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Memory Beyond Borders: Studying Wall and Door Metaphors in the Refugee Imagination:

Jenny Erpenbeck's Go, Went, Gone and Mohsin Hamid's Exit West

Par

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Ce mémoire intitulé

**Memory Beyond Borders: Studying Wall and Door Metaphors in the Refugee Imagination:
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Résumé

En s'éloignant de l'idée des frontières qui marque une compréhension de la construction des États-nations en tant qu'entités souveraines et homogènes, cette thèse adopte une approche différente en considérant les portes et les murs comme deux métaphores centrales de transgression et de transformation qui amplifient l'expérience des réfugiés et permettent une vision transnationale et trans-mnésique de divers souvenirs dans deux romans: « Exit West » de Mohsin Hamid et « Go, Went, Gone » de Jenny Erpenbeck. Dans mon premier chapitre, j'explore comment les souvenirs des Allemands sont dialogiquement liés aux souvenirs des réfugiés à travers les paradigmes de l'espace et du temps, ainsi que du passé et du présent, en examinant l'impact durable du mur de Berlin dans « Go, Went, Gone ». Mon deuxième chapitre étudie la métaphore des portes dans « Exit West » qui défie les frontières et la revendication de souveraineté des États-nations. L'objectif de mon chapitre est de comprendre comment ces portes facilitent la mobilité sans contraintes à travers l'espace et le temps, en nous encourageant à réévaluer l'universalité de la migration. Je me réfère principalement au concept de mémoire multidirectionnelle de Rothberg, en relation avec l'étude de Brand sur les mémoires collectives et interconnectées de la traite transatlantique des esclaves qui mobilise les portes comme dispositifs mnémoniques. J'utilise également la notion du « living in the Wake » en relation avec « Afterlife of slavery » de Sharpe pour comprendre comment les souvenirs des réfugiés et des citoyens des États-nations sont dialogiques à travers différentes géographies et temporalités. De plus, je m'appuie sur le concept de « de-borderization » d'Achille Mbembe en lien avec les perspectives de Gloria Anzaldúa sur les frontières pour une meilleure compréhension de l'expérience des réfugiés.

Mots-clés : frontières, mémoire multidirectionnelle, métaphore du mur, métaphore de la porte, passé et présent, réfugié, citoyen.

Abstract

Moving away from borders that signal an understanding of the construction of nation-states as sovereign and homogenous entities, this thesis takes a different approach by considering doors and walls as two central metaphors of transgression and transformation that dramatize the refugee experience and enable a transnational and trans-mnemonic reading of various memories in two novels: Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* (2015). The first chapter of the thesis addresses how memories of Germans are dialogically connected to the memories of refugees across the paradigms of space and time, past and present, through an exploration of the enduring impact of the Berlin Wall in *Go, Went, Gone*. The second chapter studies the metaphor of doors in *Exit West* that move beyond borders and challenge the nation-states' claim to sovereignty to understand how they allow free movement across space and time and rethink the universality of migration. The thesis builds on Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory in relation to Dionne Brand's study of collective and interconnected memories of the slave trade that mobilizes doors as mnemonic devices, and Jenny Sharpe's notion of "living in the wake" in connection to the afterlife of slavery to understand how memories of refugees and natives of nation-states are dialogical across different geographies and temporalities. Additionally, I rely on Achille Mbembe's notion of "de-borderization" and relate it to Gloria Anzaldúa's views on borders to better understand literary representations of the refugee experience.

Keywords: border, multidirectional memory, wall metaphor, door metaphor, past and present, refugee, citizen.

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*To my family,
for always being there and believing in me.*

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Introduction



Richard Lou, *Border Door*, 1988

“The door is a place, real, imaginary and imagined” (Brand 19). According to African-Caribbean-Canadian author, philosopher, and intellectual Dionne Brand, the “Door of No Return” simultaneously embodies a paradoxical duality as it exists and yet does not. In her memoir entitled *The Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001), Brand refers to the door as the actual door that enslaved Africans had to go through before they were forced onto ships to begin the Middle Passage to America.¹ This door is not solely a geographical and physical location but also “a spiritual location... [and] a psychic destination” (2) that shapes the

¹ Most famously situated at Senegal’s Maison des Esclaves (Slave House), and at Ghana’s Elmina and Cape Coast Castles.

diasporic Black experience. Although “the door exists as an absence, [as] a thing in fact which [they] do not know about, a place [they] do not know, ... it exists as the ground [they] walk” (25). Transmitted across generations, “the door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora” (25). Similarly, this thesis explores the symbolic, narrative, and material meanings of doors and walls in contemporary refugee narratives. Although doors and walls mean different things in different narrative and cultural contexts, my thoughts and readings of these metaphors are indebted to Brand’s poetic and political discourse about the “Door of No Return.” Thus, my readings of doors sometimes align with Brand’s perspective and at other times deviate from her approach.

According to Brand, the door that highlights the passage of Africans through the transatlantic slave trade, not only symbolizes the painful history of enslavement and displacement but also marks the irreversible physical and symbolic event the door had on slaves’ and Black people’s lives, and, thus, creating, as it did, the Black diaspora. Brand’s personal memories are shaped by larger historical, symbolic, and social narratives, and her experiences reflect broader patterns of displacement and diaspora, mainly slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives. She believes that the door is both a physical and spiritual location lost in the sea, something that Africans left behind and cannot remap but at the same time something that exists “on [their] mind, ... on [their] retina” (89). The door marks the moment during which Africans “departed one world for another; the Old world for the New. [It is] the place where all names were forgotten, and all beginnings recast” (5). Not only does the door create a rupture between past and present, but also “a rupture in the quality of being. It was also a physical rupture, a rupture in geography” (5). It marks the gap between past and present, and further acts as a site “of belonging and not belonging, belonging and intrabelonging” (71), becoming a threshold of

passage and fluidity. The earliest doors were recorded in artwork of Egyptian tombs. In Ancient Egypt, it was commonly believed that the soul of the deceased could easily and freely, with no barriers, enter and exit the tomb. The false door acts as a threshold between two opposite worlds, that of the dead and of the living, helping connect the deceased's spirit to interact with the living.² Frequently used to transport characters to different worlds, magical doors are a common theme in many literary works, especially in novels for children.³ In this sense, the door not only becomes a means of transportation and site of passage, but also becomes an in-between liminal space, a threshold between here and there, the familiar and unfamiliar, the known and the unknown, and the present and future. As a metaphor, the door, a framed space, symbolizes transition and metamorphosis. Opening a door and stepping forward foreshadows embracing new opportunities for change and transformation and further uncovers concealed truths and obscured memories, whether consciously or subconsciously, that are hidden and kept away from others, or from ourselves.⁴ Thus, the door acts as an invitation to explore the unfamiliar, the unknown, and to further embrace the mysteries that lie beyond one's knowledge and understanding. Although magical doors offer new opportunities and hope, they can also lead to unwanted and scary places, especially since what lies behind the door remains unknown and uncertain.

In the art installation above, placing the door directly on the unsecure United States - Mexico border transgresses borders, both literal and metaphorical, and further challenges and disrupts the already established norms. Directly placing the door on the border does not undo the

² For further reading of the door metaphor, see Mohamed and Abdel Hamid, "A Chronological Study of the False Door Concept," 110-117.

³ For example, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), the doors of the wardrobe act as a portal that transports Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy to the fantasy world of Narnia. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice passes through several doorways and portals throughout her adventures, finding herself in a room full of doorways that were closed except one tiny door behind a curtain that opens up to a magical garden.

⁴ The door also has religious connotations. In the Bible, the door signifies salvation, hope, and new opportunities. In John 10:9, Jesus asserts that he is the only door through which Christians may enter and be saved. "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved" (John 10:9).

border metaphor but rather disturbs it and emphasizes the malleability and porous nature of borders as they can easily change allowing people to pass through. Using the door metaphor instead of the border does not indicate the negation of one metaphor in favor of a new one, but rather an overlap. On the one hand, the door placed directly on the border becomes a productive device of power of the nation-state as it helps make the crossing from Mexico to the United States more visible.⁵ Going through the door makes those who cross subject to study and documentation, rendering the door a regulatory device. The door thus bridges two separate worlds, the United States and Mexico, and more generally the Global North and the Global South. However, the barrier that once marked the boundary and separation between here and there, between the United States and Mexico, is challenged and dismantled by the presence of the door. Placing the door on a border with a broken fence foreshadows the absurdity of the border as the door can no longer function, as it usually does, as a double mechanism of allowing people in or keeping them outside. With the broken fence and the enigmatic presence of the door, it appears that the distinction between inside and outside no longer operates. The door raises the question about who regulates who is allowed in and who should stay out. Although this art installation dates back three decades, when mobility and movement across the border were less regulated, the door that was set along the US-Mexico border by Richard Lou transforms one's thinking about borders and still remains as pertinent today as it was when it was enacted in 1988. Instead of focusing on borders and their significance in a refugee context, my thesis studies how metaphors of doors and walls generate different literary accounts of refugeeism in both Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Go, Went, Gone* (2015) and Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* (2017).

⁵ In this sense nation-states can keep track of the numbers of those who go through the door and “emerge” from it, to use Mohsin Hamid's words.

Although many have tried to define the refugee experience and move beyond and challenge the already-established borders that highlight nation-states' sovereignty, I am interested in the formation of refugee subjectivities in the specific context of literary and postcolonial studies. The wall and door metaphors are devices that produce new forms of knowledge that help understand the connection and encounter between memories of refugees and memories of citizens of a nation-state across time and space. In order to understand how questions of displacement in the refugee context are discussed, the first part of my introductory chapter focuses on Hannah Arendt's and Edward Said's discussions of the figure of the "refugee" and exile. Then I move to a discussion of borders focusing on Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of borders in relation to Achille Mbembe's concept of "de-borderization" to show how we can understand the new planetary framework in which refugees exist. The last part of the Introduction aims to understand Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" in connection with both Christina Sharpe's concept of living "In the Wake" of slavery and Dionne Brand's concept of the "Door of No Return." My discussion draws from literary studies, refugee studies, and David Farrier's postcolonial reading of asylum.

Amid widespread population relocation and distress migration⁶, one of the most pressing global challenges today, refugee studies have attracted scholarly attention not only in the social sciences but also in the humanities. Over the last few years, historiography⁷ has been looking at both fields of refugee studies and distress migration "to highlight elements of continuity and change, aiming to date and map the birth of the contemporary refugee phenomenon and

⁶ I will be using the term 'distress migration' instead of 'forced migration' since forced migration very often folds back on political or economic migration. I use this term to get away from that political/economic dichotomy that is questionable. For more explanation see, Bhabha's keynote 2019 lecture as part of the institute for World Literature at Harvard University. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIb3RqRMMIs&t=2s&ab_channel=DeliaUngureanu

⁷ It should be noted that the twentieth century marks a significant shift in terms of how historiography is perceived and defined. For example, narratology raised fundamental inquiries about the nature of knowledge and historical writing.

determine what is so distinctive about the current era” (Elie 26). Following the end of World War II, the term refugee⁸ took on a renewed significance, acquiring new meanings and connotations.⁹ German-Jewish political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt’s key essay “We Refugees,” written during The Shoah and World War II, reflects her personal experiences¹⁰ as a stateless person, a refugee, and “an enemy alien” (Arendt 266). She believes that stateless Jews, in other words rightless Jews, are increasingly created because of the concept of citizenship and belonging to advanced European nation-states. She challenges the identification of refugees as “refugees,” in the classic sense, asserting that “in the first place, we don’t like to be called ‘refugees’. We ourselves call each other ‘newcomers’ or ‘immigrants’” (264). She problematizes the simplicity of the concept of a refugee and contemplates the ambiguity of the term by examining both political and aesthetic complexities related to the narratives written by and about refugees. In her essay, she invokes her status as an exile or stateless person that is mainly created by the European nation-state system and further advances the concept of the “conscious pariah[s] ... [who would] represent the vanguard of their peoples - if they keep their identity” (274). Living on the border between European society and the Jewish community and being aware of the strengths and pitfalls of both communities, a “conscious pariah” is a Jew who belongs and yet does not belong, someone who is neither an insider nor an outsider. She invites Jews, and indeed all exiles, to become “conscious pariah[s]” and demand their political rights.

⁸ The term refugee first appeared in the English language to describe the Huguenots, a religious group of French Protestants, who were expelled from France in the seventeenth century following their severe religious and genocidal persecution. For more, see FitzGerald and Arar “The Sociology of Refugee Migration,” 387-406.

⁹ The first legal and political definition of the term ‘refugee’ was set by the 1951 Refugee Convention. A refugee is someone “outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (14)

¹⁰ She was born into a family of German Jews in Hannover and was forced to flee Nazi Germany in 1933.

But what exactly does being an exile mean? How does one become an exile? How does being one affect one's identity and self, one's sense of "belonging and unbelonging" (Brand 6)? In his influential essay "Reflections on Exile", Palestinian academic and literary critic Edward W. Said, an exile himself, asserts that "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (173). He defines it as the condition of being displaced from one's original home and further extends it to a more widespread condition. The poignancy of displacement is further captured in his book *After the Last Sky* (1986). He claims that "identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain in exile ... We are the 'other,' an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus" (16–17). Said maintains that being an exile means always being more than one thing, and therefore not being determined and static. Even though displacement is "unbearably historical" ("Reflections on Exile" 174), it can create "a discontinuous state of being" (177). He further argues that exiles' "truest reality is expressed in the way [they] cross over from one place to another. [They] are migrants and perhaps hybrids in, but not of, any situation in which [they] find [themselves]. This is the deepest continuity of [their] lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move" (*After the Last Sky* 164). In his book *Exiles in the City: Hannah Arendt and Edward W. Said* (2012), literary critic William Vaios Spanos studies the shared but conflicting historical, political, and ideological connections between Edward Said and Hannah Arendt focusing on the connections between Arendt's figure of "the conscious pariah" and Said's concept of "exilic consciousness".¹¹ He asserts that "both enable a nomadic double, or two-in-one, consciousness—an in-between or outside/inside perspective on the world ... [and enable] living and thinking responsibly (carefully) between two

¹¹ In his book, Spanos thinks through the exilic experiences of both figures showing how persistent American Zionism has been keeping both of them closed off from each other.

worlds: the Jewish world and Europe in the case of Arendt and the Palestinian and the European/American in the case of Said” (154).

Because of their displacement and their lack of a legal status, asylum seekers are facing extended exile. Existing within a “permanent temporariness” (Bailey et al. 130)¹², the displaced have no or, at best, limited access to legal protection. In their book *Extended Exile: Living on the Edge* (2016), professors Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles further assert that “refugees in extended exile without permanent status are not often recognized as political subjects in a liberal democratic world” (122). They are not granted crucial political and social rights which deepens their exclusion and maintains their status as ‘outsiders’ or ‘Other’. Displaced individuals find themselves in an exilic, or as Homi Bhabha puts it, a liminal, in-between “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” third space (103).¹³ Being in exile renders refugees liminal beings existing in a state of transition, neither here nor there; situated “betwixt and between”¹⁴ the past and the future. Becoming liminal subjects themselves, refugees are perceived as ‘illegal’ individuals who transgress borders and exist beyond the laws and policies set by nation-states.

Because of their belonging and unbelonging and because of their ongoing movement beyond national boundaries, asylum seekers, as David Farrier states, signal the limits of the existing frameworks of postcolonial studies. In his book *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary before the Law* (2011), Farrier explains how postcolonial theory can help us better understand

¹² In their article “(Re)producing Salvadoran Transnational Geographies”, Bailey, et al. used the term permanent temporariness to describe Salvadoran migrants’ situation in the United States (U.S.). They got only temporary protected status (TPS) that neither grants them lawful permanent resident status nor gives them any immigration status. TPS further limits their freedom of movement as there was no guarantee to being able to re-enter the U.S. once they leave it.

¹³ The third space is full of contradictions and ambiguities yet acts as a productive space that creates new forms of cultural production. See Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative” 57-90.

¹⁴ Victor Turner coined the phrase “betwixt and between” to convey the essence of his idea of “liminality,” a major aspect of the framework he developed in the late 1960s to analyze rites of passage within tribal, sociocultural systems. For more on liminality, see his book *The Forest of Symbols* 40-55.

the political state of the asylum seeker in relation to its hybridity and multiplicity. With reference to Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman, he asserts that refugees represent the "new subaltern" (5) who are within the already established frameworks of colonial studies and yet cannot be understood within the already existing frameworks of postcolonial studies. Asylum seekers do not belong to the "smooth space of productivity and difference ... [instead, they belong to a] space of detention and exclusion through inclusion, striated by razor wire and legislated segregation" (7). Drawing on Michael Dillon's "proposition that the refugee is a scandal for philosophy and politics" (7), Farrier claims that the refugee is equally a "scandal for postcolonial studies" (8). Not only is the refugees' situation perceived as a "scandal for postcolonial studies," but the refugees' desire to belong to the nation-state also shows that their narratives challenge the anti-nationalist position often championed in postcolonial theory.

There has been a lot of scholarly work written about refugees in relation to border crossing as it is impossible to think about refugeedom¹⁵ without considering nation-states especially that immigration laws and refugee policies entail a presumption about a nation-state's territories and borders. In both fields of refugee studies and border studies, borders reflect a political reality and serve as a potent metaphor in many stories of migration, diaspora, and postcolonial subject formation as they define refugees' existence and identity. Borders thus signal an understanding of the construction of nation-states as sovereign and homogenous entities. Hence, borders, established and maintained by nation-states, are perceived as a geographical space where the distinction between 'us' and 'them', the 'Global North' and

¹⁵ Although refugeeness embraces "ambiguity by refusing to fix the meaning of 'refugee' to any definitive definition" (Nyers 23), I employ the term refugeedom instead since it is a more refugee-focused approach that helps examine and understand the ways in which individuals and communities experienced displacement. Refugeedom is "a deliberately capacious term: it carries connotations of a new status and also a distinctive domain or sphere of practice" (Gatrell et al. 75). See also Stonebridge "Refugee Genealogies: Introduction" *Refugee Imaginaries*, 15-17.

‘Global South’ is further reinforced. Considering the widespread movement of people around the world, the image of divisive borders has been challenged and questioned by many scholars. The border represents a physical and symbolic boundary that separates and defines different territories, nations, cultures, and identities. Thus, the border can be perceived as a site of power relations and conflicts, where dominant and subordinate groups negotiate and struggle over access, resources, and recognition. In this sense, the border reflects the pertinent colonial legacy of dividing territories and ruling, as well as the ongoing struggles for decoloniality¹⁶ and sovereignty.

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borders goes beyond the traditional understanding of them as merely physical and political boundaries between nation-states. She remaps our understanding of what a border is, arguing that it exists not simply as a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, but as a psychological, social, and cultural barrier that separates individuals from one another. In the preface to her book *Borderlands* (1987), she states that “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy”. She actively invites us to understand the border as both productive and coercive, inscribing its own ambivalence. She explores the idea of borders as fluid, dynamic and shifting spaces in which the boundaries between cultures, languages, and identities are constantly questioned and challenged. Because national borders are always arbitrary, people and cultures on either side of the border cannot be kept separate or distinct from

¹⁶ I use the term decoloniality instead of decolonization as decoloniality is a broader concept and works through a global planetary perspective. Emerging from the Latin America Modernity/Coloniality research program, decoloniality strives to liberate the post-Cold War world from global colonial domination and the persistence of its consequences worldwide. For more see Mignolo 612-618.

one another. Instead, she asserts that borderlands are permeable places where traditions overlap, and new forms of cultures emerge. She asserts that she, and other mestizos, will “stand and claim [their] space, making a new culture-*una cultura mestiza*” (22). She sees borders as complex and multi-layered experiences that shape and are shaped by different social factors where identity-formation processes take place. She further argues that these borders have a profound impact on the lives of people and shape their identities, and sense of self, defining them as an open and a liminal or in-between space and a site of identity formation where various experiences are divided yet connected. Crossing the border, whether voluntarily or forcibly, can expose people to cultural differences, conflicts, and negotiations that affect their sense of self and belonging. This process of identity formation can involve multiple affiliations, languages, and cultures that challenge the binary categories of us vs them, self vs other, and center vs margin. These movements can create new social and cultural formations that challenge the fixed and homogenous notions of nation, race, and ethnicity. With her theory, she attempts to formulate new theories to better understand the identity-making processes of those who exist in an in-between state and that distinguish refugees on grounds of their apparent non-conformity with the dominant culture of the nation-state. Anzaldúa’s work is vital as it highlights the lived experiences of those marginalized by borders and provides a framework for understanding how borders are created and maintained by power structures. Challenging borders thus becomes essential for deconstruction and reconstruction and creating future possibilities for liberation by putting together identities, communities, and struggles.

In diaspora and postcolonial studies, the image of the border is a complex metaphor because it encapsulates the themes of power, (im)mobility, identity, and resistance in the context of colonialism, globalization, and migration especially since crossing an international border is a

crucial step in the process of becoming a refugee. However, following Anzaldúa's theory, border crossing can be viewed as an ongoing continual process as the divide between citizen and refugee, insider and outsider, appears and vanishes in places far from national boundaries in borderlands. Researcher Btihaj Ajana argues that borders "are no longer simply material frontiers that separate states. But they are now *everywhere* and go beyond physical spatiality" (466). In this sense, borders are not just physical structures and geographic boundaries between nation-states, but also cultural and social constructions that shape our understanding of the world and our place in it. Simply put, borders highlight the legacy of colonial powers and limit the existence of individuals. Rather than perceiving ourselves as members of fixed and immutable groups, we should embrace a more fluid and flexible understanding of identity which allows us to connect with others across traditional boundaries, in other words, borders. This means challenging the notion of nation-states as the primary structure for political organization and, instead, promoting more transnational forms of cooperation and solidarity. By inviting everyone to rethink the common understanding of borders and identity, Cameroonian philosopher and intellectual Achille Mbembe offers a powerful vision for a more inclusive and just world. With new forms of digitalized borders and robots surveilling the refugees at borders, it is necessary to remap the world in planetary terms. After World War II, nation-states started establishing and standardizing certain regulations for managing mass displacements of people worldwide. We currently live in a new digitalized era especially with the ongoing process of technological transformation of borders and "virtual barriers of separation, digitalization of databases, filing systems, the development of new tracking devices, sensors, drones, satellites, and sentinel robots, infrared detectors and various other cameras, biometric controls, and new microchips containing personal details" ("Bodies and Borders" 2019). Broeders and Dijstelbloem further argue that

‘[m]onitoring mobility and migration have changed drastically in the digital age [. . .] Data from various different sources are broken down into bits and bytes and reassembled in databases that have become a cornerstone of modern migration policy” (244). These new automated systems and technologies have had a significant impact on migration and border policies actively making us question the nature of borders.

Mbembe further asserts that “de-borderization”¹⁷ (“Bodies and Borders” 2019) is essential to move towards a more collective space where every story, or memory, is valued without privileging one over the other or instrumentalizing one to cope with the other. In his lecture “Blacks From Elsewhere and the Right of Abode,” as part of the Ruth First Memorial Lecture in 2019, he claims that it is essential to “phase out the borders we inherited from the colonial era ... [and] unfreeze the borders”. In his book *Necropolitics* (2011), he further argues that it is crucial to challenge “borders between here and there, the near and the distant, the inside and the outside, [that] serve as a Maginot Line for a major part of what passes as ‘global thinking’ today” (9). By recognizing and challenging these borders previously set and maintained by colonizers, we can work towards a more just and equitable world. Due to the legacy of Apartheid¹⁸ in South Africa, Mbembe encourages South Africa and other African countries to adopt a pro-migration stance, phase out colonial borders, and become “a vast space of circulation” (“Blacks From Elsewhere and the Right of Abode” 2019). He encourages Africans to “give [themselves] a decade during which, as a continent, [they] embark on a massive project of *border management for continental integration*” (“Bodies and Borders”

¹⁷ This term refers to the erasure of political and cultural boundaries between different groups of people.

¹⁸ The legacy of apartheid has profoundly impacted South Africa's social, economic, and political landscape, and its effects continue to be felt today. South Africa's post-Apartheid immigration laws still show that Apartheid still controls the public arena. Some examples include the 1998 Refugees Act, the 2002 Immigration Act, the 2011 Immigration Amendment Act and Refugees Amendment Act, the 2016 Immigration Amendment Act, the 2017 Refugees Amendment Act to which should be added the 2016 Border Management Authority Bill and the 2017 White Paper on International Migration.

2019). Instead of closing the already existing borders, there is a growing “need to massively invest in their modernization as a necessary step towards decommissioning them.” Mbembe calls for a new perception of the world in planetary¹⁹ terms by making Africa borderless and facilitating the movement of Africans across the continent and, ultimately, the planet. In his article “The Idea of a borderless world,” Mbembe asserts that freedom of movement “would be a radical right that would belong to everybody by virtue of each and every individual being a human being.” This can only be done when all African countries adopt and implement pro-migration laws and regulations.

In a refugee context, border studies help us analyze and understand the ways in which borders are created, maintained, and challenged. It helps us look at the effects that they have on individuals and communities and recognize the complexities between borders, nation-states, and refugees’ identities. Studying the concept of transition across borders helps us better understand the connection and separation of people’s identities across different spaces and temporalities. Border studies can thus provide a critical framework for analyzing the political and social contexts that shape the experiences of refugees. By focusing on borders and analyzing them as sites of power and resistance, scholars can gain a better understanding of the complex dynamics that shape refugee experiences and their narratives.

Recently, the concept and figure of the “refugee” has been getting a growing scholarly attention. Instead of solely thinking of refugees, scholars need to think with refugees in order to better understand refugee experiences. When considering refugees and trying to understand their narratives, scholars have returned to one of essential principles of postcolonialism to disrupt the

¹⁹ Planetary studies has been gaining scholarly attention as there is a global need to remap the world. Caminero-Santangelo asserts the necessity to create “a new planetary consciousness” (277) that challenges and goes beyond the Eurocentric perspective that maintains colonial legacies.

already-existing power dynamics. In this sense, various postcolonial perspectives question and challenge the persistent colonial mindset and the ongoing colonial disposition regarding the images of refugees and their narratives. There is an overlap between refugee studies and postcolonial studies since various refugee narratives are often affected by the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for political and cultural autonomy in postcolonial societies. April Shemak argues that postcolonial refugee narratives “can be defined as prose narratives (novels, short stories, memoirs) by and about refugees fleeing nations of origin that have a history of European colonialism” (187). To better understand refugee narratives that challenge the already established refugee images, it is crucial to consider postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory when reading literary texts since it will help us establish new forms of knowledge. Refugee narratives, as a genre, should be read against the grain of the dominant political and social discourses while considering the issues of representation of the contemporary refugee. Considering postcolonial studies’ dedication to interdisciplinary approaches and its aim to address various forms of imperialism encompassing political, economic, ecological, and cultural domination, refugee literature, and art can be considered “[...] forms of poetic and political intervention” (Gallien 724). In this sense, refugee narratives can be looked at as “contemporary postcolonial travel writing”²⁰ (Shemak 188) that is distinct from other Eurocentric travel writings since it challenges colonial writing techniques.²¹ From this perspective, refugee narratives, as a genre, create an alternative discourse of refugeeism and challenge the most common discourse of refugees, going beyond considering them as victims and survivors that dwell on the moral hypocrisy of the west.²²

²⁰ To better understand travel writing as a genre and look at its development throughout history, see Gareth Griffiths “Postcolonialism and travel writing” 58-80.

²¹ For more see Gallien 721-726

²² For more see Cox et al. 1–12.

From a postcolonial point of view, refugee narratives convey accounts that challenge colonial discourses that reproduce a dominant Western idea of the refugee by embracing new ways of looking at exiles and approaching their experiences. In this sense, works of literature can offer us valuable insights into the experiences of refugees and the impact of border policies on their lives. Through literature, one can gain a deeper understanding of the human consequences of political decisions and policies that shape borders and the movement of people across them as they challenge dominant narratives about refugees and borders and offer alternative perspectives and symbolic languages that humanize those who are often reduced to statistics or stereotypes. Linking refugee, border, and literary studies-mainly by turning to literature and understanding borders in relation to postcolonialism-can help us develop more nuanced and empathetic approaches to understanding and responding to refugee crises. This can enable us to create more effective policies and interventions that are grounded in an understanding of the real experiences of refugees and the complex contexts in which they live in.

In a globalization context, people try to overcome the entire idea of a border seeking to find a new language on how to speak about these kinds of transgressions²³ of stipulated boundaries that they have no say in. Vietnamese American professor and novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen, a refugee himself, writes about his otherness and unbelonging in his book *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (2018) explaining how it is caused not only by his fleeing from South Vietnam with his family but also by being a writer. He asserts that “a writer is supposed to go where it hurts, and because a writer needs to know what it feels like to be an other. A writer’s work is impossible if he or she cannot conjure up the lives of others, and only through such acts of memory, imagination, and empathy can we grow our capacity to feel for

²³ In reference to Foucault’s concept of transgression

others” (17). In her book *In The Wake*, Sharpe beautifully entwines academic studies, which are non-literary, in her memoir together with reading the metaphoricity and materiality of "the wake," "the ship," "the hold," and "the weather," to illustrate the afterlives of slavery and offer new ways for living in diaspora. Similarly, in her book *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand draws on poetry, fiction, collective memoir, history, politics, and philosophy, to address various issues. She moves from talking about the door that slaves were forced through before they were shipped into slavery but ends by explaining how writers also pass through a door of no return. Being mixed-genre texts, both literary works transgress genre boundaries previously set by colonial powers. Also, it should be noted that *Breach* (2016) by Olumide Popoola and Annie Holmes is a collection of short stories based on transcripts from narratives that refugees told them. By narrativizing and fictionalizing refugee stories, Popoola and Holmes go beyond genre boundaries. Similarly, *Homes: A Refugee Story* (2018), is said to be “a work of creative nonfiction, written by Winnie Yeung as told to her by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah and his family” (2). Remembering events and storytelling is in itself based on imagination and having the story written by someone else, further transgresses genre boundaries. Through these writings theoretical and literary texts transgress each other in order to capture a different sense of what that refugee experience might be. In my thesis, I provide a literary analysis within a theoretical framework of border studies and postcolonial studies focusing on the metaphors of doors and walls to explore new ways of representing the figure of the refugee and addressing refugee experience and memories.

Refugee memory should be looked at within the scope of postcolonial studies. Scholar Leela Gandhi argues that following colonialism, the rise of anti-colonial and independent nation-states often comes with a desire to erase the memories of the colonial past leading to a form of

“postcolonial amnesia” (16). She asserts that postcolonialism provides “a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath” through an insistence on “revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). Thus, throughout my thesis, I will refer to memory studies from a postcolonial framework. Refugees are often forced to forget their past but at the same time forced to invent narratives of suffering in order to be allowed in. In *Breach* for example, in the short story “The Terrier,” Eloise, a middle-aged French woman questions the narrative that was told to her by the siblings Omid and Nalin she hosted. She thinks that Omid lied about his age and maybe his and his sister’s names. She claims that “he didn’t look seventeen years old to me. Why lie to me? What other lies might he be telling? ... Perhaps they weren’t refugees at all, but criminals, or even terrorists” (41). In this sense, refugee narratives are always questioned. Later we come to learn that indeed their testimony was fabricated so that the two siblings can stay together. Memory in this sense becomes a regulatory device, a site of production and at the same time distortion. However, instead of reducing memory to the binary of being regulatory or non-regulatory devices, I consider them as multidirectional.

My understanding of memory draws from Michael Rothberg’s book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009). Rothberg challenges linear and totalizing considerations of memory arguing “against a logic of competitive memory based on the zero-sum game” (“From Gaza to Warsaw” 523). Understanding memory as the past made present,²⁴ Rothberg contends that similar memories of Nazi and colonial atrocities should become co-commemoration instead of being kept separate and competing with one another over the degree of victimization. He offers an alternative approach to memory studies arguing that

²⁴ In his book *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Richard Terdiman defines it as “the modality of our relation to the past” (7) and as the “*present past*” (8). This demonstrates that even though memory is the remembrance of past events, it occurs in the present.

memories do not have to compete against each other in order to exist and be recognized. Instead of looking at memories as competitive, we should consider all the overlapping memories without totalizing them into one big collective memory of the world. In this sense, he is critical of the uniqueness discourse that maintains that collective memory is singular and does not allow the existence of more than one group. He claims that the interaction of different memories does not result in the annihilation of one of them but rather memories can exist together leading to the emergence of a multidirectional memory that incorporates the nuanced specificities of multiple memories of various groups. He claims that we should “consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (*Multidirectional Memory* 3). In his article “Multidirectional Memory in Migratory settings: The Case of Post-Holocaust Germany,” Rothberg explains how his theory of multidirectional memory can be applied in a migratory context maintaining that migration changes different aspects of memory as “it brings disparate histories into contact with each other, reconfigures individual and collective subjects, and produces novel constellations of remembrance and commemoration in which heterogeneous pasts jostle each other in an unsettled present” (125). In this sense, it is essential to rethink how the history of memory, and especially refugee memory, is written.

Rothberg argues that memories, no matter how different and disconnected they might seem, are connected and related across time and space. This concept helps look at the ways in which Brand's personal memories are shaped by larger historical and social narratives, and how her experiences reflect broader patterns of displacement and diaspora, mainly slavery and colonialism. Through her book, one can understand how slavery still affects memories and lives of those living in the present. As explained at the beginning of this introductory chapter, “The

Door of No Return is of course no place at all but a metaphor for place. Ironically, or perhaps suitably, it is no one place but a collection of places” (30). Throughout her work, she looks at the door as both real and imaginary, a threshold and a space of belonging and unbelonging. She asserts that “since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return” (2). In this sense, going back through the door is impossible. This is similar in the case of asylum seekers, as many of them cannot cross borders again and return to their home countries.²⁵ Focusing on Brand’s study of collective and interconnected memories of the slave trade that mobilizes doors as mnemonic devices will allow me to think through the possibilities of knowledge production through the metaphor of door and through the creative imagination.

In her book *In the Wake*, Sharpe explores the ways in which the legacies of slavery and colonialism continue to shape the present, both through material conditions and through cultural representations. She argues that these legacies are deeply embedded in the structures of power and knowledge production, and that they continue to shape the ways in which we understand history and memory. Sharpe builds on Hartman’s concept of the “afterlife of slavery”²⁶ and examines how the contemporary lives of Black people are connected to those of the enslaved highlighting the continuation of the devaluation of Black life born out of slavery into the present. She argues that the past is not a past but rather a “sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are” (24). She asserts that diasporic Blacks exist “in a past that is not past, a past that is with

²⁵ Borders here are understood as doors that let refugees in. This idea will be later developed in chapter two studying Mohsin Hamid’s novel *Exit West*.

²⁶ In her book *Lose your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006), Hartman defines the afterlife of slavery’ as “the skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (17).

[them] still; a past that cannot and should not be pacified in its presentation” (82). Sharpe demonstrates how slavery haunts Blacks in the diaspora, rendering their lives “always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery” (18). She further asserts that living in the wake “means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, ... living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality” (29).

Even though refugees and slaves lived in different temporalities, Sharpe draws on connections that could be drawn between refugees and slaves. Refugees risking their lives in overcrowded boats and repeated drownings at sea suggest that an analogy can be made to the Middle Passage and the ship that slaves had to get onto before they were shipped into slavery. She states that “In the wake, the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea” (37). Starting from this connecting point and building on the concept of the ‘afterlife of slavery,’ and by extending Sharpe’s concept of living “In the Wake,” I suggest that refugees’ displacement and exile is a consequence of the colonial era making refugees are the “afterlife of colonialism.”²⁷ Thus, studying and highlighting the connection between Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory, and Sharpe’s notion of the Wake in connection to the afterlife of slavery will help me look at the connectivity and symbolic “crossings” of memories between the historical past, present, and future; and thus, develop a transnational, transcultural and trans-mnemonic reading of memory.

²⁷ In her book *Colonial Debts* (2021), Rocío Zambrana develops the concept of neoliberal coloniality in connection to Puerto Rico's debt crisis and further expands Hartman’s concept of the ‘afterlife of slavery’ asserting that coloniality is ‘the afterlife of slavery’. I use the term ‘afterlife of colonialism’ in relation to refugee studies to assert that how nation-states deal with the contemporary refugee crisis is not just a reproduction but rather an afterlife, a never-ending continuation, of colonialism.

Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory in connection to Brand's theorization of "Door of No Return" and Sharpe's concept "In the Wake" provide my theoretical framework for understanding how memory is not a fixed unidirectional phenomenon but is rather multidirectional and shaped by broader historical and social processes. Looking at other metaphors of connection and separation instead of borders challenges nation-states, gives credit to different ways of crossing and projects the interconnectedness of memories in a globalized world.²⁸ Claiming that metaphors are vehicles for memories²⁹, this thesis takes a different approach by considering doors and walls as two central metaphors of transgression and transformation that dramatize the refugee experience and enable a transnational and trans-mnemonic reading of various memories in two novels: Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* (2015). My first chapter looks at writer, essayist, and activist Jenny Erpenbeck's novel and studies how multidirectional memories are established through the text in connection to the metaphor of the wall. By focusing on the legacy of the Berlin Wall and providing a metaphorical reading of walls in the novel, I demonstrate how memories of Germans are dialogically connected to the memories of refugees across the paradigms of space and time. My second chapter studies the metaphor of doors in Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* to understand how they allow free movement across space and time and to enable a transnational and trans-mnemonic reading of various memories. In both chapters, I recur to Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory in relation to Brand's study of collective and interconnected

²⁸ In her book *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak advances a model of planetary Comparative Literature linking it to Area Studies that are usually unseen and unheard. Planetary thus provides an alternative worldview and horizon to the field of Comparative Literature. She "propose[s] the planet to overwrite the globe" (72) and seeks to recreate an image that challenges this "era of global capital triumphant" (101).

²⁹ Following Freud's dream analysis, various memories and various moments that are repressed and then condensed. Metaphor can be understood as condensation, that happens after displacement which is a sort of dream-distortion, and which refers to substituting an illusion for something real and substantial.

memories of the slave trade that mobilizes doors as mnemonic devices, and Sharpe's notion of the afterlife of slavery to understand how memories of refugees and natives of nation-states are dialogical across different geographies and temporalities.

Chapter 1: Understanding Refugee and Local Memory in Jenny Erpenbeck's Novel *Go, Went, Gone*

Originally published at the height of the European refugee crisis in German as *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (2015) and later translated by Susan Bernofsky as *Go, Went, Gone*, Jenny Erpenbeck's novel unravels the layered history of Germany's colonial past and its lasting impact on today's refugees. Focusing on one of the most important issues of our time, distress migration and forced displacement, the novel has largely been received as a novel primarily intended to raise the German public's awareness about refugees.³⁰ Based on real interactions Erpenbeck had with asylum seekers in Berlin, the novel follows Richard, a recently retired German professor of Classics at Humboldt University, as he delves into personal experiences with a group of African refugees whom he befriends and tries to help. At the beginning of the novel, despite being a highly educated academic, Richard is presented as a self-absorbed German citizen who knows little about the world he lives in. As the story progresses, Richard becomes more involved with the group of refugees. He conducts interviews³¹ with them and becomes more involved in their lives. By developing these connections with the refugees, he starts learning about European, and more specifically Germany's colonial history in Africa. Instead of solely focusing on refugees' hazardous journeys across borders and the Mediterranean Sea, the novel's narrative offers glimpses of the struggles and hardships refugees face, while demonstrating the similarities between refugee narratives, Richard's individual memory, Germany's spotty collective memory

³⁰ A lot of critics wrote about the novel's aim to educate the German public, and more generally the West, about the refugee crisis. For more see Salvo 354-362, Balint and Reitz 1-22.

³¹ Before meeting the refugees, Richard comes up with a list of questions to ask but soon learns that the questions are useless. This is made clear in the novel when he asks many questions without getting an answer related to what he asked. In this sense, his patience and ability to listen to refugees helped him build connections with refugees.

of colonialism and fascism, and European history. A lot of critical work has been done about shared trauma between Richard and asylum seekers.³²

Other scholars provided a reading of the novel as a decolonization narrative in Germany that connects the refugee crisis to issues of colonialism.³³ Building on their ideas, this chapter provides a multidirectional reading of asylum seekers' memories in relation to those of citizens'. The first part of this chapter explores how power over asylum-seekers is maintained through borders and laws, focusing on *Residenzpflicht*, the German word for mandatory residence or the obligation to dwell in one place. The second part focuses on Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory to look at how the making of refugees is, in part, a legacy of colonialism and Nazism, or, to put it differently, how the refugee history of the present is spectralized by the colonial past. Then, I provide a reading of walls in the novel, mainly focusing on the Berlin Wall to look at the connections between citizens and refugees.

Borders highlight the physical and symbolic boundary that separates and defines different territories, nations, cultures, and identities. In her book *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa claims that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" (3). To make sense of the state of refugees in Europe, Richard compares the border to a mathematical concept and, towards the end of the novel, realizes that a "border isn't just measured by an opponent's stature but in fact creates him" (211). Similarly, borders that "ha[ve] been dividing humankind" (Erpenbeck 210) help nation-states create refugees as opponents and thus, keep them out. Throughout her novel, Erpenbeck invites readers to question the diverse, yet contradictory, ways in which borders control and limit the movement of individuals. Because borders are historical constructions that

³² For more see Stone 1-12.

³³ For example, see Zhang 134-149.

result from sociopolitical processes that are constantly evolving, they can mutate and change throughout time.³⁴ Richard thinks that a border “can suddenly become visible, it can suddenly appear where a border never used to be” (209). Borders in this sense are mutable³⁵ and have a transformative nature as they can appear unexpectedly anywhere with no prior notice.³⁶ Borders, thus, are increasingly seen as thresholds and liminal spaces where everything fluidly changes. In this context, as previously discussed in the Introduction, Anzaldúa explores the idea of borders as fluid, dynamic, and shifting spaces in which the boundaries are blurred. Unable to find one specific definition for borders, the novel highlights borders’ dysfunctionality. In addition, thinking about borders and their significance, Richard realizes “that the borders drawn by Europeans may have no relevance at all for Africans. Recently, opening the atlas to look up the capital cities, he was struck by all the perfectly straight lines, but only now does he grasp the arbitrariness made visible by such lines” (54). Recognizing that borders in Africa, and everywhere in the world, were arbitrarily and randomly drawn by European colonizers in the past highlights the enduring impact of German colonialism, that continues to influence the lives and destinies of millions of people.

In a conversation with Richard, Apollo replied in Italian, that he is from “Del deserto ... From the desert” (51). Instead of specifying what country he is from, Apollo challenges national borders and disregards common understanding of the construction and development of nation-states as sovereign and homogenous entities.³⁷ His response opposes the common worldview that

³⁴ For more see Heyman, et. al. 754-786.

³⁵ Although the terms fluid and mutable are similar, I use mutable to describe borders’ capability to change since the term mutable implies that the change is intentional or under control to show nation-states’ power over borders.

³⁶ This could also be understood as Richard’s internal boundaries that Richard learns to transgress and abandon after engaging with the refugees.

³⁷ Apollo also speaks many languages but was enslaved for as long as he can remember. Other than being a borderless space, the desert can also be regarded as a space of enslavement and exploitative capitalism. In fact, in the novel, the French company Areva extracts uranium from the desert.

is based on spatial portioning of territories set by nation-states. Analyzing this statement, it could be said that the desert, due to the natural phenomena of moving sand, becomes a striking metaphor which highlights a shifting territory and a rejection of conventional categorizations imposed by nation-states. Richard's questions about borders further invite readers to rethink and reconsider the nature of borders:

How many borders exist within a single universe? Or, to ask it differently, what is the one true, crucial border? Perhaps the border between what is dead and alive? Or between the stars and the lump of earth we walk on every day? Between one day and the next? Or between frogs and birds? Water and earth? Air filled with music and air with no music? The blackness of a shadow and the blackness of coal? Three-leaf and four-leaf clover? Fur and scales? Or millions of times over between inside and outside (210).

His series of questions and his broader philosophical thoughts call into question the notion of national boundaries. His inquiries about the nature of borders deeply connects with the lives of displaced people, revealing the complex interplay between physical, emotional, and social barriers. Richard's thoughts challenge the traditional view and conventional understanding of borders as fixed entities that distinguish the limits of nation-state territory and maintain the division between one nation-state and another, but also divide the world in planetary terms.

As stated by the narrator, Germans "are defending their borders with articles of law" (81).

The novel focuses on the Dublin Regulation³⁸ that forces asylum seekers³⁹ to seek refuge in the

³⁸ It is a European law that determines which State is responsible for examining a person's asylum application with it being the State where the asylum seeker first entered the EU. For more, see the UN Refugee Agency.

³⁹ It should be noted that following World War II and specifically after the 1951 convention, the term 'refugee' took on a renewed significance and definition. Following the establishment and standardization of certain regulations for managing mass displacements of people worldwide, the term refugee became purely political. On the other hand, an

country in which they first arrive. Following these rules, the displaced must apply for asylum not in the country of their choice but in the nation-state in which they arrive. In *Go, Went, Gone*, inter-textual references to the Dublin Regulation are included to challenge nation-states and their politics that control and regulate the mobility of refugees. Under the Dublin Regulation, asylum-seekers are not granted refugee status since “the legal responsibility for the men who landed in Italy is borne by Italy alone” (261) and “because they arrived in Germany through Italy, Italy is the only European country where they’re allowed to live and work” (182). This law captures the complex interplay between a nation-state’s power and responsibility towards asylum seekers. Because of their displacement and later arrival in a country “without a Mediterranean coastline [that can] purchase the right not to have to listen to the stories of arriving refugees” (70), Ali, Khalil, Zani, Yussuf, Hermes, Abdusalam, Mohamed, Yaya, Rufu, Apollo, Tristan, Karon, Ithemba and Rashid were forced to leave Germany. Strikingly, it is only through Richard’s listening and engagement with refugees, and, ultimately, through literature that nation-states’ “right not to have to listen” (182) is transgressed and challenged. In this sense, Richard’s engagement with the refugees exposes nation-states’ inhuman treatment of refugees. Germany, and other European countries not bordering the Mediterranean, become legally indifferent towards refugees since they are not being obligated to listen to their stories and not granting them the right to file an application for asylum. Although most of the European countries are part of the European Union, each sovereign state has different migration laws. In fact, “the Italian laws

asylum seeker is someone who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. In my thesis, I use both terms interchangeably as both terms are political and further highlight the power of nation-states. My usage attempts to avoid the legal differentiation between deserving and non-deserving refugees. However, avoiding the differentiation between a refugee and an asylum seeker does not mean homogenizing the experiences of people.

have different borders in mind than the German laws do” (67). Italy⁴⁰, because of the refugee crisis and the outgrowing number of refugees entering its borders, “allows refugees to depart for other countries, ... [and] gives them the freedom to travel to France, Germany, indeed any European country, to look for work” (68). In this sense, asylum laws serve as a critical tool for nation-states to control the mobility of asylum seekers while maintaining their sovereignty and control over their territories.

Even though a significant number of asylum seekers entered Germany in 2015⁴¹ and despite directly referring to the Dublin Regulation, Erpenbeck’s novel is centered around an earlier refugee protest staged at Berlin’s Oranienplatz from October 2012 to April 2014 (Bhimji 436-437; Gully and Itagaki 263; Stone 12; Zhang 136). Refugees and some of their supporters occupied the Oranienplatz in the Kreuzberg area of Berlin protesting Germany’s asylum policy of the *Residenzpflicht*, a law that forces asylum seekers to live within a certain area defined by local authorities and forbids them from leaving it without a permit. Around 550 refugees took a bus tour from Bavaria to Berlin and occupied several places, with Oranienplatz being the main site of their protest.⁴² At the end, despite many protests, tents were evacuated by the police and many of the protesters were denied asylum in Germany. This law, *Residenzpflicht*, compels refugees to stay within the confines set by nation-states, and those who do not respect laws that limit their mobility and prohibits them from going beyond the boundaries defined by the nation-state are considered criminals. In the novel, Ossarobo clearly claims that the nation “think[s] he

⁴⁰ In a similar context, in the first story “Counting Down” in the book *Breach* by Olumide Papoola and Annie Holmes, the narrator asserts that “Italy is like Greece. Collapsed. There is no future there. It won’t come if you stay. Your future will disappear” (25). Because of its location and its closeness to Mediterranean African countries, mainly Tunisia and Morocco, opportunities are limited.

⁴¹This happened not only because of the ongoing Syrian civil war and other clashes in the Middle East, but also the suspension of the Dublin Regulation of the European Union by Angela Merkel in 2015, opening borders for refugees and allowing them to file asylum claims directly in Germany, rather than having to submit them in the country of their first arrival.

⁴²For more details on the protest see Bhimji 432-450.

is] a criminal. Every black man” (198) is a criminal, foregrounding the underlying racism of the *Residenzpflicht* law. Considered as “*Criminals, delinquents*” (183), as it has also been written about in internet forums, refugees are assigned to a territory that is often very narrow with poor living conditions rendering their freedom of movement limited and making the process of asylum-seeking similar to incarceration.⁴³

The novel depicts how bureaucracy is unable to best serve refugees and their needs. The narrator highlights how refugees go through harsh and long bureaucratic processes to obtain a status: “After Richard accompanies Ithemba to an immigration attorney’s office and learns about the complicated procedures and definitions of asylum law, he ironically comments that the refugees survived the dangerous trip over the Mediterranean Sea, but they are now drowned in the rivers and oceans of German bureaucracy” (310). Richard’s learning process about German bureaucracy suggests ways in which readers think about rigid bureaucratic regulations. Richard further thinks that there is no difference between refugees who drown in the Mediterranean Sea and those who survive and make it to Europe as “every one of the African refugees here ... is simultaneously alive and dead” (267). Following Dublin Regulation and because of their statelessness and lack of either residency or citizenship status, refugees are considered dead by the country they go to after their first arrival in Europe.⁴⁴ Therefore, Erpenbeck’s *Go, Went, Gone* foreshadows the failures and inadequacies of the European Union’s border and migration

⁴³Asylum seekers are not literally imprisoned in jail since that would be considered illegal by the International Human Rights Law. However, placing them in a well-defined space, in other words, detention centers protected with fences and wires, takes one of their basic rights from them, the right to free movement. In his article “The idea of Borderless World,” Mbembe asserts that “the carving of [Africa’s] boundaries along colonial lines, turned the continent into a massive carceral space and each one of us into a potential illegal migrant, unable to move except under increasingly punitive conditions.” I argue that similar to borders, laws set by nation-states are carceral and act “as the antithesis of movement, of freedom of movement” (para. 3).

⁴⁴ They are unseen and unheard because they are unpolitical, in other words with no residency status.

laws that are enforced as political apparatuses to control the refugees' most natural and fundamental right of free movement rendering their existence within the nation-state challenging.

German asylum laws can be traced back to Germany's colonial era. In her article "Becoming Flesh: Refugee Hunger Strike and Embodiments of Refusal in German Necropolitical Spaces," Michelle Pfeifer asserts that German asylum laws are considered "modern colonialism" (470). More specifically, *Residenzpflicht* is reminiscent of Germany's past colonial regulations over its former colonies. In South-West Africa⁴⁵, 'Natives' had to be registered and were forced to carry identification cards rendering them subject to the bureaucratic German power. They further needed to acquire a pass to be able to travel and move from one place to another. These colonial regulations show Germany's power that contained and managed "what was considered the threat of a freely moving, unregistered, and unsurveilled indigenous population" (Pfeifer 469). Similarly, in a modern context, implementing *Residenzpflicht* and other laws regulating the movement of asylum seekers and limiting their freedom of movement, highlights the enduring impact of Germany's colonial legacy.⁴⁶

The narrative links different eras of German twentieth and twenty-first-century history, mainly German colonialism, World War II, East Germany's history, the Cold War, and today's Germany with refugees from various African countries. Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts that "The past—or, more accurately, pastness—is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past" (qtd. in Sharpe 77). Challenging conventional ways of perceiving the past as distant and separate from the present, the novel demonstrates that the past and the present are connected. As Richard goes through familiar spaces, he recollects past

⁴⁵ It is today's Namibia was a former German colony between 1884 and 1919. For more information about the German colonial domination see Pfister 63-71.

⁴⁶ I will later draw more connections between the current refugee crisis and colonial Germany.

events, which demonstrates how the past resonates in the present. In this sense, space can retain traces of events and historical significance. Space thus can be imprinted with physical, emotional and cultural imprints that establishes connections between the past and present. One day Richard sits on a bench at Oranienplatz, Berlin, and observes the protest of African refugees in front of a huge historic building. When his eyes cast upon the building, he remembers that it must have been built when “Germany still had colonies” (Erpenbeck 41) in Africa. In addition, the narrator implicitly asserts that “only if they [Africans] survived Germany now would Hitler truly have lost the war” (54). In this sense, the narrator claims that the contemporary refugee crisis in Europe can be looked at as the aftermath of the Nazi past. Interestingly, after their tents have been destroyed, reminiscent of the destruction of Calais’s refugee tent city, the Jungle, “Africans are being housed in the nursing home,” (41) a facility where memories of the Holocaust and World War II of the older generation exist (Zhang 135-136). The space itself holds the memory of struggle and brutality. Although those who occupied the residential house for the elderly no longer occupy it in the present, Richard observes that “[t]he doors still bear the names of the rooms’ elderly former residents. Are they all dead now? Or have they been transferred to other facilities?” (Erpenbeck 45) Richard’s wondering shows that the space marked with German names but now occupied by Africans hosts the colonial past with a new façade. The cohabitation of refugees in a space that is usually associated with the elderly shows the legacy of the colonial past, as well as the social marginalization suffered by both the elderly and refugees. In this sense, events are not only chronologically registered in time but spatially connected as time is also space and history, as well as geography. Thus, connecting multiple events that happened in history in different locations demonstrates that the refugee situation and their existence is deeply

rooted in and tied to German colonial history and Nazism. It reveals the intricate links that exist between the colonial past, Nazi Germany and the country's present refugee politics.

Although Richard is presented as a “professor at Humboldt University, Department of Classical Philology” (42) who knows about Germany's and Europe's colonial history, he is initially indifferent towards the ongoing refugee crisis in Germany. He is unaware of tents being torn down and refugees who were protesting in Oranienplatz being divided among facilities because he was fully immersed in reading “about the acquisition of territory on the southwest coast of Africa by a trader named Lüderitz. Herr von Lüderitz, ... [and how] the lands belonging to the merchant Lüderitz were designated colonies and enjoyed the protection of the German state” (39-40). As stated by Corina Stan, although Richard is presented as an intellectual interested in reading about Germany's colonial past, he is “oblivious to its colonial past and to distant geographies and their histories” (801). Richard is also unaware that there “are fifty-four African countries” (Erpenbeck 28) and does not know any names of African capitals. He asks himself “Where exactly is Burkina Faso? ... What is the capital of Ghana? Of Sierra Leone? Or Niger?” (28). Looking up countries and tracing borders on the pages of an atlas⁴⁷ show his limited knowledge about African geography and the world around him. This highlights Richard's negligence of the current refugee crisis and the issues that asylum seekers face in Berlin. It further demonstrates that he lives in his own world of white, male privilege and, as postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests, of “sanctioned ignorance” (2). Spivak blames “both

⁴⁷ This made me think about one of the short stories in *Breach* “The Terrier” when Eloise, a middle-aged French woman used a map to better understand Omid and Nalin's journey of escape from Syria. She “... brought [her] laptop to the table to follow the journey on Google Maps... [She] tracked the story with [her] finger across the map on the screen, zooming in, zooming out.” (39) The act of zooming could represent Eloise's engagement with the siblings' story and their focus on specific details when telling their narrative, possibly mirroring hardships and struggles faced in specific locations. Conversely, zooming out symbolizes gaining a broader perspective about the world and trying to understand and grasp the length of the journey and the complex geopolitical context that refugees navigate.

[the] elite theorist and self-styled activist, in different spheres” (86) for encouraging ignorance which reproduces and maintains colonialist structures. Erpenbeck’s critique of Germany’s educated elite and their disregard for the refugee problem is embodied in the character of Richard, a retired white professor from a prestigious university living in an affluent area. The narrator clearly states that although Richard knows a lot about philosophers and literary critics including “Foucault and Baudrillard, and also Hegel and Nietzsche, ... he doesn’t know what you can eat when you have no money to buy food” (Erpenbeck 64). Richard, thus, represents the archetype of a highly privileged German citizen who, by virtue of his education and profession, should have had greater political awareness and a broader understanding of the world surrounding him.

Richard can be seen as an affluent privileged citizen who is negligent of the ongoing challenges confronted by asylum seekers in Berlin. At first, he distances himself from them, viewing them as a social problem to be solved rather than as individuals with their own unique experiences and stories. When he first meets the director of the retirement house where refugees are housed, Richard asserts that he needs to meet them because he is “working on a research project” (43). Perceiving them as “an object for inquiry” (4) shows Richard’s academic detachment from the refugee crisis. However, as the story progresses, Richard becomes more involved in the refugees’ lives and is no longer distant. Upon retirement,⁴⁸ Richard struggles with the abrupt disruption of his routine of university life, making him have “plenty of time” (48). As the narrator states, “speaking about the actual nature of time is something he can probably do best in conversation with those who have fallen out of it. Or been locked up in it” (38). Because of their displacement and their lack of a legal status, asylum seekers are facing extended exile

⁴⁸ Retirement can be understood as not being wanted by society anymore. Similar to refugees, Richard lives within a society that no longer values his existence.

and thus are considered stuck in time. In this sense, time, acts as an “invisible link” (9) between Richard and asylum seekers. By realizing that time is a unifying factor that brings people together, Richard becomes more involved and intrigued to learn more about asylum seekers and their lives: he hires Apollo to help him gardening, offers Osarobo piano lessons, and “for the first time in his life, applied for a permit for a demonstration and given it its slogan” (217). Richard further helps one of the refugees, Karon, to provide for his family by buying a property in Ghana. He increasingly adopts the lifestyle and traditions of refugees. The narrator claims that “At first Richard was always given a separate plate, knife, and fork ... [However], now he eats as they do... a thin stew made with vegetables and sometimes with meat, sometimes with fish. It tastes not terribly different from his mother’s goulash” (275). As Richard breaks the barriers between him and the refugees, the barriers on the larger level are being broken and dismantled since the narrative demonstrates that refugees and German citizens’ lives are connected.

The novel invites readers to consider the interconnectedness between Nazism, colonialism, the Cold War and twenty-first refugees in Germany. Instead of considering memories as competitive based on their degree of victimhood, they can exist together leading to the emergence of a multidirectional memory that incorporates the nuanced specificities of multiple memories of various groups. Rothberg is critical of the uniqueness discourse that maintains that collective memory is singular and does not allow the existence of more than one group. He asserts that one shouldn’t believe “that one’s own history, culture, and identity are ‘a separate and unique thing’” (*Multidirectional Memory* 17). Instead of setting memories of Nazism and the Holocaust apart from other memories and believing that they are competing with one another based on the degree of victimization, they should be considered together in a dialogical practice. He claims that “the memory is not the exclusive property of particular groups

but rather emerges in a dynamic process of dialogue, contestation, and exchange” (“Multidirectional Memory in Migratory settings” 126). The novel attempts to create a new national narrative that not only includes the experiences and histories of African refugees and asylum seekers but also suggests that their memories are part of and connected to Germany’s memory.

In their article “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,” sociology professors Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider do not study the Holocaust as a historical event itself but as a trigger that facilitates the emergence of a new kind of memory, one that goes beyond ethnic, national and geographic boundaries. The novel suggests that there should be a shift in the culture of collective memory from only focusing on the Holocaust towards a more inclusive and connected memory of multiple pasts of violence and suffering. Holocaust memory should be considered from the perspective of its interactions with memories of colonialism and slavery and the ongoing process of decolonization. In her book *Lose your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006), Hartman defines ‘the afterlife of slavery’ as “the skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (17). In her book *In the Wake*, Sharpe further builds on Hartman’s claims and examines how the contemporary lives of Black people are connected to those of the enslaved highlighting the continuation of the devaluation of Black life born out of slavery into the present. She claims that “We are, though, living in the afterlives of that brutality that is not in the past” (129). Expanding upon the idea of the ‘afterlife of slavery’, and considering living ‘In the Wake’, the figure of the refugee can be looked at as the ‘afterlife of colonialism’. Considering refugees as the ‘afterlife of colonialism,’ Erpenbeck imagines a new

world where everyone can coexist with one another and where everyone accepts the other. It imagines a better world in which refugees are more accepted and less excluded.

Following the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990, Germany has developed a rather complex memory culture characterized by an overwhelmingly normative attitude towards the past and a confrontation with Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. In her article “Reframing the Past: Justice, Guilt, and Consolidation in East and West Germany after Nazism,” Mary Fulbrook addresses the question of how individuals who had witnessed Nazi persecution and been complicit in it re-envision their lives and find ways to overcome the past. Although Richard was not a witness of Nazism, Richard’s mother was exiled from Silesia at the end of the war. Richard “had been an infant when his family left Silesia and resettled in Germany. In the midst of their departure, he almost got separated from his mother; he would have been left behind outright if it hadn’t been for a Russian soldier, who, amid the press of people on the station platform, handed him to his mother through the train’s window over the heads of many other resettlers” (Erpenbeck 14). During World War II, under Hitler’s rule, Nazi Germany killed and forcibly relocated many Silesian Poles⁴⁹, filling the area with German settlers. After the end of World War II, the vast majority of the Silesian Germans, who had supported Hitler, were forcibly expelled to the West and the land was returned to the Polish people. Similarly, his father “was sent to Norway and Russia as a German soldier to produce mayhem” (94). Entirely indifferent to his family’s complicity with Nazi Germany, Richard never adopts a political standpoint regarding either of his parents. His mother told him the story of their expulsion “so many times that eventually it seemed to him he remembered it himself. The *mayhem of war* was

⁴⁹ Between 1942 and 1944, Hitler built Auschwitz Subcamps on various outskirts of the German-occupied land including Silesia, to kill as many Polish Jewish people as possible. For more see Holocaust Encyclopedia <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/auschwitz>.

what she called it” (14). In this vein of thought, Marianne Hirsch, born to Jewish parents who fled Romanian Cernăuți during World War II, comes up with the concept of post-memory to explain how although she did not physically experience what her parents went through, she still had memories, or rather post-memories of the war, danger and survival. She asserts that post-memory “describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before— to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (5).⁵⁰ Similarly, despite being an infant when his mother left Silesia and does not necessarily remember much, his mother’s memory, deeply rooted in Nazism, became, in a way, his own memory directly affecting his present.

By the end of the novel, Richard rethinks and reevaluates Germany’s and Europe’s postwar historiography. It is only through his interaction with refugees that Richard becomes able to express his feelings of guilt and shame. Due to its colonial and Nazi history, Germany, and by extension, its citizens, have a relation of shame to the ‘wrongfulness’ of the past. In fact, “a majority display feelings of collective guilt ... [and are] ashamed that Germans have committed so many crimes against Jews” (Rensmann 177).⁵¹ Similarly, Richard’s feelings are made explicit in the novel through a conversation he had with Osarobo about Hitler:

Did you ever hear the name Hitler?

Who?

Hitler. He started the war and killed all the Jewish people.

⁵⁰ For more, see Marianne Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* 2-30.

⁵¹ For more on collective guilt and Germany’s national identity, see Lars Rensmann 169-190.

He killed people?

Yes, he killed people — but only a few, Richard says quickly, because he's already feeling bad about getting carried away almost to the point of telling this boy, who's just fled the slaughter in Libya, about slaughter that happened here. No, Richard will never tell him that less than a lifetime ago, Germany systematically murdered so many human beings. All at once he feels deeply ashamed, as if this thing that everyone here in Europe knows is his own personal secret that it would be unreasonable to burden someone else with. (Erpenbeck 119)

Although Richard admits that although Holocaust memory is widely known, he still feels personally responsible for the actions of his country. Aware of Germany's Nazi past, Richard decides to stay silent and not tell Osarobo anything about the terrible atrocities committed in the past. In her chapter "Shame Before Others," Sara Ahmed, focusing on Australia and its wrongdoings towards the aboriginal people, claims that "Shame becomes crucial to the process of reconciliation or the healing of past wounds" (101). By breaking the barriers within himself, he heals the wounds that he has and reorders his own understanding of Germany's collective memory of the Holocaust, a memory that was particularly repressed in former German Democratic Republic.

In this sense, refugees help create transnational and transcultural memories. Refugees' history and memory serve as a source of renewal and reconfiguration for the self. In a refugee context, memory is "produced through migration: for both migrants and 'natives' in the country of destination" (130). Richard learns about Germany's colonial past and changes his way of thinking about past events through connecting his memories to refugees' memories. As argued by Rothberg, "without changing the way we think about the past, it will be difficult to imagine

an alternative future” (“From Gaza to Warsaw” 541). His development of multidirectional memory helps him draw parallels between colonialism, Nazism and the current European refugee policy. Hence, the refugee problem is directly connected to Holocaust memory as well as the memory of colonialism. The novel thus shows how Richard and more generally other German citizens become decolonized by facing Germany’s traumatic past and providing support to refugees. The novel thus attempts to imagine a German community that is built on transnational migration where all memories from the past and present are relational.

Throughout history, refugees, were considered as Other, as maintained by Arendt and Said, and, as such, immobilized and subjugated to invisibility. In his book *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (2006), Peter Nyers asserts that “We expect to see the refugee, but that individual is missing, absent, invisible” (15). Although a group of displaced people occupy Oranienplatz, a highly visible square in a busy area in the city of Berlin, to gain political visibility, they were still invisible to Richard. He did not see the “ten men [who] gather[ed] in front of Berlin’s town hall” (Erpenbeck 10) despite running errands near Oranienplatz and walking past them. Although a group of displaced people occupy Oranienplatz, a highly visible square in a busy area in the city of Berlin, to gain political visibility, they were still invisible to Richard. In their pursuit of recognition, the group of displaced Africans use the resonant slogan “We become visible” (18). This slogan encapsulates the core of their struggle for acknowledgement by the government and the community in general. Aware of their marginalized status within the German and European community, refugees protest against the European Union’s asylum laws that limit their freedoms. The statement “We become visible” (14, 23, 24, 25, 27, 237) is repeated many times in the novel and shows their ongoing and determined quest for visibility. It is only by remaining visible that refugees can make their own

political demands and challenge their othering by the rest of society. In this context, in the introduction to their book *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (2020), Cox et. al assert that “Citizenship is the universal mark of belonging somewhere; it is also, as Hannah Arendt once wrote, a mask that we put on in order to be legally and politically visible” (2). Their slogan could be interpreted as their hope and longing to become citizens and thus become visible to the world.

To further render refugees invisible, the German government decides to re-move the refugees from the city centre to a remote building at the periphery of Berlin and then further to a faraway building in the woods. In this context, Nyers further claims that refugees’ “invisibility is ensured by locating the detention centers in remote and isolated areas of the country, far away from communities that could provide them with much needed emotional, legal, and political support” (119). He discloses the political intention to marginalize the refugee problem and gradually condemning the refugees to oblivion and invisibility. As told by the narrator, many men “are to move from the asylum-seekers’ residences to Magdeburg⁵², for example, or to a dormitory made of shipping containers on the outskirts of Hamburg, or to a Bavarian mountain village” (Erpenbeck 207). Relocating refugees to areas that are remote and marginalized can be considered a form of sanctioned abandonment as they are left with limited resources and facilities. Therefore, asylum seekers exist in a space composed of people who have been excluded from the commons and prohibited certain rights and privileges. Becoming “undercommons”⁵³ makes refugees less visible to the government and the rest of the population.

⁵² Interestingly, this area is known for its Neo-Nazis and the killing of refugees.

⁵³ In their book, Harney and Moten ask what lies beneath and beyond institutions of control mainly focusing on the prison and the university, the slave ship and the settlement, systems of debt and credit. They theorize their concept of “the undercommons,” which refers to the space where marginalized groups exist and make meaning with each other.

The deliberate placement of refugees and migrants in remote and isolated areas serves as a strategic measure to ensure their invisibility, limit their access to legal and political acknowledgement by the nation-state and further silence them.

Although their primary aim was to gain visibility and be heard and seen by the German government, they decided to remain silent and they “would rather die than reveal their identity” (11). Their reluctance to reveal their identity can be explained by a complex interplay of factors. The men’s decision to stay silent and not share their names functions as a form of resistance.⁵⁴ Though seemingly paradoxical, their silence can be considered as a powerful form of survival to further highlight their resistance in the face of displacement. Through their silence, these men reclaim control over themselves, choosing the ways in which to showcase their visibility. Silence can further serve as a protective shield since sharing their identity may expose them to discrimination and further limit their chances of being granted refuge. In this sense, the silence serves as a means to navigate the challenges of forced migration and further reflects their fear of saying something that may harm their chances of receiving protection. The ten men decided to remain silent and not state who they were because exposing their identities directly impacts their legal status and whether they would be granted the refugee status or not. In this sense, refugees are often forced to forget their past but at the same time forced to invent narratives of suffering to be allowed in.⁵⁵ As mentioned in the novel, the Residency law clearly states that “*False statements may lead to the rejection of the application for a residence permit or stay of*

⁵⁴ One might think that having names is a way to humanize them and further make them visible since they are not considered as nameless subjects or cases to be handled as mentioned in *Go, Went, Gone*. However, I believe that their deliberate silence makes them more visible.

⁵⁵ In the short story “The Terrier” in *Breach*, Eloise, a middle-aged French woman questions the narrative that was told to her by the siblings Omid and Nalin she hosted. She thinks that Omid lied about his age and maybe even names. She claims that “He didn’t look seventeen years old to me. Why lie to me? What other lies might he be telling? ... Perhaps they weren’t refugees at all, but criminals, or even terrorists” (41). In this sense, refugees narratives are always questioned.

deportation (exceptional leave to remain), or to immediate expulsion” (246). It should be noted that in some cases, refugees cannot appear in the public realm and become visible as there is an overgrowing risk that they would be jailed, deported, or treated like criminals. Thus, remaining silent, and by consequence invisible, is their only strategy to protect themselves.⁵⁶ Unlike the men who protested at Oranienplatz and chose to stay silent and keep their identities anonymous, “The refugees here state their names and say where they’re from” (27). At first, Richard does not understand why the refugees did not share their names. However, by the end of the novel, Richard comes to “understand why the Berlin Senate insisted on making identification of the refugees by name part of the Oranienplatz agreement. Only when a name is known can there be a list like this” (208). Because they shared personal information and told parts of their stories, many of the asylum seekers were expelled from Germany.

During the 1930s, Nazi authorities implemented new policies that helped pinpoint the Jewish population that helped advance their campaign of widespread discrimination, deportation and extermination. In 1938, the Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names was introduced forcing all Jews to use names that were selected from a list compelled by the Nazi government.⁵⁷ Those who do not have a name that exists on the list should add another first name: ‘Israel’ for men and ‘Sara’ for women. The law was created primarily to target assimilated Jews and keep track of them. In this sense, the Holocaust could not have happened had the German bureaucracy not amassed lists of Jewish people with their private information. There are clear parallels between the list of Jews that the Nazi authorities compiled in collaboration with the population and the list of names of refugees to be deported from Germany as both former

⁵⁶ For more see San Martín “Immigrants’ Rights in the Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt’s Concepts” 141-157.

⁵⁷ Other laws that have similar outcome: Decree on Passports of Jews October 1938 and the Police Regulation on the marking of Jews forcing them to wear a special yellow badge in public. See <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitic-legislation-1933-1939>

Nazi Germany and today's Germany systematically use personal data in order to keep control and assert their power over the other: Jewish and refugees.

In order to deal with past memories and protect themselves from directly confronting their traumas, refugees employ different coping mechanisms, mainly silence. Because many refugees have experienced treacherous and horrific events, violence and war when fleeing their home countries and when crossing international borders their trauma is internalized⁵⁸ rendering them unable to speak. Drawing parallels between refugees and slaves⁵⁹, in her book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006), Saidiya Hartman provides two perspectives of talking about the past and traumatic events. She asserts that “unlike [her] aunt Beatrice, who believed it was best to leave the past in the past and who was tight-lipped, especially when it concerned matters like indifferent fathers, troublesome origins, or other revelations that could only leave you shamefaced, [her] aunt Laura was willing to tell all” (61). Aunt Beatrice's silence goes back to an inherited tradition of silence and secrecy and to language's inability to describe traumatic events, which further intensifies the impact of trauma. In *Go, Went, Gone*, when the refugees were telling their stories and sharing details about their journeys across the Mediterranean, some refugees remained silent. Osarobo, for example, says that he has lived a “crazy life, crazy life, ... and then falls silent” (Erpenbeck 100). Thus, trauma makes refugees unable to share parts of their lives. In this vein of thought, Hartman asserts that her “grandparents erected a wall of half-truths and silence between themselves and the past” (21). The narrator's grand-parents distance themselves from the past by deliberately building a

⁵⁸ In this context, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014), Van der Kolk highlights the interconnectedness between mind and body and asserts that “trauma is held in people's bodies” (38).

⁵⁹ Although both slaves and refugees experienced displacement and lost their freedom of movement -to different extents-, I am not suggesting that both groups are interchangeable. My goal is to draw parallels and show that both groups are connected to colonialism.

metaphorical wall that acts as a shield mainly used to protect them and their descendants from the trauma connected to slavery.⁶⁰ Similarly, some asylum seekers decided to remain silent to run away from their past traumatic experiences and hide from them.

Rashid, a refugee from Nigeria, shares parts of his personal life with Richard. At first, he started telling him about how he always ate with his family and how he went to school and started his vocational training. Then, he gives more details about his journey when he escaped Nigeria and how his children drowned after they were forced out of Libya. Not even his “memories of his wonderful life with his family could console him” (Erpenbeck 277) and make him forget his sadness and pain and get over his guilt of losing his children Ahmed and Amina who drowned. Rashid describes what happened on the boat and that “Within five minutes, not more, in only five minutes, hundreds and hundreds of people died” (193), including his children. His memories associated with “approximately 550 of the 800 people [who] drowned” (193) and the war in Libya still haunt him and affect his present. Traumatic memories return to haunt the subject. Rashid’s present is plagued by the painful recollections of his past to the point that he can see “one of [his] children suddenly walking in the door” (194). Rashid has an empty present that is haunted by an unbearable memory from his past, mainly the drowning of his children, and devoid of any optimism about the future. Unable to escape his traumatic memories and his past, Rashid becomes trapped in a cycle of reliving the past without being able to escape its grip and envision a hopeful future.⁶¹ In her book *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand asserts that her “grandfather’s forgetting was not personal. It had been passed on to him by many, most

⁶⁰ There are many popular African diaspora books that explore the issue of intergenerational trauma in relation to slavery. Some examples include Gayl Jones’s novel *Corregidora* (1975) and Yaa Gyasi’s novel *Homecoming* (2016).

⁶¹ It should be noted that not all refugees want to be detached from the past. Awad for example does not want to forget his memories of the past. Awad “will never forget his father, he will always revere his memory. And in just this way he will never forget Oranienplatz. He will always revere its memory.” (65)

especially the one in [her] family who stepped through the Door of No Return. It was a gift. Forgetting” (223). Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche asserts that those who experience trauma have a continuing “desire to deaden pain ... [and] drive [it] out of consciousness at least for the moment” (Nietzsche 127).⁶² Nietzsche’s solution to displace and separate oneself from pain is the practice of forgetting while balancing the amount of remembering to exist and forgetting to live. Rashid wishes to cut off his memories and forget his past because of the traumatic events he has been through and because of the unbearable guilt that he cannot overcome. He wishes “...he could cut off his memory. Cut it away. Cut. A life in which an empty present is occupied by a memory that one cannot endure, in which the future refuses to show itself, must be extremely taxing, Richard thinks, since this is a life without a shoreline, as it were” (Erpenbeck 277). The combination of having an insufferable memory and the uncertainty of the future make Rashid try to alienate himself from his traumatic memories.

Just as Rashid’s past has been overshadowed by haunting memories, Richard’s present has been haunted by various historical events. Further establishing connections between the past and the present, in her book *In the Wake*, Sharpe claims that “In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (22). In *Go, Went, Gone*, the past acts as an everlasting present force, interrupting the narrator’s telling of the story giving space to Richard’s thoughts and parallel stories pop into the narrative. Stories and thoughts mainly related to colonialism and German Nazism pop into the narrative and interrupt Richard’s normal course of life. Freud argues that ‘forgotten’ memories are never erased from the unconscious. Instead, memories “appear as a symptom, without the acquiescence and also without the comprehension of the ego” (*Moses and Monotheism* 127). Throughout the novel, memories of the past haunt

⁶² See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 125-129.

Richard. In this vein of thought, Jacques Derrida uses ‘hauntology’ in reference to Marxism and its tendency to ‘haunt’ Western society even long after its demise. Richard’s narrative is interrupted not only by memories of the past, but also by the story of the man who drowned in the lake and whose body remains unfound. At the end of the novel, Richard asserts that he realized that “the things [he] can endure are only just the surface of what [he] can’t possibly endure ... exactly like the surface of the sea” (Erpenbeck 283). The significance of this statement could be that the present, what can be endured, stems from the past. The traumatic memories that each person tries to forget are hidden deep within us, just like the dead man at the bottom of the “deep, eighteen meters” (10) lake and just like “all the corpses” (193) that Rashid saw. This shows that Richard’s life is deeply connected through the refugees and their presence.

Being forced to leave their home countries, asylum seekers find themselves living in exile. Not having a place for them and being displaced, refugees in *Go, Went, Gone* are considered both an insider and an outsider living in exile.⁶³ In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt asserts that “Once they had left their homeland, they remained homeless, once they had left their state, they became stateless; once they had been deprived of their human rights, they were rightless, the scum of the earth” (349).⁶⁴ All the refugees mentioned in the novel - Ali, Khalil, Zani, Yussuf, Hermes, Abdusalam, Mohamed, Yaya, Rufu, Apollo, Tristan, Karon, Itheand Rashidshid—are exiles without a place to go to. Edward Said explains the difference between exiles and non-exiles, asserting that “Exiles look at non-exiles

⁶³ The state of being an exile and the feelings associated with it are beautifully described in *Breach* in the short story “Lineage” when the plump guy decides to step forward in the café and recite a poem: “Words about the sky, and descending, abandoned, into exile... His face is full of it. Dramatic pauses. These things resonate, the memories, fate, all that brought them here. Especially when the longing is heavy in each word. Exile.” (123) The juxtaposition between the expansiveness of the sky and the isolation of exile demonstrates the feelings of displacement and isolation felt by people in exile.

⁶⁴ For more see chapter “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man”, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951): 349-396.

with resentment. *They* belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place” (“Reflections on Exile” 180). In this context, in his poem “Memory for Forgetfulness”⁶⁵, Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian who lived in exile for many years in Lebanon and Paris, challenges the belief that exiles that are often considered ‘Other’ and alien are not strangers asserting that “the aliens are those who point to our exile with an accusing finger because they’re strangers to their own history and the meaning of their existence, strangers in a passing wave”. The narrator rhetorically asks twice “Where can a person go when he doesn’t know where to go?” (Erpenbeck 266-267). Asking the same question twice and placing it on two blank pages, invites readers to deeply think about refugees’ displacement and reflect on its profound and significant effects on their existence. Not only does the text add to the asylum seekers’ exile but also metaphorically displaces readers all over the world.⁶⁶

Richard’s personal crisis coincides with the refugee crisis. While only the asylum seekers cross international borders⁶⁷ and live in a state of exile, both literally and figuratively, Richard, too, is an exile himself. As previously explained in the introduction, in his writings, Said discusses how Palestinians, although they are in their land, the land where their grandparents and great-grandparents spent all their lives, they are still exiles.⁶⁸ Richard is an exile⁶⁹ in his own country. The narrator asserts that Richard

⁶⁵ His prose is a reflection on both the historical and political aspects of Lebanon’s invasion/siege by Israeli forces in 1982. He investigated the meaning of exile and his role as a writer during wartime establishing connection between writing (in other words memory) and the past (in other words forgetfulness).

⁶⁶ Similar to Erpenbeck’s protagonist Richard, I believe that in today’s world, understood in planetary terms, many people experience a sense of exile and disconnection even if they have not physically moved.

⁶⁷ They fled their home countries because of sectarian violence and desperate economic conditions. Subsequently, after fleeing to Libya, conflicted erupted and most of them were forced onto boats by rebel militia, leaving them in a state where they belong neither to Africa nor Europe.

⁶⁸ Here too I do not suggest that refugees are like Palestinians because they have different circumstances and many factors that make each category specific and unique.

⁶⁹ This kind of inner exile happened among German intellectuals during fascism. They did not openly oppose the fascist regime but boycotted it via their passive resistance. In his article “Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in the Third Reich”, Michael H. Kater explains why anti-Fascist intellectuals did not become more vocal when Hitler came to power.

walked through his house for no particular reason at all, as if strolling through a museum, as if he himself no longer belonged to it. As he passed among these pieces of furniture, some of which he's known since childhood, his own life, room after room, suddenly appeared to him utterly foreign, utterly unknown, as if from a far-off galaxy ... and, without knowing why, began sobbing like a man condemned to exile. (91)

Richard feels out of place and foreign in his own house, the place where he lived and continues to live. Indeed, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of both former countries, "In 1990 he suddenly found himself a citizen of a different country, from one day to the next, though the view out the window remained the same" (84). After his wife's death and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and despite things still being similar, he feels that he is an exile who doesn't belong to Germany. Whenever situating events in the past, Richard always recurs to the fall of the Wall as a time reference, which highlights its impact on his life. Some examples include: "after the fall of the Wall" (30, 70, 83, 87, 92), "not long after the fall of the Wall" (31), "four or five years after the fall of the Wall" (43), "the year after the Wall fell" (51), "years before the Wall fell" (70), "a few years after the fall of the Wall" (221). In Richard's case, rather than liberated, he feels disoriented, and following the fall of the Wall, "he no longer knows his way around ... [and] the city is twice as big and has changed so much that he often doesn't recognize the intersections" (27). Richard remembers the time before the Wall between East and West Berlin went up. Now, even though it is roughly twenty-five years since the Wall came down, he has not quite adjusted and he still feels lost when he is in the city. In this sense, the fall of Wall disrupted the course of Richard's life and separated him from his life.

Historically, the Berlin Wall represents the division and separation between East and West Germany during the Cold War, between communism and capitalism. This history is still

present in the cultural and political landscape of contemporary Germany and influences the way refugees are perceived and treated. In her book *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeism and the Boundary Event* (2010), Trinh T. Minh-ha asserts that “The wall that was dismantled in Berlin is being re-built brick by brick ... The ideology might be different, but the desperation for dominance was the same” (11). In the same context, her book *Stories Without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event* (2016), Julia Sonnevend asserts that although the Berlin Wall, whose significance goes beyond geographical and temporal borders, nation-states did not stop building and maintaining new walls of division taking the form of physical walls, fences, and barriers.⁷⁰ In his book *Necropolitics* (2011), Mbembe asserts that “A separation wall is supposed to resolve a problem of excess of presence, the very presence that some see as the origin of situations of unbearable suffering” (43). In this sense, walls act as a shield to protect a nation-state’s safety⁷¹ and further separate refugees and natives. In the contemporary world, Germany, and other nation-states build walls to keep refugees out.

The Berlin Wall was widely perceived in most Western nation-states as the most iconic event that highlighted a quick shift⁷² from being a symbol of communist oppression into a symbol of freedom. Its fall, signaling the rise of globalization and what Francis Fukuyama saw as ‘the end of history’, was celebrated worldwide as it highlights the end of communism and the triumph of neoliberal capitalism that connects the world. The narrator asserts that “in 1990 the Wall was cleared away piece by piece, and each time a new crossing point was opened, a crowd

⁷⁰ Some examples of “contemporary separation barriers include Brunei’s border fence against illegal immigrants at the Limbang border; the Kazakh– Uzbekistan barrier against drug trafficking and illegal immigration; India’s fence across part of the border with Bangladesh in order to bar terrorists, illegal immigrants, and drugs; the United States’ separation barrier at the Mexican border against illegal immigrants and drug trafficking; Saudi Arabia’s fence against ISIS on the Iraqi border; and Hungary’s antimigration fence on the Serbian border” (Sonnevend 141).

⁷¹ Because they are Other, outsiders, they are perceived as threat that should be kept out of the nation-state.

⁷² Although it is commonly believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall was sudden and quick, it was preceded by mass demonstrations in East Germany, mainly The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig. For more see Lohmann 65-71.

of emotional West Berliners punctually gathered, eager to bid a warm welcome to their brothers and sisters from the East” (30). This highlights West Berliners’ celebration about the fall of the wall and the end of separation. Although the reunification of Germany in 1990, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, was widely perceived as natural⁷³, it affected East Germans differently. For some, the Berlin Wall not only highlights the Cold War’s repression, but is also a physical barrier that separated them from their families and restricted their freedoms, specifically their freedom of movement. Thus, the fall of the Wall was synonymous of freedom and liberation that facilitated and made connections between people possible. However, following the reunification of the two Germanys, many other East Germans felt that West Germany colonized them and effectively, have treated them as second-class citizens.⁷⁴ In an interview with the Jewish Book Council, Erpenbeck, a former East German herself, states that “many people lost their jobs at this time because factories were being sold to the West and immediately closed. In universities, the elites were replaced by former West Germans. Even now, you won’t find many former East Germans among the directors of big German companies, universities, and museums. So [the fall of the Wall] was a deep cut in the collective experience — and not in all regards a good one.” In this sense, the fall of the Berlin Wall acts as an agent of transformation which leads to a questioning of one’s identity as well as an engendering of memories. In this sense, walls, literal and figural, generate a reflection on the connectivity and separation between different memories. The novel invites readers to think about how memories of multiple pasts and presents are connected and affect each other, no matter how different they are. Erpenbeck thus highlights the

⁷³ In this context, former Chancellor of West Germany, asserts that “What belongs together, now grows together.”

⁷⁴ Even today, former East Germany continues to experience higher unemployment rates compared to the former West. In 2017, it has been found out that disposable income of former East Germans was lower than that of their counterparts in the former West. For more details, see Pew Research Center who base their findings on data from the German government’s 2019 report, as well as their conducted surveys.

importance of breaking down these barriers and fostering connections between individuals and societies to create a more inclusive and equitable world. The multilayered memories reveal the refugee problem not as something external and foreign but rather as something that is deeply connected to German and European history.

Chapter 2: Unlocking the Thresholds of Time and Space: Exploring the Door Metaphor in Mohsin Hamid's Novel *Exit West*

Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* (2017) primarily follows the development of Saeed and Nadia's relationship as they move across the world. The two young lovers, who had to leave their unnamed city following the start of a civil war,⁷⁵ go through black magical doors that facilitate their movement and instantly transport them, and other people as well, from one place to another. While events unfold in actual real locations, Hamid incorporates elements of magical realism, which helps him recreate a fast-changing contemporary history. The story delves into the consequences of civil war, migration, and global movement to display how the symbolic black doors affect Nadia and Saeed's relationship and change the world as a whole. Doors in *Exit West* have been one of the most often discussed components of the novel by many critics.⁷⁶ The first part of this chapter explores how power over asylum-seekers is maintained through violence and surveillance moving away from borders and refugee-citizen labels focusing on the characters of Nadia and Saeed. Then the chapter focuses on how the door metaphor offers new narratives to better understand refugee narratives, highlighting the global nature of migration and the refugee experience.

The novel highlights how nation-states exert their power and control over refugees by resorting to violence, primarily by focusing on the way in which refugees are treated in London. The city has a long history of perpetuating police violence and brutality against refugees and immigrants and fueling riots, mainly the Brixton riots, through the racist ideologies of its

⁷⁵ A civil war is typically defined as a violent and organized struggle between groups within one nation-state following ideological, political, or religious divides. For more on definitions of civil war, see Kalyvas 1-15.

⁷⁶ See for example Fisher 1119-1130, Bilal 410-427, Perfect 187-201.

institutional political structures. Enoch Powell, a conservative British politician in the late 1960s, spoke of ‘the rivers of blood’ brought by Black people who migrated to the colonial metropolis.⁷⁷ This helped Margaret Thatcher to come to power and introduce neoliberal globalization, transforming the social fabric of England and the world. In fact, after its election in 1979, the first Thatcher government was committed to reducing and limiting public spending despite high unemployment rates. Due to the elevated unemployment rates, racial discrimination, and marginalization, clashes between Black youth and the police erupted in Brixton, London. Similarly, Hamid’s *Exit West* depicts London as a city where refugees live in constant fear of extensive monitoring and surveillance. They are subject to violence perpetrated against them by “the army [who] was being deployed, and the police as well, and those who had once served in the army and the police, and volunteers who had received a weeklong course of training” (135). In their article, Maria-Irina Popescu and Asma Jahamah explore how the book “reenvisage[s] London at a nexus of state terrorism” (123).

The novel eloquently depicts how the presence of migrants in the public realm in cosmopolitan London leads to the eruption of various xenophobic riots against refugees calling for the deportation of migrants from Britain. Refugees were perceived as a threat to the natives’ safety and to the “fabric of the nation” (Hamid 129) which led to heightened tensions and social unrest in various parts of London. Saeed and Nadia’s neighborhood “was under attack by a nativist mob ... some armed with iron bars or knives” (134). Although they tried to escape, they were unable to and were harassed by the nativists to the point that “Nadia’s eye was bruised and would soon swell shut and Saeed’s lip was split and kept bleeding down his chin and onto his

⁷⁷ He stated that Britain’s welcoming of high number of immigrants from Commonwealth nations is destructive. He anticipated that in the future “As [he] look[s] ahead, [he is] filled with foreboding; like the Roman, [he] seem[s] to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’” He further advocates for the repatriation of immigrants to their countries of origin.

jacket” (134). Nadia and Saeed, and other refugees, find themselves victims to violence and brutality. Furthermore, a rumour started circulating about “over two hundred migrants [who] had been incinerated when the cinema burned down, children and women and men, but especially children, so many children” (163). This serves as an alarming reminder of the extreme violence inflicted upon them. Although at first Saeed and Nadia “heard helicopters and more shooting and announcements to peacefully vacate the area ... after a while they saw smoke and smelled burning” (163). These incidents further underscore how British authorities use violence and non-peaceful means against refugees.

Even though there have been numerous waves of refugees throughout history there was no refugee problem and no need for its regulations until the emergence of fixed and closed state frontiers in the late nineteenth century. As stated by Mbembe, with the ongoing technological advancements and the emergence of various automated systems and technologies for monitoring refugees at borders, we live in a modern digitalized era that reshapes our understanding of borders. Following World War II, nation-states across the globe began maintaining and normalizing restrictive regulations to better manage mass displacements. In Nadia and Saeed’s hometown, “A small quadcopter drone was hovering fifty meters above them now, too quiet to be heard, and relaying its feed to a central monitoring station and also to two different security vehicles” (92). In London, Nadia and Saeed “could occasionally glimpse tanks and armored vehicles and communication arrays and robots that walked or crawled like animals, bearing loads for soldiers” (154) at the borders. In other neighbouring cities as well, “at night, in the darkness, drones and helicopters and surveillance balloons” (146) monitored the city and its citizens to surveil and control refugees’ movement.

In the novel, although many rich countries “were building walls and fences and strengthening their borders” (73) to regulate the movement of people, and more specifically refugees, the latter were still able to enter these countries through the magical doors. The newly emerging magical doors, instead of borders, were considered “by world leaders as a major global crisis” (88). These “special door[s]” (72), with their potential to facilitate the movement of refugees, have gotten considerable attention. As a globally recognized and pervasive issue, the existence of these newly merging doors represents one of the most distressing challenges, generating increasing international efforts to address the implications posed by these magical portals. Perceiving them as a worldwide predicament, nation-states started enforcing door control. Similar to how sovereignty and power are maintained through border control, nations in *Exit West* have “line[s] of men in uniform blocking their way” (112) at the doors in order to regulate the movement of individuals crossing into their respective territories. Hamid’s narrator claims that “the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places, were mostly left unsecured” (106). In London as well, Nadia and Saeed “saw a house and outside the house were uniformed guards, which meant the house contained a door to a desirable place” (116). Doors leading to prosperous affluent countries tend to be heavily secured in comparison to doors to underdeveloped countries. In their unnamed city and everywhere else armed soldiers guarded doors to regulate the movement of people into and out of their territories.

Indeed, these powerful nation-states perceive refugees as a threat that disturbs the natural order of things and that should be contained. Consequently, these countries employ military technologies at their border and across their territory to keep refugees in place, to further limit

their freedom of movement and to even criminalize them.⁷⁸ Although “the most reputable international broadcasters had acknowledged the doors existed” (88) and despite the fact that “doors were everywhere, ... finding one the militants had not yet found, a door not yet guarded, that was the trick, and might take a while” (90). In the beginning of the novel, after deciding to leave their war-torn city, Nadia and Saaed struggled to find a door that would help them escape war. But despite these struggles, the couple was able to leave their city only after paying “a people smuggler, [who] had helped people escape their city, and was doing the same thing here, because he knew all the ins and outs” (113).⁷⁹ In London, authorities stopped controlling doors and asserting violence against migrants. The narrator is not sure what the real reason behind their withdrawal might be. He asserts that “perhaps they had grasped that the doors could not be closed, and new doors would continue to open” (166). This highlights that despite the implementation of various control technologies and techniques, people were able to find a way in to enter due to the presence of magical doors.

These doors are described as “portal[s] of complete blackness” (30) and “dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness—the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging” (8). A connection could be drawn between Hamid’s novel and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) as Hamid refers to and rewrites some elements from the novella. Although at first glance Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* appears to criticize European colonialism and expose its hypocrisy through the figure of Kurtz who embodies the failure and violence of Europe’s civilizing mission, postcolonial scholars and Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic Chinua Achebe have strongly criticized the novella asserting that Conrad’s work purely reflects racism.

⁷⁸ In fact, themselves a threat to the national security, these technologies are designed to criminalize asylum seekers by keeping track of crossings of international borders.

⁷⁹ In real life, many refugees are forced to rely on smugglers to help them cross borders in their desperate search for survival. In the absence of legal routes, these people offer their services to enable illegal migration.

Achebe clearly states that “Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist” (21). The doors in this sense are as fantastic as the imperial imaginary that divided the world into nation-states and colonial spaces. Those who do not traverse these thresholds remain ignorant of the experiences and undisclosed mysteries concealed behind them. In her article “Waiting in Motion: Mapping Postcolonial Fiction, New Mobilities, and Migration through Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*,” Amanda Lagji further asserts that “While *Exit West* refers to the door as a heart of darkness, this reference revises rather than reinstates the racism of the original text” (224). In this sense, Hamid’s novel reinterprets the metaphor of darkness, maintaining that the door symbolizes something enigmatic and complex. Doors that characters go through are dark which highlights their mystery and uncertainty.⁸⁰

Nadia and Saeed approach the door, surprised “by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side” (Hamid 103). Doors in *Exit West* take refugees to unknown places, which reflects their absent, or limited, power over their future. Passing through these doors, refugees do not know where they will be. At the beginning of the novel, after going through the first door, Nadia and Saeed “learned that they were on the Greek island of Mykonos” (106). They later “clicked on a television to see if they could discover where they were, and it was soon clear to them that they were in London” (123). Since the doors hide the secrets of what is concealed beyond them, going through a door can involve risk, uncertainty, and a sense of discomfort or fear of the unknown. Despite the doors' inherent inability to reveal the unknown, refugees choose to embrace the inherent risks of emerging from the door rather than staying in their homelands where only death awaits them.

⁸⁰ Perceiving doors as mysterious made me think about how the mystery metaphor is part of the colonial imagination. The colonized, in other words the ‘other’ is perceived as exotic, the mysterious to be discovered. This means that the exoticized other remains subject to the grammar of racism.

Going through the door is an experience of “beginning and an end” (103); the passage itself “was both like dying and like being born” (104). Doors are thresholds linking the past and the future, the past life and the hoped-for life of refugees. Refugees during these journeys do not pertain to either world. The doors are thus liminal spaces where memories, identities, and borders, literal and figural, are questioned and blurred yet enhanced and amplified. They depict the transition between old and new life, hope and despair. It is the point of intersection between both worlds: where and how they were and where and how they will be. These journeys represent liminal spaces existing “betwixt and between” these two worlds. The doors give the young couple, and other refugees as well, a chance to escape civil war and the more doors they traverse, the further west they find themselves: Mykonos, then London, and finally Marin. Despite being black and keeping what is behind them unknown and unseen, doors offer new opportunities and experiences.⁸¹ Similar to Brand’s description of the “Door of No Return” as the “Door of dreams” (40), doors in *Exit West* provide new opportunities for refugees. Hamid’s narrator claims that “FOR OTHERS TOO the doors came as a release.” (Hamid 159). Nadia thinks of every door she goes through as an opportunity to further break free from the past and traditions to discover herself.

Passing through a door can be seen as a metaphorical journey into the depths of the psyche or the exploration of hidden aspects of oneself. This can be interpreted as an opportunity of self-discovery or one of trauma. For many, the door highlights breaking free from oppressive situations and a forgetting of the past and disconnection from it. Going through the door can be seen as an experience of separation, too. As Brand describes it in her book, the “Door of No Return [is] that place where our ancestors departed one world for another: the Old world for the

⁸¹ In the Bible there is a clear connection between darkness and light. “The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). In this sense, going through darkness and facing it is necessary to emerge in light.

New” (5). They present the gap and the rupture between the past and the present, namely the Middle Passage into slavery and, thus, into global modernity. Doors in this sense not only separate the boundaries between one’s previous life in their hometown and one’s possible future in a new country. According to Brand, the doors represent an uninvited and fundamental shift of history itself-the birth of global modernity through slavery-that colonizes the future of those abducted and forced through the “Door of no Return.” In contrast, doors in *Exit West* provide refugees with a new future, an opportunity to start anew by leaving everything behind. This depicts the profound loss that refugees experience when they migrate and leave their cities of birth in search for better lives and futures. In this vein of thought, Sigmund Freud’s notion of ‘screen memory’ is useful. It acts as a protective barrier and a shield between a person’s traumatic memories and their consciousness. In this sense, doors in the novel can be seen as screen memories, serving as a defense mechanism to shield and protect those who pass through them from painful memories and pasts. Just like screen memories that distort reality and conceal distressing and traumatic events, doors act as thresholds that symbolize their hidden experiences and memories of refugees when they move or flee. They act as barriers that protect refugees, and readers as well, and help numb and silence their traumatic memories at a time of danger and transformation.

At the beginning of the novel, Saeed is described as “an independent-minded, grown man, unmarried, with a decent post and a good education... [who] lived with his parents” (10). In his city, he had a good relationship with his parents who were loving and supportive. He always felt connected to them and is presented as someone dwelling on the past and longing for its return. After going through the door, Nadia “saw Saeed pivot back to the door, as though he wished maybe to reverse course and return through it” (105). This foreshadows his desire to

return to a time before the war and reverse the course of events. As the narrator states, Saeed “was drawn to people from their country, both in the labor camp and online. It seemed to Nadia that the farther they moved from the city of their birth, through space and through time, the more he sought to strengthen his connection to it, tying ropes to the air of an era that for her was unambiguously gone” (187). The further they moved West, the more he was longing to find the connection he had lost after going through various doors. As time progresses and as they move further away from home, the desire to strengthen his connection to people like him intensifies. This highlights the nostalgic feelings that Saeed has. The narrator further claims that Saeed “prayed more regularly, every morning and evening, and perhaps on his lunch breaks too” (186). Readers are told that when he used to be a kid, he used to pray all the time with his father. Praying, which became a cultural rather than a religious act, now connects Saeed to his past. This indicates that Saeed tries to restrengthen and revive the bonds he has always had with people from his country in order to seek connections and search for the broken or, more precisely, lost aspects of his own identity. On the other hand, Nadia avoided people of her hometown, “for she did not pray, and she avoided speaking their language, and she avoided their people” (98). Although they tried to make up their relationship by going to another city, the couple eventually separated. Thus, doors also created separations between Saeed and Nadia.

Trying to overcome the entire idea of borders that reflect the political reality of the conditions of distress migration and seeking to find a new language for how to speak about transgressions of enforced boundaries, Hamid uses doors as devices that transport refugees from one place to another which highlights that movement across and beyond borders is made feasible by the presence of the doors. In their introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (2013), Peter Adey et al. argue that mobility narratives, “imagine a future prospering by the

undoing of national barriers and state intervention, the unhooking of individuals from social and cultural structures” (1). Hamid’s novel extends an invitation to embrace a future devoid of borders wherein every individual, regardless of their status, can exist beyond national borders. These doors help readers envision a future that thrives by dismantling national borders and fostering a borderless world. This depiction emphasizes that the human experience and imagination surpass the constraints imposed by geopolitical institutions. Similar to Mbembe's call for “de-borderization,” a concept that challenges the borders established and upheld by colonial powers, Hamid’s novel employs doors as an alternative to conventional borders. Through the recognition and challenging of these borders that were previously set and maintained by colonizers, we can thus work towards a more just and equitable world. Doors thus unsettle physical boundaries and transform regulated barriers into portals towards new experiences and potential futures. The novel pictures a post-national future in which borders are disappearing and nation-states are becoming more and more obsolete.

The door metaphor disrupts the already established and existing structures and policies implemented by nation-states, encouraging a critical thinking about the nature and significance of boundaries. By making these doors a direct and instant route between different locations, the doors challenge the rigidity and exclusivity of national boundaries. Hamid’s narrator further asserts that “without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play” (158). In this sense, migrants and more specifically refugees challenge the concept of nation-states as “the spaces of states ... have been perforated” (Agamben 119) to the point that nation-states become more and more insignificant. From a postcolonial perspective, the implication arises that the concept of nation-states is progressively becoming less tangible. This implies that the notion of nation-states, that can be seen as

“imagined communities,” as defined by Benedict Anderson,⁸² is being interrogated and recognized as a social construct that is increasingly detached from physical borders.⁸³ Hence, the magical black doors that disrupt the already established and existing structures and policies implemented by nation-states, offer a means to bypass national borders and further question the existence of nation-states that determine who is labelled a refugee and who would benefit from the status of refugee.

Exit West critically explores and challenges the disparity between refugees and natives/citizens, a dichotomy perpetuated and reinforced by nation-states. A distinct dichotomy between refugees and natives/citizens is evident. Refugees are geographically located on the outskirts of the nation. Legally, socially, and economically marginalized, refugees have limited access to facilities with limited to no rights within the nation state they moved to. Hamid’s narrator observes that “REFUGEES HAD OCCUPIED many of the open places in the city, pitching tents in the greenbelts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleeping rough on sidewalks and in the margins of streets” (Hamid 24). Being set on the margins perpetuates divisions and reinforces stereotypes maintaining an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality. The division between refugees and natives/citizens is highlighted in the novel through the distinction made between “dark” London mainly inhabited by refugees and “light” London inhabited by natives/citizens. The narrator claims that “in London there were parts as bright as

⁸² In his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he “propose[s] the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6).

⁸³ It should be noted that nation-states also serve as the primary and often only line of defense for many former colonial states against corporate or supranational take-overs. Using Derrida’s idea of spectrality, Pheng Cheah has argued that the most apposite metaphor for the postcolonial nation-state is the spectre. He claims that nationalism seeks to define and solidify the boundaries and identity of nation-states and at the same time is haunted by the spectre of its own exclusions and the suppressed histories. In this sense, Cheah’s concept of the spectre challenges the idea of a nation-state as a homogeneous entity. For more see his chapter “Afterlives: The Mutual Haunting of State and Nation” 307-348.

ever, brighter than any place Saeed or Nadia had seen before, ... and in contrast the city's dark swaths seemed darker" (146). This illustrates the spatial marginalization experienced by refugees as they are sanctioned and pushed towards the outskirts. Also, due to growing numbers of immigrants, "in the formerly protected greenbelt around London a ring of new cities was being built, cities that would be able to accommodate more people again than London itself" (169). However, Nadia and Saeed were put "in one of the worker camps, laboring away. In exchange for their labor in clearing terrain and building infrastructure and assembling dwellings from prefabricated blocks, migrants were promised forty meters and a pipe: a home on forty square meters of land and a connection to all the utilities of modernity" (169-170), which highlights how nation-states exploit them.

In Mykonos, even though there were places "off-limits to migrants" (96), the status of refugee and resident has been dismantled as residents were "those who had been on the island longer than a few months" (85). In a similar context, in her book *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand claims that "[a] city is a place where the old migrants transmogrify into citizens with disappeared origins who look at new migrants as if at strangers, forgetting their own flights. And the new migrants remain immigrants until they too can disappear their origins" (63). As Lagji observes in her article "Waiting in Motion: Mapping Postcolonial Fiction, New Mobilities, and Migration through Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*," this invites readers to question "the root of nativism: Who exactly qualifies as a native of a particular place at a particular time?" (227) The novel highlights how this division is rooted in the nation-state system, with its rigid borders and notions of secure territories. The novel prompts a reconsideration of the role of citizens and disrupts the binary division between natives and refugees. Such a division fails to acknowledge the historical and ongoing patterns of human movement and the interconnectedness of people

across geographical boundaries. Through his narrative, he undermines the distinction between both categories, highlighting the global nature of migration. As claimed by Michael Perfect, refugees represent a crisis not solely “for particular nations at particular moments, but for the very concept of nationhood itself” (192). For instance, Hamid’s narrator asserts: “And yet it was not quite true to say there were almost no natives, nativeness being a relative matter, and many others considered themselves native to this country ... that their existence here did not owe anything to a physical migration that had occurred in their lifetimes” (Hamid 103). This statement suggests that someone’s legal status can change from a city to another and further confirms that labels are fluid.

Josephine Carter asserts that the instability of a person’s legal status shows that “whether a person is deemed citizen⁸⁴ or refugee, friend or foe is determined by the random convergence of space and time in any particular individual’s life” (633). This further highlights a shifting paradigm wherein an individual's status as a citizen or non-citizen is no longer solely determined by their birthplace or the specific country to which they migrate. Citizenship can be a fluid term, subject to changes in laws, policies, and geopolitical factors. As a result, whether someone is considered a citizen or not can be determined by the unpredictable interaction of circumstances. In *Marin*, for example, there has been a radical change in the demographics as “there were almost no natives, these people having died out or been exterminated long ago” (Hamid 195). The refugee/citizen label is further criticized in the novel through the characters of Nadia and Saeed whose status changes depending on where they are. At the beginning of the novel, they live “IN A CITY SWOLLEN BY REFUGEES” (3). In their city of birth, they take up the position of citizens, setting themselves apart from refugees. Saeed’s attitude towards the

⁸⁴ Citizenship is defined by holding a passport, given by a sovereign nation-state.

displaced as well as Nadia's first impressions of Nigerians reflect their discriminatory reaction towards refugees. Before going through the magical doors. However, upon traversing the magical doors, the characters find themselves in the marginalized position of displaced individuals. This further highlights the fluidity of the labels⁸⁵ native/citizen and alien/refugee. Looking at how one's status can easily change not only highlights the fluidity of labels and the globalized perception of how things can change but also shows that anyone can become a refugee, fostering a broader global perception of refugeedom. The interconnectedness between refugees and natives/citizens, reveals the inadequacy and invalidity of stereotypes, while emphasizing that movement and change are natural to the human experience. Consequently, Hamid universalizes the migration experience, highlighting the importance of rethinking and reconsidering the concepts of nativism and refugeeism. Hence, Hamid foreshadows the commonality of the human experience suggesting that the latter transcends our status, refugees or natives and, our country of origin, and our individual differences.

Dismantling the common grand narratives about refugees, Hamid finds a new language to better understand the refugee experience. In this sense, Hamid's novel "naturalizes the supernatural, presenting real and fantastic coherently and in a state of equivalence with one another" (Warnes 6) and introduces new ways of understanding refugee experience. Over the past decades, humanitarian discourses about refugees use different mechanisms of victimization that deprive refugees of agency and place them as suffering objects. Hamid's novel moves away from narratives of victimization that mainly focus on the deadly journeys of crossing over land

⁸⁵ Labels serve as tools to facilitate various political processes and vice versa, these processes actively influence how labels are constructed. Gupta and Mehta assert that labels "share a recursive relationship with policy-making processes in that they are tools to aid such processes which themselves have bearing on how labels are formed, and what meaning they hold" (66). For more, see the chapter "Disjunctures in Labelling Refugees and Oustees," 64-79.

and sea.⁸⁶ In fact, there are no instances of walls being climbed and barriers being scaled by refugees hiding from border guards and no perilously packed boats across the Mediterranean in Hamid's novel. Without having to undertake risky journeys full of brutal and devastating physical hardships across the sea or heavily guarded borders, characters simply "emerge from a black door" (Hamid 67). Perfect argues that replacing the perilous journeys, whether crossing borders and fences or being in a boat, by black doors "side-step[s] all too conveniently the suffering of the very people at the centre of that crisis" (192). Employing doors that have the ability to mystically transfer his characters from their homeland to a new city in the West, creates a new space with respect to the mobility of people to different places and nations. Hence, Hamid's somewhat utopian use of the doors challenges dominant narratives about refugees that usually depict them as victims and survivors. They question the moral hypocrisy of the west and further offer alternative perspectives that humanize those who are often reduced to statistics or stereotypes. Deliberately not mentioning the journeys of crossing makes us rethink how refugee narratives are depicted and highlights a new reading of global mobility studies in relation to refugee studies. Another possible reading as to why Hamid does not include details about the journey is that he acknowledges that refugees' suffering is indescribable and unrepresentable in narrative fiction. The actual journeys are hard to describe as they cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, or writing, as Erpenbeck's novel shows. They cannot even be adequately understood.

While the physical hardships of refugees' journeys when crossing borders are not explicitly described in *Exit West*, the novel includes passages that thoroughly describe the

⁸⁶ Some examples include N. H. Senzai's coming-of-age novel *Escape From Aleppo* (2018); Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* (2019); Zeyn Joukhadar's novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018).

physical state of refugees who emerge from the black doors. The refugees who emerge from this threshold undergo significant physical and emotional challenges. The narrator provides a detailed description of a man emerging out of a “rectangle of complete darkness” (16), a closet door in Australia:

He wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide ... He rallied himself again, fighting mightily to come in, but in desperate silence, the silence of a man struggling in an alley, on the ground, late at night, to free himself of hands clenched around his throat. But there were no hands around this man’s throat. He wished only not to be heard. (8-9)

This passage describes the man’s struggles to pass through the door which are evident through his inability to breathe and walk. The man’s distorted movements of wriggling through and gripping the doorway, of pulling himself up against gravity suggest that there is something blocking him and not allowing him to go through the door and emerge in the room. This scene highlights the difficulties of transition and movement from one place to another.

In this vein of thought, Brand asserts that “one’s body is emerging naked through its rough portal” (59). Both Nadia and Saeed struggled when they first emerged from the door in Mykonos as well. Similar to the man in Australia, “Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it ... and she felt cold and bruised and damp ... that this dampness must be her own sweat” (Hamid 104) and Saeed “was still weak” (105) when they came out of the door in Mykonos. They all need time to “recover from their crossing” (91). Describing the physical state of refugees after emerging from the doors sidesteps borders but maintains a sense of the suffering and pain they cause, while challenging

the nation-state's claim to sovereignty. Hamid hence shifts perspective without silencing the suffering of refugees. Instead, he provides readers with different ways to rethink the world from a planetary perspective. The hands suffocating him could be read as one's memories, relationships, and identities prior to emerging through the door. As stated by Hamid's narrator, "when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind" (79). This depicts the profound loss that refugees experience when they migrate and leave their cities of birth in search for better lives and futures. Additionally, it can be argued that by passing through the door, refugees' memories become fragmented and selective, as painful memories are left behind within the space of the door.

Instead of being completely erased, the journey of crossing is compressed. Usually, the process of crossing borders requires significant time, frequently lasting days or even weeks. However, the introduction of these magical doors revolutionizes the experience of migration by condensing the journey into mere seconds and making the movement from one place to another instantaneous. In *Exit West*, this compression of time becomes particularly pronounced as the conventional border-crossing journey. Some critics have referred to the magical doors as an "ingenious conceit ... [that] mimics the real-world journey of many a migrant, merely eliminating the time-consuming travel part" (qtd. in Perfect 196). The distortion of time through the use of doors instead of depicting the journey of crossing offers a different perspective of considering refugee experiences. People came through "varied and multiple streams of time" (Hamid 75), as they move between redefined spaces, present experiences, and memories of the past. All individuals that go through the door are thus part of a universal journey of navigating time's passage. The notion of time-space detachment, inherent in globalization theory, presents an alternative framework that enables a more fluid and nuanced understanding of the refugee

experience within a postcolonial framework. Consequently, Hamid highlights the significance of fostering a new collaborative space that transcends the limitations imposed by conventional processes of historicization and spatialization.

As the city is unnamed, and since there is no detailed description of the city, the intensified conflict as well as the existence of militants recalls the battle of Mosul (Iraq), Syria's civil war, or the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Critics have recognized the nameless city as either Syria, Pakistan, or Lebanon (Goyal 252; Sadaf 639). This also adds a timeless universal quality making the plot and the narrative valid for any place and any time. It further opens doors allowing the investigation of numerous topics and storylines that can reverberate beyond generations. In other words, it makes the story valid for various generations in different spaces and times, making the plot transhistorical. This further encourages readers to envision the story in their own context. The novel can be read as a world novel. Although Lahore serves as a sort of prototype for the unnamed city Saeed and Nadia are from, it can be said that the plot could have been equally set in a remote Middle Eastern or Latin American city.⁸⁷ The delocalization of the unnamed city further allows readers to rethink the events and relocate them anywhere in the global South. In this sense, the narrative is applicable to various locations and temporalities rather than tied to a specific setting. The author deliberately chose not to name the city, thereby creating a sense of universality and allowing readers from any corner of the world to identify with the story. By detaching the novel's characters from a particular city, readers can identify with these characters. Furthermore, not naming the city liberates the plot from the boundaries of time and space. In other words, not specifically describing the city, the narrative becomes more expansive and inclusive. By removing geographical characteristics of the city and stripping it of

⁸⁷ For more see Bilal's article "Reading Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* as a World Novel," 410-427.

most of its social, cultural, and geographical specificities, Hamid encourages readers to consider the story's themes and messages beyond the confines of a specific location, beyond borders.

These further challenges the already set borders by nation-states.

Transcending physical boundaries, the novel intertwines multiple narratives. Even though the novel mainly focuses on Nadia and Saeed, the narrative touches upon the experiences of other refugees all over the world, creating narratives that are in a way parallel to the main narrative. The narrator states that “While this incident was occurring in Australia, Saeed was picking up fresh bread for dinner and heading home” (9). By interweaving parallel stories, which show the ways in which different characters live similar experiences and have similar views and aspirations, the novel provides a multidimensional picture of global migration. At the beginning of the novel, when Nadia and Saeed still live in their hometown, in “a neighborhood not far from Nadia’s, ... [a] man had begun to emerge from a black door at the far end of the room” (55), a dark man was emerging in a pale woman’s bedroom in Australia, a man in Tokyo encounters “two Filipina girls, in their late teens, neither probably yet twenty, standing beside a disused door to the rear of the bar, a door that was always kept locked” (22), and an old man was asking “the officer whether it was Mexicans that had been coming through, or was it Muslims, because he couldn’t be sure” (32). When the couple was later waiting to hear from the smuggler to help them flee their city, doors begin to turn into portals, and “elsewhere other families were on the move” (67). The novel further highlights global migration as “it seemed to Saeed and Nadia that the whole planet was on the move, much of the global south headed to the global north, but also southerners moving to other southern places and northerners moving to other northern places” (89). Similar patterns happen in different locations all over the world.

The doors are not just magical metaphorical doors that transport people from one place to another, but they are rather productive, as they connect multiple stories and experiences across different times and spaces. The novel's depiction of the doors serves as a metaphorical representation of the interconnectedness of memories, showcasing the profound impact of shared experiences and memories in shaping our globalized reality. The use of doors serves as a poignant reminder that narratives are not isolated but rather interconnected threads in the fabric of shared human experience. Karam asserts that the novel's aim is to consider the planet as "an increasingly interconnected planet inhabited by people who share the same universal human needs and nature" (316). Rather than perceiving ourselves as members of fixed groups, it is imperative to adopt a more dynamic and flexible understanding of identity, facilitating connections with other individuals beyond conventional boundaries. Consequently, black magical doors not only facilitate movement across national borders but also symbolize the interconnectedness of memories in a globalized world. Hamid's narrator moves towards a more collective space where every story, or memory, is valued without privileging one over the other or instrumentalizing the one to cope with the other.

After pushing through the door, a person is no longer where he or she lives but rather somewhere else and suddenly millions if not billions of people start moving causing the whole world to change. Throughout the novel many people go through the magical doors. In fact, more and "more [were] arriving each day through the doors" (81). In London, Nadia and Saeed found themselves in a house in which "people began to emerge ... a dozen Nigerians, later a few Somalis, after them a family from the borderlands between Myanmar and Thailand. More and more and more" (65). In a short period of time an overgrowing number of refugees "from infants to the elderly, hailing from as far west as Guatemala and as far east as Indonesia" (67) kept

coming and installing themselves in the house in London. Hamid's narrator asserts that "every year someone was moving out and someone was moving in, and now all these doors from who knows where were opening, and all sorts of strange people were around" (144). As refugees emerge from these doors, they carry with them their ideologies, principles, and lived encounters, thereby exerting influence upon the societies into which they arrive. This accentuates the transformative potential of migration upon social, economic, and political frameworks. As many people were stepping through the doors, "the nation was like a person with multiple personalities ... and this person with multiple personalities was furthermore a person whose skin appeared to be dissolving as they swam in a soup full of other people whose skins were likewise dissolving" (158). This description highlights the divisions in the fabric of the nation. Although at first sight, this metaphor might be understood in connection to the 'melting pot'⁸⁸ or 'salad bowl'⁸⁹ metaphors of multiculturalism, another reading might suggest that the nation-state, similar to a person suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder,⁹⁰ is internally divided leading to a sense of chaos and conflict. This description foreshadows the difficulties and intricacies that arise in Britain when refugees and citizens come together causing divisions in the "fabric of the nation" (129). Refugees' and citizens' "skins" are dissolving and becoming more and more fragmented leading to a loss of identities. As argued by Sadaf, this metaphor can be understood as "the exit of the west from its hegemonic position in the power equation of a time-space compressed world" (642). Studying the concept of transition across borders helps us better understand the

⁸⁸ The melting pot theory suggests a view of complete cultural assimilation in which different groups are expected to blend and melt together abandoning their distinct cultures and identities to integrate into the dominant society which leads to the creation of national cultural identity.

⁸⁹ The salad bowl is a metaphor that suggests a more liberal theory of multiculturalism maintaining that various groups can exist and co-exist in a society while maintaining various distinct and unique identities.

⁹⁰ In psychology, research has shown that people suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder not only experience gaps in memory and sometimes amnesia, but also have multiple, distinct personalities, and thus memories, that are not connected and kept separate from one another.

connection and separation of people's identities across different spaces and temporalities. This further dismantles how we look at states, borders, and national divisions.

Across various cities, the nativists, also known as anti-migrants, were actively supported by the police as well as the army in an attempt to reinforce British national identity and "reclaim Britain for Britain" (Hamid 135). In an episode part of the Waterstones podcast, Hamid clearly states that he has "strong views on Brexit. [He is] not a fan, not because [he is] uncritical of the European Union but because [he] thinks[s] there is a kind of potentially Xenophobic nativist tendency embedded within much of the Brexit movement." Also, the nativists' threats and slogans echo the Brexit campaign.⁹¹ Both the Brexit campaign as well as the riots against refugees and the brits' aim to make Britain for Britain and go back to the post, prior immigrants and prior to being part of the European union. Slogans in the Brexit campaign included: Let's take back control; We want Our Country Back; Believe in Britain. Although many refugees were coming into Britain, many were leaving it as well. In fact, curious to see what was on the other side of the door, "an accountant in Kentish Town who had been on the verge of taking his own life ... step[ped] through the door" (129-130) that he found in his room, to find himself "on a seaside that seemed to have no trees, a desert seaside, or a seaside that was in any case dry, with towering dunes, a seaside in Namibia" (131). From one side, this could be read that the place of arrival for those with suicidal intentions is Africa, a place of marginalization. When he goes through the door, "he was gone, and his London was gone" (131). The man exits Britain and steps into the other part of the world, into a landscape that reminds readers of Africa. In this sense, this particular case could be seen as 'Britain's exit' from the European Union and more generally the West's exit from its powerful hegemonic position.

⁹¹ For more see Bellin 5-7, Sadaf 641.

By the end of the novel, readers learn about an old woman “who had lived in the same house her entire life” (143) in the town of Palo Alto. The elderly woman, who has resided in the same house in the same city throughout her lifetime, presents an intriguing contrast to Nadia and Saeed, and to other refugees depicted in the novel, who have had to move multiple times in a short time to reach safety and stability. Nevertheless, the woman herself feels that she is a migrant considering the significant changes unfolding around her, rendering the town unrecognizable. Hamid’s narrator asserts that migration is an inherent aspect of the human condition, transcending physical movement and manifesting as a fundamental characteristic of our existence, claiming that “everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can’t help it” and that “We are all migrants through time” (209).

The woman’s feeling of unbelonging is similar to Richard’s alienation in *Go, Went, Gone*. Both characters feel alienated and out of place even though they are still in the same place. In this sense, both refugees and ‘natives’ experience a similar narrative of loss and rather than differentiating between them and setting them in opposition to each other, the similarity of position of displacement and exile, should be acknowledged which offers a more optimistic vision of the future. Although the novel ends on a seemingly positive optimist view of the world in which people freely move with no restrictions from one place to another, creating an almost utopian world, the world created in the novel is not a perfect world but has its own problems and disappointments.

Conclusion

While it is important to focus on borders and address them critically in relation to refugee studies, there is a risk of falling within linear modes of understanding the refugee experience, and more specifically refugee memory. With my thesis, I tried to better understand the complex dynamics of connection and separation between refugees' and locals' memories through the metaphors of doors and walls in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. The uses of these two metaphors seek to shift focus away from the notion of a single shared memory and experience of refugees.

Although, at first glance, the novels may seem distinct due to their different genres and plot settings, it is possible to identify links between them. *Go, Went, Gone* is a fictional novel set in Germany and is inspired by the real life events of the Oranienplatz occupation from 2012 to 2014. *Exit West*, on the other hand, can be read as an example of magical realism as the author depicts the real world and refers to real places while integrating magical elements, mainly black doors, in the story. *Go, Went, Gone* follows Richard, a recently retired German professor, as he forms a relationship with a group of African refugees. Through the character of Richard, Erpenbeck unravels the complex relationship between past events, both individual and collective, and the present. Richard's interaction with asylum seekers can be read as a wake-up call which renders him aware of the current refugee crisis and helps him come to terms with the Germany's history of colonialism, fascism, and reunification. Although the novel does not clearly offer an exploration of the concept of walls as a means of separation and connection, my thesis considers how the Berlin Wall and walls in general connect and separate memories of East and West, South and North. Hamid's *Exit West* offers a new perspective to migration through its narrative orchestration of magical black doors that easily transport people from one place to another. The

novel explores the ramifications of mass migration and worldwide mobility, with a central emphasis on the impact of the doors on the identities and existence of both refugees and citizens. The novel follows the development of Saeed and Nadia's love story after fleeing their war-torn city of birth. By following the couple's journey through the black magical doors, the novel portrays doors as a means of separation and connectedness, offering a complex reading of refugee experience.

Despite their differences, both novels offer pertinent insights into various issues of migration in the global world, and specifically into questions of refugeedom. Through their different explorations of the refugee experience, the two novels divulge new ways in which to look at the concepts of separation and connection while dismantling the citizen/refugee binary and thus challenging nation-states' claim to sovereignty. Both Hamid and Erpenbeck invite readers to acknowledge the countless individual human crises experienced by displaced people and reconsider their understanding of the refugee experience from a broader planetary perspective.

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