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Transculturality in Migrant Literature

Three case studies of six novels by Olga Grjasnowa, Jhumpa Lahiri and Leïla Houari

Erika Kooistra
Student number: 5692539
g.f.kooistra@students.uu.nl
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Abstract

The subject of this study is transculturality in migrant literature. Following up on the results of an earlier paper, the present author now looks into the role of the agency to migrate in the creation of transcultural elements in migrant literature. Through the analysis and comparison of six novels written by three different authors (Olga Grjasnowa, Jhumpa Lahiri and Leïla Houari), three different kinds of agency were integrated in this study: forced migration due to war, voluntary migration for academic reasons, and the so-called ‘guestworkers’, who migrated due to economic reasons. The novels were analysed using six categories, which indicate transcultural elements according to existing literature: identity, dissolution of nationalist categories, stereotypes and *Othering*, belonging and ‘heimat’, duality and memory & trauma, and polyphony and languages. The results have demonstrated that the concepts of identity and belonging are predominant in all novels, albeit in different ways. Grjasnowa construction of a transcultural identity is more focussed on the negative effects of migration on identity and belonging. Lahiri and Houari also treat identity conflicts as well as problems with finding your roots. The overall tone, however, is different, since the protagonists undergo a development throughout the book which makes them discover themselves more and accept the richness and contradictions that come with a double identity. This study thus concludes, based on three case studies, that the agency to migrate does have an influence on the construction of a transcultural identity in migrant literature and encourages more research to confirm this as well as further research into other aspects that could have influenced this research, like the author’s gender.

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1. Introduction

In the globalised world we are living in today, the relation between culture and identity is not always clear, sometime even problematic. The homogeneity, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation that characterised the essentialist concept of culture, do not correspond to the form of cultures today. Due to new information and communication technologies as well as migratory processes, the traditional concept of culture does not suffice anymore (Welsh, 1999). In this context, it is interesting to look at migrants, since they usually have gotten to know multiple cultures and might therefore have another perspective on culture and identity. As literature can teach us a lot about culture and identity, it's interesting to look at the genre of so-called migrant literature, because literature written by migrants has the potential to transmit another perspective on culture and identity, since these authors have experienced multiple ways of living, customs, and traditions and often, forced or voluntarily, have given up the idea of belonging to uniquely one nation.

An example of such a writer is Olga Grjasnowa, a German author who was born in Azerbaijan. Her first novel was published in 2012: *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (*All Russians love birch trees*). Since then, *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (Not translated into English) and *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (*City of Jasmine*) were published in 2014 and 2017 respectively. The author of the present study has in previous work written about the construction of a transcultural and transnational identity in Grjasnowas debut novel. This analysis concentrated on categories like the removal of national categories, the use of stereotypes and clichés, and the concept of rootlessness and placelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit & Ortlosigkeit*). The overall conclusion of the paper was that Grjasnowa clearly transmitted an idea of transcultural and transnational identity but that it remained doubtful that this is interpreted as a very positive concept by the reader as well. A hypothesis and suggestion for future research was that this is due to the fact that Grjasnowa experienced traumata as a child, when living in Baku, and did not migrate voluntarily to Germany (Kooistra, 2019). Considering this, I would like to propose the following research question: *How does the agency to migrate influence the author's construction of a transcultural identity in migrant literature ?*

In order to answer this research question, it is necessary to compare Grjasnowas novels with other authors of migrant literature. First, I would like to analyse two books of Jhumpa Lahiri. A writer who was born to Indian parents in the United Kingdom but has lived a big part of her life in the United States and currently lives in Italy. She debuted in 1999 with a book of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, immediately winning the Pulitzer Prize. In 2003 followed

her first novel, *The Namesake*, followed by another book of short stories in 2008: *Unaccustomed Earth*. Her most recent novel was published in 2013: *The Lowland*. She has written the majority of her books in English, but more recently also a couple of short stories in Italian, in which she also reflects on the effect writing in a different language has on her own writing style (Biography.com, 2014).

Second, I would like to consider two novels of Leïla Houari, who came to Belgium at the age of seven. Her father came to Belgium as an immigrant worker. Her books can be considered as part of “la littérature beur”, which is literature produced by authors who are born in France but have parents from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), who came to France as immigrants (Louviot, p. 4). Houari debuted in 1985 with *Zeïda de nulle part*, and since then has published two other novels and two short stories, all treating the question of migration and the problems of the self when it finds itself between two worlds. Unlike Grjasnowa, Lahiri and Houari were not refugees, who had to flee due to war and traumatic experiences. In Lahiri’s case, her father moved for his academic career to the United States, which could be considered as voluntary migration. Houari’s father, on the other hand, moved to Belgium, because there was not enough work in his homeland. This kind of migration finds itself between the previous two described, since it is not as forced as war refugees nor entirely voluntary. The three authors represent in my case study three different kinds of migration and it is my aim to find out if the agency to migrate does have an influence in the construction of a transcultural identity in migrant literature and if there will be differences in the transcultural elements in these novels. Although an author is not equal to a narrator or even a protagonist, the connection between author and identity construction can be made in this case, due to the fact that their work can be considered as autofiction, though some novels more than others, but many scholars have remarked the autobiographical elements (Hähnel-Mesnard, 2018 ; Gans-Guinoune, 2010 ; Lutzoni, 2017). My expectation is that there will be transcultural elements in Lahiri’s and Houari’s novels as well, because their books treat the challenges people encounter when living between two cultures and two worlds. Therefore, it is possible that the authors deconstruct stereotypes and nationalist characteristics in their novels, because their characters are no longer bound to one specific country.

The analysis will consist of a case study of three authors, where two novels of each writer are compared. I have selected *The Namesake* and *The Lowland* by Lahiri, because these are the only novels she has written, next to short stories. For Grjasnowa, I have chosen to analyse *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, because these two novels describe protagonists that have the same German-Azerbaijani background as

the author. Concerning Houari, I have chosen her debut, *Zeida de nulle part*, and one of her more recent novels, *Les Rives identitaires*. After having presented the selected novels, I would like to propose a subdivision of my research question:

1. How does the agency to migrate influence the author's construction of a transcultural identity in migrant literature ?

1.1) How is this visible in the novels *Der Russe ist einer der Birken liebt* and *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* written by Olga Grjasnowa?

1.2) How is this visible in the novels *The Lowland* and *The Namesake* written by Jhumpa Lahiri?

1.3) How is this visible in the novels *Zeida de nulle part* and *Les Rives identitaires* written by Leïla Houari?

During the next chapters the theoretical background of this research will be treated, using several cultural concepts that have led up to the concept of transculturality. Furthermore, the concepts of migrant literature and agency will be explained and reflected upon. In the methods section the criteria that will be used during the analysis will be presented. During the analysis novels of Olga Grjasnowa, Jhumpa Lahiri and Leïla Houari will be analysed according to specific criteria, which indicate transcultural elements. In the discussion and conclusion, the results will of the analysis will compared and a conclusion will be made.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Cultural concepts

The concept of transculturality is central to my research question. Therefore, my theoretical basis will start with an explanation of the concept of transculturality and how it relates to other cultural concepts, like the essentialist, the multicultural and the intercultural concept. It was presented by the German scholar Wolfgang Welsch at the end of the 20th century (Welsch, 1999). According to him, there is a need for a new cultural concept, since the form of cultures today does not correspond to the traditional cultural concept anymore, which is an essentialist one. In describing this traditional cultural concept, he bases himself on the 'kugelmodel' of Herder, according to which cultures are like spheres. They are characterised by their homogeneity, their ethnic consolidation and their delimitation towards the outside. The reason for this discrepancy between cultural concepts and reality is, according to Welsch, the increase of interconnectedness in today's world, due to new information- and communication technologies, as well as migratory flows (Welsch, 1999, p. 1-2). This essentialist cultural concept (as described by Herder) was argued against by Boas in the 1920s, arguing that culture should be seen as a "highly permeable context in a constant state of flux" (Benessaieh, 2010, p. 13). In the 1970s Geertz continued this idea with his interpretive cultural concept, describing culture as "webs of significance", woven by human practices and representations and analysed from a highly contextualized point of view. It should be interpretive, searching for meaning not for general laws or rules (Geertz, 1973, p. 311). Welsch positions his new cultural concept as an alternative to the already existing concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality. The difference between the two lies in the fact that multiculturalism focusses on the co-existence of separate cultures within one society and interculturality concentrates on the contact between cultures and ways to solve (unavoidable) intercultural conflicts. Both concepts are nevertheless still based on the traditional concept of culture as clearly separated spheres (Welsch, 1999, p. 3). The concept of multiculturalism (sometimes mentioned interchangeably with cosmopolitanism) describes societies with a high degree of cultural diversity and/or an openness towards it. Furthermore, it can be associated with multicultural governmental policies to promote the idea of a so-called *melting pot* or *mosaïque*. Although these policies act out of respect for cultural pluralism, the concept of multiculturalism has been heavily criticized for maintaining differences, creating parallel societies instead of encouraging mutual adaptation and integration (Benessaieh, 2010, p. 17). Welsch wants to move away from this concept and

proposes a new concept where cultures are highly heterogeneous, interconnected and entangled with each other, and characterized by their hybridity: “Transculturality is, in the first place, a consequence of the *inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures*. These encompass [...] a number of ways of life and cultures, which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another.”(Welsch, 1999, p. 4). “For every culture, all other cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites. [...] Henceforward there is no longer anything absolutely foreign. Everything is within reach. Accordingly, there is no longer anything exclusively ‘own’ either. (Welsch, 1999, p. 5). Welsch applies this on a micro-level to individuals as well as on a macro-level, to societies (ibid, p. 5).

Concerning reactions by scholars in the field, the concept of transculturality has not created a complete change in paradigm, the concept of interculturality is still widely used and popular in socio-political contexts as well. Transculturality is nonetheless a popular concept among researchers. Benessaieh, for example, understands the concept as “a cross-cultural competence, a cohesive identity that transcends frontiers or time, or a plural sense of self for individuals and communities” (Benessaieh, 2010, p. 29). He gives the example of the Caribbean writer Patrick Chamoiseau, who has applied this idea to diasporic communities and has introduced the concepts of *créolité* and *négritude* (Benessaieh, 2010, p. 23-24). On the other hand, Hess-Lüttlich argues that the concept of transculturality is highly controversial. He bases his argument especially on the work of Löchte (2005), who attacks Welsch’ use of the traditional ‘kugelmodel’. Welsch refers for this model to Herder, and Löchte accuses him of having misused, and falsely cited Herder’s work (Hess-Lüttlich, 2018, p. 55).

Whether Welsch uses or interprets Herders cultural concept in a correct way or not, the author of this study would like to argue that this essentialist concept can still be considered as the ‘traditional’ concept of culture, since many people today still associate cultures with clearly delimited countries, belonging to people, that all act in a similar way. This way of thinking can especially be found in the media and in the rhetoric of political parties adhering to a more nationalist or right-extremist ideology (Like RN in France, FvD and PVV in the Netherlands or AfD in Germany). The proposed research uses the concept of transculturality because the protagonists reflect the characteristics of Welsch’ concept of culture, since most of them are polyglot, at home in multiple places, and do not let themselves be categorised easily.

2.2 Migrant literature

The term ‘migrant literature’ is more complicated than it might seem on first glance. It starts already with the definition, because literature written by migrants has been classified by many names throughout the years. Some examples are the so-called ‘Gastarbeiterliteratur’ in Germany and other countries during the 1980-ies, Minority literature or, alternatively, in France, francophone literature (Bayer, 2004, p. 2-5). The latter term designates those works written in French by people who were not from the ‘hexagone’. The problem which arises when trying to categorise migrant literature are multiple. First, there is a risk one concentrates too much on the origin/cultural context of the author. Both Egle (2013) and Bayer (2004) speak about the danger of disregarding literary and aesthetic qualities in a text, in favour of concentrating more on their cultural context/origins (Bayer, 2004, p. 4). Bayer even adding that “one might indeed wonder whether such praxis might not stem from the silent assumption that minority texts do not deserve an aesthetic reading” (Bayer, 2004, p. 4), based on the idea that their only value lies in their cultural context. Another disadvantage of categorisation is that migrant literature is always constituted opposed to the ‘established literature’ of a country. To designate something as ‘migrant literature’, means to draw a boundary and to create binaries like inclusion/exclusion, own/foreign etc. (Egle, 2013, p. 6). For example, the term ‘minority literature’: according to Bayer, a ‘minor’ literature already suggests that there is a ‘major’ literature, one that is even superior or more prestigious (Bayer, 2004, p. 5). Interestingly, Bayer proposes even to get rid of the category ‘migrant literature’ all together, since

“the equal-but-separate attitude that often allocates ‘German’ authors to the field of literature and *Migrantenliteratur* to that of German Studies is above all the continuation of the Western belief in its own superiority when confronted with the Other” (Bayer, 2004, p. 11).

The ideal goal, according to him, would be the creation of one ‘literature’, multi-faceted and inclusive (Bayer, 2004, p. 10).

After just having stated the danger of too much focus on the cultural context, it is nevertheless important to stress that there is no such thing as ‘one’ migrant literature, since every country has its own history with migrants, refugees etc. Postcolonial literature can also be considered an important genre, since it experiences many of the same difficulties migrant literature does. Furthermore, many migrants in for example France or England come from former colonies (Bayer, 2004, p. 12). Therefore, French migrant literature includes many works from authors with roots in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and several African countries, all of these countries having been a colony or protectorate state at some point in history. As ‘littérature

keur' is designated, literature written by authors born in France (or Belgium) of parents coming from the Maghreb region (Louviot, 2013, p. 4), an example of which is the author Leila Houari whose novels will be analysed. An important characteristic of 'la littérature-keur' is that the writers often write to tell their own story and therefore their books often have a strong autobiographical tone (Oktapoda, 2008, p. 91). Just like France and Belgium, Germany also had a big population of so-called 'guest-workers', many of them coming from Turkey. Other minority groups in the German population come from Eastern-Europe or the Caucasus. They fled mostly due to war or conflicts or were part of the group of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet-Union, that were welcomed in Germany in the 1990-ties. For example, Olga Grjasnowa, a German-Azerbaijani author, that fled the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a child, together with her parents. She was accepted into Germany as a Jewish refugee, because this process was easier and quicker than the one for war refugees (Hähnel-Mesnard, 2018, p. 98). Third, Jhumpa Lahiri is part of a minority in the US with a British-Indian background. This minority group is positioned amidst other Southeast-Asian minorities in the US, like Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Vietnamese ones. Most of them coming as immigrant workers or for educational reasons to the US in the 19th century and again starting from the 1960-ties (Pew Research Center, 2012). Lahiri's works of literature have many intersections with postcolonial literature as well, since the colonial past plays an important role in her novels, next to the problems newcomers experience when navigating between cultures in a new country (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p. 852).

From the above can be concluded that the term 'migrant literature' is a complicated one, linked to other terminologies as well (like minority-, postcolonial- and gastarbeiter literature), and time- and location-dependent. For practical reasons the definition of Bayer for migrant literature will be adopted: "Literature written by non-German, or newly-German authors [...] authors whose parents, or who themselves, have come to live in Germany at various stages since the early 1960s" (Bayer, 2004, p. 1-2). Although Bayer uses the term 'migrant literature' here to speak about German literature, I would like to propose to that the parts 'non-German' and 'newly-German' above, could also be replaced by 'English' or 'French' and will therefore be used in this research.

2.3 Agency

Furthermore, since the term 'agency' is an integral part of the research question, it needs further clarification. In sociological theory the term agency is part of the agency/structure dualism, which means that the agency of an actor is seen as distinct from social structures. It is part of a

debate asking if human beings have free will on the one hand, and are constraint by social structures/institutions, on the other hand. During the first part of the previous century there has been a dominance of approaches that emphasised the role of social structures. Approaches include Durkheim and Parsons. Later it was labelled objectivism. These approaches were gradually challenged by scholars like Giddens and Bourdieu, wanting to see human beings as actors, in control of their own life. Thus, not only re-acting, but also acting according how one interprets a given situation. They have been called the interpretivists or subjectivists as well (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 14). However, following up on what has been written above, there is not one of these two, that provides the answer in the agency/structure debate. This is where practice theories come into play: they intend to understand the interconnectedness and interaction of the two concepts, instead of opposing them. Thus, proposing a duality instead of a dualism. Neither of the two is determining, but they both influence and limit one another (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 15). The fact that Giddens's theory has been frequently applied to substantive studies, also shows us one of the strongest points of critics: Giddens's structuration theory seems to put more emphasis on agency than on structure (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 17).

When it comes to migration, the agency/structure debate helps us to understand the actors and factors in global migration processes, that influence an agent's decision and/or ability to migrate. External structures influencing possible migrants are for example global inequalities, colonial histories, but also plain norms, rules and laws of organisations and/or countries. They generally indicate the malleability of an agent (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 20). Internal structures are habits, repeated practices, conceptual frameworks and internalised social structures and norms. They are all the result of socialisation and experience (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 22). Third, communities of practice constitute the context, in which external structures enable or constrain an agent. It is about roles and positions of others in the surroundings of an agent. Thus, active agency (both routine and reflexive) is always situated in a context, which has an influence on the agent as well. Lastly, outcomes have an effect on future perceptions, actions and expectations etc. Outcomes can take the shape of all the above mentioned forms and can lead to both consolidation and innovation (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 24-25).

The term agency was chosen for this research question, because this research compares different kinds of migration to see if there are differences in both the amount and nature of transcultural elements in the novels of Grjasnowa, Lahiri and Houari. These different kinds of migration are characterised by a difference in agency of the migrant; the agency to make decisions, to leave your home and they are also influenced by external and internal structures.

3. Methodology

In order to answer the posed research questions, a critical discourse analysis of six novels will be made to discover strategies used by the three writers to construct a transcultural identity in their books. This will be based on the existing theory about transculturality in migrant literature and these books specifically in order to see if existing strategies/topoi can be confirmed and/or new ones can be added. Finally, the findings will be compared in order to see if the agency to migrate has an influence on the construction of a transcultural/transnational identity. At the start of the analysis a short summary of the novels and their reception in the press will be presented, in order to see if the reader recognised any transcultural elements in the novels. To achieve the latter, a selection of book reviews will be analysed to find out if they speak about elements that could be characterised as transcultural. The critical discourse analysis of the novels will be structured around the following topoi. They were found after analysing secondary literature on transcultural identities and postcolonial elements in the six novels that will be analysed, in articles written by Egle (2013), Catani (2018), Nadiminti (2018), and Alfonso-Forero (2007).

1. Identity concepts: multiple and/or fluid identities, internalization of assigned characteristics and/or the eurocentric values of the dominant discourse, hybrid identities viewed as positive or negative -> identity conflicts/fragmentised identities?

2. Dissolution of nationalist categories: how are nationalist categories, their characteristics and boundaries used? Are there essentialist characteristics? Are there signs of transnationalist characteristics, boundaries that are permeable, overlapping or disappearing?

3. Stereotypes and Othering: how are stereotypes used by the authors? It is possible that they are first used in order to later deconstruct them and make process of othering more visible. This section is about the relation between identity and alterity, self and the other. Is alterity inherent to identity? How is the migrant characterised and are there any stereotypes used, like victim vs. agent, poor vs. rich, religious vs atheist, conservative vs. progressive?

4. Belonging and 'Heimat': localisation in relation to identity. What means a nation/culture for the protagonists? Are they disintegrated or used in order to deconstruct? How is the question of belonging treated?

5. Duality and Memory & Trauma: in migrant literature there's often a duality, for example in space and time. This could refer to different countries, but also to present/past, which in turn could be connected to memory and trauma. Are there any third/hybrid spaces? Another form of duality can be found in migrant identities, where the self can be torn between different cultures. There is often a use of binaries, like foreign and own.

6. Polyphony and languages: the effect of using multiple perspectives in the text, not just one narrator. Also, what is the importance of languages in the novels? Multilingualism, jobs (translators), crossing borders also linguistically, language and exile.

4. Analysis

4.1 Olga Grjasnowa

In this chapter I focus on the Azerbaijani-German author Olga Grjasnowa. In *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, Mascha Kogan fled the civil war in Azerbaijan as a child with her parents. She is described as polyglot and highly ambitious. The novel starts describing her relationship with her boyfriend Elias, who dies shortly after the novel starts. Not being able to deal with his death, she flees to Israel. But here she discovers she cannot outrun her traumatic childhood nor her memories of Elias and next to that has to deal with her Jewish identity. *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, tells the story of ballet dancer Leyla and psychiatrist Altay, a couple that is living a fake-marriage in Berlin in order to please their parents back in Russia and Azerbaijan, where queer people could not live a safe life. They try to start anew in Berlin and meet Jonoun, an American artistic girl. It is the start of a story of three people looking for love, even if it comes in unusual ways. The story brings us from Berlin to Moscow and the Caucasus, the past and the present, and switches between all the character perspectives.

Before starting the analysis, the reception of the two books will be analysed in order to see which elements/characteristics were identified by the readers. März writes about *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* in *Die Zeit* the following:

Mascha Kogan musste für die deutsche Literatur erfunden werden. Erstens, weil sie den Typus einer neuen Generation verkörpert. Zweitens, weil sie ein so wahnwitzig widersprüchliches, tragikomisches Weib ist. Überautonom und überanhänglich, rational und abergläubisch, essgestört und lebenshungrig, schnell verliebt, in Männer und in Frauen, schnell auf der Flucht vor Menschen, vom Ehrgeiz getrieben und in Gleichgültigkeit versackend. Ständig sucht sie eine Schulter zum Anlehnen. Findet sie eine, haut sie ab. (März, 2012)

Der Spiegel writes that Grjasnowa has chosen the character of an interpreter to leave the category of ‚nationality‘ behind (Spiegel, 2012). Über *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* is written the following in *Die Zeit*: “Eine Liebe jenseits von Sexualität und Geschlechtergrenzen (Scheper, *Die Zeit*). According to *Der Spiegel*, Grjasnowa “erzählt von modernen Nomaden, die Zuflucht suchen in diesem modernen Berlin. Und die doch nirgendwo zu Hause sind, in keinem Land, vor allem aber in keiner Liebe. Sie suchen nach Halt“ (Becker, 2014). Concluding from the reviews, it can be said that readers have recognised the tendency of Grjasnowa to de-categorise, especially the notion of nationality and also to de-localise: the characters often have trouble finding their ‘heimat’ or where they belong. Grjasnowa is found to transcend borders, for example crossing norms concerning love and sexuality in *Die Juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*. Lastly, it was recognised in reviews that the main characters are conflicted; there is a

duality in their behaviour and characteristics, which could have something to do with their bi-culturalism.

4.1.1 Identity

Both Egle (2013) and Catani (2018) described the influence of migration on identity, which can be both positive and negative. For example, identity conflicts or fragmented identities, because migrants could feel torn between two cultures. However, migration can have a positive influence on identity when identities are fluid or multiple and characters can switch easily between them. In Grjasnowas novels this can also be observed. For example, in *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, when Altay and Jonoun speak together about Leyla:

„Altay?“ „Hm.“ „Wie ist sie wirklich?“ „Wer?“ „Leyla.“ Altay zuckte mit den Schultern: „Ist dir jemals aufgefallen, dass sie keine Versprechungen macht? Es sind immer nur wir, die ihr das Blaue vom Himmel versprechen. Manchmal glaube ich, dass es sie gar nicht gibt. Zumindest nicht wirklich. Sie lebt in jedem Moment irgendeine Rolle bis zum Äußersten aus – genau wie ihre Großmutter. Alles was uns bleibt, ist, herauszufinden, welche es gerade ist.“
(Grjasnowa, 2014, p. 166)

Leyla seems to have multiple and fluid identities. However, this is not considered as something positive by those dear to her: they associate her with an actress, playing each role to the fullest but never taking responsibility for it and leaving each role afterwards like a snake sheds its skin. Another aspect of identity in relation to migration, is identity conflicts. In *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, Mascha is arguing with her German-Turkish friend Cem about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Even though Mascha is not particularly for the expansion politics of Israel, she has the feeling that she has to defend it towards her Arab friend:

Ich stand auf und lief zur Toilette. Dort hielt ich meine Hände unter den warmen Wasserstrahl und versuchte meine Wut zu lokalisieren. Ich hatte das Gefühl, etwas verteidigen zu müssen, was ich unter anderen Umständen kritisieren würde.(Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 59)

In this situation, Mascha feels clearly forced to defend Israeli politics due to her Jewish identity. The context makes this part of her identity relevant and creates the conflict. The characters in both novels are continuously confronted to identity-forming categorisations and ascriptions, which they try to reject, but this turns out to be hard in a society which is characterised by binary structures and ascriptions. The confrontation of parts of their identity (like foreigner, Jewish etc.), which are made relevant in certain situations (against their will), and society creates identity conflicts. Just like conflicts between past and present as well Azerbaijani- and German identity. This creates in my opinion an identity concept which is unstable and fragmented as well as multiple and fluid, which can be considered as a transcultural element. The characters

seem mentally unstable during multiple occasions, and in particular, the female protagonists switch between several identity roles. Interestingly, they seem to like this freedom and flexibility, but it's not perceived as positive by those around them.

4.1.2 Dissolution of nationalist categories

Grjasnowa actively works to bring down nationalist categories in her novels, which are made arbitrarily, and whose boundaries are actually non-existent (Egle, 2013, p. 94-95). This can be demonstrated by the following citation. Here, Grjasnowa uses the case of the Bergkarabach conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

Die Mörder konnten oft nicht zwischen Aserbajdschanern und Armeniern unterscheiden, es gab keine vermeintlich ethnischen Merkmale, und die meisten Armenier sprachen ausgezeichnetes Aserbajdschanisch.“ (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 44)

Grjasnowa remarks here that these boundaries are 'vermeintlich', hinting that she doubts they actually exist. Also, she shows that the categories for Armenians and Azerbaijani are arbitrary, since they both have similar characteristics.

Furthermore, Grjasnowa shows us at multiple occasions in both novels how absurd nationalist categories and their clear boundaries can be. For example, when Mascha arrives at the airport in Tel Aviv:

“Sprechen Sie Arabisch” “Ja.” “Weshalb?” “Ich habe es studiert.” “Sprechen Sie Hebraisch?” “Nein.” “Haben Sie einen Freund?” „Ja. Nein. Ich meine nein.“ „Ist er Araber, Ägypter oder Palästinenser?“ „Nein.“ „Was denn dann?“ „Tot.“ [...] „War er Araber, Ägypter oder Palästinenser?“ (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 163)

Grjasnowa uses in my opinion actively nationalist categorisations in both novels to show the reader, that their boundaries are generally created arbitrarily, based on supposed characteristics, and that these categorisations are shown to be irrelevant and conflict-creating at multiple occasions. This points to transculturality, since borders become less relevant, are overlapping, and nationalist categorisations are refused or mocked/used in order to be deconstructed.

Finally, it is interesting to mention that, although Grjasnowa is putting much value on the importance of deconstructing nationalist categories, she provides for each character an extensive genealogy, for example for Mascha's friend Sami, that is a German citizen, born in Beirut and raised in Paris and Frankfurt, son of a Swiss banker and a Lebanese, his actual mother tongue is French. (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 127) This can be the proof that he cannot be characterised by just one nationality, but, on the other hand, it can be considered as

contradictory for Grjasnowa to insist so much on nationalist categorisations, after working to deconstruct them on earlier occasions.

4.1.3 Stereotypes and *Othering*

Both Egle (2013) and Catani (2018) speak about the use of stereotypes and *Othering* in the creation of transcultural elements. Othering is defined by Catani in the following way:

Die westliche Identität [wird] auf Kosten eines Anderen formiert, das als Gegenbild konstruiert und zugleich ausgegrenzt wird. Ein polyvalenter Prozess, im Zuge dessen zugleich das Eigene und das Andere konstruiert werden – dem jedoch klar erkennbare Machtverhältnisse eingeschrieben sind. (Catani, 2018, p. 149)

In Grjasnowa's novels the main characters are on multiple occasions confronted with stereotypes or racist categorisations. For example, when Cem hits by accident another car and he and Mascha consequently argue with the driver:

“Eine Dreistigkeit ist das. Wie verhältst du dich überhaupt auf deutschen Straßen? Du bist hier nur Gast.“ [...] „Ich bin hier geboren.“ „Gar nichts bist du. Ein Kanake, das bist du.“ [...] Ist ein Illegaler, profitiert nur von unserem System. Wie die alle.“ „Euer Fachosystem, klar!“, schrie ich. (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 155)

In this situation Grjasnowa shows us the stereotypical description of people with a migration background: as people, that are illegal and only profit from the system. Interestingly, Mascha also reacts with a stereotype: “euer Fachosystem!”. This shows that she has internalized the stereotypical discourse of the dominant societal group. By this scene, Grjasnowa is criticising binary and stereotypical ways of thinking in showing us the reality of people with a migration background. On the one hand, Grjasnowa is actively deconstructing stereotypes of a ‘typical migrant’ by giving us characters that are highly-educated, successful, polyglot, intellectual etc. On the other hand, she shows the stereotypical thinking patterns of other people concerning migrants in order to show the reader their absurdity. This points to transculturality, since stereotypes are based on binaries (foreign vs not-foreign) and Grjasnowa either mocks these binaries or refuses them by creating new, mixed categories.

4.1.4 Belonging & ‘Heimat’

In both novels the issue of belonging and ‘heimat’ plays an important role. For example, in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, Mascha often reflects on this particular issue, but she doesn't connect belonging to a particular location however:

Wenn ich mit meiner Mutter telefonierte, überkam mich manchmal die Sehnsucht nach einer Zuhause, ohne dass ich es hätte lokalisieren können. Wonach ich mich sehnte, war ein vertrauter Ort. Eigentlich hielt ich nichts von vertrauten Orten – der Begriff Heimat implizierte für mich stets den Pogrom. (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 202)

This citation makes clear that Mascha still carries the traumatic experiences of the Bergkarabach conflict during her childhood with her, and it stops her from localising her 'heimat' and might contribute to a fear of nationalist localisations. Also in *Die Juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* Grjasnowa portrays Leyla and Jonoun as two people, that are always on the move, sometimes without even knowing why anymore: "Abgesehen davon wussten beide nicht, weshalb sie immer weiterfahren, doch inzwischen war das Unterwegssein zur existentiellen Notwendigkeit geworden." (Grjasnowa, 2014, p. 229) Finally, it is interesting to remark that the protagonists always seem to find themselves on a thin line between self-discovery, flight, and self-destruction. For example, when Mascha tries to deal with her Jewish roots, but at the same time flees to Israel, because she cannot deal with the death of her boyfriend. The tendency to self-destruct becomes visible when her friend Cem tries to convince her to return to Germany: „Er hörte nicht auf, von Deutschland zu sprechen. Aber ich wollte bleiben, mich häppchenweise verlieren und nie wieder aufsammeln.“ (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 225) The topic of belonging and rootlessness is essential and recurring throughout both novels. All protagonists have trouble finding a physical location for 'heimat' and exhibit a kind of fleeing behaviour, when confronted with trauma from the present or the past, which does not help them dealing with it in the end. This contributes to the creation of transcultural elements, since, as Egle (2013) described, in transcultural theory identity constructions of individuals are often detached from nationalist and fixed localisations (Egle, 2013, p. 47). This is exactly what can be observed in both Grjasnowas novels.

4.1.5 Duality and memory & trauma

The previous section showed that traumatic experiences of the past still plays a role in the present life of the protagonists. Egle explains that duality is a recurring theme in migration- and migrant literature (Egle, 2013, p. 48). This can be a duality in time, space and even on a character level. In both novels the protagonists travel continuously between past and present as well as in space (Germany, Caucasus, Israel). Also, the perspective changes between the characters in *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*. The intertwining of past and present is something that deserves further attention, since it strongly influences the identity and mental state of the protagonists. For example, Mascha, in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*,

frequently re-lives traumatic experiences from her youth in Azerbaijan or the death of her boyfriend Elias. In these moments past and present create new spaces, so-called mixed places, where there is no separation between past and present anymore. For example, when Mascha thinks of the woman, that was killed in front of her eyes when she was a child:

Meine Alpträume wurden zu Tagträumen. Wenn ich übersetzte oder meinen Orangensaft trank, sah ich den hellblauen Stoff, der sich langsam mit Blut tränkte, und die Blutlache auf dem Asphalt. Ich konnte meine Hand nach ihr ausstrecken. Ich konnte sie berühren. Ich hörte die Stimmen ihrer Mörder. Immer deutlicher. Die meisten Gewehrläufe, die ich sah, waren real. (Grjasnowa, 2012, p. 198)

Duality is a recurring theme throughout both novels, be it in time, space or other binaries. This is also considered as an important indicator for transculturality (Egle, 2013, p. 48). Furthermore, in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, past and present melt together into third spaces and the binaries of time and space are disintegrated. These hybrid spaces are an important part of transculturality, according to Egle (2013), who is referring to Bhaba for this topic. This melting together of past and present has a considerable influence on the protagonist's identity, since her traumata prevent her from connecting the feeling of belonging to a physical place and comes back to haunt her in the present. So, especially in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, the role of trauma from the past has a big influence on the protagonist's identity and mental stability.

4.1.6 Polyphony & languages

Egle (2013) and Catani (2018) also speak about the role of perspectives in migrant literature. The use of multiple perspectives gives multiple characters or groups a voice, where an auctorial narrator conveys a more closed worldview (Egle, 2013, p. 50). Especially in *Die Juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* the perspective varies between Jonoun, Leyla and Altay and changes every chapter. But even though in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* the story is told from one perspective, Grjasnowa creates at least some degree of perspective diversity by frequently using literal speech. Also, the role of languages cannot be left unnoticed, since it shows that the characters are not only physically crossing borders, but also linguistically. In *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*, both Cem and Mascha are interpreters and polyglott. In the explanatory statement of the jury when Grjasnowa was given the Klaus-Michael-Kühne-Preis in 2012, was written:

Die Autorin hat die Figur einer Dolmetscherin gewählt, um die Kategorie der Nationalität aufzulösen. Ihre Handlung bewegt sich von Baku über Frankfurt/Main nach Israel und Gaza,

ohne jemals Gefahr zu laufen der Nostalgie, dem Folklorismus oder der Wehklage der Exilierten zu erliegen. (Abendblatt, 2012)

It is clear that the jury also recognised, next to the role of linguistic border crossers, the earlier mentioned tendency of Grjasnowa to deconstruct nationalist categories in her novels. Grjasnowa tries to show us that the protagonists are not only borders crossers in a physical way, but also linguistically, both of these two are indicators of transcultural elements. Also, the polyphony allows multiple voices to be heard in the novels (be it more in *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* than in *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt*), which contributes to a more open worldview, instead of one fixed perspective on the story, and could result in less binary thinking patterns.

4. 2 Jhumpa Lahiri

In the second part of this analysis I will focus on the Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri. In *The Namesake* we follow two generations of the Ganguli family, Indian immigrants in the US. Ashima and Ashoke give their son a so-called ‘pet-name’: Gogol, waiting for the official name (chosen by the grandmother) to arrive, but it never comes. His father chooses the name Gogol in memory of a catastrophe he experienced as a child. Later, Gogol changes his name to Nikhil (Nick). The novel shows us the transformation of the family’s traditional life in Calcutta to their new lives in America, with all the problems and conflicted loyalties that come with it. The book also shows us the journey of the second generation, finding ways to define themselves between the expectations of their parents and wanting to fit into American society. *The Lowland* follows the lives of two very different brothers, Udayan and Subhash, that grow up in Calcutta in the 1950s and 60s. Subhash leaves for the US to study, but Udayan is more idealistic and drawn to the Naxalite movement, a Maoist rebellious movement, and finally has to go into hiding because of his involvement in the killing of a police officer (in which his girlfriend Gauri was also implicated). When his brother is killed by the police, Subhash comes home, marries his brother’s pregnant girlfriend Gauri and takes her with him to the US. The novel shows us their far from functioning family in the new world. The relation between husband and wife is characterised by tension due to what happened in the past. Also, the relation between mother and daughter is fragile, as Gauri has to battle between parental duties and her longing for independence and a career.

Before starting the analysis, a short overview of the reception of both novels will be given. When looking closer at some reviews, it can be noticed that it was recognised that both novels address questions and problems of identity, loyalty to family/tradition, memory,

rootlessness & exile, and reinvention, as both Myerson (2004) and Meritt (2013) wrote in *The Guardian*. Another aspect that was addressed is the fact that Lahiri both confirms some stereotypes about Indian migrants in the U.S. but works to deconstruct the ‘stereotypical migrant’ as well. Both Meritt (2013) and Kakutani (2003) remark that the women in Lahiri’s novels are the place where this deconstruction takes place, since they are constantly reinventing themselves. For example, in *The Lowland*, where Gauri chooses her intellectual career over her family and leaves her husband and child. Lastly, Deb remarks in *The New York Times* that Lahiri moves through time and space in her novels; switching between past and present, India and the U.S., and even between different character perspectives (Deb, 2013).

4.2.1 Identity

Regarding identity, it was observed that both the 1st and 2nd generation migrants experienced identity conflicts, be it of a different nature. The 1st generation experienced more problems of country, adapting to a new culture and battling the fear of losing (the connection to) their own culture so far from home. When Ashima has to give birth to her first child in the new country, she even says “being a foreigner [...] is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts.” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 49) The 2nd generation is more estranged from Bengali culture and feels often caught between the two, part of neither one of them. For example, when Gogol visits India for the first time, he feels like he doesn’t belong there, but in the US his classmates make him feel like an outsider too (Lahiri, 2003, p. 82). Especially as a teenager it turns out to be hard: “Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for ‘American-born confused deshi’. In other words, him.” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 118). The protagonists constantly have to negotiate parts of their identity, in each situation differently, often until they feel torn between their loyalty to tradition and wanting to find a place in their new country. Sometimes interesting mix-forms are found, for example when Ashima makes concessions when it comes to food, American holidays or celebrating birthdays (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p. 857).

However, there are not only negative effects of migration on identity that can be observed, since also the concept of fluid and multiple identities can be observed in both novels, which is an important transcultural element. Both in *The Lowland* and *The Namesake* especially the younger protagonists seem to lead parallel lives, switching between university, work, girlfriend, parents etc. Furthermore, it was observed that the migration made especially the Indian-born female protagonists (e.g. Gauri, and Ashima) more independent and acquire a kind of ‘American-like independence’, since it’s at home that cultural practices take place and so are

Ashima and Gauri perfect examples of cultural fluidity. Also, the idea to start over in life can be considered an important theme in both books. Being able to start over in life, love or work allows one to let go of old identities and assume new ones. For example, when Gogol realises that his two names make him feel like two different persons:

Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist (Lahiri 2003, p. 289).

This ability to start over as well as a new-found independence fits also the concept of a 'chosen family', which can be observed in both novels. Meaning that, when one's own family isn't available (voluntarily or not), one can choose an own family. This is what happens in both novels: they find a new family in Indian diaspora all over the US, new families in partners, friends or colleagues. The identity concept Lahiri uses in both novels is rich, because it's both multiple/fluid, fragmented (due to cultural differences/conflicting loyalties), and in Gauri's and Ashoke's case also unstable, due to the trauma they experienced back in India. The novels show us that the characters undergo an identity development towards more independence and self-discovery.

4.2.2 Dissolution of nationalist categories

Considering nationalist categories, their characteristics and boundaries in general, one can observe that boundaries and nations play an important role in both novels. The protagonists cannot be characterised by just one country, they stay always in between and don't want to fix themselves to one country: they are geographically fluid. For example, both Ashima and Gauri keep their American passport in order to keep one foot in India and another in their new homeland. Another aspect is the importance of mobility in both novels, it symbolises the protagonists' ability to permeate cultural and geographical borders and, in that way, transcend their national identity (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p 858). Examples of this are that important events/conversations take place on the road (in cars or trains) and that obtaining a driver's license in the new world is, especially for the women, celebrated as an important moment, since it allows them to leave the home, while their husbands are working. Another form of independence for a female protagonist is when Ashima, after her husband's death, decides to divide her future life between India and the US: "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere"(Lahiri, 2003, p. 276). Ashima transcends by this the level of a nation and its borders.

Another interesting aspect is the role of science, and especially literature, in both novels. A first example is the name of Gogol in *The Namesake*. Gogol gets his name from a world

famous Russian author, not American or Indian. At the same time a book of the same author saved Ashoke in the train crash where he almost lost his life and it will later be the reason why leaves for the US (Lahiri, 2003, p. 21). Furthermore, in both novels the protagonists come to the US to work in the academic sphere and in *The Lowland*, Gauri even puts her academic career above her duties as a mother. The importance of science reminds us of the transculturality of science and arts, as Welsch (1999) also described. According to him, history, science and art are inherently transcultural, since boundaries changed continuously throughout history and authors/academics influenced one another through their works and encounters (Welsch, 1999, p. 6). In *The Lowland* this is visible through the importance of German philosophy for Gauri and in *The Namesake* the importance of Russian classics (and Gogol specifically).

Lastly, another way in which boundaries are crossed is visible in *The Lowland*. Subash' and Gauri's daughter, Bella, develops as someone, that continuously crosses boundaries. For example, by working together with migrants and in low-wage positions (crossing class-boundaries).

4.2.3 Stereotypes & Othering

Regarding the use of stereotypes and *Othering* in both novels, we can say that especially during the first period after arriving in the US, Indian and American culture are opposed and stereotyped, as in both novels the families hold on to their own cultural practices. They are often met with either disinterest or misunderstanding, for example when the neighbours of the Ganguli's are invited: " 'I thought Indians were supposed to be vegetarian,' she whispers to Alan" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 39). Also, they are met with prejudices as well:

For by now he is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents' accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 65).

Next to these stereotypes, used to show the prejudiced attitude of some Americans towards the protagonists, one can also observe signs of mixed-forms in both novels, as both families try to integrate, for example by celebrating American holidays or buying typically American food for their children (Lahiri, 2003, p. 65). On the other hand, it is observed that stereotypes are used by both sides, often to explain away differences or things one doesn't understand or agree with:

Only in America (a phrase she has begun to resort to often these days), only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art (Lahiri, 2003 p. 70).

Another interesting aspect is that Lahiri shows in both novels the diversity of the Indian migrant community in the US. For example, Gogol's and Moushumi's divorce shows us that two people don't have to be a good match, just because they are both Indian.

Second, in *The Lowland*, Lahiri even introduces a queer aspect into her novel, when Gauri becomes romantically involved with a female student of hers. Especially the diversity in women is remarkable, ranging from upper-class New-York, Parisian, or the university environment. Interestingly, they might seem traditional at first, since they are the ones reinforcing cultural practices at home, but in the end, they are also the ones to mix with American culture, break with Indian norms and become more independent, like Gauri and Ashima live their lives eventually both alone and independently. Deconstructing the image of the stereotypical migrant seems therefore an important sign of transcultural aspects, as described by Alfonso-Forero (2007). In *The Lowland* this can be observed more than in *The Namesake*, due to the introduction of queerness as well as Gauri's refusal of her caretaking-role and choosing her career over her family. Interesting is that Lahiri writes in such a way that this act is neither valorised nor condemned. This trade-off shows also the gendered aspect of migration. Where Ashoke and Subhash work freely in their new jobs at the university, Gauri can only find her freedom in her work or when she sneaks away from the house: "disoriented by the sense of freedom, devouring the sensation as a beggar devours food" (Lahiri, 2013, p.174). Her desire to have an intellectual life is described as almost criminal, but in a way the reader feels both for Gauri *and* her child. Furthermore, another aspect of deconstructing the stereotypical migrant is that the women in both novels are described as agents, not victims.

Finally, Alfonso-Forero describes how prescribed gender roles can become a source of agency. Being at home, taking care of the children, they are the ones preserving their cultural identity:

"And though she still does not feel fully at home within these walls on Pemberton Road, she knows that this is home nevertheless – the world for which she is responsible, which she has created, which is everywhere around her (Lahiri, 2003, p. 279).

The traditional gender roles have become a source of agency for Ashima in the citation above, which might seem contradictory, looking at it from a Western feminist point of view, but we should keep in mind that there is not only one kind of feminism, just like there is not only one kind of sexism or patriarchy (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p. 859).

4.2.4 Belonging and 'Heimat'

Regarding the aspect of belonging and 'heimat', it can be observed that both the 1st and 2nd generation have problems finding their 'heimat'. Nonetheless, the 2nd generation a bit more, since they find themselves more in between the two cultures. However, after a while (some sooner than others) they feel like they belong in their new country:

“But for the first time in her life, Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta, not now. She refuses to be so far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he died. [...] She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband (Lahiri, 2003, p. 183, 279).

Another transcultural element can be recognised in the concept of being a nomad, not stick to any fixed localisations or nations. For example, for both Gogol and Bella (2nd generation again) it can be said they go through life meeting many different people, cultures places, but never stay somewhere or with someone for too long nor permanently. Furthermore, the characteristic of escapism can also be observed, since we could say that Gauri, Subash and Ashoke all left India escaping something, like the painful memories of a train crash (Ashoke) or staying with your parents/parents in law after your brother or lover has been executed (Subash and Gauri).

Concerning the issue of belonging, it was observed in both novels that a positive idea of rootlessness develops towards the end of the book. That maybe one can belong everywhere and nowhere, or somewhere in between two countries/cultures. For example, like Ashima at the end of *The Namesake*: “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 276). This plan to live between two countries makes her a true nomad and a transcultural/transnational being: neither of the two countries can claim her.

Second, in both novels a positive idea of isolation and loneliness is propagated. For example, for Gauri:

Isolation offered its own form of companionship [...] She had no wish to overcome it. Rather, it was something upon which she'd come to depend, with which she'd entered by now into a relationship, more satisfying and enduring than the relationships she'd experienced in either of her marriages (Lahiri, 2013, p. 237).

The same goes for Bella and Ashima. Bella being, for example, a self-enforced wanderer, going from farm to farm as a volunteer. This love for isolation and flexibility has a disadvantage however, since the protagonists in both novels seem to have problems or (no wish) to bind themselves to anyone. Like Gauri, for example: “Sometimes she juggled lovers, and at other times, for extended periods, there was no one.[...] she'd never allowed herself to reach the point where they might complicate her life (Lahiri, 2013, p. 237). Or her daughter Bella:

She's used to making friends wherever she goes, then moving on, never seeing them again. She can't imagine being part of a couple, or of any other family. She's never had a romantic relationship that's endured for any length of time (Lahiri, 2013, p. 257).

Lastly, xenophobia or discrimination can stop a migrant from feeling at home in a certain place as well. For example, when Gogol “is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his

parents' accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf (Lahiri, 2003, p. 67). Another example is Gauri in *The Lowland*:

And yet she remained, in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests, a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearances and complexion were unchangeable and, against the backdrop of most of America, still unconventional (Lahiri, 2013, p. 236).

These interpretations and feelings by Gogol and Gauri are only reinforced by what Ashima said in *The Namesake*: “being a foreigner [...] is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 49).

4.2.5 Duality and Memory & Trauma

Considering the aspect of duality, both a duality in space and in time can be observed, since the story switches continuously between past and present as well as between the US and Calcutta. Another duality that's visible in both novels is the continuous opposition between American and Indian culture. Even though, mix-forms are created, and the protagonists are trying to integrate, they cannot stop themselves (naturally) from keeping comparing every new thing they discover to what they are used to in their own culture.

The switching back to the past has a clear connection to memories, which can sometimes be painful. They play a role in two ways. Firstly, they were for Gauri, Subash, and Ashoke the reason for migrating to the US. Secondly, these traumatic memories still play a role in the present, but not in a way where they haunt the protagonists. For Gauri, it's like she completely refuses the past to haunt her: “What she'd seen from the terrace, the evening the police came for Udayan, now formed a hole in her vision. Space shielded her more effectively than time: the great distance between Rhode island and Tollygunge” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 152). Time plays of course a role in the processing of trauma. Maybe therefore Ashoke, whose trauma is further away in time, has developed a different attitude and also for him the big distance helps him process:

Though he will never forget that night, it no longer lurks persistently in his mind, stalking him in the same way. It no longer looms over his life, darkening it without warning as it used to do. Instead, it is affixed firmly to a distant time, to a place far from Pemberton Road” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 78).

Interestingly, towards the end of the book, the characters have developed in such a way that they seem to have come to peace with the past and the painful memories. As Gogol puts it:

“And yet these events have formed him, shaped him, determined who he is” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 287).

4.2.6 Polyphony and languages

Regarding the aspect of polyphony, it can be said that both in *The Namesake* and in *The Lowland* the story of multiple generations within a family is told. The story switches almost every chapter from perspective and in this way allows us to have a look from several perspectives at the same story. This is useful, because it gives us the opportunity to look at the experience of Indian migrants in the US from the perspective of the 1st and 2nd generation, parents and children, of someone struggling between her duty as a mother and her desire to have a career, and of someone discovering her sexuality. These multiple perspectives create less binary and fixed ways of thinking, which are indicators of transcultural elements.

The aspect of languages in both novels comes down to the opposition of English and Bengali, the two main languages in both books. Bengali being the parents’ mother tongue (1st generation), both families don’t raise their children to be bilinguals. The second generation has only a very passive and basic understanding of Bengali. The narrator doesn’t judge this decision, it’s just presented as it is. Language is on the one hand presented as something you use to connect/communicate with people, as it’s part of a culture, but on the other hand, it can make you feel like an outsider, since your accent will always identify you as ‘the Other’. Another interesting aspect, however, is introduced in *The Lowland*, when Bella is watching some workers from Bangladesh, speaking the same language as her parents:

She can’t understand what these men are saying. Just some words here and there. The accent is different. [...] Ancestors from what was once a single country, a common land (Lahiri, 2013, p. 256).

Here, Bella connects her own ancestors to the ones of the workers from Bangladesh, showing that language crosses and transcends country borders and that these same borders are actually something made up by men, something unnecessary. The last sentence conveys a feeling of regret, that what was once a single, common land, is now separated by borders.

4.3 Leïla Houari

In this third part of the analysis two books by the Belgian-Moroccan author Leïla Houari will be analysed: *Zeida de nulle part* and *Les rives identitaires*. Her debut novel, *Zeida de nulle part*, comes close to an autobiography or contains many autobiographical elements, to say the least (Gans-Guinoune, 2010, p. 67; Redouane, 2007, p. 49; Barreiro, 2003, p.67). It describes the story of Zeida. Switching between the ‘I’ and the ‘she’ narrative perspective, the novel tells the

story of a young Belgian-Moroccan woman in search of her identity. Wanting to discover her femininity and ‘love’ in general, she finds herself often in conflict with her father, who wants to raise his children according to the laws of his ancestors, in which the honour of young women plays an important role. At first, Zeida leaves her parents’ house, but discovers that this doesn’t bring her any peace either. Therefore, she decides to go to the villages of her father’s family in Morocco to find her roots. In *Les rives identitaires*, which is told completely from the ‘I’-perspective, the narrator deals with her relation to her father, who, even after his death, is still very present in the novel. We find she expresses both sadness, anger and love for her father. The novel is an excursion into the life of the narrator, switching between past and present, Morocco and France (the narrator has moved from Belgium to France), as well as between dream and reality.

Concerning reactions from the press, we can say that definitely some transcultural elements have been recognised. For example, as was written in *Le Maghreb Maroc* : “Errer entre les rives des destinées, tantôt espoir, tantôt dépaysement. Les identités sont plurielles et l’appartenance est nomade. Telle est le soupir narratif écrit par l’écrivaine Leïla Houari sous le titre ‘Les Rives identitaires’” (*LeMag.ma*, 2011). Furthermore, *La Libre Belgique* writes that *Zeida de nulle part* addresses both the difficulties and advantages of belonging to two cultures. Finally, also *Le Soir* remarks that “le lecteur est projeté dans un univers où langues et civilisations s’interpèllent” (*Le Soir*, 2004).

4.3.1 Identity

The aspect of identity, or more precisely, migrant identity, is a central theme in both novels of Houari. A first identity aspect that can be noticed is the hybridity of it: having a double identity, but this duality creates at the same time the feeling of being in between and not belonging at either of the two. For example, as Redouane remarks: “La conscience d’une double appartenance qui n’est pas toujours simple à vivre parce qu’elle est source de questionnement.” (Redouane, 2001, p. 43). Or as Watani, a Moroccan boy in her families’ village, puts it: “[...] mais tu n’es ni européenne ni arabe, [...]” (Houari, 1985, p. 61). Even the titles of both novels hint at these identity conflicts. *Zeida de nulle part*, indicates that the main character has her origins nowhere and *Les rives identitaires* speaks about both Belgian and Moroccan identity.

The aspect of multiple or fluid identities is also present in both novels. Barreiro describes the perspective on identity in *Zeida de nulle part* as follows: “il s’agit toujours de l’identité conçue comme un ensemble organisé de sentiments, de représentations, d’expériences du passé et de projets d’avenir, et soumise à l’influence, voire à la pression du regards des

autres, proches ou lointains.” (Barreiro, 2003, p. 70). Barreiro speaks here about the fact that identities are influenced by our environment, other people and can change over time as well. Another example is the use of words or images describing masks or transformations, indicating multiple characters/identities within a person. For example, when the narrator looks into the mirage in *Les rives identitaires*: “Quel masque, quelle grimace, adopter, adapter?” (Houari, 2011, p. *peurs* p.1) or when Zeida watches her grandmother pray: “avec ce geste, toujours le même, ce n’est plus sa grand-mère que l’enfant voit mais une autre femme. Par quel prodige pouvait-elle se transformer ainsi ?” (Houari, *Ferhane* p. 2).

Another identity aspect is the difference between the 1st and 2nd generation and the ways they adapt to their new country. According to Barreiro, the exile to Belgium brings more solitude, due to the disappearance of typical spaces of feminine solidarity that existed in the Maghreb (Barreiro, 2003, p. 71). Contrary to the 1st and 2nd generation, whose identity is still largely Moroccan, the 2nd generation feels torn between two worlds and is in constant search of their identity, like Zeida in *Zeida de nulle part*: “déchirée entre le poids des traditions et la civilisation occidentale.” (Houari, 1985, p. 29). Zeida wants more freedom and is curious about men and love in general, which causes her to continuously argue with her traditional father: “... et moi, je veux justement déchirer ce voile d’interdits, je veux connaître l’amour et une ombre me poursuit, me bloque[...], j’ai voulu rejeter mon histoire et voilà qu’elle me poursuit, me harcèle, me rit au visage et me laisse perdue.” (Houari, 1985, p.39) and the following citation : “Mais d’où sors-tu ? Tu n’es qu’une rebelle. Est-ce que tu sais que tu as une religion, un honneur ? Tu n’es qu’une révoltée de ta race.” (Houari, 2011, *Rire* p.2)

The above described identity aspects create for the main characters, who are part of the 2nd generation, identity problems and create an identity that can be described as fragmented and instable at times. For example, the fact that the narrator switches continuously between the ‘je’ and the ‘elle’ perspective in *Zeida de nulle part*, creates the feeling of instability and chaos. Especially in *Les rives identitaires*, we can observe these signs of instability of identity and the mind: “Je perds pied, je tombe dans un puits sans fond. [...] Excuse-moi, je dors très mal depuis déjà plusieurs nuits, je suis partagée entre l’envie de me battre et le désir violent de tout envoyer balader par la fenêtre. [...]” (Houari, 2011, *Assia* p.4).

Lastly, it’s important to remark that the main character is at peace with herself and both identity parts at the end of both novels. In *Zeida de nulle part*, the narrator addresses specifically this search of identity and being able to combine both sides in herself: “Rien n’était à justifier, ni ici, ni là-bas, c’était comme cela, un point c’est tout ! Chercher et encore chercher et trouver la richesse dans ses contradictions, la réponse devait être dans le doute et pas ailleurs.” (Houari,

1985, p. 83). In *Les rives identitaires* the narrator deals rather with her relation to her father, which was especially complicated due to the fact that the main character was torn between her newfound freedom and her loyalty to her traditions and her family. But in the end, she also finds peace with the fact that he passed away: “Je quitte le cimetière l’âme en paix.” (Houari, 2011, *J’ai appris* p. 3)

4.3.2 Dissolution of nationalist categories

Regarding the concept of nationality, countries and its boundaries, it was observed that nationalities are especially used to show both the positive and negative aspects of having multiple nationalities. The narrator sums up nationalities of her children and the number of passports they have together. On the other hand, it complicates the issue of belonging even further:

“Je suis arabe, je suis belge, [...], ma fille st algérienne, marocaine, française et belge, mon fils a failli être apatride. Il a eu in extremis la nationalité belge à onze ans. [...] Cette période trouble l’a marqué au fer rouge. Il ne sait plus où il veut habiter. [...] A nous quatre, nous avons un carton de passeports. C’est fantastique, formidable, fabuleux.” (Houari, 2011, *Constat* p. 1- 2)

The aspect of borders is important in both novels, both physical borders (due to the central theme of migration) as well as metaphorical borders, between different identities or between family members. For example, when the narrator speaks about the effect her father’s death has on the relation between her siblings, herself and her mother, having the feeling that his influence is still there: “Le mur de Berlin est tombé mais j’ai l’impression qu’il fait des petits partout.” (Houari, 2011, *Marcel* p. 2) The act of crossing borders can be observed more clearly in her father’s profession (truck driver) or the fact that one of the narrator’s sisters emigrated to the U.S. Furthermore, the fact that the diaspora plays an important role in both novels shows the connection of peoples around the world across borders and give a certain sense of family. This idea of solidarity/family across borders can also be observed in the feminist approach Houari’s novels have. Houari shows for example in *Les rives identitaires* that women from different countries can have similar problems. For example, when an Algerian friend speaks about her traditional upbringing, little freedom for women and religious values (Houari, 2011, *Assia* p. 1). Another way of crossing borders is crossing class boundaries. For example, in *Les rives identitaires* the narrator has friends among homeless people and migrants, even though she has climbed up the social ladder for many years, becoming a writer, she still frequents the area she used to live.

Lastly, Houari clearly tries to transmit some transcultural elements, especially in *Les rives identitaires*, by stressing the connectedness of people across borders and focussing on what they have in common, not what divides them. An example would be a dream the narrator has in *Les rives identitaires*:

“Nous étions partis sur le sentiment de se sentir étranger par rapport au pouvoir, à l’histoire passée et présent et du poids de celle-ci sur notre vie. Nous avons également abordé le souvenirs d’enfance et leur incidence sur notre avenir. A ce titre, nous n’étions pas si différents les uns des autres. Personne ne choisit de naître ici ou là. Vous êtes bien d’accord là-dessus ?” (Houari, 2011, *Rêve* p. 6)

4.3.3. Stereotypes & Othering

Stereotypes and *Othering* were observed in both novels and used in different ways, however with a similar objective: to show the reader their absurdity and to, in the end, deconstruct the image of a stereotypical migrant. A first aspect of the use of stereotypes which supports this, is the fact that the protagonists are often characterised and reduced to where they come from or to their looks, like in *Zeida de nulle part*: “- Je suis seul mademoiselle, vous êtes arabe... [...] Non, je ne suis pas arabe, je ne suis rien, je suis moi.” (Houari, 1985, p. 15). The protagonist keeps rejecting these attempts to categorise her, as she is trying to establish her own identity throughout the novel. These categorisations come not only from the ‘western’ society, but also from her Moroccan family towards ‘the Europeans’. Oktapoda says about this: “Zeida découvre qu’elle est une femme qui a grandi en Europe et que, de ce fait, elle ne peut être acceptée en tant que telle” (Oktapoda, 2008 p. 101). An example of these stereotypes used by the other side is this conversation in *Zeida de nulle part*:

“Je ne les comprends pas ces hommes de l’kharij¹ ils viennent tout fier ici, ils épousent nos jeunes filles, ils dépensent beaucoup d’argent , et pour finir les laissent comme des veuves. - Qu’est-ce que tu veux c’est la folie qui les habite, ils ont trop d’argent et d’abord s’ils avaient un cerveau ils ne joueraient pas avec les filles des braves gens. – Eh, fit une autre, voilà ce que l’Europe nous apporte, même celles qui sont parties ne sont pas très heureuses paraît-il ?” (Houari, 1985, p. 53)

¹ L’Europe

The characters generally have a realistic, sometimes even humoristic perspective on stereotypes and how to deal with them. For example, the narrator's mother in *Les rives identitaires* has a clear opinion on the perspective of 'Europeans' towards people with a migration background:

“Qui nous apprécie vraiment aujourd’hui ? Enfin, ce n’est pas ça qui m’empêchera de voyager. [...] Ils nous rejettent mais nous les aimons quand même.” (Houari, 2011, *Cuisinier* p. 4-5) ‘

Lastly, in both novels Houari works to deconstruct the image of the stereotypical migrant. A clear example of this is a scene in *Zeida de nulle part*, describing Zeida getting to know Watani, a Moroccan boy in her family's village:

“Elle découvrit ses goûts de lecture, il aimait Rousseau, il avait lu les pensée de Pascal [...] – Alors qu’est-ce que tu dois penser de moi ? – Oh rien de méchant, mais tu n’es ni européenne ni arabe [...] , Zeida le fixait, étonnée de l’entendre parler comme cela, elle croyait qu’il ne pensait pas grand-chose.” (Houari, 1985, p. 61-62).

This image of the ‘educated Moroccan boy’ is clearly not what Zeida expected, even though she comes from the same background. Another interesting aspect is that Houari, albeit very shortly, shows her progressive attitude towards queerness:

“Ce sont des traces de bonheur pris au temps trop volage. Il y a une amulette dans une bourse en dentelle. Je l’ai reçue d’une belle femme à Berlin. Je lui plaisais. J’étais flattée mais je ne pouvais répondre à sa demande. Une question de désir sans doute.” (Houari, 2011, *stigmates* p. 1)

4.3.4 Belonging and ‘Heimat’

The issue of belonging is an important theme in both novels. The hybrid identity of the protagonists creates with them the feeling that they belong nowhere, or somewhere in between. Therefore, the concept of nomadism is very present in the novel, and it also connects them with their origins, since their ancestors were nomads as well. Concerning the issue of belonging, there is a clear difference between the 1st and 2nd generation. The parents still feel Morocco is their one and only home, not in the last place, because they initially thought they would stay only temporarily as ‘guestworkers’. Their children know they will stay in Europe, but still have feel neither Belgium nor Moroccan (Barreiro, 2003, p. 70). In *Les rives identitaires*, the narrator remarks this is even more complicated for her son, since the narrator married someone, who also has two nationalities: “mon fils a failli être apatride. Il a eu in extremis la nationalité belge

à onze ans. Cette période trouble l'a marqué au fer rouge. Il ne sait plus où il veut habiter.” (Houari, 2011, *Constat* p. 1)

Signs and aspects of Nomadism are omnipresent in both novels. Next to the subtitle of *Les Rives identitaires*, it is visible in the name of the protagonist's favorite bar in *Les rives identitaires*, Le Nomade, the fact that the ancestors in both novels were nomads. Even after arriving in Europe, the father still chooses a life on the move, as he chooses to become a truck driver, which gives him a certain kind of freedom and liberty of constraints: “Même en Europe, il a continué à vivre en nomade. [...] ‘Partout, soyez fiers de ce que vous êtes ; je suis ici aujourd’hui, demain ailleurs...’ Il n’a jamais voulu s’installer. Nulle part.” (Houari, 2011, *Rire* 1).

A second aspect of belonging that was observed, mainly in *Zeida de nulle part*, is the concept of ‘return to the home country’ in order to find your roots. Often these travels are described as a kind of catharsis, a way to be re-born. The problem is that, based on her childhood memories, the homeland is idealised, the misery invisible (Oktapoda, 2008, p. 99). Therefore, these returns often turn out as a disillusion, as Zeida describes: “l’exil ne finit jamais: [...] celui qu’elle appelait ‘mon pays’ à ce moment-là n’étaient que des illusions, et que des acquis auxquels elle était habituée en Belgique lui étaient devenus indispensables.” (Houari, 1985, p. 78). Zeida wanted to re-connect with her country and her roots, but this is paradoxically impossible due to her new-found values (more freedom for women) she acquired in the country she dislikes so strongly. Therefore, the return is in part an escape as well: “Ce n’était qu’une fuite, elle le savait, mais vivre autre chose et ailleurs, cela pouvait peut-être l’aider à échapper à toutes les contradictions dont elle souffrait.” (Houari, 1985, p. 41)

An important reason for the disillusion of this return is the fact that Zeida is treated as a foreigner when she returns to the country of their youth. For example, when Zeida's aunt warns her for the dog: “-Fais attention quand même, tu as eu de la chance : en général, ils sentent très vite les étrangers. Zeida regarda sa tante bizarrement, étranger, qui est étranger ? c’est mon village ici, elle était triste maintenant.” (Houari, 1985, p. 43). These kind of moments happen frequently during her stay in the village and they sadden her. She wanted to be a part of her father's family, since she originally planned to leave Europe behind and go back to her roots. Interestingly, this status as foreigner gives her some advantages and extra freedom vis à vis the other girls in the villages as well:

“Et puis qu’est-ce que tu veux, tu es là avec nous, alors que garçons et filles marchent chacun de leur côté et toi tu es entre deux garçons, ils t’excusent parce que tu viens de l’Europe.” (Houari, 1985, p. 69).

Thirdly, part of the issue of belonging is discovering that your home or ‘*heimat*’ might be somewhere else than you thought initially. Zeida is reflecting on this when she is returning from Morocco to Belgium:

“Elle retournait là-bas ; cette idée lui revenait sans cesse, pourtant elle avait dit à tout le monde que c’était fini qu’elle n’y remettrait plus les pieds, et voilà qu’elle faisait de nouveau le même trajet mais à l’envers et tout cela aboutirait chez ses parents.” (Houari, 1985, p. 77).

Interestingly, this change of ‘*heimat*’ nor the disillusion of her stay in Morocco don’t confuse her. On the contrary, they give her clarity:

“ La réponse n’était pas ici, l’exil lui avait bien plus appris qu’elle ne le croyait, l’exil était et serait toujours son ami, il lui avait appris à chercher ses racines. [...] Chercher et encore chercher et trouver la richesse dans ses contradictions, la réponse devait être dans le doute et pas ailleurs.” (Houari, 1985, p. 83).

This stage of having accepted her hybrid identity and the contradictions it entails, gives her peace of mind. Lastly, the idea of re-invention was observed at the end of *Zeida de nulle part*: “Zeida s’était levée de bonne humeur en cette matinée claire, l’avenir était à refaire, elle le sentait bien.” (Houari, 1985, p. 82). It brings a certain realism to her perspective on the world: “Elle souriait mais ne rêvait plus...” (Houari, 1985, p. 84).

4.3.5 Duality and Memory & Trauma

The idea of duality is very present in both novels, and many oppositions could be observed. For example, physically, between Morocco and Belgium, which is usually pictured as positive (sunny, bright colours) vs. negative (rainy, grey colours, country of exile). (Houari, 1985, p. 30). Morocco and Belgium are also opposed in another way : present vs. past. The past is expressed as childhood memories, that make up an important part of both novels. The memories often turn into dreams (idealising the country of your roots), creating an opposition between dream and reality. The opposition is also cultural; between Orient and Occident, or rather, between conservative/traditional and ‘European’ culture. Interestingly, Brussel is not depicted as a completely bad place. The language used shows that the protagonists have also accepted

the city, at least partly, as their new home: “Elle s’était attaché à ces murs tristes, de la pluie elle avait pris l’habitude, s’en était même fait une amie.” (Houari, 2011, *Rives* p. 1).

A second aspect of duality is the importance of the past (always in relation to the present) and memory. The childhood memories, alternated with her dreams/imagination, actually have the function of creating a bridge between the two countries. According to Redouane it also plays a role in the creation of a personal identity: “La remémoration du temps de son enfance dans son pays natal, a pour but ‘de donner un sens aux souvenir épars, de se constituer, grâce à eux, une identité personnelle.’” (Redouane, 2001, p. 45).

4.3.6 Polyphony and languages

Regarding the use of multiple perspectives, it was observed that in both novels the impression of multiperspectivity is created. For example, by continuously changing between the ‘je’- and the ‘elle’ perspective in both novels. By switching between ‘je’, ‘elle’, and ‘Zeida’, Houari shows us that this narrator with a broken and fragmented personality could actually tell the story of many others of the generation ‘beurre’, or even of people coming from two different cultures in general. According to Oktapoda the fragmented nature of Houari’s style represents the often fragmented nature of the stream of thoughts protagonists have (Oktapoda, 2008, p. 96). Furthermore, Houari uses literal speech and dialogues a lot in her novels, which creates the idea of polyphony, even if the perspective doesn’t change.

When it comes to languages, it was observed that this is a place where mixing and border-crossing takes place. According to Oktapoda Houari mixes her French with Arab words to create a mix of languages and civilisations. However, this should not be seen as merely a game with words or languages, but rather as a rebellion and the rejection of a language in order to re-appropriate the one of authors writing in French (but not originating from ‘L’Hexagone’) (Oktapoda, 2008, p. 96). Houari even offers the reader a variety of perspectives on the different meanings of language: “Pas du tout. La langue ? Laquelle ? Celle qui lèche, qui pourlèche, celle qui goûte ou celle que l’on coupe ?” (Houari, 2011, *Rêve* p. 8) Furthermore, throughout both novels there is an importance of stories, especially spoken ones. They unite peoples, generations and diaspora across borders and time. Especially the use of characters of ancient Arabic poetry in both novels, in the form of Shérérazade and Ferhane, puts the novels in a larger context, both in time and in space. Lastly, the importance of language and multiple perspectives is reinforced by the fact that the protagonists in both novels were always encouraged to acquire knowledge, as it would bring tolerance, not ignorance: “Race, ça veut dire quoi ? Tu m’as

toujours expliqué qu'il fallait être ouvert à tout, à tous. Que le plus important était d'accumuler le savoir, que l'ignorance mène à tous les excès." (Houari, 2011, *Rire* p. 2).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research has analysed six novels of three authors: Olga Grjasnowa, Jhumpa Lahiri and Leïla Houari. The analysis has showed that the researched transcultural elements as described in the methodical section were all observed in the novels, however in different ways and frequency. The characteristic of identity has proven to be crucial in all novels. In Grjasnowa's books the concept of identity was observed as a cause for conflicts between multiple identity parts, creating instability. Lahiri also addresses differences between the 1st and 2nd generation when it concerns identity. She speaks about both positive (multiple/fluid identities) and negative effects (fragmented/unstable identities) of migration on identity. Furthermore, it was observed that the characters underwent an identity development and reached at the end of the novel a stage where they discovered and accepted themselves. Leïla Houari treats the concepts of identity as an essential theme in her novels. She addresses the hybridity of the migrant identity; having both identity parts and being at the same time in between. Like Lahiri, she also speaks about multiple identities in a positive ways and addresses the differences between the 1st and 2nd generation and the identity conflicts that are experienced by especially the 2nd generation. The concept of self-discovery and self-acceptance is also strongly present in Houari's novels.

The second element, dissolution of nationalist categories, was frequently used by Grjasnowa to show its absurdity and arbitrary basis. They are either refused by the protagonists or used in order to deconstruct them. In Lahiri's novels geographical-, cultural- and class boundaries are frequently crossed. Also, the concept of the transculturality of science is addressed, connecting people throughout history despite country borders. Houari used the concept of nationality almost mockingly, speaking about boxes full of passports, but clearly identifies the difficulty they have for the issue of belonging. In both her novels cultural-, geographical- and class boundaries are crossed on a regular basis. Houari also used some clear transcultural concepts, stressing the connectedness of people across history and country borders.

The use of stereotypes and *Othering* by Grjasnowa could be described as both their refusal (and subsequent introduction of mixed forms) and their use (in order to deconstruct them). Interestingly, it was observed that stereotypes were not only used by the host-country,

but also by the protagonists themselves. The deconstruction of the stereotypical migrant was clearly observed with all three authors. In Lahiri's novels stereotypes and prejudices were observed, and according to this author used in order to show their absurdity and to deconstruct them. Also, the protagonists used stereotypes about Americans themselves, in order to explain away things, they couldn't understand. Lahiri works against stereotypes by showing the reader the diversity of the Indian migrant community, by introducing queer elements and a mother refusing her caretaking role. The protagonists in Houari's novels refuse stereotypes and categorisations in order to deconstruct them. Furthermore, the use of stereotypes by the Moroccan community towards the Europeans was also observed.

The element of belonging is essential in Grjasnowa's novels. All protagonists have trouble connecting the concept 'heimat' to a fixed location, due to their traumatic memories. They exhibit a fleeing and at times self-destructive behaviour, which doesn't help them to deal with their problems nor find their 'heimat'. In Lahiri's novels the protagonists (both the 1st and 2nd generation) have initially problems finding out where they belong. Overall, however, the novels transmit a positive idea of nomadism and rootlessness with the protagonists finding out where they belong at the end of the novel. In Houari's novels the issue of belonging is essential: the protagonists feel they belong in between two countries or nowhere at all. The idea of nomadism is also omnipresent in both novels. In *Zeida de nulle part* the protagonist tries to find her roots by returning to her country of birth, but it turns out to be a disillusion. Houari transmits the reader by this story that 'heimat' can be somewhere else than you thought initially, but in the end, one finds 'heimat' in accepting the richness and contradictions of a double identity.

The concept of duality plays an important role in all novels of the three authors. Dualities in time (past and present), space (home- and host-country) and also cultural (language, traditions) were observed. The duality in time creates a connection with the past, since memories play an important role in all analysed novels, however in a different way. Concerning Grjasnowa's novels, these are mainly traumatic memories, creating problems in the present. For Lahiri, the protagonists either block their traumatic memories out or have come to terms with them throughout the novel. In any case, they don't haunt them in the present anymore. In Houari's novels memories constitute the home country and they are a mix of dreams and reality. They create a powerful illusion of the mythical home country, which is bound to turn out as a disillusion in the end.

The final element, polyphony and languages, was clearly observed among all authors. The idea of multiple perspectives was visible through both perspective changes in the narrator and the frequent use of literal speech. Also, language played an important role. In Grjasnowa's

books it was rather observed as a profession or characteristic (translator/polyglot), while in Lahiri's and Houari's books languages were described as something that connects people across time, space and country borders.

To answer how the agency to migrate influences an author's construction of a transcultural identity, we can say that it was observed that in Grjasnowa's novels a transcultural identity was created, which focussed predominantly on the negative effects of migration on identity and belonging, creating identity conflicts and problems with finding your 'heimat'. The predominant presence of memory and trauma in her novels could point to the influence of her agency, which was forced migration due to war. Lahiri, whose migration was due to academic reasons (her father's work), creates a transcultural identity, which is also largely influenced by the elements of identity and belonging. However, concerning identity, less instability and conflicts were visible. And, more importantly, in the end the protagonists reached a kind of self-finding and self-accepting stage in their character development. Houari, whose agency to migrate finds itself in between the other two, migrated due to economic reasons (her father was a 'guestworker'). In her novels the search for an identity and 'heimat' was essential. Although the identity conflicts a bicultural identity constitute an important part of the novels, the protagonists find in the end (just like in Lahiri's novels) peace and acceptance in their double identity, their search for their origins and identity has come to an end. The elements of identity and belonging played a dominant role in all novels and also showed the biggest differences in the analysis between the three authors. Regarding the other elements indicating transculturality (dissolution of nationalist categories, use of stereotypes, duality and memory & trauma, and polyphony and languages), differences were observed but not to the same extent as the other two elements.

Some aspects that deserve some attention in this conclusion as well are for example the fact that the gendered aspect of migration occupies an important place in Houari's and Lahiri's novels, criticising patriarchal and traditional systems. Houari, however, does this in clearer way than Lahiri. She attacks the system, while Lahiri presents the two situations as they are in order to let the reader reflect on it himself. This gendered aspect makes sense, since the women are the ones experiencing the biggest differences in their new lives, and the home is usually the place where cultural practises take place. The fact that this was not (as strongly) observed in Grjasnowa's novels might be due to the fact that her stories are usually centred around individuals and not families, as with the other two authors.

Another interesting aspect is that all three authors offer the reader another aspect on migrants, the 'Other' in general, than we get through politicians or media, by telling their stories

from their own perspective. The value of these books might therefore lie in the fact that they offer us some background and might create understanding between people. Furthermore, especially Houari's and Lahiri's novels have the tendency to make the personal accessible to the collective, making it more relatable for Indian diaspora and the 'génération beurre' respectively.

Lastly, it should be kept in mind that this research constituted of merely three cases studies. Therefore, it's hard to make general conclusions, more extensive research would be needed for that. However, it has become clear that the concepts of identity and belonging are likely to play an important role in migrant literature and the agency to migrate can influence whether this focuses more on the negative aspects migration has on these concepts or if protagonists also reach a certain kind of acceptance of self-discovery, concerning their identity and origins.

Regarding suggestions for future research, it has been shown that the gendered aspect of migration played an important role in all novels. As all authors in this research were women, it could be interesting to also include a case study of a male author in order to see if the gender of the authors has an influence on the outcome of the research. It's possible that the other elements will be more dominant or that there will be less transcultural elements present, since, as discussed in this study, women are usually experiencing greater differences between host- and home country, because it's at home that different cultural identities are negotiated and the differences between 'western' culture and 'non-western' cultures are bigger for women.

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