A bricolage of identifications: storying postmigrant belonging

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ABSTRACT
How, and at what point, does a person, or a group of people, described as migrant or of migrant origin, cease to be thought of as migrants or exclusively in terms of their ethnicity? This article responds to this question by exploring a range of theoretical arguments in relation to what has come to be called postmigration. The emphasis is on second and third generation “migrants”, born in their country of residence, and on the ways in which through developing new cultural and representational practices they seek to go beyond confining and essentialising definitions which have an “othering” effect. At the same time, it is acknowledged that those of the first generation may also be engaged in a similar struggle to find agency in forms of the future. In speculating on possible meanings of postmigration, two texts will be examined, one a work of fiction, the other a social and cultural survey, which implicitly or explicitly address ways of transcending the limits of minority ascription in the context of racism, xenophobia, traditionalism, and Islamophobia.

The opening sentence of one of the first books about postmigration provides a good starting point for the discussion to follow: “We need to recognise that [...] dichotomized cultural differences[...]are vastly overstated in ethnic discourse”¹ and link this with another important reservation about the originary, or the primordial, idea of ethnicity:

In systems where “ascribed” cultural differences rationalize structures of inequality, ethnicity takes on a cogent existential reality. It is this process of reification[...]that gives it the appearance of being an autonomous factor in the ordering of the social world.²

This “cogent existential reality” is a way of describing those who are “othered” by relations of power, fixed in essentialized identities and ethnic absolutes, which justify inequalities, discrimination and racism. One of the tasks involved in the theorising of postmigration is that of de-essentializing so-called migrant coherences and homogeneities and breaking up ascribed identities, bearing in mind what Bauman says about the ways in which dichotomized cultural differences can be overstated in ethnic discourse. Postmigration is, firstly and most simply, a literal description of a status but it is also, like post-colonialism, a critique of terms such as migrant, or person with foreign background, used to describe someone born in a particular country whose family origins are elsewhere. It is also a useful concept for exploring the conflicts and contradictions, the dialectic of belonging and unbelonging, the split subjectivities which, in many cases, are a feature of postmigrant belonging, although we also need to be wary of using “belonging” too readily. In fact, we may want to consider whether it is a belonging as such or something more fluid and variable. The use of the prefix “post” is, therefore, not just temporal but also epistemological in the sense that it raises the question of how, and what point, someone ceases to be thought of as a “migrant” or in terms of their supposed ethnicity.

To date, much of the work on postmigration has been ethnographic and in the social sciences—e.g. the study of clubbing cultures among queer and “minority” groups—or has been articulated in relation to theatre, Turkish-German plays as well as a range of productions by directors from other minority backgrounds, for example.³ I should like to try to broaden the debate to take account of a range of relatively new cultural and representational practices which have produced, and in many instances have been produced by, what might be called provisionally, new postmigrant ethnicities. These new practices—I am thinking of the work of filmmakers like Fatih Akin in Germany, John Akomfrah in the UK and a host of writers in Italy, Germany, France and the UK—are a sequel to what, some years ago, I called diasporic cultural fictions.⁴ In some ways, they have emerged from diasporic families but it is limiting to describe their work as diasporic, as many of the producers, artists, writers, and musicians have not migrated from anywhere. Nevertheless, I want to speak of

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new aesthetics, new narratives, and new belongings and the ways they are articulated with specific representational practices which might be termed “postmigrant”, linked in some ways with the concept of diaspora but also detached from it in so far as the practices emphasize a present and future trajectory rather than anchorage in an “originary” culture. They may start out from a “minority” position, from the margins, but develop within new fields of reference to a point of being part of, for example. British culture, or of national/global cultural discourse, what Habermas called, “a common horizon of interpretation”.

One of the major obstacles to this kind of activity, the products of cultural diversity and second/third generational belonging is, in the UK for instance, the racialisation of Black and Asian people (people of colour) by the coloniality of power which I shall return to later. It is all very well to speak of a co-existence of cultures in countries like Britain, France, or Germany but how do we move beyond the implicit, and often explicit, racializing of postmigrant positioning? There is no simple answer to such a complex issue but, at a basic level, we can start by rejecting, as irrelevant, descriptions and labels such as “artists with a migratory, or foreign background” (in German, Migrationshintergrund) with its implications of secondariness in relation to hegemonic “primary” culture. Even terms such as BME/BAME should perhaps be seen as temporary, something to go beyond at some point in time but strategically necessary in the first instance.

Postmigrant aesthetic practices represent a challenge to ways in which we are accustomed to talking about questions of integration, or assimilation (to what we need to ask?), so-called roots or originary cultural belongings, language, inequality and, of course, identity. I am not sure that postmigration should be seen only, or if at all, in terms of identity, with its notion of fixity. As Ahmed Boubekeur argues: “Don’t overlook the ambivalence as opposed to identitarian assignation—it’s a right to be here and be elsewhere, without the obligation to have to choose.” In this context, I prefer to think of interculturalism rather than multiculturalism, with its potential for separation and essentialism. In the current British context, it is of interest to note that “mixed race” was introduced as a category on the Census form in 1991 and that by 2011 the number of people self-identifying in that category had reached 1.25 million, double the number in the 2001 census. This suggests that the “white majority” also have a role in postmigration in terms of marriage or partnership and is more complex and less monolithic than the term might indicate. Interculturalism is more fluid and dynamic, more of a dialogue, as it suggests narratives in motion, mobile and changeable belongings, with identities which are always under construction, incomplete: being here and elsewhere.

An interesting example of this fluidity is given in a chapter by Gunnar Alsmark entitled “Masooma—A Ugandan-Asian Muslim Swede” in which the woman interviewed, Masooma, describes herself in this way: “My belonging is mixed. I am a Muslim. I am an Indian. I am a Swede. I am married to a Kurd. And I am an Oriental too, who lives in the West. No one expects me to be just one person”. What she is describing is an achieved set of multiple identities which Alsmark calls syncretic. It is significant that one term Masooma does not use to describe herself is that of “migrant”. The syncretism Alsmark refers to as “the transformation of cultures into new combinations” is another possible way of thinking about postmigration. Masooma is integrated into her new society but is also something more, a “bricolage of identifications” This “something more”, the figure who goes beyond, of excess, which I consider one of the characteristics of postmigration can be linked with what Vertovec and Cohen describe as “adaptation”:

Fluency of movement and switching codes between a number of discrete cultures and social organisations is perhaps a more subtle and telling form of adaptation than syncretism. To see large numbers of people pulling off this particular trick may truly signal that we are entering a global age.

Postmigrant may be more accurate than “global” as postmigrant perspectives confront ideological forms of nationalism, coloniality, and the state. This is even more pertinent to the UK since the June, 2016 referendum, but it is also an issue in much of Europe. Something which Etienne Balibar said about racism is relevant here:

In essence, modern racism is never simply a “relationship to the Other” based upon perception of cultural or sociological difference; it is a relationship to the Other mediated by the intervention of the State [via its apparatuses]. Better still—and it is here that a fundamentally unconscious dimension needs to be conceptualized—it is a confictual relationship to the state which is “lived” distortedly and “projected” as a relationship to the “Other”.

How can postmigrant perspectives/narratives challenge the “fundamentally unconscious dimension” of the relationship to the other fantasised at the level of populist rhetoric as the organic unity of the homogeneous nation, given that these same narratives are postulated as being “other”, something exterior to a normative view of society predicated upon the existence of an exterior group (even though within the nation) that does not belong to “the people”?

Postmigrancy cannot simply be celebrated or romanticised as a “new belonging” as it is an agonistic process, a struggle on several fronts—generational
and demographic. One of the major problems post-migration has to contend with is the notion of the presumed commonality, or identity, between always-existant national subjects, a fundamental aspect of subjectivity at the level of the symbolic, the cultural, the unconscious: a taken for granted European and white ethnicity, which is not even regarded as an ethnicity. I am speaking here of the symbolic and the rhetorical because, as already argued, in many European nations today a “mixed heritage” is increasingly common. Postmigration representations have to somehow interrupt/disrupt this ideological claim to “continuity” and introduce new levels of diversity and antagonism, expose the contingency and emptiness of nationalist signifiers, to go beyond the nation to formulate other, perhaps global, but not necessarily territorial, allegiances. Because the nation somehow fails to deliver, is never enough and is always unfulfilled, it is necessary to project this frustration onto alterity. The Danish People’s Party states: “Denmark belongs to the Danes…a multi-ethnic Denmark would mean the breaking down of our stable homogeneous society by anti-development and reactionary cultures”13 and the Golden Dawn in Greece declared in their statutes: “For nationalism, the People is not just an arithmetic total of individuals but the qualitative composition of humans with the same biological and cultural heritage”.14

Contemporary postmigration does not make any territorial, or national, claims, either to past or present affiliations. How, we need to ask, does the post migrant cease to be this racialized “other”? As I have said, we need to move away from representational strategies which focus exclusively upon ethnicity or migrancy or minority to explore narratives that are post-national/ist, post-ethnic and postmigrant in order to produce stories of complex subjectivities which unsettle, render unstable, ideas of otherness. Parati15 employs the useful concept of “talking back” to master political narratives about identities as a way of developing postmigrancy, not as a new category of separateness but as a condition marked by intercultural spaces, shared and collaborative dialogues/conversations in which host/migrant distinctions are placed under erasure in a new intersectional context within a destination culture; a destination, moreover which is beyond the nation, and which perhaps is never finally reached. These dialogues should be seen as generative activities, spaces of creativity, provisional, impermanent but, above all dynamic: a series of new alliances, new paradigms, multi-normative (in the sense of setting up a range of norms rather than thinking in terms of the norm) and associational, based upon a reversal of stereotypes and expectations. Postmigrant stories will take time to become, what Jerome Bruner calls “collective coins”, through a ‘narrative dialectic’,16 that is to say, a continuous struggle between opposing stories—residual, dominant, and emergent—until such times as they produce a subjective story which enters the popular imagination shorn of any foreign or migrant background. These stories will have the authority of an alternative way of seeing shared by, and creating, a new, active, “interpretive community”. It may be that these are different ways of telling a familiar story, with fresh energy and perhaps from a transcultural perspective which exceeds the limiting category of “migrant”.

Two further quotations from Graziella Parati should help clarify what I mean here by speaking of a “destination culture” which I see in terms of an arrival, a place to start from, rather than a settled position. I consider postmigration, in terms used by Walter Benjamin, as a “continua of transformation”, or, in Parati’s words: “A destination presupposes a journey that metaphorically, and in practice, translates, that is moves across borders and betrays them”,17 and “a destination culture requires a re-drawing of lines of identification beyond migration and ethnicity into less confining and postmigration and post-ethnic realms that make the use of the term ‘migrant literature’[or migrant writing] start to lose its validity”.18 Postmigration can be thought in terms of a crossroads, a site of exchange, working against confinement and definition by anachronistic labels, and a transformation which impacts upon, and interacts with, the majority population.

Two other critics have been useful in formulating my ideas about postmigration although neither of them uses the term. Edward Said speaks of an interface between the processes of filiation in which, like the first generation migrant, people are bound to a place of origin “by birth, nationality, profession” and, we might add, migration from, and affiliation in which new allegiances are formed by “social and political conviction, economic circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation”.19 This returns us to the contrast between the passive and active and given/chosen distinctions raised earlier, emphasising the role of the “historical and social actor” in interrogating the dominant narratives of the culture in which they are situated. The second critic is Adriana Cavarero for whom political space is not located in a geographical territory “but created whenever and wherever agonistic voices are raised in concert”.20 For her, political action is always seen in a relational perspective and I see postmigration as similarly “relational” and not bounded by territory but transnational in an age of globalization: “it helps to conceive of politics in terms of a contextual relation…which does not appeal to territory or identity myths of community”.21 This is an appropriate way of thinking about postmigration as is her concept of the “absolute local”: “the absolute local is thus the
name of a taking place of politics that has no pre-defined borders, nor any fixed or sacred confines. It is not a nation, nor a fatherland, nor a land [or homeland]. It extends as far as the interactive space that is generated by reciprocal communication”. Cavarero calls this interactive space an absolute local (locale absolute), “absolute” because freed of the territoriality of place and from every dimension that roots it in a continuity. I would argue that rather than thinking in terms of no continuity, it might be more productive to see postmigration as developing new continuities, critically different anchorages. Relationality, reciprocity, and the associational are key terms and these help us to think of postmigrant narratives, for example, as starting out from a “minority” position but as progressively stripping themselves of provenance, particularity or fixed belongings, and configuring a new set of emergent spaces of plurality. These can be considered as “absolute” in the sense of existing independently and unconditionally, new “signifying voices” where “the local is...immediately anywhere—almost as it were a global condition of human plurality that is a political community”. Perhaps this “absolute local” is, or could be seen as, a postmigrant interactive space articulated through narratives.

So, to recap, postmigration culture is a complex mix of filiation (proximity to migrant experience through family, neighbourhood and, perhaps, language), and affiliation articulated through fiction, drama, film, music and cultural exchanges. These newly emergent forms can be expressed in terms borrowed from Raymond Williams, with the residual linked to the primary associations of first generation migrants, the dominant to the hegemonic forms of the majority culture (with the reservations raised earlier), and the emergent subjectivities to the new repertoires of postmigration, no longer seeking permission to story (to adapt Said’s term) but becoming interpreting agents, readers of their own condition. In other words, postmigration is about a politics and culture of recognition, of one’s self, of others, and by others, particularly by those who “other”. It is an act of appropriation, of owning and changing the political culture of narrative, speaking back to the stereotypes of coloniality.

All of this is captured by Jurgen Habermas, in “Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State”:

This [condition] is especially true of immigrant cultures which, initially, define themselves stubbornly [and are defined] in ethnic terms[objects, dress, language, images and backward-looking references] and revive traditional elements under the assimilationist pressure of the new environment, but then quickly develop modes of life equally distant from both assimilation and tradition. I am aware that I have placed too much stress on the idea that these distancing “modes of life” reside solely in the second generation, native born but, as I shall show in the next section, this transitional, post-, agency can also be inter-generational and apply to those who have migrated, as well as, to a limited extent, to those in the dominant culture. Postmigration is an active storying, a bringing into narrative a specific set of new belongings and affinities, projected towards the future and woven, eclectically, from different, and contradictory, voices in an art of contestation, and it is not solely the property of the locally born. The right not to belong, to be ascribed or prescribed, to be post-national or post-ethnic can also be claimed by those who have actually migrated as well. I think that the phrase “distant from” captures many features of postmigration: distant from stereotypes, essentialisms, ascriptions of minority and other, and from national/ist claims or presumptions.

Living in displacement

I should like to focus on a novel which illustrates the points made by Habermas, Maps for Lost Lovers by Nadeem Aslam was published in 2004. The novel is set in an unspecified English town in the early 1990s and covers a period of twelve months. The focus is mainly on one family—father, mother, brother-in-law and three adult children, but also includes a range of other characters. The parents are originally from Pakistan and, although the town is not given its English name, the place and its streets and landmarks have been customised and appropriated by the migrants and re-presented in Pakistani terms—Dasht—e-Tanhaii—the wilderness of solitude, the desert of loneliness. This appropriation, this process of re-nomination is a symbol of a first generation stubbornly defining itself in ethnic terms, as Habermas put it,—looking back to a lost homeland. Much of the novel’s development relates to this primary belonging—nostalgia for a lost narrative—which is re-created with images, objects and stories as well as many of the tensions, conflicts, violence and contradictions of the original, so that the town becomes a palimpsest. Their secondary belonging is in the space of migration, whereas for some of the native-born children these belongings are reversed as they seek a primary attachment to the place of their birth as a way out of the dilemma of cultural anomy, and only have a residual, secondary, or conflicted, belonging to a homeland distant in time and place.

Maps is a rich and complex novel which I shall not attempt to analyse but will use simply as a means of exploring some features of a generation which has not migrated but are of migrant families, the postmigration generation which is not looking back to a
mythical past but is seeking to carve out a future, appropriating their own social and cultural territory, alternative spaces to those marked by migrant traces. They seek signs of affiliation, association, home-like spaces unrelated to stories of an originary moment. An epigraph to the novel says: “A human being is never what he is but the self he seeks”. It is this search which is one of the many features of postmigration, although not exclusively so, of course. For the reasons of racialisation I mentioned earlier, it has to be remembered that is a lot easier for a white Australian than a Pakistani to live postmigracy.

The novel is a complex narrative and I don’t want to reduce it to a clash of generations with all of the customary stereotypes, as some of the first generation also seek to mobilise themselves out of a homeland mentality, including the father, Shamas, his brother, Jugnu, a Muslim who lives with his Hindu partner, Chanda. This latter relationship alone breaches a number of homeland cultural codes and leads to their “honour” killing by Chanda’s brothers who remain unreconstructed and stubbornly in thrall to their ethnic definition, part of the stationary form of life shared by many in the narrative.

For the second generation to find themselves through stories, narratives in motion and in new configurations of relationship, the difficulties are not reducible simply to family or culture, as the movement beyond being migrant, as a defining and confining characteristic, takes place always in the framework of the coloniality of power, especially for the non-white person. By this, I am referring to the perpetuation, reproduction and re-composition of the colonial situation in the present day. This is an important concept developed by a number of Latin American, decolonial thinkers for whom: “Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in commonsense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience”. In England and France, particularly, this coloniality persists and is an obstacle to the development of postmigration because of prevailing hierarchies, deep inequality, spatial distributions (enclaves like those in the novel) and, primarily, racialisation, all located in dominant power structures. This is true also in many other European countries, even where colonialism was less marked and can be seen particularly in relation to the so-called “refugee crisis”. The second generation not only has to negotiate the complexities of family expectations but also to confront the dominant relations of power through being “othered”.

For the second generation in the novel, the migrant journey is incomplete, merely a background or outline lacking in definition, a kind of absence even except insofar as it is embedded in their parents. For them, their parents’ homeland is experienced, as I said, as an absence, even when they visit it, and they try to find themselves a presence in England, a postmigrant present and future. In this sense, tense and time are important dimensions of postmigration, not considered as a point of arrival but of a series of new departures, a continua of transformation. By continua of transformation I mean that there can be no simple equivalence between first and second generation migrants as the coherences of one—homeland imaginaries—may be the incoherencies of the other, hence the dialectic of arrival and departure. Postmigracy, in many ways, performative—manifested through new forms—hence perhaps its resonance with theatre. Even the style of the novel with its poetic flourishes and echoes of Urdu culture reproduces an anachronistic set of references, out of place in 1990s Britain. What the novel is doing is unsettling, disrupting certain clichés of migration, refusing to romanticise either generation. The first generations’ mythical past is carried through to a wretched present; wretched because of the continuities of a backward-looking culture, but also because of the colonised present—the one perhaps the effect of the other. As Shamas says: “Most people live in the past because it is easier to remember than to think. Most of us don’t know how to think—we’ve been taught what to think instead”. Postmigration is the attempt to wrest that “how” from the “what”. The second generation is partially caught up in the nets of these continuities while trying to emerge and construct their own.

Postmigration is both a process of discontinuity and something which is always under construction, distant from tradition and custom or, at least, detached by reflexive critique. In some ways, Chanda and Jugnu (the “star-crossed lovers”), the murdered co-habitees, are heralds of the “yet to come”, mapping out a future which proves impossible for them: “I feel I am being erased, Chanda wrote in her diary angrily”. Charag, the artist son of Shamas and Kaukab, paints himself in the nude with an uncircumcised penis, as a metaphor, perhaps, of postmigration. He has a white wife and their son is of mixed ethnicity, which in the early 1990s was not all that common but, as was shown earlier, is far more prevalent nowadays. Charag says to his parents: “Jugnu taught me that we should try to break away from all the bonds and ties that manipulating groups have thought up for their own advantage”. This, I think, not only has application to immediate, migrant families but, also to present coloniality which also affects/infects the majority population. If postmigration is about “breaking bonds and ties” it is conditional and does not apply to all bonds and ties but only to those which are manipulative.

Postmigration is a resistance to the manipulations of power which are exercised in order to confine,
define, and limit to the boundaries of “otherness” those who are outside the dominant ethnicity. Maps is not necessarily about postmigration in itself but about the challenges faced by attempts to shape a postmigrant perspective and to move beyond the isolation and displacement of those racialized and marginalised by the dominant society. Vijay Mishra describes, what he calls the “diasporic imaginary” in this way as: “any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement”. Maps articulates the fragmented, thwarted and incomplete components of a post-diasporic (postmigrant) imaginary.

What the second generation, and those who share their perspective, attempt to arrive at in the novel is a position of reflexivity. Charag, for example, proposes to produce a series of paintings based on photographs of Pakistani and Indian migrants from the 50s, 60s, and 70s, so is not dismissive of the pioneer generation but seeks to re-present, represent it. Homi Bhabha speaks of postmigrants as those who “find agency in a form of the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory”. Charag’s photographs are an index of this agency, the emergence of a postmigrant moment.

Maps brings to mind something which Jacques Ranciere said:

The foreigner— the naif, it will be said, he is not yet informed—persists in the curiosity of his gaze, displaces his angle of vision, reworks the first way of putting together words and images, undoes the certainties of place, and thereby re-awakens the power present in each of us to become a foreigner on the map of places and paths generally known as reality.

The postmigrant is not, of course, a foreigner but someone whose narratives present a new angle of vision, undo certainties, and re-draw the map of places and paths through another way of looking.

Passivity is not an option

This reflexivity and “a new angle of vision” can be found in a recent work of social and cultural analysis of young Muslims in Europe, the USA, and beyond. With reference to this I want to pose a number of questions related to what might constitute a postmigrant or the condition of postmigrancy. Is it, for example, a point reached where the migrant is “done with justifying our place at the table?” or “no longer having to tick the box as other”? The author of Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World (2016), Shelin Jan Mohamed describes the book as “a conversation, a series of intimate moments with young Muslims from around the world”. It is designed “to find out what it means to be a young pioneering modern Muslim today”.

There is no explicit discussion of the book’s research methodology, nor does it claim to be particularly systematic or a work of academic social science. Presumably, some of the conversations were face to face but it is also acknowledged that extensive use was made of the internet and social media. The “story-tellers” who make up the substance of the book are drawn from the global Muslim middle class, predominantly young professionals who are styled as “the new Muslim consumers”. Given that the author works for Ogilvy and Mather, a branding and communications agency, the emphasis on consumption is not surprising as, presumably, one of the functions of the agency is to identify new and emerging markets. Approximately one hundred named Muslim entrepreneurs, artists, designers, journalists, writers, musicians and political activists are cited as the people the author met or consulted with, all of whom are identified as, in some way, figures of influence, those who constitute “Generation M”. They are part of what is claimed as an emerging cultural phenomenon, people who challenge the myths, clichés and stereotypes surrounding Islam and are seeking to establish postmigrant identities (in countries where they are a “migrant” minority) which embrace both faith and modernity. The book is a work of reclamation and a “talking back” in the sense used earlier.

Generation M is a work of “writing back” in so far as it foregrounds the experiences of migrants in a racialized society and places these in a critical context and contests stereotyping and discrimination. Jan Mohamed’s first book, Love in a Headscarf (2009) broke some of the ground in respect of the issues raised in its successor. She describes the book as an “irreverent memoir about growing up as a British Muslim woman in Britain”, and speaks about the “story of feeling confident and comfortable in my skin as a British Muslim woman, not conflicted or oppressed”. Arguably, the capacity to be irreverent, and to feel comfortable and confident, to be unapologetic about claiming a specific identity, could be seen as postmigrant forms of “writing back” in terms of attitude and behaviour. This ownership of identity is, of course, very much class specific, a position arrived at by an Oxford-educated woman “fully immersed in modern life”. Jan Mohamed claims that “Islamic branding—building businesses, products and brands to engage with Muslim consumers—is also gaining traction”. Where this applies to Muslim minorities, this “Islamic branding” is a form of postmigrancy, of not being content to occupy places traditionally allocated to migrants, although it is very different to what I described earlier, a means of carving out spaces in capitalist zones, the worlds of
finance and the lifestyle industry. Nevertheless, it does mark a departure from the monochrome enclaves of many first generation lives, as it aspires to a “colourful, nuanced and vibrant world”.44

At times, Jan Mohamed does make Generation M seem rather easy to achieve, but her identification of “new stories by new storytellers” does chime in with one of the conditions I would associate with postmigration, that of claiming and owning one’s own narrative. Although specifically identified with young Muslims, her location of global space as an arena of postmigration could be applied more broadly as she describes a process of chrysalis transformation: “The limits of family, tribe, and geography are dissolved, and values, shared interests and communities of purpose have for young Muslims given rise to the digital ummah, a powerful global space to assert their identity”.45 This post-nationalist, post-essentialist situation is not readily available to many, perhaps the majority, of Muslims but it does describe, with its range of affinities and affiliations, a potentiality which, perhaps, is all postmigration can be as yet. At the very least, it exists as a way of addressing the problematic nature of the Muslim stereotype as confined to a separatist “ghetto”, unenlightened and out of touch with modernity. Above all, it suggests narratives in motion, conditions of ownership and choice, unapologetic and active. In a way, rather than describing an achieved position, it is prefigurative in the sense of attempting to model a possible postmigrant experience. As the author says, “passivity is not an option” 46 and the book’s written style embodies the kind of creativity and dynamism claimed for Generation M. It is feisty, confident, assertive and unapologetic, a handbook for “futuristic Muslims”, but also self-deprecating, playful and irreverent in places. It is a work of claim and reclamation. At times, it does verge on the edge of being cute, simplistic, rather slick and naïve in its breathlessness but, at the risk of sounding banal, it might be argued that the ability to laugh at oneself and to mock and parody certain pieties are part of postmigrancy. Jan Mohamed’s chapter “Haloodies and Hijabiliciousness” deals with a range of Muslim satires and comedies, puns and coinages which break the boundaries of defensiveness and apology. An excellent example of this is Noorain Khan’s Complete Guide to Bad Burqa Puns47 which attempts to hand back agency to Muslim women. Apart from this lighter side and the, perhaps, over-celebratory treatment of consumerism, the book also takes seriously issues of environmentalism and gender. In respect of the latter, the author describes a collaboration between the International Museum of Women and the makers of the documentary film Miss Representation which produced an infographic of the packaging of Muslim women in the media and in everyday discourse: “They found there were three common ways: veiled, oppressed and homogenous”.48 This finding runs counter to the images projected in the book, images of empowerment, of women (and men) who are creative and demanding, proactive and surefooted, refusing the stereotype of “migrant”. By taking back agency, the ground is prepared for postmigration.

The phrase “passivity is not an option” in another context of postmigration is far more disturbing. Generation M, as I have said, focusses on young Muslims who are comfortable with Western capitalism and its lifestyles and have accommodated their faith within it. What is missing from the book is any consideration of those who inhabit similar spaces to, but are excluded from or exclude themselves from, this embrace of modernity. I am thinking of those second-generation migrants, born in European countries, who suffer from, what Olivier Roy calls, “deculturation” or an “identity vacuum” who seek agency, or activity, through jihadism.49 Radicalized through prison, certain mosques or imams, and peer groups, these young Muslim males are symptoms of a thwarted, or failed, postmigration, caught in permanent transit and lacking access, literally or metaphorically, to those conditions which might constitute a belonging other than that of “outsider” and choosing an aesthetic of violence and death. Whether these choices are made under circumstances of their own choosing is a moot point, of course, but no discussion of this phenomenon takes place in this rather smug book nor is it even referred to. These jihadis are another generation M but where M stands for migrant, those frozen in time and unable to go beyond the limitations of that ascription, although mostly not literally migrants but people who are not able, or willing, to seek or achieve a possible future shaped by postmigration.

Conclusion

I have discussed a wide range of issues related to journeying, arrival, belonging, identity, struggle and longing, in an effort, not to define postmigration and postmigration as such but to speculate upon the possibility of opening up new cultural and imaginative futures. Postmigration uses, and extends, the “host” language/culture and opens up new metaphorical and idiomatic possibilities, fresh cultural horizons drawn out of difference and distance, what Ricoeur calls “the play of horizons”. Migrancy may still figure in the narratives but as something to be exceeded, gone beyond. Arguing against fixity and objectification, prescriptive and manipulative ways of thinking, and attempts to place borders and boundaries around newly emergent practices and relationships, I have tried to contribute to a dialogue
which leads, not to answers, but, to frameworks for "the enlargement of meaning." 30

Notes

1. Baumann, “Introduction,” 1.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. The Ballhaus Naunynstrasse theatre in Berlin, with many Turkish-German productions, is seen as the home of postmigrant theatre and Shermin Langhoff, the director of the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin, stages productions in keeping with her idea of intercultural theatre.
4. Bromley, Narratives for a New Belonging.
5. Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, 9.
6. These are acronyms used in the UK meaning "Black, Minority Ethnic" and "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" respectively.
7. Boubeker, quoted in Robins and Aksoy, Transnationalism, Migration and the Challenge to Europe, n.p.
8. Apart from the fact that multiculturalism is now often associated with failed government policies, in practice it has often led to an essentializing of groups or communities and, at times, separation from the mainstream. Interculturalism is a process which, ideally, involves multi-directional and reciprocal interaction and exchange between "mainstream" cultural activities and those practised by "minority" cultures.
9. Alsmark, "Masooma—a Ugandan-Asian Muslim Swede," 85.
10. Ibid., 29.
11. Vertovec and Cohen, eds., Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism, xxvi.
12. Balibar, "Es Gibt Keinen Staat in Europa," 15.
13. Danish People’s Party Work Programme, 2007.
14. Quoted in Ellinas, “South European Society and Politics (2013).”
15. Parati, Migration Italy. 6.
16. Rao, “Making Sense of Making Stories,” 456.
17. Parati, Migration Italy, 71.
18. Ibid., 71.
19. Edward Said, The World, the Text and the Critic, 24–25.
20. Adami, “Human Rights for more than one voice.”
21. Cavarero, For More than One Voice, 209.
22. Ibid., 204.
23. Ibid., 204.
24. Ibid., 205.
25. Williams raised this concept in a number of places but he defined it most explicitly in Marxism and Literature.
26. Habermas, “Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State,” 131.
27. Aslam, Maps for Lost Lovers. This title will be abbreviated to Maps in the following discussion of the text.
28. Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 243.
29. Aslam, Maps. 282.
30. Ibid., 343.
31. Ibid., 321.
32. Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 448.
33. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 313.
34. Rancière, Short Voyages to the Land of the People, 3.
35. Editor’s Note, The Good Immigrant, n.p.
36. Janmohamed, Generation M.
37. Ibid., 5.
38. Ibid., 9.
39. Zahra Janmohamed, Love in a Headscarf.
40. Janmohamed, Generation M. 3.
41. Ibid., 4.
42. Ibid., 4.
43. Ibid., 7.
44. Ibid., 9.
45. Ibid., 23.
46. Ibid., 45.
47. Khan, “Your Complete Guide to Bad Burqa Puns.”
48. Janmohamed, Generation M. 225.
49. Roy, Jihad and Death.
50. Phrase used in the title of book by Kevin Robins and Asu Aksay. See note 7 above.

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