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From Here and There:
Migration and Return in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

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This thesis compares Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and their presentation of the migratory experience from Ireland (*Brooklyn*) and Afghanistan (*The Kite Runner*) to the United States. Ultimately, I argue that both Tóibín and Hosseini dislocate the migration experience from the specific geographies of the novel, using shared themes like dream, memory, and the doubling of the homeland versus home country in order to argue that migration is fixed neither in time nor in geography. As both texts' protagonists grapple with the results of their migration, such as severed ties to homeland relationships, growing autonomy within the United States, and reformation of familial ties, so too do they return to their homelands both physically and mentally. These literal and figurative returns to homeland serve both to highlight and undercut the progress the protagonists make along their migratory journeys, and ultimately reinforce their migrations as unfixed from a linear and limited framework.

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Exile is a dream of glorious return. Exile is a vision of revolution. Elba, not St. Helena. It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back. The exile is a ball hurled high into the air.

~ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*¹

Introduction:

Defining identity in today's globalized landscape seems an enterprise entirely reliant on the word *and*. Those of us who are foolish enough to try and define identity become reliant on subcategorizations to delimit us into particular categories with singular ideologies that govern them in our social landscape. We then look to group these various identities in order to piece together a collective image of *us*— using *and* as this ideological bridge. These groupings can appear as benign and even comical as identifying as a gamer *and* philanthropist, financial advisor *and* poet, social media influencer *and* babysitter. Each of these subcategories confer upon the individuals sets of ideological rules and fundamental beliefs through which they may navigate their defined social space, and these rules of membership may be so subliminal as to render them effectively invisible under a larger public gaze.

Where we might begin to understand the relative importance of these groupings vis-à-vis identity formation is as the *and* actually becomes more significant in identity formation to the individual than the subcategories it seeks to connect. In defining Irish identity, Colm Tóibín states the following: “but heritage in Ireland has been gnarled and open to question. When Samuel Beckett . . . was asked if he was English, he replied ‘au contraire.’ He meant that it is often easier, if you come from Ireland in any of its guises or aspects, to state what you are not than what you are. What works wonders now in Ireland is not the bomb or the bullet, but two

¹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1989), 212.

humble and ancient objects: the hyphen and the word ‘and.’”² Here Tóibín underscores the duality the hyphen or the *and* seek to represent by in turn doubling them. At once, the hyphen or *and* represent the duality of national identity, allowing us to stake a claim within multiple seemingly limiting frameworks simultaneously. We can be Irish *and* America, Afghani *and* Pashtun, an emigrant from one geography *and* an immigrant to another.

Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* (2009) and Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) capitalize on this notion that multiplicity of identity, and especially of national identity, comes to the forefront of Irish and Afghani migrant literature. Both texts present the migration narratives of their protagonists as processes that begin long before the characters ever leave home, and do not end upon their eventual immigration to the United States. In *Brooklyn*, Tóibín consistently presents his protagonist, Eilis, with textual moments which complicate how her identity is changing, and remaining the same, throughout her emigration. He does so predominantly through shifting the physical place within which Eilis lives and works to reflect where she is within what some may call an assimilation process. Similarly, in *The Kite Runner* Hosseini uses time as a means through which both to challenge and affirm his protagonist’s, Amir’s, own changing identity. In both Tóibín’s use of place and Hosseini’s use of time, *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* ultimately challenge normative, orthodox perceptions of migration and assimilation as fundamentally linear processes. Instead, they point to the *ands* of each character.

Eve Walsh Stoddard writes of *Brooklyn*;

As attention to the [Irish] diaspora and to immigration have complicated notions of Irishness . . . Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*, published in 2009, inscribe[s] conflicting and ultimately indeterminate debates over the nature and location of

² Colm Tóibín, “What Does it Mean to Be Irish?” *Newsweek*, Vol. 153, Issue 13. 30 March, 2009, 39.

home and Irishness for migrants who leave and then return to Ireland. The question of locating Irishness invokes a set of conflicting discourses about “home” and belonging and their inverse, alienation and strangeness.³

For Stoddard, *Brooklyn* embodies this conflict between nationalism and a transnational ethos, and she explores how the twentieth-century’s cosmopolitanism may actually resonate not only with middle-class and elite immigrants, but also the “displaced, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the poor immigrant seeking work.”⁴ I will explore the tension between home and alienation that Stoddard identifies in order to ultimately argue that the process of migration and assimilation is destabilized through an oscillation between migration and return to homeland, with Eilis and Amir pivoting constantly between migration and return.

The structures, points-of-view, settings, and timeframes of *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* distinguish these novels from one another. Whereas *Brooklyn* is told through the past tense, and is in third-person narration, excluding a few letters the protagonist and her family send back and forth, *The Kite Runner* is told in first-person with a tense shifting from past to present. The immigration in *Brooklyn* takes place in 1950s from Ireland to New York, and immigration in *The Kite Runner* takes place in the early 1980s from Afghanistan to San Francisco. The protagonists’ drives for immigration within the two texts are also near-opposites. Eilis’s immigration seems almost entirely relegated to a private, domestic space—with family obligations driving Eilis both to migrate initially to the United States and later to return to

³ Eve Walsh Stoddard. “Home and Belonging among Irish Migrants: Transnational Versus Placed Identities in *The Light of Evening* and *Brooklyn: A Novel*,” *Éire-Ireland* 47, no. 1 (2012): 148.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

Ireland.⁵ Meanwhile, public violence, specifically the turmoil of Afghanistan's changing regimes, drive Amir and his father to migrate.

So, what is the value in comparing *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner*? Parallels between Ireland and the Middle East are not entirely new in scholarship. Edward W. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* affirms the basis for comparison between Ireland and other, nonwestern postcolonial spaces. About William Butler Yeats, Said writes the following:

Despite Yeats's obvious and, I would say, settled presence in Ireland, in British culture and literature, and in European modernism, he does present another fascinating aspect: that of the indisputably great *national* poet who during a period of anti-imperialist resistance articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of people suffering under the dominion of offshore power.⁶

Said universalizes the Irish colonial experience to that of other colonized locales, and suggests that Irish literature does, in some respects, speak to other experiences of colonization. Said even identifies the historical cultural attitudes toward the Irish as a "barbarian and degenerate race" as reflective of the rhetoric imperial powers appropriated in excusing their colonization of places like India, North Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. Whereas Said places the brunt of his basis for comparison within the literature itself, and indicates that Ireland fits rather neatly within discourse regarding colonial experience, Joe Cleary's *Literature, Partition and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* more directly compares the unique political realities of Ireland to those of Israel and Palestine, especially with respect to partition, and argues for a more direct basis of comparison. From Said, we glean Irish literature's place within a

⁵ Eilis's ultimate return to the United States, too, is a family matter. She decides to go back to Brooklyn because her new husband lives there.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993), 220.

globalized discourse about colonialism, and from Cleary more direct grounds for particular comparison between Ireland and the Middle East. In evaluating two migration stories, *Brooklyn*, which speaks to Irish migration, and *The Kite Runner*, which speaks to Afghani migration, I aim to extend Said's and Cleary's lines of comparison argue through articulating how both Tóibín and Hosseini delocalize the migratory experience from their particular geographies, thereby creating further space for comparison.

According to Paul Jay, “a key challenge in locating transnational forms of literary and cultural analysis is how to map relationships between the local and the global,” as a result, “globalizing literary studies must involve a radical dislocation of the traditional geographical spaces we have been using to organize work in both the humanities and social sciences.”⁷ Thus, in comparing the migration stories expressed in *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner*, we can similarly participate in the delocalization of these narratives in order to point to a larger, more globalized migratory experience. While *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* are distinct from one another, comparing the way in which they each speak to the migratory experience, and more specifically share similar motifs of migration, memory, and return, points to the complication of the “traditional attention we pay to nation-state locations and the act of locating.”⁸ In doing so, we participate in elucidating the migration experience itself—one that, when discussed through the acutely local, is too often relegated to these discrete and isolated places to which a larger audience has minimal access.

⁷ Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press ; 2010), 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa suggests that “traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) that limit the growth of our individual and collective lives.”⁹ Imposed on immigration to the United States, we may understand this binary to be *American or not, assimilated or not*. Tóibín and Hosseini balk against conceptualizing a migratory and assimilative experience in binary, instead arguing that migration and assimilation are much more fluid events wherein migrants are able to form identity based on homeland, host country, and the journeys they take in the interim.

In some ways both *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* do eventuate in more normative perceptions of the immigration experience, with Eilis choosing her new husband in the United States over family in Ireland, and Amir fitting almost neatly into the American-dream image of a house and white picket fence. It is tempting, when considering contemporary literature, to forget these normative perceptions of identity and nationalism which form alongside imperialism. As Edward Said’s posits, “Imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become ‘past,’ once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires.”¹⁰ My central critique of both *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* is that their migration narratives appear entirely designed for an American audience ready to read Amir and Eilis’s completion of American immigration as their ultimate success within the works. For example, in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini seems to write toward “identifying with the privileged ‘us’— that is, American Readers— who may be willing to grant personhood to Afghans, but only insofar as they resemble Americans.”¹¹ That the tension of both texts seems to center on moments in which Amir and Eilis question their new

⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, and AnaLouise Keating, *Light in the Dark = Luz En Lo Oscuro : Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press; 2015), 66.

¹⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 282.

¹¹ Timothy Aubry, *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans* (Iowa City: University Iowa Press, 2011), 180.

American national identities, and are left to navigate through these questions in order to ultimately find home in America, may play into western imperialist ideologies in which succeeding and assimilating are one and the same.

History, Attenuated:

While the exact histories of violence, religious turmoil, and economic strife within Afghanistan and Ireland are certainly important and informative to the larger migratory and diasporic histories of each nation, the primary focus of this thesis will be the migratory experiences of the protagonists themselves as Hosseini and Tóibín depict them. I will thus save mapping the intricacies of these conflicts to those historical scholars better equipped than me. However, understanding the basic roots of migration from Afghanistan and Ireland will provide for the reader a basis off which to understand the national and ideological contexts from which Eilis and Amir stem. I will thus provide a highly attenuated historical perspective.

Ireland and Afghanistan's notably parallel histories, each including centuries of colonialism, war, poverty, and oppression, have rendered both of their respective national ideologies and identities opaque under controversy and dissent. So, to say forming a cross-communal and ubiquitous Irish or Afghani national identity is challenging is to say that the Titanic needed a few more lifeboats. Provoked largely by various forms of localized turmoil, emigration from Ireland and Afghanistan becomes as much a part of their national landscapes as any other societal component. Senia Pašeta writes of migration from Ireland that "emigration became a well-established fact of Irish life, touching the lives of most men and women no matter what their confessional, political, or economic circumstances," pointing in particular to the time

between 1801 and 1921 in which “Irish people were easily the most likely of all Europeans to leave the continent in the second half of the 19th century.”¹²

Emigration, a concept traditionally used to describe community upheaval, actually becomes one of the strongest footholds Irish people have establishing them both in relation with one another and with a larger, more unified Irish identity. Pašeta continues in noting that “psychological as well as geographical frontiers were traversed and negotiated as generations of Irish people were reared in the expectation that they too would join the exodus.”¹³ Not only does emigration become a normative component of society, it dictates a kind of youth culture built around the expectation of leaving. But why is this emigration necessary? In large part because of Ireland’s religious, economic, and political troubles “the vast majority left because Ireland could not guarantee them all or some of: land, work, marriage partners, the opportunity for advancement, and a decent standard of living.”¹⁴ Emigration from Ireland came initially as a response to deeply economic issues. Citizens in search of a reliable quality of life emigrated as a means of providing for themselves and their loved ones—a motivation for emigration universally shared across time and place.

Economic factors may have spurred the beginnings of Irish exodus, but they do not explain the ubiquity and consistency of migration from Ireland. Sure, challenging social, political, and economic realities ignite the genesis of migration from Ireland, but “as emigration became more and more established as a normal aspect of Irish life, the link between the state of the Irish economy and the decision to leave the country diminished.”¹⁵ When economic factors

¹² Senia Pašeta, *Modern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

are removed from the components incentivizing migration, emigration becomes more a part of the socio-political culture of Ireland. Stoddard adds to the tradition of Irish emigration that “many had to leave Ireland so that some of those who remained could sustain their close ties to the land.”¹⁶ In other words, some may enter into the diasporic relation with homeland, one in which their future children’s tie to the land rests almost entirely in an ancestral connection, a birthright rather than a birth certificate, so that those they leave behind may have the resources to sustain their livelihoods in Ireland.

For Afghanis, patterns of emigration and mass exodus from their homeland stem largely from the decade-long war that took place in Afghanistan with the Soviet Union, and the complete political turmoil that persisted long after Soviet troops left the region. The rise of Afghanistan’s Communist Party, which violently oppressed dissenters, directly preceded Soviet ground movement in Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* includes the 1973 coup in Afghanistan wherein General Mohammad Daoud Khan overthrew the king, and established himself president and prime minister of the new Afghani republic. He did so supposedly in support of the Pashtun people whose voices he felt were seldom acknowledged within Afghanistan’s political landscape. The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) initially supported Khan in his uprising. The coup d’état was centered in Kabul, Amir’s home city from which he and his father eventually flee in 1981. In the period that followed his coup, Mohammad Daoud Khan attempted to establish a one-party and progressive system in Afghanistan. However, communist bodies within Afghanistan challenge Khan’s governance consistently, and he lost favor both among the Afghani people and his Soviet allies. While he did push for progressive policies, various ethnic and tribal groups within Afghanistan resent Daoud Khan’s Pashtun Nationalism.

¹⁶ Stoddard, “Home and Belonging among Irish Migrants,” 149.

In response to civil dissent toward him, Daoud Khan limits civil liberties for Afghans, which eventuates in the 1978 Saur Revolution that saw the PDPA again take power from Daoud Khan.¹⁷ Suddenly, the more rurally-placed tribal peoples found themselves inundated with taxes and governance that challenged their traditional power structures.¹⁸ Amin responded to these dissents even more heavy-handedly than his predecessor, imprisoning and punishing those who stood against his regime. Riots soon broke out, and even those within Amin's government sought to remove him from power. At this point, the USSR decides it must step in to help "stabilize" the region, doing so predominantly to maintain Soviet control within a region that increasingly looked to Islamic power structures.

What followed was a decade-long period of gruesome guerrilla warfare operated in near-uninhabitable territory, and even after the Soviets eventually retreated, the USSR, the United States, and Islamic powers, seeking footholds within the region, continued to funnel resources into the region. The incredible destabilization, at this point, permitted the newly-formed Taliban to seize Kabul and take control over the country. Throughout this period of grotesque violence, the United Nations estimates that combat drove nearly five-million Afghani refugees to Pakistan and Iran alone, as domestic death tolls also range into the millions.¹⁹

Defining Terms

Our contemporary socio-political dialogue, both within the United States and globally, has resurrected our necessity for understanding what migration entails and who participates within it. I say resurrected because our politicians and media commentators did not, in fact,

¹⁷ "United Nations and Afghanistan." *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/un-afghan-history.shtml.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

discover the concept of migration, and are instead speaking to a global history that has become increasingly present within our international gaze. Of course, even our increased attention to migration today is not just a contemporary occurrence. We can track the prevalence of migratory patterns, and a social conversation that these issues dominate to various points in international history. Whether major migratory patterns stem from food shortages, war, genocide, a changing government, a crumbling economy, or the advent of new technology that promises increased work, people have migrated transnationally for the entirety of human existence.

Yet, what is immeasurably difficult is defining and delimiting migration and its scope. At its most basic intonation, migration simply refers to the movement of one thing from its current location to a new one. When people move from Georgia to Michigan to work in a factory, they migrate. When the California Gold Rush lures thousands to America's western coast, it spurs migration. As the Nazi regime marches its way across Europe, endangering the lives of millions, threatened peoples uproot their lives and migrate anywhere they feel is free from persecution. We begin to understand how an open and unlimited definition of migration can pose potentially devastating and dehumanizing issues. Namely, if we comfortably associate migration with something as banal as a bottle moving from one part of the bathroom to another, or a child's toy left in an airport as the family takes off on a transatlantic flight, then we run the quite possible risk of subsuming human migration into a category of the banal.

There must be a way to define migration such that it speaks to a more universal experience but does not conflate genuine human experience with insignificant forms of movement. Today, scholars like Anna Boucher and Justin Gest suggest that migration studies has traditionally failed to address migration outside of European or American receiving countries, and argue that "a variety of typologies have been developed covering both immigration control

on the one hand, and naturalization and settlement, on the other.”²⁰ Identified as part of migration is this tension between the migrant gaining independence and acquiescing to the social and political requirements of their host countries. In this thesis, I demonstrate how both Tóibín and Hosseini speak to this negotiation between self-realization and assimilation that Boucher and Gest identify as fundamental to migration. Certainly, Tóibín and Hosseini do participate in this limited and west-focused migratory framework Boucher and Gest critique, as both of their protagonists migrate to the United States. However, as Boucher and Gest call for a need to dislocate discussion of migration from a western-centric framework, I argue that Tóibín and Hosseini exhibit how the migratory experience extends from specific geography itself, delocalizing migration from its specific geographic locations and instead highlighting the trans-geographic and cerebral mediation migrants must maneuver.

This is not to say, however, that migration must take the form of transcontinental or transnational travel. That there exists in both *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* major moments of migration is indisputable, with both protagonists experiencing migration on the transnational level. I will refer to these forms of migration as macro-migration. Yet, what I also wish to acknowledge within the works is a certain degree of micro-migration, of movements from place to place that go almost unnoticed, and how these instances of micro-migration reflect, communicate with, and highlight macro-migration within the texts.

Similarly to Boucher and Gest’s highlighting of the negotiation between control and assimilation, Roger Waldinger speaks to what he determines as the paradox of migration in which migrants simultaneously experience increased agency within their host countries but

²⁰ Anna Boucher and Justin Gest, “Migration Studies at a Crossroads: A Critique of Immigration Regime Typologies,” *Migration Studies* 3, no. 2 (July 2015), 182-198, 185.

decreased connection to people and relationships within their homeland.²¹ For Eilis and Amir, I argue, this fading connection to homeland relationships rears through memory and dream that both Eilis and Amir experience as jarring and misplaced within their physical locales. These memories and dreams often highlight their anxieties regarding the separation Eilis and Amir feel from their past relationships and experiences in their home countries. As I will explore throughout this thesis, Eilis's memories and dreams often intrusively explore what she has lost from her past, like her father and her connection to home. Similarly, Amir's memories and dreams often serve to stress his severed relationships in Afghanistan. The kind of duality between isolation and autonomy Waldinger pinpoints is particularly salient to novel structure more generally, with novelists able to seclude protagonists from the familiar in order to expedite growth. For example, as I will explore in later chapters, as Eilis is separated from her sister, Rose, at the start of her migration process, so too does she appropriate Rose's confidence and poise in order to maneuver the migratory process. Eilis is at once disconnected from her familial ties and forced to develop agency through which she may succeed.

Simultaneously, the specific impetuses behind both Eilis's and Amir's migrations cannot be overlooked. Immigration from both Ireland and Afghanistan is often spoken of in terms of diaspora, as a forced exile from homeland. Kerby A. Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, Donald Akenson's *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer*, Pierre Centlivres's "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: A Nation in Exile," and Angeliki Dimitriadi's *Irregular Afghan Migration to Europe* all discuss Irish and Afghani migration in terms of diaspora and exile. As I mention in discussing Ireland's and Afghanistan's histories, poverty, violence, and civil unrest culminate in little choice but for citizens seeking improved social

²¹ Roger Waldinger, "Engaging from Abroad: The Sociology of Emigrant Politics," *Migration Studies* 2, no. 3 (November 2014), 319-339.

circumstances to migrate outside of Ireland and Afghanistan. Though subject to separate catalysts, both Eilis and Amir are driven away from their homes without much choice. Eilis's familial obligations not only compel her to migrate to the United States; they also render her passive and without objection as her emigration from Ireland is "tacitly arranged."²² Meanwhile, Amir's exile from Afghanistan is more clearly violent, as he and his father, Baba, leave to escape the rising Taliban in Kabul as the Soviet Union carries out war in Afghanistan. Amir is similarly choiceless and passive in his migration from Afghanistan as Eilis is in her migration from Ireland. The action of migration is placed on Karim, the "people smuggler"²³ whose business it is to move refugees out of Kabul, and both Amir's carsickness and Eilis's seasickness on their journeys leaving homeland reflect their vulnerability to their in-flux positions.

In attending to micro and macro-migration, as well as delocalizing the migratory experience from its specific geography, I argue we are better equipped to conceptualize the migratory experience away from discrete and unreadable cultural particularity, and toward a more comparative approach. In doing so, I hope, we citizens of an increasingly mobile, migratory world might gain a more critical awareness of the challenges, paradoxes, and nuances migrants faces as they maneuver homeland, host-country, memory, and dream.

²² Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, (New York: Scribner, 2009), 24. In every subsequent quote from this text, I will refer to this edition and in parenthetical citations.

²³ Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 97. In every subsequent quote from this text, I will refer to this edition and in parenthetical citations.

O Land of opportunity, you are
 not the supper with meat, nor
 the curtains with lace nor the unheard of
 fire in the fate on summer afternoon, you are

this room [...]
 ~ Eavan Boland, "Exile! Exile!"

Chapter 1

Migration: *Brooklyn*

I spent the summer before entering high school traveling on a bus from the United States' east coast to its west, spending three weeks on the first leg of the journey stopping in various cities leading to Los Angeles. Born and raised in Georgia, I had never been west of Illinois, so I had begun to view Dodge City, Kansas as the portal westward. Because Dodge City was neither my destination nor a remarkable rest stop, it existed for me with the same kind of transient nowhere as an airport layover or a refueling station on a long stretch of nothingness. For me it was not so much about getting to Dodge as it was getting through it, and I approached my tenure in decidedly mid-west transit as a required-though-useless step into the *real west*, to the *real destination*. Of course, as the cliché would assert, the journey trumps the destination as handily as paper covers rock. Nearly a decade after this journey westward, I remember more about my time on the bus and in Dodge City's Dairy Queen than I do my time in Los Angeles. For me, Dodge City was my volta, and the bus the vehicle through which I arrived at this turn.

Yoon Sun Lee posits about trends of diasporic migration that "shaped and scaled by the conjoined projects of capitalism and empire, such migrations have produced new forms of subjectivity and sociality, and new relations to space and place."²⁴ This change with regard to space and place, she suggests, is not isolated to the migrant's destination, and instead refers to a

²⁴ Lee, Yoon Sun. "The Postcolonial Novel and Diaspora," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 133-51, 133.

fundamental shift in how migrants must learn to present themselves within changing landscapes. For the character whose journey coincides with a diasporic pattern of migration, the migratory process is not only sustained within the confines of homeland or host country.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Eilis's navigation of the migration experience transcends one specific locale, with Eilis having to maneuver both her transatlantic crossing and the acutely placed migration from one bedroom to another in Eilis's boarding house. In analyzing both Eilis's macro and micro-migration, I demonstrate how Tóibín does not fix the migratory experience within one specific geographic place. Instead, he demonstrates how Eilis's navigation of various locations amplifies the internal, and sometimes even physical, transformation she undergoes. As Eilis maneuvers through her migratory experience, she adopts the confidence and grace she observes as requisite to more seamless migration, and even changes her clothing to reflect this more poised persona. These changes Eilis undertake demonstrate, at once, her continued reliance on others and her growing independence. While Eilis requires the help of those more worldly than her, she continues to use these acquired skills throughout the novel, and grows into the confidence and independence they confer as opposed to feigning these skills.

While a bus was my vehicle westward, a ship departing from Dublin was Eilis's own vehicle to the United States. Situated on Ireland's eastern coast, and with clear waterway access, Dublin acts as a portkey to and from Ireland. In order to leave Ireland, Eilis must first journey from her own small town, Enniscorthy in County Wexford, to Dublin. From the text's outset, Dublin existed as the highest form of society on Eilis's radar. The first mention of Dublin in *Brooklyn* comes in the first paragraph of the novel, as Eilis "watched Rose crossing the street from sunlight into shade, carrying the new leather handbag that she had bought in Clerys in

Dublin in the sale” (3) It is later remarked that “twice a year Rose went to Dublin for the sales, coming back each January with a new dress and new cardigans and skirts and blouses” (11). Dublin becomes a gateway to all that is new, exciting, and available. Later when working in Brooklyn, it is Eilis who shops the sales of her department store and brings the newest American fashions home for her family and friends.

Eilis’s preparation for Dublin seems almost in relation to her preparation for the United States, and Eilis even begins to conflate the experience of the United States with a similarly foreign and glamorous connotation of Dublin: “that day in Dublin Eilis was aware that going to work in America was different from just taking the boat to England,” as her brothers had done before her, “America might be further away and so utterly foreign in its systems and its manners, yet it had an almost compensating glamour attached to it. Even going to work in a shop in Brooklyn with lodgings a few streets away, all organized by a priest, had an element of romance that she and Rose were fully alert to as they ordered their lunch in the Gresham” (33). The glamour of her day in Dublin, for which both Eilis and Rose dressed impeccably, bespeaks her increasingly changing worlds. She is going from days working in a local grocer in a small Irish town, and moving toward a bustling metropolis. Every moment spent away from her birthplace points to difference, indicates a fundamentally changing backdrop.

As Rose and Eilis make their way to the ship, Eilis realizes that “no one who did not have a ticket was allowed beyond a certain point,” meaning that Rose would have to stay behind (33). Until now Eilis has not had to view this experience as unique to her, and as considered Rose as much, if not more, in charge of her migration than she is. It is here that limits begin to formulate around migration, as only those who contain certain qualities, even the quality of having purchased a ticket, are permitted to partake. Yet, even these set boundaries are slightly

challenged, as “Rose . . . made an exception for herself with the assistance of the ticket collector, who fetched a colleague to help the ladies with their suitcases. He told Rose she could stay on the boat until half an hour before it was due to sail, when he would locate her, accompany her back and then find someone to keep an eye on her sister for the crossing to Liverpool” (33). Rose seems to possess a quality, a kind of charisma, that pardons her from some of the limits set around migration. She is a piece to Eilis’s migrant narrative, accompanying her in the beginning of her journey in Dublin, and even crossing onto the vessel by which the migrant travel will take place. Rose is not completely divorced from the migrant experience though she is the one who must remain in Ireland in order to take care of her mother.

Eilis incorporates Rose into her migrant experience through trying to adopt the kinds of characteristics that help Rose to cross barriers of access off limits to ordinary people. Stoddard suggests that Eilis chooses to remain passive within this process, writing, “rather than inhabit the subjectivity assigned to her, she doubles herself into a twin who will do the duty of leaving while she herself can stay home.”²⁵ Rose demonstrates to Eilis that she can be proactive in getting what she needs, stating, “some people are nice . . . and if you talk to them properly, they can be even nicer,” Eilis responds by saying “that’ll be my motto in America” (34). Eilis embodies more of Rose’s characteristics perhaps because she recognizes how effectively Rose manages each task, but also as a means of remaining passive, remaining home, even as she migrates to the United States. Eilis consciously distinguishes between her governing principles in Ireland and what these principles will be, what her motto will be, in the United States, thereby characterizing herself differently in the two locales.

²⁵ Stoddard, “Home and Belonging among Irish Migrants,” 161.

After Rose has long departed the ship, and they have journeyed into Liverpool, Eilis adopts Rose's behavior. In speaking to the porter who helps her with her luggage, Eilis "found herself thanking him in a tone that Rose might have used, a tone warm and private but also slightly distant though not shy either, a tone used by a woman in full possession of herself," thus indicating a fullness and growth embodied through migratory action (34). The degree to which Eilis is becoming immersed within this migratory experience is made increasingly more apparent as Tóibín comments on her adoption of Rose-like characteristics, writing "it was something she could not have done in the town or in a place where any of her family or friends might have seen her" (34). The stagnancy of restriction of Enniscorthy life dictates Eilis's perceived personality, so only through leaving this locale where her "personality is circumscribed by her familial placement, as well as by the society from which she hails," may Eilis adorn Rose's personality traits.²⁶

Eilis, however, is never left completely without guidance throughout her migrant process between Dublin and Brooklyn. While docked in Liverpool, she meets with her brother Jack, who had himself migrated from Ireland to England in search of work. Though Jack is family, and they have been a part of each other's lives since the beginning, a new form of connection and comradery marks their interaction in Liverpool. When they first meet at the dock "she did not know whether she should embrace him or not. They had never embraced before. When he put his hand out to share her hand, she stopped and looked at him again. He seemed embarrassed until he smiled. She moved towards him as though to hug him" (34). Jack's hesitance is soon revealed to be concern that people will see them and assume they are a couple. Rose's continued influence is, too, expressed through Jack. He notes to Eilis that "Rose sent me a list of instructions, and

²⁶ Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, *Mother/Country: Politics of the Personal in the Fiction of Colm Tóibín* (Germany: Peter Lang AG, 2012), 195.

they included one that said no kissing and hugging” (35). Rose remains acutely capable of helping Eilis form her public identity.

The influence of other family members, too, permeates Eilis’s emigration experience to the United States. Remarking on the ship, Jack states “this is going to take you to America . . . it’s like time and patience” (35). When Eilis questions what he means, Jack continues, “time and patience would bring a snail to America. Did you ever hear that . . . daddy always said that” (35). Eilis’s father, who had died before her immigration, is nevertheless a present voice in her process. In fact, her father’s death four years before Eilis’s migration spurs the necessity for emigration among the Lacey family children. It becomes incumbent upon them to earn money and contribute to the welfare of their family, and Enniscorthy does not provide enough opportunities for this kind of economic growth and success.

What strikes Eilis is not the independence that Jack achieves, but how passionately and determinedly he expressed his deep desire to return home during the initial months of his migration. Tóibín writes “maybe, she thought, all three of her brothers went through the same things and helped each other, sensing the feeling of homesickness when it arose in one of the others. If this happened to her, she realized, she would be alone, so she hoped that she would be ready for whatever was going to happen to her, however she was going to feel, when she arrived in Brooklyn”^(T 40). What Eilis realizes in this moment is multifaceted. To start, there must be some factor of migration that all migrants experience universally. She understands she may experience these same emotions as someone partaking in a similar migratory action. In this respect, Eilis conceptualizes migration as containing within it some quality of the shared. Simultaneously, Eilis does identify her own migration story as unique vis-à-vis that of her

brothers'. She considers her migration more individual, and isolated, than her brothers' because they all move to the same place whereas she would be living where she does not have family.

As Eilis is maneuvering her migratory experience, she meets Georgina, her bunkmate who will be journeying with her to the United States. Georgina becomes a model off whom Eilis attempts to reformat her own identity and presentation as a migrant. Tóibín presents Georgina to us a Rose-like figure—graceful, ethereal, and determined to get her way. When Eilis realizes that the bathroom shared between their room and another third-class cabin had been locked from the inside, undoubtedly by the other room's tenants wanting to make sure they always had access to the bathroom, Eilis wishes Georgina were in the cabin to help her come up with a solution. She waits outside the bathroom “hoping that Georgina would come. Georgina, she thought, would know what to do, as would Rose or her mother, or indeed Miss Kelly, whose face came into her mind for a brief moment. But [Eilis] had no idea what to do” (43). And, in fact, Georgina does know what to do. Georgina begins to take care of Eilis. She coaches her on how to deal with seasickness, and it becomes apparent to the reader that Georgina has travelled to and from America numerous times. Georgina is an English emigrant. She is the image of a migrant who has already relocated, but who travels to and from her birthplace in order to see her family.

As an experienced traveler, Georgina becomes a source of information for Eilis. Not only does she aid with Eilis's seasickness and their rude neighbors, but she becomes an example of the model migrant off whom Eilis should base herself. Georgina teaches Eilis about Ellis Island, and prepares her for the inspection process. Anzaldúa notes about presentation and identity that “struggling with a ‘story’ (a concept or theory), embracing personal and social identity, is a *bodily* activity. The narrative works itself through my physical, emotional, and spiritual bodies,

which emerge out of and are filtered through the natural, spiritual works around me.”²⁷ There is a decidedly tangible, physical component of identity formation and presentation, and Georgina aids Eilis in making these changes. Just as Rose had helped Eilis pick out her clothes for the journey, so too did Georgina pick the wardrobe Eilis would wear when going through Ellis Island. She even coached Eilis on how to appear more in-place through customs—

‘Wear your coat over your arm and look as though you know where you are going and don’t wash your hair again, the water on this boat as made it stand out like a ball of steel wool . . . don’t look too innocent . . . when I put eye-liner on you and some rouge and mascara, they’ll be afraid to stop you.’ (51)

In teaching Eilis how to maneuver the customs process, Georgina reminds her that she is entering into the part of the migration experience that requires transformation. Now Eilis is pressed to present herself as someone other than the young Irish girl from a small town who has never before then experienced transatlantic travel. In looking at Eilis’s luggage Georgina remarks “your suitcase is all wrong, but there’s nothing we can do about that . . . it’s too Irish and they stop the Irish . . . try not to look so frightened” (51).

What stands out in *Brooklyn* as a bizarre example of Eilis’s migration experience, and how this experience does not end once she passed through Ellis Island, is when Mrs. Kehoe offers Eilis Miss Keegan’s room. Keegan, who decides to leave Mrs. Kehoe’s residence, apparently has the “best room in the house, the biggest, the warmest, the quietest, and the best-appointed (100). Eilis’s is currently in room upstairs in Mrs. Kehoe’s home. This move would require Eilis to move downstairs, and would confer upon Eilis certain privileges such as a private entryway into the home. Just as only those who held a ticket for travel could join the ship’s

²⁷ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 66

journey to the United States, so too did one need a special designation to move to the room downstairs. It is only through Mrs. Kehoe's permission, she acting as a gatekeeper, that one may be granted access to this space. Eilis, apparently, held some quality in Mrs. Kehoe's regard that deemed her worthy of this move, and Mrs. Kehoe thus selected her. While Mrs. Kehoe's offer to Eilis does represent a kind of micro-migration where she moves from one place to another, it is also a moment of return to the intensely familial and nepotistic culture of 1950s small-town Ireland. Costello-Sullivan writes, "Mrs. Kehoe is conspiratorially trying to give [Eilis] the best room in the boarding house and thereby to lay claim to her in some way," and Eilis begins to reject this favoritism.²⁸

When Eilis makes her transatlantic migration, she understands that a significant component of this migratory experience includes perception and self-presentation. She dons various affects in order to appear fit for the new roles she must embody—whether manipulating her speaking voice with porters to gain their favor or dressing sophisticatedly to cross Ellis Island with ease. Part of learning these various positions was having people instruct her on what to do and how to behave. Similarly, Mrs. Kehoe guides Eilis through the process of her moving downstairs. Mrs. Kehoe presents the process of Eilis's move as non-optional, telling her "and I don't want any discussion about it. You are getting it and that's that. So if you pack your things on Sunday, on Monday when you're at work I'll have them moved down, and that'll be the end of it" (100). Just as Rose lays out the process of Eilis getting help from porters on the boat, or Georgina guides Eilis through how to manage seasickness and present herself at Ellis Island, so too does Mrs. Kehoe instruct Eilis on how to move down into the basement. With guidance from

²⁸ Costello-Sullivan, *Mother/Country*, 109.

a more experienced body so much a part of the migration experience in *Brooklyn*, Mrs. Kehoe's behavior toward Eilis reflects this similar kind of mentorship.

Because the way in which Eilis presents herself publically and interacts with her surroundings changes depending on the migratory experience she faces, Eilis recognizes the way she will be considered among her housemates will similarly change. Just as migration renders Eilis as somehow unique from her Irish peers, moving downstairs separates Eilis from her housemates. She acknowledges this distinction immediately, asking Mrs. Kehoe "will the others not mind that I'm getting the room" (100). If an assumption of difference, of changing one's position in relation to society is a common function of migration, then Eilis's changing role in Mrs. Kehoe's home presents a similar sort of change.

The promise of the most luxurious room in the house, apart from Mrs. Kehoe's, also harkens back to Eilis's time in Dublin during which she imagined America as a kind of foreign extravagance. But, this anticipation of opulence is intermixed with uncertainty in expectation versus reality. After talking with Mrs. Kehoe, "it struck Eilis, as she made her way up the stairs to her bedroom, that the basement room could, in fact, be damp and small . . . she wondered if all this secrecy was merely a way of landing her there without giving her a chance to see where she was going or make any protest" (100). When reflecting back on the decision for Eilis to emigrate to the United States in the first place, the scene takes on a decidedly similar quality to Mrs. Kehoe's giving Eilis the downstairs bedroom.

One day, Rose comes home after playing golf, only to reveal that she had been playing with Father Flood, who runs a parish in America, and who she has invited for tea. When he comes, he says almost randomly to Eilis that "in the united states . . . there would be plenty of work for someone like you and with good pay" (23). Before this moment in the text, Eilis had

neither expressed interest in emigration nor brought up America as a possibility for herself. The only possible emigration Eilis has been confronted with was moving to England as her brothers had done. Father Flood entices Eilis with America not in extravagance, but through presenting Brooklyn as an extension of Ireland. He states “parts of Brooklyn . . . are just like Ireland. They’re full of Irish” (23).

Just as Mrs. Kehoe presents the absolute best possible image of Eilis’s new room, Father Flood glosses over life in America, describing it as safe, filled with opportunity, and fundamentally Irish. Eilis’s own say in her move from Ireland to America is almost as limited as her say in moving to the basement. Eilis “felt like a child when the doctor would come to the house, her mother listening with cowed respect . . . then it occurred to her that she was already feeling that she would need to remember this room, her sister, this scene, as though from a distance” (24). There was no verbal confirmation of Eilis’s consent, nor was there any question of what she wanted or if moving to the United States was a decision she would be comfortable with it. Instead, “in the silence that had lingered, she realized, it had been tacitly arranged that Eilis would go to America,” just as Mrs. Kehoe decides and arranges for Eilis to move downstairs without presenting her with a genuine choice (24).

Only once Eilis moves into the room does Mrs. Kehoe reveal the quality she viewed in Eilis as being requisite for occupying the room. “you are the only one with any manners” she said (103). But this assessment of Eilis’s character proved deeply uncomfortable for her, particularly to the degree by which Eilis was “othered” from her housemates. She resents Mrs. Kehoe for this othering, and “Eilis believed that this was a piece of gross presumption on Mrs. Kehoe’s part but also that the decision to give her, the most recently arrived, the best room in the house not only would cause bitterness and difficulty between herself and Patty, Diana, Miss

McAdam, and Sheila Heffernan, but would come to mean, in time, that Mrs. Kehoe herself would feel free to call in the favour she had done her” (104). Part of Eilis’s migratory experience, as Jack had articulated as being part of his, is a sense of independence. Certainly, the move to the basement acts as a kind of micro-migration, and the degree to which it reflects the facets of Eilis’s macro-migration cannot go unnoticed. What is disconcerting to Eilis, thus, is the new role as Mrs. Kehoe’s favorite that has now be thrust upon her, and that she knows will include owing Mrs. Kehoe a favor in the future.

In this chapter I have argued that Eilis’s migration process is not so specifically fixed within a particular geography, as she navigates similar challenges of immigration across the various locales of her migration experience. Tóibín’s trans-local depiction of immigration points to a similarly more globalized, and de-localized, approach to migration literature that confronts what Jay identifies as a perception of space and geography in which “identities, cultures, and nations are produced, fractured, and continually reproduced within spaces or locations where there are not no fixed borders or absolutes, where previously constructed ‘essences’ are deployed, transformed, and reconstructed.”²⁹ As a result, Tóibín’s text moves beyond location in order to confront the more global circumstances of migration and the negotiation between self, homeland, and host country immigrants undergo. While Tóibín certainly does highlight difference in the geographies Eilis navigates, Eilis transforms within her changing locations. These locations do mirror one another, in some ways, with her community in Brooklyn presenting a similarly domestic and singularly Irish space as Enniscorthy. Nevertheless, as Eilis renegotiates her place within the various locales of the novel, her fluctuating discomfort both in Brooklyn and in Enniscorthy, as well as her redefining of where home is and to whom her

²⁹ Jay, *Global Matters*, 76.

familial obligations belong, indicates that the migration experience itself is not so isolated within particular geographies.

In Wonderland they lie
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die.

~ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*³⁰

Chapter 2

Migration: *The Kite Runner*

I've never quite wrapped my head around the notion of déjà vu. It seemed to me something that happens in cartoons, but never in real life. A few months ago, my family all gathered in the living room of my grandparents' house to share stories about my grandfather, who had passed away a few days before. Suddenly, every inch of a house I had spent so much time in was tethered to a memory I could not escape. I smelled newspaper when looking at the lit lamp over the leather reclining chair, tasted French toast and black coffee when walking through the kitchen, and heard the Kentucky Derby trumpets play from the turned-off television. These moments of déjà vu were not limited to time spent in the physical places I shared with my grandfather. A few months after his passing, I rode the train downtown while heading to a basketball game. Across the aisle sat two young boys and an older man who I presumed to be their grandfather. They were all holding drink cups from a popular fast food chain. One boy dropped his cup, and soda fizzed under the train benches. The grandfather laughed, pulled napkins out of his takeaway bag, and looked at the boy and yelped gleefully "Oh, way to go" before wiping the liquid that had splashed onto their shoes, as my own grandfather had done countless times for me. In that moment, I felt so clearly as I was the small child whose

³⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wondering and Through the Looking Glass*, (Enhanced EBooks, 2014) 197.

grandfather cleaned her shoes after a soda spill. At the time these bursts of memory were intruders I had unsuccessfully locked from my mind. I took no comfort in their disquieted presence.

Anzaldúa describes her own intrusions of memory as a similarly disorienting experience. She writes:

when painful memories take over and the whispering waves cannot soothe the pangs . . . when I go for walks with my friends, they don't see la Virgen until I call their attention to her. Later, they always see and point her out to their friends. It's sort of like hunting for hidden animals in children's coloring books; it requires a slight shift in perspective to bring them up from the foliage.³¹

Here she identifies two modes of accessing conscious thought. The first is an outside assault, an uncontrollable relapse into memory, and the second a triggered response with an apparent outside motivator—like when your friend gets a bumper sticker and suddenly everyone's cars seem to have the same sticker from some half-marathon.

For Anzaldúa, understanding time, and how shifts in time inform the self, determines tracking a person's changing identity. In particular, the influence of multiple geographic locations, according to Anzaldúa, particularly emphasizes tense as a component of the self. She writes, "I attempt to analyze, describe, and re-create these identity shifts. Speaking from the geographies of many 'countries' makes me a privileged speaker,"³² noting the influence of multiple geographies on the individual. Anzaldúa continues, "I 'speak in tongues'— understand the languages, emotions, thoughts, fantasies of the various sub-personalities inhabiting me and the various grounds they speak from. To do so, I must figure out which person (I, she, you, we, them, they),

³¹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

which tense (present, past, future), which language and register, and which voice or style to speak from.”³³ Location, voice, time, and person are all critical for understanding the speaker, and for interpreting the message they present.

Rachel Blumenthal develops “framework for understanding Muslim diaspora as a geographically displaced population negotiating the social and political terrain of their new geographies, their ‘host’ countries.”³⁴ She then roots Hosseini very much within this framework of navigating a “host” country through his literature. She continues to posit that geography drives the negotiation between emigrant and host-country, writing, “diasporic writers document more than just the physical journey from one geography to another ... they traverse national boundaries, but also ideological boundaries. Their texts uncover new ideological homelands, or intellectual and moral regions in which they locate evolving political, theological, and social beliefs.”³⁵ But what does it mean to have an ideological homeland? What comprises it, and from where do these ideologies originate? Understanding the basis of these “ideological homelands” defines the extent to which homeland becomes further untethered from geographical place alone, and is instead rooted in the immaterial and temporal negotiations migrants navigate. Just as *Brooklyn* undercuts the role of singular location in expressing the migrant experience, so too does *The Kite Runner* present geography as unfixed. That ideologies exist within our moral ecosystem less overtly than subliminally complicates our tendency to prescribe a “there” versus “here” dichotomy between homeland and host country. Narratively, this lack of a clear distinction between ideological geographies allows characters to traverse physical geographies while very much within their home frameworks, and this movability between ideological and

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Rachel Blumenthal, “Looking for Home in the Islamic Diaspora of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Azar Nafisi, and Khaled Hosseini,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2012), 250-64, 252.

³⁵ Ibid., 252.

physical geography challenges writers like Tóibín and Hosseini to articulate the layered ties to home migrants experience that go beyond the physical plane and extend into much more conceptual frontiers.

When speaking to the geographic connection, Hosseini and Tóibín both manifest physical spaces for their protagonists to exist within the geography of their homelands—doing so most clearly through physically placing their characters back within the locales from where they come. I will speak more to these physical returns to homeland in Chapters 3 and 4. In this chapter, I will discuss the method through which Hosseini explores Amir’s ideological homeland. Specifically, I will look at how shifts in time serve as micro-migrations through which Amir may access both homeland and host country.

Hosseini begins *The Kite Runner* through memory, and specifically through the kind of déjà vu that drives Anzaldúa’s pain. Amir states, “One day last summer, my friend Rahim Khan called from Pakistan. He asked me to come see him. Standing in the kitchen with the receiver to my ear, I knew it wasn’t just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my past of unatoned sins” (1). For Amir, the twenty-six years that separate his “sins” and the phone call do nothing to keep his past from interrupting his present. And, like half-marathon bumper stickers, Amir’s past becomes accessible to him through the passing images of his current life. After the phone call Amir walks through Golden Gate Park, where he notes, “I glanced up and saw a pair of kites . . . floating side by side like a pair of eyes looking down on San Francisco, the city I now call home. And suddenly Hassan’s voice whispered in my head: *For you, a thousand times over*. Hassan the harelipped kite runner” (1). While this scene begins the novel, it takes place decades after Amir leaves Hassan. Hosseini creates for the reader an immediate understanding that the weight of this novel exists in its history, in the events we have not yet read but that our protagonist has

experienced. Because *The Kite Runner* is a migration narrative, setting up the theoretical distance the readers must traverse in order to understand the plot-points of the novel places them, uniquely, within novel's migrating and shifting timetable. In other words, we migrate through time along with Amir.

The effect of *The Kite Runner*'s first chapter manifests through a narrative structuring of the way memories occur. Narrative time is not yet fixed, much in the same way geography is not entirely fixed in *Brooklyn*, and we experience the swings in memory as Amir does. The first line of *The Kite Runner* indicates to the reader the importance of time throughout the novel, reading, "I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975" (1). Our first glance into Hosseini's literary world is drives us to the novel's past, but the chapter, titled "December 2001," appears as a somehow separate entity. The narrator addresses the admittedly odd subsuming of different time periods, suggesting that they should not be considered as entirely distinct from one another. For Amir, who, or, in his terms *what* he has become is a product of his history, and isolating his present self from a "past" self proves impossible. About 1975 Amir states, "that was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years" (1). The first instance of macro-migration within the text is not Amir and Baba's eventual escape from Afghanistan. Instead, the first macro-migration the on which the novel embarks is the over two-decades leap from December, 2001 in the California, United States to 1975 Kabul, Afghanistan.

In a review of *The Kite Runner*, Stella Agloo-Baksh expresses how physical geography and ideological geography can sometimes contrast with one another, as she writes of Amir and Hassan's friendship.

The boys—the protagonist Amir and his friend Hassan—live in Kabul where they have been tended to by the same wet-nurse and have been reared in the same household. Since Amir springs from the elite while Hassan emerges from a marginalized ethnic minority, the boys inhabit contrasting worlds. Their symbiotic friendship and their intertwined lives and fates ... are cleverly but unobtrusively utilized by Hosseini to mirror Afghanistan's political, social and religious tensions and complexities.³⁶

Though the boys grow up in exactly the same place, and shared so much of their upbringing, the societal ideologies that govern their different social statuses distinguishes their childhoods from one another. Geographically, they grow up in the same place, but are socially placed within two separate spheres. Hassan and his father³⁷, Ali, belong to the Hazaras, an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan. As such, they face violent prejudice from the larger community. Assef, a boy who plays with Amir and Hassan during their childhood, rapes and brutalizes Hassan because of his Hazara status.

As Amir witnesses Hassan's rape, he retreats into past and memory as an escape from the brutality he watches right in front of him. Amir sees Hassan's face as Assef rapes him, and states, "I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb" (66). The text then immediately turns to Amir's memory, juxtaposed in italics, of the traditional sheep sacrifice on Eid-e-Qorban. Amir remembers:

³⁶ Stella Agloo-Baksh, "Ghosts of the Past," *Canadian Literature*, no. 184 (Spring 2005), 143-44.

³⁷ Later, we learn that Baba is actually Hassan's biological father, not Ali. Hassan and Amir are thus half-brothers.

Just a second before he slices the throat in one expert motion, I see the sheep's eyes. It is a look that will haunt my dreams for weeks. I don't know why I watch this yearly ritual in our backyard; my nightmare persist long after the bloodstains on the grass have faded. But I always watch. I watch because of that look of acceptance in the animal's eyes. Absurdly, I imagine the animal understands. I imagine the animal sees that its imminent demise is for a higher purpose. This is the look... (67).

Following Hassan's rape, the two friends grow apart, and Amir eventually wrongly frames Hassan for stealing from him— leading to Hassan and Ali departing from Amir's family. This decision not only to betray Hassan but to neglect in standing up for him against Assef haunts Amir as the look in the sheep's eyes haunts him. Notably, too, when Amir shifts from watching Hassan's rape to the memory of the sheep's slaughter, the tense in which Amir narrates also changes. Amir goes from narrating in past tense to telling the memory in present-tense, further emphasizing these transitions, these micro-migrations, between memory and reality.

The way in which Amir and his family's societal position influences the surrounding culture, the surrounding ideologies, cannot be overlooked. Amir begins chapter three stating, "Lore has it my father once wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands. If this story had been about anyone else, it would have been dismissed as *laaf*, that Afghan tendency to exaggerate—sadly, almost a national affliction" (11). Amir places his father as decidedly within a national framework, a subject of lore that is shared communally, and that his father is a unique exception to the hyperbole that coincides with *laaf*. Amir identifies *laaf* as a societally ubiquitous, and then suggests that his father's position within this society liberates him from this trope. Amir continues, "if someone bragged that his son was a doctor, chances were the kid had

once passed a biology test in high school. But no one ever doubted the veracity of any story about Baba . . . I have imagined Baba's wrestling match countless times, even dreamed about it. And in those dreams, I can never tell Baba from the bear" (11).

The role of narrative tense here again becomes an incredibly salient component in expressing Amir's footholds within Afghani ideological geography. Because Amir is telling this narrative in past tense, the narrative takes on the quality of lore that Amir assigns to his father and to his position within society. As readers, we are thus introduced to Amir's father much in the same way an Afghani community member might have been; through narrative, and through an astonished perspective of who he was and how he was within his culture. That Amir is not only telling this story in past tense, but also after having been emotionally thrust back into his past, contributes further to the layering of the narrative timeframe as a way through which Hosseini can express Afghani ideology. Through the dream, Amir experiences the gravitas of his father, and specifically his father's lore that has permeated their surrounding environment. The dream also speaks to how chronology becomes a vehicle for ideological geography within the text. Amir asserts that this lore has been a fixture of his past dreams. On the level of the subconscious, the Afghani lore seems engrained within Amir's memory framework, and he explores how these memories penetrate through time.

His dreams pose a point of access into across the chronology of the novel. Much in the way that memory acts as a vehicle by which to address past events while in the present, dreams within the text similarly act as teleportation into a different chronologic realm. Amir is even understood as a character particularly prone to dreaming. In a conversation between Baba and Rahim Khan that Amir, Khan seemingly advises Baba that he should be grateful for Amir's health, to which Baba replies, "I know, I know. But he's always buried in those books or

shuffling around the house like he's lost in a dream" (19). This trope of being "lost" within a dream is particularly salient in discussing how dreams contribute to one's ideological framework, as the image dictates a geographic component to dreams. "Lost" is a word typically associated with a position within a particular landscape. Amir spends much of his time navigating a dream landscape in the way we would expect him to navigate a physical place.

Dreams again appear as Amir describes his frustration with his father. Amir states, "I let myself dream: I imagined a conversation and laughter over dinner instead of silence broken only by the clinking of silverware and the occasional grunt" (49). Dream becomes a method within the novel not only to access past timeframes, but to envision a hopeful future that has not yet actualized. Through the motif of dream Hosseini is able to connect us from time we are placed within the narrative of the novel to a different moment that has either occurred within Amir's life, or is otherwise a part of his subconscious.

Dreams are also a way through which Amir and Hassan's ideological frameworks are connected in their shared propensity for dream and imagination. Hassan tells Amir that "he'd had a dream.

'We were at Ghargha Lake, you, me, Father, Agha Sahib, Rahim Khan, and thousands of other people,' he said. 'It was warm and sunny, and the lake as clear like a mirror. But no one was swimming because they said a monster had come to the lake . . . So everyone is scared to get in the water, and suddenly you kick off your shoes, Amir agha, and take off your shirt . . . And before anyone can stop you, you dive into the water, start swimming away. I follow you in and we're both swimming' (52).

While both boys certainly are prone to these excursions into dream, imagination, and memory, they have decidedly different reactions to them. Amir interrupts Hassan to remind him that he cannot swim, to which Hassan responds “It’s a dream, Amir agha, you can do anything,” to which Amir continues to deny the plausibility of this dream (52). This dream concludes with both Hassan and Amir becoming sultans of the lake, effectively leveling their social statuses. Amir rejects this dream, stating that it means nothing. Hassan, however, asserts, “Father says dreams always mean something” (52). Not only does the dream demonstrate how different the two boys are in their interpretations of the dream and their understanding of its importance, but it also demonstrates a critical difference in their characters. While Amir betrays Hassan in not defending him against Assef, Hassan’s loyalty toward Amir is unwavering even in his dream. Though Hassan cannot swim, and though Amir enters into a “monster-filled” lake, Hassan still follows Amir into the water. He is willing to sacrifice himself in service of his friend where Amir instead betrays Hassan both in failing to protect him and then in framing him for a theft he does not commit.

Where in *Brooklyn* the spaces Eilis must navigate are confined to the varying locales of her migration experience, in *The Kite Runner* these oscillations between memory, dream, and the present similarly function as moments that identify migration as an unfixed and non-terminal process. Jay writes that “Anzaldúa’s borderland is a state of mind as well as a geographical location . . . where identities, languages, and cultures have become hybrid and syncretic.”³⁸ While Anzaldúa’s borderland bespeaks the cultural negotiation that takes place in physical geographies that share multiple nationalities (i.e. the Texas/Mexico border), what Hosseini depicts in *The Kite Runner* is a similar sort of three-way negotiation between identity, culture,

³⁸ Jay, *Global Matters*, 78.

and language that transpires mentally.³⁹ As a result, Hosseini depicts the cultural confusion and compromise associated with the borderland as similarly resonant within the migration experience.

³⁹ In chapter 4, I detail the role of multiple languages, specifically English and Arabic, within *The Kite Runner*.

This city weaves itself so intimately
 it is hard to see, despite the tenacity of the river
 and the iron sky; and in its downpour and its vapour I am
 as much at home here as I will ever be.

~ Sinéad Morrissey, “In Belfast”⁴⁰

Chapter 3

The Return: Brooklyn

According to Anzaldúa, fundamental to her own identity formation has been relinquishing herself of the ideologies and cultural mechanisms that stem from homeland. She writes:

I must forsake “home” (comfort zones, both personal and cultural) every day of my life to keep burgeoning into the tree of myself . . . For some, home-ethnic roots may not be as clear-cut as those connected to the land, nor as portable and potable as the diasporic roots clinging to immigrants’ feet and carried from one community, culture, or country to another. Some immigrants are cut off from ethnic cultures.⁴¹

For Anzaldúa, a key component of identity formation is the ability to step away from home, and to navigate her environment away from the “comfort zones” that she equates with home. She suggests that her ability to disassociate from the normative and comfortable features of her heritage is precisely because her connection to her own traditional ideologies and geographies remains strong. She writes that “luckily, the roots of my tree are deep enough in la cultura Mexicana and strong enough to support a wide-spread branch system,” and because her

⁴⁰ Sinéad Morrissey, *Parallax And Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 4.

⁴¹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 67.

upbringing is so entrenched within a decidedly Mexican heritage with clear cultural ideologies, she continues, “Las raíces that sustain and nourish me are implanted in the landscape of my youth, my grandmother’s stories of la Llorona, my father’s quiet strength, the preserving energy de la gente who work in the fields.”⁴²

Requisite to a successful immigration process, presumably, are the completion of two distinct steps; leaving the homeland and assimilating into the host country. What complicates this process for Eilis, challenging her as she moves along this seemingly linear path of immigration and assimilation, are moments of return from her host city, Brooklyn, to her home town, Enniscorthy. Like with migration, I argue that these returns take both micro and macro form in *Brooklyn*, with Eilis navigating what Kathleen Costello-Sullivan deems “personal growth and cultural negotiation in relation to the competing locales of the novel.”⁴³ These returns, too, further Tóibín’s stepping away from fixed geographies, as the qualities of Brooklyn and Enniscorthy are renegotiated, or flipped, to represent one another. Where Brooklyn is once a strange and foreign place to Eilis in which she has no family for guidance or support, Enniscorthy becomes similarly foreign and strange to her upon her return.

Certainly, Tóibín takes care to distinguish Brooklyn from Enniscorthy within the novel. He contrasts the progressive, busy, and ambivalent crowdedness of New York with the “oppressively small”⁴⁴ and claustrophobic familiarity of Enniscorthy. Eilis is so accustomed to the presumptive nosiness of home that, when walking through the crowded streets of New York her first morning to work she “thought a fight had broken out or someone was injured and they had gathered to get a good view” (61). In spite of prescribed difference, the translatability

⁴² Ibid., 67.

⁴³ Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, *Mother/Country: Politics of the Personal in the Fiction of Colm Tóibín* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 190.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 191.

between Eilis's home town and her new host city undercuts any harsh distinction demarcating Brooklyn from Enniscorthy. Mrs. Kehoe and the other boarders living in her home are all Irish, Fr. Flood remains a semi-permanent feature in Eilis's life while in Brooklyn, and even Mrs. Kehoe's previous attempts to single Eilis out from among the other women staying in the home draws upon the nepotism and acquiescence that permeates small-town Irish life in the 1950s. And while Eilis's broader surroundings offer experiences and people that extend far away from her home — work and school are two such environments in which Eilis is not surrounded by decidedly Irish crowds — “her boarding house is strictly Irish, and her travels in her neighborhood — from school, to the parish hall, to the boarding house — are strictly circumscribed.”⁴⁵ As Eilis maneuvers through these Irish-adjacent environments while she adjusts simultaneously to her broader New York landscape, *Tóibín* challenges to what degree Eilis has truly left home in the first place.

Tóibín writes Eilis into a New York backdrop, but shades this setting as distinctly Irish. *Tóibín*, like Hosseini, points to the kind of cultural hybridity associated with a borderland as similarly resonant within the migratory experience itself. In doing so, he creates space for what I consider micro-returns within the text where Eilis is consciously displaced from her host-country and hoisted back into an Irish framework. She returns home all-but physically. So much of Eilis's immediate New York surroundings hum with the familiarity of Irish community and insulation, and the presence of Irish life reaches a crescendo during Eilis's first Christmas in the United States. In a manner particularly fitting of the small-town familiarity shared among Irish immigrants to the United States, Fr. Flood enlists Eilis's help with the parish's Christmas dinner, during which she would spend her holiday serving a large crowd of “leftover Irishmen” who do

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

not have families in the United States (87). Those Irishmen the parish serve on Christmas seem drawn there for both the company and the taste of home it provides — “and they love the company and it’s Irish food, you know, proper stuffing and roast potatoes and Brussel sprouts boiled to death” (89). This meal at the parish provides a physical point of return to Irish Christmas tradition even for those men who, according to Fr. Flood, have been gone from Ireland for over fifty years and who are no longer in touch with family or friends still in Ireland (88). The presence of those who immigrate many decades before Eilis reinforces the reality that the immigration process is not sustained within a linear timeframe that has with a clear beginning or end, and instead immigrants navigate this process indefinitely. The parish Christmas is built as decidedly Irish. One volunteer questions the men’s politeness, asking “wouldn’t you think they’d take off their caps when they are eating? . . . don’t they know they’re in America[?]” to which Fr. Flood replies, “we have no rules here” (92). Fr. Flood challenges the rules that accompany migration, like those Eilis learns from Georgina on the ship to America, and holds Christmas in the parish as a respite from the expectations to which Irish immigrants are held. Fr. Flood’s “here” contrasts with the volunteers’ “America,” delocalizing the parish from its physical place in Brooklyn.

Not only do the parishioners and Eilis return more consciously to their home traditions during this dinner, but so too does the dinner present another kind of micro-return for Eilis; the return of her father who dies four years before Eilis immigrates.

She observed coming into the hall a tall man with a slight stoop . . . he stood still as soon as he had closed the main door behind him, and it was the way he took in the hall, surveying the scene with shyness and a sort of mild delight, that made Eilis sure, for one moment, that her father had come into her presence. She felt as

though she should move towards him as she saw him hesitantly opening his overcoat and loosening his scarf. (90)

Not only does Eilis sense her father in this moment, but she places him within this distinctly Irish and male crowd that gathers in this Brooklyn parish. Eilis realizes that this could not be her father, believing “that she could tell no one, that she imagined for an instant that she had seen her father” (90). Realizing she is mistaken, and that her father could not possibly be in a Brooklyn parish during Christmas, Eilis momentarily releases from the Irish community connection her environment bespeaks, and retreats back into the private and isolated state she has assumed during her migration process. While mistaking a man for her father may be read as a young woman far from home who misses a lost loved one during the holidays, we cannot escape from the reality that it was her father’s death, and the economic strife this creates for her family, that precipitates Eilis’s eventual emigration from Ireland. His return would permit Eilis’s return to Ireland, and his absence drives her further from homeland.

Throughout the dinner, the men strike Eilis as like those she grew up with in Enniscorthy, and “by the time she served them and they turned to thank her, they seemed more like her father and his brothers in the way they spoke or smiled” (91). By the time she serves the man she mistakes for her father, she notices he is speaking to the man beside him in Irish (92). Though in Ireland the politics of Irish language and Irish language revival remain steadfastly complex, and though Eilis herself likely is likely not conversant in Irish, this man further carves a uniquely Irish space within Brooklyn. That the United States and Ireland share a common tongue unifies them in their *Anglicization*, deconstructing the linguistic barriers to assimilation that *The Kite Runner* presents.⁴⁶ Through Tóibín’s inclusion of an Irish speaker he further

⁴⁶ In Chapter 4, I evaluate language and its relation to migration in *The Kite Runner*.

exoticizes the scene from an American context, and because Tóibín does not delve into the conversation between the two men, he further clarifies these borders between American and Irish.

In the most salient moment of micro-return during the dinner, the man whom Eilis mistakes for her father again appears and is this time singled out by Fr. Flood to sing for the crowd.

When Eilis looked up the man was signaling to her. He wanted her, it seemed, to come and stand with him . . . he did not acknowledge her arrival but closed his eyes and reached his hand towards hers and held it . . . he gripped her hand tightly and began to move it in a faint circular motion as he started to sing. His voice was loud and strong and nasal; the Irish he sang in, she thought, must be Connemara Irish because she remembered one school teacher from Galway in the Mercy Convent who had that accent. (94)

Through Irish language and song, the man continues to build a distinctly Irish setting, and he shares this moment with Eilis. In his accent, Eilis is brought back to her childhood, and she again identifies him as entirely familiar, as a teacher from her past, in spite of never having met him. Tóibín creates within *Brooklyn* a scene that is especially accessible to Irish migrants, and that seems constructed so that the characters within it may, if only for a few hours, live within the familiarity of their home country while suspended in their host country. Through incorporating a conversation around the Irish language, too, Tóibín again speaks to access. He writes, “it was only when he came to the chorus, however, that she understood the words—‘*Má bhíonn tú liom, a stóirín mo chroí*’” (94). While Eilis may understand the Irish from the chorus, Tóibín chooses

not to include the English translation.⁴⁷ In choosing to leave out the English-language translation, Tóibín further specifies for whom this scene is meant. Not only is Tóibín’s non-Irish readership denied understanding to this particular moment, so too are the vast numbers of Irish citizens today who do not speak Irish. Where, as I will evaluate in Chapter 4, Hosseini stumbles over himself to be inclusive and congenial toward his international, specifically American, readership, Tóibín is more exclusive in negotiating *Brooklyn*’s accessibility. As a result, he strengthens the Irishness he conveys as present within the United States, and further delocalizes Irish and American particularities in order to demonstrate cross-cultural symmetry and negotiation.

Even as Eilis moves relatively swiftly through her new environment, and seemingly adjusts quite readily to the new place in which she now resides, she abruptly hits periods of homesickness so severe that any progress she has made suddenly comes under question. This periodic homesickness seems to be spurred by moments that confuse her geographic landscape, that challenge the distinctions she has drawn mentally between homeland and host country. One such incident is as Eilis receives letters from her family a few months after her transatlantic journey. She has spent the majority of her time in Brooklyn up to this point trying to orient herself within her new routine of work and night classes, so when these letters arrive Eilis “realized she had not really thought of home. The town had come to her in flashing pictures . . . but her own life in Enniscorthy, the life she had lost and would never have again, she kept out of her mind” (69). Eilis becomes so entrenched in the new patterns of her daily life in America that “every day she had come back to this small room in this house full of sounds and gone over everything new that had happened,” and the life she once lived seems a part of a distant and unreachable past (69). Tóibín even describes her life in Ireland as entirely distinct from the one

⁴⁷ John Crowley’s 2015 Oscar nominated film adaptation of *Brooklyn* also omits English-language subtitles during this scene.

she now leads, as “the life she had lost.” But, the letters she receives from home somehow propel her back into her old landscape. Of this rush of memory Eilis now experiences, Tóibín writes, “all this came to her like a terrible weight and she felt for a second she was going to cry” (69). In this moment, the memories Eilis holds of home are painful and debilitating to her as she experiences her new life. It is as though her past and present selves are in conflict with one another instead of existing as two parts of the same life. Memories of her previously lived experiences are insoluble within her present circumstances.

These letters thrust Eilis into incredible turmoil, as she recognizes a degree of ownership she held over her former life. Tóibín writes:

The rooms in the house on Friary Street belonged to her, she thought; when she moved in them she was really there. In the town, if she walked to the shop or to the Vocational School, the air, the light, the ground, it was all solid and part of her, even if she met no one familiar. (69)

Eilis does identify a distinct familiarity that she felt at home. She felt entirely present while in Ireland, she was “really there.” Just as Anzaldúa identifies the landscape of her cultural upbringing as part of her, so too does Eilis feel as though the most elemental components of her home are “solid and part of her,” as though they are indistinguishable from her own person. In contrast, though, Tóibín writes of her perspective toward Brooklyn that “nothing here was part of her. It was false, empty, she thought” (69). Eilis attempts to reground herself within her surroundings through a custom she has practiced throughout her life. She “closed her eyes and tried to think, as she had done so many times in her life, of something she was looking forward to, but there was nothing. Not the slightest thing. Not even Sunday” (69). Even the elements of

her environment that had shifted rather seamlessly between Ireland and the United States, like attending church on Sunday, did not bring Eilis any comfort.

Thus, Eilis's inability to connect propels her into acute homesickness. The first image we have of Eilis's homesickness is as she dreams of home the night following receiving her letters.

One of the dreams was about the courthouse at the top of Friary Hill in Enniscorthy. She remembered now how much the neighbours had dreaded the day when the court sat . . . because sometimes the court ordered children to be taken into care, put into orphanages or industrial schools or foster homes . . . sometimes inconsolable mothers could be found screaming, howling outside the courthouse as their children were taken away. But her dream had no screaming women, just a group of silent children, Eilis among them, standing in the line, knowing that they would soon be led away on the orders of a judge (70).

This scene could be read as a lurking memory from home creeping up as Eilis reads letters, and for the courthouse scene to reflect nothing more than a childhood fear Eilis once held—one in which she and her siblings were taken from her mother. Yet, the more compelling reading of this scene, and the one which speaks clearly to the homesickness in which Eilis is now thrust, would stress how this courthouse scene may mimic, in Eilis's estimation, her own immigration process. That the courthouse actively participates in separating children from their families may speak to how emigration from Ireland becomes so systemic within the larger socio-political structure. In this vein, the children, who we imagine to be poor and maltreated kids in need of constant care, reflect the many thousands of Irish youth who have emigrated away from their families—their motherland—in search of a more sustainable existence. Eilis's dream is that she becomes wrapped up in this methodical emigration, and she wakes up to realize that, in large part, she has.

She, like so many others before her including her brothers, emigrates from Ireland because it is her best opportunity to provide both for herself and her family, and she does so through an almost systematized fashion. Because Eilis's emigration is arranged for her, and she "is not included in the decisions to have her emigrate,"⁴⁸ the passivity of this dream recalls Eilis's ambivalence at the start of her migration process. It acts as a micro-return to the acquiescent girl she is at the beginning of her migration.

The effects of Eilis's homesickness penetrate into her daily routine in America, and make it nearly impossible for her to move forward within this routine. Eilis's job in sales, according to Miss Fortini, requires the ability to be personable, positive, and outwardly happy at all times. Eilis usually does not struggle to embody this image of a happy and helpful saleswoman, but finds herself "wondering how she would face going back to the evening meal with the others and the long night alone in a room that had nothing to do with her" (71). Though Eilis does make it through the day, she does not shake the depression she now faces, and is especially upset when confronting her "tomb of a bedroom and all the thoughts that would come when she lay awake and all the dreams that would come when she slept" in Mrs. Kehoe's house (72). Notably, Eilis not only views the physical places in her environment as spurring her homesickness— her bedroom in America, her home in Ireland, the courthouse— but the more theoretical elements that rear up in the physical places. She dreads the thoughts and dreams that haunt her while she is in her bedroom at Mrs. Kehoe's. In her homesickness, Eilis does begin to question whether or not her family could even provide her comfort in this moment, and whether they even truly understand her.

⁴⁸ Costello-Sullivan, *Mother/Country*, 195.

None of them could help her. She had lost all of them. They would not find out about this; she would not put it into a letter. And because of this she understood that they would never know her now. Maybe, she thought, they had never known her, any of them, because if they had, then they would have had to realize what this would be like for her. (73)

Not only does Eilis feel isolated from her surroundings, as if no one can relate with what she is going through, she simultaneously feels as though she cannot communicate her homesickness with her family. Just as Eilis feels as though she may not tell anyone she mistakes an Irish immigrant as her father during Christmas, so too is she compelled to hide her homesickness. While her brother has shared with her, in attenuated form, his own battle with homesickness when he moves to England, Eilis questions whether even her family understands who she is. To her, the homesickness she experiences is unique to her individual self, and if her family really knows who she is then they never would have encouraged her to emigrate from Ireland so that she would have to face this experience. However, one more positive reading of this internal dialogue, in spite of Eilis's clear anguish, is that she does seem to have a fairly clear grasp of her own individual identity in order both to acknowledge the emotions she feels and to evaluate herself as the kind of person uniquely disposed to this kind of anguish.

After recovering from her homesickness, it is not until Rose's death that Eilis again comes to question why she emigrated. When Father Flood tells her that Rose died suddenly in her sleep, Eilis hits her breaking point, and asks:

“Why did I ever come over here?” she asked, but she knew that he could not understand her because she was sobbing so much. She took the handkerchief from

him and blew her nose. “Why did I ever come over here?” she asked again. “Rose wanted a better life for you,” he replied. (179-180)

Eilis’s inclination, upon first learning of her sister’s death, is to repel her surrounding circumstance, to ask why she ever immigrated to the United States. But, just as when Eilis decides not to write home to her family about her homesickness because she feels they do not understand her, so too does she recognize, here, that Father Flood “could not understand her” because she is sobbing. We do, though, get to see a change in Eilis’s character because rather than allowing what she says to go on misunderstood, Eilis repeats herself. She makes her thoughts and her experiences relatable to Father Flood. Yet there remains a kind of disconnect between what Eilis perceives as being best for her within this moment, and what her family, Rose, believes is best for Eilis. Father Flood reminds Eilis that she emigrated largely because Rose wanted her to do so and that Rose envisioned a life for Eilis better than the one she would be able to achieve in Ireland. At this point within the novel Eilis has already transformed so many aspects of her life, especially with Tony, her Italian-American love interest and eventual husband, now a permanent fixture in her life.

Much in the same way her family dictates Eilis’s migration to the United States without acknowledging her input, so too do they compel her to return to Ireland after Rose’s death. Jack, Eilis’s brother, writes her a letter dated for the day they bury Rose. In it he states:

The thing is that we have to go back to work and I don’t think Mammy knows that yet. She thinks one of us might be able to stay but we can’t, you know. Work beyond is not like that. I don’t know what it’s like over there but we have to be back and Mammy is going to be here on her own . . . I think she wants you to come home. (187-188).

Just as Rose and her mother presume that Eilis's life in Enniscorthy can be interrupted so that she may migrate to the United States in order to provide for her family, so too does Jack assume that Eilis's life in Brooklyn can be halted in order to fulfill her family duty. She "immediately surrenders to the cultural expectation of her brothers that she should be the one to throw herself on the sword of caring for her mother,"⁴⁹ and thus Eilis returns to Enniscorthy almost as passively as she left in the first place, though not before marrying Tony. At first, Eilis's return home, and the familiarity it provides, contrasts with the foreignness of Brooklyn Eilis experiences during her periods of homesickness. Unlike her bedroom at Mrs. Kehoe's that she claimed does not feel like her own, her house in Ireland "did not seem strange; Eilis noted only its solid, familiar aura, the lingering smell of cooked food, and the shadows, the sense of her mother's vivid presence" (211). Initially, home is familiar to Eilis, and she glides quite easily into the routines she, and Rose, had established before Eilis ever left home. However, Rose's absence proves a more marked shift in environment than Eilis initially recognizes, and destabilizes Eilis's ability to reconnect with her homeland. Tóibín writes, "nothing had prepared her for the quietness of Rose's bedroom and she felt almost nothing as she stood looking at it" (211). Even Eilis's bedroom seems "empty of life" and appears of little significance to her, a clear contrast to her previous longing for the familiarity and liveliness of this same bedroom (212). The components of isolation, foreignness, and unfamiliarity Tóibín writes as elements of Eilis's interaction with her environment in Brooklyn are now imposed on her home and old life in Enniscorthy. The two competing locales rupture into one another such that Eilis's experiences in one geography are transferred to the other, and this furthers Tóibín's presentation of geography as ambulatory.

⁴⁹ Costello-Sullivan, *Mother/Country*, 213.

Eilis's mother quickly tries to make Eilis fill the vacancy Rose leaves behind— getting Eilis to wear Rose's old clothing and even take over Rose's old job, while Rose's absence continues to undercut the familiarity Eilis once feels toward home. Eilis even realizes that she has seldom been alone with her mother, and grows uncomfortable in the house they all once shared (213). While in the United States, Eilis keeps private the components of her migration experience she identifies as inexplicable to others. Back in Ireland, Eilis continues this same pattern of privacy she adopts in the United States, especially in keeping her marriage to Tony private. Even with her closest friends, Eilis realizes that “if she were to tell Nancy or Annette about her own secret wedding, attended by no one except her and Tony, they would respond with silence and bewilderment. It would seem too strange” (220). Eilis has gone from a girl whose personality seems entirely dictated by the landscape within which she grows up, as passive and acquiescent to her family to a woman with her own private decisions and experiences.

Now, however, Eilis does not fit neatly into the prescribed Enniscorthy upbringing. She is a woman with secrets from her American life that are simply misplaced within a small-town Irish context. Her friend, Nancy, even tells Eilis, “you have an air about you” which makes her seem different to all those from Enniscorthy who really know her (239). It is thus that Eilis begins to claim her individuality and uniqueness more openly. When her mother tries to dress Eilis in Rose's old clothing, Eilis obfuscates before finally refusing the clothes outright. When her mother questions why Eilis would refuse Rose's clothing, asking “they are not good enough for you,” Eilis responds, “I have my own clothes” (221). The passivity through which Eilis once navigates her Irish setting gives way to Eilis's more certain sense of individuality.

While we can identify Eilis's estrangement and newfound conviction in her individuality while she is home, her ultimate return to Brooklyn, to Tony, is quite similarly passive to the

manner in which she emigrated in the first place. Eilis finally tells her mother that she is married, her mother says “Eily, if you are married you should be with your husband,” to which Eilis simply replies “I know” (258). There is neither a declaration of patriotism to the United States, nor does Eilis firmly position herself as an official immigrant except to say “I have to go back” (258). Eilis does not even name the United States as the place to which she must return apart from noting that Tony is from Brooklyn. Like with her initial migration, Eilis’s family obligations drive her move to the United States, and Eilis seems almost passive within these decisions.

Before leaving Enniscorthy, Eilis imagines that Jim Farrell, a Enniscorthy man who has been courting Eilis during her return to Ireland, would arrive at her mother’s house. She imagines that her mother would tell him “she has gone back to Brooklyn,” and looks almost smiling to the “years ahead, when these words would come to mean less and less to the man who heard them and would come to mean more and more to herself” (262). Eilis’s final journey in *Brooklyn* is a return rather than a migration. Yet, Tóibín does write that this return would not constitute the finalization of her migration process; rather, the years ahead will strengthen the meaning of her going “back to Brooklyn” (262).

Ultimately, as the particularities of Eilis’s experiences in Brooklyn are reflected in Enniscorthy, her return to Ireland is punctuated by the kind of isolation, discomfort, and longing for family she experiences in Brooklyn. This doubling of the migratory experience both in Brooklyn and in Enniscorthy further indicates how the elements pertaining to physical geography within Tóibín’s text become movable, with Eilis navigating much of the migratory experience independent of exact location. When Eilis is away from her original home, Enniscorthy, she is compelled, through memory and dream, to experience the particulars of home she presumes lost

to her past life. Even the people she encounters during Christmas in Brooklyn act as placeholders for her family members she has since lost to death or left behind in Ireland. Meanwhile, in Ireland she is similarly reminded of her life in Brooklyn, and feels a distinct emptiness and foreignness in Ireland that she once associates with The United States. Tóibín ultimately furthers the view of “geography, identity, and culture as fluid spaces” against which migrants constantly must define and renegotiate their position.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Jay, *Global Matters*, 75.

No one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
 saying-
 leave, run away from me now
 i don't know what i've become
 but i know that anywhere
 is safer than here
 ~ Warsan Shire, "Home"⁵¹

Chapter 4: The Return

The Kite Runner

In today's climate, a certain skepticism surrounds American global aid initiatives like English language programs, social service trips to build infrastructure, pharmaceutical intervention in treating medical epidemics, etc. And rightfully so. These imperial structures of international engagement stem largely from ideologies which assume that the economically and politically stronger country has dominion over comparatively lower-ranked nations. Yet, this skepticism does not predict a decrease in America's internationally focused "aid" activity. As the 21st century continues to yield strengthening global communication through social media networks, flash news, and faster and more affordable travel opportunities, the United States' ideological stronghold over what is progressive and what is primitive is steadfast.

Of his time working in a Persian Gulf state's university, Edward Said writes, "I was flabbergasted to discover that in sheer numerical terms English attracted the largest number of young people of any department in the university, but disheartened to find that the curriculum

⁵¹ Warsan Shire. "Home, By Warsan Shire," Care.org, http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/lesson_1_-_home-poem-by-warsan-shire.pdf

was divided about equally between what was called linguistics . . . and literature.”⁵² Observing the ubiquity of English-language programming, and the necessity of speaking functional English, Said identifies how elements of our imperialist histories have crawled out from under our oriental rugs and clawed their way into international dialogue, donning guises of intellectual, economic, and political enlightenment. Or perhaps the existence of imperialist tropes consists less of a re-emergence than a continuity, not needing to crawl out from their hiding places and instead slithering easily across the lines of history.

And while we might hope that those at Said’s temporary teaching post are interested in English language and literature so that they may delve into the rich intellectual lives of authors and literary scholars—so that they, as we liberal arts enthusiasts claim, can learn “how to think,” Said nips this budding hope. He writes that “many of the students proposed to end up working for airlines, or banks, in which English was the world-wide lingua-franca,”⁵³ and that this pragmatic, mechanical approach to language courses “all but terminally consigned English to the level of a technical language stripped of expressive and aesthetic characteristics and denuded of any critical or self-conscious dimensions.”⁵⁴ In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is able to decide to study English and Creative writing in America from a more literary standpoint, as he does not have to rely on English skills learned in these courses to provide him with basic proficiency for entering into a global market. Baba, however, does question whether a creative writing degree will confer upon Amir employable skills, asking, “They pay for that, making up stories?” (117). In the United States and other English-speaking nations, the study of English literature need not be

⁵² Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 304.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.

geared toward elementary English-language fluency, allowing space for a more liberal arts agenda.

We comfortably direct our cynicism towards the mechanisms through which the United States and other western powers maintain dominion over the global landscape, with countless celebrities, religious groups, and co-eds alike all critiqued for exploiting indigenous peoples while on what a good friend of mine once termed “voluncations.”⁵⁵ And most of us today would laugh at the idea of some American dream governing success both domestically and abroad. Yet according to Mohammad Shabangu and Sam Naidu, Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* “relies on a type of exoticization which in contemporary literature is, arguably, a paradigmatic example of neo-Orientalist representations of the Middle East and the Muslim world”⁵⁶ *The Kite Runner*, in spite of its entangled relationship with homeland versus home country, is in decided support of some of these more romanticized perceptions of immigration and assimilation. We see this, of course, while Amir is in the United States, but also through how the English language becomes a vehicle for information and access during his time as a refugee in Islamabad. The English language in *The Kite Runner*, especially when juxtaposed against Farsi or Arabic, becomes a source of cultural, intellectual, and emotional literacy to which Amir clings.

In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Soraya tells Amir that he will be granted a visa to enter the United States with Sohrab, and that this visa will permit him time to apply for Sohrab’s adoption papers. This takes place decades after we first meet Amir and Hassan as boys, with

⁵⁵ According to said friend, a “voluncation” consists of travelling to a second- or third-world nation while on a service-minded trip, and returning home with a sunburn and cameral roll filled with tonally confused pictures of exploited women and children, and alcoholic beverages. In fact, a quick google search of the word “voluncation” will garner countless websites bolstering volunteer trips abroad.

⁵⁶ Mohammad Shabangu and Sam Naidu, “The First world’s Third World Expert: Self-Exoticization in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 40-56, 40.

Soraya as Amir's wife and Sohrab as the orphaned son of Hassan and his wife Farzana.⁵⁷ In the second half of the novel, Sohrab very much fills Hassan's role, and his character arc is marred with the same physical and sexual abuse his father suffers.⁵⁸ Amir's joy in learning he may actually be able to take Sohrab to the United States quickly turns to anguish, as the scene lurches forward in time to the hospital after Amir discovers Sohrab has attempted suicide. Though Amir is not allowed access into the hospital's trauma room where they are treating Sohrab, he pushes his way through. According to Amir, however, "a tall, thickset man in blue presses his palm against my chest and pushes me back . . . I shove forward and I curse him, but he says you cannot be here, he says it in English . . . 'you must wait'" (300). In writing that this small phrase—"you must wait"—is stated in English, Hosseini reminds us that English is not the default-language within this Pakistani context. Moments later we see how linguistic barriers become limiting in a moment during which Amir seems dazed and searching for some simple form of human connection and understanding.

I see a nurse talking to a policeman near the restroom. I take the nurse's elbow and pull, I want to know which way is west. She doesn't understand and the lines of her face deepen when she frowns. My throat aches and my eyes sting with sweat, each breath is like inhaling fire, and I think I am weeping. I ask again. I beg. The policeman is the one who points. (301)

Amir's specific question, "where is west?," poses another kind of confusion within this scene. He states that the nurse does not understand his question, and we take this to mean that she simply does not understand the language he uses to ask it. But, as readers, we are perhaps

⁵⁷ Both Hassan and his wife are shot and killed by the Taliban, leaving Sohrab an orphaned child. Through the events of the novel, we come to understand that Hassan is actually Amir's half-brother, though as children they are unaware of this, which makes Sohrab Amir's nephew.

⁵⁸ Assef, Hassan's rapist and abuser, is also Sohrab's rapist and abuser.

confused by the question itself. We might assume that the hospital waiting area is in a western wing. We might even wonder if Amir is so lost within this moment that the west—America—becomes a focal point from which he can recollect himself and orient within a familiar and, at this moment, achievable goal. It is not until a few moments later that we learn the point of Amir's focus on west.

While *The Kite Runner* does present English as a source of information, and in some cases the language even acts as a passport to greater opportunity, the novel simultaneously posits that English may not provide transport to a more spiritual realm. Instead, Amir accesses his language of prayer, Arabic, in order for him to communicate with a higher power.

I throw my makeshift *jai-namaz*, my prayer rug, on the floor and I get on my knees, lower my forehead to the ground, my tears soaking through the sheet. I bow to the west. Then I remember I haven't prayed for over fifteen years. I have long forgotten the words. But it doesn't matter, I will utter those words I still remember: *La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah*. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. (301)

Even though Amir acknowledges he mostly has forgotten how to pray, the words that he returns to are still in Arabic, and are the most foundational words to the Islamic faith. Italicizing the Arabic, while certainly a way to mark a language shift, visually demarks the prayer language from the rest of the text. However, that Hosseini chooses to incorporate Farsi and Arabic in the text through transliterating them into the Latin alphabet instead of using the alphabet for Arabic or Farsi questions the power Hosseini grants to non-English languages in *The Kite Runner*.

Why, when Hosseini does provide the appropriate English translation of the text, does he also choose to transliterate the text out of its original script? As Arabic is itself a language with a

vibrant literary and cultural tradition, Said notes how English often takes a decidedly subservient role in Islamic traditions. He observes through his teaching post that, in Islam, “English has sunk to a low, uninteresting, and attenuated level” in comparison to Arabic’s rich hieratic tradition.⁵⁹ The readability that the transliterated text provides to an English-speaking audience perhaps implicates Hosseini’s intentions in both transliterating the Arabic and then including the English translation. And, perhaps there too is something to be said about making the Islamic prayers readable enough so that it at least sonically confronts the non-Muslim and English-speaking readers. Maybe this is Hosseini’s way of participating in an increasingly globalized society that holds a goal of more universal cultural awareness. But whether the transliterated text is included for esthetic purposes, maintaining the flow of the passage and allowing the English reader at least to utter the language without requiring fluency in the Arabic alphabet, does not address the blatant and literal Anglicization of words and ideas over which English has no logical claim. At best, the transliteration helps deconstruct perceptions of Arabic or the Islamic faith as relegated to some far off east that is untranslatable within a “western” context. At worst, it furthers an imperialist sense of entitlement to, and ownership of, language and ideologies that simply do not belong to every readership.

Geographically, that Amir even includes he is praying toward the west also implicates western, and even English-medium, ideology within an incredibly non-western circumstance. In Islam, the direction to which official prayer takes place is always toward the holy city of Mecca, which is located in Saudi Arabia. When in Pakistan, then, the general direction of Mecca is to the west, so there is a way to read this scene as a continuation of the return to tradition and comfort Amir is experiencing. It also is incredibly situational. Had Amir’s return to prayer taken place in

⁵⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 306.

the United States, he would be facing eastward. However, that throughout the novel Amir does look to the west outside of a religious context—toward the United States—perhaps overshadows the religious practicality of the direction he faces, and implies a continued gaze toward the United States as providing safety and liberation from the horrific situations Amir faces.

Similarly, while this scene does posit a kind of return to Amir's past self, referencing the fifteen years that have elapsed since Amir last prayed, it does not imply a complete ideological return for Amir. In fact, it seems a moment of further removal from the ideologies within which Amir is raised. Baba is decidedly against the existence of a god or deity, and Amir very much learns and grows within this mindset. However, this scene in the hospital seemingly undoes fifteen years of learned behavior, as Amir states, "I see now that Baba was wrong, there is a God, there always had been" (301). That Amir now believes God not only exists, but has always existed disrupts the timeframe of Amir's learned beliefs, and also positions God's existence as itself outside of the timeframe of his experiences.

Amir then frames his belief in God as consistent with a sort of geographical setting.

I see him here, in the eyes of the people in this corridor of desperation. This is the real house of God, this is where those who have lost God will find Him, not the white *masjid* with its bright diamond lights and towering minarets. There is a God, there has to be, and now I will pray . . . I bow to the west and kiss the ground and promise . . . I will set on a pilgrimage to that sweltering city in the desert and bow before the Ka'bah too. (301)

Amir's spiritual desperation is incredibly resonant in this moment, as he asks God to spare Sohrab's life. Yet, Amir still appears to shun the spiritual spaces typically attributed to Islam. He claims that rather than existing in the "*masjid*," the Arabic word for mosque, God exists in the

hospital corridors filled with desperate people anguishing over the health and safety of loved ones. Again, the importance of language is doubled. Amir is still resonating with the tradition, and therefore Arabic, words and associations he has built around Islam, but here he is shunning the importance of the *masjid* as it relates to God's existence. And again, rather than stating that he is looking to Mecca, or naming Saudi Arabia in his prayer, he still claims to "bow to the west" while he pleads with God. Even when he more directly refers to pilgrimage to Mecca, he does not name the place. Instead, he promises to one day visit "that sweltering city"— not identifying it as a particularly sacred geographical place.

To return again to Said and the role of English language in a postcolonial context, Said states:

Thus using the very same English of people who aspire to literary accomplishments of a very high order, who allow a critical use of the language to permit a decolonizing of the mind, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it, co-exists with very different new communities in a less appealing figuration. In places where English was once the language of ruler and administrator, it is a much diminished presence, either a technical language with wholly instrumental characteristics and features, or a foreign language with various implicit connections to the larger English-speaking world, but its presence competes with the impressively formidable emergent reality of organized religious fervor.⁶⁰

So what does this mean for a text that centers on migration from Afghanistan, a country decidedly entrenched within a colonial history, and which centers on a Muslim protagonist, to be written in English? That the Farsi and Arabic language used within the texts— typically

⁶⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 5.

associated either with an Afghani tradition or larger principle of Islamic faith— are transliterated and anglicized certainly diminishes their ability to tower over English even in religious contexts. What does it mean, then, that the story itself is told in English? Said suggests that working with English at such an elevated level permits a decolonization of the mind. At the very least, Amir's narrating this story in English does establish a sort of liberation from the trauma of political upheaval within Afghanistan, and poses as a way for him to navigate his changing environments and circumstances consistently.

Amir's religious hesitance, too, serves as a way through which Hosseini further establishes *The Kite Runner* as a text readable and enjoyable for a Bush-era American-Christian audience that, at best, is ambivalent toward the Middle East and its traditions and, at worst, violently opposed to it.

Amir's hesitant approach to his inherited religion stands in marked, perhaps deliberate, contrast to the stereotypical image of the fanatical Muslim. With his divided attachments and his hybrid identity, Amir offers a portrayal of Afghanistan that preserves the well-nigh kitschy allure of its perceived foreigners but simultaneously renders its specific cultural practices emotionally resonant for American readers. Moreover, his narrative of sin and redemption conforms to both Christian and Muslim concepts of salvation, and it is thus well designed to inspire the kinds of identification, capable of accommodating difference, that its readers consistently describe.⁶¹

Unlike Tóibín, Hosseini seems to polish over dissimilarities in Afghani and American culture, going so far as to anglicize the language and secularize his protagonist. Though *The Kite Runner*

⁶¹ Aubry, *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans*, 182

does require that Amir return to Afghanistan in order to retrieve Sohrab and right the wrongs of his past, and also suggests that Amir returns at least partially to the lost religious traditions of his childhood, these returns are all contextualized within this larger picture of Amir as translatable and digestible for American-Christian audiences. Because of bureaucratic red-tape which prohibits Sohrab's adoption if his parents' death cannot be proven, Amir learns that he may not be able to adopt Sohrab, and tells Sohrab he may have to return to the orphanage. Soon after, Amir is granted a visa to bring Sohrab to the United States, but not before Sohrab's desperation culminates in his suicide attempt. That after Sohrab survives his suicide attempt he goes from a withdrawn child to ceasing to speak altogether also pinpoints Hosseini's muting of Afghani people and experiences that do not fit neatly into this American-Christian concept of redemption. It is Sohrab's desperation to come to America, coupled with his aversion to returning to the orphanage should Amir fail in adopting him, that drives this impulse of self-harm when he learns Amir may be unable to adopt him. But for Sohrab, his demonstrated desperation to come to the United States culminates in his insulation and silencing once he arrives.

I am from there, I am from here,
 but I am neither there nor here.
 I have two names, which meet and part...
 And I have two languages, but I have long forgotten
 which is the language of my dreams.
 ~ Mahmoud Darwish⁶²

Conclusion

In the United States, we call the ceremony in which an immigrant is made a United States citizen the “Naturalization Ceremony.” For many, this ceremony exemplifies two points; an end and a beginning. It is the end of an often long and arduous process, bound up in red tape, to becoming a legal citizen of the United States. It is also supposedly the beginning of a new and markedly more Americanized life. Central to the ceremony is the Oath of Allegiance⁶³ which requires that those applying for citizenship swear fealty to the United States. In doing, they must also repudiate any allegiance to their country of nationality, promising to forgo any former ties to another nation that they once held. That the ceremony “naturalizes” immigrants to the United States implies that these immigrants previously held an unnatural state, bespeaking the exoticization and otherness which surrounds the immigration process.

But, as Eilis’s and Amir’s stories demonstrate to us, the migration experience is not so clearly defined through this kind of limitation which dictates beginnings and ends, and nor are the otherness, isolation, and cultural negotiation that coincide with migration limited to the

⁶² Mahmoud Darwish, “Mahmoud Darwish Bids Edward Said Farewell,” www.mahmouddarwish.com/english/Edward_Said.htm.

⁶³ There are numerous videos online of Naturalization Ceremonies from around the country, and while these ceremonies vary in length, speakers’ remarks, and number of applicants for citizenship, the Oath of Allegiance is the most central and steadfast component of these ceremonies. After its recitation, the applicants for citizenship are deemed United States citizens.

specific timeframe of the immigration itself. Instead, the nuance of the migration process, or as Tóibín might say, the *and* of it all, is that as Eilis and Amir migrate, so too do they return to their Irish and Afghani origins. Though they are the protagonists of the novels, literally the leads of their migration narratives, both Eilis and Amir fall situationally passive to their fluctuations between migration and returns. Ultimately, Tóibín and Hosseini present two protagonists who, whether through fluctuating places or times, are constantly required to grapple with their past selves and locales against their present circumstances in order to construct livable futures for themselves.

And Amir and Eilis both “successfully” emigrate from their respective nations to the United States. They seek education, accept job opportunities, and form their families all post-migration. However, even these successes that punctuate their narratives do not prevent Amir and Eilis from grappling with the ever-constant presence of their past lives. Amir is so ashamed of his childhood betrayal of Hassan that, after trying to establish a family with Soraya in the United States, he travels back to Kabul in order to redeem himself from his past. That Soraya and Amir even try, and fail, to have biological children leaves a clear space for Sohrab, who embodies so much of Hassan, to fill this void Hassan leaves. Similarly, while Eilis does meet Tony in the United States, and her eventual marriage to him drives her return to Brooklyn, Eilis still returns to Ireland to satisfy her familial obligations there. She even explores the possibility of renegeing on the obligation she now holds to Tony, as his wife, in favor of marrying Jim Farrell and more permanently tying herself to Ireland as she ties herself to the United States in her marriage to Tony.

Both *Brooklyn* and *The Kite Runner* eventuate in Eilis and Amir’s ultimate matriculation to the United States, and present this immigration as ultimately liberating to the characters. Eilis

is unbound from her Irish home to which she no longer feels accustomed, and Amir redeems himself after failing Hassan through bringing Sohrab to the United States. I have been especially critical of Hosseini's Anglicization and Americanization of *The Kite Runner* in order to create a more readable and digestible novel for contemporary, Bush-era American-Christian readers, and have suggested that Tóibín's exclusivity of access permits a clearer depiction of the tension between the competing locales of Brooklyn and Enniscorthy. However, I must qualify this criticism with the reality that Tóibín has less cultural difference, and tension, to navigate between the United States and Ireland. While he does write about the 1950s, and certainly Irish emigrants during this period may have faced the kind of discrimination American society directs toward immigrants, Tóibín ultimately writes in a contemporary context within which readers from the United States do not exoticize Ireland or Irish immigrants to the same degree to which they do immigrants from the Middle East.

Tóibín does achieve international circulation with his work, and *Brooklyn*'s popular success culminates in its adaption into an award-winning film. While he is not an Irish emigrant, he has spent a notably large portion of his career teaching and working in the United States, so his most immediate readership are Irish people whose lived histories reflect the narrative Tóibín presents as well as contemporary American audiences that do not exoticize the Irish migrants as they do migrants from different locales. As an Afghani-American immigrant himself, Hosseini's immediate audience is the United States readership, so he must adequately convince this audience that an Afghani-American immigration narrative presents universally digestible and truths that resonate with them and their Americanized points of view. As Aubry reminds us, "readers do not just imaginatively inhabit Amir's experiences in escapist fashion; they use the

novel to recast and disambiguate their own experiences.”⁶⁴ While we are rightfully weary of appropriating the lived experiences of others for the sake of our own catharsis, we must simultaneously acknowledge that Hosseini and Tóibín foster in their readers a more nuanced view of the migration process that places immigrants within the entirety of their lived experiences, reflecting their moveable and fluctuating migration narratives.

⁶⁴ Aubry, *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans*, 186.

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