth – and, to a certain extent, with every reader of Ozeki's novel. Promising an interesting story about the fascinating life of her grandmother, Nao gradually reveals the complexity of her displacement in her writing. A Japanese teenager, Nao spent her childhood with her Japanese parents in Sunnyvale, California: "my whole life started and ended in Sunnyvale, which makes me American" (43). Introducing herself as Naoko Yasutani at the outset of the narrative, Nao puts her first name first in an American manner, possibly helping the reader to position her within a Western-centred world and displaying her ability to translate her cultural environment for a potentially foreign reader. A foreigner in Japan, she is bullied at school specifically for this foreignness. She does not treat her life in Japan as real: "I was unreal and my life was unreal, and Sunnyvale, which was real, was a jillion miles away in time and space" (79). At the same time, Nao's American identity is not purely American either. In the US, she "would get caught in between two languages", "everyday words and their meanings suddenly became disconnected" (98). It can be argued that Nao's displacement began long before her family returned to Japan.

Echoing Nao's displacement in unexpected ways, Ruth also reveals the complexity of her inevitable unbelonging. A half-Japanese author who, before discovering Nao's diary, intends to write a novel about her Japanese mother, "Ruth often felt oppressed by the sense of her name" particularly because of its ambiguous meaning in Japanese: "In Japanese, Ruth is either pronounced *rutsu*, meaning 'roots',

or *rushi*, meaning ‘not at home’ or ‘absent’” (59). This ambiguity arguably gains a single united purpose with her discovery of and subsequent evolving connection to Nao’s story. Claiming that she does not “know what home would feel like” (234), in her role as a reader, Ruth shows an effort to learn more about her cultural roots. In a way, she (re)discovers her ethnic heritage through the family history of another. At the same time, she attempts to solve the problem of her homeless identity: “Maybe [Ruth] was as absent as her name indicated, a homeless and ghostly composite of words that the girl had assembled” (392). This ghostliness that Ruth suggests she adopts here is borrowed by her from Nao’s story. The insults, brutal physical bullying, and sexual harassment Nao endures at school reach their apogee when her classmates organise a funeral for her and pretend that she is no longer there. The bullying takes a new form, convincing Nao in her non-existence as she believes she is “invisible, a ghost or a spirit of the dead” (76). It is not limited to the other children, as she describes here an interaction with a teacher: “I could see it in the way he looked at me, and then looked through me, so convincingly I could almost believe I wasn’t there” (78). These incidents make Nao reflect on the levels of her unbelonging in Japan and notice even more distance between herself and her parents: “inside I knew I was dead, even if my parents didn’t notice” (124). This instance is beyond bullying, it contextualises the problem of foreignness and unbelonging in one’s supposedly native ethnic home: she is “a foreigner” who lives “with these strange people who said they were my parents but I barely even knew anymore” (136). Her foreignness does not come to the surface with the funeral since Nao already reflects on her loneliness in earlier instances. There’s a certain cultural and social homelessness in this character: “there was nobody left in my life I could count on to keep me safe. I don’t think I’ve ever felt as naked or alone” (74). In spite of her forced alienation, drawing attention to how she evolved in her life as a ‘ghost’ is important to understanding her identity formation. Transculturality implies full recognition of one’s “roots in a certain cultural ground” without a necessity or desire “to cling to them” (Epstein 342). Through her experience of *ijime*, a term used in Japan for bullying, Nao is forced to accept the cultural roots she has rejected until her teenage years. While this part of her identity – a Japanese schoolgirl – dies, she continues to carry this ghost in her and it gives her strength to live and see beyond that alienated identity of hers.

The displacement in both Nao and Ruth also takes a linguistic form through Ozeki’s use of Japanese in an English-language narrative. Nao uses Japanese terms despite insisting on being American. This is done precisely to enhance the sense of her displacement, which, due to her inability to live elsewhere, becomes her main and only locus: “By writing her diary *in* Japanese—the language at the root of her social ostracization—Nao linguistically transmits the stilted feeling of being ‘out of place,’ a feeling that is mirrored in Ruth’s experience of reading the diary with the aid of a dictionary” (Gullander-Drolet 298–99). Arguably, this displacement is also projected onto the English-language reader, forced to navigate the footnotes for explanation of the Japanese terms and slang. It is not their ethnic Japanese identities

that connect these characters, but “a shared sense of being estranged from the very language that brings them together” (299). In a sense, these characters are connected through displacement and offer their reader a glimpse of what it is like to comprehend feelings or complex concepts in a linguistic reality one does not fully inhabit.

This idea of cultural displacement that Nao and Ruth represent also opens up a discussion on transculturality. As Hsiu-chuan Lee pointed out in her essay on the novel, “[w]hile national categories remain present in *Tale*, the novel introduces characters that move, live, and think beyond the confinement of these categories and thus from time to time compels readers to think on scales larger than that of the nation” (Lee 35–36). Moreover, instead of “simply providing a window to Japanese culture,” Ozeki’s novel makes it difficult for the reader “to *make sense*” and creates “the potential to intervene in straightforward, positivist readings of the Asian other” (Chang 61). I would argue that by illustrating displaced characters with transcultural potential like Nao and Ruth, the narrative also encourages the reader to think beyond cultural boundaries and establishes itself as a narrative located beyond national and cultural categories.

Ruth, whose mother was Japanese from a Japanese American family who were interned, can be defined as a transcultural character. Having lived in New York and spent some time in Japan, she resides on a remote island in Canada with her German American husband Oliver and their cat – Schrödinger: “Their marriage was like this, an axial alliance – her people interned, his firebombed in Stuttgart – a small accidental consequence of a war fought before either of them was born” (Ozeki 32). Even in their union, there is an almost karmic parallel that brings these two people from different cultures and different forms of inherited displacement together. Although Ruth claims to have studied in Japan, she does not appear to be in touch with the language as a native and has to ask her acquaintances – Japanese sushi-bar owners – to help with translations. Almost bound for rootlessness, for even her Japanese mother did not seem to be very traditional, Ruth slightly mirrors Nao’s detachment from her cultural home. While Nao’s Americanness could actually open up a path towards transculturality but instead leaves her trapped in the unbelonging under bullying and parental neglect, it may be understood that she is hindered from finding a sense of home and sees (planned) suicide as her only escape. At the same time, by writing her diary concealed in the cover of a French book and engaging with her future reader in English, she succeeds in crossing the cultural boundaries within the self. In spite of her ironic and pessimistic comments on committing suicide here and there, Nao manages to find herself in the cultural beyond (Epstein 332) rather than nowhere at all. Even more so, through her writing, she not only creates a space for herself where cultural traditions that deem her unfit cannot dictate her right to exist, but she also extends this space of transcendence, offering it to her reader.

Heterotopic (Un)Reality

The displacement this novel portrays in Nao and Ruth almost naturally calls for the idea of belonging, or at least longing for one, to be addressed. I argue that it is precisely this displacement along with her strong imagination as a novelist that prompts Ruth to engage with the diary and create a heterotopic space – a space beyond reality, materiality, culture, and time, a space of connection and perhaps belonging, too. While Ruth acts as a reader within Ozeki's novel, we are also warned of the novelist inside her who is not only often eager to intervene in the process but also has the habit of engaging with the story so much it separates her from reality: "When she was writing a novel, living deep inside a fictional world, the days got jumbled together, and entire weeks or months or even years would yield to the ebb and flow of the dream" (Ozeki 313). Gradually diving into Nao's story-world, Ruth often recalls the question she used to ask as a child: "*What if I travel so far away in my dream that I can't get back in time to wake up?*" (184). This intense engagement with story worlds in general may hint at the possibility of Ruth's unreliability as the mediator between Nao's story and the reader of Ozeki's novel.

As Peter Schmidt pointed out, when Nao's sentences are replayed in Ruth and Oliver's mind, engaging them both in "collaborative reading", they generate "a shared space across time's barriers" (22). Realistic yet imaginary, perceptible yet somewhat inexplicable, Nao's story offers Ruth a place of escape and, perhaps, even a home, different from the island that so sharply contrasts her earlier years in New York. In her diary, Nao writes about the practice of *zazen*. What may seem like a simple meditation practice in the Zen Buddhist tradition, actually creates a sense of home for the displaced Nao and promises the same to Ruth: when "you return your mind to *zazen*, it feels like coming home" (Ozeki 182). However, as a sense of home may be complicated for these characters, the narrator assures that "*Zazen* is better than a home. *Zazen* is a home that you can't ever lose" (183). Not only is this the way to connect with the self, discover the self within, and be where you want to be in spite of the location of your physical body, "to do *zazen* is to enter time completely" (183). This practice, as Ozeki's novel – a work written by a Zen Buddhist priest, by the way – suggests, helps one travel beyond space and time. It is a practice that connects one to the past, to the inheritance forgotten or denied. The practice of *zazen*, which reappears here and there in the narrative, underlies the connection between the two story-worlds and between the novel and the reader. It also mirrors a bigger picture of inheritance created by the two interwoven storylines which can be analysed through Foucault's heterotopias.

While the practice of *zazen* determines the time-transcending mood of the two storylines, it is the diary itself, the space it creates along with other letters, that reveals Nao's inheritance – her whole family history, war trauma, and inner conflicts of belonging and cultural loyalty that give a sense of purpose to Ruth, that create an imagined heterotopic reality – a heterotopic unreality. The space created here is, on the one hand, "the realm of language, in which [...] the simultaneous presence of

incompatibilities is entirely possible” (Knight 147), since Nao’s story-world is constructed by using three languages: English, Japanese, and French. On the other hand, the fictional connection through time and space that Nao and Ruth can (imagine to) almost feel on the physical level is only possible in an unreal space. Described by Wai-chee Dimock as “home of nonstandard space and time” (qtd. in O’Brien 40), a literary space in this case becomes a locus for these unreal combinations and transformations. This means that through “juxtaposing incompatible and contradictory dimensions in the same place,” Ruth and Nao’s worlds, lives, timelines, or narratives “constitute an unimaginable textual space” (Knight 155), a heterotopic space.

There are several instances of the possible physical affinity of these two characters. Speaking to her future reader, Nao transmits a physical sensation through her writing: “It feels like I’m reaching forward through time to touch you, and now that you’ve found it, you’re reaching back to touch me” (Ozeki 26). Repeated several times in the narrative, this thought reminds the reader of the possibility of emotional connection and engagement in spite of space and time. Just like these characters manage to travel beyond the confines of one culture, their connection exists beyond the boundaries of time and space – beyond the limits of understanding reality: “It’s like a message in a bottle, cast out onto the ocean of time and space” (26). This also points to the heterotopic character of the space of their connection, namely to its ability to transform “the conventional experience of time” (Knight 143).

The heterotopic reality Ruth begins to inhabit in her engagement with Nao’s story consumes her and blurs the distinction between the real and the imagined, simultaneously confusing the reader. Obsessively looking for Nao and her family on the internet with an awful urge to protect them, Ruth forgets about the time distance between them: “In my mind, she’s still sixteen. She’ll always be sixteen” (Ozeki 314). Possibly tricked by Nao’s definition of her own name, in which she shares her American perspective that leads her to thinking that “Nao was *now*” (98), Ruth, too, perceives this girl and her world as “[t]he eternal now” (314), a life outside of time. So deeply involved in Nao’s world, Ruth “was finding it harder and harder to pick up the phone these days. She didn’t like talking to people in real time anymore” (95). This detachment from reality creates an interesting parallel with Nao’s story about her life in California: “That happy life seems realer than my real life now, but at the same time it’s like a memory belonging to a totally different Nao Yasutani” (96). Arguably, this way the narrative reflects on the effect of real and imagined spaces on one’s sense of self.

There are other parallels created by Ozeki in this narrative that allow the reader to understand the intensity of the effects of the heterotopic space on the connection between them. A single Jungle Crow, alien to North America, all of a sudden finds a new home on the island, in the trees right next to Ruth and Oliver’s house. Like an omen entering their lives out of nowhere, similar to Nao’s diary, the crow opens yet another path for Ruth’s imagination as a reader and a writer. She is told, “in Siammon mythology they’re magical ancestors who can shapeshift and change into

human form” (121). This echoes Jiko’s first son’ – Haruki #1’s recollection of Miyazawa Kenji’s “tale about the Crow Wars” that gave him courage in a test flight and made him think “*I am Crow!*” (258), almost suggesting that his spirit visits Ruth to help her complete Nao’s narrative. Their friend Callie jokingly warns them that the crow, similar yet inconspicuously different from other local crows, can be attacked by “our island xenophobes” (120), creating yet another parallel with Haruki #1’s bullying in the army and Nao’s bullying in Japan where, as a Japanese teenager, she exudes foreignness that provokes brutality.

The oysters Ruth and Oliver get on the island happen to be “*Crassostrea gigas* [which] originally came from Japan. From Miyagi, actually. In fact, the other name for them is the Miyagi oyster” (187). These oysters are yet another life form in this story through which the narrative insists on the interconnectedness of different cultures and nations and provokes the reader with another touch of mysticism because Miyagi is where the nun – Nao’s old Jiko – comes from. Since the earthquake “moved the coast of Japan closer to” North America (202), the narrative refers to this phenomenon as “Japan is coming here” (202) to intensify the sense of affinity between Ruth and Nao’s story and once again emphasise the interconnectedness of their two distinct worlds that comes to the surface through the heterotopic space of language and time.

Ozeki plays with time in the narrative by essentially allowing it to stop when there is a power outage on the island which causes Ruth’s life to be put on hold. When it happens, Ruth tries “not to read ahead in Nao’s diary” (171), which arguably implies that their lives and stories become intertwined at this point. When the power comes back on, Ruth’s “world was restored to its place in time, and her mind was back online” (172). Apart from this interdependency of the two stories, Ozeki also allows the reader to question the common perception of time by introducing the following paradox: “you are always stuck in the *then* and you can never catch up to what’s happening *now*, which means that *now* is pretty much doomed to extinction” (98). Once again, with an example like this one, the author points at the blurred boundaries between the past and the present, despite the common habit of forgetting about the effects of the former.

The most distinctive signs of Ruth’s unreliability as the narrator appear when she begins to foresee Nao’s story development in her dreams “that felt so real” before reading it further: “I had that dream over a week before I read about the beach, so how did I know that?” (230). This way, Ruth projects her confusion onto the diary – the provenance of the story: “The world of the diary was growing increasingly strange and unreal” (227). It is as if she suggests here that it is Nao whose narrative should cause doubts. As Ruth gradually proves to be an imaginative reader, it can be argued that she infuses Nao’s story with her own fantasy.

The peak confusion when the reader may as well give up on comprehending what is real and what is fictional within the realm of the narrative occurs when the end of Nao’s diary “keeps . . . changing” (375). The final pages of her diary are empty although Ruth, an untrustworthy narrator at this point, assures that all of its

pages were filled with text when she first discovered the diary. Later, Ruth opens the diary again to find out that “she’s written a whole new entry about old Jiko’s death and funeral, and her reconciliation with her father” (376). Ruth claims that the material space of Nao’s diary has an agency of its own: “I *still* haven’t reached the end. Every time I open the diary, there are more pages. Like I said, the end keeps receding, like an ongoing wave. Just out of reach. I can’t quite catch up” (376). All the while, it remains apparent that Ruth’s own fears prevent her from finishing Nao’s story, whether as a reader or as a writer.

Arguably taking over the end of Nao’s story, Ruth intervenes in Nao’s life in her dream. In this dream, where “the Jungle Crow had led her to the park bench in Ueno where Nao’s father was waiting for his suicide hookup” (376), she stops Nao’s father from committing suicide, resolving the lack of communication that exists within their family. She also places Haruki #1’s French diary on his altar in Jiko’s temple with the hope that Nao and her father discover his true story. By entering Nao’s world in her dream, she loses the sense of own self: “She looks for Nao in the mirror, a logical place, but sees only a reflection of herself that she does not recognise” (348). In her dream, she takes the role of an omniscient narrator of Nao’s world, connecting the dots that cannot be reasonably connected otherwise. She partly realises her involvement in the story: “If I didn’t put Haruki Number One’s secret French diary into his box of remains of the altar, then how did it get there?” (394). Ruth, here, is “engaged, emotional, and urgent to the point of becoming sometimes hysterical, since she partakes in the events as if she had a specific role in them” (Sarnelli qtd. in Fusco 11–12). Not realising that the events narrated by Nao happened probably a decade before her discovery of the diary, though her husband Oliver points it out to her, she believes that she can change the outcome of Nao’s story, that she can stop her father and eventually her from committing suicide. As a writer she can do it, but only fictionally. It is precisely this line between her fiction and Nao’s (supposed) reality that disappears through Ruth’s involvement with the story and the diary.

This multidimensional heterotopic space that makes one question reality and fiction alike also highlights the importance of staying in touch with the past on the search for answers in the present by allowing Ruth to (re)write the past of Nao: “Think about it. Where do words come from? They come from the dead. We inherit them. Borrow them. Use them for a time to bring dead to life” (Ozeki 345–46). The nickname for the island where Ruth and Oliver reside is “the Island of the Dead”, allegedly referring “to the bloody intertribal wars, or the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population” (142). A possible reference to cultural haunting which involves the employment of supernatural elements to reflect “the hallucinatory projections of the self” (Brogan, “ASCH” 151), the places here, the Island of the Dead, and the Jap Ranch, referring to a home taken away from the interned Japanese family, also force one to look back in an effort to understand the present: “What better place to look for missing words?”

(Ozeki 346). This is one of the many cleverly integrated allusions to history that Ozeki's novel conveys.

The novel offers different satisfying theories for its striking unreliability. The first one suggests that Nao indirectly asks or allows her reader to help her complete the story: "this crow from Nao's world came here to lead you into the dream so you could change the end of her story. [...] you intervened, which set up the conditions for a different outcome. A new 'now,' as it were, which Nao hasn't quite caught up with" (376). This partly gives the agency to Nao. The other theory suggests that: "It's not about Nao's now. It's about yours. You haven't caught up with yourself yet, the now of *your* story, and you can't reach her ending until you do" (377). Interestingly enough, at the same time, Ruth hears from an old friend of Nao's father – a university professor – that he has discovered "an old email that Harry must have sent [him]" (381). Yet, he does not remember ever receiving it. In the email, Nao's father, Haruki #2, not only is a successful owner of a startup company, but Nao has also moved to Canada for school, while her dad erased the history of her bullying from the internet. It is curious that in his first email, the professor claims to have no information about his old friend Haruki "Harry" Yasutani. Seeing how the last pages of Nao's diary begin to (re)appear as if by magic, the reader cannot help but question the effects of Ruth's imagination on the professor and Harry's emails as well. In other words, the happy ending continues to write itself not only in the diary, but in other forms of communication as well.

The space of blurred boundaries of time and reality merges Ruth's imagination with her questioning her own existence: "Surely a reader wasn't capable of this bizarre kind of conjuration, pulling words from the void? But apparently she had done just that, or else she was crazy. Or else ... *Together we'll make magic* ... Who had conjured whom?" (392). Although nearing the end of the novel, the reader gets an idea that Ruth may be Nao's creation and not otherwise: "Was she the dream? Was Nao the one writing her into being? Agency is a tricky business" (392). Their lives become so co-dependent in this reader-writer heterotopia that the only way to continue existing is to go on dreaming up the story: "if she stops writing to us, then maybe we stop being, too" (344). Despite the narrator's unreliability, the heterotopic perspective allows us to see this literary space as a "fictional representation" of the real places, "and of their simultaneously mythic and real dimensions" (Knight 147).

Perhaps, there is no need to look for reliability or the one true story within this novel. Perhaps, there are several equally realistic possibilities of the ending, and the reader can choose the most satisfying one. The narrative explains this reader-writer paradox through quantum physics and the Schrödinger's cat experiment: "The observer was singular, and now you are plural. You can't interact and talk to your other yous, or even know about your other existences in other worlds, because you can't remember" (Ozeki 398). The multitude of possible scenarios in different parallel universes, as we know for now, can be neither confirmed nor denied. Only in this heterotopic realm of this novel can it be possible.

In spite of the constant speculations on how Nao's diary ended up on the beach and let itself be discovered by Ruth, we never find out for certain how it happened. We never know if Nao died in the tsunami or moved to Canada: "In encouraging us to read for moments of uncertainty or ambiguity, Ozeki emphasizes the need to think empathically, rather than in a reactionary way, about our relationship to those whose lives are historically interwoven with our own" (Gullander-Drolet 307). The blending of reality with imagination conveys an extremely important point: "To fail to do this, she suggests, is ultimately to participate in the perpetuation of bad translations of history, the kind that dehumanize the most vulnerable in service of a grand national narrative" (307), which is the idea introduced through the characters of Haruki #1 and Haruki #2, whose generational parallels will be addressed in more detail in the following section.

Not only does the connection between Ruth and Nao become extremely important with the development of the story, but it affects the (outside) reader as well as "Ozeki offers a way for us to connect to Nao, even to care for her as Ruth and Oliver do, which is consistent with the Buddhist experience of the self as 'a collection of fluid, interpenetrating, interdependencies that change and flow through time'" (Palumbo-Liu qtd. in Adams 248). Ozeki, thus, urges us to think of the self beyond the boundaries of the self. The attachment to another "is part of what composes who 'I am'" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22). Understanding the importance of this connection and the importance of Ruth's potential loss – Nao's probable death in the tsunami along with nearly 20 000 other people (Nakahara and Ichikawa 70) – is essential to understanding one's own and others' vulnerability. This connection, which Michelle O'Brien proposed to define as "transpacific intimacy" (41), "an intimacy that develops a far closer proximity and attentiveness to these events and those affected that goes beyond the distanced televised images or knowledge of someone who lives nearby" (54), falls within the "condition of primary vulnerability" that precedes the formation of every life (Butler, *Precarious Life* 31). Instead of being a "detached narrator of [her] relations" (23), Ruth becomes involved in Nao's life and an imaginary attempt to save it, thereby inviting the reader to do the same: to perceive the tragic loss of another as a loss within oneself.

As inexplicably realistic as the origins of Nao's possessions can be – only possible in the space of a literary text – they construct a heterotopic space that takes one beyond the boundaries of time, space, language, and reality. By allowing herself to inhabit this heterotopia, Ozeki (the author) through the voice of Ruth (the narrator) forces the reader to accept this journey of imagination to see what we refuse to see in reality – intangible links and transnational and transgenerational connections. The heterotopic perspective offers the reader a possibility of accepting the imagined space and, with it, the uncontainable unrealistic features it carries. The focus on the space allows the reader to see the diary as a portal into another realm of time. It can be argued that by creating this space, Ruth attempts to reconnect with her own cultural inheritance – the one that was denied to her growing up in the US. Analysing this from the perspective of spatial (un)reality helps us to see a point, a space,

of connection to that inheritance otherwise imperceptible in reality. This space unveils the transgenerational links in Nao's life and due to its fictional character also allows her reader to find herself in that inheritance and intervene in a hope to change the outcome of the story. In spite of the lack of realism in Ruth's impossible attempts to save Nao in her dreams, the connection that is made between these two characters existing in different parts of the world and points in time lets the reader see the space where others, as far away as they may be, are part of the "I", a space of common responsibility and egalitarian vulnerability.

Answers in the Past

In her narrative, Ozeki not only portrays a strong connection between Ruth and Nao's worlds, but she also establishes intriguing parallels within Nao's family, creating yet another form of time travel within the novel – inheritance. Possibly without realising it, Nao narrates her pain in a very similar manner and form to that of her father's uncle and Jiko's only son, Haruki #1, who was a kamikaze pilot. Nao is "hiding her diary inside Proust, and he's hiding his diary by writing in French. Secret French diaries seem to run in the family" (Ozeki 226). Instead, she introduces a parallel between him and Haruki #2 – her father: "I guess you could say that suicide and philosophy run in the family, at least among the Harukis" (68). Nao herself warns of her plans to commit suicide as she writes her diary, occasionally also having to recount her father's failed attempts to end his life.

When he was enlisted, Haruki #1 ended up in a place where he did not belong – in the war: "They were student soldiers and very bright. The military men despised them. They bullied them and beat them every day. They broke their bones and crushed their spirits" (244). This experience is also defined as "ijime" (244), the kind of bullying that Nao experiences at school. Nao reflects on this link between them: "that's something else that runs in the family: an interest in French culture and getting picked on" (68). Interestingly enough, knowing that her great-uncle went through this experience gives her strength, and the next time she is bullied, she takes on his perspective: "I was thinking about Number One, and he was giving me courage. They could break my body but they wouldn't break my spirit" (277). Her ability to connect with this man in the past echoes Haruki's belief that it is that person on the other side of his writing who is worth living for, who gives him strength: "No matter how much bullying they inflict on my body, as long as I have this hope, I can endure any pain" and "the hope that someday you will know the truth about this imbecilic lynching" (318). While it may at first seem that he writes for his mother, his letters create a transgenerational conversation as his written words can reach Nao through time and pass on to her the moral strength he had to have to endure the army. With this courage and without any chance to escape, Haruki takes his beating when ordered "to kneel on the floor with [his] hands tucked beneath [his] thighs" (320), which is horrifyingly similar to what Nao describes as a cruel

form of the children's game *Kagome* which she is forced to "play" to get beaten up by her classmates.

Haruki's friend K, who is killed in the army, leaves him a "worn copy of Master Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* tucked inside [his] duffel" (319). One of Jiko's favourite books, Dōgen's work gives Nao the idea of a time being. As this suggests that the idea for Nao's tale originates from Haruki #1, her story becomes a tribute to this inheritance. The connection between the kamikaze pilot Haruki and Nao reflects how "[l]oss of family, home, of a sense of belonging and safety in the world 'bleed' from one generation to the next" in unconscious ways (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 34). This form of inheriting unbelonging can be understood through Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. According to Hirsch, this is not simply a process of identification, but rather "a *generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation" (35). Although much of what Nao learns about the war time is shaped by and exists "in a collective imagery" (35), the unexpectedly unconscious links between Haruki and her or Haruki #1 and Nao's father Haruki #2 also point to the inheritance of a so-called "psychological 'gene'" (Volkan, *KNI* 160) or, in other words, mental images unconsciously transmitted to the children or descendants of the survivors of collective trauma (160). Arguably, these generational links in Ozeki's narrative point to the larger picture of transgenerational trauma transmission.

Despite the fact that physical torture and suicide seem to "run" in the family, there is a certain form of immortality, too. Even while Nao contemplates suicide, her form of communication with the reader creates an immortal bound, as the narrative defines it: "I've always thought of writing as the opposite of suicide," it is "about immortality. Defeating death, or at least forestalling it" (Ozeki 314). Written in French to ensure the immortality of the diary, the writing or rather Haruki's act of writing a diary emphasises "the importance of transgenerational (rather than transnational or transcultural) collaboration" (Gullander-Drolet 304). It is precisely "by translating across generational lines that translation's potential to alter history comes into view" (304). While Ozeki lets Ruth really alter history – at least for Nao and her father, employing Haruki's secret diary, in which he confesses his refusal to accept the Japanese nationalist ideology and his intention to not blow up an American warship, illustrates the power of the narrative to alter the past. Changing the past is only possible by changing the narrative. As Michelle O'Brien frames this instance, "Haruki's decision to refigure this oceanic space from a battlefield into one of resistance also renders his narrative as yet another instance of a transpacific counterpoetics that emerges from an individual's minor narrative" (52). What Ozeki's work highlights here is the enormous significance of individual narratives positioning themselves against grand historical narratives and calling the reliability of collective beliefs constructed by nationalist ideologies into question. It also emphasises the ability of literary texts to open up the possibility of reading histories from beyond one's national perspective: "As Nao and Ruth extend Haruki's writings, they not only feel more connected to a history that has informed their lives,

but also recover an anti-imperialist story of the Pacific that exceeds national allegiances or boundaries” (56). It may take generations to comprehend the true, sometimes terrible, nature of historical events but precisely because of the time it takes to change or disclose the truest narrative, it is crucial that we do not lose sight of keeping conversations across generations going.

While Haruki #1’s suicide is rather forced, a very similar moral dilemma torments Nao’s father – Haruki #2. He explains that there is a difference between learning about history of victimhood, e.g. about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and admitting “a terrible Japanese atrocity like Manchu” (Ozeki 308). As he explains:

[...] we learn we must feel great shame to the world. But shame is not a pleasant feeling, and some Japanese politicians are always trying to change our children’s history textbooks so that genocides and tortures are not taught to the next generation. By changing our history and our memory, they try to erase all our shame. (308)

By altering or exaggerating the narratives of massive cultural or national trauma, politicians can manipulate collective psychological processes of identification (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 262) and use “the chosen trauma – the collective mental representation of an event that has caused a large group to face drastic common losses, to feel helpless and victimized by another group, and to share a humiliating injury” – to preserve their collective identity, which is a more “complex” tool than the stories of “glory” (48). By emphasising this personal perspective of Haruki #2, which also parallels the war crimes illustrated in the secret letters of Haruki #1, the novel defines the problem of grand narratives and their blinding yet natural effects on the collective consciousness.

Through Nao’s father Haruki #2 the novel demonstrates political manipulation of collective consciousness and individual refusal to abide by it. He suffers from “tortured conscience” (Ozeki 309), for when he realises that his work could help to kill generations of innocent people, he gives it up and loses everything. By erasing collective responsibility for violent acts and instrumentalising national trauma and grief, politicians not only assume power over the narrative, but they also manipulate the history that is transmitted through generations. To Haruki #2, this issue is larger than “conscience”, it is “shame from [his] history”, yet the biggest problem for him is that “history can easily be changed” (308). By altering history textbooks – and thereby reshaping forms of collective inheritance – Japanese politicians in this example attempt to redefine their collective identity. In highlighting this problem, the novel raises the broader collective and transgenerational issue of instrumentalising collective consciousness.

It can also be argued that by creating the characters of Haruki #1, who is able to reflect on the horrific brutality of his fellow soldiers in the war, and Haruki #2, who prefers to lose everything rather than contribute to the creation of war weapons, Ozeki’s writing addresses the issue of an implicated subject. Both unwilling “participant[s] in histories and social formations that generate the positions of

victim and perpetrator” (Rothberg 1) for others who share their collective national identity or the collective identity of the enemy, these characters bring forward the discussion of personal existential crises provoked by their refusal to directly and indirectly participate in violence, in other words, by their understanding of and inner resistance to implication. While implication does not require direct understanding of one’s involvement in injustice and “is often unconscious or denied” (11), understanding the presence of the problem of implication in this narrative, where it underlies existential problems and suicide, is a step towards reflecting on the larger issue of unconscious implication in the crimes against humanity and nature. As Michelle O’Brien puts it, “Ozeki focuses on the collective development of a transpacific narrative that produces a sense of accountability for one another” (40). I would add that, this way, she opens the path for the reader to see themselves in the position of this analytical category of implication, indirect and invisible, in the events and tragedies seemingly occurring elsewhere.

Through generational links the novel also addresses the issue of inherited responsibility. In its connections between different points in time and different generations of Nao’s family, it exposes the fact that “what we consider the present is itself the outcome of historical processes that have created the world in which we live” (Rothberg 9). Ozeki, thus, compels her reader to perceive the present through the legacies of the past, taking into account constructed collective and personal narratives of the past. Travelling beyond the borders of implication as a synchronic phenomenon, the narrative thus creates a context of indirect inherited responsibility – be it for disconnecting with people, close to us or miles and years away, or the effects of natural disasters. The novel’s attempt to underline this interconnectedness of everything – humans, countries, nature, generations – and bring it all together in the evolutionary axis of our world is precisely what makes it a narrative of inheritance – the inheritance of collective consciousness and collective implication.

As Bella Adams argues in her essay on waste/d spaces, crossing the boundaries between reality and fiction through intentional ambiguity and illustrating that “Nao’s words still manage to make their way to Ruth and to us, beyond all containers—the diary, the lunchbox, Tōhoku, Japan, the Pacific Ocean, and *A Tale for the Time Being*”, Ozeki demonstrates that the disaster of Fukushima cannot be contained by the past (255). Its effects on nature have no boundaries: “By breaking containers, including those between fictional and real spaces, as well as those between here and there, us, them and it, Ozeki’s tale breaks the fiction of containment” (255). Moreover, by deploying transgenerational parallels between Haruki #1 and Nao or Haruki #1 and Haruki #2, Ozeki illustrates how far the roots of the now, of the present, go back in history. History, however it may be written, can never be contained solely in the past. We live in, embody, and further generate the inherited collective consciousness, which is also beyond containment.

This failure to recognise the importance of inheritance and the error of changing the narrative without caring to foresee the devastating effects it will cause are also thematised in Ozeki’s narration about the tsunami. The tsunami revealed “stone

markers [...] engraved with ancient warnings” (Ozeki 114). Warning people against building too low down the coast, some “were more than six centuries old” (114). The ancestors “were speaking to us across time, but we didn’t listen” (114). This example explicitly repeats the idea that is pulsing through every page of Ozeki’s narrative – the clear yet neglected significance of history. Here, too, we can see how the effect of the novel is enhanced through an indirect accusation of failing to acknowledge the importance of the past in grasping the effects in the present.

Conclusion

Having analysed characters of different generations in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*, I have established several parallels between them – from the problem of blending with the collective consciousness that both Harukis endure to displacement and bullying that Nao and Haruki #1 deal with in very similar ways, counting on their ability to stay immortal through the on-going transgenerational conversations. Nao and Ruth also seem to connect through displacement. It is the inherited responsibility for the Japanese culture – for the history of the country, the trauma that it endured and inflicted on others – that both Nao and Ruth seem to be unable to fully accept or reflect on as their own, possibly because of their physical and cultural displacement. They do not fully belong in the Japanese culture, each for different reasons discussed in this chapter. Yet, accepting their inheritance or a chance to belong in real or imaginary spaces offers them both a way of being, which is why their imagined transgenerational conversations with Haruki #1 and Haruki #2 are so important.

Reading Ozeki’s *Tale for the Time Being* through these clever parallels between different generations, one can acknowledge the main critique of her novel, namely the critique of the age-old systematic failure or even refusal to see the connection between causes and effects, one country and another, one generation and the next, human and nature. Underestimating the value of these links minimises one’s ability to perceive the effects of inheritance on the being in the present, which, as this novel posits, can lead to displacement and tortured conscience on the personal level or to erasing atrocities from the history of a nation. Through the imaginary spaces of connection constructed in the novel, the characters achieve this reflective perception of the past. Yet, their connection means that the impervious walls humans put up between the inheritance and the present, one country and the other, human and nature are just as imaginary as the *Tale* itself but perhaps it must take some imagination to see through these borders.

The affinity created by Ozeki between Nao’s story and Ruth also suggests that there is no here and there, us and them. Everything is interconnected. Through the connection between different physical spaces that occurs within the narrative, the author also addresses the potential for understanding the common human vulnerability that not only shifts the usual distant perception of natural disasters but also underlies the discussion on violence, which is shown in the instances of bullying

and war crimes addressed by this novel. By bringing up these issues on the personal level and discussing the implication of her characters in the collective ideologies and crimes, the author also contextualises the issue of the implicated subject. The conversations across generations that Ozeki establishes with her narrative add to this issue, defining implication as an inherited responsibility as well and addressing the problem of neglecting or rewriting the past in the narratives constructed through collective national ideologies.

By looking at the space of interconnection through the perspective of Foucault's heterotopia, this analysis has aimed at establishing a way of locating unlocatable, intangible links that are formed by transcending the boundaries of time, space, culture, and language. What may seem like a story of a woman on the quest of reconnecting with her neglected cultural roots and finding herself in the inheritance of another is actually a tale of greater dimensions – a tale that urges the reader to trust fiction and cross the borders of reality to see the links between cultures and generations, to see the inheritance that we can so easily neglect if confined to the limits of reality.

In the following subchapter, I shift from the heterotopic space of a journal to a house in the United States where a mysterious family, whose identities are born out of fiction, come to instantly claim their right to belong in the rootless world. By crossing the boundaries of reality, Salman Rushdie's novel explores displacement, exile, and implication, prompting the examination of the power of inheritance over those privileged enough to escape it.

3.2 Rootless Identities and (Un)Erased Histories in Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House* (2017)

"Lies can cause tragedies, both on personal and the national scale."

— Salman Rushdie, *The Golden House*

In his 2017 novel *The Golden House*, Salman Rushdie creates a mysterious Golden family that seems to break the rules of identity politics, culture, implication, and the past before facing their inevitable collapse. This story of and for the modern times, which may appear too absurd to be realistic yet preposterous enough to be conceivable, makes the reader question how one's past relates to one's sense of self and what one can become without it. In this chapter, I set out to analyse the Golden family – the characters that try to defy their past – to examine the role of inheritance – personal or cultural – in their identity formations. Analysed by Dolores Resano as a Trump-era novel, *The Golden House* has also been approached as a work of organised crime fiction by Michael Walonen and studied by Neil H. Wright through the literary analysis of the characters and their motives concealed in Rushdie's various allusions. Here, the focus switches to identities. Exploring the issues of

rootlessness, grief, and haunting through the lens of heterotopic spatial formations, I will examine how Rushdie's novel defines the past – the inheritance and roots – as an inescapable element of identity.

Creating Rootless Identities

The enigmatic family of the Goldenes in the centre of Salman Rushdie's narrative – Nero Golden and his three sons – arrive in Greenwich village from seemingly nowhere. Easily fooling the narrator in the beginning, Nero Julius Golden makes an impression of “a benevolent emperor”, who “exuded a heavy, cheap odour, the unmistakable smell of crass despotic danger”: “an uncrowned seventy-something king from a faraway country arrived in New York City with his three motherless sons to take possession of the palace of his exile” (Rushdie 3). Although they are defined as exiles here and may thus appear to belong nowhere, there is a sense of nonchalance or, even more, an absolute absence of hard feelings in their rootless aura: “they arrived as they intended to remain, independently, with a shrugging indifference to the objections of others” (9). While this family “inhabited their chameleon identities” (11), the narrator admits that the secrecy and confusion around them only made everybody question “what awful sights had they endured, that they went to such lengths to disown their origins” (11). Although it is clear that there must be some roots, some place and home they come from, this secrecy causes rumours, speculations, and fascination rather than suspicion: “do we not celebrate every day, do we not *honour*, the idea of the Secret Identity?” (12). The narrator refers to various pop culture figures, such as Bruce Wayne, to justify his and everyone's insatiable interest in the mysterious Goldenes. Yet, it is this impossibility of rootlessness that is striking here. No one seems to be able to accept the fact that the Goldenes are simply the Goldenes, that they have no past, that they are simply new inhabitants of the Gardens. Rushdie's story illustrates how identity is more complex than that, and there are roots to it that will always demand to be uncovered.

The identities of these characters are constructed through their complete obliteration of the past from their identifications:

Tell them, screw the identity parade. Tell them, we are snakes who shed our skin. Tell them we just moved downtown from Carnegie Hill. Tell them we were born yesterday. [...] Say we are from nowhere or anywhere or somewhere, we are make-believe people, frauds, reinventions, shapeshifters, which is to say, Americans. Do not tell them the name of the place we left. Never speak it. Not the street, not the city, not the country. I do not want to hear those names again. (8)

While their complete rejection of the past, roots, personal and cultural history is of great importance to the analysis of their identity crises, there is an expectance that the magic trick with the disappearance of the past must play out well in the United States, and the narrative links this directly to political identities in America. For

instance, their family conflicts appear to reflect the nature of their new home: “America changed them both, Petya and Apu – America, that divided self – polarising them as America was polarised, the wars of America, external and internal, becoming their wars as well” (55). Hence, the author creates a parallel between identity and space here – the evolution of the characters reflects the space they inhabit. There is always a veil of mystery whenever their past is mentioned, the past spent “in the city that could not be named in the country that could not be identified” (16), but their newly acquired Americanness is out in the open. This is also directly connected to their departure from their ethnic identities, as the Goldens adopt new forms of the self: “They would escape from the historical into the personal, and in the New World the personal would be all they sought and all they expected, to be detached and individual and alone, each of them to make his own agreement with the everyday, outside history, outside time, in private” (20). This shows that their move involves abandoning the collective identities – cultural, ethnic, religious, social. The problem with it is that all these shared elements (and identity is always shared, if we follow Appiah’s argument (3)), come together to form personal identities. By moving towards new personal forms, they face a paradox: they reject the collective and historical but fail to construct meaningful personal selves without the collective identities. The Goldens’ plan is thus “to move beyond memory and roots and language and race into the land of the self-made self” (Rushdie 20). This explicit parallel between America and the new selves also illustrates how their change is beyond personal. It is cultural. It is ethnic. While there are certain dangers in fully embodying “a historically acquired identity” for collective identities (Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity* 36) and thus for individual identities as well, cutting off a whole dimension of one’s individual identity – its integral part such as belonging in a collective cultural, religious, ethnic group, a nation, or a city – must have its consequences on their personal identity formations, too. Apart from obliterating their personal selves and making up new identities, they also reject other elements of their social identities without replacing them with anything. This way, they do not allow their identities to naturally evolve and, thus, break the safe balance within their identities and on the outside.

Each member of the Golden family has created his own fictional identity that suggests his, though fictional, rootlessness. Nero’s firstborn autistic son Petronius or Petya “is the ghost of his father’s misspent intelligence sacrificed to blithe triviality, which leaves him addled by false confidence and exposed to random violence” (Wright 130). He is described by the narrator as a man with “the most retentive memory of anyone I ever met” (Rushdie 43), which made it hard for him “to avoid spilling the family beans, their real names, their origins” (44). This may be already meant to suggest that the cultural identities left behind are rather repressed or hidden within than erased but this alienation within the self also leads to forced distance within the family. When a conflict between Petya and his brother Apu arises, the estrangement between them becomes extreme: “I’m talking about untying the ties of blood” (195), as Petya puts it. Underlining the significance of cutting the blood

ties here allows the narrative to put a stronger emphasis on the gravity of alienation from the blood ties which are often defined as synonymous with ethnic identities and ancestral past.

The identity crises of Nero's other sons develop to different dimensions. For instance, Apu, the star of the Golden family and Petya's eternal enemy, is portrayed as a character so out in the open that his rootlessness becomes convincing: "His clothing embraced all the fashions of the planet" (56). As Neil H. Wright defined the role of this character, "Apu is Nero Golden's repressed aesthetic sensibility" (130). Nero's third and youngest son, D, which stands for Dionysius, "is always represented in terms of unbelonging" (Woltmann 10). Born outside of Nero's marriage to a woman that remains a mystery to D, other characters, and the reader, "[a]ll his childhood he felt excluded" (Rushdie 64). His unbelonging may be more extreme than that of his brothers, he is told: "I see that you personally are probably in exile from yourself, maybe ever since the day you were born" (70). When it comes to his outside representation, it is claimed that he channels "a particular kind of sadness", and it "reveals a man's alienation from his own identity" (70). Gradually breaking away from the father's control, D morphs into a female identity and with her suicide becomes "the sacrificial daughter, reminiscent of the slaughter of the pure Iphigenia by her ruthless father Agamemnon" (Wright 131). Although his quest for a new self is suggested to be a search for his true gender identity, it reflects a bigger picture of identity issues in this novel. His in-born unbelonging and eventual metamorphosis address the difficulty and danger of finding a meaningful sense of identity: "[h]e was running from the thing he also knew he was moving toward" (107). With this statement, the narrative also highlights that identity is an internal process, and there is no way to fully escape it through migration and exile. This way, "D may be understood as the wreckage of the authentic self, a fate that Nero Golden also suffers because of his engagement with organized crime and the consequent loss of his wife and flight to America" (Wright 131). D's character and her consequent suicide create a somber vision of absolute rootlessness, deprived of identity – the identity which was forcibly replaced by fiction.

Another member of the Golden family, who masterfully manipulates her way into the role of Nero's wife, is Vasilisa Arsenyeva. She, too, fits into the Golden's world of fictional identities as "she claims descent from the great explorer Vladimir Arsenyev", which makes the narrator conclude that Vasilisa must be lying about her identity (Rushdie 74). It can be argued that the role of this character in Rushdie's story-world is to expose Nero's vulnerability: "An exile is a hollow man trying to fill up with manhood once again, a phantom in search of lost flesh and bone, a ship in search of an anchor. Such men are easy prey" (92). Her considerations of Nero's weakness directly touch upon his personal trauma of exile. It can be argued that Nero Golden, as a tragic result of his own actions, suffers a loss of the self, the loss he consciously decides on for the sake of his physical survival. As a result, his weakened sense of self exacerbated by the lies he infuses his identity with is what enables Vasilisa's manipulations.

But the weakness Nero carries is not his alone, it is shared and inherited by his sons, who had to follow him in his exile: “This was the idea of the family. He was the head and we were the limbs” (224). In a way, the exile, abandoned past, and fictions of identity are all forms of inheritance for this character. Following Nero to his exile and his doom, his sons represent a form of inherited responsibility, which may be easily mistaken for fate or destiny passed on through the blood ties. I would argue that Nero’s three sons are tied to his guilt through implication rather than blood, and the issue of implication will be discussed in more detail on the following pages. However, there is an aspect in which they mirror their father, namely their obliteration of the roots, as an important part of the identities of the Goldens is simply missing: “The Goldens all told stories about themselves, stories in which essential information about origins was either omitted or falsified” (68). The way the narrator takes in these stories expresses a common concern about the impossibility of rootlessness: “Every time I heard something about the family’s past, I became aware of the gaps in the Golden family narrative” (229). These gaps the narrator refers to here can be understood as the gaps in their made-up identities.

While the ease with which Rushdie’s characters seem to rise beyond their roots may imply that these characters are transcultural and while their “chameleon identities” (11) or names inspired by Roman emperors suggest that they have risen beyond their culture, there is an issue in their identity formations that can prove otherwise. According to Epstein, in transculture, “origins need to be acknowledged in order to be exceeded in the *transnatural* movement of culture that at a certain stage passes into a *transcultural* movement” (341). What is missing here in the case of the Goldens is the recognition of their roots that is necessary for transcultural formations (342). They cannot rise beyond cultures if there is no starting point, if they erase it and live as if the past has never existed. This makes defining their identities more complicated. As Julia Hoydis put it, “identity is a mystery and an obsession in the novel” (157). This mystery can only be solved by the author but as he admitted “during a public reading, he, as author, is the only one knowing the characters ‘true’ identities and real (Indian) names, which are never revealed” (Rushdie qtd. in Hoydis 157). The identities of the Goldens are different throughout the narrative. Perhaps it can be argued that they evolve in the course of the narrative – a process so natural and necessary for identities that even their make-believe world cannot hinder it. They claim to be rootless, culture-less, and free yet eventually come to be consumed by the ghosts of their past. These characters are rootless yet transcultural, free from the burdens of history yet stranded in the past. There are ambiguities in them that cannot be easily resolved, and, in a sense, their complexity reflects the multidimensionality of modern selfhood.

Fake Rootless Spaces

In this novel, Rushdie creates spaces that in many ways reflect the imagined rootless and fluid identities of the Goldens: the Gardens – the neighbourhood where the

narrator and the Golden family reside, the Identity Museum, and most importantly the house of the Goldenes. All these spaces seem to be realities of the own, existing beyond the limits and rules of the outside world. Created within Rushdie's narrative world to highlight the uniqueness and, perhaps, the absurdity of the actions happening within, these fictional spaces can be analysed as heterotopic spaces. This perspective focuses on the "simultaneously mythic and real dimensions" of fictional literary representations of spaces (Knight 147). The ability of heterotopic spaces to transform the sense of space and time, reality and imagination, is what makes this perspective the most appropriate for the analysis of these imaginary spaces. With this view, I attempt to define how the narrative shows that the present is inseparable from the past, that one's identity cannot be held back by physical borders, and that spaces become representations of the haunted selves and identities fill spaces with their meaning.

The Gardens, or to be more specific "The Macdougall-Sullivan Gardens Historic District" located in Greenwich Village, are described by the narrator Rene Unterlinden as "the enchanted, fearless space", "a place of happy retreat from the disenchanted, fearful world beyond its borders" (Rushdie 9). The world of the neighbourhood has clearly defined borders. It is also important to note that the narrator hints at the imaginary aspects of it by referring to it as an "enchanted" place. Rene, the narrator, is a film maker who lays his focus on Nero Golden and his family, planning to create a fascinating film about the inexplicable life of the Goldenes. Having to see the Gardens from Rene's perspective, the reader is limited to his creative angle when taking in the story of the Goldenes. Infused with Rene's imagination, the world of the Gardens is a closed space with its own rules and own fantasy-rich life.

As Dolores Resano points out, in this novel "[t]here is no 'veil' hiding an alternate reality, as the fantasy is what brings reality into being" (521). The way this place is depicted can suggest that Rushdie creates a heterotopic reality within his narrative to highlight the empty, fictional identities of his characters, unimaginable in real life. The inexplicable absurdity of their fictive lives actually conveys the idea that all of this can be very real and probably is real for individuals powerful enough to achieve it.

Living in their own world, the people in the Gardens seem to exist outside the country they live in, creating a fitting atmosphere for the rootless and culture-less Golden family. What is more, the house they move into, referred to as the Golden house, "the grand Beaux-Arts building" (Rushdie 8), is the place that mirrors their identities:

Nero and his sons passed inside and found the world of lies they would from now on inhabit: not a spanking-new, ultra-modern residence for a wealthy foreign family to make their own gradually, as their new lives unfolded, their connections to the new city deepened, their experiences multiplied – no! – but rather a place in which Time had been standing still for twenty years or more. (10)

Perfectly fitting the still, made-up identities that they try to embody, the place they decide to inhabit reflects their frozen evolution of the selves. The house becomes a heterotopia that in some way resembles Foucault's description of a cemetery. Their house is a space that symbolises "heterochrony, the loss of life" – the loss of the past selves in this case – and a "quasi-eternity" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 26), for the space is also inhabited by the ghosts of the repressed past.

The heterotopic space of the house that exists outside of the laws of time echoes and is echoed by the identities of the Golden family. Similar to their identities, "the house always felt to us like a sort of beautiful fake" (Rushdie 11). The house exudes the same rootless secrecy that the men appear to possess: "There was nothing in the house that hinted at their origins, and the four men remained obstinately unwilling to open up about the past" (11). Even more so, the narrative directly addresses this connection: "It was as if the house exercised some power over them all – the genealogical house or the actual house, it was sometimes hard to separate them" (52). Here, Rushdie hints at the intense impact the space has on their identities which is mirrored in the effect their identities have on the space. At the same time, he points out the power of genealogy, instantly bringing the idea of inheritance to the centre of the question of the Golden's identity crises. Thus, the question of inheritance is inseparable from their identity issues. As Walonen argues, symbolically the house "represents the capitalist dream of reaching the pinnacle of wealth and power, the version of it for the era of neoliberal globalization that involves leaving one's roots behind and becoming part of the transnational, postnational plutocratic capitalist elite" (258). Hence, the heterotopia of the Golden house reflects the identities of these characters, living on top of the world, beyond responsibilities and vulnerabilities.

The house becomes an even more meaningful space for one of the characters, Petya. Nero's first son has a fear of open spaces, which makes him most comfortable in the fictive world of the house. Confined to the walls of Nero's rootless heterotopia and limiting his interactions with the outside world, he begins to perceive the world from the perspective of closed spaces imbued with imagined meanings that defy reality. To dive even deeper into the imaginary space-governed world, "Petya studied the structures of what he called 'enchanted spaces', the occultist pentagram and the Jewish *eruv*" (Rushdie 199). He agrees to accept the existence within the heterotopic space for he cannot be himself (Petya) outside of it. The openness can reveal his true self, the self that could never forget the past, the self that was hurt by the blood ties that had to be broken.

There are other spaces in Rushdie's narrative that seem to echo the identities of his characters. Having moved out of the Golden residence, Nero's youngest son D finds himself closer to his true self: "In this instance D Golden's 'home' was an even more intimate space than the family house; it was nothing less than his own body" (107). Separating himself from Nero and his make-believe world brings D closer to his real identity. It can be argued that D's rootlessness preceded that of the rest of the family because he never knew his mother. Nor was he given any

information about her or her ancestry. This genetic displacement is paralleled by his gender displacement, which leads D on the quest to discover his true gender identity: "He was a misfit in his own skin, experiencing, in intense form, this newly important variation of the mind/body problem. His non-physical self, the mind, was beginning to insist on being what the body, his physical self, denied, and the result was physical and mental agony" (107). Perhaps, this is the reason why this particular character appears most hungry for the evolution of the self and is unable to accept existence in the fictional rootless, identity-less world of his father.

The Identity Museum is yet another space in Rushdie's narrative whose use is everything but coincidental. An undoubtedly ominous space where D's girlfriend Riya Z brings him, "the Museum of Identity – was after bigger game, its charismatic curator Orlando Wolf was after identity itself, the mighty new force in the world, already as powerful as any theology or ideology, cultural identity and religious identity and nation and tribe and sect and family" (72). When it is said that "at the heart of the Identity Museum was the question of the identity of the self, starting with biological self and moving far beyond that" (72), it becomes clear that what lures D in this concept is the ability to transcend all his identities – rejected, motherless, abused, Indian, American, fictional – something Nero would not allow his sons to do. As the narrative convinces us, "God is dead and identity fills the vacuum" (72). This idea goes beyond cultural identities only, but it is precisely this cultural aspect that is of great importance here because it is the aspect that is missing in the lives of the Goldens. God-less and culture-less, their identities are built on negation and rejection rather than evolution.

The Goldens dive so deep into the make-believe rootless heterotopic space filled with the ghosts of their past that "[t]he world outside the haunted house had begun to feel like a lie" (278). This direct reference to the role of the space in relation to the outside world illustrates that in this house, Rushdie creates a heterotopia of illusion – "a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 27). The outside world, the world of reality in America is described as "the Joker's world", the world "of radical untruth" (Rushdie 278), while "[i]nside the Golden house the subject was the fragility of life, the easy suddenness of death, and the slow fatal resurrection of the past" (278). Hence, the characterisation of the house versus the outside world seems to suggest the contrast between illusion and reality while in fact exposing that the boundaries between them are so obscure in the world that the absurd reality of Rushdie's story-world may as well be a mirror facing contemporary America.

Haunted by Implication and Responsibility

There are elements of haunting in Rushdie's story, and the nature of the ghosts of the past is displayed on the surface. It was the death of Nero's wife in a terrorist shooting, which he himself helped organise, that "ended their whole life up to that

point” (Rushdie 20). When he received the news, “it seemed as if a creature hidden deep within himself was trying to escape” as he cried (19). But inheritance is part of being, nothing ever escapes Nero. Every crime, every trauma, every experience becomes part of him, in spite of the surface coated in the stories he tells everyone about himself. The narrative ominously teases the reader at the outset, warning that Nero “knew that in the end the past would not be denied, that it would come for him, and have its way” (50). The past continues to live within, and it is only a matter of time before it breaks away from his unconscious mind to haunt him, torture him, and bring him to his end.

Even their home in the Gardens is described as “a house of ghosts. These decimated rich people rejecting their history and culture and name” (180). It is their rejection of the past that makes the Golden family ghostly, dead, as the narrative suggests here: “to pretend it doesn’t exist, that you never existed there, that it’s nothing to you and you’re nothing to it, that makes me feel they’re agreeing to be, in a way, dead” (180). The narrative establishes a certain clarity here by defining the Golden family, and not their past, as ghosts, which, in a way, also suggests that in spite of rejecting their past, they still continue to embody their abandoned dead identities.

Not only do the ghosts of the past continue to live within, but their projections also come to haunt the Golden family. The narrator himself, whose reliability as a narrator driven by his film-making creativity is under question, claims to witness the ghosts coming to visit Nero Golden in the Gardens:

... what I think I know I saw even though my rational mind rejects the idea, was the fog around him gathering, like some kind of ectoplasm, into two human shapes, the shapes of women, standing in front of the kneeling man to hear his bitter regret. [...] these were the two mothers of his sons, the wife who died at the Taj and the poor abandoned woman who gave up her child. (122)

As Nero expresses regret in this scene, it can be argued that these ghosts are the projections of his unconscious mind tortured by the repressed memories of the past filled with shame and guilt. It is as if he seeks forgiveness within himself. The narrator also feeds the reader some ideas of what the roots of these projections may be: “As his expression of his guilt at finding new happiness while the unhappy dead lay at his feet? Or as his discovery that the haunting past had a far stronger hold on his emotions than the shallow, if young and beautiful present?” (122). The past will always remain part of the present self, whether for him or his sons – the inheritors of the tragic history.

Nero’s make-believe identity concealing his tragic and criminal past is complicated by Vasilisa – his Russian wife. Realising that her husband’s mind is disturbed by the powers beyond her control, Vasilisa plans to “drive the demons out” (123) and invites an Orthodox priest for an exorcism. After the ceremony, Nero tells his sons to shut the doors but Vasilisa assures them: “Shut the doors against the rain, but there is no need to close them against the demons, for they have been driven

out of my husband, and they will never return" (124). Unfortunately for Vasilisa, the haunting by the demons of the past does not end with this exorcistic ritual. With this failure the narrative illustrates how identities are truly constructed within and cannot be completely exorcised from the past trauma by the outside influences.

By creating the story of the haunting of Nero Golden this novel also opens up the issue of implication. Having escaped his country and everyone who knew about his involvement in criminal activities, including the terrorist attack in which his wife was killed, he can never flee the sense of indirect responsibility in her death. In a confession to the narrator, Nero reveals the impact of the death of his wife on his psychological state: "The destructive aspect for me, the life-altering destructive aspect, was not the fact of death but the fact of responsibility. [...] This is what haunts me when at night I walk in the Gardens" (152). Nero knew well of the planned attack. What he did not know is that he would have a fight with his wife who would leave the house to spend the evening at the doomed hotel. Although she was not the target and Nero was not the one planting the bombs or pulling the trigger, he was one of the men involved in making terrorism possible. Even if his direct responsibility for her death can be denied, his implication cannot. By illustrating the absurd chain of events leading up to her death, Rushdie addresses the question of moral responsibility and implication that shapes the mysterious past of this character. "The murderer alone bears the burden of the crime" (153), as the narrator explains to Nero, hoping to calm his guilt. But this does not make Nero's guilt go away. Nor does it save him and his sons from the punishment. If Nero cannot be directly defined as a perpetrator, he and his sons can be viewed through the analytical category of implicated subjects – "beneficiaries and accomplices" indirectly participating in injustice (Rothberg 20).

To highlight the multigenerational effect of implication, Rushdie gifts another character, Nero's second son Apu, the burden of haunting. Apu also confesses to the narrator that he is visited by the visions of the past: "I've started seeing ghosts" (Rushdie 224). The nature of the haunting is also clear when it comes to this character: "I am seeing ghosts, because the trouble with trying to escape yourself is that you bring yourself along for the ride" (225–26). Hence, the past self remains part of Apu's present identity. While he himself was never involved in terrorism, he was and is part of his father's world. Benefiting from the life in the world of power and money, he inherits implication in his father's crimes and is aware of it: "there is a deep feeling of having done something wrong. All of them are from back home" (227). In this character, Rushdie develops the issue of inherited implication to a full scale. To Apu, there is no future without resolving the past: "I have the strong sense right now of not being able to see my way forward. It feels like there isn't a way forward. Or that for there to be a way forward, first there must be a journey backwards" (227). Similar to the rest of his family, Apu experiences an identity crisis, haunted by the crimes of a repressed, inherited past. In an attempt to resolve this, he travels back to India, the home of his former self, which inevitably leads to his death. Killed by his father's enemies as a grim message to Nero Golden, Apu

embodies the first punishment for the crime of escaping the past. Sudden and sombrely quiet, his death offers a vision of the end, cruel yet anticipated, for the rest of the Golden family. With this harsh and bleak view, Rushdie's narrative, in a way, offers a warning to the world where cultural identities cannot be completely detached from the ancestral past, collective trauma, and implication.

Their sense of guilt, whether for the implication in the crimes or for rejecting their roots, is also illustrated as a bodily experience. The repressed past comes to Apu in the form of physical pain: "Sometimes it's painful. Sometimes it seems to come from within, from the region of the navel, being extruded from the body" (226). While it is prohibited to verbally share any information about their past, Apu's body reminds him of the hidden ghosts. At the same time, for Nero, it is a different process. In his beginning of an end he is devoured by the haunting memories in rapid ageing: "He was beginning to forget the present [...] but he had people to remind him of most of that, and his memory for the past seemed, if anything, to be growing sharper" (189). The past – personal and cultural history – gradually overtakes the minds and bodies of the Goldenes.

As a warning about the wrong path they have taken, Rushdie surrounds his characters with different signs indicating their fate: ghosts, the physical sense of being possessed, or, for instance, a painting that once catches the narrator's attention. The painting appears to symbolise Nero's life: "The haunted man and the ghosts of the lost past, haunting him", the present "unstable, the buildings crooked and distorted, as if seen through a pane of old, uneven glass" (226). Similar to Nero, the man in the painting is illustrated in a place so askew that it is clear his surroundings are fictional. At the same time, the ghosts of the past are present in the painting, too. In a sense, this painting reflects how obvious it is that the lives of the Goldenes are imagined, unreal, and that their past secrets, identities have never left them.

Only at the end of his days, Nero Golden opens up and shares the truth about his past, his sense of guilt, and the grief he is unable to process. He confesses: "The dead bodies of my children and their mothers weigh on my shoulders and their weight pushes me down. You see me crushed, daughter, like a cockroach beneath destiny's heel" (336). As he continues to go back to the past in his mind, he is faced by the projections of his guilty unconscious, in other words, by the ghosts that haunt him. Having to face his vulnerability to loss, Nero has to carry out the task of mourning. The process of mourning has to reveal "something about who we are", "something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22). In this case, the loss and mourning unveil to Nero his role in the deaths of his wife and children, expose him as the root of the tragedy, and leave him with the crushing sense of guilt.

Having turned their backs on the past, the Goldenes are, thus, still followed by it. From time to time, the narrative offers an acknowledgement of the crime they have committed against their identities: "we just ripped ourselves away, just tore off the corner of the page where we were standing, and that was a kind of violence. It's necessary to put the past at rest" (Rushdie 227). On the personal level, they expect

consequences: “I think a dark force out of the past would fly across the world and probably destroy us all” (228). However, as Rushdie reminds us, the rules of history apply to all: “They wanted to step away from the responsibilities of history and be free. But history is the court before which all men, even emperors and princes, finally must stand” (50). Here, the narrative emphasises that this is more than a story of one family. The impossibility of completely obliterating one’s roots and turning away from one’s personal and cultural past is universal.

The Return of the Past

While one’s inner changes may remain invisible to the outsiders, Rushdie’s characters try to reflect their identity development through physical transformations. Similar to D embodying [his] new gender identity, Apu attempts to explain his changes in physical terms to offer an understanding of how “under the pressures of one’s life one can simply cease to be who one was and be just the person that one has become” (Rushdie 237). It is almost as if the narrative tries to trick the reader into believing that the human psyche is cyclical and dreaming up completely new identities can be realistic:

Our whole bodies change all the time. Our hair, our skin, everything. During the course of seven-year cycles every cell that makes us up is replaced by another cell. Every seven years we are one hundred per cent not who we were. Why should this not also be the case with the self? It’s pretty much seven years since I left this place. I’m different now. (237)

What Apu implies in this example is his “soul” or, in other words, his identity: “I’m saying that in time the old ghost moves out and a new ghost moves in” (237). Here, he brilliantly summarises the identity attitude he and his family have or at least strive to achieve. The problem is that instead of allowing identity evolution, the Golden family practices identity replacement, and by depicting the downfall of their house, the narrative suggests that this cannot be a psychologically healthy way for identities to form, develop, and evolve.

There is a trauma which the Golden family experience through exile and complete obliteration of the past, and Nero’s second son Apu is the one who is depicted to suffer most vividly from it. Apu is described by his father as “crazy”, for he “saw visions and heard voices” (328), and the narrative also establishes a clear parallel between his troubled state of mind and the trauma inflicted upon his identity: “You could say alternatively that he suffered damage. That he too was damaged in the brain, in the heart of himself” (328). This trauma of exile along with the loss of the self and a conscience tortured by Apu’s indirect responsibility for his father’s crimes is exacerbated by the fact that “he knew what [Nero] did but also he arranged with himself to un-know” (328). Hence, the story shows that repressing the trauma, the truth, and the past is what destroys one even more than exile alone. Moreover, it is suggested that all of the Golden family are traumatised by the violent killings of their

origins: “Three sons and all with damage in the brain, in the heart of themselves!” (328).

However, their trauma of loss began not with the loss of the selves but with a different personal wound – the loss of the mothers. For D, this trauma was unconscious, as he was a child, yet it continued to affect him throughout his short life. For Petya and Apu, a strike at their souls came when they were old enough to comprehend it, and this loss they shared with their father: “A personal tragedy of course. A tragedy to me and my sons. But great tragedy is universal, is it not?” (152). By suggesting here that tragedy, loss, or grief can be universal, the narrative criticises Nero’s rather hypocritical view, for he does not take responsibility or accept implication for the terrorist attacks that took many lives. Perhaps, with Nero’s grief accompanied by a troubled sense of guilt, the narrative attempts to highlight the issue of common human vulnerability – the theme also explored in other chapters discussing novels such as Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* and Ruth Ozeki’s novel *A Tale for the Time Being*. The perspective of common human vulnerability helps us to understand that “there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe” and that not all lives are seen as equally “grievable” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 32). This issue also appears in Rushdie’s novel *The Golden House*. Here, the story points out and criticises that the perception of human vulnerability may largely depend on power, class, and affluence.

At the same time, with to-absurdity-miraculously accidental deaths this novel reminds one that “[v]iolence exists” (Rushdie 275), and each human being is susceptible to it. As Judith Butler posits in her theory, we all are “vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other” (31). The mistake is to believe there can be exceptions, and this is the mistake Rushdie’s character makes: “You mean, in the case of yourself and your loved ones, you make an exception. In this case they must be in a charmed circle and the horror of the world cannot touch them and when it does it is a fault in reality” (Rushdie 275). Having failed to keep his wife safe, Nero tightens the enchanted circle around his family, cutting ties with the past, with their home country, with their ethnicity, and with reality. But the past breaks the circle anyway and brings the Golden to their tragic end, which again highlights the existence of primary human vulnerability.

Not only does the end of their lives signify the failure of their make-believe identities but it also allows the past to take full possession of the identities which have been craving evolution, development, and change all throughout their exile. Apu, who attempts to come to terms with the past, is essentially killed by that past. Nero’s youngest son, D, can be believed to be overpowered by the freedom to be herself: “D Golden for the last time entered her father’s house – for the first time, perhaps, as herself – her true self, the self she had always feared she might be, and whom she had had such difficulty in setting free” (266). Having come back to their fictional home, as close to the origins of her trauma of exile and unbelonging within herself, D channels an aura of grandeur, fitting the powerful status of the Golden:

"[He] arrived at the Golden house in splendour, emerging from the back of a Daimler limousine deliberately chosen to echo the vehicle in which all the Goldenes had arrived on Macdougall Street to take possession of their new home" (266). This parallel with the beginning of the narrative is introduced to, perhaps, take the reader back to the roots of the Goldenes' identity crises, to the point when they decided that the past no longer mattered until their deaths proved to them and to the reader that it always did.

In Petya's death, fate seems to play a major role as it is implied by Rushdie's reference of an ancient Mesopotamian fable retold by Maugham as "The Appointment in Samarra". Nero's first-born and last-to-die son Petya "knew it too, that he saw Death threatening him in the marketplace and became desperate to avoid it, to mount a borrowed horse and gallop toward Samarra, believing he was escaping from what he was in fact riding to meet" (278). Confined to the space of the house for he was afraid of open spaces, as it has been mentioned earlier, Petya might have come to a realisation of the effect of their existence in the fictional heterotopia of rootlessness, timelessness, and imagined freedom from the past. Unlike his brothers, he does not attempt to return to the past in hopes to seek forgiveness from the ghost of his origins. What Petya does is break away from his father's fairy-tale space and face the reality. He goes "away from that house weighed down by death into the parade that celebrated life; and so, running toward life and away from death, they found death waiting for them, as the old story had prophesied, in Samarra" (297). Although it might seem like it is fate that kills Petya, this novel can be seen more as a critique of such beliefs. Instead of presenting us with the idea that fate and coincidence control one's existence, the novel raises the questions of implication, vulnerability, inheritance, and identity formations to emphasise the complexity of the processes that may be mistaken for mere fate.

Nero claims that "children of kings are born to kill their fathers" (266), but it is he who doomed them to be the inheritors of his crimes, implication, and exile. After their passing, "Nero Golden spent hours each day alone at his desk gazing upon the ashes of his sons, interrogating them for answers" (270), while all the answers were his: "I spurned God and now he punishes me" (272). Towards the end of the narrative, this character opens up more about his guilt and reaches more clarity about his responsibility for the deaths of his sons. Nero claims: "I shifted my identity too" (307), but he also forced his sons to follow in his footsteps. In spite of their tragic end, they successfully managed "to close the book of the past and to live in the present. This is a fortunate gift" (Rushdie 328). It is almost ironic that even after their deaths, Nero fails to see that they have never freed themselves from the past, for no one can fully achieve this. Similar to his sons, he accepts the fact that the past cannot be erased: "I myself am closing the book of the present and living mostly in the past" (328). Here, again there is no sign of attempts or potential to transcend the past and mediate between the roots and their adopted fictive identities.

Having suffered yet another trauma of loss, Nero Golden attempts to find compensation for his pain in the Little Vespa, a baby he believes to be his son, who in fact was born out of Vasilisa's affair with the narrator Rene: "it was easy for the old man to forget the details and hold tightly to his only living child as if he were the reincarnation of his dead brothers as weak as being himself, as if he were a treasure chest contained all that his father had lost" (359). By describing Vespa as the reincarnation of Nero's true sons, the narrative yet again hints at the idea that the ghosts of the past never abandon Nero. His grief is infused with a sense of guilt, which only adds to the haunting he has experienced before, in the beginning of his exile.

In the end, the fictional house where time has stood still and where the rootless Goldenes have hidden from the demands of the reality burns down. The space intended to serve a safe haven, guarding Nero and his family from the past, ultimately fails him. As the narrator reflects, "the monster was always at the gates, and a little of the monster was within us too, we were the monsters we had always feared, and no matter what beauty enfolded us, [...] at the end of the road the fire was burning, and it would consume us all" (364). By insisting that there is no escaping the past because it is always "within us", the narrative presents a grim vision of the Goldenes' fate, framing it as an utterly inevitable conclusion to their story. This also leads to the interpretation that the conclusion of the story represents:

...the death of both of the imagined possibilities symbolized by the Golden House: of using entrepreneurial success of whatever level of legal and/or ethical dubiousness to escape one's past and one's origins, and of globalization paving the way to a diverse and tolerant US society that has shed its long historico-cultural legacies of nativism and xenophobia. (Walonen 258)

The house that is arguably the symbol of their existential decay is an inseparable reflection of their family. The heterotopia of their house, their space of escape, reflects their identities – imaginary, rootless, seemingly detached from the past, from direct and inherited responsibilities, and from reality itself, and this link becomes even more obvious as the house burns down, allowing the flames to consume Nero Golden as well. The destruction of the house by fire mirrors the death of the genealogical house of the Goldenes. The death of their identities imminently leading to their physical deaths causes the inescapable death of the space. It could also be said that it is the death of the space that takes the life of Nero Golden but a switch of perspective is of lesser importance here for the space and identities are tied together in the end and one mirrors the other.

With this ending, Rushdie reminds us that there is a bigger picture that the story of the Goldenes reflects in his novel: "Lies can cause tragedies, both on personal and the national scale" (Rushdie 349), which can arguably be defined as the main point of his book. By looking at this story of one family, one may be able to achieve a better understanding of the problem of extremes – being stuck in the past or obliterating it completely, living by the rules of one's ancestors or, for instance, the Founding Fathers, or making up entirely new selves deprived of the roots. There is

a failure to transcend the past and the present, the old and the new, the reality and the secrecy, a failure to rise beyond dichotomies and allow modern identities to evolve, and the sombre end of this narrative vividly, though with exaggerations, illustrates possible consequences.

Conclusion

There is something uncanny and almost horrific about their life starting from the point of the arrival of the Goldens in the Gardens. This unnaturally rootless family intrigues and attracts attention. As argued in this chapter, the Goldens strive to embody rootless identities but their complete rejection of the past goes against the possibility of transcultural formations. At the same time, they never fully leave their roots for they continue to be haunted by the ghosts of their past. This suggests that whether it haunts one within or comes from the outside as an unexpected strike, inheritance is part of identity formation, and breaking away from it completely is a form of loss. The loss of the self or even of parts of it is accompanied by the loss of family in this novel, which only complicates the identity crises of the characters. Their obliteration of the roots and trauma of exile result in the existential deaths of the Goldens which inevitably leads to their physical deaths as well. By killing these characters, Rushdie, in a way, punishes them for neglecting the importance of the past, responsibilities, implication, common human vulnerability, and their true selves.

The heterotopic perspective in this analysis has allowed to focus on the illusory aspects of the space of the Golden house and point out how the aim of the fictive nature of this space helps to expose the real world outside it. It has also highlighted the necessity of the Goldens' existence within a confined space where time stands still to maintain their illusion of rootlessness. However, even within their fictive space supposed to harbour them from the past in their exile, they are haunted by the guilt that comes along. With the grim tragic end of the Goldens, the narrative shows that identity formation is a complex process that cannot be fully and solely determined by fiction, deliberately created rootlessness, migration, or any other dimension attempting to absorb the complexity of individual identity, for in the end, there is no escaping oneself.

While loss is a central theme in this chapter, it takes on even greater significance in the next. Delving into the analyses of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, and Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, I focus on collective and personal mourning and the impact of its absence on personal and collective identities.

4. Inheriting Displacement, Loss, Implication

4.1 The Heart That Never Healed: Inherited Displacement in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)

“This was how history moved, the slow build, the quick burn, and in an incoherence, the leaping both backward and forward, swallowing the young into old hate.”

– Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*

Winner of the Booker Prize 2006, Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* centres on a retired judge Jemubhai Patel, living with his granddaughter Sai, his cook, and a dog Mutt in an old, isolated house in Kalimpong, a town in West Bengal, India. Constructed against the backdrop of an ethnic conflict in 1986, the novel reflects the consequences of colonialism by exposing the personal and cultural inheritance, as its title suggests, of trauma, loss, and displacement. Retired and alienated from the world and everyone he has ever known, the judge seeks isolation in the Himalayas. When his orphaned granddaughter Sai comes to live with him, her arrival invites his past trauma into the present, causing him to reexperience the emotions and memories he has desperately tried to repress. As a parallel to his revisitation of

the past, the novel also follows the development of the ethnic conflict between the Gorkha Liberation Front and the Indian army. The conflict involves violence and rage that are not sudden and fresh but are rather the consequences of decades of injustice and oppression, and the narrative reveals how these struggles are exploited to strengthen the sense of ethnic identity and enhance the divide between the people. As Desai's novel reflects "the limitations of both postcolonial and cosmopolitan perspectives" (Jackson 30), this analysis takes a different approach. Focusing on large-group psychology and implicated subjects, it provides insights into the impact of the past on personal and collective identities and examines displacement as a trait that unites rather than separates those whose lives have been shaped by colonialism and its consequences.

Inherited Prejudice

The story Kiran Desai creates in *The Inheritance of Loss* expounds on the wounds of colonialism and the Indian partition on different levels. Used as a background for the story, the Gorkha National Liberation Front is depicted as it continuously grows and gains power and, sometimes forcefully, supporters in Kalimpong. When the tensions start, the reports mentioned at the outset of the narrative claim: "It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state" (Desai 10). The description makes it appear as though this trouble is expected. In this place, where too much "warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there", any "drawing of borders" has always been "ridiculous" and "messy" (10) and involved too many actors creating never-ending troubles. Trauma that was not inflicted in one day and by one act, "the partition as a rending of the land caused the rending of hearts, communities, families, the tearing up of ethics and sense of morality itself" (Mohanram 922). While this traumatic experience itself can never be repeated, Desai's narrative illustrates how it continues to live in people's minds.

The return of the trauma to the collective conscious begins with "old discontents, the slogans scratched and painted on the side of government offices and shops" (Desai 139) to remind people of the injustice that has been in the shadows of their existence for decades. In this written protest, the Nepali refer to themselves as "stateless", "slaves", "constitutionally tortured" and demand "[their] land from Bengal" (139). This way, they awaken these feelings in everyone who has endured injustice because of their ethnic identity. In the beginning, the Nepali still remain invisible, their slogans written, not voiced, and thus ignored, but it all becomes more serious as "one day fifty boys, members of the youth wing of the GNLF, gathered to swear an oath at Mahakaldara to fight to the death for the formation of a homeland, Gorkhaland" (139). The slogans gain not only a voice and face, but they also turn from demand to pledge. Their presence cannot be ignored any longer: "They

were watched [...] as they waved their unsheathed kukris, sliced the fierce blades through the tender mist under the watery sun” (140). Suddenly, the demands went beyond slogans and it was clear they would not stop at that, “everyone was using the word *insurgency*” (140). The restrained discontent acquired a body of expression – an organised group with a concrete purpose – “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas” (8) – to return Nepal to Nepali, and with this cause the decades-old trauma became a distinctive part of their collective ethnic identity.

The common sentiments of the people overrun by the sudden fear for their status and safety are expressed well through the conversations of the two rich and westernised sisters Noni and Lola. Their conversation topics change as the conflict begins to unfold. These are not spontaneous thoughts about different ethnic groups, but rather prejudice that has been there at the back of their minds, existing in their unconscious minds until a larger political movement brings all these strong feelings to the surface. Lola claims that she is not surprised that the Nepalis “will be after all outsiders now, but especially us Bongs. They’ve been plotting this a long while” (141). As she says this, she can imagine their watchman Budhoo robbing them and hiding in Kathmandu with “other Kanchas and Kanchis with their respective loot” (141). This condescending remark reflects that to Lola, their watchman personifies a whole ethnic group that causes her annoyance. Her sister Nona, on the other hand, points out that the Nepali have “been here, most of them, several generations. Why shouldn’t Nepali be taught in schools?” (143). However, the issue is not about the language, it is about them receiving equal rights, assimilating, blending in. It is about their opportunity to reclaim their home and their right to belong:

‘Because on that basis they can start statehood demands. Separatist movement here, separatist movement there, terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents, rebels, agitators, instigators, and they all learn from one another, of course – the Neps have been encouraged by the Sikhs and their Khalistan, by ULFA, NEFA, PLA; Jhakhand, Bodoland, Gorkhaland; Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Kashmir, Punjab, Assam. . . .’ (143)

Here, the narrative draws attention to the fact that ethnic conflicts caused by various issues of language, borders, and political power are familiar to India. Even more so, it appears to suggest that all these regions owe their troubles to one common root: “Very unskilled at drawing borders, those bloody Brits” (143). Forty years later, the trauma of displacement preceded by colonialist oppression has not been healed.

Irrespective of their social status, each character begins to look to the past for the roots of the current discontent. Mrs. Sen also believes that the Indian Partition and the founding of the Dominion of Pakistan form their chosen trauma: “First heart attack to our country, no, that has never been healed –” (144). A chosen trauma, the Indian Partition in this case, is a shared traumatic event during which a group suffered loss of lives, land, and home (Volkan, “TTCT” 87). In this case, the same trauma was inflicted upon several ethnic groups. Their inability to mourn the losses of people and land or essentially recover from them, for displacement, minor

conflicts and tensions never ceased, also suggests the possibility of transgenerational trauma transmission (87). Some conflicts can never be forgotten since they shape the nation's life afterwards, and this narrative depicts this transmission in the younger Nepali characters, like Gyan, who join the Gorkha Liberation Army. The trauma of partition is passed on through the stories of struggle, strength, and victory: "Gyan remembered the stirring stories of when citizens had risen up in their millions and demanded that the British leave. [...] If a nation had such a climax in its history, its heart, would it not hunger for it again?" (Desai 174). Here, the traumatic past is represented in the stories of victory and power rather than loss, to remind people of their strength and, arguably, to inspire them to fight for victory and freedom again, not fearing the inevitable deaths. As Radhika Mohanram pointed out in her essay on the Indian partition, "[i]t is this other history of trauma, grief, loss, diaspora and separation that is not articulated in the narrative of Indian nationalism and Independence, for doing so would completely undercut the more acceptable and triumphant event of Independence" (922). Desai's novel also points out that the narratives of trauma and loss can mainly be found underlying the stories of victory. Despite the difference in the opinions on the conflict that Desai depicts through her characters, the novel conveys a common understanding that it was bound to happen: "*It didn't come from nothing*, even Lola knew, but from an old feeling of anger that couldn't be divorced from Kalimpong" (265). By repeating the idea that Mrs. Sen brings up through Gyan who speculates on the continuous existence of the revolutionary spirit of the nation, the novel consistently draws the reader's attention to the trauma persisting in the collective unconscious.

As the conflict intensifies in the Himalayas, on the other side of the world, the cook's son Biju is reminded: "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them" (151). Despite poverty and despair, he consciously decides to reject work opportunities in places where they cook with beef. His determination helps Biju find a sense of home in America in "an all-Hindu establishment. No Pakistanis, no Bangladeshis" (155). Although far away from Kalimpong and "under pressure to westernize" (Kondali 109), he does not abandon his cultural self. The conflict that is unfolding in his home is part of him, too, and not even their mutual foreignness would bring Biju closer to his so-called enemies – Pakistanis or Bangladeshis, for example – in America. In the US, Biju comes to the realisation "that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India" (Desai 86). Biju's racist attitudes towards his fellow illegal workers may be due to the internalised "racial inferiority that stems from colonial racism" (Loh 311). At the same time, characters like Biju or his father "ignore colonial racism as a veil for economic exploitation and cultural oppression" which has historically been responsible for the hardships and poverty endured by their social class (311–12). Instead, despite the deprivation, they continue to celebrate the West. In contrast to the tensions growing in his home country, America confuses Biju with its multiculturalism. In his attempt to comprehend whom it is

acceptable to hate – all Muslims or just Pakistanis or all Muslims except for his friend Saeed Saeed – he mirrors the liberation army back home, who divides a myriad of ethnic groups into the army supporters and their enemies. Through his suppression of American multiculturalism Biju, this way, represents solid knowledge in Desai's narrative (Spielman 76). Although his personal experience with black and Muslim people in America may contradict everything he has been taught to believe, he suppresses these contradictions and “trusts his inherited prejudices over firsthand experience” (79). The struggle he endures in the US hinders change and causes a sense of alienation, forcing him to fixate on his ethnic identity in an extreme way. Biju thus resists the fluidity of his identity offered by his life among immigrants in America, choosing instead to stay true to his inherited identity and beliefs. By providing this ending for Biju and allowing him to return home, although stripped of his money and clothes, Desai illustrates his embrace of his native culture, leading him to “a new and more affirmative subjectivity” (Nanda 130).

Becoming Part of History

While the novel perfectly illustrates the frustrations of the collective identities involved in the conflict, it makes an even greater point by depicting the impact of the ethnic conflict on personal identity, this way enhancing our understanding of the inevitable harm such conflicts have brought in the past and continue to bring in the present. The author illustrates these inner changes well through Sai's math tutor – Gyan. It all begins with him watching students march for the victory of the Gorkha Liberation Army and becoming “melded into a single being” (Desai 172). Describing a group of marching protesters as a single entity, the author emphasises how every single personal identity blends with the crowd. Abandoning the many identities one possesses, one fully becomes part of the larger collective identity. As Volkan argued in his work *Killing in the Name of Identity*, being “subjected to humiliation and other hardships paradoxically increases victims' investments in their societal or large-group identities” (40). With this perspective in mind, we can see how Desai's text illustrates the strength of the collective unconscious, highlighting the extent of the struggles and injustice endured by these people and their ancestors as they succumb to the pressure of a shared revolutionary cause. The following quote shows Gyan's conflicting realisations of the crowd being one, a blurred image of people coming together for one cause, and his succumbing to their power:

... Gyan had a feeling of history being wrought, its wheels churning under him, for the men were behaving as if they were being features in a documentary of war, and Gyan could not help but look on the scene already from the angle of nostalgia, the position of a revolutionary. But then he was pulled out of the feeling, by the ancient and usual scene, the worried shopkeepers watching from their monsoon-stained grottos. Then he shouted along with the crowd, and the very mingling of his voice with largeness and lustiness

seemed to create a relevancy, an affirmation he'd never felt before, and he was pulled back into the making of history. (Desai 173)

The author illustrates the power of collective national identity by showing how as soon as Gyan loses his objectivity and fixates on the chants, his mind becomes one with the crowd. In the collective identity he achieves the unattainable – importance. This inner shift is introduced to portray how political and historical importance bring a sense of power and control that persons of his social class have been deprived of in Kalimpong. The inner changes Gyan undergoes are not simple at all, and the narrative illustrates this through his doubts again:

Free from history. Free from family demands and the built-up debt of centuries. The patriotism was false, he suddenly felt as he marched; it was surely just frustration – the leaders harnessing the natural irritations and disdain of adolescence for cynical ends; for their own hope in attaining the same power as government officials held now. (173)

Through Gyan we see the logic behind the escalation of the conflict, the moving force behind bringing to the surface the tension that has existed for decades for the sake of someone's political success. In this instance, the author urges us to think objectively and critically about the power of the collective mind in this novel and, at the same time, to reflect on the real struggle of these people: "they didn't have any cynicism. They meant what they were saying; they felt a lack of justice" (174). In this example, it is apparent that there is nothing imagined about the cause they march for. Their struggles are real, but it is the very real pains so easily accessible to the political leaders that they use as tools to achieve their own purposes. *That* is the cynicism the common marching crowd does not possess – it is there for their leaders to exploit. Elizabeth Jackson has also pointed out that the novel, this way, draws attention to "the destructiveness and the artificiality of nationalistic fervour" (35). At the same time, while the novel emphasises the imaginative power of nationhood and thus seems to favour cosmopolitan attitudes, it also addresses existing "inequality between nations" (36–37). The perspective offered by Volkan's studies in large-group psychology also aids in understanding that in spite of the artificiality of political instrumentalisation of collective problems, it is often very real threats, injustice, and trauma that are deployed by politicians to influence ethnic groups or nations.

Desai depicts how becoming part of a collective cause such as the liberation movement alters not only one's sense of self but also one's judgement of the others. Gyan begins to project his anger onto Sai, irritated by the inequality, the different opportunities Sai is given, the judge's massive house that so sharply contrasts Gyan's own low salary: "all the different pretences he had indulged in, the shames he had suffered, the future that wouldn't accept him – all these things joined together to form a single truth" (Desai 177). Knowing he is refused every opportunity because of his ethnic background, he now finds a personification of his lack of success, blaming Sai for his deprivation: "*Because of people like you?*" (180). While here

Gyan begins to embody the collective ethnic identity, to him, Sai also becomes an embodiment of the enemy, “defining his hatred” (191). She now combines and represents all the causes of misfortune of his people. The tension created between these two characters represents the problem of inheritance. I argue that by going into detail in this conflict between Gyan and Sai, Desai addresses the issue of implication. Although their argument may seem absurd at the first glance since it downplays the role of political structures in the ongoing injustice, it in fact represents a bigger problem of implication. Implication here, in Rothberg’s sense, involves subjects “who need to be held accountable for their relations to histories of violence and current hierarchies of power” (37). While Sai is an agreeable character, her fortunate social position and education opportunities are the outcomes of the past. Through the critical perspective of Gyan, the reader may be able to perceive Sai’s role in the historically established social structures as an implicated subject.

Through Sai’s perspective, the author also ponders on the difficulty of understanding implication. As Sai realises that Gyan’s anger is directed at her “for big reasons, that have nothing to do with [her]” (Desai 285), she understands that “[h]e wasn’t a bad person. [...] The trouble was that he’d tried to be part of the larger questions, tried to become part of politics and history” (299). As Appiah argued in his research on the politics of identity, we need “identities to construct our human lives” (19), but since we live in the world where people may face restrictions because of their ethnic identities, their collective identities can become “valuable parts of who [they] are” (20). While in its following of the ethnic conflict, this narrative does depict how people “pursue a politics of recognition” (21) after years of being denied justice and belonging, it also points out the role of the group leaders in the enhancement of collective identity.

The indirect transmission of trauma that continues to prevail in Kalimpong is also an example of what Marianne Hirsch theorised as postmemory that involves sharing a legacy of trauma through generations (*The Generation of Postmemory* 35). As Hirsch put it, “trauma both solidifies and blurs generational difference” (82), as it creates an invisible link between the trauma survivors and their descendants yet a distance too. Desai also portrays how this strong desire for a new revolution feeds on the old suffering in her novel. While it may seem that the new conflict is too distanced from the old colonial violence, implication bridges this gap.

The depiction of the demonstration captures how the leader of the movement calls for action, inflaming the anger that has already existed in the collective unconscious. His rhetoric convinces the crowd that it is their duty to unite and fight: “We must fight, brothers and sisters, to manage our own affairs. We must unite under the banner of the GNLFF, Gorkha National Liberation Front” (Desai 175). Here, the people’s collective identity acquires, in addition to the invisible ethnic link between them, a new name. There is also a direct indication that the cause is important enough to justify violent actions: “If necessary, we will wash our bloody kukris in the mother waters of the Teesta” (176). In this instance, one may identify signs of regression in the leader’s attempt to reinforce a state in which a large group believes

in “ruining the lives of many people” to prevent or cease the threat toward their own collective identity (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 59). To conclude his speech, the GNFL leader “waved his kukri and then pierced his thumb” (Desai 176). In response, “the crowd screamed, their own blood thrumming, pulsing, surging forth at the sight of the speech giver’s hand. Thirty supporters stepped forward and also drew blood from their thumbs with their kukris to write a poster demanding Gorkhaland, in blood” (176). Here, the blood is deployed to symbolise not only their willingness to use violence and expect bloodshed on the path toward their goals but also the invisible ethnic link between the people who have the right to belong in Kalimpong by birth, by blood. At this moment, one may be forced to reflect on the fact that, as Lawrence Hill cautions, “[t]he magic of blood has the potential to turn toxic [...], when it becomes a metaphor for racial, ethnic, or family identity” (194). Blood, or ethnic identity, is the tie that links generations of people together, and this link is used to make the old trauma and old hate be perceived as new: “This was how history moved, the slow build, the quick burn, and in an incoherence, the leaping both backward and forward, swallowing the young into old hate” (Desai 303). This idea of young people consumed by old hate signifies a time collapse that may occur on the collective level. When the collective identity is under threat, the group leaders may deploy “hate speech” or “propaganda” to magnify the group’s common opinions and “feelings about themselves” and the enemies (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 49). Volkan refers to it as “a *time collapse*”, when the past trauma is perceived “as if it has happened only yesterday: feelings, perceptions, and expectations associated with the past heavily contaminate those connected to current events and current enemies, leading to irrational political decision-making and destructive behavior” (49). By depicting how the past trauma is deployed to escalate a new conflict that is perceived as one’s ethnic duty, Desai’s narrative precisely shows the grim vision of such a time collapse and the role of political power concealed behind the honourable ideas of justice, in a sense, offering a critique of the belief that loss is inherited.

More than merely a liberation movement, the group that is gaining power in the narrative exhibits signs of political extremism. They do not accept disloyalty of the people of their ethnicity. Their leaflet sounds like a threat to their ‘own’ “Gorkha soldiers protecting India”, warning that they must join the army and if they do not comply, they “may be treated as a foreigner” (Desai 176). To appeal to their people, they make strong promises to “offer jobs to its own, and a 40,000 strong Gorkha army, universities, and hospitals” (176), all of these sounding rather utopic. There is a forceful way to dedicate everything to the collective identity, concealed behind the idea of duty and reinforced by appealing, albeit illusory promises. The marches that seem to have started it all are followed by boycotting elections, cancelation of national celebrations, strikes, tortures, a symbolic “[b]urning of the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950” (211). There also appears a pressure to support the movement: “Nepali or not, everyone was encouraged (required) to contribute to funds and to purchase calendars and cassette tapes of speeches made by Ghising, the top GNLF

man in Darjeeling, and by Pradhan, top man in Kalimpong” (211). It seems that there hardly is any choice left. Everyone is forced to engage in the conflict.

As the conflict that arises between Gyan and Sai mirrors the larger tensions in Kalimpong, the author also questions the generational responsibility for the past. Directly yet covertly, the narrative speculates on the logic of the violence unfolding. This yet again highlights the problem of understanding implication. When Sai stumbles upon an extremely racist statement in a book by H. Hardness, she is overwhelmed by anger:

It was unwise to read old books; the fury they ignited wasn't old; it was new. If she couldn't get the pompous fart himself, she wanted to search out the descendants of H. Hardness and stab the life out of them. But the child shouldn't be blamed for a father's crime, she tried to reason with herself, then. But should the child therefore also enjoy the father's illicit gain? (218)

In this instance, the narrative criticises the ‘old’, generational fury ignited by the GNFL men yet, at the same time, points out how these old wounds cause rage that feels and is new. Desai also makes implication central to the character's inner conflict here as Sai wonders whether reaping the benefits of her ancestor's privilege implicates her in the inequalities of their time. Through Sai's perspective, we are urged to question the rationalisation of violence, but we are also pushed to think critically about the connection between the current bloodshed and the role the actors of the colonial time and the Indian partition unknowingly play in this conflict, taking place decades after their actions. We are thus urged to consider the intricacy of implication. The narrative also offers a perspective on this issue suggesting that the implication matrix cannot be shattered:

There was no system to soothe the unfairness of things [...] but great evasive crimes would have to be dismissed because, if identified and netted, they would bring down the entire structure of so-called civilizations. For crimes that took place in the monstrous dealings between nations, for crimes that took place in those intimate spaces between two people without a witness, for these crimes the guilty would never pay. There was no religion and no government that would relieve the hell. (219)

This statement also reflects on the fact that the current conflict depicted in the narrative does not resolve decades or centuries of injustice. On the contrary, it generates new violence amid new crimes and new forms of displacement.

Another personal perspective in this large conflict that appears to highlight the generational guilt is presented through the sisters Lola and Noni. Known as affluent people in Kalimpong, they are suddenly brought into the spotlight: “They, amid extreme poverty, were baldly richer, and the statistics of difference were being broadcast over loudspeakers, written loudly across the walls” (266). To the liberation movement, people like Lola and Noni become symbols of injustice, and the fury that grows in the hearts of the people is directed at them: “The anger had

solidified into slogans and guns, and it turned out that they, *they*, Lola and Noni, were the unlucky ones who would pay the debt that should be shared with others over many generations” (266). Although the author points out that inequality in the region has existed for multiple generations and the concerns of the poor are justified, she also emphasises the fact that these are just two of the many people who have benefitted from it, and it seems that they have to pay for their inherited crimes only at a stroke of bad luck. The paradox of their situation is that their fall is accidental and expected at the same time. Lola crying at her late husband’s portrait out of despair and Noni, in a way, understanding the demands of the Nepali, both comprehend that they cannot escape the inherited responsibilities, the “generations worth of trouble [that] settled upon them” (265) or, in other words, their implication in the injustice of the past. When the GNLFF men come to occupy the grounds of the sisters’ residence Mon Ami, they “redefine the place-ness” of Lola and Noni’s home (Ferguson 46). As Ferguson analysed this transformation through Ashcroft’s understanding of the relationship between place and power, the squatters change the meaning of Mon Ami from a place associated with the oppression of the Nepali to the symbol of their freedom and power (46). This transformation of the meaning of the place is what unveils the implication of the two sisters in historical injustice. These characters, apart from representing wealthy Westernised Indians, are also arguably created to express that inheritance of this form – of culture, affluence, class – cannot be evaded. The revolution reveals their diachronic implication in the system of inequality. The idea of inheritance that is evoked through the collective pressure is imbued in many characters in this narrative but, to intensify its importance, it is also depicted in detail in the personal story of Sai – the character I will now move on to.

The Paradox of Orphanhood

Sai appears to be a character predestined to be displaced. Her father “had been brought up in a Zoroastrian charity for orphans” (Desai 31), while her mother was rejected by her father – the judge Patel – even before she was born, and “[w]hen Sai’s parents eloped, the family in Gujarat, feeling disgraced, disowned her mother” (31). To Sai’s mother, this relationship offered her a way to “escape the sadness of her past” (29). Having been rejected by her own family, it seemed that she was seeking a way to break away from her world completely. Sai’s parents made an unthinkable couple: “[t]he pilot and the student, the Zoroastrian and the Hindu, emerged from the tomb of the Mughal prince knowing that nobody other than themselves would be impressed by their great secular romance” (29). The description of their romance suggests displacement of both characters, their real and forced orphanhood, yet also their resilience to the inheritance of displacement. They recognise each other’s “loneliness” and seem foreign to one another, yet their shared education “with an eye to the West” allows them to be “free and brave, part of a modern nation in a modern world” (29). This modern and unique relationship was

created not only by their trauma but also through their intercultural upbringing. Sai's parents grew up with the generation influenced by "Baba Yaga" and "the troubles of Prince Ivan" amid the time of the so-called "Indo-USSR romance" (28–29). Although they stayed in touch through letters, Sai's parents physically left her long before they died in Moscow, where Sai's father was part of the Intercosmos-Program. Influenced by her parents' intercultural lives, Sai became an "orphan child of India's failing romance with the Soviets" (48), highlighting how her personal tragedy serves as a collective representation. She is a child of an unexpected union, and Sai's own orphanhood creates an echo or even an inheritance of her father's orphanhood and mother's separation from her family. This, paradoxically, is also symbolic of breaking away from inheritance, which is a trope that appeared first in her grandfather – a man who became a judge in spite of his father's criminal practices.

Similar to her parents' relationship, Sai's romance with Gyan is also described as "free, self-righteous, modern love" (Desai 157). Their romance is built on differences – in age, religion, class. Before the larger ethnic conflict causes a clash between the two, Gyan is able to see their similarities: "his own family story also led overseas [...]. They had more in common than they thought" (157). Gyan's great-grandfather, born to the family of people who came to Darjeeling from Nepal, "swore allegiance to the Crown, and off he went, the beginning of over a hundred years of family commitment to the wars of the English" (158). He was killed by the Turkish soldiers in Mesopotamia, his eldest son was killed by the Japanese in Burma and the next son died in the bombing in Florence (158–59). They never belonged to one place and, like Sai's parents, died far from home. The displacement is thus generational for both characters, illustrating its prevalence in India – a country whose colonial past underpins its legacy of displacement – and that the shared history has the potential to unite rather than divide different ethnic groups who suffered from foreign influence. In spite of their connection, the judge disapproves of Gyan, which implies that Sai's love is creating a distance between her and what is left of her family, the same way her parents' relationship led to her mother's displacement.

This separation from family – which occurs for different reasons in each generation yet continues to run in the family – appears to represent attempts to reject the past and, perhaps, also suggests the possibility of changing the future. At the time of the narrative, Sai's perception of the past is formed through the image of her grandfather. Although already an orphan, she seems to realise that "[s]he'd have to propel herself into the future by whatever means possible or she'd be trapped forever in a place whose time had already passed" (82). To Sai, living with her grandfather implies living in the past. In contrast to her grandfather and the sisters Lola and Noni, she does not reject her Indian identity because of her westernised education. Because of her ability to see beyond the inherited differences, Sai can be read "as Desai's narrative consciousness, as she attempts to draw parallels between minority subjects across nation-states, in the spirit of Srikanth's networked consciousness and Naipaul's work" (Sabo 385). It can be argued that the relative freedom Sai exhibits in this novel also represents her potential for transculturality. If we see

transculturality as a way of existing beyond “the entire cultural realm” (Epstein 332), we can recognise that her ability to transcend ethnic differences and the colonial past that influence yet never determine her future suggests a transcultural formation of identity. By completely leaving the past behind she would be repeating the fate of her many ancestors, creating yet another paradox in the narrative. However, the future of this character is not clear, and it does not need to be: the reader is left to only speculate on how the conflict may eventually affect her, which, in a way, reflects the fluidity of her identity and endless possibilities of its further evolution.

Inheriting Displacement

The power of inheritance in this narrative is depicted well through the character of the judge Jemubhai. When his granddaughter Sai first meets him, she notices that “he seemed not to have travelled forward in time but far back. Harking to the pre-historic, in attendance upon infinity, he resembled a creature of the Galapagos staring over the ocean” (Desai 37). In this description, one may see someone old yet possessing a strong desire to appear important in order to mask one’s own sense of shame and humiliation. The shame, in his case, refers to his social class, family, culture, race, and, most importantly, inability to belong. The sense of shame is one of the reactions to an emotional and possibly traumatic realisation of the displacement of the self. As has already been noted in the analyses of *In Our Mad and Furious City* and *Home Fire*, shame is an emotion authors often deploy to illustrate the traumatic impact of the past. The judge’s awareness of the self as something negative is first depicted through his memory of leaving India for Britain. When he boards the ship, his father’s goodbye overwhelms Jemubhai with a shame of his family: “Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn’t adulterated by another, contradictory emotion” (42). The fact that love for his parents is overpowered by embarrassment may find its roots in his childhood. Putting every effort into his son’s education, “Jemubhai’s father owned a modest business procuring false witnessses to appear in court” (64). It was he, however, who envisioned this future for his son – his career as a judge. He wanted his son to become a complete opposite, a different class, leading him towards something one may see as *a reversal of inheritance*.

From the moment of boarding that ship, everything related to his family and, without realising it, to a part of his self, too, is filled with humiliation and disgust. Even the food his mother lovingly packed for her son becomes a source of anger, and he throws it away as an “[u]ndignified love, Indian love, stinking, unesthetic love” (43). What he also realises is that he cannot simply throw away what is part of him: “The smell of dying bananas retreated, oh, but now that just left the stink of fear and loneliness perfectly exposed” (43). The food, here, signifies his cultural identity – the union of ethnicity, class, and religion. By throwing it away, Jemu rejects his cultural identity, anticipating that his new life has no place for it. It is not his own difference he fears and is ashamed of at this point while travelling among *his* people. What makes him different is the inheritance – all the elements of his

identity that are social and perceived as inherited. This inner conflict appearing at the beginning of his journey exposes that his cultural past is what he cannot avoid but can attempt to conceal from everyone else but himself. As Aparajita Nanda examines Jemubhai's inner conflict, she notes that his "delusional" sense of superiority gained with emigration eventually "reveals and reinstates his weak, marginalized position" (123). Ultimately, he embodies "colonial prejudices, without really acknowledging the damage done by this attitude, and turns it against his own people" (124).

Starting as a fear of the difference of his class, Jemu's sense of shame of his self progresses even further as he is faced with his racial difference in Britain. Realising his difference, "he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar" (Desai 45). In this example, he adopts and accepts the perspective of the other. The sense of shame is exacerbated to the extreme point where "he could barely let any of himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence" (45). This obsession with making his true self invisible is not temporary: "To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly" (45). The author describes the dehumanising effects of his own rejection of his ethnic identity: "Eventually he felt barely human at all, leaped when touched on the arms as if from an unbearable intimacy" and "his voice ran back and out as he dissolved into tears of self-pity at the casual affection" (46). In efforts to conceal his difference, he rejects himself so much that the idea of being seen and heard as a human being becomes almost unbearable to Jemu. Although it develops to extremes, his fear of being seen is not unjustified. On the contrary, it is supported by a traumatic incident that occurred in Britain. The author offers us a flashback of an unforgettable experience, which may suggest its traumatic nature. Jemu once witnessed an Indian boy being beaten and kicked, but "the future judge, walking by, on his way home with a pork pie for his dinner – what had he done? He hadn't said anything. He hadn't done anything. He hadn't called for help. He'd turned and fled, run up to his retired room and sat there" (229). While he is not attacked himself, this experience that haunts him throughout his life is the survivor's shame, an emotion that, according to Ruth Leys, "most defines the post-traumatic state" (147). At the same time, what he witnessed in that incident reflects his relationship with Britain – his cultural identity is 'beaten' and destroyed. The Jemu who comes back to India is filled with bitterness – the feeling that later infuses the judge and his wife's relationship: there was "bitterness" as "they belonged to this emotion more than to themselves, experienced rage with enough muscle in it for entire nations coupled in hate" (Desai 190). The rejection of the self, exacerbated by traumatic inner conflict caused by his displacement in Britain forces him "to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen" (122). Here, the narrative describes how Jemu's physical displacement and alienation become an inner process as well, for it is impossible to erase an

indispensable part of the self. It is possible that at this point his inner crisis of displacement – the crisis that never gets resolved – reaches its apogee. Displacement seems to be imbued into every aspect of his identity, as it appears that “he acquired a fearsome reputation for his speech that seemed to belong to no language at all, and for his face like a mask that conveyed something beyond human fallibility” (70). A foreigner in Britain and now in his homeland as well, he seems to exist outside of all languages and emotions. More importantly, this apparent placelessness indicates the obscurity of his roots and origins.

After decades in alienation, since he despised his wife and disowned his own daughter, the judge finds a family in his granddaughter Sai. Yet, the narrative presents this change as a trauma trigger, making Sai bring the past with its memories and pain into her grandfather’s present. Not only a reminder of the family he chose to abandon, she is also a token of the past that makes him think “of his own journeys, of his own arrivals and departures, from places far in the past” (Desai 40). If there is any guilt that eats him for being ashamed of his parents or beating his wife, in Sai he sees a chance to break the cycle through “something in the past that had survived, returned, that might, without his paying too much attention, redeem him” (229). What Sai represents here is more than family. As Desai suggests, she is “familiar”, with “the same accent and manners” of “a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, an estranged Indian living in India”, continuing “[t]he journey he had started so long ago” (230). Here, Desai points at the recognition of the judge’s displacement, suggesting that Sai mirrors his own past tragedy. Yet, as a potentially transcultural character, Sai may also be showing a way beyond the limits of displacement and towards transcending the unbelonging. Her arrival creates a balance in “his unconscious”, imbalanced by the hate he felt towards her mother and grandmother (230). At the same time, Sai triggers his past trauma, and every feeling young Jemu felt when he left “his ancestral home of Piphit” and “journeyed to the Bombay dock and then sailed to Liverpool” (40), now comes back to him in full intensity, “vividly, cruelly” (41). To highlight the traumatic influence of displacement, Desai possibly offers an example of narrative memory here by telling the story of Jemubhai Patel’s experience in England.

There is nothing nostalgic or pleasant about reminiscing about that period of the judge’s life: “He was silly to be upset by Sai’s arrival, to allow it to trigger this revisitation of the past” (42). The past that comes back to him is more than a memory, it is painful: “When he thought of his past, he began, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with a burning sensation” (64). The utter repulsion that the British displayed in Jemu’s presence that led him to believe it was caused by his skin odour forced him “to wash obsessively” in an attempt to remove or conceal his smell, trying to make himself invisible (45). His trauma repetition comes back as burning and itching, for “emotions and physical sensations that were imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as memories but as disruptive physical reactions in the present” (van der Kolk 204). His skin – symbolic of his otherness – bears the weight of trauma. This repetition of the physical pain emphasises the traumatic

nature of his experience in Britain. Infused with a sense of embarrassment of the self, shame for his family, and alienation in Britain, the flashbacks of the past are both traumatic and inevitable. That journey, the very creation of his displacement would always be part of him: "A journey once begun, has no end. [...] the monsters of his unconscious prowled, awaiting the time when they would rise and be proven real [...]" (Desai 122). Here, the text suggests that those moments continue to exist in his unconscious mind and await their triggers to come back and strike him with shame, anger, embarrassment or, in other words, trauma repetition. At the same time, Sai's appearance and her relationship with Gyan create a parallel story to illustrate "the complex relationship between personal lives and political history" (Jay 128).

Through experiences of unbelonging Desai also creates a parallel between the judge and Gyan, which she deploys as another trauma trigger for Jemubhai. When the judge asks Gyan about his favourite poets, and Gyan's embarrassment – since he does not read poetry – reflects one incident from the judge's past. In 1942, Jemu recited Sir Walter Scott at an examination and halfway through the poem he realised that the examiners were laughing at him because of his Gujarati accent. Looking at Gyan's awkwardness as if into a mirror, he furiously at Gyan for his "unease" and reminding him of the past: "Soon all the judge had worked so hard to separate would soften and envelop him in its nightmare" (Desai 124). By humiliating Gyan and widening the distance between them, the judge instead feels closer to the past he has tried to forget (Spielman 76). This internalised anger may be Desai's way of depicting internalised racial inferiority, for the judge's own sense of embarrassment seen in his outrage is brought to the surface despite all the effort he put into repressing it. The return of the judge's trauma is again described as a bodily experience: "an old emotion came [...] that was not merely a feeling, but also a taste, like fever" (Desai 119–20). In the world of the judge, Gyan feels a similar placelessness that the judge experienced among the British. At this moment one also notices a parallel between the shame that was imbued in Jemu by the British and Sai's sense of shame imposed on her by the English nuns at the convent. Spanked by Sister Caroline "so that she without shame quickly acquired some", she was taught at the convent that "cake was better than *laddoos*" or that "English was better than Hindi" (33). Just like her grandfather, Sai was raised with a conflicting sense of inner displacement, experiencing forced westernisation. Although she appropriates English culture and sensibilities in many ways (Loh 311), unlike her grandfather, she did not end up rejecting her heritage and returned to him and thus her roots to signify a "redemption" and to challenge "the superiority of Englishness" for the judge with her being (Spielman 78). Her being, thus, redeems the inheritance.

To the judge, displacement offers an escape from the traumatic past, with its fear and humiliation. When he settles in Kalimpong, the author captures his understanding of the conscious choice to be displaced, living "with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language" (Desai 32). His displacement is inevitable and, at this point, chosen. He is isolated in the

house where “[t]ime might have died” (20), which is similar to the fictive rootlessness Salman Rushdie’s Golden family attempt to embody by settling in the house that knows no laws of time. The judge is also surrounded by other displaced individuals, from Sai, Noni and Lola to even his own cook whose son is an illegal worker in the US. The displacement in the cook’s family is also generational: “This way of leaving your family for work had condemned them over several generations to have their hearts always in other places, their minds thinking about people elsewhere; they could never be in a single existence at one time” (342). Displacement that cultivates despair, anger, and conflicts pervades each character and each layer of the story in its own way. As Paul Jay describes it, the “literal journeys [of Desai’s characters] are linked to westernization, so that the experience of westernization becomes itself a kind of journey” (Jay 126). The novel illuminates the inevitability of displacement in the postcolonial world decades after gaining independence. It will always be part of history and, as this narrative may be meant to suggest, the history that is part of the present and future, the one that has shaped the different collective identities of the present India, Pakistan, Bangladesh will have its effects on the decades to come.

Conclusion

There is an parallel between the judge’s opinions and the development of the ethnic conflict in the narrative. In his last conversation with an old friend, the judge says: “The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind” (Desai 227). As this analysis shows, the narrative discloses the exploitation of the past conflicts to ignite tension. While the present does not really change the past, some actions may intensify the sentiments and emotions attached to it, as the novel shows through the enhancement of the power of the collective mind. Some actions can even force one to relive the past trauma as we see in the character of the judge Jemubhai Patel. While nothing may change the devastating effects of the Indian partition, this cultural trauma is not a wound one can heal from. Its effects are devastating but the novel shows us how a traumatic past may be used and abused for political purposes in the present, leading to new tragedies and new forms of displacement, making, this way, an important point about accepting and transcending the past. Perhaps, this way, the novel also underscores a small degree of freedom that groups and especially their leaders possess when it comes to choosing whether to repress, forget, transcend, or exploit the past trauma in the present.

It is curious that both the judge Jemubhai Patel and his granddaughter Sai remain relatively distant when it comes to expressing ethno-political sentiments in this narrative. Their detachment from the family and culture makes them outsiders in the conflict. These displaced characters cannot fully belong to a single collective identity. In their own identity crises, they are safe from losing their displaced selves to the power of the group. Displacement underlies every family history, every group in this novel – from the judge, his daughter, and granddaughter to their neighbours’

daughters who live in the UK and the US and the cook's son Biju working in the US. There is, however, one contrast between the judge and Sai in their displacement. While trauma and displacement taught the judge to reject and despise all things Indian, Sai demonstrates an ability to transcend the differences, as it is shown in her love for Gyan, this way, indicating a hint of transculturality in her identity formation.

The relationship between personal and collective identities is distinctly depicted through Gyan on the one side on the conflict – and the affluent sisters Noni and Lola on the other. To Gyan, blending in with the collective unconscious – their trauma and humiliation – and finding a cause, an achievable meaning in life is a way to gain importance. Although it may be generating violence, it enhances his sense of personal self with the collective ethnic identity. The problem with this enhancement of personal identity with the collective cause is that it requires an enemy, as the perspective of large-group psychology suggests – a generator of their collective anger, someone to take the blame – and this role falls on Sai and the judge. To many other dissatisfied members of the liberation front, the generational guilt falls on Lola and Noni. To Lola, in turn, their watchman becomes the embodiment of the violent men taking away their riches. By making them – these individual characters with their own hopes and fears – responsible for generations of injustice and trauma, the narrative reveals how boundaries between personal and collective blur during ethnic and political conflicts, how complex the aspects of diachronic implication in historical injustice can be, and how social aspects of each person's identity make one carry the burden that should otherwise be shared by several generations, multiple groups, and many actors of political and religious power.

In the following section, I examine another collective tragedy of the 1980s. Padma Viswanathan's novel *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* shifts the focus to the Indian diaspora in Canada, centring on the 1986 terrorist attack that claimed the lives of the Air India flight passengers. My analysis will focus on grief while also addressing themes of ethnic conflicts, diachronic implication, and primary human vulnerability.

4.2 Personal and Cultural Grief in Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* (2014)

“How many generations does it take to achieve fluency in the language of grief?”

– Padma Viswanathan, *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*

On the 14th of July 2022, Ripudaman Singh Malik, who was acquitted of bombing the Air India flight 182, was shot dead in his car right outside his clothing shop in Surrey, British Columbia (“Man Acquitted of Bombing 1985 Air India Flight Shot Dead in Canada”). Pronounced not guilty of plotting the bomb explosion that took

the lives of 329 people, he was killed 17 years after being acquitted and 37 years after allegedly plotting and executing the terrorist attack. The incident, which will no doubt find its place in the endless chain of ethnic tensions that began long before the above-mentioned terrorist attack, once again reminds us of the difficulty or, perhaps, the impossibility of resolving collective cultural trauma, of the problem of achieving justice for the departed – those who cannot be there to demand it, and of the fine line between the personal and the collective when it comes to ethnic conflicts. Initially framed “as a ‘non-Canadian’ tragedy” (Chakraborty, “Feature Section: Air India Flight 182” 175), the bombing and its consequences have raised the questions of terror and justice, collective trauma, and grievable lives which were reflected in, though limited, scholarly work and finally in Padma Viswanathan’s 2014 novel *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*. Padma Viswanathan’s novel deals with the consequences of the Air India tragedy by delving into the issues of personal and cultural trauma and grief. By depicting personal perspectives of the bereaved, her narrative provides insights into the blurred lines between personal and collective tragedies. As the novel offers a critique of how various groups respond to ethnic conflicts, it shows how collective crimes become one’s ethnic responsibility and, as I argue in this chapter, frames the issue of implicated subjects.

In his work which involves interviewing the victims’ families and writing a book about how they process grief and mourn the losses, the narrator of Padma Viswanathan’s novel, Ashwin Rao, aims at achieving an understanding of his own loss: “I had not recovered. Did anyone, from so severe a blow? Perhaps not, but I had, in some way, stopped my life. [...] How or why did some absorb loss into life’s floodplains, while others erected a dam?” (Viswanathan 41). This implies that by studying their trauma, he is forced to revisit and understand his own, and the narrative expresses it by portraying the links that can so naturally be created between the bereaved even decades after the tragedy. The narrative, this way, represents an invisible connection created by collective trauma. Not only is the effect of Ashwin’s own loss perceived intensely, but it is also enhanced by the losses of others: “I heard voices. Yes, they rolled in on the whisky, the sunset, my unselfconscious grief, my incontrollable self-pity, undeniable and loud: a multitude of tiny, tinny voices in chorus” (75). By going to the trial, which takes place twenty years after the tragedy, and meeting the other families, Ashwin allows his loss and trauma to transform from personal to collective.

Going back to Canada to attend the trial forces Ashwin to revisit the trauma and reconnect with his past self – the one that survived a loss – and with the memory of the people he lost in the tragedy: “I had avoided Air India on my last trip, but this time, I made myself fly Delhi-Heathrow-Montreal, reversing the route of all those dear departed and retracing my own of so many years ago” (10). Writing about this experience, as the character of this novel does, makes Ashwin’s fictional book within *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* “the site of trauma” (Caruth 109), since he relives his own loss by retracing and analysing it in his book. The aim of Ashwin’s work is to shine light onto the effects of trauma that remain deep a generation later.

Through the narrator, the novel criticises the lack of work on the impact of this tragedy. While it offers a critique of the handling of the tragedy and the racism involved, this narrative also attempts to provide a better understanding of the loss and grief, of the personal and the collective.

Ethnic Tensions: Who Are the Guilty?

By delving into the nature of the ethnic tensions leading up to the Air India tragedy, the author not only offers a critique of the strength of ethnic ties and their abuse for justifying violence but also provides the reader with a deep personal perspective. This personal perspective is necessary for addressing the issue of implicated subjects. Before I dive into the issue of implicated subjects in this novel, it is important to examine how the present narrative deals with the ethnic conflicts since they are fundamental to the issue in question.

From the perspective of Ashwin Rao, we see the exact acts of violence directed towards an ethnic group – the Sikhs. The first wave of violence the narrator describes in detail is the one that followed the death of Indira Gandhi – her assassination by her Sikh bodyguards. Ashwin acts as a witness in the pogroms when on his way home he sees young men attacking the Sikhs: “I saw a tall gentlemen dragged out of another bus by his shirt, spectacles askew” (Viswanathan 24). Not only do the streets become unsafe, but the narrative also describes how their homes become the target. People are not attacked “randomly” but instead “those batons of smoke were rising only from the [Sikh] addresses on the lists”, “Sikh-occupied homes, Sikh-owned businesses” (26). These attacks are described as “[s]tate-sanctioned. Not officially, but” (27). It seems that the violence directed at the Sikhs was well organised, with “unemployed young men” hired by the Congress Party “to enlarge the mobs, 500 rupees a pop. To employ professional mourners is no new thing; to direct them to express their grief for their dear, departed leader with gleeful barbarism – this we had not seen before” (27). Although it is employed ironically here, the use of the term ‘grief’ is important since this feeling – an initial response to Indira Gandhi’s passing – is abused to direct the emotions of her supporters to ethnic violence instead. While the narrative continuously keeps clarity when it comes to the ethnic groups, i.e., collective identities involved in each wave of the conflict, the personal perspective enhances the perception of violence and its effects. The images of the violence he witnesses remain with Ashwin. He vividly remembers seeing their neighbour burnt alive as the mob cheers and laughs at him suffering, “seeing the man shake in his own flames” (28). While he manages to save the neighbour family by hiding them in his parents’ house, the reader is reminded that the narrator, at the same time, is the witness of horrific brutality imposed on a certain ethnic group.

An insight into the characters’ first reactions to the Air India bombing – their grief, and the subsequent development of their acceptance of the event, the mourning process – depicts how the boundaries between the personal and the collective

disappear. Personal grief, which causes anger that would supposedly be directed at the bombers only, is transformed into hate directed at the whole ethnicity. The first response of several characters is to project their anger onto their common enemy – Pakistan: “Since day one they’ve had it for us. Show India who’s who. Let us give them jihad!” (107). Venkat, who lost his wife and son in the tragedy, joins in on these accusations and argues: “Pakistan [...] was born in a deal with the white devil. They are paying for it ever since” (107). These words reveal signs of inherited, old trauma of the Indian Partition, which echoes similar nationalistic rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter which explores Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*. It is not their sudden realisation that Pakistan is the enemy. Instead, the accusations directed towards Pakistan are described as “stock monologues”, part of the collective idea inflamed by the tragedy: “Daily life depended on the suppression of a person’s worst fears. Bereavement kicked open the doors to let the demons swell, stretch their tongues, show their fiery eyes” (107). Although none of the characters personally witnessed the Indian Partition, the rhetoric depicted in the novel reflects the intensity of their inherited cultural trauma or, in other words, chosen trauma, which comes back in full force with the terrorist attack.

As soon as it becomes known from the news that the bomb was planted by Sikh extremists, Venkat changes his statements, angered by the police’s inability to properly respond to his personal yet also cultural tragedy. All he says to the police is that everything is clear, “It was the Sikhs”, “Hang them high!” (126). The hate he expresses in those first moments never abandons Venkat. Even decades later Venkat “monologued without restraint on the Sikhs: on forcible reconversion, mass expulsion, jail” (212). The tragedy takes away his family and as the result of experiencing this very personal loss he devotes that part of his identity – the bereaved part – to a collective identity. To be specific, he starts, though secretly, to support the Hindu nationalists: “They controlled education, so that school history books told a story of a past India remarkably similar to the India they wanted to create: valorous, prosperous, unitary, Hindu” (230). Venkat’s grief makes him live for a collective cause: “a consummately modern ideal of a nation-state unified by an apocryphal identity resurrected for people who didn’t know the difference. A key tenet: elimination of the Muslims” (230). In contrast to Venkat, Ashwin does not nurture grief in his soul to the point of pure ethnic hate. Even when describing the terrorists on trial, he is able to distinguish between the personal and the collective: “I would name them, but what’s in the name? I try to block their faces, but they rise in my mind’s eye. Specimens. Bad examples of their community, their race, their species. Bad men” (5). Through these two characters very different in their attitudes towards collective grief and group violence the narrative exposes the influence of collective identity. Caught up in the nationalist rhetoric supported by his personal grief, Venkat’s worldview is shaped only in terms of collective identities. He perceives the Sikhs as a single entity that is forever to blame for his and his people’s pain.

There is a parallel between Venkat and the students of Ashwin Rao whose Muslim parents are killed by Hindus (whom Venkat, in turn, supports). The narrative

illustrates how the young boys' minds are shaped by the trauma of loss and violence they witness. Disturbed by their understandable recklessness, Ashwin comments: "Terrorists in the making. Suicide bombers, ready-to-use. This was six months after 9/11. Their career options couldn't have been better advertised" (231). Ashwin's comments suggest his understanding of the effects of collective trauma. He has seen it before and understands that whenever these tensions began, they do not end with the two boys he manages to rescue. While this might seem a very specific example, the anger of the young students generated by their grief, in a sense, forces one to reflect on the roots of ethnic violence and extremism. Moreover, the direct references to ethnic identities in the dialogues illustrate how the idea of collective identity – be it Hindu or Sikh – is strengthened through grief.

To emphasise the generational problem of the ethnic tensions, the novel draws on the generational injustice that Sikhs have endured as "[f]irst-class fighters, second-class citizens" (240), belonging to "inferior races", used by "the white man" to fight wars but never let into their world (240). It describes how an ethnic identity has been formed through history: "Each humiliation grew the Sikh's pride. Each galvanized a small subset into quests for purity and self-rule. Each formed a rough link on history's rattling chains" (241). This way, the narrative urges one to consider a collective identity – the Sikh identity in this case – as the result of history: "When I think on the Air India disaster, I hear the chain of history rattle. Its links are loops. Loops have holes" (242). Reminding the reader that identity is always in the process of development, the novel highlights the links between the past and the present: "The Air India bombing was not simply the result of some limited if collective murderous rage. That rage was fed by a larger sense of outrage, resulting from the under-noticed, under-reported Delhi pogroms" (235). This way, the narrative depicts a chain of events – pogroms, military operation, terrorist attack, an assassination – where one violence follows or causes the next, where a sense of collective grief and ethnic violence prevails in the collective unconsciousness and survives through time and through generations: "Planes were going to be bombed, that's what they said, payback for decades of atrocities" (68). In a sense, the novel depicts these tragedies as unavoidable effects of the repressed and ungrieved past, suggesting the impossibility of resolving the collective trauma, and it does this even more by framing the problem of the trial.

The trial of the terrorists who allegedly planned the attack is heavily criticised in this narrative. It is not so much the acquittal that is criticised as the justice system's failure to speak the language of personal grief. To those who suffered personal loss, no court can resolve personal pain: "I *hated* those men. I might gladly have punished them with my own hands [...] No government in the world possessed a moral scepter weighty enough to flog these puny fellows" (5). No amount of justice can relieve the trauma of loss. Perhaps, this way the novel suggests that on the collective level, it is impossible to comprehend the depth of the personal tragedy. The perspective of Ashwin Rao – the character able to distinguish between the personal and the collective even when drowning in personal pain – suggests a critique of the verdict:

"I was hardly even disappointed. Who Are the Guilty? [...] They could never, to my way of thinking, be so guilty as an elected government perpetrating violence and death on its own people" (348). The trial is not about achieving justice through capital punishment or killing the killers, as Ashwin contemplates in the moments of severe pain caused by his forced revisitation of the past trauma during the trial. As the philosopher Giorgio Agamben pointed out, "law is not directed toward the establishment of justice" (18) and "judgement aims neither to punish nor to extol, neither to establish justice nor to prove the truth" (19). As he concludes, "punishment does not follow from judgement, but rather that judgement is itself punishment" (19). With this perspective in mind, it is possible to see the trial, as it is depicted in the narrative, as punishment in itself, and to understand what the judgement means for the bereaved.

It is apparent that the judgement stands far from personal grief. What the novel may be attempting to convey this way is that while the trial cannot resolve personal trauma, it offers a way to acknowledge and accept the losses that were initially practically ignored by the Canadian government. As Judith Butler argued, "[o]nly under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear" (*Frames of War* 14). Neglecting the mourning of the losses for almost twenty years, this way, reflects a derealisation of the value of the lives of a whole ethnic minority of Canadian citizens. While there is an unmeasurable degree of personal pain that the characters feel and express when describing the terrorist attack, there is a much bigger issue when it comes to recognising the collective grief of Canadian citizens of Indian descent. In the context of the bombing, the narrator speculates that terrorists "never represent the will of a majority. Popular governments, by contrast, are supposed to. Those five or ten Khalistani fools who engineered the bomb plot: they killed some hundreds of people, and I'm willing to wager no more than that many people cheered their actions" (Viswanathan 349). When his counterpart in grief, Venkat, suffers a breakdown at work, he screams something "about betrayal and misplaced faith" (190). Although Venkat is clear about his hatred of the Sikhs in general, his never-ending grief is supported by the fact that the mourning of this tragedy is personal and cultural rather than egalitarian. I will dive into the issue of grief in more detail on the following pages but, at this point, I would like to finish with the argument that this novel conveys the idea that it is this personalisation of grief and the delay of the judgement that only help to reinforce the sense of ethnic hate.

Implicated Subjects and Collective Responsibility

Through trauma, loss, and grief, the narrative draws the reader's attention to the personal, though indirect, responsibility for the collective events. Ashwin's life, as the narrator assures us, is hit three times by collective trauma: "I am a man thrice-struck by lightning. The first strike, the pogroms, came close. The second, the bombing, struck home. [...] Finally, the third bolt had struck, but at a distance. It didn't kill me, but it deadened me, for about fourteen months" (Viswanathan 222).

The distance here refers to the lack of his personal involvement in the strike that inflamed another ethnic conflict. None of his family members or neighbours are involved this time. It is his Muslim students who come to him, not asking, but telling him that he must help them escape. He owes it to them, for their family was killed by Hindus: "Killed by Hindus, Professor Rao. Like you" (227). His ethnic identity makes Ashwin Rao responsible for a personal yet also collective tragedy of other people. The choice of words in the almost accusatory remark of Ashwin's students highlights the figure of the implicated subject in this narrative. The implicated subject, as Michael Rothberg defined it, is an analytical category of the subject "who participates in injustice, but in indirect ways" (20). While having no clear role, the implicated subject is implicated in the conditions that contribute to violence. By agreeing to help his students, Ashwin, perhaps unconsciously, understands his implication in the system that allowed ethnic violence and accepts their demand of his responsibility.

This idea of indirect responsibility, through collective identity and through generations, is presented in other characters as well. Believing that the West or Canada in particular is responsible for his daughter's unhappiness, Seth sees the role he played in making migration part of his family identity, thus influencing all younger generations: "His mother had had it right when she said her greatest regret was letting him emigrate. It opened up the flood, in their family. Now half of his siblings' children also were located abroad" (Viswanathan 251). What causes a much deeper emotional crisis in Seth is the news about his Shivashakti guru. The holiest person – the guru of the people that, he believes, helped him cope with the trauma of loss is involved in a scandal. Understanding his role in celebrating the man who has ruined lives, Seth begins to question everything in his life. He thinks about generations of his fellow Shivashakti devotees, comparing them to numerous Catholic priests who got away with their crimes against the indigenous people in Canada. Thus, the implication problem this narrative frames is not culture-specific. He suddenly remembers his old neighbour Francine, an indigenous woman, and ponders: "He hadn't given her a thought when all the news was breaking on these generations-old traumas, dating to when government officials seized children from their homes, putting them in the care of lecherous priests who beat them for speaking their mother tongues" (315–16). Implication, as Rothberg argues, can be "difficult to grasp" because it is "frequently rendered obscure by forms of psychic and social denial" (8). In this emotional, spiritual, and existential spiral, Seth, too, refuses to believe it was possible for anyone to know about the crimes of their guru: "But systematically? Surely he would have known" (Viswanathan 316). This difficulty of seeing or accepting one's position as an implicated subject, I argue, is due to the power of the collective unconscious, which is blinding: "Perhaps he had been infected by their view, over time" (319). Neither victims nor perpetrators, implicated subjects carry a certain amount of responsibility. In this particular example, collective grief enhances people's vulnerability, making them more susceptible to

succumbing to the power of their religious leader and being implicated in his abuse of that power.

The difficulty of positioning oneself as an implicated subject is illustrated most profoundly through the narrator. Ashwin points out that being a witness of ethnic violence does not make him implicated or obliged to write about it: “*I didn’t see anything*” and “I would not pretend to understand mass murder because I passed it in a moving car” (232). Although he attempts to distance himself from the third strike – the traumatic event that did not affect him directly – this form of denial does not protect him for long. Through his own rage, Ashwin manages to see the signs of “shame over [his] inaction” (232), or in other words, understand his implication.

This figure of the implicated subject in Viswanathan’s narrative also involves inheritance of this position. When Sikhs are being attacked following Indira Gandhi’s assassination, Ashwin’s parents first exhibit similar forms of denial of their implication as Ashwin would notice in himself years later. His father is “insulted, angry” at Ashwin’s idea that the government – the government that he has always supported – sanctioned the killings (28). However, Ashwin and his father finally take action, go to protest against the violence, and persuade their Sikh neighbours to hide in their house from the mob. For Ashwin’s father, this becomes “a seminal moment in his life”, opening up “a new reality” to him: “He wasn’t sure whether it had been hidden from him or he had been hiding from it” (30). While he carries responsibility as an implicated subject, this statement also suggests the role political structures play in creating the narrative of events that does not expose the inequality.

Ashwin’s mother, on the other hand, exhibits extreme forms of denial of her and their collective implication in the events. After the neighbours safely return to their home, she maintains “that practically none of what we had experienced had happened” (30). It is apparent that the awareness of the reality is there: “When we asked if she didn’t see what was happening on the street, she said we had told her to stay away from the windows. None of it was false, but all was incomplete, and inarguable” (30). It is not so much the denial of the event but rather an attempt to deny one’s own, though indirect, implication that the author demonstrates in this example.

Through the perspective of Ashwin as a therapist, the novel also frames implication as a collective problem. Ashwin claims that the events have affected all: “I saw people in the course of my regular therapeutic work who had been implicated in the violence, and were haunted” (31). There were also people “whose guilt and disillusion were eating into their livelihoods and relationships” (31), who were forced to reconsider the social structures they have been a part of. More important, however, is the role of the government in this context, and its claim is “that we had not seen what we saw” (31). What the novel emphasises here is that through denial of implication or denial of direct responsibility for violence, the government attempts to deny mourning to those who suffered loss, deny any acknowledgement

of the losses and, thus, also lives, and erase or conceal the chain of violent events that will continue to happen across continents and generations nonetheless.

The analytical category of the implicated subject examined in these specific examples also allows us to see the bigger picture this narrative creates. In his essay on this tragedy, Fred Ribkoff addressed a very important question: “What if, as is the case here, the Canadian listener is directly or indirectly – as a member of the culture responsible for allowing the disaster to happen and the mishandling of the case and those most affected – also the victimizer?” (513). The role Canada played in this tragedy could no longer be denied after the “final report of the Commission of Inquiry on 17 June 2010”, which “concluded that a ‘cascading series of errors’ by the Canadian government and official agencies had contributed to the Air India tragedy” (Chakraborty, “Official Apology, Creative Remembrances, and Management of the Air India Tragedy” 111). Setting aside the undeniably important role of the government in the mishandling of the tragedy and its failure to achieve justice, I would argue that on the collective level Canadians rather fall under the category of implicated subjects than victimisers. By referring to the Canadian response as “betrayal” (Viswanathan 190), Viswanathan’s novel draws attention to this implication, the indirect involvement of Canadians in dismissing the extent of this collective trauma and thus hindering cultural, transcultural, and universal mourning.

United by Collective Trauma

In its portrayal of collective trauma, *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* depicts how the trauma of loss creates invisible yet perceptible links between the bereaved. As the narrator assures us, he is interested in “the bereaved, the others like myself, those who had lost the people most important to them” (Viswanathan 5). Understanding that twenty years have not erased the pain of loss, Ashwin seeks to comprehend the trauma that others like him suffered: “*This* was why I had come, I realized, to find out how these people had coped up. Not only *how* as in *how well*, but rather *by what means* did they go on” (6). This desire to connect, as mentioned earlier, reflects the author’s critique of the way the tragedy was handled by the Canadian government, of the way those 329 people represented the problem of unbelonging, of being nobody’s tragedy. It may be possible to retain this distance to the tragedy when one evades the voices of those who suffered loss. In her narrator, Viswanathan establishes a listener who wants to hear, who wants to know, who was supposed to be there for these people from day one.

To childless Ashwin, his little niece who was on that flight was like his own child. She was not simply part of the future generation of Indo-Canadians, she “was not a saint. She was not a future unrecognized Canadian asset. [...] She was just a child. [...] my child, oh, my lost, my smiling child” (80). His conversations with Brinda who lost her friend Sundar, Venkat’s son, in the tragedy with time go beyond the context of mourning. Ashwin becomes her therapist, unofficially, arguably out of a sincere desire to help but in truth to heal himself by compensating for his own

loss. Seeing in her a “reincarnation” of his niece or “Aisha’s figurative re-embodiment”, he finds a way to experience “small tender wellings of paternal feeling”, which are “in some way serving [his] lost little girl” (158). He believes she could be his “way of *changing [his] life to preserve the bond?*” (158), in other words, to keep the connection to his niece by fulfilling his role of a caring uncle in his relationship with Brinda. Having suffered loss, he is afraid to go through it again with Brinda, forming a family-like attachment with her and her father Seth and beginning to rely on this connection: “They both would leave me. I would have no one” (298). Through this connection, he manages to cope with the loss yet also puts himself in danger of suffering it again.

Without Seth’s presence in his life, Ashwin begins to feel emptier and constantly thinks of ways to stay connected: “We would become friends – real friends. Over time, his daughters would be like nieces to me” (188). When trying to reconnect with the memory of his father for support that he lacks in his work and life, Ashwin already senses some similarity with Seth: “Appa’s voice gained strength and intimacy in my mind, sounding increasingly like Seth’s” (235). This sense of closeness through their shared grief appears between Ashwin and Seth first as Ashwin admits that he, too, lost loved ones in that tragedy: “I distinctly felt that my pain was filtering through him, and that he had no sense of how vulnerable this made him” (54). Complete strangers who only met through Ashwin’s efforts to narrate or create a ‘site of trauma’, they are instantly drawn to each other through the tragic link: “He hadn’t moved, nor had I, and yet it was as though some column connecting our chests was collapsing, drawing us toward an unseen centre” (54). Throughout the narrative, we witness this development of a family-like bond between Ashwin and Seth, as well as between Ashwin and Brinda. This dynamic offers a better understanding of not only compensations for loss but also trauma as a collective condition.

The narrative also uses trauma to generate a connection between Ashwin and Venkat. Venkat trusts Ashwin with the information about his support for the Hindu nationalists, knowing, sensing that Ashwin can understand, if not approve, his motives: “He saw in me his reflection. They wrecked his life; they wrecked mine” (Viswanathan 233). This awareness of similarity is mutual, as Ashwin writes: “I feared him too much. Not him, exactly. My similarity to him” (219). Conversations with Venkat, who appears to be and act so different from Ashwin, reveal an affinity between these characters: “The superficialities of his barren life were so close to my own that they brought all my despair to the surface” (219). There is an inerasable link established between these characters through sharing the stories of loss. Although Ashwin releases Venkat in writing, “the feel of him” remains, along with “his loneliness” and “emptiness” (70). Here, again it is apparent that through his attempt to investigate the impact of the tragedy on others, Ashwin begins to recognise the resemblance of his suffering to those people he would otherwise never connect with. This way, he begins to perceive his personal loss as collective trauma. Although these characters are completely different in their nature and attitudes toward

the tragedy, the author creates extreme, unconscious affinity between them to emphasise the effect of trauma on strengthening the sense of collective ethnic identity.

While Seth does not suffer personal loss in the tragedy, he assumes responsibility for Venkat who is consumed by grief. Involving this character in the process of mourning may be a way of allowing the reader to consider this particular trauma as a condition that is more than personal. This is illustrated in Seth's experience of extreme empathy when Venkat thinks of his lost child: "Seth felt the knife in Venkat's ribs at the memory of that adolescent cheek slightly glowing, his lips brushing his son's ear as he whispered these words" (113). Venkat's son was practically part of Seth's family, too, and after the tragedy, Seth attempts to become the family that Venkat needs in spite of their differences: "He himself was only functioning for Venkat's sake. Otherwise, grief could easily have unhinged him" (113). Seth accompanies Venkat to Ireland, and in this part of the narrative, when they see other families on their way to County Cork airport, the author highlights the unconscious bond that is created between those affected:

They made eye contact, acknowledging that they, too had been singled out by history, tapped on the shoulder and asked to step out of the long file of people shuffling obliviously forward into an unknown future of children, grandchildren, spouses with whom to grow old. (129)

By illustrating this unspoken bond between the families affected and connection between Seth and Venkat, the author allows us to see grief as something beyond personal; perhaps, even cultural. The way the novel depicts the evolution of connection between the bereaved characters is important for understanding the forms of grief and mourning the narrative frames. Now that the importance of connecting through trauma has been established in the context of this narrative, I will move on to the final part of this chapter which considers different forms of grief this novel represents.

Loss and Mourning: Personal, Cultural, Universal?

There are three layers of grief that this novel illustrates. While Viswanathan provides an insight into the depth of personal suffering, with her narrative, she also creates a consideration of mourning as cultural and universal. Starting with the analysis of personal grief, I will examine the effects of the cultural and universal perception of loss on the personal mourning processes in this narrative.

The different ways in which characters react to Ashwin's decision to write about the collective trauma already show how individual mourning is to each person. Some believe that the stories of their loss are "private matters" (Viswanathan 93). Suresh, Ashwin's brother-in-law, for instance, says that he's "happy to talk to [Ashwin], if it's important, but why dredge this up? Let it lie" (41). It is not the coping process itself that is portrayed as difficult, but rather the conversations about it – speaking about the unspeakable. Speaking about the trauma or having to

reexperience it again by attending the trial is compared to “somebody putting a needle in a wound that has formed a crust. It was probably bleeding on the inside, but you couldn’t see it. Now it is bleeding on the outside” (67). Comparing the experience to a wound is a way to define the tragedy as trauma, an existential wound inflicted upon the soul.

Despite the differences between his subjects, the narrator finds parallels between their ways of coping, namely giving space for the lost ones to continue being part of their lives, to continue living (something this novel, in way, does too). Analysing previous work on the grief in this context, Ashwin writes: “Ann Finkbeiner said that the parents she interviewed had found ‘subtle and often unconscious ways of preserving the bond’ with their children. I had begun to see this in many of my interviewees’ stories” (69). The narrative offers specific examples here: “My brother-in-law, Suresh, had gravitated to hospice work, comforting other grieving parents and departing kids. [...] The dancer [...] created and performed a choreography inspired by her horrendous losses” (69). However, to mirror Ashwin’s helplessness when dealing with his own loss, the narrator creates the strongest connection between him and the characters whose mourning is just as complicated – Seth and Venkat.

The grief Venkat experiences is summed up well in this statement: “He thought about what happened in ways that allowed him to not think about what happened” (99). It is as if the trauma opens up a different perception of the self and the world to him. When Seth found him on the day of the tragedy, “Venkat was sitting on the floor [...], not crying [...] but staring as though being spoken to by authority expressing grave disappointment and possibly anger. His was the look of a man accepting judgement” (103). When he received his son’s body, he knew he did not need to expect them to find his wife’s body, for he did not “deserve that much” (140), suggesting that “losses might differ in their sharpness, how pain’s varied qualities might relate to varieties of guilt or forgiveness” (140). It can be argued that by making Venkat perceive his personal tragedy as a form of judgement or punishment, the author attempts to situate this particular traumatic event in the chain of historical events leading up to this tragedy.

Months after the tragedy, Venkat still appears “crushed, emptied” (172). He comes back home “to nothing. Worse than nothing”, to memories (172). The change in Venkat’s house after the loss of his family is depicted through smells: “The smell hit him – grey, fuggy, miserable – the afternoon’s dread giving way to the decay of grief” (111). To express the intensity of his personal tragedy, the author uses such descriptions to show how, just as Venkat himself, his space is, too, absorbed by grief. While one might expect a sort of recovery in Venkat, especially through his conversations with Ashwin, the reader does not get to indulge in this kind of a happy ending. The extremes to which grief takes this character are arguably created to illustrate the continuing effects of trauma and its depth: “Venkat’s grief put him in mind of that turning-point passage in the Gita, when Krishna [...] takes his true form for Arjuna. Divinity revealed. The mortal quakes. Here, they were

being shown the infinite depths of human vulnerability. *The void*" (108). While the novel delves into the depth of personal trauma and succeeds in portraying the links between those who suffered losses in the same tragic event, it also reflects an awareness of the distance between the grieving ethnic group and the rest of the world. Already at the outset of the narrative, the author offers a direct critique of the Canadian response to the tragedy: "Canadians at large did not feel themselves to have been attacked, although nearly every passenger aboard that flight was a born or naturalized Canadian" (7). It also clearly defines the role of the government in alienating Indians in this tragedy: "Canada's prime minister infamously sent a telegram of condolences to the Indian government, who had lost what? A jet. Oh, and a couple of pilots" (7). These state actions, as this example shows, contribute to creating a distance between Canadians and Indo-Canadians, leading to a certain degree of forced privacy when it comes to the remembrance of this national tragedy. On "the eve of the anniversary. All over Canada, we were in our rooms, alone or with others, readying ourselves for the onslaught of memory" (70). The narrative keeps it clear that trauma cannot be shared with those who did not suffer it: "Not everyone re-died each June 23" (83). It suggests that no one but the bereaved are triggered by each anniversary of the tragedy as well as no one but Indians and Indian-Canadians feel part of this collective grief, thus defining this trauma and, with it, mourning as cultural.

Through the relationships of different characters post-tragedy, the novel draws attention to the way trauma unites people and takes the mourning process beyond one's personal space: "Was that what terror did – give us unwanted family, weird and delicate alliances; did it drive us into the arms of people who were then forced to embrace us?" (207). This comparison to the idea of gaining a new family through terror echoes the idea of large-group psychology that enhances collective cultural identity. In the moments of grief, sorrow, and personal tragedy, one is more likely to seek and gain strength in the group. As Canada fails to respond to the traumatic event, it is apparent that the needed support and understanding have to be sought within the Indian diaspora.

Strengthening the sense of collective identity, it is as if trauma creates a wall around this particular ethnic group. To portray this form of alienation through grief, the novel often reflects on the invisibility of the dead: "Seth looked around the cabin, repopulating it with the passengers of the lost plane, eating breakfast, watching TV. How long till the vanished became invisible?" (128). It is not only the sudden void created in the lives of the bereaved that this invisibility suggests, but also the apparent efforts of the Canadian government to insist on the unbelonging of these people, thus hiding this tragedy from the rest of the world. This, yet again, implies a critique of the derealisation of the losses and the lives of these people. Adding to this critique, the narrative reveals the efforts to limit collective trauma through ethnic bonds when, I would argue, grief in this case should clearly be a transcultural issue: "Was the bombing a Canadian or an Indian tragedy? Why pose this false division? Canada was colonized when India was, and their fates were ever

linked. There is no expiration. The declaration of any single truth is itself an act of violence” (242). Just like the victims of this tragedy, grief cannot be limited to a single culture or nation. Chakraborty also reflected on this problem arguing that “the framing of Air India Flight 182 as a *national* tragedy continues to marginalize Indo-Canadians and *their* grief through the state’s tactics of differentiation” (“Official Apology, Creative Remembrances, and Management of the Air India Tragedy” 127). Through the chain of historical events – pogroms and attacks, the narrative also defines this tragedy as not solely Canadian. It also criticises the efforts to frame it as an Indian tragedy, thus urging the reader to reflect on the (im)possibility of egalitarianism in the context of grief. In his essay on Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief”, Fred Ribkoff frames the problem of vulnerability and mourning as the problem of identification:

It is one thing to recognize and sympathize or even empathize with loss, but another to recognize and identify with minority voices whose community and sense of self have been violated and traumatized by terrorists as well as Canadian security, legal, and political processes. (513)

As he continues, this identification would force Canadians to acknowledge “the imminence and inevitability of their own death” (513). In other words, by realising the vulnerability of the minority, they are forced to recognise their vulnerability to the very same violence. Judith Butler defines this as “a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself” (*Precarious Life* 31). Failure to recognise this primary human vulnerability results in failure to grieve the lives of those whose vulnerability we do not identify with (32). It is precisely this failure addressed by the novel that reflects the problem of perceiving the tragedy as the tragedy of the Indian minority only.

The world does not grieve what it does not (have to) see. While Viswanathan’s novel does not neglect the fact that the Air India bombing as well as Indira Gandhi’s assassination were all over international news, it directly addresses the purpose of a trauma narrative like this one: “Statistics are well and good, but names, faces, stories make us understand, pay attention. *Who are the victims?*” (Viswanathan 91). It seeks to make the losses of individual lives real to the world which follows the tragedy in numbers and facts, as something that happens far away to somebody else. One of the reasons of the difficulty of accepting it as a Canadian tragedy or transcultural trauma is exactly this first-world point of perception: “In India, people died easily and without much fanfare. Canada had so many resources dedicated to keeping every single person alive” (116). This implies, in a way, the impossibility of accepting terror on the first-world soil. Blaise and Mukherjee also addressed the problem of perceiving the tragedy as “theirs, not ours” and believing that this “*still* hasn’t happened here” (qtd. in Ribkoff 514). Highlighting this form of denial that claims that terror is culture-bound – and it is never the first world cultures that inflict it – is precisely the racism problem that followed the Air India tragedy and that this novel aims at criticising.

To achieve a certain degree of proximity to ‘foreign’ trauma and arguably to define common human vulnerability, the narrative establishes a strong connection between the physical body and trauma of loss. When Suresh, Ashwin’s brother-in-law, discusses coping with trauma, Ashwin reflects on changes in his facial expression: “I felt the droop of his face in my own, felt how grief compressed his lungs, made of his body a trap” (Viswanathan 40). Even years after the tragedy, the trauma of loss has control over his physical body. Grief also takes occupancy in Venkat’s body: “There was a deadness to Venkat’s face as he spoke. His lips barely moved; his voice was a monotone. It had begun the week after the bomb, but back then it seemed no more than appropriate, the numbing effect of horror” (211). Although Seth attempts to repress his grieving self to support Venkat and instead explore that part of himself through meditating with other Shivashakti devotees, his physical body still reacts to his trauma of loss: “He lost weight – food held no interest for him – and had difficulty focusing on teaching and remembering such mundane matters as groceries. Yet he had the sense of being hyper-alert, flooded with lost memories and exhilarated by insights” (148). Focusing on the physical, the descriptions emphasise the all-consuming effects of trauma and remind us of the fact that “[s]uppressing our inner cries for help does not stop our stress hormones from mobilizing the body” (van der Kolk 97). In other words, the impact of a psychological wound also exhausts the physical body.

Living yet considered dead since no one knew she did not get on that doomed flight, Sita, Venkat’s wife, struggles with self-perception, questioning her own body as “not even a body” (Viswanathan 360) and being compared to a ghost: “I must only give, now: a ghost should not take” (360). Her form of grief lies in her disappearance, perhaps, to reflect the invisibility of the deceased. Living on a farm, without a phone, distancing herself from people, she becomes non-existent to the outside world and everyone she used to know in her ‘previous’ life. This character represents the sudden emptiness created by loss: “Even a plane that passed through the same airspace shortly after saw nothing. In place of more than three hundred people, *the void*” (104). In a sense, Sita’s comparison of her body to a ghost echoes that void, and with it a blind eye turned by the world to the tragedy. Through this comparison, the narrative criticises the way the loss of certain lives is perceived as less important, if we analyse their bodies as seen through their “invariably public dimension” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26). Denying, at least at first, justice to the deceased and perceiving them as bodies of their own instead of acknowledging their connection to the world and other people and understanding how the world is changed without them hinders us from comprehending human vulnerability and processing grief (30).

The same critique appears in the novel when a tsunami hits Asia and it reminds Seth of the way the world went on when the tragedy was his: “Seth recalled Bantry Bay, the sea calm as surely the Indian ocean now was, lapping as its own debris, the way their cat ate its own vomit” (Viswanathan 295). In a way, this tells the reader that when we continue to disconnect from the people and ethnic groups whose

tragedies do not directly affect us, there is no potential for mourning to be universal. The fact that it took twenty years for the trial to happen – an issue heavily criticised in Viswanathan's narrative – shows how strong the disconnect is when certain ethnic groups are not seen as equal citizens in the Global North: Ashwin expected this trial would "be a sham", since "it came so very late – and after so much had changed, from the political situations that fed the bomb plot to the security situations that permitted it" (5). This example also shows that while the terrorist attack led to changes, the changes were happening in the wrong places – security measures instead of achieving justice for the deceased and the bereaved, who, as Viswanathan illustrates in the example of Venkat, felt betrayed.

At the same time, when the narrative follows Venkat and Seth to Ireland, the perception of grief shifts as well. The anger that devours Venkat in Canada is put on hold here, "in a place where everyone had tragedy mapped on the palms of their hands, where every family tree was torn by civil war or emigration, famine or sudden squalls at sea, here, they knew how to address themselves to death" (129–30). By comparing how the bereaved deal with their grief and how differently their tragedy is taken in these two countries, the novel poses the key question: "How many generations does it take to achieve fluency in the language of grief?" (130). Here, it again seems to criticise the failure of Canadian government to respond to the collective tragedy by, at the same time, implying that this failure is generational. This may be a reference to the ungrieved victims of the residential schools in Canada and imply criticism of this inherited failure to mourn the deaths of non-white citizens. While it is a generational responsibility to see mourning as universal, the Irish response to the tragedy in this case is employed to open up a possibility of egalitarian mourning, even if it is only in the context of this narrative.

Conclusion

Whether the killing of the alleged terrorist Singh Malik in the summer of 2022 in Canada was a purely personal vendetta or an act of revenge for the ethnic violence directed at a whole group, it once again brought to the surface the egalitarian failure to mourn the losses. Padma Viswanathan's novel *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* addresses this failure by delving into the process of mourning on many levels – from personal to universal – and criticising the derealisation of the losses in the Air India tragedy. This critique of the problem of unbelonging exposes the attempt to treat the terrorist attack as a cultural tragedy instead of crossing the boundaries of ethnic tensions and understanding it as a transcultural issue. At the same time, by constructing a seemingly unbreakable chain of ethnic conflicts, from the military operation in the Golden Temple in Amritsar to the Air India bombing, Viswanathan's narrative frames the problem of understanding, representing, and mending cultural trauma. It urges us to recognise the importance of looking back at the past and noticing the signs of inheritance – of trauma repressed and losses ungrieved – within the self.

By analysing the narrator Ashwin Rao as the figure of the implicated subject, we are able to position Padma Viswanathan's narrative as a work that addresses the multidirectional memory of the ethnic conflict that has developed to transcultural dimensions in the decades of its existence. By revealing implication of the bereaved, this novel not only defines the complexity of collective trauma but also opens up a possibility of a dialogue or resolution – of going beyond the markers of collective ethnic identities involved in the conflict. This openness grounded in understanding and accepting the implication may be a way of, if not breaking, then weakening the never-ending chain of ethnic tensions between the groups involved. It also allows us to analyse the ethnic tensions depicted in the novel beyond the dichotomy of victims and perpetrators, beyond the collective identities involved, and reflect on not only cultural trauma but also its unavoidable multi-generational, transcultural effects in all their complexity.

In the following and final part of this chapter, I will focus on a narrative exploration of cultural trauma rooted in the Vietnam war. Deeply personal and moving, Ocean Vuong's debut novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* tackles losses of the past – personal and collective – as an ongoing issue of the present. Much like this and previous subchapters, my final analysis will revolve around mourning and its role in dealing with transgenerational trauma to examine how a sense of self can – or even must – be found within an inheritance of loss and pain.

4.3 The Wars Within: Generational Bonds and Mourning in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)

“When can I say your name and have it mean only your name and not what you left behind?”

– Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

In his debut novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong creates an intimate story, a confession almost, of how an identity is shaped by generations of traumatic experiences. Written in a form of a letter to the narrator's mother Rose who cannot read, the novel takes the reader back to the times of the Vietnam War to unveil how the losses and struggles of his ancestors were bound to affect the narrator, Little Dog, no matter when or where he would be born. Yet, the narrator shares how the inherited pain has also given him the strength to heal and possibly transcend the generations of trauma and loss passed on to him. In this final analysis, I will rely on Marianne Hirsch's postmemory and Vamik Volkan's studies in transgenerational trauma transmission to explore the signs of generational bonds created by trauma in Vuong's very personal narrative. This poetic story illustrates how wars continue to live within the minds and bodies of their survivors who, often unconsciously, pass on their pain, humiliation, and psychological struggle to their offspring.

Collective trauma, at the same time, also involves a possibility or rather necessity to mourn the losses, both personal and collective. What I argue in this analysis is that Ocean Vuong renders a site of mourning for his speaker in this narrative, a site that offers a way to not only mourn the losses and transcend the multigenerational trauma, but to also discover a meaningful sense of self in his inheritance.

Living with Ghosts

Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* creates a written site of losses ungrieved and trauma unhealed. A myriad of metaphors is sewn into his work to continuously remind the reader that the Vietnam War can never be left in the past. Instead, the war passes its ghosts on to the future. When addressing his mother at the beginning of his letter, the narrator Little Dog is surprised at her lack of fear of death when she sees a taxidermy buck at a rest stop: "How it was not the grotesque mounting of a decapitated animal that shook you – but that the taxidermy embodied a death that won't finish, a death that keeps dying as we walk past it to relieve ourselves" (Vuong 3). This example resembles a person struck by a trauma flashback and dismayed at the realisation that the trauma of the past has found its way into the present to disrupt the existence of its survivor. Introduced right at the outset of the narrative, this incident is a warning to the reader that the ghosts of the dead will be present, hiding in the shadows of the lines of this novel.

The novel is then the story of realising how trauma never leaves its survivors, continuing to occupy their bodies and unconscious minds. The speaker observes the bodily signs of trauma in his grandmother Lan, whose crooked posture shows that she may never heal from the strikes of the Vietnam war: "They say trauma affects not only the brain, but the body too, its musculature, joints, and posture" (19). Wounds also profoundly shape the image of his mother, not only the scars of war but also those of her body "ruined further from three decades in factories and nail salons" (79). Vuong reveals this way "the eerie similarities between past and present histories of injury: it is not the American war machine that continues to inflict violence on Vietnamese bodies now, but its contemporary gendered and racialised economic structures" (Soler i Arjona 8). He also expresses his understanding that his mother, a child of the war, the daughter of Lan and an unknown American GI, will continue to bear the traces of trauma, recalling how, as a child, he tried to prank his mother by scaring her, but instead ended up truly terrifying her with his "toy army helmet tilted on [his] head" and causing her to "burst into sobs" (Vuong 4). What is important here, as in many other scenes, is that the focus of the narrative remains on the speaker's gradual realisation of his mother's trauma instead of highlighting the traumatic event itself. By not making the traumatic events of his characters fully accessible to the narrator and the reader, Ocean Vuong shows his understanding of the unrepresentable nature of trauma and instead keeps the focus on the effects of the trauma on its survivors and their offspring.

When addressing his mother, Little Dog implies his understanding of the way the war trauma affected her: “I didn’t know that the war was still inside you, that there was a war to begin with, that once it enters you it never leaves” (4). The text suggests here that trauma survivors are always haunted by the ghosts of their painful past (Caruth 4). While it also indicates that the narrator becomes his mother’s reminder, ‘echo’, or token of her trauma, it hints at the idea that the mother’s trauma is bound to be passed on to her son. The literary representation of this transmission refers to Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, which suggests that children of trauma survivors may discover that their lives become a way of reversing the losses of their parents’ traumatic past (*The Generation of Postmemory* 34). Using the narrative space as a form of finding a way to understand the impact of the war on his mother, the narrator thus creates a space of postmemory – a space that unveils the life of the child of a trauma survivor.

The narrative is filled with the idea that inheritance is part of being in the present. Yet, instead of insisting on the inescapable past that shapes the present lives of its characters, it highlights a certain type of inheritance, namely the inheritance of trauma. At the point of writing, the speaker has already come to the realisation of the roots of his family’s struggles. Although offering perspectives from different points in his life, he comprehends that the ghosts that have been following his family came from the war. Only by understanding the roots of trauma can he raise the question of healing: “When can I say your name and have it mean only your name and not what you left behind?” (Vuong 12). The rhetorical question implies the speaker’s attempt to accept the inevitable: what is left behind, the loss, is and will always be part of his mother and thus of their present.

The painful outbursts of guilt the narrator observes in his mother and grandmother suggest their inability to mourn the past. His grandmother Lan tells Little Dog that she ran away from her arranged marriage and met his grandfather Paul when she was a sex worker for American GIs. When she speaks, her tone is apologetic because, as the narrator realises, she addresses her own mother. She betrayed her mother by running away from her terrible arranged marriage, bringing shame to her family. Lan speaks, Little Dog recalls, “as if she was defending herself before a jury” (46), which suggests a sense of guilt that she could never resolve. Her tone is replete with guilt in this scene: “I never wanted to, Ma” (47). As the implied recipient of her words is revealed, it indicates the presence of another ancestor in their interaction, in other words, a ghost from the past that reminds Lan of her shame. This leads to the assumption that to pass on her story to the offspring, she must share it with her mother and ask for her forgiveness. The narrator’s presence in his grandmother’s conversation with the past is meant to suggest that resolving the past or, in other words, completing the task of mourning is the only way for the future to be possible. However, there can be certain complications when it comes to doing the necessary work of mourning:

One of the common reasons for complications is the contamination of the mourning process with reactions to a trauma. When a loss is associated with experiences of helplessness, passive and therefore ineffective rage, shame, and humiliation, the mourning process is accompanied by other psychological tasks, such as turning helplessness into activity, transforming passive rage into assertion, reversing shame and humiliation [...]. (Volkan, *KNI* 52)

Lan's loss of her family, who rejected their daughter, is filled with an aftertaste of shame and humiliation. Her loneliness, consequent poverty, and despair in a war time are the causes of her becoming a sex worker. This change may be ultimately the situation that exacerbates her sense of shame and thus prevents her from completing the task of mourning the loss of her family. This form of rebellion has been theorised by Erik Erikson as a negative identity. This type of identity, as the famous developmental psychologist argued, is "perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous, and yet, also as most real" (Erikson 87). Lan's choice to turn to sex work and eventually marry an American can be interpreted as an attempt to embody the negative identity of humiliation and betrayal projected on to her by her family. The interpersonal and, at the same time, personal conflict that lies at the roots of her adult life, Rose's birth, and the family's eventual migration to the United States, may serve as a serious obstacle for the mourning of the loss of her family, home, and eventually country.

There is, however, an even more powerful barrier that may be standing in Lan's way, and it is manifested through her daughter. The narrator's mother Rose is described as "a half-white child in Go Cong, which meant the children called her ghost-girl, called Lan a traitor and a whore for sleeping with the enemy" (Vuong 61). Lan's half-American daughter, this way, becomes another part of her negative identity, another embodiment of her betrayal of the family followed by traumatic shame. Until Lan's last days, Rose's existence is there to remind Lan of her displacement and humiliation, which may be one of the reasons her trauma remains unhealed, misunderstood, and unresolved. It is also interesting to this analysis that Lan's daughter Rose is described as a 'ghost-girl'. This lends Rose's character a feel of haunting, making her a living example of the continuous presence of the dead. At the same time, it can also be read through Kathleen Brogan's idea of cultural haunting. This form of haunting is built around an image "of the internally haunted self" in narratives that investigate not merely personal memory but rather "people's historical consciousness" (Brogan, "ASCH" 152). Rose's image of a ghost-girl thus signifies that her mother is destined to be haunted by the past. Moreover, it can also represent the survivors of the war in Vietnam who were and will be haunted by the massive war trauma.

In Lan, the author also illustrates trauma flashbacks that teach Little Dog about her past. She once wakes up from the neighbours' fireworks before Independence Day and tells him to be quiet, for otherwise they could get hit by "the mortars"

(Vuong 19). They spend the rest of the night hiding under the windowsill as she continues to whisper something about the mortars, convinced she is in danger. Other nights, she could ignore actual gunshots heard from the street, as those were not that many compared to the war time. While the narrator's perspective shows us that the war made his grandmother tougher in many ways, in these flashbacks, the novel also depicts the unpredictable nature of trauma that comes back unannounced. The flashback takes Lan back to the war time, which depicts how it disrupts the survivor's understanding of time (van der Kolk 69). The patience with which Little Dog handles his grandmother's trauma flashbacks is, I argue, the author's sign of faith in the possibility of accepting and transcending the traumatic past. By providing these contradictory reactions to violence in Lan, the narrative is also meant to illustrate that "the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life" (Caruth 62). Even though her movement in time and space allowed Lan to find a safe place, the unconscious readiness to respond to danger followed her to her new life.

The figure of the grandmother Lan is thus associated and surrounded by the idea of death that follows one through life. The narrator recalls how Lan often used to sing of the dead in Vietnamese, to his luck, because nobody understood the lyrics in America. What is interesting here is how he describes her as a source of the ghosts of the dead as she is singing: "the corpses, fleshed from Lan's mouth, piled up around us" (Vuong 50). This almost creates an illusion that the presence of the ghosts of the war is brought to this novel through Lan. Yet, when Little Dog, as a child, sings for his grandfather Paul, he picks a song that Lan used to sing: "The song, originally performed by the famous Khanh Ly, describes a woman singing among corpses strewn across sloping leafy hills. Searching faces of the dead, the singer asks in the song's refrain, *And which of you, which of you are my sister?*" (49). It appears that although Lan may be haunted by the losses of the past, unconsciously, her grandson is haunted by her losses, too.

This transmission does not skip Lan's daughter Rose either. She, too, addresses the past in one instance. Reminiscing about the first time his mother attended a church service, the narrator recalls that there, inside the church, with her face "lifted toward the ceiling", she was calling for her father, the "real one", asking him to come for her (59). Only in that church, "inside the song, [...] [she] had permission to lose [herself] and not be wrong" (59). Hence, the narrative depicts these open conversations with the ghosts of the past, with the parents who may or may not be already deceased, to emphasise the traumatic power of loss, humiliation, and displacement. As Michael Richardson reminds us, "trauma is never in the past, it is rather the continual presence of the past in the present, impinging on the future" (104). As his characters are haunted, each in different ways and each by own ghosts, Vuong employs fiction to confirm this statement.

Generational Bonds

Through the connection between Lan and her daughter Rose that causes apparent complications to Lan's mourning of her losses, the narrative is also meant to suggest that Lan's trauma is bound to be transmitted to her daughter. When traumatised people do not succeed at stopping their feelings of shame and are consequently hindered from completing the task of mourning, they pass on their "unfinished psychological tasks to future generations" (Volkan, *KNI* 154). By going back in time to tell the reader about the roots of the trauma-instilled existence of the narrator's family, the author makes this work a narrative example of transgenerational transmission of trauma. While this is a personal story, it arguably represents the transmission of war trauma that Vietnamese people have experienced on the collective level.

The narrator, Little Dog, also continues to carry memories of war-time Saigon. He writes: "A family hiding underneath a table. Do you understand? All I was given was a table. A table in lieu of a house. A table in lieu of history" (Vuong 232). It is possible that the author implies "the kitchen table", where the narrator's father beat his mother for the first time, before the child was even born (232). While what is left in the past is non-existent in the narrator's present, the words hint at the idea that the traumatic past is destined to persist: "I remember the table anyway. It exists and does not exist. An inheritance assembled with bare mouths. And nouns. And ash. I remember the table as a shard embedded in the brain. How some will call it shrapnel. And some will call it art" (232). While this inheritance is indeed transferred into a piece of literary art, it is presented by the narrative as a wound that is there to stay. It is a trauma experienced by different generations and at the same time transmitted through generations of the narrator's family. There is violence associated with the table – whether from the mortars or his father's abusive behaviour – and, in a sense, this violence can never fully leave its survivors.

The tasks that trauma survivors pass on to their offspring are "transferred through parents' behavior patterns, physical gestures, other nonverbal communications, and the granting or withholding of affection when a child behaves in certain ways" (Volkan, *KNI* 154). The novel reveals such tools of trauma transmission in the relationship between Little Dog and his mother Rose. Her impatience, stiffness, and abusive behaviour towards her son clearly affect his upbringing. Little Dog's flashbacks of his mother's physical abuse, woven into various early paragraphs, suggest the unpredictable nature of trauma repetitions, as they appear "out of sequence and fragmented" (Manh Ha and Tompkins 217). In this case, unresolved mourning may hold some answers. When there are complications to the mourning process such as displacement, the children of trauma survivors usually receive "similar primary tasks: complete the mourning over the losses, reverse shame and humiliation, and turn passivity into assertion" (Volkan, *KNI* 154). There is also an instance of such a task transmission in this novel. When Little Dog comes home after getting beaten up by other boys, his mother asks: "Why'd you let them do that?" (Vuong

25). Without showing love or pity, she tells him to be strong: “You have to step up or they’ll keep going” (26). She refuses to take on responsibility for his weakness: “You have to because I don’t have the English to help you. I can’t say nothing to stop them. [...] You find a way or you don’t tell me about this ever again” (26). In this instance, the narrative offers us a possible reason for Rose’s failure to transcend her family’s trauma. Her physical and linguistic displacement create an obstacle, preventing her from escaping a vicious circle of traumatic memories and from mourning the past. Thus, she passes the violence she knew on to her son, hitting him and then telling him that he must “get bigger and stronger” (6), even though it is sometimes his own mother who takes on the role of his abuser. These scenes are also an example of a psychological task being passed on: to be strong, to stop the abusers, to prevent bad things from occurring again. In other words, the task given to Little Dog is to reverse the inheritance of trauma.

The mother’s task of transcending the traumatic past to face the present cannot be undertaken by her alone. Their migration to the United States, which can be seen as a traumatic experience of its own, causes complications. Rose never learns English, since she has never learned to read and write in her mother tongue, and it complicates her mourning the loss of her old life by creating a barrier not only of language but also in her identity. The language barrier acts as an anchor holding her in the past. Her task of reversing the trauma is instead attempted by her son, the “family’s official interpreter” (32), which suggests that he also takes on the given task of reversing the painful inheritance.

The traces of transgenerational trauma transmission illustrated by ghostly figures can also be seen in the speaker’s narration of his own experiences. After the death of his cousin, he thinks he sees him in New York when in fact it is simply a man who looks like him. He calls his mother as he is apparently having “a panic attack”, later realising that she “knew it” (10). Her understanding of his experience of encountering a ghost in this scene is meant to suggest her son’s repetition of her experiences and possibly serves as a hint at a transgenerational transmission of ungrieved losses.

The speaker himself also becomes a representation of inherited trauma as a bodily experience. While from his perspective the reader views Lan’s decaying health as the baggage of war, there are traces of trauma Little Dog senses in his body, too:

There are times, late at night, when your son would wake believing a bullet is lodged inside him. He’d feel it floating on the right side of his chest, just between the ribs. *The bullet was always here*, the boy thinks, older even than himself – and his bones, tendons, and veins had merely wrapped around the metal shard, sealing it inside him. (76–77)

As this source of pain is ‘older’ than the speaker, it is apparent that this bullet is the epitome of trauma. This metaphor almost brings the speaker’s trauma to the edge of genetic inheritance. Despite the psychological impact of physical violence illustrated in the text, Vuong makes his speaker sometimes embody the belief that

trauma has been transmitted to him as a biological trope. Little Dog thus perceives himself as a child of trauma: “*It wasn’t me, the boy thinks, who was inside my mother’s womb, but this bullet, this seed I bloomed around*” (77). By eliciting a feeling in his reader that trauma inheritance is fateful, inescapable, permeating the deepest structures of a human body, the author achieves an understanding of the significance of the inheritance of trauma and urges the reader to reflect on the psychological effects of trauma.

Vuong conveys the idea that inheritance makes up one’s being not only through the patterns of transgenerational trauma transmission but also by bringing up the importance of inheritance for one’s sense of self. Even for the protagonist who finds himself in the in-between space of translation, inheritance or rather the idea of it shapes his identity. It comes to light most intensely when he finds out that Paul is not his real grandfather. Addressing his mother, the narrator speculates on inheriting nothingness: “The father, the real one, was just another American John – faceless, nameless, less. Except for you. All that remains of him is you, is me” (55). In a heart-breaking realisation, he is shattered by the idea that his real grandfather is not Paul. Instead, it turns out that his actual “grandfather is nobody” (55). Discovering this strangeness within the self, the narrator questions his previous justification of the possibility to belong in America: “Up to that point I thought I had, if nothing else, a tether to this country, a grandfather, one with a face, an identity, [...] whom I was a part of, whose American name ran inside my blood” (55). Similar to the literary texts analysed earlier in this work – Guy Gunaratne’s *In Our Mad and Furious City* and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, for example – Ocean Vuong invokes blood as a metaphor for ethnicity and culture. Here, blood also represents belonging and the inherited part of the speaker’s identity, namely the culture that is partially his. His mother’s words here reach him “as if through a vein” (55). The narrative implies that the inner shift that occurs with this realisation alters the speaker’s blood or rather his perception of it. What occurs is the shift in his understanding of his own identity construct. As the author deploys this common metaphor of blood, it can be interpreted as his critique of the belief that blood or genetic make-up shape one’s identity. The disappointment experienced by the protagonist here also suggests the common susceptibility to such beliefs. The displacement and abuse he suffers as a Vietnamese child in the United States create a sense of shame around his identity, and the impossibility of fully knowing the roots may be a factor hindering the transcending or reversing of inheritance.

Another important metaphor Vuong invokes in his novel is that of the monarch butterflies. Telling the reader about the migration of monarch butterflies, he creates a connection between the trauma of loss experienced by the ancestors and the effect the trauma has on the offspring: “Monarchs that survived the migration passed this message down to their children. The memory of family members lost from the initial winter was woven into their genes” (12). This example can be attributed to narrative representations of epigenetics, which studies how traumatic experiences are transmitted to the offspring as epigenetic tags “along with DNA sequences”

(Hirsch, *Epi-Memory, Art and Action*). Mirroring the transgenerational transmission of trauma, the story of the monarchs creates a parallel with the speaker's family history, conveying the idea that the inheritance of trauma is an unavoidable, natural process and maybe suggesting that the war trauma is imbued in the speaker's genes. While the novel is dominated by the scenes that explore the psychological aspects of a mother-child relationship, it primarily illustrates the transmission of mental representations or, in other words, transgenerational trauma transmission as a psychological process rather than an epigenetic one. Clearly finding the echo of his own experiences in the story of butterflies, the speaker speculates on the possibility of haunting while still describing the survival of the monarchs: "Maybe a survivor is the last one to come home, the final monarch that lands on a branch already weighted with ghosts" (Vuong 13). It can be understood "as an apt metaphor for the post-memory endeavor carried out by Vuong and his fellow writers, as they attempt to grapple with and work through the trauma of the Vietnamese-American community" (Abizanda-Cardona 236). I would add that here, the author addresses not only cultural haunting that concerns the representation of collective Vietnamese memory but also the trauma flashbacks and the ghosts of the dead that the speaker witnesses in his grandmother Lan and mother Rose. Finally, the metaphor points to the irreversibility of trauma, loss, and displacement: "The monarchs that fly south will not make it back north. Each departure, then, is final. Only their children return; only the future revisits the past" (Vuong 8). In this metaphor, too, the author conceals the speaker's task of reversing the inheritance and completing the task of mourning that his family so far could not perform.

According to Volkan, a process of mourning involves "the mourner's review of the images of persons or things that are lost [...] and then achieving the ability to no longer be psychologically preoccupied with the mental images of what was given up – in other words, making such images 'futureless'" (*Animal Killer* 65). Hence, by creating a narrative space inhabited by the stories of his mother and grandmother, the speaker constructs a site of mourning for their losses, attempting to make their war futureless. What is important here is that he does not speak for them but addresses his mother directly instead. Staying clear in this perspective, the author conveys the idea that in spite of the transmission of mental representations, trauma creates a distance between generations, and this distance can only be bridged in a literary space. Hence, in this novel, trauma also strengthens the generational bonds as it passes on psychological tasks to the survivors' offspring. By looking at the narrative as a site of mourning, we can see that while the speaker comprehends his inability to mourn the losses for his grandmother or mother, he shares their story as a way of accepting his task of reversing the shame and humiliation and, perhaps, also a task of finding a way to heal, even if he is the only one who will go through this healing.

Rediscovering Inheritance, Rediscovering the Self

Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a narrative of understanding the inheritance of trauma, but a journey towards this understanding is also a pathway to discovering a sense of self. Writing this letter to his mother is the narrator's way of communicating with himself, as the self encompasses his inheritance, including the projections of his ancestors. Considering the nature of their trauma, the speaker wonders: "I believe the wound is also the place where the skin reencounters itself, asking of each end, where have you been? Where have we been, Ma?" (Vuong 137). Hence, every trauma is not just a wound, but it is also a damage that requires and involves the means of finding one's way back to the self.

The identity of the narrator's family has been shattered by violence, collective trauma, and individual abuse, which were followed by displacement and humiliation. The self that is left is broken into pieces, wounded, traumatised. The family suffers "an existential injury" which "undermines the basis of [their] existence, severely altering how [they] see the world and how [they] make sense of it" (Thompson and Walsh 379). Tasked with a generational responsibility of mourning, the narrator seeks to bring all the parts of the self together through writing.

The work of mourning that becomes the task of the offspring, as argued earlier, involves the responsibility of reversing the shame and humiliation associated with the traumatic events the ancestors survived. In this narrative, this task becomes one of the main responsibilities of the narrator. In my analyses of the scenes in which the narrator's mother and grandmother address the ghosts of their parents, I stated that their revelations involve unresolved issues, including the problem of freeing oneself from shame. Vuong's text directly points at the transmission of this task to Little Dog: "Because I am your son, my apology had become, by then, an extension of myself. It was my *Hello*" (Vuong 94). By repeating the pattern of his grandmother and mother in showing how seeking forgiveness grows to become a part of his identity, the narrator thus represents the inheritance of their unresolved task.

The war that damaged yet, in a sense, also created his family made violence a part of the speaker's inheritance. As Christina Slopek stated in her investigation of Vuong's novel, the abuse both Little Dog and his first love Trevor suffer at home directly shapes the dynamic of their relationship, which is permeated by abusive behavior, although it is also driven by desire and love (755). From his mother, who used to hit him since he was about four, the narrator inherited the idea that love is inseparable from violence, that violence is a form of love, for violence [...] was what [he] knew, ultimately, of love" (Vuong 119). However, as the story reveals that his grandmother Lan carries a war trauma, too, and violence-filled behaviour did not start with him and his mother, our attention is drawn to the mixing of roles: the mother is an abuser yet a victim of abuse as well. We are thus urged to recognise not only the speaker's own physical vulnerability but also the vulnerability of those of whom he speaks.

The physical and emotional vulnerability of Vuong's characters conveys an important message about acknowledging human lives and deaths. Pondering over the ephemeral beauty of life, in an eponymous passage, the narrator concludes: "To be gorgeous, you must first be seen, but to be seen allows you to be hunted" (238). This statement ultimately alludes to the paradox of primary human vulnerability. What I refer to here is "a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 31). As Butler claims in her theorisation of the condition of primary vulnerability, we are "vulnerable to violence" as much as "to physical support for our lives" (31). Here, the speaker of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* asks his reader to pay attention to beauty in life, but by doing so, he also reminds one that by acknowledging life, one must recognise the possibility of violence and death. I argue that by addressing the issue of vulnerability and the problem of acknowledging lives and deaths, the author strives for highlighting the significance of mourning. Mourning here is meant to imply not only an individual task that falls on Little Dog, but also a collective task of the Vietnamese people who suffered massive trauma as the result of the Vietnam conflict.

As a child whose life was shaped by war, the narrator becomes a symbol of failed mourning, a being that continues to carry the inheritance of the massive collective trauma within. At the same time, the author reminds us of survival, too:

All this time I told myself we were born from war – but I was wrong, Ma. We were born from beauty. Let no one mistake us for the fruit of violence – but that violence, having passed through the fruit, failed to spoil it. (Vuong 231)

His inheritance may be one of trauma, violence, pain, and abuse but as any inheritance, it also symbolises survival, life, and family bonds. While there are complications to the process of mourning, such as family's displacement and language barrier, the task that Little Dog takes on signifies his acceptance of traumatic inheritance and, possibly, an attempt to transcend it. In the process, the narrator is not simply a recipient of inheritance. He performs an active role in his attempt to help his mother with the complications of overcoming displacement in a country that sounds foreign to her. Trying to teach his mother to read, Little Dog faces yet another complication. He recalls: "But that act (a son teaching his mother) reversed our hierarchies, and with it our identities, which, in this country, were already tenuous and tethered" (5). This reversal of roles is foreign to his mother and brings out "embarrassment" in Rose who, clearly as a result of trauma, is still afraid to display her weaknesses (5).

Yet, the most crucial step towards the reversal of traumatic inheritance is an attempt to find the way back to the self, and the narrator attempts to perform it through writing. The narrator's state of in-betweenness when it comes to his failure to find himself and his roots in either Vietnamese or English may seem to represent loss and displacement, yet it is the act of translation that provides the narrator a space of belonging, the space necessary for the reversal of his painful inheritance.

As Birgit Neumann points out, “[i]nstead of imagining language as the basis and effect of a seemingly natural community, Vuong’s text suggests that for Little Dog as for many other speakers of Vietnamese, there is no given or original ground for an ethnic community” (286). I would argue that this is especially true of the speakers of Vietnamese and English for whom the roots of these two languages coming together are associated with the collective war trauma. Hence, instead of focusing on loss and displacement, the narrative focuses on reconstructing the self in the space between two languages. It becomes the narrator’s way of rediscovering his identity: “Self-representation through translation [...] radically re-forms the individual, re-configuring him along the terms, concepts, connotations and sounds provided by another and an other’s tongue” (290). As Betty Waselowsky also notes, “English as the language of Vuong’s and Little Dog’s writing ultimately appears to be a medium of self-representation rather than one of assimilation” (59). Thus, in this narrative, the language is more of a form of finding and expressing oneself rather than overcoming displacement.

What is even more important is that Vuong deploys English to reconstruct the narrator’s identity and thus also to unveil his inheritance. As the inheritance involves trauma – an event never fully accessible to the narrator and thus unrepresentable, it creates a certain paradox in the narration. Only by narrating his identity, with the pain he inherited, can Little Dog reveal his mother’s story. Only by telling his mother’s story, can he truly speak of who he is: “I took off our language and wore my English, like a mask, so that others would see my face, and therefore yours” (Vuong 32). While his may be a language of loss, by adopting the English language and transcending the boundaries between two languages, the narrator assumes the responsibility for transcending the losses of the past and thus making his language the language of mourning, of remembering, of learning and healing.

The language that dominates Little Dog’s life is not only a form of self-representation but also a way of reversing the past. Influenced by the mental representations of violence passed on to him through his mother’s abuse, the speaker inherits a language imbued with violence: “Ma, to speak in our mother tongue is to speak only partially in Vietnamese, but entirely in war” (32). To Little Dog who grows up in the US, the Vietnamese language is a vacuum “of signifiers and signifieds that he never learned, this loss being a direct result of trauma” (D’Urso 8). Thus, a process of learning English can also be seen as the narrator’s pathway towards reversing the inheritance of loss. At the same time, as Sophia D’Urso writes, “embodying the language associated with the past ‘is not simply to allow its violence to co-opt one’s entire narrative and perspective, but to recognize the beauty in the strength of healing from it’ and the ability to find ‘pleasure within their mother tongue outside of its syntax’ (8). Hence, while the writing in the English language becomes a form of mourning, it is not to eradicate Vietnamese entirely but to attempt to transcend the pain that it carries and acknowledge its beauty instead.

The speaker’s writing initially becomes a form of mourning and thus transcending the inherited trauma: “I wasn’t trying to make a sentence – I was trying to break

free" (4). Paradoxically this attempt to reverse the inheritance is also a way of preserving the inheritance: "If we are lucky, something is passed on, another alphabet written in the blood, sinew, and neuron; ancestors charging their kin with the silent propulsion to fly south, to turn toward the place in the narrative no one was meant to outlast" (10). Writing becomes a form of survival. However, writing becomes not a means of survival for those who endured trauma but rather a form of preserving the inheritance as it is: violent, traumatic, and inescapable. Perhaps, the author means to tell that it is a way of setting off the healing mechanisms, which may never change the past but, perhaps, carry the power to transcend the pain, for one's own self and for the future.

At the same time, the process of writing for Vuong and for Little Dog also assumes the task of listening. In his grandmother's trauma flashbacks, for instance, Little Dog discovers "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). Lan, in turn, finds a listener in her grandchild or, in other words, an addressee of her story of trauma. Similar to the reader's perception of Lan, the image of her husband and Little Dog's non-biological grandfather Paul is also shaped around trauma. Introduced to the reader at the moment that possibly indicates that he suffers from PTSD, Paul becomes yet another figure that teaches the narrator to observe, listen, and accept his family as they are: injured by the war.

Yet, through his mother, Little Dog learns about another consequence of PTSD that influences the formation of his identity, namely her constant physical abuse of her child. This makes Little Dog believe that his mother is "a monster" (Vuong 13). This monstrosity, however, is not in the act of abuse itself. From "a divine messenger of catastrophe" to "an animal of myriad origins" (13), monstrosity in Vuong's sense rather implies an origin of trauma. Thus, to Little Dog, "a monster is to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once" (13). The duality of Rose's monstrosity points to being a survivor and an abuser at the same time, to being a woman who is haunted by death and a woman who gave life. Similar to her ethnic identity, there is a duality, a hybridity to Rose's character. Nonetheless, the pain she passes on to Little Dog does not escape the reader's attention: "I read that parents suffering from PTSD are more likely to hit their children. Perhaps, there is a monstrous origin to it, after all. Perhaps to lay hands on your child is to prepare him for war" (13). This contemplation may be yet another instance indicating the task of reversing inheritance. The mother Rose may be illustrated as a monster, but the above-mentioned theoretical works on transgenerational transmission of trauma point to the idea that she has to perform this role to ensure his survival.

Rose is thus a character depicted as a messenger on the chain of transgenerational transmission of trauma. Perhaps, the perspective of transgenerational trauma transmission allows us to perceive the figure of the mother in this narrative not as a monster but rather as a medium, a transmitter of war trauma. Not only is she depicted as a child of a trauma survivor and a child who possibly experienced further abuse as a half-Vietnamese and half-American, but she is also a literary

illustration of a child who does not complete the received task to reverse the inherited shame and humiliation, “to ease the pain and terror of the original trauma or control the outcome of the trauma” (Volkan, *Animal Killer* xi). Instead, she transmits this task to her son.

Rose’s inability to transcend the inherited trauma is portrayed in her inability to read and write, either in Vietnamese or in English. This barrier gives this character a sense of stillness, an inability to move forward in spite of her migration to the United States. It sets up a wall that ensures that she never fully abandons the space of her past. These limitations force her, although unconsciously, to use Little Dog “as a permanent reservoir” for her trauma without sharing “the experiential/contextual framework” of the trauma images (xii). I have thus come back to the argument that this narrative is a literary example of transgenerational transmission of trauma and, at the same time, a literary form of mourning. In his investigation of Borges’s poetry, the psychoanalyst and writer Thomas Ogden “explore[d] the idea that mourning is not simply a form of psychological work; it is a process centrally involving the experience of making something, creating something adequate to the experience of loss” (66). To support the idea that the creation of a literary space, in this case, can be seen as a form of mourning I would refer again to Vamik Volkan. Volkan’s theory of linking objects refers to “certain inanimate objects or living beings to symbolize a meeting ground between the mental image of what had been lost and the mourner’s corresponding self-image” (KNI 53). For the mourner, a linking object offers a way to externalise mourning, which is essential for maintaining one’s “sense of self” (53). Hence, the process of writing can also be interpreted as a way of externalising mourning. Not only does “speaking out to share his family’s story” allow Little Dog free himself from “the confining box he is expected to inhabit as a Vietnamese refugee” (Manh Ha and Tompkins 215), but the voice is also fundamentally underscored by mourning. Compared to an elegy in a multitude of book reviews, Vuong’s novel represents mourning in Ogden’s sense as it is a process of creating a literary space to mourn the past. As Ogden concludes in his analysis:

[...] an elegy, if it is to succeed as “Borges and I” succeeds, must capture in its own voice, not the voice that has been lost, but a voice brought to life in the experiencing of that loss, a voice enlivened by the experience of that death. The new voice cannot replace the old ones [...]. But there can be a sense that the new voice has somehow been there all along in the old ones, as a child is somehow an imminence in his ancestors and is brought to life both through their lives and through their deaths. (86–87)

Ocean Vuong’s voice of the Little Dog is a voice of a mourner but one of an inheritor too. Paying respect to the massive trauma of the past, he writes with his voice to partially share his voice with the past. He speaks with a voice that represents generations and mourns their losses with them and for them.

Conclusion

As argued throughout this analysis, Vuong creates a site of mourning rather than trauma in this novel. While the narrator offers us flashbacks of the violent past, his and his family's, and thus provides an example of transgenerational trauma transmission, I argue that this is still a narrative of healing and dealing with grief rather than trauma itself. At the point of writing, the story of transgenerational transmission of trauma has already taken shape in the focaliser's unconscious, making him slowly come to the realisation that he is a descendant of a war trauma, the trauma that affected his grandmother and mother and eventually his upbringing as well. By trying to understand what cannot be understood by writing that which cannot be read by his addressee, the narrator offers his family a possibility of mourning their losses of home and selves. This task, however, is his alone, and the story of the monarch butterflies hints at his understanding of it. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* may be a story of war and orphanhood, but then it is also a story of striving to transcend the suffering and alienation, of looking for beauty in spite of violence, of finding a meaningful sense of self in that beauty while also acknowledging the violence one endures along the way. Therefore, it is a story of mourning and healing, a story of losses grieved and accepted, even if only through writing. Perhaps, it is only possible in writing after all.

Another point that has come up in several analyses of narratives throughout this work concerns cultural identities of the characters, and it may be important to address it here as well. The survivors of massive trauma and their descendants who experience migration and allow their identities to change and evolve in new environments while also accepting their roots can have a potential for transculturality. This option cannot be excluded. However, when it comes to transcending their roots and culturally evolving, these inner processes may involve complications caused by personal or collective trauma, losses, or failure to complete the task of mourning. In this novel, Vuong offers us a narrator who finds his place in the space of translation and, this way, I would argue, in the process of transcending his language and past in a new environment. The narrator's stance on the nature of his mother tongue may sometimes confuse one with its seeming ambiguity. While Vietnamese for him is a language of war and displacement, it is also a language of beauty. The interpretation lies in the idea that the language and with it the space of writing encompasses both. The identities of Vuong's characters are imbued with war forever, but this also means that they are filled with the possibility of healing and surviving, mourning, transcending the past, and in case of the speaker, with the potential of transcending the boundaries of cultures and accepting his own trans-cultural self.

Some of the metaphors invoked by Ocean Vuong – from monarch butterflies to bullets sitting in the body or to Paul's American blood – may tempt the reader to view the speaker's trauma as biological, genetic inheritance. At the same time, the novel vividly illustrates mental representations of traumatic images passed on to the

narrator by his family – from their trauma flashbacks to physical abuse. This way, the novel can be seen as a literary example of postmemory, paying its respects to the survivors of the war in Vietnam.

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous is thus a novel of inheritance but the focus on the past in this case is made to create a possibility of laying the past to rest. As argued earlier in this analysis, the author shows his understanding of the nature of trauma by never making the traumatic events survived by Lan or Rose completely accessible to the speaker. The right to speak about the unspeakable remains with his mother and grandmother. Yet, the text of the novel itself suggests that Little Dog attempts to speak for them, to write to and for his mother who cannot write. Perhaps, the speaker has the ultimate right to not only grieve for the past but also to be its voice, for, in part, he is what he inherits. His being is (in part) his inheritance and with this narrative, Ocean Vuong brings the inheritance into being.

5. Being as Inheritance, Being Is Inheritance

“We are but creatures of our origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghosts from our past stand not far behind and are not easily shaken off.”

– M.G. Vassanji, *No New Land*

Motivated by my interest in contemporary transcultural narratives, this work has been driven by my aspiration to demonstrate that works of fiction illustrate the often obscured intricate links between the past and the present. In my selection of novels, I did not direct my focus to works of fiction explicitly centred on inheritance. On the contrary, I first turned my attention to transculturality that promised a way beyond the confines of cultural roots. Yet, in my reading, I kept noticing the presence of the roots that were left behind but continued to secretly follow or haunt their owners, revealing a complicated and fascinating relationship with inheritance – of rich cultures but often of trauma and loss, too. This idea of inheritance – and the word *idea* is crucial here, since I am focusing more on the common understanding of this word, which implies every trait and history and tradition we have inherited from our ancestors – has become central to my analysis. In the following, I provide an overview of the novels analysed in this work by exploring their broader significance considering where they ultimately guide my research.

Necropower: Sustaining the Trauma of Inheritance

Starting with Shamsie's narrative in the subchapter about "Unmourned and UnBritish," I focused on the instrumentalisation of inheritance and its effects on contemporary transcultural selfhood. Shamsie's characters and their stories appear constrained by their cultural identities – yet, as the analysis has shown, it is more their roots and the spectres of their origins, each in its unique way, that impose those constraints. Emphasising the complex interplay of identity politics and state exploitation of personal and cultural trauma, the novel exposes the failure to recognise the primary human vulnerability of British Muslim lives. It is this failure to recognise the lives and mourn the losses that exacerbates the divide between cultures and leads to new ethnic tensions. All in all, Shamsie's narrative can be interpreted as a critique of the notion that inheritance is solely genetic, transmitted through blood, and inherently destined to shape one's life. A similar conclusion can be drawn from my analysis of Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*. Criticising the belief in the idea of blood through Caroline's coming of age during the Troubles and amid her family's affiliation with the IRA, Nelson's involvement in the Association's resistance to the racist mob, and Yusuf's death during the protest, Gunaratne points to the very same failure to recognise the other's primary human vulnerability.

The dehumanisation of the other appears to be a trope in most of the narratives that tackle group conflicts analysed in this work. Gunaratne, Khakpour, and Desai directly employ the depictions of crowds and pure violence that pierces through hundreds or thousands of people ensnared in a collective frenzy of hatred. While the actual reasons for conflicts may precede the existence of the individuals embodying the hatred, the narratives illustrate how an act of dehumanisation can be seen as a tool for generating conflicts, a necessary step in prompting and justifying violence. The examples of these novels present the authors' common critique of deploying the ideas of blood and inheritance to imply that genetics alone explains cultural conflicts – a trope that Volkan often refers to when investigating the political rhetoric of ethnic conflicts. In my work, I analysed how literary narratives criticise the idea of biological transmission of trauma and highlighted instead the complexity of trauma transmission by investigating repressed trauma of loss and denied mourning.

The sense of disconnection that underlies ethnic conflicts is further exacerbated by the lens of necropolitics that is revealed in Shamsie's novel and also echoed most prominently in Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*. The past is thus more than just inherited memory, as both Shamsie and Gunaratne criticise the idea that beliefs are inherited. Instead, it is the derealisation of lives and trauma that inevitably extend through generations, perpetuating their effects by virtue of the power of necropolitics. Once certain people are derealised by the state on the grounds of their identity, and identity is always shared as reiterated throughout this work, the fact of derealisation of those people's lives and consequently of denial of egalitarian mourning inevitably affects other members of the shared identity. The impacts can

be observed both synchronically, across the affected collective identity, and diachronically, through generations.

In each of the instances of dehumanisation and derealisation of lives examined in this work, one may discover that the authors unveil the lack of connection or, in other words, the lack of recognition of the shared human identity. I argue that this is in part due to the failure to acknowledge the shared human commonalities that precede cultural differences. As Wolfgang Iser argued in his lecture on the acquisition of commonalities delivered in 2004 and subsequently published in an essay collection, “we are able to connect inwardly with the contents of other cultures” (“On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities” 33) based on the common level that “*underlies* all formation of difference” (5). The disregard of this shared link appears to be a trope dangerously common to the narratives of conflict. This form of blindness for human commonalities is depicted well in many of Shamsie and Gunaratne’s characters, but also in other trauma narratives. In Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, the Gorkha Liberation Front demonstrates signs of political extremism by their readiness to deploy violence. Treating everyone who is not fighting on their side “as a foreigner”, meaning an enemy (Desai 176), they not only aim to seek revenge from implicated subjects rather than actually responsible individuals, but they also draw the line on the shared human commonalities within the boundaries of their own ethnic group. My approach influenced by Vamik Volkan’s studies of the groups’ ‘blind trust’ in their leaders and ‘time collapse’ in times of crisis therefore not only highlighted how the boundaries of personal and collective identities blur during conflicts but also emphasised how the distinction between human and political identities can be dissolved by necropolitical manipulations. In *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, Padma Viswanathan depicts this failure to acknowledge human commonalities in the bereaved who are left to overcome their transcultural trauma on their own. In this novel, the parallels between the commonalities and the concept of primary human vulnerability are highlighted through the narrative of mourning. These commonalities, namely loss, trauma, and grief, that Viswanathan stresses to “make us understand” (Viswanathan 91) are not merely cultural, they are fundamentally human. A profound tragedy becomes clear, perhaps, only if we shift our focus not ‘beyond’ cultural borders but ‘prior’ to them. As these narratives attempt to reveal, susceptibility to the blindness towards pre-cultural commonalities is often connected to or rather evoked through grief or unresolved cultural or ethnic tensions incited by necropower.

On the other hand, the authors provide examples of the ability to see beyond differences. By introducing us to Nelson and Caroline, Gunaratne illustrates a significant ability to discover sameness with the perceived enemy. They depict how Nelson finds the shared emotional link with the mob, the link made invisible by politicising identities. Nelson discovers the shared human identity in the enemy group, a revelation also experienced by a different character, Caroline, in Belfast who fails to find the justification for IRA’s actions in the hatred and dehumanisation of their enemies. Both characters witness ethnic conflicts in their time and now

observe how their children relive the same trauma, how they too will be shaped by the conflicts outside of their power – the conflicts of collective identities. Such examples in literary texts can be analysed as an appeal for the practice of nonviolence.

Sometimes, however, the grip of the collective is illustrated as a solid, immovable foundation of the self to demonstrate the danger of dissolving all elements of identity in one. In this regard, *The Inheritance of Loss* appears to be the strongest example of the relationship between collective and personal identities. In Biju's story, for instance, Desai pictures the naivete of trusting inherited prejudice, the foundations of which may have lost their relevance, replaced their leaders, and changed their narratives. At the same time, in the relationship between Sai and Gyan, Desai unveils the universal susceptibility to Biju's naïve dependence on inheritance. She depicts how collective beliefs can meddle with personal ones by introducing the changes between the two characters step-by-step and illustrating how, in the times of crisis, one sees justification in embodying the collective. The embodiment of one part of identity reveals the unresolved trauma and unmourned collective losses that Desai draws her reader's attention to, perhaps, also emphasising the failure of egalitarian mourning.

This point brings me back to the idea of necropolitics. As both Shamsie and Gunaratne reveal, despite families' efforts to bury their personal trauma, the echoes of the tragedy in the subsequent generations are almost unavoidable, as the state inevitably intervenes. There are beliefs engrained in the collective unconscious by the deployment of necropolitics, and often they are manipulated and capitalised on by the state itself. Similar to Shamsie's narrative, where the sons are bound to repeat the tragedies of their fathers, where derealisation of certain lives is repeated from one generation to the next, Gunaratne also points to the tides, coming and going, hatred repeating itself from one generation to the next.

Self, Home, Ghosts: Understanding Necessity of Mourning

With the third novel discussed in the second chapter, Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Object*, I subtly begin to shift the focus towards the themes of exile and displacement. This transition sets the stage for the subsequent chapter, where these themes are explored in the works of Ozeki and Rushdie. In her novel, Khakpour delves into the profound loss of home, roots, and the sense of identity frozen in the past due to migration and emphasises both personal and cultural trauma transmission. The concept of transgenerational trauma transmission – a most unpleasant form of inheritance if you regard it as such – emerges as mourning remains incomplete.

In *Sons*, the incomplete work of mourning is depicted through the deployment of various elements. Tormenting dreams that haunt Darius, hysteria that sporadically grips Xerxes, and a distinct sense of unbelonging that engulfs all members of the Adam family at times more than they might be able to handle – all these instances cause the reader to question the reliability of the narration. The recurring

trope of questioning the reliability of the narrators resonates in Ozeki's novel as well as in Rushdie's. I would argue that this unreliability of the narrators is a necessary element explained by the unfathomable, ineffable essence of the initial trauma – a trauma that necessitated mourning, which, in turn, remained uncompleted and subsequently repressed.

In Khakpour's narrative, the loss of home emerges as a poignant thread, intertwining personal loss with collective trauma. Displacement suffered by the Adam family is not merely a physical relocation but a rupture of identity and belonging, and Khakpour illustrates two contrasting struggles with inheritance. While Darius epitomises an entrapment in the past, Xerxes embodies a complete rejection of inheritance. For both characters, however, the struggle is about learning to find or create own sense of home to achieve the sought-after sense of belonging. In the character of Suzanne, the author makes a case for transcending cultural past by illustrating an open and non-traumatic embrace of one's inheritance. What distinguishes the two men as afflicted by displacement is their failure to face loss. They both exhibit a failure to mourn their losses by repressing the truth and failing to exist with a false sense of reality. One can conclude that this is one of the most significant points emerging from Khakpour's compelling story.

The ineffectiveness of repressing loss is echoed as well in other narratives examined in my work. In *Home Fire*, one may observe how the repression of loss, the denial of mourning the death of the Adil Pasha, results in a repetition of the derealisation of lives and subsequently in the derealisation of deaths. All three, Parvaiz, Aneeka, and Eamonn, ultimately become lost to the death-worlds, defined by Achille Mbembe as “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*” (92). In my argument, the necropolitics of both the British state and the IS doom the radicalised individuals and those vulnerable to radicalisation, as, for example, Parvaiz Pasha on the account of his inheritance, to become the living dead.

In contrast to the necropower wielded in *Home Fire*, Salman Rushdie serves us a tale of self-destruction to represent the dangers of repressing loss. While *The Golden House* echoes Khakpour's family saga through the theme of repressed inheritance, Rushdie imbues his story with greater grandeur and tragedy to shape the narrative of grappling with the past. In the Golden family, he illustrates the destructive consequences of failing to transcend the past and move beyond polarities, which resonates well with Darius and Xerxes Adam. Even more importantly and also similar to Khakpour, he illustrates the repressing of inheritance as a form of loss. After all, what is left behind is integral to one's sense of self and it is not easily forgotten and replaced. However, the issue lies not solely in the loss itself but rather in the unfinished task of mourning.

The haunting by the ghosts of the past emerges as another compelling thread in this work to capture the significance of mourning. Surfacing most distinctly in Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* and Rushdie's *The Golden House*, the novels replete with imagination and paired together in my third chapter, cultural haunting signifies

a continued conversation with the past. The presence of the ghosts symbolises unresolved matters from the past that demand an intervention from the living – those of the present. A spectral presence necessitates recognition or resolution, as my previous arguments showed. At the same time, the ghosts reveal the existing link between the past and the present. In a way, the spectres unveil the unseen, namely that inheritance permeates the present. Transcending and accepting the past, and thereby laying the ghosts to rest is a crucial step towards achieving a meaningful sense of self. This is why the imagined transgenerational conversations with the ghosts of the past are essential to both Nao and Ruth, who, in different ways, experience a sense of displacement. Nao's loss of home, Los Angeles, where she did not doubt her sense of belonging, and Ruth's disconnection from her roots represent not only the need for connection that both narrators display but also a way of approaching mourning. Ozeki, thus, suggests crossing the borders of reality, space, time, and language, to see the connections often invisible to the 'modern' eye, those revealed in the commonalities preceding culture, which I addressed earlier in this chapter (Welsch, "On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities").

The ghosts of the past wander through my analyses in chapter three and settle as undeniable elements of inheritance at the end of my explorations of literary narratives in chapter four. They are mentioned here and there in *Ashwin Rao*, and predictably so, for Viswanathan's novel focuses on loss. However, they are not the central feature of the bereaved, as the narrative primarily centres on mourning rather than suppressing grief and shifts the angle onto the collective failure to mourn the losses. Bearing resemblance to *Home Fire*, Viswanathan's narrative demonstrates how political denial of mourning generates divides that lead to further violent clashes, perpetuating a chain of unresolved conflicts.

Haunting emerges as a potent element in Vuong's novel, where unresolved trauma and loss struggle to find a voice. In the same vein as *The Golden House*, the novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* allows the ghosts of the past to occupy the present. The purpose of the spectral inhabitants of the narrative is clear: it is to be the voice of the repressed past. In other words, they embody the inheritance. By deploying elements of haunting, Vuong establishes the needed connection between the past and the present, allowing Little Dog to understand where the ghosts of the dead originated and why, a generation after, they refuse to bid farewell. It can be contended that by employing this way of communicating the task of mourning to Little Dog, Vuong, much like Kiran Desai, creates his own story of the inheritance of loss.

Much like spectres intruding into the present, implication discloses confrontations with the past. Investigating how authors illustrate chains of conflicts between collective identities, I deployed Michael Rothberg's theory of the implicated subject to examine the nature of transgenerational links that affect one's selfhood. By providing examples of implicated subjects, I approached the idea of cultural haunting in literary narratives not only as a representation of collective trauma but also that of implication. My analysis of Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*, Kiran Desai's

The Inheritance of Loss, or Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* revealed the direct connection between the work of mourning and implication. The significance of mourning that I highlighted in the previous chapters is linked not only to our understanding of trauma and loss and their effects on personal and collective identities, but also to diachronic implication that uncovers the most complex connection to inheritance.

In this final chapter, I reiterate the themes of loss and mourning as these themes were at the core of my investigations of the narratives throughout this work. There is the loss of home, which plunges individuals into a state of displacement as Khakpour, Ozeki, Desai, and Vuong highlight in their narratives, the loss of loved ones, which leaves them grieving as Shamsie, Gunaratne, Rushdie, Viswanathan express in their moving storytelling, and eventually the loss of a sense of self – traced in every novel explored here – for what was lost was always part of the self. In this work, I approached loss as a significant matter in examining selfhood, whether personal or collective. Consequently, mourning is no less important for understanding being because mourning is less about another and more about unveiling “who we are” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22). It is a process of rediscovering the meaning of what is lost to comprehend what it meant for the sense of self. This reevaluation is necessary for identity as, inspired by Appiah, I maintain that identity is always shared. It is constituted by links – cultural, social, geographical – with others. The identities brought to life in the narratives of Shamsie, Gunaratne, Khakpour, Ozeki, Rushdie, Desai, Viswanathan, and finally Vuong confirm that their being lies in the sense of connection, often through space and time. What my work has shown is that the mirror of inheritance may offer a clearer image of loss and trauma within the self. In the end, the lens of the past is essential for achieving a meaningful sense of self in the present.

Deploying the theory of the implicated subject, my explorations of literary narratives illustrated that being – even seemingly cosmopolitan, post-ethnic, rootless being – may contain links with the past that are not necessarily obvious in the everyday context. The large-group psychology – through the concepts of chosen trauma, time collapse, and transgenerational transmission – helped me to shed light on the relationship between personal and collective identity.

Inheritance in Other Contemporary Narratives

The trope of the mystic power of inheritance over contemporary identities continues to emerge in literary fiction beyond those novels analysed in the scope of this work. To highlight literary narratives that may offer valuable insights into the theme of inheritance, in the following, I provide a brief overview of selected novels that have caught my scholarly attention. These works may serve as further discourses facilitating the investigation of diverse tropes relating to inheritance in contemporary literature.

In 2023, Guy Gunaratne, a British author whose debut novel was one of the inspirations behind this work, published his second novel *Mister, Mister*. Yahya Bas, Gunaratne's narrator, finds himself under arrest on suspicion of terrorism and sets out to write down the story of his life, addressing an unnamed interrogator referred to only as "Mister". Through his fragmented storytelling, it becomes evident that his being and inheritance are no less fragmented. While Yahya's upbringing seems to be the responsibility of a number of people lost and invisible in Britain in different ways, his parents paint an even more dramatic image of inheritance. Yahya's father and the brother of Yahya's main caretaker is Marwan, an Iraqi immigrant in the UK, whose fate is uncertain after his disappearance in the Middle East, with suggestions pointing towards his death as a martyr or, in other words, a suicide bomber. In the same house with Yahya and multiple other women he calls his 'mothers' resides his biological mother Estella, a white woman suffering from depression, prone to self-harm, and indifferent to her son since the moment of his birth. At his school, a madrasa, Yahya discovers a latent talent for religious poetry, which marks the real beginning of his journey of self-discovery. Starting with his rise to prominence as the online poet Al-Bayn who condemns the West and celebrates terrorists, his path leads him to Syria in search of his roots, tracing the first and last footsteps of his father. After nearly dying in the desert, he begins a new life in a free city – an in-between space teeming with people whose sense of belonging has been obliterated by wars. His refuge there is not final, for he returns to where his story began, London, and has to account for his involvement in a series of terrorist attacks.

When it comes to the character's self-reflection, he concludes that his uncontrollable nature is his "fitra, [...] – a kind of inherited jinx", "bound to [him] by blood" (Gunaratne, *Mister, Mister* 140)². Yahya pointing to his inheritance and blood as the roots of unbounded destructive behaviour reveals and thus possibly criticises a dangerous line of thinking that deploys the idea of inheritance to explain one's actions, thus inflicting even more ideological harm on the collective identity. However, it could be contended that Gunaratne's Yahya, similar to Shamsie's Parvaiz, is a product of necropolitics. He might be doomed to follow in the footsteps of his father, but it is his mother whose fears he inherits by "shar[ing] a whiteness at birth" and ultimately being "haunted by the same things" (30). The ghost that haunts both is, as one may interpret, Yahya's father Marwan, an Iraqi suicide bomber who was lost to the death-world or rather belonged to it even before he migrated to the UK.

The missing father – the void, the untransmitted inheritance, the unconfirmed and unmourned death, the loss – gains some form of presence in Yahya's story. I would even describe it as a form of his *being*. The loss which hangs over him and his mother and which seemingly was neither discussed nor grieved may be interpreted as a cause of Yahya's manias. The unresolved task of mourning rather than blood accounts for the circumstances which the unnamed Mister demands

² Fitra is an English spelling of an Arabic word that means "natural disposition" or "innate nature".

explaining for. Gunaratne, in way, reveals a disposition to mourn the losses in Yahya's behaviour which mirrors his mother's:

My mother had been working toward my father with her cloth. Same way I'd been poring over his tapes, Mister. Marwan was there, in them knots in her head, chased down between her fingers. My mother and I had resorted to an invented method, just so we could claim my father's absence somehow as our own. (95)

Becoming a vessel for loss without an ability to mourn, both of them are bound to seek answers within the self and in the world. Although this may read as a personal loss, it can and, I would say, should be posited as a larger critique of necropolitics. The author criticises Mister's view that the radicalised martyr Marwan is what constitutes Yahya's inheritance. Instead, the author directs the focus to the mourning denied systematically and, as a result, his coming of age among people just as lost and invisible in the necropolitical system that continues to produce more losses.

With *Mister, Mister*, similar to *In Our Mad and Furious City* or Shamsie's *Home Fire* and Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, Gunaratne touches on the phenomena of derealisation of deaths and of dehumanisation of the enemy, almost unavoidable elements of conflicts. By giving Yahya the voice, the author reveals how the necropolitics manipulates the perception of inheritance to deflect the responsibility onto marginalised individuals.

A different relationship with inheritance can be explored in Meng Jin's debut novel *Little Gods* published in 2020. Certain tropes woven into the story of Su Lan in Meng Jin's novel reminded me of *The Golden House* and the characters who successfully erased their past, at least for the time being. Su Lan is a brilliant physicist who built her career in the United States. The foundation of her scientific career is her fight against time as she successfully erased any traces of her past. Her daughter Liya inherits, as it seems, Su Lan's rootlessness and cultural emptiness. I would even say, she inherits the very absence of inheritance. As a result, she finds herself displaced and disinherited by circumstances but strives to make sense of her selfhood. Seeking to transcend the rootlessness, Liya travels to China to get to know her mother in ways she could not when Su Lan was alive.

The narrative presents a story of Su Lan in fragmented ways through the narration of other characters. Creating Su Lan as a figure who prefers to be anonymous, Meng Jin does not demand that Su's voice be present. As Su Lan insists on invisibility, on erasing her history and, in a sense, her being, it can be contended that she attempts to prevent any form of cultural transmission. Here, the reader is given a hint as to why: "But there would always be the problem of history. How could you keep your history from infecting the child? [...] It should be born free, [...] it will be tempting to pass yourself on even though you know it's wrong" (Jin 122). The fear of passing on her inheritance might be the cause of Su Lan's anonymity and disconnection not only from her own roots, but from her daughter as well.

While this complicated relationship with (dis)inheritance may be appealing for further analysis of Meng Jin's novel, I would also briefly touch upon the theme of haunting that might be crucial to understanding the complexity of Su Lan's identity. Right at the outset of the novel, amidst the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre,³ when her daughter Liya is born and the father has already disappeared, Su Lan's condition is portrayed as some sort of an ending. She is described "as if" on her "deathbed", and this portrayal is "correct" as on this day, "Su Lan begins to die" (11). In fact, everything she is before the birth of her daughter appears to be gone in the next seventeen years of her existence. As Liya discovers her mother's Shanghai apartment, she struggles to find traces of the person she knew. It can be, therefore, argued that by erasing her past, Su Lan kills her past self and attempts to lead the life as a different Su Lan. While there are various other ghosts in Meng Jin's novel, it is the ghost of Su Lan that can be deemed most significant and it appears to be embodied by her daughter Liya, manifested in Liya's birth amid Su Lan's symbolic 'death'.

When Liya arrives in Shanghai, her mother's old neighbour meets her with: "Su Lan, I told them you'd be back" (93). In their interaction, Su Lan's fear to pass on herself onto her child is materialised. Meng Jin's peculiar character of Su Lan is depicted as someone who sought to understand human memory as "*the mind's arrow of time*" (32). Her project is described through a "thought experiment", in which "the thermodynamic arrow of time would run backward, toward order instead of disorder. The mind's arrow should run parallel to it, so instead of remembering what had already occurred, we would be able to predict what was about to occur" (32). Beset by this work, this way of thinking might hold the key to Liya's inheritance. To transcend it and thus bring 'order' to her understanding of the self, she has to travel back in time.

A journey back in time also occupies the protagonist of Taiye Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013), which follows the Sai family and their relocations between Ghana, Nigeria, and the United States. Kweku Sai dies in Accra, Ghana, years after returning there and remarrying, having previously abandoned his wife, Fola, and their four children—Olu, the eldest son; the twins, Kehinde and Taiwo; and the youngest daughter, Sadie—in the United States. As the five of them travel to Africa, some for the first time, to bury Kweku, the personal loss reopens old wounds, compelling them to confront and reconcile with both personal and ancestral histories.

One of the tropes of inheritance Selasi employs in this novel is that of grievable lives – lives whose vulnerability is predetermined by the place of birth, for generations. Butler's question of grievable lives is explored through the perspective of Kweku (Wallinger 212), whose younger sister Ekua died at the age of 11 from

³ The 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre was a violent crackdown by the Chinese government on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing, which resulted in numerous deaths as the Chinese government declared martial law and sent troops and tanks to forcibly end the demonstrators on the night of 3 June 1989.

tuberculosis. Kweku, who becomes a brilliant surgeon in America, is made immune to grief by the world that shows “heedlessness” and “disregard” to “all dirt-poor children” (Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* 27). Arguably, his migration experience provides the foundation for this heart-wrenching meta-perspective of “how loss worked in the world” (28). There is no counting of losses for Kweku when loss follows him as a shadow: “He didn’t add it all up – loss of sister, later mother, absent father, scourge of colonialism, birth into poverty and all that – and lament that he’d had a sad life, an unfair one, shake his fists at the heavens, asking why” (28). In fact, Selasi portrays in this character an understanding of grief that is predestined – an understanding shaped by the postmemory of colonialism.

Kweku’s wife Fola, originally from Nigeria, also narrates her own experiences of ungrievability in relation to the death of her father during the Nigerian civil war. In flashbacks, she still recalls the “indifference” towards her father – “this ‘victim’ whom they didn’t know, anonymous as are all victims” (106). The brutality of his death complicates the mourning for her as a death like his seems “natural” to everyone (107). The author arrives at the conclusion that: “If one could die identityless, estranged from all context, then one could live estranged from all context as well” (107), exemplifying Butler’s theory that the failure to condemn violence and mourn the losses signifies the refusal to acknowledge these lives as ones that matter (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 105). Selasi highlights how this tragedy extends beyond the personal, shaping an entire generation of Nigerians who become the children of the civil war: “she’d stopped being Folasadé Somayina Savage and had become instead the native of a generic War-Torn nation” (Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* 107).

The Sai children are thus the children of the parents who learnt to perceive violence and death as natural and inevitable. While they are seemingly denied that sad history, the longing for inheritance is there but none of them are happy to eventually discover it, with an exception of Sadie. For example, Olu would be jealous of his friends’ houses decorated with framed photos of their grandparents, great-grandparents and beyond, he would “tour their homes aching with longing, for *lineage*, for a sense of having descended from faces in frames” (251). But as he travels to Accra to see his father, he realises that Kweku moved on, with no place in his life for his children – and this is the legacy Olu refuses to carry forward. This desire for cultural and existential validation that devours Selasi’s characters “undermines the Afropolitan feeling of being ‘at home’ in the world, replacing it with an elusive and fragile reality of being fundamentally unhomed” (Phiri 148).

The twins Kehinde and Taiwo’s encounter with Africa also deepens the existential void within their identities. They are sent to Nigeria to go to high school but this only traumatises them, as they are abused – emotionally and sexually by their uncle, Fola’s step-brother. As Hanna Wallinger puts it, the twins are forced to bear the burden of “the sins of their fathers and mothers, and they learn that their identities are not personal and individual but collective” (Wallinger 216). Taiwo cannot forgive her mother for sending her and her brother away to Nigeria and failing to protect them – failing to acknowledge their vulnerability, much like the world had

done to her mother and generations before her. Carrying the trauma of abuse throughout her life, without confiding in anyone, Taiwo is described as having “a dead woman’s eyes on a baby girl’s face” (Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* 235). It is only when she shares the story of her abuse with her mother and is held tight by Fola that she feels safe, and her eyes begin to change (291).

The novel serves as a literary example of Afropolitanism, which Selsasi put into focus in her essay “Bye-Bye Babar” as a term that defines Afropolitans as “not citizens, but Africans of the world” (Selasi, “BYE-BYE BARBAR” 528). Afropolitan novels, as Christopher T. Fan concludes in his essay, render “an aesthetic space for a new kind of character” (86), joining the “minority discourse that figures the literary realm as a utopian site in which the un-manning damage done by racism can be reversed” (Kim qtd. in Fan 86). The Sais are “recognisably Afropolitan” as Amy Rushton writes in her analysis of the novel (51), making them fascinating characters for exploring the notions of inheritance and belonging. Kweku, who dies in Ghana, in the very last moments, discovers his sense of belonging in his ex-wife Fola, whom he had abandoned. In spite of his multiple relocations, he realises that his “home” is tied to emotions and “memory”, rather than “a static locale” (52). But perhaps the most interesting perspective on inheritance in *Ghana Must Go* is offered through the eyes of Sadie, who is “privileged, protected”, “the least impressive” and therefore “the most ostensibly Afropolitan” (Phiri 149). Sadie, feeling that “she *doesn’t* belong” – especially within her family – views them as “weightless,” “a family without gravity,” “completely unbound,” with no roots and “no living grandparents, no history” (Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* 146–47). As the family travels to Africa for Kweku’s burial, Sadie at last connects with the family she comes from and looks like, as her aunts recognise in her a reincarnation of Kweku’s sister Ekua, who died as a child and serves as the novel’s symbol of ungrievability. It is through this reincarnation of the ungrievable that Sadie discovers her meaning, belonging, and, perhaps, the belief that she matters. Only towards the end does Selasi reveal why the Sai children were never brought to Africa, as Kehinde explains here: “They were hurt – Their countries hurt them” (240). Ultimately, confronting the inheritance – along with its trauma and losses – is essential for accepting oneself.

Another novel worth exploring within the framework of the approach outlined in my work is Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* published in 2006. In this acclaimed novel, Anita Rau Badami tackles a span of fifty years – from the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 to the terrorist bombing of Air India flight 182 in 1985. Similar to *Ashwin Rau*, the novel is set in both Canada and India. It follows three women – Bibi-Ji, Leela, and Nimmo – whose lives are caught amidst historical circumstances that affect not only their existence but also their ethnic identities.

The lives of the three women are affected by loss, each in its own way. Bibi-Ji’s sister Kanwar dies during the Partition, and although Bibi-Ji and her husband Pa-Ji migrate to Canada and become prominent members of the Sikh community there, they continue to bear the loss that is both personal and collective. The other central

character, Leela, is a daughter of a German mother and a Hindu father, a “half-and-half” (Badami 74) who is rejected by both sides of her family. A witness of her mother’s death, she too is affected by loss. Yet, it is her search for a meaningful sense of self that preoccupies this character, even after her migration to Canada alongside her husband. At last, there is Nimmo, the daughter of Bibi-Ji’s sister Kanwar, who remains in Delhi all throughout her story, deeply affected by being orphaned by the Partition as a small child.

These women are connected not only in their lives but also through the gruesome circumstances that lead to their or their loved ones’ deaths. Bibi-Ji’s husband Pa-Ji is killed in the storming of the Sikh Golden Temple, which was ordered by Indira Gandhi. When Indira Gandhi is assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, a series of attacks on Sikhs follows around the world. As a result, Nimmo loses her husband and two children yet keeps hope that her son, whom she sent to Canada to Bibi-Ji and who became radicalised in search for meaning of his selfhood between two cultures, will one day return. Finally, Leela loses her life in the Air India bombing that allegedly was a radical terrorists’ response to the violent killings of the Sikhs. She thus dies as she was born “between two worlds” (392).

While one could interpret that the “literal connection” instead of false “oral narratives” ultimately becomes the reason for Pa-Ji’s death (Bhat 11), I would look to the failure of egalitarian mourning that the author expresses in her portrayal of the chain of massacres and attacks – in the ongoing ethnic conflicts at the backdrop of her characters’ lives. As Jennifer Randall argued in her analysis of Badami’s novel, “[t]he loss of a loved one, experienced in various degrees by every single character in the novel, plants in them the seed of fanatic revenge, resulting in the breeding of a young generation which seeks escape in acts of terror” (39). By diving into these personal stories of three women, Badami tackles ethnic conflicts of a large-group and long-time scale, thus drawing the reader’s attention to an egalitarian issue. Depicting how Bibi-Ji becomes “mad with sorrow” (39), she also illustrates how “history fails in that attempt to establish a sense of belonging, since it becomes a monster in its own right” (39). Similar to my analysis of *Ashwin Rao*, here too one can detect elements of the failed collective mourning, of inability to identify forms of implication in collective tragedies, and of loss without closure. Linking the apogees of ethnic tensions in her storytelling, Badami provides a different angle on the inheritance of trauma.

Replete with themes of displacement, belonging, and inheritance, Badami’s narrative presents the traumas of the past as “insurmountable” (Bhat 14), for their lingering impact is bound to perpetuate the power of their wounds over the present. With this novel, she establishes a necessary and always relevant conversation with the past. If groups of people who had suffered violence faced denial of acknowledgement of their suffering before, Badami offered an insight into their intimate and heartfelt stories and created personal links between collective conflicts. Perhaps, the connections between different acts of unimaginable violence directed at

large groups of people are best imagined through this literary lens that turns the nameless into named and the ungrieved into grieved.

There is a no-less violent and seemingly never-ending ethnic conflict that found representation in another work of contemporary English-speaking fiction. Aline Ohanesian's novel *Orhan's Inheritance* published in 2015 tackles, as the title announces, inheritance, also in the ways parallel to the framework this study. Crossing through generations and continents, the narrative follows Orhan, a young Turkish man who inherits his grandfather's textile business in Turkey. At the same time, it is revealed that Orhan's grandfather Kemal, who allegedly committed suicide at the age of ninety-three, has left their family estate to an Armenian woman named Seda Melkonian, who resides in Los Angeles, California. The family is outraged by Kemal's nonsense act and demands that Orhan finds Seda and persuades her to sign over the estate back to the family. Seda who has not said a single word about her past, about how she is the only one in her family who survived the genocide, reveals to Orhan the horrors she endured and the truth about his inherited home and business. The home, along with the textile business, in fact belonged to Seda's family and were taken by Kemal's family after the deportations and the war.⁴

The young Seda, who used to go by the name Lucine, survives by eliminating all traces of her real self. During the war, she is rescued by Fatima, who allows Seda to work for her, never revealing to anyone where she comes from: "you will answer to Seda. It means 'echo,' so that you may find your voice again" (Ohanesian 240). The life that she gains under Fatima's roof keeps bearing fragments of her experience of the death march – she is silenced, raped, and surrounded by 'enemies' all of the time. Her everyday tasks include preparing meals and cleaning for the people who have killed and continue to kill hers, but she has made herself invisible: "Soldiers, merchants, and the occasional missionary travel through these walls without ever seeing her. She is a spirit – a ghost – soundless and practically invisible. Existing only in the in-between spaces – between daylight and darkness" (242). Although she is a ghost to them, she carries spectres of her own: "In her arms, a silent witness to all this exorcism, Aram's ghost gives up his screaming and sucks impatiently at her breast" (238). Aram was Seda's baby brother, the last of her family members to die during the death march. Ohanesian does not detail the circumstances of his death but hints at its traumatising effects, as Seda seems to still relive this trauma as an old woman. Her family's ghosts seem to continue following Seda even to her nineties. Even her migration to the US is described as a way of following "the ghosts of her people" (303). The severe trauma Seda endured during the genocide is depicted by Ohanesian through elements of cultural haunting. Arguably, the ghosts in this novel symbolise all victims fallen to the Armenian genocide.

Another crucial element in this narrative is the task of mourning. It can be contended that, unable to bury her dead, Seda transmits the unfinished task to Ani, her niece. This would imply that by becoming an activist, Ani acts as a recipient of

⁴ Here I refer to the Turkish-Armenian war of 1920.

Seda's task "to reverse shame and humiliation, [...] and to mourn the losses associated with the trauma – the actual deaths of relatives and friends in the original tragedy, [...] and the loss of land" (Volkan, *Blind Trust* 48). This form of inheritance that Ohanesian portrays can also be investigated as postmemory. Yet, interestingly enough, Ani never gets to hear Seda's story directly. Instead, Seda shares it with Orhan, as she tells him: "She [Ani] has too much past in her veins and you have none" (Ohanesian 293). In this confession, Ohanesian reveals why this is a story of Orhan's inheritance and, therefore, the story of the implicated subject. The unfinished task of mourning does not belong to the victim alone since the act of loss and trauma itself involved a perpetrator. Even more so, the act of the dehumanisation of an ethnic group, of the derealisation of their lives and consequently deaths involved 'the other'. What this narrative seeks is the reversal of that derealisation and thus acknowledgement of the collective trauma, and it must come not only from the Armenian community.

The past cannot be changed but the task is to transcend it by acknowledging it and although when Seda's niece Ani finds out about the house, she describes Kemal's actions as "an admission of guilt" (318), it is not guilt that this narrative seeks. Orhan's decision to transform their estate, which he receives 'back' from Seda, into a museum is the author's hint at an idea of a literary site of mourning. Ultimately, with her novel, Ohanesian creates a site of collective mourning for all Armenians.

The exploration of inheritance themes extends far beyond the novels featured in my work, encompassing a vast array of works published before them. I cannot list all of them but there are two more novels I would like to mention at this point, Zadie Smith's 2000 novel *White Teeth* and M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land*, published in 1991. Zadie Smith's acclaimed multi-generational saga *White Teeth* offers an intricate exploration of multiculturalism, identity, and inheritance. Following two war-time friends, Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal, and their children and weaving together her characters' histories, Smith brings together elements echoed "from generation to generation" and transmitted "through the genes" (Gill 20). Intricately inserted into the beliefs of her characters, references such as "good blood" (Smith 88), "*good genes*" (314), or "mutiny in [...] blood" (526) can make the case for a perceptible critique of biological transmission of traits. At the same time, introducing the reader to Marcus Chalfen, a geneticist who aspires to create a superior race, Smith intricately twists together genetic and cultural transmission, adding a nuanced layer to her narrative. It can even be argued that genetic references in her novel are deployed to strengthen cultural continuity amidst migration and assimilation (Hamann-Rose 170) by at the same time unveiling the absurdity of some "myths about genetics" produced in the contemporary culture (Gill 20). In this ultimate tale of inheritance, one can effectively examine how genetic discourse illuminates the links between generations and countries.

Finally, a noteworthy mention is M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land* that follows Nurdin Lalani and his family, Asian immigrants from Africa, who have come to Toronto, Canada. Nurdin is falsely accused of sexually assaulting a young woman

at work. Although he did not do anything wrong, he is “oppressed with guilt” (Vassanji 146) by his own self. Arguably, the issue lies in Nurdin’s inability to retain his old self and resist the corruptive temptations of the West. Vassanji suggests seeking answers in the past because its “ghosts” cannot be “easily shaken off” (9). Indeed, histories haunt the characters of *No New Land*, making it another interesting piece for exploring inheritance in the form of cultural haunting.

Final Thoughts

Bringing together both the works examined within this study and the broader spectrum of literary narratives lying beyond my immediate focus, I cannot help but return to a fundamental question, or rather, my innate curiosity regarding the complicated origins of contemporary cultural conflicts which track back to the past. The question I pose is whether one of the underlying reasons behind these conflict lies in identity politics that compels us to seek sameness with others by delving into our ancestral past. I would argue that this imperative is even more pressing and essential for those who are torn from their roots by migration. What is even more curious are the revelations we may discover when we delve into the past. The complexity of history – of wars, conflicts, genocides, conquests, ever-shifting borders, ever-evolving languages, political identities we are pressured to recognise as blood and culture – almost always guarantees that some unresolved and unmourned stories await us in that past. As this work has illustrated, the absence of closure tempts its discoverer to claim it as his or her *raison d'être*. In this reason for existence, we may find our duty to take on the burden to grieve, to accept, to avenge (by mourning) – the burden that our ancestors could not carry any longer.

This discussion on the revelations unearthed from the past leads me to another significant conclusion drawn from my analysis, namely that the past does not follow us, but rather, we follow the past. This work illuminates the reasons behind this need to cling on to inheritance. Inheritance is part of us but not because it is passed down through the generations through genes. We pursue it ourselves, often to understand our position in the present, the histories that led to it, and the responsibilities we inherited. At the same time, inheritance can also be imposed on us by those who do not accept us as part of their present, who are not willing to share their identities with us, who refuse to see sameness. Perhaps, this perspective can help remedy the emotionally ambiguous relationship with the past.

Having constructed the framework of this book, I embarked on a journey to explore contemporary identities through the lens of inheritance. However, as I arrive at these concluding pages, I have come to recognise that existence itself is inherently intertwined with the concept of inheritance. Taking different perspectives to examine intricate relationships with the past, I can conclude that my analysis has tackled *inheritance as being* and *being as inheritance*. The reason I have linked these two notions lies in the sharp dynamics of our increasingly divided world, in which individuals who have undergone migration themselves or whose parents migrated may

face obstacles in their quest for a meaningful sense of self. The inheritance, however, often holds the elusive sense of meaning they may seek.

It has been argued that the beginning of the current millennium was characterised by the raised interest in post-ethnicity and cosmopolitan identities (Alcoff 100). The focus on being as inheritance that I chose reveals the meaning of cultural and ethnic pasts as parts of identity. This way, my exploration of collective trauma and implication in contemporary literary narratives unveils the connections with the past that cannot be easily erased by a shift of vocabulary or a change of perspective. Despite selecting transcultural narratives and setting transculturality as a desired goal, I have demonstrated that origins remain important in contemporary national, ethnic, or religious conflicts. While transculturality aims to transcend traditional cultural boundaries, the arguments that stem from my analysis reveal the urgent need for acceptance of the commonalities that exist before cultural differences while also acknowledging the complex cultural histories affected by the failure to recognise the primary human vulnerability. Instead of aiming at 'post-identity' and 'post-ethnicity', this work rather looked to the roots of identity and to the reasons why these roots cannot be erased. Evading the past, as demonstrated through many examples, is often an act of denying implication, repressing trauma, and staying detrimentally oblivious to the unfinished mourning of losses.

While these arguments stem from my analysis of literary fiction, the fictional stories inspired by real conflicts offer an intensified perspective, enabling us to perceive more clearly the intricate roots underlying these conflicts. Connections between generations are not always instantly apparent. They often lie beneath the surface, obscured by geographical and linguistic distances. The imaginative power of literature reveals these connections across generations that may not be perceptible in real life, as it brings forth the chains of events although their links might be long buried in repressed memory.

While the theories of implication or chosen trauma can serve as a foundation for our understanding of ethnic conflicts and mourning, literature provides a connecting thread between theory and society by letting the reader into the minds of trauma survivors, implicated subjects, victims, bereaved in ways often unimaginable in real life. Its creative power can help us imagine conflict resolution, transcendence, and mourning in places where reality – with further reignited violent conflicts – cannot. Those who are nameless, belonging to the death-worlds, and not worthy of mourning in real life, have a chance to be acknowledged in literature as living whose lives are grievable and whose losses are mourned. This way, I would argue, literary discourse contributes to securing the foundation of egalitarian mourning.

Many societies today continue to experience losses and collective trauma, which signifies that egalitarian mourning requires more attention than ever. In the wake of new wars, media and politicians draw on cultural traumas of the past to justify violence – often on both sides of every conflict, further exemplifying the danger of utilising trauma for political purposes and demonstrating the need for looking beyond guilt and responsibility and for understanding implication. Yet, as I followed

Judith Butler's theoretical aspirations in demonstrating the examples of the failure of egalitarian mourning through a number of literary texts, I would like to conclude this work with further amplification of my research, namely by conveying my vision for *transcultural mourning* as a way of tackling the inheritance of trauma and loss. While I strongly agree with Butler's argument that a commitment to egalitarianism is crucial for acknowledging all lives as valuable and all humans as equally vulnerable and for practicing nonviolence (*The Force of Nonviolence* 28), there is a layer of complexity to cultures and their pasts that requires recognition, and I would advocate for this recognition when studying literary texts. While investigating works of contemporary transcultural fiction, it is valuable to mitigate the almost idealistic subtext of egalitarianism and acknowledge the damage inflicted by the unresolved conflicts and ungrieved losses of the past – the view I supported with the perspective of large-group identity in this work. After all, it is this acknowledgement that the narratives of loss, whether the loss of home, land, loved ones, or self, plead for, if I were to allow myself this generalisation. This transcendence of the roots that may carry collective trauma and loss has been in the centre of this work, and I have shown that its role is integral to the process of mourning. The contemporary narratives I have investigated illustrate how mourning – personal and collective – is often complicated by the act of the derealisation of lives and denial of acknowledgement of trauma by subjects beyond the circle or culture of the bereaved and often by implicated subjects, too. When approached as transcultural, mourning may encompass the possibility of recognising and transcending the complex cultural histories of trauma and loss. Instead of inviting us to be equal to the survivors of cultural trauma and their descendants, transcultural mourning appeals for the acknowledgement of the complex structures of implication and urges us to admit that we are not all equal to those who experienced massive losses after all, but we recognise our position in history and theirs and we commit to acknowledge their lives as real, valuable, and grievable.

Mourning and acknowledgment of primary human vulnerability are, therefore, required on a transcultural level, and the vocabulary for this must become firmly established through ongoing conversations in academic contexts and beyond. As I reveal in my explorations of transcultural narratives that bring forth the invisible, implicit conflicts of identity, it is these unresolved, unburied, unmourned, unacknowledged issues that stand in the way of an unconflicted, meaningful, and possibly transcultural selfhood. Only by confronting being as inheritance, transcending the pasts, and acknowledging the complex cultural histories often marked by trauma and loss, can we really move on to a transcultural future.

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In an era of growing political conflicts and resurgent national populism, the enduring significance of nations, ethnicities, and cultural roots remains undeniable. This work examines how contemporary literary fiction reflects these tensions, exploring the complex relationship between identity and inheritance. Drawing on Vamik Volkan's studies of large-group psychology, Judith Butler's theory of primary human vulnerability, and Michael Rothberg's theory of the implicated subject, this study examines how literary narratives portray identity conflicts and the weight of cultural pasts. The investigation of inheritance, which entails different forms of loss – of home, land, loved ones, or self, also considers the role of mourning, both personal and collective, in shaping a meaningful and unconflicted sense of self. By anchoring the analysis of narratives in theories of transgenerational trauma, implication, and grievability, this book reveals how literature confronts the unrepresentable, exposing the deep, often unseen ties between past and present.



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