

University of Nevada, Reno

**Languages of Self: American Immigrant Writers and the New Global
Literature**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English

By

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Abstract

In a global era, identity categories take on new meanings as globalized communities and all their accompanying tokens of identification (social, political, and personal) are formed and placed into competition with previously-held national and local identities. This dissertation explores the ways in which immigrant writers have conceived of identity, grappling not only with the social conditions which give rise to individual and collective identities, but also how these projects are depicted in the literary form. It's clear that an emerging subcategory of writers exists, particularly among immigrant writers, whose literature not only reflects, but also attempts to articulate the concerns of globalization. Because globalization directly impacts our view of interconnections between people, in other words, our notions of community and interpersonal connections, it also directly influences our view of the self and how social and personal identities are formed. It is natural, then, to speak simultaneously of globalization and identity when discussing the impacts globalization has had on the body of American literature. Furthermore, because immigrants are the most socially and economically vulnerable to the forces of globalization, the fiction of immigrant writers tends to strongly reflect transnational discourses on identity. Interconnectivity becomes important for these authors as they create their own sense of community on top of the nation and beyond its boundaries. The literary inheritance of writing produced from the ashes of postmodernism and contemporary globalization, from deterritorialization and interconnectivity, promotes writing that creates a new sense of community. In this project, I limit discussion to immigrant and first-generation writers, to those who have

been most directly affected by global forces, in order to examine the ways in which globalization has influenced discussions of identity, and in turn, contemporary American literature. Through close readings of Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves*, Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, Junot Díaz's *Drown*, and Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*, issues which affect contemporary discourses on globalization and identity such as power, marginality, time, space, and history are explored along with their impact on the body of what I term "globalized American literature."

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction: Immigrant Writers and the Global Context.....	1
Chapter 2: The Postmodern Immigrant Autobiography in a Transnational Era: Global Influences in Adeline Yen Mah’s <i>Falling Leaves</i>	20
Chapter 3: The Influences of Postmodernism and Globalization: Interconnectivity across Time, Space, and History in Aleksandar Hemon’s <i>The Lazarus Project</i>	54
Chapter 4: “You Need to Learn How to Walk the World”: Identity and Transnational Social Collectives in Junot Díaz’s <i>Drown</i>	106
Chapter 5: Marginality and Transnational Feminism in Rattawut Lapcharoensap’s <i>Sightseeing</i>	167
Chapter 6: Conclusion: Globalization and Globalized Literature.....	209
Works Cited.....	218

Chapter 1: Introduction: Immigrant Writers and the Global Context

Judith Butler reflects, “I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (709). In a global era, identity categories as sites of necessary trouble take on new meanings as global communities and all their accompanying tokens of identification (social, political, personal) are formed and placed into competition with previously-held national and local identities. Where do the stumbling blocks or dissonances lie between each mode of identification, between social identities created within the nation and without it, between personal identities forced to navigate so many new categories? And why, in Butler’s words, should these new global identities be promoted as sites of “*necessary trouble*”? While defining the new symbols and standards of global culture is beyond the scope of any singular project, linkages between discussions of identity, literary studies, and globalization studies have begun to emerge. For example, James Annesley argues in favor of globalization as a lens through which “the shape and character of concerns that have a key bearing on the interpretation of contemporary cultural, social and political life” can be read via contemporary fiction (6). He writes, “Stepping beyond postmodernism’s preoccupation with representation and simulation and avoiding its Eurocentric bias, arguments linked to globalization promise more productive ways of interpreting the relationships that link culture with socioeconomic conditions” (10). Annesley’s argument is echoed in the works of a number of other literary scholars studying the impacts of globalization on American fiction. Paul Jay, for example, argues “Since the rise of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has reshaped literary and cultural studies more than its embrace of transnationalism” and links these changes to civil rights and other social-political movements which influenced theoretical developments within the academy (1). He notes that

transnational thought has productively complicated nationalist paradigms embedded within the disciplines and has “transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders” (1).

Similarly, Rachel Adams, like Jay and Annesley, also stresses interconnections and pragmatic responses to real-world social inequalities over postmodernism’s tendencies toward experimentalism and the isolation of the individual. She delineates postmodernist fiction as characterized by disconnection, by solipsism and paranoia, and by the notion that personal connections may be nothing more than the figments for an individual imagination, while “the literature of globalization represents them as the shared perception of a community whereby, for better or for worse, populations in one part of the world are inevitably affect by the events in another” (268). Like it or not, in a world where we are continuously connected to one another via information technologies, a sense of disconnection, in the postmodernist sense of rootlessness and isolation, is becoming increasingly impossible.

The literary inheritance of writing produced from the ashes of postmodernism and contemporary globalization, from deterritorialization and interconnectivity, does not produce an even more disconnected for of postmodernism, Diane Krumrey argues, rather it promotes writing that creates a new sense of community. For writers influenced by globalization, particularly immigrant writers, “Theirs is a confidence in the unsettledness, a confidence in their ability to navigate and survive it. Fragmentation and discontinuous reality produce a paradoxical sense of possibility. These authors reinscribe an indeterminate international space on the surface of America and American culture” (38). For Krumrey, like Jay, Adams, and Annesley, the literature influenced by globalization, or what I shall simply refer to as “globalized American

literature,” interconnectivity becomes important for these authors as they create their own sense of community on top of the nation and beyond its boundaries. Although I am not proposing that all contemporary literature has been influenced by globalization equally, or even in precisely the same ways, it’s clear that an emerging subcategory of writers exists, particularly among immigrant writers as both Krumrey and Adams argue, whose literature not only reflects, but also attempts to articulate the concerns of globalization.

While the extent to which globalization has, and continues to influence the body of American literature as a whole is in the process of ongoing debate, a number of trends have emerged in the more narrow field of immigrant literature, particularly in its treatment of identity. Because globalization directly impacts our view of interconnections between people, in other words, our notions of community and interpersonal connections, it also directly impacts our view of the self and how social and personal identities are formed. It is natural, then to speak simultaneously of globalization and identity when discussing the impacts globalization has had on the body of American literature. In this project, I limit discussion to immigrant and first generation writers, to those who have been most directly impacted the influences of globalization, though a similar study could, and should eventually be done on writers outside of the narrow parameters of the immigrant literature genre. Nevertheless, because immigrants are the most socially and economically vulnerable to the forces of globalization, the fiction of immigrant writers tends to strongly reflect transnational discourses on identity. The aim of this study is to explore the ways in which immigrant writers have conceived of identity, grappling not only with the social conditions which give rise to individual and collective identities, but also how projects in identity politics are conceived of and carried out—and most importantly, how these projects are depicted the literary form.

In other words, this study asks three main questions: Firstly, how has globalization influenced discussions of identity? What makes identity construction unique to the global era? Secondly, how have these discussions influenced contemporary American literature? In other words, in what ways do the influences of globalization manifest themselves in literary explorations of identity both thematically and stylistically? And finally, why is such an approach useful to the study of contemporary literature? What is to be gained by delineating texts as globally-influenced works of literature versus postmodernist texts?

Global Transformations

Before continuing, it may be useful to narrow down what is meant by globalization as it is being used here. Although popularly understood as an economic phenomenon, globalization carries important sociopolitical dimensions as well. Anthony Giddens argues globalization is political, technological, and cultural and, like Immanuel Wallerstein, traces its evolution specifically to developments in mass systems of communication (10). Moreover, globalization is profoundly restructuring the ways people live, on the large and small scale. He writes, “Globalisation isn’t only about what is ‘out there’, remote and far away from the individual. It is an ‘in here’ phenomenon too, influencing intimate and personal aspects of our lives” (12). Wallerstein notes the concentrated rise of globalization can be linked to developments in communications technology making manifest relatively open frontiers; however, this phenomena is not new, but “has in fact been a cyclical occurrence throughout the history of the modern world-system” (93).

Affected both by deep economic shifts and changes in global patterns of migration, it is little wonder that the works of immigrant writers in particular reflect the conditions of

globalization. However, accepting that globalization is both an old and new phenomena, one that affects society at different levels and has uneven impacts upon members of society, I will confine my discussion on globalization to more recent, post 1970s shifts in global flows, to the phenomena that would have most directly impacted the texts included in this study.

Manfred B. Steger officially locates the rise of globalization to the 1960s with the creation of new technologies and dramatic acceleration of worldwide interdependencies that occurred as a result in the early 1970s. Unofficially, he traces global mentalities as far back as 10,000 BCE and the spread of hunter gatherer bands across the world, noting that globalization “is not a single process but a set of processes that operate simultaneously and unevenly around the world” (36). However, accepting that the urge to migrate and cross borders is not a new but very, very old phenomena, there is still something distinctly unique about our contemporary era. The rise of global governance, global culture, and the spread of languages are just some of the aspects of contemporary globalization. Steger further defines post-Cold War globalization as a “*social condition* characterized by tight global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnection and flows that make most of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant” (8). Steger stresses both the social dimension to contemporary globalization and its ever-evolving nature cautioning that there is no determinate endpoint which that precludes further development; globalization “signifies a future social condition that, like all conditions, is destined to give way to new constellations” (Steger 8).

Among those constellations, globalization has created a new, truly global public arena online. Instead of privileged elites, anyone with an internet connection is now allowed to participate in this new social arena, subsequently increasing the number of social actors in the public sphere. These changes, Farhang Rajee argues, have simultaneously affected our modes of

production and social frameworks. Taking a Marxist approach to society and social change, he writes, “A drastic change in the mode of production has occurred: from industry to information technology. We have left the age of Fordism for that of post-Fordism” (25). And the post-Fordist economy views localized national production as a detriment, instead sharing production internationally based on political and economic advantage. By Rajee’s definition, the new global era can discretely be considered its own age with all the subsequent accompanying ideological shifts that follow changes to a society’s economic base.

The global economy has resulted in the redistribution of production by governments, businesses and consumers, which has in turn encouraged new patterns of migration as economically disadvantaged workers leave their home countries to chase jobs or are forced across borders as national industries collapse. However, Robert K. Schaeffer points out that cross-border migration is not a new phenomena and that only 3% of the world’s population live in countries outside of their birth nations, a figure which has not changed significantly since the 1950s (103). In fact, the primary difference of contemporary migration isn’t the number of migrants being produced, but rather the shape and character of the migratory patterns. Earlier periods of global migration were characterized by unidirectional migration flows. From 1500 to 1850, during the first great period of migration, Eastern populations in Europe and Africa shifted West toward the colonized Americas. The industrial era brought about a new global pattern of migration in 1850 as Southern populations headed North to work as farm labor in rural areas and as factory workers in cities. In 1945, these patterns changed once again. Instead of chasing jobs in colonies and industries, many ethnic populations began returning to their homelands thanks to decolonization, while widespread collapse in industry and other economic hardships encouraged migrants to spread outwards, moving to neighboring, less impoverished countries rather than

heading North or West. Additionally, post-World War II, the demand for female labor grew and for the first time, large groups of women joined the migration flows, leaving their home countries to work in female-oriented jobs such as nurses or domestic workers, rather than specifically heading toward the colonized West or booming industrial north. Ethnic conflict and war has also led to large groups of displaced populations looking for refuge rather than migrating in a specific direction in search of economic prosperity. In short, unlike previous periods of global migration, post-World War II immigration has been characterized by multidirectional flows and many different types of migration patterns driven as much by culture and politics, as economics. Or, according to Schaeffer, “It would be more appropriate to describe the current period as ‘an age of migrations’” (103).

A combination of economic shifts redistributing production and wage labor jobs out of industrialized nations and into increasingly impoverished territories, along with greater communications technologies, which have served to empower populist movements by increasing the numbers of people able to participate in the public arena have given rise to increasingly large numbers of disenfranchised populations. Now forced to chase work around the globe, diaspora and mass migrations have become common in the global era, subsequently changing the social ties people hold with one another. As deep local ties are broken, many individuals push back, creating even stronger bonds between subject and locality in response to external global pressures. At the same time, the rise of the internet has created an entirely new social field, one in which race, gender, class, and nationality do not matter. Individuals are thus simultaneously able to create both local and global social ties, while being freed from the confines of what Stuart Hall calls the “great collective social identities,” (“Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” 44). Ironically, these forces have also served to create increasingly fragmented

identities and disenfranchised populations searching to establish stability in their conception of self.

The works in this dissertation reflect both the new migratory patterns caused by globalization and the attempt to form new social ties beyond the nation. The formation of social identities plays an important part in each of the works studied, which I will discuss further below, while the changes to global patterns of migration can be seen in how the writers characterize their immigration. None of the writers studied attempt to present themselves as typical American immigrants and even try to distance themselves from its archetypes, with *Sightseeing* eschewing them completely by setting all of its stories outside of the United States in Thailand. The immigrant stories presented here run the gamut from diaspora (Mah), to war refugees (Hemon), to child immigrants (Díaz). What is absent in each of these stories is *choice*. None of our hero protagonists come to the United States entirely by their own volition. Rather, it is circumstance, and not the nobility of the American dream, which initially brings them to our shores. It is little wonder, then, that each story presents its own critique, or in some cases, outright revision of the classic immigrant story whose tropes have become outmoded for the realities of global migration.

Today, large-scale social movements (or what are collectively termed identity politics) differ from similar movements created during the Civil Rights era. Contemporary discussions on race and gender, for example, are markedly different than those held in the 1960s. According to Hall, the great collective social identities have evolved from the “large-scale, all-encompassing, homogeneous” unified collective identities which “placed, positioned, stabilized, and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self” (“Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” 44). Current discussions on identity and within social

justice movements center on the notion that identities are constructed in difference rather than sameness. How we discuss individual identities has changed, though the notion of categories of identification has not disappeared. The great collective social identities are no “longer, in either the social, historical or epistemological place where they were in our conceptualizations of the world in the recent past. . . .We are as attentive to their inner differences, their inner contradictions, their segmentations and their fragmentations (“Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” 45)

These same transformations have found their way into the literary realm as authors, and immigrant authors in particular, attempt to make sense of, and reconcile these forces within their texts. Rachel Adams argues that the fiction of contemporary American immigrant authors is especially sensitive to these changes because immigrants themselves are among the most socially and economically vulnerable to the forces of globalization. For this reason, fiction by immigrant writers tends to reflect global discourses on power and identity. As recent arrivals, immigrant writers come to the United States “Relatively unburdened by the legacies of Euro-American modernism or the politics of the Cold War,” and are far more influenced by global upheavals, the flows of international capital, and world culture and politics (251). Adams further argues that this outsider status enable immigrant writers to react “against the aesthetic sensibilities of high postmodernism while providing American literature with a new set of genealogical, geographic, and temporal referents” (251). Unburdened by not only the history of the cold war but the (postmodernist) literature it tends to produce, immigrant authors can make use of the stylistic conventions of their adopted language while infusing their writings with their own cultural concerns. Adams’s argument ultimately boils down to texts by immigrant authors being influenced by globalization simply because the writers themselves must be, but does not, I think,

go far enough to explain what the nature of those differences are or what has caused them. This project locates those differences within changing notions on the conception of individual identity that have arisen as a result of heightened global interconnectivity.

New Global Identities?

Individual identity is a combination of both personal and social identity. Personal identities are defined by the sense of being distinct and unique in relation to others, while social identities are defined by a sense of belonging in larger social groups. The relationship between personal and social identities form individual identities as social actors work to define themselves in relation to others, while simultaneously incorporating collective identities into their individual selves. Marian Kempny points out that identities are always formed in relation to others, and are situationally defined and redefined. As a result, identity is not a stable, intrinsic, and independent property of a person or group, but is always formed via interaction with groups and other social actors (6). In this way, contemporary thought on identity holds that identification slides between similarity and difference. Kempny further argues that globalization “may be seen as the heir to the debates surrounding postmodernism, especially in the context of understanding sociocultural change” (2). Unlike postmodernist thought on identity which privileges difference, globalization, which links the cultural, political, economic, and environmental practices of individuals across the globe, has also created new discussions on human interconnectivity.

While globalization has given rise to new forms of oppression, cultural violence, and unequal economic development, it has simultaneously created what Peter Evans terms “counterhegemonic globalization” or transnational social movements that advocate for more

equitable distributions of wealth and power (483). He writes, “For activists and theorists alike, these movements have become one of the most promising political antidotes to a system of domination that is increasingly seen as effectual only in its ability to maintain itself in power” (483). Amartya Sen agrees, arguing that “the real issue is the distribution of globalization’s benefits. Indeed, this is why many of the antiglobalization protesters, who seek a better deal for the underdogs of the world economy, are not—contrary to their own rhetoric and to the views attributed to them by others—really ‘antiglobalization’ (19). For all the anger at the inequalities propagated by globalization, Sen points out that antiglobalization protests are always highly globalized—not localized—events. Steger argues the benefits of globalization—instantaneous access to media, technology, and mass-market commodities—make it impossible for activist groups to completely detach themselves from the processes of globalization, whether grassroots charitable organizations or militant terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda. He writes, “The tensions between localism and globalism have reached unprecedented levels precisely because the links interconnecting them have been growing faster than at any time in history” (Steger 7). And while some groups have a tenuous relationship with globalization, making use of its benefits while disdaining the concept on principle, others embrace globalization as a rallying call. Groups such as the We Are Everywhere movement make use of global interconnections in order to push their social agendas forward:

Those who tear down fences are part of the largest globally interconnected social movement of our time. Over the last ten years, our protests have erupted on continent after continent, fuelled by the extremes of wealth and poverty, by military repression, by environmental breakdown, by ever-diminishing power to control our own lives and resources. We are furious at the increasingly thin sham

of democracy, sick of the lies of consumer capitalism, ruled by ever more powerful corporations. We are the globalization of resistance (*We Are Everywhere* 21).

The notion of a “globalization of resistance” has spread to a number of social justice and human rights movements including labor and environmental movements; however, at the vanguard of these is the feminist movement whose goals encompass a broad spectrum of economic, cultural, geographic, and political goals. Peter Evans argues, “it is almost impossible to imagine a movement for counterhegemonic globalization in which the transnational women’s movement did not play a leading role” (486). The transnational women’s movement, one of the focuses of this project, serves as a prime example of a successful global rights movement in that their goals are founded in a discourse of human rights, but do not take a universal approach to women’s issues acknowledging cultural and geographical differences among women worldwide. The rise of transnational feminist movements has brought the global North and South into critical discourse with one another, making manifest the divide between the global North and the South, or the First and the Third World, and allowing for more productive anticolonial discussions to take place. In this sense, while power inequalities continue to exist, inroads into hegemonic power discourses have also been forged by global interconnectivity. The distribution of power is no longer exclusively from the top down.

Stuart Hall points out that “identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one’s own self” (“Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” 49). If identity is representation, a personal narrative that we tell ourselves, then literature becomes a natural medium through which different facets of identity can be explored. However, the representation of identity within literature has changed

over time, evolving in recent generations from the modernists' notion of a fixed, stable identity to the postmodernists' fragmented, unstable conceptions of the self. The postmodern notion of identity has been especially influenced by discussions on the relationship between discourse and power. According to the postmodernists, the language game of the discourse both marginalizes those outside it and legitimizes those in control of the discourse, conferring power through its expression. The more dominant a discourse becomes, the more it is internalized by the subject, and thus, the more naturalized it seems. For this reason, the postmodern conception of identity is centered on the individual as a subject within discourses of power.

Identities themselves are constituted within these (often conflicting) discourses making it impossible for the subject to extricate him or herself from social conditions. Without the ability to objectively judge discourses of power, the postmodernists argue that the thoughts and expressions of the individual “are seen as part of a pattern of contaminated, patriarchal discourses, which in any case conflict, and of which he is the mere epiphenomenon” (*Postmodernism* 51). In this way, discourse serves to marginalize individuals outside its power structures while simultaneously destabilizing the notion of a cohesive self. The notion of a cohesive self was an especially modernist project, argues David Harvey. Modernists assumed a centered identity the individual could become alienated from, allowing for the oppositional pursuit for coherence. In contrast, postmodernism concentrates upon “the schizophrenic circumstances induced by fragmentation and all those instabilities (including those of language) that prevent us even picturing coherently” a centered identity or a better future (54). In that sense, postmodernism exists outside of time, outside of the moment where a cohesive self existed prior to alienation, or could exist again afterwards. In this sense, “postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability

to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present” (54). Thus, the notion of the individual in postmodernist terms is fractured, decentered, and pluralized, the subject cast adrift amongst competing discourses.

While contemporary discussions of identity retain a number of the same concerns as the postmodernists, there are a number of key differences as well. Zbyszko Melosik argues that within postmodern culture, “the disciplining role of difference is diminished,” leading to two parallel trends: the trend to erase difference and pretend it doesn’t exist—for example, erasing the gap between “high” and “low” culture—or the exaggeration of difference (75). Within identity movements, he argues, Otherness is celebrated to the point where “the particular forms of ethnicity, race, gender, or sexuality become the absolute criterion of social reality assessment” (76). However, I argue that global rights movements have a distinct relationship with difference. Taking their cues from the feminist and labor movements, difference is neither valorized nor erased, rather it becomes an acknowledgement of complexity. Writers influenced by globalization are interested in how discourse maintains and replicate power structures; however, as immigrants, women, and people of color, many of these writers come from the margins themselves, altering the discussion on subject positioning. In a world of increasing social fragmentation, where the individual belongs to multiple social fields simultaneously, ranging from marginal to mainstream, the discussion on how power works to marginalize cannot follow along strictly Foucaudian terms. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, global identities “are now as ‘mobile’ as the world itself, changeable and protean, elusive, difficult to hold, uncertain—indeed, flexible—and their story cannot be trusted to be continuous and consistent” (21). The way the mechanisms of power are enacted upon flexible identities, upon people who do not consistently class themselves in one way or another over time, also changes the identity and

power in a global system: When it comes to identity formation in marginalized peoples, “what we find is that the ebb and flow of identifications is structured in important ways by conditions and contexts that have been the concern of sociology for over a century: power, role expectation, normative frameworks, and so on” (O’Brien 36). In other words, while discussions of power still play a central role in globalized American literature, the enactment of power, and the ability for marginalized peoples to resist the structures of power has changed.

Another key difference between the postmodernists and literature of the global era is in their relation to history. While language games serve to decontextualize a text, taking it outside of time, globally-influenced literature is very much aware of its place in history and often attempts to situate itself, grounding the events of the text with relevant social, cultural, and political movements. Movements within identity politics which have been influenced by globalization, such as the feminist movement, show a similar trend toward historization, contemporary feminists very much aware that they are part of the “third wave,” part of a legacy which has evolved, in part, thanks to larger geopolitical shifts. In globalized literature, this creates both an acknowledgement of postmodern social conditions, of the fragmentation which creates multiple social spheres, while also signaling a kind of return to the modernists’ conception of a centered identity.

Within literature, these tensions between discourses of power, the margins, and history play out in interesting ways. Autobiography, for example, became an especially fertile ground for the postmodernists to play on. Continuing the modernist tradition of mixing fact with fiction, the postmodern autobiography (and roman à clef) worked to bring the fictional and nonfictional worlds into contact with one another, calling to attention the artificialness of the text and genre. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, for example, intermixed seemingly factual accounts

of its author's childhood with dream-like fairytales of her adventures as a swordfighter. Brian McHale argues that autobiography functions on a distinct ontological level, as a "world to be juxtaposed with the fictional world, and thus a tool for foregrounding ontological boundaries and tensions" (203). Within postmodern autobiography, the author as character in the text signals an intermixing of two worlds (the real and the fictional) which are otherwise inaccessible to each other. According to Linda Hutcheon, "The representation of the self (and the other) in this form is also done with intense self-consciousness, thus revealing the problematic relation of the private person writing to the public as well as personal events once lived (by the narrator or someone else)" (157).

Autobiography in the hands of the postmodernists becomes another form of language games, the cohesion of genre (autobiography/roman a clef) called into question by the presentation of the text. While the postmodernist compulsion questions genre for the sake of questioning genre, we see a slightly different turn in globally-influenced literature. In autobiography, the quintessential genre of immigrant literature, immigrant autobiographers have continued with the tradition of playing with reality. However, these texts do so not simply for its own sake, for the sake of language games, but to create a different sort of reality. While the postmodernists' intention is to interrogate genre, globally-influenced writers take the opposite approach and utilize nonfictional elements to give fictional texts greater verisimilitude, recalling both Annesley and Adams's earlier point that globalized American fiction stresses pragmatic responses to real-world social inequalities. From this standpoint, experimentalism in order to create verisimilitude is a far more global way of thinking than high styling for the sake of high styling. Knowing readers would attempt to conflate author with character, Junot Díaz embraced that possibility, giving his central character his own childhood nickname. The effect is to give

readers a false sense of closeness to a diffident narrator. The text seems personal because readers presume the author is speaking directly at us, rather than filtered through a fictional character in a fictional universe. Aleksandar Hemon tackles the roman a clef with similar results. The author, like his main character, went on a roadtrip through eastern Europe, snapping photographs along the way. The photographs included in the novel from Hemon's actual trip become representative of both the author's experiences and his character's. In this way, the blended elements of both texts create a marriage between the high stylistic elements of postmodernism and a sense of humanity, of lived experience, grounding the novels in space and time, not push them further away from it.

The works in this project were selected and arranged in order of increasing fictionalization, from Adeline Yen Mah's autobiography, *Falling Leaves* to Rattawut Lapcharoensap's short story collection, *Sightseeing*. This range helps demonstrate the complex relationship between globally-influenced literature and representations of identity. Each of the selected authors grapple in varying degrees with some of the predominant issues of globalization and its representations of identity, with power and marginality, and with time, space, and history. And, most importantly, each work represents just some of the ways the influences of globalization have manifested themselves in literary texts.

The first chapter in this project, "The Postmodern Immigrant Autobiography in a Transnational Era: Global Influences in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves*," attempts to define some of the new symbols and standards of "the globalization of American literature," to borrow Adams's phrase (251). For this reason, the study turns to one of the classics of the immigrant literature genre, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, and the memoir, the classic literary form of the immigrant literature genre in order to

sketch out some of the concerns of contemporary globally-oriented literature, including its preoccupations with history and the interplay of cultures. Kingston's serves as a good precursor to a more contemporary autobiography like Mah's *Falling Leaves*, but lacks the historical situatedness of the latter work. Whereas *Woman Warrior* seems to exist out of time, *Falling Leaves* is very deliberately a product of its time. In this way, globalized literature does not close its eyes to life outside of the borders of a select few nations and ethnic groups; rather, global literature demonstrates an awareness of the interconnectivity between nations and culture groups. These ideas can be demonstrated even in memoir, the most personal of literature.

From there, the project moves on to consider how the interplay between history, postmodern social conditions, and the cultural conditions of globalization have given rise to new modes of thinking identity in "The Influences of Postmodernism and Globalization: Interconnectivity across Time, Space, and History in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*." The chapter begins with a discussion on postmodernism and globalization, demonstrating that while Hemon and other contemporary immigrant authors are conversant in postmodern traditions, it is the conditions of globalization which most directly impact their daily lives, and fuel their literary imaginations. It is the conditions of globalization which prompts Brik, the novel's protagonist to rewrite the immigrant myth into one that better reflects his own circumstances and the lived realities of other immigrants in a global era.

The importance of social identities in the new global era and a text's ability to represent those identities becomes the focus of the third chapter, "'You Need to Learn How to Walk the World': Identity and Transnational Social Collectives in Junot Díaz's *Drown*." As a collection, *Drown* serves as a meditation on identity, on the ways in which globalization has created transnational identities and social collectives, and the ways those identities can be represented

through the literary form. Díaz's stories focus on the formation of individual identity within difference, group identity, and the evolution of transnational identities. Díaz replicates the tensions which have given birth to his characters' identities, manipulating the positionality of the reader, and allowing his audience to experience the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion Latino migrants face in a transnational era.

And finally, the fourth chapter, "Marginality and Transnational Feminism in Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*" examines how contemporary notions of difference have resulted in changes in the ways in which projects in identity politics are conceived of and carried out in the global era. As the precursor to the identity politics movement, the feminist movement greatly influenced the collective discussion on identity in general, and it is with feminism that I conclude this project, tracing how one of the oldest movements in identity politics has been influenced by globalization, and how that influence in turn is reflected in *Sightseeing*. Existing within a social field where identity politics have become part of the cultural conversation, the stories in *Sightseeing* act as part of the discussion on gender, influenced in particular by contemporary critiques of first-world privilege and third-world exclusion, and feminist discussions on gender and power. While wholesale, universal changes to the fabric of society are impossible, the stories explore how Othered individuals can push against the boundaries separating the center from the periphery and achieve agency via individual identity projects. In *Sightseeing*, just as in the texts that preceded it, global forces intersect with social conditions of difference, giving rise to new formations of identity and new representations of identity within the literary form.

Chapter 2: The Postmodern Immigrant Autobiography in a Transnational Era: Global Influences in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves*

Junot Díaz observes, “There is a lot of skepticism today as to whether memoir is real. But when fiction is done at a certain level there is skepticism as to whether it is really fiction” (“Junot Díaz: A Life in Books”). Although packaged as nonfiction, memoir and autobiography have become contested sites of literature for writers and readers alike. Early precursors of the genre such as slave and captivity narratives demanded absolute validity. The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave* contains the subtitle: *Written By Himself*, underscoring in both title and byline that the work is genuine, and contains a lengthy preface by prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison testifying to the truthfulness of the narrative. Intended to placate reader doubt over whether a freed slave could write an account of his experiences, contemporary authors, in contrast, embrace this skepticism. After Modernist writers began mixing fact with fiction in their works, postmodernist writers continued the tradition, creating self-consciously *literary* memoirs and autobiographies that mixed in fictionalized elements with true events. The effect of these hybridized memoirs served to reveal “the problematic relation of the private person writing to the public as well as personal events once lived (by the narrator or someone else)” (157). Memoir and autobiography thus became less about the tale being told than about its telling, about genre and style than over strictly verifiable fact.

Accustomed to the postmodernist style, Díaz’s point is well taken; inevitably, readers would grow mistrustful of memoir and autobiography once they lost their strictly journalistic style, and as a consequence, skeptical of the imaginary nature of fiction. If fictional elements had already enter nonfiction, it makes sense nonfictional elements would have found their way

into fiction. Which presents a quandary for contemporary writers: embrace postmodern skepticism of genre and public skepticism of the work as a whole, or find a way to interrogate or subvert these doubts and create a new sense of reality, one that speaks to current social and cultural conditions? It is for this reason that we begin this study with autobiography, both for the prominence that it has held within the immigrant literature genre as a whole, and because contemporary responses to the blurred lines between fiction and nonfiction—specifically in memoir and autobiography—signal some of the ways in which globalization has influenced discussions of the self.

While the postmodernists' intention is to interrogate genre, globally-influenced writers take the opposite approach and utilize nonfictional elements to give fictional texts greater verisimilitude. Contemporary autobiographers not only seek to make sense of lived experience, but also to process it within the framework of culture, history, and literary influence. In general, when the writers of these works are immigrants, the act of telling becomes increasingly delicate as the writer's home culture is balanced alongside the reader's. The narrative thus becomes dependent upon a wellspring of history, art, and culture the reader may not have experienced, or understood, in the same way as the storyteller. The increasing awareness of globalization further complicates matters as autobiographers, in many cases, are no longer able to tell the stories of two cultures and two nations locked in solitary discourse, but must open the conversation to the rest of the world, balancing awareness of larger historical and cultural processes at work with an audience that consists less of a single nationality (i.e., American or Canadian), but of an entire language group (speakers of English). And speaking practically, with the ever-increasing global marketplace and the ease with which print media can now be disseminated among speakers of the same language group, a writer's target audience may no longer be fellow nationals, but

fellow English speakers. This leads to an important shift in attitudes toward writer and text. For example, as will be later discussed, *Falling Leaves* was written and published for a global English-speaking audience, leading Mah to portray herself as a citizen of the world, rather than as a proud American immigrant, and influencing the novel's decision to include historical research alongside the personal.

In many cases, because of the overlap between postmodern and globalist concerns, what may seem like an example of global fiction may only be a postmodern novel. The question then becomes, what is the difference between the two, between a postmodern, Cold War-era literary work, and one written in the (post-postmodern) contemporary global era? It may be helpful before continuing to sketch out a few of the key differences between what I mean by globalized literature, versus simply postmodern.

The simple answer to this question is that globalized American literature shares common ground with literature influenced by postmodernism, including some of its stylistic hallmarks, its obsession with particularity, its interest in multiculturalism, its tendency toward social critique. However, where globally-influenced literature differs from postmodernism is its interests and concerns. While the Cold War bears its imprint on postmodernism, the literatures of globalization have been influenced by the forces that created globalization—by the advancements of high-speed telecommunication, by runaway free-market capitalism—and the resulting cultural, political, and social upheavals those changes have brought on. Literature influenced by globalization does not close its eyes to life outside of the borders of a select few nations and ethnic groups; rather, global literature demonstrates an awareness, not only of the interconnectivity between nations and culture groups, but of the social movements and historical processes that gave rise to these interconnections. There is a situatedness, a feeling of being in-

time, rather than out of time, that globalized literature possesses, which postmodernism, for all its high style and experimentalism, often lacks. These ideas can be demonstrated even in memoir, the most personal of literature.

The more difficult answer to the question of what separates globalization and postmodernism is that while postmodernism is a known intellectual movement that has been studied in-depth, the field of globalization is still evolving. What follows are a number of observations on trends found in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves: The Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, a work especially cognizant of its place as a transnational novel. Mah's autobiography is as much the personal account of an individual as it is the story of Hong Kong itself. Interweaving family history with Mah's observations on the movements of transnational economics and political forces within Hong Kong, *Falling Leaves* establishes its global influences through the work's preoccupations with history and the interplay of cultures. *Falling Leaves* is contrasted with Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, a work that makes use of postmodern literary techniques by blending genres, mixing Chinese folklore with more traditional elements of autobiography, and relying on a fragmented, nonlinear narrative structure. Both works are clearly influenced by the eras in which they were written, *The Woman Warrior* as a classic example of a Cold War-era postmodernist literary memoir, and *Falling Leaves* as representative of contemporary global thought. However, despite any background similarities the two authors share, for example, both authors' cosmopolitan upbringings in major port cities (Kingston in San Francisco and Mah in Hong Kong), *The Woman Warrior* lacks the kind of historical situatedness and global awareness that *Falling Leaves* possesses.

While autobiography and memoir act as the focus of this chapter, a few words must first be said about the evolution of American immigrant literature as a whole. The tropes of immigrant fiction as a whole are as familiar to most Americans as the myth of immigration itself: an underprivileged hero comes to America in search of a better future and faces various difficulties along the way in the form of a dangerous journey, isolation, and cultural alienation, only to triumph over adversity in the end as a hard-won better future is obtained. William Boelhower's seminal article, "The Immigrant Novel as Genre" formally lays out these tropes as Boelhower explains that the three major narrative moments of immigrant fiction are "EXPECTATION (project, dream, possible world), CONTACT (experience, trials, contrasts), and RESOLUTION (assimilation, hyphenation, alienation)" (5). In other words, immigrant fiction must contain scenes distinctly portraying the hero/ine's desire (or motivation) for immigration, his/her experiences in the new world, and a final synthesis of the protagonist's experiences in the new world where s/he comes to "idealize the [old world]—either through an attempt to preserve his [old world] culture, even though he may be assimilated into the [new world], or through a stiff criticism of an alienating set of experiences in America" (5).

Classic works of immigrant literature such as Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* seem to fit Boelhower's model to an almost ideal degree. Cahan tells the story of the titular David Levinsky as he immigrates from turn of the century Russia to New York, attempting to understand American culture, fit in, and reach personal and financial success along the way. True to form, the novel contains scenes of David's pre-immigrant life leading up to his eventual decision to leave, before centering most of its narrative focus on his experiences within the United States. Though he is highly ambivalent about those experiences and finds his eventual success to be "devoid of significance," David nevertheless embraces the American

dream as he also affirms that his life in the United States has been “nothing short of a miracle” (3).

Boelhower sets up a similar schema for immigrant autobiographies as he does for immigrant novels by arguing that the goal of the immigrant autobiography is to tell a single, larger cultural story. He contends that the narrative logic of these autobiographies “is the logic of the collective experience of the immigrants isomorphically translated into autobiographical code” (“The Brave New World of Immigrant Autobiography” 7). In other words, while no single autobiography can hope to speak for the collective experiences of its members, it can attempt to bring the reader some understanding of the commonalities of those experiences. He sketches out a few basic points that immigrant autobiographies tend to have in common. Similar to the model he proposes for immigrant novels, Boelhower explains that the central figure in these works must also undergo a series of stages in the immigration process ranging from anticipation of the journey, to the journey itself, to the subsequent feelings of separation from the homeland, to first contact with the new culture, and finally, to a series of contrasting memories as the central figure compares the old culture with the new.

While subsequent critics of immigrant literature as a whole, and immigrant autobiographies in particular, disagree with certain points of Boelhower’s schema, the general consensus among literary critics has tended to be that immigrant autobiographies can be read on both macrocosm and microcosm levels as emblematic of both the experiences of an individual and the experiences of a culture, of both the immigrant’s home culture and that culture within the United States, and even of the United States itself. Differences among critics arise when attempting to ascribe specific meaning to those experiences. Betty Ann Bergland, for example, argues that “ethnic autobiographies resist easy reading, but viewed collectively they suggest

narratives of opposition to prevailing ideologies” (70). However, the tacit agreement among literary scholars has been that these works are almost inevitably commenting upon the cultural whole, of the writer’s specific ethnic group, if not of America itself. April R. Komenaka calls the bilingual-bicultural autobiographer “an informant of the highest quality: observant of even the most minute cultural differences; articulate about relationships, emotion, and thought; sensitive to nuances of language use,” thus privileging the autobiographer’s usefulness not in telling the story of an individual, but as a commentator on America as a whole—and keeping America firmly centered in the study of these works (105).

Like Komenaka and Bergland, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong also agrees with Boelhower’s basic premise that “immigrant autobiography may illuminate the meaning of being American as well as, if not better than, autobiography by the native-born” (144). However, she disagrees with the universal applicability he proposes for the processes of immigration and acculturation in immigrant autobiographies. She notes that while his basic schema may fit *The Rise of David Levinsky* and other narratives written by immigrants of European origins, it breaks down when applied to immigrants from outside the western hemisphere, particularly in the case of Chinese autobiographies. While European immigrants can be counted on to arrive in America already ideologically in favor of the Enlightenment principles which founded the United States, non-Occidental immigrants arrive with no such indoctrination, resulting in autobiographies wherein the process of becoming American is treated with a much lower order of concern. For Chinese emigrants in particular, she writes, “America is one, albeit a particularly attractive one, of many destinations . . . in a global scattering over a long period that some scholars call the Chinese diaspora” (155). Partially embracing the American dream and western ideology in general, this

further erodes the notion of America as the land of dreams and golden opportunities within these autobiographies, turning the autobiographer's Americanization into a marginal theme.

The United States as universal cultural center within immigrant autobiographies is a highly contested prospect, dependent not only upon which ethnic group the individual autobiographer belongs to, but also which era the autobiographer writes in. In "Translocality in the New Post-American Immigrant Literature," Diane Krumrey specifically examines the effect postmodernism has on immigrant literature as a whole. She argues that postmodern novels provide "a vision of place, nation, and identity that in its cumulative effect (for there are many immigrant novels bearing this meaning today) decenters America. In the geography of these novels, America is levered away from its presumed centrality. It is no longer the hub but a spoke, no longer the logical endpoint of all immigration" (28). Much like Wong's Chinese immigrant autobiographies which reflect a culture for whom the United States is *not* the only option for a better life, postmodern immigrant literature also shies away from making claims about universalizing experiences, whether the writer's own experiences of the home culture or of the United States, precisely because postmodernism as a whole shies away from universalizing experience. Krumrey acknowledges that "[i]n some novels, the process of a character's arrival at [cultural] competency drives the narrative, but in many, the characters' recognition that their worlds exceed geographical determination forms the background to the events that occur" (31). In other words, while the conventional tropes may still be found in much of immigrant literature, they are also being refashioned and reappropriated for contemporary realities of immigration, life within the United States, current cultural discourses, and the state of the world at large.

The state of the world at large and the increasing interest in globalization and global topics has caused literary critics to begin rereading immigrant literature as a whole under the

microscope of globalization, a move Sarika Chandra argues has not yet been met with much success. Chandra posits that most attempts to globalize contemporary literature have amounted to no more than rhetorical, rather than ideological, moves which have done little to shift the status quo. She views the hidden purpose of cultural and literary globalizing projects as ultimately a national one (but which makes use of different terminology), just as it always has been in canonical literary studies. Rather than erasing center/periphery boundaries, globalized literary studies affirm them as Chandra notes that “the figure of the immigrant” within immigrant literature “comes to occupy the position of an ‘outsider’ that helps make the ‘inside’ seem more secure” (833). Rather than accepting the particularizing nuances of postmodernism, the effect of globalization (which is itself a postmodernist movement) on literary studies has been to reuniversalize immigrant experiences and return the image of America to the standard of mythic cultural monolith. Chandra examines the trend of scholarship surrounding Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and finds that “although Alvarez’s text is in conversation with historical processes that complicate issues of localized immigrant identities, many critics have attempted to reappropriate those aspects of the novel, producing criticism in which ‘identity-thinking’ is reintroduced, globalizing even while preserving the discipline of American literary study itself” (835). By sticking to a narrow field of supposedly globalist concerns, Chandra argues that critics limit the meaning of the novel and force it to conform to a narrow range of themes, all of which end up making the United States central in their focus.

In fact, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* treats acculturation with a certain amount of ambivalence, neither upholding America as a cultural myth nor repudiating it. Primarily focusing on the four García daughters, the novel tells the reverse chronological story of their progression from adulthood back into childhood. While the García family finds a great deal

of financial and personal success after immigrating to the United States from the Dominican Republic, a general malaise permeates the family. The familial problems the sisters face are personal ones, the novel argues, not social or cultural. To be sure, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is a postmodern novel. Its multiple narrators, multiple points of view (occasionally slipping from third to first person perspective), nonlinear narrative structure, and obsession with feminism and other issues of identity politics all indicate a postmodernist sensibility to the writing; however, they do not by necessity indicate a *globalist* sensibility. In the novel's universe, only the Dominican Republic and the United States exist. The cultural exchange is a bilateral one, not one involving any part of the rest of the world. In this sense, while a far more contemporary work than *The Rise of David Levinsky*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* treads the same ground as it speaks only to the cultural experiences of a single, solitary ethnic group. The movements of the rest of the world, of its economic and media flows, are largely absent. No mention is made of the island's French colonial period, for example, or its economic ties to Haiti, Western Europe, or China. In short, from the novel's perspective, the García girls and the Dominican Republic itself are not dancers on a world stage, but locked in a solitary tango between two major cultures.

Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* also serves as a convincing example of a postmodern-influenced immigrant autobiography. Telling the story of her early childhood as a Chinese-American immigrant growing up in Northern California, Kingston interweaves snippets of her personal history with Chinese folklore and family legends, and presents a less coherent portrait of herself, either as a girl or as an adult, than she does when slipping into the retelling of her mother's own history. Kingston's memoir suggests that understanding the "I" at its center can only be done

through an exegesis into the stories which influenced her, rather than knowing the simple facts of her life. Through the presentation of these stories, the memoir betrays its postmodern roots in its reliance on a fragmented narrative structure that reads more like a series of related essays than a linear, chronologically ordered memoir. Additionally, the work blends genres, mixing Chinese folktales with Kingston's accounts of her childhood and functioning neither clearly as autobiography nor fiction. David Harvey calls the "prevailing mood" of contemporary postmodern thought as one blended in between "[f]iction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos," traits Kingston's work shares as it systematically defies categorization (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 98). Bonnie Melchior further observes:

Kingston deconstructs autobiography and the male American ideologies associated with it by problematizing its assumptions about the nature of the self and the nature of "fact." Reading her text implies that *I* is not causal; it is a textual construct, open-ended, that exists only paired with *you*. A self is not a product that is made, but a participatory process. Neither is the meaning of a text (or a life) linear. Her text constantly folds back on itself, reflexively contradicting meanings it had seemed to support, as the very title illustrates. This is autobiography that inhabits a postmodern world. (282)

The self in *The Woman Warrior* is neither a child nor an adult; it is not a mythic figure or an ordinary person. Rather, the child's voice and adult voice intermingle, while Chinese legends are presented along Kingston's real life experiences. The move blurs the line between real and imaginary by privileging neither myth nor Kingston and creating a kind of neomythology out of Kingston's life. April R. Komenaka points out that when approaching both Kingston's text in

particular, and memoir in general, “the reader in search of social fact must keep in mind the nature of the genre: that its essential purpose is the presentation of a more or less consciously constructed self-image to the public and to posterity. In the service of this object, autobiographers have generally been granted certain latitude with literal fact and literary form” (105).

As a literary work, *The Woman Warrior* makes demands on readers’ perceptions of the autobiographical form as it continually straddles the line between the nonfiction of memoir and the fantasy of fiction. The majority of the “White Tigers” section features Kingston, not as herself, but as the heroine in a self-created conglomeration of the many Chinese legends recounted by her mother on swordswomen and their heroics on behalf of village and filial piety. When beginning her tale, Kingston maintains the conventions of storytelling, letting readers know that the call to heroism “would come from a bird that flew over our roof,” additionally that she “would be a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains” (20). Kingston continues speaking in the conditional form, distancing her own persona from the action of the story only until the other characters are introduced, an old man and an old woman who will train her in kung fu for the next fourteen years until she is old enough to return home and seek vengeance on behalf of her family for an unnamed grudge. As the old couple asks if Kingston has eaten, the nameless girl from the story replies out of politeness that she has, while Kingston herself reminds us parenthetically that in real life, she would have denied the claim, “mad at the Chinese for lying so much,” she would have replied, “I’m starved. Do you have any cookies? I like chocolate chip cookies” (21).

After this brief glimpse of anger where Kingston simultaneously calls readers’ attention to how very different her child self was from that of the nameless girl, while also calling into

question the credibility of her love for the very myth she is telling, the conditional voice drops completely out of the story and Kingston's persona merges completely with the girl's. Rather than what Kingston would do, it is the "I" in the story who experiences everything firsthand, every moment of triumph and tribulation. Only at the end of the story is this convention reinstated as Kingston proudly declares that thanks to her triumphant exploits, "the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality" (45). This time, however, Kingston draws the line even farther away from her own persona and the girl's experiences as she immediately transitions from the heroism of the swordswoman back into her own persona by bluntly declaring, "My American life has been such a disappointment," effectively jolting readers out of whatever spell her storytelling may have cast, and deliberately tearing down all artifice of fiction (45).

However, for all the ways in which *The Woman Warrior* evidences postmodern sensibilities, it also explicitly engages with issues of Americanization and the American myth. Unlike many postmodern literary works where the image of America has been decentered, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's negotiation between her gender, cultural, and social identities is a pervasive theme throughout the memoir. The title itself subtly references all three identities beginning with her Chinese cultural heritage (in relation to the women warriors of Chinese legends), her gender (Kingston's pointed reference to her "girlhood," rather than the more common, and gender neutral "childhood"), and finally to her life among the "ghosts" (her reference to all non-Chinese—or mainstream, white America in general). The negotiation is a difficult one as Kingston laments, "[t]hose in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home, Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid

America” (5). Survival in this sense becomes both physical and metaphorical: survival of the literal journey into the new country; survival of the experience of finding oneself stranded in a new, and alien culture; and finally, survival of the difficulties found in living between two cultures. To make sense of these difficulties, Kingston addresses her Chinese-American readership by directly asking, “Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese Tradition and what is the movies?” (5-6). By turning to the reader, Kingston makes her experience into a shared one as Melchior explains, “[b]y focusing the book on an ‘autos’ that is created by and through stories, Kingston affirms its communal nature, for stories live and are modified in the communal memory” (285).

Throughout the memoir, Kingston’s attempts to become accepted into mainstream American culture are conscious and deliberately orchestrated. She compares soft-spoken American women who stand properly erect to her mother’s delicate, pigeon-toed gait, and to her loud speaking voice, cultivated through years of growing up in a small Chinese village. Kingston determines to make herself more like her white American counterparts as she declares, “[w]alking erect . . . and speaking in an inaudible voice, I have tried to turn myself American-feminine” (11). While Kingston acknowledges the influences both Chinese and American cultures have had over her own identity, she engages very little with cultures outside of her own, or with the symbol of mainstream acceptance white America becomes. Only towards the end of the memoir does Kingston openly discuss “Black Ghosts” (or African Americans) for the first time; her worldview is too preoccupied with White Ghosts(166). Previously, Kingston’s ghosts, “Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming

Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts” are all blurred into one colorless mass (97). Kingston’s choice to primarily address the White Ghosts represents a challenge to mainstream, white America, though it somewhat ignores the ethnic and racial diversity of her Bay Area community.

Like other postmodern works, *The Woman Warrior* is interested in racism and social critique; however, unlike globally-influenced works, it does not engage with multiculturalism, or with creating interconnections. African American children becoming interested in Chinese and attending Chinese language school is presented as a surprising thing, rather than the natural product of the social structure of her community. While Mah’s experiences growing up reflect internationalism despite Hong Kong’s segregation, *The Woman Warrior*, written prior to the technological revolution which spurred contemporary globalization, has no reason to look outward beyond the United States, and frames its heroine as disconnected rather than connected to her local community or the world at large. Throughout the narrative, Kingston is shown having little to do with immigrants of other ethnicities; and if any family members immigrated to any nations outside of the United States, Kingston does not dwell upon it. Kingston’s universe in *The Woman Warrior* is a hermetically sealed one consisting of China and her life in the United States, with neither nation seeming to exist within a global context, only standing firmly—and equally—in relation to each other.

Kingston has received criticism for her loose interpretation of Chinese legends in *The Woman Warrior*, and for what some of her detractors view as an essentialized portrait of Chinese femininity. By obscuring her “I” voice through hazy layers of myth and storytelling, Kingston’s persona is smoothed out into the formless voice of the everywoman speaking the thoughts of the community, rather than the individual. Ruth Maxey criticizes Kingston’s liberal use of storytelling, calling her portrayal of China “self-orientalizing” as she shakes China loose from its

social and historical moorings and instead turns it into “an American-imagined construct of despotism, splendour, cruelty and sensuality” (2). Rather than breaking stereotypes, Kingston’s work reinforces them as America, the land Kingston knows “is presented as banal and safe, whereas China, the land [she does] not know, is a place of excitement, danger and tragedy” (2). By focusing so narrowly on the tensions between her inherited Chinese culture versus her adopted American persona, Kingston metaphorically isolates China, turning it exotic while ignoring its turbulent history and complex relationship with the west, both necessary components in telling the tale of her family’s emigration and the difficulties of her life in the United States. What prompted the family to come to America—and choose to stay here—has as much to do with Kingston’s response to the United States as the fearful ghost stories her mother told her throughout childhood.

However, in Kingston’s defense, her autobiography is a product of high postmodern styling and skepticism of genre. Unlike Mah who presents her autobiography in a straightforward fashion, Kingston’s read like loosely-connected fables, which limits her ability to engage in the type of cultural criticism that contemporary writers like Mah are more likely to engage in, and contemporary scholars have come to expect. It is likely that had *The Woman Warrior* been written today, it would be a very different book. For example, the immigrant experience of exiles differs greatly from that of diasporic populations or educated elites searching for better employment opportunities, a point which *Falling Leaves* illustrates, having been written in an era where the Chinese diaspora has been studied and written about. However, *The Woman Warrior* lacks that type of hindsight and Kingston naturally glosses over Chinese history and global social context. What little readers witness of external cultural forces are presented in brief glimpses—Kingston’s mother crying over a letter from home, its contents

unknown to either the child Kingston or the adult narrator, nameless doubts over the family's ability to return to China (106).

Ethnic context is also ignored as all non-Chinese are flattened into "ghosts," frightening, but ultimately ephemeral figures, while the Chinese themselves become "emigrant villagers," a homogenized mass of fellow Chinese nationals ready to pass judgment on the young Kingston, rather than migrants with their own dialects and regional cultural differences (46, 47). E. San Juan, Jr. argues that understanding the situation of Asian Americans in the US today or in the past is impossible "without a thorough comprehension of the global relations of power, the capitalist world-system that 'pushed' populations from the colonies and dependencies and 'pulled' them to terrain where a supply of cheap labor was needed. These relations of power broke up families, separating husbands from wives and parents from children" (406). However, Chinese history and global social context are absent from Kingston's attempt to understand her Chinese heritage glosses. A product of its time, *The Woman Warrior* clearly fits into a continuum of post-World War II postmodern literature, but cannot be classified as a globally aware memoir.

In contrast, Adeline Yen Mah's autobiography, *Falling Leaves: The Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1997), has a clear-eyed view of China's (and the United States') position within a global context. While also relating the childhood (and later, adulthood) of a Chinese woman who faced gender discrimination, Mah is cognizant of her position as an individual who experienced personal tragedy, and how that tragedy was shaped by the forces of history and global transactions of culture and economics. As will be further discussed below, Mah revises the immigrant narrative from a global perspective in a number of key ways. In attitudes and intentions, *Falling Leaves* presents itself quite differently than *The Woman*

Warrior. Both written and published for an international audience rather than for strictly American nationals, Mah isn't constrained to isolate her narrative primarily on her experiences in the United States. While Kingston presented herself as a first generation American citizen reacting to life within the United States, to appeal to an international audience, Mah portrays herself primarily as a citizen of the world as opposed to as a proud American immigrant. In part, the autobiography's decision to include historical research alongside the personal is a result of *Falling Leaves* being intended for a global audience, many of whom may know little of the Chinese diaspora. In large part, however, Mah's interest in history is reflective of global influences. *Falling Leaves* is hyper aware of its historical context, most specifically of its place in a *global* historical context as Mah creates two parallel stories in her memoir: her own personal story simultaneously interwoven with a history of China's transnational relationships, working to establish both family and nation as cosmopolitan and globally-connected. Context is everything in *Falling Leaves* and in other globally-influenced works. These attitudes are not necessarily present in postmodern literature. While the postmodernists' intention is to interrogate genre, globally-influenced writers take the opposite approach and utilize nonfictional elements to give fictional texts greater verisimilitude. Contemporary autobiographers not only seek to make sense of lived experience, but also to process it within the framework of culture, history, and literary influence. Mah ensures her readers understand not only the personal, but also the *societal* forces that shaped her life.

Although both Kingston and Mah grew up differently, with Kingston as the child of immigrants and Mah as an immigrant herself, both were raised in major port cities, highly diverse communities economically subject to the movement of people and goods across national borders. *The Woman Warrior* should reflect at least some of *Falling Leaves*'s global interests,

yet it does not. Mah concludes her opening chapter with this observation, which resonates throughout the memoir: “My roots were from a Shanghai family headed by my affluent father and his beautiful Eurasian wife, set against a background of treaty ports carved into foreign concessions, and the collision of East and West played out within and without my very own home” (3-4). Unlike *The Woman Warrior*, *Falling Leaves* is simultaneously a postmodern and a globally-influenced literary work. Mah’s postmodernist sensibilities are apparent in her preoccupation with race and gender, and in her concern with colonial discourses of power; however, *Falling Leaves* is also a distinctly global work, written for an English-speaking—rather than exclusively American—audience. Moreover, America itself is neither privileged among the autobiography’s other locales, nor treated as a major theme in the narrative. Far more important than exploring the act of immigration, Mah argues, is understanding the influences of family, state, and capital on the public and the private, on the Yen family, and on Hong Kong itself. And it is through the memoir’s examination of these issues, through its awareness of the movements of transnational economics and political forces, and through its preoccupation with history and the interplay of cultures, that the global influences on Mah’s work become most apparent.

Surrounded by capitalist prosperity and communist unrest, *Falling Leaves* begins with the story of Mah’s Grand Aunt, a respected businesswoman and founder of the Shanghai Women’s Bank, before moving on to the story of Grand Aunt’s younger brother and Mah’s grandfather, Ye Ye, and later Ye Ye’s son and Mah’s father, Joseph Yen. Each subsequent generation is more financially successful than the last, firmly establishing the Yens as businessmen and capitalists—bankers, import/export traders, and industrialists—amid a turbulent backdrop of deprivation on mainland China and western privilege within the port cities. The youngest of five children, Mah is born during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria at the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, the

tragedy of the nation mirrored in the tragedy of the family as Mah's mother passes away from an infection two weeks after her birth. The family is permanently changed by the passing of her mother; Mah's Aunt Baba is asked to become the children's caregiver, losing out on her own prospects of marriage, while Joseph becomes entangled with Jeanne Prosperi, a beautiful half-French, half-Chinese teenager who later becomes the reluctant stepmother to Joseph's five children, ruling the household with an iron fist, and rupturing the children's relationships with their father and with each other. Known to the children as Niang (an old-fashioned, formal address for Mother), Jeanne is cruel and cold with her attentions, particularly toward Mah, who as the youngest, and also female, has the least power in the household. Surviving a childhood of neglect, Mah eventually completes her education in England as a physician before briefly returning to Hong Kong, and then finally immigrating to America and settling permanently in Huntington Beach, California. Throughout the memoir, Mah is continually haunted by the unrest within her family and their rejection of her, and while she finds happiness and success in the United States, she remains emotionally and intellectually tied to Hong Kong, and to the family she is never fully able to make peace with.

Like other immigrant autobiographies, *Falling Leaves* is the first-person account of a young woman's struggles with adversity, and details the reasons for leaving her homeland while also chronicling her successes in her new, adopted country. However, unlike typical immigrant autobiographies, very little of *Falling Leaves* takes place within the United States. Mah ends up in America later in life, only after circumstances prevent her from staying in Hong Kong, or returning to England. Her choice to immigrate to the United States is, in many ways, circumstantial (an American friend made the suggestion at a time when she was desperate to leave Hong Kong), and her success within the United States has little to do with the United

States itself (she had already completed her education and training to be a physician before immigrating). And unlike other immigrants, Mah's learning curve for her adopted country was low as she had been educated in English since childhood, and had already experienced life in a western nation (first in the east-west hybridized Hong Kong, and later as a student for eleven years in England). Prevalent issues in other immigrant autobiographies—learning the language, understanding social customs, and achieving economic prosperity—do not apply to Mah's case. America, and her own Americanization, is barely an afterthought in the memoir. Anyone looking toward *Falling Leaves* hoping to find “an informant of the highest quality” on language use and cultural difference between China and the United States would be sorely disappointed. Rather than a promised land, or a great puzzle to be understood, America stands alongside England, Canada, Nigeria, and mainland China as simply another one of the memoir's locales.

Mah's narrative privileges no one nation as owning greater cultural currency than another. America does not serve as a wall for her to climb over on her journey towards acculturation in an adopted homeland. Mah's journey in the novel is, in Amy Tak-yei Lai's words, “truly diasporic” as the various settings of the memoir “reveal a complex interplay of cultures” (“Happily Ever After” 162). The largest portion of the memoir is spent in Mah's homeland in the Chinese port cities of Tianjin, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, but significant time is also spent in England, where Mah receives her education, before finally ending up in the United States, where she takes a job as an anesthesiologist. Although Mah is currently an American and lives in Southern California with her husband, the book was published in the United States in 1999, two years after it was first published in Great Britain in 1997 (and later, the rest of Europe and Australia). When asked about the book's publication history, Mah observes that *Falling Leaves* was published in London, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia *before*

finally reaching an American audience, and it has also been translated into Chinese, Japanese, and Dutch, in addition to translation rights being sold to Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Greece, and Spain, with additional offers from Germany, Portugal, and France (Mah). With such a far-reaching international audience, and with the United States so far down on its list of places of publication, it becomes abundantly clear that the audience for *Falling Leaves* is not, and was never intended to be, an exclusively American one.

In tone and intent, *Falling Leaves* is a global memoir meant for an international audience. Though China is the major focus of the narrative, Mah provides enough historical foregrounding that a reader ignorant of Chinese politics and culture can understand the events taking place. Mah's use of historical fact both draws in an uninformed reader and contextualizes her struggles for acceptance within her family. Sarah Gilead argues that it is the form of the immigrant autobiography itself which allows Mah the freedom to explore her personal history—in a way which she could not do, even in fiction. Gilead notes immigrant autobiography in general is “particularly well adapted for women autobiographers” since the act of immigration serves as an apt parallel for women's quests for selfhood in the patriarchy (43-44). As a literary form, immigrant autobiography highlights the ambiguities of such a quest including “conflicting desires to escape the burden of traditional limits on self-concept and ways of living, yet to retain links to traditional culture and its capacity to lend social and historical significance to the self” (44). But if Mah belongs to a subgroup of female ethnic autobiographers, Christine So places Mah's memoir into a continuum of contemporary female Chinese autobiographers living outside of China. They constitute a body of literature which becomes “representative of universal and depoliticized notions of history, trauma, geography, migration, family, and home. The women become symbolic of China, which has itself become symbolic of twentieth-century turmoil, and

the symbolic value they acquire is as globally transportable as the economic value their male counterparts accumulate” (140). So argues that *Falling Leaves* is particularly emblematic of the impulse to universalize Chinese women’s history as Mah chronologically “juxtaposes the rupture of the Yen Family with the fragmentation of China as a whole, and the many moves that various family members make to Hong Kong, Canada, Britain, Nigeria and southern California replicate the experiences of the wealthiest Chinese elite after the communist victory” (141).

As the microcosm of Mah’s family reenacts the Chinese diaspora, *Falling Leaves* retains its awareness of the movements of other Chinese nationals during the course of the narrative. During her schooling in England, for example, Mah cultivates a small group of friends at the local Chinese Students’ Union. While she celebrates their commonalities, calling them a group of people who could speak the same language as her and could “laugh at the same things,” Mah is also careful to indicate their dissimilarities as well (132). Unlike Kingston’s homogenized “emigrant villagers,” Mah carefully differentiates her Chinese friends by region and nationality, gently pointing out that all Chinese do not come from mainland China. She notes that among her friends, “[t]here were Chinese students not only from China and Hong Kong, but also from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mauritius and elsewhere, bringing an international dimension to our mini-Chinese world” (132). Moreover, she provides a brief synopsis of how each of these students would later fare after the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, reminding readers that the Yens were not the only family subjected to the tempests of history as one friend is browbeaten by the Communists into committing suicide, while another loses his revolutionary fervor altogether. And lest the contemporary reader, already well-aware of the negative effects of communism on China, scorn the still-naïve Chinese students for their then enthusiasm over revolution, in the persona of Karl, Mah’s older German friend, the narrative draws parallels

between China and European history as he cynically observes, “I’ve lived through this patriotic nonsense in my own country during the Second World War. Believe me, reality is not like that. So everyone in China is now an angel because Mao Zedong has liberated the country! . . . Only kindness, love and universal justice! Do you really believe that, you little fool?” (134).

Mah’s observations of Chinese history are not limited to the movements of people and politics, she also chronicles the changes in place as Hong Kong, much like Mah herself, slowly matures throughout the narrative from Shanghai’s unwanted stepchild into a viable cultural center and economic powerhouse on its own. Upon her return to Hong Kong from England, Mah enthuses, “Hong Kong was no longer the sleepy city I had left behind eleven years ago. The narrow, cramped, neon-lit streets were teeming with pedestrians and traffic even though it was after nine p.m. There were a great number of new buildings, some of them half completed and covered with bamboo scaffolding . . . The vitality was almost tangible” (141). The Hong Kong of the early 1960s was “an extraordinary place” that achieves near-mythic status in *Falling Leaves* (147). Yet Mah never quite falls into the trap of over-idealizing the city as she is fully aware that despite being “[p]oised on the cusp of a glittering destiny,” and having “replaced Shanghai as the gateway to the West,” Mah also notes with some concern, “[e]verything was in flux. Life [in Hong Kong] revolved around passports and money. People were moving in or getting out” (147). Rather than the world having been brought to China via trade, warfare, and colonization as we witnessed in the Shanghai of Mah’s childhood, the Hong Kong of her adulthood has been brought to the world. The wealthier classes of Hong Kong took out multiple foreign passports and sent their children to be educated abroad, initially as an outward show of their westernization and elite social standing, and later in a panic over communist China taking back Hong Kong from the British. Residents took out foreign passports from primarily English

speaking nations (America, England, Australia, or Canada in particular), staying in their adopted countries only long enough to obtain a passport before returning to Hong Kong. Mah writes, “[s]ometimes, only the wife and children remained abroad while the husband turned into a *tai hong ren* (astronaut-commuter) between the two countries” (234). The shift between colonized subject and international citizen becomes even more apparent in Niang’s assertion that she and Joseph would be fine, no matter what may occur in Hong Kong since, “[y]our father and I are really citizens of the world. If the situation looks bad, we can fly to any country at a moment’s notice” (233). The Yens are not the only Hong Kong residents to view their citizenship as a flexible proposition, to borrow Aihwa Ong’s terms. Ong describes this as a common practice among a population long used to political upheaval and continuous colonization without hope for independence (*Flexible Citizenship* 2). Torn between “the regimes” of family, state, and capital, Hong Kong residents become a special brand of refugee, mentally flexible in geographic and social positioning (3, 2). Always in transit, the multiple-passport holder embodies “the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets” (2).

Family, state, and capital dominate the pages of *Falling Leaves*, the interplay between all three serving as the memoir’s central unifying focus. Mah’s narrative excursions into Chinese history and the financial dealings of her father, grandfather, and Grand Aunt do more than educate western readers ignorant of Chinese culture, rather they indicate the pervasive nature these forces had upon the young Mah. Her story cannot be told without reference to economics, to political upheaval, and to the dominion of her family because to Mah, all three are inseparable. Mah is driven out of Hong Kong thanks to the cruelty of her family, and driven out of China altogether thanks to the brutality of the communists. Her emigration is both social and personal,

a response to not only the people who surround her, but the times in which she lives. Prior to departing for England, her beloved grandfather, fully aware of Mah's weak position within the Yen household advises her, "The world is changing. You must make your own life outside this home" (110). Ye Ye, like Mah, stresses both the personal and the social in his instructions to his granddaughter. She must leave not only because she has no place within the family, but also because the world is changing and the Hong Kong she leaves will not be the one she returns to. However necessary her leaving may be, Mah is always fully aware that emigration, in and of itself, will never mend the rift between herself and her parents, will never fuse the schism in her public and private personas, between her longing for academic success and acceptance from her family. Hongyu Wang points out that while mobility fulfills "her search for independence," it is unable to relieve "her craving for love, respect, and acceptance from her family. Memory [defies] the constraints of time and place, connecting and separating, surfacing and concealing. Even in her adopted land, she [does] everything she [can] to reconcile with her family" (146). Mah's efforts never prove successful, her adopted homeland only providing limited comfort rather than solving her dilemma.

Just as Mah is fully aware that the Hong Kong she is leaving has become a hostile environment to her, she is also equally aware that the England she is heading toward may not be much better. While she joyfully exclaims, "[g]oing to England was all I dreamt of. It was like going to heaven. Did it matter what you did after you entered heaven?" Mah simultaneously worries about the possibilities of facing discrimination in England and about being the only Chinese student in her school (116). In an effort to understand British culture, Mah and her older brother James begin reading dictionaries to improve the English language they are already fluent in, discovering they "would be called 'rare' if the English liked us, and 'odd' if they did not"

(117). Despite how westernized Mah had already become simply by living in western-controlled Hong Kong, and by attending Catholic schools that instructed only in English, served only western food, and kept Chinese books out of their libraries, Mah does not identify as a westerner, instead viewing herself as a cultural outsider subject to ridicule by the English. Nevertheless, the west, like Hong Kong itself, is alternately idealized into a mythic land of dreams and criticized for its real-world failures. Whatever her childhood dreams of the west may have been, Mah is quick to present the realities of life in England for a racial outsider. Soon after arriving at school Mah is invited for tea at the home of a British widow who had lived in Shanghai for many years. Despite the fact that the two women had spoken—in proper English—over the telephone prior to the visit, Mah is dumbfounded when Lady Ternan insists upon speaking to her in pidgin English: “Across the table my Chinese features must have sparked off an old, buried, conditioned reflex. . . . As I spoke, I began to grasp that to Lady Ternan, this dialect placed me where I ‘belonged.’ By speaking pidgin, she reaffirmed her own superiority, establishing with every rounded vowel and clipped consonant that we were not equals” (124). Rather than escaping colonial oppression in England, the incident reaffirms its pervasive nature. Thousands of miles away from Hong Kong and Shanghai, the urge to establish her racial superiority remains within Lady Ternan as the “conditioned reflex” of a woman who had lived as part of the system. And Mah herself, having grown up in an era and a place where whites were prized above Chinese, is unable to protest her treatment, and instead begins responding in pidgin in an effort to “humor” the widow (124).

As a child dreaming of escape from the oppression of her stepmother, Mah’s fantasies of England and America comprised of “vistas of ivy-covered college buildings, citadels of learning in the shape of baronial castles and holy cathedrals. As described by the Tang dynasty poet,

Wang Bo, these were the mythical places I truly longed to visit and be transformed into an . . . inspired scholar in an enchanting land” (105). However, as Joss West Burnham and David Roberts point out, Mah’s experience in the west is “shattering”; her fears of discrimination in England are quickly realized, the west no longer the land of dreams it once was (414). Burnham and Roberts write that by demythologizing the west, Mah “reminds us that myths work both ways and that the exotic can be constructed as myth within both East and West” (414). Unlike Kingston who falls into the trap of self-orientalizing, Mah’s immersion from birth in eastern and western culture prevents this. Thanks to economics and colonization, as a child Mah was continually exposed to the rest of the world, rather than being sheltered from it. She is fully aware of the power of cultural mythologies, knowledge which a number of times she is able to use for her benefit.

While in school, Mah’s older brother Gregory manipulates British prejudices against the Chinese by claiming it is against his religion to eat mutton (a food he detests). In order to convince his headmaster of the truth of his words, Gregory flatters western enlightenment views while denigrating the comparative ignorance of the Chinese. He states, “I wish we had religious tolerance in China. Unfortunately we only have barbaric intolerance” (123). Later, Mah herself attempts a similar ploy when writing to the Philadelphia hospital where she has been hired, requesting assistance with the cost of relocating from Hong Kong to America: “‘I don’t know your origin or background,’ I wrote, ‘but perhaps someone once reached out a hand to help you achieve your American dream. I’m humbly asking you to do this for me now’” (156). Mah’s decision to seek employment in America was hastily made, a result of a suggestion from an acquaintance, her desperation to free herself from her parents’ control, and her reluctance to return to England (where she’d had a failed love affair). She could not be said to have had an

American dream, as such. Nevertheless, Mah is as aware of the myth of the American dream as anyone educated in western schools could be, and knows an appeal to American cultural pride could secure her the money she needs for airfare, just as it once helped her brother eat better meals while at school. Whether finding themselves in England, America, or any of the memoir's other locales, the Yen children are able to make use of their immigrant status as cultural outsiders, while also wielding the knowledge of the cultural insider, of language, social customs, and western thought gleaned through years of western schooling.

While the movements of the various characters within *Falling Leaves* effectively serve as a metaphor for the Chinese Diaspora, diasporic conditions exist *within* each of the memoir's various locales prior to the eventual global scattering of each member of Mah's immediate family. The Shanghai of her childhood is portrayed as a decidedly segregated version of the United Nations as a system of extraterritoriality becomes the ruling order of the city, and which granted foreign powers within the concession the right to govern "all subjects, be they foreign or Chinese . . . by the laws of the foreigner and were exempt from the laws of China. Foreigners had their own municipal government, police force and troops. Each concession became an independent city within a city: little enclaves of foreign soil in treaty ports along China's coast line" (6). The creation of cities within cities inevitably leads to a social hierarchy which placed white foreigners, and all things western, at the top of the social ladder. Mah's father demonstrated his family's wealth by dressing his children in western clothes and grooming them with short, western haircuts. His ability to speak English and his eventual marriage to Niang further solidified his elite standing among Shanghai and Hong Kong social circles as an enviously westernized businessman; while Niang, in turn, flaunted her own westernization through her fluency in three languages (including French and English), and her pride over her

inability to read or write Chinese (29). The Yens' westernization confers not only social prestige, but also encourages the adoption of colonial attitudes on race. The adult Mah listens to her parents' Sunday dinner diatribes against their fellow Hong Kong Cantonese with hidden disgust:

My parents regularly decried and condemned the Hong Kong Cantonese for their avarice, blatant materialism and ostentatious vulgarity. Yet I could not help but notice their own obsession with money. Their prejudices were broad and catholic. Besides the Cantonese, they criticized the Jews, the Indians and the Japanese. As for their potential Nigerian business partners, Niang considered them subhuman and beneath contempt. (150)

Just as Lady Ternan had once sought to put Mah in her place by speaking pidgin English, the Yens' attitudes, similarly inherited from years spent living within a colonial system, also seek to reaffirm power imbalances between their own status as members of the wealthy upper classes and the working class Cantonese.

Throughout the memoir, Niang wields her westernization as a sword and shield, both as a method of belittling those she views as inferior, and as a protection against the displacement of her iron-clad control over the Yen household. Alternately enthralled and bullied by her, Joseph puts up little to no resistance against Niang's whims, whether they be to treat her stepchildren like second-class citizens by sending the boys to school with old clothes and shaved heads, or by placing a ten year-old Mah in a nearby boarding school and ordering the family to cut all contact with her. Aunt Baba compares the spell Niang casts over Joseph to that of "the fox-devil of our ancient folklore" (224). However that thought is quickly set aside as Aunt Baba chooses instead to contextualize Niang's appeal. She explains, "Besides her youth and beauty, Joseph was

probably in awe of her foreign blood. Remember, he grew up in the French concession during an era which was unique in China. We are all victims of history” (224). Joseph’s obsession with all things western is an inherited one, gained simply from the time and place of his birth. Mah remarks, “[g]rowing up in the treaty ports, observing daily the symbols of western might, living within a foreign concession in his native country, ruled by extraterritoriality, [Joseph], like many Chinese, had come to see westerners as taller, cleverer, stronger and better” (29). As a child he attended Catholic missionary schools, and as a teenager, he educated himself in English and converted to Catholicism, permanently taking the Christian name Joseph at his conversion (15). His knowledge of English provided him with his first career boost as the teenage Joseph quickly became an indispensable part of the staff at his father’s import-export business, becoming the lone office member in charge of writing and translating all foreign correspondence. Personally, intellectually, and professionally, the young Joseph had thoroughly internalized the supremacy of anything western. It is not surprising then that Niang as a young, beautiful, educated, and most importantly, European woman should appear as “the ultimate status symbol” for Joseph, and for the rest of a Hong Kong high society in which “everything western was considered superior to anything Chinese” (27). Mah observes, “Father began to desire Jeanne with a desperation in which sexual longing mingled with social aspirations” (27). *Falling Leaves* implies it is not, ultimately, the tyranny of an individual that destroyed the once-close Yen family, but rather the tyranny of social and historical forces which orchestrated the events necessary to bring a woman like Niang into their lives and to keep her there.

The pervasive influence of the west on daily life in Shanghai, and not simply on high society, comes through in a girlhood escapade at a restaurant between Mah’s mother and her beloved Aunt Baba. Hungry for a meal during their lunch break, the pair stumble into Sincere’s,

a restaurant resembling Harrod's of London (and accordingly nicknamed Shanghai's Harrods) only to discover the restaurant preferred an exclusively western clientele. The two women quickly notice the elegant restaurant's "white tablecloths, fresh flowers and crystal glasses" and the fact that [t]he menus listed only western food items with which they were unfamiliar. Chinese food was unavailable" (19). Confused by the menu items and sickened by the restaurant's claim to serve what they think are dog meat sausages (and which they discover years later were simply hotdogs), the two women become hesitant when placing their order, triggering the (Chinese) waiter's impatience, a man Mah characterizes as "one of those Chinese who had adopted the haughtiness of the foreigners and preferred to serve the wealthy whites from the concessions" (19). Their embarrassment quickly leads to the discovery that the two girls are the only Chinese patrons in the restaurant, causing them to feel "like gauche simpletons" for having the audacity of being non-white and native born (20). Years later, the incident in the restaurant is repeated when the adult Mah, visiting from America, attempts to bring her aunt into a hotel dining room for lunch. Though the Chinese living in Hong Kong faced less restrictions and discrimination than they once had, an "unofficial policy" existed which divided Chinese society into four classes (224). White tourists (particularly rich North Americans) belonged to the first class; overseas Chinese who spoke Chinese to the second; foreign-born ethnic Chinese who could not speak the language to the third; and finally, native Chinese belonged to the fourth, and lowest class. As a native Chinese, Aunt Baba is regarded "with contempt" by Mah's tour guide (224). However, it is not until she attempts to eat lunch with Mah (who, as an American doctor, belonged to the second class) that Aunt Baba draws the tour guide's fury as he scolds her "for not knowing her place and abusing [Mah's] hospitality" (225). Only with the support of the other members of the tour group is Aunt Baba eventually served lunch. Rather than living up to

the image of progress Mah witnesses upon her return to Hong Kong, the incident ends up underscoring how little social progress was actually made in the years since her departure. While challenging racist and classist attitudes, Mah's narrative never fully repudiates western cultural norms, either through the Yen children who by and large find happiness abroad, or in her portrayal of Shanghai, of which Mah carefully notes that "[t]o this day, amidst the new high-rise buildings, Shanghai's architecture reflects the influence of the foreign traders" (5). The observation is not an innocent one as Mah expects her readers to understand that she, like Shanghai, identifies not with a single, or even a dual culture, but that her roots are spread across the globe.

Blending autobiography with cultural history, Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves* functions as a memoir of acculturation in the broadest sense, rather than an immigrant autobiography in the traditional sense. It is not a single culture, not strictly American culture, which Mah seeks to understand in *Falling Leaves*, but the larger global forces which have shaped her life and the lives of other Chinese nationals in Hong Kong. Rather than concerning herself with the intricacies of English language use and western ideology, concepts which Mah already had fluency in prior to emigrating, she instead focuses on unpacking the social, political, economic, and historical forces which most strongly influenced her journey. Thanks to the prevalence of western media and the strength of transnational social and economic flows, Mah, like many contemporary immigrants, has already experienced America—whether culturally or economically—before ever setting foot in the United States. Unlike their predecessors a century ago, many of these immigrants have already experienced the difficulties of living and working in nations outside of their home countries, and do not arrive in the United States as cultural greenhorns unfamiliar with either America or the process of assimilation. Like Mah's, the

contemporary immigrant experience is ultimately colored by global forces, by an increased awareness of foreign cultures, and by the economic and political conditions which compel immigration.

Chapter 3: The Influences of Postmodernism and Globalization: Interconnectivity across Time, Space, and History in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*

On the subject of research, Zora Neale Hurston once wrote, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein” (*Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* 143). The notion of research, of questioning, exploring, seeking, and seeking again resounds throughout Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, a novel centered on a research trip that ends up being an exploration of both researcher and subject, their shared history, consciousness, and place in the world the primary focus of investigation. Questions abound right from the beginning of the narrative as even the opening lines work to cast doubt on the entire narrative, not to invite readers into the novel: Readers are introduced to an unknown narrator who offers little textual assurance on the validity of his tale, explaining only that “The time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain” (1). The questions that begin the novel—who is our erstwhile biographer, and can the truthfulness of his narrative be relied upon?—are immediately sidestepped as the narrative seamlessly launches into a detailed account of the killing of 19 year-old Lazarus Averbuch, an Eastern European immigrant shot to death by the Chicago chief of police.

A direct introduction to the narrator does not come until the second chapter, which opens with the assertion that “I am a reasonably loyal citizen of a couple of countries” (11). The narrator, Vladamir Brik, reveals himself slowly, initially withholding knowledge of his name, and instead beginning only with the two most critical facts of his identity: firstly, that he is a writer, and secondly, that he is a man with divided citizenship, and divided cultural and linguistic

ties. Brik's reticence to define himself apart from internal conflicts over his citizenship and his identity demonstrates both a conflicted understanding of his own identity and a preoccupation with political identity, the writer's life, and where the two intersect. Brik's undertaking in *The Lazarus Project* thus becomes a journey to understand the world, his place in the world, and his relationship to those that "dwell therein," through the mode of writing. By cutting across "the haze of history and pain," the novel attempts to construct interconnections across time and space among American immigrants, complicating the immigrant myth itself, and moving beyond common stereotypes as Hemon recreates the immigrant myth for the new global era.

This chapter will consider how the interplay between postmodern social conditions and the cultural conditions of globalization have given rise to new ways of thinking about the interconnections between people across time, history, language, and culture. Globalization, *The Lazarus Project* implies, isn't a new phenomena in the sense that interconnections between people and societies have never existed. It is only our recognition of those interconnections, of globalization as a phenomena and the linkages that have always existed across time and borders that has changed. In fact, Hemon's deliberate parallels between Brik and Lazarus, between history and society, between the anarchists of the turn of the century and the terrorists today, indicate there are far more similarities than differences in the experiences most immigrants share. *The Lazarus Project* reflects the fact that our vocabularies, and our ability to recognize and understand interconnections has expanded. Or to put it more simply, the language of globalization, and of large-scale political movements has entered the social consciousness and this helps fuel Brik's interest in creating a more authentic immigrant story, one which reflects current social and cultural forces.

The immigrant story of the past has been created by the dominant culture and reflects the values of the mainstream, rather than the margins, rather than the people who have actually lived the stories. Instead of conforming his narrative to the outmoded expectations of the American immigrant novel and its symbols (particularly its imagery which glorifies the new country and erases the connections between migrant and home country), Brik wants to tell a story of immigration filled with ambivalences which explores connections between migrants, and brings to light what has been neglected, erased, or suppressed. A common thread which ties together both globally-influenced works of literature, and the works in this dissertation, is the reaction against silenced voices and oppression. Within *The Lazarus Project*, the influences of the various political projects of the oppressed, or what can be broadly thought of as identity politics, can be seen in Brik's desire to give voice to previously silenced minorities like Lazarus, a character who does not directly speak in the novel until the end, after Brik's research has been completed, finally giving him presence.

The chapter begins with a discussion on postmodernism and globalization, demonstrating that while Hemon and other contemporary immigrant authors are conversant in postmodern traditions, it is the conditions of globalization which most directly impact their daily lives, and fuel their literary imaginations. It is the conditions of globalization which prompts Brik, the novel's protagonist to rewrite the immigrant myth into one that better reflects his own circumstances and the lived realities of other immigrants in a transnational era. The chapter then moves on to an examination of how *The Lazarus Project* problematizes immigrant stories as a whole, their well-worn metaphors and stylistic choices, including their use of documentary photographs. The novel's critique of the common immigrant story leads to its final exploration of the ways in which both Brik and Lazarus defy that model. In a sense, then, *The Lazarus*

Project acts as a literary illustration of a contemporary imagined community where the novel's two narrative threads exist in simultaneity and interweave in a kind of homogeneous empty time as the past of Lazarus Averbuch and future of Vladimir Brik exist in an instantaneous present through the act of readership. In this way, *The Lazarus Project* begins in postmodernity, born from its literary heritage, but ends as a reflection of the contemporary transnational era.

Although the previous chapter explored the influences of globalization on *Falling Leaves*, its preoccupation with history, with cosmopolitanism, and with the idea of globalization itself, the influences of transnationalism manifest themselves in a different way in *The Lazarus Project*. While *Falling Leaves* was a memoir written for a wide audience, its exploration of globalization rooted in the practical, *The Lazarus Project* is a more self-consciously artistic, literary work. For that reason, the influences of globalization take on a more literary-oriented turn in *The Lazarus Project*. For example, Mah's interest in history is forward looking, rooted in politics and culture. She takes a history from the bottom approach in order to depict China as a nation that always had globalist tendencies, its evolution as an international superpower a logical conclusion. *Falling Leaves* ends with the prediction that the twenty-first century will be a Chinese century, China's ties to the rest of the world proving a valuable asset. In comparison, Hemon's interest in history is backward looking. Instead of evolving away from the past, Hemon attempts to find connection with it, to create a sense of *literary* kinship between both of its main characters. His protagonist sets about to rewrite the immigrant story not only for himself, but for men like Lazarus who lived a century earlier. *The Lazarus Project* bridges the gap between the two men through space and time, simultaneously making use of the stylistic conventions of postmodernism while maintaining specifically globalist concerns. The chapter will firstly outline the postmodernist influences on the novel before moving on to identify how globalization also

strongly informs *The Lazarus Project*, a novel written with 9/11 and American neocolonialism in mind.

Brik is a man at odds with himself: He is a storyteller who can't tell stories, and a citizen of the United States who never intended to be a citizen. Although he writes a popular newspaper column and lives in relative comfort in the Chicago suburbs with his American-born wife, a vague sense of dissatisfaction permeates Brik's professional and personal life. He lacks his wife's cultural identification with the United States, and as a student in the United States during the Bosnian conflict, did not participate in the war. By missing out on the singular defining event of Brik's generation of Bosnians, he feels alienated from his "fellow double-citizens," particularly when the conversation inevitably turns to battles or massacres, a subject of confusion to outsiders (like Brik) as the stories become "unintelligible to someone (like me) who has not experienced the horrors" (11, 12).

Neither American by birth nor Bosnian by experience, Brik is in a culturally liminal state. He spends *The Lazarus Project* systematically interrogating each of the forces which have shaped his self-identity—war, immigration, marriage, and the United States. The structure of the novel itself is dragged along on this journey as the further Brik delves into understanding his own psyche, the more his own experiences become implicated in the parallel narrative containing Brik's biography of Lazarus Averbuch. Lazarus thus moves from biographic object to Brik's own objective correlative, a symbol of what he believes to be a failed immigration experience as Hemon slowly strips away the thin veneer between biographer and subject. The novel's initially linear, well-ordered narrative becomes increasingly fragmented, and the lines between biography, autobiography, and photojournalism blur. The narrative fragments as portions of Brik's scholarly work on Lazarus Averbuch get mixed into a literary soup consisting of Brik's

personal narrative and a series of unlabeled historical and contemporary photographs. Unity in point of view falls to the wayside as Brik initially alternates between narrating his own story in the first person and Lazarus's story in the third person. Later, even the marginal attempts at maintaining textual formalities are rendered moot as Brik begins shifting without preamble between first and third person, between the past and the present, between what Lazarus has experienced, and what Brik himself is experiencing. *The Lazarus Project* invites readers to question the distinctions between writer and subject, biography and autobiography. If the art of the biography is in the writer's ability to conjure lives one has never lived, Brik's dilemma lies in the art of the autobiography, in the conjuring of his own life for an American audience unfamiliar with war and forced emigration, when elements of history, experience, culture, and nationalism complicate one's ability to tell that story. By writing outside of a clearly defined, accepted literary form, Hemon's highly mixed narrative uses language and images to unmake Brik as a character, as a writer, and to unmake literary genre itself as the conventions of the immigrant novel itself are tested and ultimately rejected through the course of Brik's own intellectual and literary journey, ending not in the United States, but with Brik's repatriation back into Bosnia.

Photography and Metafiction: Postmodernism and *The Lazarus Project*

Hemon's approach in redefining the immigrant novel is heavily indebted to postmodernism, though *The Lazarus Project's* attitudes and sensibilities—its response to notions of space and time, and its interest in silenced and oppressed voices—are all shared by global fiction. While certain aspects of *The Lazarus Project* draw from a postmodernist tradition (most notably the narrative's strong social consciousness, and its self awareness of being a literary

work), the influences of transnationalism are felt in how the novel chooses to frame Brik as a character: Brik's worldview, his experiences as an immigrant, and even his mode of storytelling all reflect lived reality and the influences of globalization. While a number of critics argue that globalization is simply another facet of postmodernism¹, globalization is unique enough as an emerging mode of discourse to merit its own consideration alongside postmodernism. Although the literature of globalization still situates itself in the conventions of postmodernism, it draws primary inspiration from transnational social fields. Or as Rachel Adams has argued, while making use out of the stylistic conventions of postmodernism, globally-oriented writers are utilizing those conventions to situate themselves "in relation to the vast inequities, economic interconnections, and movement of people and goods associated with globalization," not in reaction against cultural metanarratives (249). In other words, while Hemon and other contemporary immigrant authors are conversant in postmodern traditions, it is the conditions of globalization which most directly impact their daily lives, and fuel their literary imaginations.

As a literary work influenced by postmodernism, *The Lazarus Project* picks up on much of the conflicts inherent in postmodernity with its dual narrative threads and its protagonist struggling to make sense of himself and the transcultural influences which have shaped his life and his writing. As Linda Hutcheon argues, the tensions within postmodernism lie between its theory and its practice, between its tendency toward self-analysis, and its ability to conduct real world, external criticism. In other words, postmodernism comments upon itself while also commenting upon the world around it. This tension, which Hutcheon calls "complicitous

¹ Omar Lizardo and Michael Strand, for example, contend that at bottom, globalization and postmodernism share the common concerns of temporality and mistrust of monocultural master narratives. They conclude that globalization is, at its core, simply "*the decline in hegemony of one particular (and once dominant) mode of conceiving the process of postmodernization*" (emphasis theirs 68).

critique,” is one of the key features of postmodernism, a phenomenon whose mode she defines as “resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political” (2, 1). Ihab Hassan and other theorists of postmodernism echo Hutcheon’s analysis of a duality within postmodernism. Hassan for example views the contradictions in postmodernism as a result of its penchant towards immanence, or the tendency toward symbolism and abstraction, and its equal affinity toward indeterminacy, or what Hassan views as signs which move “a vast will to unmaking, affecting the body politic, the body cognitive, the erotic body, the individual psyche—the entire realm of discourse in the West. In literature alone our ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory, and of literature itself, have all suddenly become questionable” (282). *The Lazarus Project* is itself a kind of unmaking, both of Brik as a character as he delves into his own psyche and deconstructs himself as an American, as a Bosnian, as a writer, and an unmaking of the immigrant novel itself. In this regard, argues Diane Krumrey, Brik’s movement in *The Lazarus Project* is not forward, but backwards as the novel begins where most immigrant novels end, with a relatively prosperous and settled immigrant hero, only for it to conclude with the unsettled and disquieted protagonist’s retreat to his homeland. This inversion of the narrative trajectory followed by classic immigrant novels, Krumrey concludes, is what allows Brik at last to “write the narrative that will unwrite the [immigrant] myth for each individual who tried to live it” (37).

As part of its challenge to the genre of immigrant literature, the structure of Hemon’s narrative straddles the line between factual biography and thinly veiled allegory commenting upon storytelling itself, the cultural challenges faced by contemporary American immigrants, and traditional immigrant literature’s ability to adequately represent those challenges. This impulse to critique itself while critiquing the world around it is one inherited from literary

postmodernism, as is its dual narrative structure: “The fictional world of an allegorical narrative [in postmodernist fiction],” writes Brian McHale, “is a tropological world, a world within a trope. Its ontological structure is *dual*, two-level, one level (or frame) that of the trope . . . the other that of the literal” (141). Hemon’s novel takes the notion of an allegorical narrative and disguises it within the genres of autobiography and scholarly research in order to utilize Brik’s struggles as a platform from which to conduct external critique upon American society and literary genre, while also self-reflexively critiquing its main character. Brik’s faults are laid bare to the reader and his considerable flaws as a writer and as an observer of human nature are dissected. At the same time, culture receives the same critique as character, and the novel criticizes America’s disdain for all things foreign. The jingoistic national response to 9/11 is given particular attention, with Brik darkly noting that the entire country, down to its homeless, its drug addicts, and its “crews of crazies roaming the streets, dazed and drooling . . . became as patriotic as everyone else” (40). The fervency of 9/11 patriotism, Brik believes, underscores both a myth of national superiority, and a literalness in American storytelling that privileges truth (or lies masking as truth). He dryly observes “a barefoot guy who put a sticker reading UNITED WE STAND on his forehead—his multiple personalities united for the war on terror. Belief and delusion are incestuous siblings” (40).

In Hemon’s America, pithy slogans stand in for messages of truth to an American public uninterested in complexities, and convinced of its national superiority. In this way, the novel’s critique of America moves beyond political critique into literary critique as Brik remarks upon larger attitudes within American society that have also affected American storytelling. These attitudes affect both how stories are told and how they are received. Among Bosnian listeners, Brik notes that “Disbelief was permanently suspended, for nobody expected truth or information,

just the pleasure of being in the story;” however, to his frustration, “It was different in America: the incessant perpetuation of collective fantasies makes people crave the truth and nothing but the truth—reality is the fastest American commodity” (103). Brik’s criticism of American society echoes Guy Debord’s notion that the spectacle in all its forms (information, advertisement, entertainment) “is the present model of socially dominant life” (6). Debord defines spectacle not as “a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (4). For Brik, American notions of storytelling are largely predicated by collective fantasies (of Truth, of America as a whole) and dependent upon the social relationships produced by sharing in these fantasies. Cultural insiders/outsideers are determined by one’s ability to assimilate and repeat these stories. There are both correct and incorrect modes of telling the immigrant myth.

But if truth and collective fantasies are the ultimate spectacle in American life, Hemon chooses to further play on this notion through his inclusion of photographs within the text. Framing each chapter, a total of 23 images appear throughout the novel, printed on sheets of solid black paper, giving the impression of leaves from an old photo album slipped into the pages of the novel. Hemon’s imagery comes from both historical and contemporary sources, from the Chicago Historical Society and from photographer Velibor Božović, and the use of each image is meant to directly reflect the events of the chapter it precedes. The historical photos used all directly relate to the murder of the real Lazarus Averbuch, and interested researchers can view them through the Chicago Historical Society. The novel’s contemporary photos were taken during a real trip through Eastern Europe, making *The Lazarus Project* essentially a fictionalized account of true things. Hemon merges historical fact with fiction, and plays loose with literary genre, drawing elements of nonfiction, biography, autobiography, and fiction into his novel. By

embracing what Hutcheon terms “historiographic metafiction,” or the mixing of historical and fictive representation, *The Lazarus Project* is able to convey a sense of realism and legitimacy that the written word alone can’t convey in fiction (33). While Hutcheon cautions that “the danger of photography lies in its apparent transparency, but also in the pleasure it arouses in viewers without creating any awareness of its act of ideological constructing,” Hemon is fully aware of the fine line his novel walks between fiction and nonfiction, making use of the text’s literary gray areas to call into question the ideological construction not just of photography, but of genre itself (118-119).

Hemon’s use of visual imagery intentionally recalls ethnic autobiography, which often includes photographs of people and places connected to the subject. These images, Betty Bergland argues, influence the reader’s comprehension of cultural and historical context and “frame the boundaries of meaning” in a text’s ability to represent memory and ethnicity (46). Photographs, both in the choice of subjects posited and in the cultural meanings historically acquired, speak as much to the mindset of the photographers as they do to the mindset of the viewers of those photographs. (53). Or to borrow Susan Sontag’s words, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power” (*On Photography* 4). Photographs carry an assumption of representative veracity: “Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it. . . . The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture.” (Sontag 5). However, no photograph is free from the photographer’s interpretive lens—the angle, exposure, and lighting were all intentionally selected for their ability to create a desired effect. In this sense, the meaning associated with visual images is less stable than the images themselves,

which give the appearance of fixity, but which have been subjected to several layers of ideological construction.

From the photographer's lens, to the author's selection and presentation of those images, to the reader's presumptions and interpretations, photographs are no less subjective than the written word. While Hemon intentionally mimics the conventions of ethnic autobiography through his use of photographs, he also bends genre conventions to his own purposes. Unlike in traditional immigrant memoir, the photographs in *The Lazarus Project* contain no marked signs of ethnicity. The novel's historical photos primarily concern the investigation into the death of Lazarus Averbuch and feature images of the scene of the crime, Lazarus's body on display in the basement of the Chicago police station, and a few of the key figures such as Lazarus's sister Olga Averbuch and friend Isador Maron. Hemon resists the urge to include passport photos or depict Lazarus as an immigrant or in any way other than a dead body. No example images are included to provide either an historical or ethnic context for Hemon's readers. While the text acknowledges Lazarus may have been a follower of Emma Goldman, the expected stock photos of Goldman and other prominent Jewish anarchists of the 1900s never appear. Neither do generic photographs of ethnic ghettos, synagogues, schoolchildren in national costume, or any other signs of cultural otherness.

Similarly, Hemon's selection of contemporary photographs avoids obvious ethnic identification. Many of these images are anecdotal to the narrative, presenting fragments of things glimpsed while traveling, such as blurry images of buses passing at high speeds on the expressway, shadowy exterior shots of tenement housing, or a few headstones in a graveyard. None of the photographs contain the postcard ready, sweeping panoramic views of Eastern European metropolises that are conventional for travel narratives. Hemon avoids the kind of

large statements about foreign culture that these types of images suggest. In his first night in Chernivtsi, a city popularly known as “Little Vienna” and renown for its architecture, Brik encounters all the Eastern European stereotypes one might expect from the Ukraine: older, chubby *babas* working as cleaning personnel (123), frail café waitresses in black dresses and white aprons (128), and a well-muscled gangster who “wore a cell-phone holster on his belt, much akin to the way Soviet commissars used to wear Lugers” (130). However, the image Hemon chooses to represent Chernivtsi isn’t one of ethnic otherness or place-based splendor; instead, Hemon opts for a photograph of a sad little dog Brik and Rora encounter in a dirty hotel lobby, avoiding any depictions of cultural and ethnic identification altogether. Instead he presents the kinds of small moments that could be indistinguishable from one place to the next, creating universal statements of a different kind on similarity and connectedness rather than difference. Without the assistance of the narrative letting readers know where Brik has traveled to, it would be impossible to tell from a glance which photographs were shot in Eastern Europe versus North America. The order is inverted: rather than the images working to contextualize the story, the story contextualizes the images.

The Global Roman a Clef

Inspired by Walter Roth and Joe Kraus’s *An Accidental Anarchist*, a nonfiction account of the investigation into the death of the real-life Lazarus Averbuch, the blending of fact and fiction within *The Lazarus Project* becomes further confused by Hemon’s account of his writing methods. In an article for *The Paris Review*, Hemon explains that like Brik, his fictional counterpart, he realized he needed to retrace Lazarus’ journey from Kishinev (modern Chisinau, Moldova) “where I felt it all began, with the pogrom that was, for Lazarus, completed by Chief

Shippy. . . . I wanted to get a sense of the magnitude of his journey, to understand the loss and the shock and the sadness of his transition from Kishinev to Chicago” (“The Lazarus Project”). Moreover, like the fictional Brik, Hemon also decided to bring a traveling companion to record the journey, his best friend from childhood, the photographer Velibor Božović. While Brik serves as a vaguely autobiographic stand-in for Hemon himself (like Hemon, Brik is a writer who came to the United States to study English, was forced to settle here after the start of the Bosnian conflict, and is also married to an American woman), Božović, who provided the images (and Hemon’s author’s photo on the back cover), also gets his own textual avatar in the form of Ahmed Rora. Rora (like Božović) is a photographer and Brik’s childhood friend who accompanies him on his research project. It is Rora’s photos, not Božović’s, readers are meant to assume have been included in the novel. Many of the experiences Hemon recalls while describing his own research trip will seem familiar to readers of *The Lazarus Project* as they would later become important scenes in the book. In “The Lazarus Project,” Hemon describes a trip to the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau and a visit to the local Jewish Association, along with a harrowing ride in a hired car from Chisinau to Bucharest, all scenes which took place in his novel. However, *The Lazarus Project* is not strictly autobiographical; Hemon also discusses an encounter with a Chinese film crew that did not appear in the novel, and Hemon and Božović have decidedly happier endings than their fictional counterparts. While Rora is killed by a mugger in Sarajevo and Brik chooses to remain in Bosnia, the status of his marriage and completion of his novel left in doubt, Božović returned to his home in Montreal and Hemon returned to his family in Chicago and achieved literary success with *The Lazarus Project*, a National Book Award finalist.

Božović's photographs and Hemon's research became not only the basis for the novel, but research itself is one of the central themes to *The Lazarus Project*. In reflecting on the research process, Hemon writes, "There is no objectivity in writing fiction—to do the research I had to recognize that my interest in Averbuch was not a historian's. I was after stories, the stories that I had to tell out of a need that could be defined only in the process of telling them" ("The Lazarus Project"). Although Hemon is quick to clarify that his novel is a work of fiction and not history, history and temporality nevertheless play an important thematic role in the novel. And while history and temporality are postmodernist preoccupations, the scope of Hemon's critique is less a reaction to the influences of postmodernism as it is a response to the specific conditions of globalization—it's social inequalities and silences. The literature of globalization preoccupies itself, as *The Lazarus Project* does, with giving voice to the marginalized and suppressed. Brik's choice of research subject—a murder victim whose death is surrounded by mystery and controversy—is symbolic of this interest. Lazarus represents Brik's desire to give voice to previous silenced minorities like Lazarus, a character who does not directly speak in the novel until the end, after Brik's research has been completed, finally giving him presence.

Many of the issues Hemon confronts—poverty, Americanism, intercultural misunderstanding—deal largely with negative socioeconomic conditions generated by globalization which have promoted the creation of vulnerable populations. These populations are especially susceptible to shifts in economic and political climates, war, and other forms of social violence as individuals and entire populations are displaced, often unwillingly, across international borders. Both the lowest social classes and increasingly, even the middle classes are increasingly affected by these shifts. For example, anthropologist Marc Abélès notes that

rather than seeking business solutions that take into account local social and economic conditions, economic globalization has further commodified labor, turning workers into interchangeable parts that can be relocated at a moment's notice (483-484). The commodification and denationalization of a nation's labor force widens inequalities and threatens traditional social and cultural fabrics as it creates an entirely new type of social violence, what Abélès sees as the violence of self-sacrifice, perpetuated by the state onto its people (487). As workers are shifted across national boundaries, social networks of "deterritorialized, mobile and dispersed" populations are created (487)—populations which can no longer seek social ties across national boundaries and must find alternative forms of connection. In *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Saskia Sassen similarly argues that "much of the multiculturalism in large cities is as much a part of globalization as is international finance" thanks to the emergence of supranational megacorporations (xx). As workers flock to large cities in search of jobs, whether through immigration or corporate relocation, the population of these cities shifts, becoming just as international as the capital that flows through them. These new global cities in turn become places where capital is valued over disempowered populations. These vulnerable populations include women, immigrants, and people of color, disadvantaged social groups who find public presence, if not political power, through their positions as economic actors, thanks to the denationalizing space of a global city (xxi).

'Scattered Across Continents and Centuries': Migration in Space and Time

The Lazarus Project reflects these contemporary conditions of globalization by giving readers a protagonist whose forced immigration to the United States was a result of circumstance, rather than choice. Brik immigrated to the United States not in search of freedom

and a better life, according to the standard tropes of the immigrant novel, but rather because he couldn't return home. Originally here on a student visa, the onset of the Bosnian conflict forced Brik to remain in the United States. As a U.S. citizen, Brik uncomfortably finds himself straddling the lines of multiple new social groups: Among Bosnian-Americans, he is seen as a fellow expatriate; during his travels through Eastern Europe, the locals quickly identify him as American; while to his in-laws, to the readership of his column, and to American society at large, Brik is a foreigner. Yet even amongst what should be his peer groups, Brik finds himself disconnected and unable to fit in. For Brik, "A human face consists of other faces—the faces you inherited or picked up along the way, or the ones you simply made up—laid on top of each other in a messy superimposition" (105). A person's deep face, or their true self lies buried between layers of history and experience, and only through understanding the layers can one see underneath them, into the deep face. However, there is no one with whom Brik is able to reach a deeper sense of understanding, not even with his own wife. He laments, "Mary could see no deep face of mine, because she did not know what my life in Bosnia had been like, what made me, what I had come from; she could see only my American face, acquired through failing to be the person I wanted to be" (106). A sense of powerlessness and failure permeates many of Brik's attitudes toward America, from his lack of choice in whether or not to immigrate in the first place, to his feelings of being indebted and financially dependent on his wife, and to his frustration over being unable to write. His sense of alienation from other migrants who had a more successful transition into the United States further complicates matters. It is little wonder then that for Brik, America comes to symbolize powerlessness and personal failure rather than success.

Lacking a clearly defined peer group, and finding himself simply one amongst broad groups of the displaced, Brik begins searching for communion and commonality in alternative sources. In Brik's retelling of the fateful morning where Lazarus was killed, Lazarus watches a young woman peeking at him from behind the curtain of a house in an affluent neighborhood. As he watches her withdraw, the narrator observes, "All the lives I could live, all the people I will never know, never will be, they are everywhere. That is all the world is," words which may equally have come from Brik's consciousness as they did Lazarus's (2). These lines resonate throughout the novel as Brik's quest for a self-identity leads toward an ultimate realization of interconnectivity, toward a collapsing of the distance created by time, history, race, culture, gender, and all other nominal modes of identity which traditionally divide peoples, as Brik begins seeing himself in others, internalizing the notion that the lives of strangers are "all the lives I could live," rather than seeing them as wholly separate entities with separate concerns apart from his own.

If history and experience are only layers of the superficial face, then according to Hemon, understanding these layers is a process that goes beyond simply understanding the culture of a particular time or a particular place, or what Raymond Williams calls the structures of feeling. The difficulty in studying any past period, Williams argues, is getting hold of "this felt sense of quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living" (*The Long Revolution* 47). In describing the structures of feeling, Williams differentiates between three levels of culture, lived culture, recorded culture, and the culture of the selective tradition, or the elements of culture future generations deem important enough to preserve and pass along (49). The structures of feeling, Williams argues, are the relationships between all three types of culture combining to form the

culture of a period (48). The structures of feeling are not stable or constant; rather, “the cultural tradition can be seen as a continual selection of ancestors. Particular lines will be drawn, often for as long as a century, and then suddenly, with some new stage in growth, these will be cancelled or weakened, and new lines drawn” (52-53). It is our own cultural moment which influences these choices, turning culture into not only a selection, but also an interpretation (53). Thus for Williams, the relationship between the past and the present is ultimately unidirectional, one where the present works to reshape the past; however, the past does not work on a living continuum with the present. There is an intangible quality to the past which can never properly be understood by someone of the present. He writes, “everyone living in the period would have had something which, I have argued, no later individual can wholly recover: that sense of the life within which the novels were written, and which we now approach through our selection. Theoretically, a period is recorded; in practice, this record is absorbed into a selective tradition; and both are different from the culture as lived” (50).

Hemon, on the other hand, does not see history so much as an impenetrable wall that can only be glimpsed over, but as an entity which can be touched and felt, however fleetingly, and which retains relevance to our own lived experience. In describing his research process for *The Lazarus Project*, Hemon stresses that,

stories can come from anywhere, at any time. To do research really means to open yourself up to all the possibilities of storytelling, to be ready to own whatever comes your way. The fragments you can use to build a story can be scattered across continents and centuries: the hand of a Bosnian I saw at the Vienna airport clutching a plastic bag containing all his immigration documents can be transposed to Ellis Island in 1907; the eyes of a Ukrainian boy, hardened

by poverty, could belong to anybody in the ghettos of Chicago at the beginning of last century. (“The Lazarus Project”)

For Hemon, the past and the present become inextricably interrelated, both working to inform each other, and to inform his story. Rather than the present holding interpretive control over the past, Hemon posits a two-way relationship in which past and present interlink with one another in living communion. The novel expresses this interrelationship through its use of characters, many of whom cross timelines as real figures in the life of the historical Lazarus Averbuch, and enter the world of the fictionalized Vladimir Brik, becoming both central and secondary characters in Brik’s Chicago. The reverse occurs as well: fictionalized characters from Brik’s contemporary universe travel backwards in time, becoming participants in the events following the death of Lazarus. Chief George Shippy and his wife, Mary share first names with Brik’s own wife and father-in-law. Assistant Chief Schuettler, one of the primary officers involved with investigating Lazarus’s anarchist ties has the same family name as Bill and Susie Schuettler, the donors of Brik’s research grant. Iuliana, a volunteer at the Chisinau Jewish Community Center reveals that not only was her grandmother’s maiden name was Averbuch, but she may be a direct descendent of Olga Averbuch. There is also Miller, the opportunist reporter who once covered the Bosnian conflict, and Miller, the opportunist reporter assigned to the Lazarus Averbuch story. Even Brik himself briefly makes an appearance as Lazarus’s English teacher at the Maxwell Street Settlement House and is quoted in one of Assistant Chief Schuettler’s reports: “Indeed, Mr. Brik, a teacher there, describes Lazarus Averbuch as *a faithful and persevering student of very good character*” (61). Thus in an odd moment where Hemon uses one of Brik’s historical personages to collapse time and space and formally insert Brik’s voice into the narrative past, the two story threads irrevocably twist, erasing any pretense at nonfictional

objectivity. By the end, the artificial realism of the first half of the novel has entirely given way to confusion over the truthfulness of Brik's narrative as boundaries between biography and autobiography become blurred. Which experiences belong exclusively to Lazarus Averbuch and not to Vladimir Brik? What is real and what isn't? The answers don't come easily, or perhaps, at all. As Brik continually reminds the reader, and which is equally true of his narrative, "I am complicated" (15).

In "Narrating Memory," Terry DeHay points out that within literature written by marginalized people, the "deconstruction of the traditional realist narrative metalanguage" is often utilized to "produce alternative narrative patterns to those of the dominant culture and to destabilize the 'hierarchy amongst discourses' within the text" (28). In other words, by writing outside of accepted literary forms, authors writing from the margins are able to use language to write their own realities rather than conforming to socially created cultural norms. Similarly, Hemon's highly mixed narrative also works to destabilize conventional storytelling in order to represent Brik's protest against a mainstream American culture he believes is incapable of understanding him. To men like George, Brik's father-in-law, anyplace outside of the United States is a dark land of provincial Otherness: "*My Country* was this remote, mythical place for him, a remnant of the world from before America, a land of obsolescence whose people could arrive at humanity only in the United States, and belatedly" (162). Brik's narration thus serves as a last-ditch effort to communicate something of his life and experiences to an English-speaking readership, before making a final break with the United States and ultimately deciding not to return to at the end of the novel. Brik's choice in subject to help him convey that final message, a 19 year-old boy who lived and died a century earlier, might seem like an unusual one as the two initially appear to have little in common; however, the story of Lazarus Averbuch is

one that speaks not to the specific circumstances of Vladimir Brik, but rather suggests an interconnectivity to the movement of people into (and out of) the United States, and a similarity to economic, social, and cultural forces across time.

At the beginning of the novel, Brik's life is both safe and well ordered. He lives in a comfortable suburb of Chicago with his neurosurgeon wife and has a job writing articles for the local newspaper on the immigrant's perspective on life in America. Neither entirely content, nor fatally dissatisfied with his marriage or his life in the United States, Brik appears to have settled into a state of benign limbo. However, the deeper the narrative delves into Brik's psychology, the more his feelings of confusion and displacement become apparent. The mounting disorder of Brik's psyche begins to take its toll on his marriage, his attitudes toward America, and on his narration. A shared narrative transforms into one where Brik's perspective, and Brik's exploration of his own identity becomes the winner. Initially kept separate, the third-person account of Lazarus's story begins to bleed through into Brik's first-person narration, initially as large sections of text contiguous with previous sections of the biography, then as smaller and smaller vignettes which seem to have less to do with the biography of Lazarus Averbuch, and more with indirectly commenting on something Brik has experienced: The irritation of finding himself navigating a densely crowded Ukrainian train station is retold in the next scene as Lazarus fighting his way across an equally-hostile shipyard upon arrival in the United States. Moreover, Brik's associations with Lazarus's experiences often seem anecdotal, and extremely particular to Brik's own experiences, rather than meaningfully commenting on points of connection between himself and Lazarus, yet, the novel argues, it is in these small, extremely mundane connections where their greatest similarities lie. While the novel makes the case for experiential similarity on the macro level—the parallels between past hysteria over Jewish

Anarchists and contemporary hysteria over Muslim terrorists are hard to miss—it is on the micro scale, in ordinary, lived experience, the experience that Williams argues is unknowable to a contemporary audience, where Brik most identifies with Lazarus.

To be sure, Hemon isn't making a case for complete transparency between the past and the present in *The Lazarus Project*. Had this been the case, the novel might have attempted to answer some of the central questions behind the death of the real Lazarus Averbuch. Readers end *The Lazarus Project* no more certain of the motives behind Lazarus's visit to Chief Shippy's home that fateful morning than we were when we began. We also never discover whether Lazarus actually had ties to Anarchist organizations or not. And Lazarus himself is a largely silent figure, primarily inhabiting the text as a murder victim rather than a fully realized presence. It is the side players in his life, Lazarus's sister Olga, his friend Isador, and Miller, the journalist who reported on his case for the local papers who take central stage in the Lazarus narrative. In writing a novel on Lazarus Averbuch, Hemon acknowledges that he did not expect to "solve the mystery of his death. I had to accept the defeat in the face of history—the complicated fullness of Lazarus's life could never be reconstructed. But I wanted to collect the fragments of the times and places he passed through so I could imagine what it was like to be Lazarus" ("The Lazarus Project"). Nevertheless, while the complicated fullness of the past can never be recreated, a point that Williams stressed, the significance of Hemon's vision in *The Lazarus Project* isn't that he presents a vision of the past which has been perfectly recreated by his hero narrator, but one which has contemporary relevance. Or more to the point, a contemporary relevance that leads to identification. To Brik, Lazarus does not belong to a faded past, a historical period that served as a precursor to the (more relevant) struggles of today's

immigrants. Rather, Lazarus is a man whose struggles Brik can identify and empathize with. Brik explains that he undertook his Lazarus project because,

I wanted to be immersed in the world as it had been in 1908, I wanted to imagine how immigrants lived then. I loved doing research, poring through old newspapers and books and photos, reciting curious facts on a whim. I had to admit that I identified easily with those travails: lousy jobs, lousier tenements, the acquisition of language, the logistics of survival, the ennoblement of self-fashioning. It seemed to me I knew what constituted that world, what mattered in it. (41)

For Brik, history stops being a closed narrative, one that ended with the deaths of the people who lived it, and becomes something that continues to matter, that is knowable on an essential level, in the commonplace struggles of ordinary life. Unable to feel a sense of belonging among his fellow Bosnian expatriates, it is Olga, Isador, Lazarus, and the people of 1908 who become part of Brik's community of immigrants slowly being crushed under the American system. As the researcher-author, Brik invites himself into their world, and in turn, invites their world into his. As the novel continues to twist the strands of the Brik-Lazarus narratives together, discrete breaks between one storyline and another becoming less pronounced, the timelines of 1908 and 2008 gain a kind of simultaneity within the novel. Within the narrative, Olga's aborted attempts to write her parents about the death of her brother, and Brik's own simultaneous aborted attempts to write Mary about the end of their marriage no longer give readers the impression of events taking place across centuries, but rather events running in parallel at the same time, and occupying the same narrative space.

As theorists of cultural globalization will frequently argue, the forces of globalization have given rise to new definitions of community and what constitutes social groups. Within a global paradigm, culture is no longer exclusively dependent upon location, neither in the way culture is experienced (it is possible to watch Italian cinema while snacking on French cheese all from within the comfort of one's American home), nor in the ways in which we identify fellow consumers of that culture (members of transnational NGOs, global environmental movements, and investors in international markets all represent different forms of communities). In an era where communities form around interest groups just as frequently as they do neighborhoods, it is not difficult to see how for Brik, Lazarus could more accurately represent his interest group than his fellow Bosnian expatriates. While Brik feels alienated from other Bosnian immigrants who have successfully integrated into American society, and who experienced a war Brik did not, he identifies with Olga's grief and Lazarus's disillusionment with the American system. The objection to Brik's interest in Lazarus comes from Mary, who Brik claims "found my idea of a Lazarus who struggled to resurrect in America a tad pretentious, particularly, she said, since my own American life was nothing to complain about. I had to know a lot about history to write about it. And how could I write about Jews when I wasn't one?" (41-42). Mary's objections to Brik's work, that he cannot write about a man whose life and ethnicity were different than his own, are characteristic of a world less exposed to the influences of other cultures, of a pre-global era where communities were exclusively local, and immigrant authors wrote primarily about their own ethnicities. Part of Brik's unmaking of the immigrant novel, then, is not only to invert the traditional narrative trajectory of immigration to assimilation, but also to question its traditional subject matter as well. As much as *The Lazarus Project* tells the story of Brik's immigration experience as a Bosnian American, it also presents alternative stories large and

small, from Lazarus's shared narrative to brief glimpses into the lives of people Brik connects with along the way: Olga Averbuch, Isador Maron, Elena the human trafficking victim, all the lives Brik could live, all the people he will never be.

In part, then, Hemon's novel serves as an examination of the contemporary conditions of migrancy as Brik reflects upon the circumstances of his own arrival in the United States, but more importantly, *The Lazarus Project* serves as a meditation upon interconnections between people across time, history, language, and culture. By embarking on his Lazarus book project, Brik seeks commonality which is missing from his life, between his own experiences as an immigrant with those of a younger man from a different ethnic and religious background, and who immigrated more than 100 years earlier. The question then becomes why would Brik look into the distant past for a peer, rather than for a man from his own generation, and how ontologically is he able to make this connection?

In *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, David Harvey argues that shifts in how people experience space and time thanks to the rise of "flexible accumulation," or to the continually changing patterns of consumption, labor markets, and products and processes characteristic of contemporary modes of production has had a profound effect on geopolitics, and on how individuals grapple with reality (147). In an early experiment with capitalist social manipulation, Harvey argues, Henry Ford attempted to create disciplined, productive workers ideally suited to an assembly-line system through the use of labor management and control (126). While Ford's corporate experiment may not have been entirely successful, Harvey claims current economic conditions have given rise to a new type of social experiment on global workforces. He writes, "The intensity of time-space compression in Western capitalism since the 1960s, with all of its congruent features of excessive ephemerality and fragmentation in the political and private as

well as in the social realm, does seem to indicate an experimental context that makes the condition of postmodernity somewhat special” (306). To extend Harvey’s argument further, the current political, private, and social conditions of time-space compression are too distinct to merely be only a special case of postmodernism. Rather, contemporary forms of time-space compression are distinctly influenced by the social, economic, and political flows of globalization. In other words, Brik’s particular identification with Lazarus—as a peer, rather than as an ancestor—is uniquely enabled by mass cultural ideological shifts resulting from globalization. Rather than forming connections between people merely across geographic space, *The Lazarus Project* presents readers with the notion of community across boundaries of time, space, and history.

Benedict Anderson, who defined national identities in terms of “imagined communities” of individuals, has previously argued the concept of community across time and space. By invoking Walter Benjamin’s concept of “homogeneous, empty time,” Anderson contends that national communities are formed on the basis of individuals being able to envision themselves as part of a group of people who exist at the same time as part of the same national space (*Imagined Communities* 24). These imagined communities transverse the problem of differences in locality and create a shared (national) sense of ideology, history, and culture. For Anderson, national identity was first engendered by print capital, which gave readers of books and newspapers consistent access to the politics, events, and concerns of other parts of the nation. By printing these stories alongside the local news, a shared sense of national concerns were created as readership became interested in events outside their own regions and could imagine other readers, all existing at the same time, reading the same news stories, and sharing similar concerns. Anderson’s ideas were later expanded on by Arjun Appadurai who argued that the

same kinds of thought processes and social forces which gave rise to national communities were also giving rise to transnational communities in an increasingly global era.

While actual differences in time zones, regional culture and politics make true simultaneity among readers impossible in actual fact, it is the imagined sense of simultaneity created by homogeneous, empty time in which past and future exist in an instantaneous present that allows for a shared sense of community among individuals who are likely to never meet (*Imagined Communities* 24). In this sense, homogeneous, empty time creates a sense of history and continuity between the past, present, and future that allows people to conceive of the world as a place where distant communities exist alongside familiar localities, creating a sense of homogeneity between simultaneously existing multiple presents (as well as multiple pasts and futures). By creating a space where communities can be imagined, not simply in the here and now but also arising from the past and continuing on into the present, Anderson concludes that a national identity could be formed, one which distinguishes members of national communities from one another through a shared vision of politics, ideology, and history.

In a sense, then, *The Lazarus Project* is a literary illustration of a contemporary imagined community where the novel's two narrative threads exist in simultaneity and interweave in a kind of homogeneous empty time as Brik's observations blend into Lazarus's experiences and the past of Lazarus Averbuch and future of Vladimir Brik exist in an instantaneous present through the act of readership. A sense of community is formed between Lazarus, Brik, and the reader through a shared interest in the immigrant story. In the simplest sense, then, Hemon is able to reconsider notions of history and its immediate relevance on his characters for the same reasons why individuals in a global era are able to reconsider notions of community, and find collective solidarity through time and space and across political boundaries.

The ability to make these kinds of complex transpersonal interconnections, or what John Tomlinson terms “complex connectivity,” is one of the key traits of cultural globalization. Tomlinson defines complex connectivity simply as “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life,” and tie the experiences, practices, politics, economics, and environmental fates of individuals around the globe (*Globalization and Culture* 2). These connections are multidimensional in that they intersect through all parts of social life (economics, culture, politics, etc.) and link “the myriad small everyday [local] actions of millions with the fates of distant, unknown others” (*Globalization and Culture* 25). Brik’s quest in *The Lazarus Project* is itself an identity quest through the mode of connectivity. To find out who he is, Brik must first discover who he was, and how a broad cross section of language, history, culture, and politics relates—and how it relates as connected by individuals. By creating links between himself, the people he encounters on his journey, and the distant, unknown others he finds buried in Lazarus’s history, Brik’s ultimate journey is not only to find his place in the world, his communal identity, but also to find his individual identity through the mode of writing.

The Representation of Self in New Global Stories of Immigration

In *The Lazarus Project*, Brik unwrites not only the immigrant myth, but also *himself*, as Hemon deconstructs both traditional narrative form and his main character’s psyche. On his journey, Brik attempts again and again to situate himself—first within Lazarus’s story, and later, within the lives of the people around him—as he begins a long chorus of identifying himself in other people. In various forms, and sometimes through the mouths of other characters, the novel continually returns to the moments before Lazarus’s death, and to his final observations: “All the

lives I could live, all the people I will never know, never will be, they are everywhere. That is all the world is” (2). Again and again, Brik utters “he is me” as he recognizes himself first in his long-dead grandfather, then in people he is increasingly disconnected from, from family members, to friends, to strangers, and finally, to his own broken bones in an x-ray.

Ostensibly, the practical purpose of Brik’s research trip through Eastern Europe is to find out more about Lazarus Averbuch and complete his book. However, Brik starts their journey in the Ukraine, in Lviv, a village near Krotkiy, where “Lazarus had almost certainly never been” (65). Rather, Krotkiy is where Brik’s paternal grandfather was born, and where Brik’s own family story of immigration begins. The novel ends in Sarajevo, also a city with no connection to Lazarus, but very personal to Brik. The journey thus becomes less about research than it becomes a quest of self-discovery for Brik. Textually, readers see very little, if any, of Brik’s investigative process while on the trip. In fact, Brik notes that he has already completed his research by the time he reaches the Chisinau Jewish Community Center. Although Brik goes through the motions of speaking with volunteers there about local history and about the pogrom Lazarus survived, this trip also ends up having more relevance to Brik’s own journey than it does on his understanding of Lazarus’s history. While in the cemetery behind the community center, Brik undergoes a kind of epiphany claiming, “Some part of my life ended there, among those empty graves; it was then that I started mourning. I can tell you that now, now that there is little but mourning” (235). The epiphany is not a complete one. Brik does not reach a conclusion about the future course of his life, or of his writing (nor arguably does he even at the end of the novel); however, Brik’s epiphany sets off an awakened consciousness of his own mortality, and of the mortality of others. In gaining a belated sense of empathy, Brik suddenly becomes cognizant of the interconnections between himself and the lives of the people immediately

around him—between himself and Rora, between himself and Iuliana their volunteer guide—and then between himself and the lives of strangers. The novel’s unspoken connection between Brik and Lazarus finally comes to fruition, as Brik’s epiphany is not initially triggered by the living, but by his pity for the dead while standing in front of the grave of Isaac Averbuch, a 12 year-old possible relative of Lazarus’s. He states, “They were me. We lived the same life: we would vanish into the same death. We were like everybody else, because there was nobody like us” (236). The gravesite is the closest the two men will ever come to one another in the course of the novel, but it is enough to elicit a change in Brik’s consciousness:

And again I thought: That’s me. The thought bounced in my head deliriously, I couldn’t get to the end of it, could not fold it up into meaning. Iuliana walked behind; I heard her gentle panting. She was me, Rora was me, and then we came upon the man on the bench, drooling asleep, his mouth open enough for us to see a graveyard of teeth, his hand wedged inside his pants’ waist—and he was me, too. The only one who was not me was myself. (235)

In trying on other identities, in seeing his own life in the lives of others, Brik attempts to finally situate his own identity. If Iuliana “was me, Rora was me . . . [and the] only one who was not me was myself,” then the question the final part of the novel seeks to answer, at last, is not “who was Lazarus Arverbuch?” but “who is Vladamir Brik?” Interestingly, it is not Brik himself who first makes the realization of interconnectivity in the novel, but Olga Averbuch pages earlier, also while witnessing death, during the final moments of an elderly neighbor: “Lord, Olga thinks. That’s me. It never ends, Pinya says. Every time, you think maybe this here is a different world, but it’s all the same: they live, we die. So here it is again” (172-173). The separateness of both timelines collapse each time Brik repeats Olga’s thoughts from 100 years

earlier (or perhaps as Olga channels Brik's thoughts from 100 years later), revealing more similarity than difference even between the lives of two people separated by language, culture, and history. The question then becomes, of all the people Brik could have chosen to identify with, why does the story of Lazarus Averbuch resonate so much with him?

In part, the choice of Lazarus Averbuch as textual counterpoint to Hemon's narrator comes from the obvious parallels inherent between the mass social hysteria surrounding Jewish anarchists at the turn of the twentieth century, and Muslim terrorists at the turn of the twenty-first century. As the hapless victim of ethnic intolerance, Lazarus fits into the novel's indictment against the racism, religious discrimination, and general mistrust of immigrants brought on by 9/11. Additionally, as a forgotten historical figure from an oppressed social class, the valorization of Lazarus Averbuch allows Hemon to create linkages between conditions of immigration in the past and in the present, creating continuity in experiences across time. While simultaneously affirming just how little has changed in American society from the turn of the twentieth century to contemporary times (history repeats, our flaws are culturally endemic), Hemon also begins creating his own historical cultural narrative, distinct to the experiences of immigrants as a whole. In a history from the bottom up approach, the material conditions of neglected social groups are examined in order to give them historical presence alongside the favored, ruling-class heroes that typically dominate historical master narratives. Hemon uses this approach in part to create a genealogy between Lazarus and Brik, establishing immigrants as a distinct social class within American society, bound by lived experience rather than language or ethnicity.

Employed as a columnist at a local Chicago newspaper, Brik writes a popular weekly column on the immigrant experience in America. Rather than focusing exclusively on himself,

he culls a lot of material for his column from students he has met while teaching English as a second language. His students' experiences, Brik notes, are "not at all unlike my own," and his columns all tend to focus on the milder, more palatable aspects of immigration, such as getting a social security number, meeting Americans, and dealing with nostalgia (31). However, in writing about experiences that are not his own, Brik completely avoids the subjects that truly preoccupy his mind—trauma, racism, isolation, and alienation. Nevertheless, Brik notes that his readers like the column because it is "honest and personal and they found the quirky immigrant language endearing" (32). Brik's participation in reducing the immigrant experience into quaint universalities serves as very much a deliberate attempt on his part to situate himself as a cultural insider. As a man marginalized by his ethnicity, by proliferating socially-accepted archetypes on the immigrant mythos, Brik positions himself as a cultural producer, rather than the subject those myths are enacted upon. According to DeHay, dominant cultures often "negate the importance of a minority group's shared and different past in favor of a more universal reading—We're all Americans—implying that the difference that the minority group *senses* is not real, but rather imagined. This is the myth of assimilation" (26). At the beginning of the novel, Brik is nothing if not a man who has forcibly convinced himself of his own contented assimilation into American life. He is married, employed, and comfortable. He robotically repeats to anyone who will listen that his life and Mary, his American wife, are "great," despite feeling like a failure for having lost his teaching job, and despite a growing sense of resentment toward Mary's characteristically American values. Attempting to convince himself that he is happy, and that he has easily settled into his new life as an American is easier than challenging these notions.

At a dinner celebrating Bosnian independence, Brik watches children outfitted in supposedly ethnic dress struggle in American-accented voices through a traditional Bosnian song

and a series of folk dances. Fully aware that neither he, nor they, have ever worn anything like Bosnian dress, Brik notes the performance is nothing but “costumed fantasies . . . enacted to recall a dignified past divested of evil and poverty” (13). Despite being fully aware of the willful ahistoricism of the spectacle, (from what era does the children’s ethnic dress proceed? who typically wears it, and in what context?), he goes on to state, “I participate in that self-deception; in fact, I like to help with it, for, at least once a year, I am a Bosnian patriot. Just like everybody else, I enjoy the unearned nobility of belonging to one nation and not another” (13). Brik’s self-deception as a Bosnian patriot, as a member of the majority, serves as a counter-point to George’s own self-deception as a privileged American. In his columns, and to the public at large, Brik dispassionately plays the role of the token immigrant. Without complaint (though with a great deal of unspoken resentment), Brik takes the brunt of George’s ignorant, if not xenophobic, mistrust of all things un-American. Professionally, privately, and even socially, Brik embraces the mantle of the immigrant. His well-worn cocktail party speech includes the expected references to his early struggles and (of course) eventual successes, all thanks to the assimilatory power of the American dream. The speech inevitably wins listeners over as he states, “the party inquisitors were often given to gushing over the neatness of my immigrant story; many would recall an ancestor who came to America and followed the same narrative trajectory: displacement, travails, redemption, success” (32).

In one sense, Lazarus Averbuch initially appeals to Brik because of his easy universality as a subject. Like the children mimicking a romanticized, mock-noble Bosnian past in their balloon trousers and fezzes, Lazarus’s story, because it takes place in the distant past, allows for the same kinds of easy generalizations Brik makes in his articles. Very little is left of Lazarus the man except for a handful of facts about his birth and death. What Lazarus wanted, and

whether or not he arrived at Chief Shippy's residence the day he died with malicious or benign intent is impossible to know, and remains a mystery throughout the course of the narrative. The story behind the Biblical Lazarus also resonates with Brik, who views him as the prototypical immigrant: "And once he was resurrected, did he remember being dead, or did he just enter another dream of another life by way of Marseilles? Did he have to disremember his previous life and start from scratch, like an immigrant?" (127). Brik identifies with the Biblical Lazarus's forced relocation and forced reinvention, and most particularly with his disquietude over his resurrection:

Perhaps [the absolute peace of death] was what Mr. Christ deprived Lazarus of. He may have been okay dead; it was all over, he was home. Maybe Mr. Christ was showing off in order to lay—spiritually speaking, of course—Lazarus's sisters; maybe he wanted to show that he was the boss of death, as he was the boss of life. Either way, he just couldn't leave Lazarus alone. Once Lazarus was thrown out of the comfy bed of eternity, he wandered the world, forever homeless, forever afraid to fall asleep, dreaming of dreaming. It all made me so goddamn angry. (179)

To Brik, the Biblical Lazarus was a man deprived of peace, not triumphantly revived, not unlike Brik himself who still feels the trauma of war, and who never became comfortable with his own reinvention in the United States. And not unlike Lazarus Averbuch who was also deprived of peace after death, his body put on display for Chicago residents interested in viewing the face of an anarchist. The local papers furthered this humiliation by printing a picture of his face alongside an anthropological explanation of how his profile fit "THE ANARCHIST TYPE," including: "1. low forehead" and "5. large simian ears" (143). And the final indignity: for the

good of the city, so as not to turn him into an Anarchist martyr, officials had Lazarus buried in an unmarked grave without the proper Jewish rites. However, for all the turmoil and disquietude over Lazarus's death in 1908, in a sense, Brik acts as Lazarus's own resurrector by writing about Lazarus's death 100 years later, dredging up the violence of the past once again for public consumption.

As a man long-since deceased, Lazarus Averbuch becomes the perfect blank slate for Brik, and his symbolic weight changes as Brik's understanding of his own life story changes. Initially, Brik views the connection between himself and Lazarus in terms of the genial kinship borne of being fellow immigrants. As immigrants whose lives must surely have followed "the same narrative trajectory" of trials and tribulations, he claims, "I had to admit that I identified easily with [Lazarus's] travails: lousy jobs, lousier tenements, the acquisition of language, the logistics of survival, the ennoblement of self-fashioning. It seemed to me I knew what constituted that world, what mattered in it" (41). However, Brik finds that he doesn't know what constitutes the immigrant world and what matters in it—at least, this particular vision of it. Instead, he finds whenever he sits down to write, the words won't come. All he can produce is "a costumed parade of paper cutouts performing acts of high symbolic value: tearing up at the sight of the Statue of Liberty, throwing the lice-infested Old Country clothes on the sacrificial pyre of a new identity, coughing consumptive blood in large, poignant clots" (41). The insights into the immigrant experience Brik thinks he has, and the authenticity of voice which should come naturally to someone who has claimed to share in these experiences, has somehow escaped him. But how can Brik tell the immigrant's story and speak to immigrant experiences when he himself is not an immigrant but an asylee?

For all his attempts to fashion himself as an immigrant success story, the part never quite fits because Brik's initial decision to become an American was never a voluntary one. He entered the United States as a student intending to study English, then stayed when the Bosnian conflict erupted simply because he couldn't return. Anthony H. Richmond draws the distinction between immigrants as "proactive" migrants and asylum-seekers and refugees as "reactive," or forced migrants ("Globalization: Implications for Immigrants and Refugees" 708). In 1951, the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees explicitly defined what constituted a refugee and what legal protections to which they were entitled. In the years following World War II, Richmond argues, the differences between refugees and immigrants were far clearer; however, thanks to globalization, the reasons why people emigrate have changed. Political, economic, and social factors force migration of individuals and entire populations, either within national boundaries, or across borders. Richmond no longer sees a "clear-cut distinction between 'proactive' migrants, but rather, a continuum between those who have some freedom of choice whether, when and where to move and those who are impelled by circumstances beyond their control" (708-709).

From this perspective, Brik's attempt to reconfigure himself into the mode of the archetypal immigrant is impossible. By traditional definitions, he cannot contribute to the immigrant mythos because he did not willingly emigrate; by contemporary definitions, he cannot contribute to the immigrant mythos because it is redefining itself as the intentions, circumstances, and outcomes of immigration are changing. The changes Richmond identifies allow for closer textual association between Brik and Lazarus since, according to contemporary views, all immigrants fall along some continuum of choice and compulsion. However, Brik's experiences with immigration alone are not the source of his writing difficulties. The words will

not come because the stock phrases and well-worn symbols associated with the immigrant myth no longer work to describe the immigrant experience. This begs the question: if these symbols don't fit a man who fled Eastern Europe to avoid religious persecution, a man who should have fit the model perfectly, then who do they work for? Ultimately, *The Lazarus Project* argues, the immigrant story itself—like the costumed children—has always been, to borrow Baudrillard's terms, little more than a simulation, or an irrational construct which “no longer measures itself against either an ideal or a negative instance,” and has been rendered largely meaningless by changing tides in transnational population shifts (*Simulacra and Simulation 2*).

Race, ethnicity, economics, history, culture, and a host of other complex, individual circumstances turn universalizing attempts at telling the immigrant story into a literary impossibility. Whether in the past or in the present, there is no singular master narrative which fully encompasses either Vladimir Brik or Lazarus Averbuch, particularly not when globalization is changing the process of immigration as we have known it. As our understanding of the conditions of migrancy evolves, so too must our understanding of the immigrant myths whose metaphors have become outmoded. The circumstances of migration themselves, argues Roger Bromley, are so “culturally, temporally, and spatially multi-layered” that attempting to express these conditions can become problematic for migrant authors whose writing is thus “a product of flux, moving identities, and sometimes conditions of near illegibility” (297). If Brik's words are limited to “a costumed parade of paper cutouts performing acts of high symbolic value,” then it is little wonder he finds common cultural symbols and language itself inadequate to express the complexities of the immigrant experience, both in the present and the past. A multilayered experience dependent upon the forces of history and culture cannot be easily explained, and certainly not by depending upon the language of clichés, whose meaning and

impact has dulled over time with mindless repetition. It is to be expected that Brik's appeals to cultural clichés should be met with failure.

To find the literary voice of authenticity needed to write Lazarus's story (and finally express his own), Brik must first leave the comfort of the United States and return to the beginning, to his origins in Eastern Europe. His secret, "unspoken" hope is that by completing the biography project, Brik will gain the moral identity he believes he lacks: "The book would make me become someone else, go either way: I could earn the right to orgasmic selfishness (and the money required for it) or I could purchase my moral insurance by going through the righteous processes of self-doubt and self-realization" (133). However, rather than a moral identity, what Brik truly lacks is both a self-identity, and an identity as a writer. Unable to live up to Mary's standards of "American decency"—to find a job or to put much effort into his marriage—Brik languishes in a state of what he terms "moral waddling," where he fantasizes about the possibilities of life outside of marriage (133). Failing in his profession and in his marriage, at all the typical avenues adults use to carve out a self-identity, Brik fantasizes about a world where "I could stop caring what I promised, what I committed myself to, because I would just not care who I was and become somebody else on a whim. And I could do it whenever I wished. I could be the sole meaning of my life" (132). Rather than using the trip to bring him closure on his past before triumphantly returning to America, completed manuscript in hand (as one might expect), Brik's journey follows the opposite trajectory.

Hemon takes his protagonist further and further away from the United States, uncertainty mounting over Brik's future and the completion of his writing project the farther he goes. The trip, Brik thinks, will provide him with the chance for reinvention, a reinvention tied to the opportunity to cast off the responsibilities tying him to American life. As the two men embark

on the final leg of their trip, Brik claims, “I was unsettled by the feeling that we could not return now. Where can you go from nowhere, except deeper into nowhere?” (178). While these lines foreshadow Brik’s eventual choice not to return, they also encapsulate the symbolic weight of the entire trip. Just as research entails exploration rather than an absolute demand for results, Brik’s research trip is not a journey *to* anywhere, merely an exploration. By delving into the experiences of his subject, Brik more importantly delves into the nowhere place of his own psyche, and even this is not a teleological journey. The novel leaves us not with Brik as a psychologically complete moral being, epiphany of enlightenment achieved, but with the process only having just begun, the search continuing.

Brik’s quest for a moral identity, a self identity, is equally connected to his writer’s identity, to his ability to communicate his understanding of the world around him. To find that literary voice, Brik must not only stop using the borrowed language of a monolithic vision of the American immigrant story, but he must also challenge its authenticity—authenticity in what constitutes “the immigrant story,” authenticity in the ways that story gets told, and the socially-conferred standards that have given that story authenticity. Not every story of immigration contains the same hopeful vision of “lousy jobs, lousier tenements, the acquisition of language, the logistics of survival, the ennoblement of self-fashioning” (41). To unwrite this particular myth, the novel presents readers with three alternate visions of immigration: the story of Lazarus Averbuch, the story of Vladamir Brik, and finally, the story of Elena, a young woman Brik and Rora meet while traveling to Romania. Each narrative provides its own challenge to traditional archetypes: The Lazarus story, meant to represent the classic account of the immigrant myth—a young man at the turn of the century fleeing to the Land of the Free in order to escape religious persecution—in fact undermines the foundations of the myth as a whole. Rather than gaining

freedom and prosperity in America, Lazarus finds more persecution and becomes disgruntled enough to have (possibly) joined an anti-government revolutionary group. His story ends in murder, not the typical binary of alienation or assimilation.

Exploitation and Epiphany: Literature in a Global Era

Brik's own story also presents a break from the traditional immigrant myth. Although the choice of settling in the United States was not his own, he eventually gains his citizenship, marries an American woman, and ends up living in relative comfort. However, at the end of the novel, Brik still chooses divorce and repatriation in a war-torn country over a return to the prosperity of the United States. If readers can dismiss Lazarus's dissatisfaction with the United States due to the poverty he lived in and the discrimination he faced, the novel challenges them with the dissatisfaction of a character who possessed the advantages of citizenship, romance, few troubles with the language barrier, and thanks to a research grant, the financial means to write his book and make his dreams of authorship become a reality. But perhaps most unsettling of all, Hemon's final objection to the traditional immigrant myth comes in the form of Elena, a young woman being trafficked into Romania, probably to be sold into prostitution. As the victim of a crime proliferated by transnational forces, Elena neither chose the circumstances of her migration, nor had hopes of a better future after relocation. While all three stories present visions of forced migrancy—not the *choice* that it is depicted as in most immigrant literature—Elena's story is arguably the bleakest of the three, and especially relevant to contemporary conditions of migration where social, political, and economic currents have forcibly displaced not only individuals, but entire populations. And it is further significant that it is *this* event, Brik's confrontation with an exploited and silenced woman, that allows him to acknowledge his

own search for a moral identity and his failures as a writer. While Brik had spent the novel contemplating Lazarus's oppression in the abstract, through newspaper clippings and old photographs, the rescue of Elena provides Brik with a direction, with the missing desire to allow silenced voices like Elena, Lazarus, and even himself, to speak through his writing.

After spending an entire novel witnessing Brik disparaging the impotence of his own life while simultaneously projecting himself into the lives of others, as a final test of his hero's convictions, at the end of the novel, Hemon provides Brik with the opportunity to take action, to acquire the moral identity he lacks by liberating a young woman from her sex trafficker. However, rather than emerging from the incident full of confidence and moral certitude, Brik's actions throughout the scene are confused and contradictory, the episode adding more complexity than clarity to the development of Brik's persona.

Opting to travel from Chisinau to Bucharest via taxi, the driver Brik has hired is replaced at the last moment by a different man. To Brik, it is apparent that their original driver had been "bullied" into allowing the substitution; however, he does not object to it, and the men begin the journey, agreeing to stop for the driver's "girlfriend" along the way (256, 258). The situation becomes even more suspicious as Brik observes not a happy reunion between lovers, but Seryozha, the driver escorting a young woman into the taxi, "gripping her biceps" as "[h]e opened the rear door and shoved her inside" (258). The young woman, whose name Seryozha claims is Elena, remains silent and does not speak to any of the men in the car, not even to complain about Seryozha's reckless driving. While Brik finds the whole experience "exhilarating," even finding "liberty" in the "perfect helplessness" he feels while at the mercy of an out of control driver (258, 259), (a fear he embroiders with a very brief interlude into the image of Lazarus being restrained by Chief Shippy in the moment before he was shot), he can

also sense Elena's fear as she grips the back of his seat with each dangerous curve Seryozha takes. Brik's exhilaration at imagined fear appears foolish alongside the real fears of a woman about to be sold into slavery; nevertheless, Brik remains too preoccupied with his own thoughts to give Elena much consideration until he reaches the Romanian border, where the car's occupants are instructed to turn over their passports for inspection. Noticing "Rora glanced at me with what I read as contempt" as he cooperates with the request, Brik is finally knocked out of his complacency and forced to acknowledge the abnormality of the situation before him (259). As he witnesses Seryozha silencing Elena in front of the border guard, glaring at her "with a hissing gaze," Brik realizes: "I understood at that moment that the young Elena was not traveling to Bucharest of her own volition; Rora and I and our American passports were there to provide plausibility, a respectable cover" (259). The specter of Brik's American passport facilitating Seryozha's crime provides an interesting commentary on the reach of American influence all on its own. While Elena herself is neither an American immigrant, nor attempting to become one, she nevertheless, thanks to the boon of Brik's U.S. citizenship, fell victim to some of the very worst aspects of contemporary migration. As Brik obsesses over his own problems, the novel quietly recognizes the complex interplay of forces that have turned citizenship into sociopolitical currency in a globalized world.

It is no coincidence that Hemon chose human trafficking, a crime whose proliferation is widely acknowledged in activist, media, and scholarly circles as stemming directly from globalization: An article in *New Statesman* argues "human trafficking is increasingly a commercial problem, its proliferation encouraged by the speed of globalisation," and quotes actress and prominent anti-trafficking activist Emma Thompson, who calls human trafficking "the hidden side of globalisation" (Groskop 36). Within academic circles, sociologists Loring

Jones, David W. Engstrom, Tricia Hilliard, and Mariel Diaz focus on the economic conditions that force migration among disadvantaged populations, similarly arguing that human trafficking is “one of the dark sides of globalization” (108). Legal scholar Lan Cao echoes this perspective while attributing the rise of human trafficking in the new global era to changes in both economic dependence on international markets, and the nation state’s inability to cope with those changes (63). In short, whether among activists, scholars, or popular media outlets, it is impossible to discuss the root causes of human trafficking without also bringing up globalization.

Once confronted by real crime, by a woman who he realizes is a victim of human trafficking, Brik’s flights of fancy do not take a more pragmatic edge; rather, he begins weaving a completely new tale, one in which Elena, whose emotions he’d taken no notice of, now “seemed to be terrified,” and in which conspiracies abound as he begins theorizing: “And for all we knew, our illustrious, insane driver could have been in cahoots with the border guard, who was putting up a show for those who might be watching” (259). Brik eventually comes to the conclusion the random border guard who happened to be on patrol when they arrived in Romania “was definitely in cahoots” with Seryozha and begins rationalizing his complacency over the situation, coming up with excuses that Seryozha may have been armed, or that Elena, who had previously been terrified, was in actuality choosing to become a prostitute (260). In an attempt to distance himself from the uncomfortable situation, he even wonders, “Who was I to judge Elena? Each life is legitimized by its rightful owner” (260). However, now somewhat morally awakened, Brik’s guilty conscience chastises him with the memory of a time he watched a woman on the El suffer from a seizure, but did nothing to aid her, not even call for help.

Knowing he should assist Elena, but unable to take action on his own, Brik waits until they arrive in Bucharest before helplessly turning to Rora for advice. Rora instructs him to relax

and be silent, then without telling Brik of his intentions, follows Seryozha into the restroom where he physically assaults him. Brik decides to take his own turn with Seryozha, after Rora has already left him in a dazed heap on the toilets, breaking his writing hand in the process, yet excited over the “beastly, thrilling pain” (264). He even laments, “I wished Mary could have seen me at that moment, the lethal combination of wrath and good intentions” (264). However, Brik immediately returns to his role following behind Rora, unable to capitalize on his newfound confidence after his questionable moment of triumph in the bathroom. Entirely without his assistance, Rora returns to the car to finish the task of liberating Elena, pulling her out onto the streets, returning her passport and “a bundle of money” taken from Seryozha, and urging her to flee—in Bosnian, not English (264). Brik’s contribution to the events amounts to beating on an already-beaten man; he takes no part in saving Elena, the planning and the execution entirely Rora’s. A pivotal moment wasted in which Brik could, indeed, have created a moral identity for himself. Lesson unlearned, the symbolic result of the incident is the breaking of Brik’s writing hand. The failure to create an identity for himself becomes a literary failure as Brik ends up both psychologically *and* physically unable to write his manuscript.

Early in the novel, Brik realizes Rora “had always been complete, He had finished the work of becoming himself, long before any of us could even imagine such a feat was possible. Needless to say, I envied him” (30). Unlike Brik, Rora is able to take action because he is comfortable with himself, “complete” as both an individual, and as an artist. Even within Brik’s own medium, as a storyteller, Rora’s ability to captivate an audience outpaces Brik’s. While Brik struggles to find the words to express Lazarus’s story, Rora effortlessly finds anecdotes that relate to nearly any situation, no matter how implausible his stories may seem. As a teenager, Brik remembers being impressed by Rora’s words: “If someone told you he had flown in a

cockpit or had been a teenage gigolo in Sweden or had eaten mamba kebabs it was easy to choose to believe him; you could trust [Rora's] stories because they were good" (20). Not only are Rora's stories entertaining in and of themselves, but they work because they are true to Rora as an individual, true to his own artist's voice. Brik acknowledges, "Even if Rora lied, even if I didn't always believe what he told us had taken place, he was the only person who could be cast as a character in those stories" (20). Moreover, according to Brik, Rora's best skill as a storyteller is that he "was good with the audience, as judged by my unflagging, unquestioning, decades-long interest in his stories. . . . He could measure the intensity of my involvement; he could balance suspense, withhold information, manage asides, read my face, qualify my laughter. It was pleasant, I have to say, to be subjected to such studious storytelling" (104). Although Brik believes Rora's stories are mostly improbable and fantastic, he manages to captivate Brik during their trip, weaving a realistic murder-mystery featuring Rora as the lone witness to the death of Miller, an American reporter Rora knew during the war. Completely convinced of the veracity of his tale, it is only after Rora is killed that Brik accidentally discovers Miller is still alive, a final tribute to Rora's consummate ability to captivate his audience. However, the true genius of Rora's storytelling was not in the stories in and of themselves—Brik's own attempt to retell one of Rora's anecdotes about the Berlin Wall ends up a dismal failure (103-104)—but but in his ability to connect with his audience, to tell stories they wanted to hear. Brik notes Rora's teenage stories "were true to our shared adolescent reveries," while the Miller narrative, full of conspiracies and mayhem, was exactly what the adult Brik—who never experienced the war for himself, and whose own mind was full of anger and cynicism—had wanted to hear.

However, despite Rora's considerable way with words, photography is his true medium, and it is in his dedication to his craft, a dedication Brik lacks with his writing, where readers see

his artistic sensibilities truly at work. While in the bus station at Chernivitsi, Brik has a disorienting moment where he “realized that my center had shifted—it used to be in my stomach, but now it was in my breast pocket, where I kept my American passport and a wad of cash. I pushed the bounty of American life through space; I was presently assembled around it and needed to protect it from the people around me” (177). To his irritation, Rora takes the window seat on the bus “so he could take more pictures, forcing me into the olfactory inspection of every passing armpit” (177). Uncomfortable in his own skin and in his artistic vision, Brik clings to money and citizenship, to external markers of identity to give him a sense of presence in a crowd of strangers, while Rora uses the opportunity to take pictures of interesting faces in the crowd. Watching Rora photograph “some helpless tote-bag carrier,” Brik realizes that unlike him, “The seat of his fucking soul was in that camera” (177). As an artist, Rora’s eye is continually trained outward, on the next shot, the next image worth capturing, while Brik, who has not yet found his artist’s voice, keeps his eye trained inward, on his own pain, his own struggles, his own difficulties. For Brik, this is a necessary evolutionary step. To create a new immigrant myth, one sensitive to the interconnections between immigrants past and present, which complicates the story of immigration beyond flat archetypes, Brik must first understand his own immigrant story. Only then can he find the words to express it.

Trin T. Minh-ha argues that a woman writer of color often finds herself locked in a “triple bind” wherein her identity as a woman, as a person of color, and as a writer comes into conflict: which identity does she privilege and under what circumstances? Added to this conflict is the consciousness of the writer as historical subject, and “writing itself as a practice located at the intersection of subject and history” (*Woman Native Other* 6). Additionally, the woman writer of color finds herself at odds with not only her identity, but also with language itself, which “is

used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations,” and with her relation to writing (6). For Minh-ha, writing creates hierarchies, an inside and an outside of knowledge relationships:

as holder of speech, she usually writes from a position of power, creating an “author,” situating herself *above* her work and existing *before* it, rarely simultaneously *with* it. Thus, it has become almost impossible for her to take up her pen without at the same time questioning her relation to the material that defines her and her creative work. As focal point of cultural consciousness and social change, writing weaves into language the complex relations of a subject caught between the problems of race and gender and the practice of literature as the very place where social alienation is thwarted differently according to each specific context. (6)

As an immigrant author, Brik is caught in a similar triple bind wherein he finds himself in conflict with his identities as a writer, as an immigrant, and as a Bosnian-American. His research project and simultaneous identity quest become the vehicles through which he is able to interrogate his own positioning as both writer and historical subject.

The novel’s final challenge to the traditional immigrant story—and to contemporary fiction itself—lies in its ending. While Brik reaches a decision about his future (he will remain in Sarajevo), the decision hardly functions as a moment of clarity. Despite the trauma of his experiences, Brik never evolves into the kind of man, or the kind of writer he’d hoped to become. The standard epiphany never occurs. By centering the novel around a character who expects that he will evolve into a moral being and find his writer’s voice, who expects an epiphany of himself, yet never giving him one, Hemon challenges the idea of epiphany itself.

Rather than ending with a transformation, the novel ends as it begins, with the death of an innocent person, the cycle of history repeating as Lazarus's senseless death in the past becomes Rora's senseless death in the present. (Rora is shot to death in Sarajevo by a mugger looking to take his camera, his art and his life simultaneously stolen.) Brik's ultimate fate is left uncertain as well, the novel ending with his writing hand broken, but not crushed. Readers are left wondering if Brik will ever complete his Lazarus Project, the possibilities that he will finish or not finish left equally open. The forces that drove him to consider the project in the first place (his interest in the subject of immigration, his dissatisfaction with the United States) no longer exist in Bosnia. The Lazarus Project itself was a uniquely American undertaking. Perhaps Brik may choose to write and complete an entirely new writing project; however, the fate of this particular endeavor remains forever in doubt. Even Brik's decision to relocate to Sarajevo is, according to the internal logic of the novel, an uncertain one. The opening chapter both identifies a theme of interconnectedness—"All the lives I could live, all the people I will never know, never will be they are everywhere. That is all the world is"—and defines the concept of home—"Home is where somebody notices when you are no longer there" (2, 3). Both notions resonate equally throughout the novel. Brik continues to repeat Lazarus's thoughts, reiterating "Home is where somebody notices your absence" even into the novel's final pages; however, despite his decision to return there, no one remains in Bosnia to remember Brik's absence (278). In the only mention Brik makes of his parents in the entire novel, he states, "I no longer had a home in Sarajevo—my parents had sold our apartment to finance their exile in America" (282). With his wife, his family, and his friends all in the United States, who will notice Brik's absence in Bosnia? In this sense, Brik's resettlement in Bosnia isn't so much a return, or a rediscovery of home, but a further step on his journey into the nowhere place of his own psyche. While

remembering a fight in which he nearly left Mary, Brik recalls that the fear of having nowhere to return to is what compelled him to go home: “I understood a simple fact: if you can’t go home, there is nowhere to go, and nowhere is the biggest place in the world—indeed, nowhere is the world” (182). Although Brik’s return to Sarajevo does not signal an official return to home—to a place where someone notices his absence, it does signal an abandonment of his fear, and an embracing of the nowhere place that is the world. Ultimately, his return to Sarajevo is just another stop on his search for an identity, a quest that can only be completed by continuing to embrace the world—a world no longer bounded by national borders—and by beginning to look with an artist’s eye outward, rather than inward.

Although this is a realization that Brik continues to move toward, Hemon closes Lazarus’s portion of the novel with a discussion on the future between Lazarus and Olga. In the only direct speech Lazarus is allowed in the entire novel, he tells us: “I imagine my life to be so big, so big that I cannot see the end of it. Big enough for everyone to fit into it. You will be in it, Mother and Father will be in it, people I have never met or known will be in it. I can see it. I have a picture of it in my head. It’s a field in bloom so deep you can swim in it. I can see it now, and I cannot see its end” (288-289). The novel’s opening sentiment is recalled and expanded. Rather than a melancholy reflection on a world filled with people who will never know one another, never meet—our greatest interconnection is our disconnection—Hemon turns the notion on its side, a sentiment of exclusion becoming one of inclusion as humanity’s interconnections become boundless and stretch across the fabric of time, space, and history. If Hemon’s ending demonstrates that history can repeat in a negative way with the deaths of two innocents, Lazarus’s speech hints that it can also repeat in a positive way, creating the hope that

Lazarus's beliefs will eventually become Brik's, the feelings behind words spoken 100 years in the past continuing to resonate into the future.

And it is Lazarus as well who gives us the novel's most complete thoughts on writing. A scene involving Lazarus and Isador attending a lecture on writing and literature is interwoven with displays of Rora's artistry: Rora beginning the final part of his story on the death of Miller, stopping just before the conclusion to photograph costumed actors rehearsing in the park, and then returning to reveal the identity of the killer after having expertly built up the suspense. And in the middle of this display of artful audience manipulation, the story returns to Lazarus, in time for the lecturer's concluding remarks:

“But what about the lives that we could live, the lives that cease to be an endless, mad drudgery, repugnant struggles?” the speaker went on. “What about the lives worth living? We need new stories, friends, we need better storytellers. We are tired of the preponderance of lies.” Afterward, Lazarus remained in his seat, as the hall way emptying, still struck by the intensity of the speech, by the thoughts that raced through his head as he took notes. I want to write a book, he said to Isador. Don't we all, Isador said. But I am going to write it, Lazarus said. Just watch me. I am going to write it. (212)

Lazarus's epiphany is not triggered by the current crop of stories, stories that do not represent who he is and what he has experienced. It is the notion of new stories and better storytellers that inspires Lazarus to write, truthful storytelling about lives worth living. While Rora is murdered and Lazarus never realizes his dream of writing a book, Brik remains as the witness-survivor to both of their lives. As the one left behind, Brik's role is to tell both their stories, to realize Lazarus's dream, and to become the kind of storyteller the novel demands. *The Lazarus Project*

thus moves beyond its roots as a simple story of immigration and becomes Brik's tribute to both men. In a sense, both *Falling Leaves* and *The Lazarus Project* attempt to rewrite the immigrant myth in their own ways. Less concerned with writing an *American* immigrant story than a *global* immigrant story, Mah's narrative utilized Chinese history to create her persona, framing Mah as a product of her cosmopolitan, global upbringing and publishing her book for an international, rather than national audience. Hemon also made use of historical research when writing *The Lazarus Project*, but took a different approach, implying that globalization isn't a new phenomena in the sense that interconnections between people and societies have never existed. Rather, the differences between immigrants today and in the past exist in our recognition of globalization, of the connections we share across time and across borders. *The Lazarus Project* represents an attempt to retell the immigrant story utilizing a contemporary vocabulary of globalization, marginalization and oppression. Further, while *Falling Leaves* was told in a straight-forward fashion, Hemon utilized structural elements to create interconnections and to represent ambivalences about his national identity, a technique Junot Díaz will also make use of in *Drown*. Ultimately, as characters, Lazarus, Brik, and Rora are all men with identities more complex than their nationalities, their race, their religions, their status as immigrants. The recognition of difference, brought about by postmodern social conditions and the cultural conditions of globalization, have created new ways of discussing the complexities of identity, a subject the next chapter will explore. The men of this novel aren't connected across time and history via broad, singular overarching categories of identity but through their experiences, through their art, and simply through their shared humanity. It is this recognition of a shared sense of humanity which will finally allow Brik to recreate the immigrant myth for the new global era, a dream stretching from the past and into the future.

**Chapter 4: “You Need to Learn How to Walk the World”: Identity and Transnational
Social Collectives in Junot Díaz’s *Drown***

Junot Díaz’s *Drown* presents audiences with a series of ten loosely-connected short stories centered in urban New Jersey. Woven in between stories of drug addicts, sexually confused teenagers, and jaded twenty somethings, the stories in *Drown* are framed by the emotional growth and disillusionment of a young immigrant family—Yunior, the youngest son, his brother Rafa, and his Papi and Mami—as they struggle through varying points of the immigration process, from the family’s early life in the Dominican Republic to the people they will later become after immigrating to the United States. The family portrait is not a complete one as large gaps in Yunior’s chronology are left unanswered between stories; however, by keeping Yunior and family on the peripheries rather than making them the narrow focus of Díaz’s stories, *Drown* is able to take an eagle-eyed view of the gains and losses of immigration, of its effects on Yunior and on the diverse cast of characters that populate Díaz’s New Jersey, and in his larger community of Dominican Republic nationals and immigrants. Not quite a novel, but more cohesive a work of fiction than is normally found in a short story collection, *Drown* rests somewhere comfortably in the middle, telling the story of both a family and a community of people. Díaz does not employ a consistent narrative perspective to tell his stories, despite many other unities they share, including time, place, and cultural setting. Utilizing multiple narrators and multiple narrative styles, Díaz alternately invites readers into his universe and pushes them away depending upon who tells the story and how they choose to tell it. The choice of narrative point of view works to privilege readers in one story, while seeking to marginalize them in another. In this way, Díaz replicates for the audience the sense of being an immigrant, the sense of simultaneous belonging and exclusion involved in membership in an

adopted group. His stories focus particularly on the ways in which social, racial, and linguistic codes play a part in belonging or being excluded from community membership. In a sense, *Drown* tells the story not only of a particular family, but a particular community of people, and how that community constitutes itself locally, nationally, and across national boundaries.

While the previous two chapters traced the ways in which globalization can influence the worldview of a literary work, from Mah's cosmopolitanism to Hemon's anger at first-world neocolonialism, each chapter also reflected the ways in which globalization affected identity. In *Falling Leaves*, Mah kept her focus on the personal, on the family, while Hemon turned his focus outward on the clash between national and global identities. This chapter picks up on these themes as Díaz also focuses on the ways in which identities are shaped first locally in "Drown," both locally and nationally in "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie," and finally transnationally, between multiple nations across North and South America in "Negocios." Mass migration and diaspora isn't a unique concept either in a global era, or among the works in this dissertation, Adeline Yen Mah herself a product of the Chinese diaspora. What makes the Latino community unique, however, is its cultural cohesion across North and South America. As a community, Latinos actively cultivate a unified cultural identity reflected through mass media, formally through the work of governments, and informally via direct contact between Latino migrants. Centered within North and South America, the expanding international Latino community has yet to spread across the globe, and for that reason will be discussed here primarily in terms of its transnational (across nation), rather than global ties. However, both *Drown* and the Latino community itself represent interesting case studies for this dissertation, the Latino community simply as an emerging international community that intentionally constitutes itself transnationally, and *Drown* as a work that reflects the influences of this community.

Because the conditions of globalization promote patterns of mass migration, it is likely that other cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups will, like the Latino community, also start constituting themselves transnationally, and eventually, globally.

The stories in *Drown* represent the voices of immigrants who have directly and indirectly participated in this community. The stories discussed in this chapter each characterize a different aspect of social identities, from local, national, to transnational. Although only the final story, “Negocios” directly addresses the transnational Latino community, globalization plays an indirect role in the other stories in the collection. “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” focuses on a boy attempting to negotiate between his ethnic identity, local neighborhood identity, and national identity in an America *prior* to contemporary globalization. The lack of a strong Latino social presence is felt in the way Yunior is homogenized by the girls as a *Spanish* guy, not a Dominican or a Latino. A different type of lack is felt in “Drown,” where the narrator himself rejects participation in external social communities, instead preferring to isolate himself in neighborhood culture. The choice is a negative one as the story continually reminds readers of the importance to look outside one’s own borders and “walk the world” (102). Only “Negocios,” the longest story in the collection, addresses the transnational community most fully. Chronologically one of the earliest stories in *Drown*, Díaz places “Negocios” last because it depicts most fully the scope of the Latino community from the perspective of an immigrant and essentially depicts the origin of Díaz’s New Jersey neighborhood, tracing it from the arrival of its immigrants to the building of the apartments Yunior and his family would later reside in. In this sense, *Drown* underscores the importance of this community, which although not explicitly seen, had been felt in each of the previous stories. The neighborhood was created thanks to the work of Latino migrants from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean,

a neighborhood which shaped the identities of the characters in the stories, even those opposed to external social communities.

As a collection, *Drown* serves as a meditation on identity, on the ways in which complex connectivity has created global identities and social collectives, and the ways those identities can be represented through the literary form. This chapter begins with an overview of *Drown* as a whole, demonstrating its unity as a work and how common themes of language, identity, and community run throughout all the stories in the collection. Individual identity and the formation of individual identity within difference becomes the subject of Díaz's "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie." Discussion then turns to group identity in "Drown," focusing primarily on local, neighborhood identities, before considering the evolution of global identities in "Negocios," the final story in the collection. The evolution of identity within a transnational era, whether individual, local, or global identity, is a result of internal and external forces, as individual social actors find themselves responding both to transnational forces, and local discourses of power which marginalize immigrants racially, culturally, and linguistically. Díaz replicates these forces, exploring the tensions which have given birth to his characters' identities, and manipulating the positionality of the reader, allowing his audience to experience the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion Latino migrants face in a global era.

The tension of immigration remains with Díaz's characters, whether they are immigrants themselves, or first generation (and beyond) American-born citizens. The Dominican Republic is never quite left behind in *Drown*, whether through the literal choice of its characters, many of whom have opted to maintain cultural ties with their homeland, or metaphorically through the narrative structure of *Drown* itself as Díaz intersperses stories set in the Dominican Republic with stories of Yunió's family, long after they have relocated to the United States. The divided

identities produced by shifting landscapes of language, social class, and culture give Díaz's characters a sense of rootlessness, and many of the stories in *Drown* feature characters trying to reconcile themselves to warring urges. The conflicts generated between shifting codes of behavior dependent upon race and social class are the central focus of "How to Date a Brown girl, Black girl, White girl, or Halfie," a short story featuring a teenage Yunió explaining the differences between how neighborhood girls will act around him on a date versus more affluent girls from outside the Terrace, and how those differences in social behavior further breakdown because of race. Ostensibly about the girls, it is Yunió's understanding of those differences and his attempts to negotiate them that serve as the central conflict of the story. A similar theme of not-quite fitting in, not quite moving away from the margins plays out in many of Díaz's other stories as well. In the titular story, the nameless narrator unsuccessfully tries to reconcile conflicting images of masculinity and notions of friendship. In "Drown," the narrator lives in a world where for men, the military is the only respectable way out of the neighborhood, and where male friendships gain special importance akin to brotherhood. The revelation of his best friend's homosexuality upsets the narrator's worldview and leaves him unable to resolve his own conflicted feelings about their relationship, his future, or his own sexuality. The tensions in "Drown," between what is acceptable in American society at large and what is acceptable in the neighborhood play themselves out in varying forms throughout Díaz's short stories. In "Negocios," the final story in the collection, Díaz provides an alternative vision by offering a typical outsider character (the greenhorn immigrant); however, instead of focusing on how mainstream America beats him down, the story illustrates how the Latino community lifts him up and assures his success in the United States. "Negocios" plays with other conventions as well. On the surface, it appears to be an immigration story in its most traditional sense, depicting

the journey Yuniór's father takes from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Although the story form is a familiar one, Díaz plays with reader's expectations by offering a complicated protagonist. Readers will have mixed feelings witnessing Papi's successful pursuit of the American dream. "Negocios," like the rest of the stories in *Drown*, intentionally challenges readers' perceptions of its characters. By creating distance between audience and narrative, Díaz creates characters that do not unfold themselves easily to the reader's gaze. A level of impenetrability remains in all of his stories, though readers are allowed to become closer to certain characters rather than others, especially with Yuniór, the collection's lead character.

A reoccurring character in Díaz's fiction, readers are first introduced to nine year-old Ramón (Yuniór) de las Casas in "Ysrael," the opening story in *Drown*. Older incarnations of Yuniór go on to appear in the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and short story collection *This is How You Lose Her*; however, *Drown* represents the first glimpse at Díaz's favorite protagonist. "Ysrael," like most of the stories in *Drown*, gives only a peek into Yuniór's life without painting a cohesive portrait of his experiences. Rather than fleshing out Yuniór, in "Ysrael," Díaz provides a quick sketch of the people, the poverty, and the culture of the Dominican Republic. To save money, Yuniór's mother sends him and his older brother Rafa to live with relatives in the countryside during the summers. Free of parental supervision, Yuniór and Rafa spend their days wandering the campo, their restlessness eventually leading them to play a cruel prank on Ysrael, a disfigured boy who is the only reoccurring character in the collection, besides the members of Yuniór's family. As a character, Ysrael begins and ends the collection, with "Ysrael" appearing as the first story and "No Face" as the second to last. Díaz views the Ysrael stories as a warning to readers looking to compartmentalize people of color and find some reductive, greater singular Truth to their identities:

The way that these brothers go hunt this boy down to look under the mask there could be no greater warning to a reader than that. That's what some people come to the book trying to do. They're trying to look under the mask of the other. If it's going to be this voyeuristic moment for you as a reader then you're not going to understand the book. You're not only not going to understand the book but it is an act of violence for you to try to look under the veil of people of color like that.

(“An Interview with Junot Díaz” 116-117)

There is no singular experience in *Drown*, no singular immigrant or Latina/o or even Dominican experience. Díaz's stories intentionally resist definition. “Ysrael,” like the other stories in *Drown* is more preoccupied with the commonplace details of daily life—with particularity over universals—than in fully defining its characters, setting them in stone as fixed entities. Identity is a more complex proposition than that. Díaz not only avoids turning his characters into symbolic monoliths of the immigrant Other, he also resists many of the plot commonplaces of the immigrant genre. In “Ysrael,” while details of the boys' wanderings are given at length, the adults' conflicts are largely left in the margins. It is mentioned that Yuniór's father is already living in the United States; however, both his parents' issues and all discussions of the family migrating to be with him are never touched upon. By the time readers meet Yuniór again in the second story in the collection, “Fiesta, 1980,” three years have passed, the family has already settled in the Bronx, and Yuniór's mother has given birth to a third child, a little sister. What would be discussed in any other work chronicling a family—the birth of a new member, the dissolution of the parents' marriage—and chronicling the immigrant experience—the decision to migrate, Yuniór's attempts to learn English, meditations on the old world versus the new, in

addition to varying permutations of culture shock, homesickness, and the difficulties of assimilation—is largely elided in *Drown*.

In subsequent stories, Yunior grows into adulthood and his family structure changes; however, just as before, readers witness the defining moments in Yunior's life only after they have occurred. The period between adolescence and adulthood is skipped entirely as Yunior's final appearance in *Drown* is only as a bystander, as the adult Yunior narrates the story of his father's migration to America in "Negocios." Despite the significant passage of time, basic facts of Yunior's adult life—his profession, whether or not he ever married or had children—are never touched upon. Similarly, the sections of *Drown* that do not directly relate to Yunior and his family also provide cursory sketches of their narrators' lives. The characters in *Drown* come from a larger community of Dominican nationals and immigrants; however, their immediate connection to Yunior and to each other is never made clear. The narrator of "Drown" mentions Lucero, who appears in the "Aurora" chapter (93), but while both characters have passing knowledge of each other, neither is familiar with Yunior or any of his family members. Instead, both Lucero and the "Drown" narrator are simply treated as another part of the New Jersey landscape Yunior and his family come to make their home. In that sense, *Drown* tells the story not only of a particular family, but a particular community of people. Ultimately, the stories as a whole are more concerned with presenting another day in the life of their main characters than with character-defining moments of epiphany: Just as most of the important moments in Yunior's family history are reserved for second-hand telling, the majority of Díaz's stories end without clear resolution. Rather, it is the immediate textures of the world around Yunior that gain presence in the stories: the sound of a boy flying a kite, the smells of riding in a VW during the New Jersey summer. In this way, the lives of Díaz's characters blend into the landscape

itself, the characters becoming simultaneously familiar to his readers while remaining largely unexplored beings, ultimately giving readers the sense of being visitors, passers-by in Díaz's multinational neighborhood.

Díaz creates a unique sense of sense of community in his stories both through the characters who inhabit them, and through their idiosyncratic use of language. The narration is written in a blend of Standard English, Spanish, and slang words in both English and Spanish. This intermixing of languages is common among Spanish-speaking writers, many of whom use the dual registers as a method of recreating everyday Latino bicultural, bilingual experiences. Gloria Anzaldúa once famously stated, "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (81). For Anzaldúa, as well as for members of border populations and residents of ethnic enclaves, that language is Spanglish. Writing in only one language privileges a monolingual audience in exchange for negating the history and culture of bilingual characters, inherent in the language they speak. Lourdes Torres calls Latina/o texts "an example of a contact zone where English and Spanish confront each other and comfortably or uncomfortably coexist" (92). The confrontation between dual languages, between English and Spanish, carries both cultural and political meaning for bilingual speakers who struggle to reconcile their dual tongues with the Standard English favored by American society. In *Drown*, readers watch characters struggle with language as they themselves struggle with some of Díaz's word choices. Not every reader will understand every language strain in the text. The effect is both evocative of a particular group of people in a particular time and place, and occasionally alienating to the reader. In this way, Díaz continually reminds us we are outsiders looking in, never insiders who have glimpsed past the mask of the cultural Other.

By forming “neighborhood” identities and identifying with a particular locality, whether in the Dominican campo or the New Jersey suburbs, Díaz’s characters are able to create a world for themselves which resists mainstream society via the social power found in language use and cultural and territorial familiarity. As a writer, Díaz plays off of the tensions between subgroups and mainstream culture, utilizing the two primary modes available to him—language and storytelling—to create a fictionalized space of inclusion and exclusion. The characters in *Drown* function as the insiders, while readers are the out-of-towners invited in but never more than visitors, new immigrants to the neighborhood. Language and narration work to make readers aware of their outsider status, the stories less concerned with the particulars of Díaz’s characters as they are with the social context that created them. Each of the characters in the stories has been shaped by language, locality, race, and transnational social ties linking together Latinos within the United States and across the world. The stories intentionally create a space wherein readers are briefly shown a glimpse into the immigrant experience—language strains that don’t always make sense and a heightened awareness of difference. Ultimately, to understand these characters, Díaz’s stories argue, it is important to understand the social conditions in which they live and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion faced by Latino migrants in a global era.

Identity and Difference in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie”

The only story in the collection narrated in the second person, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” allows readers a unique glimpse into teenage attitudes on race, class, and sexuality, and how all three intersect in Díaz’s New Jersey neighborhood. Taking on the persona of a now-teenaged Yunion attempting to negotiate the world of adolescent dating, boundaries of the inside and outside are permeated as the reader gains group, social, and family ties along with an insider’s knowledge of local people, places, customs, and history. Through the use of the second person, Díaz’s text demands that readers inhabit Yunion’s consciousness, sharing his thoughts and feelings, performing his actions as he performs them. The act of reading, Wolfgang Iser argues, is itself a performance wherein readers become actors playing all the parts. He writes,

aesthetic semblance entails placing our thoughts and feelings at the disposal of an unreality, bestowing on it a semblance of reality in proportion to a reducing of our own reality. For the duration of the performance we are both ourselves and someone else. Staging oneself as someone else is a source of aesthetic pleasure; it is also the means whereby representation is transferred from text to reader. (244)

In “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” representation, both textual and political, is placed in the reader’s hands as we are asked to consider race and identity from the perspective of a teenager, a boy with his own bicultural background. The reader’s hybrid perspective, simultaneously his own and Yunion’s, becomes the text’s hybridity as the performance of the text stretches to encompass multiple perspectives. In this way, Díaz plays with positionality throughout the stories in *Drown*, with what readers bring to a text and how they inhabit it.

“How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” in particular challenges our ability to become not a *tabula rasa* character, but Yuniór, a boy we’ve already come to know throughout the course of the narrative. Stepping into Yuniór’s already-familiar shoes also means transforming ourselves into members of his sprawling ethnic enclave. Díaz affirms Yuniór’s status as an insider both through the use of the instructive voice welcoming readers into the neighborhood and instructing them on proper codes of behavior, but also via side characters’ almost prescient knowledge of Yuniór’s actions, effectively painting a picture of a small, tight-knit community. Both family and friends are finely attuned to Yuniór and the events in his life: His mother knows when he’s lying his way out of a family outing for a date: “And even though your moms knows you ain’t sick you stuck to your story until she finally said, Go ahead and stay, *malcriado*²” (143). And the neighbors are not only aware that Yuniór is meeting a girl, but also when she is supposed to arrive: “Wait and after an hour go out to your corner. The neighborhood is full of traffic. Give one of your boys a shout and when he says, Are you still waiting on that bitch? say, Hell yeah” (144). Lives and relationships in this neighborhood are interconnected and intimate.

However, it is not the neighborhood which is the subject of “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” but Yuniór’s views about the neighborhood and how those attitudes carry over in how he presents himself to the world. More importantly, the story serves as an exploration of how those views were formed. Yuniór’s objectification of the girls and his own self-hatred are the result not of community-based forces in isolation, but an intermixture of local culture and larger social forces exerting influence over the ways in which he views women, his own masculinity, his race, and his ethnicity. The world Yuniór inhabits has its own set of

² brat

rules: how one must approach a girl's parents, how one must treat a girl depending on her race and status as a local or out of townner, and how he should carry himself in each situation. Yet for all of Yuniór's self-imposed rules and coded behaviors, the date he plans goes awry, the girl becoming upset over the way her peers treat her because of her race and asking to go home. Although the girl's feelings mirror Yuniór's own—he too inhabits multiple racial and ethnic categories—Yuniór is unable to step outside of the role he has created for himself and empathize with the girl enough to save the date. By inhabiting Yuniór's skin, the story ultimately turns his inability to break social conventions back onto the reader, reminding us of our own socially-received behaviors and the ease in which uncontested generalizations are adopted. Identities are hybrid, pluralized, and girls come in more shapes and colors, than brown, black, white, or half.

In reflecting on diversity in the United States, Díaz states, "One of the things I see in the United States is that it's like any center of empire: It's a Simplification Factor. It's the place where really complicated, really heterogeneous, really enormously diverse and uncategorizable people, culture, and movements are just rendered (by media, by scholarship) into simplicities that make them unrecognizable" ("An Interview with Junot Díaz" 107). In this story, Díaz enacts his own over simplification onto the characters. By rendering them nothing more than racial and gendered stereotypes, he effectively challenges the notion that people can be reduced into broad generalizations. During the course of the narrative, readers experience Yuniór's anxiety as he alters his manners and verbal style depending upon the race of the girl coming to visit, and her status as a local girl, or an out-of-townner. Social and racial segregation become intertwined with geographic segregation as the browngirls (Latinas) are always local girls from the Terrace, blackgirls are occasionally local, or may be more affluent out-of-townners "Who grew up with ballet and Girl Scouts, who have three cars in their driveway," while lighter-skinned halfies (girls

with black and white parentage) and whitegirls are never local (145). However, Yunion—and by extension, the girls—are all more complex figures than “Latino” or “whitegirl,” than media stereotypes and even identity politics allows for. Through the act of suppressing Yunion’s complexity as an individual, his own hybridity, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” argues instead for the plurality of identity.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick laments, “every single theoretically or politically interesting project of postwar thought has finally had the effect of delegitimizing our space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be alike or different from each other” (23). Thanks to identity politics, we have learned a lot about how to deconstruct the category of the individual, yet we have allowed ourselves very little space to interrogate differences within the larger overall definitional categories of political thought (gender, race, class, nationality, and sexual orientation). While these broad definitional categories are useful, when one is unable to admit difference within difference, categories of identity can become just as reductive as the mindset that political thought originally set out to counteract. Without the acknowledgement of difference, we become nothing more than faceless, nameless blackgirls and whitegirls, single-entity signifiers of only one aspect of our identities.

Amin Maalouf argues against the impulse to compartmentalize identity or turn it into a fixed entity, which he sees as a divisive concept, rather than one which promotes unity of the self. He writes, “I haven’t got several identities: I’ve got just one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual” (3). In a broad sense, all people share commonalities with one another; however, the more specific one gets in defining his or her specific characteristics of identification, the more unique the individual becomes. Unfortunately, identity politics often lays claim to certain aspects of identity, in effect

compartmentalizing them. Within Cold War-era movements in identity politics, including second wave feminism, one is allowed to wear the mantle of a feminist, for example, but not a black feminist, or a lesbian feminist. Maalouf states that each person is “a meeting ground for many different allegiances” and that in both the field of identity politics and in daily practice, each of those allegiances that a person holds often comes into conflict with one another, creating a sense of contested identity within the individual. Further complicating matters is the fact that identity changes over time and is neither stable nor experienced the same from place to place. In other words, identity can change depending upon the political climate that the individual finds him or herself in, thereby altering each of the allegiances of identification that one holds. Depending upon the values that a given community recognizes, an individual may choose to define him or herself by race in one social group, and by sexuality in another. The conflict between the desire for a single, easily-defined identity and the individual’s actual modes of identification, in all their multi-faceted glory, is one that has existed since the beginning of identity politics. However, by exposing people to other cultures and ideologies, globalization has not only exacerbated the schism between modes of identification, but also changed the ways people view the process of identity formation itself. Maalouf argues that the recognition and acceptance of multiple modes of identification is the most important project for identity politics in the new global era. “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” underscores this importance by reducing each of the girls in the story into a category, a symbol of a browngirl and not a browngirl in her actuality. The story ends on an unhappy note with an upset and uncomfortable halfie going home and Yunion left alone in the apartment, the two of them never able to properly connect. Without acknowledging one another in their fullness as human beings, Yunion and his date never bridge the gap of their differences to find their similarities.

As racial Others, both Yuniór and his halfie date defy easy racial categorization. Díaz recalls becoming conscious of race only after moving to the United States, “suddenly everybody was staring at me. I no longer fit in. The black kids stared at me, I didn’t look totally black. The white kids stared at me because I was an Other. The foreign Other. And I remember from the start of my U.S. life feeling like I was disfigured. . . .In Santa Domingo I never even roused a glimpse, I just fit in. But here I became this Other in every way” (“An Interview with Junot Díaz” 116). As an Other, as someone outside of accepted racial categories, both Díaz and Yuniór become suspect. While Díaz was stared at in school, Yuniór’s Othering is enacted through his role playing, through his desperate attempts to prove himself to each date—and to each date’s parents. The girls themselves become Othered in turn, losing their specificity as people and inhabiting racial categories instead.

As Yuniór prepares for his date, three different, distinct possible storylines are imagined, each dependent on the visiting female’s race—and by extension—social class and neighborhood identification. Each of these stories is narrated simultaneously, Yuniór’s actions from one girl flowing into the next, the girls in turn blending into one another. The effect of this is to create a sense that Yuniór’s behavior is not necessarily being prompted by the girl he is with, so much as there is a sense that these actions are common from girl to girl and say more about *Yuniór* and his own consciousness of race. While the girls in the story are depersonalized, becoming monikers for their racial class rather than treated as individuals, Yuniór is in turn depersonalized by the girls, becoming a generic “Spanish” guy, or “the only kind of guy who asks me out” (148). In this way, both Yuniór and the girls enact predetermined roles based on race and social class rather than on individual desire. Additionally, Yuniór himself is further depersonalized by the narrative perspective. Spoken in the second person, Yuniór becomes an everyreader. Rather

than an “I,” he is a collective “we,” an exemplar of both himself and how a typical member of this community would think and act as Díaz instructively has him narrate every possible dating scenario.

Readers are told how to prepare for the date: “Clear the government cheese from the refrigerator. If the girl’s from the Terrace stack the boxes behind the milk. If she’s from the Park or Society Hill hide the cheese in the cabinet above the oven, way up where she’ll never see. Leave yourself a reminder to get it out before morning or your moms will kick your ass” (143). How the girl will arrive: “If she’s an outsider her father will be bringing her, maybe her mother. . . .If the girl’s local, don’t sweat it. She’ll flow over when she’s good and ready” (144). What to do if she doesn’t arrive and what to do once she does: “You have choices. If the girl’s from around the way, take her to El Cibao for dinner. Order everything in your busted-up Spanish. Let her correct you if she’s Latina and amaze her if she’s black. If she’s not from around the way, Wendy’s will do” (145). We also get advice on how dinner might go, what to do and how the girls might react if your nemesis, Howie, “the Puerto Rican kid with the two killer mutts” shows up (146), what happens after dinner and whether or not you are likely to get sex, and finally, what to do after the date: don’t answer the phone if she calls an hour later, and of course, be sure to “Put the government cheese back in its place before your moms kills you” (149). Yuniór works against stereotypes only insofar as he manages to ingratiate himself, but not to outright resist them. The advice Yuniór gives always entails changing himself to fit someone else’s perception of him, whether the girl’s or her parents’, to carefully appear less marginalized. His poverty must be hidden along with the government cheese, and his identity as both a black male and an immigrant becomes negotiable. Before the girl arrives, readers are further advised

to “Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the campo,³ especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash. . . .Hide the pictures of yourself with and Afro” (143). From Yuniór’s use of Spanish at the restaurant to “amaze” a local blackgirl and prove himself to a Latina, to the way he carries himself around an out-of-towner’s parents, writing the directions to the Terrace in his best handwriting “so her parents won’t think you’re an idiot” (144), to the posture he adopts when meeting her parents: “Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa. . . .Say, Hi. Her moms will say hi and you’ll see that you don’t scare her, not really” (145).

With the girls themselves, Yuniór willingly plays up to their stereotypes and misperceptions about his ethnic identity. Recognizing an out-of-towner will want colorful stories about the neighborhood, he advises, “Supply the story about the loco who’d been storing canisters of tear gas in his basement for years, how one day the canisters cracked and the whole neighborhood got a dose of the military-strength stuff,” but warns, “Don’t tell her that your moms knew right away what it was, that she recognized its smell from the year the United States invaded your island” (145-146). While a story about a crazy foreigner might seem quaint and easy to laugh at, less-funny stories about US imperialism are forbidden subjects. Stories of his family’s victimization at American hands are not to be discussed with outsiders, especially outsiders Yuniór is trying to impress. The performance of his ethnic identity must be carefully negotiated and kept within socially-acceptable boundaries, rather than challenged. When a whitegirl confesses, “I like Spanish guys,” Yuniór advises, “even though you’ve never been to Spain, say, I like you. You’ll sound smooth” (148). Validating his identity as a black male, a Dominican, or even simply as a Latino isn’t worth breaking the façade of the proper foreign boy

³ countryside

who doesn't scare an out-of-towner's parents. However, Yuniór's attempts at racial passing aren't limited to passively accepting a date's mistakes; at other times in the narrative he makes the deliberate choice to minimize his status as a foreign born, racial other, and to appear more American (and more white).

Whiteness and white acceptability is prized in the story, both by Yuniór himself and by the girls' parents as embodiments of the attitudes of society at large. "The white ones are the ones you want the most, aren't they" Yuniór admits (145), and in one of his more personal moments reflecting on a whitegirl's desirability explains, "tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because, in truth, you love them more than you love your own" (147). Like mimicking the posture and mien of one of the whiteboys in order to seem more palatable to his date's mother, he also makes sure to write her good directions in his best handwriting so that he won't appear like a non-native speaker (like an "idiot"). The underlying concern is less about messy handwriting than appearing to have a poor grasp of Standard English, the Spanglish of his neighborhood devalued in dominant culture. Gloria Anzaldúa points out, "Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture" (38). Yuniór's reactions—the high value he places on whitegirls, his attempts to blend in with dominant society—are all a product of the culture he has been exposed to, and what that culture places value on: whiteness, white acceptability, Standard English, and singular identity.

Yet for all of the story's attempts to reduce matters of race and racial identity into simple categories of whitegirls, blackgirls, browngirls, and halfies, a parallel portrait of racial complexity emerges. The negation of individual difference in favor of broad-brush racial

categorization brings race relations front and center. While Yuniór plays up to stereotypes, a critical awareness of his behavior remains. He runs a hand through his hair like the whiteboys do “even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa”; he says nothing when the whitegirl confesses she likes Spanish guys “even though you’ve never been to Spain.” And the notion of easy racial categorization is subtly interrogated through Yuniór’s own divided identity. While Rafa teases Yuniór for his dark skin, calling him a “Haitian” in front of the other boys, the girls themselves do not acknowledge his blackness, ethnicity trumping race (5). A halfie date will tell him, “You’re the only kind of guy who asks me out... You and the blackboys,” leaving readers to wonder what “kind of guy” Yuniór is to her if not a blackboy? (148). A question Yuniór himself also wonders: “Black people, she will say, treat me real bad. That’s why I don’t like them. You’ll wonder how she feels about Dominicans. Don’t ask” (147). In reflecting on cultural identification and his own position as a bicultural author, Díaz states, “I feel like I’m a Caribbean writer, but in the United States I get cast as a Latino writer because the United States doesn’t have a way of interpreting Caribbeans. If you speak Spanish folks are like, ‘You’re Latino.’ Forget the fact that the Caribbean has had an overwhelming impact on who you are” (“An Interview with Junot Díaz” 106). To all his dates, Yuniór is a Spanish guy, a Latino, never a Dominican. His dark skin, his Caribbean roots never acknowledged, simply because, as Díaz points out, the United States doesn’t have a way of interpreting Caribbeans. Or perhaps it might be more proper to say, the United States doesn’t have a way of interpreting complex modes of identification where an individual holds multiple allegiances—racial, cultural, social—and these allegiances shift over time.

Stuart Hall argues, “identification is not one thing, one moment” (“Ethnicity: Identity and Difference” 344). Rather, identification is a process that “happens over time, that is never

absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference” (344).

However, historically, identity has been assumed to be a fixed subject. Over time, this notion was undermined by a number of factors, notably Marx’s declaration that we are all partially made by history, which called into question the individual’s ability to have total control of the course of his or her own destiny. Further destabilizing the concept of a fixed identity was the discovery of Freud’s unconscious as it posited an entire aspect of identification that could neither be seen nor felt. Additionally, Saussure’s argument that we are always in language and the parallel decentering of western rational thought called into question the concept of a stable Truth—and consequently, a stable identity. Destabilizing individual identity had the effect of destabilizing collective identity as well. In a contemporary global era, this has led to formerly stable concepts of group identification, such as national identity, to be increasingly called into question. In the case of national identification, group identity is being destabilized from the top and the bottom—from the top as nations are absorbed into larger collective global communities, and from the bottom as groups within the nation are forming new collectives based upon shifting concepts of group identification predicated upon newly defined—or rediscovered—classes of racial or ethnic identification. The consequence of altering how group identities are formed and function is that “at one and the same time people feel part of their world and part of their village. They have neighborhood identities and they are citizens of the world” (343). For Hall, identity is an inherently divided concept, one that lacks fixity. Moreover, the notion that new global identities should be divided between the nation, between collective global communities, and between local groupings is not a new concept, but rather simply a function of how identity and identification has always worked.

In *Drown*, readers are presented with a microcosm of Hall's concept of shifting group identification. Yunior simultaneously wants to be accepted by his dates and seen as a member of mainstream society, while at the same time demarcating the girls as locals, or out-of-towners, as people *from here* and *not from here*, creating his version of an inside and an outside. Yunior is clearly a part of his neighborhood while at the same time preoccupied with his relationship to American culture at large. And, as Stuart Hall points out, these relationships have changed over time. The Yunior in "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" has a different affiliation with his local community than he had as a child in "Fiesta, 1980," or the one he will later have as an adult in "Negocios." However, more than just simply how identification works, part of Yunior's hybridized identity in fact comes from being Latino. Unlike other diasporic ethnic, cultural, or linguistic groups, a formal transnational Latina/o community exists across nations in North and South America, which has been propagated by the media and other sources (economic, cultural, governmental, and non-governmental), and is also being reproduced by individuals who participate in the spread of these ideas. Multiple Latino scholars have written on the transnational ties Latinos share, theorizing how such a community might have come into existence, and what benefit these social linkages might hold for individuals sharing a common language, but with sometimes radically different histories, localities, and cultural backgrounds.

Juan Flores draws on Benedict Anderson, calling transnational Latinos an *imagined community* held together both by a common language and the experience of migrating north. However, he also warns of the reductive nature of referring to such a community too broadly. A critical eye must be turned to how such a community is being imagined, from the inside or the outside, and for what purpose. He argues that much of the Latino community is a product of capitalist neocolonial influences and has been imagined from the outside through the work of

governments, census takers, and sociologists. Cultural expression from within the Latino community helps counteract many of these stereotyping, homogenizing forces. “But,” Flores explains, “the marking off of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ though the foundational exercise in ‘imagining’ communities, has its own limits, as it becomes evident that there is from both angles as much blurring involved as clear and meaningful bounding” (97). While the imagining of such a community may have its problems, Flores does not dismiss its existence, instead arguing that recognizing how internal and external forces have contributed to the imagining of a cohesive Latina/o community deepens our understanding of the contemporary Latino experience.

Similarly, Daniel Mato also views the transnational Latino community in terms of an imagined community. He emphasizes that a consciousness of globalization and the development of global and transnational economic and social collectives has also facilitated the creation of that community. Mato contends that “identities are not legacies passively received but representations socially produced, and—in this sense—matters of social dispute” (283). As a socially produced, imagined community, Mato questions what imagining that community might entail, what aspects of Latina/o identity are privileged, and which are left out. He observes that the European roots of Latino identity have been favored to the exclusion of other aspects of Latino history and culture. Collective Latino identity is predicated upon an ability to speak Spanish, a colonial and postcolonial history related to the arrival of Columbus, and the creation of mestizo populations. Any imagining of an Iberian-centered Latino identity consequently excludes the history and culture of native populations and the African slaves and freedmen who arrived in America during the early stages of exploration and settlement. It also excludes US Latinos who only speak English, Portuguese-speaking Brazilians, and all indigenous-language speakers. Mato, like Hall, emphasizes difference within identity and urges those differences be

accounted for in any discussion of a transnational Latino community, noting “one cannot avoid thinking such an identity through those assertions of differences” (292). To deny difference is to deny the most basic component of identity, a difficult lesson the teenage Yuniór has yet to accept. Difference in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” is flattened out, reduced to its most basic singular components. Like Díaz himself with his Caribbean roots devalued in favor of a monocultural Latino identity, Yuniór spends the entire narrative negotiating between the girls’ perceptions of him as a “Spanish guy” and his Dominican origins, the two never comfortably resting together. In this way, by denying difference, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” in fact emphasizes its importance.

Interestingly, for all the girls Yuniór dates, the story spends the most amount of time focusing on the halfies. While the story acknowledges, “The white ones are the ones you want the most, aren’t they,” the whitegirls never move beyond vague objects of desire. We are told specifically that the whitegirls are the most likely to give Yuniór sex; however, the story spares few other personal details about them or any of the other girls with the exception of the halfies. The story gives us this singular description of the halfie: “In school she is known for her attention-grabbing laugh, as high and far-ranging as a gull, but here she will worry you. You will not know what to say” (148). For a brief moment, the halfie stops being a racial caricature and turns into a specific girl with an attention-grabbing laugh, one Yuniór seems to know. None of the other girls are spoken of with such specificity and receive similar treatment. Moreover, While the other girls in the story rarely speak, we hear at length from the halfie as she explains how her parents first met, her discomfort around black people, and her discomfort with her own body, mirroring Yuniór’s own: “The halfie might lean back, breaking away from you. She will cross her arms, say, I hate my tits. Stroke her hair but she will pull away. I don’t like anybody

touching my hair, she will say” (148). Hair for both Yuniór and the halfie is a source of anxiety, the halfie not liking if anyone touches hers, Yuniór hiding away pictures of himself with an afro. The halfie also mirrors Yuniór’s ambiguous attitudes about race: “A halfie will tell you that her parents met in the Movement, will say, Back then people thought it a radical thing to do. It will sound like something her parents made her memorize. Your brother once heard that one and said, Man that sounds like a whole lot of Uncle Tomming to me. Don’t repeat this.” (146-147).

Like Yuniór with his carefully-prepared dating routines, the halfie also has her own carefully-prepared speech apologetically explaining her interracial status. And Rafa’s critique of the girl’s birth and of the girl’s speech could also equally apply to Yuniór’s own actions around the girls. Yuniór seems to feel closest to the halfie, unlike the other girls, even the Latinas, because she, like Yuniór, has multiple identifications. While the girls in the story were each placed in convenient racial boxes, Yuniór never places himself in any box, simultaneously inhabiting Dominican, Latino, black, and American. And in its own way, the story itself creates multiple self-identification through the use of the second person. Even as the reader experiences the world through Yuniór’s eyes, through the perspective of a boy who identifies as American, as Dominican, as Latino, and as black, the reader also brings his or her own racial identification to bear on the text, and the notion of multiple identification splinters and compounds with every reader who picks up “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie.”

Language and Exclusion in “Drown”

While “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” used second person as a method of bringing readers inside his neighborhood, Díaz chooses the opposite rhetorical move in “Drown” by using a first-person narrator. Rather than inclusive, here the choice is exclusive as Díaz creates a sense of the inside and the outside and places the reader firmly outside. By shifting the reader outside and away from the narrator and his world, readers can only judge the story from a distance. Because he was us, both narrator and fellow-reader, Yuniors in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” had a relatively high degree of self-awareness. Yuniors, along with the reader, could share a sense of dismay at being mistaken for a “Spanish guy.” The external influences on Yuniors’s attitudes toward race and his own identity were somewhat clearer than they are in “Drown,” a story which features a reticent narrator who has already internalized most of his community’s attitudes on sexuality and masculinity, and who cannot separate himself from those influences. Unable to step foot outside of his neighborhood, even frightened by the very idea, the narrator of “Drown” remains trapped throughout the story, unable to progress forward and choose a path for himself toward adulthood. While Yuniors’s identity was shaped as much by American society at large as it was by local culture, the narrator of “Drown” is influenced almost exclusively by his neighborhood, a position he finds no less untenable than Yuniors did. However, without the narrator’s assistance in unpacking some of the pressures he feels, Díaz creates a different role for the reader in “Drown.” Rather than becoming complicit in the story along with our narrator, it becomes the reader’s job to sift through the narrator’s consciousness—as much as we are able without allowing our own influences to interfere—and attempt to understand the unique pressures he faces as a teenager living in a very particular time and place and how those forces have in turn shaped his consciousness.

In “Drown,” Díaz directly plays with the reader’s mastery of language. *Knowledge* in “Drown” is street knowledge, cultural knowledge. The story turns on the reader’s ability to understand the slang meaning of a common word, rather than its denotation. It also turns on the reader’s ability to understand events and emotions that the narrator himself is unwilling and unable to process. Unlike a third-person omniscient narrator who could assume a critical eye on the events of the story that the protagonist could not, and unlike the second-person instructive voice in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” which forced Yunion into formulating a kind of interpretation for his actions, the use of the first person in “Drown” is designed to keep the reader at a distance. The narrator answers few questions about himself, recounting the conflict with his best friend in only sketchy details, and even refusing to give readers his name.

At the mercy of a narrator both reluctant to tell his story and confused about his feelings, the text keeps readers at arm’s length, continually teasing us with what we don’t know. Doris Sommer cautions against readers and literary scholars who approach minority writing strictly from the point of empathy. That is to say, the notion that shared structures of feeling are all one needs in order to understand the complex socio-historical context that a writer positions him or herself from. Sommer makes the point that what a writer *doesn’t* say is as significant as what he or she *does* say, noting that “[a]bsences can incite the fill-in work that keeps a reader self-important; but they can also interfere with comprehension . . . [and the] usually unspoken assumption that we should know the Other well enough to speak for him/her” (x). According to Sommer, as readers, we should be paying particular attention to the writer’s use of “rhetorical moves [which] hold readers at arm’s length or joke at their pretense of mastery, in order to propose something different from knowledge” (xi). “Drown” keeps readers as far as possible

from its protagonist without rendering the story unintelligible. Aware of how much *isn't* being said, readers can only follow along for the ride, taking the narrator for who he is, rather than who we wish he would be. The mask of the Other firmly in place, it is this story which lends its name to the entire collection, a story where language shapes identity and where place and community intersect to test the boundaries of belonging and identification.

That language itself is a central component of *Drown* is immediately apparent from its opening pages. In the epigraph, Díaz quotes from “Dedication,” Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s poem on bilingualism, almost as a warning to readers expecting easy access to the language, thoughts, and culture of his characters:

The fact that I
 am writing to you
 in English
 already falsifies what I
 wanted to tell you.
 My subject:
 how to explain to you that I
 don’t belong to English
 though I belong nowhere else

At one and the same time, Díaz’s characters belong to their own language and culture group, while also belonging to the English of mainstream society. They engage with the attitudes and expectations of the dominant culture while also holding fast to the rules, codes of conduct, and verbal conventions of their own distinct cultural group. “Drown” in particular explores the relationship between language and culture, between the tension of belonging and exclusion that

language creates. Díaz utilizes multiple linguistic registers to create a sense of the inside and the outside, not only for his characters, but for the reader as well.

“Drown” centers on a nameless young drug dealer metaphorically drowning in his own inertia. Having graduated from high school a year earlier, buried fears over the future resurface when Beto, the narrator’s best friend returns home from college for the summer. There is discord between the two boys, a hidden conflict, though the reader’s ability to decode the source of that conflict largely rests upon our knowledge of a single word. The source of tension is revealed at the start in the narrator’s own summary of his relationship with Beto as he explains, “he’s a pato now but two years ago we were friends and he would walk into the apartment without knocking, his heavy voice rousing my mother from the Spanish of her room and drawing me up from the basement, a voice that crackled and made you think of uncles or grandfathers” (91). The unwary reader who knows only classroom Spanish could listen to the narrator’s description of Beto and be misled by the fondness the narrator once had for him, his voice that sounded like uncles or grandfathers, his ability to walk into the narrator’s home like he was a member of the family. The significance of the fact that Beto is a “pato” will be missed by readers who have little experience with Dominican slang, either skipping the word entirely if they do not know Spanish, or if they do, wondering why it matters that Beto has become a duck.

The Spanish in *Drown* is never footnoted or italicized. It is simply a part of the linguistic register of the stories in much the same way that slang and theoretical language are blended in with Standard English. Readers are expected to cope with the Spanish in the same way they would cope with any other unfamiliar vocabulary. In this way, by leaving the Spanish unmarked, it loses its *foreignness* and becomes a normal part of the daily language these characters use, a normal part of their cultural vocabulary. As readers, our ability to understand it

or not is what marks *us* as insiders or outsiders to the text. As a writer, Díaz is particularly interested in unintelligibility and how readers cope with it:

part of the thing that really interested me about the reading experience is that a lot of times we forget that a large portion of what we're reading we don't understand. And most of the time we just skip over it because it's sort of implicit. We don't understand a word, we'll just skip over it and keep going. But, you know, that's like a basic part of communication, you know, unintelligibility. And so if you're an immigrant, you're so used to not being able to understand large chunks of any conversation, large chunks of the linguistic, cultural codes. And part of what I was trying to get at when writing [*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*] is that, you know, I wanted everybody at one moment to kind of feel like an immigrant in this book, that there would be one language chain that you might not get. And that it was OK. ("Interview: MacArthur 'Genius' Junot Díaz").

Díaz plays with language in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and his other works of fiction to create, at times, a sense of cultural alienation, of being part of one language group while outside of another. Evelyn Nien-Ming observes that by watching how Díaz's characters interact, readers "experience the ways in which communities grow proximate to and distant from one another through language. He shows us linguistic utopias of heterogeneous discourses where no group has more dominance than any other in terms of linguistic power" (202). While Díaz intentionally chooses not to privilege one language strain over another, his multilingualism calls attention to language rather than letting it fade to the background as a seamless part of his story. Díaz forces readers to confront unintelligibility. Whether from Spanish they don't know,

slang they've never heard of, or Standard English they aren't comfortable with, nearly every reader will have a moment where s/he is challenged by the verbal registers the stories employ.

However, Díaz's bilingualism isn't simply artifice. Díaz, like a number of other Latina/o authors, utilizes Spanish to convey a sense of the reality of his characters. Bilingual writers like Díaz who make use of code switching, or the alternating shift from one language to another, do so to represent culturally specific experiences, histories, social groups, and most simply, the realities of life as a Latina/o. Lourdes Torres points out that with the increasing presence of Latino communities across the United States and in the US/Mexico borderlands, "code-switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/bicultural communities" (76). Or more to the point, Gloria Anzaldúa expresses the frustration of having to choose between English or Spanish when her true language is Spanglish: "Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate" (81). Multilingualism *is* the actuality of bicultural communities, of language groups who "don't belong to English/though [they] belong nowhere else." Translation is an acquiescence to the mainstream, not a reality of multilingual language groups who speak in a way that is accessible and intelligible to other members of the group, though not always to outsiders. In "Drown," readers are the visitors, the immigrants who must accommodate the text, not the other way around.

Most Spanish/English dictionaries will not provide the correct (regional slang) translation of "pato," instead giving its formal, rather than particularized meaning. Thus, with the text

negating formal, denotative meaning, readers are forced into a passive role, accepting whatever information the narrator is willing to reveal about the loss of his best friend, unable to truly understand what happened between them until the narrator himself chooses to explain it. Given the narrator's brief description of Beto, the most readers can infer is that whatever a "pato" is, it's something Beto apparently wasn't when the narrator first knew him, but has now become. The term is mentioned casually, as though readers are already familiar with its meaning, and the narrator himself provides no other clues in understanding what might have happened between them beyond offering a solitary term. Instead, the narrator's thoughts focus on the present and on simpler memories of their shared past. Díaz chooses not to footnote any of the Spanish used in his stories, and "Drown" itself does not discuss the conflict between the two boys again until the end, ultimately creating an entirely different reading experience between readers who approached the story already aware that "pato" is a pejorative for a homosexual⁴ and those who did not. The term does not return again until the end, Díaz finally providing a contextual definition—"At the Old Bridge Turnpike we pass the fag bar, which never seems to close. Patos are all over the parking lot, drinking and talking" (103)—immediately preceding the revelation that Beto and the narrator had two sexual encounters in the summer before Beto left for college.

For a reader who has understood the conflict from the beginning, the tension the narrator feels every time Beto is mentioned, and the way he changes the subject when his mother asks about him, will carry a different meaning than it does for the reader who hasn't. To a Spanish-illiterate reader, what might seem like simple (platonic) bonding experiences between the two

⁴ Although the term is commonly understood as this in many Latin American countries, in many regions it either carries no slang meaning at all, or may have alternate meaning. In Chilean slang, it means to be broke, have no money, and in Mexican slang, it means to act foolishly. In the context in which it was originally used in the story, any of those meanings could have fit and made sense, thus creating further opportunities for confusion, depending on the reader's knowledge of Spanish, facility for street language, and national origin.

boys might be viewed in a different light by a reader aware since the beginning of the queer subtext within the story: The narrator's memory of holding Beto's hand when they were caught shoplifting—"his hand squeezing mine, the bones in our fingers pressing together"—or his fixation on their nighttime memories—"Days we spent in the mall or out in the parking lot playing stickball, but nights were what we waited for"—when they met to go swimming at the local pool, suddenly taking on a sexual undercurrent (99, 92). While a Spanish-speaking reader might anticipate a sexual encounter eventually taking place between the two boys, other readers will be surprised by the sexual turn their relationship takes, influenced instead by the narrator's carefully platonic early memories of Beto, and by Beto's ingratiating presence.

By choosing not to immediately define the word for an English-speaking audience, "Drown" resists the reader, not only in how it privileges certain members of the audience through their knowledge of street Spanish, but also in refusing to clarify the narrator's feelings about Beto and what occurred between them. Readers themselves are turned into immigrants missing out entirely on an important language strain, the story itself perpetuating the awkwardness of a malapropism. In Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, he argues that readers "never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them . . . through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions" (9). Jameson is less interested with the text itself than with how the text is confronted and appropriated, a move that "Drown" also concerns itself with as readers' interpretative ability is tested by their linguistic acumen. By challenging what audience members understand of Dominican culture, what they bring to the text, Díaz calls attention to our own understanding of this particular culture, of what we know and what we don't know. The

narrator himself refuses to assist the reader, to hand us the answers about either his culture or himself. The narrator becomes the subject Other, refusing the reader from glimpsing underneath his mask.

For this reason, finally discovering the source of the conflict does not create an epiphany for the reader in understanding the narrator. The conflict between them is not so simple a matter as repressed desire. The narrator's regrets over Beto center as much on the fact that Beto went to college and left the neighborhood as they do on his sexual panic. The text intentionally conflates the two issues, leaving it unclear where the narrator's desire to leave the neighborhood crosses with his sexual desires, his voice becoming vague and deceptive when describing what took place between them. He tells us just enough about his thoughts and feelings that readers are teased with possibilities, but not answers. The narrator's confusion over Beto is especially evident in the markedly different way he depicts both of their sexual encounters. The narrator is frank in his account of what took place during their first encounter and how he felt about it. He describes his shock when Beto suddenly reached into his shorts while they were watching a porn movie together, tells us about the feeling of Beto's "dry" hand, the fact that he kept his eyes on the television the entire time, "too scared to watch," and that he "came right away, smearing the plastic sofa covers" (104). He does not shy away from discussing the panic he felt as he left, nor his subsequent feelings, explaining how for days afterward, he hid in his parents' basement "terrified terrified that I would end up abnormal, a fucking pato" (104).

In comparison, their second sexual encounter—the one the narrator *chooses* to participate in—is narrated in the vaguest terms. After avoiding him for days, the narrator claims he finally agrees to see Beto because "he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything. This alone got me out of the apartment and over to the pool that night"; however,

immediately after this admission he stops allowing us to see into his thoughts (104). At the pool Beto subtly propositions him, while leaving the narrator with an out: “He put his hand on my shoulder, my pulse a code under his palm. Let’s go, he said. Unless of course you’re not feeling good” (105). The narrator’s response is simply, “I’m feeling fine” (105). No other information is offered to the reader, neither why he accepted Beto’s offer, nor what he felt in that moment. Was his pulse racing in excitement or fear? Did he agree to Beto’s offer because friendship mattered to him “more than anything,” because of latent sexual desire, or because he was attracted to Beto’s success, his forward momentum in life? The sexual encounter itself yields no clues. The narrator himself must know why he agreed to the sex and what he felt about it; however, he refuses this knowledge to the reader. Whereas their first experience was given in explicit detail, their second is told in a hazy manner, and the text pulls a classic fade to black before readers can witness what took place between them: “We sat in front of his television, in our towels, his hands bracing against my abdomen and thighs. I’ll stop if you want, he said and I didn’t respond. After I was done, he laid his head in my lap. I wasn’t asleep or awake, but caught somewhere in between, rocked slowly back and forth the way surf holds junk against the shore, rolling it over and over” (105). For a second time, Beto gives the narrator an out; however, the narrator turns passive, neither accepting Beto’s offer to stop nor refusing it, his thoughts immediately afterward centering on images of powerlessness, on the feeling of being adrift. Unable to articulate his desire for the sexual freedom and upward mobility Beto represents, the narrator disavows responsibility for his actions, carefully framing their encounter for the reader so that Beto appears to initiate everything, the narrator himself passively accepting, but not reciprocating.

Yet despite the narrator's careful editing of the scene, some of his ambivalence towards Beto seeps out, his thoughts turning from the feeling of being cast adrift to memories of visiting Beto's college campus and the disparaging words of a teacher who compared his students to space shuttles, promising that only a few students would make it into orbit while the rest burned out. His fears creep in that he will never be able to move beyond the neighborhood: "I could already see myself losing altitude, fading, the earth spread out beneath me, hard and bright" (106). Interspersed with these thoughts of the narrator's impending failure is Beto's insistence that now that he was leaving for college, "Nobody can touch me, he kept saying" (105). In a world of well-defined gender roles, where masculinity is defined by a man's sexual prowess with women and "no Dominican male has ever died a virgin," the narrator is caught between his own desires and social expectations (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 174). In reflecting on his own upbringing, Díaz recalls, "the kind of boy I was, or that I was told to be, you were kind of this half-gadiator, half-dude who, you know, was supposed to have as many girls as possible and work until your heart exploded, have no fear, you know" ("Interview: Mac Arthur 'Genius' Junot Díaz"). Caught in a world where masculinity is a hyper ideal of strength and heterosexual virility, where his intellect isn't valued and teachers assume he will fail in life, the narrator is frozen in place, unable to meet gender expectations, and unable to rise above his circumstances.

The knowledge that he is leaving, that he will soon belong *outside* the neighborhood is what empowers Beto to act on his transgressive sexual desire. At the beginning of the story Beto is "delirious from the thought" of finally leaving for college, his narrative trajectory taking him further away from the neighborhood and setting him apart from the other people who live inside it (91). Unlike the narrator who can barely articulate his own fears and desires, Beto is always very clear about what he wants. The narrator never tells us what he himself thinks of the

neighborhood, but from the very beginning, we know Beto's opinion, how he "hated everything about the neighborhood, the break-apart buildings, the little strips of grass, the piles of garbage around the cans, and the dump, especially the dump" (91). He serves as the voice of temptation to the narrator in more ways than one, continually urging him to leave the neighborhood behind: "I don't know how you can do it, he said to me. I would just find me a job anywhere and go" (91). The fact that Beto had found a way out and would be leaving the neighborhood becomes the focal point of their second sexual encounter. The narrator's fantasies afterward center on failure and rootlessness, imagining himself as aimlessly floating driftwood, a falling space shuttle, his fears and desires over growing up and leaving the neighborhood taking shape. Beto thus becomes symbolic of the narrator's hidden urges, of the sex he is afraid to acknowledge and the world outside his self-imposed boundaries.

Temptation in "Drown" is as much sexual as it is the promise of the world outside the neighborhood. The army recruiter sent to entice poor boys out of the neighborhood with promises of a better life through the US military engages in a parallel seduction of sex and place, a seduction the narrator feels he is losing: "He won't have to show me his Desert Eagle or flash the photos of the skinny Filipino girls sucking dick. He'll only have to smile and name the places and I'll listen" (101). The appeal of travel is enough for the narrator to unwillingly listen to what the recruiter is offering, even more than earlier promises of all that can be gained through the US military, stereotypical tokens of heterosexual masculinity including "a house, a car, a gun and a wife" (100). Despite the temptation that both the recruiter and Beto offer, the narrator's response is to hide from the recruiter in the bushes when he sees him coming and to avoid Beto at all costs when he returns home for the summers. Like with the recruiter, the narrator feels a kind of attraction/repulsion towards Beto, urging his mother to tell him he's moved, while also

trying to track Beto down, first at his apartment and then at the local pool. Still unable to face Beto despite the fact that two years have passed since they last spoke, the narrator can only attempt to see him under the cover of darkness, sneaking out of his mother's house in the middle of the night. He attempts no other daytime or public visits with Beto, continuing to insist to his mother that he has no interest in hearing anything about Beto. The narrator's panic over his desires causes him to retreat to home, to the familiar. He takes refuge in the basement after his first sexual encounter with Beto and interrupts his normal route when Beto returns home for the summer, dealing drugs "close to home, trooping up and down the same dead-end street where the kids drink and smoke" (106). An interruption in business is far better than a public meeting with Beto in full light of day. The fear of becoming "abnormal, a fucking pato," of transgressing against gender norms, leads him to enact a self-protective regression into the well-known territory of the neighborhood rather than encouraging him to take a risk.

The community is a known entity with familiar expectations and codes of conduct, and it is this familiarity which makes the narrator's communal identity so important to him. As the neighborhood drug dealer, the narrator engages with these rules on a daily basis; it is his knowledge of the neighborhood that earns him money. By walking the streets and learning where and whom to sell to, the narrator becomes a fixture in his community. Simultaneously an active participant in the creation of a local culture and subject to the variances of that culture, the narrator's livelihood and communal sense of self is enmeshed in the culture, people, and landscape he surrounds himself with. Local identities are just as powerful sources of identification as types of political identification. Manuel Castells explains, "local communities, constructed through collective action and preserved through collective memory, are specific sources of identities. But these identities, in most cases, are defensive reactions against the

impositions of global disorder and uncontrollable, fast-paced change. They do build havens, but not heavens” (68). For Castells, local identities are inherently oppositional and are formed as a reaction to the pressures of globalization and mainstream, civil society. Mike Featherstone also discusses the oppositional nature of local identities noting that while individual localities contain varying disagreements, power struggles, and interdependencies, these disputes are submerged in times of conflict when the notion of belonging becomes particularly important. According to Featherstone, “conflicts heighten the sense of the boundary between the ‘in-group’ and the ‘out-group’” and localities define themselves through difference (347). Local identity becomes particularly important in a global era when multiple localities are simultaneously in contact with one another, and the need to self-define against oppositional social forces is heightened.

In “Drown,” the importance of the narrator’s local identity is emphasized through his attempt to self-protectively isolate himself in the community. By reminiscing as much about Beto as the places they visited during their high school years, the neighborhood is transformed into a symbol of nostalgia. In the narrator’s attempt to resist growing up and the passage of time, or more to the point, to resist globalization’s hurried experience of time, he spends the entire story close to home, never venturing further away than a bus trip to the local mall with his mother. However, resisting time is impossible, and as Doreen Massey points out, places are “absolutely not static” (155). She writes, “If places can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time” (155). Local needs, history, and culture contribute to the production of communal identities. While the neighborhood functions as a (temporary) haven for the narrator, it is not a static entity outside of time, free from the forces of global change and disorder. As a natural matter of course, human populations shift, the landscape changes. People

and place in constant flux, it is only the narrator who attempts to stand still and resist the change. In the two years since Beto left for college, the dump got cleaned up, new stores and strip malls opened up throughout the community, and the narrator observes that the kids at the local pool are no longer the people he went to school with, but their younger siblings. The narrator's misguided attempt to find Beto at the local pool symbolizes his inability to cope with change. It never occurs to him that after two years of college, Beto is unlikely to spend his evenings sneaking into the local pool as he did during his teenage years. The pool and the neighborhood represent the nostalgia and familiarity of childhood, of the things the narrator has always known; however, it is a false sense of security. Change is inevitable and the narrator subconsciously knows he'll eventually be forced to take a risk into the unknown.

Taking a risk means putting himself in opposition to the familiar, becoming one of the men at the local gay bar, rather than the boy silently listening as his friends yell curses at them. It also means becoming like Beto and finding a new place in the world. Even during their teenage years, while Beto continually pushed at the boundaries of the neighborhood, frequently spending his days away from school visiting other neighborhoods and cultivating friendships with people outside their community, the narrator spent his days off at home or at the mall or the library, in all the familiar haunts in the local area. Beto's admonishment, "You need to learn how to walk the world, he told me. There's a lot out there," falling on deaf ears (102). Diversity exists even within a single place: "there is no essential one-to-one relation between a place and a social network," writes Ruben Gielis (275). Localities can hold multiple social networks, both local and global, allowing individuals to experience many places all within one place. Unlike the narrator whose worldview consists of only the most familiar parts of neighborhood, Beto continually sought out diversity, visiting other neighborhoods, befriending unusual people.

While the narrator noticed that Beto “knew a lot of folks I didn’t,” what he didn’t realize is that Beto’s wanderings allowed him to participate in a large variety of social networks within only a small section of New Jersey (102). The notion of walking the world, of seeing external connection repeats throughout the story, symbolized both through Beto’s words and actions. In their final conversation before Beto leaves for college, he reiterates the notion that one day the narrator must also seek a life for himself outside the confines of the neighborhood: “You can’t be anywhere forever, was what Beto used to say, what he said to me the day I went to see him off” (107). While Beto’s vision in the story is continually turned outward, the narrator’s is comfortably turned inward, toward the familiar streets of home and toward the comfortable acceptance he finds, spending Friday evenings with the same boys he’s known his whole life, doing the same kinds of things he’s always done.

A major source of the narrator’s conflict in “Drown” is one of perception. He can’t walk the world because he can’t conceive of the world. He can’t imagine a Beto who wouldn’t spend his summer evenings at the local pool in the same way that he can’t imagine a future for himself where he has become rooted somewhere. Perpetually floating driftwood, the narrator can only think in static categories, binary oppositions of the here and the not-here, rather than the kinds of nuanced patterns of thought that become particularly necessary for understanding identity in a global era. “Drown” tests the reader’s—and the narrator’s—ability to understand what Sedgwick would define as “nonce taxonomies,” or “the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one’s world” (23). Nonce taxonomies are made, unmade, and remade as an individual moves through the world encountering similarity and difference, categories of thought continually shifting and being defined and redefined. In queer politics, nonce

taxonomies have the effect of interrogating how sexuality is understood: There is no universal model of queer sexuality. How an individual responds, under what circumstances, and how often vary from person to person to such a degree that Sedgwick takes it as her first axiom that “people are different from each other” (23). The narrator fails in his understanding of this axiom, taking cues on masculinity from the kinds of broad-brush categorizations espoused by the men in his neighborhood and applying a binary, reductive nexus to his understanding of his own sexuality: sex with Beto would make him abnormal, gay, while avoiding it would negate the feelings. Readers as well are tested in our ability to cope with provisional hypotheses, to continually reevaluate what we think we know about the story. The narrator parses information, presenting incomplete portraits of events he doesn’t fully understand himself. As the narrator is forced to broaden his understanding of the world, the reader is similarly challenged, both through language and our understanding of character, to make sense of frequently incomplete and contradictory messages.

Walking the world means conceptualizing difference, understanding how oppositional forces work within not only himself, but collectively, between social groups and localities. Difference not only gives rise to collective identification, it can also become the source of powerful social movements. Chela Sandoval notes that differential oppositional social movements which preceded from what Sandoval terms “oppositional consciousness,” or a “rhetoric of resistance, an apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations,” are in fact both created by global capitalism and its neocolonial influences as well as a way to combat those forces (1-2). Both difference and consciousness of the differential enables “new levels of metaideology” and represent “a cruising, improvisational mode of subjectivity” (180). Whether Sandoval’s differential consciousness, or Sedgwick’s nonce

taxonomies, both stress the disenfranchised subject's continual awareness, and continual reevaluation of dominant social codes and behaviors. Sandoval argues that it is this awareness, this permanent gamesmanship that gives oppressed peoples the ability to not only perceive and decode categories of difference, but also to move among them, leading to oppositional political movements.

As a young gay man from a predominantly heteronormative culture, Beto should be the most disenfranchised character in "Drown," yet it is Beto, and not the narrator who has found a way out of the neighborhood, who is capable of moving among and between social groups. Unlike the narrator, Beto never feels confined either to one space or a singular way of conceiving the world. And, as Sandoval suggests, the fluid ability to move from the peripheries to the center becomes his form of resistance as he finds a way to move beyond the restrictiveness of the neighborhood. The notion of resistance, of reacting against the inside and the outside is metaphorically interwoven throughout the story. "Drown" is filled with imagery of blockage, of characters being barred against their wants and desires. From the opening scene of the narrator with his ear pressed against the door of Beto's darkened, silent apartment (92), to the graffitied sign at the local swimming pool explaining codes of behavior and who is and isn't allowed at the pool: "*No Horseplay, No Running, No Defecating, No Urinating, No Expectorating*. At the bottom someone has scrawled in *No Whites, No Fat Chiks* and someone else has provided the missing *c*" (93-94). "Drown" pushes readers to the margins, to a world of racial segregation where outsiders are immediately recognized by the color of their skin. The local army recruiter is described as "a Southerner, red-haired, his drawl so out of place that the people around here laugh just hearing him" (100). The recruiter is so out of place—not only for being white, but for speaking differently—that the narrator assumed he was "helping some white dude with

directions” when they first met, not that the recruiter could possibly be a local (100). Both the pool sign proclaiming “*No Whites*” and the army recruiter out of place because of his skin color and manner of speaking demonstrate how race and language use unify together in “Drown” to form markers of exclusion.

The reader’s struggle with language is mirrored by the narrator’s parallel conflict with words, specifically with Standard English. The difficulty presented by code-switching on both monolingual readers and bilingual speakers becomes evident during the narrator’s lone argument with Beto, which occurs over the pool sign and the meaning of “expectorate.” Angered over the narrator’s refusal to explain how he’d learned a word even the college-bound Beto didn’t know, he dunks the narrator underwater, holding him there long enough that he starts choking: “Even then I didn’t tell him; he thought I didn’t read, not even dictionaries” (94). Language once again becomes an issue between the two boys as Beto’s final gesture to the narrator before leaving for college is to give him a book, which the narrator promptly threw away, “didn’t even bother to open it and read what he’d written” (107). The narrator’s refusal to look at the book and read Beto’s inscription speak to a larger theme of how language can divide in “Drown,” just as surely as race and class created difference in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie.” And in both stories, locality—the neighborhood one lives in, the territory one identifies with—is given as much weight as race, nationality, and ethnicity as a common marker of identity. And it is these differences which unify to keep the reader at arm’s length in the story—language, place, and community shaping identity and creating boundaries between reader and text.

Transnational Social Collectives in “Negocios”

While “Drown” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” reflected the influences of local culture and local culture in conjunction with national culture have on identity, “Negocios,”⁵ the final and longest story in *Drown*, reflects the ways in which global and transnational culture can also play a role in shaping the self, and in turn the lives of others. Each story in *Drown*, not just “Negocios” represents the voices of immigrants who have directly and indirectly participated in this community. Although only “Negocios” directly addresses the transnational Latino community, globalization plays an indirect role in the other stories in the collection. Chronologically one of the earliest stories in *Drown*, Díaz places “Negocios” last because it depicts most fully the scope of the Latino community from the perspective of an immigrant. “Negocios” essentially depicts the origin of Díaz’s New Jersey neighborhood, tracing it from the arrival of its immigrants to the building of the apartments Yuniór and his family would later reside in. In this sense, *Drown* underscores the importance of this community, which although not explicitly seen, has been felt in each of the previous stories. In “Negocios” readers witness how the neighborhood was created thanks to the work of Latino migrants from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, a neighborhood which in turn shapes the identities of each character in *Drown*.

“Negocios” differs from the rest of Díaz’s stories in that Yuniór serves not as his own narrator, but as the narrator of his father’s story. While it is Yuniór’s father who most benefits from transnational ties forged with other Latino migrants, the continuing influence of those ties is reflected throughout all the previous stories in *Drown*, in the close neighborhood culture we see in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” in the Spanglish that

⁵ business

permeates “Drown.” The end result of all these stories is a hybrid culture, and in turn, hybrid narrators, whose identities have been shaped by global, transnational, national, and local forces.

Although *Drown* had previously resisted the classic tropes of the immigration narrative, “Negocios” is the closest Díaz offers to an immigrant story in the traditional sense: Readers first meet Ramón de las Casas (senior) as a young married man in Santo Domingo, learn what prompts his migration, witness the difficulties he experiences after arriving in Miami, and follow his eventual successes, his decision to leave Miami for New York, his assimilation and success in his new American life, and finally, the fulfillment of his original promise to return to Santo Domingo for his family. While the form “Negocios” takes is a familiar one, including Papi’s motivation for immigration, his experiences in the new world, and a resolution in which he adapts to the new world,⁶ where Díaz turns the common tropes of the immigrant story on their heads is by making Papi into an incorrigible figure. His departure from the Dominican Republic is triggered less by the yearning to be free than by restlessness in his marriage, repeated infidelities, and the need to be away from “his two bellicose sons and the wife he had nicknamed Melao”⁷ (173). And his success in the United States is a combination of his own efforts, the good fortune to become friends with other, more affluent immigrants, and the hard work of Nilda, a Dominican woman he marries while in the United States. Papi hardly qualifies as a self-made man. His most altruistic action, the realization of his promise to Santo Domingo for his forgotten family, is not so much a symbol of his American success as it is a combination of Papi having grown tired of Nilda and the guilt-inducing insistence of Jo-Jo, his friend and financial backer. So Papi’s immigrant story is framed less by persecution and American dreams as it is by

⁶ See Introduction, William Boelhower

⁷ molasses

infidelity and polygamy. By giving us a traditional immigrant story with an untraditional protagonist, Díaz provides his own challenge to the immigrant myth, complicating it with a character whose success readers will have trouble endorsing. “Negocios” plays with not only story, but also narrative form, placing readers into the awkward position of empathizing with Papi, while simultaneously aware of the pain he caused the narrator. Despite taking a relatively small part in the action, Yuniór, because of his prior familiarity to the reader, becomes a central figure in “Negocios,” the fact that he is narrating impossible to forget. Thus while “Negocios” superficially appears as the most conventional story in *Drown*, it is in fact Díaz’s most direct interrogation of the traditional immigrant story and the conventions of narrative form.

Modeling itself after the style of an immigrant autobiography, “Negocios” is very conscious of the tropes of the immigrant narrative. This can especially be seen in the story’s preoccupation with veracity. Ordinary conventions of biography or autobiography, such as the use of photographs, or the objective voice of a third party preface, are reinterpreted in “Negocios.” Manfred Jahn argues that readers typically carry a number of assumptions for third-person narration, namely that the narrator is conveying something relevant, believes in the story being told, is giving the right amount of information, and the information is being conveyed in an orderly manner (447). Yuniór works hard at establishing his credibility as his father’s biographer. To demonstrate his ability to perform the expected duties of a narrator, Yuniór references his sources, specifying that different parts of the narrative have been gathered from interviews with multiple people including Nilda, Mami, Papi himself, and Papi’s old friends. Conventionally speaking, Yuniór does come across as though he has relevant information about his father and that he believes in the story being told. Additionally, while the story does not include actual photographs, it references them, both giving a nod to tangible proof of the

factuality of Yuniór's story, and also calling attention to their proper use in an immigrant biography. However, the story's reference to photographs not only underscores their importance to Yuniór's research, but also their notable absence in "Negocios": "With the radio tuned in and incoherent, he trimmed his mustache. No photos exist of his mustache days but it is easily imagined" (169). How can it be "easily imagined" when no photos were included in the story and readers have never seen Papi?

Unable to provide photographs of his father, the reader begins to wonder how much our errant narrator-biographer really knows his subject. In fact, Yuniór's knowledge is limited. "Negocios" begins with Yuniór still in the middle of his research, with a visit to Nilda to hear her version of events. In this way, the story represents Yuniór's *ongoing* effort to understand his father and is not the end result of that understanding. While Yuniór has factual understanding of the major events in Papi's life, readers never come to understand Ramón the man, and never see that deeply into his head. What he thinks, what he feels about the things that happen to him are largely kept at a superficial level indicative of Yuniór's own limited knowledge of his subject. For example, Yuniór gives this account of Papi's first look at America: "When he finally exited the terminal, he rested his bag on the sidewalk and threw away the cigarettes. In the darkness he could see little of Northamerica. A vast stretch of cars, distant palms and a highway that reminded him of the Máximo Gómez. The air was not as hot as home and the city was well lit but he didn't feel as if he had crossed an ocean and a world" (167). Yuniór's description of Papi's first moments in the United States is detailed enough that we are given precisely what he saw—the highway, the stretch of cars, even the palm trees—even the exact order in which he performed minor actions—setting down his bag before throwing away his cigarettes—yet his initial feelings of disorientation are described in generic terms, that Papi "didn't feel as if he had

crossed an ocean and a world.” The tone of Yuniór’s narration is low key and reporterly, but lacks the depth of knowledge about the story’s main character normally expected of both a biographer and a third person narrator in literary fiction. The wide psychic distance maintained between Papi and the reader, between the reader’s access to Papi’s internal experiences versus his actions, or what John Gardner refers to as “the distance the reader feels between himself and the events of the story” is equal to the psychic distance Yuniór feels between himself and his father (111).

However, for all of Yuniór’s attempts to best represent the facts of Papi’s life accurately, his anger toward his subject occasionally seeps through in his narration. He describes his meeting with Nilda as “two strangers reliving an event—a whirlwind, a comet, a war—we’d both seen but from different faraway angles” and the awkwardness at being in her home, how he felt “no longer as willing to ask her questions or even to be sitting there. Anger has a way of returning” (207, 206). To Yuniór, his father is a disaster, “a whirlwind, a comet, a war.” With this kind of anger, can readers fully trust his ability to impartially represent Papi’s life? In describing the morning Papi disappeared from Nilda’s life, Yuniór uncharitably observes, “I doubt if he was crying or even anxious” over the impending abandonment of his second wife (208). While Papi may indeed have been that callous, in Nilda’s account of that morning Papi seemed at least somewhat emotionally affected. She recalls him behaving oddly, lying in bed stroking her hair when he normally showered and dressed immediately after waking, and spending time standing over the crib of the child he and Nilda had together. So whose perspective on Papi’s state of mind can readers trust? Nilda likely felt some comfort in thinking Ramón experienced remorse before leaving them, while Yuniór understandably has some issues with his father. He watched Papi abandon his mother twice, was regularly taken to meet his

father's girlfriends behind Mami's back, and grew up knowing Nilda's son had been given the same name as him. With everyone involved in the story so emotionally invested in the events of the past, a completely accurate account of Papi is impossible to come by. Papi, like the narrator-protagonist of "Drown," and like Díaz's other narrators, remains an elusive figure. The story ends on Yuniór's uncertainty over his father's actions before leaving for Santo Domingo to remind readers of how much we haven't learned about Ramón de las Casas. Yuniór hasn't gotten the entire story on his father, his research must continue on.

The story's consciousness of Yuniór's narration gains special emphasis in its final scene, which ends with Yuniór's admission that he doesn't know what his father did before flying out to meet his family to bring them to the United States: "The first subway station on Bond would have taken him to the airport and I like to think that he grabbed that first train, instead of what was more likely true, that he had gone out to Chuito's first, before flying South to get us" (208). Ending "Negocios" on this note calls into question not only the veracity of the more personal details in the story, but much of the narration itself: Did Papi leave immediately for his family, or did he visit his friend first? Yuniór knew enough minute details about his father's life to describe his exact actions after exiting the airport terminal in Miami, but he was unsure about his general movements before leaving for his family, an event personally relevant to Yuniór? Of all the ways in which the story—and *Drown* itself—could have ended, it is particularly interesting that Díaz chooses to do so in a way which calls attention to its narrator. While "Negocios" takes care to establish Yuniór's credibility as a narrator, it simultaneously undermines his authority over his subject matter. As proof of that credibility, Yuniór periodically interrupts his narration to point out discrepancies in the different versions of events that's he's heard. For example, from his explanation of what took place the night Papi left Miami: "There are two stories about what

happened next, one from Papi, one from Mami: either Papi left peacefully with a suitcase filled with Eulalio's best clothes or he beat the man first, and then took a bus and the suitcase to Virginia" (174). Nevertheless, Yuniór can't be described as an outright unreliable narrator. He is personally involved in the story he is telling; he has yet to learn all the facts; he isn't close to his subject matter, but Díaz never implies that he is a liar. Rather than outright mistrust him, lingering questions over the accuracy of the narrative serve to call attention to the narrative method, to remind us of Yuniór's presence, even if the story being told is about someone else. Stefan L. Brandt writes, "The urban—or, rather, 'post-urban'—experience is shaped in postmodern fiction as a complex, near organic web, comparable to the famous 'grid' of New York City. Metropolitan practice, postmodern texts suggest, produces a multitude of identities, all of them existing at the same time and struggling for dominion" (563). "Negocios" replicates this tension in its struggle between two dueling protagonists: Ramon, the subject of the story, and Yuniór, the subject of the collection.

No longer the teenager we last saw in "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie," the Yuniór we meet in "Negocios" is now an adult. However, "Negocios" is neither a satisfying conclusion to Yuniór's story nor his father's. Very little is said about the adult Yuniór in the narrative. We are never told his age, his profession, whether or not he married or has children of his own, or even what prompted his interest in family history. We do not know what kind of relationship he currently has with his father, beyond their recent conversations about his past. His mother is still alive, but no mention is made if she ever remarried or where Yuniór's siblings are or what they are doing. Was Yuniór able to grow into a successful adult, or has he been weighed down by unpleasant childhood memories? Readers never find out. In a sense, by refusing to answer these questions, Yuniór remains an unfinished character. His emotional

growth and development is never completed. Since Díaz intended to continue on with the character, a major resolution wasn't necessary for Yuniór; however, *Drown* does not attempt even a minor one. In this way, Díaz encourages readers not to form a set opinion of Yuniór, neither to embrace his narrative nor fully reject it. Rather, we are meant to evaluate and reevaluate what we know of Yuniór with what we are told of Papi. Knowledge in "Negocios" is provisional, evolving, much like Yuniór's own research into his father's life. Thus Yuniór remains the kid remaking his persona with every girl he dates, that image sticking with the reader with more clarity than the adult Yuniór who sits at the margins of his father's story. And it is this struggle between the margins, self, and society that preoccupies all of Díaz's protagonists.

Both a facet of Díaz's stories and the realities of life in an era of globalization, the ability to form nonce taxonomies gains a particular importance. Echoes of Sedgwick's definition of difference, how human beings recognize and respond to difference can be heard in the words of more than one critic as scholars of globalization attempt to explain how human beings make sense of a world that has become increasingly sped up. In a world of global currencies, high-speed telecommunication, rapidly shifting populations and culture groups, and where individuals are daily required to walk the line between local and global allegiances, systems of totalizing cultural metanarratives are less useful than the ability to quickly and fluently shift between temporary modes of thought, continually reevaluating and redefining situational categories of perception. As such, theories of globalization frequently explore the ways in which individuals encounter and respond to difference. For example, anthropologist Alicia Re Cruz discusses how place, in particular, forces a continual negotiation with difference. Localities contain histories, cultures, political relations, and their own unique global dynamics that change over time. Incoming populations reproduce their own social structures in addition to absorbing the ones

already in place, left behind by previous migratory populations, and are further complicated by global and transnational social dynamics, with the negotiation with cultures and societies beyond their borders. In that way, Re Cruz explains, “The mobility of people is a contributing factor in the shaping of their identity colored by an experience of being neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ and constantly articulating their ‘here’ and ‘there’” (136). Papi’s first glimpse of the United States is a disorienting moment of neither “here” nor “there”-ness as he exits the terminal in the dark, the landscape not clearly revealing itself as Northamerica, instead deceptively reminding him of home. The sensation of the journey, of having “crossed an ocean and a world” is also lost. In Sedgwick’s terminology, queer subjects are continually articulating their position in larger society relative to the closet,⁸ whether in or out, while immigrants engage in similar negotiations, positioning and repositioning themselves through their status as locals or migrants, neither consistently one nor the other. In one instance, the nonce taxonomies are of sexuality, in another of place and residential status, though both require a parallel negotiation with difference.

Ulrich Beck expresses a similar view of globalization, difference, and place as he notes that global social conditions have rendered “one’s own life. . . no longer sedentary or tied to a particular place,” a condition he refers to as “the globalisation of biography” (168). Beck views contemporary life as intrinsically mobile from our communication technology to the frequency with which people spend travelling from place to place. The globalization of biography means that people are simultaneously tied to multiple localities: “Place-polygamous ways of living are translated biographies: They have to be constantly translated both for oneself and for others, so

⁸ Judith Butler argues, “being ‘out’ must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as ‘out.’ In this sense, *outness* can only produce a new opacity; and *the* closet produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come” (711). Thus the articulation of the closet creates the closet, the individual continually interpellated by ideological processes. In this sense, outsiders, whether marginalized via sexual orientation or national origin, are never able to gain insider status thanks to hegemonic discourses of power and sexuality.

that they can continue as in-between lives. The transition from the first to the second modernity is also a transition from place monogamy to place polygamy” (168). Globalization, in essence, produces contradictory, complex processes that force individuals to continually reevaluate and redefine what they think they know of the world based on place, social setting, and other context-specific factors. Papi’s sense of place-polygamy in “Negocios” is both literal, in that he acquires two wives, one he leaves behind in the old country, one he finds in the new, and metaphoric in that Papi’s ties to the Dominican Republic—specifically to the transnational Latino community—are what lead to his success in the United States.

From the narrator of “Drown,” frustrated by his inability to reconcile his place in the neighborhood with his desire to redefine himself, to Ysrael, the disfigured protagonist of “Ysrael” and “No Face,” his marginalization symbolically etched on his appearance, Díaz’s characters negotiate the margins, attempting to define themselves against hostile social forces. Even Papi, Díaz’s most confident protagonist, faces the same the same struggle to create a new identity as the other characters in *Drown*, simply for being an immigrant. If Ysrael represents the most Othered character in *Drown*, Papi is his complete opposite. In Santo Domingo, Papi embodied the establishment as a police officer working for the regime of a corrupt dictator. Handsome, popular with men and women (especially women), and blessed with good fortune, Papi is hardly an outsider. However, once in the United States, Papi finds himself stripped of many of the social advantages he enjoyed back home. Arriving in the US without a job, a place to stay, or the ability to speak English, Papi’s natural good luck saves him from homelessness and deportation. A Spanish-speaking cab driver finds him at the airport in Miami and takes him to a safe place to stay, giving him a discount on the fare with the advice that “Whatever you save on me will help you later. I hope you do well” (168). He chances upon a share in an apartment

with three Guatemalan immigrants and a job as a dishwasher in a Cuban sandwich shop (170). Papi's ability to utilize the transplanted Latino network in the United States is not limited to his first job or his first apartment. Papi learns how to save for rent money based on "the advice of many a veteran immigrant," and later finds other jobs, including the one that took Yuniór's family to New Jersey, thanks to other Spanish-speaking immigrants (174). In a system of mutual support and exchange, Papi contributes as much to the transplanted Latino community as he benefits from it. After losing a lot of money in a marriage-for-citizenship scam, Papi writes an account of his experiences and leaves it on the wall of his old apartment "as a warning to whatever fool came next to take his place. Ten cuidado,⁹ he wrote. These people are worse than sharks" (181).

Papi and the other migrants are able to benefit from their association with one another, creating informal support groups in place of absent family ties left behind in the home country. Interestingly, among various diasporic ethnic and national populations, Latinos in particular have been able to form some of the strongest transnational bonds. In a comparative study between Dominican and Chinese migrants in the United States, Vivian Louie argues that a number of factors, including geographic proximity to the country of origin, contribute to greater transnational orientation among Dominican respondents, a high percentage of ethnic language maintenance, enduring political and economic relations between the Dominican Republic and the United States, and the ability to travel home frequently all contribute to the formation of transnational attachments. In addition, social contexts such as the family and ethnic enclaves can both mediate and encourage transnational practices, while racial, ethnic, and class inequalities within the United States at large further create a situation in which "ties to the parental country

⁹ Be careful

of origin offer a way for the second generation to cope with their own marginalization in the United States” (367). In other words, transnational identities are formed among Dominican migrants from the top down due to larger social conditions within the United States and the Dominican Republic, and from the bottom up due to local factors within an individual’s family and community.

In a similar study, Wendy D. Roth analyzes panethnic transnational identity formation within the Latino community as a whole and generally agrees with Louie’s conclusions, adding that the notion of a collective Latino identity has been fostered by a variety of external sources, including the media, for economic purposes; however, face to face contact between the migrants themselves has significantly contributed to the growth of a discretely transnational Latino community. Contact between Latino nationals through diasporic conditions enables migrants to create transnational social fields that tie together local communities with their countries of origin. She writes, “Within such fields, it is not merely local level interactions that shape ethnic boundaries, but the numerous links that make ethnic groups in distant societies appropriate reference groups. Those links allow non-migrants to form symbolic identifications with other Latino groups and create panethnic consciousness” (928-929). In this way, among Latino migrants, a consciousness of shared experience is created along with a dual frame of reference where both the United States and the home country become relevant for daily life. In “Negocios,” the strength of these ties is expressed through Papi’s social circle: his Puerto Rican friend and neighbor, the Chinese-Cuban owners of the restaurant Papi worked at, all forming a small, informal social circle where ideas of business and family were shared. The subject of frequent criticism for how he treated his family back home, it was thanks to the mobilization of that network that “Nilda learned about Papi’s other familia from a chain of friends that reached

back across the Caribe. It was inevitable” (187). Local disapproval is transmitted along international lines, unavoidably returning back to the United States and straight to Nilda’s ears.

In *Drown*, the existence of these networks is taken as a matter of course, Nilda’s discovery inevitable and unsurprising. However, while many scholars agree some form of panethnic Latino social collective exists, the notion of an explicitly *transnational* community has also drawn criticism. Ellie D. Hernández, for example, prefers that Latina/o culture at large be examined under the lens of postnationalism rather than globalism because she views global and transnational frames as having limited applicability to U.S. minority studies (34). She writes, “The term ‘postnational,’ as I distinguish it from ‘transnational’ and ‘global,’ refers to those ideas, experiences, or cultural works in which the connection between two nations plays a central and vital role by offering a new critique; certainly the term refers to an important experience that is a part of the global encounter” (15). Chicana/o studies, Hernández argues, is still nationally-oriented, though slowly transitioning into a global mindset. Postnationalism is therefore an in-between state separating nationalist-based studies with globalization. Additionally, while Latina/o culture is gaining an increasingly global bent, it cannot be forgotten that the global itself has a neocolonial impulse. Globalization is deeply implicated with transnational corporations, global capital, and a system of discourse which typically excludes less-educated, working-class women and other disenfranchised populations from self-representation (19). Therefore, it is important to discuss Chicana/o cultural participation on a transnational scale, while also being mindful of the problems inherent in such a discussion.

In *Drown*, transnational Latina/o culture functions as a defensive, protective bubble against oppressive social forces; however, the characters in the stories never reach the level of equal participant in the flows of global capital. Although Papi benefits from “the umbra of his

fellow immigrants,” the moment he steps away from their safety to take a union job outside the community, he faces extreme discrimination (194). A return visit to the Dominican Republic further reinforces the lack of political presence Papi experiences while in the United States: “Seeing the country he’d been born in, seeing his people in charge of everything, he was unprepared for it. The air wooshed out of his lungs. For nearly four years he’s not spoken his Spanish loudly in front of the Northamericans and now he was hearing it bellowed and flung from every mouth” (197-198). Only by changing frames of reference does Papi realize his own subjectivity. Unable to speak his own language with confidence, Papi was forced to hide an important part of his own identity in order to find social acceptance in the United States.

Papi’s status on the margins, as an illegal migrant, an ethnic Other, culminates in an encounter he has with the police while hitchhiking from Miami to New York. Freezing and exhausted from travelling on foot in the middle of winter, Papi accepts a lift from two marshals riding with a convict: “His visa had expired five weeks earlier and if caught, he’d go home in chains. He’d heard plenty of tales about Northamerican police from other illegals, how they liked to beat you before they turned you over to la migra¹⁰ and how sometimes they just took your money and tossed you out toothless on an abandoned road” (175). The warnings Papi is given represent a blend of horror stories culled from experiences with police officers throughout North and South America, transforming into one giant, panethnic urban myth on the abuses of the police. The reality of the encounter turns out to be disturbing in its own right as the captive the police are transporting turns out to be a weeping murderer who has committed, according to one of the marshals, “many many murders. Mucho murders” (176). The police officers’ misinformed attempts to appear knowledgeable about Latinos are not limited to poor attempts at

¹⁰ immigration

pidgin Spanish, there is also quite a bit of confusion about Papi's nationality. Upon learning he is from Miami, the marshals assume he is a musician, an assumption Papi plays into, claiming to be an accordion player. Impressed, one of the officers exclaims, "Shit, my old man played the accordion but he was a Polak like me. I didn't know you Spiks played it too. What kind of polkas do you like?" however his partner corrects him, "Jesus, Will, the driver said. They don't play polkas in Cuba" (176). Alternately a "spik" and a Cuban, Papi is reduced to an interchangeable, generic representation of a Latino, much as Yunion was in "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie." He is nothing more than "you spiks" who don't play polkas in Cuba. However, Papi encourages their assumptions, recognizing the more he conforms to stereotypes, the less unremarkable—and less suspicious—he seems. He does not correct them on his nation of origin, and recognizing the cultural power of language, he changes his speech pattern to appear more American, making sure to give the English pronunciation and not the Spanish when the marshals ask his destination: "New York, he said, carefully omitting the Nueva and the Yol" (175).

Papi's ability to fluently change his speech pattern and alter his identity stems from a heightened awareness of difference, reinforced by his status on the margins as an illegal immigrant. Aware of his own subjectivity, Papi's identity becomes malleable, his words and nationality adjusting to fit the situation. Struggling with Díaz's linguistic registers creates a moment of sympathetic understanding between Papi and readers, our own prior difficulties allowing us to more easily perceive his discomfort. His lack of fluency, careful choosing of words, and pronounced accent underscore the difficulty Papi faces when encountering mainstream civil authority. As a writer, Díaz plays off of the tensions between subgroups and mainstream culture, utilizing the two primary modes available to him—language and

storytelling—to create a fictionalized space of inclusion and exclusion. Within these spaces, new modes of thinking identity are created and transnational social collectives form in reaction against the systems of power and authority symbolized by the marshals. The next chapter will consider how some of these social collectives, specifically the feminist movement, works to resist and respond to hegemonic social structures, but as a single individual Othered by his status as an illegal immigrant, Papi must chose his words carefully and avoid drawing the gaze of authority. The scene between Papi and the marshals is the only time in *Drown* in which Díaz attempts to convey accented speech as Papi struggles with correct pronunciation and answers the marshals' questions with a Spanish-inflected "Jes."

The fictionalized space of inclusion and exclusion in Díaz's stories is encapsulated in this scene as the marshals are presented with a highly edited version of Papi's history and identity, in much the same way that Díaz's narrators have also presented edited versions of their own histories. However, it is not the particulars of Papi's life—whether or not he is a Cuban accordion player—which is important; rather, it is understanding the forces that have made him into who he is. The stories he has heard from other migrants, the social ties he has created with them, his awareness of difference, his feelings of exclusion and the fear he experiences in the car—the complex interplay of all of these along with Papi's race, transnational social ties, local identification, and linguistic identity are the true building blocks of Papi's identity. While the previous two chapter discussed globalization, literature, and identity in more general terms, sketching out the ways in which *Falling Leaves* and *The Lazarus Project* concerned themselves with marginalization, place and history, and social interconnections, *Drown* revisits each of those themes in its own ways. While Mah and Hemon were particularly interested in history and the way an inherited past can stand alongside the present, Díaz is less concerned about history as he

is about place, and how communities and localities can shape identity. Both local and transnational social identities (and how the two intermix) were the focus of this chapter. In the next, the dissertation will explore personal identities, also in the context of the local and global forces (in this case, transnational feminism) which shape discussions on identity. Specifically within *Drown*, understanding the social conditions both locally and transnationally that have contributed to the characters' identities in *Drown*, allows readers a glimpse into the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion they, and other Latino migrants, face in a global era.

Chapter 5: Marginality and Transnational Feminism in Rattawut Lapcharoensap's

Sightseeing

The notion of visiting, of a transitory interest in the foreign and the exotic runs throughout *Sightseeing*, Rattawut Lapcharoensap's short story collection set in contemporary Thailand. Readers witness the complex negotiation between Thai natives, tourists, and foreign permanent residents filtered through the exchanges of transnational capital and local discourses of power. The stories also rely on the notion of sightseeing in the sense of spectatorship. As readers we get taken on our own sightseeing tour of the country and are witness to the complex facets of Thai culture, visiting tourist resorts, refugee camps, and brothels, and are introduced to local cultures of abject poverty, wealth, and middleclass comfort. The notion of sightseeing also carries undertones of the colonial gaze in stories like "Farangs," where native characters dependant on the tourist economy find themselves catering to first world assumptions, reinterpreting local culture to suit foreign expectations. Within the stories, sightseeing also carries elements of the male gaze as its female characters find themselves fighting against masculine objectification and asymmetrical gender power relations. As a work of immigrant fiction, *Sightseeing* turns that gaze back on the reader, setting stories written in English outside of the English-speaking world and effectively defying first world views on third world inequalities.

The world of *Sightseeing* is hierarchical. J.M. Coetzee calls the colonial gaze, "the eye that by seeing names and dominates," an apt description of the pressures the characters in Lapcharoensap's stories face (174). In a society divided between tourists and locals, wealthy and poor, power structures and the ability to dictate social and economic realities becomes an important distinction as the notion of an *us* versus *them* plays an especially strong part in the

stories in *Sightseeing*. While previous chapters concentrated on the development of social identities in a global era, focusing in particular on community and sameness, this chapter turns to the opposite side of the problem: the development of personal identities within the context of difference. In *The Lazarus Project*, Brik's quest was to find a sense of social belonging, a "we" in which he could identify. The negotiation of community played a large role in *Drown*, where characters were defined by their participation in local neighborhood communities and larger transnational social networks. Although Brik and Yunior were both portrayed as marginalized characters, their identity quests represented a conscious attempt to step out of the margins, Yunior by reclaiming his family history, and Brik by creating a voice for himself through his writing. In both stories, finding a social voice meant accepting a degree of commonality. Brik's desire to rewrite the immigrant myth came from an interest in creating a story for all immigrants, not for a particular group of people. In "Negocios," Yunior sought to reconnect with his estranged father and the stepmother he had never gotten to know in an attempt to reconcile his past. By doing so, however, Yunior discovers a number of parallels between himself, Nilda, and his father, and "Negocios," more than any other story in *Drown*, stresses the importance of community. However, identities are formed as much by difference as they are of sameness.

Individual identity is a combination of personal identity (or the perception of being distinct and unique in relation to others), social identity (or the perception of similarities within a group, or differences to members outside of the group), and the relationship that is created between both personal and social identity as individuals incorporate group identities into their sense of self (Melchior 105-106). In this chapter, the development of personal identity is explored, specifically the ways in which the experience of difference influences how marginalized characters conceive of their identities. The racially mixed narrator of "Farangs"

finds himself on the outside of two distinct worlds looking in: neither accepted by foreign tourists nor his fellow locals, he fruitlessly pursues one failed love affair after another. Ladda, the teenage heroine of “Cockfighter” stands on the cusp of young womanhood, negotiating different types of femininity as she attempts to define herself as a person amid constricting intersections of gender and power. While questions of gender play an important thematic role in *Sightseeing*, in this chapter, transnational feminism also functions as an example of how one type of contemporary social movement has been influenced by globalization, and how that movement in turn is reflected through individuals who may or may not be direct participants in these movements. In this way, both local attitudes and global social movements can equally play a part in the development of personal identities. In this case, the relationship between globalization and feminist praxis proves to be somewhat complex as both the feminist movement itself and marginalized women outside of the movement have been touched by contemporary feminist thought. In *Sightseeing*, the influences of transnational feminism can specifically be seen in how the characters respond to gender and power inequalities, in their attempts to grapple with, and overcome those inequalities.

Marx once famously noted, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (11-12). While Marx equated the modes of production (and the superstructures they create) as the context in which social beings are created, contemporary sociologists have expanded the notion of social context to also include discourses of power and normative frameworks (O’Brien 36). These forces play an especially large role in the development of identities among marginalized people distanced from the institutions of power. Martin O’Brien argues, identity formation is “an uneven, politically dangerous and socially-regulated process of sustaining old inequalities and

producing new ones” (39). It is this world of uneven power discourses that Ladda must enter and become conversant in, all while being mindful of how her own differences work to create boundaries of identification. Globalization itself has worked to reinforce these boundaries while simultaneously fragmenting the individual further. Marian Kempny states, “nowadays the globalized individual should rather be perceived as fragmented, composed of several diverse, sometimes contradictory identities;” however, the same degree of fragmentation does not apply to collective identities, which have instead solidified in reaction to the destabilization of personal identity. Both trends can be seen in *Sightseeing* with the relatively strong sense of femininity Ladda gains in comparison to the difficulties she faces defining her personal identity. In short, transnational feminist networks have flourished in a global era while personal identities have grown increasingly diverse and contradictory.

Lapcharoensap himself is a bicultural writer born in Chicago but raised in Bangkok who divides his time between Thailand and the U.S. In particular, the stories in *Sightseeing* demonstrate an interest in gender, gender roles, the construction of identity, and narratives of power. Lapcharoensap traces these interests and his development as a writer to his upbringing, claiming, “I had to learn very quickly, as a child, that what was true and natural in one place was unambiguously not true and natural in another. You don’t need to know much about W.E.B. DuBois or Victor Shklovsky or Russian literature or ideas about ‘defamiliarization’ to grasp that stuff. You just need to move from Bangkok to Chicago and back again in the 1980s, apparently” (Lapcharoensap). As Lapcharoensap’s experiences suggest, there is no such thing as the notion of a stable, fixed identity through time and place. What constitutes categories of race, class, or gender in one location and at one point in history are not necessarily true in another. And these

ideas are further complicated when categories of identity are brought into play with and against one another.

Human beings occupy multiple identities simultaneously and must navigate these between the interstices of unequal power relationships, colonial attitudes on third world difference, and gender inequality in order to exercise the right to autonomy and self-determination, goals especially privileged by third wave feminism. Existing within a social field where identity politics have become part of the cultural conversation, the stories in *Sightseeing* act as part of the discussion on gender, influenced in particular by contemporary critiques of first-world privilege and third-world exclusion, and feminist discussions on gender and power. While previous chapters centered on social collectives and social identities, this chapter examines personal identities and how contemporary notions of difference have effected discussions of identity. The discussion begins with an overview of specific discussions in contemporary feminism relating to literature, the third world, and feminist political projects before moving to a discussion of “Farangs,” a story which turns third world difference on its head by examining first world gender oppression through third world eyes. “Farangs” also explores the complexity of identity formation within social fields of indeterminacy, while “Cockfighter” especially focuses on gendered identity formation and the collision between gender, power, and agency as its 15 year-old protagonist must come to terms with both social injustice and her own feminine identity for the first time in her life. Both stories present a vision of characters struggling against the margins, against silences in the pursuit of self-definition. While wholesale, universal changes to the fabric of society are impossible, women can push against the boundaries separating the center from the periphery and achieve agency via individual identity projects.

As one of the oldest sustained movements in identity politics, the feminist movement has undergone considerable changes, both internationally and within the United States since its inception. Responding to economic, cultural, and social changes to the status of women as well as the influences of other collective social movements including the civil rights movement, postcolonialism, and the gay rights movement, feminism and feminist politics have undergone considerable generational changes, ushering in first, second, and now third waves of feminist thought. While proto-feminists like Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft lamented women's access to basic education and modest employment in an attempt to influence social thought on the intellectual capacities of women, later-day feminists organized for the purposes of legislating change. First-wave feminists, emboldened by greater access to education and strengthened by a coalition of their peers, sought to change the formal mechanisms of society by earning women the right to vote and legislating away other impediments to gender equality such as property rights and marriage and divorce laws.

In "A Room of One's Own," Virginia Woolf famously noted that while we know the accomplishments of men, which of them have been scientists, explorers, or adventurers, "There is no mark on the wall to measure the precise height of women. . . . Few women even now have been graded at the universities; the great trials of the professions, army, and navy, trade, politics and diplomacy have hardly tested them. They remain even at this moment almost unclassified" (131-132). The second wave of feminism in the United States was ushered in by a generation of women who had, according to Woolf, reached their "mark" and been educated on par with men. Having finally gained a foothold in the establishment, women were not only able to demand basic rights, but to begin theorizing their own lack of equality and enter into the critical conversation as peers with their male counterparts. No longer outsiders looking in, the second

wave was marked by a new focus on covert, de facto discriminatory practices. While first wave political projects were often closely allied with abolitionism and temperance movements, the second wave focused on reproductive rights, sex and sexuality, and rape and other forms of violence against women. Theoretical discussions among second wave feminists were preoccupied with the ways in which laws, culture, and the mechanisms of power served to delegitimize women's positions in society. Simone de Beauvoir argued that women were treated, not as fellow autonomous beings, but as "the Other," a term that would later circulate throughout identity politics. She writes, "History has shown us that men have always kept women in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other" (300). The notion of the Other would go on to influence race and postcolonial theories, demonstrating the interrelationship between feminism and other rights movements within the United States during the second wave.

Feminism and feminist causes have continually evolved over the years, responding to contemporary activist causes, current cultural and sociopolitical trends, and the shifting, lived experiences of the women within the movement. The emergence of global social conditions, bringing women around the world in greater contact with one another, coupled with diverging camps of feminist practice and disagreements over feminist theory within Western feminism brought about the end of the second wave and gave rise to the current, third wave of feminism. Unlike earlier feminist movements which sought solidarity via universal goals of suffrage and empowerment, third wave feminists embraced difference. Influenced by the currents of postmodernity and globalization, third wave feminists now define themselves along transnational, rather than national lines, arguing that there are as many types of feminism as there are women. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier contend that third wave feminism is shaped by,

and responds to, “a world of global capitalism and information technology, postmodernism and postcolonialism, and environmental degradation. We no longer live in the world that feminists of the second wave faced. Third wavers, who came of age in the late twentieth century and after, are therefore concerned not simply with ‘women’s issues’ but with a broad range of interlocking topics” (10). Dicker and Piepmeier’s definition denounces universalism, celebrates particularity, and locates the influences of third wave feminism on globalization, postmodern cultural conditions, and the influences of other contemporary social movements, themes echoed in the writings of other contemporary feminists. Whereas second wave feminists insisted on privileging gender above other forms of identity as a method of creating solidarity, the third wave recognizes multiple forms of identification and the interrelationship between feminism and other branches of identity politics. Myra Marx Ferree observes, “Feminist activists and activism typically are embedded in organizations and institutions with multiple goals. To have a feminist goal is in no way inconsistent with having other political and social goals as well” (7).

Third wave feminists denounce the essentializing tendencies of the second wave and argue in favor of plural identity categories. Dicker and Piepmeier go on to state, “Just as it is interested in a multiplicity of issues, the third wave operates from the assumption that identity is multifaceted and layered. Since no monolithic version of ‘woman’ exists, we can no longer speak with confidence of ‘women’s issues’; instead, we need to consider that such issues are as diverse as the many women who inhabit our planet” (10). Similarly, Ella Shohat makes a case both for the influences of globalization on contemporary feminism and third wave theoretical trends arguing that, “Any serious analysis has to begin from the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but, rather, as part of a set of permeable, interwoven relationships. This kind of relationality is particularly

significant in a transnational age typified by the global traveling of images, sounds, goods, and populations” (“Area Studies, Transnationalism, and the Feminist Production of Knowledge” 1269). She further goes on to argue that the complex connectivity fostered by globalization lends itself to the production of “knowledge within a kind of a kaleidoscope framework of communities-in-relation,” where “multicultural feminism is a situated practice in which histories and communities are mutually complicated and constitutively related, open to mutual illumination” (“Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge” 69, 75).

While Shohat’s analysis centers primarily on the ways globalization has expanded feminists’ ability to theorize identity, other third wave feminists see the influences of globalization in third wave political practices. Sylvia Walby claims that “Globalization constitutes a new framing for feminist politics,” whereby new spaces, institutions, and rhetoric have been created providing women with increased representational opportunities (534). She views globalization as a political process that affects both social relations and the nation state, giving rise to transnational networks and institutions that women can participate in and use to enact social and political change. However, as much as women have benefitted from globalization in the ability to organize and consolidate efforts, globalization has also dramatically impacted women’s labor forces, creating even larger groups of low wage, displaced, and exploited female workers. Additionally, weakening nation-states, uneven economic development, and the creation of flexible labor forces have also given rise to cultural and political losses. The rise of conservative social movements and hegemonic global culture has led to gender discrimination, marginalization, and political fragmentation. Breny Mendoza reasons that the term *transnational feminism* “points simultaneously to the position feminists worldwide have taken against the processes of globalization of the economy, the demise of the nation state

and the development of a global mass culture as well as pointing to the nascent global women's studies research into the ways in which globalization affects women around the globe" (296).

For Mendoza, as well as for other third wave feminists, the notion of a transnational feminism is as much a reaction *against* globalization as it is a response *to* it.

With a heightened awareness of difference, the limits of the second wave become apparent with the emergence of transnational feminist networks which create, activate, or join global networks to local partners to mobilize pressure both internally and outside nations, in addition to promoting the critical exchange between Western and non-Western feminists (Moghadam 13). However, this critical exchange also brought with it a critique of not only the ideology and practices of the second wave, but also Western feminism, even as it continues to be practiced within the third wave. Southern (or third world) feminists critique the tendencies of the North (or first world) to read the issues of the third world through its own cultural lens rather than attempting to understand the varying social and historical contexts which produced third-world feminist movements. Marginalizing third world women's voices serves not only to maintain an asymmetrical discourse of power between Western and non-Western feminists, but also to disenfranchise third world feminists themselves. Marnia Lazreg offers this pointed assessment of the discourse and practices of both Northern feminism and the second wave:

Hiding behind the lofty and unimpeachable calls for equality, choice, human rights, etc., Western feminists have promoted conceptions of individual and institutional change modeled after their own societies. Although they sometimes espouse a relativistic stance by denouncing universalism in the social sciences, they paradoxically present their constructions of change for Other women in a decontextualized fashion that assumes a universal order of values. They fail to

appreciate that their own cultures and societies form the implicit context for the changes they hold up for Other women to emulate. (29-30)

Finding themselves silenced within the discourse of the second wave, yet expected to conform to Western preconceptions about the self, about gender identity, and about proper feminist beliefs and practices, Southern feminists were characterized as victims of culture, empowered only through their exposure to Western feminist ideology. Aili Mari Tripp echoes Lazreg's critique, noting with exasperation that "One sometimes gets the impression that some Northern activists think that women in the North exist above culture and without oppression, whereas women in other parts of the world are steeped in oppressive cultures" ("Challenges in Transnational Feminist Mobilization" 303). These attitudes not only exaggerate the power and freedom Western feminists enjoy (to the detriment of first-world feminists), but also create hierarchies that prevent Western feminists from relying upon their non-Western counterparts as active, viable partners for their efforts ("Challenges in Transnational Feminist Mobilization" 303).

Thus the underlying message Western feminists send to their non-Western and third world counterparts is that "concepts like rights and justice are always and only Western ideas" and "no other culture has a notion of rights upon which to condemn violence and oppression" (Hesford and Kozol 19). In turn, these attitudes negatively impact both global feminist political projects and the reception of female-produced arts and scholarship. Specifically within literature, third world authors were read and analyzed under Western critical models. This in turn affected not only how women's texts were received in the west, but also in their home countries as well (Amireh and Majaj 7). The end result, Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj contend, was that Western literary scholars gravitated toward works that fit their preconceived notions on what a third world woman's text should look like. For authors celebrated in the west,

that popularity became a double-edged sword where home audiences perceived these texts as catering to the west and no longer speaking to them. In the nominally benign attempt to give voice to non-Western writers, literary scholarship replicated hegemonic discourses of power onto third world women's texts.

Constance S. Richards notes that, "The dialectic between the self-construction of identity and the industry of literature, that is, the acts of writing and reading, amounts to the articulation of ideology" (vii). While Richards argues powerfully against the type of homogenizing reading practices that Amireh and Majaj describe, her point remains that literary texts represent the articulation of ideology. However, the articulation of ideology that a text produces is a *particular* reflection of one form of ideology, of ideology on the micro scale. It is when critics attempt to extrapolate from the micro to the macro, to use one particular text as a stand-in for the whole, that Othering occurs. Texts can both reflect larger social trends while also presenting an individual character's view on them, which may or may not coincide with the text's general attitudes on them, or the author's personal opinions. Conflating author with character and text has long been an issue for feminist literary criticism where female writers tend to be read more autobiographically than their male counterparts. A similar problem tends to occur when reading third world authors of either gender, so literary critics have the potential to be led into a double-bind when approaching third-world women writers. This becomes a problem for both writer and reader as Lapcharoensap has noted that one of his own difficulties in writing is the problem of "depicting the inner lives of my characters in a language that they would not normally articulate themselves in: namely, English. Doing so without compromising their humanity—without, say, re-exoticizing them for a foreign-language audience in a way that feels false and corny and wholly ridiculous—I worry about that stuff a great deal" (Lapcharoensap). He goes on to state

that so much translated fiction in English about Asia and Asian characters tends to elide entire regions of people's experiences, particularly their sense of humor. These stories typically depict Asian characters as "humorless, self-serious, Zen-koan-speaking people for whom laughter and humor, however light or dark, seemed entirely impossible. And that hardly agreed with my sense, growing up in Bangkok, of what people are like not only in Thailand, but also, well, anywhere" (Lapcharoensap). Even in matters as simple as portraying a character's sense of humor, re-exoticizing author, character, or text occurs as a consequence of flattening out difference and ignoring the complexities of identification.

Thus the lesson, for Western literary scholars is, as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan suggest, maintaining "categories of differentiation and analysis that acknowledge our structurally asymmetrical links and refuse to construct exotic authors and subjects" (15). In other words, to avoid Othering third world writers, readers must acknowledge their own positionality while bearing in mind the historicized particularity of the writer's relationship to national and international sociocultural discourses. Gender isn't the only matrix of analysis; it exists in a continuum of other cultural and sociopolitical forces. The same continuum produces reader, writer, and text. Literature becomes a natural site to reflect upon these forces and their ability to shape identities. Alice Ludvig argues, "From the point of view of the individual subject, it is through narration that the axes of identity and subjectivity become explicit. . . . *How* a person perceives or conceives an event (and speaks about it) would therefore vary according to how she is culturally constructed, what she identifies herself with and/or differentiates herself from" (249). Rather than viewing third world texts as an affirmation of the writer's subjugation, the act of writing in itself can also be viewed as a mode of resistance. The choices a writer makes—in point of view, in narrator, in setting and imagery, etc.—all constitute a particular way of looking

at the world. Of equal importance to a reader interested in the construction of identity, what a text *doesn't* say—the silences—can tell us just as much about narrator and character as what it *does* say. Are the silences deliberate, or have the narrator's choices been conscribed in some way? By what or whom? What are the social forces that have gone into the creation of this narrator and this text? And how do these forces intersect with not only gender, but race, class, sexuality, national, and transnational influences? In short, how is the text producing and conceiving of identity?

In describing his own experience of being an immigrant, Lapcharoensap states, “There are few things that can estrange one from oneself, or make one painfully aware of the perceptions of others, than the act of moving from one country to another, especially from what people used to call the ‘Third World’ to the ‘First’” (Lapcharoensap). Moving from one incompatible framework to another creates a kind of double-consciousness, “one that consists of the ineluctable need to situate oneself through one's own eyes as well as the eyes of others, eyes through which you're often an odd, foreign, exotic, seemingly unassimilable creature” (Lapcharoensap). For Lapcharoensap, the friction between the perception of one's self against the perception of that self by others is an inescapable condition of being alive, “even if the *conditions* of that condition—the terms through which that self-estrangement takes place (racial injustice, immigration, plain old delusional thinking, economic pressures, etc.)—can be vastly different and powerful in very specific ways” (Lapcharoensap). Many of Lapcharoensap's own experiences filter through to his characters. Though most are not immigrants but naturalized Thai citizens, the notion of the double-consciousness, of the struggle between one's own self-created identity and social pressures and expectations, becomes an especially powerful force in the stories in *Sightseeing*, particularly in how they relate to gender. While men and women in

Lapcharoensap's stories experience gender norms and social violence differently, all experience varying forms of dispossession, marginalization, and exploitation. The characters in *Sightseeing* must negotiate their own identities, navigating between the interstices of unequal power relationships, colonial attitudes on third world difference, and gender inequality in order to exercise the right to autonomy and self-determination, goals especially privileged by third wave feminism.

Shelley Budgeon identifies three core assumptions to third wave political practices: firstly, that identity categories are complex and contradictory; secondly that identity categories are constituted within postmodern conditions of indeterminacy, thus allowing for dominant narratives of femininity to be reappropriated and destabilized; and finally, that a primary site for feminist reconfiguration is within individual identity projects (104). Influences of indeterminacy, social reappropriation, and the destabilization and reconfiguration of identity can be seen throughout *Sightseeing*, a collection of short stories that presents readers with a broad cross-section of the Thai social and cultural landscape. From the poverty of Cambodian refugee camps to the relative luxury of *farang*-infested beaches, readers get taken on their own sightseeing tour of the country. Lapcharoensap's Thailand is a place of beauty, poverty, wealth, tourism, happiness, and despair. It is like any other place on earth and like no other place. The stories intentionally resist broad generalizations about the third world, instead reflecting the specificity of experiences of a particular set of characters. The characters' experiences in *Sightseeing* are all directly tied to time and place—to Thailand, its history and politics, and the flows of global capital and foreign culture that bisect it—yet it is in this specificity that Lapcharoensap believes the stories gain their universality. He states, “Most of the writing that I really admire—the really good stuff—tends to be both very specific to whatever experience or

country or region the writer is writing about as well as wholly universal in its depiction of human loneliness and tragedy and despair. You only get to the latter if you do the work of the former, I think” (Lapcharoensap).

That the characters in *Sightseeing* view themselves in complex and contradictory ways equally reflective of the complexities and contradictions inherent to the human condition almost goes without saying. “Draft Day,” for example, centers on two boys waiting to see whether or not they will be forcibly conscripted into the military. The story is as much about the discourses of power as it is about friendship and betrayal. While all young men are meant to be subjected to the government’s brutal military service without exception, the narrator’s parents, unbeknownst to his friend, have managed to exert what little influence they have among military officials to ensure his name doesn’t get called. The move creates a gulf between the friends, the narrator symbolically becoming complicit with the military regime at the end of the story. Another story, “Don’t Let Me Die in This Place,” is both a classic fish-out-of-water tale and an immigrant story. The narrator is an elderly American man who was brought to live with his son and his Thai wife after having suffered a stroke. The narrator experiences culture shock for the first time in his life and struggles with the loss of autonomy. Both narrators in “Draft Day” and “Don’t Let Me Die in This Place” are forced to reevaluate who they are and how they understand the world thanks both to their own actions and forces beyond their control.

The narrator of “Farangs,” the opening story in the collection faces a similar reevaluation. The son of a local hotel owner and an American serviceman, the narrator finds himself in one failed romance after another as he continually chases, and gets his heart broken by, the *farangs* (foreign tourists) staying at his mother’s hotel located on one of the islands off mainland Thailand. Rejected by the local girls for his mixed heritage, the narrator instead pursues

relationships with the only type of women who will have him, foreigners with plane tickets who like the exotic appeal of sleeping with one of the locals. As a boy, the narrator's father left Thailand promising to send for his family when he returned to California. The family never heard from him after he departed, leaving the narrator's mother embittered after his disappearance and the narrator with fractured memories of his father, a man who was "known to me only as Sergeant Marshall Henderson. I remember the Sergeant well, if only because he insisted I call him by his military rank" (5). As the product of a relationship between a stranger and a native, the narrator inhabits a paradoxical position within Thai society, and within the text, familiar to the reader, yet unnamed in the text. Recalling the stories in *Sightseeing*, Lapcharoensap asserts, "The 'stranger comes to town' story cuts both ways: there's often narrative interest on both sides of the divide. And in a city like Bangkok—a city, like so many others of its kind, of immigrants, migrant workers, tourists, students from the provinces, etc.—it's often difficult to tell who the stranger is at any given moment" (Lapcharoensap). The story invites readers to question the notion of foreignness: while the tourists, who find themselves to be one among many foreign nationals, are the obvious unknown elements in the local environment, the narrator, whose first language was English and not his native Thai, is a "mongrel" in the eyes of the natives, a stranger in his own home (7). To return to Budgeon's assertion, the lives of the characters in "Farangs" are steeped in social fields of indeterminacy, contradictions, and complexities, particularly because of the ubiquitous relationship they share with foreign tourists.

The narrator's affairs in "Farangs" both repeat the family drama of his early childhood while also replicating larger discourses of power between the first and the third world, discourses where capital is exchanged, but the flow of culture remains unidirectional. In reflecting on his

own childhood growing up in Bangkok, Lapcharoensap recalls, “I often felt as if the ‘natives’ and the ‘tourists’ inhabited two distinct, intermittently overlapping cities, and that the bridge between the two cities was, more often than not, money” (Lapcharoensap). Within the story, the farangs are omnipresent, their foreign currencies fueling the entire Island’s economic structure, yet only a transitory part of local culture. Tourists and natives act as part of closed systems of exchange dividing consumers from service providers: farangs, including the narrator’s own father, visit and leave, while the narrator, his mother, his cousin, and his aunt and uncle—in short, every local character we are introduced to in the story—all work in the tourism industry. The locals’ dependence on tourism is so intricately woven into the fabric of their daily lives that their economic structures, social behaviors, and even their perception of time has become implicated by interrelationships with foreign tourists. The complexity of these relationships can be seen right from the story’s opening line: “This is how we count the days,” which goes on to detail what type of tourist shows up and when (June brings the Germans, July the Italians, French, British, and Americans, in August the Japanese) (1). We also learn the kinds of preferences and behavior each nationality has (the Italians like pad thai, the Americans make poor drunks, the Japanese too polite to bargain). And worst of all, the tourists don’t come to the Island seeking authenticity, the richness of Thai history and culture. Rather, they come for the simulacra, for sex tourism and the fantasies of Southeast Asia created in Hollywood films. The narrator’s mother complains, “Pussy and elephants. That’s all these people want. . . . You give them history, temples, pagodas, traditional dance, floating markets, seafood curry, tapioca desserts, silk-weaving cooperatives, but all they really want is to ride some hulking gray beast like a bunch of wildmen and to pant over girls and to lie there half-dead getting skin cancer on

the beach during the time in between” (2). And of course, if the locals want to stay in business, they have to give the farangs what they want and feed into the simulacra.

And feed into the simulacra they do. When the narrator offers (for a small fee) to correct the grammatically incorrect sign written in Pidgin English directing customers to his uncle’s elephant-trekking business, Uncle Mongkhon “just laughed and said farangs preferred it just the way it was, thank you very much, they thought it was charming, and did I really think I was the only huakhuai who knew English on this godforsaken Island?” (8). Even at a young age, the narrator realized what kinds of things would please the tourists. To capitalize on their expectations of a third-world experience, the narrator and his cousin Surachai set up a small business calling themselves “the Island’s Miraculous Monkey Boys” (8). He states, “For a small fee, we’d climb up trees and fetch coconuts for farangs, who would ooh and aah at how nimble we were. A product of our Island environment, they’d say, as if it was due to something in the water and not the fact that we’d spent hours practicing in Surachai’s backyard” (19). For added effect, they fashioned loincloths out of straw and old t-shirts and made monkey noises as they climbed. The narrator impressed tourists with both his climbing skills and his proficiency in English. And as part of the performance, he often told a story where he claimed to be an American boy shipwrecked on the Island as a baby who had been raised in the jungle by a family of gibbons. Fueling the farangs’ Orientalist fantasies for the exotic earned the narrator pocket change and the embarrassment of his mother who called the entire enterprise “that idiot stunt” (19). The boys’ performance and Uncle Mongkhon’s sign both appeal to what Chandra Mohanty terms “Third World difference,” or the first world’s assumption of a “stable, ahistorical something” that perpetually oppresses most if not all women (and men) living in the third world (20). She writes, “it is in the production of this Third World difference that Western feminisms

appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the Third World that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse” (20).

While the use of Pidgin English on the sign and the Miraculous Monkey Boys performance point to certain kinds of assumptions about homogenized third world oppression (poor education, lack of civilization), “Farangs” destabilizes those concepts by having the characters fully aware of Western stereotypes and knowingly participating in their reenactment. However, it is through the story’s exploration of gender roles that stereotypes of third world difference are ultimately broken down. Here the story turns its focus away from the behavior of the locals, from the familiar trope of third world oppression, and shifts instead onto the treatment of first world women. While critics of Northern feminism had previously derided its tendencies to focus on oppression in the third world while ignoring similar examples of oppression in their own backyards, “Farangs” demonstrates how feminine oppression isn’t just a Southern problem. The story presents two different portraits of jilted women: the narrator’s mother, and Lizzie, the American girl the narrator falls for. The narrator’s mother went on to become a successful businesswoman while raising her son alone after his father abandoned them. Whether or not her journey was a difficult one is never mentioned; readers only see her after her success. Of all the characters in the story, the narrator’s mother is the most financially stable. While Uncle Mongkhon is slowly being driven out of business by “Monopolated Elephant tours,” an international conglomerate that has been “underpricing the competition, monopolizing mountain-pass tariffs, and staking their claim upon farangs at hotels three stars and up—doing, in short, what they had done on so many other islands like ours,” no such concerns exist for their hotel

(9). Moreover, as both the narrator's mother and his boss, she holds the most influence over him than any other character in the story. In contrast, Lizzie's experiences with her boyfriend Hunter can only be seen as a loss of power.

When readers first meet Lizzie, she is vivacious and confident. Sunbathing on the beach, the narrator instantly identifies her as an American because "Her Budweiser bikini told me so" (3). While the story openly acknowledges the locals' dependence on transnational capital, Lizzie's corporate-sponsored bikini, which she wears throughout most of the story, serves as a subtle reminder of the West's own culturally-normalized reliance on national and transnational capital. After admiring her bikini, the narrator invites her to go on an elephant ride. While on the back of the elephant, they swap stories about their childhoods and failed relationships. Lizzie confesses that she had just left her boyfriend, Hunter, the night before after catching him with a young prostitute. The admission engenders a feeling of sympathetic kinship in the narrator, who has been abandoned numerous times himself. While humorous in its lovesickness, the narrator's vision of Lizzie in that instant endows her with a kind of strength and grandeur: "I turned to smile at her and she seemed, at that moment, some ethereal angel come from heaven to save me, an angel whose breasts left round, dark damp spots on my T-shirt" (12). To the narrator, Lizzie is the angel coming to save him, not the victim needing to be saved. She demonstrates that agency by initiating their sexual encounter: "With a quick sweeping motion, Lizzie took off her bikini top. Then she peeled off her bikini bottom. And then there she was—my American angel—naked on the back of Uncle Mongkhon's decrepit elephant. 'Your country is so hot,' she said, smiling, crawling toward me on all fours" (13). Here Lizzie's actions are predatory, in control. Although not a terribly fleshed-out character, had the story ended here, with Lizzie and

the narrator having sex on the back of Thailand's national symbol, of all the words readers might have used to describe her, powerless wouldn't have been one of them.

The story's portrayal of Lizzie radically changes, however, the moment Hunter is introduced. He shows up while the narrator and Lizzie are eating dinner together, his presence causing an instant alteration in Lizzie's behavior. From a girl who had been laughing and childishly excited to go on an elephant ride, Lizzie turns morose, absent-minded. She hardly touches her meal. When she finally confesses that Hunter is eating at the same restaurant, the narrator asks if she means her ex-boyfriend. She corrects him: "No," she says. "My boyfriend. He's here" (16). From a woman with the confidence to leave a cheating lover and initiate a rebound fling with a man she had just met, Lizzie becomes subservient, accepting Hunter back before they'd even spoken. When they finally do speak, Hunter reveals himself to be arrogant: "Who's the joker?" he asks Lizzie, gnawing on my squid," racist: "Hey you," he says. "I'm talking to you. Speak English? Talk American?" and sexist: "Oh Lizzie," he says, feigning tenderness, reaching out to take one of her hands. "I've missed you so much. I hate it when you just leave like that. I've been worried sick about you. I'm sorry about last night, okay baby? Okay? I'm really sorry. But it was just a misunderstanding, you know? . . . You know how Thai girls get when we're around" (16, 17). Hunter's demeanor is patronizing towards Lizzie and displays colonial attitudes towards the women of Thailand, yet Lizzie barely says anything in response to his behavior, beyond insisting that they "talk about this later" (17).

By the time the narrator decides to leave, Lizzie has become totally silenced: "I look over at Lizzie. She's staring at the table, tapping her fingers lightly against the wood. It seems she's about to cry. . . . 'It was a pleasure meeting you, Miss Elizabeth,' I say, smiling. I want to take her hand and run back to the motel so we can curl up together on the beach, watch the

constellations. But Lizzie just keeps staring at the top of that table” (18). The next time the narrator sees Lizzie is later that evening on the beach as she trails behind Hunter and his friends: “Lizzie’s walking with them silently, head down trying to ignore their antics” (21). Again she takes a submissive posture in Hunter’s presence, only momentarily raising her head to look for the narrator when Clint Eastwood, the narrator’s familiar pet pig approaches her; however, in the darkness, “she can’t see us from where she’s standing. She can’t see us at all” (21). “Farangs” ends with the American boys chasing Clint Eastwood and Surachai and the narrator furiously throwing mangoes at the group to defend him. Submissive, blinded in the darkness, Lizzie’s voice has been completely taken away as readers neither hear her scream nor react to the counterattack: “Some of the mangoes hit Lizzie by accident, but I don’t really care anymore, I’m not really aiming” (22). Had Lizzie been hoping to see the narrator on the beach? What would she have done if the narrator stood up to Hunter at the restaurant? What did she think when the American boys began to chase a pig she had become friendly with, or when she was hit by the mangoes? The story never answers those questions. By the end, she is essentially forgotten about as the climax of the story becomes an exclusively masculine one: the narrator fighting Hunter and his friends over the safety of his pet, not the love of his girl. Lizzie’s loss of agency is symbolized by her disappearance from the text. Not only her voice, but her ability to act, completely gone.

Lizzie’s silence in “Farangs” is contrasted by “Cockfighter,” a novella-length short story, which represents a coming of age story for its 15 year-old protagonist, Ladda. Ladda’s narrative trajectory takes the opposite approach from Lizzie’s. Lizzie initially appears strong and confident, but is stripped of her power by the end of the story. Ladda, on the other hand, begins “Cockfighter” in the subject position, as a child under her parents’ control, and in fear of men

and her own sexuality; however, she ends the story both literally and metaphorically in the driver's seat having finally begun the process of growing up. Ladda faces disillusionment with the adults in her life, grows to form her own opinions about the world, and most importantly, makes her own determinations on what she believes it means to be a woman. The cockfighter of the title is Ladda's father, a man whose hobby and life's passion was fighting gamecocks until Little Jui, the local gang leader's teenage son, decided to become a cockfighter himself. After badly humiliating Little Jui during a match, Papa—and Ladda by extension—become his targets, inside and outside of the weekly cockfights. Little Jui acquires a boy from the Philippines to manage his chickens, and thanks to Ramon's expertise, Papa's fortunes turn. The story begins in medias res, portraying the family at one of its lowest points, after Papa's chicken coops have been nearly decimated by losses in the ring. Images of dead chickens brought home from the fights—"beady little eyes wild with chicken-terror, bold brilliant feathers wet with their own blood"—are juxtaposed with Ladda's night terrors (159). Her fears of sexual violence conflated with the dead chickens:

My terrors were no longer childish. I saw lewd, horrible men dancing on my walls with fangs, claws, raw red penises. I saw myself naked before them like a slab of meat quivering on a butcher's block. I felt fingernails sinking into my breasts, rancid breath moistening my face, wooly hairs chafing my stomach. . . . I dreamt of sex and I dreamt of decapitations and these dreams were often one and the same. (160)

We soon come to learn that Papa's losses and Ladda's fears are literally and metaphorically tied together. Although Ladda's troubles stem from the same source as her father's, both age and gender play the primary difference in how those difficulties are enacted upon them.

As both a child and a young woman, Ladda's choices are circumscribed in a way that her father's are not. Her journey toward adulthood during the course of the story ultimately provides Ladda with more agency than when she started out, in addition to Ladda's efforts to carve out her own female identity. That "Cockfighter" is as much a story about gender roles as it is about growing up becomes apparent through Ladda's efforts to navigate her own fears of social injustice, sexual violence, and the family shame of a fallen woman. By the end of "Cockfighter," Ladda has begun to come to terms with both her place in the world and her views on life, and readers are able to see a glimpse of the woman she will eventually become. Aside from the obvious phallicism of the title, "Cockfighter" establishes itself as a story about men and women from the start with its opening imagery contrasting Papa's active, masculine response to his losses cockfighting with his daughter's helpless passivity, gendered roles the story will eventually break. While Papa isolates himself in the chicken house at night, "cooing to his chickens for hours" in the hopes of coaxing them to victory, Ladda watches on fearing for her father's sanity and her own (159). Unable to enter her father's realm, yet unable to separate herself from it, Ladda's dreams turn nightmarish as she is transformed, not into the keeper of the chicken house, but as one of the chickens in a strange, sexualized mix of death and rape.

Having caught the ire of the local gang leader's son, Papa's refusal to quit cockfighting threatens the stability of the family economically as he proceeds to lose large sums of money, his stock of chickens, and even the family's truck. The losses have other consequences as well. No longer known as one of the best cockfighters in town, Papa becomes a laughingstock, losing the respect he once commanded, his vulnerability transferring itself onto Ladda as the men begin to look at her differently. She becomes an easy target for their ridicule, their teasing carrying a vaguely sexual undertone: "In town, the men would cluck at me, flap their elbows, and I never

knew if they were making fun of Papa or making a pass at me or some strange combination of both” (161). But worse still, Ladda also catches the attention of Little Jui. He begins following her after school accompanied by his two bodyguards, shouting flirtatious comments, lewd remarks, and threats from the passenger seat of his Range Rover: “‘Don’t be that way,’ he said, laughing. ‘I’ve seen the way you look at me, girl. I’ve been watching you. We’re not children anymore, you know. Just think about the things we could do. We could touch tongues. We could fondle each other. We could do it doggy-style” (173). And when Ladda doesn’t give enough of a response to his innuendos, Little Jui adds in a warning for her father, asking her to send Papa his greetings and “‘Tell him I’ll be back at the pit on Sunday. And tell him’—Little Jui leaned far out of the car now, almost whispering into my ear—‘tell him I’m going to fuck his daughter one of these days’” (174). Knowing Little Jui isn’t an enemy they can win against, Ladda says nothing to her father and attempts to keep Little Jui’s actions secret from her family. No longer able to rely on the protection of her parents, Ladda begins to feel vulnerable, isolated, and afraid for the first time in her life. As Little Jui’s harassment escalates, culminating in a failed kidnapping attempt at school, Ladda grows increasingly anxious, no longer feeling safe away from home: “I had begun to dread the outside world after our last encounter. Open air made me nervous. In my mind, the Range Rover loomed around every corner” (212).

It is from within this crucible of fear and anxiety, this unsettling of home, that pushes Ladda toward adult realization. Unable to rely on the adults in her life, school and the familiar streets of home no longer feeling safe, Ladda is left to figure out the world on her own. The more she is confronted with the vulnerabilities of her family, the more the personal becomes political and the vulnerabilities of her society become apparent to her. Susan Strehle observes that home spaces have a much closer affiliation with the public sphere than social discourse

acknowledges. She views home as “as a patriarchal space where power relations vital to the nation and culture are negotiated,” and notes that home and homeland are “bathed in a golden shower of sentiment” to protect existing lines of power while obfuscating the social inequalities (racism and the exploitation of class and gender) necessary for the production of power (1, 7). From a security guard at school who is easily bribed into silence when Little Jui attempts to kidnap her to Big Jui’s stranglehold over the town, what Ladda comes to understand are the mechanisms of power and how those mechanisms benefit those in power, while subjugating those over whom power is enacted. These realizations are painful for her—“I began to understand for the first time what kind of world we were living in, what men were capable of, and I longed more than anything to take the three of us to someplace safer, far, far away”—and her desire to return to a simpler, safer world represent the last gasps of childhood naivety; however, growing up proves to be unavoidable (172-173). Finally hearing the story of her aunt for the first time has a profound effect on Ladda. It marks a turning point in her psyche, the end of childhood innocence and the beginning of adult understanding: “I wanted more than anything to return to life before Mama had told me her story about Papa’s no-name sister. For I felt like Mama had pushed me violently down a one-way street with her cockamamie story, a street I never wanted to go down in the first place. There would be no turning back now, though at the time I couldn’t say why or from what” (191).

The path Ladda ends up taking is one that leads her into testing both the boundaries of power, the limits of femininity, and where power and femininity intersect. Foucault argues, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the

knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (194). That power has the ability to produce reality becomes increasingly apparent within the story, manifesting itself in large and small ways: the shock Papa feels once the men at the cockfights begin treating Little Jui like a seasoned veteran, despite the fact that Ramon wins all his matches. Papa’s forgotten sister, disgraced because of her involvement with Big Jui. Even the town’s ability to ignore Big Jui’s crimes in repayment for “every superficial civic deed Big Jui did—a basketball court, new bulbs for the town’s streetlights, sidewalks repaved, mailboxes on every third scorner [sic]—the townspeople agreed to endure his less philanthropic activities. Mama said it was like being massaged with one hand while getting punched with the other” (198).

If the extent of Big Jui’s stranglehold over the town weren’t implied clearly by earlier parts of the story, it becomes obvious by the climax where, after Papa loses his final cockfight, Little Jui has Papa’s ear removed in payment for the gambling debts he could no longer afford. Unfortunately, reporting Papa’s attack to the police is out of the question since the chief of police is Big Jui’s brother-in-law. When Noon, Ladda’s childhood friend, remarks that it isn’t right for the crime to go unpunished, Ladda counters that Noon “should know by now that we were living in a world where words like that didn’t mean a thing: right or wrong, left or right, up or down, inside or outside—our people didn’t speak that kind of language” (239). The idealism of childhood completely wiped away, for Ladda only an adult cynicism remains on the limits of power to protect those on the margins. Despite their sympathy for Papa, the family receives some flowers and cards, but no visits: “It was as if people were afraid that they might be putting themselves in harm’s way, as though Papa’s unfortunate fate was a contractible disease” (238). While the townspeople are reluctant to publicly support Papa by showing up for a visit, the doctors are no better. In relating the good news that only the cartilage had been taken and Papa

would still be able to hear out of both ears, Ladda remarks how the doctors' attitude "made Little Jui's barbarity seem perversely generous" (240). If power produces reality, the reality that the townspeople attempt to create is that Papa was not the victim of a crime, and that there was no responsible party. Moreover, according to Ladda, "Given the way things worked in our town, Papa'd get arrested for having his own ear cut off" (239). Powerless to hold either Big Jui or Little Jui responsible for their actions, it is simply easier to act as if they are not guilty of anything, the story of Papa's ear eventually becoming an unspoken secret like his no-name sister.

Power shapes not only reality, but identity as well. Moya Lloyd argues that identities "are always saturated with power relations" (40). According to Lloyd, rather than shaping discourse, identity is in fact the effect of discourse. For this reason, "When feminine discourse proclaims that it has discovered the basis of homogeneity among women, this is not a benign gesture free from power. It is a generative move. It produces the particular feminist—or female—subject that it claims to have discovered" (40). Any critical consideration of female identity runs risk of essentializing women if it does not acknowledge the constructed nature of identity itself, that it creates subject positions, exclusions, and opposition (Lloyd 40). Other third wave feminists, including Chandra Mohanty, make similar critiques of the second (and parts of the third) wave's tendencies to create an essentialized female subject in the interest of solidarity. Mohanty argues that the connection between women as real, material subjects of their collective histories and the representation of women as a cultural and ideological composite produced by hegemonic discourses "is not a relation of direct identity or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures" (19). Power relations exist both in larger cultural forces, and between women themselves. Ladda's journey in "Cockfighter" is not just to come to terms with power relationships in society at large, but in how

they work against and between women as well. The story interweaves varying models of femininity—those presented by her mother, her aunt, her mother’s boss, her childhood friend—alongside her parents’ views on life, forcing Ladda outside her comfort zone and leaving her with the task of determining what being a woman, and what being part of the world means to her.

Ladda’s parents each present conflicting views of the world. Her father explains the reason why he continues cockfighting despite his losses is to prove that he’s willing to stand his ground: “This isn’t a matter of honor, Ladda. It isn’t even about standing up to Little Jui and his kind,” rather, he claims, it’s about not letting the world run you ragged and refusing to be pushed around (180). It is a valuable lesson, yet as Papa’s losses mount and as painful family history is revealed, providing an alternative reason why Papa fights, the question of when and how to face unbeatable odds remains. Trying to live up to the ideals Papa has set out for her, Ladda feels pride at fighting back against her kidnappers, particularly when she bites one of them in the hand: “I wished Papa could see me. I wanted to break the skin, feel the warm gush of blood on my tongue” (205-206). Although Papa had been helpless against his sister’s injustice and unable to stop his own humiliation at the cockfights, in that moment against Little Jui’s bodyguard, Ladda feels empowered at having struck a blow in the name of family honor. However, Papa’s influence over his daughter is limited. With mounting losses, he begins separating himself from his family, leaving his daughter increasingly in the company of her mother. Acting as the story’s chief instructive voice on feminine conduct, Mama speaks in absolutes. Her dictums cast light on the universal sufferings of women, on what men force women to endure. In Mama’s view, men have become the oppressors, women the oppressed. And just as with her father, Ladda must choose to accept or reject Mama’s advice, and determine whether Mama’s notions of being a woman ultimately match up with her own.

The image of femininity Mama constructs is that of an oppressed sisterhood subjected to the capricious whims of men. When Papa refuses to quit cockfighting, her somewhat tongue-in-cheek response is that “Men are lunatics. . . You’d think God invented stupidity the same day he came up with the penis” (176-177). However, as tensions mount, Mama’s observations become less humorous. After revealing the tragedy of Papa’s sister, Mama remarks, “If there’s one thing you should know by now, Ladda, it’s that men are monsters. . . They have no decency. The best a woman can do is learn to tolerate one barbaric thing, to the next” (185). Mama’s views construct women as victimized, oppressed, their destinies left to the whims of men. After discovering Little Jui’s harassment of Ladda, Mama takes the two of them to stay temporarily with her boss, Miss Mayuree, explaining that they are leaving because, “Love or no love, the men in this world don’t leave women with much choice sometimes. It’s all we can do to hang on to our dignity” (228). Preaching against the kind of male violence which robs women of their dignity, Mama’s words recall H  l  ne Cixous:

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven’t got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove. (426)

Mama presents an older mode of femininity, its logic based on models that essentialize women, constructing them into creatures that must forbear, but never resist while men are universally positioned as the oppressors. However, identifying the oppressor as a single entity mimics the strategy of the oppressor and turns masculine and feminine into separate entities that do not

interact, factoring out race, class, and other constitutive identity categories (Butler 18-19). In Mama's worldview, one is a woman before one is anything else, causing Ladda to wonder, "What did a woman's dignity have to do with anything? I wanted to ask her. What kind of dignity would we have by going to Miss Mayuree? Wasn't it Papa's dignity in the balance? Wouldn't we just add to the sum total of his humiliation by leaving him?" (228). When Ladda disagrees with her advice, the conflict between them thus becomes generational in both the literal and metaphoric sense: If Mama's style of thought represents the second wave, then Ladda is more clearly a product of the third. For younger feminists influenced by the third wave, "Figuring out the contours of a feminism that isn't simply adopted but allows for the expression of one's own experience has become a rite of passage that signals the coming of age of younger women" (Budgeon 107).

As much as history appears to be repeating itself with the current Little Jui poised to become the next Big Jui, just as his father once inherited the position, change is inevitable. The townspeople move on from cockfighting to dog racing at the end of the story; Ladda resists Little Jui's advances, stopping the cycle of violence in her own generation. Although less obvious than in "Farangs," the characters in "Cockfighter" are subject to the same currents of global capital and foreign culture. Like the narrator in "Farangs," Ladda's family also earns its living off foreign consumers, the bras and lingerie Mama sews in the family living room sold abroad, to "anonymous women living in faraway places [Mama would] probably never see," rather than staying in Thailand (222). It is this world Ladda must contend with, a world of postmodern discord and dependent upon the dynamics of social and cultural difference. These are the conditions that have shaped Ladda's identity and that continue to shape her consciousness of race, gender, and class. Unlike Mama, Ladda does not identify exclusively, nor first and

foremost, as a woman. She balks at leaving Papa for the sake of female dignity because the notion of it conflicts with her identity as a daughter. Her meditations on social justice indicate an awakening political consciousness that is not solely the property of gender. While her feminine identity may play an important role in the story, she recognizes, as do other women influenced by the third wave, that gender exists on an axis that intersects with multiple forms of identification, and multiple forms of oppression.

From the loss of Papa's ear, to the story's final revelation that Ramon was likely a victim of human trafficking, brought over to become Little Jui's representative in the weekly cockfights, men fall victim to Big Jui and his ilk with equal frequency as women. Although the male experience of violence and oppression in "Cockfighter" may be different than women's experiences—the removal of an ear versus the threat of rape—both males and females are caught up in the same constellation of social, political, and economic processes. Nira Yuval-Davis explains that for a woman, attempting to navigate the intersections of identity construction and social politics is much like trying to cross a busy intersection, "The main highway is 'racism road'. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street. . . .She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression" (200). Multiple identities and positionings cross one another in different ways at different times under particular locations and contexts, different in each historical instance. For this reason, it is impossible to use *female* as an exclusive definition of gender because the category of woman is not exhaustive. Judith Butler also points out that gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts or regions, and among different racial, ethnic, sexual, or social

classes (4). “As a result,” she writes, “it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (4-5).

The cultural intersections that produce and maintain gender roles within “Cockfighter” create a world wherein women must “learn to tolerate one barbaric thing, to the next”; however, they also create a world where the wealthiest, most powerful character in the story after Big Jui is Miss Mayuree, a woman with gold-capped teeth and a household of servants with their own sleeping quarters including maids and drivers. A venture capitalist who started her own lingerie company, Miss Mayuree eventually expanded, selling the beaded bras Mama and her other workers make from home to international markets. They also create a world wherein Mama is the primary breadwinner of the family, her paycheck from Miss Mayuree representing the only steady income the family has in comparison to Papa’s fortunes as a cockfighter. Despite Mama’s lectures on male oppression, her family is economically controlled by women, by women’s labor, and by women’s spending habits. The family earns a living from female sexuality and disposable income. That violence against women exists is undeniable; however, Mama’s attitudes deny women what agency they do have in “Cockfighter.”

Although she plays a key role in Ladda’s development, Mama represents only one female voice in the story. As the figures of the mother and the business woman, Mama and Miss Mayuree, respectively, are countered by a number of other female archetypes including Noon, the girlish coquette, Papa’s sister as the fallen woman, and Charunee, Noon’s older sister who had “notoriously gone to Bangkok and come home calling herself Charlie, like she hadn’t only changed into a man, she’d also become a farang” (196-197). Ladda initially begins the story much like Mama, with her own set of preconceptions about femininity and how women should act. She resents Miss Mayuree for the economic power she has over her mother, for the way

Mama had to “bow and stoop before her,” in what Ladda interprets as “submissiveness” and “feigned gratitude for a paycheck” (196). Even worse, she looks down on Noon for her made-up appearance and flirtatious behavior. Although they had been best friends as children, Ladda became distant from her as they grew, Noon becoming beautiful while Ladda grew “plump and ordinary in comparison” (197). The changes in both girls weren’t just physical, but in how they related to the opposite sex. While Noon “gave the boys instant hard-ons,” Ladda “ignored them altogether” (197). And after a time, Noon “began to seem vapid and whorish with her relentlessly dollish ways. It was as if, with her sister going to the other side, she’d decided she needed to be twice the woman the rest of us were. For my part, I must have seemed tragic to Noon, with my pale, moonlike face and crispy, uninteresting hair; my indifference to beauty; my thick ankles; my bookishness” (197).

However, despite her low opinion of both women, Miss Mayuree surprises Ladda by helping the family after Papa loses his ear, causing Ladda to realize that “for the first time I did not feel any rancor toward her” (239). And Noon proves herself to be a better friend than Ladda gave her credit for. When Little Jui attempts to kidnap her from school, Noon is the only person to step forward and try to help her, attacking Little Jui’s oversized bodyguard despite her small stature. Thanks to Noon’s intervention, the two girls manage to stop the kidnapping and the event serves as a reconciliation between them: “I wanted to hug Noon then; I wanted to apologize for being cruel the day before. She had surprised me with her bravery” (208). Noon also proves her worth by coming to take the family to the hospital the night Papa loses his ear and staying to console Ladda. For a girl Ladda had once dismissed as vapid, as someone who didn’t “think about anything besides penis,” Noon’s actions come as a surprise (198). Proving herself to be brave, steadfast, and loyal despite Ladda’s dismissive attitude, Noon establishes

herself as a complex, multifaceted character. No longer a one dimensional symbol of male desire or gendered sexual expression, she is someone with a “monomania for boys,” but who is also willing to attack a man in defense of her friend (222).

Shelley Budgeon contends the third wave is itself a politics of difference, and a politics of the self. Choice is celebrated as a political project in itself, where individual women are encouraged to strive for self-definition and self-determination. She writes,

Third wave discourses conceive identity as a complex project, which individuals engage with knowingly, by drawing upon a range of cultural resources. Because these selves are defined through difference, the politics of third wave feminism is constituted through practices that not only allow for the expression of differences, but invite further complication through an acceptance of ambivalence and paradox. (108)

While these attitudes may lead to a form of relativism, or to an uncritical valorization of choice without consideration of the discourses that make choice possible or impossible; ultimately, there is no one right way of being a feminist. Ladda comes to understand this herself as she realizes she had misjudged Noon and judged Miss Mayuree too harshly, and as she comes to understand the frailties of her parents and her aunt. What connects them all isn't their collective experiences as women, but a shared humanity. Life itself is a gamble, she realizes, one where “We each chose the game we thought would yield the most for us and our own. We gambled, gambled selfishly, gambled more than we could afford, the odds staggeringly stacked in somebody else's favor” (222). Love, ultimately, is the biggest gamble with the worst odds: “The rules were convoluted and mystifying and changing all the time. Even Papa's sister must've known this. The house would always win that bastard game, so I decided at that moment to become its

undying enemy forever” (222). In their own way, Ladda realizes, each of the characters in the story is striving for victory, whether victory in love, or success in life, or a combination of both. Whether it’s Papa’s cockfighting or the countless hours Mama put in working for Miss Mayuree for the sake of her family, it’s all “a difference in degree, not a difference in kind” (221). Although the choice Ladda makes is to reject the notion of love, she is able to accept the differences between herself and the other women in the story, and accept the differences between the choices they have made, the goals they have chosen to pursue in life, and how they have self-determined as women.

However, the true turning point in the development of Ladda’s feminist consciousness comes when her mother finally reveals the story of Papa’s late sister. Mama begins her story by telling readers, “Nobody likes to talk about it anymore, not even the ninnies in town,” alerting us that Papa’s sister has effectively been erased from collective memory (182). A developmentally disabled woman who made the mistake of wandering into the teahouses where she was sexually used by the men who frequented them, Papa’s sister is the story’s most Othered character, her existence actively suppressed, silenced by her gender, her sexuality, and her disability. Almost ten years younger than his sister, Papa acted as her caretaker until leaving for the air force. Left alone with indifferent parents, Papa’s sister began to wander the streets, eventually finding her way into one of the teashops where, little by little, the men took advantage of her, making her dance for them, having her crawl around like an animal for their amusement, and eventually, using her for sexual gratification. Big Jui, then still a teenager, acted as the ringleader, convincing Papa’s sister she was his woman and they were going to get married. By the time Papa found out what was going on, it was too late to convince his sister to return home. Horrified by what happened to his sister, Papa quit officer school, abandoned his dreams of

becoming a pilot, and took up cockfighting, the care he'd once shown his sister transferred to his chickens instead. The men eventually tired of Papa's sister, and unwilling to go home, she began sleeping in the park instead, eventually dying of malnutrition. Mama concludes her story explaining, "I suppose she was your aunt, Ladda. I guess that's why I'm telling you all this. I don't know what difference it makes, though. I hadn't thought about that girl for so long, but I've thought about her a lot lately. Can't help but wonder if this cockfighting thing has something to do with her. Even if your father refuses to admit it. Even if nobody likes to remember her now" (186).

Mama's attitude in relating the story is very telling: She never names Papa's sister. She calls her Ladda's aunt only as an afterthought. She even claims not to have thought of her in years. By pretending not to remember her, the townspeople act as if they can inoculate themselves from the horror of aberrant female sexuality. Just as Lizzie was disempowered by her exclusion from the action of the story in "Farangs," Papa's sister is disempowered by the townspeople's refusal to acknowledge her existence. Kimberlé Crenshaw contends that Othered women "are silenced as much by being regulated to the margin of experience as by total exclusion. Tokenistic, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion is at least as disempowering as complete exclusion" (181). Rather than the mock-sultry image of the teenage prostitutes in "At the Café Lovely" who "endure in such silence" the brutal pleasures of their clients, Papa's sister is their diametric opposite: in her early thirties, disabled, and actively desirous of sexual gratification, yet no less silenced (47). Instead of passively acting as the men's source of comfort, Papa's sister eventually began seeking them out on her own, fondling men in the streets in broad daylight, and "wailing outside Big Jui's window every night" (186). Her existence is brought to light once more not to honor her memory or right the injustice she faced, but to

explain Papa's behavior. Even in Mama's telling, the shame she carries does not allow her to be given a name. Instead she becomes an object, a symbol: an event that changed the course of Papa's life, to Mama, yet another instructive example of masculine barbarity. But she is never a person. Mama's story endows Papa's sister with few human characteristics: what she looked like, the places she liked to go, the things she liked to do before her death, or before Big Jui and the teahouses. Mama's story is the closest Ladda will ever get to her aunt in "Cockfighter" and the vision is a truncated one: Papa's sister remains forever victimized, forever the nameless, faceless, fallen woman.

Ladda begins identifying with Papa's sister after the kidnapping attempt, feeling vulnerable for the first time in her life: "I wanted to tell Noon how afraid I'd been when that goon picked me up and carried me across the street. How suffocated. How helpless. How—for the first time in life—truly endangered" (208). Fighting off Little Jui gives Ladda the courage to ask Noon if she knew the story of Papa's sister, and her response only shocks Ladda further: "'Yeah,' she said nonchalantly. 'The Slobbering Slut. That's what the men in the teashops used to call her'" (208). Horrified at the public shaming her father's sister had received, Ladda stops thinking of her as "*Papa's* sister," and instead she becomes "*my* aunt," someone directly related to her, no longer someone else's sister:

Ever since talking to Noon, I wanted to know my aunt as somebody other than the Slobbering Slut. I wanted to know her by another name. Because, by then the moniker had become the substance of my nightmares: spittle and blood and sex and men grunting in back alleys and a lunatic's laughter answering their cries. I thought things might be tolerable if I could know her name. (216-217)

As Big Jui's victim and as Little Jui's potential victim, new kinship bonds are formed between Ladda and her aunt through the generational, shared experience of sexual exploitation and violence. She begins a personal quest to reclaim Papa's sister by giving her a name and bringing her out into the light. Ladda confesses to her father that she had finally heard the story of her aunt. However, Papa claims the story was made up, that he never had a sister. His words leave her feeling embittered: "Papa was lying. Papa was denying his own sister," and create a wedge between father and daughter (217). Whereas before, Ladda had spent time with both parents equally, she now begins ignoring him: "I no longer sought my father's company. After he'd lied about his own sister, I felt as if I were seeing him for the first time in my life, stripped of any daughterly admiration. I wasn't angry with him; I was frightened. I wondered if Papa would deny me, too, if Little Jui had his way with me" (218).

The moment Ladda turns away from her father signals a change in her, a shift toward a more self-aware feminine consciousness. No longer sharing time equally with both parents, Ladda begins to rely exclusively on other women, on Mama, Noon, and even Miss Mayuree. Fighting Little Jui's bodyguards and rejecting Papa for denying his sister signify active forms of resistance located in the spaces of everyday life, while reclaiming her aunt acts as symbolic protest against the mechanisms of society. Chandra Mohanty suggests that "Resistance is encoded in the practices of remembering, and of writing. . . . The very practice of remembering against the grain of 'public' or hegemonic history, of locating the silences and struggle to assert knowledge that is outside the parameters of the dominant, suggests a rethinking of sociality itself" (83). The act of reappropriation, of turning "Papa's sister" into "my aunt," speaking about her openly with Noon, and attempting to discover her name all constitute an effort to change the social order, to create feminine space outside of the margins. Although Little Jui is never

brought to justice and the story ends without revealing the name of Papa's sister, "Cockfighter" doesn't represent a total abdication to the status quo. Rather, the story represents a personal shifting of the boundaries, a single character's quest for self-definition. While not all wrongs are righted by the end, Papa's sister is no longer a hidden topic within the family, the town quits cockfighting, and Little Jui stops harassing Ladda, moving on to "other, more entertaining game" (241). Within her small sphere, Ladda has made an impact, even if indirectly. Ladda's most heroic moment in the story, however, comes at the end, when she helps Ramon escape from Little Jui.

One evening after Papa has come home from the hospital and life has returned to normal for the family, Ladda sees a truck approaching her home. Recognizing it to be the family truck Papa lost while cockfighting, she assumes it is Little Jui and waits alone on the porch, hoping to finally have it out with him. To her surprise, a badly beaten Ramon gets out of the truck. Unable to speak her language, he uses hand gestures to communicate his distress: "for the first time I saw how helpless he actually was—this foreign boy cast into a foreign land to handle other people's chickens—and I wondered what had happened tonight to produce those bruises on his face, where he'd been headed in the Mazda before he saw me" (245). Finally Ladda realizes what Ramon is asking her for, and he speaks for the first time in the entire story: "He wanted to go home. 'Help,' he said loudly in Thai, and for a moment I stared at him dumfounded. . . 'Help,' he said again. 'Me.' He walked to the Mazda. He got in the passenger seat. He sat there for a long time staring at me, waiting. I knew then what I needed to do" (246-247). A character Ladda had ignored for most of the story, it is only via the acknowledgement of his helplessness, of his subjectivity that allows Ramon to finally communicate. Like Papa's sister, Ramon had been dispossessed and silenced, ignored by Ladda and the other townspeople for

being Little Jui's property. Bartered for on the market like a commodity, Ramon had been "procured" in one fell swoop along with four new chickens (176). Although the story does not explicitly state Ramon had been a victim of human trafficking—he lacks the necessary vocabulary to express his condition—the battered state that he appears in, his inability to communicate in Thai (and therefore agree to employment), and his powerlessness to return home are all highly suggestive.

Confronted by a boy whose subject positioning had placed him into the peripheries, the final scene represents a shift in power in Ladda's favor. Against Little Jui, she may be at a disadvantage because of her gender; however, in comparison to Ramon, she enjoys the privileges of citizenship, linguistic fluency, and kinship ties. Her parents' protection, her ability to communicate, and her status as a legal resident give her social standing and a place outside of the margins. Symbolically, it is Ladda who sits in the driver's seat at the end. However, more importantly, the confrontation with Ramon solidifies Ladda's entry into the adult world. After realizing what Ramon needed, Ladda states, "I knew then what I needed to do," placing herself in charge of helping Ramon instead of running for her parents. The final line of the story also emphasizes Ladda's agency: "I stood up and walked toward the Mazda. I got in the driver's seat. I rolled down the window. 'Let's go,' I muttered, popping the truck into gear, and then I was gone" (247). Significantly the story ends with the unexpected phrasing "and then I was gone," rather than "and then we were gone," the entire focus placed on Ladda's choice, and Ladda's actions. She ends the story in control of the family truck, acting against the dominant social order. By pushing against the boundaries of power and social injustice that work to marginalize women and Other vulnerable members of society, Ladda gains agency via struggle and resistance.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Globalization and Globalized Literature

“Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man’s life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self.” (B. R. Ambedkar)

“Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.” (Karl Marx)

A central question that this dissertation asks is how has globalization influenced discussions of identity? Are individuals nothing more than the product of their societies, slaves to the new global cultural economy, or are individual selves created in difference and fragmentation, influenced as much by dissonance as the discourses of society? The answer, inevitably when it comes to globalization, is both. “At its core,” Steger reminds us, “globalization is about shifting forms of human contact” (9). Viewed as a series of uneven social processes working simultaneously to create interconnections between people—economic, political, cultural—globalization simultaneously creates new social connections as it broadens discussions on identity. The works within this dissertation reflect these changes and attempt to address the problems of identity formation. Whether addressing social identities or personal identities, a sense of interconnectedness pervades each of the major works studied in this project.

Further complicating the question of globalization and identification is the contested nature of identity itself. Is identity stable or fixed? Is identity inclusive or exclusive? Can social identities be defined without creating an Other? The notion of identity itself is continually in flux, continually being redefined by each generation, and so, it is understandable that current discussions of identity should include reflections on globalization as well. Globalization itself

has become one of our contemporary cultural touchstones, references to globalization frequently appearing in conjunction with discussions of economics and communications technology. In response to both the ever-evolving question of identity and the social and economic shifts brought about by globalization, theorists have also continued to revise the definition of identity itself. For example, Gurminder K Bhambra and Victoria Margree argue that identity “may be re-theorised as that which is continually produced and reproduced by political projects in the present, and on the basis of a shared vision of the future” (59-60). In other words, not only our understanding of identities in the practical sense, but also our definition of the concept in the general sense is both unfixed, evolving, and highly reliant on contemporary social climates—contemporary social climates which are currently being influenced by global forces. The authors in this dissertation each reflect on identity and on globalization in a variety of ways, each attempting to make sense of the dissonances produced by our rapidly shifting world.

A further question posed in this project is, how have discussions on globalized identities influenced contemporary American literature? To establish a base for answering this question, this dissertation progressively moved from nonfiction to fiction, creating a broad overview of some of the ways global concerns have influenced American literature as a whole. Thematically, the chapters began with a general impressions on how globalization has influenced immigrant identity (and in turn immigrant literature), before turning to specific case studies in the second half of the project, and exploring how global influences have shaped both social and personal identity. The opening chapter, “The Postmodern Immigrant Autobiography in a Transnational Era: Global Influences in Adeline Yen Mah’s *Falling Leaves*,” focused primarily upon the relationship between globalization and literature. By comparing *Falling Leaves* with Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, a few

generalizations could be drawn. Mah's work was far more preoccupied with history and the interplay of cultures than Kingston's, a theme which would carry across through the other works in this dissertation. *Falling Leaves* seemed to be hyper aware of its historical context, most specifically of its place in a *global* historical context as Mah created two parallel stories in her memoir: her own personal story simultaneously interwoven with a history of China's transnational relationships, working to establish both family and nation as cosmopolitan and globally-connected. A combination of folktales and Kingston's abstracted childhood memories, *Woman Warrior* serves as a good example of postmodernism's skepticism of genre and form, a trait other works in this project have also inherited, but lacks the preoccupation with time and place that globalized works of literature share. Whereas *Woman Warrior* seems to exist out of time, mentions of San Francisco or World War II appearing few and far between, *Falling Leaves* intentionally constructs itself as a product of its time.

A similar brand of awareness appears, to varying degrees, in the other works studied in the dissertation. For example, Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* makes conscious efforts to discuss xenophobia in the context of 9/11, while in Junot Díaz's *Drown*, the story titles contain references to dates ("Fiesta, 1980") and places ("Edison, New Jersey"), and the stories themselves allude to historical events (the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic). While both *The Lazarus Project* and *Drown* have elements of social critique in their narratives, their attempts at contextualization are less attributable to critique, as they are a mindful awareness of their works as part of a set of attitudes and concerns brought about through the interconnectivity between nations and culture groups.

History and interconnectivity play a major role in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*. In *Falling Leaves*, these same influences manifested themselves in how the author

presented herself as autobiographical subject, portraying herself as a citizen of the world, rather than as a proud American immigrant, and in the novel's decision to include historical research alongside the personal. However, in *The Lazarus Project*, Hemon's roman a clef detailing the literary aspirations of its writer protagonist, global attitudes manifest themselves in the writing quite differently. Like Mah, Hemon concerns himself with place and history, even attempting to present some quasi-historization, as Mah did, through his use of archival photographs of the real Lazarus Averbuch, and helping to establish his novel's links to the realm of nonfiction and biography. However, *The Lazarus Project* is ultimately a fiction book, and the issues of globalization and identity are filtered through the lens of fiction. Brik's ambivalences about his national identity manifest themselves through the story's divided narrative, which becomes increasingly chaotic as Brik's personal identity unravels, the distinctions between Brik's narrative and Lazarus's growing blurred. In this sense, Hemon uses structural elements to create interconnections.

While Mah's narrative is forward-thinking, implying that China's place in world politics was an inevitability from the port cities' long-standing cosmopolitan ties, Hemon takes a different approach, implying that globalization isn't a new phenomena in the sense that interconnections between people and societies have never existed. In fact, Hemon's deliberate parallels between Brik and Lazarus, between history and society, between the anarchists of the turn of the century and the terrorists today, indicate there are far more similarities than differences in the experiences most immigrants share. The conditions of globalization have merely sped up the processes of migration creating conditions of quickly shifting populations. However, the real differences between immigrants today and in the past, Hemon implies, come in our recognition of globalization, of the connections we share across time and across borders. *The Lazarus*

Project reflects the fact that our vocabularies, and our understanding of those conditions has also changed. Or to put it more simply, the language of globalization, and of large-scale political movements has entered the social consciousness and this also fuels Brik's interest in creating a more authentic immigrant story. Rather than conforming his narrative to the outmoded expectations of the American immigrant novel and its symbols (particularly its imagery which glorifies the new country and erases the connections between migrant and home country), Brik wants to tell a story of immigration filled with ambivalences which heightens, rather than erases connections between migrants.

The increasing importance of social identity-based political movements is also reflected in other works throughout this dissertation, particularly Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*, a work which demonstrates how feminist thought, specifically transnational feminist thought, manifests in the third world through Ladda's struggles with her gender identity. Within *The Lazarus Project*, however, the influences of the various political projects of the oppressed, or what can be broadly thought of as identity politics, can be seen in Brik's desire to give voice to previously silenced minorities like Lazarus, a character who does not directly speak in the novel until the end, after Brik's research has been completed, finally giving him presence. In many ways, the works in this dissertation are all reacting against silence and bringing to light what has been neglected, erased, or suppressed. Mah's autobiography is subtitled *The Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, the marginalization she experienced from within her own family becoming the central motif of the work, while Ladda's discovery of the erasure of her aunt from the family tree serves as a turning point in "Cockfighter."

In *The Lazarus Project*, an American identity isn't substituted for the immigrant's old national identity, nor are the two blended easily together. While Hemon represented these

dissonances through a divided narrative, Junot Díaz utilized point of view to achieve a similar effect. Both *The Lazarus Project* and *Drown* concern themselves with the representation of the margins. As a collection, *Drown* serves as a meditation on identity, on the ways in which globalization has created transnational identities and social collectives, and the ways those identities can be represented through the literary form. Díaz's stories focus on the formation of individual identity within difference, group identity, and the evolution of transnational identities. Díaz replicates the tensions which have given birth to his characters' identities, manipulating the positionality of the reader, and allowing his audience to experience the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion Latino migrants face in a transnational era. While the first two chapters of the dissertation discussed globalization, literature, and identity in more general terms, sketching out the ways in which *Falling Leaves* and *The Lazarus Project* concerned themselves with marginalization, place and history, and social interconnections, *Drown* revisits each of those themes in its own ways. Mah and Hemon were particularly interested in history and the way an inherited past can stand alongside the present; however, Díaz is less concerned about history as he is about place, and how communities and localities can shape identity. Both local and transnational social identities (and how the two intermix) were the focus of this chapter. In the next, the dissertation will explore personal identities, also in the context of the local and global forces (in this case, transnational feminism) which shape discussions on identity.

While previous chapters concentrated on the development of social identities in a global era, focusing in particular on community and sameness, the final chapter turned to the opposite side of the problem: the development of personal identities within the context of difference. In *The Lazarus Project*, Brik's quest was to find a sense of social belonging, a "we" in which he could identify. The negotiation of community played a large role in *Drown*, where characters

were defined by their participation in local neighborhood communities and larger transnational social networks. While a sense of marginality pervaded both works, similarity played an important role in how Brik and Yuniur were able to reconcile their own identity quests. However, identities are formed as much by difference as they are of sameness.

Individual identity is a combination of personal identity (or the perception of being distinct and unique in relation to others), social identity (or the perception of similarities within a group, or differences to members outside of the group), and the relationship that is created between both personal and social identity as individuals incorporate group identities into their sense of self (Melchior 105-106). In *Sightseeing*, the experience of difference plays a key role in how marginalized characters conceive of their identities. The racially mixed narrator of “Farangs” finds himself on the outside of two distinct worlds looking in: neither accepted by foreign tourists nor his fellow locals, he fruitlessly pursues one failed love affair after another. Ladda, the teenage heroine of “Cockfighter” stands on the cusp of young womanhood, negotiating different types of femininity as she attempts to define herself as a person amid constricting intersections of gender and power. While questions of gender play an important thematic role in *Sightseeing*, in this chapter, transnational feminism also functions as an example of how one type of contemporary movement in identity politics has been influenced by globalization. The relationship between globalization and feminist praxis proves to be somewhat complex as both the movement itself and marginalized women outside of the movement have been touched by contemporary feminist thought. The influences of transnational feminism (which in turn has been influenced by globalization) can be seen both in how the characters respond to gender and power inequalities, in addition to how they view their own gender identities. Each of the selected authors in this dissertation grapple in varying degrees with some

of the predominant issues of globalization and its representations of identity, with power and marginality, and with time, space, and history. And, most importantly, each work represents just some of the ways the influences of globalization have manifested themselves in literary texts.

A final question this project asked, which I will explicitly address now, is what is to be gained by delineating texts as globally-influenced works of literature versus postmodernist texts? The simplest answer is because globalized American literature is neither a fad nor a tiny literary niche. A growing body of literature exists which directly reflects upon the conditions of globalization. As one of the major critical discussions of our times, this body of literature is only poised to grow as the critical discussion on globalization further bleeds into popular culture. As the works in this dissertation have shown, not only have globalist attitudes influenced how writers chose to portray their characters—as cosmopolitan versus strictly as American immigrants—but more importantly, these attitudes are displaying them in stylistic choices, in the desire to rewrite traditional immigrant myths for contemporary times, in choices in narration and point of view. Globalized American literature is changing, and being changed, in response to these new social and cultural forces. While not all literary works currently being produced reflect the discourses of globalization in precisely the same ways, or at all, enough trends exist among those that do—a preoccupation with contextualization, with social conditions and marginality—that a genre can be defined which bears further study.

Although this project centered on immigrant writers, interesting work can be done on other marginalized writers, particularly in the relationships between larger social justice movements. How do the works of American-born writers reflect the discourses of transnational feminist movements? Global environmental justice products? International labor movements? Beyond interrelationships created by social justice movements, many other modes of cultural

interconnections can also be studied as well: the transmission of humor and other types of cultural in-jokes across borders via literature and other media. The influences of external forms of popular culture (for example, Japanese horror) on American literature and popular culture? In what ways is the spread of globalization amorphous and not unidirectional? How do the works of other immigrant writers such as Gary Shteyngart, Edwidge Danticat, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Yiyun Li, and Gish Jen also explore the issues of globalization and identity? The literature is rich, expanding, multifaceted, and worthy of further study.

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