

North-South Connections: The Representations of Travel and Travellers in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Fictional Memoir *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (2005)

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Abstract: *This article seeks to critically examine three stories out of nine from Jhabvala's book My Nine Lives (2005) in which the author boldly merges fictional memoir with the short story genre. I argue that the three stories selected for analysis indicate the most dominant component in her works, namely her uprooted characters as constant wanderers whose cultural identities and belongings are as shifting and fuzzy as their home in a certain place in the age of worldwide globalisation and modernity. While examining her characters as tourists and travellers with multiple dwellings, this article highlights that journey is not merely a metaphor of cultural dialogue between the Global South and the Global North within the realms of Jhabvala's fiction but also a means to (re)discover or simply (re)imagine the established truths of the self, family and community, the notion of home and belonging, and the formation of new cultural identities in "our run-away world" (Giddens 2003, xxxi). By seeking a connection between travel and literature, my article aims to shed ample light on the transcultural connections of Jhabvala's fictional characters, their fluid cultural allegiances and above all their perception and representation of "travelling cultures" (Clifford 1992, 96-116) during their journeys around the globe.*

Keywords: Travelling cultures, Global South and the Global North, home and belonging, transcultural connections

1. Introduction

Best known for her Booker-Prize-winning historical novel *Heat and Dust* (1975), the works of Ruth Praver Jhabvala are a fine illustration of different kinds of travellers who are always in search of something to give meaning to their seemingly ordinary lives. A British writer of German Jewish origin, Jhabvala's move to India in 1951 after her marriage to an Indian Parsee made her write a considerable amount of literature about the wandering, idealistic, bored and seemingly naïve Europeans in India who are keen on discovering the deeper dimensions of the self and identity during their travels to and within unfamiliar places. Her move to New York seems to inspire her more recent work as she tends to write about the first and the second generation of Europeans, mainly German Jewish refugees, around the world. Jhabvala's famous quote in an

interview “Once a refugee, always a refugee” (Jaggi 2005, n.p.) not only reminds the reader about the all prevailing quest motif in her storylines but also indicates the most dominant component in her works, namely her uprooted characters as constant wanderers whose cultural identities and belongings are as shifting and fuzzy as their home in a certain place in the age of “liquid modernity” (see Baumann 2000).

For Jhabvala, arrival is not a condition but only a beginning to another journey as her major novels, especially *A New Dominion* or *Travellers* (1973) and *Three Continents* (1987), vividly demonstrate. Therefore, this article sets out to discuss Jhabvala’s characters both as tourists and travellers in *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (2005), consisting of nine short stories, each of which tells a fictional autobiography of Jhabvala, covering a certain facet of her life. Although travel has always been a significant aspect of Jhabvala’s fictional oeuvre, in *My Nine Lives*, travel takes on two different modes – active and passive. Firstly, the narrator in every story travels, mostly from England to India, and her travelling compels and urges other characters, especially family members to travel, too; secondly, the reader travels not only to different locations but also to different time zones. Thus, ‘nine stories’, based on the narrator/Jhabvala’s life, lived in Germany, Britain, India and the United States of America, symbolize ‘nine journeys’ – external and internal, which her narrator undertakes and then chronicles along with the other characters. As a result, the role of narrative as journey (Mikkonen 2007, 286-305) appears to be a crucial dimension in Jhabvala’s fictional frames as her characters shuffle between multiple dwellings.

Like V.S. Naipaul, Jhabvala deliberately transcends the clear-cut borders of different literary genres in *My Nine Lives*, for all stories in the book, which Jhabvala, in the preface titled “Apologia,” calls “chapters,” are “potentially autobiographical: even when something didn’t actually happen to me, it might have done so. Every situation was one I could have been in myself, and sometimes, to some extent, was” (2005, vii). Consequently, the author not only toys with the idea of past as an invention but also with the genre of autobiography which she boldly merges with short story, memoir or travellers’ tales. Often, the theme of travel overlaps with the theme of the guru, which tends to prevail in her stories in *My Nine Lives*, as it has prevailed in several of her novels, particularly *Three Continents* (1987) and *Shards of Memory* (1995). Therefore, Clare Colvin declares, “The novelist explores nine possible lives against the background of her past, ranging from the London and New York of German Jewish refugees to the India of Westerners in search of a guru (2004, n.p.).

While examining her characters as tourists and travellers, this article highlights that journey is not merely a metaphor of cultural dialogue between the Global South and the Global North within the realms of Jhabvala’s fiction but also a means to (re)discover or simply (re)imagine the established truths of the self, family and community, the notion of home and belonging, and the formation of new cultural identities in “our run-away world” (Giddens 2003, xxxi). By seeking a connection between travel and literature, my article aims to

shed ample light on the transcultural connections of Jhabvala's fictional characters, their fluid cultural allegiances and above all their perception and representation of "travelling cultures" (Clifford 1992, 96-116) during their journeys around the globe. In the following, I first define the interdisciplinary notion of travel and culture before employing these concepts as a reading methodology.

2. Travel, Culture and Anglophone Literature: Mapping the Terrain

According to Michel de Certeau: "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (1980, 115). Indeed, travel has always been an important strand of literature since time immemorial. The theme of travel in a significant amount of Anglophone literatures such as V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* (2001) or Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) – Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2000) or M.G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989) – is reflective of and responsive to the modern condition as we live in an era of increasing globalisation in which mobility, travel and cross-cultural contacts are facts of life. In other words, travel is a metaphor of our globalised world. For James Clifford:

This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people "dwell" with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay—mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions [...] Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood (1988, 14).

Clifford in his later study rejects the dichotomy between place/mobility, home/away, and introduces the concept of "dwelling-in travel" [namely travel as normality] (1992, 108). As travel is a fundament of our existence, whether we are armchair travellers or active ones, a critical analysis of travel in a work of literature can provide insights into the often "fraught encounters and exchanges currently taking place between cultures, and into the lives being led, and the subjectivities being formed, in a globalising world" (Thompson 2011, 2). New terms like "mobile cultures" (see Berensmeyer and Ehland 2013; see Berensmeyer, Ehland and Grabes 2012; Berry, Martin and Yue 2003) or "touring cultures" (see Urry and Rojek, 1997) have surfaced in different disciplines, which address not only emerging cultural trajectories today but underline increasing peoples and cultures on the move "in the speed age of modernity" (Andersen 2007, 32). The very notion of modernity makes us imagine a world in motion, which has not only created rapid means of travel in the tourist industry but is conducive to the production of "travelling concepts" (see Bal 2002; see Neumann and Nünning 2012) as well as "travelling theory" (see Said 1982; 1991) in the academic discourse.

The word travel in English has a French origin, initially "travail" and meant – as it still does with that spelling – "bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering" (2019, n.p.) as mentioned in *Oxford English Dictionary*. However,

according to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, it is defined as “a movement through space that changes the location of something” or “the act of going from one place to another” (2019, n.p.). More than travel as travail, I look at it as a movement at several levels, for this movement is implicit in the stories in *My Nine Lives*. The very word travel and its several offshoots like passage, mobility or migration have generated a significant number of theoretical concepts such as cultural mélange, deterritorialization, transculturality, transmigration, transnationalism, (neo)cosmopolitanism or (neo)nomadism, among others, confirming the fact that the idea and practice of travel is at the heart of several theories in cultural and literary studies.

Travel as an interdisciplinary concept has been interpreted with reference to numerous other aspects in various disciplines; for example, it is discussed with reference to translation by cultural anthropologist Clifford who defines it as overlapping experiences marked by different translation terms: “diaspora”, “borderland”, “immigration”, “migrancy”, “tourism”, “pilgrimage”, “exile” (1997, 11) whereas the philosopher Michel Butor extends the activities of travel beyond tourism, including reading and writing as part of travel together with nomadism, settlement and exodus, exploration, pilgrimage, emigration, business trips or round-trips (1974, 1-6). In literary and cultural studies, travel is discussed in regard to gender, colonialism and transnationalism by Inderpal Grewal (1996) or in relation to violence by Laura E. Franey (2003) whereas it is examined with reference to memory by Astrid Erll (2011) and modernity and modernism by Robert Burden (2015). The theme of travel is, hence, currently approached from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, philosophy, history, postcolonial and literary studies and other related domains of research, which encompass the discussion of themes like: the histories of travel and the travel of histories, the relationship between travel – knowledge – power, discourses of identities and/or difference, the poetics of the exile, or the definition of borders as spaces of transcultural and international communication and/or conflicts.

Due to increasing interest in the studies of travel in the recent years, a distinction between a tourist and a traveller has surfaced in the discourse of travel. For example, according to James Buzzard, a traveller is not a tourist, as he contends in his study *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture,' 1800-1918* (1993), which underlines how the circulation of the distinction between traveller and tourist influenced the nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers on Europe, such as Anthony Trollope, Henry James, E. M. Forster among others, and how they viewed and presented themselves in writing. ‘Authentic culture’, according to Buzzard, was represented as being in the secret precincts of the ‘beaten track’ where it could be discovered only by the sensitive true traveller and not the vulgar tourist (1993). However, Paul Fussell in his book *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars* (1982) takes one step further as he attempts to draw some explicit distinctions between what he readily admits are ‘slippery’ categories: the explorer, the traveller, and the tourist:

All three make journeys, but the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveler that which has been discovered by the mind working in history, the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity [...] If the explorer moves towards the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché (1982, 39).

I argue that the practice of global travel invites us to think beyond the Eurocentric view of travel, as travel has been long associated with Western imperialism or expansion. Several works of South Asian Anglophone literature, particularly Jhabvala's fiction, capture the phenomenon of worldwide travel from a broad perspective. The experience of travel in Jhabvala's fiction, whether gained as a traveller or a tourist, means inhabiting liminal spaces of cultures through the writer's travelling imagination – spaces in which the reader is able to grasp the dynamics of “overlapping territories, intertwined histories” (Said 1993, 43) rather than encounter culture as an isolated sphere. Located in heterogeneous cultural and geographical landscapes, the nine stories in *My Nine Lives*, therefore, make the reader participate in the phenomenon of present-day travel. In fact, the reader becomes the globetrotter as he is made to explore places and spaces and as the characters in stories navigate their newly found “routes” and “roots” (Clifford 1997, 3) in a new continent.

Since travel embodies a variety of movements, the word travel itself involves not merely a crossing of spatial, geographical but also social and cultural borders, which urges the formation of transcultural realities and transnational relations. In fact, cross-cultural travels are increasingly reflected in the lives of modern travellers with multiple cultural associations. This is why Edward W Said claims, “No one today is purely one thing” (1993, 336) since culture, either the host or the migrant one, cannot be stripped of “the other echoes,” (1993, 336); consequently, an increasing number of people today are likely to have several cultural connections, identities or plural histories, mirroring “the predicament of culture” (see Clifford 1988). Such people are fictionalised in Jhabvala's stories whose cultural associations illustrate the fact that “mixes and permeation” (Welsch 1999, 197) are fundamental to culture on the move, inviting us to acknowledge the importance of hybrid forms of cultures today.

This article sets out to examine three stories closely: “Life”, “Pilgrimage” and “The Choice of Heritage” in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of Jhabvala's treatment of travel and travellers in her fictional autobiography-cum-memoir-cum-short stories *My Nine Lives*. By choosing a hybrid genre, which cannot be placed in well-defined categories, as mentioned above, Jhabvala is able to spread her stories over a large spatial and temporal canvass, which vividly reflects her North-South connections. These connections in *My Nine Lives* also echo the experiences of displacement and relocation, as she writes both as an insider and an outsider in a new cultural space. “I was practically born a displaced person”, Jhabvala told Ram Lal Aggarwal, “and all any of us ever wanted was a travel document and a residential permit. One just didn't care as long as one was allowed to live somewhere” (cited in Chakravarti 1998, 40).

According to Deborah Mason, “[y]et it is precisely this sense of dislocation that has provided Jhabvala with the cross-cultural eye to create [...] the sumptuous geography of her short stories” (1998, n.p.). These short stories, indeed, illustrate new cultural configurations across fixed territorial and ‘national’ borders, which mirror the cultural challenges and transactions of modern travellers.

3. Travel as Existence

The story *Life* opens with “I have gone back to live in India” from New York (Jhabvala 2005, 3), underlining mobility as the personal and cultural condition of the narrator but also a choice she has deliberately made. The narrator leaves New York for India in old age, as the only place she can afford to live after the death of a stepmother who had exploited her goodwill. As a young woman she had lived there and written an unfinished thesis on an Indian poetess-saint. Now, nearly penniless, she spends her days among tombs in a ruined pavilion, drawing people to her gradually. As a result, in the closing years of her failed life, she begins to assume the status of a saint. However, despite narrating the story of an apparently unfulfilled life, the author seems to idealise the practice of travelling to and settling down in distant places as if travel was necessary to attribute a fairytale quality to otherwise banal and dull existence.

As the title of the story indicates, it deals with travel as the most dominating metaphor of existence and existence itself as travel between distant geographies beyond cultural differences or hindrances. Indeed, the plotline clearly highlights that the narrator does not seek satisfaction in staying tied to a fixed but to a moving centre. The narrator, called Rosemary, claims, “It was true that life at first hand only began for me with my visits to India (2005, 11) where she begins a life-long acquaintance with an Indian man Somnath even though her parents “considered India an unsuitable, dangerous place” (2005, 14). The reader is shocked to know that the narrator’s mother Nina visits her daughter in India, eats some green pistachio sweetmeat at Somnath’s place, catches a disease and dies. At this point, the narrator recalls her Jewish father Otto Levy’s family accounts, the members of whom moved to India to escape the atrocities of Nazi Germany but failed to settle down there:

Otto had unfinished reports from relatives who in the 1930s had emigrated to Bombay, that being the only place where they could get the entrance permit. Although they had done well there, establishing a successful confectionery business, they never got used to the alien atmosphere. In long letters to their relatives – all the family wrote long letters to each other, it was characteristic of the Diaspora [...] they reported on conditions of squalor and ignorance that made the country completely impossible for cultured Europeans like themselves (after the war, they sold the confectionery business and returned to Germany) (2005, 14).

Apparently, such passages reveal the love-hate relationship Jhabvala’s characters have had with India, but it is interesting to notice that despite presenting the darker sides of India, the narrator considers it to be an important place to return.

She is not necessarily pulled by the utopian dimension of travel, as it is often underlined by travel critics. For example, Bill Ashcroft in his essay “Travel and Utopia” claims, “Almost all journeys are begun in hope. While they may not begin with the expectation of arriving at utopia, the impetus of travel is essentially utopian” (2015, 249). Instead, Jhabvala seems to be keen on taking a path different from her parents. Hence, travel provides the narrator the chance not only to rediscover herself away from the nest but to be able to live life to its fullest in a different location despite its dangers and challenges.

However, travel is not merely an escape into a new world but also a means of embracing a life of transcultural encounters opposed to life in her homeland. According to Michael Upchurch, “That sense of being suspended between cultures” informs almost all of Jhabvala’s stories (2018, n.p.). Upchurch adds, “Some of her characters desperately want to escape their circumstances. Others just as obsessively want to lose themselves in new surroundings” (2018, n.p.). Indeed, Jhabvala’s stories are “drawn quite heavily on her own cross-cultural dilemmas” as Vanessa Thorpe points out (2004, n.p.). Thorpe adds:

The nine lives described range from women who feel emotionally pulled towards India, to those who have rejected it, from those who have embraced their mixed heritage, to those who are still struggling to accommodate it. Repeatedly, whether in New York, London or India, an array of influential Middle European relatives shapes the central characters’ sense of self (2004, n.p.).

Just like places and spaces remain shifting, so does the persona of the narrator Rosemary who is considered an intellectual by her parents Otto and Nina, both of whom are of German origin who have escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930s to New York and who, unlike their daughter, are not ready to migrate to another place. The narrator, who is always interested in pursuing her oriental studies, points out that changing identity in India has been a way of coming to terms with her new life:

During my first visit to India, in my early twenties, I changed my name to Shanti (meaning Peace, which I was anxious to pursue and, if possible, possess). But on my return to New York I changed it back to Rosemary – which did not suit me, never had done, but was all that was left of my parents’ expectations for me (2005, 4).

Moreover, as the narrator has felt detached from her own family, she is more at home in India, “My Indian family – I thought of Somnath and his family as my own” (2005, 16). In fact, not only home or homeland but also family have non-traditional patterns in Jhabvala’s fiction, as the narrator keeps travelling within India as much as she tours around in New York without ever thinking of settling down near her close family. For she is unable to arrive permanently in any destination; only creating a new identity in a new geographical domain appears to the fundament of her life as well as the most promising goal. Further, it is life in transit with no fixed roots that seems to appeal to the narrator than life, lived in a comfort zone.

Travelling with the purpose of journeying far is what seems to shape Jhabvala's characters with multiple cultural roots. Moreover, the plot development demonstrates that as people move from country to country, it is not only their 'national' or cultural identity that is bound to change but also their psychological and emotional state, urging them to set different goals in life. In this way, travel is not merely a form of transgression, as it often leads travellers to transgress cultural, linguistic, religious and social boundaries, but it tends to be a life-changing experience as it compels them to undergo transformation at a variety of levels. Lastly, the story emphasizes that travel has a primary role in self-discovery and self-knowledge as the narrator is not ready to live a life under the shadow of a more glamorous and domineering mother but rather on her own in an unfamiliar location, which promises reinventing and rewriting the self and identity in constant flux.

4. Travel and Pilgrimage

The story "Pilgrimage" provides the modern meaning of pilgrimage as it tells the adventures and companionship of a European and an Indian couple, both of whom are rather extraordinary in terms of their cultural identity and social belonging, which remains dubious throughout the plot development. Just like a broken family is the focus in the previous story, two dysfunctional families are central to this story in which mothers and daughters are at daggers drawn due to their infatuation with powerful men. Consequently, the reader is perplexed about tense family units in which mysterious lovers seem to damage the relationship between mothers and daughters, urging the young, impressionistic daughters to stand by their lovers. Love takes on the overtones of an obsession, further deteriorating the individual and the family. The journey of both Indian and European characters within their countries and abroad is treated as a form of pilgrimage, a religious quest vis-à-vis search for love and devotion, which is Jhabvala's focal point also in her novel *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983) that reveals the interior lives of three generations of people in their quest for love and beauty.

Jhabvala begins with the difficult relationship between a mother and a daughter who are Austrian Jewish refugees settled in London. The narrator as a seventeen-year-old happens to fall in love with her mother's lodger, known only as C., who is not only always behind his rent but lives a carefree and secretive life. Just as his origin is vague, so is his means of living. However, the narrator is ready to travel to any part of the world just to stay with him. Edith, the narrator's mother, is at loggerheads with her, as the narrator is increasingly infatuated with C. who finally decides to go to India, develops a vague philosophy and becomes a guru. The theme of the guru turning the heads of both European and Indian women in London and Delhi once again is central to the plotline (Blackwell 1977, 6-13). The reader is introduced to a European guru (C.) who happens to be as much a trickster and a hypocrite as the Indian one (Shivaji). Nevertheless, the female characters, the narrator and two Indian women – a mother and a

daughter called Renuka and Priya – remain mesmerized by the charismatic yet fake leaders from the beginning of the story to the end.

The idea and practice of pilgrimage, mostly associated with religious and spiritual journey in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, takes on three dimensions in the story: firstly, it is a personal and inner journey for the narrator to seek peace within by indulging in someone the narrator adores namely C.; secondly, it is a journey to and between three continents, namely Europe, Asia and America, as the narrator from London seems to search in distant places what is lacking in her normal existence; finally, it is a form of travel that the narrator is compelled to undertake to escape the present just as C. does. The following paragraphs address the three dimensions of the pilgrimage in more detail.

As soon as the narrator's mother Edith commits suicide in their London flat, the narrator cannot bear her life there, leaves London and moves to Delhi with C. to apparently turn over a new leaf, which turns out to be a strange form of journey that does not ever seem to come to an end. It is as if the narrator has adopted an existence on a constant run. The narrator informs:

After my mother died, C. sold whatever he could of her possessions, and with the proceeds he and I went to India. At that time, one could still travel overland, partly by hitch-hiking, partly on a bus through Turkey and Iran, from Kabul over the Khyber Pass and into Punjab; so by the time we arrived in Delhi, we had already traversed great stretches of country different from anything we had known in England (Jhabvala 2005, 247).

The reader discovers that C. has come to India to seek out an Indian philosopher and guide he has heard about before he becomes a philosopher himself whom many people begin to follow, including the narrator. While living in London, C. was only a casual laborer or a porter. Ironically, the Indian philosopher/guru C. seeks is as ordinary as C. himself who appears to be a person of shady character. However, the pervasive irony of the story is that none of the female devotees is ready to see the moral corruption in these so-called dynamic gurus who become the centre of their lives. First, Renuka is infatuated with the Indian guru, Shivaji, then her own daughter Priya is soon obsessed with the narrator's lover C. who becomes a famous spiritual leader with her financial and emotional assistance. Priya does not mind sharing C. with the narrator, for Priya is determined to be completely focused on being devoted to him whose love seems to have blinded her. Finally, Priya decides to take extreme measures to prove her devotion to him; she leaves her homeland so that C. has better chances to make himself an international spiritual figure. The narrator points out:

Priya conceived the idea that C. too had to be set up, like Shivaji, as a leader with a following of his own. He could not be wasted just on me and on herself in a broken-down bazaar hotel. She wanted to take him away – not just out of the hotel or the city of Delhi but right out into the bigger world. Shivaji already had a following in Europe, but for C., Priya wanted a new world, *the New World*, America itself (Jhabvala 2005, 262; italics in the original).

Priya stays with C. for many years in America and “was largely responsible for building up the practical side of his movement” (Jhabvala 2005, 263). Naturally, Priya’s indulgence in C. compels the narrator to accept her alienation from him, making the narrator think of the time in London that has united C. and the narrator as a chapter, “sealed off in all its sweetness” (Jhabvala 2005, 264). Eventually, with the passage of time, C. becomes increasingly dictatorial and even criminal: “Many lawsuits were filed against him [...] He also had to fight an extradition order from Holland, where he was accused of forging a will in his own favour. But all this was in a future that I did not share with him” (Jhabvala 2005, 268). At last, C. is convicted of a “fraudulent conversion of title deeds” (Jhabvala 2005, 273) and is imprisoned in Texas for fifteen years. Hence, his mission of using travel as an escape and a cover of hiding his dark deeds terminates miserably without discouraging infatuated women to abandon travelling to seek him as a holy grail.

Even so C. is finally sentenced for his misdeeds, the narrator still does not stop travelling in his pursuit and decides to seek a journey to Texas as a mecca of her dreams. She declares, “After some misadventures – I was no longer used to travelling, and America was a new continent to me – I reached the prison in Texas” (Jhabvala 2005, 275). She takes up minor jobs in Texas just to stay close to C.’s prison and imagines the time to be together with him when he has finished his sentence. In this way, it is the narrator’s life that becomes a pilgrimage in the real sense of the word, as she seems to have embraced travelling for seeking love and devotion for a man who ironically does not exhibit any Godlike characteristic, as he is simply a criminal. It is, indeed, the travesty of pilgrimage that the author tends to highlight. Jhabvala’s narrative reeks of her irony and satire, as the events in the story only startle the reader as most journeys, however aimless, in the story never end. In short, the story leaves the reader bewildered about ‘making a pilgrimage’ for the sake of a fake guru whose travels to and within three continents are shaped by mercenary gains in the guise of Indian spirituality.

5. Travel and Shifting Origins

The story “A Choice of Heritage” not only deals with the theme of mixed heritage in the age of worldwide migration but also mentions that authenticity of origin or heritage does not matter. Indeed, Jhabvala is not merely satisfied with presenting identity as mixed or plural like Salman Rushdie who believes in celebrating “Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that” (1992, 394); in fact, she boldly reveals in her plotline that finding out about authentic cultural origin is a worthless effort. Jhabvala, therefore, employs her typical technique in this story, namely, elaborating on the unknown and unclear origin or jumbled identity of the female protagonist/narrator. Thus, not multiple but confused or fuzzy origins and identities is what determines the plotline in which facts and fiction are as much muddled as reality and imagination. Such a technique has, indeed, a double-edged purpose: first, it makes the story entertaining, unfolding

Jhabvala's acerbic wit; second, it makes the reader think as to how a person on the move should define him or herself whose cultural loyalties are changing all the time.

The story tells of four characters: the narrator as a little girl who has grown up in London but is very much attached to her Indian maternal grandmother known as the Begum and the Begum's companion-cum-friend-cum-lover Muktesh, both of whom live in New Delhi and visit the narrator every now and then in London where the narrator's English father lives. The narrator likes spending her time both in London and India like her Indian mother who died of cholera in England when the narrator was only two years old. In fact, the narrator's mother had preferred to spend as much time in India as possible despite her marriage with a British man. Consequently, the narrator seems to relive her mother's life just like the young unnamed narrator in Jhabvala's novel *Heat and Dust* who begins to relive the life of her step great-grandmother Olivia Rivers in post-independent India.

Just as her mother was caught between two men, one of whom is her husband, so is the narrator caught between two fathers, one of whom is only on paper whereas the other is biological. None of her so-called fathers ever contests her half British and half Indian identity on the basis of her very Indian appearance, showing no signs of British ancestry. The narrator declares: "I ought to explain that my appearance is entirely Indian, with no trace of my English connections at all" (Jhabvala 2005, 133). Muktesh is particularly "reticent about my singular appearance as the rest of my family. Yet sometimes he gazed into my face the same way my father did – I knew what for: for some trace, some echo of something lost and precious" (Jhabvala 2005, 148). Thus, the reader is reminded about the enigmatic origins of the narrator whose 'real heritage' is supposed to be an irresolvable riddle.

Additionally, the narrator reveals that she bears no resemblance to her Muslim maternal grandmother, as the narrator's features are Hindu rather than Muslim. The narrator finally adds, "I have the same broad nose and full lips as Muktesh. My complexion too is as dark as his (Jhabvala 2005, 133)." Clearly, the reader is made to wonder whether the narrator is Muktesh's daughter and purely Indian instead of half Indian and half British as she has always believed. Consequently, the reader is confused about the narrator's origins as much as the narrator herself, especially as the author mentions that one day Muktesh takes the narrator to his ninety-year-old blind mother who takes the narrator's hands, touches them carefully and claims that they do look exactly like Muktesh. Jhabvala, hence, joins the reader in this confusion as she keeps blurring the line between the real or fake origins of her characters. Neither the narrator nor Muktesh, neither the narrator's English father nor her Indian grandmother ever bothers to find out through any DNA test as to who the real father is.

Even the story ends with the idea of confused identity as the Begum begins to wonder about the narrator's curly hair, for no one in her family have had curly hair. This observation leads to another one, namely the affair the narrator's

maternal great-grandmother had had with her cook, who had curly hair, making the reader imagine the narrator's grandmother, the Begum, being as much confused about her heritage as the narrator herself. Such a revelation simply confirms not only the running theme in the story that purity of one's origins in our moving world is a myth and a fiction but also the fact that it is virtually impossible to prevent either social classes or ethnic groups to mingle and thus to keep the 'origins' pure. Therefore, the author seems to suggest that a person, no matter to what culture or ethnicity he or she belongs, needs to be accepted regardless of his or her origins.

Indeed, Jhabvala brings home to the reader that identity is an ambivalent notion, especially as it is changing all the time like the travel destination of her characters. She appears to completely dismiss identity as singular in our present times, which are defined by "global cultural flows" (Appadurai 1996, 30). In other words, she is increasingly fascinated by the world in which cultural and ethnic overlaps define ourselves and not the purity of our origins. Indeed, authenticity of cultural identity in the story remains a disputed terrain, as Jhabvala portrays characters who choose to be on a long search far away from home. This is also demonstrated in the very opening of the story as the narrator reveals:

During the latter half of the last century – maybe since the end of the 1939 war – nothing became more common than what are called mixed marriages. I suppose they are caused by everyone moving freely around the world, as refugees or emigrants or just out of restless curiosity. Anyway, the result has been at least two generations of people in whom several kinds of heritage are combined: promoting the questions "Who am I? Where do I belong?" that have been the basis of so much self-analysis, almost self-laceration. But I must admit that, although my ancestry is not only mixed but also uncertain, I have never been troubled by such doubts (Jhabvala 2005, 129).

In the wake of the recent refugee crisis, Jhabvala is busy reflecting on the European refugees in her stories, the category to which she and her family belonged. It is as if she was trying to understand the pattern of history and today's world, dominated by war and the refugee crisis, the phenomenon of which urges refugees, migrants, exiles or expatriates to experience new concepts of culture and cultural associations. The narrator's 'choice of heritage' embodies the will to reconcile with rediscovering as well as reimagining entangled roots, biological or cultural, as she focuses on characters who do not live ordinary lives; they are neither satisfied with traditional family patterns nor with the comfort of belonging to a single country or culture. For transcultural connections (Schulze-Engler 2009, ix-xvi) are what define their family history as well as their identity in the fast-changing world in which cultural complexity tends to render the sacrosanct borders of nation or culture more and more porous and permeable.

In Jhabvala's fictional realm, the end of war in 1939 initiated the (post)modern period, which created several generations of refugees or emigrants for whom there was no longer a fixed centre to which they could go back. I argue that once these characters have embraced mobility as their cultural condition,

they go around the globe as wanderers for whom identity and belonging tend to become fleeting notions just as the notions of home and homeland. In fact, home appears to be a mere figment of imagination. Commenting on the nomadic mode of being and the status of people like him, wandering the globe, the writer Alberto Manguel's words uniquely sum up the story of Jhabvala's characters:

Even when declaring allegiance to one place, we seem to be always moving away from it [...] Nationalities, ethnicities, tribal, and religious affiliations imply geographical and political definitions of some kind, and yet, partly because of our nomad nature and partly due to the fluctuations of history, our geography is less grounded in a physical than in a phantom landscape. Home is always an imaginary place (2008, 145).

The journey of her characters always starts at home, which is treated as a temporary destination before packing the suitcases to travel to another place; it is arrival and departure, coming and going that haunt their lives. As home is depicted as a place of transit, Jhabvala presents unusual family patterns, especially as the relationship between parents and children are mostly tense, tangled and tragic despite having strong women as the head of the household. In short, the members of such a family possess an identity that is anchored in mobility and not in a static condition.

It is noticeable that besides fictionalizing the theme of European refugees and their dilemmas in a novel location in the stories *Refuge in London* or *Pilgrimage*, Jhabvala deals with the idea of travel from a broad perspective by demonstrating that travel is both a political and personal necessity – political as it is often war that compels people to travel as migrants or refugees and personal as it is a desire to seek the new, the exotic, the unfamiliar that urges one to leave home. Jhabvala stages the times in her stories in which boundaries whether geographical, national, social, 'racial' or familial are bound to be transgressed as "newness enters the world" (Rushdie 1992, 394). For 'newness' defines her characters travelling between distant locations as contact zones in which opposing cultures meet on a common ground beyond the hierarchies of 'us and them'.

Before confusing her heritage in the latter half of the story, the narrator states that she is a product of a mixed marriage, an Indian mother and an English father. To bring out her hybrid family background, she first points to the colonial travels in the nineteenth-century and then to educated Indians travelling to England for higher education, which paved way for mixed marriages and hence mixed origins:

Many members of my father's totally English family have served in what used to be called the colonies – Africa or India – where they had to be very careful to keep within their national and racial boundaries. This was not the case with my father: at the time of his marriage, he had been neither to India nor to Africa. He met my mother in England, where she was a student at the London School of Economics [...] She was an Indian-Muslim (Jhabvala 2005, 129).

The author apparently writes about the family connections between the Indians and the British in her story, but it is more of a story of Anglicized Indians and Indianized British. For example, not only does the narrator's Indian mother make England her second home and marry an Englishman despite being a transmigrant all her life, but also the narrator's maternal grandmother, the Begum, travelling frequently to London, has friends who "had all been at Oxford or Cambridge and spoke English more fluently than their own language" (Jhabvala 2005, 130). She reads only male Western authors "ten volumes of Proust, all the later novels of Henry James, existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus whom everyone had been reading when she was young and traveling in Europe, usually with a lover" (Jhabvala 2005, 142). Nevertheless, the Begum is someone who apparently believes in being loyal to her homeland – her heritage, above all kinds of ethnic conflicts; therefore, she refuses to move to Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 with her family and even after "Hindu-Muslim riots arise" (Jhabvala 2005, 132), so her husband remarries in Pakistan while she remains busy developing her network of international friends who become her new-found family. Indeed, being a "global soul" (Inez 2008, 225), she chooses a cosmopolitan existence by being located in Delhi for the rest of her life.

The narrator always enjoys her grandmother's visits to London, but the grandmother soon gets tired of London and insists on having her sent to her in India for the whole of her school holidays. It is during her stay in India does the narrator discover a special association with a new culture. "I felt totally at home in Delhi. I had learned to speak the Begum's refined Urdu as well as mixture of Hindustani and Punjabi that most people use" (Jhabvala 2005, 133). An immersion into Indian languages makes way for integrating more strongly into a foreign culture. Therefore, she begins to translate Muktesh's poems happily from Hindi into English and stays loyal to him until his assassination by some young political zealots who are against his political ideals.

The narrator gets to know about the affair between her mother and Muktesh when she is around seventeen or eighteen. She discovers that even though her English father, who was very interested in India and in early Hindu architecture, visited her mother in India frequently, she carried on with her affair with Muktesh, silently keeping a polyandrous relationship. "She and I followed my father to England in September, after the monsoon, but we were back again the following January. She could never stay away for long" (Jhabvala 2005, 138). Muktesh remains a frequent traveller to London after the death of the narrator's mother where "he wore the same cotton clothes as in India" (Jhabvala 2005, 144) and always met the narrator and her father "in an Indian restaurant, a sophisticated place with potted palms and Bombay-Victorian furniture and a mixed clientele of rich Indians and British Indophils who liked their curry hot" (Jhabvala 2005, 143). Apparently, the narrator's mother as Muktesh's lover "became *more* Indian while living in England" as it was believed (Jhabvala 2005, 134; italics in original). However, despite dwelling in two worlds as a

cosmopolitan citizen, she had never been either completely English or Indian but a bit of both:

During the months in between her visits to India, my mother led a very conventional life at home [...] My mother seemed to have charmed them (my English aunts), and gave them the impression that she too had been charmed – by England, by their way of life: the family Christmases, fireworks on Guy Fawkes night, the village pageant of medieval English history. In her country garden she gathered plums and apples from her trees and bottled jams and chutneys; although in India she had, like her mother, hardly been inside the kitchen, she learned to roast, to baste, to bake, with a rattle of the gold bangles that she never took off (Jhabvala 2005, 138).

6. Conclusion: Travelling Stories

All three stories discussed above portray characters who are not only in between distant worlds but have identities in the interstices of culture; thus, these stories capture present-day migratory flows, diasporic and expatriate experience and “neo-nomadic trajectories” (Dagnino 2013, 131). In short, each story presents the snapshot of a distinct experience of travel and global mobility as well as ambivalent relationships with undiscovered places and spaces: For some characters, travelling to a foreign country means loss or an adventure whereas for some it is simply part of lifestyle or existence. In every story, the omniscient female narrator always looks at travel as transformation – both cultural and personal, which she perceives as a unique opportunity to comprehend the self and the surroundings from an innovative angle. Indeed, it is always a new location that provides the narrator with a different perspective and a hope to carry on with life full of suspense and surprises – a life that does not take straight paths but several detours consisting of several journeys. Hence, the experience of travel for Jhabvala’s characters as perpetual voyagers not only promotes a renewed understanding of cultural exchanges between the North and the South but also reveals the multidirectional flows of cultural circulation that are marked by “disjuncture and differences in the global cultural economy” (Appadurai 1996, 27-47).

Jhabvala’s *My Nine Lives* belongs to what Ottmar Ette calls “literature on the move” as he has envisioned that “the literatures of the 21st century will be literatures without a fixed abode, literatures that evade attempts at clear territorialisation” (2003, 13). Travel not only shapes the imagination of Jhabvala’s travellers but the story of Jhabvala herself as an author whose life is defined by movement and metamorphosis. Jhabvala’s works are, indeed, a vivid reflection of transcultural encounters as her European and Indian characters travel from one continent to the other. Hence, she chooses an unusual narrative form in her stories, declared to be as much a fictional autobiography as a fictional memoir, in which the narrative not only gives travel a literary expression but also becomes a form of journey. As Jhabvala speculates on the emotional and cultural dilemmas of her characters as exiles, refugees, immigrants and expatriates in her narrative, she is able to provide new insight into their struggles with their

uncertain past, present and future, located in heterogenous countries and continents. Thus, while touring and travelling around the globe, both the European and Indian characters are urged to perceive spaces of cultures as a shared entity beyond the spectrum of superior or inferior cultural patterns. It is through the experience of inhabiting the in-between spaces of cultures do they manage to reconcile with their role as outsiders – as the ‘other’ in a different culture but at the same time to make sense of their life as a travelling story.

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