ANGLICA
An International Journal of English Studies

28/1 2019

EDITOR
Grażyna Bystydzińska [g.bystydzienska@uw.edu.pl]

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Martin Löschnigg [martin.loeschnigg@uni-graz.at]
Jerzy Nykiel [jerzy.nykiel@uib.no]
Marzena Sokolowska-Paryż [m.a.sokolowska-paryz@uw.edu.pl]
Anna Wojtyś [a.wojtys@uw.edu.pl]

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Magdalena Kizeweter [m.kizeweter@uw.edu.pl]
Katarzyna Kociołek [kkociolek@uw.edu.pl]
Dominika Lewandowska-Rodak [dominika.lewandowska@o2.pl]
Przemysław Uściński [przemek.u@hotmail.com]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITOR
Barry Keane [bkeane@uw.edu.pl]

ADVISORY BOARD
Michael Bilynsky, University of Lviv
Andrzej Bogusławski, University of Warsaw
Mirosława Buchholtz, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń
Edwin Duncan, Towson University
Jacek Fabiszak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Piotr Gąsiorowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Keith Hanley, Lancaster University
Andrea Herrera, University of Colorado
Christopher Knight, University of Montana
Marcin Krygier, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney, University of Łódź
Brian Lowrey, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens
Zhigang Mazur, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin
Rafał Molencki, University of Silesia, Sosnowiec
John G. Newman, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Michał Jan Rozbicki, St. Louis University
Jerzy Rubach, University of Iowa
Piotr Ruszkiewicz, Pedagogical University, Cracow
Hans Sauer, University of Munich
Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger
Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester
Peter de Voogd, University of Utrecht
Anna Walczuk, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk
Jerzy Welna, University of Warsaw

GUEST REVIEWERS
Chris Ackerley, University of Otago, Dunedin
Tomasz Basiuk, American Studies Centre, University of Warsaw
Rafał Borysławski, University of Silesia, Katowice
Anna Branach-Kallas, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń
Ilona Dobosiewicz, University of Opole
Emma Harris, University of Warsaw
Grzegorz Koź, American Studies Centre, University of Warsaw
Barbara Kowalik, University of Warsaw
Jerzy Kunit, Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin
David Malcolm, University of Gdańsk
Iwona Mišterová, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen
Marek Paryż, University of Warsaw
Małgorzata Rutkowska, Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin
Keith Hanley, Lancaster University
Piotr Gąsiorowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger
Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk
Michał Jan Rozbicki, St. Louis University
Jerzy Rubach, University of Iowa
Piotr Ruszkiewicz, Pedagogical University, Cracow
Hans Sauer, University of Munich
Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger
Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester
Peter de Voogd, University of Utrecht
Anna Walczuk, Jagiellonian University, Cracow
Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk
Jerzy Welna, University of Warsaw

UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW
Forever Displaced?: Identity, Migration, and the Concept of Home in the Works of Manzu Islam, Neamat Imam, and Tahmima Anam

Abstract

This paper explores the meaning of identity and nation, home and belonging, through the study of internal and international migration in three novels. In doing so it encounters the construction of collective identity in Manzu Islam’s *Song of our Swampland*, the dystopian dislocation in Neamat Imam’s *The Black Coat* and the concept of meta-home in Tahmima Anam’s *The Bones of Grace*. The complex, unstable space of diaspora seems ever evolving and forever shifting. Here ‘home’ becomes what Homi K. Bhabha has expounded as “a mythic place of desire.” In this fluid construction of diasporic existence the paper examines the concepts of “de-territorialization,” “unhoming,” “dislocation,” “identity,” and “belonging.”

Keywords: national identity, migration, diaspora, Manzu Islam, Neamat Imam, Tahmima Anam

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in,”
(Robert Frost, “Death of a Hired Man”)  
“All that is solid melts in the air, all that is holy is profaned […]”
(Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*)

The aim of this paper is to study the construction of a collective identity in Manzu Islam’s *Song of our Swampland*, the dystopian dislocation in Neamat Imam’s *The Black Coat*, and the concept of the meta-home in Tahmima Anam’s *The Bones of Grace*. The central theme which binds the three novels penned by three Bangladeshi “writers born out of the migrant experience” (King et al. xii), is migration. This paper takes a holistic view of the word ‘migration’ to refer to a range of displacement experiences, as “migration has been employed as a metaphor […] for movement and dislocation, and the crossing of borders and boundaries”
Tahmina Mariyam

(331). Added to this is a homing desire experienced by the characters of the novels, no matter how differently, intensifying their quest for identity. The paper is neither a “celebratory reading of migration literature,” nor it is one more “hybridity backlash” (Moslund 6, 8). The paper rather tries to “conceptualise the simultaneity of home as sedentarist and as mobile” (Ralph and Steaheli 518) thus creating an injunction between the “celebration” and the “backlash.” In the centre lingers the figure of the migrant, creating an interplay between “being” and “longing,” thus chasing the meaning of “belonging” (see Ralph and Stæheli 524).

We live in a time of “intense deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations: people are passing borders, but borders are also passing people” (Frank 2). It is a time when ‘dispersion’ alone no longer defines a diaspora. Rather we may brave ourselves to ask: “Do we now need a homeland in order to conceive of a diaspora?” (Cohen 3). Thus we now talk of a homing desire which at times overlaps or even replaces the desire for homeland (see Cohen 3). It is in this entangled context of diasporic consciousness that I wish to study the characters in the three different novels. As Søren Frank promulgates:

The characters of migration literature invariably “cope with migration” in different ways, from the experience of migration and the uncertainty of displaced identities as “destructive, agonizing, and painful” to the experience of migration and displacement as “productive, fascinating, and appealing,” but in general, the migration novel works from a perspective of “rewriting [...] identities in order to evoke their impure and heterogeneous character.” (qtd. in Moslund 3)

Song of our Swampland depicts the possibility of the creation of a collective identity. Connected to it is the protagonist’s search within, for the capacity for true community. Kamal, the protagonist of the novel, who is regarded as the “village idiot” (but secretly is actually a man of letters) and has a “hole for a mouth,” is unable to join the ‘resistance’ during the bloody liberation war of Bangladesh, an armed struggle that took place between the then East (modern-day Bangladesh) and West Pakistan in the year 1971 due to West Pakistan’s linguistic, sociopolitical and cultural discrimination against the people of the East Pakistan. While the concept of his country itself goes through “the process of migration” (Hasanat, 62), Kamal embarks on a ‘Noah’s ark’ journey set for what may be called an internal migration, with his adoptive father, Abbas Mia the teacher. Being a man of ‘peace,’ Abbas Mia is disinclined to join the liberation forces. He does not want to lower himself and “become a beast” (57). He rather wants to launch his boat, his version of Noah’s ark, and “spend the rest of the war wandering about in it.” His ultimate contention is that “fighting is not our thing, but survival is” (57). Thus he does not want to give “the war the chance to swallow us up,” as “some of us have to survive the war to build the nation afterwards” (76). With his expectation of opting out of the war Abbas Mia gets his boat built. A moral quandary takes place regarding the “composition of the travelling party” (143), as Abbas Mia is
no Noah and thus cannot think of a “perfectly logical and fair” choice (128). He just wants to survive with his “family and a few others” (128). Out of the four hundred villagers, choosing the “few others” becomes an intricate task. Woefully, “in the event, he didn’t have to decide who to select for the journey. It was death that had decided for him” (144). After the massacre committed by the Pakistani soldiers in the school yard, only a handful of villagers were left. Consequently, Abbas Mia begins the journey with the “village’s leftovers” eventually declaring the boat a “sovereign territory” (211). It is among the nine and later ten émigrés of the boat that the possibility of the construction of a collective identity takes place.

As my intention is to study the formation of a collective identity among the émigrés of the boat, I wish to employ Alberto Melucci’s concepts of collective identity as my theoretical framework. Melucci conceived “collective identity as a process” (43) that requires a “certain degree of emotional investment” (45). He further asserts “passions and feelings, love and hate, faith and fear are all part of a body acting collectively” (45), thus rejecting the idea that “collective identity was a given” (Fominaya 394). For Polletta and Jasper, “collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests and boundaries. It is fluid as well as relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of audiences rather than fixed” (298). This fluidity and the interplay of varied emotions is what characterizes the motley crew of the boat, consisting of a bombastic old actor, Ducktor Malek; the village Mullah, Ala Mullah; the village cutthroat, Bosa Khuni; two Hindu boatmen, the Majee brothers; a foul-mouthed old woman, Datla Nuri and a pious Islamist cum collaborator, Asad Khan; the village idiot cum the man of letters Kamal and the teacher Abbas Mia; making it a total of six Muslims, two Hindus, and one ‘unidentifiable’ character. Ostensibly, they have nothing in common. Despite the seeming absence of a common core they embark on creating a collective identity: “[because] collective identity is not the same as common ideological commitment, [one] can join a movement because one shares its goal without identifying much with fellow members (one can even, in some cases, despise them)” (Polletta and Jasper 298). In this regard, their goal is survival, the driving force that binds them together. Thus Abbas Mia announces that “if we don’t stick together, we will all perish, […] I want this boat to sail through the war with everyone alive” (147). As Melucci argues, “collective identity is crucially linked to a shared collective action project” (qtd. in Fominaya 396; original emphasis), the very act of survival becomes that shared collective action project for the crew of the boat.

Collective identity may be defined “in terms of diversity, heterogeneity and inclusivity” (Fominaya 399). This explains the rescue and inclusion of a ‘Bihari’ woman from the enemy line into the crew. Abbas Mia declares fervently that “she’s in our care now. No one should lift a finger to her or molest her.” Becoming ten from nine the inhabitants of the boat keep on interrogating their concept(s)
of identity, home and belonging, because “even a cutthroat needs a country. A place he can call home, and where he can speak his own tongue, without feeling like a stray dog” (151). As Polletta and Jasper point out, “the core collective identity continues to shape an individual’s sense of self” (296). In the “farcical theatre” of the war (164) the actor of the collective identity ceases to remain one. The betrayal of Asad Khan the collaborator eventually creates a Hobbesian state of nature in “the boundary of the boat” (158), creating almost “a war of all against all” (Stumpf and Fieser 200), demolishing equality and “the right to free speech” (158). The only episode that wavers the possibility of a collective identity and a true community is the connection between Kamal and the Bihari woman, Kulsum.

Kamal’s story takes a new turn through his marriage with Kulsum. Here I would like to argue that in marrying Kulsum, Kamal has complicated the “Jungian concept of the sanctity of the threshold” (Porteous 384). Datla Nuri’s warning to Kamal echoes Frost’s idea of home, “if someone knocks on your door, you don’t ask who it is. You don’t even look at their face. You just do everything you can for them” (189). The possibility of creating a collective identity and a true community relies on Kamal’s capacity of following the warning. Their journey together becomes the “dynamic reflexive process” (Fominaya 396) of creating a collective identity. Displaced from their homes and homelands, Kamal and Kulsum seek refuge in each other, creating an entirely different notion of home. Kulsum says: “I’ve no country, no people. You are my only home now” (219). Kamal thinks: “Would she be my home too?,” because “if you can’t claim a place where you come from and where you belong, you’ll be homeless. Not a nice place to find yourself. Hindu, Muslim, high caste, low caste – it doesn’t matter but you have to be something. If not, you’re a rudderless boat. Just drifting. No human can live like that” (100). Despite the homing desire, Kamal finds it exceedingly difficult to follow the advice. As for him, “Pakistan died on us a long time ago” (252), whereas for Kulsum “the idea of Pakistan […] will never die on me” (252). Thus the process of the creation of a collective identity becomes “limited and inflected by both the ‘weight of the past’ and the current balance of forces” (Bertholomew and Mayer 150).

The turn of fate makes Kamal land on an island in the depths of the swamp-land. There he meets “Legless” – another physically deformed individual. The island turns into a diaspora on its own, reuniting Kamal with Kulsum. Soon they realize that “perhaps we should never mention the names of our countries again. They are like ghosts, aren’t they? They haunt you, but remain unreal. Can we both begin with something real, like home? You are my home, that’s what really matters […]” (253). Soon the trio forms a community based on “friendship” (295): “We don’t assign ourselves tasks. Instead, all three of us do anything and everything […]” (308). They “avoid any talk of flags, of countries, of religion,” nevertheless, “there are still things that come between us” (310). They come to an understanding that a collective identity is not given but rather it is a process
that requires emotional investment (Melucci 43, Fominaya 394). Thus they stop worrying “too much about flags and country” (315) and “become a country all by ourselves” (331). They know that “it won’t be easy for us” (306), but “if we have each other and work hard we will survive” (307). Starting their journey towards Dhaka, Legless, Kamal and Kulsum carry the hope of materializing their utopian dream of a ‘true’ community that they have “imagined” (Anderson 6).

_The Black Coat_, with its purpose of meditating power, greed and the human cost of politics, begins precisely where _The Song of our Swampland_ ends. In this novel “home” is “more generously interpreted to mean […] the place of settlement, or a local, national […] place” (Cohen 3). Like Kamal and Kulsum with their unborn baby, or Legless, thousands of people are pouring into Dhaka from all over the country. Unlike Kamal and his companions, however, it is not the hope of the fulfillment of some utopian dream that brings them to the city but a nightmarish reality of looking for food and shelter, once “the most valuable and inevitable cause in human history: the cause of freedom” (13) has been served. The marriage of the nation with the state has been consummated, resulting into the materialization of a nation-state. “My Bengal of Gold” is no longer a dream now, it is rather a reality which is about to emerge. Khaleque Biswas, the journalist and the “staff writer with the _Freedom Fighter_” (5) goes out on a quest for recording the materialization of a utopian dream, “to understand how individuals had coped with the horrors of the war and how they now felt about living in a liberated country” (9), they now call home. It is during this quest that he meets Raihan Talukder at Gangasagar in Akhaura. Coming back to Dhaka, Khaleque Biswas sends Raihan Talukder a thank you note for his hospitality. Many days later he hears back from Raihan Talukder with the plea of helping the “loyal, patient, sociable and diligent young man” Nur Hussain through employment. According to Smith, “all nations today have […] a sense of destiny, that is to say a futurist possibility of greater fulfillment as a nation that therefore requires devotion from its members” (qtd. in Vanaik 2). Hence Nur might serve “in a responsible position in the government” and assist in the “painstaking and challenging” process of “nation-building” (14). To his dismay Khaleque Biswas gradually learns that “he had no transferable or marketable skills” (15). This “shy, introvert, principally a useless human being” possesses the only unalienable quality of sleeping “all day and all night without ever asking for food” (16). But in a free and liberated country Khaleque Biswas must do at least a fraction of what Mostofa Kamal (the Bir Sreshtha, one of the awardees of the highest military award of Bangladesh) has done to liberate the country. He must find Nur Hussain employment (22). In his quest of “theorizing” and “finding a superior meaning” of the freedom that the eighteen month old Bangladesh has gained, Khaleque Biswas finds instead “a Dickensonian wasteland of urban poverty, exploitation and violence” (Gordin et al. 13), a country that was “falling into a deep pit of brutality” (23). Unable to see the country suffer, Khaleque Biswas expresses a desire to portray the true
picture of the nation in *Freedom Fighter*, because “freedom is freedom when it surfaces as a lifestyle for people” (25). Getting fired from his job, Khaleque Biswas “became like Nur Hussain,” unemployed.

The situation compels Khaleque Biswas to go back to the Nation’s root, “to refocus on Sheikh Mujib’s speech delivered in Dhaka on 7 March 1971,” the speech that inspired the Bengali people (the people of the then East Pakistan) to prepare for a war of liberation (29). Now with the “nationhood” achieved, he wants to understand “what Sheikh Mujib had in mind for me as an individual citizen” (30) because “nationalism being a modern construct replaces the ‘subject’ by the ‘citizen’” (Vanaik 6). Soon Nur Hussain begins to repeat Sheikh Mujib’s speech with an “artificial, but deep, loud and passionate” voice (31). This is his “extraordinary power,” the ability of “mimicking a famous speech of the prime minister’s,” “the ability to rouse his audience exactly as Sheikh Mujib had done” (32). At this point I would like to make use of Homi Bhaba’s concept of mimicry in order to examine the characters of Nur Hussain and Khaleque Biswas. According to Bhaba, “mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (12; emphasis mine). Here it needs to be noted that while Bhaba uses the term mimicry in colonial discourse in order to position the colonial subject, I intend to use the term in relation to the discourse of the nation and nationhood in order to position the citizen of the nation. This is because “colonialism then dislocated the colonies in various ways creating among other things a clash of cultures wherein ‘marginal men’ became attracted to Western notions of independence and self-reliance thereby adopting and adapting the doctrine of nationalism to suit their purposes” (Vanaik 6). The emergence of Nur Hussain as “Sheikh Mujib’s copy, a true, honest, reliable and enviable copy” (34) makes him attain the position of a “mimic man” of the nation. But the speech is not enough to create a “fake Sheikh Mujib,” and “attending to his look” is essential (38). Therefore, “the hair, the moustache, the coat, the Punjabi, the specs and the pipe- all were there now, in a purposeful combination, ready to function and serve” (48). Khaleque Biswas now starts to cash on the activity of the “mimic man,” the “Sheikh Mujib impersonator,” declaring “he mustn’t speak like Sheikh Mujib because he was Sheikh Mujib.” As the people are already in a “trance of Bengali nationalism,” all Khaleque Biswas is trying to create is “a trance within the trance” for them to “reach into their pockets” (52). With a fake Sheikh Mujib he was “manufacturing dreams” for the mass people, convincing them “the future was behind us; it had frozen the moment Sheikh Mujib opened his mouth in 1971; now we must live in the past forever” (55), because the past proved only to be a utopian dream whereas the present emerges as no more than a dystopian reality.

More refugees migrate into Dhaka city, getting displaced and dislocated from their native villages; the way Nur Hussain had been from Gangasagar. The more people “died from starvation” the more Nur Hussain’s mimicry became essential
Moina Mia, “local Awami League (the then ruling party and one of the major political parties of Bangladesh) leader and member of parliament hires Nur Hussain through Khaleque Biswas to prove to the outraged mass that “in Mujib’s country nobody would be allowed to die of hunger” (75). Soon it becomes clear that it is not Nur Hussain who is the “mimic man,” rather it is Khaleque Biswas who is dwelling in duality, recreating a Bhabaian “ambivalence” (126), fulfilling the colonial agenda of Macaulay’s Minute (1835) in a nation state, as “the emergence of the nation state cannot be understood separate from its connection to the effort to establish some political control over a territorial space” (Vanaik 1). It is out of greed that Khaleque Biswas sold his soul to the nationalistic agenda – not unlike Doctor Faustus’s selling his soul to Mephistopheles: “I could not wait to smell the new money, to clasp it in both my hands” (95). Soon he creates an indivisible nationalistic identity, because “a Bangaldeshi could be either an Awami League supporter or a collaborator of Pakistan. Since I was not a collaborator, I must have been an Awami League supporter” (96). He dons himself with the Mujib coat (a tailored coat for men, worn and made famous by the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) because “no Bengali would be a true Bengali unless he wore the Mujib coat […]” (99), “a man wearing a Mujib coat could not charge Mujib with any wrongdoing; a man wearing a Mujib coat could not object anything said or done by any other man wearing a Mujib coat, not even when he saw people dying. It would not be civil” (103). He states that “we will invade every brain and plant there the flag of Bengali nationalism” (121). As Breuilly connotes, “nationalism demands that the nation-state be the site of primary loyalty” (qtd in Vanaik 6). Khaleque Biswas openly declares: “I am a nationalist […] I have duties to my motherland” (122), confessing that: “Thus I sold Nur Hussain once again. First I sold him to the people on the street for their coins. Then I sold him to Moina Mia for his campaign. Now I sold him to sheikh Mujib through Moina Mia” (123). In this way Khaleque Biswas demonstrates his state of mind as a mimic man with a national agenda: “I am the king here. I rule this country” (217), since “the nation is a state of mind but one with a political thrust” (Vanaik 6). Whereas Nur Hussain’s displacement was spatial, Khaleque Biswas’s one is psychological, and thus more dystopian in nature, for as Brah asserts, “the notion of diaspora reverberates the image of a journey that is normally materialized in a real displacement but can also be associated with a cultural or psychic one” (qtd. in Fernandez 154). Nur Hussain welcomes Khaleque Biswas, the mimic man by “whispering, […] ‘Look at that little Sheikh Mujib’ […] Victory to you little rejuvenated Sheikh Mujib. […] May you be happy, little, rejuvenated, indomitable, indefatigable Sheikh Mujib” (225).

The temporarily physical mimic man Nur Hussain is actually intellectually free. Therefore he cries out to Khaleque Biswas: “Good citizens do not stand against each other; they stand against their government. Haven’t you learnt anything?” However, the psychological mimic man has to be the copy of his national master
in a manner in which the postcolonial mimic man desired to be a copy of his colonial master(s). Thus Khaleque Biswas hits Nur Hussain “repeatedly and consistently,” shouting, “You understand now, […] ‘what little Sheikh Mujib is capable of? […]’” (228) and therefore creating a horrific and “schizophrenic” “dystopian consciousness” (Hasanat 67). But even in this “dystopian consciousness” there is still a ray of hope. After Nur Hussein’s death, Khaleque Biswas keeps on physically dislocating himself, perhaps in order to get rid of his psychological displacement and his status of the mimic man. It dawns on him that “by destroying Nur Hussain, I have only destroyed myself” (240). Thus the character of Khaleque Biswas seems to represent that ‘home’ is nothing but a state of mind.

The concepts of migration and home becomes even more complicated in Tahmima Anam’s The Bones of Grace. It recounts the story of a whale, a ship, an orphan cum paleontologist Zubaida and a migrant worker Anwar. It conjoins the bizarre assemblage in an intricate manner. The story is narrated as an elaborate confessional note that Zubaida composes for her lost love. She has been “living in a state of waiting” (3), gathering strength for hunting the haunting homing desire. Studying as a graduate student in the USA, travelling to Pakistan to dig the fossil of a whale, and getting back to her birthplace Bangladesh, only to travel into the depths of the country, and then travelling back to the USA again – gives Zubaida the status of an “Amphibian” that “signaled people in between, people who lived with some part of themselves in perpetual elsewhere” (15). I would like to use the notion of the Unheimliche in order to understand Zubaida and her relationship to home the way Reed has used the notion to explain Sophocles’ Antigone’s relationship to her home (317). Despite being conventionally translated as the “uncanny,” Unheimliche is actually rooted in the word Heim, “home.” As Reed writes:

The range of significations associated with the word unheimlich [eerie, strange, disturbing] is shared to a certain extent by the word Heimlich [secret, furtive, hidden], despite the fact that the latter term looks like the opposite of the former, and in fact originally had the same meaning as heimisch [homey, domestic, familiar] – a historical connection that remains visible in the near-identity of the words themselves. The notion of the Unheimliche can thus suggest that there is something strange or improper about that which belongs to the home – and at the same time, something familiar or “homely” about that which belongs outside of it. (316–317)

The novel begins with Zubaida, already displaced, signifying the “unhomely.” From the very beginning there seems to be a contradictory relationship with home, as “she is both loyal to and transgressive of its demands” (Reed 319). Her adoptive mother thinks of migration as an abandonment of one’s own country (19). She herself is ambivalent in her determination to stay in the USA (18). She cannot settle anywhere but Dhaka, Bangladesh, as her loyalty lies with her adoptive parents and her childhood sweetheart Rashid, and to construct her “loyalties in any other way would constitute a betrayal,” and she is above “all things, aware of
my commitments” (19). But her true home seems to be lying not here in Dhaka, but elsewhere. There is an ‘intrepid’ self that resides in Zubaida, which comes out when she packs and sets for Pakistan to begin the fossil hunt for the *Ambulocetus*, an intermediate species (30). It is the help of this very ‘intrepid’ self that Zubaida requires in order to find her true home.

In Zubaida’s pursuit, the American stranger Elijah, who also shares the “same restless spirit” and wishes to be “somewhere else” (265), becomes her beacon of home, “as if we had lived together in a house and raised children” (44). After meeting him for the first time, Zubaida states that “I didn’t care where or who I came from. I didn’t care if I was an amphibian or a member of an in-between species because I belonged here, in this moment […]” (47). But her fate takes her to Pakistan, which is only, however, “a brief interlude” on her way home to Dhaka. But “home too was not going to be my ultimate destination, that other, final place more barren than anywhere I could have imagined?” (54). Her stay in Pakistan ends as abruptly as it begins, so Zubaida has to set for home, finding herself “immune to the sight of my city” (76). In spite of possessing a heart that is a “nomad” (84), Zubaida settles to marry her childhood sweetheart Rashid, perhaps because “the implication that I was not at home in my own country irritated me” (93). Thus, she again gets displaced from one home to the boundaries of yet another home, an entirely “another world” (120). It is in this “another” home of her wealthy in-laws that she finds out about her pregnancy. After the initial rage passes she thinks of “meeting a person who was related to me by blood, something that has never happened to me before” (127). She finally finds a cause to live for, and finally feels a sense of belonging. As the baby vanishes “as suddenly as it had appeared” (128), Zubaida returns to her nomad self and sets on a lone ‘unhoming’ journey to Chittagong, the port city of Bangladesh, far from the “people who had known me all my life and not at all” (81). Her “arrival coincided with the purchase and arrival of a new ship called *Grace*,” purchased by one of the ship-breaking companies, ready to be dismantled (143).

Losing the baby makes Zuabida’s homing desire acute (141). She braves to invite Elijah, her beacon of home, to Chittagong. Together they create a temporary home by the shores of Chittagong, observing the ship *Grace*, which like Zubaida is an intermediate species, dwindling between the land and the sea. But the sudden arrival of her husband disrupts her temporary home, creating a “disjunction between the physical and the relational aspects” (Reed 320) of home. It is in the shipyard of Chittagong that she meets Anwar, a former expat construction worker who seems to hold the key to the mysteries of Zubaida’s life. He too, like Zubaida, is displaced. He was displaced from his homeland and the love of his life, Megna. As the alluring Dubai was calling him, he had to marry another woman. He bears the horrors of the diasporic consciousness as a labourer, getting displaced to his native land again. But it is not his native land which can fulfill his homing desire. Thus he sets out to find his lost love. It is through Anwar
that Zubaida gets to learn about her real self. That she is not Zubaida Bashir but Mohona, Megna’s sister. Due to poverty, her biological mother had to dislocate one of the twins, in order to keep the other firmly grounded to home, making her realize that “I wasn’t the only one in Chittagong in search of a self. I wasn’t the only one who felt like the loneliest person in the world” (252). Knowing who she is, no matter how partially, made her arrive at the “disjunction between the physical and the relational aspects” of home (Reed 320).

The physical boundaries of the house do not restrict Zubaida’s “proper place” but rather serve as an obstacle (Reed 319). Similarly to Pakicetus, the most basal whale felt at home in the sea, unlike her ancestors (389), Zubaida “assumed an air of being able to float seamlessly from place to place.” She decides on a “transgression” and “abandonment” of the familiar (396) in order to fulfill her homing desire. The arrival of the fossilized skeleton of Ambulocetus natans, the walking whale she calls Diana, makes her quest even more intense. Not unlike her, Diana too is “incomplete” (403). In order to dispel her incompleteness, Zubaida dreams of her communion with Elijah, who “will always remain the making of me.” Thus Zubaida evolves as a diasporic new woman (Hasanat 61), ready to leave “all our ghosts behind” and to stand fearless before “the terrible, dark world,” taking strength from the sense of “belonging only to each other” (407), without any “roots” or “nation” to bind her. She remains, therefore, both homely and unhomely, suspended – Unheimlich (Reed 339). As Chambers suggests, “while ‘going home’ recalls the nostalgic associations of a mythologized point of origins (our mothers and fathers), ‘being at home’ in the world involves finding ourselves in a wider, shifting, but more flexible, framework in which our mothers and fathers, bonds and traditions, the myths we know to be myths yet continue to cling on, cherish and dream, exist alongside other stories, other fragments of memory and traces of time” (qtd. in Leon 16).

This is precisely how the characters in the three novels complicate Frost’s concept of a sedentary home by trying to make the “solid” “melt” and the “holy” “profane.” Kamal and Kulsum go on a quest to form a collective identity based on “social friendship” (Yack 51). Khaleque Biswas and Nur Hussain fall into the trap of the “dystopian consciousness” of the collective nationalistic identity. Yet the diasporic world in which they live cannot be called “a madhouse” (Hasanat 67). The journey that Kamal and his companions set forth upon seems to shatter with the death of Nur Hussein and the fall of Khaleque Biswas. But the vision rejuvenates with Zubaida as if she is the unborn child of Kamal and Kulsum, reminding us, as Auerbach proposes that “our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation” (qtd. in Frank 12). If we then ask “where is home?” – as we so fear displacement and dislocation and as our identity and belonging seems to be connected to the notion of home – we have Avtar Brah to answer: “On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. […] On the other hand home is also the lived experience” (192).
References


Macaulay, Thomas Babington. “Minute by the Hon’ble T. B. Macaulay.”
Vanaik, Achin. “Marxism and Nationalism.”