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*Dilemmas of Identity*  
*in Contemporary British and American Novels*  
*on Central and Eastern European Migration*

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# Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter One: Identity</b>	<b>20</b>
1.1 Perspectives on Identity	21
1.2 Identity as a Controversial Concept	23
1.2.1 Subjective Identity vs. Objective Identity	24
1.2.2 Stable vs. Fluid	25
1.2.3 Individual vs. Social	26
1.2.4 Discovered vs. Narrated vs. Personally Constructed vs. Socially Constructed	28
1.2.5 Single vs. Multiple, Distinct vs. Overlapping	29
1.2.6 Dominant vs. Inferior	31
1.3 Perspectives on Migrant Identity	32
1.4 Conclusion	37
<b>Chapter Two: Place and Identity</b>	<b>38</b>
2.1 Place and Space in Human Thought	40
2.2 Place, Space, and Identity	50
2.3 Place and Space and Migrant Identity	56
2.4 Place and Space in Migrant Literature	59
2.5 Conclusion	63

<b>Chapter Three: Place and Migrant Identity in <i>Gimme the Money</i> by Iva Pekarkova</b>	<b>65</b>
3.1 Place-Space Relationships in the Novel	69
3.2 Mental Maps as Space-Making	71
3.3 Dynamism and Mobility as Space-Making	75
3.4 Flânerie as Space-Making	85
3.5 Derivé as Space-Making	89
3.6 Conclusion	91
<b>Chapter Four: Language and Identity</b>	<b>93</b>
4.1 Perspectives on Language and Identity	95
4.2 Language and Migrant Identity	102
4.3 Language and Migrant Literature	105
4.4 Conclusion	107
<b>Chapter Five: Language and Migrant Identity in <i>Lost in Translation</i> by Eva Hoffman</b>	<b>110</b>
5.1 Native Language, Identity, and Linguistic Image of the World	111
5.2 Place, Language, and Identity Transformation	126
5.3 E(v)va: Polish Ewa vs. American Eva	135
5.4 Conclusion	139
<b>Chapter Six: Memory and Identity</b>	<b>141</b>
6.1 Theories of Memory and Identity	144

6.2 Memory and Migrant Identity	153
6.2.1 Migrant Memory is Place-Related	154
6.2.2 Migrant Memory is Dynamic	155
6.2.3 Migrant Memory is Transcultural	156
6.2.4 Migrant Memory is Forgetting	157
6.3 Memory, History, and Migrant Identity	160
6.4 Memory and Literature	165
6.5 Conclusion	171
<b>Chapter Seven: Memory and Migrant Identity in <i>Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian</i> by Marina Lewycka</b>	<b>173</b>
7.1 Ludmilla Mayevska	177
7.2 Nikolai Mayevskyj	186
7.3 Vera	199
7.4 Valentina	210
7.5 Conclusion	225
<b>Chapter Eight: Narrative and Identity</b>	<b>227</b>
8.1 Narrative, Narration, Narrativity, Narratology	229
8.2 Narrative, Self-Narrative, and Narrative Identity	237
8.3 Sociocultural Pragmatics of Narrative	245
8.4 Narrative and Identity in Literature	252

8.5 Literary Narrative and Migrant Identity	255
8.6 Conclusion	260
<b>Chapter Nine: Narrative and Migrant's Identity in Kapka Kassabova's <i>Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria</i></b>	<b>262</b>
9.1 Narrative Strategies	263
9.2 Place Identity	271
9.3 Memory and Identity	292
9.4 Linguistic Identity	300
9.5 Conclusion	306
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>320</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>331</b>

## Abstract

Migration and literature have long been linked as spatial movement of people across borders has always generated narratives of displacement, exile, and cultural transition. These stories, whether personal or collective, not only laid the basis for the national literatures of many countries but also gave grounds for an extensive research on the psychological, social, and cultural nature of the migrants' experience. Undoubtedly, migration is a universal phenomenon, and its challenges are well-known to any migrant despite their origin. Origins, however, should not be disregarded. As a combination of numerous historical, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors, the homeland determines the migrant experience as much as the land of the new destination. Taking this into consideration, this dissertation studies selected 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century English-language novels on the theme of migration, written by authors who are Eastern and Central European migrants themselves. The aim of the dissertation is to study the literary representation of the dilemmas of identity that migrants from these parts of Europe confront in relation to such concepts as place and space, language, and memory. The key notion in the research is the concept of self-narrative through which the process of migrants' self-reinvention in a literary space is examined. By using the experiences of the authors who do not only write about migrants but also were and some of them still are migrants, we have approached these particular examples of literature about migration both as literary interpretations of migrant life and as records of their authors' personal processes of self-exploration and identity re-creation.

The analysis is conducted on twelve selected books by Eastern and Central European migrant writers. Four of them (*Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova, *Lost In Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka, and *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* by Kapka

Kassabova) are subjected to a detailed examination of how migrant identity dilemmas related to place, language, memory, and self-narrative are represented in a literary space.

The exploration of the literary reconstructions of migrant identity dilemmas draws on a mix of the interdisciplinary approaches. The frameworks of humanistic geography and environmental psychology are applied as methodological and theoretical background for the analysis of the interrelation between place and a migrant's identity (Harold Proshansky, Edward Relph, Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman, Yi-Fu Tuan, Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary). The role of language in the process of a migrant's self-definition is explored with the help of the Linguistic Image of the World framework (Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Anna Wierzbicka). To explore the influence of memory on a migrant's sense of self, we make use of the concepts of collective (Maurice Halbwachs) and communicative memory (Jan Assmann) theories, together with the concept of postmemory (Marianne Hirsch). Finally, scholarly views on narrative, self-narrative, and narrative identity (Dan P. McAdams, Paul Ricoeur, Regina E. Fabry), help us to approach the literary representations of a migrant identity as both a means of self-expression and self-interpretation through writing.

This dissertation makes an attempt to explain cultural, emotional, and psychological challenges that the characters, and possibly also their authors themselves, face searching for their identities away from home. The similarities of the narrative strategies employed by the authors to reconstruct migrant experience and probe into migrant identity make it possible to view the writings by Eastern and Central European migrants as a distinct literary tradition which offers a unique perspective on the challenges of migration set against a specific, shared historical and cultural background.

## Introduction

In its *Glossary on Migration*, International Organization for Migration defines migration as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State” (United Nations 137) and understands a migrant as someone “who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” (132). More than 200 pages of definitions are dedicated to migration-related terminology, which defines the diversity and complexity of migrant experience. These concepts not only call for a name, but also need an exploration and an understanding of all involved processes that constitute migration. It is within this context that the importance of studying literary representations of the challenges that migrants confront becomes ever more apparent: capable of catching and reflecting various aspects of human experience, literature serves as a medium of migrants’ self-expression, making the link between the external circumstances and migrants’ inner transformations visible. In “Geography, Literature and Migration” Paul White explores the power of literature to recreate the ambiguity and multidimensionality of migrant experience:

Creative or imaginative literature has a power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artifacts used by academic researchers. In migration, above all topics, the level of ambivalence, of plurality, of shifting identities and interpretations are perhaps greater than in many other aspects of life. (15)

Viewing literature as an effective means of depicting and reconstructing psychological, emotional, and cultural layers of human experience, which at times are unattainable through traditional academic methods, Paul White accentuates the unique role of literature which has the potential to serve as a medium of such complex and ambiguous experiences as migration.

As a global phenomenon, migration is, on the one hand, marked by the universality of the processes it involves (leaving the homeland, adapting to the new surroundings), but on the other hand, it varies significantly across different ethnic and national groups. Migration from Eastern and Central European countries occupies a special place in migration studies. The historical, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic background of these regions creates a peculiar combination of factors that determines the migrant experience of those who come from this part of the world. Taking this into consideration, we propose to assume that the Eastern European transition from communism to post-communism and democracy, its geopolitical challenges and economic hardships, led to creating a unique type of migrants whose identity and experiences were greatly influenced by the sociocultural environment they were brought up in.

Fueled by my personal experience of and interest in migration<sup>1</sup> and grounded in the understanding that literature is an artistic representation of human experiences, this dissertation studies selected 20th and 21st century English-language novels on the theme of migration, written by authors who are Eastern and Central European migrants themselves. The aim of this study is to verify if the geographical closeness, the shared cultural background and the common historical context of the authors, their characters and narratives (and thus their migrant

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<sup>1</sup> As an Eastern European migrant, I understand what it means to be in between two places, two times and two languages. This is why, in many ways, this study is a process of self-probing for me. Exploring the literary representations of the dilemmas of migrant experience, I re-evaluate my own journey and rediscover my migrant identity.

experience), allow us to look at the group of novels chosen for this study as a sub-type of migrant literature. Special attention is paid to the literary representation of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic challenges that migrants from Central and Eastern European countries confront in the new environment. This dissertation aims at exploring how the experience of being caught between two places, two cultures, two times, two different traditions, and two different languages is depicted in literature. On the example of the chosen migrant literary works, the study approaches self-narration as one of the central means of migrants' self-definition and a key tool to understanding the ambiguous nature of their identity. Focused on the literary depiction of migrant identity, this dissertation studies the categories that are used to construct that identity and the ways in which narratives express it while they deal with the challenges that migrants encounter.

Viewing an individual's identity as a story about the self, this dissertation uses Bakhtin's theories of chronotope and speech representation ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", "Discourse in the Novel") to study the principle components of the literary construction of a migrant's identity. Like every story, which needs space, time and language to be narrated, the individual story of a migrant is anchored in time, space and language, and their intersection creates a meaningful narrative representation of a migrant's self. In the context of migrant literature, these foundational elements of the author's narrative identity become particularly visible: the decision to relocate to a different country with a new sociocultural environment disrupts the temporal continuity of a migrant's narrative, divides their life into before and after, and forces them to reinvent their identity in a new place narrated in a new language. Yet whatever is new and reinvented in this narrative remains rooted in what was before. This is why

we believe that approaching the narrative identity of a migrant writer from the perspective of place, language and memory, three major constituents of the migrants' story of the self, offers a useful vantage point in the exploration of migrant experience narrated in literature.

Drawing on the concepts of humanistic studies, which allow to describe and interpret the identity formation processes that migrant authors as well as their literary characters undergo, this dissertation uses the concepts of human geography, environmental psychology, and cultural anthropology to explore and theorize the literary representations of migrant experience. It attempts to show how literature discusses and problematizes these concepts through the creation of narratives that encapsulate the essence of migrant experience.

Among the vast number of migrant literary expressions written in the age of migration, this study focuses specifically on literary works written by migrant authors themselves. Their self-narratives, which are personal accounts of the challenges of migration, offer a more authentic, insider perspective on migrant reality which migrant writers not only describe but also experience. First-person narration, which dominates in the chosen books, only reflects the personal and subjective nature of these migrant writings and makes it possible to approach the selected literary narratives not only as artistic interpretations of identity dilemmas, but also as acts of authorial self-reinvention.

While we are aware of the genre differences between the books we study (some are fictionalized memoirs, some are creative autobiographies) we use the inclusive term "migrant novel" to refer to them all, prioritizing their shared thematic focus and the migrant backgrounds of their authors.

It is also important to point out that all of the migrant novels discussed in this dissertation have been written predominantly in English, although the presence of words and phrases in their

authors' mother tongues is often conspicuous. The decision to recount the story about the self in the new language is a significant factor in the representation of migrant identity. As a tool deliberately chosen for the reconstruction of the self in a literary space, the English of the narratives indicates the writers' adaptation to the new environment. The nature of the specific language of migrants' self-narratives becomes a measure of the transformations that their migrant identity undergoes.

The corpus for the study consists of twelve books. *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova (the Czech Republic; the first publication in Czech – in 1996, in English – in 2000), *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffamn (Poland; 1989), *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewicka (Ukraine; 2005), and *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* by Kapka Kassabova (Bulgaria; 2008) serve as a basis for close analysis because they best exemplify the ambiguity of migrant experience in relation to place and space, language, time and memory, illustrating that self-narration is an effective tool to study the elusive processes of migrant identity formation and transformation.

Eight other novels are referred to in the discussion as valuable evidence of migrant experience that broadens the scope of the study by presenting accounts of migrant writers from different Eastern and Central European countries and provides additional perspectives on the themes of migration and identity. Grounded in the personal experience of migrant writers, the books selected for this study are read as records of their personal reality, regardless of whether they refer to actual events that happened in an author's life or are just an artistic and fictional interpretation of the theme of migration. Self-narration and autofiction, which become the essential tools for migrants' self-recreation in literary space, allow migrant writers to go beyond

the boundaries of memoir and autobiography and to use the potential of the narrative to explore the identity dilemmas that migrants face.

*Stroika with a London View* by William B. Foreignerski (Latvia; 2019) is a story inspired by personal experience of a Latvian author and musician William B. Foreignerski, whose pseudonym indicates the importance of the concept of foreignness in his self-definition. The book portrays the life in migration of economic migrants from Eastern and Central European countries in the United Kingdom, focusing on their financial, linguistic, and emotional struggles, accompanied by acculturative stress.

*An Involuntary Genius in America's Shoes (And What Happened Afterwards)* by Andrei Codrescu (Romania; 2001: Re-issue of *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* (1976) and *In America's Shoes* (1983), with a new forward and a coda-essay) is a representation of a Romania-born American poet, novelist, essayist and commentator Andrei Codrescu's journey of self-reinvention in a foreign country. The author's emigration, caused by his refusal to follow the rules of the communist censorship, brings him to the USA, where he faces the challenges of preserving his self as he tries to adapt to a new culture. The process of his identity transformation is reflected in his autobiography, which Codrescu himself defines as "an elaborate identity card" (9).

*What Language Do I Dream in?* by Elena Lappin (Russia; 2016) is, as Dan Vyleta, Giller Prize-shortlisted author, calls it, "a thoughtful migrant's memoir that will speak to all those of us who find their lives suspended between nations, cultures, languages; between past and present selves; between rival identities and loyalties; to all those who live with a hyphen at the centre of their life stories" (taken from the cover of the book). Written by a British novelist

Elena Lappin, who was born in Moscow, grew up in Prague and Hamburg, has lived in Israel, Canada, and the United States, the book explores what it means to live in five languages and belong to more than one country.

*The Photographer at Sixteen*, written by the British poet and translator of Hungarian origin George Szirtes (2019), is an attempt at reinventing the self through the process of comprehending the family's past hidden in the shadows of turbulent history. By telling the story backwards, the author not only deals with the feeling of loss that the death of his mother caused, but also reinterprets his own Hungarian and Jewish heritage and addresses the questions of displacement, trauma, and inferiority common in migrant experience.

*Lost Birds* is a novel-in-stories by a Lithuanian-American writer Birute Putrius (2015), which tells the story of Lithuanian migrants who came to Chicago after WWII to start their life anew in an unknown country. Depicting two generations of the migrant community, the author explores how different the parents' and the children's experiences of migration are and why the word "motherland" evokes dissimilar, and at times contrasting images and meanings in them.

*A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka* by Lev Golinkin, a Ukraine-born American author (2014), is a story of his family escape to the USA from the oppressive communist regime of the USSR. The memoir, which, in the author's own words, "was born from a need to understand my past" (ix), is dedicated to the hardships of the journey from Kharkiv to New York, which took the family almost six months. By writing the book, Golinkin makes an attempt to reconcile the oppressed and forgotten part of his identity with his new life in the USA.

*A Replacement Life* by Boris Fishman (2014), an American writer who was born in Belarus and migrated to the USA at the age of nine, is a story of a young man, Slava, a failed

writer, whose greatest desire is to break away from his migrant past. However, his grandmother's death makes him confront what he was trying to escape. Returning to the neighborhood of his childhood, Slava gets involved in forging Holocaust restitution claims for old Russians in Brooklyn, discovering the past of his family compatriots through inventing the fake narratives of the Jewish pogroms in Minsk during WWII.

*Madame Mephisto*, a novel of a Polish-British writer A.M. Bakalar (2012), invites its readers to follow the complicated story of a Polish migrant Magda, who has lived in London for years and now travels back to Poland to attend a funeral. Using the form of a confession, the narrative discloses a double life that the heroine has led: hiding behind an invented identity of a professional, Magda developed a drug-dealing network between Poland and Great Britain. The duality of the realities the heroine exists in is paralleled by the hybridity of her migrant life: shaped by two countries, the narrator's two identities are a product of contemporary migrant experience.

The dissertation is divided into four main sections. Each section opens with a theoretical chapter, which introduces and discusses categories of identity seen as essential in re-defining a migrant's understanding of the self, such as place and space, language, memory, and self-narration. Each theoretical chapter is followed by an analysis of the literary representation of migrant experience in a novel that best exemplifies a given dilemma of identity referring to one of the theoretical categories.

Chapter One focuses on the notion of identity, its formation and representation viewed from the perspective of different academic disciplines, and explains these aspects by reference to categories understood by scholars as foundational components of identity: place, language,

memory, and self-narration. For the purpose of this dissertation, the general concept of identity is specifically appropriated to the discussion of a migrant's identity and experience.

Chapter Two maps the theoretical interconnections between geography and identity: it studies the evolution of the concepts of place and space in human thought, introduces key terms of environmental psychology and humanistic geography, such as place attachment, place identity, and place-making, and explores the representation of place and space in literature. Grounded in the theories by Edward Relph, David Canter, Yi-Fu Tuan, Doreen Massey and others, the chapter focuses on the crucial role that place and space play in the process of one's self-identification. Studied from the perspective of migrant literature, place and space reveal themselves as essential elements of migrant experience that determine an individual's narration of the self not only by anchoring the narrative in a particular geographical location, but also by becoming an active agent of the story.

Chapter Three offers an analysis of literary representations of the dilemmas of identity in relation to place and space. In *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova, which is a story of a Czech woman who comes to New York to become a cab driver, the migrant's identity is portrayed by narrating her intensive interaction with the geography of the city, the place and space that shape and redefine the character's self.

Chapter Four studies the interrelation between language and identity, discusses the concepts of linguistic identity, the linguistic image of the world, bilingualism, and biculturalism, and attempts to problematize the role these concepts play in a literary depiction of a migrant's self. Referring to the works by Ferdinand de Saussure, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and Anna Wierzbicka, the chapter views language as a core component of personal, cultural, and

social identity. In migrant literary texts language serves both as a constructor of a character's identity and a marker of its transformation, bringing to the foreground the interconnection between the language in which a person is brought up and his or her image of the self.

Chapter Five is dedicated to the analysis of a literary representation of the dilemmas that migrants experience in relation to language as depicted in *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman. The book involves the reader in a narration of the transformation of the migrant character's linguistic identity, shown as parallel to the gradual "translation" of her linguistic image of the world. The autobiographical story of a migrant losing her mother tongue to acquire a new language becomes a metaphor of the heroine's loss and remaking of identity, but is also a testimony to the importance of language as a category of identity formation.

Chapter Six explains the role of memory in the formation of one's image of the self. Grounded in Maurice Halbach's theory of collective memory, Jan Assmann's concept of communicative memory, and the frameworks of embodied and extended memory, our argument proposes that migrant identity, as it is being shaped by the new environment in a foreign country, remains in constant interaction with individual, collective, communicative, extended, and embodied memory. In literature, memory becomes a narrative tool that allows migrant writers to set the connection between their past and present, to locate their story in the broader context of known history, and to reconstruct their identity by anchoring it in a retrospective interpretation of their lived and narrated experience.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the literary representation of the dilemmas that migrants experience in relation to memory. *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka shows memory to be an active element in migrant identity

transformation. Addressing the past as an essential part of migrant identity, the leading character embraces her Ukrainian heritage and makes it a part of her self-image in which the Ukrainian past and the British present coexist.

Referring to the works by Paul John Eakin, Jerome Bruner, Dan P. McAdams, Paul Ricoeur and others, Chapter Eight examines the role of self-narration in identity formation. Viewed as an essential element of an individual's identity which integrates one's reconstructed past, perceived present, imagined future, and life experience into one coherent story of the self, in migrant literature, self-narration performs a function of a therapeutic and transformative practice which creates a space for migrants to reinvent their identities by reconciling all parts of their experience into a meaningful narrative.

Chapter Nine explores the narrative self-portrait of an Eastern European migrant as depicted in Kapka Kassabova's self-narrative *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*. The story is a prominent example of a literary text which serves as a medium of migrant narrative identity formation and transformation. Implementing the narrative pattern of a migrant's return to the motherland as a central framework for the representation of migrant experience, the author uses narrative as an essential means to contrast the past and the present, the here and there, the Bulgarian and the English, in order to show the ambiguity and the uniqueness of the identity of a migrant.

By treating self-narration as a major tool of a migrant's identity construction and reconstruction, as well as a dominant mode of migrant literature, this dissertation attempts to make use of concepts and categories employed in migration studies to analyze and appreciate migration literature. Approaching identity as, first and foremost, a meaningful story about the

self which emerges at the intersection of place, time, memory and language, the study explores how these categories are used by migrant writers to reflect the identity processes narrated in literature. By focusing on books written by migrant writers from – up to a point – a shared historical and political background, however dissimilar in their national and linguistic origins they are, this dissertation views the similarities of their self-narration as a reason to identify the discussed books as a distinct type of migrant literature. It is a literature based on personal migrant experience, written in the newly acquired language to narrate the process of the disruption and reconstruction of identity that emigration from the former Soviet Bloc countries to the West meant for the authors.

## Chapter One: Identity

*Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.*

– Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”

*Though migrant identities constantly change vis-à-vis citizens, other immigrants, and compatriots remaining in the country of origin, they are shaped by influences associated with the country, region, or village of origin and other axes of differentiation including age, gender, religion, and skin colour. The ability to express this identity or these identities in the country of immigration in which they settle is a particular concern for many migrants. At the same time, many migrants also wish to adopt at least some of the cultural, political, and social practices of the majority of citizens in the country of immigration.*

– Michael Samers, *Migration*

Migration has always been an inseparable part of human history and human experience. The interstate movement of individuals, however common to every historical period, has always brought questions and controversies with it. On the one hand, migration contributes to the processes of globalization as people moving from one place to another carry their culture with them to the new place. On the other hand, migrant experience often involves facing challenges that force migrants to distance themselves from their original background and to reinvent their sense of self as a result of their interaction with new social, cultural, linguistic, and other environments. The concept of migrant identity which arises from the interplay between the

known and the unfamiliar has been in the center of academic interest in recent years, as scholars attempt to establish an all-encompassing theoretical framework that is capable of describing the ways in which people who have relocated to a new place of residence experience and negotiate their sense of self and belonging.

While there are numerous approaches to the specific concept of migrant identity, among which we find theories that consider migrant identity a combination of cultural peculiarities of home and host societies, or view migrant identity as a multilayered phenomenon shaped by a set of factors such as race, community, language, gender, or socio-economic status, most researchers agree that the understanding of migrant identity must be informed by the more general concept of individual human identity. Therefore, in order to study the concept of migrant identity, it is important to establish its relation to the general notion of identity which will help to structure our analysis of the literary representation of migrant experience of the formation and transformation of identity in the contexts of the social, cultural, linguistic, and other changes that migration brings. This chapter will review several major approaches to the concept of identity afforded to us by the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, and sociology, which, we trust, will allow us to establish a working theoretical framework and define a set of terms that we will use in our exploration and discussion of the literary representations of the phenomenon of migrant identity.

### **1.1 Perspectives on Identity**

Identity, one of the most widely debated concepts in modern academic discourse, has received definitions from scholars working in many different disciplines, which alone reaffirms its importance and its interdisciplinary dimension. Derived by way French from the Latin *identitas*,

which had etymologically originated from the demonstrative pronoun *idem* (“the same”), the English term “identity” appeared for the first time in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (OED) and has, overall, retained its original meaning of “being the same” until today. Of course, its use in various academic fields has stretched and expanded its original semantic field. Philosophy understands identity as the ability to recognize the same self through time (Locke 335; Kant 121) and is viewed as a fundamental feature of human existence which is unique and meaningful in the way an individual experiences it and endows it with interpretations (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21-35). Psychology recognizes identity as a reflexive and continuous awareness of who one is (Baumeister 682-83), focusing on the uniqueness of an individual’s values, beliefs, and the worldview that define his/her sense of who he/ she is and distinguish him/ her from others. Scholars in cultural studies view identity as a set of peculiar characteristics, such as nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, locality, political system, gender, financial status, etc., common for a certain group of people. They see identity as a product of the shared cultural symbols and meanings that individuals use to make sense of their experiences: “We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture – and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it: Dobuan and Javanese, Hopi and Italian, upper-class and lower-class, academic and commercial” (Geertz 49). Identity also appears to be a central concept for the discipline of sociology, where it is defined as a product of social interaction (Mead 135, 155; Cooley 136-137, 147) in which the self is “formed and played out in relation to those who are similar and those who are different” (Kehily 6).

The existence of numerous approaches to the concept of identity in different academic fields reflects its centrality for the scholarly discourse. Examined separately, each definition

emphasizes a particular aspect of the idea, whether it is the psychological connectedness of one's personal characteristics, or a set of cultural traditions that define one's sense of self. But only when these views are taken into account simultaneously do they reveal the full multidimensionality and complexity of the concept. For the sake of this study, identity is approached as an interdisciplinary construct that combines psychological, philosophical, cultural, and sociological perspectives on the nature of selfhood. This will allow us to study the literary representation of identity as a combination of various social, cultural, and psychological factors which shape one's sense of self in different contexts captured by literary narration.

## **1.2 Identity as a Controversial Concept**

Whether we approach the concept of identity from the psychological, philosophical, cultural or sociological perspective, we encounter a number of controversies running through all of the fields as identity can be viewed in them as both subjective and objective, individual and social, stable and fluid, discovered, narrated, personally constructed and socially constructed, single and multiple, distinct and overlapping, dominant and inferior, stressing similarities and highlighting differences. Close attention of the academic community to the ambiguous nature of the self is beneficial for the study of migrant identity which, as a product of the polarizing experience of moving to live abroad, is negotiated in the context of contradiction and hybridity. The coexistence of opposites, which according to Vignoles et al. is an innate feature of personal identity (2), intensified by the process of adaptation, assimilation, and acculturation, becomes a defining characteristic of a migrant's sense of self and his sense of belonging or not belonging.

### 1.2.1 Subjective Identity vs. Objective Identity

The question of subjectivity and objectivity of identity constitutes one of the key areas of the debate in the study of identity. The theoretical framework to approach this controversy was suggested by Harke A. Bosma, who understood identity as a combination of two elements: objective identity and subjective identity. A person's general characteristics visible and accessible to the outside world (such as appearance, name, date of birth, biographical descriptions, intellectual skills, attitudes, needs, personality traits, a person's social roles, etc.) which define him or her as a specified and unique person represent a person's objective identity. The idea of subjective identity refers to a person's self-conception, their awareness of these characteristics:

“Subjective identity” is the experiential side of objective identity, for example, the awareness ...of continually being one and the same person, distinct from others. Being and remaining identifiable, from the objective perspective and the person's own, subjective perspective, thus seems to be the core meaning of “identity”. Since the objective and subjective perspectives concern the same object, the objective and subjective qualifiers are two sides of the same coin. (Bosma 6)

What Bosma means is that subjective identity and objective identity are mutually dependent. Objective identity provides a stable foundation for a person's subjective experiences while subjective identity shapes and modifies a person's objective identity. For example, through the development of new skills or the acquisition of new knowledge a redefining of the central aspects of objective identity happens, and, at the same time, the change in the defining elements of objective identity will result in an immediate change of subjective identity. Stability and sameness coexist with change and difference in the process of identity development and remind

us of the dynamic nature of the concept. Bosma calls this process a negotiation between a person and a context, where both decide which identifier, objective or subjective, is more relevant to a given situation:

Both context and person play a role, “negotiate” as it were, which identifiers are relevant. In many situations this negotiation process is implicit. When I go to the baker to buy some rolls I really do not expect that he tries to sell me gasoline. In other situations – personal relationships, work – this negotiation process can be an active and conscious process in which person and context try to achieve agreement on the relevant identities (e.g., my identity as a friend, partner, colleague, psychologist, etc.). “Identity,” thus, does not refer to a fixed set of characteristics, but to identifiers whose relevance depends on situation-specific person-context relationships. In other words, with regard to “identity” person and context mutually define each other. (6)

### **1.2.2 Stable vs. Fluid**

In the introductory chapter to *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, we read that “[D]evelopmental psychologists tend to view identity change as a long-term process that occurs mainly during specific parts of the lifespan” and “that identity issues are most often addressed during the adolescent and emerging adult years”, and, therefore, “most developmental psychological approaches continue to view identity as relatively stable once it has been formed” (Vignolez et al. 10). However, sociopsychological and discursive approaches to identity claim that identity issues may be revisited later in adulthood under the influence of changing social and cultural contexts (Vignolez et al. 10). Laeyendecker (qtd. in Bosma 6) elaborates on the notion of the dynamic balance between sameness and change of identity and proposes that the necessary

balance provides an individual with a sense of continuity and stability while simultaneously being inherently fluid and contingent on social, cultural, and historic contexts. According to Laeyendecker, individuals are constantly in the process of constructing and reconstructing their identities, and the process is shaped by a range of both internal and external factors. This view, as Bosma concludes, reconciles fixity and transformation and allows identity to be perceived dynamically as an issue of “sameness and continuity” (6).

### **1.2.3 Individual vs. Social**

Although there is no established framework or theory that would view identity as solely individual or purely social, there are approaches that prioritize one over the other. In the introduction to the *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* we read:

Neo-Eriksonian perspectives such as the identity status paradigm ..., as well as most perspectives in self-psychology ..., have tended to focus mainly on aspects of individual identity and on individual processes of identity development. In contrast, social-psychological, sociological, and discursive perspectives have tended to focus on aspects of relational and collective identities, and to view these as constituted by social processes. (Vignoles et al. 8)

Among the theories that accentuate the role of individual identity, there is Erik Erikson’s concept of psychosocial development which emphasizes the importance of personal experience and reflection in shaping individual identity (*Identity: Youth and Crisis*). Along the same lines, James E. Marcia defines personal goals, values and beliefs as crucial stimulators of the process of “identity achievement” (551), while Kernis sees one’s self-esteem as an important factor in the processes of identity formation (Kernis et al. 478-79).

Among numerous approaches that study identity as a social phenomenon, the Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, is one of the most influential ones. For Tajfel and Turner social identity consist of “those aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging” (Tajfel and Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior” 16). Social identity impacts an individual’s self-esteem: being recognized as one that belongs to a group carries “positive value connotations” (16), while being excluded from a group and marked as different creates negative feelings, lowers one’s self-esteem and may lead to an internal or/ and external conflict.

The concepts of social and individual identities are especially important for a discussion of migrant identities. Migration severs links with the social contexts that constructed the individual’s selfhood so far and calls for a reinvention and a new representation of the individual in the new, often misunderstood context of social signs and symbols. “Self-representation includes both social and personal identities,” Anne Reid and Kay Deaux come to the conclusion in their article “The Relationship Between Social and Personal Identities: Segregation or Integration?”, insisting that the “integration model of identity”, which proposes that different aspects of identity simultaneously coexist within the limits of cognitive structures, captures the essence of the nature of identity which is changeable, fluid, and flexible (1084), and, we believe, serves the purpose of discussing migrant identity. Indeed, identity which simultaneously refers to a sense of who a person is as an individual and as a member of a social group, and reflects how they define themselves and how others perceive them, is capable of adjusting to the context which determines the manifestation and temporary domination of a dimension of identity required by a given communicative situation.

#### **1.2.4 Discovered vs. Narrated vs. Personally Constructed vs. Socially Constructed**

Another issue related to the ambiguous nature of identity underlies the debate concerning the ways in which individuals establish their self-structure, i.e. their collection of beliefs about themselves. Some scholars claim that identity is discovered, others believe that it is narrated, some insist that identity is personally constructed, others are convinced that the image of the self is socially determined.

Carl Rogers's self-actualization theory speaks in favor of the approach that emphasizes discovery as a method of identity formation. Identity is an inherent aspect of the self waiting to be revealed: "... the real self is something which is comfortably discovered in one's experiences, not something imposed upon it" (114). This view suggests that instead of trying to fit one's experiences into a pattern, which will define one's sense of self, a person has to find "the unity and harmony which exist in ... actual feelings and reactions" (114).

The theory of narrated identity suggests that people construct their sense of self through a conscious creation and interpretation of a coherent story about themselves. This creation happens in every communicative situation in which an individual participates, including communication with oneself in thoughts and meditation. Identity is then neither fixed nor determined, but is constantly evolving and being reshaped as a person interprets and reinterprets life events for the purpose of their narrative. The self is seen in this theory as a product of the stories people tell about themselves, while the narrated stories serve them as space and context within which they make sense of their experiences.

Dan P. McAdams explains another aspect of narrated identity which appears to be especially useful for our discussion of migrant narratives, which are all rooted in particular social and historical realities. McAdams observes that narrated identity is a medium of cultural, social,

and historical contexts in which individuals live and which influence the way they perceive themselves: “In constructing self-defining life stories, people draw heavily on prevailing cultural norms and the images, metaphors, and themes that run through the many narratives they encounter in social life” (“Narrative Identity” 99)<sup>2</sup>. Individual narrative is therefore dependent on the cultural narratives a person encounters. This consideration appears especially important in exploring migrant identity formation since, as the novels we are about to study show, a migrant is exposed to many rivalling, or even conflicting, cultural narratives.

The debate between proponents of individually constructed identity – Erik Erikson, James Marcia, Michael Berzonsky – vs. socially constructed identity – Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman (Berzonsky 55-76) – appears to be reconciled by Vivian L. Vignoles in the *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, who claims that studying these perspectives as completely separate phenomena is misleading and that excluding either of these elements from the description of identity formation processes would result in a limited and incomplete view on self-structure. Vignoles’ reminder that “identity construction involves the interplay of these two dimensions” (12) will be a useful guide in our attempt to understand the struggles of the migrant narrators who try to come to terms with who they are as they interpret the new social narratives they become part of.

### **1.2.5 Single vs. Multiple, Distinct vs. Overlapping**

Another controversy debated by scholars researching the process of self-construction and representation is the problem of the singularity and multiplicity of identity. Does one and the same identity manifest itself through its multiple expressions in various contexts and situations

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<sup>2</sup> The interconnection between narrative and identity is discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight of this dissertation.

or are these different identities, separable and unrelated, on which individuals draw to meet the purpose of a given communicative situation? Vignoles asks the question referring to particular identity categories, “When people switch between multiple cultural, gender, or sexual identities are they switching between multiple identities, or between multiple aspects of a single identity?”

(6) The answers are again divided. Carolin J. Showers and Virgil Zeigler-Hill, commenting on the organization of self-knowledge understand identity as multiple and define it as “a set of basic-level categories or self-aspects...each represents a distinct self or persona...they typically correspond to distinct roles, contexts, relationships, activities, traits, states, and the like” (107).

On the other hand, Pamela A. Hays’s ADDRESSING framework of identity proposes that identity is a singular but multilayered phenomenon. Hays sees identity as a unity shaped by nine complex and overlapping cultural influences: **A**ge (and generation), **D**isability, **R**eligion, **E**thnicity, **S**ocial status, **S**exual orientation, **I**ndigenous heritage, **N**ational origin, and **G**ender. The model emphasizes the interconnection and relatedness of all the categories as they all shape and transform the same self-structure (“Addressing the Complexities of Culture and Gender in Counseling” 332).

Another theory that speaks in favor of viewing identity as a unitary concept involving numerous interrelated components is the so-called Iceberg Model of Culture<sup>3</sup>, developed by Edward T. Hall in his book *Beyond Culture* in 1976. The Model understands culture as a complex unity consisting of surface elements, such as language, food, fashion, music, literature, etc., and deep or hidden elements, such as values, attitudes, and beliefs. The deep elements, not easily accessible, determine the nature of the surface elements. “Beneath the clearly perceived, highly explicit surface culture, there lies a whole other world, which when understood will

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<sup>3</sup> The term is frequently used by the proponents of Hall’s views although the researcher never used it in his texts.

ultimately radically change our view of human nature” (15). The Iceberg Model of Culture implies an analogous structure for the concept of individual identity. Viewed as a cultural construct of surface and deep elements (16-17, 240), the multifaceted conventional expressions and representations of individual identity are informed and bound into unity by the deep structure of the self, made up of individual values and beliefs. It is the deep structure of the self that ensures the wholeness and the continuity of one’s self-image.

The reconciliation of these contrasting views, Vivian L. Vignoles et al. claim, lies in admitting that the interpretation of identity either as a unitary or a poly-dimensional phenomenon is “a definitional question rather than a real substantive problem” (6). While this may not be a real substantive problem for psychologists, and while for the argument of this dissertation we accept the notion that individual identity is singular rather than multiple, we need to take note of the fact that the literary representations of migrant identity we propose to study often probe into the question of fragmented identities and search for ways to express the difficulty of combining and uniting the different aspects of the self in their narratives.

### **1.2.6 Dominant vs. Inferior**

The discussion of singularity and multiplicity of identity leads to another debate which centers on viewing various expressions of identity components as either dominant or inferior. Sheldon Stryker and Richard T. Serpe, exploring the structure of the self, refer to the concepts of psychological centrality and identity salience in order to explain the hierarchy of the multiple aspects of identity (“Identity Salience and Psychological Centrality: Equivalent, Overlapping, or Complementary Concepts?” 16). The idea of psychological centrality, suggested by Morris Rosenberg in *Conceiving the Self*, poses that “self-concept is not a collection but an organization

of parts, pieces, and components” (73) which, depending on the context and an individual’s intention, “vary in the degree to which they are central or peripheral, cardinal or secondary, major or minor parts of the self” (18). Stryker and Serpe believe that “the hierarchy in which identities are organized is based on identity salience” (“Identity Salience and Psychological Centrality: Equivalent, Overlapping, or Complementary Concepts?” 17), which they define as the relevance of a certain aspect of identity to the particular context or, in other words, the likelihood of a dimension of identity to be manifested in a given situation or to be invoked across the varieties of situations (“Commitment, Identity Salience and Role Behavior: Theory and Research Example” 206). Rosenberg is convinced that “the differential importance of self-concept components is ... critically significant for self-esteem” because the latter is based not only on the constituent qualities of a person, but also “on an assessment of the qualities that *count*” (18, italics in original). It is important to emphasize that because the domination of a particular aspect of identity is individually and situationally determined, it may change with time, which confirms the fluidity and flexibility of the nature of identity. The model of changing hierarchies of identity categories and elements will again be crucial in our discussion of migrant experience for migration, like no other change in life, disrupts and shifts an individual’s list of challenges and confuses the salience of identity elements.

### **1.3 Perspectives on Migrant Identity**

Of course, all that has been said about the concept of identity pertains to the phenomenon of migrant identity. Yet, because the latter term appears in the title of this dissertation, we feel obliged to define and explain it in detail. Migrant identity will be approached in our discourse as a multidimensional concept that encompasses various disciplines, including psychology,

sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies. It will be viewed as an expression of an individual's psychological coherence and connectedness, a result of social interaction with others and with a unique cultural background coupled with an assessment of that interaction, a means of an individual's way of understanding, constructing and narrating oneself and the surrounding reality. Following the conciliatory rhetoric of Vivian L. Vignoles we will choose the middle way and avoid controversy. We treat identity as a dynamic psychological entity that can be both fixed and flexible in time and context, discovered and constructed in its making, individual and social in its structure, subjective and objective in perspective, single and multiple in its functioning, with many distinct but overlapping elements of various and changing salience. However irreconcilable these apparent opposites may sound, we believe that especially in an attempt to understand and narrate the identity of a migrant, whose experiential points of reference undergo a drastic change, the entire spectrum of the theoretical facets of identity must remain open.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, we propose to understand migrant identity not as a particular combination of established identity categories, but as a distinct form of individual identity. Such a comprehensive and holistic approach is required to face the challenge that the study of migrant experience, whether reported in a straightforward documentary form or transformed into literary narration, poses to scholars. Approaching migrant identity only by way of such constituent elements as ethnic identity, cultural identity, or linguistic identity, is, in our opinion, inadequate because migrant experience, often unsettling, traumatic and psychologically and mentally demanding, escapes the simple sum of known categories.

If identity structure were to be envisioned as hierarchy, individual identity would be defined as a concept of the first level (identity 1), its components (cultural, ethnic, linguistic, place identities, etc.) would be marked as concepts of the second level (identity 2), and migrant

identity could be viewed as an iteration of the concept of the first level (identity 1.1) with all the elements of the second level contributing to its formation. Such a model of migrant identity, in our opinion, allows to approach it as a distinct type of identity formed by a distinct type of experience, yet rooted in the general concept of personal identity explained above.

As a distinct form of individual identity, migrant identity can also be studied as a multidisciplinary concept which can be approached from different perspectives. Interpreted in psychological terms, migrant identity is viewed as a particular psychoemotional state of a person which denotes the development of individual identity stimulated by the experience of migration. Sociology studies the processes of identity construction in the context of migration which triggers such forms of social interaction with the unknown environment as integration, assimilation, exclusion, or marginalization. From a cultural perspective, migrant identity is understood as a product of cultural, sociopolitical, and historical factors which describe migrant identity as representative of a particular worldview and a system of values that defines one's sense of belonging.

As a distinct form of individual identity which is evoked by the experience of an interstate relocation, migrant identity can also be approached with the help of the oppositional frameworks. The categories of the subjective and the objective as well as of the individual and the social are inherent elements of the nature of migrant identity because the latter is simultaneously shaped by an individual's own self-perception and the outside environment. Migrants, socially branded by their objective identity, marked by their accent, skin color or name, are instantly labeled as "the other" without much interest in their subjective identity. Faced with the need to belong, migrants are forced to reconstruct their social identity which emerges as a result of their individual experience of and reaction to a new context. Migrant

identity is also a concept which reconciles fluidity and stability. Forged in the context of geographical, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic change, it adapts to the challenges that living in the host country poses. At the same time, commitment to their cultural and ethnic heritage, together with interpersonal connections with meaningful people of their own background, provide psychological continuity and connectedness and speak for the fixity of some aspects of migrant identity.

The framework of identity development processes, which stresses the narrational element of identity construction, is especially helpful in studying literary representations of the migrant experience, where literary narration of migrant characters constructs their literary selves and, we believe, reflects the experience of their migrant authors. Through the processes of self-exploration, self-reflection and self-narration, migrant characters negotiate their identity in the new surroundings and try to construct a coherent and meaningful story of the self.

The ADDRESSING framework and the Iceberg Model of Culture are two informative approaches which aside from suggesting a perspective to study migrant identity as a singular but multilayered notion, also provide our research with a plurality of contexts in which migrant identity is redefined. Both perspectives show that migrant identity is shaped by various factors, including ethnicity, nationality, language, history, society, etc., all of which get reinterpreted in the reality of living abroad. Moreover, the Iceberg Model of Culture is particularly relevant in the study of the literary representation of migrant identity formation and transformation because it provides us with a lens to view migrant identity as a product of the interaction between primary and secondary aspects of culture, or cultures, that migrants belong to and draws attention to the ways in which authors deal with the process of their transition. Finally, the concepts of psychological centrality and identity salience explain why certain aspects of migrant identity

become more prominent or dominant while others are weakened and become irrelevant. They allow us to study migrant identity as a situationally and subjectively predetermined phenomenon whose flexible nature allows it to adjust to the requirements and expectations of the context of migration.

The study of migrant identity, a distinct form of individual identity which emerges in the circumstances of moving abroad, is faced with the same set of ambiguities, overlaps and grey areas we listed in relation to the study of the general concept of identity. The complication of the object of this study, an identity that is in itself hybrid, multilayered and exposed to internal controversy, is even greater. As Consuela Wagner notes, controversy is a fundamental element of a migrant's consciousness: "The migrant will seek in the host country what he was missing in his home country and will miss in the host country the things that he left in the country of origin" (240). A migrant's judgement of reality will therefore always involve ambivalence and will call for the creation of a multifaceted self-image that serves as a survival mechanism providing migrants with a flexibility and a dynamism that will allow them to adjust to the new, unknown and challenging environments more easily. Homi K. Bhabha calls this mechanism the hybridity of their self-structure (107), which, on the one hand, manifests itself in the urge to continue dominant behaviors, narratives, cultural acts, etc., but, on the other hand, is seen in the need to diverge from the authoritative mode of self-representation. The liminal space between these two extremes is where migrants exist and negotiate their identities (Bhabha 1, 4). The access to multiple cultural contexts provides them with the means to reinterpret their concept of the self in accordance with the needs of the new sociocultural environment that they face.

Shaped in the context of cultural, linguistic, social, economic, and psychological challenges that living in a new country implies, migrant identity reflects the tension of the

outside world and becomes hybrid by selectively appropriating the qualities of the host culture and selectively preserving the qualities of the home culture. The negotiation of identity that the interaction with both cultures evokes occurs in the space in-between which becomes a unique terrain for migrants' self-reinvention.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

“Across the social sciences and humanities, identity is a conceptual tool to think about sameness and difference, both in terms of individual continuity and change over time and social categorization or group affiliation”, Phillip L. Hammack writes in his work on theoretical foundations of identity (11). Wagner points out that our “decisions and life targets are established based on the experiences made through recognition and classification” (239). We live in a world of meaning where the constant processes of naming, identification, classification, and categorization serve our innate need to understand, structure and tame the outside reality and to locate ourselves within that reality. Constructing an identity means telling a coherent and continuous story of ourselves built of the many fragmented elements of our experience. Those of us who happen to be migrants find double difficulty in constructing that story, just as the heroes of the literature we are going to discuss do.

## Chapter Two: Place and Identity

*Leaving home does something to your sense of identity. Either you become more of that place than you ever were while you lived there, or your identity calcifies around the rejection of this place. It is challenging to inhabit the space between these two positions.*

– Lauren Elkin, “Losing New York”

Among many of the questions that we must answer when we try to tell a story are those that ask about “Who?”, “When?”, “Where?”, “How?”, “What happened?”, and “What happened next?”. But there is one crucial question always asked in a story told by a migrant and about a migrant, namely, “Where from?” It appears to be a simple question of location, but it is in fact a complicated question about the migrant’s identity. The migrant literature we study attempts to answer this question by affording the characters it narrates to explore the “Where from?” by revisiting the country of their origin, reminiscing the past, or discovering the history of their families. The place they came from proves as important as the place they live in now as they try put together coherent stories of themselves. Migrant literature will therefore have a unique perspective on the relationship between an individual and the concept of place because its stories are always about change or loss of a place, about acquiring, taming and forming a new place and the space within and around it. The first and most immediately recognized novelty on the journey of a migrant is the new, unfamiliar place with which a relation is yet to be built. Interest in the relationship of man and his immediate physical environment has led to the emergence of the field of human geography, in which psychologists, anthropologists, urban planners and geographers work together to understand the mutual influences occurring in this relationship. Some of the theoretical background developed by these scholars will be helpful in our study of

the identity dilemmas migrants experience in relation to place, a category which, we will try to show, is an important factor of individual identity formation and transformation and a meaningful element of the literary representation of migration.

Place, space and identity are inextricably bound to one another. While the concepts of place and space in relation to man have been explored within such disciplines as geography or landscape architecture, they have treated the relation in a starkly pragmatic and utilitarian manner. It is the relatively recent field of anthropogeography that has identified a much more complex relationship – mental, emotional, or even psychosomatic – and a mutual dependence between humans and their spatial settings. Art, including literature, have their own means of probing into this relationship. Some of the common terms we use to describe our own recognition of an interaction with a place we experience, “sense of place”, “place attachment”, or “sense of belonging”, have been adapted by modern scholarship and endowed with scientific meanings. Literature has explored the element of setting for a variety of artistic purposes and in many different literary modes. In migrant literature, the significance of spatial setting and the characters’ relation to it gains special significance. The new place and space a migrant character encounters (and often describes or relates to) requires the construction of a new mental map and becomes the beginning of his new story. His identity will from now on be constructed by his experience of this new environment.

Before delving into the investigation of the complex relationships between place, space and migrant identity in literary texts, it seems useful to review briefly the evolution of these concepts in human thought.

## 2.1 Place and Space in Human Thought

Since the notion of place, one of the oldest tenants of geography, first appeared in human thought, it has been explained by numerous definitions, but it is still considered by many geographers (Gregory and Castree xxvi; “Geography” 288, 289) one of the most complex ideas. The numerous definitions of the term provided by dictionaries confirm the claim: *Oxford English Dictionary* offers 39 definitions of place which stress different aspects of the concept, while *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* provides more than 50 examples of the possible usages of the word (“Place” 1478). Among them there are those that refer to its spatial characteristics (“a particular part or the region of space” (“Place”, *OED*), “a particular portion of space, whether of definite or indefinite extent”, “space in general”, “the specific portion of space normally occupied by anything”, “a portion of space used for habitation, as a city, town, or village” (“Place” 1478)), and those that emphasize its physicality (“a physical locality, a locale”, “a spot, a location”, and “a region or part of the earth’s surface”(“Place”, *OED*)).

There is no unanimity in the definition of the concept of place among academics, either<sup>4</sup>. Commenting on the plurality of meanings the concept evokes, Dolores Hayden, an urban historian and architect, admits, “‘Place’ is one of the trickiest words in the English language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid. It carries the resonance of homestead, location,

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<sup>4</sup> David Canter in his *Psychology of Place* views places as units of experience: “...it is concerned with those situations in which people live and work, converse with others, are alone, rest, learn, are active or still. It does not mean it is concerned with the activities alone, or only with the buildings that house them. It is about those units of experience within which activities and physical form are amalgamated: places” (1). Yi-Fu Tuan is convinced, “Place is a type of object. Places and objects define space... place is whatever stable object catches our attention” (*Space and Place* 17, 161). Doreen Massey approaches place as a site of social relations that define the uniqueness of any place (*Space, Place and Gender* 4), while for Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman “Place ... refers to space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes” (5).

and open space in the city as well as a position in a social hierarchy” (15). David Harvey, professor of anthropology and geography, defines place as a multifaceted phenomenon which can be used to describe even contradictory notions:

The word “place” evokes a surfeit of synonyms and connotations: milieu, locality, location, locale, neighborhood, region, territory, and the like, which refer to the generic qualities of place. There are other terms such as city, village, town, megalopolis, and state which designate particular kinds of places, and still other, such as home, hearth, “turf,” community, and nation, which have such strong connotations of place that it would be hard to talk about one without the other. “Place” also has an extraordinary range of metaphorical meanings. We talk about the place of art in social life, the place of men in society, our place in the cosmos, one’s place in the affections of others, etc. Place has to be one of the most multilayered and multipurpose keywords in our language. (*Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* 208)

Edward Relph, commenting on the need of clarification of the term “place”, admits that the confusion about the meaning of the notion of place results from its dual nature: on the one hand, it is a formal concept that can be analyzed structurally and systematically, but on the other hand, it often carries an expression of personal interaction with a place, shaped by social and cultural contexts (*Place and Placelessness* 4). In this ambiguity that defines one’s geographical experience Tim Cresswell recognizes the power of a place to influence the interpretations of it: “One confusing aspect of the genealogy of place is that place stands for both an object (a thing that geographers and others look at, research and write about) and a way of looking...” (1896). In other words, while theoretical instruments help us to understand the world and study different

physical dimensions of a place, our relation to the studied place determines the way we interpret the knowledge we gather.

Edward Casey sees a reason for place to be a hardly definable notion in its inherence to everyday life<sup>5</sup>. In his opinion, place is as essential as air, it is innate in human nature, and, because it seems so obvious and understandable, it is taken for granted without further exploration.

However, the concept of place has never been one-dimensional and straightforward, and philosophers have been aware of its complex nature since ancient times. The oldest known theory about place can be found in the extant fragments of a treatise by Archytas of Tarentum, a Pythagorean thinker who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Its main idea is the logical conclusion that place is prior to all things. This follows from the assertion that “to be is to be in place” and because existing is impossible without existing in place, place itself is nothing (Sambursky 37). Later, Archytas’s ideas were developed by Plato, who in his *Timaeus* wrote “that it is somehow necessary that all that exists should exist in some spot and occupying some place, and that that which is neither on earth nor anywhere in the Heaven is nothing” (52B). Aristotle in his *Physics* suggested that the place of an object has to be understood as the internal wall of its container, which derived from the belief that the universe was an enclosed space filled with matter and that

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<sup>5</sup> “To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced” (Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* ix).

“...just because place is so much with us, and we with it, it has been taken for granted, deemed not worthy of separate treatment. Also taken for granted is the fact that we are implaced beings to begin with, that place is an a priori of our existence on earth. Just because we cannot choose in the matter, we believe we do not have to think about this basic facticity very much, if at all...” (*The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* x).

the outer surface of any object must be within a common boundary with some other matter; that is, the inner surface of its surround (212a8-212a19, 212a29; O’Keefe and Nadel 5). The Greek geographer Strabo, who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and was at the forefront of chorology (the study of regions) believed that places are parts of the earth’s surface and therefore they have to be properly specified and described (“Chorology/ Chorography”; Cresswell 1897).

Beginning with Philoponus who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and moving on to medieval theology and 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>-century physics, place was overshadowed, if not replaced, and relegated to the background by the fascination with space and its cosmic partner – time (Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* x). As a result, place, in its meaning, was assimilated with space and considered an alternative version of the latter, denoting, unlike infinite and cosmic space, a site for monotonous everyday human activities<sup>6</sup>. Places were understood as “something *posterior to space, even made from space*” (14, italics in original) which is neutral, absolute, and general, and which, filled with culture and history attributed to a particular geographical location, results in place. In other words, the abstract nature of space makes it unreachable for human experience, whereas place is bound to physical and emotional perception of a geographical location.

The idea of space, however, had appeared in human thought much earlier than medieval theologians put it in the forefront of philosophical discourse. Debates concerning the nature, essence, and the mode of existence of space also date back to antiquity. Socrates in his

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<sup>6</sup> “Since Plato, Western philosophy – often times with the help of theology and physics – has enshrined space as the absolute, unlimited and universal, while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local and the bound” (Escobar 143).

“Once it is assumed that space is absolute and infinite as well as empty and a priori in status, places become the mere apportionings of space, its compartmentalizations” (Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time” 14).

reflections on what the Greeks called khôra (i.e. “space”) claimed that “khôra...hovers before us as a place so all – encompassing that whatever is set apart from it can only be nothing” (Sallis 120-21). Aristotle in *Physics* defines space as a volume co-existent with a body which fills in a container which, according to him, is place (208b27-209a2). Later the 11th-century Arab polymath Alhazen in the *Discourse on Place* writes about “geometrical conception of place” with space as its extension (El-Bizri 59, 67).

Many of the above-mentioned classical philosophical questions were discussed, transformed and reformulated in the Renaissance, for instance by Galileo who, claiming that space is infinite and infinitely open, shifted the vision of place as a static container into place as a relative position in a larger spatial continuum. Galileo suggested that a thing’s place was no longer anything but a point in its movement and its stability was illusional (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 23). A couple of centuries later Yi-Fu Tuan will use a similar concept to distinguish between place and space: “...if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (*Space and Place* 6).

The remarkable shift in philosophical thought on place and space came together with the early development of classical mechanics. In Isaac Newton’s view, space was absolute – in the sense that it existed permanently and independently of whether there was any matter in space (“Newton’s Views on Space, Time, and Motion”). Other natural philosophers, notably Gottfried Leibniz, thought instead that space was in fact a collection of relations between objects, given by their distance and direction from one another (“Leibniz’s Philosophy of Physics”). In the 18th century, the philosopher and theologian George Berkeley tried to prove that space is, first of all,

a sense modality which due to one's perception and experience can correlate to other sense modalities such as time (CXXVI, CXXX). Later, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* the metaphysician Immanuel Kant said that the concepts of space and time are not empirical ones derived from experiences of the outside world – they are elements of an already given systematic framework that humans possess and use to structure all experiences (115, 157-65): space and time are a subjective “pure a priori form of intuition” (70).

The question Kant is trying to answer in his *Critique of Pure Reason* about whether space is a constituent of objective or subjective reality is remarkably important for the study of the interrelation between place, space, and identity. By claiming that space is a form of a faculty of sense (seeing, hearing, touching, even thinking), Kant suggested its uniqueness for every human being. This means that the space of one percipient is unlike the space of any other, because not only their sensual qualities vary from an individual to an individual, but also their experiences and mindsets they use to create and interpret their spaces are different. Furthermore, the space a person creates and lives in is, first of all, the reflection of his/ her unique worldview, background, and personal characteristics. As Walter Smith put it more than 100 years ago:

A man seems to look into space and see his neighbours about him, and the trees, the sun, the waters, and the immensity that holds all and is beyond all. But it is not so; in this space which he sees his neighbor does not dwell, nor are sun and tree and river to be found in it. The space is the space of his sensations. The sensations may be proved to be in some sense ultimately due to other things, but they are not these things. It is his conscious experience that constitutes this immensity and fills it; in what seems so vast and all-comprehensive he has not escaped from himself. (500)

Placing a human being in the center of the spatial discourse marks a significant shift in the history of human thought because it initiates the appearance of a new discipline – humanistic geography – which puts an individual’s personal experiences, emotions, motives, and needs at the forefront of the study of place and space and can be viewed as a starting point in the discussion of the interrelation between place, space, and identity. By focusing on the personal and subjective dimensions of space, humanistic geographers viewed individual experiences of a place as the main criterion in its definition<sup>7</sup>. Thus, people’s emotional attachment to the inhabited spaces, the beliefs they hold about them, and the objects that fill the space become integral components of how a place is approached and understood.

Fred Lukermann was among the first researchers who acknowledged the importance of the human factor in the perception and creation of a geographical location. He understood a place as a peculiar mixture of natural, cultural, and historic components which distinguish one geographical location from the other, connect the place to other places, and influence the beliefs that people hold about it. Lukermann was convinced that meaning that people assign to places, be it their emotional experience of a place or cultural associations related to the place, is the most important element in its definition.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Humanistic geographers rejected the notion of place as a measurable geometric space and privileged instead a notion of place as a field of care, a locus of emotional attachment, where the subject experiences events meaningful to her/ his life” (Antonsich 121).

<sup>8</sup> “To describe the place of a thing is to mark it off by identifying the things that bound it” (Lukermann, “The Concept of Location in Classical Geography” 196).

“Geographers wish to understand not only why place is a factual event in human consciousness, but what beliefs people hold about place... It is this alone that underlies man’s acts which are in turn what give character to a place” (Lukermann, “Geography as a Formal Intellectual Discipline and the Way in Which it Contributes to Human Knowledge” qtd. in Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 3).

In his work on place and placelessness, Edward Relph expresses similar ideas. He points out that a concept of place includes physical setting, activities and meanings related to a place<sup>9</sup>. It is “not just the ‘where’ of something: it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon” (Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 3).

Yi-Fu Tuan also studied place through the perspective of human experience of it. He claimed that it is people who give meaning to the world’s geography and derive meaning from it, which enables them to organize the world around themselves (*Space and Place* 6).

Tatyana Chernigovskaya, a Russian neuroscientist and psycholinguist, in her lecture on art and brain, also refers to the human being as a main figure in the interpretation of the external environment. The scholar poses the question whether there will be music if people disappear. In other words, will there be the notion of sound, any sound as a phenomenon, including the wind blowing in the trees or birds chirping, if there are no tools such as a human ear to receive it and a human brain to decode it (Chernigovskaya 00:11:10 - 00:12:12). The same can be said about place, which is enriched with meaning only when there is a human being to assign this meaning. Without an actor any place is just a location with coordinates in universal space.

Per Gustafson, in his research of what makes places meaningful, comes to the conclusion that the meaning of a place is built of three components: self (life path, emotion, self-identification, knowledge), others (friends and relatives, community), and environment (citizenship, tradition, localization, opportunities) that are interconnected and inseparable (10). His attempt to structure the study of place shows that the concept of place is both physical and psychological, and it is impossible to separate a place from a person: it is people who interpret, narrate, perceive, feel, understand and imagine places. As Norsidah Ujang and Khalilah Zakariya

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<sup>9</sup> “A place is above all a territory of meanings” (Relph, “Modernity and the Reclamation of Place” 36).

write, “It is apparent that without addressing the significance of the people’s psychological connection with places, any form of assessment in determining place quality will be inadequate” (710). David Canter, inspired by behavior-settings theories<sup>10</sup>, calls such an approach psychology of place and describes place as a unit of environmental experience which “is the result of the relationships between actions, conceptions, and physical attributes” (Canter 158).

Such a theoretical shift in understanding the interrelation between a person and a geographical location also transformed the way space is conceptualized and studied. Due to “the spatial turn”, an intellectual movement of the late 1980s which emphasizes the importance of space as a means to understand social, historic, and cultural processes, space began to be viewed as a social product, meaningful for the formation of identity. Encouraged among others by French philosophers of spatiality, such as Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Paul Virilio, that proclaimed the present epoch to be above all the epoch of space<sup>11</sup>, a change in thought of social and human scientists initiated a transformation in humanistic geography. Space, which was previously viewed as an absolute and unconditional container for human activities, started to be recognized as an active, dynamic, and highly subjective element that shapes human experiences and social interactions. Instead of being understood as fixed and given, space was suggested to be produced and constantly defined and redefined through the objects, activities, and interpretations which fill the space and in such a way make it politically, socially, historically, and culturally determined. Besides defining space as a product of social interaction which is molded by value and meanings its dwellers hold or develop about it, scholars

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<sup>10</sup> Behavior-setting theories are frameworks used in environmental psychology to understand the interaction between people and their environments. Behavior-setting theories suggest that certain environments determine particular types of behavior which makes them active participants in shaping human experience (Blanchard).

<sup>11</sup> “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space...Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (Foucault “Of Other Spaces” 22-23).

also proved space to be a fluid, constantly changing and transforming category, which suggests the reciprocal connection inherent to the interaction between place, space, and their inhabitants. It is important to emphasize that the suggested perspective does not set the notions of space and place apart, quite the contrary. Seeing them as parts of one whole, the researchers understood place as a rather stable and objective element of reality which functions as an arena for space to be produced, transformed and reinvented. Dealing with relatively the same set of environmental features, which is place, inhabitants of the same location create and take part in a plethora of different subjective experiences (emotional, psychological, political, social, cultural, economic, etc.) which result in space-making.

This approach is especially informative for the study of identity processes because it shows that both place and space influence the formation of place identity which, as one of the central aspects of individual identity, determines a person's self-concept and worldview. In this dissertation place and space are viewed as inseparable aspects of the interaction between a person and a new geographical location because they both influence the formation and transformation of migrant identity. Place is understood as an objective category, a site for activities, which is the same for all the dwellers of a particular point on a map; and space, their subjective experience of a place, is unique and socially, culturally, and historically predetermined. Therefore, in this research, even if the concept of space is not mentioned directly as a separate element of the spatial interaction between a person and a place, it is always implied as an inherent element of such an interaction because the latter is always personal, highly subjective, and loaded with various meanings.

## 2.2 Place, Space, and Identity

“In the early twenty-first century”, Stephanie Taylor claims, “our connections to place might appear to have lessened in importance as people have become more mobile. Migration ‘has never been so pervasive as it is today’” (1). However, despite the mobility Stephanie Taylor refers to, she believes that “...place, and especially where someone lives, retains a special contemporary relevance for identity” (2). Taylor argues further that “living in a ‘late modern’ or ‘postmodern’ or ‘globalized’ society involves a substantial change of experience, including a change in the nature of identity” (2). Anthony Giddens may mean something similar when he writes, “In conditions of late modernity we live ‘in the world’ in a different sense from previous eras of history” (186). Therefore, understanding “who I am” becomes more difficult and more important in the modern world than ever before.

Environmental psychology, which developed at around the same time as humanistic geography, is also helpful in discussing identity and its literary representations by providing frameworks and concepts to identify and describe relationships between place, space and identity. One of such concepts is the “sense of place”, a collective term which unites different aspects of the interaction between a person and a place and serves a foundational role in identity processes related to environment perception, spatial cognition and place-making. Sense of place denotes emotional attachment of a person to a geographical location, a particular experience in a particular setting through which people relate to it (Agnew 28). As an umbrella concept, sense of place includes meanings of a whole range of other terms used in the discourse of environmental psychology (Shamai 347). Let us name only some of them: “place identity” (Proshansky, “The City and Self-Identity” 60), “place attachment” (Altman and Low, *Place Attachment* 3-4), “sense of belonging” or “belongingness” (Baumeister and Leary, “The Need to Belong: Desire

for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation” 497), “place rootedness” (Hummon, “Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and Sense of Place” 263; Tuan, *Space and Place* 152-156, 194; McAndrew, “The Measurement of Rootedness and the Prediction of Attachment to Home-Towns in College Students” 412-413; Relph, *Place and Placelessness* 37-38), and “rootlessness” or “uprootedness” (Weil, *The Need for Roots* 40-41), “at-homeness” (Zingmark et al., “The Experience of Being at Home Throughout the Life Span. Investigation of Persons Aged from 2 to 102” 50-51), “insidedness” (Rowles, “Place and Personal Identity in Old Age: Observations from Appalachia” 302; Rowles and Watkins, “History, Habit, Heart, and Hearth” 78-79), “place dependence” (Stokols and Shumaker, “People in Places: A Transactional View of Setting” 457), “community attachment” (Trentelman, “Place Attachment and Community Attachment: A Primer Grounded In the Lived Experience of a Community Sociologist” 201), “topophilia” and “topophobia” (Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* 92-93; Leach, “Topophilia/ Topophobia: The Role of the Environment in the Formation of Identity” 40), “placelessness” (Relph 79). This abundance of concepts expressing forms of relation between man and his place shows how place and space can be variously implicated in studying the construction of the self. However, for the purposes of this study, we will use the concept of “place attachment” as a central, unifying, multi-dimensional term that denotes the emotional significance of places and spaces created in literary narratives to express the migrant identities of their characters.

Depending on the intensity of an emotional connection between a person and a place, place attachment may show itself through place familiarity, place dependence, place belongingness, place rootedness, and place identity (Green qtd. in Harun et al. 531). All these expressions of a person’s emotional connection to a place are the signifiers of the very special

bond that a person holds for a particular geographical location. Place attachment, which is established through behavioral, cognitive and emotional experiences of the dwellers of a place (Brown and Perkins 284) describes their socio-physical environment and sets an emotional liaison with it through which dwellers associate and identify themselves with their place of residence. Irwing Altman and Setha M. Low claim that affect, feeling and emotion are central to the understanding of the concept, which may equally relate to positive emotions (such as happiness, satisfaction, security, fondness, well-being, belonging) as well as to negative sensations (such as nostalgia, homesickness, sadness, loneliness) (4-5). Yi-Fu Tuan defined these interactions as topophilia and topophobia, while Edward Relph used the terms of “insiderness”, and “outsiderness” (*Place and Placelessness* 49-50). “[P]lace attachment may contribute to the formation, maintenance, and preservation of the identity of a person, group or culture. And, it may also be that place attachment plays a role in fostering individual, group, and cultural self-esteem, self-worth, and self-pride” (Altman and Low 10). It provides a person with a sense of daily security, stability, a possibility to relax and escape from formal social roles. Place attachment is highly influenced by a person’s experience of a particular place as comfortable and safe, which is synonymous to familiarity (Hidalgo and Hernandez 273-74; Hernandez 310). It not only links a person with a place, but also with a family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances and provides them with a feeling of belonging to a particular social, religious, national or cultural group which establishes a sense of belongingness and community attachment. In this case, place as well as place attachment performs a role of a medium through which a person gains diverse experiences, which stimulate and influence their identity (trans)formation (Altman and Low 1-12).

Place attachment begins with place familiarity. “Selves and identities”, as Sharon Krummel puts it, “... are forged in particular contexts and environments, in relationship with others and with place” (726), and it all starts with place familiarity, which can be simply explained as the information about “how well a place is known” (Chalmers and Knight qtd. in Kitchin 44). However, as Robert M. Kitchin claims, it is more complex in nature and it is difficult to identify and measure it because place familiarity contains objective spatial and subjective aspatial components which go beyond theoretical knowledge about a place and complicate the concept with affective associations that people may have with a place, such as feelings of warmth, safety and security (44). Moreover, a subjective component cannot be neglected here. Different people will attribute place familiarity with different meanings: “Some will claim to be familiar with a place if they know its name, others if they recognize images of it, others if they have visited or passed through a place frequently, and others if they know about a place’s geographical position or history” (Kitchin 44). No matter how close one’s familiarity of a place is, spatial knowledge acquired by an individual as a result of their functioning in the environment defines beliefs and meanings they will be attributed to this place. In such a way place familiarity performs the role of a central cognitive element in fostering place attachment because individuals tend to get involved in an affectionate interaction and later identify themselves with more familiar places. Place familiarity preconditions further levels of person-place relationships such as sense of belonging and place identity and defines the extent of a person’s emotional involvement in spatial interactions.

Sense of belonging, the next level of the interaction between a person and a place, was listed by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow among basic psychological needs, along with food, shelter, clothing, health, emotional stability and well-being, which lie at a core of

human motivation (Maslow 371-386). Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary emphasize the influence of the sense of belonging on a person's behavioral and emotional patterns and cognitive processes. Similarly to Maslow, they believe that unfulfilled need of social contact and lack of emotional attachments may have a negative influence on health and adjustment (Baumeister and Leary 498).

Understandably, the sense of belonging becomes an especially valid category when we consider the migrant context. Deprived of their place familiarity and their personal connections, often unable to understand the reality narrated in a new language, migrants need time and effort to build their sense of belonging, if that sense can at all be built. Kelly-Ann Allen believes that the human need to belong, to set emotional bonds with a place and other people, and to be an important part of something greater than themselves is an inherent part of human nature (5). Group interaction and collective existence allow for rooting and preset the conditions for self-identity processes and social reference. Through identification with a group and its specific features – where the concept of place is one of them – a person gains a foundation to identify themselves on different levels. For instance, the intensity of the emotional reference to the spatial imagery of the group defines the intensity of the local, regional and national identities. In community sociology such an affectionate connection is very often called “community attachment” and is used as an equivalent of “sense of belonging”. Using this term, scholars refer to “the extent to which residents of a place possess cognitive or affective ties to each other and to that place” (Shaker). They also believe that by developing the setting of community attachment a newcomer can appropriate the space inhabited by that community and develop his/ her sense of place identity.

Introduced by Proshansky in late 1970s, place identity is defined as a “potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings, as well as types of settings” (60). This type of emotional attachment to a place is viewed as a part of self-identity similar to gender and social class, which functions as a cognitive “data base” in comparison to which any environmental setting is experienced. It is comprised of cognitions about the environment and may include memories, values, ideas, thoughts, settings, social connections and events, which construct a person’s attitude to them (Proshansky 60). “A sense of place identity derives from the multiple ways in which place functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning, foster attachments, and mediate change” (Gieseking et al. 73) and emerges from place dependence, place belongingness, place familiarity, and place rootedness. Place identity represents a set of personal associations and meanings an individual attributes to a particular place (Kyle et al. 158) and is an important dimension of subjective spatial experience. By making a place part of one’s identity a person finds one of many possible answers to the question “Who am I?”.

Place attachment, place familiarity, sense of belonging, and place identity are the central concepts of this study because they determine the interaction between a new geographical environment and individual identity which results in the appearance of migrant identity. Defined in the previous chapter as a distinct dimension of individual identity which emerges in unknown social, cultural, and geographic contexts, migrant identity carries the same characteristics of individual identity, and therefore, is molded by the same aspects of spatial interaction. This is why it is important to look more closely at how the experiences of a new geographical location determine the formation of place attachment and influence migrants’ self-image.

## 2.3 Place and Space and Migrant Identity

Per Gustafson, in his work “Place Attachment in an Age of Mobility”, calls the modern society “a society on the move” (37), accentuating the significant shift that the development of mass automobility and mass aeromobility has caused in the way of living. This change of lifestyle has had far-reaching consequences for the way we perceive place and the way we relate to it. This subchapter will consider how being on the move influences our understanding of the major concepts of environmental psychology we discussed above.

The concept of place attachment, which scholars view as an emotional bond between people and places, to a great extent predetermines the way individual and collective aspects of identity are shaped in the conditions of an interstate relocation. Maria Lewicka in her article “On the Varieties of People’s Relationships with Places: Hummon’s Typology Revisited” analyzes the changes education, mobility, economic development and urbanization have brought to the connection between a person and a place and comes to the conclusion that the modern evolution of lifestyle implies a serious transformation of our notion of place attachment:

This may include both changes in the extent to which attachment is a matter of a conscious life decision (“ideological rootedness”) rather than of a traditional way of life (“everyday rootedness”), and changes in the scale of place that is an object of attachment... as people become more mobile the scale of place with which they identify changes... from purely local and national to regional and supranational... (679)

Analyzing the influence of human mobility on the relationships between a place and an individual, Per Gustafson highlights four main peculiarities: the mobility or immobility of individuals defines the quality of their interaction with a place; mobility may stimulate multiple place attachments, including the one to the home place; mobility initiates the transformation of

an individual's identity in terms of the territorial scale; the technological development has enriched the field of spatial relations with new forms of interaction (38).

Following Gustafson's observations, it is just to claim that migration, as one of the forms of mobility of the modern world, has a significant impact on the sense of place attachment among migrants. Migrant mobility, whether forced or voluntary, broadens a person's cultural horizons and provides them with a wider range of categories for their self-reinvention. While it may intensify the emotional connection with the place of origin, it also initiates the formation of new attachments to new places of residence, resulting in multiple place attachments that will expose elements of the local and the global.

Place attachment, which "implies 'anchoring' of emotions in the object of attachment, feeling of belonging, willingness to stay close, and wish to return when away" (Lewicka, "In Search of Roots" 49) is closely connected with place familiarity which defines the intensity of place attachment an individual experiences towards a certain location. Place familiarity, which can be viewed as a combination of objective knowledge and subjective experience of a place, is a determinant element in a migrant's interaction with a new environment: the better a place is known to a person, the more confident and assimilated a person feels. Kevin Lynch explains this idea with the help of mind-mapping framework (*The Image of the City*), while Maria Lewicka refers to the length of residence as a measure of place attachment ("In Search of Roots" 51).

As it was stated before, place familiarity is an initial stage of all identity processes related to place, which also predetermines the sense of belonging a person may foster towards a particular location. Understood as the position and relationship between individuals and society(ies) (Skrivanek 189), sense of belonging can be viewed as a relational category through which the self evolves both in relationship with people and in relation to a place which is the site

of their interpersonal communication. Migration sharpens the need to belong to a particular social group, and this need can be fulfilled either by the migrant's membership in a community that represents the place of origin or through participation in the social life of the host country. The first one stimulates the expression of ethnic or national identity, while the second one initiates the formation of hybrid identity.

Migration, which evokes identity transformation, influences the process of self-redefining through the sense of belonging which can also be experienced in relation to a place. As Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon state, "Identification may involve *self-conceptions* in which people appropriate the meanings of place to articulate a sense of self. Often it includes significant *affiliation of self* with place, producing a sense of belonging – of feeling at home in one place, out of place in another" (549, italics in original). In the context of migration, sense of belonging to a particular place enhances the processes of adaptation and assimilation and leads to the formation of place identity, which, "...can be defined as an interpretation of self environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity. Like of identity, place identity answers the question, 'Who am I?', countering, 'Where am I?,' or more fundamentally 'Where do I belong?'" (Cuba and Hummon 548, italics in original). Place identity of migrants develops as they start seeing themselves as related to the physical environment which has become familiar and safe and towards which they experience a sense of belonging and place attachment.

The initial interaction that develops between migrants and their new sociophysical environment is called "Third Space" (36-37) by Homi Bhabha and is defined as a space in-between, where migrants are able to negotiate their identity between the two poles of "here" and "there". Emily Skop in "'Third Space' as Transnational Space" writes, "For many migrants who relocate across national boundaries, the transition can create a sense of cultural limbo as

individuals attempt to reconcile their lifestyles and customs in a new social context” (81). Marie Price and Courtney Whitworth state that “This Thirdspace comes from the duality of immigrant existence, a tension between a lived-in space ...and a distant, remembered space. The reconciliation between these different worlds leads us to someplace in between” (185). The interpretation of the liminal space in-between by Edward Soja is extremely valuable for our analysis of migrant experiences and the theme of formation of migrant identity. Soja describes “Thirdspace” as the “assertion of an alternative envisioning of spatiality” that “directly challenges (and is intended to challengingly deconstruct) all conventional modes of spatial thinking” (163). Applied in the context of migration, Thirdspace allows us to understand spatial interaction of migrants in a new way. Viewed as the habitat of liminality and in-betweenness, it represents the ambiguity of migrant experience, and consequently the hybridity of migrant identity:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (Soja 56-57)

## **2.4 Place and Space in Migrant Literature**

“Works of literature are redolent of spaces and places,” writes Gerhard van den Heever in his article on spatializing practices in literary texts and outside them, however, the scholar adds, the study of literature in general has not been involved in exploring the place- and space-making processes as essential aspects of literary production (70). Indeed, Robert T. Tally Jr. adds,

“Although scholars have long paid attention to the relationship between literature and space or place, the development of distinctive scholarly practices related to that work within literary studies or within such spatially oriented sciences as geography are relatively recent” (“Spatial Literary Studies Versus Literary Geography?” 317). The interdisciplinary approach the researcher refers to is spatial literary studies, which, among others, contributes to and partakes in such literary fields as literary geography, geocriticism, geopoetics, and literary cartography (“Spaces of the Text: Literary Studies After the Spatial Turn”, p.1) Defined as a means “to reflect upon the representation of space and place, whether in the real world, in imaginary universes, or in those hybrid zones where fiction meets reality”, spatial literary studies “draws upon diverse critical and theoretical traditions in disclosing, analysing, and exploring the significance of space, place, and mapping in literature and in the world, thus making new textual geographies and literary cartographies possible” (Tally, “Spaces of the Text: Literary Studies After the Spatial Turn” 2). By combining geographical, sociological, and cultural perspectives, spatial literary studies examine the role of spatiality in achieving the artistic effects of a writer and views the interaction between place, space, and literature as dynamic and complementary.

The intersectional nature of spatial literary studies makes it an effective means in interpreting the interrelation between place, space, and identity in literary texts. By using the toolset of spatial humanities, such as geocriticism, which “explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads, and writes a place; it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces” (Tally, “On Geocriticism” 2) or psychogeography, which complements the geocritical analysis with the exploration of the effects that geographical environment has on the emotions and behavior of individuals, spatial literary studies helps to explore the multidimensionality of migrant identity

expressed in spatial interaction with an unknown sociophysical environment depicted in literature.

Although general precepts of philosophy, geography, and social studies determine much of the perspective from which place and space are viewed in literature and literary studies, it is important to remember that the literary environment changes the nature of some of the concepts we have defined as essential in identity studies. In literature, place and space are components of a fictional universe and constitute the location, setting and surroundings of events, characters, and objects in a story: “Matters of space and spatiality are, in some senses, nothing new to literature. Setting is a key feature of almost all stories, as events take place in a given place, after all” (Tally “Introduction: The Reassertion of Space in Literary Studies” 1). Space in narrative is an element of a subjective perception of the world and is only a verbal reconstruction of the spatial aspects of a real place. It is often shaped by the emotional, physiological, and social experiences of the author with a place, but it is not necessarily identical to it. “The way a writer reconstructs a place and creates a literary space from a real world in a textual universe is predetermined by his/ her personal outlook, tradition, culture, individual qualities, etc.” (Zoran 317). In such a way, in a literary text, place is transformed from an object into a system of signs, from the signified into a signifier which might only partially resemble its physical prototype. Iren J.F. de Jong states in “Introduction. Narratological Theory on Space” that “Whether it is provided for in abundance or more sparingly, narratologists agree that space can never be presented in a narrative text in its totality: the narratees are offered a mere selection of details” which call for interpretation (de Jong 2). Places and spaces in literature are per se sensory and imaginative experiences of places and spaces in real life, verbalized and reinvented in a text by an author who imbues it with

multiple meanings shaped by the narrator's or the character's visions of their connections with the narrated environment and other people in it:

Places are neither good nor bad in themselves but in the values attached to them, and literature is one of the agencies involved in attaching values to places. Thus, spaciousness may elate or terrify; small enclosures may be sought-after refuges, wombs where the spirit may be reborn, or they may be prison, the places of despair and death; a forest may be a sheltering grove or a dark wood to get lost in, a place of freedom or of horror; and a garden may harbor earth's delights or earth's poisons. It is simply not possible to assume a fixed relationship between places and their effects. (Lutwack 35-36)

Moreover, a verbal representation of space in narrative is incomplete. The possibilities of language, in comparison with live experience, are limited. The experience of place and space in real life can be translated into a textual form through description or narration of action built into the set environment. Yuri Lotman claimed that because the information provided by the text about space is incomplete, artistic space is only a model of real space, not its copy. (Lotman 252-253). Place and space in literature set the scene for the story, ornament it, mirror events, or characterize a person, they may even increase the reality effect of a story, but recreated in a text they will always remain products of language and imagination. Places and spaces in literature do not necessarily depict an actual geographical location, but they use meanings associated with it and create new meaning required by the narrative. The geographical "Where?" of the story becomes less important than the meanings resulting from its verbal analogy. "All places, whether drawn from geographical reality or fantasy, from literature or actual life, serve figurative ends and thereby sacrifice part of their concreteness as they cater to some human desire or craving beyond present reality" (Lutwack 32).

The manner in which migrant characters in literature are represented against the background of the new place and space they inhabit and function in can be a useful creative instrument. The setting of migrant narration achieves special importance as the change of habitat that migration involves, with the loss of its familiar mappings and meanings, may serve as pattern to expressing the character's decoding and new encoding of the geography and the sense of the new place. Their interpretation of the surroundings, their attribution of meanings and emotions to the geography of the new space, their mental mapping of it, speak of who they are and how they cope with the change of their environment.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The above mentioned theories and concepts present the notions of place and space from the philosophical, social, geographical, and environmental perspectives. As complex and many-sided phenomena, depending on the area of study and a perspective, they are defined differently and attributed with various features. Philosophers treat space as a boundless, absolute ("a thing in itself" (Harvey, "Space as a Key Word" 94)), three-dimensional collection of spatial relations between objects in the world, while place is limited to something material, local, and bound to earth. Sociologists have developed the idea of social space as a conceptual framework for the interactions that happen between a given space and its inhabitants. They also study the connections between a location and a person's identity and examine how interactions with a place shape the way individuals define themselves. In literature, narrative and descriptive constructions of place and space, even if they are meant to mimetically represent the real geography of an actual location the author recreates, become part of the conscious creative process of the represented world and should therefore be interpreted within the framework of the totality of meanings expressed in the text. Instructed by sociologists and psychologists, we read

in them the character's beliefs about place and space and the emotions they develop for particular physical elements of their environment, we identify their spatial-behavioral strategies and finally gain access to the map of their spatial self-identification.

In migrant literature, place and space are of a primary importance for a migrant's identity (trans)formation because migration is, first of all, defined by a change of place. Following the ideas suggested by theories of spatiality, we can conclude that the interaction between a person and an unknown place, both in real life and, we believe, also in literature, starts by identifying its physical layout as an emotionally-neutral stage of human activities. It is only with time that the person can establish social, cultural and emotional relations with that place and transform it into a meaningful and subjective space of his or her own. The present dissertation is primarily interested in the literary depiction of the process of that transformation, which reflects a major part of a migrant's appropriation of the new system of meanings that migration brings. As the literature we discuss also shows, this appropriation is possible only when the migrant engages in a productive social interaction with the environment.

## **Chapter Three: Place and Migrant Identity in *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova**

*Migration is a one way trip. There is no “home” to go back to. There never was.*

– Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”

There is no other place where the impact of migration is more vivid than in the streets of New York City, which has been built by migrants and has thrived on migration for more than two centuries. It is the migrant laborers, the shop owners, the taxi drivers, who form the essential part of New York City’s diverse nature, and are constantly redefining the identity of the city just as their own identities are being transformed and reimagined through their interaction with it. “There is only one New York, especially when it comes to immigration”, says Nancy Foner, professor of sociology at Hunter College, CUNY (“New York: A Unique Immigrant City, Newsletter of the American Sociological Association”). New York City is America’s classic migrant city, which has its long immigration history, densely populated migrant neighborhoods, cultural and linguistic diversity. Throughout the years, New York City has been a major point of entry for migrants and, as local studies suggest, this socially and culturally diverse place is more likely to adapt well to new migration, to be more inclusive, and to foster a positive integration for migrants (Phillips and Robinson 415), so it is no exaggeration to say that New York is a quintessential migrant city.

The Annual Report of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs of New York City (published in March 2019) says:

New York City is home to 3.2 million immigrants, the largest number in the City’s history. Immigrants comprise nearly 37.1% of the city population and 44% of its

workforce... New York City is also home to approximately 477,000 undocumented immigrants... Nearly 60% of New Yorkers live in households with at least one immigrant, including over one million New Yorkers who live in mixed-status households (in which at least one person is undocumented). (9, 11, 23)

In this context, *Gimme the Money*, the novel by Iva Pekarkova, a “taxi story” (Eliasova 637), as the author calls it herself, can be read as a vivid literary representation of New York as the migrant city. Many contemporary writers, such as Mo Mason, Graham Russell Gao Hodges, Dmitry Samarov<sup>12</sup>, use the taxi driver’s perspective to tell a story of the interactions that occur between the person at the wheel, the people that chance to be his passengers and the places he takes them. Film directors have also found this narratorial form useful. The cult film *Taxi Driver* by Martin Scorsese investigates the personality of a taxi driver, who, lonely and alienated from other people, develops a relationship with the city he knows from driving its streets. Jim Jarmusch uses the taxi driver perspective in the film *Night on Earth*, which is made up of five episodes from taxi drivers’ lives happening on the same night in different cities around the world.

*Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova employs the form of a taxi story to reveal the complex nature of a migrant’s identity formation and self-definition and explores to what extent social and urban environments, made central and vivid by the taxi driver framework, determine the sense of belonging. Based on the migrant experience of the author, the novel is a relatively straightforward, often brutal, portrayal of migrant reality, without much screening of

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<sup>12</sup> *A London Cabbie* by Mo Mason.

*Taxi! A Social History of the New York City Cabdriver* by Graham Russell Gao Hodges.

*Hack: Stories from a Chicago Cab* by Dmitry Samarov.

embellishment. New York (the City; capitalized in the novel), presented through the main character's eyes, is not only the background for a migrant taxi driver's life, but also a medium in the migrant's search for a new self. Pekarkova uses the streets of New York City to show a migrant's identity as an identity in motion, on the move somewhere, never stopping. She depicts the leading character cruising around the city as a cab lady and represents the city both as to the exterior setting of her narration and the interior landscape of the leading character's mind.

This chapter offers an analysis of the personal transformation of the heroine, who, faced with dislocation and change as a migrant, which is metaphorized in the changing images of the city as she makes her taxi rounds through the confusing maze of the streets, must build a map of the city to succeed in her job and develop an inner map of her sense of belonging as she tries to redefine her identity in the new environment. Finding her way in New York City's perplexing traffic system Gin becomes part of the city and the city becomes part of her. She learns the city and acknowledges it as her new home. The places and spaces whose meanings she learns and constructs help her to discover the new self she must embrace in migration.

The city, its geography, its traffic rules, its recognizable sites related to the reader through Gin's eyes, will be viewed in our discussion as an emerging system of signs that Gin must learn to understand and use in her new life, and which encode and express her emotions, attitudes, her changing worldview and her newly-forming self-perception. The places and spaces of the city recreated in the novel will be approached with the help of the instruments developed by spatial literary studies which resort to theories of humanistic geography, environmental psychology, and urban experience studies. The analysis of spatial relations in the novel will be informed by postmodern concepts of space and place, developed, among others, by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Paul Virilio, who understand place as an objective category, a

set of natural peculiarities of a particular location, and define space as a construct and a subjective category, created in and around that place by an individual and defined by their functional use of the place, cultural and personal background, and their social connections within it. The concept of the mental map, defined by the human geographers Peter Gold and Rodney White in 1974, will come helpful in reading the specific literary depiction of the geography of New York in the book. Kevin Lynch's observations applying the mental map concept to urban studies, expressed in *The Image of the City*, will help to understand how an individual's patterns of navigating a city reflects and builds his/ her interrelation with it.

As a point of departure for our reading of *Gimme the Money*, we turn to Vera Eliasova's article "A Cab of Her Own: Immigration and Mobility in Iva Pekarkova's *Gimme the Money*", where she calls Pekarkova's book a "nostalgia-free novel", claiming that it is unusual among books on migrant experience because it imagines a contemporary migrant's identity without making constant references to the past and the missed homeland. Eliasova focuses on Pekarkova's narration's insistence on the present as the only time frame within which we see the character of Gin and offers an analysis of the mobile and dynamic way in which the character experiences her new city here and now. She borrows Charles Baudelaire's and Virginia Woolf's concepts of the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse*, the thoughtful walkers in the city, to comment on Gin's presence in New York. We will follow in the footsteps of Gin as a *flâneuse* on wheels and use elements of Guy Debord's theory of psychogeography to explore how the heroine constructs herself by constructing the space within which she moves and how she learns to see her own reflections in the many faces of the city. Since Iva Pekarkova lived through an episode of working as a taxi driver when she arrived in New York, we propose to look in the book for insights into the author's own process of self-transformation as a migrant.

### 3.1 Place-Space Relationships in the Novel

The place-space relations in the novel are multilayered. They start with the widest category, which is the concept of the American city itself, and are then narrow down to districts, streets, Gin's homes, and, finally, to the personal constructs of "protective bubbles", representing one's own space that a person manages to create in the geographical maze of the megalopolis of life (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 33). At the very beginning of the novel, New York is represented as too large and unattainable for Gin, she cannot conceive its vastness or understand its spatial structure, she cannot yet build a mental image of the city. Gin's acquaintance with the city is shown to grow step by step – interestingly, not from the local to the global, but the other way round. She begins with an awareness of New York as a city, large and incomprehensible, then moves down to learn of its districts, and finishes by cruising along its streets with a pervasive sense of belonging. As her place familiarity increases, the same places she sees change their meaning for her and their subjective appearance.

The novel opens with an intriguing image of a city as a planet emitting gravity and attracting migrants from all over the world. It resembles a huge octopus that catches and pulls people to it with its tentacles. The migrants in this image become food for the monster, its weak-willed victims that do not have a choice. It is the monster that decides whom to devour and who will be "lucky enough to be allowed to slowly, stealthily orbit this or that metropolis" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 1). The experience of entering the city is compared to falling, "usually head first" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 1), and crashing violently, unless the migrants have someone (friends or family) or something (a book or a film they know, language or background knowledge) that can make their landing softer. They are then metaphorically portrayed as astronauts in space suits which allow them to penetrate the atmosphere of the new

planet safely and painlessly. Those that have no protective suits, those that come from far enough to have no cultural cushions to land on, try to resist the impact of the gravity with nothing else but their big love for the “unique and thorny planet” (2). For these migrants landing is abrupt, harsh and unexpected, it is a “butt-fall” (2), because the space suit they acquired at home serves no purpose on the new planet. Gin, as well as the author herself, belong to the second category of astronauts, whose encounter with New York is a painful experience; Iva Pekarkova clearly states this at the beginning of the novel: “But some of us have none of these [...] The gravity of big cities captures us from the other side of oceans, across nine mountains and nine rivers” (*Gimme the Money* 1).

The city remains a dominant force in the remaining chapters of the migrant story. New York sets its rules by which Gin and other migrant inhabitants are forced to live, it imposes its order on their routines and defines their rhythm: “She chopped her whole life into segments defined by the heartbeat of that City” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 245). But Pekarkova does not see this impact to be one-directional. As migrants change under the influence of the city they inhabit, they interact with the new surrounding on equal terms so that the transformations that happen are reciprocal. Migrants make their presence in the city visible and shape its space as all the other inhabitants do. In Chapter 12, “Art, City”, Iva Pekarkova attracts the reader’s attention to even the tiniest signs of people’s presence in the space of New York, such as the “pink, white, blue and light chewing gums trampled into the asphalt of the streets” or the “lost shoes strings and buttons and bags” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 61) along street art artefacts, which all contribute to the meaning of the city. Here Gin is also compared to an artist who, by “working day after day on a humongous canvas – the Manhattan Island – was creating yellow pictures on it

with jerky motions of her brush” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 63) and left her imprint on the city with the tires of her car pressing the surface of the asphalt of the streets.

As many other characters of the story, Gin feels dependent on the city. Her moods, her ups and downs, the challenges she faces in her life are depicted as if they were all determined by the city and as if she had to deal not with individual problems to solve, but with one collective figure of the city which manifests itself through these challenges. Coming from a central European country, Gin inherits the complex of inferiority that this group of migrants has been associated with ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with it a kind of apathy and a tendency to give up in the face of difficulty. Gin is unable to understand that she and New York are in equal positions: they depend on each other, they transform each other, and they reflect each other. The authority of the city is indisputable to her. To some extent, she is trapped in what we could call a parent-child relationship where the active, adult, and responsible role is performed by the city, and Gin, as a child, has to learn how to live in its world. Only at the end of the novel does Gin become mature enough to separate herself from her “parent”, to get in charge of her interaction with the city and to make herself responsible for the decision to leave it. Up until then, Gin’s perception of the city is ambivalent: at times she receives it as safe and friendly, at other times it instills fear and causes discomfort in her.

### **3.2 Mental Maps as Space-Making**

In the context of spatial interactions, urban theory provides readers of migrant literature with an approach to understand the process of the characters’ appropriation of a place by getting to know it and making it their own. Kevin Lynch, an urban planner and an early proponent of the concept of mental mapping, believed that the emotional perception of a place is defined by the

degree of a person's awareness of it and by its incorporation into the person's mental map. The term "mental map" is defined by Lynch as "the environmental image, the generalized picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual" (Lynch 4). Developing a mental map helps a newcomer to discover an unknown location and obtain the skill of navigation, which becomes a crucial tool in the process of a migrant's self-identification and assimilation. With the help of a mental map, a person adjusts their mode of navigation (and of life) to the referential points of geography and gradually incorporates that geography into their own understanding of a place. While in urban studies the concept of mental maps helps to imagine and plan more human-friendly environments, in reading literature, they help us to see the connections that authors draw between characters and their settings, endowing the settings with senses and meaning that reflect the minds of their characters.

At first Gin feels lost in the city without her mental map of the place. New York "seemed reserved and far-away...Gin sat by the window, drinking in the City with her eyes – the City into which she had arrived and still hasn't arrived...The skyline of Manhattan lured her into itself with an enormous colorful Unknown" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 11). With time Gin acquires more experience of New York and creates her own mental map of it. It ceases to be distant and detached.

And that's how the network of anchors and lifebelts grew thicker on Gin's mental map of New York...

The grid of the City, that humongous multiplication table, seeped into the creases of her brain...

Street corners she'd gotten to know, curbs made wiggly by people's steps, puddles, potholes...for her all that turned into climbing ropes, ship anchors – dependable friends she always knew where to find.

By becoming familiar to her, the City developed a hard-to-explain kindness.

(Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 114-15)

Kevin Lynch explains that mental maps stand at the root of an individual's sense of balance and well-being (Lynch 4). Failure to orientate oneself in an unknown location causes the feeling of anxiety and even terror, while developing one's own ordered image of the place alleviates the fears and brings security and confidence. Concentrated on the fear of disorientation, a person perceives the surrounding environment as a potential threat, while a clear and distinct image of it not only creates the sense of safety but also intensifies other positive emotions. Gin's changing perceptions of New York represented by the author reflect the character's state of mind and emotions. The original metaphor of New York as a giant and dangerous octopus (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 1) is echoed later in the novel to show how Gin has now become part of the octopus. "... all over the surface of her body visual sensors sprouted like she was a rainworm. Tentacles emerged from her belly like she was an octopus, and their gentle suction cups stroked the whole world. The world stroked her back" (*Gimme the Money* 19). Gin is now like the city she feared, Gin is the city. The world stroking back creates a sense of satisfaction and pleasure, so different from her state of mind when she first arrived in New York.

Our mental map of Gin's New York becomes more concrete when Pekarkova provides us with a precise address of Gin's home. By mentioning a real address Pekarkova puts a realistic mark on the map of New York. Her place is not somewhere any more, it has a name and

particular coordinates and it is marked on her own mind map of the city. And it is not just an address – it is already endowed with meanings, associations and memories, through which Gin feels a connection to the place.

In one of them, on 64th Street (where she shared one cubicle with seven cats and their owner – the cats climbed over her while she was sleeping, the owner, thank God, didn't, although she had to cook and clean and pay the phone bill and listen, without any visible signs of boredom, to endless ranting and raving), the little window looked at the airshaft that was tiled in fresh green to remind the tenants Nature existed. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 11).

Names of New York streets, often mentioned by Pekarkova, play a role not only in constructing a map of the represented city for the reader, but are also signs of Gin's own self-education as she learns them maturing as a New Yorker. Identifying street names is an essential element of a taxi driver's livelihood. The more detailed her own map of New York becomes, the safer she feels.

Pekarkova's manner of representing New York from Gin's perspective and by Gin's own mapping of it emphasizes the growing connection between the character and the city. This connection is constantly presented as a mutual relationship. New York needs its residents to become the city it is just as its people need the city to realize their dreams and be who they want to be. New York is a place and space that determines their experience, but they also create its space. Gin's insistent appropriation of New York's sites, together with the meanings and emotions she attaches to them, onto her mental map of the city as she drives through its streets, becomes her act of space-making, her act of becoming part of the city and becoming herself in the city. Like other migrants, to overcome her initial isolation and alienation, she tries to redefine

herself by creating for herself a new place of belonging that will give her security and comfort. The more places she put on her mental map, the less threatening New York will appear. Gin and the stronger her sense of belonging grows. Once she can name all the streets and intersections, arches and bridges, parks and rivers, avenues and boulevards, tunnels and highways, turns and detours, she knows that the city is hers and that she belongs to the city. Gin enjoys the precision with which she can tell her way through New York as each act of naming strengthens her connection with the city and her presence in it. The frequency and the importance of geographical references in *Gimme the Money* allows us to call the book a literary map of the Big Apple. Following Gin's taxi, we are guided not only through its complex road system and its sites, but also through its colors, smells and sounds, which Gin tries to comprehend and appropriate to her vision of the city.

### **3.3 Dynamism and Mobility as Space-Making**

Narrating Gin absorbing new experiences of the city with every new trip, Pekarkova continues to draw the image of the city more sharply and intensely for the readers. She allows Gin to keep her basic image of New York solid but growing, filling the picture with new sensitive and emotional details which add color and meaning to many previously visited sites. In such a way, Gin not only creates a visual image of the city for us, but also endows it with personal experience and meaning, transforming an objective and featureless place into a subjective and distinctive space:

In front of her there was a whole maze of streets crossing each other at right angles, well known to her, made penetrable and available to her as if it was a map of her own head.

Late at night, toward morning, Gin's thoughts were spread like a map on the grey asphalt

and concrete, her thoughts, adventures, memories and hopes included. Memories and adventures became those beer caps, flattened aluminum cans or glass shards forced deep into the asphalt by numerous tires. Hopes had the shape of reverse arrows left in the wet concrete by pigeons' toes. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money 2*)

Analyzing the patterns of Pekarkova's narration, Vera Eliasova defines dynamism and mobility as the basic principles of representing the interaction between New York and the leading character (636-37, 639-40). Because of Gin's job, the relationship between her and New York is of very special nature. It is a relationship of motion. It happens at different speeds and is captured from different angles as the driving conditions require. At times, the driver has only half of a second to shoot a glance at a site or an event and that glimpse, momentary and unmeditated, leaves a snapshot on her mental map. At other times, Gin is given time to ponder and examine what happens outside the window of her car. Pekarkova manages to express the driving speed with the speed of narration and the number of descriptive details she shares with the reader, reflecting Gin's perceptiveness and the scope of attention she can allow herself at a given moment. As we follow Gin's eyes looking at the road from behind the wheel we follow the observant and interpreting eyes of a driver and we are allowed to read what we see from the perspective of the cab driver's knowledge of the city. Gin's growing rootedness in the city is expressed through her acquired ability to quickly interpret the fast moving images behind the window. Even the way a passenger waves to catch a taxi tells her a lot about him. A real New York cabbie, we read, is able to tell by a single gesture whether a person is local or a tourist, from which part of New York he is, where he plans to go (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money 47-48*).

Indeed, there is no better job than that of a taxi driver that an author could invent for a character who must learn to navigate a city to find her own bearings in it and to find herself anew

after she has been uprooted by migration. Learning to navigate the streets of New York becomes a metaphor of the process every migrant must face entering a new environment. Gin is, in a way privileged by her job, because New York taxi drivers form a special category of citizens. They acquire a deeper knowledge of the city than anybody else, they understand the city better than an average New Yorker. Gin belongs to this special caste of city servants who are invisible yet attentive observers. She develops a close contact with it and gradually learns to understand its unique language:

And Gin couldn't help herself, she had to wonder whether all that might be part of some scheme, the same way hooded sweatshirts are part of a scheme, and the heavy gold chains on the neck of drug dealers are part of a scheme ...– whether all that might be a sign, a secret script, difficult and ancient and uncrackable, some strange script that, day after day, reveals something to people who inhabit those streets.

It seemed to her that some message was hidden in the way plaster was coming off the walls of buildings, exposing the brick. It seemed to her that graffiti ... graffiti, too, carried in it some mysterious codes of the City, codes that she never understood ... and after a while she got quite positive that all those things she sees around her are the fingerprints of a powerful Time God; that it's an unfamiliar, fragrant, completely foreign language for which she has no textbook. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 103-04)

The city Gin learns to understand has an impact on her, too. The rhythms of the city define her rhythms, the city sets her schedule and decides the hour she wakes up and goes to work, the time she spends at the wheel depends on the needs of the city. Pekarkova expresses this dependence in an apt traffic-light metaphor: “Red-and-green-and-yellow made Gin's nights rhythmical” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 114).

New York gets deep inside her; the city is everywhere she goes: it penetrates her car through open windows, through passengers who tell their stories, and unless she blocks out the city with the help of music or partitions, the city gets into her and constantly transforms her:

When night taxi drivers make it home and fall on their bed, the film of everything they'd seen on their shift, of everything they drove past, gets projected onto their eyelids. But if they drive through streets day by day, they witness far more things than they want to, and then they get a headache from it, a stomach ache, a liver ache – and so the drivers build barriers in themselves, barriers against perception, they put blinders on their own eyes as if they were carriage horses, and – to make sure not too much of the City enters them every night – they fortify themselves against it. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 51)

During the fifteen years he spent “on the street,” even though wrapped up in his comfortable metal can, the rhythm of the City imprinted itself into him, as if Ashraf himself became a traffic light. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 123-24)

Driving the streets of New York, learning to understand the reel of events she glimpses, is what shapes Gin's self-identity transformation after her arrival in the city. Unlike many other taxi drivers, she is eager to merge into the city's life and blend in. She does not hide from the city, refuses to use a partition, and by rolling her windows down she invites the city into the car – her space of privacy and safety (“In her funny car she was her own mistress.” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 255)). The city also becomes Gin's mirror reflecting her emotions, shifts in her perception of the outer world and herself, and the arena for her social interactions. Her taxi cab performs the role of a medium between Gin and the city and becomes not only the point of

their connection but also the channel of Gin's perception; the car is, as if, her second skin with whose help she feels and discovers the world around.

To understand fully the concept of Gin as a character depicted in motion in a dynamic and continually mobile narration, we need to draw attention to the idea of a symbiosis between Gin and her car, which is especially vividly expressed in the descriptions of Gin's cruising through the city. Gin and her car are often depicted as one whole, one conjoined body: "She felt the bridge twitching and vibrating under her wheels just like the muscles on a horse's back" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 2); "... she landed soundlessly at the foot of the bridge; the asphalt quietly hissed under her tires like a tide" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 2). The unity between car and driver is a quality of other New York cab drivers as well:

...he'd been living in the space between the steering wheel and the front seat for six years or so. During that time, Jean-Pierre developed a gut of a shape that fit perfectly into the gap between his spine and the wheel. He grew into his cab and took on the shape of the space inside the cabin... (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 84)

Gin's car is often referred to as an animate creature, her companion and friend. It is called "... her yellow nag" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 30), "... her regular Yellow dream, her shiny Yellow stallion..." (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 221), "... her Pegasus..." (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 250). The owner of the garage Gin works for, Alex, pats the hoods of the cars lovingly and calls them "my Yellow sheeps" (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 253, original spelling). When her car breaks down and a mechanic comes, Gin feels alarmed:

Gin didn't have the stamina to watch that surgery any longer. It seemed to her, just like it always did on similar occasions, that her car was bleeding, that it cried quietly, that

this kind of operation should be performed only with sterile instruments and under general anesthesia. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 112)

Personified in the animate language, the car sometimes takes over and becomes Gin's guide in communicating with the city. When in Chapter 19 ("Comebacks") it breaks down in the most inappropriate places, Gin realizes that her Yellow Cab takes her to places she used to live in in the past:

The car – naturally – stalled out only in the least pleasant streets, after all, it was programmed to do that, but it sometimes seemed to Gin that, in addition to everything else, Ramon's gremlins were fucking with her soul. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 98)

Her Yellow, which was constantly falling apart, guided her way through all the neighborhoods she ever lived in in New York City. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 98)

The malfunctions of the car make her return to her New York past and revise "the network of anchors and lifebelts" on her mental map of the city (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 114). The places she is thus forced to revisit are loaded with meanings and memories of people and events; they were places that shaped her and spaces in which she created herself. Embedded in her life they became inseparable parts of her personality that changed Gin's vision of herself. Found again and recollected, these New York addresses (including 64<sup>th</sup> Street), are represented as pieces of her own map of the city and of herself. She is the of sum of the addresses she lived in and the destinations she has traveled to in her Yellow.

Commenting on the never-ending movement of Gin's yellow cab, Vera Eliasova (643) notices that the patterns of her cruising around New York may remind readers of the infinity symbol and express the circular (interactive) character of the connection between Gin and her

city. To pursue this reading further, Gin and New York are both in motion, moving away and returning, changing, absorbing each other and overlapping. Gin and the city will remain inseparable parts of each other's natures even when the time to part comes:

The whole life, the whole New York was replaying itself in Gin now – every street corner, every day, two thousand traffic lights. All the apartments she's ever lived in in New York. All her lovers. All the ... art. And the trails of reversed arrows that pigeons' toes had left in concrete sidewalks navigated her thoughts all the way to hope.

(Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 273)

Eliasova proposes that the image of circles becomes a recurring symbol in the novel. Circlural movement stands at the cognitive basis of several chapter titles: "Protective Circles", "The City, Circles", "Cobwebs", "Return Trips". The mapping of Gin's rounds in her cab forms circular shapes, it also refers to migrant identity as to the subject of "constant reimagination" and embodies the repetitiveness "of Gin's writing of the self" (Eliasova 649). Cruising in circles around the city can be read as a metaphorical parallel to the heroine's complex inner world and a pattern of her complicated search for the self. Just as she learns the city through circling its streets and blocks, she learns herself to finally set her own route

Eliasova applies the concept of circularity also on the meta-narrative level. The circles recurrent in the book are parallel to the author's attempt to create a migrant story that is "nonlinear", "open to chance" (649), detached from the either a history in the past or a goal in the future. Eliasova suggests that in migration "there is no [...] final 'discovery' and being a 'stranger' is a persistent state of identity" for a migrant (Eliasova 649). *Gimme the Money* is an open-ended story, which accentuates the present and "is always in making" (Eliasova 649). Gin does not talk about her past and refuses to explain her history. There are only a few moments in

the book when her Czech origin is mentioned: “Gin’s thick, unmistakable and ungotten-riddable-of Slavic accent that took Gin out” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 27.), “A black man. Don’t teach this here missy bad words like that. This here missy, she don’t know words like that. She’s from Czescoslovakia.” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 129), “You’re ... from Europe. ‘Cause you are...Czecoslavian...Yugoslovakian...what is it that you said?” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 229), “He was touching that old appendectomy scar which the doctors back in Czechoslovakia had lousily sewn up with seven stitches” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 278). She does not make plans either. Gin concentrates on solving the relevant everyday issues which distract her from constant thinking about her past and future and, as Madelaine Hron believes, give her the chance to have “a fresh outlook on things” (Pekarkova), which is devoid of nostalgic digressions, and live in the moment, because, as Pekarkova sees it, this is the only way for Gin to fully integrate into her new environment. Sladja Blazan rightly notices that Gin liberates herself from the necessity of being a Czech migrant and thus gets a chance to be accepted and heard (197). New York becomes her present when she manages to create and claim her space: Gin makes friends, has a family, falls in love and finds meaning. And if in the beginning she comes to the city as a “clean slate” (Pekarkova), lost and completely overwhelmed with its magnitude, in the end Gin leaves New York with a store of experience and knowledge and the feeling that she belongs to it.

Pekarkova’s understanding of migrant identity as a non-linear, a historical narrative might be taken to contradict views of its hybridity and in-betweenness. But even if Gin’s place of origin and her past history are not narrated, we are all the time reminded that Gin is not from New York, she is a stranger. She has a history, but she decides to exclude it and focuses totally on the present. One might wonder if this is at all possible in real migrant experience and if

Pekarkova's picture of migration is believable. An answer to the query may be found in Eliasova, who endorses Pekarkova's concept of character as part of her debate with traditional migrant literature. She argues that "the ideal of the baggage-free state of mind should not be dismissed altogether. Rendering Gin as living without history enables Pekarkova to revise the stereotype of the immigrant full of Old World tradition and history" – the new type of immigrant represented by Gin "belongs to the New World unequivocally" (646).

... she felt she belonged... to something, to the secret brotherhood of blue distances perhaps, to the brotherhood of those who dared". (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 19)

"Gin BELONGED, and even though Gin's English was simply funny to listen to, Gloria couldn't help herself; she had to envy her her lack of knowledge of the New York world ...and Gin's naivety...which made it possible for her to regard the whole colorful palette THE WAY IT WAS, without any prejudice". (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 27)

The need of the sense of belonging may be satisfied in two different ways in migrant experience, and both are depicted in *Gimme the Money*. One is what Gin feels when she enters the taxi drivers' community: a group of people from different backgrounds that become united in their professional effort. It is the here and now that brings them together, it is the city that they venture to know that is their challenge. The second one is what Talibe, Gin's husband from Mali, desires and experiences by keeping in close contact with the African community of Harlem. It is primarily their common past, with its memories and its alliances, and the inability to fully embrace the new city that keeps them together. Talibe's map of New York is a list of addresses where his Mali countrymen live and where they cherish and practice their old traditions. They do

not want to assimilate, they try hard to keep their identities untouched by western culture and believe that this will help them to survive in the foreign environment.

As soon as a person made it here, to America, even though only as a nonentity without a social security number, without a driver's license and without any rights – well, then it's sink or swim – and Talibe was truly grateful for the life belt the Harlem African community threw to him day after day. The African community of Harlem was an alliance of people who would, at home in Africa, barely say hello to each other, but here they were glued together with their need for unity in an enemy land. The Africans recognized one other immediately... (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 142)

And so they recognized one another – and immediately started to speak to each other in the African creole. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 142)

Talibe represents a person totally closed to the new culture, treating it as “enemy land”, and trying to recreate the communal links he remembered from home. By contrasting Talibe and Gin, Pekarkova openly criticizes migration rooted in nostalgia and reliance on ethnic connections in the new place.

For some immigrants horizons broaden after their arrival in America, for others they get narrowed. Talibe belonged among those whose horizons got narrowed... Talibe's life had long ago shrunk to the size of a morbidly clean apartment, a couple of friends and his taxicab. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 157)

Talibe does not treat New York as an opportunity to expand the map of the world he knows. He limits his interaction with the city to the bare minimum that allows him to exist. He never belongs or wants to belong in the city. Gin's approach is different: in need of assimilation she is open to the changes that the interaction with the city brings, she studies the city to expand

and to detail her map of it. Her understanding of the concept of the sense of belonging is closely related to her vision of her new self as a part of the city she now lives in. Gin learns to speak better English, does not use her Czech name and gets married twice in order to get a Green Card. She accepts the city's rules to call it home, she insists on speaking its language to understand it better, she discards the past to live in the present.

Space-making, which in *Gimme the Money* is portrayed as an act of negotiation, adaptation, and self-discovery, is Gin's way of reinventing her migrant identity. As a taxi driver, she interacts with the city on an intimate level. Through driving along its streets, Gin observes the city, listens to its sounds, and decodes its signs. By living according to its rules and rhythms Gin becomes the city. Unlike other migrants, Gin invites the transformation that the presence of New York brings into her life and develops for herself a sense of place which reflects her consciously labored connection with the city and its inhabitants.

### **3.4 Flânerie as Space-Making**

The narrative pattern of *flânerie* (the art of strolling, looking and narrating) makes it possible to study Gin's internal transformation through her external engagement with the urban environment. The concept of the *flâneur*, originally proposed by Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (9), refers to the casual wanderer and reporter of street-life in a modern city, whose sensitive observations of the urban environment express his emotional state and shape his understanding of the world around him. As a narrator of everyday experience, who responds to the kaleidoscopic manifestations of life in a city space, the *flâneur* becomes a focus of investigation of the impact of city life on human self-perception. Christopher Butler explains that through wandering and strolling around the city without any particular purpose, the *flâneur*

is trying to achieve a form of transcendence as his aim is “to derive ‘l'éternel du transitoire’ (‘the eternal from the transitory’) and to see the ‘poétique dans l’historique’ (‘the poetic in the historical’)” (133). In this context, the city becomes “a constituent of identity” (Parsons 7) for the *flâneur* whose experience of urban space is translated into a narrative form of self-representation.

We can look at the *flâneur* as a figure that allows the showing of a variety of fragments of daily life from a sensorial and sensitive way. In fact, in an approach on the lived experience, the *flâneur* is the sign of a modality that informs us of the way humans feel, perceive, detect, and express a space and its symbolic significance. (La Rocca 10-11)

He [*flâneur*] uses the space with his body and conscience and in this way composes a construction of senses, allowing an understanding of the collective spaces through daily construction of directions and relations. (La Rocca 12)

In literature, *flânerie* helps to decode and make sense of character’s urban experience. While Baudelaire saw the *flâneur* as having a key role in understanding and portraying the city, later theorists such as Georg Simmel or Walter Benjamin analyzed the urban experience in sociological and psychological terms. They believed that the modern city was transforming identities of those who inhabited it by giving them a new relationship to time and space and by shifting fundamental notions of freedom and being (Simmel 409-24). They also believed that it was exclusively a male prerogative to be a person with enough time and money to allow oneself to amble around the city at will and, at the same time, to be involved in and separate from the urban performance. But as we read in Lauren Elkin’s “A tribute to Female Flâneurs: The Women Who Reclaimed Our City Streets”:

...for as long as there have been cities, there have been women living in them, yet if we want to know what it's like to walk thoughtfully in the city, there is only a long tradition of writing by men that tells us... But there have always been women writing about cities, chronicling their lives, telling stories, taking pictures, making films, engaging with the city any way they can. (Elkin)

The only requirement the genre imposes on a female counterpart of the *flâneur*, according to Lauren Elkin, is simply being a walker, “who gets to know the city by wandering its streets, investigating its dark corners, peering behind façades, penetrating into secret courtyards”. Virginia Woolf described this activity in a similar way. By calling it “street haunting” she insisted that *flânerie* makes women leave the things that define their identities at home, and become a casual anonymous passerby on the streets of a city, who instead of just reacting to the cityscape start interacting with the urban space changing it and at the same time being changed by it (5). In this respect, Vera Eliasova claims, Virginia Woolf and Iva Pekarkova have similar understandings of the city's impact on female subjectivity (Eliasova 652). Both authors see the city as a place of chances and encounters, which inevitably – no matter how much time it may take – bring a character to a significant discovery of a new self. Obviously, the *flâneuses* Woolf and Pekarkova portray in their texts are different in terms of their historical periods, worldviews, and life situations, but their visions of a woman as an active figure in an urban space and a careful observer of the city spectacle, bring their literary esthetics closer.

Dynamism and mobility, defined by Vera Eliasova as central features of the interaction between Gin and New York, mark the difference between the modern *flâneuse*, who often walks in a home city, and the postmodern *flâneuse*, who “travels continents and whose sense of dislocation is persistent” (653). Eliasova also comments on the different speed and the forms of

mobility of a postmodern *flâneuse* (653). Driving a cab at different speeds is not only the primary means of exploring and visualizing the city space, but also a tool for the character to build her image of the city image and to reinvent herself. Stefanie Weymann-Teschke claims that Gin “as one of the few female taxi drivers in New York City, engages in a form of motorized *flânerie*” (18): the invisibility of the driver and private space that a cab provides Gin with puts her in a unique position of an everyday observer who, although present in the city image, is at the same time removed from it and absent for a passerby on a street. Thus, as a *flâneuse* she observes the city in her own rhythm – which, as we argued above, coincides with the city’s rhythm. From inside the car Gin narrates details of ordinary life and reveals the city as she sees it to the readers. Gin is frank enough to lift the veil of privacy and let the audience into her territory as if welcoming them as passengers into her yellow cab. Taking a literary ride with Gin, readers discover her secrets, support her in stressful situations, hold their breath at moments of intimacy, and become invited to see the city through her eyes and meet *her* New York. Every day Gin gets a chance to see the city anew, to rediscover the places she already knows and to encounter their inhabitants performing simple but meaningful acts. For instance, “the uppity-mellow lifting of the left arm” of ladies whose “right hand is holding a leash with a choking lap-sized dog” become an identifier of Madison Avenue and “the well-practiced wave of the stockbrokers and bond traders” denotes the area near the World Trade Center or on Wall Street (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 47). She also learns more about herself – her yellow cab turns out to be not only a hard shell for her fragile inner world but also a connector which establishes a strong bond between Gin and the city. As Mimi Sheller, professor of sociology at Drexel University, puts it, a car “transforms the way we sense the world and the capacities of human bodies to interact with that world through the visual, aural, olfactory, interoceptive and proprioceptive senses. We not

only feel the car, but we feel through the car and with the car” (228). Pekarkova makes Gin’s cab, a postmodern means of the exploration of the city, a part of the urban landscape and the site of the heroine’s security and self-reflection, turning the act of driving into the narrative process.

### 3.5 Dérivé as Space-Making

Psychogeography also studies the mutual relations between a city and its dwellers, but from a slightly different perspective than *flânerie*. Defined by Guy Debord as a subdiscipline dealing with “specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (65), psychogeography crosses boundaries between geography, urban studies and psychology. In his “Theory of Dérive”, Debord investigates a particular way of interacting with urban space, when a walker, attracted by the sensory experiences a place offers, like a *flâneur*, delves into their exploration without any particular reason (65). Any turn, crossing or even dead end of the *dérive* (also called drifting) are treated as a promising possibility, a chance to discover something new and saturate the image of a place with new shades of emotional experiences. The narrative drift of *Gimme the Money* can be read as reflecting the experience of a *dérive*. Gin’s constant movement across New York, full of opportunities and unexpected discoveries, is seen as a sequence of variable combinations which in the end bring her accidental and unique finds:

Chances were chained one after the other – and Gin was painfully aware that with every YES she loses a NO, with every RIGHT TURN she loses a LEFT TURN or KEEP GOING STRAIGHT, that behind every chance there is a whole mob of other chances hiding, chances that had escaped Gin forever. (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 63)

In her analysis of the psychogeographic features of the novel, Stefanie Weymann-Teschke states that “it is the haphazardness of driving through the city that *Gimme the Money* banks on to produce an intensely visual experience of urban space” (235). By showing Gin’s emotional exploration of New York, Iva Pekarkova proves that the process of space-making cannot be purely rational. Its fortuitousness, unpredictability, and impossibility to be everywhere at the same time play a crucial role in finding Gin’s own path in this “enormous colorful Unknown” (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 11). In the end, random finds will lead her to another unexpected discovery – her new self, when the most urgent answers to the most complicated questions can be given and the road to herself will not be twisted and uncertain anymore. The result of such haphazard interaction between Gin and New York is an emotional map of the city, created by her impressions related to particular spaces. For example, East Village, the center of artistic life and the habitat of the creative community, will for Gin always symbolize the contradiction between art and reality. Midtown, “the epicenter of movement, a place of transition and transfer” (Weymann-Teschke 241), will be associated with work, two taxi garages, yellow strokes Gin’s cab leaves on the city’s image, and colorful and rhythmic reflections of New York.

Gin’s interactions with people also play an important role in her emotional exploration of New York. Cruising around the city, she not only transports passengers from one place to another, but relates these places to her passengers and the emotions and experiences they share with her during the ride. They also built her mental and emotional map of the city and are part of the unexpected *dérive* experience. Her image of New York is made up of both individual and collective perspectives which merge into one big concept of the City:

The interference of thoughts, opinions, ideas and heads, however, penetrated through the entire City. ALL the heads here left their signatures on one another; all the opinions,

loves, hates, happy and unhappy thoughts, ideas, emotions, inspirations, - absolutely everything that ever took place in human heads got reflected in the heads of all the others... (Pekarkova, *Gimme the Money* 33)

Her own experiences, impressions and opinions merge with those shared with her by other New Yorkers. Out of them all she waves a canvas of memories, faces, and signs and projects them onto her image of the city.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Iva Pekarkova's *Gimme the Money* is a novel offering a new approach to migrant storytelling. It questions the conventional hybrid vision and advocates a character who replaces the conventional nostalgia for her old world with an insistent search for herself in the new one. The spatiality of the created setting becomes extremely important in Pekarkova's text. Through the circular narration of her intense, dynamic and mobile relationships with New York's places and spaces, Gin is shown reimagining herself and embracing the new self emerging from that relationship. Her transformation from a lost migrant into a New Yorker with a sense of belonging is paralleled to her construction of a mental map of the city, which she builds like a sensitive and open-minded *flaneur* during her taxi *dérives*. Iva Pekarkova's text resonates with Henry Lefebvre's ideas on the production of space and Guy Debord's views on psychogeography. We follow Gin's cab to see her create her own city space and establish emotional bonds with the city places, shapes and colors. The psychological growth of the character of Gin as a confident New Yorker echoes Kevin Lynch's concept of mental mapping. She builds her own image of the city to know and tame it and to feel at home in it. As her mental and emotional connection with New York grows, she develops what psychologists call place attachment and sense of belonging,

which allows her to treat New York as a new place of her identity. In Pekarkova's novel *Gin* becomes the city.

## Chapter Four: Language and Identity

*In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh. It was so in the beginning and it is so today. The language, the Word, carries within it the history, the culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is the people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other.*

– Ulibarri, “Cultural Heritage of the Southwest”

*In reality, our very sense of who we are, where we belong and why, and how we relate to those around us, all have language at their centre.*

– John E. Joseph, “Identity”

Language, a fundamental element of each dimension of a person’s identity, is, according to Kari Gibson, “a complicated dance between internal and external interpretations of our identity” (1) because it not only manifests our individuality, intellect, cultural understanding, unique worldview to the outer world through the act of speaking, but it also shapes our vision of ourselves through mapping and understanding the reality we exist in by referring to categories that language equips us with. People also use language to discover and organize the world around them; by naming phenomena in the outer world people appropriate the space they occupy and tag it as safe. The cognitive strategy of naming makes it easier for people to navigate in given circumstances, to follow rules, and show expected behavior.

The word “identity” is in itself the key to the understanding of the nature of self-concept: the core meaning of the word refers to “the condition of being identical” to something or

somebody (Joseph, *Language and Identity; National, Ethnic Religious 2*), and it is through language that identities are manifested, belonging is expressed, and behavior is interpreted. “As a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are and so on” (Jenkins 6). What Jenkins highlights is that language is the marker of an individual’s identity, the reflection of one’s personal, collective, and cultural background on the basis of which a person is being judged and evaluated. Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt, in their introduction to *Language and Identities* argue:

[L]anguage not only reflects who we are but in some sense it *is* who we are, and its use defines us both directly and indirectly. We use language in a direct way to denote and describe who a person is through use of naming and kinship terms, description based on appearance, behavior, background, and so on, and we use language to assign identities indirectly when we base our judgements of who people are on the way they speak. (1, italics in original)

What is implied here is that the language people use in their everyday communication not only helps to make sense of the world around, but it also signals their belonging. As a denominator of national and cultural identity, language allows individuals to communicate and express themselves in unique ways that are specific to their common cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Being able to perceive, recognize and decode these markers means to share the same cultural, ethnic, historic, social, and linguistic code and, therefore, belong:

Identity, even in the here and now, is grounded in beliefs about the past: about heritage and ancestry, and about belonging to a people, a place, a set of beliefs and a way of life.

Of the many ways in which such belonging is signified, what language a person speaks, and how he or she speaks it, rank among the most powerful, because it is through language that people and places are named, heritage and ancestry recorded and passed on, and beliefs developed and ritualized. (Joseph, “Historical Perspectives on Language and Identity” 19)

Before we study the aspect of language in literary narrations of migration it is useful to look at the connection between language and identity in human thought. The fields of semiotics, social studies, the theories of Linguistic Relativity and the Linguistic Image of the World (Natural Language Metaphysics), as well as the linguistic identity theory, will help us to understand the interrelation between language and migrant identity and will shed light on its representation in migrant literature.

#### **4.1 Perspectives on Language and Identity**

The nature of language and its relations with its users and the outer world have been a topic of human thought for centuries. As John E. Joseph writes in “Historical Perspectives on Language and Identity”, “From earliest recorded history to the present day, reflection on language has included (and has at times been dominated by) ideas concerning the link between a particular language and the people who speak it” (20). Joseph adds that scholarly discussion of these ideas has developed in two directions: one dismisses the role of language in the formation of the distinctive nature of people who speak it, the other regards language to be an essential element in the formation of collective ethnic identity. The first concept originated in ancient philosophy. Aristotle believed that language is an important tool in shaping personal identity, but rejected the notion of language as a determinant of a particular worldview or group identity:

Those things therefore which are in the voice, are symbols of the passions of the soul, and when written, are symbols of the (passions) in the voice, and as there are not the same letters among all men, so neither have all the same voices, yet those passions of the soul, of which these are primarily the signs, are the same among all, the things also, of which these are the similitudes, are the same. (*On Interpretation* 46-47)

The other approach to language was developed, among others, by Plato in *Cratylus*, where language is understood as a matter of social convention or implicit agreement which determines the sense the words of a particular language hold. What the philosopher means, Raphael Demos writes, is that “In a language, we find embodied the total orientation toward reality of a particular society at a given time and place” (598). Epicurus who believed that language is an inseparable part of human life and self-expression also saw it as an integral part of social interaction which predetermines the way communities think, perceive the world and even look:

Thus names too did not originally come into being by coining, but men’s own natures underwent feelings and received impressions which varied peculiarly from tribe to tribe, and each of the individual feelings and impressions caused them to exhale breath peculiarly, according also to the racial differences from place to place. Later, particular coinings were made by consensus within the individual races, so as to make the designations less ambiguous and more concisely expressed. Also, the men who shared knowledge introduced certain unseen entities, and brought words for them into usage. Hence some men gave utterance under compulsion, and others chose words rationally, and it is thus, as far as the principal cause is concerned, that they achieved self-expression (97).

Platonic and Epicurean perspectives on language and identity superseded Aristotle's views in the Renaissance and have contributed to the modern perception of the relationship. The Enlightenment added the belief that language is a system of rational signs, while the Romantics proposed that language originates in the senses and reflects a unique worldview of a particular nation or race ("Historical Perspectives on Language and Identity" 20-21).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the interrelation between language and identity became a focal point in the debate of linguists and sociologists, who saw language not only as a means of knowledge sharing, but also as a tool of meaning making. Works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and Pierre Bourdieu argued that "language not only reflects and expresses relations, ideas and information but also actually plays a large part in constructing them...the meanings that substantiate self-concept or identity are both created through language and expressed by language" (Evans, Introduction 3).

The linguistic theory created by Ferdinand de Saussure proposes that language is not a direct reflection of reality, but rather a culturally constructed system of meanings that its speakers use to understand the outer world and create a sense of self. Defined as a system of conventional associations between words and notions (the signifier and the signified), "... language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system but only conceptual and phonic differences that issued from the system" (de Saussure 120). In Saussurean terms, David Evans clarifies, "language-identity tells us more about being in the world rather than the nature of the signified objects – it tells us more about the nature of identity in how we perceive the world rather than about the world itself... When we use words, our usage may tell us more about our perceptions and ideologies than about the realities of the outside world" ("The Identities of Language" 22).

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, known also as the Linguistic Relativity Theory, proposed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, can be extremely informative for any study of the interrelation between language and an individual identity. The theory suggests that language not only reflects but also determines the way a person thinks about reality and behaves in it. The assumption that different languages encode and express information in different ways and can thus shape a particular outlook allows to view an individual identity as a product of a unique linguistic environment which predetermines one's self-concept:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir qtd. in Whorf 134)

Louis Hjelmslev approaches linguistic relativity from a different angle. His sign model offers a framework to analyze how cultural-, social-, and self-perception are molded by the linguistic reality they are part of. The researcher believes that any language is a combination of two essential components that he calls "the content plane" (which represents any possible thought or idea a person would like to express) and "the expression plane" (which stands for linguistic means typical for a particular language that a person can use to express a thought or an idea). Although all languages share the same content plane, the means they provide their

speakers with to manifest it differ. What follows is that the content plane of a particular language is limited by the expression plane available to the language users. It is the expression plane of a language that forms the uniqueness of the users and, by predisposing their expression of experience, determines their worldview (Hjelmslev 47-60).

Anna Wierzbicka emphasizes a different aspect of the interrelation between a person and a language. Wierzbicka approaches language as a reflection of the cultural background of its speakers which denotes a specific way a person interacts with the outer world and interprets it. “There is a very close link between the life of a society and the lexicon of the language spoken by it”, writes Anna Wierzbicka in her *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words* and illustrates her point with various language-specific words that reflect the cultural peculiarities of English-, Russian-, Polish-, German-, and Japanese speakers (1). The examples that Wierzbicka provides refer to, among others, the domains of food, religious traditions, social rituals, and material culture and reflect “people’s values, ideas, and attitudes and ... their way of thinking about the world and ... life in it” (2).

The diversity of approaches to studying the concept of identity in the 20th century influenced the way the role of language in the formation of one’s self is viewed. Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, suggested that a person’s linguistic skills predetermine their position in the social hierarchy and can be viewed as a form of capital that can structure the interrelations within a particular society:

Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Hence the full definition of competence as the right to

speech, i.e. to the legitimate language, the authorized language which is also the language of authority. (Bourdieu, “The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges” 648)

Understanding language as a defining element of the establishment of one’s social status allows one to interpret one’s linguistic skills as a crucial force in shaping a person’s individual and social aspects of identity.

John Baugh, in his presentation on TED Talks on the significance of linguistic profiling, speaks of examples of housing discrimination that show how, depending on the quality of the language spoken in a telephone conversation by the same speaker who imitates different accents in English (standard American, African-American, Indian, Asian, Arabic), the speaker’s request to see a house to rent is either accepted or declined (Baugh 00:10:50-00:11:33). The fact that a realtor’s decision is only based on the language they hear, supports Pierre Bourdieu’s assumptions on the relevance between the language a person speaks and their authority and social status. Language can carry a variety of ethnic identities and communicate sets of behavioral stereotypes that create assumptions about the speaker and address our prejudices. Baugh’s experiment illustrates that language can be both a connecting and a disconnecting factor in interpersonal communication, and that it is through language that a person is tagged as belonging to a group or as the other.

Linguistic identity can be understood as a set of social, cultural, and ethnic characteristics manifested in the use of particular forms of language that communicate a speaker’s belonging to a certain group. In “What about Linguistic Identity”, Micah Andrews sees linguistic identity as an element of social interaction and argues that it is an identity enacted through the choice of a linguistic code. “Our language or style of language is intimately connected with who we are as individuals... linguistic identity would include those cultural and language elements from our

social and/ or cultural group...Linguistic identity would be the type of language speaker the individual wants to be viewed as” (95).

If we accept that “[P]ersonal identity is the relationship of the person to herself overtime”, we can follow Martin’s argument that “[L]inguistic identity is the relationship of a person to her language over time” (Martin 4-5). Gholam Mohammad Payman and Curiously Bareh’s add that linguistic identity manifests itself through linguistic behavior determined by the communicative context and is interpreted by the participants of interaction:

...linguistically articulated identity is co-constructed by individuals in linguistic situations and it is an intersubjective phenomenon whose social implication is indexically defined by the context in which the identity is constructed. By linguistic identity we mean linguistically articulated identity being highly inconsistent and changeable by which individuals express themselves in different contexts. (90)

In view of all the theories discussed above, the relationships between language and identity can be defined as reciprocal and mutually transformative. On the one hand, language is a sociocultural phenomenon which reflects the peculiarities of the lifestyle and worldview of a certain group, a product of their sociocultural activity; but on the other hand, language is a means of identity formation which predetermines the way people perceive the outside environment and themselves. The fact that language is both a medium of meaning and a tool of meaning making has direct implications for the interpretation of identity: the concept of linguistic identity, which is based on the set of cultural, social, and other meanings that language embodies, illustrates the importance of language in the process of self-(re)defining. As a source of social, cultural, historical, and other knowledge, language influences the formation and transformation of every aspect of human identity.

## 4.2 Language and Migrant Identity

As stated in Chapter One, most researchers agree upon the fact that migrant identity is a distinct form of personal identity shaped in the context of relocation from home. In the new cultural environment, or the new home, language becomes an essential tool for balancing between identity preservation and identity transformation. As a primary source of knowledge about the new surroundings, lifestyle, rules of behavior, and traditions, language provides migrants with a means to navigate new cultural environments and negotiate their place in the new society. It is no exaggeration to say that language is one of the most important factors of successful socialization, acculturation, and integration, because the functional use of language can influence how migrants find themselves in the new context and how they are perceived by others. New language acquisition is a long process parallel to the process of change of the cultural identities of migrants. But the preservation of their native language, which stands at the root of their personal identities and remains a tool for their re-definition in the new context, is equally important for a successful transition. One's native language will be used to make sense of the new environment at the beginning of the migrant experience and will for longer continue to be the language allowing migrants to understand and define themselves. "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language", writes Gloria Anzaldúa (59), indicating that language is the core of every aspect of individual identity which, in the context of migration, serves as an anchor that provides a person with stability and continuity while they are reinventing themselves by adapting to new social, cultural, and linguistic realities.

The acquisition of a new language and the preservation of the native one will result in the construction of a hybrid linguistic identity, which combines the features of the cultural and linguistic codes of both communities. A hybrid linguistic competence is required to deal with

and express the complex cultural experience and the identity dilemmas that an uprooted individual faces in the new environment. Hybridity of language, bilingualism, multilingualism, and code-switching become common communicative practices among migrants. Operating in and between two languages may be a powerful tool for the expression of the duality and ambiguity of the reality migrants live in. Additionally, multi-language skills help to secure the migrants' sense of belonging to multiple linguistic communities.

While language is a means of assimilation and belonging, its lack can be a reason of disconnection, alienation, and marginalization. The lack of linguistic fluency, or, in Bourdieu's terms, the lack of linguistic capital, leads to the exclusion of a migrant from the new social and cultural environment. The lack of language skills may lead to the migrants' lowered self-perception and the feeling of being dependent, and worse. It is therefore possible to claim that language, both the native language of origin and the newly acquired language, shapes the way individuals adapt to new cultures, reinvent their identities and balance and control the degree of their assimilation and acculturation.

In this regard, language can be viewed as a primary tool for migrants' self-expression which constitutes their identity and reflects it. As Sepideh Hozhabrossadat states in his article on communicative practices in multilingual societies, "Language changes our identities and our identities are shaped by different forms we use language" (195). Similarly, Judith Butler approaches language as a projection of one's identity and as a medium to interpret it, "We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both 'what' we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences" (8).

Such an interpretation of the concept of language justifies Payman and Bareh's idea of it as "a site of identity construction", which indicates the existence of a distinct dimension of individual identity constituted by one's linguistic identity (90). In the context of migration, which exposes individuals to a "plurality of linguistic codes" (Ansaldo 17), the impact of several languages leads to the formation of multiple linguistic identities. Because linguistic identity is a contextually determined phenomenon, the emergence of numerous linguistic identities is a natural part of adaptation to a new sociocultural environment and an integral element of migrant identity construction.

Approaching language as a culturally and socially constructed system of meaning that individuals use to create their sense of self, it becomes possible to suppose that migrant identity, which is comprised of more than one linguistic identity, is also a combination of different social and cultural sets of codes that the interaction with the new language brings. Following the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis of a particular linguistic image of the world that language establishes in its speakers, it is logical to conclude that, together with the development of a new migrant identity, accompanied and triggered by the formation of a new linguistic identity, a new linguistic image of the world evolves, combining the old and the new planes of expression, expanding the old though not yet, or maybe never, fully embracing the new one. Such linguistic adaptation and growth of migrant language identities is in fact the process of their linguistic hybridization, which results not only in their becoming bilingual, their practicing code-switching or developing a mongrel language, but which will also lead to the transformation and a hybridization of their original linguistic image of the world.

It is important to bear in mind that, in the context of migration, language is both a tool for the preservation of ethnic and cultural identity, which helps migrants to maintain their

psychological coherence and continuity, and a means of exploration of the new sociocultural environment. It is at first one's native language that determines the way in which a person engages with an unknown setting. And it is the acquisition of the language of the new community that initiates the formation of a new linguistic identity and a new linguistic image of the world. The completion of this process, involving recourse to both languages, indicates a migrant's assimilation and acculturation in the new environment.

### **4.3 Language and Migrant Literature**

In literature, the workings of language are also manifold. In its mimetic function, literature uses language to create and recreate reality in the textual space, but, at the same time, its expression plane is defined by the linguistic image of the world ingrained in that language. The interplay between creativity and convention, also in the cognitive dimensions of language meaning and use in a given culture, has always been the domain of literature. Using a language creatively literature represents the culture it belongs to, but it can also question and challenge that culture. Dora Thompson's functional definition of language in literature can be quoted to support this proposition:

“... literature involves the exploitation of language for creative purposes... While language is the medium used in expressing people's culture, literature is the reflection of this culture. Literature itself has been described as a pack of material, oral or written, which reflects how people live their lives” (3).

In *Beyond Culture*, Robert A. Hall, Jr. expresses the same set of dependencies in the following way: “Literature does not exist in isolation from either life or language: it derives

certain of its basic characteristics from the latter, and has an intimate essential relationship to the former” (121).

Inseparable from the events of life, literature uses language to represent and reflect on human experience, but literature’s creative act also calls for a reflection on language itself as a means of expressing experience. For obvious reasons, migrant literature often takes up language as a theme. Language in migrant narratives can be either a proud marker of identity, or a curse of otherness, a key to understanding a new reality and oneself in it, or a cause of failure and marginalization. The language of migrant characters both shapes and is shaped by their migrant experience. Derek Duncan observes rightly that “...languages bear the imprint and energy of human mobility” (319). We adopt Duncan’s metaphor to propose that, in migrant literature, the language of migrant characters bears the imprint of their migrant mobility.

Migrant experience is always stressful. It involves the loss of essential points of grounding for one’s identity, such as a stable place to live, a network of family and friends, an operating system of understandable cultural signs, and very often, the loss of language, at least in the sense of the loss of its full communicative powers. This is vividly depicted by the Vietnamese-born American graphic novelist Thi Bui in “What Gets Lost” (non-paginated) in *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*. The illustration presents the figure of a migrant surrounded by broken concrete blocks with words written on them. One of the blocks reads “language”. In an article on re-constructing the self in language, Anita Jarczok says, “When one loses a language, one, in a way, loses the self” (21). Among all the facets of identity that get lost in migration, the loss of language can be most painful. Without this “pillars” of their self-expression, migrants are forced to reinvent, or translate themselves in the new language. To comprehend and embrace the meaning of this transformation, they need to re-narrate themselves

in the new words available to them. Some of them tell or write their story to reassert their new being. The migrant author Reyna Grande, who arrived in the US as an undocumented child from Mexico, admits that “Writing continues to be an act of survival. As an immigrant or refugee, there is no end to trauma” (non-paginated). But writing is not only emotional and therapeutic. It must tell a story. Writing a narrative of their experience is for migrants also a means of reinventing themselves and understanding the transformations they are going through. They translate themselves into the new selves they become. Inevitably, since this is an effect of literature, they narrate themselves to turn their individual experience into a more universal statement about migration. “Propelled by changes to migrants’ economic status, religious life, language capacity and awareness of their ethnicity, migration writing re-defines their individual, collective and national identities” (Kosmalska, “Defining Migration Writing” 347).

Migrant literature will often use more than one language in its narration, will switch between language codes and dialects in order to express, and come to terms with the difficulty of expressing, a reality that neither the native nor the newly acquired language can yet describe. The presence of the different codes and languages is a central feature of books written by migrant authors and should be treated as an effective representation of the transformation and hybridity of their identity. What scholarly disciplines dealing with migration try to define with precision in theoretical arguments, literature depicts effectively by allowing readers to share in the intimate narrated experience of migrants themselves

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Language, a most effective carrier of cultural and group identity, the DNA of a group sharing that language, is also the original expression of a person’s uniqueness, intellect,

particular worldview and cultural understandings. It is both a means of self-expression, and a matrix shaping a person's cultural, ethnic and social perception and thus their identity. By studying the language people use we can track the changes that happen in their mental and emotional relation with their worlds. Language is a person's visiting card that represents them and defines the way they are perceived. Language stimulates and defines interaction.

In the context of migration, language is both a primary tool to discover the new environment and a means of preserving one's endangered identity. This has to do with the multifaceted nature of identity which, as has been argued before, is at the same time stable and changeable, objective and subjective, personal and social. As a tool helping to navigate an unknown world, language provides an individual with access to cultural norms, behavioral patterns, social institutions, and a whole variety of specific knowledge unavailable to those that do not possess the language. Depending on whether the process of appropriation of a new language is successful or not, a migrant's adaptation may lead either to assimilation or to marginalization and nostalgia. Migrants are forced to reinvent and renegotiate their identities because the sociocultural framework they had known is not applicable anymore. They have to gather the shattered "blocks" Thi Bui drew and rename them in the new language to construct that framework again.

Language is not only a tool of identity reinvention, but it is also a means of identity preservation. As a repository of collective cultural heritage, language manifests an individual's linguistic identity which provides them with the sense of belonging and psychological coherence and continuity. Their native language allows migrants to preserve and transmit traditions, values, and beliefs characteristic of a particular ethnic or social group across generations or even in distant geographical locations. While migrants are situated in an "in-between zone", when their

old life is gone and the path to the new one has not been found yet, their native language is an anchor in their search for stability and can be their comfort. The native language of a migrant, his most intimate connection to a particular culture and worldview, is always a starting point for further transformation of a migrant's identity and remains a lens through which a migrant sees the new world.

## Chapter Five: Language and Migrant Identity in *Lost in Translation* by Eva Hoffman

*“This language is beginning to invent another me.”*

– Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*

In the preface to his memoir *Out of Place*, Edward Said defines the process of writing about the past as an attempt to translate experiences that he not only had in a remote environment, but also in a different language (xi). From this perspective, immigration is not only a relocation in place, but it is also a relocation in language where everything one knows about the world including his or her self has to be placed within the limits of a new linguistic reality. The concept of translating experiences is the central theme of Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, which tells a story of a Polish girl, Ewa<sup>13</sup> Wydra, who together with her family emigrates from Poland to Canada, and then moves to the USA. The geographical displacement, that the heroine of the book experiences, is accompanied by a linguistic one; the relocation to a new sociocultural environment forces her to abandon her native Polish for English. Aside from providing a deep and complex exploration of migrant experience, the autobiography focuses on Ewa’s linguistic journey on which she discovers language to be both a tool for communication and a means for cultural and personal expression.

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the numerous challenges and dilemmas that accompany Ewa’s linguistic and personal transformation. Her story becomes an example of how language and identity intersect, conflict, and finally reach an agreement and reconcile denoting

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<sup>13</sup> In this chapter the heroine is referred to as Ewa (her initial individual identity, her Polish self); Eva appears only in connection with her American aspect of identity; and E(v)va is used to denote the hybrid identity of the heroine which combines both her Polish and American self.

the formation of hybrid identity of the heroine and marking her cultural and linguistic assimilation. A profound shift in Ewa's linguistic identity and her linguistic image of the world caused by migration is of particular interest for this analysis because it reflects an interconnection between the act of place changing, verbal self-expression, and the transformation of the self-concept.

The linguistic relativity theory, the natural language metaphysics theory, and the theory of hybridity of identity are used as informative frameworks that will help us to analyze the interrelation between the processes of new language acquisition and migrant identity (trans)formation that the heroine of *Lost in Translation* undergoes.

### **5.1 Native Language, Identity, and Linguistic Image of the World**

As the title of the autobiography suggests, there is always a loss in translation. This is as true about translating texts as about translating lives, which is what happens when migrants must find their bearings in a new language environment. Often the process proves to be impossible and leads to confusion and disorientation. The new linguistic – and not only linguistic – frame of her existence in America calls on Ewa to discard and forget what does not fit into it. Memories of people, sounds, and emotions, at first blurred and misplaced, eventually get lost in the process of writing herself anew, in the new language. As she builds her new linguistic self some aspects of her former identity become inaccessible. The feeling of loss evokes in her a profound sense of dislocation and estrangement. From the moment of disembarking in Canada, Ewa is forced to exist in a dichotomy of a life “before” and a life “after”. She confronts the same dilemmas that most migrants are faced with in the context of relocation. Her narration is delivered in the form of a constant binary opposition, contrasting the happy past and the lackluster and troubled

present, the meaningful Polish and the empty English, the extravert Ewa and the reserved Eva. Attempts to define what side of this dichotomy her true self is turn out to be futile and bring more confusion. Ewa will become successful in understanding herself only when she stops negotiating between the two selves, embraces her temporal, spatial, cultural, and linguistic duality, and admits that a painful loss can actually be a valuable acquisition. Ewa realizes that the process of finding oneself as a migrant is not about identifying a midpoint in one's divided identity, or choosing one part over the other, but is it rather acknowledging the worth of the unity that comes from the whole spectrum of her Polish and American experiences. Both, not either; wholeness not in-betweenness.

The first part of the book which presents the narrator's Polish childhood is meaningfully entitled "Paradise". For her it is a vibrant world full of unequivocal love, joy, familial warmth, animated conversations with friends, solidarity, order, and belonging. It is the language through which the heroine explores reality and absorbs the culture through peasant music, poems, or fairy-tales. The Polish language is for her not only a tool of communication but also a foundation of her personal and cultural identities. It is the source of ideas, thoughts, and emotions. It is the thread which links her cognitive map of the past (her memories) with experience and imbues the latter with meaning. Rosalia Baena Molina, analyzing Hoffman's linguistic construction of the self, states that "In Hoffman's recreation of childhood, the acquisition of language is one of her earliest memories, the love of words a lifelong influence that deeply marks her in every aspect... Through language she tells stories, establishing a solid connection with the world" (2). Indeed, the author recognizes the complex and multifarious nature of language: on the one hand, it is a system of signs that shapes her thoughts and identity, but on the other hand, it is a reflection of her individual and cultural identity, a tool of self-expression and meaning-making.

Everything she narrates in the Polish language creates an image of a harmonious world that is familiar, secure, and comforting for Ewa. Eva Hoffman shared her memories of childhood at a conference in Israel and called them again “the paradise of childhood”, in which, regardless of the harsh economic and political situation in the adults’ reality she felt happy:

So, the book is divided into three sections: “Paradise”, “Exile”, and “The New World”.

And it might seem very strange to entitle the first part which is about growing up in post-war, post-Holocaust Poland with parents who had both lost absolutely all members of their families, in a very impoverished country, in a country which experienced not only Holocaust, but another enormous war in which 3 million non-Jewish Poles died. So, it might seem strange to entitle that section “Paradise”, but to some extent I was describing the paradise of childhood, of the great sort of intensity of childhood perceptions, the sensuality of childhood perceptions. And, indeed, paradoxically, and I don’t know if it would have lasted much longer had I gone on to grow into adulthood in Poland, I did feel safe (“Eva Hoffman | The Third Gathering” 00:03:39 – 00:04:55).

So, there was something, you know, I experience as idyllic, and indeed, I was a kind of, you know, a linguistic child, I suppose, I loved language, I loved poetry, I loved books that I read, but I simply loved language, I loved expressiveness, and Polish was, of course, completely incorporated into my psyche, and, you know, it is a feature of the first language that you learn it as a child, you learn it unconsciously, and so the words in the language seem to be coeval, seem to be equivalent, seem to stand for the things they name. W.H. Auden had a nice sort of reflection on this...He imagines a very small child been taken out by a nanny and been told “Look, there is the Moon”. And to the child the

word “moon” has some of the glow, some of the enchantment of the Moon. He says that in order to become a writer you then have to understand that words are not completely equivalent to things, that words are separate from things as well, but this is the enchantment of the first language which is very hard to replace later (“Eva Hoffman | The Third Gathering” 00:06:02 – 00:07:35).

Dagmara Drewniak, professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, interprets Hoffman’s idealized vision of Poland as rooted in memory and intensified by migration: “There is no need to discuss the correctness of dates and places; what has to be acknowledged instead is Hoffman’s reliance upon memory and the emotional condition of an immigrant” (157).

Eva Hoffman’s emigration to Canada and later to the United States initiates a transition to a new linguistic reality in which the domination of the English language as the language of everyday life causes the transformation of Ewa’s linguistic image of the world. Eva Hoffman experiences English as a much colder and more impersonal language the use of which leads to a distinct, sometimes disorientating shift in Ewa’s perception of her surroundings. The author depicts Ewa’s struggle to express her true self and her Polish past within the linguistic framework of English as a challenge in which she must align a foreign linguistic construct with her established worldview. Notions that used to be clear and simple, such as love or friendship, start puzzling Ewa because it turns out that she is unable to decode the signs of interpersonal communication which are considered common there: “We like each other quite well, though I’m not sure that what is between us is ‘friendship’ – a word which in Polish has connotations of strong loyalty and attachment bordering on love” (Hoffman 148).

An explanation of the incongruity of meanings and incomprehension that Hoffman alludes to may be found in the article by Tatiana Larina et al. “*I*-Identity vs *We*-Identity in

Language and Discourse: Anglo-Slavonic Perspectives”. Their research aims at showing the difference in the mentality of Anglo and Slavonic language speakers, which the scholars explain with the help of linguo-cultural traditions that the speakers of the languages grow up in. One of the central arguments of the study is that “Anglo culture is considered to be rather individualistic, or ...*I*-oriented” while Slavic cultures “are firmly anchored in the collectivist – or *we*-orientation – tradition, as it is deeply embedded in their very fiber” (114, italics in the original). Slavonic speakers, in whose linguo-cultural tradition there is an innate need for the common activity, value solidarity and closeness, while English speaking people value distance and interdependence (116). Therefore, for Ewa friendship is a representation of fidelity and mutual help – “It is better to have 100 friends than 100 roubles” (Russian proverb translated in Tatiana Larina, Vladimir Ozyumenko, and Svetlana Kurteš’s article (117)) – while for Penny, Ewa’s new acquaintance, the concept “probably means that friends should not be burdened with problems, as they are needed for a pleasant pastime” (“Friends are like fiddle-strings and they must not be screwed too tightly” (English proverb presented in Tatiana Larina, Vladimir Ozyumenko, and Svetlana Kurteš’s article (117))). What this episode illustrates is that the elements of cultural and ethnic backgrounds are one of the foundational aspects of identity which, according to the natural language metaphysics theory, predetermine the way a person perceives and interprets the world around them and which manifest themselves through language. Therefore, before Ewa masters the English language, she perceives herself as not heard and not seen by others – a common experience for many migrants. Unable to link the words to the experience and their true meaning, she feels awkward, out of contexts, and artificial:

When my friend Penny tells me that she’s envious, or happy, or disappointed, I try laboriously to translate not from English to Polish but from the word back to its source, to

the feeling from which it springs. Already, in that moment of strain, spontaneity of response is lost. And anyway, the translation doesn't work. I don't know how Penny feels when she talks about envy. The word hangs – in a Platonic stratosphere, a vague prototype of all envy, so large, so all-encompassing that it might crush me – as might disappointment or happiness. (Hoffman 107)

In Polish, happiness or disappointment would have been endowed with meaning and enriched with specific contexts for Ewa. However, in English, these words are for her just empty combinations of sounds that do not refer to any situation she has experienced, which suggests that her linguistic image of the world, which used to be interconnected with her emotional and cultural experiences, is not valid anymore.

English does not satisfy Ewa's need for emotional self-expression, either. Partially for this reason the story is saturated with Polish words which are often introduced with the author's explanation or commentary. These words refer to proper names, *Pani Ruta* (Hoffman 17), *Pani Witeszczak* (69), *Pani Orlovska* (68), cultural phenomena, *dorozhkas* (10), *górale* (18), *ciocia* (20); *dama* (45), *recepta* (50); *kogelmogel* (50); *banieczki* (50); *wiwat* (73), *sto lat* (73), and feelings, *tesknota*, which appears several times (4, 20, 28, 115, 116). Hoffman's use of these words, and her refusal to look for English equivalents, is a good example of the workings of the linguistic image of the world speakers of a language hold and share. A fairly fluent speaker of English by then, Ewa is not able to find words that denote the Polish senses. The expression plane, in Louis Hjelmslev's terms, of the English language makes it impossible for these words to be translated; they can only be explained. They are also signs of the authenticity that the author, as a Polish migrant herself, endows the text with.

The Polish words used in text not only delineate the Polish part of E(v)va's hybrid identity, but they also help to recreate the bilingual and bicultural reality she now exists in. Through the Polish words, readers see the multilayered nature of her linguistic image of the world and are able to understand E(v)va's migrant experience better. In the narrator's attempt to tell the story with utmost precision, the inclusion of Polish words not only fulfills her need of accuracy in reconstructing the past and as it was, but they also help her to reconnect with the world she misses. The presence of such words in the text also illustrates the inability to separate the experience from the language in which it happened. As Edward Said writes, "Everyone lives life in a given language; everyone's experiences therefore are had, absorbed, and recalled in that language" (xi). Words in Polish appear much more often in the first two parts of the memoir, where the narrator recalls her life in Poland before her family migrated to Canada and the period right after it. They are scarce in the third part, which mostly refers to her current life in the USA. Her Polish memories cannot be translated into English, they must be expressed, at least partly, in the language they happened in. The linguistic toolset of the English language turns out to be ineffective in representing details of Eva's Polish childhood. She soon notices that her Polish fails in describing her present American reality:

Each night, I dream of a tiny old woman – a wizened Baba Yaga, half grandmother, half witch, wearing a black kerchief and sitting shriveled and hunched on a tiny bench at the bottom of our courtyard, way, way down. (Hoffman 6)

When my parents, or their Polish friends, use the word "psychological," it's to suggest something weird, verging on crazy. "It's something psychological," they say about a woman who's afraid to come out of her room, or a man who's celibate for too long.

Normal human beings are assumed to have understandable feelings and motivations”.

(Hoffman 261-62)

Agata Szepe’s article on language and migration suggests a different explanation of why Eva Hoffman uses Polish words in her narrative. Szepe identifies in migrants the psychological need to idealize their native language and to believe that native words describe the world closer and better. (122).

It is clear that the Polish words that appear in the text are emotionally charged for the speaker. The motivation in her refusal to use English approximations results certainly not just out of her care for precision. *Dorozhkas* (10) helps her to recreate the atmosphere and the busy street of Cracow; *górale* (18) brings Ewa back to her careless childhood summer in the mountains; *ciocia* (20) stands for Ciocia Basia’s rough, large hands, which fold small Ewa into a towel, and indicates a broader meaning in Polish culture than its direct translation (“auntie”) has in English. Referring to Ewa’s sensual perception of the world, the Polish words illustrate how much meaning, life, and pure happiness they contain for her: *recepta* (50), *kogelmogel* (50), and *banieczki* (50), regardless of the rather unpleasant memories they refer to, bring back to life her mother’s face and sweetness of the home-made remedy; *Wiwat!* (73) and *Sto lat!* (73) convey the meanings of collective joy that the sense of belonging can give.

The presence of Polish words in the text also indicates the referential points of Ewa’s linguistic image of the world that will determine her behavioral patterns and her outlook. Words such as *Pani* (17) and *tęsknota* (4) are more than just markers of her linguistic identity; they are carriers of her cultural heritage and personal associations.

The use of proper names in the polite Polish address to a woman, “Pani”, indicates closeness, warmth, and importance. Translating “Pani” into English as “Mrs” or “Madame”

would load it with extraneous meaning. Reducing the phrase to a name or surname only would rob it of its cultural, social and emotional significance. Keeping it original in the text reflects the traditional Polish, archetypal understanding of a respectable woman. When used by a woman speaker it additionally implies a kind of sisterhood and, used by Hoffman in the book, it expresses her admiration and respect for the intelligent, wise, kind, beautiful, and talented women she remembers from Poland. For Ewa, Pani Ruta is an example of true friendship, Pani Orlovska<sup>14</sup> – of social status and its attributes, Pani Witeszczak – of talent, sensitivity, and dedication to work. They all in some way are role models for her, and their influence will determine the way Ewa will want to see herself in the future:

There's my mother, her best friend, Pani Ruta – *Pani* means something like Madame – and several other ladies with their children. Their husbands, who can't get away from their jobs, come just for part of the summer. The women are sitting on the green riverbank, with neat patches of wheat fields just back of them, playing cards, reading, or doing nothing much. (Hoffman 17)

...Pani Orlovska, the mother of my friend Krysia, and a "better" person – she is educated a doctor's wife ... (Hoffman 33)

There is dignity and uprightness to Pani Orlovska's very bearing. She is a tall woman dressed with a resolute dowdiness; she wears shapeless sweaters, thick stockings, and

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<sup>14</sup> The spelling of Pani Orlovska's surname is an interesting detail of Ewa's identity transformation. The letter "v" which is absent in the Polish alphabet is used in the Polish language only in the borrowed words which kept their original spelling. Therefore, the spelling of the surname of Pani Orlovska, which seems to be Polish, is incorrect unless it is a transliteration of the Russian version of the same surname or is a marker of the heroine's linguistic assimilation which results in forgetting the nuances of the native language and unconscious application of the rules of the English language.

sensible, block-heeled shoes. Her face, framed by beautiful white hair, tightly pulled back in a bun, is long, plain, and extremely attractive – I suppose because of her clear blue eyes, which she focuses on people with an energetic concentration. She uses no makeup and tells me I should wash my face with the hardest laundry soap – it’s the best thing for one’s complexion. Cracow, roughly, is Poland’s Boston, to Warsaw’s New York, and Pani Orlovska is a sort of Boston bluestocking whose class confidence is evident in her very lack of ostentation. (Hoffman 44)

Nevertheless, in my mind Pani Orlovska possesses a kind of female authority that I admire, and that I recognize in many vivacious and strong-minded women around me. I want to grow up to be like them, animated and sturdy and smart. (Hoffman 47)

Eventually, it is agreed that I should be passed on to Pani Witeszczak, a teacher who has the reputation for being particularly good with young people and who has nurtured some well-known Polish pianists. She is not a beautiful woman, but although I am at first intimidated at the prospect of playing for so exalted a personage, I soon find something peacefully reassuring about the mildness of her brown, owl-like eyes and her understanding smile ... Although she never raises her voice, and is unfailingly kind, Pani Witeszczak exercises great authority over me. She is the first in a sequence of music teachers to whom I owe the closest thing I get to a moral education...she is trying, indirectly, to teach me the language of emotions. (Hoffman 69-70)

The relocation from Poland to Canada disrupts Ewa’s understanding of the outer world: her social identity and the system of values and beliefs crash, confronted with the American

reality. The core concepts of her worldview, including the idea of womanhood, beauty, and life's purpose, are reviewed and rejected by the new society. Ewa, who grew up confident in her own attractiveness, finds it difficult to accept that without any valid reason her physical appearance, instead of causing admiration, evokes sympathy and disdain:

Since in Poland I was considered a pretty young girl, this requires a basic revision of my self-image. But, there's no doubt about it; after the passage across the Atlantic, I've emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable. In fact, I can see in these women's eyes that I'm a somewhat pitiful specimen – pale, with thick eyebrows, and without any bounce in my hair, dressed in clothes that have nothing to do with the current fashion. (Hoffman 109)

Explained by different outlooks on life the Poles and Canadians hold, the shift in Ewa's self-perception illustrates how interconnected the notions of place, culture, language, and self-image are. What used to be normal and obvious in Cracow, now is questioned or even considered inadequate by the new society, which leads to an inevitable re-evaluation of Ewa's own identity and self-concept:

The allegory of gender is different here, and it unfolds around different typologies and different themes. I can't become a "Pani" of any sort: not like the authoritative Pani Orlovska, or the vampy, practical Pani Dombarska, or the flirty, romantic woman writer I once met. None of these modes of femininity makes sense here, none of them would find corresponding counterparts in the men I know. (Hoffman 189)

Just as Ewa finds the stereotypical Canadian understanding of beauty and womanhood foreign and contradictory to her own Polish interpretations, so too does she notice how incompatible the emotional language she used to rely on in Polish is in the new English contexts.

The Polish word “*te̋sknota*” appears meaningfully at the beginning of the book: “I desperately want time to stop, to hold the ship still with the force of my will. I am suffering my first, severe attack of nostalgia, or *te̋sknota* – a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing” (Hoffman 4). *Te̋sknota*, one of the central motifs of the book, will appear in the text many times later as there is no equivalent in English that would reflect all shades of meaning this word contains in Polish. The word “*te̋sknota*” denotes everything Ewa is losing: summer villages, escapades with friends, piano lessons, and Cracow, which she loves as one loves a person. *Te̋sknota* is “...an annunciation of how much an absence can hurt” (Hoffman 4) – this is what she says in the third paragraph of the story. Ewa’s *te̋sknota* is so potent that it feels physical:

As I walk the streets of Vancouver, I am pregnant with the images of Poland, pregnant and sick. *Te̋sknota* throws a film over everything around me, and directs my vision inward. The largest presence within me is the welling up of absence, of what I have lost. This pregnancy is also a phantom pain.

I don’t know what to do with this private heaviness, this pregnancy without the possibility of birth. (Hoffman 115)

*Te̋sknota* is as intensive, palpable, and enduring as pregnancy is with the only difference – the burden Ewa is carrying is not material, and it cannot be embodied. This is why she compares it to “a phantom pain”, implying that the cause of her emotional state is not physically present, but influences the perception of the reality she is in. Ewa’s longing for Poland discolors her view of Vancouver and makes it difficult for her to accept her new life. She does not see any prospect of shedding the burden. She is “pregnant without the possibility of birth” – overflowed with memories and experiences from her past life which she is desperately trying to hold on to in

order not to lose the Poland she loves. She is pregnant with the weight of the past which has no future.

Zygmund Bauman's idea of retrotopia can be an informative means helping to analyze Ewa's emotional relationship with Poland and her past. With the help of retrotopia, which is defined as "negation of utopia's negation" (Bauman 8), Bauman describes a person's longing for the past as a place of safety, stability, and happiness as opposed to the utopian idea of the bright future which, instead of being "the natural habitat of hopes and rightful expectations" (6), is uncertain, threatening, and troublesome. As Martin Aidnik and Michael Hviid Jacobsen propose, "whereas utopia negates the reality that currently is, Retrotopia negates that very future which utopia represents and replaces it with the past that once was" (16). Unable to find her place in the new environment, Ewa is even more unsure if there can be anything hopeful for her in the future. This explains her nostalgic attitude towards her Polish childhood and her anxiety about the future which awaits her in America.

Joanna H. Martinez also believes that Ewa's emotional detachment is a result of the human tendency to romanticize the past. Because Poland is the only home Ewa knows before her family comes to Canada, her nostalgia and painful assimilation are caused by "the profound idealization of the past and the fantasy of Paradise, or some 'promised land', as well as the constant observation of an alien culture from a marginal position" (non-paginated). This romantic nostalgia is a defensive mechanism that allows Ewa to compensate for the migrant inferiority she experiences in America and overcome the trauma of her involuntary exile. Indeed, at times Ewa enjoys her melancholy or is even proud of it. Next to being a means of confrontation, *teŝknota* is also a particular feature of her exoticism that distinguishes her from her peers and makes her special: "I have now gained the status of an exotic stranger...I'm

excited by my own otherness” (Hoffman 179). Portrayed as an innate element of the Polish spirit, formed by the country’s history marked by wars, partitions, and political upheavals,  *tęsknota* becomes a way for the heroine to connect to her Polish identity and reassert some of her original cultural settings. As Joanna H. Martinez writes, “Eva’s idealization of Poland is, however, a function of a specific kind of Polish melancholy, for an outsider hard to understand. It is a melancholy that is taught in school and at home by the constant glorification and romanticization of the turbulent Polish history” (non-paginated). Elżbieta Tarkowska in *Time in the Life of the Poles* [*Czas w Życiu Polaków*] states that “Numerous studies and publications show that Poles are a ‘historically sensitive’ nation, which could be classified as ‘a society with memory’”<sup>15</sup>(69).

It is in the nature of the Polish people, Eva Hoffman reminds her readers, to dwell on the past, find romanticism in suffering, and long for what has been lost or changed. Poeticized by art, music, and literature,  *tęsknota* has become one of the most prolific topics and modes of Polish culture. Nostalgia, a recurring theme of Polish art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a means of expressing the longing for a free motherland, glorifying its great history, and celebrating its beauty. Significantly, that art had also been created by émigré artists – Eva Hoffman invokes Adam Mickiewicz and Fryderyk Chopin as examples of that noble melancholy. She recalls her last meeting with her classmates when they all write “appropriate words of good-bye” in her journal before her family emigrates. The Romantic feeling of nostalgia is clearly present there as a unifying, national feature:

... melancholy verses in which life is figured as a vale of tears or a river of suffering, or a journey of pain on which we are embarking. This tone of sadness is something we all

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<sup>15</sup> In the original: “Z licznych badań i opracowań syntetycznych wynika, że Polacy są narodem ‘czującym historycznie’, że można by ich zaliczyć do ‘społeczeństw z pamięcią’”.

enjoy. This makes us feel the gravity of life, and it is gratifying to have a truly tragic event – a parting forever – to give vent to such romantic feelings. (Hoffman 78)

To illustrate the cultural and emotional difference between Polish and American worldviews, Hoffman recalls her one-month bus trip across Canada and the USA with a group of teenagers, whose fare-well wishes were completely different from what her Polish peers had written for her:

“It was great fun knowing you!” they exclaim in the pages of my little notebook. “Don’t ever lose your friendly personality!” “Keep cheerful, and nothing can harm you!” they enjoin, and as I compare my two sets of mementos, I know that, even they’re so close to each other in time, I’ve indeed come to another country. (Hoffman 78)

Ewa’s comparative study of the two farewell texts is an exercise in the cultural exegesis of language. She has by now developed the ability to decode and understand the language of her new country and can compare and contrast it with what she still remembers as her own ways of expression. In one of her lectures, Hoffman commented on the differences of perception and self-expression between languages and cultures that the scenes convey:

The differences in culture extend ...to forms of personhood, to the kinds of feelings that we value or we don’t, to the kinds of relations with others that we value or that we don’t, so that, for example,.. American culture, of course, valued individuality and self-reliance greatly, and I learned a lot from it eventually, I really did learn a lot from it; Polish culture valued intimacy and closeness. Americans valued a certain kind of assertiveness, a certain kind of decisiveness. Poles valued a certain kind of sensitivity, sensibility. (Eva Hoffman| The Third Gathering 00:11:48 - 00:12:48).

Hoffman's contrast between a Polish farewell and an American good-bye recognizes the different mentalities that stand behind them, which are products of two different linguistic images of the world conceptualizing relationships and emotions differently. The cheerful phrases written in Ewa's notebook by her American friends express what they treasure most, self-reliance, initiative, and determination. As Larina et al. (116) confirm, positive human interaction in the American language code should feature openness, optimism, and encouragement. Ewa's surprise at the words of good-bye she receives are a sign that her linguistic identity is not yet fully adjusted to her immigrant context, it is still rooted in the patterns of the Polish forms of expression. The intuitive bonds with her language, the core of her identity, are not yet severed

## **5.2 Place, Language, and Identity Transformation**

In Eva Hoffman's self-narrative, the notion of language is inseparable from the notion of place which plays a crucial role in the transformation of the heroine's linguistic image of the world. Her mother tongue, Polish, is determined by the place of her birth and defines the core aspects of her identity. Before the migration, Ewa has no doubts who she is. Departure from Poland draws her from her original cultural and linguistic milieu and gives birth to Ewa-the-migrant. The image of Ewa standing on the upper deck of the *Batory* ship in Gdynia we find in the opening lines of the book is a starting point of her migrant adventure and her identity transformation. The new place and the new language she encounters will from now on influence her and change her.

Hoffman's narration keeps the concepts of place and language ostensibly close to each other. Images of idyllic places she remembers from Poland resound with Polish words and sounds that bring emotion and positive associations. The sterile and empty sound of English, at

least in the initial chapters, fills the sterile and meaningless urban spaces of America. It is impossible to say definitively whether place or language is initial in the formation of one's linguistic image of the world. Poland provides the heroine with the physical and cultural setting in which the language of her soul emerges and becomes the means with which Ewa creates her own world and interprets it:

All it has given me is the world, but that is enough. It has fed me language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind. It has given me the colors and the furrows of reality, my first loves. The absoluteness of those loves can never be recaptured: no geometry of the landscape, no haze in the air, will live in us as intensely as the landscapes that we saw as the first, and to which we gave ourselves wholly, without reservations. (Hoffman 74-75)

The Polish language is more than a medium of communication for her; it is an integral part of her identity and her understanding of home, family, and community. Her linguistic image of the world is rooted in a distinct cultural and geographical place and tied to her personal experiences and collective memories that she carries with her on her migrant journey. Images and names of places appear important in her narrative and help her to keep her memory alive. References to different geographical locations, such as Gdynia (Hoffman 3), Planty (40, 75, 238), Biały Dunajec (17), Kazimierza Wielkiego Street 79 (13), allow the narrator to recreate the sense of place she possessed at home and help her to locate her memories on the mental map of her childhood. Her nostalgia is not an abstract feeling; it is a craving for particular places with names, particular points of the map, which resonate with moments of her happiness and idyllic life.

The loss of Poland, the Paradise of her childhood, results in losing touch with the living language of the place and a gradual loss of the linguistic image of the world she developed in

Poland: the expression plane of her language ceases to be valid for her new experiences and has to be updated to embrace them. The linguistic image of the world works like echolocation: it is constantly monitoring changes in the socio-cultural surroundings and is being reshaped depending on the return signals it gets from the outside world. Migration, involving a change of place and a loss of basic points of reference, requires not an update, but a reprogramming, to follow the computer metaphor. The new place of living is filled with new senses and meaning, new symbols and codes, many of which are incomprehensible to the migrant. The old program does not work. In her own metaphor, Eva Hofmann's heroine is left with a wardrobe full of old clothes she has nowhere to wear. She can only recall occasions from the past that made her look chic: "...we go to a restaurant perhaps once a month, take long summer vacations, have a live-in maid and more than one change of clothing, and can occasionally afford to buy an imported item, like spike-heeled shoes for my mother, or a nylon blouse for me" (Hoffman 14). Additionally, she does not yet know the dress-code of the new place and therefore her new wardrobe is still empty:

In fact, I can see in these women's eyes that I'm a somewhat pitiful specimen – pale, with thick eyebrows, and without any bounce in my hair, dressed in clothes that have nothing to do with the current fashion. (109)

Similarly, her limited linguistic ability to express herself in English makes Ewa feel inappropriate, out of place and lost:

What has happened to me in this new world? I don't know. I don't see what I have seen, don't comprehend what's in front of me. I'm not filled with language anymore, and I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don't really exist. (108)

As it was stated in Chapter Two, the process of migrant identity formation is directly linked to the notion of place. Leaving a place initiates the shift in one's self-concept. However, it is in the context of the linguistic transition that the distance (both physical and metaphorical), that migrants have to overcome in order to assimilate, becomes most apparent. While traveling from one place to another is an easy feat, bridging the abyss between different cultural traditions is impossible without overcoming the linguistic gap between the two worlds, which is never an instantaneous achievement, but rather a laborious process that takes time. In any case, the space between two points, be it kilometers, traditions or a language, is a transit area, in-betweenness, that Ewa experiences as a simultaneous physical presence in and a mental and emotional absence from the same place:

I can't afford to look back, and I can't figure out how to look forward...Betwixt and between, I am stuck and time is stuck within me...I arrest the past, and I hold myself stiffly against the future; I want to stop the flow. As a punishment, I exist in the stasis of a perpetual present, that other side of "living in the present," which is not eternity but a prison. I can't throw a bridge between the present and the past, and there I can't make time move. (Hoffman 116-17)

Displacement, caused by the inadequacy of her linguistic tools, results in Ewa's inability to connect words and things they denote. Ewa will need time for her Polish linguistic image of the world to transform and a new one to develop. At one point they will come together, overlap and complement each other. Words that are identical in meaning in both languages will coincide and those that are not – will just broaden her bilingual and bicultural expression plane. But now, in the state of in-betweenness Ewa is unable to link what she knows in Polish to what she encounters in English, "...this radical disjoining between word and thing is a desiccating

alchemy, draining the world not only of significance but of its colors, striations, nuances – its very existence. It is the loss of a living connection” (Hoffman 107).

The physical distance, the cultural and linguistic unbelonging teaches migrants to recognize and comprehend the relativity of human perception and opinion. Relocated and displaced, Ewa discovers that the centrality of Cracow, the Polish language, and its culture in her image of the world is not at all universal, but rather unique in these parts of the world. She learns she must also restructure her world-picture to counter her feeling of displacement:

Of course, I will not convince these teenagers in this Vancouver classroom that Poland is the center of the universe rather than a gray patch of land inhabited by ghost. It is I who will have to learn how to live with a double vision. Until now, Poland has covered an area in my head coeval with the dimensions of reality, and all other places on the globe have been measured by their distance from it. Now, simultaneously, I see it as my classmates do – a distant spot, somewhere on the peripheries of the imagination, crowded together with countless other hard to remember places of equal insignificance. The reference points inside my head are beginning to do a flickering dance. I suppose this is the most palpable meaning of displacement. I have been dislocated from my own center of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my center. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily. (Hoffman 132)

Internal disconnection, caused by cultural and linguistic displacement, results in Ewa’s identity crisis and referring to herself as “I” becomes impossible for her. In her state of in-betweenness Ewa has not covered the distance from “ja” to “I” yet, because her linguistic images

of the world, as well as her visions of herself, have not come to overlap. The moment Ewa and her sister are given new names, she realizes the necessity to invent a new self in the new land:

This morning, in the rinky-dink wooden barracks where the classes are held, we've acquired new names. All it takes is a brief conference between Mr. Rosenberg and the teacher, a kindly looking woman who tries to give us reassuring glances, but who has seen too many people come and go to get sentimental about a name. Mine – "Ewa" – is easy to change into its near equivalent in English, "Eva." My sister's name – "Alina" – poses more of a problem, but after a moment's thought, Mr. Rosenberg and the teacher decide that "Elaine" is close enough. My sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism. The teacher then introduces us to the class, mispronouncing our last name – "Wydra" – in a way we've never heard before. We make our way to a bench at the back of the room; nothing much has happened, except a small, seismic mental shift. The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us-but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. We walk to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves. (Hoffman 105)

The passage is a powerful illustration of how the linguistic image of the world, migrant identity, and displacement intersect. "This careless baptism", the Americanization of the Polish names, initiates a shift in the linguistic image of the world where the core notion of one's identity is a person's name. The "tiny distance" the new names create is symbolic of the disconnection between their past identities and their current circumstances: Poland vs. Canada. The heroine's

Polish name, Ewa, is meaningful to her because she is named after both her grandmothers. Her name is a part of her identity; her familial heritage is encoded in the name. Provided with a new name, Ewa is robbed of her personal story, cultural belonging, and self-perception. She does not know who this new person is, and in order to find it out she will have to reinvent herself:

“...Nobody gives you your identity here, you have to reinvent yourself every day” (Hoffman 160). This heartless renaming is like an act of objectification: nobody is interested in whether Ewa and Alina want to be given new names and whether they can pronounce them at all. The teachers just want the girls’ names to be easy and understandable, comfortable for the group. The teachers seem to know best what is good for the girls and what names suit them better, and they do not have the faintest idea that the new names evoke a “seismic mental shift” in Ewa and her sister – psychological displacement, loneliness, and disorientation. They become “strangers to themselves” in a “roomful of unknown faces”.

A similar experience is described by Joseph Azam, an Afghan-American lawyer, writer, advocate and policy advisor, who in his essay “Last, First, Middle” refers to the moment of the enrollment to school when, trying to help his son to integrate, his father registers him as Joseph Azam instead of Mohammad Yousuf Azam. Of course, Joseph’s real name, as he himself admits, was a marker of his migrant status and his ethnic background, “Even my name itself, like my green card, became a billboard for my foreignness”, however, his father’s choice was shock for Joseph, “...my father’s decision liberated me from the immigrant self-gaze that had consumed me for so long, but it also felt like a death” (non-paginated).

Slowly accepting her in-betweenness, Ewa gains a new identity. Longing for the familiar, she struggles to grasp the new and to assimilate. By doing what she as a migrant is expected to do (she starts speaking English, finds new friends, imitates behavior), Ewa is forging

her new American self which fits into the framework of societal norms, but is at the same time becoming more and more detached from the spontaneous, playful, and sensual Ewa of the past. The American Eva is oddly objective, “cold” (Hoffman 146), “less demonstrative” (146), and “too timid” (152):

I become a very serious young person, missing the registers of wit and irony in my speech, though my mind sees ironies everywhere. (Hoffman 118)

You’ve become more serious than you used be. (Hoffman 120)

I’m more careful about what I say, how loud I laugh, whether I give vent to grief. The storminess of emotion prevailing in our family is in excess of the normal here, and the unwritten rules for the normal have their osmotic effect. (Hoffman 146)

Not yet knowing all the rules of the place, Ewa stays cautious and alert and makes sure she looks and behaves as if she already fully belonged. This is a defensive mechanism that migrants turn on in order to survive:

Perhaps the extra knot that strangles my voice is rage. I am enraged at the false persona I’m being stuffed into, as into some clumsy and overblown astronaut suit. I’m enraged at my adolescent friends because they can’t see through the guise, can’t recognize the light-footed dancer I really am. They only see this elephantine creature who too often sounds as if she’s making pronouncements. (Hoffman 119)

I know that, among my other faculties, I've lost my sense of humor. I am not about to convert my adolescent friends to anti-Russian jokes. I swallow my injury, and giggle falsely at the five-hundred-pound canary. (Hoffman 119)

However, by imitating the behavior of others she is gradually losing herself. The displacement she is experiencing is not only psychological, it is also physical: her body language manifests the tension and dislocation:

Inside its elaborate packaging, my body is stiff, sulky, wary. When I'm with my peers, who come by crinolines, lipstick, cars, and self-confidence naturally, my gestures show that I'm here provisionally, by their grace, that I don't rightfully belong. My shoulders stoop, I nod frantically to indicate my agreement with others, I smile sweetly at people to show I mean well, and my chest recedes inward so that I don't take up too much space – mannerisms of a marginal, off-centered person who wants both to be taken in and to fend off the threatening others. (Hoffman 110)

Alienation is beginning to be inscribed in my flesh and face. (Hoffman 110)

Ewa is consciously making herself smaller, both physically and metaphorically, to avoid occupying too much space or drawing attention to her difference. She wants to be accepted, but at the same time she is keeping a protective distance in order not to be rejected. The strategy Ewa is choosing to survive in the new circumstances is one adopted by many migrants. Left without their mother tongue, migrants are limited to being passive observers, while native speakers' prerogative is to be active participants: "I decide that my role in life is to be an 'observer' – making a poor virtue out of the reality that I feel so very out of it" (Hoffman 131).

### 5.3 E(v)va: Polish Ewa vs. American Eva

The perspective of an observer leads Ewa to the realization of the necessity to invent another self, one that will fit into the framework of the new reality. Out of Ewa's constant self-reflection and attentive observation of everything and everybody, the American Eva emerges. Although acknowledged by the narrator at one point, the American Eva still needs time to develop and prevail. The dialogues between the Polish Ewa and the American Eva effectively reveal the process. For a while, the heroine's Polish linguistic identity will remain dominant: she will be called "the real one":

But you would have been different, very different.

No question.

And you prefer her, the Cracow Ewa.

Yes, I prefer her. But I can't be her. I'm losing track of her. In a few years, I'll have no idea what her hairdo would have been like.

But she's more real, anyway.

Yes, she's the real one. (Hoffman 120)

Of course, the prevalence of the Polish Ewa is inseparably related to the fact that Polish as her mother tongue gives her a fullness, a freedom of thought and self-expression that the American Eva does not yet possess. First and foremost, her language provides her with a sense of internal security, confidence, and, she believes, univocity; she can rely on it, and she believes it will never let her down. Polish is her home, the language of the self and the past; the language in which she feels understood by herself and, in her memory, by others. Ewa is the master of Polish, but ... she is the servant of English. Switching to English makes her vulnerable, insecure, and doubting.

The fragmentation of Ewa's linguistic worldview becomes imaged in the two dialogic characters of Ewa and Eva, representing the divided identity, the hybrid character of a migrant. The dialogues, which appear at turning points of the heroine's life, illustrate the duality of self-perception she is experiencing; they reflect the internal conflict between her past and present, there and here, Polish and English, while also revealing the gradual process of assimilation and self-reinvention in the new cultural landscape, marking a gradual fusion of her linguistic images of the world into one: expanded, bilingual, and hybrid.

The dialogue between the two identities of E(v)va is viewed by Mary Besemeres in her article "Language and Self in Cross-Cultural Autobiography: Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*" as a representation of the two conflicting cultural selves of the character. She sees them merging and confusing their identities at times and says they "are not altogether certain which is which. The Polish voice addresses the English as 'you' ... but in a somewhat schizophrenic vein, the same Polish voice talks about itself as 'she'" (331). In our opinion, the dialogic merging of identities is not confusing at all and it indicates the existence of a third, hybrid E(v)va, who, in Khomi Bhabha's understanding, encompasses both of them. Both voices in the dialogue address the hybrid E(v)va as "you" and use the pronoun "she" to refer to each other. Both, Ewa and Eva talk to, i.e. inform, influence, constitute, the hybrid E(v)va. This third hybrid identity contains Ewa's/ Eva's experiences in both languages and can understand and relate to both past and present events in the character's life. She knows why in the beginning Cracow Ewa is the real one, the one she prefers; why later the American Eva should not become a pianist but should marry her Texan; why the Polish Ewa should aspire to connect her life to music and never divorce her husband. Her responses are not directives; they are just different possibilities grounded in E(v)va's experience in different languages and

cultures. She knows that a musical career is prestigious in Poland, but writing is something that may be equally praised and recognized in the USA. Love has completely different connotations to Ewa in Polish than it does in English. Eva's decision to get married is criticized and rejected by her Polish self as light-minded and irresponsible because the institution of marriage has a special place in Polish culture and is viewed as a sacred, life-long commitment related to family duty. In American culture, often characterized as individualistic, love and marriage are viewed as manifestations of personal freedom and self-fulfillment, and they are unions of personal choice, not obligation:

Really? Really? Do you love him as you understand love? As you loved Marek?

Forget Marek. He is another person. He's handsome and kind and good ...

When you get married you have to assent to someone with your whole self.

A romantic illusion. (Hoffman 199)

Divorce is viewed in a similar way: discussing it in the third dialogue, Eva says, "It's dishonest to live in a state of emotional compromise" (Hoffman 231), implying that happiness is personal responsibility, and if marriage brings nothing but the feeling of incompatibility, divorce should be considered. In her analysis of the third conversation, Anita Jarczok proposes that "In Poland Hoffman might have felt exactly the same in the confinement of an unhappy marriage, but she knows that in Poland divorce would not be something she would consider because she 'would exist within the claustrophobia of no choice, rather than the agoraphobia of open options'" (30; the quoted phrase is from Hoffman 230-31).

The process of the character's transformation and the growth of her hybrid identity is also visible in the dialogues and in the literary space devoted to the narration of the past and the present. First, through historical narrative, Ewa revisits some of the missing or blurred elements

of her Polish identity that never had a chance to be lived or contemplated, and reasserts her Polishness. But the original domination of the Polish Ewa gradually gives way to more narrative space being devoted to the American Eva and her opinions. Writing helps the American Eva to invent herself through narrated experience. The second conversation shows that both dimensions of identity are equally important to the heroine, and that they recognize the necessity to coexist: “But we’ll get along somehow. /Yes, we’ll get along” (Hoffman 200).

Later, when the heroine comes to debate her decision of divorce, the American Eva gains the upper hand. At this point, the American part of E(v)va’s identity feels strong enough to believe that she can deny the other part of herself:

Leave me alone. It’s you who’s playing the charade now. Your kind of knowledge doesn’t apply to my condition.

I’ll never leave you quite alone ...

But I don’t have to listen to you any longer. I am as real as you now. I’m the real one.

(Hoffman 231)

After becoming an equal narrator of E(v)va’s inner world, it is her American self that becomes the dominant observer and leader, but her Polish self will never disappear. The American Eva, first invented and narrated by the real Polish Ewa to deal with the trauma of migration, is now becoming the book’s dominant narrative identity and is soon accepted as E(v)va’s constituent self. E(v)va’s Polish identity, the “real one” at the beginning, without interaction with Polish reality has now become only a reminder of the past, existing in narration, but always present.

## 5.4 Conclusion

*Lost in Translation* by Eva Hoffman is an insightful migrant memoir novel which shows how migration leads to the transformation of the heroine's linguistic image of the world and, consequently, her self-identity. Ewa's family's emigration to Canada initiates a profound disruption in her linguistic image of the world which results in her permanent sense of dislocation and duality. Faced with the necessity to speak a different language, she is forced to invent a different version of herself which will fit into the linguistic and cultural framework of the host society. Hoffman's self-narrative shows that her linguistic transition is not merely about acquiring proficiency in a new language; it is about translating her entire existence, her thoughts, her emotions, her memories into a different linguistic construct, which often turns out difficult or impossible. The process, as Eva Hoffman portrays it, is accompanied by misunderstanding, alienation, and a keen sense of loss. Physical relocation to a different place results in ambiguity in which the referential points of Ewa's linguistic image of the world are verified. Polish, her native language, is constantly referred to as the language of her inner world, her home, the source of her *polot*, the language in which she understands and is understood. English, despite all the beauty Ewa discovers in it later, seems reserved, far-away, unreliable. It is the language of Ewa's observations and silence; the language in which she is an exotic and attentive listener; the language which deprives her of her sense of humor and irony. The inability to comprehend the new world in the new language results in Ewa feeling inferior, insecure, and timid, longing for what is left at home. Displaced in a new reality, the range of emotions Ewa is experiencing is limited to *tesknota* which combines features of nostalgia, melancholy, and sadness. Regardless of the new meanings that the host culture is offering her, such as self-reliance, optimism, and assertiveness, Ewa finds it difficult to dissociate herself from her Polish self and reset the cultural

patterns encoded by her place of birth. Distance – cultural, linguistic, and physical – defines the quality of Ewa’s life: in-betweenness and emptiness make it possible for her to comprehend the relativity of her assumptions about the universality of the outside reality and to recognize her own self to be culturally, linguistically, and geographically constructed. Although, it may seem that in a new reality a migrant develops a different system of linguistic and cultural values, Eva Hoffman’s narrative illustrates that the comprehension of new circumstances is inevitably linked to the updating of a linguistic image of the world which is not replaced by the new experience or values but is rather transformed and extended, containing all dimensions within the same worldview making it bilingual and bicultural. Changes within Eva’s linguistic image of the world are inseparably connected with her identity transformations. Adjusting to the existing linguistic and cultural circumstances, Ewa creates the American variant of herself, which although invented through writing and reinvented in experience, coexists together with her Polish version of the self. The dialogues between the heroine’s identity dimensions provided in the book illustrate how the extension of Ewa’s linguistic image of the world results in the creation of a hybrid identity, E(v)va, which contains her Polish and American backgrounds and provides her with an access to both cultural codes. On the example of her own story, the author portrays a migrant’s identity as a multifaceted changeable construct shaped by geographical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Linked to her Polish and American experiences, E(v)va’s linguistic image of the world as well as her identity is double-natured: the dialogues between Polish Ewa and American Eva reflect this hybridity which is not about completely replacing the old self with the new one, but about integrating, balancing, and reconciling the two.

## Chapter Six: Memory and Identity

*Memory is identity...You are what you have done; what you have done is in your memory; what you remember defines who you are; when you forget your life you cease to be, even before your death.*

– Julian Barnes, *Nothing to Be Frightened of*

The word “memory” is polysemantic. There are 18 meanings listed in *Oxford English Dictionary*’s entry for the noun “memory”, six of which are labeled as “obsolete”. Other definitions refer to something remembered from the past; the mind regarded as a store of things remembered; the length of time over which a person or event continues to be remembered; or even the part of a computer in which data or program instructions can be stored for retrieval (“Memory” OED). Astrid Erll in the introduction to *Memory in Culture* calls memory “an all-encompassing sociocultural phenomenon” (1) whose “omnipresence is surpassed only by the flood of commemorative ceremonies, memory controversies, and writings on memory” (3). Erll emphasizes the number of fields involved in exploring the connection between culture and memory, including sociology, philosophy and history, archaeology and religious studies, literary and art history, media studies, psychology, and the neurosciences: “The connection between culture and memory cannot be approached solely within the purview of one single discipline. On the contrary, memory is a transdisciplinary problem” (2). Searching for an answer to the question “What is the reason for this extraordinary fascination with memory?” (3), Astrid Erll comes to the conclusion: “What seems qualitatively new today is perhaps not so much a heightened frequency and depth of cultural remembering (which may be claimed for other historical periods,

too), but the fact that memory discourses and practices are increasingly linked across the globe. ‘Memory’ has become a truly transnational phenomenon” (3-4).

Aside from being defined, memory is also performed. *Oxford Collocation Dictionary* lists the number of actions people can do with memory: jog, refresh, lose, bring back, evoke, rekindle, revive, stir (up), blot out. *Inspirassion.com* (another online English collocation dictionary) offers some other collocations such as leave, cherish, preserve, recall, perpetuate, retain, escape, honor, keep, hold, carry, search, obliterate, love, store, bless, awaken, possess, aid, wipe out, celebrate, trust, suppress. Whatever people do to or with memory influences who they are. Whether one attempts to “jog” a fleeting recollection or “wipe out” a painful one, the act of engaging in a relationship with one’s remembered past will irreversibly transform one’s identity.

All the verbs listed above illustrate what Richard Terdiman observed: memory lives in the present (he even calls it “Present Past” (viii)); it is not a recollection of the past, but a present action and reaction to what already happened that bridges the past with the current moment. One’s identity is forged at such moments of active engagement with memory. For instance, the act of “cherishing” a memory may indicate a positive experience that carries emotional value for a person which they recognize as a part of their self-concept and want to appropriate it. In contrast, “obliterating” a memory may stand for the traumatic past that a person wants to distance themselves from. In the same manner, a “search” for memory and the need to “preserve” what has been inherited within a particular social group mark the necessity to belong through shared values and collective identities, while, in the context of social interactions, “suppressing” memories eliminates the society’s risks to be divided over contradictory interpretations and narrations of the past.

Numerous approaches to the interrelation between memory and identity show that memory is at the heart of the way most people think about personal identity (“If I had no memory of past experiences, the sense that I existed in the past would be dramatically compromised” (Klein and Nichols 677)). John Locke calls it consciousness, Derek Parfit – psychological continuity, Paul Ricoeur refers to it as narration, and Maurice Halbwachs forges the idea of the collective memory. Literature engages directly with memory by endorsing personal memoirs, retrospective and historical narratives, or creating narrators and characters who share memories. Literary texts can finally evoke memories in their readers.

Migrant literature written by migrant authors is probably one of the most memory-engaged literary traditions because it is often, though not always, deeply-rooted in events from the past. The memory of a migrant is inseparable from the idea of place and time because it emerges at the moment of relocation in space which happens at a particular moment in history. Almost for everyone migration is a critical moment in life connected with the loss of known behavioral, cultural, linguistic, and other patterns, while the new required ones have not been acquired yet. In this turbulent time, recourse to the past, to personal and collective memories and histories, serves as a bridge between the lost home and the uncertain present. Memory becomes an essential tool for rethinking and (re)defining one’s identity. Migrant literature, in which the past is often left behind the great divide of emigration, often uses the retrospective narrative mode and has its characters rediscover and ruminate the past only to realize how much they still depend on it.

In order to study the relationships between memory and migrant identity in literary texts, it is essential to look closely at the existing theories of memory and identity, to trace the

connection between memory and migrant identity, and to to define the role of memory and history in the formation and transformation of migrant identity.

## 6.1 Theories of Memory and Identity

Miss Prism, one of the characters of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, declares that "Memory... is the diary that we all carry about with us" (98), suggesting that what people remember about their experiences constitutes what they are. John Locke would make the definition more precise by adding the categories of time and consciousness and introducing the Memory Criterion of a personal identity. According to it, one's identity at one time is the same as their identity at another time if and only if the person remembers the experience of the previous time. "...as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that *Person*; it is the same *self* now it was then; and it is by the same *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done" (Locke 335, italics in original). However, Derek Parfit, a British philosopher-reductionist, and his proponents would disagree. They believed that what matters for personal identity is not memory per se, but psychological continuity; in other words, in order for a person to be the same person from one day to the next, one has to maintain a day-to-day connectedness which involves coherence in consciousness, memory, personality, and traits of character:

Besides direct memories, there are several other kinds of direct psychological connection. One such connection is that which holds between an intention and the later act in which this intention is carried out. Other such direct connections are those which hold when a belief, or a desire, or any other psychological feature, continues to be had.

I can now define two general relations:

*Psychological connectedness* is the holding of particular direct psychological connections.

*Psychological continuity* is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness. (Parfit 205-06)

Paul Ricoeur suggested his own understanding of connectedness in relation to memory and identity. From his perspective, memory helps to structure personal identity which is created and recreated by the stories an individual tells about their lives. The category of time, implied in the notion of memory, provides an individual's narrative with coherence that defines who a person is by connecting their past experiences with the verbal expressions and interpretations of such experiences in the present:

On the one hand, memory is a keeper of time: we are sure that something happened in the past, before we started telling about it, exactly because we are recalling it. On the other hand, memory needs language as a means of expression, in narration. Consequently, memory performs the function of an evidence about the events that happened in the past, and narration helps to structure memory. This is why there is a need to create phenomenology of memory, i.e. the description of what the Greeks named *anamnesis* – recalling. Then there is a problem of connection between a recollection, which appears in the consciousness as an image, and a remembering subject because recalling/ remembering anything means recalling/ remembering one's self. (Our translation of the excerpt of Paul Ricoeur's "Interview with Professor Paul Ricoeur" 8-9)

Known as Narrative Identity theory, Ricoeur's approach connects the process of remembering/ recalling anything to the process of remembering/ recalling one's self. Our memory of ourselves becomes our narration:

We equate life to the story or stories we tell about it. The act of telling or narrating appears to be the key to the type of connectedness that we evoke when we speak...of the 'interconnectedness of life'...Here, the question of identity is deliberately posed as the outcome of narration. (Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity" 77)

Another perspective on the continuity of personal identity was developed by Maurice Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist, whose pioneering work on collective memory has profoundly influenced the field of memory studies. In his work *On Collective Memory* the scholar suggested that:

[W]hat makes recent memories hang together is not that they are continuous in time: it is rather that they are part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days. (52)

What Halbwachs meant is that personal identity is never constructed in isolation and is deeply intertwined with people's social and relational contexts: "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (*On Collective Memory* 43). In other words, people's understanding of the past, its interpretation, and the memories they have are shaped by the social context and the groups they are or used to be a part of for their memories are linguistically and socially determined. Consequently, their image of the self which is based on their individual memories is influenced by the discourse (ideology, traditions, beliefs, cultural and religious practices, historical perspective, values, etc.) of the group they belong to because it is exactly the memories of the interaction within the group, its hierarchy, the common experience that the participants of the group share that shape one's self-construct:

To be sure, everyone has a capacity for memory [*mémoire*] that is unlike that of anyone else, given the variety of temperaments and life circumstances. But individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over – to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. One cannot in fact think about the events of one's past without discoursing upon them. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle. It means to perceive in what happens to us a particular application of facts concerning which social thought reminds us at every moment of the meaning and impact these facts have for it. In this way, the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other. (Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* 53)

Here is what a Palestinian poet and author Mahmoud Darwish said about personal and collective identities: “I don't decide to represent anything except myself. But that self is full of collective memory” (qtd. in Jaggi).

Although closely connected with the idea of collective memory, the theory of communicative and cultural memory offers a different perspective. Developed by Jan Assmann at the end of the 1980s, the theory differentiates between a collective memory which is based on forms of everyday interaction and a collective memory which, as Astrid Erll states, “is more institutionalized and rests on rituals and media” (28). The first one, which Assmann defines as communicative memory (collective memory in Halbwach's understanding), refers to the everyday memories that are shared and communicated within social groups, such as families, friends, or communities. It encompasses lived experiences of contemporary witnesses and

typically spans 80 to 100 years, or roughly three generations. Its content is rather fluid and flexible without a structured order, and members of a group or community participate actively in its construction and reconstruction, tied by the affective bonds that unite them in one collective:

Communicative memory is non-institutional; it is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation; it is not cultivated by specialists and is not summoned or celebrated on special occasions; it is not formalized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations. Still, there are frames, “communicative genres”, traditions of communication and thematization and, above all, the affective ties that bind together families, groups, and generations. (Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory” 111)

The second one, cultural memory, is “more exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sound of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcended: they may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another” (Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory” 110-11). Cultural memory is a structured, ordered reservoir of external symbols, the reminders, such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, which carry meaning which people have invested into them. This kind of memory always has its specialists which decode the meaning, study it, and spread further, constructing in such a way cultural identity of the group and its participants:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose “cultivation” serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but

not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" 132)

Another peculiarity of cultural memory is its unboundedness in time because, unlike collective memory, it refers to cultural, historical, even mythical time justifying the existence of its agents for, as Astrid Erll notices, "Without eyewitnesses to history, societies are dependent on media-supported forms of remembrance (such as historiography, monuments, or movies)" (4). Cultural memory plays a crucial role in identity formation and enhances the process of identity concretion because it provides a person with a source from which they can derive their collective and personal identity.

Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition...Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember in order to belong.

(Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory" 114)

Another perspective on the connectedness of personal identity was suggested by the Theory of Embodied Memory, or sense memory in literature and performing arts, according to which body is the means of coherence of personal identity because mind and body are inseparable, and all the experiences a person gets throughout their life are physically or bodily predetermined. Based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, the approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of mind and body (the mind is a part of the body and the body is a part of the mind) arguing that both are the sources of knowledge and experience and therefore both determine one's sense of self. From the scholar's perspective, the fact that people think and speak about perception in the first person, and then refer to a body, even their own

body, in the third person, is erroneous: “I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, inspect them, walk around them. But as for my own body, I do not observe it: to do so, I would need a second body, which would itself be unobservable” (Merleau-Ponty 104). Consequently, memory is not just a cognitive phenomenon, but it is also a physical one: one’s bodily sensations, emotions, and movements create a person’s memories and construct one’s identity.

Exploring the boundaries between the mind, body, and the world (“Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?”(Clark and Chalmers 7)), Andy Clark and David Chalmers analyzed the theories which relied on body as a marker or agent of the borderline of consciousness and believed that what is outside the body is outside the mind, suggesting that the meaning as well as mind could be external, and proposed their own hypothesis based on the understanding of the environment as an active element in driving cognitive processes (7). In their article “The Extended Mind” the scholars illustrate on the examples of Tetris, a calculator, a language, and a notebook, how natural it is for a person to transfer their cognitive processes outside, and come to the conclusion that objects and artifacts outside our bodies can become extensions of our minds: “The moral is that when it comes to belief, there is nothing sacred about skull and skin. What makes some information count as a belief is the role it plays, and there is no reason why the relevant role can be played only from inside the body” (Clark and Chalmers 14). Although the researchers do not focus on the interaction between memory and personal identity directly, we think it is logical to expound their ideas and suppose that the fact that people tend to delegate some cognitive process to the outside “media” is also true for the processes related to memory. Consequently, if the function of creating, storing, and sharing one’s memories is passed onto paper, photos, videos, smartphones, social media, etc., then it is important to admit their influence on shaping one’s identity. In case of photos, videos, or devices, externalizing of

memories makes it possible to materialize one's recollections and endow them with objectivity which is unattainable with internal memories. Moreover, it provides a person with a reference point with whose help a person is able to trace back their identity transformation because external memories can as well serve as a narrative of one's life experience. According to Clark and Chalmers's theory, the boundaries of mind and cognition are not limited to the confines of the body. Similarly, the existence of such external memory storages as notebooks, photo albums, or pen drives suggests that personal identity extends far beyond the contour of the bodily vessel and is influenced by the external repositories because they not only function as a backup for biological memory but also actively participate in the continuous construction and reconstruction of personal and collective self, making them both internally experienced and externally situated. External memory reservoirs become the legacy of personal and collective identities which get time resistant through recorded narratives, taken photos, cultural artifacts, and shared history.

The concept of external memory is persuasively visualized in popular culture. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* Albus Dumbledore stores and reviews his memories in a special bowl, the Pensieve, which allows him (and Harry) to delve into the recollections and revise the past (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 00:37:52). In *Rise of the Guardians*, one of the main characters Jack Frost awakens from a frozen pond with amnesia and throughout the whole film is in search of his true self. In the conversation with Santa Claus Jack Frost asks, "But how can I know who I am until I find out who I was?" (*Rise of the Guardians* 00:49:08). It turned out that many years ago Jack frost was a kid, and as with all kids' memories, his are stored in The Tooth Fairy's palace in his baby teeth box. *50 First Dates* tells a story about Lucy Whitmore (played by Drew Barrymore) whose short-time memory is damaged after a car accident. As a result, she remembers her life up until the night before the accident, but all the new recollections vanish

when she goes to sleep, and she relives the same day over and over again. Adam Sandler's character Henry Roth falls in love with Lucy and tries to give her the lost memory back. A video tape, a journal with the evidences of the accident Lucy's father collected for her, Lucy's diary, and family photos become a reservoir of Lucy's lost memories due to which she can remember the reality she lives in and herself every day.

Another important approach to the study of the interaction between memory and identity is developed by Daniel Kahneman, an Israeli-American author, psychologist, Nobel laureate and founder of behavioral economics, who views identity as a unity of two selves: the experiencing one and the remembering one. In his presentation "The Riddle of Experience vs. Memory" on TED Kahneman defines experiencing self as the one that actually lives the life, while the remembering self is understood as a storyteller which endows the experience with meaning and evaluates it:

We might be thinking of ourselves and of other people in terms of two selves. There is an experiencing self, who lives in the present and knows the present, is capable of re-living the past, but basically it has only the present. It's the experiencing self that the doctor approaches when the doctor asks, "Does it hurt now when I touch you here?". And there is a the remembering self, and the remembering self is the one that keeps score and maintains the story of our life, and it's the one that the doctor approaches in asking the question "How have you been feeling lately?" or "How was your trip to Albania?" or something like that. (00:02:40 – 00:03:24)

Daniel Kahneman's theory allows us to view memory as a main factor of the interpretation of human experience which determines its quality and endows it with meaning. Consequently, memory can be understood as a defining aspect of an individual's identity because

it is to a great extent based on the assumptions about one's life and the level of satisfaction with it.

All in all, memory is one of the foundational aspects of an individual's identity which predetermines its personal, social, cultural, and other dimensions because it provides it with the coherence and continuity of the self-structure. Perceived as psychological connectedness, reservoir of collective, communicative, and cultural knowledge, bodily experiences and extension of mind, memory links the past and the present and shapes how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world.

## **6.2 Memory and Migrant Identity**

As migrant identity is a dimension of personal identity, it is just to say that all the categories of memory that are relevant to personal identity also apply to the identity of a migrant. Thus, following John Locke's and Derek Parfit's definitions, the memory of a migrant possesses psychological continuity which makes it possible to say that a person who has changed the place of living is the same person who was living in a different place for many years or was even born there. Interpreted in Paul Ricoeur's terms, psychological continuity allows a migrant to perceive the events in their lives as parts of the story and make them meaningful through narration. Memory of a migrant is also a product of collective (as Maurice Halbwachs called it) or communicative (according to Jan Assmann) memory because individual memory is never shaped in isolation and is always predetermined by social and linguistic contexts. It is also cultural memory because, as Jan Assmann claimed, it is molded by cultural, historical, political, religious and other meanings shared by the members of the same community or group; and through the awareness of their existence and the ability to decode symbols, discourses, and rituals and

interpret them, a person manifests their belonging to a particular sociocultural background. The experience of migration is directly connected with embodied memory because it is first and foremost the relocation of a body in space that is the core of cultural, linguistic, psychological, and other transformations that migration evokes. Andy Clark and David Chalmers' framework makes it possible to view memory of a migrant as extended memory because the grains of their migrant identity are stored and therefore can be restored in photos, videos, archives, books, diaries, and letters. Daniel Kahneman's approach to memory and identity allows us to claim that migrant identity is a product of the interpretation of the experiencing self by the remembering self because it is the latter that endows the lived experience with meaning.

Although these categories may seem excessive and all-encompassing for the definition of the memory of migrants, there are some other attributes essential for the understanding of the relationships between memory and migrant identity such as the relation to place, dynamism, transculturality, and forgetting.

### **6.2.1 Migrant Memory is Place-Related**

In the introduction to *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies* Julia Creet claims that “[M]emory, in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural, and familial, plays a crucial role within the context of migration, immigration, resettlement, and diasporas, for memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity...” (3). From the researcher's perspective memory of migrants is, first of all, memory in relation to place regardless of whether the latter creates a stable and unchanging environment for the former which exists only in situ rooted in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects or is constantly shaped in condition of mobility and traveling distances. Her view is grounded in

Pierre Nora's approach to memory as a disappearing phenomenon ("We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (Nora 7)). Memory "crystallizes and secrets itself" in sites of memory ("lieux de mémoire") (Nora 7) which include both real physical locations, like monuments or historical sites, and various symbolic entities like events, rituals, historical monuments, and practices that are the carriers of the meanings and memories from the past. Sites of memory, Nora believed, play a significant role in shaping individual and collective identities because they are the reservoirs of individual and collective symbolic and emotional meanings which lie at the core of remembering and forgetting. Nora's approach is highly informative for the study of migrant identity. At the moment of relocation, when the habitual geographical, social, cultural, and other environments (environments of memory, "milieux de mémoire" (Nora 9)) disrupt and dissipate, the memory of a migrant comes into existence. From now on, caused by the disconnection with the place of origin, a migrant's memory will inherently exist in a two-dimensional split between the present and the past. The duality, which emerges at the intersection of memories of home and acquired memories in a new place, will shape the identity of a migrant, creating a sense of temporal in-betweenness. All sites of memory, the old and the new ones, will not only hold the memories and meanings, but will also serve as points of reference where migrant identity is negotiated, constructed, and reinterpreted under the influence of the old and new cultural narratives.

### **6.2.2 Migrant Memory is Dynamic**

Using the stability of place, or rather its loss, as a starting point for a migrant's memory, Julia Creet goes further by posing the question: what if fixity (or its illusion) does play a role in creation of memory, but it is movement, dynamism, migration itself, that is the condition of

memory in general and a migrant's memory in particular? (6). If we suppose that memory fixes on changes, and the notion of place is not a stable and particular geographic location but the relational "here and now" where the body is, then this place will just be a referential point for the analysis and reevaluation of the self in new circumstances. Hence, it will be just to say that change, dynamism, and movement produce a migrant's memory and lie at the core of migrant identity which is constantly reinterpreted in relation to the referential "here and now": "Memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left. What's forgotten is not an absence, but a movement of disintegration that produces an object of origin" (Creet 6). This is similar to Homi Bhabha's concepts of "hybridity" and "third space" according to which migrant identities and memories are formed in a space that is neither wholly of the home country nor of the host country but is rather a dynamic space of negotiation, mixing, and transformation.

### **6.2.3 Migrant Memory is Transcultural**

Dynamism and hybridity are closely connected with another prominent feature of the memory of a migrant which is transculturality. Defined by Astrid Erll as a perspective on memory that "allows... to focus on those aspects of remembering and forgetting which are located between, across, and beyond what we construct as 'cultures'" (65), transculturality refers to the processes of memory transition across the boundaries of time, space, and social groups, and its transformation in different local contexts. Because migration is inseparable from relocation in space both geographically and culturally, it is inevitable that under conditions of multiculturalism, blending, adaptation, and assimilation in a new place the memory of a migrant will perform itself as transcultural. Transculturality in migrant memory emerges as intertwined memories from the past and the present, personal and collective, lived and non-lived. As Ric

Knowles wrote in his chapter on performing intercultural memory, “All cultural memory is performative. It involves the transmission of culture through bodily practices such as ritual, repetition and habit” (16). The memory of a migrant is, as it was stated before, among others cultural memory, which being exposed (shared, talked, written about, performed, etc.) to other cultural narratives away from the place of origin becomes transcultural because it traverses geographical, cultural, temporal terrains and blends into the multiplicity of interpretations of human experiences. Such intercultural interactions influence the identity of a migrant directly: the plurality of sociocultural codes makes a migrant’s identity dynamic, hybrid, and transcultural, due to which migrants reinterpret and reshape not only personal but also collective identities they belong to or interact with.

#### **6.2.4 Migrant Memory is Forgetting**

Transculturality, as well as remembering, would be impossible without the often neglected, but still extremely important function of memory which is forgetting. It is especially crucial to talk about this other side of the process of memory-making in relation to the memory of a migrant and migrant identity for it not only serves as a coping mechanism helping migrants to overcome potentially traumatic or painful memories of events experienced in their country of origin or during the migration process, but it also is an inseparable part of emotional, psychological, and cultural adaptation to a new environment. Astrid Erll believes that “forgetting is the very condition for remembering. Total recall, after all, the complete memory of every single event in the past, would amount to total forgetting, for the individual as well as for the group or society” (8). To explain her opinion the researcher refers to Niklas Luhmann, a German sociologist and philosopher of social science, who believed that “the main function of memory

lies in forgetting, which prevents the system from blocking itself with the accumulation of the results of former operations, and frees processing capabilities” (qtd. in Erll 9). David Shields shares a similar perspective on the nature of memory:

In a sense, all memories have been forgotten. Memories are predicated on loss. It’s through the act of remembering that we bring these forgotten experiences back from oblivion...But it’s not as if our memories have been rubbed away by years of wind and rain...instead, our memories are filled with gaps and distortions, because by its very nature memory is selective. (59)

In case of memory of a migrant, forgetting or selective remembering functions as an indicator of a degree of a migrant’s adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, and hybridity because, as Jan Assmann stated, “Assimilation, the transition of one group into another one, is usually accompanied by an imperative to forget the memories connected with the original identity” (“Communicative and Cultural Memory” 114).

Forgetting as an element of migrant memory is especially vivid and easily traced when performed in an oral or written form and marked by the presence of awkward lexical and grammatical structures in the mother tongue resembling those of the host language, including borrowed words or substitutes when a migrant cannot remember the same word in their native language; by sharing or expressing controversial opinion not typical for a member of the society of origin; or by interpreting historic events in accordance with the host society’s narrative. Forgetting also serves as a means of shaping and reshaping a migrant’s collective identity because in the end any narrative about the past (including a family story and national or general history) is the proportion of how much is remembered and how much is forgotten. Salman Rushdie once said that “A thing that happens to migrants is that they lose many of the traditional

things which root identity, which root the self.” (“Hay Festival 2012: Salman Rushdie on Security and *The Satanic Verses*”). However, no matter how painful the loss may be, forgetting can also lead to a valuable acquisition. As a marker of transformation, it indicates changes in identity processes: as a defensive mechanism which allows to erase any unwanted memories, forgetting makes it easier for a migrant to assimilate in an unknown environment and develop a self-structure which will correspond with the present circumstances and future aspirations. In such a way, forgetting proves to be an active element of a migrant’s self-reinvention which makes it possible to view any manifestations of memory of a migrant as an expression of their migrant identity because migrant memory is not only what migrants remember but also what they forget.

Memory of a migrant, apart from being collectively, culturally, and communicatively predetermined, is also transcultural, dynamic, and forgetting. Transculturality, which gives birth to the hybrid identity of a migrant, and emerges in the context of the polysemy of cultural, linguistic, and temporal codes, makes the relocation of identity, together with its individual recollections, psychological continuity, connectedness, and cultural background, possible. Dynamism and flexibility of memory of a migrant facilitate their transition from one sociocultural environment to another by accelerating their assimilation and acculturation. However, in the context of migration, it is important to emphasize that the process of migrants’ adaptation happens not only through remembering, but also through forgetting; therefore, both of these notions are extremely important for the analysis of migrant identity formation and transformation in migrant narratives.

### 6.3 Memory, History, and Migrant Identity

Migration, which in essence is a change of place that happens at a particular moment of local and global history, is inseparable not only from the notion of memory, but also from the notion of history. This is why it is important to define these terms in relation to migrant narratives and study their influence on the construction and reconstruction of migrant identity in texts. Some scholars believe that it is the similarity between memory and history that is worth taking into consideration analyzing migrant experience. Jacques Le Goff, in the preface to *History and Memory*, defines them as “the two forms of reference to the past” (qtd. in Erll 41). James V. Wertsch notes “that they both employ narrative tools” and “both seek to tell ‘what really happened’ in the past” (“Texts of Memory and Texts of History” 11). Jay Winter believes that “In a nutshell, both are performative and constative” (12), meaning that they both describe the events of the past and recreate them. However, other researchers study memory and history as completely opposite phenomena. Pi re Nora’s exhaustive definition of distinctions between memory and history describes memory as an active, living, evolving, and inherently personal phenomenon which is deeply entwined with emotional and subjective aspects of human existence, while history is defined as an intellectual attempt to reconstruct the past in a manner that is rational, objective, and universal (8). Maurice Halbwachs speaks of two sorts of memory – autobiographical memory and historical memory where the first one refers to internal, inward or personal memory and the second one is external or social memory. The scholar believed that

The former would make use of the latter, since our life history belongs, after all, to general history. Naturally, historical memory would cover a much broader expanse of time. However, it would represent the past only in a condensed and schematic way, while

the memory of our own life would present a richer portrait with greater continuity. (*The Collective Memory* 52)

Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher, Shierry M. Weber writes, defines memory and history as two kinds of experience: “*Erfahrung*, something integrated as experience, and *Erlebnis*, something merely lived through. It is *Erlebnis* that epitomizes the modern age, whereas *Erfahrung* entails the integration of the individual into a larger social context” (qtd. in Weber 263-64).

Although both perspectives on memory and history have a place to be, in the context of migration it is their interrelatedness that comes to the fore because migrant identity lies at the intersection of subjectivity and objectivity, personal and collective, emotions and facts, local and global, within and outside, fluidity and fixity, inclusion and exclusion:

History is memory seen through and criticized with the aid of documents of many kinds — written, aural, visual. Memory is history seen through affect. And since affect is subjective, it is difficult to examine the claims of memory in the same way as we examine the claims of history. History is a discipline. We learn and teach its rules and its limits. Memory is a faculty. We live with it, and at times are sustained by it. Less fortunate are people overwhelmed by it. But this set of distinctions ought not lead us to conclude, along with a number of French scholars from Halbwachs to Nora, that history and memory are set in isolation, each on its separate peak.... Approaching the intersection of history and memory through the performative turn highlights what they have in common and how important it is to avoid a rigid bifurcation between the two. (Winter 12)

Migration sets the context for the interplay between memory and history which is essential for the construction of migrant identity and migrant narratives because, as Jay Winter states, “the effort to recapture the past in such trans-national times is almost always framed in an act of memory which takes on the contours of history. Where the memory stops and history starts is almost impossible to say” (21). Narratives by migrants make such complicated interrelatedness even more vivid. As Monika Palmberger argues, “Individuals’ narratives are never solely personal memories but are always related to a wider social framework and to the prevailing official histories” (7). Although migrant memory as a dimension of memory is inherently subjective because it carries an individual’s emotional recollections about the past, it is firmly grounded in a more objective, official account of events which provides a person with a wider context and historical background to place their story within. Of course, this may lead to a less nuanced and more linear, factual, detached narrative that levels emotional and subjective depths and generalizes meaning that the events of the past hold for a person, but on the other hand, it provides people with a global, but more importantly, common perspective on the past uniting them under the idea of collectivity and engaging them into broader sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts and narratives.

In migration studies, the opposition between “memory as private undertaking vs. history as the official version of the past”, as Astrid Erll proposes (45), can as well be interpreted in terms of individual and collective memory, which, in Monika Palmberger’s opinion, coincides with the division of firsthand and secondhand experience, where the former is the memory of an individual and the latter – the shared account of the past (7-8). In her claim, the researcher refers to Harold Welzer who argues that “narrations of memory are never transmitted, but rather constitute an occasion for an endless line of re-narrations that are constantly reformatted

according to generational needs and frames of interpretation” (16). Narration of memory becomes a tool with whose help individual, including migrant, identity is being shaped and reshaped through borrowing, cross-reference and negotiation of personal and shared past (this is the reference to Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory in Palmberger 8). Such an approach, in James V. Wertsch’s opinion, inevitably shapes the views of the past and present and is reflected in the use of narrative tools applied to construct the discourse about the past:

The basic difference at issue whether a narrative template is somehow about our past or about some distanced other in time and place that has little to do with us. If people take a story line to be about events that they have experienced, they are using this narrative tool in the service of memory, whereas if they take it to be about “them and then”, they are using it in a way that suggests historical objectivity. (16)

In order to illustrate this idea Wertsch refers to William James’s approach to memory and history and uses “me-ness” and “us-ness” of memory as equivalents of individual and collective memory stressing out the importance of the event to be dated in one’s experienced past and not merely mentioned as a factual event of the collective past (qtd. in Wertsch 16-17).

Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory is another example of how memory and history intersect. The product of the communicative and multidirectional nature of collective memory, postmemory (belated or inherited memory) is understood as “a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” which

describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experience of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they

grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. (106-07, italics in original)

In the context of migration, postmemory is an informative approach which explains the challenges of familiar memory and collective history that different generations of migrants may deal with. For example, the leading character of Boris Fishman's *A Replacement Life* Slava, who together with his family migrated to the USA at the age of nine, reinvents the episodes of Jewish pogroms during WWII, while Nadezhda, a protagonist in Marina Lewycka's *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, who was born in Great Britain and considers herself British, explores the notion of Ukrainianness through the reference to the familial past and the memories her sister and her father holds.

Marianne Hirsch's framework of postmemory correlates with another twist of memory and history in the context of migration which is the intersection of what Michel Foucault defined as counter-memory ("...a transformation of history into a totally different form of time (160)), or, simply put, a victim's version of the past, and "the grand narratives" (as defined by Jean-François Lyotard in "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge"(7-8, 37)), or, in presumably Winston Churchill's understanding, history of the victors. In this opposition migrants' recollections construct their own version of the past, "history from below" (Myers and Grosvenor 10-11), which attempts to account for historical events from the perspective of ethnic minorities rather than dominant groups. Migrant narratives are the means for migrants to give voice to the others, neglected, and silenced and tell the alternative version of the past; this is how migrants may use memory to transform history.

Although memory and history offer distinct accounts of the events from the past, in the context of migration it is their interrelatedness that comes to the fore because migration is a

change of place of living with particular historic processes in the background. Therefore, migrant narratives will always be the reflection of subjective and objective perspectives on the experience of interstate relocation because one is impossible without the other. Rooted both in memory and history, the identity of a migrant can be viewed as a product of their interaction, which traverses territories, time, and generations.

#### **6.4 Memory and Literature**

Birgit Neumann's essay on the literary representation of memory starts with a claim that memory has always been a central topic in literature:

Memory and processes of remembering have always been an important, indeed a dominant, topic in literature. Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, they re-examine the relationship between the past and the present, and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfill for the constitution of identity. (333)

Astrid Erll adds that literature has served – and continues to serve – as medium of memory because it has a potential to represent the past in the present for its genres “fulfill a multitude of mnemonic functions, such as the imaginative creation of past life-worlds, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about processes and problems of cultural memory” (144).

In literary studies there is even a term that describes the merging of memory and literature – “fictions of memory” – which, as Birgit Neumann explains, “alludes to the double-meaning of fiction” (334). Such texts represent the workings of memory (“...showing more

precisely not only *what*, but above all *how* certain historically significant events are remembered” (Milevski and Wetenkamp 2, italics in original)) and tell the stories of the individual and collective past which, among others, shed light on the multifaceted notion of identity. Such interconnectedness is explained by Paul Ricoeur’s theory of “circle of mimesis” – a tripartite model with mimesis1, mimesis2, and mimesis3 that presents literature as a medium of cultural memory. Ricoeur believed that literary texts are predetermined by the extratextual reality because they by default are based on memory culture (imitate it) and refer to it (mimesis1). The second and the central element of the framework (mimesis2) is a literary configuration of new memory narratives borrowed from extratextual reality. The third one (mimesis3) is the reception of the literary texts (memory narratives) by different mnemonic communities because, in order to be comprehended and incorporated into a broader cultural context, memories as a literary product have to be interpreted by the recipients (Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation” 139; also qtd. in Erll 152-53, 156).

Astrid Erll defines literature as a symbolic form of cultural memory (144). Resembling to a great extent the way memory works, literature’s specific way of worldmaking is also based on the creative and constructive processes of selectivity (only meaningful elements are remembered or chosen for the story) and condensation (uniting various meaningful elements in limited special and temporal space). Such symbolism results in what, according to Astrid Erll, “social groups continually, and often contestingly, do” (146), – reading memory. “If we want to reconstruct such interpretive practices – and thus gain insight into the dynamics of cultural memory – then one way to proceed is by looking at the various narratives, which unfold condensed mnemonic objects into meaningful stories” (Erll 146).

Jay Winter believes, that interrelatedness of memory and literature is grounded in performativity – the feature that memory and literature share:

Memory performed is at the heart of collective memory. When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. These renewed and revamped memories frequently vary from and overlay earlier memories, creating a complex palimpsest about the past each of us carries with us. (11)

What is meant by the performativity of memory and literature is that they both describe a condition and recreate it. “Memories return to past experience but add their traces to the initial story” (Winter 11), while literature produces meaning and transmits ideas about the past through the process of narrativization. What comes from Jay Winter’s quote is that “the performative act of remembrance is an essential way in which collective” – and, we would add, individual – “identities are formed and reiterated” (Winter 15). Consequently, if a literary text is a performative act, then literature, as well as memory, has power to shape interpretations of individual and collective self.

Literature as a performative act also “enhances the overlap between history and memory because it borrows from both. It offers us truth statements rather than true statements, though the two coincided more frequently than not” (Winter 13). The goal of literature is to present the truth about people rather than demonstrate truth about particular events; it tells stories which, regardless of the fact of being fictitious, diverge from the truth. The power of literature to create a realistic feeling of experiencing everything which is described in the book is, for Winter, “the

power of the performative” (14) due to which recollections of bygone times become alive, dynamic, and visible.

In the “Author’s Note” in *A Replacement Life*, Boris Fishman, a migrant writer of Belarussian descent, states that “The line between fact and fiction, invention and theft, is as loose as line between truth and justice... Sometimes we struggle to remember that fiction is often nonfiction warped by artifice, and nonfiction unavoidably a reinvention of what actually happened” (319), implying that the clear distinction between memory, history, and literature is impossible because of the very nature of human perception of these categories of experience. David Shields, an American writer and filmmaker, offers a similar perspective on the intertwine between memory, history, and literature: “Every work of literature has both a situation and a story. The situation is the context or circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say” (Shields 42). David Shields is convinced that “Reality takes shape in memory alone” and “Anything processed by memory is fiction” (58). Therefore, in the writer’s opinion, books are “equal to the complexity of experience, memory, and thought” (56).

Boris Fishman’s and David Shields’s observations are of crucial importance for the study of memory and history in migrant literature. Migrants use memory to tell stories, and in their account of events it is often impossible to distinguish the fact from its interpretation. In the narrated perspective of the past, migrants still rely heavily on the real events, which makes the unity of memory, history, and literature the priority for this research and delegates the discussion about their facticity or credibility to the background: “Nonfiction writers imagine. Fiction writers invent” (Shields 60).

Memory is a foundational element of migrants' self-narratives. It not only anchors personal and collective histories but also initiates the process of writing as an attempt to preserve one's identity and the life left behind for the possible benefits of migration. As many migrant writers claim, memory of migrants is the memory of loss<sup>16</sup>, and writing is "the act of recovery" (Arabindan-Kesson 25). In Eva Hoffman's opinion, absence and longing is exactly what sharpens the focus of migrants' memory and distinguishes their self-writings from other texts. Having experienced the material, physical loss of reality, the memory of a migrant tries to keep the most precise recollections about the past so that at least the images of it can be held on to. The fear of a complete disconnection from the past makes migrant literature one of the most performative categories of literature: it both describes the past and recreates it and does it in the most specific way with close attention to every detail:

... but memory can perform retrospective maneuvers to compensate for fate. Loss is a magical preservative. Time stops at the point of severance, and no subsequent impressions muddy the picture you have in mind. The house, the garden, the country you have lost remain forever as you remember them. Nostalgia – that most lyrical of feelings – crystallizes around these images like amber. Arrested within it, the house, the past, is clear, vivid, made more beautiful by the medium in which it is held and held and by its stillness. (Hoffman 115)

The perspective on memory and identity developed by Daniel Kahneman about the interaction between the experiencing self and the remembering one is also an informative source

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<sup>16</sup> As Viet Thanh Nguyen writes in the introduction to *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, "All of these writers are inevitably drawn to the memories of their own past and of their families. To become a refugee is to know, inevitably, that the past is not only marked by the passage of time, but by loss – the loss of loved ones, of countries, of identities, of selves" (non-paginated).

"Migrants must move between what is transitory and what is lost, to create some link between what is known and what is remembered" (Arabindan-Kesson 24-25).

for the analysis of the formation and transformation of a migrant's identity in literature because it makes it possible to claim that literature is an attempt of the remembering self to give voice to the experiencing self and reinvent it: "We don't only tell stories when we set out to tell stories. Our memory tells us stories. That is, what we get to keep from our experiences is a story" (00:04:00-00:04:10). Thus, migrant literature written by migrant authors can be viewed as a representation of migrant memory that tells stories about the experiences of relocation while the remembering self can be perceived as the narrator of such stories which endows them with meaning and in such a way actively participates in the interpretation of the lived experiences and consequently of a migrant's self.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson, an art historian and Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora Art at Princeton University, approaches memory as a foundational element in the construction of migrants' narratives. As an active agent of storytelling, migrant's memory creates a cohesive story, shapes identity, reconciles displacement, and constructs meaning:

This discontinuity is often expressed as a kind of fragmentation: whether that be in the actual physical displacement of movement, or the psychological experience of being somewhat in between, neither from here nor there. Memory becomes a type of narrative formation that creates links, adds context, and delivers some kind of resolution.

(Arabindan-Kesson 25)

The mimetic function of literature, its ability to imitate and reflect life, makes it one of the most powerful and efficient means of identity processes exploration. As a medium of memory which has the potential to represent the past in the present, literature makes it possible to view the transformation of the self-concept in time. As an element of migrant narratives, memory aside from being a source of an individual's coherence and continuity, is also the

marker of their personal, collective, and cultural backgrounds which get redefined and reinterpreted in the interaction with the past in the present.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Memory, a store of individual and shared experiences, shapes every aspect of one's identity. As Michael Rothberg writes, "Not strictly separable from either history or representation, memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, *and* constructed side of our relations to the past" (4, italics in original). Personal history, achievements and failures (individual memory) form one's self-concept – the way a person distinguishes oneself from other people being aware of their own personal traits, behaviors, and attitudes. Similarly, collective identity, built on a foundation of shared memories (collective memory), defines a person's social selfhood in smaller groups (such as a family or a professional union) and bigger communities (which relate to one's ethnicity or nationality). Social roles and experiences as well as the collective recollection of historical events, cultural practices, values, and norms of behavior (cultural memory) bind a group of people together and define the common ground for their self-identity and sense of belonging.

Migrant identity is also shaped under the influence of recollections: migration which divides a life of a migrant into "before" and "after" places them into the turbulence zone where a person faces the necessity to undergo numerous transformations including the ones related to the process of self-(re)defining. Relocation in place is tightly linked with the concept of time: being not only in geographical, but also in social, cultural, and linguistic transition, migrants carry with them their past experiences which serve as an anchor of stability and a reference point in their search for the new selves. Relocating from one geographical place to another, migrants, although

arrive to a different place physically, not always manage to reach a destination point psychologically, emotionally, and mentally. Left with the only source of the connection with their homeland and the past – memory – migrants are determined to preserve the repository of their individual and collective identity which is seriously threatened in new sociocultural circumstances.

In this case, migrant narratives become a reflection of what it means to be a newcomer in unknown surroundings. Intertwined with memory and history (migrant narratives address history to set the background and refer to memories to tell the story), migrant literature is one of the most performative literary dimensions which is capable of portraying how the past influences the migrants' present. Migrant experience, which is inseparable from the existence in the dichotomy of memory and history, interpretations and reinterpretations of the past, initiates the emergence of the new self-concept which reconciles the controversies that living in emigration involves. Apart from being a therapeutic practice through which numerous individual and collective challenges related to the past can be manifested and solved, literature endows migrant experience with meaning which influences the way migrants perceive themselves and their place in a new environment.

## Chapter Seven: Memory and Migrant Identity in *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka

“But this is all in past, Nadia. Why you have such bourgeois preoccupation with all personal history?”

“Because it’s important... it defines ... it helps us understand... because we can learn ... Oh, I don’t know.”

— Marina Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*

Among numerous brief positive comments on Marina Lewycka’s *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* that appear on the cover of the book, such as “Mad and hilarious” (*Daily Telegraph*), “Delightful, funny, touching” (*Spectator*) or “Outstanding” (*Daily Mail*), there is one that hits the bull’s eye: “Hugely enjoyable...yields a golden harvest of family truths” (*Daily Telegraph*). Hidden under a veneer of comic farce (the book is the winner of the Boullinger Everyman Prize for Comic Fiction in 2005), the novel offers an insightful look into a darkly poignant family story whose depth and seriousness reach far beyond the limits that the genre of comic fiction imposes. As Dmytro Drozdovskyi states, in *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* Marina Lewycka “uses irony writing a story about present times but she is precisely serious talking about Ukrainian past when people were struggling against Russian imperial colonization” (296).

*A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* tells the story of the 84-year-old Nikolai Mayevskyj (a Ukrainian living in Great Britain) who, two years after his wife died, falls in love with a 36-year-old Valentina, “a glamorous blonde Ukrainian divorcée” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1). She treats the elderly man and his high feelings towards her as a

chance to have a decent life for herself and an “Oxford Cambridge” education (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 3) for her son Stanislav. In search for a better future, driven by pragmatic motives, Valentina marries Nikolai, and unknowingly brings “to the surface a sludge of sloughed-off memories, giving the family ghosts a kick up the backside” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1). Nikolai’s quarreling daughters, Vera and Nadezhda, unhappy with the shift in their father’s private life and his new marital status, unite over the common goal of getting rid of their inappropriate stepmother. However, the price of the enterprise is high: the reunion is possible only on the condition of dispelling the illusions of the past and revealing the whole truth of family history; and this does not go smoothly. Bringing to life the ghosts of bygone days, the sisters are forced to look more deeply into themselves and embrace the transformations that the interaction with memory inevitably evokes. In the end, a painful revelation leads the sisters to who they really are, the ones they felt but hid even from themselves.

Memory is one of the central themes of the novel; it is multilayered, ambiguous, and elusive. It is expressed through three narrative modes: Nikolai and Valentina’s “love story” and how the family deals with it, depicted from Nadezhda’s perspective. Numerous stories from the family’s past are evoked by events in the present, told by different members of the family and gathered and interpreted by Nadezhda. The book that Nikolai Mayevski is writing on the history of tractors mirrors the events in the family’s present and places them within a historical framework. All three modes reflect different patterns of interaction, perception, and understanding of the past. Nikolai and Valentina’s relationship, which at first seems to Nadezhda farcical, superficial, nonsensical, and venal, leads to deep and at times dramatic but nonetheless therapeutic discoveries which illustrate that memories do not live in the forgotten country.

Although hidden, suppressed, and unacknowledged, they exist in every moment of the present and manifest themselves at every opportunity.

Memory is a fundamental element of the novel: in the end, it becomes obvious that the whole story is constructed around this concept. Memory lies at the core of the interaction between family members and defines how they perceive the world around and themselves. The story itself delves into memory; it even starts with the Past Simple indicating the entrance into the realm of the past:

Two years after my mother died, my father fell in love with a glamorous blonde Ukrainian divorcée. He was eighty-four and she was thirty-six. She exploded into our lives like a fluffy pink grenade, churning up the murky water, bringing to the surface a sludge of sloughed-off memories, giving the family ghosts a kick up the backside.

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1)

The memory characters encounter and share is a combination of individual and collective, transcultural and multidirectional memory, postmemory and embodied memory. As a family of first-, second-, and third generation migrants, the Mayevskyjs are the literary representation of migrant identity formation and transformation in time. Their family history makes it possible to observe how the recollections of the past that the characters carry influence their present and the present of their children. The fact that Marina Lewycka uses characters' memories and perceptions of the past and Ukraine as a crucial force in reshaping the narrator's self-concept resonates with Maurice Halbwach's conviction that (any) identity is a product of collective or, in Jan Assmann's words, communicative and cultural, heritage, and Richard Terdiman's and Michael Rothberg's belief "that memory is the contemporary phenomenon, something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present" (Rothberg 3-4). It also

echoes the theory about the fluidity, changeability and dynamism of identity which is never fixed and stable and is being constantly negotiated and renegotiated in the course of life.

Nadezhda, the younger daughter and the narrator, is the central figure of the story whose identity transformation under the influence of the past is the most visible. As “a Piecetime Baby” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 313) born abroad after WWII, Nadezhda did not experience the darkest times in the family history which resulted in her being refused access to the family memory. In their attempt to protect Nadezhda from “the dark underside of life” and the past (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 10), her parents and her elder sister unconsciously exclude her from the sacred fold and disinherit in the sense of memory, belonging, and true identity. As a result, at the beginning of the book, Nadezhda does not define herself as a migrant or as a refugee and considers herself British<sup>17</sup>; this is the identity she was able to construct by herself in the reality (isolated bubble) she had been brought up into. As Shanna Große puts it, “Nadia is missing an essential part of the past that has shaped her whole family, but herself” (5). This also confirms Julia Creet’s assumptions about memory of a migrant and consequently a migrant’s identity which come into existence only in the context of place changing and movement (3) because there is no presupposition for a migrant’s identity to evolve when the everyday life is fixed and stable especially if the access to the past is limited as it is in Nadezhda’s case. For her, Ukrainianness existed only in reference to her parents’ past and was

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<sup>17</sup> The fact that Nadezhda defines herself as British is an informative detail of her migrant identity. In *British Social Attitudes: The 21<sup>st</sup> Report*, James Tilley et al., having analyzed the interpretation of British identity in Great Britain, come to the conclusion that Britishness by the majority of citizens is viewed as an indicator of feeling British, respecting laws and institutions, speaking English, and having British citizenship; and it has less to do with the ethnic dimension, which contains the items about birthplace, ancestry, living in Britain, and sharing British customs and traditions (153). This explains why first-, second-, and third-generation migrants define themselves as British rather than Irish, English, or Scottish, because for them Britishness is a kind of an institutional or state identity. Naming herself British, Nadezhda, maybe subconsciously, brings to the fore her formal and legal connection to Great Britain, which, although is dominant in her life, is unable to substitute the ethnic connection the heroine has with Ukraine.

more sensed than comprehended. The way her parents organized their life, the food her mother cooked, the language she spoke to her daughters, the plants that grew in her mother's garden, – everything was about Ukraine, but it was not enough for Nadezhda to feel Ukrainian. After the death of their mother, Nadezhda feels that the Ukrainianness is meant to be passed onto Vera and her, however, she realizes neither her elder sister nor her father considers her a rightful heiress of the mother's legacy. What started as an argument over the mother's money and the locket (because at first it seemed there was nothing else to inherit) turned out to be a negotiation of whether Nadezhda may be allowed to share the family's past and appropriate the family's memory. What Vera considers hers by default (she either experienced the past by herself or received (heard about) it from her mother or other relatives directly), Nadezhda has to claim her right to know the truth by showing her readiness to accept it. The chapter explores how Nadezhda's self-concept created in the circumstances of a stable life of a typical family of assimilated Ukrainian migrants in Great Britain is being transformed and redefined under the influence of personal and collective recollections about the past. The analysis shows that the narrator's idea of Ukrainianness is a composite image which includes her parents', her sister's, and Valentina's understanding of what Ukraine stands for and what it means to be Ukrainian. Nadezhda's Ukrainian identity is a product of the collective past in the present which although never experienced by her directly has a transformative power over her perception of the self as a lawful heir of the family history and cultural legacy of the nation.

### **7.1 Ludmilla Mayevska**

It is no coincidence that their mother's death becomes the starting point for the narration. Ludmilla Mayevska, the guardian of the family history, Ukrainian values, traditions and

language, “the spinner of stories, the custodian of the narrative that defines who we are” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 49) was the carrier of the Ukrainian identity and its cultural code. Her presence made it possible for Nadezhda to cultivate Ukrainianness outside (by delegating the duty to remember to the mother) and reach for it when needed. Ludmilla’s death causes an identity crisis in the family: faced with the fact that it is their turn to be “the guardians of the family archive” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 49), Vera and Nadezhda realize that it is time to retrieve the family memory and appropriate it. The family’s past predetermined the hierarchy according to which Vera inherits, materially and symbolically, the mother’s legacy. The fact that she knows about the past and that to a great extent her experience of it is firsthand place her and Nadezhda on uneven playing fields: realizing her absolute supremacy in the question of succession, Vera makes the mother resign the will and assumes the right to own the locket and the mother’s photograph. At the same time Nadezhda enters a conversation with the past bringing to life the shreds of memories and fragments of stories in order to tell the story of the family from her perspective, “It is time, I think, to find out the whole story, and to tell it in my own way” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 49). The death of her mother makes Nadezhda, who as a permanent listener of those stories has always been dependent on the recollections of other people, realize her potential and legitimate right to be an active participant and creator of the family history and of her Ukrainian identity which is a combination of memories and stories that the narrator has to delve into.

Memories and stories are the main means of the communicative memory within the family, and it is very often almost impossible to distinguish between them. Trying to make her way into the past of her family Nadezhda refers to them:

I sit on the bench under the wild cherry tree in the cemetery and sort through my memories, but the harder I try to remember, the more I get confused about which are memories and which are stories. When I was little, my mother used to tell me family stories – but only the ones that had a happy ending. My sister also told me stories: her stories were strongly formulaic, with goodies (Mother, Cossacks) and baddies (Father, communists). Vera’s stories always had a beginning, a middle, an end, and a moral. Sometimes my father told me stories, too, but his stories were complicated in structure, ambiguous in meaning and unsatisfactory in outcome, with lengthy digressions and packed with obscure facts. I preferred my mother’s and my sister’s tales. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 47-48)

Ludmilla in some way was a data medium of the memories about the past and Ukraine: the Ukraine Nadezhda knows is the Ukraine her mother remembered, and what seems as a feud over money is in fact a negotiation about cultural heritage. The phrase “her legacy, her life savings” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 7) appears right at the beginning of the book in reference to the mother’s will and eleven pages later it becomes clear that what Vera and Nadezhda did inherit is not material at all. The second chapter of the book, “Mother’s Little Legacy”, explains that the money on Ludmilla’s bank account is an embodiment of the knowledge gathered throughout her life, and the legacy Vera and Nadezhda are fighting over is symbolic: it is mother’s memories and stories that have real value.

Nadezhda’s knowledge about her mother’s Ukraine is sensory. Not knowing the Ukraine her parents and her sister experienced and lived in, Nadezhda could sense it in every detail of the world Ludmilla created. The locket with two photographs of Ludmilla and Nikolai smiling “fadedly at each other” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 9), his wedding gift on

their wedding day; the photograph of Ludmilla in the hat, who “is looking out towards the fields and the horizon” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 122) “with the veil pulled back and a girlish smile on her face” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 168); the house and the garden which without Ludmilla look neglected and dispirited; the food she cooked; the songs she sang; they all are the attributes of Ludmilla’s Ukraine. The locket and the photograph are the containers of extended memory; they keep the recollections about the past even if the people or the circumstances they stand for or are related to do not exist anymore. The garden with the house is of a different nature: portrayed as if animated, it seems to decay without Ludmilla’s presence. In their article dedicated to the motif of death in the novel, Yulia Lapteeva and Oleksandra Gonyuk refer to Ludmilla’s garden as to a symbol of life and death:

In Ukrainian culture, according to Christian beliefs, a garden has always been the embodiment of an ideal, harmonious world order. Ludmilla Mayevska, after having survived famine, began to multiply the gifts of the earth, which no one took away, transforming them into profits for her daughters. Thus, she created her own ideal world, embodied in the garden. With the death of Ludmilla Mayevska, the well-tended garden she cared for begins to deteriorate. (103, our translation)

Lapteeva and Gonyuk believe that the havoc in the garden is a precursor of Valentina’s destructive impact on the family life: “The image of weeds that appeared in the Mayevskyj’s garden after Ludmilla’s death embodies decline and chaos that disrupt harmony and replace the orderly cosmos of family life” (103, our translation).

Olga Eliya Krochak Sulkin analyzing the representation of hospitality in Marina Lewycka’s novels comes to the conclusion that “The garden is a powerful symbolic tool that allows Lewycka to engage with issues such as motherland and home” (69). The researcher pays

attention to the fact that the garden becomes one of the central chronotopic elements of the novel:

In addition, the time and space of the novel are related to the garden, because most of the encounters with the other, whether it is the father or other newer immigrants happen in the house, and part of the time in the garden or connected somehow to the garden. In this sense, the garden becomes almost the centre of events of the entire novel and this is very important for the plot. (70)

There is no doubt, Ludmilla's garden is a symbol of the memories she carries about Ukraine; her little universe, her motherland that came alive in Great Britain. Born in steppe, she tried to recreate her native Ukraine visually with the abundance of flowers and plants she grew in her garden and greenhouse that resembled the plants and flowers which had grown in Ukraine:

My mother came from the steppes, and she felt at ease with these open horizons. The Ukrainian flag is two oblongs of colour, blue over yellow – yellow for the cornfields, blue for the sky. This vast, flat, featureless fenland landscape reminded her of home...Around the house on three sides is the garden, where my mother grew roses, lavender, lilacs, columbines, poppies, pansies, clematis (Jackmanii and Ville de Lyon), snapdragons, potentilla, wallflowers, catmint, forget-me-nots, peonies, aubretia, montbretia, campanula, rock roses, rosemary, irises, lilies and a purple trailing wisteria, pinched as a cutting from a botanical garden. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 11-12)

Not taking care of the mother's garden stands for alienation from the memories and values Ludmilla cherished and the lack of readiness from Nadezhda's side to embrace her cultural heritage the garden stands for. In Oksana Blashkiv's opinion, as a second-generation

migrant Nadezhda has become hostage to the cultural duality she was brought up in:

“Nadezhda’s Ukrainianness is closely linked with the image of a Ukrainian woman deeply rooted in a traditional Ukrainian culture conflicted by the feministic perspective typical for the British society and the university” (1514). This is why taking care of the mother’s garden is difficult for her in direct and figurative sense of the word:

I am paying tribute to Mother’s garden. It makes me sad to see the havoc four years of neglect have wreaked; yet it is the havoc of superabundance. In such a rich soil, everything that takes root thrives: weeds proliferate, creepers run amok, the grass is grown so tall it is almost like a meadow, fallen fruit rots, yielding curious spotted fungi; flies, gnats, wasps, worms and slugs feast on the fruit, birds feast on the worms and flies.  
(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 246)

However, as the passage hints, the Ukrainianness Ludmilla planted will sprout in her daughters and her memories will have continuation. The garden, a living monument to Ludmilla’s Ukrainian identity, once a symbol of care and abundance, now reflects the passage of time and change symbolizing a lost era and a connection to a homeland that lives on in her daughters’ memory, in the locket and the photograph as the physical reminders of the past. Ludmilla’s legacy, her memory, is priceless for Nadezhda. When Nikolai, desperate to satisfy the appetite of his young wife, comes up with the idea of selling Ludmilla’s garden, Nadezhda is infuriated, “Valentina requires more money, and he must liquidate some assets. But what assets does he have? Only the house. Ah! At the back of the house is a large area of land which is good for nothing, This he could sell. (He is talking about Mother’s garden!)” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 187). The garden for her is much more than just a piece of land which is good for nothing, and selling it equals betrayal of the mother’s memory. But for Nikolai, it is a

natural flow of things, “Millochka died. This is sad, of course, but is now in the past. Now is time for new life, new love” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 170).

If the garden symbolizes Ludmilla’s personal memories of Ukraine and at the same time stands for the family’s memory about the mother, the house represents the collective memory of the family. As it was stated before, Marina Lewycka pays much attention to the sensory representation of Nadezhda’s recollections of her mother which is, to a great extent, the way the idea of Ukrainian identity was transmitted from the mother to the daughter. In most cases, her sensory recollections were directly or indirectly related to their house. The coziness and comfort of their house are Ludmilla’s attempt to recreate the ambience of Ukrainian home which is always hospitable and welcoming; she is its Berehynia. As Oksana Blashkiv writes in her article “Outside the University: (Re-)Constructing Self and Other in Marina Lewycka’s *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*”, in the Ukrainian family “...the role of a woman is defined through the symbol of Berehynia (the hearth mother and the protectress of the home), which her mother fully represented” (1514). “When my mother was here there were always fresh flowers, a clean tablecloth, the smell of good cooking” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 30). The food she cooked for her family was the Ukrainian cuisine recreated in Great Britain: a unique taste of “home-made jam (plum, strawberry, raspberry, blackcurrant and quince in all combinations)” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 18), “kotletki” and “beetroot soup” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 11, 173), “Both the rabbit and the chicken were pot-roasted with garlic, shallots and herbs from the garden, and then when the meat was all eaten up, the bones were used for soup. Nothing was wasted” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 47). She spoke Ukrainian with her daughters (“My mother spoke to me in Ukrainian, with its infinite gradations of tender diminutives. Mother tongue” (Lewycka, *Short*

*History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 15), “She talked in her own DIY language – Ukrainian sprinkled with words like handheldblendera, suspenderbeltu, green fingerdski” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 7-8)) and Nikolai (“Kolyusha” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 173)) and spoke to her plants (““Come on, my little darlins,’ she would whisper to the marrows...” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 13)). The house is also the representation of Ukrainian history which is seen in detail as a shade, as an invisible companion the knowledge of which is intuitive, but comprehensive. The pantry under the stairs where Ludmilla stored food supplies in case of hunger serves as an example of embodied memory. Ludmilla, who had experienced hunger in Ukraine, was grappling with the recollections of it. This is why it was important for her to have plenty of food to be laid in at home so that she could not only see that amount of supply but also feel it with her hands. Although the pantry was a representation of Ludmilla’s memories, for her daughters it is a medium of knowledge about the hunger they did not experience, a means of postmemory:

She knew – and this knowledge never left her throughout her fifty years of life in England, and then seeped from her into the hearts of her children – she knew for certain that behind the piled-high shelves and abundantly stocked counters of Tesco and the Coop, hunger still prowls with his skeletal frame and gaping eyes, waiting to grab you and shove on a train, or onto a cart, or into that crowd of running fleeing people, and send you off on another journey where the destination is always death. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 19)

Analyzing the different patterns of behavior post-was Ukrainian migrants and post-communism Ukrainian migrants of the novel fall into, A. Nejat Töngür and Yildiray Çevik admit that

The terror, pain and anguish which came with the occupations and the wars, and the repressive measures of the totalitarian regimes left psychological scars on the Ukrainian emigrants. Ludmilla ... is drawn as a woman who had to endure and survive all these miseries, and therefore, her lifestyle in Britain was shadowed by unpleasant memories and experiences. (442)

Austere rooms with functional furniture, the vintage vacuum cleaner and the cooker that has been there since Ludmilla's time with only two of three rings working are imprints of Ludmilla's past of scarcity and constrain on their house which her children, consciously or unconsciously, took over.

At the end of the story the house, the symbol of familial history and collective memory, is about to be sold. Four years and one Valentina is how much the sisters need to come to terms with the family's past which Maryna Lewycka depicts symbolically as a cooperative act of house cleaning:

A short time before Christmas, Vera and I spend a few days up at the house together, clearing it out, preparing it to be put on the market in spring. There is so much to look through, clean up, throw out, that we don't have much time to talk in the intimate way I had hoped for. At night, I sleep in the top bunk, while Vera sleeps in Valentina's old room. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 321)

Although Ludmilla witnessed numerous atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, lived the hard life away from her motherland, and faced numerous challenges, she did not lose her essence, the connection to her roots, Ukrainianness. The way Ludmilla transmitted the idea of Ukrainian identity was a feminine, soft one: her stories about the past were with happy endings; her connection to nature was intuitive; her art of taking care of the family was innate; her Ukrainian

language was melodious; her boundless optimism and thirst for life were contagious. Her legacy is much more than money on a bank account: it is her knowledge, her memories, the stories about the life she and her family lived, and the motherland she cherished in her heart. Vera and Nadezhda took Ludmilla's Ukraine in with their mother's milk; however, accepting and appreciating the Ukrainian identity that has always lived in them took time and effort to embrace and reconcile with some memories and stories in order to comprehend the true meaning of their heritage.

## **7.2 Nikolai Mayevskyj**

Nikolai Mayevskyj, Vera and Nadezhda's father, is an example of how the idea of national identity together with cultural and familial heritage is passed from parents to children in a masculine way. As Nadezhda states in the beginning of her journey into the past, "Sometimes my father told me stories, too, but his stories were complicated in structure, ambiguous in meaning and unsatisfactory in outcome, with lengthy digressions and packed with obscure facts. I preferred my mother's and my sister's tales" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 48). While Ludmilla's stories about the past were about common people who lived their real lives, Nikolai's reflections about the past are based on his profound interpretations of Soviet Marxism and Communism that turned people into slaves and which he saw as two destroying forces that had a negative impact on the Ukrainian national identity. While Ludmilla's stories were a medium of memory and personal experience ("My mother understood about life and death" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 47)), Nikolai's lengthy digressions have always served as a source of historical critique: his perspective on the past strives for emotional detachment, objectivity and unprejudiced analysis on a broader scale. Ukraine and

Ukrainians in his stories are the victims of politicians and regimes who exploited them for their own purposes. While Ludmilla planted the garden full of memories about Ukraine, Nikolai plows fields full of Ukrainian history.

Nikolai Mayevskyj's vision of himself fits within his historical criticism worldview. In his own stories, regardless of the fact whether they are based on true events or are reinterpreted for the didactic purposes, Nikolai is always a rebel who fights against the regime standing on his dignity and saving other Ukrainians. At the beginning of the book, justifying his decision to marry Valentina, Nikolai insists that this noble initiative to give a helping hand to a fellow countrywoman is the only way to help her, "You must understand, Nadezhda, only I can save her!" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 4). Commenting on his altruism, Nadezhda recollects other occasions on which her father's inner need to help Ukrainians manifested itself: "This isn't the first time he has harboured fantasies of rescuing destitute Ukrainians. There was once a plan to track down members of the family whom he had not seen for half a century, and bring them all over to Peterborough..." (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 26). In Nikolai's version of their first meeting with Ludmilla, his bravery and readiness to protect the weak played a crucial role, too: "...She was under attack from some boys that wanted to steal her skates, and I intervened on her behalf. From that time we became close friends. Yes, it is the natural instinct of man to be the protector of woman" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 32). However, in the course of the book it becomes clear that for the daughters Nikolai is an unreliable narrator: Nadezhda questions her father's heroic self-sacrifice; and later in the book Vera presenting their mother's or her own account of the past events, will tell completely different stories of love, poverty, and bravery:

Did they love each other?

No, says Vera, she married him because she needed a way out.

Yes, says my father, she was the loveliest woman I had met, and the most spirited.

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 69)

“...Maybe it’s just Papa who attracts violence. Did Mother never tell you the story of what happened when they first met?”

“No. Tell me.”

...

One Sunday in February 1926, my father set out across the city with his ice skates slung around his neck and a hardboiled egg and a slab of bread in his pocket...He had just crossed Melnikov Bridge and was heading towards the sports stadium when a snowball lobbed from the other side of the street whistled past his ear. As he turned to see where it had come from, another hit him full in the face...His tormentors were two brothers called Sovinko, who had left school a couple of years before...They had crossed the road, and were following him along the pavement, getting closer...The younger brother sneaked up and shoved a handful of snow down the back of his trousers. Nikolai tried to get away, but the pavement was treacherous. He fell on his face. The two boys pinned him down and straddled him shoving handfuls of snow into his face, down his neck, down his trousers...Just at that moment, three figures appeared at the top of the street. From where he was lying, face down in the snow, he made out a tall girl holding two smaller children by the hand...The tall girl pitched in, and started to pull the bigger boy’s hair. “You geroff, you fat bully! Leave him alone!” ...It was his classmate Ludmilla Ocheretko, with her younger sister and brother. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 143-45)

However, contradictory versions of the past which Vera and Nadezhda consider Nikolai's fiction, in Maurice Halbwachs's opinion, are a byproduct and an integral part of the collective memory of the family: "Family recollections in fact develop as in so many different soils, in the consciousness of various members of the domestic group... each family member recollects in his own manner the common familial past" (*On the Collective Memory* 54).

It is important to point out that sometimes Nikolai's "forgetfulness" not only serves his personal intentions, but also reflects his deep patriotic feelings towards his motherland. Regardless of the historic circumstances Nikolai Mayevski always refers to Ukraine as to an independent country, and stressing its difference from Russia, the USSR or the Russian Empire is indicative of his deep-rooted national pride and a conscious effort to honor and preserve Ukraine's unique identity and history. He often emphasizes the linguistic, behavioral, spiritual, and cultural maturity and superiority of Ukrainians:

When he was training to be an engineer in Kiev, he belonged to a secret circle of Ukrainian poets, which had been outlawed as part of the drive to impose Russian as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 32)

"I think she means to kill me, Nadia."

"She really said that, about returning to the graveyard?"

"In Russian. Said all in Russian."

"Pappa, the language doesn't matter..."

"No, on contrary, language is supremely important. In language are encapsulated not only thoughts but cultural values..." (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 139)

“Pappa, for goodness’ sake. How could you imagine that she ever loved you? Just remember how she used to behave towards you, the things she said, the pushing, the shouting.”

“True, this is the defect of character which is typical, by the way, of the Russian psyche, in which there is days the tendency to believe in violence as first rather than last resort”.

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 204)

Nikolai’s convictions about languages and their speakers are deeply rooted in the key ideas of the linguistic relativity theory and the linguistic image of the world theory, according to which language predetermines the way a person understands the world around and themselves and at the same time is a reflection of their cultural, ethnic, and other identities. In his understanding, the Ukrainian language fosters wisdom, politeness, and self-respect in its speakers and embodies their cultural and spiritual wealth, while the Russian language imposes aggression, intolerance, and rudeness and cultivates arrogance and indifference in its speakers which is reflected in the way they communicate.

Nikolai’s need to prove the linguistic self-sufficiency of Ukraine together with its cultural, political, and economic independence is of a primary importance for him, which, aside from portraying Nikolai as a devoted son of his country, also indicates his postcolonial identity. Although this is something Nikolai always rejects, Marina Lewycka’s depiction of him suggests that he himself is an example of how intertwined and closely connected these two cultures, modes of thinking, behavior, and histories became. The language he speaks is not pure Ukrainian; it is Surzhyk – the Ukrainian-Russian pidgin which indicates geographical, cultural, and historic closeness of these two countries as well as a conflicting and contradictory nature of

their interaction. The characters' names are russified: Nikolai – instead of the Ukrainian version Mykola, Ludmilla – instead of Ludmyla; Vera – instead of Vira; Nadezhda – instead of Nadiya/Nadiia; Valentina – instead of Valentyna. The way Nikolai and Ludmilla called each other (Kolya, Kolyusha (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 7, 45) and Millochka (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 6)); how Vera and Nadezhda address Nikolai (Pappa (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1), not tato in Ukrainian); the patronymics Nikolai and Dubov exchange “Volodya Simeonovich” and “Nikolai Alexeevich” (not Semenovych and Oleksiyovych in Ukrainian) (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 252) are also elements of the Russian language in their everyday life although sometimes Marina Lewycka defines them as Ukrainian (““Come, come, Volodya Simeonovich,” murmurs my father in Ukrainian” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 252)). On the other hand their surname in its both male and female forms is Ukrainian: Mayevskij (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 69) and Mayevska (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 12) (as well as Marina Lewycka's name is a combination of a Russian form of Ukrainian Maryna and a Ukrainian surname (it is Lewycka not Lewickaya)); Anna, Nikolai's granddaughter, calls him Dyid (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 75); Nadezhda speaks Ukrainian (“Stanislav exclaims, ‘Wow! I didn't know Nadezhda could speak such Ukrainian!’”(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 100)); and Nikolai's English is spangled with Ukrainian words, sounds and syntax (“vat”, “pro-cess”, (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 56), “a-shoo-re”(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 75), ““Hmm. Of course this question of psychological’ (he pronounces both consonants: p, s) ‘determinism is very interesting to discuss’”, ““Tak tak”” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 90), ““You see in this country Lada is not considered to be chic

car.” (He pronounces it the French way – “sheek”. He fancies himself as a bit of a francophone.) (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 95) – although it can also be a sign of Ukrainian language (“шик”), “lordovska keпочka” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 130)). The presence of the Ukrainian language in Nikolai’s speech is an important element of his migrant Ukrainian identity and bilingual reality he lives in. The fact that he speaks English even to his daughters denotes his assimilation to the society he lives in and the assimilation of Vera and Nadezhda, whom Nikolai, judging by their behavior, style of life, and values considers British and therefore unable to share the beauty and depth of meaning the Ukrainian language offers. However, he still has the need to communicate in his native language. This is why he is so excited and enthusiastic about Valentina’s presence in his life. He envisions her as an ideal partner with whom he will be able to share language, history, and awe to Ukraine. Unfortunately, Valentina is somebody completely opposite: having been brought up geographically more closely to Russia, Nikolai tries to be culturally and linguistically as far from it as possible, while Valentina, who was living a whole country away from Russia, mentally, culturally and linguistically is very close to it. The distance from Ukraine and life abroad fuel Nikolai’s patriotism and desire to emphasize his Ukrainian identity and idealize his motherland, while the closeness to Ukraine makes Valentina speak Russian and her image of Ukraine is far from being poetic. “She is not Ukrainian in the sense that Nikolai is; she comes from a Ukraine that is just part of Russia, and even Russia is just part of the globalized, capitalist West. Ironically, she is too westernized and not Ukrainian enough to be amenable to a melancholically imagined England (Fielding 212).

Nikolai’s alternative version of history presented through the domain of agricultural machinery is also an attempt to show cultural and technological advancement of Ukraine which

together with the idea of Ukrainian identity was devalued, concealed and appropriated by the USSR. In his understanding, Ukrainianness is based on peaceful labor and this is one of the key points he makes in his history of tractors. As Dmytro Drozdovskyi claims,

...the tractors in M. Lewycka's novel represent a symbol of peace and a sort of industrialized Ukrainian village; they seem to be a kind of metaphor of the Ukrainian identity represented in the novel mainly as rustic and peaceful. The tractor is a special tool for industrialization and a form of private property. However, it is important to underline that the tractors are not only the symbol of industrialization and modernization as a positive transformation of the society but also a Soviet symbol of human "colonization". (298)

The history of tractors also becomes Nikolai's way to deal with memory and to revise the past. Nadezhda jokingly compares his retrospective narrative style to plowing a field: "He shifts his voice into an easy narrative gear. He is in control now, driving his tractor across the crumbling furrows of the past" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 91). The work becomes Nikolai's legacy, his knowledge about the past that he leaves to his motherland. While Ludmilla left money, the locket, the garden, memories and stories to her daughters, Nikolai bequeaths his legacy to Dubov, who becomes his long-awaited male heir, his true companion who shares his passion towards engineering and in whose power to use Nikolai's treatise for Ukraine's best. However, in fairness it is worth noting that, Nikolai's dedication to his motherland expressed in his history of tractors evokes patriotic feelings in Nadezhda who not only becomes a listener of his thoughtful reflections about the past, but also contributes actively to the translation of his work into English:

All this Ukrainian nationalism bothers me – it seems outdated and irrelevant. Peasants in the fields, folk-songs at harvest, the motherland: what has all this got to do with me? I am a post-modern woman. I know about structuralism. I have a husband who cooks polenta. So why do I feel this unexpected emotional tug? (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 82)

In spite of the fact that Nikolai's history of tractors to a great extent reminds the stories Nadezhda heard in her childhood ("complicated in structure, ambiguous in meaning and unsatisfactory in outcome" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 48)), the seeds of Nikolai's Ukrainianness sprout in Nadezhda unexpectedly.

The constant presence of an outside aggressor from whose impact Nikolai is striving to free and cannot help but refer to in order to prove the self-sufficiency of Ukrainian identity is both the sign of a postcolonial outlook and an outdated image of the motherland which froze in Nikolai's memory and has been defining his perception and narrative through all these years.

The lack of understanding of what life in Ukraine looks like and what has happened to the country since his departure creates the discordance and misunderstanding between his intentions and Valentina's true motives. This is what Nikolai says about living in Ukraine now:

You see, he explains, he is her last hope, her only chance. To escape persecution, destitution, prostitution. Life in Ukraine is too hard for such a delicate spirit as hers. He has been reading the newspapers, and the news is grim. There is no bread, no toilet paper, no sugar, no sewerage, no probity in public life, and electricity only sporadically ...

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 4)

However, this has little to do with the reality in Ukraine at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The memory of the country he holds is not applicable to the country Valentina is from. So, the

image of the motherland and Ukrainianness Nikolai has been cultivated all his life feel so out of place because there is almost 50-year gap between the dilemmas Nikolai and Ludmilla's generation had to solve and the issues Valentina's generation is grappling with. In A. Nejat Töngür and Yildiray Çevik's words, "Lewycka enables readers to compare and contrast the post-war Ukrainian emigrants to the post-communism Ukrainian emigrants whose aims, expectations, aspirations, life styles utterly differ from the formers" (441).

Nadezhda's vision of Ukraine is not much better; although it is closer to the reality, this plain image of Ukraine of the 1990s lacks depth and complexity:

"Pappa, Ukraina isn't like you remember it. It's different now. The people are different. They don't sing any more – only vodka songs. All they're interested in is shopping. Western goods. Fashion. Electronics. American brand names" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 27).

Not living in the country of their origin, Nikolai and Nadezhda have created extreme images of Ukraine which do not agree with reality. Here is how Heather Fielding explains a wry representation of Ukraine:

Structurally, *Short History* absolutely excludes Valentina from its vision of the Ukraine. The text utilizes a bifurcated narrative structure..., so that its present is a frame tale that provides opportunities for accounts of the family's history: in the framing present, Nikolai and his family deal with Valentina, and within this frame, Nikolai, Vera, and Nadia narrate episodes in the family's past. The family's British present is therefore juxtaposed with a Ukrainian past, a Ukraine defined in a limited and exclusive way, by a certain period of history. Structurally, the Ukraine the novel interpenetrates with contemporary England is an old, twentieth-century one: it is the Ukraine before and

during the famine, during the purges, during the war. Valentina is made to exist in contemporary England and then made to disappear; the Ukraine she goes back to is not the novel's Ukraine. (212-13)

The memories Nikolai holds about his motherland as well as Nadezhda's knowledge about the country had been sealed in the bubble of migrant life within Ukrainian community and nurtured with information from mass media up until the moment Valentina appeared in their family bringing with her a reviving image of Ukraine and a new type of a Ukrainian migrant of "the Brezhnev era" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 170):

"Good news, Nadezhda. I'm getting married!"...

"Yes, yes. She is coming with her son from Ukraina. Ternopil in Ukraina."

Ukraina: he sighs, breathing in the remembered scent of mown hay and cherry blossom.

But I catch the distinct synthetic whiff of New Russia. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1)

Presented from Nikolai's perspective as a quintessence of Ukraine, Valentina indeed becomes the breath of fresh air for him bringing to life still and faded emotions towards the motherland. Her presence in his life awakens Nikolai's poetic part: he, who for many years has spoken English, even to his daughters ("He always speaks to me in English, eccentrically accented and articulated, but functional. Engineer's English" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 15)), starts writing love poems and letters full of patriotic epithets in Ukrainian which for Nikolai are the markers of the highest feelings because in his perception Ukraine and its beauty are the crown of creation:

I have a feeling that something terrible is going on, but I can see that my father is alive and excited for the first time since my mother died ...

Now I see his energy is all redirected towards this woman and her son – they will become his substitute family. He can speak with them in his own language. Such a beautiful language that anyone can be a poet. Such a landscape – it would make anyone an artist. Blue-painted wooden houses, golden wheat fields, forests of silver birch, slow wide sliding rivers. Instead of going home to Ukraina, Ukraina will come home to him. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 26)

The time between Valentina's return to Ukraine and her re-entry into England was a time of great personal growth and intellectual activity for my father. He started pouring out poems again, which he left lying around the house on scraps of paper, all written in the same crabbed Cyrillic hand. I deciphered the word "love" once or twice, but I couldn't bring myself to read them. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 54)

Under the bed, in a Tesco's carrier bag, I make my next discovery: it is a bundle of letters and poems in my father's crabbed hand. Interspersed with the letters and poems, someone has supplied an English translation. My darling... beloved ... beautiful goddess Venus. . . breasts like ripe peaches (for goodness' sake!). . . hair like the golden wheat fields of Ukraina... all my love and devotion... Yours until death and beyond. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 134)

Of course, Nikolai's emotional involvement and the intimate details of his relationship with Valentina disgust Nadezhda, but the image of Ukraine that emerges in every line of his writing draws Nadezhda closer to the motherland of her parents she has never experienced. Later in the book the confrontation between the Mayevskyjs and Valentina will more and more

resemble the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia with the victorious trophy of maintaining not only personal, but also national dignity. Nikolai, trapped between his poetic love to Ukraine and physical attraction to Valentina, will face a necessity to protect himself and choose only one of two options, and the chapter “Under duress” illustrates how Nikolai’s rebellious Ukrainian identity gets the upper hand: “...taking a gamble on her lack of English” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 131), Nikolai outwits Valentina’s venal plans by confessing to the Immigration panel “I will speak under duress” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 131).

Nikolai is one of the most influential characters of the book whose love and dedication to Ukraine he remembers as well as an incomprehensible relationship with Valentina, however strange that may sound, shapes Nadezhda’s Ukrainian migrant identity. An ordered and structural, almost scientific approach to the past of the motherland sets the background for an alternative historic narrative in which Ukraine, a beautiful, rich in natural resources and cultural traditions country whose people are a peaceful and hardworking nation, has always had a right to be a sovereign and independent country. Valentina’s presence in his life awakens his long ago forgotten poetic talent together with the Ukrainian language and inspires Nikolai to write his history of tractors which he sees as a tribute to his beloved Ukraine. His writing, both in form of poetry and historic review, is in fact a combination of his devotion to Ukraine and passion towards Valentina: dedicating lines to Valentina, Nikolai refers to the beauty of Ukrainian nature; and writing about Ukraine he has in mind an image of a young sexual woman which got embodied in Valentina. Unexpectedly, Nadezhda who in the beginning is skeptical and suspicious about Nikolai’s emotional involvement with Valentina spiced with his nationalistic devotion to everything related to Ukraine, feels unconscious response to her father’s complex

and at times illogical manifestations of his connection to Ukraine which in turn awaken and enrich her own sense of identity and cultural heritage.

### 7.3 Vera

Vera, the Big Sister (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 9), is another significant person in Nadezhda's family whose outlook and recollections of the past influenced Nadezhda's Ukrainian migrant image of the self. Vera, the "War Baby" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 313), "was born on the eve of the greatest conflict the world has known, into a country already ravaged by famine and choked in the mad grip of a paranoid dictator..." (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 313). The fact that she was a participant of those events vested her with a special position within the family hierarchy: aside from psychological and emotional age-related domination over the younger sister ("I am forty-seven years old and a university lecturer, but my sister's voice reduces me instantly to a bogey-nosed four-year-old" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 9)), due to the first-hand experience of the past, Vera also got an access to the family history and after their mother's death by default becomes the keeper of the family archive. 10-year gap between Vera and Nadezhda sets them apart: aside from Vera's individual recollections about the past that Nadezhda strives to share, there are so many significant historical events that happened during these years of which Nadezhda is only a passive recipient from the future.

My sister is ten years older than me, and had one foot in the adult world. She knew things I didn't know, things that were whispered but never spoken about. She knew grown-up secrets so terrible that just the knowledge of them had scared her heart. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 49)

There are ten years between Vera and me – ten years that gave me the Beatles, the demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the student uprising of 1968, and the birth of feminism, which taught me to see all women as sisters – all women except my sister, that is. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 239)

See how we grew up in the same house but lived in different countries? (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 240-41)

The readers see the relationship between sisters from Nadezhda's perspective, and it is very often that Vera is portrayed as an autocratic, dominating, and aggressive sole proprietor of the past and its secrets who believes that the demons of the family history must stay behind a closed door and be forgotten. Indeed, Nadezhda senses that something awful happened in the past that changed her family forever but to which as the youngest in the family she has no access to: "I don't know what to believe. I have a sense of something terrible that has happened in the past, which no one will tell me about because even though I am in my forties I am still the baby: too young to understand" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 45). This is why Nadezhda is always in an asking position: all the conversations about the past are initiated by her questions:

"Vera, what's all this about you wanting Mother to divorce him?" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 176)

"...He thinks he's so clever he can outwit the system. It's not the first time he's done something like this."

“What do you mean?”

“There are a lot of things you don’t know, Nadia.” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 183)

“Vera, why does Father always go on about you smoking? He’s got a thing about cigarettes.” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 185)

“Pappa said something happened to you in the camp at Drachensee. Something about cigarettes. Can you remember?”

“Of course I can remember.” I wait for her to continue, and after a while she says, “There are some things it’s better not to know, Nadia.”

“I know. But tell me anyway.” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 268)

“Vera, tell me...”

“There’s nothing to tell. You were a beautiful baby. Let’s go to bed now. It’s late.”  
(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 313)

This is how Shanna Große comments on the relationship between sisters: “The past events during the war seem to be a huge burden for Vera, which she constantly expresses by not talking about the past, escaping the conversations. The feeling of being the only family member that did not witness the war and therefore had a much better start into life ...is a different kind of burden for Nadia” (8).

Vera uses the 10-year gap between her and Nadezhda as a shield to hide behind from the past, explaining it as an inability of her sister to comprehend many things which are obvious to those who have come through the darkest times:

“How do you know all these things, Vera?”

“How do you not know them, Nadia?” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 227)

“Spiritual! Really, Nadia! Where do you think the meanness and selfishness come from, if not from the human spirit? Do you really believe there is an evil force stalking the world? No, the evil comes from the human heart. You see, I know what people are like deep down.”

“And I don’t know?”

“You are fortunate that you have always lived in the world of illusion and sentiment. Some things it is better not to know.”

... And yet this dark knowledge of Vera’s troubles me. What if she is right? (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 254-55)

However, in our opinion, Vera’s behavior is more protective than aggressive. As an elder sister and the only adult in the family (because after Ludmilla’s death Vera considers herself responsible for both the father and the younger sister: “Yes, well he’s another idiot. Mother and I were the practical people in the family” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 119)), she feels the necessity to protect Nadezhda from the burden of the past, and rejecting and avoiding seem the most efficient in her attempt to guard the sister. The denial of the past as well as Vera’s abrupt style of communication with Nadezhda is a sign of a trauma she cannot admit.

“Vera, why does Father always go on about you smoking? He’s got a thing about cigarettes.”

“Cigarettes? He talked to you about cigarettes?”

“He says you’re obsessed with divorce and cigarettes.”

“What else did he say?”

“Nothing else. Why?”

“Forget it. It doesn’t matter.”

“Obviously it *does* matter.”

“Nadia, why do you always go scrabbling around in the past?” Her voice is tense, brittle.

“The past is filthy. It’s like a sewer. You shouldn’t play there. Leave it alone. Forget it”

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 185).

It is exactly the deeply disturbing past that Nadezhda sees as something that taught Vera “to see so darkly” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 207), the time and place when and where she got “dark knowledge” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 255). Ukraine and the past in Vera’s perception are dreadful and dangerous, and the image of Ukrainians is controversial: although many of them have a big heart like Baba Sonia or Baba Shura, there are also those not to be trusted, ““So you see everybody is betrayed in the end...”” says Vera in one of the conversations about the Red Plough and Babi Yar (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 206). When Nadezhda hears Vera’s version of their family story about their parents’ relationship and wedding, Nikolai who almost had Baba Sonia sent off to Siberia, about the labor camp in Dranchese with Kishka and Vanenko, she realizes that her sister has her own reasons to be tough, to neglect their father, to despise Valentina and to have a need not to be Ukrainian. However, the latter is impossible because memory keeps the past in the

present allowing it to influence Vera's self-perception and to make her the person she is. Vera, wanting or not, is to a great extent a product of her Ukrainian past. Her childhood which was full of terror, hunger, and death made her, on the one hand, hard-tempered and emotionally detached, but on the other hand, more receptive to the feelings and motives of other people ("Oh, Big Sis, what a nose you have for sniffing out the tainted, the soiled, the venal, the compromised...") (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 207); "Oh, Big Sis, what an instinct you have for digging up the dodgy, the dirty, the dishonest" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 227)). This is why she sees her parents' marriage as Ludmilla's self-sacrifice ("She must have forgiven him in the end. She stayed with him for sixty years.' / 'She stayed with him for our sake. For you and me, Nadia. Poor Mother'" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 185), and reads Valentina's scheming as an open book:

"They are working illegally. That's why he doesn't want you asking questions. Of course Stanislav is probably under age to be working in a pub, too."

...

"And the woman at Eric Pike's house?"

"Obviously his wife has been having an affair while he has had an affair with Valentina".  
(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 227)

For Nadezhda, whose life experience is based on living in an independent country with freedom of speech, law supremacy, equality, and democracy, the reasons behind Vera's behavior remain a mystery ("Oh, please! She's still going on about all that old wartime stuff! Why can't she let it go?") (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 23)) until she discovers what the dark past hides: "Once, not so long ago, Big Sis's attitudes would send me into a rage of righteousness, but now I see them in their historical context, and I smile to myself in a superior

way” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 240). In fact, trauma is what separates Nadezhda from her family because all of them, Nikolai, Ludmilla, and Vera, are traumatized by the past. Nadezhda’s need to discover it in order to understand her father, her sister, and herself, her delving into the collective memory, makes her a carrier of postmemory through which she shares the traumas her family went through and becomes closer to them. Otherwise, without the appropriation of the traumas it would be impossible.

It may seem that the interaction between sisters is one-directional and that Vera’s impact on Nadezhda’s self-image is much more evident. However, it is not only Nadezhda whose identity gets redefined. Nadezhda’s stubborn search for the truth about the past makes Vera more susceptible to revising her own carefully constructed image of the self, challenging her to confront the suppressed aspects of her cultural, ethnic, and personal identity that she has long attempted to leave behind. Vera, who is running away from the traumatic past, is also running away from the Vera a traumatized Ukrainian refugee. She not only managed to construct and assimilate into a new, British, identity which is less burdened by the weight of historical events and personal memories, but also to believe she has become one. This is why she calls Great Britain “our country” and perceives Valentina as the dangerous other regardless of the fact that they probably have more similarities than differences in common:

Vera is delighted with Justin’s findings.

“You see, it confirms what I always believed. She is a criminal. Not satisfied with ripping off Pappa, she is also ripping off our country.” (Our country?) (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 239)

This utterance also alludes to the situation from Vera’s past when a German guard in the labor camp says to their mother: “You Ukrainians are ungrateful swine. We save you from the

communists. We bring you to our country, we feed you, we give you work. And all you can think of is to thief from us..." (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 271). It looks like Vera after having experienced the position of the weak deliberately chooses to be in a position of power. As a helpless child Vera learned that being a Ukrainian refugee is dangerous and miserable and, therefore, she rejects any connection to her Ukrainian past and chooses a strategy of emotional distance and domination, becoming those who exercised power and superiority over her:

"Remember the woman on the bus, Vera? The woman in the fur coat?"...

"The woman who gave Mother sixpence."

Mother, our mother, did not dash the coin in her face; she mumbled, "Thank you, lady," and slipped it into her pocket. The shame of it!..

"It was that moment – more than anything that happened to me afterwards – that turned me into a lifelong socialist."

There is silence on the other end of the telephone and for a moment I think she has hung up on me. Then: "Maybe it was what turned me into the woman in the fur coat."

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 242)

What Vera does not understand is that "the German guard" and "the woman in the fur" behavior as well as "a helpless Ukrainian refugee" position are the two sides of the same coin – the rejection of the past and the inability to admit and appropriate the traumas and move on in the present. Such search for the truth (unnecessary when Ludmilla who knew it was alive) also places the characters of the book into the closed space where they have no choice but to embrace the past and themselves in it. The whole situation with Vera, Nadezhda, Nikolai, and Valentina fits perfectly into the Karpman's drama triangle framework because all of them interact within

the paradigm of victim-rescuer-persecutor exchanging the roles, unable to exit the vicious circle. In the relationship with Nikolai Vera who knows about the father's role in the family's past is persecutor, while Nadezhda, who is either unaware about the true family history or gets pieces of retold stories, is rescuer, and Nikolai as the least reliable and responsible in the family performs the role of victim. In the relationship with Nadezhda Vera is sometimes victim (she uses her unhappy marriage and complicated divorce, drops hints about the dreadful past in order to manipulate Nadezhda's guilt and make her shift from persecutor to rescuer), and sometimes – persecutor because she feels emotional and empirical domination. In the relationship of Nikolai and Valentina, which started as a relationship between rescuer and victim and then transformed into all other possible configurations, Vera and Nadezhda move around the circle in their attempt to protect their father and the family from Valentina's greedy attacks. Vera's attitude to Valentina is one of persecutor and victim (Vera, as a child and a refugee, was victim in the past and with Valentina who reminds Vera of her own weakness chooses the position of power). What we are trying to say using Karpman's approach to analyze the interactions within the Majevskyjs family is that migrant identity does not necessarily goes in hand with the victim-rescuer-persecutor state but because of the traumatic events (and migration for many is the one) this is often so, and the relationship between characters of the book illustrate it. To a different degree, all of them are influenced by migration. They all have experienced the position of weakness. As Thomas Nail puts it in the introduction to *The Figure of the Migrant*, “Even if the end result of migration is a relative increase in money, power, or enjoyment, the *process of migration itself* almost always involves an insecurity of some kind and duration...” (2, italics in the original).

The role of persecutor that Vera performs the most frequently is her way to protect herself from the influence of the past she is not ready to admit. In order not to experience weakness she experienced as a refugee child she rejects the notion of being a refugee by being “the lady in the fur” or “the German guard”. Both these roles are extremely vivid in Vera’s attitude towards Valentina whom regardless of the many similarities they have in common, Vera despises and with whom she rejects to identify. Vera and Valentina understand migration differently. While for Valentina, it is a way to improve the financial status and have a better life for herself and her son; for Vera it is the means to save life. Obviously, their migrations happened at different times, and the reasons for them are different, too, but the Ukrainianness they both share might have been a connecting bridge unless it had not been suppressed and replaced by Vera’s deliberately elaborated protective British identity and disrespectfully neglected by Valentina’s materialism. The cultural, experiential, and social abyss between them is highlighted with the words Vera uses to emphasize Valentina’s otherness – “we” and “our”:

“... she is also ripping off our country”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 239)

“When we first came here, Vera, people could have said the same things about us – that we were ripping off the country, gorging ourselves on free orange juice, growing fat on NHS cod-liver oil. But they didn’t. Everyone was kind to us.”

“But that was different. *We* were different... We worked hard and kept our head down. We learned the language and integrated. We never claimed benefits. We never broke the law”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 240)

In spite of Vera's rejection of her refugee past and Ukrainian identity, it is impossible not to notice how the enduring impact of these experiences on her character, behavior, and worldview, shaped her self-image. This proves that even if historical and cultural background together with personal and collective memory are consciously denied or suppressed, they still influence the way migrants see themselves and interpret the world around them. She represents a traumatized Ukrainian migrant who, trapped in dichotomy of the past and the present, vulnerability and power, memory and forgetting, constantly exists in the tension between embracing her origins and blending into a new culture. She is Nadezhda's most reliable source of the family history and the kind of the Ukrainian migrant identity she is transmitting enriches Nadezhda's self-image with an idea of different (comparing to Ludmilla's and Nikolai's) Ukraine: the Ukraine which instead of the deep sense of patriotism and awe evokes the feeling of fear and helplessness. The Ukrainianness Vera experiences is felt as a burden, as a state of inferiority and vulnerability, which invokes to be suppressed and forgotten. It turns out that for Nadezhda embracing the traumatic family past together with the ambiguous image of Ukraine which combines the calming pastoral (by Ludmilla), the lyric poetry (by Nikolai), and the utter horror (by Vera) is a missing puzzle, an essential element in her image of the self. Neither of the visions of Ukraine alone is complete without the others: Ludmilla's idyllic garden, cozy home, and tasty food were not enough for Nadezhda to feel Ukrainian; Nikolai's patriotic and retrospective digressions did not persuade Nadezhda to fully embrace her heritage; Vera's painful recollections about the past alone would rip off Ukraine of its beauty and cultural meaning. Only when these narratives intertwine Nadezhda begins to comprehend the complexity and depth of her identity as a Ukrainian migrant, and becomes closer to her sister and her parents:

It dawns on me: Big Sis is no more than a carapace. My real sister is somebody different, somebody I am only just beginning to know. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 238)

When I was young, I wanted my father to be a hero. I was ashamed of his graveyard desertion, his flight to Germany. I wanted my mother to be a romantic heroine. I wanted their story to be one of bravery and love. Now as an adult I see that they were not heroic. They survived, that's all. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 311)

#### **7.4 Valentina**

Another character that contributes to Nadezhda's migrant identity formation through manifesting a different image of Ukraine and transmitting a controversial idea of Ukrainiennes, is Valentina, a 36-year-old "glamorous blonde Ukrainian divorcée" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1). Although she appears in the very first sentence of the book, her personal story before her migration remains a mystery to the readers. Valentina is the only character that does not deal with the past and whose development is determined by her present only. On the one hand, this prevents readers from justifying Valentina's actions in the present: not knowing about her personal story and motives the readers perceive her as light-minded and superficial, devoid of depth and complexity; but on the other hand, it allows to create a fresh and updated image of Ukraine and Ukrainianness which differs from the one the Mayevskyjs had. Ukraine in Nikolai and Ludmilla's memories, although immersed in war, hunger, and terror, is idealized and longed for. Valentina's image of the motherland, on the contrary, is centered around the financial survival which eclipses its non-material aspects. Her depiction, devoid of

the historical and emotional baggage carried by the older generation, presents a version of Ukraine and Ukrainianness that is less about the past's influence and is more about adapting to the present and future challenges:

“Is better in Ukraina, Christmas,” says Valentina.

“Well why don't you...” I try to stop myself, but Valentina knows what I am saying.

“Why for? For Stanislav. All is for Stanislav. Stanislav must have good opportunity. Is no opportunity in Ukraina,” she turns on me loudly. “Is only opportunity for gangster prostitute Ukraina.”

...

“Was it better under communism?” I ask.

“Of course better. Was good life. You no understand what type of people is rule country now.”

...

“My school was better,” says Stanislav. “More discipline. More homework. But now in Ukraina you have to pay the teachers if you want to pass the exams.”

...

“Don't children in your country give their teachers apples?”

“Apples never,” says Stanislav. “Vodka, yes”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 112-13)

“You in university teacher?” Valentina asks me.

“Yes.”

“I want for help Stanislav in OxfordCambridgeUniversity. You working CambridgeUniversity. So you help?” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 113)

As Oksana Weretiuk writes in her article “Identifying the Ukrainian: Marina Lewycka’s *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*”, “With intrinsic humor, the narrator opposes Daddy’s sentimental and charming Ukraine in the past (the lost homeland) with the contemporary East European country on the initial stage of its independence” (161). Valentina’s case, the researcher continues, reflects “the results of the post-war Russification of the Western Ukrainians, their powerful and dynamic assimilation (whether voluntary or not) in favour of Russian language, behavior and culture and the creation of hybrid national and cultural individuals” (161). Regardless of the fact that in its majority Ternopil has always been a Ukrainian speaking region, Valentina is portrayed as Russian speaking not only with a Russian surname (Dubova), but also with a New Russian behavior: “Ukraine he sighs, breathing in the remembered scent of mown hay and cherry blossom. But I catch the distinct synthetic whiff of New Russia” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 1). In the light of events that happened in Ukraine since 2014 one of the most precise Valentina’s characteristics gains a more ominous, almost prophetic quality. On April 17, 2014 in his public speech which followed the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin referred to the historical origins of “Новороссия/ Novorossiya” (New Russia) which evoked the new wave of political tension and cultural resentment in relation to this term. The President of Russia stated that the vast territories in the south and southeast of Ukraine, previously known under the term “Новороссия/ Novorossiya” (New Russia), cannot be fully considered as historically Ukrainian lands (“Five Loud Statements by Putin...”). Since then in the Russian political discourse the term “Новороссия/ Novorossiya”

(New Russia) appears regularly in relation to Ukraine. In 2005 when the book was published such an interpretation was not on the horizon; however, what readers have always been able to recognize in this phrase even without knowing about historic and sociocultural aspects of the term “New Russia”, is its negative connotation and the offending effect it has on the feelings of the people of Ukraine. Valentina’s desire to marry an 84-year-old man is perceived by Nikolai, who is aware about hardship the life in Ukraine is full of, as a cry for help; however, Nadezhda senses in it materialism, opportunism, and exploitation. From our point of view, and we found a similar opinion in Oksana Weretiuk’s and Heather Fielding’s articles, this happens because, the phrase “New Russia” although has a strong connection to the historical occurrence of the same name (New Russia gubernia was “the administrative-territorial designation from 1764 for the region in Southern Ukraine annexed by the Russian Empire from the Zaporozhian Cossacks, the Hetman state, the Crimean Khanate, and the Ottoman Empire” (“New Russia Gubernia”)), refers to a much later sociocultural phenomenon, the new Russians, which is descriptive of the 1990s in Russia and is characterized by rapid wealth accumulation (gained through questionable (very often illegal) means), ostentatious displays of luxury (a sign of compensation for the constant shortage of products and goods), and often deprecation of such traditional for the USSR values as hard work, equality, modesty, and intellectualism. In the 1990s this phenomenon was at all on hearing, especially in the post-Soviet area. Taking into consideration territorial and historic closeness of Ukraine and Russia, it is no surprise that this term is used in relation to a character from one of the most Ukrainian-oriented regions of the country. Although the phenomenon of new Russians was less vivid in Ukraine, after Ukraine had gained its independence in 1991, it was still under the influence of Russia and in many regards followed its economic and social patterns, including the emergence of similar oligarchic structures and the gradual decline in the

value of intellectual work in favor of material wealth and power. This is why the only perspective Valentina sees for herself at home is being “gangster prostitute Ukraina” and believes that it was better under communism because most people in power are criminals (“...Was good life. You no understand what type of people is rule country now” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 112)). Renald Simonyan [Ренальд Симонян], a chief researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in his article “On Some Sociocultural Results of Russian Economic Reforms of the 90s” [“О некоторых социокультурных итогах российских экономических реформ 90-х годов”] defines new Russians as the product of the reforms of the 1990s. He describes them as “Physically strong, poorly educated, assertive, devoid of moral values, and materialistic types” (4, our translation) that under the influence of the ideology of enrichment at any cost and criminalization of society devalued intellectual activity and cherished social aggression, indiscriminateness in the means of achieving goals, and brute physical force (3). In the researcher’s opinion, the social, political, and economic reforms of the 90s initiated a significant cultural shift from the Soviet values and turned entire layers of the nation, especially the youth, into spiritually depleted and completely indifferent to their own country, its past, and future (3). This aligns with Valentina’s portrayal: focused on the financial well-being, she neither shows interest in traditional values and cultural heritage nor expresses deep concerns about her historical and national identity: “Clearly this Valentina, she is of quite different generation. She knows nothing of history, even less about recent past. She is daughter of the Brezhnev era. In times of the Brezhnev, everyone’s idea was to bury all gone-by things and to become like in West” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 170). The fact that she speaks poor English and cares about asserting herself through letting the dust in the eyes of other people through possessing brand-spanking-new things

portrays her as a simpleton, lacking in educational and cultural sophistication, further emphasizing her detachment from her own heritage and superficial approach to life:

“Now here is a problem. Too much talking. Husband, brother, sister, mother, uncle, auntie, friend, cousin. Sometimes Ukrainian but mostly Russian...Not intelligent talking. Chatterbox talking”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 96)

“Yes, I work in Cambridge, but not at Cambridge University. I am at the Anglia Polytechnic University.”

“Angella University? What is this?”

My father leans across and whispers, “Polytechnic.”

Valentina raises both eyebrows and mutters something that I cannot understand.

(Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 113)

“Valentina’s sister is arriving from Ukraine. She is coming to see for herself the good life in the West that Valentina has described in her letters – the elegant modern house, the fabulous car, the wealthy widower”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 86)

Valentina is delighted with the Rover. It is sleek, shiny, metallic green in colour, with a 3-litre engine, leather seats that smell of expensive cigars, a walnut dashboard and 186,000 miles on the clock... (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 85)

Valentina’s boldness and assertiveness are even reflected in one of the chapters of Nikolai’s history of tractors. In a satiric way Marina Lewycka introduces a part of Nikolai’s

work which follows Nadezhda's detailed description of the results of her search of Valentina's room and Valentina's abusive behavior towards Nikolai. In the form of revenge, Nikolai alludes to Valentina describing the history and technology behind the Valentine tank: "...it was born into the world on the day of St Valentine in 1938. But there was nothing lovely about it. Clumsy and heavy with an old-fashioned gearbox, it was nevertheless deadly, indeed a true killing machine" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 136). Aside from the direct references to Valentina's deceiving appearance and ruthless character, the tank is also an allusion to the Ukrainian phrase "перти як танк" which literally means "to push forward like a tank," "to bulldoze through". The comparison to a tank suggests a bold, fearless, determinate, and even aggressive person who moves forward with force and little regard for obstacles or opposition, much like a tank would. Dedicating a chapter to the description of such a model, Nikolai metaphorically accepts it as an important element of Ukrainian history, which although repulsive and unattractive, is an integral part of the process of the development of machinery. The same is true for Valentina and the generation of Ukrainians she represents: regardless of her questionable worldview and behavior, she is an inseparable component of a Ukrainian path to a better future.

Renald Simonyan's article also provides with clarification of Stanislav and Valentina's words about bribes and nepotism in the sector of education ("...But now in Ukraina you have to pay the teachers if you want to pass the exams" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 113); "I want for help Stanislav in OxfordCambridgeUniversity. You working Cambridge University. So you help?" (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 113)):

The widespread corruption in higher education that began in the mid-1990s has today become not just a mass phenomenon, but a universal one. In many educational

institutions, there exists an unofficial tariff for university admission, passing coursework, and receiving positive exam grades. Our current officials have come to treat education as a service sector... Therefore, obtaining higher education is increasingly being replaced by the acquisition of diplomas. Russians understand that the decline in the quality of higher education since the 1990s is unlikely to be halted in the near future. It is not surprising that today, higher education obtained in Russia has ceased to be valued. (6, our translation)

This also explains Valentina's neglectful attitude to Nikolai's attempt to write an alternative version of Ukrainian history:

It is the latest chapter of his book...He wants to read it to Mike, and to Valentina and Stanislav.

“You will learn something about the history of our beloved motherland.”

But Stanislav suddenly remembers that he has some homework to catch up on ... and Valentina is detained on the telephone in the next room...

...

He stops, and gathers together his paper quietly...In the silence that follows, I can hear Valentina still chatting on the phone next door, and a faint beat of music coming from Stanislav's room. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 80-81)

As Renald Simonyan states in his article, “The resulting decline in the value of mental labor has led to a sharp decrease in the social status of the intelligentsia. As a criterion for holding a position in management structures, intellect is becoming increasingly less important” (7). What Valentina values Nikolai for is not his intellectual facilities or an exceptional philosophy of life and history, it is his financial potential that she assigns to him by the mere fact

of being a western country's citizen. Her pattern of behavior parallels the one described by Nikolai in his history of tractors: with her obsession with material prosperity Valentina can be viewed as an outside aggressor (the prototype of the USSR or Russia) that only intends to make use of Nikolai's resources (which embody Ukraine) without being interested in his non-material values or taking care of his emotional needs.

Trying to explain Marina Lewycka's motives behind Valentina's (New)Russianness, Oksana Weretiuk comes to the conclusion that such a character represents a mixture of cultural, historic, and economic influences that turn any person into a product of their time. Valentina's portrayal is not just a literal embodiment of Russian ethnicity; it is a reflection of cultural mentality shaped in the context of Russian domination and Ukrainian inferiority which happened at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Valentina exemplifies Ukrainian identity at the very early stages of independent Ukraine which to a great extent serves stereotypical conceptions about cultural and territorial union of these two countries:

Characterizing Valentina as Russian, does she mean her Russian ethnicity in a literal sense, or Russian mentality as a result of prolonged imperial power, when the Ukrainians were the subordinate group and the Russians the dominant group, and when it ran to *dessemiNATION* of Ukrainian identity? Or is the generally accepted Western perception (in the traditional English narration of the narrator) of everybody from Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia etc.) as Russian? In spite of Marina Lewycka's reported comment in Ukraine, that she oriented her book to an English reader (Western perception), I am prone to think, that she tries to locate her mind under Western stereotypes and imagines present Ukraine as a non-holistic nation, where heterogeneous processes were and still are taking place. (Weretiuk 161)

Aside from cultural and historic meaning that the elements of russification in Valentina's image carry, bringing such details to the forefront of her character also allows Marina Lewycka to emphasize Valentina's thirst for status and impression: unlike the Ukrainian language, which was treated as a language of a village and peasants, the Russian language, which for a long time was considered more prestigious, in Valentina's opinion, marks her as a more educated and well-off city dweller. Status and ostentatious financial prosperity are what Valentina has always been after, and such a mindset predetermines her materialistic expectations about living abroad and her consumerism-oriented migrant behavior:

The first crisis of their marriage comes shortly after our visit. Valentina is demanding a new car – not just any old car, either. Must be good car. Must be Mercedes or Jaguar at least. BMW is OK. No Ford please. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 83)

“Auto ne prestijeskiy”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 86)

And there is another problem. Crap cooker. The cooker in the kitchen, which has been there since my mother's time, is getting old ...

“In former Soviet Union all cookers are white. Crap cookers...Your wife peasant Baba. Peasant Baba, peasant cooking. For civilized person, cooker must be gas, must be brown...a civilized person's cooker”. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 88)

Another problem: the house is dirty. Crap Hoover. The vintage Hoover Junior is not picking up properly. Valentina has seen an advertisement for a civilized person's Hoover. Blue. Cylinder. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 88-89)

In their article "Migration to a Consumer Society: A *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka" A. Nejat Töngür and Yildiray Çevik state that Valentina represents a different Ukrainian migrant who came to Great Britain looking for a better life:

Through a history of tractors that Nikolai is writing, and through his daughters' recollections about their country's history, their family history, and their dead mother, Ludmilla, Lewycka enables readers to compare and contrast the post-war Ukrainian emigrants to the post-communism Ukrainian emigrants whose aims, expectations, aspirations, life styles utterly differ from the formers'. In contrast to Ludmilla and Nikolai who immigrated to Britain after the Second World War to escape from the repressive regime in the Soviet Union, the main motive behind the immigration of the post-communism Ukrainians is the lure of the opportunities offered by capitalism and consumerism in Britain. (441)

*Encyclopedia of the History of Ukraine* confirms the researchers' words. According to the entry on the Ukrainian diaspora, as of 2019 there were 4 waves of Ukrainian immigration; each of which was evoked by different reasons for people to leave the country. The first wave covered the period from the last quarter of the 19th century to the beginning of WWI (1914); the second wave happened between the two world wars (1918-39); the third wave occurred in the period after WWII (it was most intense immediately after the war); the fourth wave included sporadic departures from the territory of Ukraine in the 1970s and 1980s, and more numerous ones during the years of independence (starting from the 1990s and up to the present time [2019

is the year of publication]). While social factors urged the second wave of immigration, and political situation encouraged the third one; economic reasons are named among the most crucial ones that stimulated the first and the fourth waves of Ukrainian immigration (“Ukrainian Diaspora”). Consequently, Ludmilla and Nikolai left Ukraine during the third wave of immigration, having been influenced by the political upheavals of their time, while Valentina, a fourth-wave Ukrainian migrant, is motivated by the economic opportunities and changes of the post-Soviet era. As A. Nejat Töngür and Yildiray Çevik claim, the shortage of goods in the past against the background of the luxury boom in the western countries led to “bleak despair, widespread frustration and growing anger” among those Ukrainians who wished but did not have an access to the abundance of products the consumer societies exposed. “The only possible way seemed to be the Western European countries where ordinary people could find, afford and enjoy these products” (444). This is why, Valentina falls prey to the attraction of consumerism, and Nadezhda’s rummaging through Valentina’s room proves it:

... I am startled to find that Valentina has transformed it into a Hollywood-style boudoir, with pink nylon fur-fabric cushions, quilted and frilled holders for tissue paper, cosmetics and cotton wool, pictures of wide-eyed children on the walls, cuddly toys on the bed, and bottles of perfume, lotions and creams on the dressing table. It seems they have all come from mail-order catalogues, several of which lie open on the floor.

But the most remarkable thing about the room is the mess. There is a chaos of papers, clothes, shoes, dirty cups, nail varnish, pots of cosmetics, crusts of toast, hairbrushes, beauty appliances, toothbrushes, stockings, packets of biscuits, jewellery, photographs, sweet wrappers, knick-knacks, used plates, underwear, apple cores, sticking plasters,

catalogues, wrappings, sticky sweets, all jumbled together on the dressing-table, the chair, the spare bed, and overflowing on to the floor. And cotton wool, everywhere blobs of cotton wool covered with red lipstick, black eye make-up, orange face make-up, pink nail varnish, strewn on the bed, on the floor, trodden into the blue carpet, jumbled up with the clothes and food. (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 132-33)

Nadezhda, overwhelmed with the abundance of things in the room, which used to be austere and functional, struggles to reconcile this change with her memories of the past; however, Nikolai is not surprised, “To build this economy, people must be buying, something new all the time. New desires must be implanted as fast as old ideals must be buried. That is why she is always wanting to buy something modern. It is not her fault; it is the Post-war mentality” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 170).

Consumerism is not the only reason for Valentina not to be accepted by the family. Heather Fielding in her article “Assimilation after Empire: Marina Lewycka, Paul Gilroy, and the Ethnic Bildungsroman in Contemporary Britain” discusses Valentina’s incompatibility with the melancholic imperialistic discourse of British nation reflected in her interaction with the assimilated Mayevskyjs family. The researcher claims that the characters of the book are torn between admitting that Valentina is one of them and rejecting her as the dangerous other. They are stuck between the Ukrainianness they all share, and the Britishness that sets them apart. Finally, Heather Fielding comes to the conclusion, that the second dominant takes over, “characters learn to sympathize and identify with Valentina, but then they withdraw sympathy and identification too” (201):

Melancholic discourse projects a nostalgic vision of a homogenous, pastoral nation as the authentic Britain, and in *Short History*, the immigrants that can safely be incorporated

into the nation are those that can be fit into such a model. Nikolai, the narrator's father, loves agriculture and comes from a peasant background; he can be compatible with melancholic Britain. Valentina is too modern, too invested in shopping, too sexualized, too new; she threatens this nostalgic, scared, exclusive nation. (Fielding 202)

In Heather Fielding's opinion, in the end everything comes to the question what it means to be British, and the novel "shows that this irreducible doubleness [of two moods (conviviality/sympathetic identification and melancholy) and two identities (Ukrainian and British)] is effective: it actively shapes what it means to assimilate" (203). The researcher believes that "Valentina plays an essential role in the novel's concluding celebration of national assimilation, although at the level of the plot, she is about to be deported" (205). Due to her presence in the Mayevskyjs' family life, its members realize their union with Great Britain. Nadezhda manages to embrace her parents' past which as well as Valentina's story could be an attempt to provide their children with better life and defines her place in the British society:

... the novel moves into an allegorical mode that makes her union with the nation explicit, as Nadia realizes that she stands in for postwar immigrant Britain ... Nadezhda becomes an allegory for an England that can include her family and their generation of traumatized Ukrainian refugees. The process of becoming British here involves a movement from youthful ignorance to maturity, signaled by Nadezhda's growing ability to identify sympathetically with others. As she begins to see other people as full subjects and to imagine herself in their situations, Nadia becomes an exemplary British subject. (Fielding 205)

However, in our opinion, Valentina's presence actually awakens in Mayevskyjs' family the sense of Ukrainianness, which was forgotten, not talked about, suppressed. When fighting

with Valentina, Nadezhda switches to Ukrainian because she understands that the language they share is much more effective in transmitting meaning than British tactfulness (Ukrainian is the language of emotions, English is the language of sensibility: “‘Well why don’t I just pop out and get your shopping. Then we can all have tea together when she comes back.’ Cheery, sensible voice. English voice. Distances me from all the pain and madness” (Lewycka, *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* 34)); she remembers that this is her language too. She engages in translation for Nikolai and eagerly collects the pieces of the family’s Ukrainian past in order to restore the missing elements of her Ukrainian identity. Nadezhda never questions the components of Britishness that got incorporated into her personality due to the surrounding she grew up in, but she did not feel fully herself without the knowledge about her family’s past. The fact that the Mayevskyjs reject Valentina has nothing to do with their British identity or assimilation; on the contrary, we tend to think that this is the Ukrainian rebelliousness, the act of justice, that manifests itself as a protest against the centuries-old exploitation from Russia’s side embodied in Valentina. And as Russia and Ukraine are different countries, so are the Mayevskyjs and Valentina, but not because they assimilated and consider themselves a different nation, but because the moral values they have are of different nature. The ending of the story is hopeful: by returning Valentina back to her family and its values and by sending her with a newly-born baby girl back to Ukraine (along the same route but in other direction that Nikolai and Ludmilla together with Vera took many years ago) with a husband-engineer who managed to fix the car to make it there and with Nikolai’s blessing and legacy in the form of patents and the book about the history of Ukrainian tractors, Lewycka suggests that they have chances to start it over and have a better future.

Valentina who at first is perceived as the dangerous other and evokes indignation and anger, appears less distant and more sympathetic closer to the end of the book. Memories and stories her presence in the Mayevskyjs' life evokes illustrate that the characters of the book regardless of numerous differences have many more similarities in common. Valentina's image reflected Vera's traumatic migrant childhood that she was hiding even from herself, and in Valentina's story Nadezhda saw the part of her family's journey into the big world of Western countries. A. Nejat Töngür and Yildiray Çevik admit a striking resemblance Ludmilla's and Valentina's lives bear: they pay attention to the way both women got to Great Britain, their motives to emigrate and their total dedication to their children's better future which can force a mother to go to extreme length (448-50).

Although, as it was stated before, Valentina lives in the present and does not directly refer to the past, her presence in the Mayevskyjs' family opens doors to the suppressed, unconscious, and unspoken personal and collective memories the members of the family ignored for a long time. She plays one of the most influential roles in Nadezhda's and Vera's Ukrainian identity (re)defining, reminding them of their own migrant past and expanding the boundaries of the history of Ukraine by showing its continuation on her own example.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

*A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* is an illustrative novel that shows that migrant identity is never constructed in isolation and is always a product of collective, or in Jan Assmann's terms, communicative memory. The book explores how different generations of Ukrainian migrants remember past events and how they deal with memory and memories in diverse and nuanced ways. Marina Lewycka disagrees that memory stays in the past and gets

weaker with time, on the contrary, on the example of the Mayevskyjs' family the author illustrates that memory always exists in the present shapeshifting into stories and acquiring alternative interpretations and unpredictable meanings. On the example of Nadezhda, one of the central characters and the narrator of the story, Marina Lewycka depicts the process of migrant's self-identification as a never-ending multilayered transformation which under the influence of stories and recollections about the past can be viewed as a continuous process of identity reconstruction. Her mother's memories, stories, and lifestyle taught Nadezhda the cultural values, optimism, kindness, and melodiousness of Ukrainian language. Her father's unreliable recollections about the past, his historical passages, love poems and letters to Valentina full of epithets and metaphors referring to the natural beauty of Ukraine inspired her to unpack the Ukrainianness she inherited from her parents but did not realize until the moment Valentina entered their life. Her sister's unwillingness to talk about the traumatic past, her need to get rid of it, her rejection to identify with Ukraine she knew changed Nadezhda's perception of her family's past by showing that all of them are traumatized by migration. Even the infuriating boldness of Valentina, who will stop at nothing to achieve the desired, provides her with a key to a missing puzzle of her well-constructed but still unsatisfactory British identity – with Ukrainianness and migrant perception. Ludmilla, Nikolai, and Vera's memory, although idealized, poeticized or suppressed, is memory of loss and trauma, and the price Nadezhda pays to share the family's history is postmemory which she inherits together with the money on a bank account, the locket, the photograph, the garden with the house, and many often unanswered questions about the past her family had had before the Peacetime Baby came into their life. And now, after all, Nadezhda knows for sure that the "bourgeois preoccupation with all personal history" does matter.

## Chapter Eight: Narrative and Identity

*It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a “narrative”, and that this narrative is us, our identities.*

*If we wish to know about a man, we ask “what is his story – his real, inmost story?” – for each of us is a biography, a story. Each of us is a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us – through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives – we are each of us unique.*

*To be ourselves we must have ourselves – possess, if need be re-possess, our life-stories. We must “recollect” ourselves, recollect the inner drama, the narrative, of ourselves. A man needs such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self.*

– Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*

Paul John Eakin, in the preface to his book *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*, states that “...narrative is not merely something we tell, listen to, read, or invent; it is an essential part of our sense of who we are” (ix) because “narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience” (2). What Eakin means is that the process of self-narration has become an innate part of our everyday life regardless of whether we have any outside recipients or perform the role of an inner listener ourselves: “In a certain sense we are always talking about ourselves to ourselves if to no one else, making plans about what we’re going to do, reviewing what we have done and thought and felt” (1). Jerome Bruner calls such a tendency to self-creation and re-creation through narrative “the nature of thought” which,

aside from being “an instrument of reason”, is also capable of going into the construction of narratives or stories people tell about their lives (691). Marya Schechtman, in “The Narrative Self”, provides an example, “If the person sitting next to you on a long plane trip suddenly launches into the story of his life, you may be amused, or annoyed, or simply glad for the distraction. Whatever your reaction, you are unlikely to be *surprised* that he has a story to tell” (394, italics in original). “Human beings are storytellers by nature...” and “The self is both the storyteller and the stories that are told”, Dan P. McAdams claims and illustrates his idea with a list of numerous genres from folktale to reality television shows which are known to every human culture as the means of delivering the story about the self (“Personal Narratives and the Life Story” 244). The researcher is convinced that narrative is an essential element of every dimension of identity, including personal, social, cultural, religious and other, because “the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large” (“Personal Narratives and the Life Story” 242-43).

Literature, as well as other media of narrative, such as film or theater, emerged from the need to tell stories about ourselves and since their appearance they have served as a means of communication, preservation of the past, and making sense of experiences. Similarly, narrative has become one of literature’s most essential means of transmitting meaning and values, shaping identity processes, and reflecting all dimensions of identity. As a medium of personal identity in literature, narrative helps to articulate and construct the self, gives coherence and sense to the life experiences of a narrator, and provides readers with the clues to interpretation. Narrative is also an active element of social identity construction and reconstruction in literary texts because it is a

source of collective memories, cultural knowledge, traditions and beliefs which denote one's belonging to a particular social, cultural, religious, or national group. Narrative as a means of self-representation in literature is the central object of this closing chapter because it is the terrain in which all dimensions of identity we have discussed in previous chapters (individual, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, place identity, migrant identity, etc.) simultaneously converge. Narrative in literature allows the narrator plurality of meaning and self-expression which, with the help of such narrative elements as structure, perspective, mode, dynamism, and others, contributes to multidimensional manifestation of identity. Literature, among other media of narrative, proves to be most effective in showing the interplay between the personal and the collective, interiority and exteriority, here and there, the real and the imaginary, home-country and host-country, past and present, us and them, and thus provides the migrant author with an ideal space for exploring and expressing migrant identity which is hybrid by nature and therefore capable of reconciling opposites.

This chapter outlines the basic concepts related to narration that will help to discuss identity formation and transformation processes presented in self-narratives of migrant writers. It focuses on the evolution of the concept of narrative, self-narrative, and narrative identity in academic thought and pays attention to the pragmatics of narrative in the literary context. The chapter also views narrative, narration, and narrativity as key components of identity expression in literary texts and shows that narratology is an effective framework to analyze identity process.

### **8.1 Narrative, Narration, Narrativity, Narratology**

In "Narratology and the Narrative", Fotis Jannidis explores the meaning of key terms of the field, among which, together with concepts of narrative, narration, and narrativity, the

concept of narratology appears as well. Distinguishing between these notions is important because although they all, in one way or another, refer to narrative, each term captures a specific aspect of the study of stories and storytelling, defining the way the representation of identity in literary works gets expressed, interpreted and understood. The discussion begins with the definition of narratology as it deals with all other aspects mentioned above and provides the study of the relationships between narrative and identity with an appropriate toolset. Following this, the research focuses on the concept of the narrative which is a foundational element of the study of self-formation in literature because it is capable of simultaneously shaping identity and reflecting its transformation. Finally, the analysis will address the other key categories, such as narration and narrativity, in order to have a clearly defined and structured theoretical framework which will be used to study the interplay between narrative and migrant identity in literary texts.

In the *Handbook of Narratology*, narratology is defined as “a humanities discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation” (Meister 329). For Monika Fludernik “Narrative theory – ...or narratology – is the study of narrative as a genre. Its objective is to describe the constant variables and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how the characteristics of narrative texts connect with the framework of theoretical models (typologies) (8). Fotis Jannidis is convinced that the analysis of narrative texts is “...the most prominent strand of narratology” (39).

Analyzing the importance of narratology in understanding of the self, Anna Burzyńska, a Polish literary theorist, rightfully notices, that it has managed to change the direction of philosophical thinking from the Cartesian assertion “I think, therefore I am” through the

hermeneutic “I understand, therefore I am” to the narrativist vision “I narrate, therefore I am”<sup>18</sup> (33).

Gerald Prince, an American academic and literary theoretician, Professor of the University of Pennsylvania, is inclined to think that narratology is “the science of narrative” which helps to understand narrative structures and techniques used to construct a story. Thus, its definition directly depends on the definition of narrative (“Surveying Narratology” 1). Narrative, however, is a complex and ambiguous concept because it may refer equally to the product of narration (which is the story told), the act of narration (the process of telling the story), and the material object (the text of the story) (Lamarque, 394-95). Marie-Laure Ryan’s overview of the definitions that had been developed by narratologists up to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century only confirms the illusory simplicity of the term:

All of these characterizations provide useful insights, but none offers a complete and self-sufficient definition of narrative, because they depend too much on implicit elements...A definition should support, even entail, statements like these, but it does not have to spell them out:

Narrative is about problem solving.

Narrative is about conflict.

Narrative is about interpersonal relations.

Narrative is about human experience.

Narrative is about the temporality of existence. (24)

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<sup>18</sup> In original: “Mówiąc inaczej – dzięki idei narracji myśl filozoficzna znalazła stosowne przesłanki dla przejścia od substancjalnego do dynamicznego ujęcia podmiotu, zaś szlak prowadzący od kartezjańskiego „myślę, więc jestem”, poprzez hermeneutyczne „rozumiem, więc jestem”, sfinalizował się w narratystycznym „opowiadam, więc jestem”.

Trying to unify the existing approaches to the concept of narrative into a coherent whole, Brian Richardson concludes that, in their attempt to provide an all-encompassing definition of narrative, scholars accentuate different aspects of the term that fall into four main frameworks which view narrative as a temporal, causal, minimal, and transactional phenomenon:

The first posits the representation of events in a time sequence as the defining feature of narrative; the second insists that some causal connection, however, oblique, between the events is essential; the third and most capacious ... suggests that any statement of an action or event is ipso facto a narrative, since it implies a transformation or transition from an earlier to a later state; the fourth posits that narrative is simply a way of reading a text, rather than a feature or essence found in a text. (169)

Brian Richardson's informing observation regarding the multifaceted nature of narrative compiles the main ideas of the foundational works of the central figures of the field. For instance, temporality as a defining feature of narrative is singled out by Gerald Prince for whom narrative is "the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (*Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* 1). Later in his interview Prince broadened the concept claiming that "...narrative is about what happens or what can happen. It articulates experiences, devises and explores (space)time, illuminates self and other, individual and group, practices and possibilities" ("My Narratology: An Interview with Gerald Prince" 86). Causality, as the key component of any narrative, has been in the center of attention of Noël Carroll who believes that "...the earlier events presented conditions for the realization of the later events. Specifically, it involves recognizing that the earlier events were causally relevant conditions (or contributions thereto) for the occurrence of the pertinent later events in the story at hand" (Carroll 131). Gérard Genette's approach,

mentioned in the quote by Richardson, highlights the ambiguity of the term, illustrating its numerous applications. In Genette's opinion, narrative may equally refer 'to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events' and "to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.". At the same time, from Genette's perspective, narrative can be descriptive of an event: "not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself" (25-26). Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle's framework unites the ideas of Prince, Richardson, and Genette and stresses the importance of temporal and logical sequence of events in narrative, "The simplest way to define narrative is as a series of events in a specific order – with beginning, a middle, and an end" (53). Fotis Jannidis focuses on the importance of a medium of narrative because "...narrative represents the event in a medium" (46) and distinguishes between a story and narrative, claiming that "A story is not narrative, but the representation of a story is" (50). In addition, Louise M. Rosenblatt articulates the idea of narrative as a transactional phenomenon which defines a reader as a sole constructor of the meaning that text may only imply. In the Rosenblatt's opinion, narrative is a creative process, something that emerges as a result of an interaction between a text and reader's perception, individual experience, imaginative involvement, and emotional response<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> "Unfortunately, important though the text is, a story or a poem does not come into being simply because the text contains a narrative or the lines indicate rhythm and rhyme. Nor is it a matter simply of the reader's ability to give lexical meaning to the words...Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances...The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness. The reader, bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl. If the subsequent words do not fit into the framework, it may have to be revised, thus opening up new and further possibilities for the text that follows. This implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning" (Rosenblatt 268).

Taking all the attempts at defining narrative that present it as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon into account, it becomes possible to claim that narrative is a means of dealing with human experience. By recounting the events, real or imagined, narrative transforms one's understanding and experience of life into a story. As a means of temporal and causal connection between the narrated events, narrative endows lived experience with coherence and meaning that make the interpretation of the personal history and life journey possible. Narrative is also a transactional phenomenon which requires interaction between a narrator and a recipient of the story because both of them contribute to the construction and interpretation of meaning. For the analysis of migrant identity reinvention in migrants' writings, what happens to a character becomes less important than how such transformation is depicted. Therefore, the reference to narratology as to the central means of the exploration of the narrative text is essential because it provides us with an effective toolset to study the "how" of migrant identity re-creation in writing.

Two other important terms that will be used to analyze the literary representation of identity in migrants' texts are narration and narrativity which will allow us to see the mechanics of self-creation and re-creation through narrative and help to approach these processes as dynamic and multidimensional.

In "Story, Plot, and Narration", H. Porter Abbott calls narration one of "the three principal components of the overarching category 'narrative'" (40) (the other two are story and plot) and defines it as the process of telling. "The process of telling is the story's *narration*... It is an implicit acknowledgment that a story is understood as having a separate existence from its narration. As such, it can be told in different ways by different narrators" (39). In a similar vein Fotis Jannidis draws a connection between narration and what it represents ("Narration relates

‘something that happened’” (41)) and claims that “Narrated story, not simply the story *per se*, is narration” (43).

Defining narration as “the narrative act of the narrator” (2), Monika Fludernik emphasizes a direct connection between narrative and a narrator’s identity:

Narrative is associated above all with the act of narration and is to be found wherever someone tells us about something: a newsreader on the radio, a teacher at school, a school friend in the playground, a fellow passenger on a train, a newsagent, one’s partner over the evening meal, a television reporter, a newspaper columnist or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy reading before going to bed. (1)

Although it is not directly mentioned in the above quotes, the process of narrating anything indicates the presence of a narrator whose intentions<sup>20</sup> and motives are seen through the need or desire to tell a story and can be interpreted as markers of a narrator’s identity because it is exactly the identity of a narrator which determines how the story is told.

Another significant element of the study of narrative and identity is narrativity. Characterized by the act of narration and the mode of representation (Jannidis, 43), narrativity can be viewed as an enabling force of the narrative which is present at every point of the storytelling (Sturges, 5-28). Philip J.M. Sturges posits that narrativity is a means of the interaction between a reader and narrative, which to an extent may be read as a logical continuation of Louise M. Rosenblatt’s theory about the transactional nature of narrative:

It is the narrative which contains narrativity, and this narrativity will precisely include the means by which the reader is encouraged to a lesser or greater degree to “actively

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<sup>20</sup> Intentionality, as McAdams rightly notices, is the heart of narrative (“Personal Narratives and the Life Story” 250), thus, interpreting and understanding of personal stories in a literary space reveals a driving force that compels people to create and recreate all dimensions of their identity in writing.

construct” the story, or in a wider sense actively to decipher the textual world, from the “fictional data” offered to him. Every narrative will possess narrativity, but the ease with which it can be apprehended or not will determine the extent of the “active construction” in which the reader has to engage. (Sturges 15-16)

While Philip J.M. Sturges accentuates the potential of narrativity to shape reader’s reception of narration, Wolf Schmid shifts the stress to narrator claiming that narrativity is a tool for his or her self-expression. In his analysis of narrativity and eventfulness<sup>21</sup> (the set of events that indicate the change of state in the storyworld), the scholar refers to two distinct approaches to narrativity: classical narrative theory and structuralist study of narrative. In the first tradition, Schmid writes, the communicative function of narrative was emphasized, and “...Narration was bound to the presence of a mediating authority, the narrator, and contrasted with the direct presentation of events in drama. The existence of such a mediator between the author and the narrated world was the defining feature of narrativity in classical narrative theory”<sup>22</sup>(1). In the structuralist study of narrative<sup>23</sup>, according to Schmid, the role of medium is disregarded, and instead narrativity is related to the temporal structures and change of state. However, Schmid claims, that none of the above mentioned categories are completely satisfactory, and comes to the conclusion that “narrativity is related not to what is described but rather to the presence that describes and the way in which it does so” (6). Schmid’s integrated approach offers a broader

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<sup>21</sup> What Schmid means by eventfulness is described in detail in his *Narratology: An Introduction* (9-13).

<sup>22</sup> By classical narrative theory Schmid means an approach to a narrative text which precedes the formal development of narratology and emphasizes the subjectivity and interpretive role of the narrator in shaping the narrative world, seeing the mediation process as essential for defining narrativity. In his work, Schmid refers to such German critics and scholars as Käte Friedemann, Friedrich Spielhagen, and Franz Stanzel.

<sup>23</sup> Discussing the structuralist concept of narrativity, Schmid mentions Tzvetan Todorov’s approach, according to which what is narrated and how it is organized is more important than how the narrative is mediated by a narrator.

perspective on the concept of narrativity because it takes into account both the role of the narrator and the structural organization of the narrative.

The key statements of this subchapter can be summarized in the following way: firstly, narratology is a humanities discipline that focuses on the study of narrative and its peculiarities and provides an effective terminological framework for the interpretation of literary representation of identity. Secondly, narration is the act of telling a story which in this research is treated as a reflection of a narrator's motivations and intentions in his/ her literary story of the self. Further on, narrativity refers to the mode and qualities that define a verbal representation (text/ speech) as a narrative. Thirdly, a story itself is not narrative, but the act of telling the story is. The narrative itself is both the process and the result of storytelling which is shaped by the act of narration and characterized by its narrativity. And finally, narrative, narration, and narrativity are meaningful elements of the process of self-expression because they represent the way people interpret their experiences and construct their individual and collective identities. Narrative, narration, and narrativity will be used as crucial concepts in the current analysis of migrant narrative identity formation and transformation in literature because they are both a direct reflection and a source of human identity processes.

## **8.2 Narrative, Self-Narrative, and Narrative Identity**

The connection between narrative and identity became a central topic to developmental theory and personality psychology in 1970s and early 1980s<sup>24</sup> when works by Silvan S. Tomkins

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<sup>24</sup> In his overview of the development of the discipline, Dan P. McAdams mentions the predecessors of the subject. The scholar refers to Sigmund Freud's study of dream narratives, Carl Jung's universal life myths theory, and Alfred Adlers's contribution to narrative accounts of earlier memories. McAdams acknowledges their impact on the field by initiating foundational discussion on the potential of the narrative structures and content for the development of different dimensions of identity. However, as McAdams claims, "...none of these classic personality theories from

on script theory of personality (“Script Theory”, 1979), Bertram J. Cohler on the self as a narrative project (“Personal Narrative and Life Course”, 1982), and Dan P. McAdams on a life-story model of identity (*Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity*, 1985) brought up the idea of narrative as the crucial element in understanding how people interpret and reinterpret life, endow their experience with meaning and construct their sense of self and self-perception. This interrelation between narrative and identity was further developed and theorized by Paul Ricoeur (“Narrative Identity”, 1991) who believed that narrative is the key concept that serves as an evidence of continuity and sameness of individual identity.

However, the concept of narrative identity is far from being unequivocally defined. Marya Schechtman’s overview of the most influential theories that contributed to the development of the study of narrative and identity shows that the views on the nature of narrative identity distinguish between the proponents of two perspectives. The first group of scholars, represented by Alisdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Paul Ricoeur, believe that selves are constituted by narratives (“our *sense of self* must be narrative”), while the second one, including Katherine Nelson and David Velleman<sup>25</sup>, suggest that selfhood is defined by the capacity to engage in narrative thinking (“the *lives* of selves are narrative in structure”) (“The Narrative Self” 395, italics in original). Supporters of the first view see the self as a result of a continuous narrative; in contrast, the advocates of the second perspective link the process of self-understanding to the ability to structure personal experience following the narrative patterns.

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the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century explicitly imagined human beings as storytellers and human lives as stories to be told” (“Personal Narratives and the Life Story” 243).

<sup>25</sup> Katarzyna Gajek in “Auto/Narrative as a Means of Structuring Human Experience” also mentions Barbara Hardy and David Carr (11).

Although both perspectives present different interpretations of the concept of narrative identity, Marya Schechtman emphasizes the importance of merging the two visions into a holistic approach which will help to study the process of narrative self-formation and transformation from different perspectives (395). This view of narrative and identity is applied in this study because it is sometimes impossible to define whether narrative identity is a product of the inherent need to tell a story about the self or a result of perceiving one's self in terms of received narrative patterns.

In the context of the study of the relationships between narrative and identity, and especially of their literary representation, it is important to discuss the concepts of self-narrative (or as some scholar define it, self-referential narrative, self life writing, or autonarrative) and autofiction because, in the case of migrant authors', it is their lived experience that becomes the basis for their self-redefining in narrative, even if the narrated events, characters, and situations are fictitious or embellished with imaginative elements.

Among all the variety of forms, experiences, and accounts that narrative can take and convey, self-narrative has to be distinguished as its subcategory which focuses on the author's perspective on the experienced events, feelings, and memories, and offers a more personalized account of the narrated story. As Katarzyna Gajek writes, "...auto/narratives become a tool by which people explain events external to them, representing their causal relationships, and understand themselves as the main characters" (13). Defining the main features of autonarrative, Gajek names retrospective, causal connections, and self-reflection as its key elements:

Auto/narrative organizes the experiences of an individual, anchoring him/ her in the past and making his/ her life purposeful and meaningful. A man telling his/ her own story cites one possible version of it, depending on the context in which he/ she is located. The

narrator reconstructs the events by presenting the links between them, which allows for rendering the processual nature of the phenomena and provides the internal dynamics of the narrative. This retrospection is accompanied by an ongoing reflection of the narrator who continually interprets his/ her own biography, trying to explain the personal motives or the reasons for particular situations. He/ she explains, comments and valorizes past events from the current point of view undertaking, sometimes explicitly, the effort for arranging the past and the present perspective. In this way, the narrative documents the changes taking place in the biographical identity of the individual and the social process of its development. (13-14)

A similar opinion on the narrational characteristics of self-narrative is expressed by Regina E. Fabry in “What is Self-Narrative?” where the scholar emphasizes two crucial features: first, self-narrative is self-referential, which rests upon the interrelation between the narrating “I” and the narrated “I” and the narrator’s reference to his/ her episodic memories; second, self-narrative is always intertwined with other narratives and normatively constrained sociocultural practices (9-13).

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s definition of self life writing deepens the understanding of the phenomenon and presents it as a complex concept:

Our working definition of *self life writing* assumes that it is not a single unitary genre or form, “autobiography.” Rather, the historically situated practices of self-representation may take many guises as narrators selectively engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, narrators are at the same time in dialogue with the processes and archives of memory and the expectations of disparate others. Ever constrained by occasion and convention, and

ever contingent, adaptable, fluid, and dynamic..., self life writing shares features with the novel, biography, and history. It can employ the dialogue, plot, setting, and density of language of the novel. It may incorporate biographies of others in its representations of family, friends, historical or religious figures. It projects multiple histories – of communities, families, nations, movements. Even as it does so, however, it maintains its distinctive relationship to the referential world in its temporality. (18)

Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Kapka Kassabova's *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, Lev Golinkin's *A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka* or Andrei Codrescu's *An Involuntary Genius in America's Shoes (and What Happened Afterwards)* can serve as illustrations of how effective self-writing as a narrative practice is in reconstructing a migrant's identity in literary space. Through self-writing the narrators of these books revise their past, discuss the questions of belonging, and redefine their image of the self by addressing their personal stories and individual experiences of migration.

Another important concept for the analysis of the literary representation of identity in migrant writings is autofiction, which, although close to the idea of self-narrative, is a distinct strategy of self-expression and self-study. The term, coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, is used in literary criticism to describe a blend of autobiography and fiction: "Fiction, made up of events and facts that are strictly real" (Doubrovsky, qtd. in Vilain 5). Unlike autobiography, which requires factual precision and usually covers the duration of the author's lifespan, autofiction focuses on key events of the writer's life that help to develop and deliver the main message of the story. The authenticity of characters, settings, and events is nonessential as they perform the function of the supporting elements of the narrative and only serve the initial

purpose. By blurring the boundaries between real and imagined life (the protagonist of the story may have the same name as the author, may go through the same experiences and visit the same places), autofiction makes it possible for a writer to explore difficult topics without being limited by time, place or factual truth. Commenting on the presence of imagined elements in autofiction, Brooke Warner, a writer and a publisher, comes to this conclusion:

Just because memoir must start with the truth doesn't mean that fiction doesn't start there, too. Fiction does not mean "not true" just because the characters are portrayals and the scenes are ostensibly made up. Fiction is often drawn more from the imagination than from lived experience, but the characters who populate novels are not fake (they're always drawn from the author's understanding of their own world), and fiction has always been a vehicle for poignant observation about real people, human dynamics, and societal and cultural dilemmas.

Analyzing the nature of autofiction, Hywel Dix also pays attention to the tension between real and imagined worlds that authors combine in their writings. In Dix's opinion, by introducing uncertainty into the story, a writer confronts the readers with the dilemma of truth understood in a factual sense, and the revelation of symbolic truths, presented through fictive narrative in the first person (6). That is to say, in Kendall Walton's<sup>26</sup> terms, the content of fictional narrative asks to be imagined while the content of non-fiction asks to be believed (41). Prioritizing the author's experiences and feelings over the veracity of the narrated events, autofiction focuses on the subjective perspective of the narrator and his or her personal understanding of the world allowing

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<sup>26</sup> Kendall Walton is an American philosopher who in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* explores the idea of representations in art. According to Walton, art is inseparably related to make-believe games in which fiction and imagination play a crucial role. Literature is not an exception. Walton is convinced, literary texts serve as representations of the real world which readers engage with through the imaginative process.

him/ her to explore what could have happened instead of what did happen. “Autofiction raises the possibility of non-referential, non-object orientated form of autobiographical writing. As such it may be considered as autobiographical fiction written in the subjunctive mood” (Dix 6). In other words, it is less important to narrate the events that really happened to the narrating character. Instead, focus is placed on the way the protagonist responds to unknown or even fictitious environments.

Among the twelve books by Eastern and Central European migrant writers chosen for this study, *Madame Mephisto* by A.M. Bakalar, *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova, *Stroika with the London View* by William Foreignerski, *A Replacement Life* by Boris Fishman or *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka can be viewed as examples of how the autofictional narrative strategy is used in migrant literature as a means of exploring the complex nature of migrant identity. The elements of fiction that the authors of these books introduce into their stories make the literary expressions of identity more vivid and intensify the representation of the emotional experience of the narrator. Autofiction is often used by migrant writers because it provides them with a flexible narrative structure which allows authors to examine the challenges of migration at a closer range and at the same time distance themselves from a strictly autobiographical self-focus. By blending fact and fiction, migrant writers go beyond the limitations imposed by such genres as autobiography or memoir and use the potential of the narrative to create a literary space that broadens interpretation of and reflection on the dilemmas that migration poses. Thus, migrant literature created by migrant authors has to be viewed as a manifestation of their personal reality. Regardless of whether it refers to actual events that happened in an author’s life or is just an artistic and fictitious interpretation of the theme of

migration. The experience of the writer (even if he or she is apparently absent from the text) is there as a part of the narrator's voice.

The power of narrative to serve as both a means of self-expression and self-interpretation is also reflected in another important concept that emerged at the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and literature and proved helpful in the current study, namely narrative identity. The discussion initiated by Paul Ricoeur who focused on the philosophical exploration of how individuals construct their identities through narratives was later developed by Dan P. McAdams who researched the concept of narrative identity from the psychological perspective, paying special attention to the role of life stories in personality development. For Paul Ricoeur, narrative identity is "the sort of identity to which a human being has access thanks to the mediation of the narrative function" ("Narrative Identity" 73) which provides a person with the sense of continuity and development. In a similar vein the concept of narrative identity is coined in Antony Giddens's *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Although the term "narrative identity" does not appear directly in the scholar's argument on identity, his concept of reflexivity, understood as "a central feature of the structuring of self-identity," appears similar to Ricoeur's narrative identity. "The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" implies the use of self narrative in constructing the self understood as "a reflexively organised endeavor" (5).

However, the most useful definition of narrative identity was developed by Dan P. McAdams who views it as

an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person's life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning. Complete with setting, scenes, characters,

plots, and themes, narrative identity combines a person's reconstruction of his or her personal past with an imagined future in order to provide a subjective historical account of one's own development, an instrumental explanation of a person's most important commitments in the realms of work and love, and a moral justification of who a person was, is, and will be. ("Narrative Identity" 100)

Literature becomes the space where self-narrative and narrative identity intertwine because both serve as the means of self-construction and reconstruction through storytelling. With the help of self-narrative authors make sense of their experiences, while narrative identity uses these experiences to create a coherent story of the self. In migrant literature self-narrative and narrative identity become key tools of migrants' self-reinvention because they allow them to grasp the changes in their image of the self that migration evokes. In such a way it becomes possible to look at a migrant's identity as a creation in process and explore its complex nature through imagined and real stories that migrant authors tell about themselves and other migrants.

### **8.3 Sociocultural Pragmatics of Narrative**

Aside from being a means of individual self-expression, self-narrative is argued to be socially, culturally, and politically predetermined because it reflects the way in which society functions, norms and traditions shape people's behavior, and power hierarchies dictate the interaction between particular social groups. In the chapter "Personal Narratives and the Life Story" Dan P. McAdams claims that "Life stories speak directly to how people come to terms with their interpersonal worlds, with society, and with history and culture" (257). This view gains special importance in the context of migrant literature. Intensified by migrants' experience

of change, narrative becomes a mirror of redefinition of social roles and cultural adaptation which inevitably lead to a migrant's identity transformation.

McAdams accentuates the social component of narrative because it is people who tell the stories and it is people who are the recipients of the stories. Moreover, narrative is predetermined by social relations because it is told "in accord with societal expectations and norms" (245) and cannot be interpreted outside a social context which shapes the narrative identity of a narrator, defines the meaning and intention of the narrative, and establishes possible patterns of the recipients' reception. Paul John Eakin expresses a similar opinion by claiming that the process of self-narration is "a rule-governed regime and that the rules are enforced" (24). The researcher states that self-manifestation is accompanied by the presence of social constraints and that "...our sense of autonomy, of total control, is something of an illusion when it comes to talking about ourselves. The source of our narrative identities...is not some mysterious interiority, but other people (25).

The social component of narrative identity is one of the central topics of Carol Fleisher Feldman's research. In her analysis of the interplay between individual and group narratives, "Narratives of National Identity as Group Narratives: Patterns of Interpretive Cognition," Feldman comes to the conclusion that individual and group narratives are in a reciprocal connection and define and influence each other simultaneously. In their case it is impossible to say which ones come first and dominate because, as "individual selves are mere internal copies of social culture", "social structures are a mere projection of private mental life" (131). Therefore, Feldman suggests that individual and group narratives should be taken into consideration all at once because in most cases people write and rewrite their personal and collective stories at the same time (132).

Margaret R. Somers is also inclined to think that narrative as well as narrative identity are, first and foremost, socially defined. In the article “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach”, Somers draws a connection between narrative, narrativity, and social identity construction, claiming that the former are the primary tools of social self-expression: “...it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” and what matters is “that all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making” (606). In Somer’s opinion, narrative defines the way people act and provides explanations for many historic, behavioral and social occurrences because any social structure known to people “...from making families, to coping with illness, to carrying out strikes and revolutions is at least in part a result of numerous crosscutting relational storylines in which social actors find or locate themselves” (607). Somers is convinced that:

... social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life... people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that “experience” is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives. (614)

In Somers's opinion, a narrative of an individual is never a product of a unique, inimitable nature created in isolated conditions, but it is always a variant of the plurality of plots, scenarios, and patterns which the society a person is brought up in or surrounded by has to offer. This is why for McAdams, narratives are also cultural texts because they "mirror the culture wherein the story is created and told. Stories live in culture" (McAdams, "Personal Narratives and the Life Story" 246). Culture itself can be viewed as a form of narrative which provides people who identify themselves with a given culture with particular narrative patterns, strategies, and tools they use to express themselves and differentiate themselves from people from other cultural groups (cultural identity expressed in narrative). As Mark Freeman puts it, "'my story' can never be wholly mine, alone, because I define and articulate my experience with and among others, through the various narrative models – including literary genres, plot structures, metaphoric themes, and so on – my culture provides" (287).

In this connection, it is important to emphasize the significance of language which plays a crucial role in the processes of self-manifestation and self-distinction. First of all, the concepts of narrative, including self-narrative, and narrative identity, are inseparably related to language which, by providing a narrator with a toolset of linguistic means to tell a story, makes narrative possible. Secondly, language as a deeply cultural construct ("...language is a cultural tool" (Wertsch, "Narrative as a Cultural Tool for Representing the Past" 73)) is loaded with specific meanings, typical for a particular culture, which influence the narrator's mindset and worldview by shaping their linguistic image of the world and making it the marker of their cultural identity.

And, finally, any narrative as well as narrative identity is linguistically determined. As David Evans points out in the introduction to *Language and Identity: Discourse in the World*, "...self-concept or identity are both created through language and expressed by language" (4).

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle express a similar idea: the researchers claim that the concept of self-identity (and consequently all of its expressions such as cultural identity, place identity, narrative identity, etc.) is fundamentally rooted in language which at the same time limits and defines the way people understand themselves and the world around them:

We may like to suppose that there is some “me” outside language or that there is some way of thinking about ourselves which involves a non-linguistic “me”. But the *idea* of this non-linguistic “me” must find itself in language – beginning with the name itself, or with the words ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’, ‘myself’ and so on. We cannot, in any *meaningful* way, escape the fact that we are *subject to* language. (126, italicized in the original)

Further in the chapter, Bennett and Royle come to the conclusion that even Cartesian “I think, therefore I am” is determined in language because it is language that defines “the I” and “the I think” (127). This is why thinking about one’s self is impossible outside the categories of language, and consequently, culture.

Since, as it is stated above, narrative and narrative identity are socially, culturally and linguistically loaded, it is also important to recognize narrative as a tool of power for, as Dan P. McAdams states, “It is painfully clear that life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony in the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are situated” (“Personal Narratives and the Life Story” 247). McAdams’s elucidating quote suggests that it is power elites who by granting privilege to certain narrative modes, plots and meanings establish dominance of a particular type of stories over other, less appropriate ones and less fitting into the ideological framework. In such a way, narrative is turned into a tool of power with whose help the control over which stories are heard, valued, and praised is exercised and narration (what to tell and how to do it)

becomes predetermined. “The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property and domination” (Bennett and Royle 52). Many researchers have studied the relationship between narrative and power (Michael Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Antonio Gramsci *Prison Notebooks*; Edward Said *Orientalism*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*), and they all come to the conclusion which is best summarized in the following saying – “Those who tell the stories rule the world”. In this respect it is important to refer to Eakin’s reflections on social, cultural and power components of self-narrative and narrative identity according to which the latter are socially, culturally, and ideologically governed and as a result “...we are embedded in a narrative identity system whether we like it or not. Our social arrangements ... assume that we all have narrative identities and that we can display them on demand” (16). Eakin is convinced that narrative identity is a sign of conformity and people are judged by what they present as their narrative identity. In the chapter “Talking about Ourselves: the Rules of the Game”, John Paul Eakin argues that normalcy is determined by the power structures, and a failure to articulate a stable narrative account of one’s self, which aligns with the socially- and culturally accepted norms, has drastic consequences: “The verdict of those for whom we perform is virtually axiomatic: no satisfactory narrative (or no narrative at all), no self...” (44). In such a way, marginalized individuals and social groups whose narratives do not correspond with the ones imposed by the hegemonial discourse and therefore do not fulfill the requirements of normality are bound to be, in John Paul Eakin’s words, “de-storied” and as a result “de-served” which equals to loss of life and existence (46).

The imposition of narrative structures by a dominating group evokes resistance from marginalized layers of society, often migrant groups, and gives voice to their suppressed

discourses and untold stories. In the introduction to *Routledge Handbook of Counter-Narratives* Klarissa Lueg et al. define counter-narrative as stories which resist hegemonic narratives (which are or are perceived as more powerful) and reveal marginalized views (4). The researchers claim that

This simple rule indicates the assumption of two narratives in confrontation and apprehension. Most affirmatively, counter-narratives can be interpreted as creative, innovative forces fostering beneficial societal change; forces holding productive potential for progress, development, as well as for ethical issues such as justice and accessible resources. From a more dialectic point of view, counter-narratives cannot be reduced to emancipatory, liberating or constructive stories. Instead, they can be hostile, and destabilizing... Narrative and counter-narrative, as notions, help us naming and categorizing how social groups position their sense-making processes vis-à-vis each other, and help us observing how this “map” of narrative interpretations shift form and position through social negotiations. (4)

In this case, counter-narratives serve as means of regaining voice and a right to tell one’s own story, to assert their identities, to manifest their existence and, to use Eakin’s concept, be re-storied and re-selved<sup>27</sup>.

Exploring the sociocultural pragmatics of narrative, we come to the conclusion that narrative, and therefore narrative identity, can be viewed not only as a marker of personal characteristics of a narrator, but also as a reflection of sociocultural peculiarities of the

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<sup>27</sup> “Telling stories invests text with feeling, gives voice to those who were taught to hide their emotions. Hearing stories invites hearers to participate, challenging their assumptions, jarring their complacency, lifting their spirits, lowering their defenses.

Stories are useful tools for the underdog because they invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story’s point, and test it against his or her own version of reality” (Delgado 2440).

environment in which the narrator's self has been shaped. It is possible to claim that self-narrative is not an isolated phenomenon, but is socially, culturally, and politically predetermined. As a means of migrants' self-expression, narrative is a tool of individual and group manifestation which allows to reinterpret the self-concept and the notion of belonging and, in the context of living in a new sociocultural framework, to challenge the existing dominant narratives.

#### **8.4 Narrative and Identity in Literature**

The views presented above make it possible to conclude that, if identity is both constituted by the narratives people construct about themselves (regardless of whether these narratives are told, written, or performed) and manifested by those narratives, then literary narrative can be analyzed as a medium of the narrator's identity formation and transformation. In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle look at the nature of personal identity through the prism of "...literature's capacity to question, defamiliarize and even transform the sense of who or what we are" (124). This unique ability of literature to be "a space of exhilarating, even anarchic openness and imaginative or transformational possibility" (124) makes narrative a universal means of self-reflection and self-exploration.

Mentioned earlier in this chapter, the perspectives on narrative identity offer an adequate explanation why literature is a valuable source of studying identity processes. As people create their own life stories imitating the literary forms and elements they get inspired by (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 114), they also derive meaning from and construct their identities in the space of their personal stories. The latter in most cases is at the core of literature because "...we cannot but strive to give our lives meaning or substance, and ... this means that we understand

ourselves inescapably in narrative” (Taylor 51). This valuable elucidation allows us to approach the notion of personal identity in terms of what literary texts themselves suggest about it because, as Bennett and Royle put it, “Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also in stories” (Bennett and Royle 52). Narrative is the essence of literature, and, therefore, it not only makes the fabric of a literary text, but also functions as a means of interpretation and meaning making of lived experience. In “Life as Narrative” Jerome Bruner argues that narrative seems to be the only adequate means to describe “lived time” because there is no other temporal form that succeeds in capturing the sense and value of experience (692). And although there are many media that can be considered a narratological statement such as films, comic strips or even computer games, literature, or, in Fotis Jannidis’s terms, narrative texts, turns out to be the most effective in conveying the lived time (35). This happens because literature unites events, characters, and places into an organized and meaningful whole using temporal order, causal relationships, purpose, and intention as main components to structure the storytelling.

As it was stated before, the self is constituted by narratives, thus literature becomes the space in which identity issues are most clearly raised, most fully explored, and most provocatively articulated (Bennett and Royle, 125). This makes it possible to claim that narrative is a fundamental device that gives form and meaning to people’s experience and that stories that people tell about themselves and about other people help to shape their sense of who they are, who others are, and how they relate to each other. In this context, narrative identity, which is created by and expressed in the integrative story of the self (McAdams, “Personal Narratives and

the Life Story” 242), is an inseparable part of literary studies and an effective tool of interpretation of narrative texts which mirror the processes of self-reflection and self-exploration.

Viewing an individual’s identity as a story about the self, this dissertation uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s narratological concepts of chronotope and speech representation, the fundamental elements of a literary text defined by Bakhtin, as the means to study literary reconstructions of migrants’ narrative identity. Bakhtin believed that the unity of time and space in a literary text lay the foundation for the entire narrative to be built. Time-space relations in his theory not only refer to the time and space that the characters of the story experience, but also serve as a key element of the interpretation of the literary work: they provide the narrative with the coherence and unity, reflect social and cultural contexts, and shape the image of the characters through their interaction with the created environment. “Every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of chronotope” (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 258). “The chronotope”, Bakhtin says, “as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” 85). So, if the intersection of time and space is the beginning of any narrative, then it is possible to claim that migrants’ story of the self are anchored in time and space, and their narrative identity is chronotopic.

Another basic category of any literary text, according to Bakhtin, is speech representation (“вербализация наррации”). Defined as a narrator’s way to depict a character’s thoughts, speech, and the manner of communication, speech representation turns the language of a literary work into both the object and the medium of interpretation. Thus, language for Bakhtin is not

only a combination of linguistic features but also a narrative strategy to verbalize different intentions, meanings, beliefs, and values that literary characters express and embody: “Language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete conception of the world” (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 293). Language becomes a means of the representation of the characters’ consciousness, social status, and emotional state in the verbal narrative: “Each word tastes of the context... Words bring with them the contexts where they have lived... all words and forms are populated by intentions (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 293). Following Bakhtin’s theories it is possible to claim that in the context of migrants’ self-narratives, which serve as a medium of migrants’ narrative identity, language, together with space and time, becomes a fundamental element of migrants’ stories of the self. Thus, analyzing them as basic narrative strategies that migrant’s employ to recreate their identity in narrative is an effective means to study the processes of identity reinvention in migrant literature.

### **8.5 Literary Narrative and Migrant Identity**

Although in the contemporary scholarly discourse the relationship between literature and social science is seen as complementary rather than antagonistic, certain schools of academic thought might underestimate and devalue the potential of literature in being an effective means in the study of human nature, cultural context, and social interaction. For instance, positivist researchers in social sciences often prioritize quantitative empirical methods and disregard literary methods as unreliable, subjective, and lacking proof. Traditional historians question the veracity of literary works and their value for establishing the objective truth, while behavioral psychologists discard literature for its fictional nature. Despite such skeptical views, literature’s

unique capacity to grasp and portray the essence of human experiences has become particularly evident in the context of migration. In the Preface to *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, Russell King et al. emphasize literature's exceptional power of nuanced depiction of the experience of migration unattainable for scientifically-based forms of social research:

The social-scientific research, immensely rich and diversified in its own way, is often limited in its objectives, aiming to shed light on some single aspect of migration such as the decision to leave, residential location or arrival, or socio-linguistics. It fails to capture the essence of what it is like to *be* a migrant; and be, or not be, part of a community, a nation, a society – cut off from history and from a sense of place. It fails to portray nostalgia, anomie, exile, rootlessness, restlessness...“non-academic” literature, written often (but by no means exclusively) by migrants, can offer powerful insights into the nature of migration process and the experience of being a migrant. Literary accounts focus in a very direct and penetrating way on issues such as place reception, landscape symbolism, senses of displacement and transformation, communities lost and created anew, exploitation, nostalgia, attitudes towards return, family relationships, self-denial and self-discovery, and many more. Such insights are often infinitely more subtle and meaningful than studies of migrants which base themselves on cold statistics or on the depersonalized, aggregate responses to questionnaire surveys. (ix-x)

Narrative, which is the essence of literature, becomes the main tool of literary expression of migrant experience. Initiated in a search for psychological, emotional, and physical relief from the stress that the process of relocation causes, self-narrative is transformed into a practice of reinvention of one's identity, meaning making, and life-organizing. Yvonne Völkl refers to the therapeutic quality of narrative which helps migrants “to give meaning to the experiences of the

past and to find some sort of guidance in the complex world around them. Those who take up paper and pencil start to express in writing their particular situation, their torn up memory, and their questioned identity” (141). Völkl is convinced that the process of relocation is a traumatic experience for most people. Dinesh Bhugra and Matthew Becker’s believe that migration “involves the loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support networks” (19) and leads to cultural bereavement which narrative helps to overcome. “In the course of the self-narration, the often traumatic experiences are ordered and a certain sense is attributed to them” (Völkl 141). Thus, the process of self-transformation, evoked by migration, gains therapeutic qualities when captured and performed in literature because the latter has the power to create space for self-reflection and emotional healing.

As an innate ability of human beings, narrative accompanies a person throughout the whole course of his or her life whose every moment gets reflected in narrative and is interpreted by its means. Narrative is stimulated by life occurrences and is defined by them, particularly at such momentous and transformative periods of one’s life as migration. In the chapter “God’s Fate” in *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*<sup>28</sup>, Aleksandar Hemon, a migrant author himself, captures the interplay between narrative and migration in the following way:

Migration generates narratives; each displacement is a tale; each tale unlike any other...each getting here is a narrative entanglement of memory and history and emotions and pain and joy and guilt and ideas undone and reborn. Each story contains everything

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<sup>28</sup> *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* is a valuable source for the current study of literary representation of migrant identity in migrant narratives because as a collection of essays written by migrant writers it enriches the analyses of literary texts with an authentic perspective and depth. Its contributors refer to migration as to an intimate, emotional, and transformative journey rather than to a factual physical relocation in space and discuss its various expressions from being labeled as “a displaced person” to being given a new, American, name.

I've ever cared about in literature and life, mine or anyone else's, each story complements all the other ones – the world of refugees is a vast narrative landscape.

(non-paginated)

In *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration* Russell King et al. claim that all literary accounts of migrant experience (both fictional and lived) are equally important (x), however, in this research, the experience of migrant writers reflected in their narratives is accentuated because their true stories endow the discussion about migrant identity with authenticity, credibility, and accuracy:

You can't write meaningfully or honestly about anything, even things that have nothing to do with your own life, if you haven't yet confronted who you are. My refugee experience does not define who I am, but for better or for worse it has informed how I see myself, how I see how others see me, and how I want to be seen. (Tran, non-paginated)

Migrant literature becomes a medium of a migrant's identity invention and reinvention because migration evokes the need to update one's story about oneself. As Eakin rightly notices, "Despite our illusions of autonomy and self-determination – '*I write my story, I say who I am*' – we do not invent our identities out of whole cloth. Instead we draw on the resources of the cultures we inhabit to shape them, resources that specify what it means to be a man, a woman, a worker, a person in the settings where we live our lives' (22, italics in original). In the conditions of sociocultural transition, it is literature that is capable of providing migrants with the space and the means to reevaluate every aspect of their identity system and to make a new one under the influence of their new environment.

Migrants' self-representations in literature are multidimensional: through writing migrants address various issues related to their migrant experience. Portrayed in their narratives

as active protagonists of their life stories or as victims of circumstances, migrant authors discuss social and cultural challenges they face, describe their self-reinvention in a new language and negotiate their ethnic and geographical belonging. The narrative identity of a migrant, which comes into being as a result of a migrant's self-narration triggered by his/ her physical relocation in space, emerges out of and combines all dimensions of personal identity which get redefined and reinterpreted in the new environment. As a social construct, the narrative identity of a migrant reflects the interconnection between individual and group identities which simultaneously redefine each other. Migrant literature mirrors these social interconnections and reflects the cultural transformations that migrants undergo. In their texts, the interaction and interconnection between home culture and host culture is omnipresent: intensified by the natural mechanism of comparison (starting with people's appearance, the way they dress, how they move, what they eat, etc.)<sup>29</sup> migrant's literary self-reflections show how their image of the self is being reevaluated. Narrative identity of a migrant is also influenced by the linguistic challenges that they encounter abroad. Forced to switch into a language of a host country to deliver a story about the self, most migrants lose the fluency of their narrative identity: limited by the means that the new evolving linguistic image of the world has to offer, migrants are often unable to construct a presentable account of their narrative identity in a foreign language. Their struggle for self-expression related to the acquisition of a new language is often accompanied by the unfavorable change of their position in the social hierarchy which results in the migrants' feeling deprived of voice and of the self. In the transition from a dominant group to a minority one, the status of the narrator also shifts: instead of being a part of a prevailing discourse, a migrant's

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<sup>29</sup> "Migrants' narratives provide insight into conceptions of the self and the other within a cultural context, as narrators affirm aspects of their own identity and of the identity of others via the presentation and evaluation of behaviors" (Golden and Lanza 295).

narratives start representing an alternative one, which very often goes hand in hand with tagging one's migrant story of the self as counter-narrative. Literature, which serves as a medium that captures and reflects these complex aspects of migrant experience, offers a unique view on a migrant's identity. By portraying it as a product of personal, social, cultural, and linguistic challenges, literature provides space for migrants' self-expression and delivers migrants' stories to the whole world.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

The study of migrant literary narratives is a useful tool in investigating the process of migrant identity formation and transformation. Literary narration is capable of reflecting the hybrid nature of migrant experience and the multilayered structure of the migrant's self. Narrative becomes a therapeutic practice through which migrants negotiate and renegotiate their story of the self, reconcile opposites, make meaning of their life, and structure their experience. The evolution of identity captured in self-narrative depicts migrant identity as a dynamic, constantly changing entity, which adapts and reshapes in response to new contexts and experiences. Aside from being viewed as a reflection of a migrant's personal experience and self-formation, narrative identity also indicates a sociocultural background which shapes a migrant's story of the self and predetermines the way they see themselves and interpret the world around them.

Migrant literature is in essence a powerful narrative about self-reinvention that portrays the experience of migration not only as a physical relocation to a different place but also as an intimate, emotional, and transformative journey to the new self that the physical relocation only

evokes. Self-narrative is the migrants' means not only of dealing with the new reality, but also of re-asserting themselves in the new world. As Salman Rushdie says, "Those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts" ("One Thousand Days in a Balloon" 432).

## **Chapter Nine: Narrative and Migrant's Identity in Kapka Kassabova's *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria***

*I come from Sofia. I was initially happy, then with the onset of consciousness unhappy, then with the advent of adolescence wretchedly miserable, and finally, in the last throes of my domestic incarceration, convinced I was born in the wrong place and had to escape at all costs. In other words, an ordinary childhood followed by an ordinary adolescence, followed by an ordinary emigration — more or less.*

– Kapka Kassabova, *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*

Telling stories, an innate mode of verbalizing and passing on experience, is one of the oldest media of communication through which people not only share knowledge but also understand the world and, ultimately, themselves. Irrespective of the form of the story, distinct events built into a coherent timeline create a narrative which brings meaning into experiences that represent a human life. Through integrating one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future into the connected story of the self, a person forges narrative identity which provides him or her with the sense of continuity, development, and purpose. Literature, which emerged from the human innate need to tell stories, is inseparable from the concept of narrative identity. With the help of its narrative form, literature contributes to self-understanding by reflecting identity processes of an author and creating space for the analysis of identity formation and transformation.

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the narrative representation of the identity dilemmas that the narrator of Kapka Kassabova's *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* experiences as a migrant who returns to the motherland after 14 years in emigration. The book is based on the author's life story and explores how revisiting the places of her childhood forces the narrator to revise her understanding of home, belonging, and the self. Narrative, which according to Paul Ricoeur, is the essence of identity of literary characters<sup>30</sup>, becomes Kapka Kassabova's central means of the narrator's identity-(re)invention. Portrayed as a complex unity of intertwined components that are questioned and redefined during the narrator's visits to Bulgaria, Kapka's narrative identity reflects how returning home launches the process of her self-narrative, affecting every dimension of her migrant identity. Viewing narrative as the main literary device that Kapka Kassabova employs to explore the identity dilemmas that migrants experience in relation to their homeland, this chapter focuses on the literary depiction of the key aspects of a migrant's identity, such as place, language, and memory, that get reinterpreted and redefined through the means of narrative. Place, memory and language become Kassabova's main tools of her literary self-reconstruction.

### **9.1 Narrative Strategies**

*Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* consists of two parts ("Childhood" and "Other Misadventures"), preceded by a prologue, and concluding with an epilogue. In the first part of the book (in the title childhood is ironically hinted at as a kind of a

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<sup>30</sup> "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told" (*Oneself as Another* 147-48).

misadventure), the narrator retells the story of her early years in communist Sofia when she lived in a residential apartment complex called Youth 3, went to school and studied at the French College, and enjoyed holiday visits with her relatives in Balchik, Pavlikeni, or Suhindol. The first part of the story covering Kapka childhood ends with her family's migration to New Zealand which opens up a new chapter in her life.

However, readers do not discover much about the narrator's life in emigration. Instead, the second part of the book is dedicated to the portrayal of her return to Bulgaria fourteen years later. Visiting places important for her image of the self, Kapka delves into the vortex of geography, history, and memory, searching for hidden aspects of the self inside (by posing uncomfortable questions without answers) and outside (by presenting her philosophical reflections inspired by the past Bulgaria – and Kapka – belong to):

Travelling around the country where you grew up, lost some of your virginity and a few of your illusions, and left in a nihilistic mood, is a schizoid experience. You are at once an outsider to the present and an insider of the past. Or perhaps the other way round. In the apparent chasm between past and present, you search for answers.

Which is to say that I grew up, went back into the woods, shuffled the leaves with my walking stick, and here are the pictures I found. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 4)

Surprisingly, the narrative of a migrant told from the perspective of return to the motherland is as effective (or even more effective) for a nuanced depiction of migrant identity dilemmas as a narrative focusing on assimilation, acculturation, and living abroad. The latter emphasizes the difference between the migrants, their cultural traditions and social norms, and the host society; while the former illuminates how living in immigration changes one's

perception of and relationship with their place of origin, highlighting the shifts in their identity that separate them from their own people: home among strangers, a stranger among his own.

The narrator of *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* by Kapka Kassabova is the author herself. By presenting a personal account of events based on her own recollections, feelings and opinions, Kassabova addresses her readers through the subjective narrator who invites the audience into a more intimate and deep conversation about the life after migration, migrants' past and present, and a never-ending search for the lost self. Focused on the recounting of her personal and familial history, the first-person narrator manages to create a broader image of what it means to be a migrant by exploring her inner transformations through the reference to the changes Bulgaria undergoes.

The subjective perspective is a determinant feature of Kassabova's narrative. Using subjectivity as the main mode of narrating the events, Kassabova places a migrant's emotional experience of the outer world in the center of the story, accentuating the importance of the personal perception and emotional involvement for understanding the challenges of migration. Such a narrative strategy allows Kassabova to value and validate an individual perspective of a migrant as a defining element in the narrative construction of identity which emerges in personal stories about a migrant's interactions in and with new environments.

A mixture of memoir and travelog, which is the essence of *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, allows Kassabova to use the narrative flexibility of such a combination of genres. On the one hand, it provides space for the narrator's monologous self-reflection, but on the other hand, it turns the narrative into a conversation

between fellow travelers who share a journey in time and space by engaging readers into her inner world.

Aside from influencing the readers' perception of the text, a subjective perspective of the narrator also determines other elements of the narrative such as plot, setting, and characters.

Presented through the narrator's perspective, her life story does not follow a straightforward and chronological order. Quite the contrary, her episodic and non-linear, and at times even fragmented narration accentuates the most important moments and events in the narrator's life that were crucial for her self-definition and the worldview. Such selectivity also mirrors the often chaotic and unpredictable nature of memory which is not bound by temporal, contextual or other constraints and operates by its own mechanisms and patterns. By focusing on the particular episodes of her life, Kassabova lays the foundation for the narrative identity of the narrator whose story about the self is deeply grounded in the events from the past which still influence her perception of the present. It is important to emphasize that the first part of the story is more chronologically and structurally ordered than the second part. The development of the plot line in "Childhood" is rather traditional with the introduction of the setting and characters (presented through the prism of the narrator's perspective), gradual building of the conflict of the story (the explanation of the internal and external circumstances that led to migration and caused the heroine's inner lack of identity continuity and coherence), and climax (the moment the family decides to migrate). All that creates the feeling that the narrator sees that period of her life as stable, predictable, logical, and easy to understand. Years later, in one of their reminiscing conversations about the past, Rado will say "...it was simple" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 183), implying that their decision to migrate complicated their life. Although the

melancholic tone and the philosophical mood of the narration does not change throughout the whole book, the confidence with which Kassabova narrates the events from her childhood is significantly more tangible in this part than in the second one. There, the simplicity of life and structured self-narrative give way to doubts, constant search for the self, and the lack of answers. The second part of the story, which is supposed to present falling action (what happened after the climax), and denouement (the resolution of the conflict), becomes episodic and fragmented, signaling the narrator's confusion and bewilderment. As a migrant who returns to the country of her origin after 14 years of living abroad, Kapka arrives in Bulgaria she does not know only to realize how much she herself has changed. Puzzled with the numerous transformations Bulgaria (and herself) has undergone, the narrator's thoughts move from one change to another as if making notes and looking for the signs of continuity that would help the narrator's migrant identity to build itself upon and resume the connection with the narrator's Bulgarian self. The narrative does not provide the readers with the solution of this internal conflict that the narrator experiences either, suggesting that migration launches irreversible processes that continually redefine the self, leaving a migrant in a perpetual state of re-evaluation, adaptation, and search. Analyzing the detached, nostalgic, and at times even brooding narration and the non-linear structure of "Other Misadventures", Gabriele Linke points to the ambiguous nature of Kassabova's narrative which is far from presenting a clearly ordered story of one's life: "Although she starts and ends in Sofia closing a spatial circle, her narrative is neither linear nor decidedly circular, and its parts refuse to fall neatly into a structure and chronology" (34). It may seem that Kapka Kassabova privileges content over structure and what is being narrated becomes more important than how it is being narrated; however, her many-layered and fragmented

narration mirrors the nature of her migrant experience and migrant identity and is never entirely here and now or there and then (it is rather both here and now and there and then) and thus captures the in-betweenness, hybridity, and heterogeneity of a migrant's sense of self, constantly navigating between the past and the present, homeland and new land, belonging and standing apart.

If the setting of the first part of the book recreates the narrator's life in communist Bulgaria, explaining the conditions that made Kassabova's family leave the country and exposing the core of the narrator's self-identity, then the second part of the book recreates a migrant's search for the lost self through the metaphor of returning to the motherland and exploring its history and cultural transformations. The narrative style of Kassabova changes in the second part. Dedicated mostly to pondering about a migrant's fate and continuous displacement, which the narrator's traveling around Bulgaria illustrates, Kassabova spares her readers of the details of the events that take place in the second part focusing only on her inner feelings so that the audience gets the impression of her continuous presence in Bulgaria and can only guess the circumstances of the mentioned episodes of returning. Such indifference to details from the author's side indicates her focus on the inner feelings of the narrator; highlighting the emotional state of the narrator as the primary locus of the exploration of a migrant's identity formation.

The subjectivity of Kapka Kassabova's narrative is inseparably related to the characters that appear in the story. Portrayed fragmentarily, they rather become the reflectors of the social context and the catalysts of the narrator's self-reflection than a well-developed, dynamic and complex actors of the story. This serves the same strategy: as elements of the narrative, they help

the narrator to create a meaningful story of the self in which every aspect contributes to the protagonist's self-defining and self-understanding. People that Kassabova mentions in her narrative, and therefore considers influential and important for her identity, provide an explanation to the narrator's interpretation of the events of the past and the present and shape her vision of the self. The reference to her family and relatives becomes Kapka's way to portray the core of who she is. Returning to her family history allows the narrator to set the missed causal connection between the past and the present and reinterpret the events that, as a child, she took for granted. On the example of one particular family, Kassabova manages to outline a more general picture of life in Bulgaria in the 1970s-1980s. The presence of friends and acquaintances from school in the first part of the book helps to tell Kapka's story of adolescent transformation of the self and mirrors the formation of her early social identity. Associating herself with her peers, Kapka experiences the feeling of belonging which compensates for the low economic status of the majority of the population and the political instability within the country.

Mentioning some of her friends in the second part of the book, when Kapka returns to Bulgaria after years abroad, not only helps to revise the past from the present perspective and reflect the changed social and political landscape of the country, but also serves as a means of contrasting Kapka and her friends' aspirations about the future in immigration with the reality of their lives.

The presence of her Bulgarian compatriots is the narrator's way to address the issue of a migrant's ethnic self-transformation and the feeling of in-betweenness migration causes. On the one hand, the narrator still sees so many cultural and behavioral features that unite her with Bulgaria and its people, but on the other hand, she feels excluded from the Bulgarian present, unable to bridge the gap that living in immigration created. For the same reason Kassabova's

narrative refers to the image of foreigners with whom she does not fully identify either. A visiting family from Holland, classmates in England, a group of elderly American evangelists in Veliko Tarnovo, – all of them emphasize a different side of Kapka's interaction with her identity. In the first part of the book, foreigners are depicted as if they came from a different planet and their lifestyle evokes in Kapka the feelings of astonishment and inferiority. In the second part of the book, the image of foreigners gets reinterpreted and redefined, suggesting that living in immigration brought the narrator closer to identifying with those whom she considered different. Now, she recognizes a part of herself in her Bulgarian compatriots at the airport, but at the same time, similarly to the foreign tourists, she explores Bulgaria as an exotic country and gets astonished by the changes that took place while she was away. Addressing both of these groups allows Kassabova to comprehend to what extent she herself has changed and to show the readers that a migrant's identity is a combination of the original heritage and the acquired experiences in the new environment and that separating them is impossible.

Kapka Kassabova's narrative style, which combines subjectivity, non-linear and episodic narration with an introspective focus, is a unique literary strategy used to explore a migrant's identity formation and transformation through self-narrative. Unlike Iva Pekarkova, who chooses a third person narration with a more distant perspective on a migrant's emotional experience, Kapka Kassabova places the narrator's self-reflection in the center of the story, making the narrator's voice the only medium of her self-transformation. Such a narrative strategy resembles Eva Hoffman's approach to portraying the migrant experience by focusing on the inner feelings of the narrator with only one difference: while *Lost in Translation* provides the readers with a chronologically structured coherent story which has an ending, *Street without a Name* leaves the

audience with the unsolved dilemma of the narrator's identity conflict and the unanswered question of her belonging. The way Kassabova employs the characters in her narrative corresponds with Marina Lewycka's technique. Although the characters of *Street without a Name* appear in the story sporadically and serve as complementary components of the story while in *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* they become fully-fledged actors with their own storyline and motivation, both authors refer to other people in order to explore their own inner world and complete the missing parts of their identity.

The narrative strategies that Kapka Kassabova employs in *Street without a Name and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* show that self-writing is an essential tool of a migrant's self-exploration and identity formation. It plays a crucial role in constructing different dimensions of migrant identity (including individual and collective, cultural and ethnic, place identity and linguistic identity) as it makes room in a migrant's (life)story for them all. The following subchapters explore the narrator's narrative identity which comes into being at the intersection of place, time, and language which become the main tools of Kassabova's self-reconstruction in writing.

## **9.2 Place Identity**

One of the central themes of *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* is confronting the dilemmas of identity that migrants experience in relation to their connection to place. The country of the narrator's origin, Bulgaria, takes the central place in Kapka's self-definition. Through the reference to the land, its people, the language they speak, the history they share, and the future which awaits their nation, Kassabova addresses the

complex question of belonging, essential for a migrant's identity. The narrative reflects "the geographical uncertainty" of the narrator. Embodied in the series of questions that Kapka asks herself throughout the whole book, this uncertainty is being approached and negotiated. Is it possible to return to something that does not exist anymore? Where do I belong? Is there a chance to cross an invisible but distinctly recognizable inner, psychological border between East and West even if the physical borders have long ago been opened? Is there any place for me in the present of my motherland or will my Bulgarian life forever remain in the Past Simple? These questions, identical to those many migrants from behind the Iron Curtain ask themselves, make Kapka Kassabova's story a compelling exploration of the internal experience of migration that her narrative not only signals but also explores.

At the beginning of the book Kassabova clearly defines the premise of the narrative: in Kapka's search for the true self, she refers to the home country, trying to locate her story into the rich fabric of the country's past, present, and future. Homeland is central to Kapka's image of the self, and this is reflected in many chapters of the book that start with a direct reference to different places in Bulgaria. In "Prologue", "Chapter 1", "Chapter 2", "Chapter 3", and "Chapter 4" the reference to Bulgaria appears right away in the first sentences, illustrating how important it is for the narrator to constantly remind her readers about the Bulgarian context. Returning her audience to the places foundational for Kapka's self-definition reminds of the narrator's own returning to the places of her origin physically and in thoughts. Trying to anchor herself in something that used to be stable, understandable and firm, the narrator reaches out for the core of her collective and personal identity that Bulgaria represents, shapes and challenges as it undergoes its own transformations over time.

I know that Bulgaria has many faces – I have seen them – so I decided to write my own Bulgaria into being, as a preventative antidote to future appendixes. Have I got it right? I'm sure I have got it wrong, in places. But what I wanted above all was to write about the journey of a people through time. I am one of them. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 3)

Aware of the subjectivity that any self-narrative is characterized by, Kassabova does not discard the idea of capturing the essence of Bulgaria through writing. Quite the contrary: using the power of self-writing to recreate her own version of Bulgaria, Kapka Kassabova emphasizes the value of an individual experience of a place. It is through writing that the narrator manages to establish a very special connection with her homeland and to tell her own story of migration accompanied by similar stories of her compatriots and a unique history of Bulgaria. Shaped by the narrator's personal experience, memories, and attitudes, Kapka's place identity is being redefined through the narrator's creative engagement with Bulgaria, which initiates the beginning of her journey to the true herself.

The moment the narrator realizes how long she has been running away from her Bulgarian past and has been avoiding to confront her identity, marks the beginning of the transformation of her narrative identity which is grounded in the narrator's complicated relationships with the place of origin:

My chief delusion was that by becoming deeply absorbed by every other country on the planet except Bulgaria I could get rid of two things. One, my Bulgarian past, which was not of the miserable variety but bothered me nevertheless, like an infirm relative calling out from a darkened room at the back of the house. Two, the need to answer directly the

question nice people ask when they meet you: where are you from? (*Street without a Name 2*)

The need to answer this question to “nice people”, but more importantly to herself, inspires Kasabova to search for the meaning Bulgaria carries for her. As a migrant that is caught between two worlds, Kassabova is aware of the fact that on the international stage her home country is often misrepresented by foreigners. This is why among the goals that Kassabova’s narrative aims at there are dispelling the stereotypes and errors that people nurture about Kapka’s homeland and creating a different image of Bulgaria by showing its rich culture and history which are unknown to outsiders.

Bulgaria. Capital: Bucharest. Uncle Bulgaria<sup>31</sup>. A yogurt bacillus called bulgaricus. A republic of the former Soviet Union. The Bulgarian umbrella murder.<sup>32</sup> Wrestlers — or was it weightlifters. And, lately, the place from where swarthy folk will come beating down the doors of the European Union. A cheap place-in-the-sun property paradise – or was it skiing – about which we know that... well, it’s cheap. You soon learn not to take any of this personally, but the pain of it doesn’t ever leave you. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name 2-3*)

The humorous tone that is used to mock people’s indifference to or ignorance about Bulgaria is underpinned by frustration and sadness that unleash Kapka’s inner struggle in reconciling the two opposite dimensions of her identity: the Bulgarian one and the western one. Understanding that people from other countries perceive Bulgaria through a consumerist lens,

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<sup>31</sup> Uncle Bulgaria is one of the characters of a series of children’s novels and later a television series *The Wombles*.

<sup>32</sup> The Bulgarian umbrella murder refers to the assassination of Georgi Markov, a Bulgarian dissident, in London in September 1978 with the help of a Bulgarian umbrella which, in fact, is an umbrella with a hidden pneumatic mechanism which injects a small poisonous pellet.

seeing in it only a cheap place to spend a vacation, hurts Kapka's sense of national pride and personal identity. As a person who grew up in Bulgaria and considers it her motherland, Kapka finds it difficult to accept the oversimplified and stereotypical image of Bulgaria. However, as the passage suggests, after spending so many years in immigration, the narrator partially shares the opinions of others about her country, which not only leads to the sense of internal conflict and self-alienation, but also accentuates her own disconnection from Bulgaria.

The fact that Kassabova recognizes this internal conflict and ambiguity of her image of the self in relation to place indicates the narrator's transition to her adult awareness. The desire to immerse herself in the cultures of other countries and to experience the western life in adolescence shifts to a need to establish a close connection with her homeland, demonstrating the narrator's need for self-definition which is the sign of maturity. The focus on the emotional and sensory connection to physical locations that Kapka's narrative reflects unveils another approach to a place which is perceived as a container of memories and personal history. During their last meeting in Sofia, Kapka's friend Rado speaks about his emotional attachment to Bulgaria, suggesting that by being a storage of recollection, stories, and senses, a physical location can be considered a denominator of one's identity:

All this means so much more to me than France. All that's happened here, all the emotions this place contains. First love that never dies. First dreams. First car. First car-crash. First shag. First job. Not in that order. All of me is contained here, in these panels, in this mountain ... (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 317)

Rado's emotional connection to Bulgaria is a literary depiction of what Pierre Nora<sup>33</sup> defined as *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory. Stating explicitly that his identity is inseparable from the place he calls home, Rado refers to Bulgaria as to a place of memory which holds and contains his personal recollections and memories of events foundational for his self-image. Coming back to its panels and mountains evokes in Rado his hibernated senses, suppressed feelings, and faded memories. Kapka narrates her experience of returning to Bulgaria through Rado's words, suggesting that emotionally coming back to roots is similar for every migrant. While newcomers may only see the physical representation of the place and can enjoy the beauty of its landscapes or appreciate its architecture, people with deep ties, like Kapka or Rado, reconnect with their place of origin on numerous levels. What for strangers is just another random geographical location, for those rooted in the place it becomes *lieux de memoire*, full of personal history, memories, and meanings.

When an outsider comes to a new place ... he sees the picturesque and the freakish, whereas the local sees through layers of emotion and memory. In other words, they see completely different things. So while a newcomer would have looked at Youth 3 and seen an uninhabitable dystopia of concrete and mud, I learnt to see it for what it really was: my home. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 30)

Revisiting the apartment residential complex Youth 3 brings to life many mixed feelings. It reminds Kapka of her carefree childhood, which regardless of products and goods shortages, communist hysteria around conspiracy theory, mud and concrete of never-ending building, was a happy period of her life. It also triggers recollections about the moments of Kapka's

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<sup>33</sup> Pierre Nora divided all places into *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memory, where collective memory is naturally embedded in everyday life) and *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory, where memory is deliberately preserved because the natural environments of memory are fading). For more information see Chapter Six p.155.

disappointing discovery when she realized that there must be something wrong either with them or with the place where her family lived because the only view they could get from their balcony was the one of “the concrete mudscape” which prompted her to ask “a cruel question”, ““Mum, why is everything so ugly?”” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 4).

Life in Bulgaria in general, and in Youth 3 in particular, was not only the key element of the formation of the narrator’s individual and social identity, but it also fostered the development of her migrant identity. The socio-political situation in the country which led to widespread economic hardship made the desire to emigrate a norm for Bulgarians:

“Go, for heaven’s sake,” Rado said, “And don’t look back. It’s the chance of a lifetime. I don’t intend to hang around much longer either.”

“New Zealand?” Maxim said. He was going to study economics in Sofia. “Classy. The further away from here, the better. And they speak English. Very classy.”

Jimmy maintained his stiff upper lip and vowed to emigrate to New Zealand as soon as possible...

Tedy was practical about it. “You always wanted to be somewhere else.”...

Grégoire...said, “...I will write you from France, I promise.” He didn’t intend to hang around much longer either. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 136-37)

I was completely numb. A sick, dumb relief was all I felt. That was it, then. Goodbye England. Goodbye France. Goodbye Bulgaria. Goodbye Youth 3. I don’t know where the hell I’m going, but I never want to come back. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 138)

The need to escape was palpable, and migration was seen as both a beacon of hope and a source of relief. Many years later during one of her visits Kassabova will jokingly compare emigration to religious faith in God:

“This weekend there’s a convention for people who believe.”

“For people who believe in what?” I ask, helping her with the shopping bags.

“In God, of course. A belief that there is a better life than the one we have here. Do come if you can.”

And all these years I thought the misguided belief in a better life was simply called emigration (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 142-43).

Equating the belief in a “better life” through faith with the belief in a better life through migration is Kassabova’s way to approach a sensitive topic of the romanticized idea of migration in Bulgarian society when moving out of the country was synonymous to hope, and thoughts about leaving the country were an attempt to rebel against the oppressive system, a means of “rejecting the ugly world we lived in” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 119). To illustrate how desired the escape was, Kapka tells a love story of her geography and philosophy teachers who disappeared one day without an excuse or explanation: “The rumour went that they had deserted to the West. Clearly, she knew her geography well. I felt abandoned, but like everybody else I was also silently cheering for the escaped lovers. They had made it, and that was a sign of something important” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 111-12). However, from the height of her migrant experience, Kapka realizes how naive the faith in the almightiness of migration was. Through her narrative, which effectively dispels “the misguided belief in a better life”, she hints at disappointment that often follows the illusory expectations, shaped by desperate hopes and romanticized escapes. It takes Kassabova 14 years of living in immigration and a book to

become aware of her place identity and to understand that physical relocation does not necessarily mean leaving behind the emotional and cultural ties that shape one's identity.

Since leaving Bulgaria, I have gone backwards and forwards across the world several times, propelled by a slightly manic energy – I managed to convince myself that I'd left Bulgaria behind for good. I chose to see emigration and globe-trotting as an escape, not as a loss. Nowhere to call home? No problem, the world is my oyster. Where are you from? they ask. Does it matter? I answer.

But it does. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 16)

And Kassabova becomes aware of this by writing the book – self-narrating herself.

Motherland is an essential component of personhood, and returning to it is an unavoidable stage of identity processes especially in the context of living in immigration which fosters the revision of every aspect of personal identity in reference to categories and norms established (as if by default) in the country of origin. As Kapka's narrative reflects, her idea of selfhood will be always constructed and reconstructed referring directly or indirectly to a basic model received from the society she grew up in; the concept of home will always be examined against her life in Youth 3; the notion of belonging will be tested against her understanding of the motherland and its nation; her mindset and worldview will always reflect her Bulgarianness no matter how hard she will try to get rid of it. Regardless of whether such references are in favor of her Bulgarian past or not, it will always be a starting point of her self-reflection because identity consists of these crucial concepts, and the revision of identity means reinvention and transformation of its existential pillars. Returning home, fostered by her need to reconnect with her baseline values, senses and purpose in life, is also a means of Kapka's self-redefining and reassembling ("healing" as she calls it at the end of the book (Kassabova, *Street without a Name*

317)) which brings her directly to her origins illustrating the ineffectiveness of resolving identity dilemmas from afar. The sense of disconnection that Kapka experiences being away from Bulgaria is vividly depicted in Kassabova's narrative: "I have lived in France and in reunified Berlin, I am living in Scotland as a putative New Zealander after a decade in that welcoming, generous country, and I haven't listened to Morrissey for a long time. But I also haven't felt settled anywhere since we left Youth 3" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 141).

Unlike Kassabova who stresses the importance of a place of origin for a migrant's self-redefining, Iva Pekarkova denies one's original identity and focuses on the influence of a new place on a migrant's image of the self. In *Gimme the Money*, the writer places her heroine in an unknown place, exploring the ability of a migrant to construct a new identity away from home. While the absence of the connections with the Czech Republic makes it easier for Gin to embrace her new place identity, which is inseparably related to New York now, it also indicates Gin's conscious suppression of her origin and the need to distance herself from the homeland as the only possible way to create herself anew. Although both Kassabova and Pekarkova approach a notion of a migrant's place identity differently, they recognize the role of the place of origin in the process of a migrant's self-reinvention.

The migrants' need to return to roots, which is clearly articulated in Kassabova's narrative, becomes something that she discovers in her self-narration:

At passport control, the attractive thirty-something officer with the face of a philosophy graduate who couldn't find another job looks at my photo, then at me.

"Where are you returning from?"

Returning? I hesitate for a second, then I go along with him.

"Scotland," I lie. He flicks through the virgin pages of my Bulgarian passport.

And I suddenly want to be returning, to be welcomed home by his depressive, familiar face. I don't want to be just visiting. I want my name to be easily pronounced by clerks and written down correctly in a flash without having to spell it ten times. I want to stop explaining where I come from to the well-and-not-so-well meaning. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 8)

However, Kassabova knows that returning is rarely possible for those who emigrated. Living abroad changes migrants' worldviews, habits, and lifestyles. What is more, the country of their origin undergoes changes, too; this is why returning to the homeland may be disorientating for many migrants because they can no longer fully identify with their people and the mentality of the place they left behind. William B. Foreignerski, the Latvian author of *Stroika with a London View*, describes migration as a double culture shock: "I guess mine is a story about culture shock. No, about two shocks. The first strikes you when you arrive in your new place of residence, and the second when you return home. It's a scary experience, seeing your old self from the outside, in the faces of those you left behind" (177). The same is reflected in Kapka Kassabova's narrative: she together with her childhood friends, who, like all her emigrant friends, is trapped between the need to return to their motherland and the impossibility to fit in in its new reality:

"If only Bulgaria would have me back, I'd return," Grégoire continued (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 145).

... Esther emigrated to Canada where she now lectures in literature and hopes for tenure. She returns to Bulgaria once every few years. "I'll never feel particularly Canadian," she

emailed me, “but I’ll never go back to Bulgaria, and after ten years away, in what way am I actually Bulgarian?”

Right now, that’s a question I can’t answer for her, or for myself. Right now, my sense is that it’s possible, perhaps inevitable, to live between – no, among – nationalities. It’s a bit like wearing different suits, all of them the wrong size, all of them slightly ridiculous, either too baggy or too tight. They don’t make the right size any more, it’s been discontinued. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 144-45)

The passage poses another dilemma that most migrants confront: is it possible to cross the borders (social, historic, cultural, linguistic) once and for all or do migrants have to remain in a limbo, an in-betweenness, destined to shuttle between the countries physically and, in their minds, forever trying to reconcile the disparate elements of their identities and experiences from both worlds?

Kassabova’s narrative reveals that the topic of crossing borders is multidimensional in Bulgarian discourse. As a part of cultural narrative, it, on the one hand, and it is especially vivid in the second part of the book (where the narrator uses the theme of traveling around the country of origin as a means to resolve the inner conflict of self-definition in relation to place), is depicted as the state of in-betweenness, innate to Bulgarian identity because the country’s history has known many divisions and migrations. On the other hand, in the mindset of the contemporary Bulgarians, crossing borders is directly linked to the aspiration to the West and the western style of life, leading to a collective sense of national inferiority. Moreover, as Gabriele Linke admits, “The crossing of physical borders in Kassabova’s writing may also stand metaphorically for the crossings of cultural and mental boundaries which characterize her and anyone’s life as an emigré” (35-36).

Returning to the country allows the narrator to delve into the plurality of social, cultural, historic, and linguistic codes that people from Bulgaria share, and trace their presence in her vision of the self and the world around. Her reference to the family history accompanied by the historic digressions about the past of the country, illustrates that ethnically Kapka, just as many other Bulgarians, is a person “among nationalities”, and being in-between is in their nature, history, and culture. Traveling to the country’s borders with Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, and Turkey, the narrator explores the inner borders of her national identity which is a combination of shared history, cultural and linguistic influences, and personal memories that are blended into the broader collective narrative of Bulgaria. Gabriele Linke points out to the fact that the theme of crossing borders is one of the central elements of Kassabova’s self-narrative in relation to place: “Kassabova’s description of her many (near) border crossings privately and as a travel writer are part of her interpretation of her own life as unsettled and transnational, characterized by ‘several passports, foreign spouses and ex-spouses, dynamic careers, borrowed identities. And fractured psyches’” (Linke 36; the phrase qtd. is from Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 317).

The image of the Iron Curtain that separates Bulgaria from other developed countries of Europe and from the rest of the progressive world (“And we grew stronger with the certainty that we lived behind a wall. A wall that didn’t protect us from anything any more, except from the things we wanted” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 107)) is another representation of the dilemma of crossing borders which is descriptive of Bulgarian identity and, as Kapka Kassabova’s narrative reveals, of the identity of Bulgarian migrants. The Wall separates the two worlds not into two parallel parts, but, as Kapka finds out in her self-narration, especially Chapter 4 “East and West”, into the peripheral East and central, meaning superior West. This

narrative experience shows that the presence of the Iron Curtain in the life of Bulgarian people was far from being metaphorical as it had a direct influence on the way they perceive the world around themselves and their own place in it. Aware of the hierarchy that the Wall imposed, Bulgarians knew that they belonged to the less privileged and marginalized side of the divide. The communist ideology that positioned Bulgaria as a little brother along with the political and economic situation of the country and its close linguistic and cultural resemblance to Russia fostered a sense of inferiority that appears to be deeply ingrained in the Bulgarian mentality, “To the vast wasteland of Soviet Russia, little Bulgaria was a sunny, friendly back garden of agricultural plenty and shops semi-full of goods” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 62-63).

In the narrator’s idea of the world, the USSR was a representation of the East which she had never visited but heard a lot about, and in her imagination the life in the “Brotherly Soviet Country” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 63), unlike the life of the capitalist West, could be translated into concepts of the Bulgarian reality. This made it possible for little Kapka to conclude and accept it as an indisputable fact that Bulgaria and its people are closer to the East than to the West, and thus, lost in the unseen battle for global supremacy:

From my parents’ accounts of their work trips, the Brotherly Soviet Country sounded to me like a very cold Bulgaria on a massive scale, but without the watermelons and tomatoes, the skiing, the sea, the people I knew, and with the addition of six grammatical cases. Moscow was a place with shops even emptier than ours...A place where people queued up for kilometres without knowing what they were buying because anything was good — if they already had it, they could trade it for something else later. It was a place where people didn’t live in their own apartment, but rented, because ownership was a capitalist crime. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 63)

The West was a representation of an abundant luxurious life the stories of which sounded like fiction and were hard to imagine:

The West, however, was the stuff of exotic rumour and fantastic legend. Occasionally, it reached us in the shape of glossy objects. My mother's cousin ... showered us with gifts like oval Lux soap bars with women smiling on the packets, colourful panties for the girls in packs of threes, chocolate bars in shiny foil wrappers which I smoothed out and kept between the pages of books, roll-on Nivea deodorants the likes of which I'd never seen. These objects were like messages in a bottle from the other side of the divide, but I couldn't tell whether they were friendly or not. They seemed coded, sealed inside their smug luxury. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 64-65)

The West was beyond the reach of the Bulgarian people, and when Kapka's parents went to Holland for the first time, it was a sensation for their family and friends, "From Pavlikeni, Holland seemed like another planet. My parents may as well have gone into space" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 71).

Gabriele Linke claims that the imbalance of economic and political power between the East and the West led to the inferiority complex that experienced on a large scale became a distinctive feature of East European identity (31). Kapka Kassabova describes it as a poor cousin syndrome (*Street without a Name* 67) which manifests itself as a need to prove that we are as good as them if not better ("In the Western world Bulgaria is a country without a face. It appears in English language literature as a chapter – the shortest one — which begins with an edifying sentence about the unjust obscurity of Bulgaria in the Western mind. Or as an appendix, a kind of afterthought" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 3); "What if we're not good enough?" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 8), "For a moment, you could even think we were equal. But

we knew, and they knew, that we weren't equal" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 66)).

Interestingly, the topic of inequality that Kassabova's self-narrative addresses is approached with the help of literary, narrative terms. Referring to Bulgaria as to a "shortest chapter" or "appendix", Kassabova hints at the fact that her motherland is often underrepresented, overlooked, trivialized or even omitted in the global narrative. Despite their rich cultural and historical heritage, Bulgarians feel neglected and unfairly forgotten. On the example of her own family, the narrator vividly depicts the nature of the inferiority complex that many Bulgarians experienced. This is why Kassabova includes the heated discussions, aimed at healing wounded self-esteem into her narrative, illustrating how important it is for her countrymen, and for her, to confirm their self-value no matter whether it is an award in an international competition or the ability to be resourceful in conditions of products and goods scarcity:

It was a serious matter, and whenever gold or silver was won for Bulgaria and the national anthem was played, the whole nation shed a tear together with the long-suffering steroid-fed medallist on the podium. It was collective therapy: in those few minutes, before we were plunged behind the Iron Curtain again, back in the drab anonymity of the Soc Bloc, the world knew that we existed, and that we were good at something, and that was balm for a nameless wound. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 34-35)

"Ashamed? I have nothing to be ashamed of," my mother's cousin said. She was a medical journalist ... "On the contrary, I'm proud. Yes, we live in a shitty one bedroom flat with a cat and an occasional grandmother, and I know exactly when my neighbour has diarrhoea. Even so, I have a medical degree, a journalism degree, a PhD, and three languages. My children are well brought-up and well-dressed despite the empty shops,

and I can make a birthday cake without flour, sugar, baking powder, or milk. If anyone should be ashamed, it's them, not us!"

This struck me as a clever argument. But it didn't help my mother. In fact, it made it worse. It confirmed that we were living in a banana republic, but minus the bananas. It confirmed that the more languages you spoke, the more cakes without ingredients you made, the more political jokes you told, the more wretched you were. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 66-67)

The feeling of inequality grew even stronger when Bulgarians had a chance to experience life in the capitalized West on their own. Having returned from Holland to Sofia Kapka's mother declared, "It's another world" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 76), which signaled a serious reevaluation of illusory values they had been holding onto their whole life:

"But it's not that much better," my father added cheerfully. "They're just normal people. OK, they have more material things than us, but otherwise their lives are not that different."

"Of course they are," my mother insisted. "Whether we like it or not, they *are* different. They think differently. They take so many things for granted. They have rights, they demand things...They live in another world". (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 76-77)

We are twenty years behind them. No, forty. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 82)

Two years of living in Great Britain confirmed Kapka's mother's words: the way their family looked was typical for Bulgaria. However, in Colchester their appearance struck the eye of the local inhabitants with their distinctly different and exotic looks the true origins of which

remained a mystery because the only country the people of Colchester were able to locate behind the Curtain was Russia (“...an indifference fed by ignorance, and vice-versa” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 215)):

Soon, I realized that the polite people of Colchester didn’t know where or even what Bulgaria was. This was confirmed by a multi-choice quiz in a tabloid paper, where I found the following:

Bulgaria is a) a character in a children’s story; b) a Soviet republic; c) a country in south-east Europe; d) a wild river in Mexico. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 125)

Jamie...the chief bully... didn’t miss the opportunity to point out that I came from a country that wasn’t a real country, but a character in a children’s story called *The Wombles*. In Phys. Ed., Jamie mocked my cheap canvas sports shoes from the height of his bouncy Puma trainers, “Are these made in Russia? They look like shit.” Jamie’s lackeys sniggered. They all wore trainers like him.

“I’m not from Russia,” I said, “I’m from Bulgaria.”

“Same thing.” Jamie said. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 126-27)

Kasabova’s self-narrative reflects that even many years later after living a half of her life abroad, she is still able to recognize the signs of the inferiority complex which, apparently, remain an integral part of her personhood as well as of the Bulgarian national mentality. Traveling around the country, Kapka observes the transformations of the Bulgarian streets: although the roads are still covered with “muddy holes”, “the pavements are occupied by parked cars”, and “rubbish containers overflow” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 11), the billboards portray luxurious women advertising an abundant lifestyle imitating latest European fashions and

create trends which the narrator decodes as her compatriots' attempt to reach the desired western style of life, at least in the pictures. The inferiority complex, once an inner feeling discussed in the private conversations in the kitchen, now has permeated the consumer culture, has set beauty standards, and has determined societal expectation, gaining not only verbal, but also a visual representation.

They're overshadowed by giant posters of sultry goddesses advertising perfumes, "mobiphones", leather sofas, and bioactive yogurt. The façades of *belle époque* buildings peel like damp wallpaper.

Down on street level, Sofia's women are thoroughly epilated, manicured, hair-dyed, tailor-dressed, perfumed, and pouting. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 142)

The mismatch between the dirty streets and glossy advertisements, between the peeling off walls of the fading buildings and the perfectly groomed women serves as a constant reminder of the failure to achieve the desired lifestyle, unavailable to many Bulgarians, making the difference between the East and the West even more noticeable for those who have experienced both worlds.

Kapka recognizes the inferiority complex instantly in her fellow expats, her countrymen from abroad at the airport. "Nobody is complaining. They are used to waiting: in state hospitals, shop queues, immigration offices, visa departments... Three Germans are standing in a small cluster, complaining loudly about the delay and glancing conspicuously at their gold-plated watches" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 6). What the narrator sees behind the patience that her compatriots demonstrate are many years of economic stagnation and an oppressive political regime which made it life-threatening to express one's dissatisfaction or disagreement publically. Using patience as an expression of the inferiority complex that distinguishes Bulgarians from the

representatives of other European nations who are waiting for departure impatiently, Kassabova makes it obvious that, despite the ubiquitous presence of the Western ideals in the Bulgarian reality, some things need more than 20 years to be changed.

Kassabova's self-narrative is full of political metaphors that vividly capture the essence of the Bulgarian inferiority complex. One of them – the image of the train departing from the station while running alongside Bulgarians are trying to hop onto the last car.

Are they sneering at us, the last passengers at the EU gates? Are they in fact laughing with perfect teeth as we run along the speeding bullet-train and wave our tattered bundles desperately, smiling to show that we mean well? Wait, we cry over the whistle of the train as the sausages in our bundles begin to fall out. Wait, don't leave us behind. We too are Europe! (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 6-7)

The symbolism of this situation evokes the feeling of desperation that Bulgarians as the last to board feel in their attempt to catch up with the European Union and the broader Western world. The “sausage heritage” that Bulgarians carry with them and which remains a burden intensifies the sense of exclusion from the fast developing world that seems to be indifferent, if not snobbish, to the national peculiarities of the unique Bulgarian identity. The whistle of the train that drowns out the voices of the belated passengers shows how hard Bulgarians will have to try to be heard, noticed, and accepted by the speeding bullet-train that represents the progressive West.

Self-narrative becomes Kassabova's way of dealing with the inferiority complex. By traveling around the country and exploring its complex, but fascinating history and culture, the narrator understands that Bulgarian ways are just different, but equally good, and she has nothing to feel inferior about. Writing becomes Kapka's means to reconnect with her place identity and

gain her national and ethnic self-value back. Her personal experience and her narration of it can be understood as a representation of the hybridity of migrant identity which implies the coexistence of the native and the host cultures, the fragmentations of the self, emotional and psychological in-betweenness, and impossibility to define one's self one-dimensionally. Hybridity refers to all aspects of Kapka's migrant identity, and the following quote illustrates how it is expressed in relation to place:

Then I turned the absurd question on myself: if tomorrow there is a war between Bulgaria and New Zealand — a farcical scenario — which side would I be on? Would I side with one and spy for the other? Or sit tight in Scotland and pretend it wasn't happening? Answer: let's be glad that neither country can find the other on the map.

It seems primitive as well as pointless to demand that people who are culturally divided in time ... or in space, like me, have single loyalties. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 264-65)

Place identity is one of the most prominent aspects of the narrator's identity which defines her migrant self-concept in many respects. Bulgaria, the country of her childhood, is a foundational category of Kapka's self-definition because it serves both as a referential point in her self-narration and as a place that initiated the formation of her migrant identity. The sociopolitical situation defined the narrator's collective and ethnic identity, implanting the feeling of deficiency and inferiority that marked Kapka's childhood years in communist Bulgaria and accompanied her in adulthood. Borders, the core concept of Bulgarian historical and national discourse, influenced Kapka's self-image by projecting the idea of being cut off and isolated from the rest of the world onto the matrix of the self, and it took her many years to overcome the feeling of being lost and realize and articulate her right to belong not only to the country behind

the Iron Curtain. Coming back to the motherland is an important moment in the narrator's migrant identity transformation because it allows her to reunite the past with the present and reconcile the contradicting elements of her identity that emerged as a result of her migration.

### 9.3 Memory and Identity

“...an outsider to the present and an insider of the past. Or perhaps the other way round” – this is how Kapka Kassabova describes herself in the prologue to *Street without a Name: A Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* (4), implying the temporal in-betweenness she as a Bulgarian migrant who left the motherland almost twenty years ago experiences. Grown up in the country that no longer exists in the same form, the narrator finds herself thrown into its present reality which she is trying to navigate referring to its past image she remembers. Memory and history are Kapka's main tools in her search for the self with which crossing cultural, mental, and time boundaries becomes possible. Traveling around the country of her childhood is Kapka Kassabova's way of delving into the past which allows for the revision of personal identity and self-reinvention because, as the narrator states, “travelling in the present tense has proved impossible” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 320).

The past is an essential part of Kapka Kassabova's narrative identity. It not only sets a background for a coherent story of the self, but is also a foundational element of her migrant identity. It indicates the life left behind as a price paid for the benefits of migration and contains emotions, values, senses, and the worldview initial for her personal identity. *Street without a Name: A Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* shows that living in the present solely is impossible for a migrant because their present is in essence some version of their transformed past which is needed as a reference point on their way to self-understanding. In her interview for

*pentransmissions.com*, Kapka Kassabova claims that separating the past, the present and the future is a futile task and in order to illustrate her idea refers to William Faulker who believed that “The past is not over yet. It’s not even past” (qtd. in Kassabova, “Living History: A Conversation with Kapka Kassabova”). The issue of a rejected past, which sooner or later, will always claim its rights is clearly articulated in Kassabova’s narrative. In her attempt to run away from her Bulgarian life, the narrator did not manage to escape from herself: confronted with the necessity to make sense of her experience, Kapka realizes that true self-understanding is possible only if she can embrace her past as an initial reference point. By reconciling with personal recollections, familial and national history, Kapka Kassabova tries to fill in the emptiness that denial of her Bulgarian identity had left:

I suddenly see that I have sleepwalked through my life between then and now. Between the hazy eighties and grown-up days, there is a void. And in this void I see a familiar figure running frantically between continents, not knowing what it’s running from. Just contemplating the tiny wretch tires me. (*Street without a Name* 15-16)

The past in *Street without a Name: A Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* is a combination of the narrator’s personal recollections of her childhood and adolescent experiences in communist Bulgaria and of the references to the national history of the country. The narrative focuses on the two components of memory (personal and group memory) which, in Kassabova’s opinion, equally influenced her vision of the self. For this reason, the first part of the book relies on personal memory of the narrator’s life in Bulgaria, while the second part makes continuous references to group memory, a narration of the country’s historical past told from the perspective of a Bulgarian migrant.

Returning to Bulgaria is a moment of reevaluation in the narrator's life; as Kassabova says in the book, coming home allows her to remember places and people she had almost forgotten "[I]n the excitement and trauma of immigration" (*Street without a Name* 60). Attending places from her childhood as well as ones from the country's officially narrated past has a therapeutic effect on the narrator in whose life "There are so few moments ... when the past and the present connect in the right place..." (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 145-46):

recollecting memories and events and weaving them into a coherent story contributes to constructing the narrator's complete image of herself. Like Nora's *lieux de mémoir*, the places the narrator visits evoke memories of events from the past that are foundational for her self-identity and become meaningful denominators of the narrator's migrant identity formation:

It's hard to believe that the busy Happy Bar and Grill was formerly The Hungarian Restaurant that provided both my first experience of dining out and a fight scene involving my father, a rude waiter and a plate of meatballs. Now, waitresses in miniskirts and dyed hair smile "enjoy" as they serve steak and fries (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 163).

It's a glittering, air-conditioned, clinically tidy emporium with an escalator snaking up its middle. The girls at the perfume stands offer me the latest Givenchy with toothpaste smiles. Upstairs, in the spot where my sister had put on those miraculous red boots, a shop sells sophisticated natural cosmetics (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 157).

I look up to the limestone cliffs, searching for the hillside villas of Dobrich. But there are only cheap, ugly new hotels and wild overgrowth. I ask the sellers at the souvenir stalls

outside the gardens, but they nod no, they've never heard of the villas of Dobrich. I search their sunburnt faces and feel a strange void. We share nothing except a language. My Balchik is not their Balchik. I'm a ghost from the past, but it isn't their past. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 279-80)

Tahseen Shams's analysis of migrants' interactions with their motherland after many years of living in immigration in *Here, There, and Elsewhere: The Making of Immigrant Identities in a Globalized World*, offers an accurate explanation for Kapka's experiences:

Migration studies trace how immigrants traverse boundaries to get to new societies, change their surroundings, and, in the process, become changed themselves. In this approach, the homeland seems to matter only when the immigrants are present in it or when they transform their sending society by remitting resources from the hostland. It is as if the homeland stays static and isolated without the immigrants' presence, its contexts neatly bound within its nation-state borders. That is, of course, not the case. Immigrants' homelands are not cut off from the rest of the world once the immigrants have left; rather, homelands continue to change and interact with other countries in numerous ways as part of the global geopolitical tapestry. Indeed, as immigrants make return visits to their homelands, they find that as they themselves have changed while living abroad, so, too, have the people, places, and societies they left behind. (71)

Indeed, in the transformations of the places of her childhood, the narrator not only sees the changes that have happened in the country since her family's departure, but she also recognizes the changes in the way she perceives the world and herself: "Time shrinks buildings and people, everybody knows this, but I'm still shocked by how tiny the Lycée looks" (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 146). The places important for Kassabova do not exist

anymore the way she remembers them which says much for the fact that the country the narrator belongs to is from the past and challenges the possibility for her to belong to the country's present. As Claudia Duppe admits commenting on the double temporal perspective of Kassabova's narrative, "More often than not the memories of her past stand in stark contrast to her contemporary experience, which is governed by a strong sense of unbelonging and not being able to participate in the country's cultural habitus" (423-24). Duppe is convinced that the fact that Kassabova feels as a tourist in her native country influences her identity and the image of the world which is reflected in a two-dimensional mode of her narrative. On the one hand, she can meticulously describe the neighborhood of Youth 3, but gets lost in what is now Transfiguration Street (Youth 3 renamed), where nothing reminds her of the old world. Reflecting on the interaction between migrants and the places of their past, Elena Lappin, a British novelist, memoirist and journalist of Russian origin, speaks of the idea of an exile dream which illustrates the impossibility for migrants to return to their motherland:

Like all émigrés, I have recurrent exile dream about walking down the streets of my childhood and realizing I am utterly lost. It's not unlike that other dream everyone has occasionally, of not being able to unlock a door despite holding the key in your hand. There is a mysterious incompatibility between the real and the remembered or imagined context: the dream is about withholding, about being kept on the outside of a world to which I cannot return. By removing myself from it I have been sentenced – or have sentenced myself – to never again finding a way back. The betrayal of the émigré is both a self-inflicted wound and a grave sin. The dream cityscape of my childhood is a map I can clearly see but no longer follow. (79)

The opposition between the past and the present, which runs like a red thread through Kapka Kassabova's self-narrative, is also a marker of the narrator's inner changes which becomes most apparent when she meets her old Bulgarian friends. Reuniting with them is Kapka's way of reconciling the past and present that finally get a chance to meet in the right place. "“Seeing you makes me feel seventeen again,’ Rado says” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 183), implying the undeniable passage of time and anticipating the pleasure of delving into the conversations about the hopeful past that they both share. However, connected in the past, they are separated in the present. Changes, visible to readers and through self-narration to the author, make the characters strangers, united by the disillusionment of migration.

“Maybe our golden age is yet to come,” I offer.

He laughs cynically. “I love your optimism. But I don't share it. No, I think our golden age was then. Of course we didn't know it, we never do. But think about it, it was simple. We knew what we didn't have, we knew what we wanted, and we went to get it. We wanted the world. We wanted to go and speak our languages. We wanted carnal knowledge. And now we've done all this and complicated our lives beyond repair... Now we've lost our innocence. Oh, I don't know...” He prods furiously at the rice-stuffed lamb.

“And now we don't know what we want,” I offer.

“I don't know what I really want. Do you?” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 183)

It turns out that for Kapka and her migrant friends talking about the past is easier than talking about the present. Back then they were young, ambitious, and free. Now they are older, lost, and disillusioned. The past brings back a sense of a simpler life, while the present is full of uncertainty, frustration, and complex realities of life in immigration. Unlike the conversations

about the past which have power to transform Kapka and her migrant friends into full of life and optimistic teenagers and reconnect with their former self, the conversations about the present only emphasize their helplessness and disappointment over the false advantages of migrant life: having reached their goals abroad, the migrants realize that they paid too high a price for it; stuck somewhere in-between they lost the link to the place they called their home and probably will never be able to belong anywhere again:

“It’s funny,” Rado says, “I can only be Bulgarian when I’m in France. Here, I’m semi-French. Everything is funny and bizarre, and I laugh like someone watching a Beckett play. Except I’m a Frenchman with Bulgarian memories. I remember being inside that Beckett play. In France, I’ll never be a Frenchman, despite my accent-free French. I’ll always be *Rado le Bulgare* to them. At work, they think it’s exotic... But I’ll never be one of them”. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 185)

It is only with her Bulgarian migrant friends that the narrator can openly discuss the existential dilemmas, their motherland, the common past, and life abroad. For others, even those who care about Kapka, her answer is in the Present Simple, “I have a good life there” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 199) which protects both, those asking and herself, from unnecessary ruminations about the past and excuses.

The contrast the narrator experiences when returning to Bulgaria refreshes her memory and allows Kapka to reevaluate her life story and herself. The perspective of an emigrant, clearly stated in Kassabova’s self-narration, provides her with an ultrasensitive lens to see the changes (inner and outer) invisible for those living in Bulgaria continually. Bulgaria is a place where Kapka looks back at her life and compares it with what her idea of life had been before her family migrated to New Zealand. During one of their visits to Sofia, Kapka and Grégoire decide

to go inside the French Lycée in order to find their teacher Madame Taleva. On their way out, the guard asks a meaningful question, “So, did you find what you were looking for?” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 147). For the two Bulgarian expats this simple question has broader connotations and expresses a true dilemma. “We shake our heads, then nod – yes, no, *da, ne* – confused by two different body languages and the tricky question” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 147). This is how Kapka describes their reaction to the unexpectedly deep private enquiry she and her friend were not ready to respond to or did not know how to respond; neither the communicative patterns of the past (shaking heads for yes and nodding for no) nor the one from the present (shaking heads for no and nodding for yes) seemed an appropriate toolset to talk about the ambiguities of their migrant life:

“Were they happy years, do you think?” I ask Grégoire.

“Well, if I’m not happy now, I must have been happy then. When I was at the Lycée, I wanted to be in France, to be free, to be myself. Now that I’m in France, I wish I could come back here, to be at home again. I feel more connected with the past than with the present. Is that normal?” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 147)

Kapka Kassabova’s narrative identity is inseparably related to memory which not only serves as a means of her psychological coherence and continuity, but also allows the narrator to reconnect with her personal and familial past and collective history. Through memory her self-narration gains a temporal flexibility that makes it possible for Kapka to jump from different time frames without losing the focus on the self which is the core of her literary exploration. It also provides her with the links to forgotten and suppressed elements of her identity which exist within the narrator no matter how hard she tried to get rid of them. Memory makes Kapka’s Bulgarianness visible to her: despite many years of living abroad, she is still able to decode some

cultural, historic, and social codes that the Bulgaria of the past instilled in her. However, she has difficulties with the decoding of modern Bulgaria. Being lost in the geography of her neighborhood is a perfect metaphor for Kassabova's attempt to understand the present of her motherland and her inability to fit in. Returning to the places of her past becomes a moment of Kapka's reevaluation of the self: in the transformation of her country, the narrator is able to recognize her own inner changes.

#### **9.4 Linguistic Identity**

Another distinctive element of Kapka Kassabova's narrative is language which becomes both an essential tool for capturing the process of the narrator's self-reflexivity and growing self-awareness and a means of literary depiction of the complex linguistic identity of the narrator and the ambiguity of her perception of the world and herself.

Aware of the potential and limitations of the genre of her self-narrative, Kassabova consciously uses language as the most powerful narrative device for a literary self-reconstruction, making the process of writing herself a distinct part of the story. Being both a form of storytelling and an indicator of the identity of the narrator, language makes it possible to trace the transformation of Kapka's self-image by looking at the linguistic choices that shape her literary self-reflection.

Like many migrant writers, Kassabova chooses English as the language in which she tells the story of her life even though recreating herself in writing is accompanied by constant negotiation between languages. Similarly to Eva Hoffman, Kassabova uses language to explore her migrant identity, however the displacement she addresses is of a different quality. While Eva Hoffamn focuses on language to show the transformation of her image of the self and the world

in her transition from Polish to English, Kassabova uses language to narrate her inner conflict between her English reality with her memories and knowledge of herself in Bulgarian. In *Lost in Translation* English becomes the means to reinvent the narrator's identity and to find a different voice. In *Street without a Name* English serves as a medium of the narrator's migrant identity and a tool of reconciling Kapka's past and present in narrative. Her English, elegant and witty, is effectively used to address the issues of a migrant's self-definition and belonging. Recreating herself in English, Kassabova constantly refers to everything Bulgarian, showing the core of her personal identity. Unlike *Lost in Translation*, *Street without a Name* does not focus on English as a key part of migrant experience; it is simply a means of Kapka's cultural self-translation. Probably this is the reason why Kapka's attitude to it is less emotionally charged than in Eva Hoffman's self-narration. *Street without a Name* is not only Kapka's attempt to talk to herself about herself in English, but also a means to create her own Bulgaria in narrative and to talk to the world about it in English.

Commenting on the use of the English language by migrant authors for whom English is not their native language, Joanna Kosmalka comes to the conclusion that this decision is one of the major factors that shape the nature of their writing. The choice of English defines the intended reading audience as more international and requires the authors to refrain from culture-specific elements in their texts. "[T]hey engage with more universal topics and tend to avoid cultural references" ("Liberated from Their Language: Polish Migrant Authors Publishing in English" 672).

The fact that Kassabova's narrative is exophonic (composed in English which is not the narrator's first language) has several implications for Kapka's narrative identity of a migrant. On the one hand, as Claudia Duppe admits, "Writing in English about Bulgaria makes clear that

Kassabova considers herself an expatriate and that the intended readership is Western. At the same time, it points to the fact that she employs the language in which she feels at home as a cosmopolitan intellectual, which is shielding her from an all too emotional identification with Bulgaria” (427). Kassabova’s apparent “westernness”, which demonstrates the narrator’s unbelonging to Bulgarian reality, performs the function of a protector with whose help she distances herself from her childhood memories in order to evaluate them better and translate them into a more universal language. On the other hand, as Gabriele Linke writes, “By spreading knowledge about Bulgaria and her life in communist Bulgaria in English, she not only tries to heal herself and her Bulgarian inferiority complex but also tries to restore Bulgaria to an acceptable place in Western consciousness and systems of knowledge and its rightful place among other cultures of Europe, all of which carry their own burdens of history” (32). Therefore, English can be considered a means for Kassabova to make the world listen to her story because the need to be heard is often a primary motivation for migrant writers. Agnieszka Dale, a Polish-born, London-based writer says in an interview for *Jantar Podcast*, “I write in English because I want to be heard” (“Polish Special” 00:04:44).

Commenting on the role of a writer in a transnational context in an interview for *Cross-Border Talks*, Kapka Kassabova declares, “My mission as a writer is healing”, emphasizing that writing (and it is especially true in the case of writing in English) is a means of “building bridges”. “I set off to write about a very painful thing and I ended up experiencing connectedness, with people, across time, across languages even” (“Kapka Kassabova: My Mission as a Writer is Healing”). Kassabova’s writing serves two purposes. On the one hand, her narrative is a personal journey of healing, which helps her to solve her identity dilemmas, to reflect upon her migrant experience, and reconcile the past with the present. But on the other

hand, through this self-exploration, she invites her readers into an open conversation about their own experience of migration. Such connection with her audience helps Kassabova to build bridges between cultures, histories, and languages, making her writing not only a therapeutic practice for herself, but also for other migrants.

A similar view on what possibilities biculturalism and bilingualism give to migrant writers was expressed in a conversation with *Jantar Podcast* by A.M. Bakalar, a Polish writer who lives in the UK and writes in English: “We have this unique position, we can ‘translate’ our culture into English so even if we write about events happening in Poland, it all kind of comes together because we are able to swim between two cultures, between two different languages” (“Polish Special” 00:06:53-00:07:18).

Kassabova is aware of the implications of the choice of language. This is reflected in carefully selected events and characters in the second part of the book. Few of them speak English, so it becomes clear that while traveling around the country, Kapka uses Bulgarian to communicate with people she meets. However, outside Bulgarian context, English is the language of the narrator’s present, while Bulgarian is the language of her past. Telling her story in English only highlights this temporal and linguistic divide. Joana Kosmalka, analyzing the tendency among migrants to use English as a medium of their experience, comes to the conclusion that many writers “find it easier to describe commonplace situations, events and issues in English” because it has become the language of their everyday life (“Liberated from Their Language: Polish Migrant Authors Publishing in English” 672). In an interview for *pentransmissions.com* Kapka Kassabova admits, “Language is a powerful home and a powerful psychological glue” (“Living History: A Conversation with Kapka Kassabova”), this is why she is so confident speaking English, and her voice producing Bulgarian sounds is like an echo from

a different time: ““Do you dial the zero?’ I ask, cringing at the sound of my expat’s voice. Expat voices are always slightly off-key, like an instrument that hasn’t been tuned for years”

(Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 6). Kassabova’s narrative shows that feeling insecure when speaking their mother tongue after many years of not practicing it is not uncommon among Bulgarian migrants:

There are two desks in the Lost Luggage office, and one is occupied by a ravaged-faced man who’s arrived from “Amerika”. He has an American girth and his gouty feet are bursting out of delicate white-leather moccasins. He can’t decide what language to speak. His American has a heavy Bulgarian accent, and his Bulgarian comes out in small, involuntary spasms of village dialect. (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 9)

Many years abroad have transformed migrants’ perception of their mother tongue as a boundless source for self-expression and marked it with a sense of estrangement and vulnerability. This is why A.M. Bakalar defines writing in English as “a liberating experience because there were certain ideas that I wanted to talk about and I found it difficult to express myself in Polish...I just didn’t feel comfortable writing in Polish...because I was kind of moved – living in the UK – from the language” (qtd. in Kosmalska, “Liberated from Their Language: Polish Migrant Authors Publishing in English” 672). Kapka feels likewise linguistically limited and easily identified as an expat. Despite her native Bulgarian past, her language is often inadequate: “I can’t tell if this is some kind of bad joke, and I don’t dare ask the young taxi-driver for fear of betraying myself as a clueless expat and getting ripped off at the end of the ride” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 10). Whenever there is a chance to return to the comfort of English, the narrator prefers it: “There is a choice of Bulgarian or English, and I join a group

of elderly American evangelists for the English version” (Kassabova, *Street without a Name* 214).

In *Street without a Name and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, language becomes a means of the narrator’s self-reconstruction in writing and an identity marker which allows Kassabova to tackle numerous dilemmas of migrant experience. Although the choice between two ethnic languages, Bulgarian and English, is made in favor of the latter, the inner negotiation between Kapka’s linguistic identities is an inseparable part of her self-narrative.

The English language is the language of Kapka’s present, the language of her confidence, and cosmopolitan identity. The choice of English as a means of her migrant self-narrative serves several functions. As a tool of her cultural self-translation, the English language allows Kassabova to narrate her Bulgariannes, which, expressed in a different language, becomes even more apparent to the readers. Paradoxically, English becomes the language of the narrator’s cultural and emotional connection to the motherland and a symbol of the in-betweenness that the narrator experiences. Through constant reference to everything Bulgarian, Kapka Kassabova keeps her origin in focus, emphasizing how important it is for her image of the self. English also denotes Kapka’s self-perception as an expatriate which provides her not only with a linguistic, but also an emotional distance from the memories of her childhood brought back by her visit to Sofia. Kassabova consciously uses English as a means to build cultural and linguistic bridges in order to reach a wider reading audience and to assist Bulgaria in gaining the recognition it seeks.

The Bulgarian language, which constitutes a fundamental part of the narrator’s identity, is the language of her past which turns out incompatible with the reality she lives in now (both abroad and in Bulgaria). Bulgarian, which is almost absent in Kassabova’s text, is invisibly present in her story because it becomes obvious for the readers that the situations, people and

places that Kassabova narrates in English could happen only in Bulgarian and are unimaginable without the Bulgarian language. It is the narrator's key to the Bulgarian heritage and an inseparable part of her migrant identity because it anchors her culturally and ethnically.

Kapka Kassabova's self-narrative is an expressive literary case which illustrates how transcultural migrant writers approach the dilemmas they experience in relation to language. In *Street without a Name* Kassabova has managed to create a space where Bulgarian and English intersect which provides the readers with a unique perspective on native and host cultures, and this is what makes "building bridges" and "healing" possible.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

Kapka Kassabova's *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* is a notable migrant account which places returning to the motherland at the center of the narrative. Such a strategy allows for a multilayered perspective on the identity of a migrant, portraying it as a combination of various expressions of identity. Its essential elements, such as place, memory, language, and narrative, not only play a central role in migrant identity exploration but also become main tools of its creation in literary space.

Using subjectivity as a key narrative strategy in constructing a migrant's identity in writing, Kassabova emphasizes the importance of personal experience and a subjective perception in recreating the self in writing. Fragmented and at times chronologically disrupted narration is another distinctive feature of Kassabova's story of the self. Imitating the nature of memory, the narrator focuses on the most distinctive events that are influential for her self-image. All elements of the story (places, people, situations) are meticulously selected by the

author in order to create an effect of in-betweenness that the narrator experiences coming back to Bulgaria after 14 years abroad.

Kassabova's narration is anchored in place. Motherland becomes the starting point of Kapka's story, and returning to it initiates the narrator's literary self-reconstruction and fosters her self-awareness. The core of her identity is Bulgarian, this is reflected in many chapters of the book which start with a direct reference to different places in Bulgaria. Despite many years spent abroad, Kassabova is still able to recognize the elements of cultural and ethnic belonging in herself and in her Bulgarian compatriots. Some of them, like rich history or cultural diversity, make her proud, but some, like the consequences of the communist past that she still sees on the streets of Sofia, upset her. Inferiority complex is among those features that Kassabova still sees as the heritage of the oppressive system that she shares with her compatriots and tries to overcome through self-writing. Although Bulgaria and her people try hard to keep up with European and Western ideals, what the narrator sees coming back to the places of her childhood is that they are still behind the progressive world. This does not make her feel less Bulgarian, but initiates the process of self-redefining. Kassabova uses returning to the motherland as a perfect denominator of the transformations that she undergoes. Narrating how much the country of her origin changed, the author makes it obvious for the readers that Kapka changed too.

As most migrants, Kapka is lost in time. Unable to connect the past and the present into one coherent story, the narrator travels around the country of her childhood gathering the elements of the Bulgarian identity she considered missing. History and memory are Kassabova's tools of self-reinvention in writing. Dedicating the first part of the book to the recollections of her childhood, the narrator shows that her narrative identity is deeply influenced by the events from the past. Delving into the exploration of Bulgarian history in the second part of the book,

Kassabova explores how important it is for a migrant not to lose touch with his/ her ethnic identity.

Otherness and the state of in-betweenness, the defining features of migrant identity, are vividly articulated in Kassabova's narrative as parts of Kapka's linguistic identity. Choosing English as the language of her story, Kassabova depicts the constant negotiation between languages that migrants experience. Living between two languages, Kassabova prefers English to translate her Bulgarianness and her migrant experience to the rest of the world. Language becomes a tool of her self recreation in narrative and a means of "healing".

The identity of a migrant created in *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* is an identity in constant search and opposition. Trapped between here and there, now and then, English and Bulgarian, cosmopolitanism and belonging, the narrator explores what it means to live in the two worlds simultaneously. Kapka Kassabova's journey to the origins as well as to herself demonstrates that the essence of migrant identity lies not in choosing between these opposites, but in the continuous process of integrating them into the story of her life due to which a migrant's constant quest for identity can be easily transformed into an ongoing dialogue between her both equally important parts.

## Conclusions

Literature, undeniably the most powerful medium expressing and commenting upon human experience, gains special importance in the context of migration. Especially when created by writers who are migrants, or children of migrants themselves, the narratives offer representations of migrant reality rooted in and expressing the personal identities of their authors. They themselves have experienced the trauma of physical relocation, the difficulties of cultural transition, and the pains of linguistic adaptation that migration involves, and are therefore, more than others, entitled to write about them. What is more, their writing is not only a literary representation resulting from their authors' experience, but also, as we believe this dissertation has shown, their own self-narration that helps them to come to terms with the challenges that migration poses to personal identity. The feeling of displacement, in-betweenness, cultural and linguistic loss are potent drives towards a need of self-reinvention, which sometimes finds its outlet in writing. This is why, for the purpose of our argument, we have approached these particular examples of literature about migration not only as literary interpretations of migrant experience, but also as records of their authors' personal processes of self-exploration and identity re-creation.

Although migration is a global phenomenon, the experience of it varies across different ethnic and national groups whose geographical, cultural, historical, socioeconomic and linguistic peculiarities determine the way their representatives see migration and deal with its challenges. Consequently, the literary representation of the experience of migration of these groups also differs. With that in mind, we have approached migrant literature written by Eastern and Central

European migrants as a unique type of writing which creates a distinct literary character whose migrant identity is influenced by the shared sociocultural background of this part of Europe.

Notwithstanding the many obvious differences between the authors' memories of life in Poland, Bulgaria or Ukraine, the major reason for migration is always the same: to escape the economic and political ills of communism.

By making the literary representation of identity dilemmas of migrant characters from Eastern and Central Europe a focal point of this study, this dissertation has sought to study the categories and narrative strategies that migrant writers use to reconstruct the identity of a migrant in a literary space. In our analysis we turn to numerous theories that humanistic studies, linguistics, memory studies, narratology and narrative theory have developed to define identity, and we borrow from them the key concept that an individual identity is primarily rooted in such domains as place, language, memory, and self-narrative. The process of redefining one's own concept of place, language, memory, and self-narrative, which is found to be the focal point of many books written by migrants, is seen in our argument as a process of identity re-creation, triggered and made necessary by migration.

As our analysis of the selected books by migrant writers from Eastern and Central European countries illustrates, the representation of a migrant's identity is inseparably related to the notions of place and space, linguistic image of the world and language, time and memory. In the self-narratives of the authors, these elements become tools of identity construction and means of self-expression.

By applying the theories of humanistic geography and environmental psychology, it became possible to approach the literary representation of a migrant's identity in the selected

books through the notions of place and space. Such terms as “place identity”, “sense of place”, “place attachment”, and “sense of belonging” emphasize the emotional connection between a character and a place and illustrate that a migrant’s identity, among others, is a product of physical environment. The concept of space, an essential element of the study of the interaction between a person and a geographical location, allows us to approach the literary representation of such a connection as highly subjective and intimate. The examples of migrants’ self-narratives on Eastern and Central European migration offer diverse interpretations of the interrelation between a place and a migrant’s self. In *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova, leaving the place of origin and arriving in a new place of residence initiates the never-ending process of the migrant’s self-reconstruction in relation to the geography of New York experienced from the perspective of a driver. In Kapka Kassabova’s *Street without a Name: A Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, returning home makes the narrator confront the emotional and psychological distances between the memory of the revisited place and its new shapes and meanings, which leads her to understand and embrace the change that living in immigration has affected in her. In *Lost Birds* by Birute Putrius, the dream to see the motherland again becomes the life’s purpose for the first-generation migrants of the Lithuanian community. By making their arrival in New York and their returning home the framing events of the narrative, Putrius draws a parallels between the characters of the book and migrating birds, depicting how much rooted in the place of origin the migrants’ sense of self is<sup>34</sup>. In *Madame Mephisto*, A.M. Bakalar portrays

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<sup>34</sup> “It was so amazingly different... we disembarked like birds thrown out of our nest, staring at the immense forest of skyscrapers” (1).

“They were returning to visit their homeland like a disoriented flock following some generic flyway to return to their natal nests” (267).

the migrant's place identity as ambiguous: although Magda, the narrator of the story, calls London her "new home" (37), her connection to Poland is "a love-hate relationship" (65). The process of a migrant's self-reinvention is inseparable from the concepts of place and space. Both the place of origin and the place of arrival are equally important for migrants' sense of self. Endowed with meanings shaped by the need to leave the familiar and adapt to the unfamiliar, the interaction with place and space transforms into an act of self-recognition and self-definition. Narrating place and space becomes a way of narrating oneself.

Another significant finding that emerges from the study is that in self-writings by Eastern and Central European migrants language is not only a medium of storytelling but also an element of identity reconstruction in narrative. By resorting to bilingualism and code-switching in narration and character construction, the authors recreate the cognitive processes that language adaptation in a new linguistic environment triggers. In *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* Eva Hoffman masterfully captures the narrator's inner duality which, evoked by the transition to a new linguistic image of the world, is reflected as a constant negotiation between her Polish and American identities. With the help of cultural references, untranslatable Polish words such as "ciocia", "pani", or "tęsknota", Hoffman shows how the mother tongue influences the narrator's thought and perception and is deeply ingrained in her identity. As a narrative device, language also helps Hoffman to recreate the process of the gradual domination of English in the narrator's sense of self. In the course of the story, the dialogues between her two selves become more pragmatic and less introspectively oriented. Marina Lewycka uses language as a marker of migrants' emotional connection to their place of origin and as an indicator of their cultural and ethnic background. In his everyday life, Nikolai Majeviskyj, one of the characters of

*Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, speaks functional English with a strong Ukrainian accent. However, in letters to a young divorcee from Ternopil, he expresses his deep feelings in poetic Ukrainian, believing that there is no other language in the world that could praise love so beautifully.

Our analysis also shows that, next to the concept of place and language, memory is another fundamental category used in the process of self-reinvention through narration. As an anchor that provides one's personal identity with coherence and continuity, memory becomes a means of addressing the temporal dilemmas that characters of the analyzed books face in immigration. The remembered self remains crucial in understanding and narrating the currently narrated self. The migrant's past remains part of his/her present, however different the present may prove. Memory supplies a narrative device that structures migrants' stories about the self and shows the evolution of a migrant's identity. Fragmented narration, disrupted chronological order of events, blurred temporal boundaries and different accounts of the past help to reconstruct the ambiguity of migrants' world and the challenges of their experience. These narrative strategies, employed by Kapka Kassabova in *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, effectively depict the narrator's temporal and emotional in-betweenness that living in immigration causes. Unable to reconcile the past and the present, Kassabova turns to memory, searching for a coherent and unified story of herself.

As an element of literary works of art, the memories that the characters narrate can be viewed as fictional creations serving the purpose of the narrative, but, in fiction written by authors who are migrants themselves, they can also be seen as representations of the authors' personal migrant experiences that become projected onto their characters. Their fictional writing

can be viewed as self-writing exploring and interpreting their own processes of identity formation and transformation. In *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka, the numerous parallels between the identities of the narrator of the story and the author herself clearly suggest that the fictional characters invented by Lewycka carry the burden of her family's migrant memory and become her own way of dealing with the consequences of migration.

The books, chosen for the study, often refer to the memory of a migrant as to a source of collective and cultural engagement with time. As a narrative device, memory structures migrants' stories of the self, reconciles spatial and temporal displacement, and constructs meaning. Memory helps to portray the identity of a migrant as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. *Lost Birds* by Birute Putrius and *Replacement Life* by Boris Fishman present accounts of different generations of migrants which allow them to explore how postmemory influences the processes of migrant identity formation. The way their characters, second- and third generation migrants, deal with traumatic events they did not witness directly but only share in collective memory, shows how inherited, collective memories have the power to shape their present perceptions of themselves and their migrant identity. Postmemory becomes Slava Gelman's way of self-identification. Having agreed to his grandfather's plea for the invention, or more precisely fabrication, of narratives describing the wartime experience of the Russian-Jewish Holocaust survivors to file claims against Germany, the protagonist of "A Replacement Life" finds answers to the questions of belonging<sup>35</sup> that he has been asking himself since the

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<sup>35</sup> "What parts of the old culture do I want to keep and what do I want to get rid of? What parts of my new culture do I want to adopt? This is what America is. I'm free to choose what parts of my culture become my identity" (Fishman, "Interview: Author Boris Fishman Discusses Émigré Novel *A Replacement Life*").

moment of his family's relocation to the USA. Craving for a connection with and understanding of his roots, Slava turns to his inherited identity, represented by the voice of his grandmother, which helps him to write, or imagine, their story<sup>36</sup>. The merging of their identities, which Fishman imagines at the end of the story<sup>37</sup>, is a symbolic representation of what migrant identity truly is – a combination of individual, collective, cultural, and inherited memory.

Narrative, an innate ability of human beings to view their life as a coherent story of the self, is also a crucial element of a migrant's identity formation in the literature we analyze. Its potential to simultaneously construct different dimensions of identity – individual, social, cultural, linguistic, etc. – turns narrative into a powerful tool of self-expression because it is capable of presenting the multilayeredness, hybridity, fluidity and flexibility which the identity of a migrant must embrace. Written by migrant authors, books chosen for this study illustrate how self-narrative serves both as a means of the migrants' self-reconstruction and a reflection on how they interpret, reinterpret, and endow their experience with meaning. Through self-narration migrants deal with the challenges of migration: they try to overcome displacement, reinvent themselves in a new language, reconcile their past with the present, and search for coherence within their often fragmented identities. Similarly to their characters, migrant authors use narrative as a means to process and articulate these experiences. Andrei Codrescu calls his book, *In America's Shoes*, “an elaborate identity card” and attempts to leave the world his own story

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<sup>36</sup> “Now his grandmother would talk to him. Now it was no imposition. Now he would follow the movements of *her* mouth. Now he would embrace her and not let go until he could speak as her, until they became the same person” (Fishman, *A Replacement Life* 86, italics in original).

<sup>37</sup> “And so she will have to live on in the adulterated form in which he has to imagine her. He cannot strip himself out of the imagining. If she is to live, she will live as Slava + Grandmother, one person at last” (Fishman, *A Replacement Life* 315).

rather than “their” story<sup>38</sup> (9). George Szirtes considers *The Photographer at Sixteen* to be a retrospect that helps him build the picture of his mother, and consequently, of himself<sup>39</sup> (203-204). By reconstructing “something resembling a past” in *A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka*, Lev Golinkin lays a personal claim to his migrant future which, he believes, is impossible without a past<sup>40</sup> (3).

The analysis of the selected literary representations of migrant experience by Eastern and Central European migrant writers makes it possible to conclude that the geographical, historical, and cultural closeness of these countries contributed to the creation of a distinct category of migrant writings with a unique type of literary character. The aftermath of WWII and life under the communist regime shaped the way migrants from these regions understand migration, deal with its challenges, and negotiate their identity dilemmas.

Poor living conditions, unstable economy, isolation and alienation from the rest of the world, not only created conditions for mass migration from Eastern and Central European countries in the second half of the 20th century, but also divided the world of these migrants into two parts: the West, perceived as a stronghold of security, equality, and financial prosperity, and the East, associated with scarcity of goods to buy and political repression and persecution. The idealization of the West we find in the books under scrutiny goes hand in hand with what can be diagnosed as an inferiority complex, accompanied by a critique of the countries’ political past

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<sup>38</sup> “In order to leave the world “my story” rather than “their” story, I proceed to write my autobiography...In fact, this book, *In America’s Shoes*, is an elaborate identity card (Codrescu 9).

<sup>39</sup> “My constant thanks to my family: ...to my brother Andrew who helped build my picture of Magda (Szirtes 203-204).

<sup>40</sup> “I had to go back ... and reconstruct something resembling a past...you can’t have a future if you don’t have a past” (Golinkin 3).

and their current socioeconomic situation. The characters, ambitious Eastern and Central European migrants, pushed by the hardship of living in their homeland and lured by the mythologized abundant West, move to another country to achieve the imagined level of financial prosperity, social security, and political freedom. However, as their self-narratives show, despite all the benefits that the western style of life has to offer them, the migrants often exist in an uncomfortably liminal state, caught between two worlds, two countries, and two place identities.

Common historical experience which left a painful imprint on the region has also influenced the way migrants from Eastern and Central European countries see themselves. Focused on stories from the past, full of dramatic events that touched each family, migrant characters search for the self in the chronicles of familial memory and official history. Deprived of access to their families' past, which was either lost in the vicissitudes of history or muted by the survivors of the turbulent times, migrant writers enter into dialogue with the collective narration of history to contextualize and structure their narrative (i.e. historical) image of the self. In order to reconcile the contradicting elements they recognize as parts of their identities, perceived as incoherent and incomplete from their present perspectives, migrant writers reinvent their past and the past of their families in their historical self-narratives to re-assemble the jigsaw puzzles they are.

Self-narratives by Eastern and Central European migrant authors also show that the migrants' understanding of the self is directly linked to their necessity to express themselves in English, the language of their new environment. Even though many of the characters are multilingual – they often have access to other languages, such as Russian or Yiddish – reinventing the self in a new language is one of the most challenging experiences for them. Torn

between their authentic self, expertly expressed in their mother tongue, and their new self, struggling for expression in their newly acquired English, migrant writers search for a linguistic compromise. While their migrant experience is ultimately narrated in English, indicating the speakers' integration into the new social environment, their story of the self is deeply rooted in their native languages. Permeated by the presence of words, phrases and sentences in their mother tongue, their bilingual narratives not only reflect the characters' linguistic transition, but also underline the specific combination of different worldviews afforded to them by the cognitive matrices of the two languages they operate in. The foreign words express the migrants' otherness and narrate their continuous self-translation.

Many of the Central and East European literary migrant characters, shaped by the specific historical and socioeconomic situation of the region, share a similar narrative dynamics. They readily engage with the new place, acquire a new language, discover an unknown sociocultural context, struggle to fit in, and reinvent their identity in the unknown environment, always a hybrid identity. Their acquired hybrid identity operates in relation to place, language, and time: as the migrants' self-narratives illustrate, their characters are in constant negotiation between here and there, now and then, English and their mother tongue.

By approaching self-narrative as the central means of migrants' self-reinvention in a literary space, this study proposes to view the writings by East and Central European migrants as a distinct literary tradition that reflects a unique perspective on the challenges of migration caused by particular historical and cultural factors. Resonating with Paul White's views on the power of literature to capture the ambiguity and multidimensionality of migrant experience, this dissertation recognizes the potential of literary narrative to create complex and dynamic

representations of migrants' shifting identities and to serve as a means of interpretation of the migrant experience of the basic identity building concepts of place, language, and memory.

## Summary

This dissertation focuses on the representation of identity dilemmas of migrant characters from Eastern and Central Europe created by authors with a migrant background. It seeks to explore how key aspects of identity, such as place, language, memory, and self-narrative, get reinterpreted and redefined in the context of migration and how they influence a migrant's sense of self. The textual material for the research comes from twelve books by migrant writers with origins from Eastern and Central European countries: *A Replacement Life* by Boris Fishman (Belarus), *The Photographer at Sixteen* by George Szirtes (Hungary), *Stroika with a London View* by William B. Foreignerski (Latvia), *Lost Birds* by Birute Putrius (Lithuania), *Madame Mephisto* by A.M. Bakalar (Poland), *An Involuntary Genius in America's Shoes (And What Happened Afterwards)* by Andrei Codrescu (Romania), *What Language do I Dream in?* by Elena Lappin (Russia), and *A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodkaby* Lev Golinkin (Ukraine), *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova (the Czech Republic), *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman (Poland), *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka (Ukraine), *Street without a Name: A Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* by Kapka Kassabova (Bulgaria). The last four novels in the list have been subjected to a detailed analysis to illustrate how the formation and transformation of migrant identity are conditioned by the interplay between place, language, memory, narrative and the migrant's self.

The analysis of the books uses a variety of categories developed by the disciplines of human geography, environmental psychology, linguistics, memory studies, narratology and narrative theory, and relates them to the notions of identity, its nature, structure, and its

interrelation with the concepts of place, language, memory, and self-narrative. These categories are defined and discussed in five theoretical chapters of the dissertation (“Identity”, “Place and Identity”, “Language and Identity”, “Memory and Identity”, “Narrative and Identity”). Each theoretical chapter is followed by the analysis of the literary representation of migrant experience in a chosen book that best exemplifies a given dilemma of identity referring to one of the theoretical categories.

Chapter One of this thesis sets out the theoretical premises for the research. It shows that although perspectives on identity are diverse, most scholars agree that identity is a multifaceted concept which combines the subjective and the objective, stability and fluidity, the individual and the social. It also elucidates that identity can be simultaneously discovered and narrated, personally constructed and socially developed. Moreover, it discusses various aspects of identity which blend into one unifying notion standing for one’s coherent image of the self. This chapter also deals with the concept of migrant identity which is viewed as a distinct form of personal identity and, evoked by the process of relocation, manifests itself in the context of cultural adaptation, linguistic challenges, social integration, and psychological transformation within a new societal framework. As an expression of personal identity, migrant identity shares the features characteristic of the concept of identity which include a combination of seemingly incompatible qualities, such as stability and change, individuality and collectivity, distinction and interdependence. This makes migrant identity inherently hybrid for it is capable of reconciling opposites which are the inner markers of the in-betweenness migrants experience in the outer world.

Chapter Two of this dissertation focuses on the interrelation between place and identity and explains why place is considered to be one of the essential factors that shape individual and migrant identity. Such terms as “place identity”, “sense of place” or “place attachment” attempt to express the emotional significance of the interaction between a person and a place, which illustrates that individual identity is built by physical environment. The chapter examines key ideas of humanistic geography and environmental psychology and proposes that places and spaces gain meaning through the beliefs and emotional connections that people attach to them. The analysis also explores the concept of space-making because the migrants’ experience and understanding of the place they live in becomes a component of their self-narration. The results of the theoretical research presented in the chapter illustrate that the relationship with a place is a crucial force in migrant identity formation and transformation because leaving the place of origin as well as arriving in a new place of residence initiates the never-ending process of a migrant’s self-reconstruction.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the analysis of the literary representation of the influence of a place on migrant identity, as depicted in *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekatková. The exemplary migrant novel explores the formation of migrant identity through the dilemmas the heroine experiences in the course of her interaction with New York. Throughout the story, New York plays the central role in the way Gin, a taxi-driver from the Czech Republic, perceives the world around her and her place in it. Being a taxi-driver in the megalopolis allows Gin to interact with the city in a very intimate way: by cruising its streets, meeting its inhabitants, and observing its life from the inside of her cab, the heroine gradually becomes attached to New York, which transforms for her from an unknown place into a welcoming space. The chapter studies the

interconnection between the identities of the city and its inhabitants, which are reconstructed in the narrative, and stresses the reciprocal influence they have on each other. As the analysis of the novel shows, through the interaction with the urban environment, migrants find a way to their new self, which emerges as a result of their encounter with the place they inhabit, and is vividly shaped by their interaction with it.

Chapter Four deals with the category of language, which is another important factor that influences the processes of migrant identity formation and transformation. By referring to the Linguistic Relativity Theory (Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf) and Natural Language Metaphysics (Anna Wierzbicka) theory, the chapter posits that language is a fundamental element of each dimension of personal identity which not only manifests individuality, intellectual skills, and the unique worldview of its speakers but also expresses their ethnic and cultural belonging. The chapter explores the notion of linguistic identity which is an inseparable element of the formation and transformation of a migrant's self. The new language opens for migrants a new linguistic image of the world which develops in them a hybrid identity that combines the features of the cultural and linguistic experiences of their origin and of the new environment. Finally, the chapter discusses the notions of bilingualism and biculturalism which become external representations of a migrant's internal duality, reflecting their negotiation between distancing themselves from their heritage of origin and assimilating the new cultural and linguistic environment.

Chapter Five of this dissertation attempts an analysis of a literary representation of the interaction between language and migrant identity portrayed in *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman. The book serves as a perfect illustration of the linguistic

identity dilemma that a Polish migrant experiences in the process of her migration to Canada and then to the USA. The story is centered around the interrelation between language and identity where the former is portrayed as a core element of the redefining of the leading character's linguistic image of the world. The chapter analyzes the literary representation of the narrator's physical transition to a new linguistic reality accompanied by a profound transformation of her inner world. The narrative shows that the process of building her new linguistic identity is a dialogue between two sides of the heroine's self, the Polish-speaking Ewa and the English-speaking Eva, rather than a process completely erasing her original personhood. Eva Hoffman approaches language as a central means of identity formation and proposes that narrative language not only shapes the narrator's particular vision of the world but also determines her individual behaviors. Thus, the Polish-speaking Ewa demonstrates an emotional, open, confident, and cheerful personality, while the English-speaking Eva is melancholic, insecure, and vulnerable. The analysis of the book reveals that the narrator's linguistic hybridity of her migrant identity as well as of her linguistic image of the world represents the displacement that she, as a Polish migrant, experiences and probably will never be able to overcome.

Chapter Six of this dissertation aims to explicate why memories can rightly be considered the architecture of personal identity and how what an individual remembers about his or her experience constitutes what he or she is. The research shows that memories provide personal identity with coherence and continuity which contribute to the connectedness of an individual's self-image. The theories of collective memory formed by Maurice Halbwachs and of cultural memory developed by Jan Assmann emphasize the role of the social and cultural environment in one's sense of self, while the theories of embodied memory, as discussed by Maurice Merleau-

Ponty, and extended memory, defined by Andy Clark and David Chalmer, enrich the theoretical background of the domain by highlighting the role of bodily sensations and inanimate objects in the process of self-definition. The chapter also discusses the interplay between memory and history which leads to another important concept of memory studies, namely, postmemory, developed by Marianne Hirsch. Viewed as an integral element in understanding generational influences on identity, postmemory explains how traumatic events from the past shape the self of those who experienced them, and how they continue to influence the narratives of the following generations. Further on, the chapter explains how migrant identity is formed by the influence of collective, cultural, embodied and extended memory and how the inherited dilemmas from the past persist in shaping migrants' present. The chapter highlights the transformative power of memory to drive the ongoing reinvention of a migrant's identity which is always negotiated between now and then.

Chapter Seven focuses on the literary interpretation of the ways migrants engage with memory and time in *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka. On the example of the Majevskyjs family, whose rich familial history is at the center of the story, the chapter examines the role of memory in the formation and transformation of the identity of a migrant. The memory that the characters of the book are equipped with is a combination of individual, collective, cultural, communicative, embedded and extended memories. The analysis emphasizes the role of postmemory in shaping the narrator's sense of self. Portrayed by Marina Lewycka as a product of the collective past, the identity of a Ukrainian migrant reveals itself and is embraced by the leading character only after she confronts the temporal dilemmas that life in immigration poses. By reconciling the past of her family with her present, the narrator embraces the

Ukrainianness she is a legitimate heiress of and makes it part of her sense of self, rooted both in the Ukrainian past and in the British present. The analysis of the narrator's use of memory in her narration of herself shows how, in a migrant's story, the past continues to live in the present. Migrant identity reveals itself as, first and foremost, a fusion of the intersecting personal and collective memories of the bygone time.

Chapter Eight of this dissertation brings into the proposed debate on migrant identity a few theoretical perspectives on the concept of narrative, an innate ability of human beings to view their life as a coherent story of the self. This crucial element of identity formation is approached as a reflection of how people interpret, reinterpret, and endow their experience with meaning and construct their sense of self and self-perception. Drawing on Dan P. McAdams' and Paul Ricoeur's understanding of the concept of narrative identity, the chapter proposes to view self-narrative as an effective tool for one's exploration of identity processes because it is capable of reflecting the nuances of personal identity development and simultaneously depicting the dynamic interplay of its components. The chapter accentuates the connection between literature and narrative and stresses the interpretative role of the latter in migrants' understanding of who they were, are, and want to be in the future. As a cultural, social, and linguistic construct, the narrative identity of a migrant reflects the redefinition of every component of their identity.

Chapter Nine examines self-narrative as a means of addressing and overcoming identity dilemmas faced by migrant authors and their characters. The analysis focuses on the narrative strategies employed in *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria* by Kapka Kassabova to show the process of the narrator's migrant identity transformation as she revisits her homeland and retells her past. Placed in the context of temporal duality, the leading

character struggles to construct a coherent story of the self which the migration of her family to New Zealand disrupted. Experiencing the emotional narration of the migrant author's return to her homeland, we see the fractured nature of her identity reflected in the broken chronology of her narrative and the often confusing use of Bulgarian words and phrases in an otherwise sophisticated English text. Centered around the themes of ambiguity and displacement, Kapka Kassabova's self-narrative reflects migrants' eternal challenge: destined to shuttle between two or more countries, they will always be trying to reconcile the contradictory components of their identities. Stuck between here and there, now and then, English and the mother tongue, migrants have no other choice but "to live among nationalities" (Kassabova *Street...* p.144). The hybridity of their identities, resulting from the duality of their reality, is what their experiences and their narratives reflect.

Focused on the literary representation of identity dilemmas that characters of the chosen books on Eastern and Central European migration face, this dissertation studies place, language, memory, and self-narrative as the central means of migrants' self-recreation and reinterpretation in a literary space. In the self-narratives of the authors that are migrants themselves, these elements become tools of the narrators' identity construction, a medium of their self-expression, and a reflection of various changes that personal identity components undergo in their transition to a new migrant identity.

The underlying assumption of this dissertation is that the geographical, historical, and cultural closeness of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe has fostered a particular experience of migration that the narratives we discuss reflect and share. The chosen literary representations of major identity process inherent in the experience of migration in relation to

place, language, and memory show that this assumption is correct and that the authors from the former Soviet Bloc see many of the dilemmas of migration similarly and that they use narration to understand and overcome these dilemmas.

The analysis of the selected books demonstrates that a migrant's identity is to a large extent a product of the physical environment. Endowed with meaning, place and space become the central categories in migrants' self-interpretation. No matter whether the narrative starts with the migrants leaving their place of origin, returning to their motherland, or arriving at a new setting, place and space are always the starting point of the never-ending process of their identity formation and transformation. As the analysis shows, most writers not only refer to the physical environment in order to emphasize the emotional connection between a character and his/ her place but also they use it as an active narrative element of their characters' stories of the self. In *Gimme the Money* by Iva Pekarkova, New York is not only the background of the narrated events – New York becomes a character, whose dynamic presence shapes the protagonist's experiences. In Kapka Kassabova's *Street without a Name: Childhood and Other Misadventures in Bulgaria*, the narrator's motherland, the place she revisits, becomes a powerful transformational force that initiates her self-reinvention. In Birute Putrius's *Lost Birds*, the lasting disconnection from Lithuania is the reason of Al's displacement: he is no longer completely at home anywhere.

The analysis has also revealed that the communist past and the post-communist present of most countries in Eastern and Central Europe define the way migrants from these regions evaluate themselves in relation to place and space. Having experienced life in the West, immigrants from behind the Iron Curtain are destined to struggle with the inner, psychological

borders, which not only divide their perception of the world into two parts but also deepens their sense of inferiority. Having assimilated in a new country, migrants still feel insecurity and a constant need to prove, even if only to themselves, their belonging to a new place.

Another important finding of the current study is the function that language performs as a narrative element in migrants' self-writings. Employed as a driving force for self-reinvention in narrative, it not only manifests the unique worldview of its speakers and their ethnic and cultural belonging but also serves as a means of their self-expression, a tool constructing the migrant's image of the world. Drawing on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and the Natural Language Metaphysics Theory, the analysis shows that in migrants' self-narratives language becomes a site of identity negotiation. In the analysis of *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* by Eva Hoffman, which masterfully captures the inner conflict of the narrator's linguistic identities, this dissertation sees the interpretative function of language as actively shaping the story that a migrant tells. A migrant's identity becomes redefined through the acquisition of a new language. Bilingualism, cultural hybridity, and continuous self-translation are frequent modes of the self-narration of migrants from Eastern and Central Europe. Their identity is always a combination of and a compromise between the different linguistic images of the world that the languages they possess afford.

Taking into consideration the common historical experience shared by countries from which our authors originate, such as WWII, communism, the Cold War, and the post-Soviet transition, this dissertation proposes that these shared traumatic events from the past ingrained temporal ambiguity in their sense of self as a defining feature of the self-image that migrants from Eastern and Central European countries reconstruct in their self-narratives. Viewed as a

product of collective memory, the identity of a migrant relies on shared histories and inherited memories that shape their understanding of the self. Often left without direct access to records and evidences of the past, migrants turn to personal memory, cultural symbols, and fragmented family stories to piece together and reinterpret their identity. As a narrative device, memory provides migrant stories about the self with coherence and continuity and becomes a means of dealing with time-related dilemmas. Such narrative strategies as fragmented narration, disrupted temporal order of events or conflicting accounts of the past, as encountered in *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka, become an effective tool in migrant identity reconstruction, emphasizing the role of memory in the evolution of the migrant's self.

By viewing self-narration as a major tool of a migrant's identity construction and reconstruction, as well as a dominant mode of migrant literature, this dissertation attempts to show that self-writing creates a space for migrants to reinvent their identities by reconciling all parts of their experience into a meaningful story. Drawing on the interdisciplinary perspectives on identity, this study approaches the foundational categories of personal identity, such as place, language, and memory, as the major constituents of the migrant's self in their writings. Self-narratives by Eastern and Central European migrant writers present a unique perspective on the experience of migration which we propose to read not only as a literary portrayal of the challenges that living in immigration poses but also as records of their authors' personal processes of self-exploration and identity re-creation.

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