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**DIASPORA AND REPRESENTATION: JEWISH ARGENTINE, TURKISH
GERMAN, AND CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS**

A Dissertation in
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by
Luz Angélica Kirschner

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The dissertation of Luz Angélica Kirschner was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Sophia A. McClennen
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Spanish, and Women's Studies
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee

Djelal Kadir
Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature

Bettina Mathes
Associate Professor of German, Science, Technology & Society, and Women's Studies

Véronique M. Fóti
Professor of Philosophy

Caroline D. Eckhardt
Professor of English and Comparative Literature
Head of the Department of Comparative Literature

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

Abstract

Drawing upon the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, this dissertation is born of a concern regarding the prevalence of criticism that presents essentializing analyses of work by minority writers; therefore, the primary aim of this research is to complicate readings of immigrant literatures, particularly those of immigrant women. All too often, literary analyses of minority women writers' works offer reductive and, at times, even inaccurate readings of specific immigrant realities. Such literary criticism posits a continuous and universal female immigrant identity as well as an immutable, inescapable immigrant status. Consequently, analyses of their literary works frequently represent their immigrant experiences as those of perpetual victims trapped at the juncture of an absolute cultural divide between static cultures: that of their culture of origin and of their "guest country." Other essentializing readers suggest that, in spite of the immigrant woman's apparent lack of agency, she has felicitous options: after resolving her ethnic conflicts, which include a formulaic critique of the guest country's culture, these critics presume that the immigrant woman achieves a joyful assimilation or, more accurately, a state of felicitous hybridity in which she consciously chooses the best aspects from each discrete culture and finds fortuitous personal resolution.

In this project, I explore writing by the Jewish Argentine writers Cecilia Absatz (1943-) and Nora Glickman (1944-), the Turkish German writers Seyran Ateş (1963-) and Yadé Kara (1965-), and the Chinese American writers Gish Jen (1955-) and Sigrid Nunez (1951-). By examining their works through a non-binary rather than a binary lens, this research complicates the logics of incommensurability and stereotypical facile hybridity that have prevailed in the literary analysis of narratives of immigrant women.

The readings offered here avoid such dichotomies as inclusion vs. exclusion, majority vs. minority, oppressor vs. oppressed, or the center vs. periphery/margin/fringe/interstice of nations and endeavors, in order to instead enhance the literary criticism of minority writing, to portray minority women as integral members of the nations that many of them have come to view as their home countries. These women writers, as instigators of change who are capable of refashioning the circumstances of their lives, also fashion narratives that present their own critical perspective on their own situation.

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Chapter 1

Preliminaries

“Between two worlds” as an explanatory model does more to assuage anxieties about worlds, nations, and cultures in flux than it does to grasp the cultural innovations that migration engenders.

Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* 5.

Essentialist pictures of culture represent “cultures” as if they were natural givens, entities that existed neatly distinct and separate in the world, entirely independent of our projects of distinguishing them.

Uma Narayan, “Essence of Culture and the Sense of History” 86.¹

Let us accept history as it is, always dirty and entangled, and not run after supposed identities. Even the gods of Olympus, who appear as archetypes of Greek identity, were far from being pure, contaminated as they were by Egyptian and Asiatic divinities.

Ernesto Sabat6, qtd. in Chanady’s “Latin American Imagined Communities and the Postmodern Challenge” xviii.

1.1. Introduction

Too often, literary analyses of the work of minority women writers offer reductive and, at times, inaccurate readings of specific immigrant realities. Such literary criticism posits a continuous and universal female immigrant identity and the immutability of the immigrant status of minority writers. Consequently, critical responses frequently represent the experience of minority women writers in their guest countries as an absolute cultural divide between static cultures: that of their culture of origin and that of their “guest country.” The victimized immigrant woman is presupposed as trapped at the

¹ In *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*.

juncture of this cultural divide. However, some analysts suggest felicitous options for individual immigrant women. After resolving her ethnic conflicts, which entails a formulaic criticism of the guest country's culture, the immigrant woman is presumed to achieve joyful assimilation, or more accurately, a state of "happy hybridity" in which she consciously chooses the best aspects from each discrete culture and finds fortunate personal resolution detached from her ethnic group (Adelson, *The Turkish Turn* 5).

For example, despite some recent innovative readings of works by Jewish Argentine writers (perhaps symptomatically, almost exclusively by Jewish Argentine or other Jewish literary critics), literary criticism has frequently focused either on "the Jews' perception of life in the New World or the perception of Jewish immigrants by the non-Jewish Argentine population" (Lindstrom, "Problems and Possibilities" 123). Unfortunately, this type of criticism has assumed an incommensurable cultural divide between the Latin American Jewish and the non-Jewish Latin American communities within which these writers reside, communities that have existed for many generations. In Germany, the critical response to works by Turkish German women writers tends to gravitate towards the idea of the uniform victim-hood of "the immigrant woman," her status as caught "between two worlds" (backward Turkish and progressive German culture), her inability to make cultural choices or to fashion an adequate existence (Adelson, *The Turkish Turn* 5). Likewise, in the instance of critical responses to Chinese American writing, Chinese American and non-Chinese American critics alike often presuppose that the works by these writers engage with a singular "ethnic malaise" (Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* 396) produced by the unbridgeable duality between the "inscrutable Oriental" culture and that of the democratic U.S. American. However, more

frequently, readings of Chinese American literature within the framework of what Palumbo-Liu calls “model minority discourse” tend to fetishize the “ethnic dilemma” of the characters and to celebrate the heroine’s/hero’s subsequent inner “healing,” constituted by the cheerful assimilation of the immigrant into the dominant culture regardless of the contradictions and tensions that their narratives might expose (Palumbo-Liu 396). This dissertation is born of concern regarding such essentializing analyses of work by minority writers, and, therefore, the primary aim of this research is to present more complex readings of minority literatures with a focus on literary works by minority women.

Stereotypical representations of minority women in literary criticism contribute to “the production of knowledge” about their subjects (Mohanty, “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle” 32). They “control” and “regulate” images of these women and thereby restrict the ways their narratives can be read, understood, and promoted. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty reminds us, stereotypical representations have “material effects” on women’s lives that not only have an impact on the creation of “laws, policies, and educational systems” but also influence “the constitution of selves and subjectivities” (32). In short, these dominant images obscure how minority women see themselves and the way they are seen by the societies within which they live. Such essentializing scholarship also fuels the “objective” perception of dominant cultures of the inherent “inadequacy or underdevelopment of ‘minority’ work” (JanMohammed and Lloyd 8), resulting in the exclusion of the work of minority writers from the national literatures of their guest countries.

Mohanty also correlates stereotypical representations of minority women with sexist discourse. More specifically, she suggests that “victim-oriented” studies sustain a sexist discourse categorizing women as inherently insufficient, ineffective, irrational, naïve, unbalanced, uncritical, nervous, and emotional (29). Mohanty reminds us that such discourses are often deployed to consolidate, and even justify, “particular relations of rule” to the detriment of women (32). Thus, assuming that John Berger is accurate in suggesting that “the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled,” a primary goal of this research is to counter representations of minority women in literary criticism that portray immigrant women as either unhinged between two worlds or as achieving joyful hybridity (278).

Furthermore, accepting Berger’s assertion that “the way we see things is affected by what we know” (278) and assuming that knowledge production is a significant site of political struggle for women, this dissertation seeks to complicate objectifying and reductive literary criticism that precludes the possibility that minority women are complex subjects who engage in political struggle. Such criticism limits the interest value of their narratives to the status of psychological case studies or subjective records of ethnic concerns. This research endeavors to enhance literary criticism by portraying minority women as integral members of the nations many of them have come to view as their home countries, as “agents who make choices,” and as authors whose works present the “critical perspective” they have of “their own situation” (Mohanty, “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle” 29).

1.2. Some Problems of Self-Representation

It is not only mainstream literary criticism that has often posited an incommensurable cultural divide between two worlds and limited the way minority women are represented and perceived. In fact, minority women writers themselves have contributed to the representation of immigrant women as trapped between two worlds. For example, Marjorie Agosín relates that in some Jewish Latin American women's writing there is a "sense of dichotomy" that suggests "the almost impossible task of crossing boundaries, of participating in two worlds and two identities while not feeling fully part of either one" (Introduction, *Taking Root* xxi).

A primary example of a woman writer unconsciously limiting the perception of minority women to just such a dichotomy is acclaimed Turkish German writer Saliha Scheinhardt. In Scheinhardt's effort to advance the cause of Turkish women in the Federal Republic, some of her early works represent Turkish women who are "so regularly victimized by brutal Turkish men" that, at times, her writing has contributed "to increased prejudice" against Turkish minorities among her German readership rather than a more sympathetic understanding of the immigrants' reality in the guest nation (Suhr 94; see also Fischer and McGrowan 12-15; Johnson 267-68). It is even possible that her work has been highly praised by German readers because it fulfills all the essentializing clichés about the hopelessly subordinated Turkish women at the hands of violent Turkish men, thus solidifying German stereotypes of monolithic Turkish culture and practices. The same criticism applies to some of the early fiction by Alev Tekinay, a Turkish woman who views herself as an authentic insider as regards Turkish culture and practices, and thus a truthful representative of Turkish people in Germany. Wishing to push the cause of

Turkish women “in general” in Germany, the characters in Tekinay’s works are often subordinated Turkish women who drift between two discrete and static worlds: the proscriptive and constrictive Turkish Muslim world and the liberal German one (Wierschke 100-28).

Similarly, in their desire to claim America as their new home and the source of a new identity, several Chinese American women writers have perpetuated the idea of the naturalness of the “ethnic split” between two disconnected worlds (Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* 401): the oppressive Eastern culture and the liberating U.S. American culture. In fact, some writers have even blamed Chinese immigrants’ sense of self for their lack of success in the American Promised Land (400). The work of some Chinese American women writers presents Chinese Americans as “the model minority” whose personal “destiny” is to assimilate into democratic mainstream culture and detach from Chinese American “historical and collective memory” in the U.S.A. (396-400). Scholars have additionally commented that, by “reinforcing ties to a Chinese past” in works that place the minority world and experience outside U.S. American history and contexts, some Chinese American women writers’ representations of the Chinese American experience “do not burden the conscience of the Euro-America readers” (Young, *Mules and Dragons* 145). Instead, “[t]hey make the readers feel good” (145) about themselves and their cultures.

1.3. Literary Analysis of Minority Writing: Foundational Criticism

A number of scholars agree that reading practices too often essentialize minority experiences. For instance, Sylvia Wynter observes that literary criticism about minority writing has often taken the “*majority/minority*” divide as the natural order of things and

thus “as a brute fact” (461; original emphasis). Wynter suggests that this literary practice has assumed that the category “majority” has something inherently “majoritarian” about it and that the epithet “minority” is a God-given attribute of the persons thus perceived (461). In other words, as Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd acknowledge, literary criticism of minority writing has often overlooked the fact that minority cultures are not isolated phenomena but are “produced as minorities by the dominant culture” (4).

Along similar lines, Leslie A. Adelson has questioned the usefulness of the “between two worlds” paradigm, which posits timeless, incommensurable, mutually exclusive worlds with the perpetual immigrant dwelling helpless in between (*The Turkish Turn* 5). David Palumbo-Liu’s work has also suggested that, by pathologizing the eternal immigrant as ever split between cultures or celebrating the subsequent heroic “self-healing” (396) (read: assimilation) of the individual, literary criticism has perpetuated stereotypes and intellectual biases. In this way, literary criticism has contributed at times to the exclusion and marginalization of the very minorities whose works critics may have sought to promote (Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* 396). Sophia A. McClennen has also questioned the prevailing binary logic in the literary criticism of works by exile writers, arguing that literary criticism frequently presents exile as either the source of “creative freedom” or the site of “restrictive nostalgia” for the individual, but not as a location that might offer both (2).

The focus of this project is contemporary autobiographical and semiautobiographical writings by second generation Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American women writers: Cecilia Absatz’s *Los años pares*, 1985 (“The Even-Numbered Years”) and Nora Glickman’s *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, 1983

(“One of her Johns and Other Stories”); Seyran Ateş’ *Große Reise ins Feuer: die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin*, 2003 (“Great Trip into the Fire: The Story of a German Turkish Woman”) and Yadé Kara’s *Selam Berlin*, 2003 (“Hello, Berlin”); and Gish Jen’s *Mona in the Promised Land*, 1996 and Sigrid Nunez’s *A Feather on the Breath of God*, 1995. The questions that inform this project are: How can we read these women as part of their larger ethnic group without essentializing them? How can we appreciate their differences without losing their links to others? How can we understand their works without limiting them to dichotomies such as inclusion vs. exclusion, majority vs. minority, oppressor vs. oppressed, center vs. periphery/margin/fringe/interstice? This project suggests that Leslie A. Adelson’s historical, cultural, and affective “touching tales” and Sophia A. McClennen’s “dialectics of exile,” two concepts discussed in more detail later in this chapter, are literary devices that can help to produce more intricate readings of minority women’s writing, lives, and experiences. These literary devices can prevent the propagation of readings about minority women writing that continue to present “the immigrant woman” as only and always perpetually torn between two worlds or achieving “happy hybridity.”

This study focuses on these particular writers because they represent a series of identity traits (such as ethnicity, nationality, and religious identity) that allow an interrogation of both the usefulness and the dangers of identity markers when studying the works of immigrant women. Their narratives are treated as important sites of struggle both against essentializing representations and for affirming self-representations. This approach permits an inquiry into the degree to which their literary works perpetuate the status quo by incorporating traditional stereotyped mainstream expectations about

minority women within guest cultures. This inquiry thus builds from the following questions: To what extent do these writers intervene in and rewrite stereotypical representations of “the immigrant woman”? To what degree do their works resist comfortable hegemonic fantasies that have denied immigrant women their diversity and complexity? To what degree do their productions present alternative ways of seeing minority women?

1.4. Dilemmas of Categorization and Naming

A researcher faces several fundamental dilemmas when dealing with the works of minority women writers. These dilemmas prompt the following cautionary remarks about this project. On the one hand, this project questions reading practices that have tended to essentialize minority women writers and thus contributed to their further marginalization. On the other hand, though this dissertation aims to present each writer as unique as regards her particular experiences as represented in her literary works, the subjects of this research are also examined as Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American minority women writers. However, this research does not present the monumental categories Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American to give the illusion of unity and transparency. Doubtless, such labels cannot do justice to the experiences of the different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups thus defined, let alone the infinitely varied persons who have been grouped, often randomly, and labeled as one or the other. As Sigrid Nunez asserts: “the fewer categories we have to put people in, the better” (qtd. in Alonso Gallo 613).

Not only are the homogeneity and stability of the cultural categories Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese in question, but also the coherence and naturalness of the unifying

national labels: Argentine, German, and U.S. American. Obviously, the essentialist connotations of the terms tend “to erase the reality that the labels or designations that are currently used to demark or individuate particular ‘cultures’ themselves have a historical provenance” (Narajan, “Essence of Culture and the Sense of History” 86). As Ernest Renan asserts, there is nothing natural about nations, but rather: “nations are made by human will” (Gellner qtd. in Thom 23). As such, the consistency of national categories is an artificial construct often achieved by the violent erasure of internal differences among peoples and by brutality exercised on international and national landscapes (McCann and Kim 153). The long list of genocides throughout history demonstrates the aggression deployed in service of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. In short, unifying national labels are “the byproducts of unliberatory discourses” (Shrage 292).

Further, I do not contend that the works and the particular experiences of these six women writers, as they emerge in their literary works, are representative of the experiences or the writings of so-called Jewish Argentine women in Argentina, Turkish German women in the Federal Republic of Germany, or Chinese American women in the U.S.A. Nor am I asserting that there are quintessential Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, or Chinese American “school[s] of writing” (Kolinsky 188). On the contrary, as Eva Kolinsky suggests: “[e]ach writer is an individual with his or her own cultural or cross-cultural identity. Each has a story to tell, characters to introduce, emotions to kindle, reflections to impart” (188). Each author has “a palette of individual experiences, sufferings and hopes” (188). Moreover, I recognize that epithets like “immigrant literature” or “minority writing” are also categorizations that, by “guaranteeing the

visibility of a minority,” simultaneously “render minority literature invisible due to its perceived special nature and interest” (Konzett 47).

This project also deploys sensitive categories such as “the Orient” and “the Occident”; “the East” and “the West.” These labels should not be understood as conveying the idea of incommensurability between the aforementioned multiethnic and multilingual artificial constructs or their inherent cultural stability. Scholarship by Michael Hamilton Morgan, Chris Lowney, Maria Rosa Menocal, and Richard Rubenstein, among others, has shown that, too often, “the West” (Western Europe and the U.S.A.) has suppressed knowledge of the role, transfer, exchange, and interaction of Eastern and non-Western cultures and religions in Western civilization. In the study of Turkish German women writers, “the Orient” refers to what the Eurocentric worldview perceives as “violent Islamic civilization and Muslim communities” and “the Occident”/“the West” to “Christian, secular and humanist Western civilization.” In the research on Chinese American women writers, “the Orient” stands for the region that U.S. American Orientalist discourse has historically designated as “the Orient,” that is to say, “East Asia” (Ling 333). As Jinqi Ling reminds us, it is relevant to remember that for the most part, “South Asians [...] India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh- are not represented” in this U.S. American designation of “the Orient” (Ling 333).

However, although these categories are recognized as problematic, unstable, denigrating, and potentially essentializing, and although it is recognized that they do not depict any inherent quality of the persons labeled, the same categories this research problematizes are necessary in order to provide “a meaningful context” for these writers’ experiences (Aguilar-San Juan 275). That is, these minority women writers need to be

“fixed” as “stable, knowable, nameable” (275) because, as Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald, and Elizabeth Tonkin remind us, classificatory “[a]cts of naming” are “immediately implicated in the most trenchant material and political realities” (2). In fact, essentialist categorization and reductive labeling are used by the mainstream cultures in Argentina, Germany, and the U.S.A. to stereotype the Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese minorities living in their countries and to rationalize the marginalization of those whose very presence fundamentally questions monolithic ideas of a coherent national identity.

Hence, although using such labels might contribute to the perpetuation of limiting taxonomies, this research employs a “strategic use of essentialism” (Spivak 109) and recognizes and respects that these categories matter for the writers in question. That is, the exclusion, ghettoization, physical violence, and death that have often resulted from essentializing stigmatization are painfully real to the people thus categorized. Thus, to ignore these essentialist identities is to undervalue their lived persecution because of these identities. Paraphrasing the Turkish German writer and critic Zafer Şenocak, Tom Cheesman poignantly reminds us that “stereotypes are fully real in people’s minds, however much based on mutual misapprehension, ignorance, fear and, not least, the organized amnesia of national histories” (152).

Thus, while I readily recognize that intervention is an unsafe undertaking that is also inexorably “exclusionary,” I accept that, as Djelal Kadir proposes, “between neglect and intrusion,” it is better to intervene (179). We cannot simply reject socially constructed categories even if they are reductive, homogenizing, and dehumanizing. We cannot merely refrain from exposing oppressive identity markers. As Laurie Shrage suggests: “such refusals perpetuate systems of power that oppress those subsumed under

these categories” (292). In fact, to pretend as if such categories did not exist would amount to perpetuating the posited naturalness of exclusionary and essentializing dominant social orders, the very “system[s] of power and privilege” that work to marginalize them (Shrage 291). Consequently, this research will use categories of racialized ethnic identity in order to contest and disrupt the discourses that marginalize Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American women in their guest countries.

Additionally, one of the problems that minority writers face is readers’ inclination to perceive their literary works “as sociological or anthropological statements” about the minority group (Kim, *Asian American Literature* xv). This tendency has led scholars to demand attention to the aesthetic aspect of such writing. However, the primary method of this study is to put a greater focus on the social content of the writing by the women writers in question. Nonetheless, this emphasis should not be understood as disregard for the aesthetic value of the works. In future scholarly projects I plan to engage with questions of literary experimentation and narrative fragmentation in the works of immigrant women writers in order to determine if there is a direct connection between the writers’ social marginalization and their experimental use of language.

The recognition of the tension created by the dilemma of naming leads me to present other aims of this study. By discussing women minority writers with different ethnic backgrounds and in different guest countries, this research intends to “forge international links between women’s political struggles” (Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” 54). This interdisciplinary project draws from scholarship by, among many others, Marjorie Agosín, Fernando Ainsa, Edna Aizenberg, King-Kok Cheung, Judith Laikin

Elkin, Uki Goñi, Lucía Guerra Cunningham, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Yasemin Karakasoglu, Elaine H. Kim, Amy Ling, Naomi Lindstrom, Helma Lutz, Francine Masiello, Sandra McGee Deutsch, Mary Louise Pratt, Nelly Richard, Stephen A. Sadow, Helmut Scheuer, Dagmar Schultz, Zafer Şenocak, Ella Shohat, Ilan Stavans, Erel Umut, Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, Karin E. Yeşilada, and Annette White-Parks. In the context of contemporary globalization, which includes growing ethnic minority populations and the rapid rise of nationalisms, ethnocentrism, and religious fundamentalisms, this investigation endeavors to contribute to meaningful connections of solidarity and alliances across continental, cultural, religious, linguistic, class, gender, racial, and sexual differences. The history of genocide shows that, lacking meaningful alliances, minority groups can be isolated and eliminated with little deliberation and intervention at any one time.

1.5. Charting the Project

JanMohamed and Lloyd suggest that the study of minority literatures and cultures cannot be carried out without providing the pertinent cultural contexts, as “otherwise, the specifics of the struggles embodied in cultural forms remain invisible” and risk being labeled merely metaphysical matters (10). Consequently, the second of the seven chapters of this dissertation starts with the presentation of “Cultural Contexts.” In order not to forget the particularities of their struggles, I present the ways Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese minorities have been perceived in the guest countries in question: Argentina, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the U.S.A., respectively. This first section will broadly map the trajectories of these ethnic groups in these nations. The second section of this chapter, “Tracing the Presence of Immigrant Women in Mainstream Feminisms,”

acknowledges that middleclass feminist theorizing in the guest countries under study has significantly advanced the understanding of women's marginalization and provided the ground for building a feminist political agenda. However, this chapter also suggests that, perhaps because immigrant women are not perceived as constitutive members of the guest nations, some feminist scholars have missed the opportunity to conceptualize the experience of immigrant women.

The third chapter, "Immigrant Realities through Literature," is also divided into two parts. The first presents the challenges that minority women writers encounter as members of both patriarchal guest cultures and patriarchal immigrant communities struggling for recognition and acceptance. This section also argues that the mainstream perception of these writers as outsiders occupying a historical and cultural non-space in their guest countries has meant that their literary works have been virtually absent from historical and cultural analysis. Additionally, this section explains that, despite the fact that immigrant writers might have been born or might have spent most of their lives in the countries they now understand as their homes, literary criticism of their work has tended to read their work as Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese: as primarily ethnic and thus peripheral. In this way, literary critics have contributed unwittingly to their further marginalization. The second part of this chapter details the conclusions drawn from comparing and contrasting the position of minority women writers in their respective guest countries. This section calls for a complication of the discourses of identity politics when theorizing women's experiences and reading their narratives. Such comparative research promotes collective responsibility and "a multicultural feminist politics of identification, affiliation, and social transformation" that allows us to understand

women's experiences in more complex and multilayered ways (Shohat 9). In addition, this chapter confirms the ongoing relevance of Barbara Smith's definition of the aims of feminism and a feminist way of life as follows:

Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women — as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than a vision of total freedom is not feminist, but merely female self-aggrandizement. (25; original emphasis)

Thus inspired by Mohanty's observation that, when dealing with women's narratives and producing knowledge about their works, "the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant" ("Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle" 34), this research suggests a method of literary criticism that does not perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of immigrant women by placing them between two incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds or by depicting them as cheerfully attaining assimilation into the dominant culture. In order to conceptualize immigrant women writers as writing from somewhere other than between two worlds (or the margins, the periphery, the borders, the fringes, the interstices), or as Seyhan Azade has put it, "outside the Nation," I propose reading the literary works of these authors with the help of what Leslie A. Adelson calls historical, cultural, and affective "touching tales" (*The Turkish Turn* 20). The term refers to instances that hint at points of historical and cultural convergence of nations. Touching tales is a critical concept that facilitates, without denying these writers' exclusion or jeopardizing the specificity of their experience, ethical and political possibilities that allow us to conceptualize immigrants as social actors and historical agents, as integral members of the histories and cultures of their guest nations.

The second concept to be used in this third chapter is McClennen's "dialectics of exile" (29), which suggests that "literature can be best understood as a series of dialectic tensions, as opposed to a series of mutually exclusive binaries" (29). This concept allows us to understand to what degree binaries help or hinder our understanding of immigrant women's writing by admitting that the site the immigrant occupies includes "irresolvable tension[s]" (2), human dilemmas, and ambivalence. In other words, this is a place where the immigrant does not inevitably achieve satisfactory resolution or hopeless entanglement between two incommensurable worlds/cultures.

The fourth chapter, "Cecilia Absatz and Nora Glickman: Reenvisioning Latin American Identity and Reevaluating Mestizaje," is about the Jewish Argentine writers in the title. This chapter explores how Absatz and Glickman rewrite hegemonic versions of Argentine history and reevaluate the role of women within patriarchal structures in the following works: *Los años pares*, 1985 ("The Even-Numbered Years") and *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, 1983 ("One of her Johns and Other Stories"). Additionally, this chapter argues that, within the framework of the Latin American postmodernist discourse of identity, Absatz and Glickman problematize and reevaluate modern ideological views of autochthonous "Latin American identity" that have tended to exclude non-Catholic, non-mestizo, non-criollo elements from their definitions of Latin Americanism.

However, this analysis also argues that Absatz and Glickman offer options for a Latin American identity that include the dialectical tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes that traditionally have emerged in the dialogue among Latin American intellectuals in their attempts to imagine Latin American "Identity's New Frontiers" without falling back on the enigmas of nationalism and essentialism (Ainsa 60). In fact,

this chapter suggests that the tensions and contradictions Absatz's and Glickman's literary works present make their productions profoundly Latin American. Without explicitly claiming to belong to the modernist Latin American tradition, these writers simply inscribe themselves into this tradition by presenting the desire that renowned Latin American writers and intellectuals have expressed for generations: the aspiration to advance the cultural autonomy of the Latin American region in relation to Western influence.

The fifth chapter, "Seyran Ateş and Yadé Kara: Interventions in the Debate Between Orient and Occident," studies the autobiography *Große Reise ins Feuer: Die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin*, 2003 ("Great Trip into the Fire: The Story of a German Turkish Woman") by Seyran Ateş and the novel *Selam Berlin*, 2003 ("Hello, Berlin") by Yadé Kara. This chapter argues that these literary works fundamentally question the analytical paradigm of both the victimized Turkish woman torn between incommensurable Oriental and Occidental worlds and that of the violent Turkish man. Ateş and Kara problematize Western holistic discourses that presuppose unified, continuous, and centered subjects, posit different cultures as incommensurable, and depict individual cultures as discrete and integrated wholes. In the German context, these unifying discourses have been deployed to declare the subjecthood of bicultural people as problematic and, as it were, unthinkable. Jenny B. White explains that, in a large corpus of German writing on the subject, German Turks are categorized as "neither Turkish nor German" or as having "a double or schizophrenic identity" (759). Their multiculturalism has been acknowledged as an insurmountable hurdle that prevents their assimilation and

relegates their Turkish German self to the position of an identity in perpetual crisis, torn between two worlds: traditional Orient and progressive Occident.

This chapter argues that Ateş and Kara present a critique of the unitary and authentic subject by presenting a self that is multiple and capable of dealing with the dialectical tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes emerging between reformist and radical Muslims that polarize Muslim communities in Germany. These writers display shifting identities largely able to cope with the dialectical tensions produced by religious and cultural differences between Turkish and German cultures. Ateş and Kara present a form of subjectivity that, in contemporary European political contexts, calls for the negotiation of the crisis between Orient and Occident. They present a Turkish German subjectivity that averts the Huntingtonian conception of the unavoidable clash between Muslim and Christian civilizations, a notion that intellectuals, politicians, and the media have often propagated and reported as “evident” in the German context (Helicke 175).

The sixth chapter, “Gish Jen and Sigrid Nunez: Approaches to Chinese American Identity,” explores the works *Mona in the Promised Land*, 1996, by Gish Jen, and *A Feather on the Breadth of God*, 1995, by Sigrid Nunez. This chapter argues that these works display an Asian American cultural identity of “multiple consciousness” that complicates the conception of the unitary Western subject (Cheung, *Articulate Silences* 19). Their narratives dismantle the “double consciousness” paradigm of the Asian American subject ever split between the (feminine and exotic) East and the (masculine and rational) West. Instead, these narratives present a shifting subjectivity that is “neither schizophrenic” nor “merely preserving the ancestral culture or one that dissolves into

mainstream culture” (Cheung 19). Their works present the Chinese American immigrant experience as heterogeneous.

In fact, this chapter argues that Jen’s witty work dismantles the idea of cultures as constituting discrete and separate worlds. Nonetheless, this chapter also argues that, by presenting the Changs as “the New Jews,” a celebratory move that suggests the felicitous resolution of the tensions between the U.S. American cultural center and the Chinese American minority (read: between Orient and West), her narrative betrays the precarious position of Chinese Americans in the Promised Land. In the context of globalization and the recent emergence of Asian economic power, acknowledging the Changs as the New American Jews not only perpetuates the notion of Chinese Americans as constituting a homogeneous “model minority” but also unwittingly exposes the unresolved status of these tensions and the potential effects of the anxiety engendered by the lack of resolution on the lives of Asian Americans in the U.S.A.

In contrast, Nunez’ narrative, which also problematizes the notion of cultures and cultural identity as unchanging, presents a diverse view of Chinese American immigrant experiences that U.S. media represent as monolithic. By questioning traditional psychoanalytical practices, her narrative dismantles the convenient assumption of an innate schizophrenic mental landscape for bicultural Asian American immigrants who are naturally incapable of becoming faithful Americans. Nunez likewise exposes the misogynist bias running through the Freudian narrative. In response to a guest nation that fails to appreciate differences among Asian Americans, assuming all Asians belong to a unified Oriental culture, her work calls for engagement with works by Chinese American writers as “the outcomes of specific material histories” (Palumbo-Liu 310).

The seventh chapter presents the conclusions drawn from comparing and contrasting the works of the six writers analyzed in this project. These conclusions provide answers to the questions posed above: To what extent do these writers rewrite the stereotypic representations that immigrant women writers have often sustained about “the immigrant woman”? To what degree do their works resist comfortable hegemonic fantasies that have denied immigrant women their diversity and complexity? To what degree do these writers’ literary works present an alternative way of seeing immigrant women?

Chapter 2

Contextualizing Minorities

Essentialist notions of culture are held by people who occupy a wide range of places on the political spectrum. Progressive Western and Third World subjects, too, sometimes uncritically endorse essentialist notions, of what “Western culture” or a particular “Third World culture” amounts to. Like many ideological notions, the widespread acceptance of essentialist ideas of culture results from how obvious these ideas appear to a great many people.

Uma Narayan, “Essence of Culture and the Sense of History” 90.²

The politeness with which many among us refrain from interpreting and, if one say so, “learning” from other cultures and the self-accusation implicit in this attitude are based on stable and intrinsically homogeneous distinctions between center and periphery, hegemony and subjection, repressor and repressed.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Untenable Positions” 254.

2.1. Cultural Contexts

For the readers who might not be familiar with the trajectory of Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese minorities in Argentina, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the U.S. of America, respectively, this section provides an overview of the presence of these ethnic groups in their guest countries, focusing on the ways these minorities have been perceived since their arrival in their new homelands. In addition, it presents the cultural contexts in which the experiences of Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American diasporas have been embedded. I do this not in order to suggest that this cultural environment has completely determined the members of these minorities, but

² In *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*.

because their literary works do not emerge from a vacuum. As JanMohamed and Lloyd remind us, in the study of minority writing there is the “tendency to repress the current political context of minority cultures” from which these literary works emerge (2). In other words, borrowing Palumbo-Liu’s words from another context, there is the inclination to obscure “the rough grain of history and politics, the very things that have constructed them” as minorities (“The Ethnic Canon” 2).

This analysis follows Jacqui Alexander’s suggestion that in order to start a feminist transnational dialogue that moves beyond restrictive identity politics it is vital “to become fluent in each other’s histories” (qtd. in Mohanty, “Genealogies of Community” 125). In order to promote a multicultural feminism of affiliation, coalition, and engagement, this chapter foregrounds the commitment to one another’s histories and struggles and thus to put Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American women writers in dialogue across cultural, religious, ethnic, and individual differences. The cultural contexts of the women writers at the heart of this study share a common trajectory of hope, disenchantment, pain, and struggle against stereotyping, exoticization, and often the all too material effects of discrimination and disenfranchisement.

2.1.1. Jewish Circumstances in Latin American Lands

The Jewish presence in Latin America dates back to the time of the discovery of the American continent by Admiral Columbus in 1492.³ But, as this project focuses on

³ In her article, “Colonial Origins of Contemporary Anti-Semitism in Latin America,” Judith Leikin Elkin suggests a link between the Reconquista and the Conquest of the New World to explain predominant ideas in Latin American nations about Jews as subversive, guilty of deicide, or possessing magical powers. Elkin explains: “That the origin of these ideas about Jews runs deep in the Latin American mentality was made explicit by Argentine military leaders in 1970s, who drew a historical time line from the period of Spanish rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the imminent and unavoidable Third World War, in which they inculpated the Jews as instigators” (127). Elkin not only elucidates the origin of the anti-Semitic tradition in the New World, but also explains how in order to make sense of “the otherness of the Indians,” Europeans “focused on the supposed descent of the Amerindians from The Tenth Lost Tribe of Israel”

contemporary Jewish Latin American writers whose ancestors arrived in Argentina as part of European migrations from East to West during the nineteenth century, for the purpose of this study, this section broadly considers the Jewish immigration to the Latin American independent republics, and more specifically to Argentina, from the year 1889 to the present day.⁴

In Latin America, from about 1830 onwards, the educated elites of the young Latin American republics saw in positivism, and its rational vision of the world, the theoretical apparatus that would enable them to achieve their intellectual independence from the old vision of the world based on “faith and a hierarchical vision of the world order” (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 26).⁵ Since Latin American governing classes wanted to emulate the progress of European nations in order to advance the cultural and economic growth of the young republics and to create a “new and superior race,” they actively recruited immigrants (27). Yet, in the search for new immigrants who would invigorate their nations, Latin American governing elites expressed a bias towards whiteness. The intellectuals believed that Northern Europeans were racially superior and had an advanced work ethic, and they made explicit their preference for Anglo-Saxon and German immigrants (27). Leading Latin American thinkers believed that white Northern European immigrants would culturally and racially enhance marginal groups like Indians,

(135). Furthermore, though the Spanish Crown protected the Indians -as New Christians- against charges of heresy and thus from the Inquisition, in their confusion about the origin of the Indians, the Franciscans prohibited “the admission of Indians or mestizos to their order in 1539” (135). As Elkin illustrates, Jerónimo de Mendieta concluded that “just as those converted from Judaism were new Christians and thus prevented from joining religious orders, so also should Indians be barred because they too were ‘nuevos en la Fe’” (qtd. in Elkin 136).

⁴ See Alberto Klein’s *Cinco siglos de historia argentina: Crónica de la vida judía y su circunstancia* 15. For Jewish colonial history in Latin America, see Judith Laikin Elkin’s *The Jews of Latin America* 3-22; Avni 19-55.

⁵ Elkin also explains that “as national politics and problems varied, so versions of positivism varied as between Argentina and Mexico, Brazil and Cuba. Nevertheless, varieties of positivism became the dominant philosophy of governing elites in the latter half of the nineteenth century” (26-27).

Blacks, and low class *mestizos* and *criollos* who were perceived as retarding the progress of Latin American nations (27). Other intellectuals, thinking within a Spanish Catholic framework, were reluctant to accept the idea that “other religions might be equally authentic” (30). Prioritizing religion over race, these theorists preferred the “Spaniards and Italians who, as Catholics and Latins, were less likely to disrupt existing institutions” (27).

In Argentina, Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-84), who created the legal basis for Jewish migration, heavily influenced national ideas of immigration.⁶ Statesman Bautista Alberdi believed and propagated the idea that:

The republics of South America are products and living testimony of the actions of Europe in America. ... All that is civilized on our soil is European; America itself is a European discovery. ... In America, everything that is not European is barbarian. (qtd. in Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina* 14)

With Nordic and Anglo-Saxon laborers in mind, Bautista Alberdi was convinced that Argentina would not be able to advance in the modern world as long as the “interior provinces remained unpopulated” (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 30). Immigrants were expected to regenerate (read: whiten) the race but also to settle and civilize the Pampas. Ruling elites additionally saw them as cheap labor for farms and ranches (31). By 1879, Argentine officials indeed hoped that the newcomers would render more lucrative the fertile territories that had been recently acquired as a result of the Indian genocide known as the “Conquest of the Desert.” That infamous military expedition, under the direction of the Minister Julio A. Roca, resulted in the almost total elimination of “native Americans who were resisting the attempts from Buenos Aires to settle the

⁶ Until around 1825, many Argentines “were comfortable with an inquisitorial mindset” (Elkin 30). Only after the xenophobic and cultural exclusivist dictatorship of Juan Manuel José Domingo de Rosas (from 1835 to 1852) came to an end did “the policy of religious and national exclusivism” change (30).

Pampas, which was necessary to establish Argentina's vast cattle industry" (8; see also Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina* 16-22).⁷

In 1889, the Jewish population throughout Latin America amounted to "only a few thousand" (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 47).⁸ Although in Argentina the rhetoric of immigration recognized the need for immigrants in order to face the challenges of modernization, in reality foreigners were viewed with distrust and were often the source of social tensions. For example, Argentine social scientists, overwhelmed with polyglot immigrant crowds, acknowledged that "immigration and urbanization, the potential salvation for a barbarous country, had potential perils as well" (Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina* 23). Additionally, European race discussions that followed the anti-Semitic "scientific" ideas propagated by Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Le Bon had an impact on the racial notions of the more Europeanized of the Latin American republics: Argentina and Chile. In these nations, the European intellectual influence translated into the tendency to regard "Syrian, Jewish, or Asian" immigrants with contempt (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 27). Argentine intellectuals viewed Arabs and Jews in particular as "capable of affecting the country's ethnic mix beyond recognition" (Klich 14). In the meantime, Argentine scientists celebrated "the authority

⁷ Comparing the Indians with the political dissidents during the Dirty War, critics have suggested that the Indians must be viewed as the first "disappeared" people and as "the first victims of the processes, both official and quasi-official, of disappearances" in Argentina (Foster et al. 8). The wars against the Plains Indians during the 1870s were so effective that, as Ilan Stavans explains, "[i]n sociological terms, the long-term effect of this genocide was the same as if there had been no pre-Columbian population" in Argentina (*The Inveterate Dreamer* 50). In the Latin American context, Argentina has been one of the nations that has "most explicitly and systematically sought to negate any indigenous contribution to the constitution of a national being" (Briones 252). Only in 1994 did the National Constitutional Reform recognize "difference" and acknowledge "the ethnic and cultural preexistence of Argentina's indigenous peoples" (qtd. in Briones 248).

⁸ As Elkin elucidates, among them there were Portuguese Sephardim; West European Ashkenazim from Germany, France, Alsace, Lorraine, Switzerland, and England; Spanish-speaking Sephardim from North Africa; and Arabic-speaking Sephardim. And yet, despite their ethnic diversity, the different languages they spoke, and the diverse "social mores and religious practices" they displayed, "all usually were perceived by the majority population simply as Jews" (47).

of science” and with “religious fervor” adopted European and North American civilizing ideas “such as evolution, positivism and psychology” (Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina* 33; see also 68-69). Concurrently, the control of the Catholic Church on civil matters made the life of non-Catholics in Argentine territory difficult. For example, the church refused to provide “for the registration of births, deaths, and marriages in non-Catholic families” (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 34). It was only after the victory of the “secularist forces”⁹ in 1888, an event which made the country seem more hospitable to non-Catholics, that mass immigration of Ashkenazim, Eastern European Jews, who were escaping the pogroms in Russia and Poland was feasible and enacted on a large scale.¹⁰

The first group of about 824 Ashkenazim arrived to work the land in 1889. However, the group was temporarily denied entrance to the country as “harmful elements,” since otherwise they would not have been expelled from their homelands in the first place (54). Soon after, scientific studies on criminology and the press began propagating the notion that “Italians or ‘Russians’” were responsible for bringing “anarchist doctrines with them from the Old World to the New” (Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina* 55). In Argentina, the New World land that, unlike Europe, seemed to promise to put an end to arbitrary expulsion and violence, thousands of Jews sought work tending the land. The Jewish immigrants hoped to show their guest country that they valued “honest agricultural labor” and that, given the chance, they could be good land laborers

⁹ At the same time, often, as Elkin explains, “the forces for modernization, which favored lifting religious restrictions so as to facilitate immigration, won legal decisions that were not always put into practice because of the resistance offered by elements within Argentine society that were still tied morally and mentally to the old regime” (30).

¹⁰ Elkin explains: “Ashkenazim soon outnumbered the West Europeans and Sephardim who had preceded them, stamping Latin American Jewish communities with the East European orientation they retain to this day” (53). Nevertheless, Sephardim equally arrived to Argentina from Turkey and Morocco during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. They also arrived during the 1960’s from Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Salonika.

too (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 109).¹¹ Unfortunately, the impoverished immigrants often encountered harsh conditions in the new land. As a result, many children died, and numerous young women were forced into prostitution.¹² Though historians agree that “prostitution in Argentina was not primarily a Jewish business,” the tragic specter of Eastern European prostitution fostered a damning stereotype that Jewish people were morally and religiously dissolute (Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade* 3). In her work *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman*, Nora Glickman explains: “In spite of the fact that the larger number of foreign-born women arrested in Buenos Aires for scandalous behavior were Spanish, French or Italian rather than Eastern European, the constant reference to Jewish pimps and prostitutes became a sign of religious depravity” (3). Presenting a distorted picture of Jews, conservative politicians preferred to blame the immigrants for the corruption of Argentina’s morality rather than confront “the complex relation of prostitution to Argentine society, politics, and economy” (15).

The settlers’ conditions would improve through the intervention of the Jewish Baron Maurice von Hirsch, who bought lands from the government and private owners in order to support his coreligionists. On September 10, 1891, Hirsch founded the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), an organization that hoped to renovate “the lives of Diaspora Jews” by taking them away from urban centers and attaching them to the land

¹¹ David William Foster, Melissa Fitch Lockhart and Darrel B. Lockhart explain the willingness of urban Jews to work in the field as follows: “The explanation is to be found in the currents of Jewish thought at the turn of the [XIX] century. Three major ideas were developed: Zionism, the creation of a Jewish homeland; the emphasis on the spiritual unity of Jews throughout diaspora; and the return to nature and to the productive labor on the land. Jews, therefore, were eager to renew their spiritual connections with the land as well as to find a place of their own” (22). In “Zionism as an Erotic Revolution,” David Biale offers a more detailed explanation of this ideology that, among others, aimed at “the reclamation of the body” (283).

¹² For this tragic chapter of Jewish women’s immigration and of Jewish stereotyping see also Elkin 96-98.

(Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 107).¹³ The organization founded its first colony, Moisesville, in the very same year. Nevertheless, by 1914, despite government attempts to keep immigrants in the countryside, and even though “most immigrants were rural in origin,” over 70 percent of immigrants had immigrated to the cities (118). The traditional “system of latifundia,” the marginalization of the “rural populace from national life,” and the lack of infrastructure prevented immigrants from settling in countryside (118). The movement of Jewish immigrants into the cities has to be understood in the context of a massive urbanizing movement and not as a consequence of the immigrants’ inherent inability or unwillingness to work the land (118).¹⁴

At the same time, the success of numerous Jewish scientists, artists, and actors, such as Joseph Kessel, Abraham Rosenwasser, Alberto Gerchunoff, and Cesar Tiempo, offers evidence of the opportunities given them in the guest country and the degree of successful integration that these immigrants achieved in the early decades of the twentieth century (59). And yet, integration and the major cultural contributions of the Jewish community to the Argentine nation could not avert the 1919 pogrom called the “Semana Trágica” (*The Jews of Latin America* 98; “Tragic Week”), organized against Catalan and Jewish immigrants in Buenos Aires. Reacting to undesirable effects of immigration that seemed “to be changing Argentine society” for the worse, members of the conservative *Nacionalista* party imagined that the “*rusos*” (98; “Russian Jews”) (by now perceived in the popular imagination as anarchists and Bolsheviks) planned to

¹³ The driving idea of Hirsch’s project was not merely charity. The main force was the desire “to accomplish the moral and physical regeneration of the Jews through agricultural labor” (Elkin 107).

¹⁴ For the history and development of Jewish settlements with the help of the railroad millionaire Baron Maurice von Hirsch (1831-1896), as well as the ideology that supported the creation of the colonies in Argentina, see Judith Laikin Elkin’s chapter “Agricultural Colonies: The Burden of the Dream” in *The Jews of Latin America*.

overthrow “the governments of Argentina and Uruguay” in order to establish dictatorial “rule by workers’ soviets” (98). Though the death toll was never unambiguous, it has been estimated that between 850 and 1,000 people died and that about 3,500 to 5,000 persons were wounded in the tragic event. Of the “182 bodies collected, 150 were of Russian Jews” (99). Further research has revealed that “continuous anti-Semitic propaganda and education sponsored by some Catholic groups,” with priests preaching “on street corners and in churches against anarchist socialism, and Jews,” had been circulating as a form of preparation for the event (99). As for the alleged Bolshevik plot in Argentina or Uruguay, no evidence has ever been found (99).

By World War I, the belief that European immigrants would act as “whiteners” and “enlighteners” of “inferior mestizo races” had lost currency in most modernized Latin American countries (76). As a reaction to accelerated industrialization and labor organization for which immigrants were held responsible, Argentine *criollo* intellectual elites were now beginning to promote the commemoration of “the native races” (76).¹⁵ By 1930, Argentine elites mostly held the view that immigrants were incapable of assimilating. More specifically, they believed that “Jews and other immigrants were not melting directly into the *crisol de razas*, but persisted in holding on to elements of their cultural heritage” (77; “crucible of races”). The years between 1930 and 1943 (which have come to be known as the “infamous decade”) witnessed the proliferation “of

¹⁵ Carl Sollberg explains: “many of the changes wrought by immigration dismayed powerful segments of the population. Foreign-born business-men and professionals controlled ever greater shares of [Argentine economy]. Immigrant urban laborers organized, struck, and became continually more militant. The specter of anarchism, and, some thought, of bloody social revolution, loomed ... After 1905 influential writers [...] were rejecting the positivist and cosmopolitan-oriented ideologies invoked by the elites since 1850s to justify liberal immigration policies. In place of cosmopolitanism, these intellectuals began to formulate nationalist ideologies that lauded traditional creole social and cultural values and stressed the belief that immigrants must adopt these values. Such a vindication of creole culture contrasted sharply with nineteenth-century Argentine and Chilean thought, which has disdained the Spanish and indigenous heritages as barbaric while regarding the immigrant as the very symbol of civilization” (qtd. in Elkin 77).

ultranationalism and anti-Semitism spurred by a conservative crusade to free the fatherland from the ‘evils’ of democracy and cosmopolitanism” (Aizenberg, *The Aleph Weaver* 30). As a consequence of the conservative turn, Argentina closed “its doors to legal immigration” in 1933, the year when Adolf Hitler came to power (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 77). In fact, as Edna Aizenberg reminds us: “The Nazi persecution of the Jews served as an incentive to local racists seeking a solution to Argentina’s own ‘Jewish problem’” (*The Aleph Weaver* 30). As World War II approached, in countries like Uruguay and Brazil, but also elsewhere in the Latin American region, governments’ reception of Jews was “lukewarm at best” (Sheinin and Barr vii). In 1938, the failure of the Évian Conference was received with complaisance among Catholic circles in Argentina (Ben Dror 49). The decision to further restrict immigration was viewed by the influential magazine *Criterio* (“Criteria”) as “Buena política inmigratoria” (49; “Good immigration policy”).

After World War II, Juan Perón saw fit to support the immigration of German “scientists, technicians, engineers, and military instructors” (Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* 83). And though most of these immigrants were not Nazis, it is also true that numerous Nazi war criminals were granted entrance into the country, among them, Gerhard Bohne, Adolf Eichmann, Josef Mengele, Eric Priebke, Josef Schwammberger, and Klaus Barbie. In his work *La auténtica Odessa* (*The Authentic Odessa*), Uki Goñi’s research on “el romance de Argentina con Hitler” (373; “Argentina’s love affair with Hitler”) has proven that, with the support of the Vatican and the Argentine Catholic Church, Perón provided not only German and French Nazi criminals with false documents but also Belgian and Croatian collaborators and neo-Nazis wanting to enter

the country. In the meantime, remaining true to its traditional predilection for Italian immigrants, Argentina once again started to recruit refugees from that country. As Elkin reports, in 1947, a year when the immigration figures numbered 116,095, only 600 Jewish immigrants were allowed to enter the nation (*The Jews of Latin America* 84). Once again, Jewish refugees from Nazism did not fit into any of the desired or correct categories of immigrants in Argentina and most other Catholic Latin American countries. Up to the present day, Jewish communities have remained marginal in the Latin American region.

Today, approximately “half a million Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Jews” live in Latin American countries, but scholarship confirms that the existence of these communities is seldom recognized “outside the region” (Sadow, Introduction xxiii).

Stephen A. Sadow elucidates this further marginalization of Jewish Latin Americans:

Even with the trailblazing work of Robert Weisbrot, Judith Laikin Elkin, Jeffrey Lesser, Naomi Lindstrom, Saúl Sosnowski, and a number of other scholars associated with the Latin American Jewish Studies Association, the American public, including most Jews, is largely unaware of Jewish populations in Brazil and in virtually every Spanish-speaking country of Latin America. Latin American Jews are invisible to all but their relatives in other countries, a few international Jewish organizations, and Israel, which sees them as a source of educated immigrants. (xxiii)

Ilan Stavans has also highlighted the “peripheral” position of the Jewish presence in the region. In “Versions and Perversions of the Holocaust in Latin America,” where he discusses the limited awareness about the Holocaust in the Latin American countries, Stavans likewise states:

Latin Americans know little about the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. They know about Columbus. They know about the arrival to the New Land. But very few [know anything] connected directly to the fact that it is the same year that the Jews were literally thrown out from the Iberian Peninsula. The presence in textbooks all over Latin America of

Crypto-Jews, conversos, marranos -in Hebrew, *anusim*- and other sort of “masked Jews” in the region is also minimal. (see: <http://www.violence.neu.edu/Ilan.Stavans.html>.)¹⁶

Argentina, like the United States, is essentially a nation of immigrants that became home to many Jews. Jewish newcomers came to the region with the intention “to make America” rather than “to make it *in* America,” thus refusing the view of America as a society that had already taken shape (Segal 203; original emphasis). To date, Buenos Aires has the largest Jewish community of Latin America and the fifth largest Jewish community in the world (Foster et al. 23). Nevertheless, “Argentina has tended to subjugate immigrant and ethnically and racial marginal elements to a dominant creole-Hispanic culture” (Foster, *Cultural Diversity* 95).¹⁷ Bernard E. Segal attributes the rapid decline of ethnic plurality in the country to the “Latin character and Catholic faith” of most Argentine immigrants who soon after their arrival would become more completely and more easily, in comparison with Jewish immigrants, loyal Argentines (204).

In contemporary Argentina, the greater part of its Catholic citizens “are substantially more secular than religious” (Foster, Fitch, and Lockhart 17). Nonetheless, the Roman Catholic Church has been a significant force in the social and political formation of the nation. In fact, in the Latin American context, the Argentine Catholic

¹⁶ At the same time, Edna Aizenberg, resenting the Euro-U.S.-centrism of Jewish Studies that neglect Latin American Jewish Studies, correctly remarks that the “field of Holocaust Studies has tended to ignore Latin America, as if Latin America had no role in the immigration politics of that worst of eras, or in the imitation or condemnation of Hitler, or in writing compelling fiction about what took place then, and later, under replays of Nazi fascism.” She adds: “Standard Holocaust handbooks and literary compilations all but overlook anything south of the U.S. border, in a kind of perverse ethnocentrism that has no room in a discipline devoted to chronicling grievous racial hatred” (38). For more information about the Holocaust in Latin America, see Stavans “The Uses of Catastrophe.”

¹⁷ Comparing the Jewish experience in Latin America, Israel, and United States, Gilber W. Merks explains: “In the United States, Jewish identity and national identity are discrete and unrelated. One is no less an American and no more an American. In Israel, Jewish identity and national identity are coterminous; being Jewish confers citizenship. In the Latin American republics, national identity and Jewish identity have been antithetical, contradictory, or problematically related, at least in the eyes of the majority populations” (7). For more comparing and contrasting of Jewish life in the United States and Latin America, see Elkin’s *The Jews of Latin America*, 215-29.

Church remains one of the few established churches in the region. And if it is true that, as religious elites have proclaimed, “To be Argentine is to be Catholic” (Burdick ix),¹⁸ Jews, as non-Catholics, have not been able to “alcanzar la *argentinidad* (Kovadloff, *La nueva ignorancia* 195; original emphases; “achieve Argentineness”) and thus have remained second class citizens.¹⁹ As this section has shown, Argentina has a troubled history of anti-Semitism. And although Latin America has not witnessed the virulence of Nazi anti-Semitism in Argentina, movements like *Nacionalismo* openly celebrate and express their agreement with Nazi ideology. Elkin states that, “impervious to reality-based evidence,” a central belief of Argentine *nacionalismo* remains “the conviction that Judaism is a worldwide conspiracy aimed at destroying Christianity” (*The Jews of Latin America* 252). Along these lines, Sandra McGee Deutsch explains that, “To this day, extreme Anti-Semitism characterizes this movement” that has so deeply influenced Argentine military thought and practice (63).

During the years of the Dirty War in the Southern Cone, some Jews joined bourgeois Argentines in disconnecting themselves from the horrid context they lived in.

¹⁸ In his book, *For God and the Fatherland: Religion and Politics in Argentina*, Michael A. Burdick illustrates that though the Argentine Catholic Church is not a monolithic institution: “the country’s political history and culture cannot be fully understood without assessing its religious heritage and the role Catholic elites have played in public life” (x). He explains: “Throughout the twentieth century, religious elites have upheld the church as the mortal conscience of the nation and therefore have claimed the ethical imperative to effect the proper ordering of society according to normative Catholic values. Repeatedly, the catholic hierarchy has disclaimed any involvement or responsibility for partisan politics; this did not preclude them, however, from being political in the sense of safeguarding the interests and the privileges of the church and its secondary institutions. This primary responsibility for the church has led those elites to resist at times governments whose policies ran counter to the church’s social teachings or that have tried to hinder its influence, while conversely they encouraged, albeit tacitly, governments that have enhanced the church’s position in society” (1).

¹⁹ The Argentine constitution no longer stipulates that the president of the nation has to be a Catholic. However, David William Foster suggests that “it is unlikely that a non-Christian would be elected president anytime soon,” since nationalists would likely understand it as a treason to traditional values (*Buenos Aires* 133). In fact, Judith Laikin Elkin adds: “The record shows that Jews attain official positions during democratic interludes but are removed by right-wing and military governments, as much for their Jewishness as for their politics” (*The Jews in Latin America* 264).

Like many Argentines, these Jews also attempted to rationalize and deny the terror and the disappearances taking place around them. However, critics agree that the Jewish community was excessively affected by the terror: “Jews amounted to 1 percent of the population and about 10 percent of the disappeared” (McGee Deutsch 64-65; see also Foster et al. 20-21; Sheinin 72-73).²⁰ It is well known that the Argentine military *junta* justified brutality against its citizens by parading its role as “savior” of “Western Christian civilization” (Sheinin 74). In fact, scholars agree that “Anti-Semitism was a constant in Argentina’s detention centers and at the core of why the Argentine military tortured and killed” (Sheinin 72). Jewish prisoners were treated with extraordinary brutality by the armed forces. Jews were also often singled out for physical and verbal abuse. The most dramatic case of Jewish persecution during the terror regime was the detention of the journalist Jacobo Timerman.²¹ Bringing back memories of the *Semana Trágica*, his torturers repeatedly questioned the human rights activist on what he knew about an alleged “Israeli plan to invade Patagonia” (Sheinin 72). For the Argentine authoritarian regime that viewed Freud, Marx, and Einstein as enemies of the state and of Christian religion, the fact that Timerman was a Jew “made him a subversive” (Sheinin 73).²² Scholars additionally suggest that the dictatorships in the Southern Cone have paved the way for the current expansion of anti-Semitism “manifested in the conspiracy

²⁰ Foster et al. illustrate: “One of the goals of the military was to rid Argentina of the subversive ideologies of the evil Jewish triumvirate-Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Karl Marx- who had tried to destroy the concept of the family, the concept of time and space, and the concept of society, respectively” (20). For more about the role of anti-Semitism during the Dirty War, see Elkin’s *The Jews in Latin America*, 257-63.

²¹ After his release, Timerman wrote *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* [*Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*]. Another literary work that witnesses the links between the Argentine military ideology and Nazi Anti-Semitism is Alicia Partnoy’s *The Little School*. Partnoy, herself a survivor of the regime, was “a disappeared” for four years.

²² In fact, the Argentine military “imagined a Jewish enemy in a variety of forms. A disproportionate number of subversives were Jews. There was a fantasy among some that Israel, and, more generally, Jews abroad, represented part of an amorphous and dangerous threat to Argentine sovereignty. This menace also supposedly incorporated Amnesty International, the Soviet Union, and French socialists among others” (Sheinin 74).

theory propaganda linking the Jewish presence in Latin America to Zionism and the oppression of the Palestinian people” (Agosín, Introduction xv).²³

On March 17, 1992, the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed. On July 18, 1994, a bomb destroyed the seven-story building of the Ashkenazi Jewish Mutual Aid Society (AMIA) and damaged surrounding schools and houses in downtown Buenos Aires. The explosion almost obliterated one of the most noteworthy Yiddish libraries in the world. Eighty-five people, Jews and non-Jews, died and two hundred and fifty were injured.²⁴ To date both terrorist attacks have remained unresolved. Stephen A. Sadow has written on the anxiety produced by the bombing of AMIA in the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. He states that the fatal aggression “was *the* turning point in the life of most of Argentina’s 220,000 Jews” (“Lamentaciones for the AMIA” 150; original emphasis). And though Argentine Jewish writers and artists have openly protested the destruction of the center and have, nonetheless, remained hopeful about the future, Sadow explains: “The sense of physical and psychological security and the broader participation in national life that had been growing since Argentina’s return to democracy in 1983 were suddenly threatened” (150).²⁵

Despite the fact that individual Jews have become well known in entertainment, publishing, and journalism in Argentina, and some exercise political, economic, and

²³ For the dubious role that Israel and other European nations played during the Argentine Dirty War, see Elkin’s *The Jews in Latin America*, 240-244.

²⁴ Like in the United States, the great majority of Jews who immigrated to Argentina were of Ashkenazi origin. Nevertheless, it is also true that the historiography of the Sephardic Jews in Argentina has often been omitted. Calling for the need to counter the disinterest in the Sephardic tradition, Fabiana Sabina Tolcachier states that though a more self-critical historiography has been developed since the 80s and 90s, there has been a “lack of interest shown [...] by the Ashkenazi-sponsored Jewish networks” that should no longer be taken for granted or explained away on the basis of Sephardic numerical under-representation in the country (218).

²⁵ For varied non-Jewish Argentine reactions to the tragic AMIA event, see Foster et al. 24; Feierstein 159-60; Elkin 1998, 265-68. For a short historical account of AMIA, see Aizenberg’s *Books and Bombs* 1-2. Additionally, in *Books and Bombs*, see 7-13 for further responses to the attack.

cultural power, Argentine Jews remain well aware of “their exposure to political crosscurrents in Argentine and international conflicts played out through local affairs” (Foster, *Buenos Aires* 133; see also Stavans, “Of Rabbis” 178). In Hispano-Catholic Argentina, the idealized country where Jews “did not expect to live as outsiders any longer” (Barr 2), Jewish people and Jewish culture remain vulnerable, like the “peculiar people” this chapter now turns to: the Turkish minority in the Federal Republic of Germany.

2.1.2. A “Peculiar People” in Germany

The history of Turks in Germany does not date as far back as the Jewish settlement in Latin America, but after the conquest of Constantinople and the sieges of Vienna by the Turks, Christian Europe has remained unable to overcome the fear of the Islamic “Turkish Peril” (Adelson, “Coordinates of Orientation” xxi). In the European Western imagination, Turks remain linked with “the memories of the Ottoman threat to Christendom, [and the] fear of Islamic revival” (Robins 64). In 1925, critic Arnold Toynbee wrote: “The Turks, like the Jews, have been, since they made contact with the West, a ‘peculiar people’” (65). Although Turkey has again and again demonstrated its strategic value as “both a ‘barrier’ to Soviet expansion and a ‘bridge’ to the Middle East,” its position vis-à-vis the European community is “a decidedly precarious one” (65). Arguing against the full membership of Turkey in the European Community, German politicians, like Helmut Schmidt, have sometimes depicted Turkey as a country whose unfamiliar culture is rooted in Asia and Africa, not in Europe, and, consequently, as non-European (Adelson, “Opposing Oppositions” 308-09; Şenocak, *War Hitler Araber?* 5).²⁶

²⁶ European leaders also argue that there is something “equivocal in Turkish culture” (Robins 65). They point out that “[t]here appears to be some considerable doubt even among Turks of similar socio-economic

Additionally, in the Federal Republic, laws issued during “Imperial Germany,” such as one restricting residency rights of non-Germans and assuring the temporary residency and cultural exclusion of migrant workers, still have an impact on the perception of Turks (Horrocks and Kolinsky xiv).²⁷ In the context of post-war Germany and the Cold War, Turks arrived as laborers when the government decided to recruit *Gastarbeiter* (“guest workers”) to alleviate labor shortages in specific areas in the rapidly growing post-war economy (Freyer Stowasser 54-55).²⁸ In its attempt to compensate for the scarcity of the work force between 1955 and 1968, the Federal Republic forged intergovernmental contracts with eight Mediterranean countries: Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia.²⁹ Nonetheless, despite the rationale of recruiting workers to alleviate a deficiency in the guest country, the move was “greeted with hostility” by some sectors of German society (Kolinsky 78-79). *Gastarbeiter* “should adapt to the culture of the guest country,” but were not supposed to become permanent residents (Kürsat-Ahlers 114). They were expected to remain “a

background as to the exact nature of the country and its people” (65). Some of the other objectors to Turkish membership, Robins explains, not only draw attention to “Turkey’s Middle-Eastern and Islamic connections,” but also go as far as to enlighten the Europeans about “Turkey’s Asiatic origins” (66).

²⁷ The Nationality Act of 1913 lost currency only after the unification of the country because, as Gerald L. Neuman explains: “The Federal Republic maintained a legal claim to continuity with the predecessor German Empire. It never recognized East Germany as a foreign state and always regarded the citizens of East Germany as sharing a common nationality with West Germans; the 1913 act provided the juridical basis for that common nationality. Since unification, that function of the 1913 act has become obsolete, and the long-delayed recodification of nationality law a feasible project, though a politically divisive one” (qtd. in Adelson, “Coordinates of Orientation” xvii).

²⁸ The history of Germany as a nation is recent. As Diana Forsythe explains: “in Germany when one talks about ‘the past’ (*die Vergangenheit*) one is often referring to the events of the past one hundred years and primarily those of the past fifty years. This is the period that began with Bismarck’s unification of Germany under Prussia in 1871 and took shape with Hitler’s rise to power in 1933” (138). And, as Forsythe observes: “Although in Germany *die Vergangenheit* formally denotes the past in general, the term is frequently used as a euphemism for the Nazi era (1933-45)” (138).

²⁹ In the context of the oil crisis of 1973 and a stagnant economy, the recruitment came unilaterally to an end in November of this same year. “The halt was accompanied by a program of financial incentives designed to motivate the foreign workers to leave Germany. Some did choose to leave though others who had already brought their families to Germany opted to stay” (Freyer Stowasser 55).

mobile labour force outside civic society, economically necessary and socially excluded” (Kolinsky 80); that is to say, outsiders to the German body politic, history, and culture. Currently, Turkish immigrants constitute the largest non-German ethnic immigrant minority in the country.³⁰ In the year 2000, though some protective German politicians remained attached to the idea that “Germany is not a country of immigration” (Horrocks and Kolinsky xiv), the conservative CDU Party (Christian Democratic Union) finally acknowledged that “Germany had become a country of immigrants” (Göktürk 965).³¹ Nevertheless, Kolinsky correctly notes that in reality the Federal Republic had become a country of immigrants actively and despite itself, as it were, the moment it created the following policies: “the policy of admitting asylum seekers and the policy of recruiting foreign labour into the post-war economy” (73).³² As a matter of fact, the 15.3 million immigrants living in the country have turned Germany into “a new diaspora for an eclectic body of displaced people” (Hestermann 329). Yet, restrictive citizenship

³⁰ In relation to the epithet “Turks,” assigned to the guest workers from Turkey in Germany, James Helicke explains: “Differences among ‘Turks’ were apparent in the first generation of the *gastarbeiter*. They represented the general demographic composition of Turkey. Accordingly, ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctions between Turks and Kurds, Sunnis und Alevites revealed themselves most fully in their limited networks of acquaintances outside the workplace.” Helicke adds: “Nonetheless, those in the first generation of *gastarbeiter* also had a good deal in common. Their living arrangements, their lack of family life and institutional support, and their status as undifferentiated ‘Turks’ among Germans initially created a more homogeneous effect” (179).

³¹ In March of 2001, the protective cultural approach in relation to immigrants was once again evident, if only for a short while, in the reactions to the “green card” proposal for foreigners. Göktürk explains: “The government’s proposal to give “green cards” to twenty-five thousand South Asian computer scientists provoked short-lived slogans such as “Kinder statt Inder” (Children not Indians) or “Ausbildung statt Einwanderung” (Education not Migration)” (965). Cultural fears became once again apparent in November of the same year, when Friedrich Mertz coined the controversial concept of “a German *Leitkultur*” (Göktürk 965). This concept triggered a national debate proposing “a ‘leading’ or ‘guiding’ mainstream culture to which all immigrants were expected to adapt” (965).

³² In contradiction of this notion of cultural and social homogeneity, Barbara Freyer Stowasser writes: “German history, because of the nation’s geographic location in the center of Europe in an expanse with few natural boundaries and at the crossroads of ancient continental and transcontinental trade and migration routes, has been a canvas of migration and immigration movements” (52). In relation to contemporary Germany, David Horrocks and Eva Kollinsky lucidly observe: “The self-perception of the Federal Republic as ‘German’ in citizenship and culture no longer reflects its nationally diverse and increasingly multi-cultural reality” (75). (For more work addressing this fiction, see Şen and Goldberg 50-53).

regulations have meant that most Turks, even in second and third generations, still remain non-citizens with limited political rights (342-43; Lutz, “The Limits of European-Ness” 99). Furthermore, as minority anti-discrimination laws have citizenship as a prerequisite, Germany still lacks anti-discrimination laws for these immigrants.³³ Scholars believe that the creation of a minority anti-discrimination law will become relevant when larger numbers of foreigners, making use of the new German citizen law that went into effect on January 1, 2000, become German citizens (Joppke 361).³⁴ Currently, the “Immigration Act,” the new law regulating labor migration and permanent residence, effective January 1, 2005, promises to start the transition that will, eventually, officially turn the Federal Republic of Germany into a land of immigration. Nevertheless, Leslie A. Adelson points out that the “law itself speaks only of *Zuwanderung*, migration ‘to’ rather than ‘into’ Germany” (*The Turkish Turn* 7). Adelson calls for sobriety: “The long-range consequences of these legal changes remain to be seen. The cultural effects of Turkish migration have been in any case far more difficult to assess than debates about governmentally sanctioned and self-imposed ghettoization imply” (7).

³³ The second prerequisite for an anti-discrimination law is “the willingness of the state to assign public status to ethnic and racial groups” (Joppke 361). Nevertheless, as Joppke explains, Germany’s Nazi ideology of ethnicization, “which had driven such categorization to the murderous extreme,” has made this move impossible on the side of the German government. Nevertheless, Joppke highlights the glaring inconsistencies of the unwillingness to recognize people in terms of ethnic and racial groups: “This aversion to ethnic categorization is ironic, because pre-unity Germany’s exclusion of guestworker immigrants from the citizenry had to have exactly this effect, to ‘ethnicize’ its immigrants by keeping them in the separate legal and social status of –nationally divided– ‘foreigners’, in a kind of soft apartheid” (361).

³⁴ With this new law, as Freyer Stowasser suggests, “the transition from an ethnicity-based concept of nationality to a liberal republican one is now well under way” (68). These changes also raise hopes that “the self-perception of many second-, third-, and fourth-generation Turks that so far has remained colored more by alienation than by sense of belonging and integration” will substantially improve as they become active political agents (65) (see also Joppke 364; Benhabib 103). Fatima El-Tayeb also explains that the law of 1999 has “softened the harshest effects of *ius sanguinis* that had meant immediate citizenship for ‘ethnic German’ immigrants, but heredity foreign status for people born in Germany of non-German parents” (79). Nevertheless, she reminds us that ethnicity is still favored over culture. She explains: “While people of non-German ancestry are forced to choose one citizenship, naturalized ethnic Germans can keep the nationality of their country of birth” (79).

Until August 17, 2006, discrimination against a member of an ethnic minority was not regarded as a criminal offense in the Federal Republic. Nonetheless, since August 17, 2006, “das Allgemeine Gleichbehandlungsgesetz-AGG” (“the law of general equality of treatment”) that pledges to offer more protection to foreigners, disabled people, the elderly, homosexuals, and women, has been in effect.³⁵ Passed with significant parliamentary resistance, this law declares that it is no longer legal to require a photograph for job applications or to otherwise attempt to determine or limit the applicant’s age, ethnicity or religion. Additionally, the regulation strives to prevent direct and blatant discrimination against a person because of gender, race, or ethnicity in crucial sectors such as housing and services like education, car rental, restaurant service, and discotheque or bar entrance.³⁶ However, as with the new German citizen law, the ways in which the highly debated and brand-new general antidiscrimination law will affect the lives of foreigners in the Federal Republic remain to be seen.

In Germany, where the legal notion of citizenship based on blood ties –*lex sanguinis*³⁷ is to a large extent still current, scholars of German social movements suggest that, although prior to the country’s reunification a great number of East and West Germans disapproved of xenophobia, the nation’s “relative colonial inexperience with foreign cultures may also have had consequences for the contemporary attitudes of

³⁵ Before the AGG law was in effect, in relation to foreigners in the Federal Republic, “[o]nly murder, [or] incitement to murder or to racial violence [were] classified as criminal offenses before the law” (Kürsat-Ahlers 130).

³⁶ Nonetheless, the unclear law makes an exception in the field of housing. Landlords-ladies with less than fifty rental properties are not forced to follow the law. For the new law of general equality of treatment, see Philipp Mattheis’ “Das neue Gesetz gegen Diskriminierung. Basteln an Gleichheit: Chance oder Last?” “Süddeutsche.de Online” 31 July 2006. 16 Sept. 2006
<<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/jobkarriere/berufstudium/artikel/549/81468/>>.

³⁷ For the origins of this discourse and its vicissitudes, see Fatima El-Tayeb’s “Foreigners, Germans, and German Foreigners: Constructions of National Identity in Early Twentieth Century Germany.”

Germans towards foreigners” (Argun xii).³⁸ Furthermore, some social theorists have proposed that the xenophobic violence after the country’s reunification, which primarily targeted Turks, might be attributed to East Germans’ lack of experience with foreigners and lives spent in a regime based on segregationist practices. Scholars emphasize that attacks on foreigners “began as soon as the first groups of asylum seekers were distributed in the new Länder” (Kolinsky 104).³⁹ In the united Federal Republic, anti-foreign sentiments have also been attributed as the cause of the disappointment of East Germans who perceive themselves as the “losers of unification” in the enlarged new state (Harnisch et al. 13).⁴⁰ Finally, Jenny B. White suggests that, in the process of reorganization of national identity, the hostilities against foreigners might also be understood as a “displacement onto Others” of the “latent hostilities between eastern and western German citizens” (763; see Rätzzel, “Aussiedler and Ausländer” 172).

The most tragic and chilling attacks against non-Germans in reunited Germany have occurred in Mölln, Solingen, Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen.⁴¹ Though it would be naïve to overemphasize the East German factor as a reason for the racist attacks

³⁸ For the legal and social discrimination of people with African ancestry in Imperial Germany and for apartheid laws for African Germans living in Southwest Africa –Namibia-, see Fatima El-Tayeb.

³⁹ “Socialist state policy had proclaimed internationalism, but did not allow migration of any kind. [...] The few foreigners who were admitted were separated from East Germans by over-privilege, if they happened to be foreign diplomats, or by rigid social exclusion (including locking hostels at seven o’clock at night) for contract labour” (Horrocks and Kolinsky, Introduction xv-xvi).

⁴⁰ In fact, after unification, East Germans became “Other” in the eyes of West Germans. After years of living in different economic systems, East Germans had “lost their Germanness” and were thus stereotyped as “inefficient, old-fashioned, unqualified, and authoritarian” (Fachinger 12). Nevertheless, in relation to the wholesale rejection of East Germany in the West, Nora Rätzzel suggests: “all these negative characteristics, however, have to do not with their being ‘German by blood,’ but with their being socialized by the Communist system. East Germans are considered as socially and culturally different, not different by nature” (qtd. in Fachinger 12).

⁴¹ Though the main targets of attacks were Turks, they were not the only victims of this outburst of violence in Germany. In September 1991, in Hoyerswerde, dormitories for non-German workers that housed Yugoslavs, Mozambicans, and Turks were attacked with the approval of bystanders. In August 1992, for a period of about a week, the provisional shelter of Romanian asylum seekers and Vietnamese workers were bombarded with Molotov cocktails (Adelson, “Coordinates of Orientation” xiv). During this period, there were also acts of desecration of synagogues and Jewish graveyards.

on perceived non-Germans, it is relevant to remember that it was in former West German cities, Mölln in Nov. 1992 and Solingen in May 1993, that eight Turkish women and children died as the consequence of arson attacks (see Horrocks and Kolinsky, “Migrants or Citizens?” xvi). (Several other people were injured in both attacks, as well.⁴²)

Xenophobic violence against Turkish Germans led critic and writer Zafer Şenocak (who has articulated his concern that after Judaism, Islam might become a new target for contemporary European self-definition) to explain: “What has become taboo in the case of the Jews because of the Holocaust has become acceptable in the case of the Turks: the wholesale stigmatization of an entire people because of their otherness” (qtd. in Robins 66-7). A great number of Germans openly showed their disapproval of and sorrow for the horrific events in the form of candlelight demonstrations, but still “Turks remained foreigners, at best cocitizens, an essentialized ethnic Other whose plight was addressed as a human rights concern rather than an attack on German residents. The Other, even if a German citizen, is always foreigner” (White 760).

As a matter of fact, despite the substantial attention to “the Turkish problem,” the general lack of knowledge about Turkish culture prompts in most Germans a fixed and monolithic ideal of Turkishness, in which Turks “seem to appear particularly monochrome [and] culturally backward” (Horrocks and Kolinsky, “Migrants or Citizens?” xx). In the Federal Republic, the assumption that all Turks must be Muslims is still common; the possibility that practicing Muslim Turkish immigrants might have diverse approaches or even an ambivalent or critical relationship to Islam remains to a

⁴² For more sources on xenophobic attacks, see Adelson, “Opposing Oppositions” 322.

large extent unrecognized.⁴³ As critic Zafer Şenocak has expressed, there is a tendency to think that “a Turk reads the Koran; he doesn’t go to the opera” (qtd. in Robins 65).

Generally, only Turks who openly embrace a secular lifestyle and assert Western values, that is, who do not “challenge Germany’s ostensibly secular public sphere,” find acceptance among Germans (Pratt Ewing 412).

Along these lines, largely as a result of the construction of Islam as a violent religion and the biased analyses of Muslim societies by prominent “westliche Experten” (Lutz 148; “Western experts”; see also Şenocak, “Feindbild Türkei” and “Ingenieure des Glaubens; Karakasoglu, “Anti-Islamic Discourses in Europe”), there is a tacit understanding that by “immigrant women in the Federal Republic” is meant “irrefutably subordinated Turkish women” who are seen as victims of non-European despotism and Muslim religious fundamentalism. It is true that the Islamic tradition—akin to Catholicism, Judaism, Confucianism—is patriarchal and that Muslim women, like women in other patriarchal cultures and religions, have often not been able to study and have been limited in their options. However, in the Federal Republic, some mainstream German feminists use this fact to represent Turkish women in general as victims of Muslim men who embody a “tödliche Gefahr” (Lennox 488; “deadly threat”) for not only Muslim women, but also German women in general. Attempts to desessentialize the image of Turkish communities and their religious orientations according to region, generation, age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, education, etc. have had little effect on the

⁴³ Yasemin Karakasoglu illuminates: “The term ‘Muslim’ is primarily a cultural attribution that is by no means synonymous with religious practice. The latter, as in most religions, varies enormously. It can find expression in such conscious, public demonstrations of faith as weekly attendance at Friday prayer, fasting during Ramadan or wearing specific garments to cloak parts of the male or female body. Equally, however, is possible to think of oneself as a Muslim without adhering to any such practices. Among Turks in Germany there is also a relatively small group who, under the strong influence of Kemal Atatürk’s secularization policies, have largely turned their backs on Islam or even see themselves as atheists” (158).

German popular discourse about Turkish women and men, and Turkish cultures and communities. Indeed, “Turkish women,” who are represented as very much unlike secular and “liberated” German women, are among the “Lieblingsthemen der Deutsche” (Lutz 148; “Germans’ favorite topics”). Women from Turkey have become research subjects of numerous social studies, Orient studies, and feminist interventions where the general approach is to represent them as hopelessly outside the potentially emancipatory and democratic German cultural space. Paradoxically, though viewed as occupying a cultural non-space in Germany, social workers, feminists, and intellectuals have given much thought to the way in which the Turkish woman could liberate herself and be liberated from her pitiful subordination.

It is true that the “cultural identity of [most] Turks in Germany is built around their religious identity as Muslims” (Kürsat-Ahlers 117). It is likewise accurate that in the frame of an exclusionary European Community and the rise of fundamentalisms worldwide (which not only promote the reassertion of patriarchal structures and values, but also corroborate the practices of some oppressive religious observances), a number of second and third-generation women of Turkish background have been victims of oppressive patriarchal attitudes and behavior (Tan and Waldhoff 137). Occasionally, Turkish German women grow up in families where girls and young women are “viewed [only] in family metaphors such as mothers, sisters or daughters” (Erel 160). In Germany and other countries in Europe, second- and third-generations of women from Turkey sometimes have to confront and negotiate the conservatism of older generations that stick “to the idea of Turkey and Turkish of 30 years ago” (van der Zwaard 149). However, expressing that it would be incorrect to conclude that for these reasons all women in

Germany from Turkish backgrounds are equally and unquestionably subordinated,

Yasemin Karakasoğlu explains that:

the extent to which families adhere to values of [‘honour,’ or ‘honourable behaviour’] in their daily lives depends on the urban or rural living environment and on the social status, educational qualifications of the parents, and the conformist pressures which may emanate from their immediate neighborhood. In Turkey and also in Germany; Turkish families develop their own interpretation of traditional values, not all of them adhering with equal intensity to the prescribed role models and social codes. (“Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 161)

Nonetheless, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, on September 11, 2001, and in Madrid, on March 11, 2004, have significantly reinforced the stigmatization of Islam and Turkish culture as violent in the consciousness of modern European and German societies (Şenocak 15). Turkish (read: Muslims) neighbors are often suspected to be potentially deceitful. Any Muslim could be “the powerful enemy within” (Pratt Ewing 406). Indeed, Hans-Ulrich Wehler has gone so far as to suggest that Germany “does not have a foreigner problem: it has a Turk problem” (224). Turkish Germans have been called “a Muslim diaspora” which “is fundamentally incapable of integration” (224). Islam is regarded “as not compatible with humanism and freedom of the individual” and “as a threat to the achievements of the European age of enlightenment” (Karakasoğlu, “Anti-Islamic Discourses in Europe” 2). Most strikingly, Heike Henderson illustrates that “an analysis of current European discourses shows that the Eastern boundary once occupied by Stalin’s regime has been replaced by the Islam” (228).

Yet, despite the feelings of alienation caused by xenophobia, lack of perspective, and the unspoken social exclusion of Turks in Germany: “the majority [of Turkish Germans have] not opted for fundamentalist solutions. Instead, they have taken the course of re-affirming their more modern Muslim identity and culture in their non-

Muslim country of residency” (Karakasoğlu, “Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 174; see also Tan and Waldhoff 141-42). The great majority of Turkish Germans have not recurred to extremism, though discrimination has often perpetuated low economic and social status and has frequently restricted social advancement, notwithstanding long-term residency. As an alternative, Turkish German representatives and intellectuals have joined the German authorities in search of solutions to violence and prejudice. Hoping that a decrease in ignorance will diminish intolerance, Turkish German intellectuals have engaged “in a dialogue with the German population about the history as well as the current situation of Turks within German society” (Harnisch et al. 221).

Currently there are 3 to 3.2 million Muslims living in Germany, that is, about 4% of the German population.⁴⁴ After Christianity, Islam has become the second largest religion in the Federal Republic. On Nov. 21, 2005, Claudia Roth, the leader of the green party, suggested that “Islam should not only be tolerated as a guest-worker religion but must be recognized as part of our nation” (510). Amid an atmosphere of increased misunderstandings between Muslims and Catholics because of the tendency to associate Islam and Muslims with religious fundamentalism and political extremism, the Chancellor Angela Merkel chaired the Integration Summit in Berlin on July 14, 2006 as an endeavor to facilitate recognition of Germany’s reality as a multicultural country of immigrants. Following this event, in another attempt to come to terms with Germany’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious reality, the first Islam Conference was organized by the German Minister of Interior Affairs, Wolfgang Schäuble, in Berlin. On Sept. 25, 2006, during an interview by Heribert Prantl for the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Schäuble

⁴⁴ Andreas Goldberg reports: “Two thirds of German Muslims are of Turkish origin, and the rest come from countries in the Middle East, South Asia, the Balkans and the former Soviet Union.” He adds: “There are also an estimated 100,000 ethnic German Muslims” (29).

became the first German politician who has openly and unambiguously expressed: “Der Islam ist Teil Deutschlands” (“Islam is a Part of Germany) (see: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel/898/86812/>.) The second Islam Conference took place in Berlin on May 02, 2007. However, though Schäuble has initiated the acknowledgment of Islam in Germany, the minister has also expressed suspicion of Islamic activities by suggesting that “German should be the language of worship in mosques” (Karakasoğlu, “Anti-Islamic Discourse in Europe” 4). The politician has likewise continued “to use discriminatory expressions concerning Muslims and their way of life” (4). The long term effects of these important recent developments remain to be seen.

Concomitantly, in the face of the disenfranchisement of Turkish immigrants in the Federal Republic and the fear of Islamists, the Turkish government and authorities claim to be the “legitimate representative of Turks in Germany” (Şenocak 4).⁴⁵ Ironically, in Turkey, Turkish Germans are often viewed with contempt due to their poor command of Turkish, their Germanized behavior, and their perceived excessive and backward religiosity. Turkish Germans are called *almanyali* [somebody from Germany], a word that “stresses the German, not the Turkish connection” of the people who have spent most of their lives in or were born and raised in Germany (Tan and Waldhoff 152; Kaya 160-61; Zaimoğlu 406; Jahn 449). Still, in Germany, an annoyed Turkish German young man explains: “I can eat like a German, walk like a German and still remain a Turk” (qtd.

⁴⁵ Because of the conflicts between Islamists and secularists in Turkey and because of the large flow of Turkish guest workers into Germany and other European countries, the Turkish government, in “order to prevent opposition forces from exploiting the religious needs of Turkish migrants and mobilizing them against the interests of the Turkish republic,” founded the Diyanet for religious services abroad in 1971 (qtd. in Pratt Ewing 423). For an excellent overview about the problems this organization faces in the form of competing nongovernmental Turkish Muslim groups and organizations that likewise express their concern for the spiritual well-being of diasporic Turkish Germans, see Pratt Ewing’s “Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany.”

in Karakasoglu 162). Like Chinese Americans, the third minority I consider in this project, who are often viewed by U.S. Americans “as too Chinese to be American” and by mainland Chinese as “too American to be Chinese” (Chang, *The Chinese in America* xiii), “peculiar” Turkish Germans have also been treated like strangers by two nations on two accounts: as a people too German to be Turkish, and too Turkish to be German.

2.1.3. Can Chinese Americans be “Real Americans”?

The United States, very much unlike Germany, has come to be celebrated and to celebrate itself as the land of immigrants. Nonetheless, to a large extent, Asian Americans are still perceived either as “inassimilable aliens” (Kim viii) or as a homogeneously successful and well adapted “model minority” (viii).⁴⁶ Chinese Americans trace a long history in the United States that dates back before the Gold Rush years. But, until 1965, harsh immigration laws made the formation of Chinese families in the United States exceedingly difficult. Additionally, since Chinese male laborers were not expected to reproduce, racist laws prohibited marriages between Chinese men and Euro-American women. “Yellow men” were not supposed to have families whose members could become citizens and thus “become a threat to the U.S. as a country for the whites” (Uchida 163).⁴⁷ Concurrently, the imposed celibacy on Chinese men encouraged

⁴⁶ Explaining that there is nothing natural about this category, King-Kok Cheung contends that the self-definition of Asian American emerged in the late 1960s. In her words, the label “grew out of the frustration felt by many American-born citizens of Asian extraction at being treated as perpetual foreigners in the United States, even if their roots in this country go back several generations” (“Re-Viewing” 5). However, the unifying label “Asian American” has also been contested by critics like Lisa Lowe, Oscar Campomanes, Shirley Lim and R. Radhalrishnan, who emphasize the need to take into account “heterogeneity,” “exile,” and “diaspora” when theorizing the “Asian American” experience (2).

⁴⁷ In her work *Negotiating Identities*, Grice points out that it would not be accurate to assume that only the Chinese tradition and culture limited the “migration opportunities for women” (3). The author explains that the “Chinese Exclusion Acts which were in force between 1882 and 1943, for example, banned the entry of certain groups of Chinese immigrants to America (notably women), and several laws were also passed to restricting Chinese Americans’ ability to work in California and other states.” (3). This resolution not only created a society of single Chinese men in the United States; it also supported the emergence of the “split household” with women in China (Almquist 589).

prostitution among the Chinese and the arrival of many Chinese “slave girls” in the United States. This practice unwittingly gave force to the stereotype branding the Chinese as morally inferior and as a danger for U.S. citizenry and morality in general (Young 139).⁴⁸ Indeed, dismantling legends of an all inclusive and democratic American society, Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong argues that “Chinese immigrants constitute a powerful counterdiscourse to the myth of America as a nation open to all immigrants” (“Chinese American Literature” 43).

Amy Ling reminds us that “racial characteristics have an immediate visual impact” (14). In white U.S. America, “race has always played a more significant role in the lives of minorities [...] than class” (14). But as U.S. society still tends to define race in a strictly black-white paradigm and to reduce racism to “the white-Black axis” (Martínez, “Seeing More Than Black and White” no pagination), this binary race model leaves no room for plural and hybrid identities and reduces Asian Americans to “conceptual invisibility” (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 88). Their facial features, differentiating them from the Caucasian norm, have led to what Maxine Hong Kingston sees as the “refusal to understand that an American can look like one of us and does not have to be white” (qtd. in Madsen 41). Or, as Elaine M. Kim has suggested: “the assumed social inferiority and racial otherness of Asian Americans has been constructed around

⁴⁸ Young adds: “Slave girls were bought, kidnapped, or lured into leaving China. In nineteenth century China, many factors impelled a family to sacrifice an unimportant family member, a daughter, so that an important one, a son, might survive. [...] Contrary to popular opinion, prostitution was not honorable among Chinese, but there did not seem to be the same stigma attached to prostitution as there was among Euro-Americans. Apparently prostitutes were generally seen by the Chinese as loyal daughters who obeyed the wishes of the family rather than as ‘fallen women’” (139-40). Additionally, Linda Trinh Vo and Marian Sciachitano explain: “U.S. immigration policies and laws did not allow men to bring their partners or families, although it did permit (at least initially) Asian women who emigrated to be sold into a system of enslaved prostitution in order to pacify the heterosexual Asian male workforce” (“Introduction: Moving Beyond ‘Exotics, Whores, and Nimble Fingers’: Asian American Women in a New Era of Globalization and Resistance” 3; see also Young 84)

the premise that because we are Asians we are and cannot be Americans” (“Such Opposite Creatures” 68; see also Chang Iris 389-403).

In U.S. America, partly because of their physiognomy, there is also a tendency to assume that all Asians are a homogeneous group, members of a monolithic Oriental culture. As Ling comments: “distinctions about Asians among Caucasians are rare” (10). This discourse has meant that Asian American women and men in general have been found utterly Other not only in terms of culture, social life, and geography, but also in terms of sexuality. This racist rhetoric of inferiority has been used to rationalize Asian exclusion and subordination and has declared Asian Americans’ sexual identity as defective, immoral and corrupt. These racist ideas have been used to justify anti-Asian legislation.

In other words, as a result of this devaluation, Asian American sexuality has been constructed in often denigrating ways, seemingly contrasting with Caucasian American sexuality: “Asian men have been cast as both hypermasculine (the ‘Yellow Peril’) and effeminate (the ‘model minority’); Asian women have been rendered both superfeminine (the ‘China Doll’) and castrating (the ‘Dragon Lady’)” (Le Espiritu, “Race, Class, and Gender in Asian America” 136). Jinqi Ling suggests that the stereotype of Chinese male femininity “distinguished Asian Americans from blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans during the political ferment of the 1960s because the latter’s back-talking militancy is typically viewed as a sign of male potency” (315). Thus, in U.S. popular discourse, Asian American men are rendered delicate, docile, womanly, accommodating, and eager to assimilate into mainstream American society. They are also depicted “as

having no sexuality” (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 69).⁴⁹ The Asian American woman, in contrast, modeled on the archetype of “the exotic Oriental Woman,” has been created as either “modest, tittering behind her delicate ivory hand, eyes downcast, always walking 10 steps behind her man, and, best of all, devoted body and soul to serving him” or as being “as desirable as she is dangerous” (Ling, *Between Worlds* 11). Critics have understood these perceptions of Asian sexuality as “symptomatic of the Western prejudice of treating [...] Asia [...] as ‘feminine’ and desirous of accommodating to the needs of the ‘masculine West’” (Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics” 315). Furthermore, Elaine H. Kim has persuasively argued that “Asian woman are only sexual for the same reason that Asian American men are asexual: both exist to define the white man’s virility and the white race’s superiority” (“Such Opposite Creatures” 70; see also Young, *Mules and Dragons* 134-35).

Nonetheless, though Asian American women have been as harshly stereotyped as Asian American men in the history and fiction of the United States, studies of U.S. histories and its Asian American immigrants have neglected Asian immigrant women. Research has largely overlooked the ways Asian women have participated in every stage

⁴⁹ The debate around what some Chinese American scholars have viewed as the “emasculatation” of the Asian American man (Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics” 312; Chin et al. xxi-xlvi; Chin 1-92) has been a source of ongoing controversy in Asian American scholarly and literary circles. The discourse emerged in the early 70s when the critic and writer Frank Chin and the editors of *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* exposed the “emasculatation” of Asian American men as one of the most damaging and denigrating stereotypes about Asians that has materialized in U.S. American racist discourse. The editors compiled a second volume, *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, which was published in 1991. The volumes aim to recognize the manhood of Asian men and create “a form of ethnopoetics that is specifically masculine” (Cheung, “Re-Viewing” 10.) Chin’s epic and masculinist solution to racist representation has been complicated and contested by Asian American feminists. Their protest came after the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), a work that exposed sexist prejudice in her ethnic community. Kingston’s controversial book is still perceived as a “sell out” by some Asian American scholars who feel “betrayed” by her questioning of the patriarchal order of things and for what they view as her contribution to the perpetuation of denigrating stereotypes about Asian American men (Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics” 322).

of American history, even if in reduced numbers. Likewise, the experience of Chinese “paper sons” has been broadly acknowledged, but the history of Chinese “paper daughters,” who resisted “the intersections of racism, patriarchy, and imperialism,” has received only shallow attention (Võ and Sciachitano xi).⁵⁰ Indeed, Asian American males’ experience of “feminization” has been widely acknowledged and systematically contested, often to the detriment of the no less debasing “hyperfeminization of Asian women in American culture” (Cheung, “Re-Viewing” 11).⁵¹

The ongoing controversy about the very tangible social and political “emasculatation” and “feminization” of Asian men in the context of U.S. capitalism and Western racist discourse is a source of anxiety for most Asian American women who wish to articulate their needs and differences in their own terms (Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics” 314). Whenever Asian American women have tried to express their own concerns, they have been accused of “abandoning [their] Asian American brothers in the struggle against racism” (Võ and Sciachitano xx). Yen Le Espiritu succinctly explains the conundrum of Asian American women: “The racist debasement of Asian men makes it difficult for Asian American women to balance the need to expose the problems of male privilege with the desire to unite with men to contest the overreaching racial ideology that confines them both” (“Race, Class, and Gender in Asian America” 137; see also Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 80; Cheung, “Of Men and Men;” Chu).

⁵⁰ Judy Yung explains that “[b]ecause of the Exclusion Laws, many Chinese immigrants were forced to lie and come to the U.S. as “paper sons” (54). “Paper daughters” and “paper sons” were Chinese immigrants who bought papers that testified that they were the children of American citizens (see also Huang 20-26).

⁵¹ At this point, as scholars Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana explain, it is relevant to remark that Asian American intellectuals are questioning these “historical narratives widely circulated since the Asian American movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s” that I am here presenting because of their “implicit assumptions about gender and sexuality.” That is to say, these scholars problematize the “heteronormativity” of these narratives that make room for “only two categories of thinking sex-conjugal heterosexuality and nonconjugal heterosexuality” (Ting qtd. in Wong and Santa Ana 176) and construct other forms of sexuality as abnormal (176).

Simultaneously, Asian American feminists have decried the inability of some Asian American men, who argue that their “manhood” has been denied and questioned for too long, to see and acknowledge the realities of gender subordination. They have suggested that this blindness makes some Asian American men “unable—or unwilling—to view themselves as both oppressed and oppressor” (Le Espiritu 136; see also Almquist 589-99).

Even by the end of the 1960s, anti-Chinese discrimination in the U.S.A. remained significant. Nonetheless, by that time, many Chinese Americans had managed to attain a comfortable life; a large number of American-born Chinese, called ABC’s, understood themselves as primarily Americans with only little knowledge of the “old country” (Chang, *The Chinese in America* 262; Yin 118). Since the immigration reform of 1965, the Hart-Celler Act, the Chinese American minority is one of the fastest growing minorities in the United States. After many generations living in the United States, they are dispersed throughout all possible professions. However, as “[a]ccents and cultural traditions might disappear, but skin tone and the shape of the eyes do not” (390), their physiognomy has been deployed to mark Chinese Americans as “not ‘real’ Americans” (390). Chinese Americans continue to be perceived as “innately and irreversible different” from their fellow Americans.

In our contemporary time, when “China and Japan are once again, due to their financial strength, being invoked as ‘evil empires,’ anti-Chinese sentiments are again gaining momentum” (Shah xvii). Chinese Americans are often viewed as foreigners whose loyalty must constantly be proven (Chan 390). Once again, some Chinese

Americans have been made to feel the fear of possible expulsion and mass persecution.⁵² In fact, the rise to power of the People's Republic of China in a period fearful of "sweeping international forces" (Chang, *The Chinese in America* 394) has given way to incidents against Chinese Americans simply because aggressors cannot "figure out the difference between Chinese Americans and Chinese foreign nationals" despite the fact that many Chinese Americans have been living here for countless generations (395). This state of affairs prompted Iris Chang to suggest that as long as the recognition of Chinese Americans is "linked to the ever-shifting relations between the United States and China rather than on their own particular behavior," the position of Chinese Americans within U.S. American society will remain precarious (397). The future of Chinese Americans as an ethnic minority in the U.S.A. remains as uncertain as the future of Jewish Argentines in Argentina and Turkish Germans in Germany.

2.2. Tracing the Presence of Minority Women in Mainstream Feminisms

Why are there not closer communication networks between migrant women and the rest of the women's movement?

Rosi Braidotti "The Exile, the Nomad and the Migrant" 9

... excluded are those women, who of course live in one's own milieu and are thus in no way distant or invisible, but who fall out of one's own self-definition.

Christina Thürmer-Rohr⁵³

This section studies middle class feminist theory in Latin America, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the United States. It shows that though middle class Latin American, German, and U.S. American feminist theory has provided significant tools for

⁵² See Iris Chang's *The Chinese in America* 389-403.

⁵³ Christine Thürmer-Rohr qtd. in Dorothy J. Rosenberg's "Distant Relations," 145.

developing strategies for making better sense of women's situations and experiences, as well as improving their lives, white middle class feminist literary criticism has sometimes missed the opportunity to theorize the experiences of minority women, or has offered a restricted vision of their experiences.

This dialogue with middle class Latin American feminist literary criticism has been primarily inspired by the work of the Chilean poet, feminist, and human rights activist Marjorie Agosín; and the U.S. Mexican writer and scholar Ilan Stavans. It builds on Agosín's concern that, in Latin America, Jewish women are "made to feel like outsiders or distant neighbors" (*Invisible Dreamer* 191) and on the work of Stavans, who, like Agosín, has called attention to the scant awareness of Jewish presence and cultural contribution in Latin American countries. It is also informed by the work of the feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Using Agosín, Stavans, and Mohanty as a foundation, this section suggests that some mainstream middle class Latin American feminist literary theorizing has unwittingly excluded the experiences of non-Catholic, non-mestizo and non-criollo minority women, thereby contributing to the myth of *an average Latin American woman*.⁵⁴

This section engages with Latinamericanist literary feminist critics such as, among others, Sara Castro-Klarén, Lucía Guerra Cunningham, and Nelly Richard. Since

⁵⁴ I also build on the work by other scholars, including: Jean Franco's article "Apuntes sobre la crítica feminista y la literatura hispanoamericana;" Ignacio Klich and Jeff Lesser and the contributors to their anthology *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America: Images and Realities*; the work by feminist anthropologists Rosario Montoya, Lessie Jo Frazier, and Janise Hurtig and the scholars who contribute to their anthology *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies in Latin America*; the research by Corina Curtis in her book *Construcciones de alteridad: discursos cotidianos sobre la inmigración coreana en Buenos Aires*; the scholarship by Kristin Ruggiero and the contributors to her compilation *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory*; the collection by David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr, *The Jewish Diapora in Latin America*; the work by Doris Sommer and the essayists in the collection *Cultural Agency in the Americas*; and the comparatist project by Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir, the editors of the three volumes *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, 2004.

their works and articles are among the most frequently taught in U.S. academia in courses that engage with Latin American feminism and Latin American women's writing, I am concerned that certain features of their arguments might hinder analysis of the full range of Latin American women's lives. In the cases of Germany and the United States, this section draws on, among others, the work of Helma Lutz, Christina Thürmer-Rohr, Leslie A. Adelson, Pamela Thoma, and Karin Aguilar-San Juan, to argue that by narrowly and superficially addressing the concerns of women who are perceived to occupy non-spaces in the nations' cultures and histories, mainstream feminist theoretical endeavors in these countries have sometimes contributed to the further marginalization of Turkish German and Chinese American immigrant women.

Joining Agosin's and Stavans' visions of a truly diverse Latin American region, this theoretical section hopes to expand the field of feminist studies in Latin America by addressing the need to specifically engage with the concerns and cultural contributions of non-Catholic, non-mestizo and non-criollo minority women in Latin American nations. In the case of the mainstream German and U.S. literary feminisms, this section foregrounds the need to theorize in a more nuanced fashion the experiences and realities of women that disrupt standard ideas of Germanness and U.S. Americanness.

2.2.1. Latin America and the Workings of "Spiritual Empathy"

In her article "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggests that though it would not be accurate to view Western feminism as a "homogeneous" or "singular" movement (52), she recognizes the need for "internal critique of hegemonic 'Western' feminism, and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies" (51). As part of her project of

self-critique, Mohanty expresses her desire to take a closer look at some “*Western feminist*” (52; original emphasis) scholarship and the way that it contributes to the construction of a monolithic “average third world woman” (56). In other words, Mohanty seeks to question Western scholarship that assumes third world women are “an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions” – a position that “implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (55). Mohanty goes on to explain that though she focuses on what she considers “‘Western feminist’ discourse on women in the third world, the critique [she offers] also pertains to third world scholars writing about their own cultures, who employ identical analytical strategies” (52).

Feminist scholars working on Latin America have also been aware of the hegemonic and heterocentric bias that Mohanty exposes. For this reason, the relationship between Latin American feminist scholars and the so-called Western feminist movement has been an ambivalent one. Not only have Latin American critics questioned the feasibility of representing “*la latinoamericana*” (“the Latin American woman”) in the face of the “*la enorme diversidad étnica*” (“the great ethnic diversity”) of Latin American countries (Mora 53), but Latin American feminist scholars have also warned about the dangers of applying theories created in vastly different circumstances from the specific social, political and economic conditions reigning in Latin America. The role of the West in understanding Latin American women, though, has been quite complex. In fact, as Debra A. Castillo explains, Latin American women writers have not simply appropriated European metropolitan discourses. Though they celebrate their European colleagues, they

have always been aware that despite their commonalities, they cannot simply write in “the same way” about “the same thing” due “to the specific conditions that may not be duplicated in Latin America” (Castillo, *Talking Back* xvii). So, while Western feminism has played a role in Latin American debates about gender identities, that role has never been one of simple influence, since, in most cases, Latin American feminists have tried to distance themselves to some degree from Western ways of thinking about the problem of gender identity.

One of the particularly common markers of Latin American feminism has been its interest in theorizing subjectivities that are hybrid and multiple. Theorists like Lucía Guerra Cunningham have problematized the special “mestizo” or “criollo” subject position and its impact on gender relations in Latin America. She presents Latin American men as victims and Latin American women as the victims of colonized victims. Thus, Guerra Cunningham understands Latin American women’s identity as an Other of an Other: “La postulación de un Sujeto masculino y otro femenino se complejiza cuando ese supuesto Sujeto es también Otro colonizado ¿qué significa, por lo tanto, ser un Otro de Otro?” (“Silencios, disidencias y claudicaciones” 50; “The positing of a masculine Subject and a feminine one gets more complicated when this posited Subject is also a colonized Other, thus, what does it mean to be the Other of Other?”).

Feminist theorists like Nelly Richard have also called attention to the exceptional position of women in Latin American countries, that is, to “la doble colonización del sujeto mujer latinoamericana” (“De la literatura de mujeres” 32; “the double colonization of the feminine Latin American subject”): an oppression as Latin American third world

woman and as a woman.⁵⁵ Critic Sara Castro-Klarén expresses the double marginalization of the Latin American woman as follows: “la lucha de la mujer latinoamericana sigue cifrada en su doble negatividad: porque es mujer y porque es mestiza” (“La crítica literaria feminista” 43; “the struggle of the Latin-American woman still continues to be characterized by its double negativity: because she is a woman and because she is mestiza”). The recognition of this distinctive “double otherness of Latin American women writers” (López de Martínez 30) and its “unique character” has also meant that, more recently, in the study of the Latin American women’s literature, “European and Anglo-American feminist critical theories are being sharply rejected because they are recognized as unworkable in the study of ‘mestizo’ or ‘criollo’ literature” (23).

To a certain extent, this attitude can be understood as a response to the self-critical disenchantment produced by the perhaps innocent yet still problematic application, by some feminist Latin American theorists, of First World theory to texts written by Latin American women. Some view such moves as naïve textual analyses that resemble “a privatized and idiosyncratic quest, ungrounded in the issue of women’s historical role and status and unmotivated by any drive to reorganize society” (Lindstrom, “Feminist Criticism and Lusophone Literatures” 46-47).⁵⁶ Most of all, this

⁵⁵ In “Un dialogo entre feministas hispanoamericanas” (“A Dialogue between Hispano-American Feminists”), compiled by Gabriela Mora, the feminine marginalization is also acknowledged as double. Nevertheless, hinting at the critical perception of feminism in Latin American countries, the marginalization is at times also categorized as: “¡Triple!: latinoamericana, mujer, feminista ...” (69; “Triple!: Latin-American, woman, feminist ...”).

⁵⁶ In her article, “Feminist Criticism and Lusophone Literatures: Bibliographic Notes and Considerations,” Naomi Lindstrom intervenes in the debate resulting from the adaptation of the French *écriture féminine* by Hispanic and Lusophone literary critics. She exposes how, in their effort to make women’s experience visible, some feminist critics, inspired by the theories of “Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and others,” that posited “the inscription of the experience of woman’s body into the literary text,” produced a literary criticism of difference that, on the one hand, limited itself “to single out women writers and assert that their

disappointment in French and Anglo-American feminist criticism emerged when it became evident that the discourse of the celebrated theories was not concerned with diversity and difference among women. Third World feminists soon decried the ethnocentric homogenization of women's experiences and perspectives that tended to reflect the limited viewpoints and concerns of select white, middle-class women of North America and Western Europe. Latin American feminists realized that mainstream Western feminism's shortsighted and normative analysis did not leave room to address the problems and material conditions specific to the oppression of black women, poor white women, lesbians, and Third World women. The disenchantment became more apparent when Latin American women realized that they "figured as the 'others' of the predominantly white middle-class Anglo-European feminists who were purporting to speak on behalf of women in general" (Brooksbank Jones 204). Most unfortunately, this hegemonic, one-dimensional engagement with the situation of women in the Third World resulted in the construction of the monolithic and essentializing image of an "average third world woman" (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 56). The discourse of difference unwittingly resulted in a monolithic construction of what difference is, as their idea of difference annihilated difference.

Awareness of this danger of certain feminist discourses reinforced Third World feminist theorists' determination to theorize the specificity of the Latin American female subject and to challenge Anglo-European feminist theorizing that falsely universalizes and totalizes women's experiences and thus silences the voice of many social groups and

work shows features no male writer could have generated" (45). On the other hand, in their effort to celebrate "lo femenino" [the feminine] in the literary texts, some of these critiques also mindlessly assumed, following the Kristevan notion that "feminine writing" is inherently subversive and decentering, that "any writing that can be claimed to reveal its female authorship automatically counts as dissident or healthily subversive work" (45).

delegitimizes the demands of women of color, black peoples, lesbians, etc. As Nelly Richard has written:

la doble colonialización del sujeto mujer latinoamericana refuerza la urgencia de probar modelos de análisis culturales que potencien lo femenino como interrogante, lanzada contra el derecho de las culturas dominantes a falsificar universales. (“De la literatura de mujeres” 32)

[the double marginalization of the Latin American feminine subject stresses the urgency to try out analytical models that give power to the feminine as a question mark, to throw it against the right that dominant cultures have assumed to create false universalisms.]

Thus, in their attempts to theorize Latin American women’s experience and situation, to affirm the emergence of a new feminist subjectivity, and to create “un discurso de resistencia” (Masiello 53; “a discourse of resistance”) that defies patriarchal social hierarchies and masculine discourses, some Latin American feminist literary theorists appropriated the theoretical feminine practice commonly referred to as *écriture féminine* (“feminine/female writing”) for their own ends. This feminine way of writing, defined in the 1970s by French feminist critics Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, argued that women writers typically use nonlinear, fragmented, and fractured language, that is, a language that disrupts the masculine linear logic of order and thus goes beyond the masculine text of reason. Accordingly, these theorists suggested that this feminine practice of writing not only reflected the conflict between women and dominant male discourse, but also female writers’ resistance to that discourse.

Following these critics, some Latin Americanist feminists, such as Francine Masiello, suggested that, in the specific Latin American context, it is also possible to say that women write “desde lo amorfo, lo no nombrado del espacio y del lenguaje;

condensan lo público y lo privado, buscan un nuevo idioma, y así, articulan un nuevo espacio para si mismas” (53; “out of the amorphous, out of what is not spatially named, what is not named in language; collapsing the public and the private, looking for a new language, and, in this way, articulating a new space for themselves”).⁵⁷ Though Masiello’s statement places women, ever again, in the realm of the mysterious and the unknown that patriarchy has traditionally assigned them, some Latin American women writers use this kind of writing to denounce oppression and to expose and defy discourses of power (56). Latin American literary feminists not only acknowledge the urgent need to produce theories that address the double marginalization and material realities that affect Latin American women, but some also recognize the imperative to create a new literary language, “un language híbrido” (56; “a hybrid language”) that allows Latin American women to express themselves within, and subvert, repressive systems.⁵⁸ In fact, Masiello suggests that Latin American writers engaged in surviving under the terror of dictatorships and the tyranny of silence are particularly prone to the use of hybrid literary

⁵⁷ However, in her article “Against Feminist Aesthetics,” Rita Felski has questioned the oppositional “feminist aesthetics” that attempts to define literary forms in gender-specific terms and thus celebrates *écriture féminine* as opposed to masculine language and the similar idea of an autonomous women’s language proposed by Masiello. Hinting at the difficulties that linguistic subversion might create, Felski states: “this vision of an autonomous women’s language and aesthetic also appears to generate intense anxiety; by claiming that women’s writing must be radically *other* than anything which has gone before, feminism sets itself the hopeless task of generating a new aesthetic by means of a negation of the entirely existing cultural and literary traditions” (43; original emphasis). Felski adds: “As a result, an accusation often leveled at women’s writing by feminist critics is that it is not different enough, that it fails to excise all traces of male influence from its language, structures, or themes.” (43). Instead, Felski persuasively suggests that: “Rather than coding language as masculine or feminine and defining forms as gender-specific, a feminist cultural politics should be engaged in questioning the value of such categories in textual analysis and opening up the range and richness of existing cultural traditions as potentially accessible and adaptable to the specific political and aesthetic interests of women” (43).

⁵⁸ Toril Moi also expresses the unfeasibility of attempting to create a new discourse of oppositional female resistance, a new language as it were, since “the subject is always already inserted in the symbolic order,” and thus “[w]e have to accept our position as already inserted into an order that precedes us and from which there is no escape. There is no other space from which we can speak: if we are able to speak at all, it will have to be within the framework of symbolic language” (168-69).

language and Bahktinian double discourse in their literary productions (56-57). She explains:

En el caso de América Latina este discurso doble emerge por dos razones: en primer lugar, a las mujeres aisladas de los centros del poder (*y se enfatiza de manera radical, la distancia entre la mujer y el discurso hegemónico*), les toca inventar un lenguaje híbrido que reconozca las estructuras de poder a la vez que ofrezca una alternativa a las mismas; *la voz de la mujer*, por consiguiente, siempre se desdobra para hacerse sentir. En segundo lugar, esta pluralidad recuerda la violencia trazada en la sociedad civil, de manera que *la identidad femenina* no se limita a un espacio privilegiado único; más bien, se utilizan la pluralidad de los márgenes y las zonas periféricas para redefinir a *la mujer* como actante político y social. (56-57; added emphases)

[In the case of Latin America this double discourse emerges for two reasons: in the first place, women kept away from the centers of power (*and at this point, the distance between the woman and the hegemonic discourse has to be emphasized in a radical way*) are forced to invent a hybrid language that not only recognizes the power structures but that simultaneously aspires to offer an alternative to them; for this reason, *the female voice* always has to unfold to make itself heard. Secondly, this plurality reminds us of the violence exercised within the civil society. For this reason, [Latin American] *female identity* does not limit itself to a unique privileged space; rather, women make use of the plurality of margins and peripheral social spaces in order to redefine *woman* as political and social agent.]

In their theorizing, Latin American women and scholars have been auto-critically reluctant to assume a falsely universalizing and dehistoricizing discourse that erases differences. For this reason, feminist critics have been sensitive to the variables of race, class and, more recently, sexuality in order not to reenact First World feminist exclusionary practices. Still, this literary criticism, as this section has shown so far, by tending to refer to Latin American women *en masse*, as the monolithic “la mujer latinoamericana” (“the Latin American woman”); “la mujer” (“the woman”); the “mestiza”; the “criolla;” Latin American “identidad femenina” (“female identity”); “la voz de la mujer” (“the female’s voice”), paradoxically, tends to ignore differences among

Latin American women's histories, existences, experiences, and cultural influences in order to present Latin American women as a coherent group.

Actually, much has been written about race, class, and gender in the region, although critics like Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have called attention to the fact that the analysis of these variants restricts the range of discussion around women's lives because "[a]ll peoples of the world are not solely constructed by the trinity of race-sex-class" (19). Theorists, like Ella Shohat, have also emphasized the fact that even the addition of culturally constructed sexuality to the three aforementioned variables will not be sufficient in order to theorize women's experiences. These theories highlight that people are not only constituted by "the mantra of race, class, gender and sexuality" alone (40). Simultaneously, it seems that white middle class Latin American theorizing of marginalization has failed to acknowledge that marginalized individuals can occupy more than one position simultaneously. That is, individuals in a given situation are capable of "being empowered on one axis" (for instance, sexuality or class) "but not on another" (such as religious identity, ethnicity or citizenship) (Shohat 4). Regrettably, such analyses tend to overshadow and suppress any form of privilege that a marginalized individual may have (e.g. religious identity, citizenship) and therefore reinforce essentialist binary oppositions that view power relations simply in terms of oppressor/oppressed.

Thus, in the context of middle class Latin American feminist literary theorizing, though critics have attempted to account for differences such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, they are, more often than not, unable to articulate specific privileges such as religious identity or ethnicity. As a result, feminist theorists have returned to a generalized category of the doubly marginalized Latin American woman. Unwittingly,

this undifferentiated discourse of benign pluralism strongly suggests that the degrees of marginalization and oppression, and the effects of civil violence perpetrated against the colonized “Latin American woman” might be somehow analogous for all women in Latin America. It is as if this form of theorizing that views oppression in terms of discrete oppressor/oppressed categories attempted to achieve a form of feminist solidarity based on the “commonality of oppression” of the monolithic Latin American woman by the equally homogeneous Latin American man (Mohanty, “Introduction: Decolonization” 7). Inadvertently, this unsophisticated discursive homogenization of patriarchal oppression, as if women’s relationship to power were exclusively one of victimization, “reinforce[s] binary divisions between men and women” (Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” 64) and the perpetuation of popular cultural stereotypes about violent Latin American men and subordinated Latin American women. By suggesting that women’s struggle is one against a centralized power structure, this feminist theorizing fails to grasp that “[f]eminism is not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existent power structures- and in the process, transforming the very concept of power itself” (Moi 147). In obscuring the complexities that characterize the lives of women in the diverse Latin American countries, societies, and cultures, this discourse consequently creates an average Latin American and Third World woman by promoting the idea of a homogeneous Latin American identity.

Latin American countries are predominantly Catholic. And although Sophia A. McClennen reminds us that in Latin America, like in Spain, “cultural unification was mythical and ideological” (44), the predominance of Catholicism has often led people and scholars- native and non-native- to think of Latin America as having a homogeneous

history and culture. At the same time, from the outside and, from time to time, at local levels as well, Latin American societies are also often perceived and/or perceive themselves as “homogeneously *mestizo*” despite the ethnic and racial multiplicity present in the region (Stavans, *Tropical Synagogues* 1, original emphasis). In fact, it would be possible to suggest that mainstream Latin American history and identity have been to a certain degree based on the exclusion of, indifference to, or scant attention paid to the specific histories, cultural contributions and experiences of minority cultures, e.g., Korean, Japanese, Jewish, African, Native Indian, Hindu, Muslim, etc., of Latin American nations. It is also possible to say, to a certain extent -though to a different degree depending on the specific historical context of each country- that the Latin American region is perceived as strangely homogeneous. Through the substantial lack of interest in, omission of, and silence of the voices of the minorities present in the region, Latin American nations have shown a proclivity, which is by no means limited to this area of the world, to be “intolerant of the particular” (1).

This observation resonates with the objection I present in relation to the theorizing of some feminist Latin American discourses: The tendency to theorize the experiences of Latin American women, in light of their posited double marginalization, as a homogeneous woman, or as an equally monumental “*mestiza*” or “*criolla*.” This exclusionary practice has overshadowed differences experienced by other marginalized Latin American women. Although some mainstream Latin American feminist theorists have taken into consideration the variables of gender, sexuality, class, and race- and even when much attention is paid to the influence of Native Indian and African religions on the cultures and lives of women in the region- feminist analyses have nevertheless

generally ignored the experiences of Latin American women who do not happen to be Catholics, mestizas or criollas (though there is equally room to doubt that Catholic Native Indian or Catholic Black women are meant to be embraced in the theorizing of the monumental Catholic Latin American mestiza or criolla I engage with in this section). In their studies, these scholars have overlooked the religious identities of Latin American ethnic women who do not embrace Catholicism and, apparently, who thus do not fit the predominant conception of the Christian criollo elite or the mestizo race.

In fact, the theorizing of some Latin American feminists has unwittingly remained intellectually faithful to the idea presented in 1930 at an International Conference of American States in Bogotá by the Venezuelan novelist Teresa de la Parra. On this occasion, the writer posited “a spiritual empathy” (Miller, “Latin American Feminism” 10) uniting women of “Catholic and Spanish America” (qtd. in Miller 19). However, this empathy has apparently also resulted in a lack of affinity or “spiritual empathy” with women who do not happen to be Catholic in Spanish America. In other words, the region we have come to understand as Latin America is, and has always been, a complex web of histories, cultures, races, religions, and languages. By centralizing their theorizing around the idea of the double marginalization of the Latin American woman, as woman and as - implicitly Catholic- mestiza or criolla, some mainstream feminist criticism in Latin America has been complicit with the tendency to remain oblivious to the plight of, for example, Jewish, Arab, Japanese, Hindu, Chinese, and Korean immigrant women.⁵⁹ This

⁵⁹ In his book *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, Peter Wade suggests that “mestizaje,” the seemingly all-encompassing and ambiguous ideology of “ethnic homogenization” or “racial mixture,” is “used [by those who endorse the creed of inclusion] to exclude those considered unmixed.” He adds that this is the case “the more so because the ideology has a tacit qualifying clause which ups the price of admission [to the mixed nation] from mere “phenotypical mixture” to cultural *blanquimiento* (“whitening”, in terms of becoming more urban, *more Christian*, more civilized; less rural, less black, less Indian)” (84; emphasis added). In his essay “Race and Nation in Latin America: An Anthropological View,” in *Race and Nation in*

exclusion has meant that the voices and the stories and cultural contexts of these women, who have occupied a historical and cultural non-space in the region, have been largely absent from analyses of mainstream Latin American history and culture.⁶⁰

As research shows, in the Latin American historical and cultural context, “[t]he Jews are part of [the] particular” (Stavans, *Tropical Synagogues* 1). Although in the introduction to the compilation *Memory, Oblivion and Jewish Culture in Latin America*, Marjorie Agosín acknowledges that in the last decade scholars have paid more attention to the presence of Jews in the region (xiii) and nevertheless supports Stavans’ views in relation to the scant and tardy interest in the study of the Jewish contribution to Latin American histories and cultures, she asserts: “*Mestizaje*, or the mixing of races, has been the most outstanding characteristic of the Americas, but even so, the Jewish presence has gone almost unnoticed by historians, and the history of the Jewish presence in Latin America remains largely unwritten” (xiii). Agosín also articulates that Jewish women as women are “forgotten in the annals of History, not included in the national consciousness and made to feel like outsiders or distant neighbors” (*Invisible Dreamer* 191).

Mainstream white middle class Latin American feminist criticism requires revision. In suggesting a form of ethnic nationalism, it has failed to recognize the existence of immigrant minorities perceived as not sharing a common ethnicity based on “blood ties” in the subcontinent.⁶¹ Latin American feminist studies should discuss,

Modern Latin America, Wade discusses in more detail the tension between inclusion and exclusion and “homogeneity and diversity” in “mestizaje” parlance.

⁶⁰ Works by Jewish Latin American women writers and thus their diverse and specific experiences have been made available through several anthologies compiled by Jewish Latin American writers and scholars. Marjorie Agozín, Rita Gardiol, and Ilan Stavans have published anthologies of Latin American Jewish writing that include works by Jewish women writers.

⁶¹ In fact, in his essay “Lexicomania,” Stavans supports this notion of identity based on some form of “biology” (126). In relation to the Spanish legacy in the subcontinent, the critic suggests: “‘Purity of blood’ is at the heart of Hispanic civilization, inspiring the *Reconquista*, drawing Jews and Moslems out

engage, analyze, and theorize the richness of women's experiences while also attending to the specific realities of women in the region. This practice would significantly expand the scope and quality of scholarship on women in Latin America. In any case, it is safe to say that these ethnocentric exclusionary practices that have failed to grasp the magnitude and complexity of women's lives in the region in ways that can no longer be ignored or made invisible render some mainstream Latin American mainstream feminist literary theorizing incomplete.

2.2.2. A Homogeneous German Nation, "with Guests"

In Europe, feminist research on the social participation of immigrant women in the labor market and the political domain confirm their exclusion (see Lutz, "The Limits of European-Ness"; Kofman and Sales, "Towards Fortress Europe"). In the citizenship debates their status is yet to be considered since deliberations "on citizenship tend to exclude migrant women by focusing one-dimensionally on migrants, generally defined as male" (163; see Andall; Kofman and Sales). As a matter of fact, in united Europe, amid the proclamation of internationalism and the rise of xenophobic, racist, and neo-fascist ideologies, the scarce engagement with the specific situation of minority women in European countries has led critic Rosi Braidotti to ask: "How aware are European feminists of the realities of migrations in our continent?" Braidotti's interrogations encourage self-reflection:

Is it not the case that many feminists share with the dominant culture a basic resistance to the simple idea that internationalization begins at home? How sensitive are feminists in the host countries to those migrant

from the Iberian peninsula, articulating the mandate for religious and ethnic cleansing for the Inquisition as a policing institution. [...] To this day, purity of blood, somewhat attenuated as a theory, but still pervasive as a definition of turf, underlies domestic and social relations in the Spanish-speaking orbit" (126).

women whose rights of citizenship are vastly inferior and whose intellectual potential is often ignored? (Braidotti 9)⁶²

And indeed, in the heterogeneous and tension ridden “new” Germany, Magda Mueller hints at the long standing tradition of taking superficial notice of newcomers to the society when she asserts: “German feminists have done very little to come to terms with the tensions between asylum-seeking women, ethnic German women and the female citizens in the united Germany” (277).⁶³ In her article “Distant Relations,” tracing the history of postwar second wave German feminism during the last twenty years, Dorothy J. Rosenberg suggests that the exclusionary attitudes and tendencies Braidotti warns us against are a reality within the conservative West German women’s movement.⁶⁴

Rosenberg lucidly exposes the limitations of German feminism:

The reduction of a women’s liberation movement to a women’s movement; the reduction of a women’s movement to a women’s project movement; ... the reduction of cooperation to those who are the same,

⁶² In “The Exile, the Nomad, and the Migrant,” Braidotti expresses her concern for the precarious position of immigrant women in Europe and warns European feminists about the celebratory rhetoric of Internationalism and new utopias. She hints at the unresolved relation of European women to the nation-state and at the complex tasks feminist movements in the continent face when she asks: “Are women sufficiently present as citizens in our respective countries to start thinking seriously in an international perspective? Is Internationalism not a convenient pre-text, masking our inability to come to terms with national politics and local realities? Does the overemphasis on International or ‘cross-cultural’ perspectives not come to fill the lack of internal national dynamics that marks many women’s movements in Europe today?” (7). In “A Continent in Transition,” Claire Duchén expresses the same concerns, asking, in turn: “Is Europe a white, Judeo-Christian culture, viewing itself explicitly or implicitly as superior in every way to other cultures and continents? If this is the case, what part do women play –is Europe conceptually a masculine concept?” (1). Duchén further warns that “The EC leaves the public/private divide relatively untouched. [...] Research suggests that Community law does little to modify patterns of earnings and sex segregation; [...] without positive steps, both to break stereotypes and to take account of the different, real experiences of women at work and in the family, equality of opportunity is a fiction” (3).

⁶³ It is relevant to mention that the integration of ethnic Germans into German society has proven to be more difficult than initially predicted. Some ethnic immigrants perceive modern postwar Germany as alien and unfamiliar. And though many have successfully integrated into German society, a large number of Germans resent ethnic Germans both for their ability to return to their homeland and for the rigid and archaic notions of Germanness and womanhood some of them bring back with them to the fast changing German society (see Mueller 284).

⁶⁴ In *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, Gisela Kaplan, beginning with the German unification in 1871, presents an excellent historical analysis of feminism in the Germanic countries, where due to “the relentless development of a strong economy, and in creating social, economic and political stability that would permit unimpeded growth” (103), there has been “[a] lack of commitment to the ideal of equality” (124) between women and men.

who think the same, look the same, talk the same and live the same; ... Excluded from the critique of patriarchy are those forms of dominance which are not sexist, but racist or ethnically based and thus do not affect white women. [...] What has also disappeared is the overreaching goal that feminist politics should contribute to the liberation of all women. (Christina Thürmer-Rohr qtd. in Rosenberg 145)

On the whole, Rosenberg corroborates Mueller's observation by highlighting how this lack of sensitivity on the side of the homogeneous German women's movement "has seriously handicapped western German feminists' ability to cooperate or even communicate with eastern German, immigrant, Jewish, Afro-German women, or any others whose experience differs significantly from their own" (145).⁶⁵ It seems that when it comes to their attitude towards immigrant women, mainstream German feminists remain stuck in what antiracist feminist Sabine Bröck has called: "Germany's obsessive fiction of being a homogeneous country, with guests" (qtd. in Lennox 482). Remaining true to the no longer tenable Bismarckian notion of ethnic homogeneity, the conservative German feminist movement has signaled that "We are not a movement open to immigration" (Schultz qtd. in Rosenberg 150). Instead, as Leslie A. Adelson has suggested, mainstream German feminist theorizing has largely remained compulsively attached to a binary view of gender "with Woman as gen(d)eric victim" ("The Price of Feminism" 314).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Simultaneously, it is relevant to note that the inability of Western German feminists to cooperate and communicate with other women is not exclusively limited to interaction with immigrant women. After German unification, the conservative faction seemed to remain oblivious to the fact that feminisms develop differently in different contexts and approached Eastern German women with a sense of superiority that soon led to disappointment, rejection, and withdrawal (Rosenberg 146). For more information about the development of the feminist movement in united Germany, see Julia Teschner.

⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it is important to remark that, like women of color in the United States, Afro-German women have confronted mainstream German feminism and demanded that feminists "recognize women's differences" (Lennox 482). They have also made "common cause with immigrant and Jewish women" and required that "white Christian feminists confront feminism's exclusionary practices" (482). Additionally, Jewish women, following the example of Afro-German women, also "began to organize in their own behalf" (483).

Antiracist feminists, belonging to an emergent feminist movement in Germany, have attempted to make members of the conservative women's movement aware of the "privileges of their actual social location" to little avail (484).⁶⁷ Struggling to explain the lethargy and indifference of mainstream feminist movements, Helma Schultz and Christina Thürmer-Rohr have suggested that apathy might be a consequence of the unwillingness of these feminists to see themselves as an integral part of the German nation, that is, as German citizens who engage and cope with the dark sides of German history and its outcomes whether they like it or not.⁶⁸ This evasive attitude has meant that often "mainstream feminists locate themselves outside of German history" (484) as a way to signal their refusal to take "any responsibility for the past or present of German history, representing themselves as only victims of it" (485). As a consequence of their failure "to confront their own relationship to national history," the faction typically expresses the conviction that universal and monochrome patriarchy has always been (is and will always be) responsible for all injustice and suffering in Germany and throughout the world (Mushaben 8). By relinquishing their Germanness, a move that some still view as intellectually transgressive, some German feminists do not see themselves as liable for the dealings of the nation. The country's affairs often become "Männersache ... für die Frauen nicht verantwortlich sind" (Lennox 485; "Men's business ... for which women

⁶⁷ Antiracist feminism acknowledges that in order to effectively address women's one must attend to the heterogeneity, specificity and positionality of women's experiences. They understand themselves as a group of privileged *Germans* who directly address and confront racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism within the feminist German movement. They contend that "racism is a structural component of contemporary German society, including its female part (thus not only expressed in far-right violence)" (490; Dagmar Schultz 157-187).

⁶⁸ For instance, Thürmer-Rohr explains the evasive attitude of mainstream West German feminists in relation to East German women by depicting their position as follows: "frau habe die Vereinigung nicht zugestimmt, sie fühle sich nicht deutsch, geschweige denn gezammtdeutsch, sie habe keinen Bezug zu denen drüben, habe überhaupt mit der ganzen Geschichte nichts zu tun" (qtd. in Lennox 484) [woman disagreed with the unification, she does not feel she is German, let alone a citizen of united Germany, She does not have any rapport with those over there. In any case, she has nothing to do with the whole thing].

are not accountable”).⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, the denial of their German identity by some German feminists has often been utilized not only “to justify their lack of interest” but also to “embrace a discourse of victimization that elides their own situation with that of other oppressed groups worldwide”(484).⁷⁰

The fact remains that a significant number of German feminists are largely unaware of the unconscious internalization of social hierarchies and the racial and ethnic bias in German society. Instead of questioning the state’s power structures, the conservative German feminist movement has become an un-influential and almost inaudible “femocrat” voice that unilaterally and indiscriminately decides what is best for all women in the nation (Lang 290). Mainstream German feminism has largely ceased to be an activist movement focused on politicizing and mobilizing forces for the improvement of women’s participation and status within established institutions and civil society (291). Instead, the movement has become segmented in “small-scale professionalized organizations” that are financially dependent on the state and seem unable to network more broadly (291). Simultaneously, scholars also acknowledge that the dependence on the state is more than just economic. As Sabine Lang expands, “[i]t includes state decisions about which initiative does or does not get financed” (299).⁷¹

⁶⁹ For an example of this binary feminist analysis, see Alice Schwarzer’s “Hate in Solingen.”

⁷⁰ In relation to the lack of willingness to identify as “*German women*” with all its implications, Joyce Marie Mushaben argues: “Ongoing tensions between Eastern and Western feminists underscore the inadequacy of research paradigms limited to a critique of patriarchy in exploring women’s role under authoritarian regimes. It is not the German’s collective incapacity to mourn but rather the unwillingness to identify directly with the negative as well as the positive components of the national past –made easy by division- which has undercut FRG feminists’ ability to empathize with women in the East as well as with women of other cultures living in their midst” (33; original emphasis).

⁷¹ Concerned with the financial dependency of the German feminist movement on the state financial support, Lang takes her thoughts a step further and considers the precariousness of the fragmented feminist movement in the changing European context: “If we put this dependency in the larger context of the decline of welfare states in Western Europe, then the question is where future resources will be accumulated for critical state gender politics and for social mobilization against divisions that discriminate anew against women (social security reforms, etc.)” (300).

Ideologically, this shift has also made room for an essentialist and ahistorical intellectual feminist approach where “there is the tendency to translate the ‘traditionally’ complex feminist agenda of emancipation and equality into specific single issues” (292). Though, by now, most Third World and Western feminisms understand that for women it is crucial to be aware that “the nation cannot be taken for granted” (Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures* 37), some German feminists seem to feel safe within the new German nation. Along these lines, the growing discourse of cultural diversity has allowed, as Helma Lutz explains, some “German feminists to contrast their own emancipation to the deficits of women from other cultures –a consequence of their domination by men- that would be eliminated if those women could rise to the level and adapt the lifestyle of German women” (qtd. in Lennox 486).

Under these circumstances, meetings between sophisticated, academic, professional, white German women and minority women are often conducted in “the form of intersection or mediation on the part of the higher status women in aid of lower status women” (Rosenberg 151). In terms of the plight of immigrant women, especially in the last two and a half decades, there is a broad paternalistic attitude towards the backward immigrant woman. In this scenario, plagued by binary oppositions, self-appointed “saviors” –feminist foundations or private action groups- assume it is their private responsibility to rescue a group of “helpless victims”.⁷² Often, this well-intentioned feminist intervention has also been characterized by a “tokenism” that either

⁷² Gisela Kaplan suggests that in the 70s the German feminist movement was “unable to tackle the class bias” (116). Kaplan adds: “There were feminists who participated in giving guest-worker women and their children German-language classes, and helped and supported [them] in kindergartens and crèches” (116). Nevertheless, she emphasizes: “the movement was only for privileged and well-to-do women who had little interest in the affairs of the socially disadvantaged. Indeed, neither faction of the women’s movement in West Germany [...] took the downtrodden of all women into its fold or fought in any specific way on their behalf. The large number of foreign quest-worker women was never made part of the movement” (116).

reduces the perceived otherness of the immigrant to “tolerable” levels, that is to say, to a “‘safe’ otherness” which represents no threat to the precarious self-understanding of German identity (Mueller 281). On other occasions, the theorization of German humanist feminism has reinforced the construction of exotic immigrant or asylum seeking women “as radically ‘other’” (282), as individuals whose *Heimat* (“homeland”) can or/and must be “somewhere else.” Their universalizing feminist rhetoric has depicted immigrant and asylum seeking women as outside German contexts and as perpetually victimized. Since their discourse has rarely presented these women as responsible subjects and agents of change, it has precluded the possibility of imagining immigrant women as something other than an injured party. In any case, there have been relatively few attempts at a pragmatic/analytical historical approach to the legal, political, and economic situation of immigrant women in the guest country.⁷³

And yet, Lena Inowlocki and Helma Lutz state, “From the 1970s onwards, a clear tendency towards the orientalizing of migrant women can be identified: “the debate on ‘foreign women’ (*Ausländerinnen*) became a debate on Turkish women” (qtd. in Erel 155).⁷⁴ Drawing upon Orientalism, these debates have often presented Turkish women as unenlightened societal burdens that need to be uplifted and as unable to make any contribution to the shaping of German culture, economics, or society. Turkish women with Islamic headscarves remain outside of German history and context as “the

⁷³ Rosenberg reminds us that in class-segregated German society: “In practice, higher class women enjoy enhanced acceptance and legitimation in the public sphere (while also assuring themselves paid professional employment) in their traditional role of ‘helper of those in distress.’ [A social norm that] reinforces, rather than breaks down, class and ‘race’ privilege in the power and status hierarchy” (151).

⁷⁴ The construction of the powerless Turkish woman goes hand in hand with the criminalization of Turkish men in contemporary popular German culture. This generalizing discourse on Turkish men “armed for street fighting and mugging” has led social scientists to deliver warnings about the “dangers posed to civil society in Germany when migrant youth express a willingness to resort to violence in the name of Islam” (Adelson, *The Turkish Turn* 130).

(uncivilized) stranger, the victim of patriarchal honour” who could be liberated by superior German/European culture if only these women would be able to embrace it wholesale and enjoy its rewards (Inowlocki and Lutz qtd. in Erel 155; Adelson, “The Price of Feminism” 307; Lutz, “The Limits of European-Ness” 96-97). Thus, these feminist “celebrations” of European cultural supremacy and sophistication (where for uncultured victims compensations “auf der Hand [liegen]” (Lutz, “Sind wir uns immer noch fremd?” 145; “are obvious”) end up presenting the generic Turkish woman as the victim of undemocratic Turkish culture and Islam fundamentalism. In this patronizing feminist discourse, the monolithic Turkish woman remains a hopelessly backward Muslim woman who, as it were, miraculously remains untouched by the German discourse of nation. So called “Turkish women” in the Federal Republic, paraphrasing Halef Afshar and Mary Maynard, are not really seen; these women are often made invisible by veils of misunderstanding and anti-Islamism, despite their position in the spotlight of German media and society (“Gender and Ethnicity at the Millenium” 811).

Christina von Braun and Bettina Mathes have suggested that the excessive preoccupation of mainstream German feminists with the (un)questionable victimization of Turkish women with headscarves might actually hint at contradictions and unresolved problems in the process of German women’s emancipation (154). This focus on “more victimized” women is a carefully unconscious means for feminists dissatisfied with the progress of the women’s movement in Germany to make the achievements of the Western women’s movement look better “als sie tatsächlich sind” (225-24; “than they actually are”). Indeed, Birgit Rommelspacher reminds us of the discrimination that all varieties of German women continue to face in the form of unresolved salary

discrepancies between women and men, the massive male presence in the labor market, and domestic violence (sometimes culminating in murder) (qtd. in von Braun und Mathes 154; see also von Braun and Mathes 225 and 322-332). In her own attempt to explain the dissemination of the discourse of victimhood around the downtrodden Muslim woman who is forbidden to leave her house, Rommelspacher suggests: “Je größer die Kluft zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit, desto größer das Bedürfnis, über eine forcierte Emanzipationsrhetorik die eigene Fortschrittlichkeit unter Beweis zu stellen” (qtd. in von Braun and Mathes 154; “The wider the gap between claim and reality, the more intense is the need to prove one’s progressiveness by means of a strident emancipatory rhetoric”).

However, it is not only feminist discourse that has contributed to the stereotyping of Turkish women; “social policy and public discourse [have also] converged to construct a homogenized image of women of Turkish background as essentially oppressed by fathers, husbands or brothers” (Erel 155). Nonetheless, there are empirical reasons to believe that the lives of women of Turkish ancestry in Germany are more varied than the stereotype suggests (Topçu, “Many Worlds” see http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/03-2005/foc_art2.html.)⁷⁵ In fact, when these women are occasionally asked about the reasons why some of them do not leave home or go to work, they do not mention their husbands’ or fathers’ prohibition as the reason for their isolation or unemployment (Von Braun and Mathes 224). Like many German women, instead they mention factors such as “fehlende öffentliche

⁷⁵ Among others, Topçu states that: “many daughters of Turkish immigrants are very keen to education. [The number of female Turkish students] increases almost tenfold from 1980 to 1996, whereas the number of male students only increased 2.5 times. In the winter of 2002/2003 there were 24000 Turkish citizens studying at German Universities, 9300 of whom were female. [...] However, as many migrant children have chosen to become German citizens, the official statistics do not tell the whole story” (see http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/03-2005/foc_art2.html.)

Kinderbetreuung und erfolglose Arbeitssuche” (224) [unavailable public childcare and unsuccessful job searches], among others, partially due, undoubtedly, to employee bias against immigrant women.

Faced with a rise in religious fundamentalisms and the reassertion of patriarchal values in the European continent, Islamic minority women who struggle to get away from unhealthy or violent familial situations are often confronted with a lack of understanding from social workers who possess stereotyped views of migrant cultures and thus prefer not to interfere “in family matters” (Kofman and Sales 35). Oblivious to internal ethnic differences, legal status, social class, political situation, and religious observances and practices, social workers often simply orientalize Muslim women and view their subjugation as unquestionably and exclusively originating “from the patriarchal culture paradigm” attributed to Islamic cultures (36).⁷⁶ In this homogenizing discourse, Muslim women in general and immigrant Turkish women in particular are thus constructed as the binary opposite of triumphant German women “whose life style is seen to embody Western democracy and liberal values” (Erel 157). Western gender relations are paraded “as a civilitory achievement, granted by German democratic institutions,” deserving of emulation (157).

Meanwhile, in the process, the lack of reflection characterizing some current feminist and social critical discourses circulating around Muslim women of Turkish

⁷⁶ Helma Lutz reminds us that often restrictive immigration regulations of family reunion that impose the “Western model of nuclear family life” with “a breadwinner and marriage” contribute to jeopardize the well-being of immigrant women and perpetuate the perception of backwardness of immigrant cultures in Germany. In the case of those immigrant women who depend on their “spouses’ legal status” and are thus forced to remain in abusive marriages, Lutz explains: “Numerous reports have argued that these laws put women into a deeply vulnerable position which can be easily misused and exploited by men” (105). In many instances, Lutz adds: “patriarchal habits are reinforced by the legislation of the countries of immigration” (105). She concludes: “In this respect very low divorce rates among the non-European labour immigrants (Turks and Moroccans)-which are usually interpreted as a cultural feature of these groups- are also an indication of the law’s impact on the private sphere” (105).

background- recently been joined by feminist academics of Muslim background- regularly serve “to reinforce the anti-Islamic prejudices of the German public sphere” and the idea of the uniformly passive Turkish woman (Adelson, “The Price of Feminism” 307). Yasemin Karakasoglu has called attention to the emergence of Muslim-born intellectuals, such as the writers Necla Kelek or Ayaan Hirsi Ali, whose criticism of Muslim societies and analyses of phenomena like forced marriages, honor killings, and domestic violence are “regarded as authentic and plausible” by the German media, politicians, and conservative feminists simply because they grew up in “a Muslim family background” (“Anti-Islamic Discourses in Europe” 5). Karakasoglu has further expressed her concern about these celebrated “Islam-Experts” who have become “Muslim spokespeople” (though their autobiographical analysis might lack generalizable empirical support) simply because “[t]he value of their opinion derives also from the fact that leading politicians declare them as noteworthy experts” (5). Karakasoglu emphasizes that these popular narratives, which unwittingly assist mainstream anti-Islamic discourse, should not be read the way German readers tend to read them. That is to say, they should be read not as scientific analyzes but rather as personal accounts which can by no means be regarded as representative of “die Lebenssituation der Mehrheit von Musliminnen und Muslimen in Deutschland” (“Reduzierung auf Körper” see <<http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=6794>>; “the life situation of the majority of Muslim women and men in Germany”).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ At no point does Karakasoglu deny that honor killings, domestic violence or forced marriages take place. She emphasizes that these tragic events demand engagement within the German and the Muslim communities. Nevertheless, she also explains: “es sind Vorfälle, insbesondere, was die Ehrenmorde angeht, die nur eine Minderheit betreffen” [those are events, specially, in relation to honor killings, that pertain to a minority] (“Reduzierung auf Körper” see <<http://www.islamische-zeitung.de/?id=6794>>.).

In point of fact, the current dissemination of sensationalist autobiographical narratives makes integration significantly more difficult, since these personal accounts about forced marriages, honor killing, and domestic violence make it difficult for the majority of Germans and non-Germans in the Federal Republic to perceive a more complex and varied image of Islam, including the judicious aspects that many Muslim women incorporate in their daily lives. In another interview with Schiwa Schlei (addressing the emotional public display in the German media for Hatun Sürücü's forced marriage and death as a result of a honor killing), Karakasoglu accurately concludes:

Doch das Hauptproblem junger Migranten ist das Thema Zwangsehe mit Sicherheit nicht. Ich halte das Ganze für eine verlogene Ersatzdiskussion. Die breite Masse der Zuwanderer braucht ganz andere Hilfen zur Integration. Es gibt im Bereich der sozialen, beruflichen und schulischen Integration massive Probleme, die gelöst werden müssten. Ich wünsche mir, hier würde die Politik ansetzen, nach Lösungen zu finden. ("Mord im Namen der Familienehre" see http://www.wdr.de/themen/politik/1/integration_muslime/zwangsehe.jhtml.)⁷⁸

[The topic of forced marriage is certainly not the main problem young migrants have. I think the whole public discussion [related to Hatun Sürücü] is a dishonest, displaced debate. The large majority of immigrants need other forms of help to achieve integration. There are massive problems in the social, occupational and educational fields that need to be solved. I wish politicians would start to look for solutions for these problems].

In addition, German antiracist feminists have pointed out that the construction of Turkish women as monolithic victims has simultaneously fashioned Muslim men and men of Turkish descent in the Federal Republic in a negative light, propagating the image of the

⁷⁸ Karakasoglu also accurately reminds us that honor killings are not limited to some Muslim societies. Honor crimes against women were, until not long ago, common and socially accepted in traditional Christian Southern European and Latin American countries. "As for arranged marriages," as she expresses: "one can certainly say that this is a relatively widespread form of finding a marriage partner not only in Muslim countries but also in countries in the South east and the Far East" ("Debate on Rights of Women in Germany" see <http://www.emunion.org/?action=artikel&id=47>.) See also von Braun and Mathes' "Der Ehrenmord-östlich und westlich" in *Verschleierte Wirklichkeit*, 322- 32.

dangerous Turkish/Muslim man (Lennox 487-88). In the end, mainstream German feminist investigations and stereotyping social analyses of Islam and Muslims (in conjunction with some of the work of emerging Muslim scholars) have little or nothing to do with Muslim or Turkish immigrant women, and a lot to do with the fiction of a so-called authentic, continuous, and stable German cultural identity that posits itself as independent, unquestionably superior, and essentially distinct from other historical subjects.⁷⁹

2.2.3. The U.S. American Case: Can Invisibility be a Result of the Natural Flow of Events?

Minority women face all the issues and problems that white women face. Nevertheless, in the United States, “race discrimination erects enormous barriers between minority women and among various groups of minority women” (Almquist 573). It is surely not surprising that within the U.S. feminist movement, race is poorly understood theoretically and often uncritically treated as “monolithically ‘black’” and thus only superficially included in dialogues with minority women (Vō and Sciachitano xx). As a consequence, Asian American women, perceived as not quite black or white, are habitually silenced and excluded from debate. In feminist studies, some white women have not even viewed “Asian women as an ethnic minority” and have often deemed “black women and Chicanas as the only minority women in [the] struggle” (Chu 207). Habitually, critics have tended to perceive and understand studies of African American women as “studies of all women of color or even the real women of color in the United

⁷⁹ At this point is of interest to mention that because of Karakasoğlu’s critique of the writer Necla Kelek, the leading figure of conservative German feminism, Alice Schwarzer has attacked Karakasoğlu and called her “a defender of the pro-headscarf league and a close friend of Islamic leaders in Germany” and tried to mark Karakasoğlu “as a collaborator of Islamists” (Karakasoğlu, “Anti-Islamic Discourse in Europe” 7).

States” (Thoma 152). On a regular basis, Asian American women have been perceived as “‘too close’ to whites to be ‘authentic’ female subjects of color” (152).

In fact, white scholarship and the majority of the Anglo population, frequently uninformed about the history of Asian Americans in this country, “fail to recognize the depths of hostility and humiliation” that the allegedly diligent, silent, disciplined, hard-working, ambitious, affluent, and polite members of the “model” minority have had to confront from the moment they arrived in the United States (Almquist 591). Some even resent when obedient Asian Americans express discontent with popular stereotyping and negative definitions of themselves, reclaim their Asian identity, expose ongoing harassment, or protest employment discrimination (Yamada, “Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster” 35-40; Uschida 169). Asian American women’s frustrations are often interpreted “as being personal rather than ideological” concerns (Yamada, “Asian Pacific American Women” 74). Thus, partly as a consequence of the segregation that Asian immigrants have often experienced in Anglo society (Zhou 450-58), but also out of skepticism of hegemonic feminisms that have not been receptive to the concerns of Asian women, Asian American women have organized themselves and redefined and reinterpreted feminist ideas in order to address their own concerns. And yet, perhaps predictably, unlike other color feminisms that have achieved some acknowledgment in mainstream U.S. American intellectual spheres, “Asian American feminisms [...] have sometimes gone unrecognized and have been undertheorized” (Thoma 150).

Since the Immigration Reform of 1965, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minorities in the United States. The constant influx of new immigrants has meant the steady infusion of Confucian traditional values that have viewed women as

reserved, unpretentious, and family oriented. For younger Asian American women, the regular influx of conservative ideologies has often been a source of conflict. Such women, “who espouse feminist values, who place individual desires over family needs, or who merely pursue a chosen career actively[,] are in danger of coming into conflict with their parents” (Almquist 590). Even if female higher education is encouraged by the patriarchal older generations, Asian American daughters more often than not remain fundamentally subordinated within the family. They are expected to support the family and “not to venture very far outside its confines” (591).

In relationships, oppressive gender interaction remains by and large uncontested. Often altruistic Chinese ideals of the dutiful wife and the good mother are sources of strain for educated women. However, traditional Asian values and customs are not the only principles complicating the lives of Asian American women in the U.S. For instance, the Confucian ideology of Chinese male supremacy is regularly corroborated by gender inequity in the United States (Zhou 445-59). Likewise, in the context of U.S. American “emasculatation” of Asian American men, the dogma is at times accentuated within Asian communities as a way to counter the degradation of Asian American men in dominant U.S. American society. Indeed, this state of affairs has led Amy Ling to suggest that Chinese American women, as members of an undesired ethnic minority, are triply exposed: “as Chinese in a Euro-American world, as a woman in a Chinese man’s world, as a Chinese woman in a white man’s world” (15 *Between Worlds*).

For their part, most Asian American feminists have come to pragmatically understand that “[r]ather than using a skewed and simplistic approach that solely blames Asian cultural traditions, it is more appropriate to accept that both Western and Asian

patriarchy may vary but that they both work to oppress Asian and Asian American women” (Vō and Sciachitano xxi). Asian American feminists tend to join groups that are not solely oriented toward women’s issues, but that are “multi-issue focused and grassroots in nature” (Chiang 61). They also tend to prefer organizations that promote “multiculturally sensitive programs” (Chow, “The Feminist Movement” 371). While it is correct that Anglo-American feminist organizations have invited Asian American women to become members of the feminist movement in order to build coalitions and to influence decision making, this is “not because what [Asian American women] have to say is of inherent interest to the audience” (Cheung, “Woman Warrior” 308). In point of fact, Anglo American feminists’ insistence that personal freedom is good for all women and lack of understanding about Asian American women’s histories and cultures have often led Anglo American feminists to grow impatient “with the relatively low level of consciousness and apparent slow progress made by Asian American women in organizing” (371-72).

In other words, Anglo American feminism has sometimes forgotten that in order to fight isolation, to produce some form of public visibility, and to create “a sense of racial solidarity,” community-based Asian American feminism has to engage with “a series of internal tensions” (x). In order to build fruitful coalitions, occasionally, Asian American feminists have had to turn away from “other competing social categories as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality” (x).⁸⁰ Since the 1960s, Asian American

⁸⁰ For most Asian American women it makes sense to talk about Asian American women in a single group because, as Sonia Shah explains: “we all share the same rung on the racial hierarchy *and* on the gender hierarchy. It is not that our lives are so similar in substance, but that our lives are all monumentally shaped by three major driving forces in the U.S. society: racism and patriarchy most immediately, and ultimately, imperial aggression against Asia as well. As long as these systems exist, it will continue to make sense to talk about Asian American women as a group (as well as other racial and gender groups)” (xiii; original emphasis). Aware of the homogenizing tendencies of U.S. racial discourse, Helen Zia further contends: “I

women have fought and resisted the stereotype that Asian American women are apolitical, unvocal, and uncritical by engaging in a wide variety of campaigns. Asian American activists have challenged the persistent and psychologically damaging “myth of Asian women’s hypersexual appetite and skill” (Lu 17), have simultaneously confronted domestic violence and subordination at home, and have developed Asian American Studies and Asian American Women’s Studies courses and programs (Chu 201-13). Moreover, Asian American activists have attempted to grasp the impact of racism on the human psyche in order to develop a healthier self-concept, to challenge the insidious “model minority” myth (Nowrojee and Silliman 73-89), to create organizations for immigrant workers (Shah xviii-xix), and to defend the rights of migrant women workers (Ching Louie; Chang Grace). Asian American women activists also recognize the advantages of their exclusion by white mainstream feminism. Milyoung Cho explains: “the fact that they have not incorporated us or made a space for us has given us a lot more independence to define our own agendas” (61). At the same time, Meizhu Lui suggests, Asian American women remain aware that the gains of white feminism “did help [them all] in a certain way” (60). Asian American feminists also acknowledge their indebtedness to the African American movement: “They have had a much longer history of fighting oppression. We have not only benefited by participating with them in the civil rights movement and beyond, but we have also learned a great deal about how to think about Asian Americans within the larger context of people of color” (67).

think what unifies us as Asian women is pretty similar to what unites us a community at large. We are basically seen as more or less the same, and we encounter the same sort of problems in the United States, even though we have very different histories and backgrounds. Here in the United States, our political and cultural historical differences are not evident to the public. The other thing is, as Asian American women, we have a lot more in common culturally than we have that separate us. The 100 million women who are missing from the world [due to female infanticide], not so coincidentally, come primarily from Asia: South Asia and East Asia. And there are patriarchal practices here in the United States. Our common understanding of oppression that begins in Asia draws us together” (57).

In our contemporary time, when the West perceives that China and Japan are again turning into economically powerful forces, Asian American women have also felt isolated in white leftist and anti-racist organizations.⁸¹ Groups of so called “white-race-defying white activists” tend to agree that Asian Americans were victims of virulent racism in the past. Many believe that, though lingering discrimination might still be present, the situation of Asian Americans, as the model minority, is indisputably better than that of African Americans or Mexican Americans. Or, as one longtime radical anti-racist scholar, unaware of his relentless racism, concisely elucidates:

Chinese are people of color, and in the past they faced fierce oppression in this country, and still suffer the effects of prejudice, but would anyone argue that Chinese in America today constitute an oppressed race? They have been defined as an ethnic group, indeed the ‘model minority.’ (Noel Ignatiev qtd. in Pegues 8)

In response, Mary E. Young reminds us that the contemporary image presented in the media of Chinese American women as members of the “mascot minority” is “at odds with their present-day participation in sweatshops or low-level positions in the Silicon Valley” (Young 142). Yen Le Espiritu states that in the garment, microelectronics, and cannery industries:

[Asian] immigrant women, as racialized and feminized labor, are more employable than men due to the patriarchal and racist assumption that women can afford to work for less, do not mind dead-end jobs, and are more suited philosophically to certain kinds of detailed and routine work. [...] Numerous studies of the Chinatown garment industry conclude that the Chinese women workers are indeed exploited. (*Asian American Women and Men* 74)

⁸¹ Iris Chang also presents the paradox of the Chinese American experience: “The great irony of the Chinese American has been that success can be as dangerous as failure: whenever the ethnic Chinese visibly excelled –whether as menial laborers, scholars, or businessmen- efforts arose simultaneously to depict their contributions not as boon to white America but as a threat” (*The Chinese in America* xi). She adds: “The mass media have projected contradictory images that either dehumanize or demonize the Chinese, with the implicit message that the Chinese represent either a servile class to be exploited or an enemy force to be destroyed” (xi).

Moreover, in contrast to the ethnocentric and simplistic assumption that once Chinese women immigrate to the United States their situations automatically improve, as they “enjoy more liberty, freedom and equality” (Zhou 446), research shows that the opposite is closer to reality. Studies have exposed that although the Confucian ideology of masculine superiority is still deeply engrained in Chinese culture, newly arrived middle-class Chinese immigrant families have often “found more conservative norms about women’s roles than they were used to in China” (455). In fact, researchers confirm that, unlike Korean and Vietnamese women, a noteworthy segment of middle-class Chinese women “face a deterioration or permanent loss of their relative status due to migration” to the legendary Promised Land (458).

Chapter 3

Migrant Literatures

Migration, so it is still believed, changes only the immigrants' lives and biography, not those of the society concerned.

Regina Römheld, "When *Heimat* Goes Global" 371-72

3.1. Immigrant Realities Through Literature

This chapter discusses how the frequent perception of Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese American minority women writers as outsiders occupying a historical and cultural non-space in Argentina, Germany, and the U.S.A. has meant that the literary works of women belonging to these minorities have been virtually absent from mainstream analyses of their guest countries' histories and cultures. Additionally, it points out that when their narratives have been studied, analyses of their works have often offered essentializing and even incorrect representations of their specific realities. Such readings have represented the experience of immigrant women in a way that presupposes an absolute cultural divide between cultures, at whose juncture the immigrant either remains perpetually trapped or, after resolving their ethnic conflicts, achieves cheerful assimilation. Such literary criticism has perpetuated stereotypes and intellectual biases rather than rectifying them and, thereby, has contributed to their exclusion and marginalization.

3.1.1 Argentina and the Intricacies of Jewish Gauchos

The literature produced by the Jewish population in Latin America is a significant cultural presence in those nations. The works of Clarice Lispector of Brazil; César Tiempo, Marcos Aguinis, and Ricardo Feierstein of Argentina; Marjorie Agosín and

Ariel Dorfman of Chile; Moacyr Scliar of Brazil; Margo Glantz, Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, Rosa Nissan, and Sabina Berman of Mexico; Alicia Freilich de Segal of Venezuela; and Teresa Porzekanski of Uruguay have been widely read. But the reception of their literature has had the alienating effect, despite the recognition their writing earns, of making Jewish writers feel like strangers in their own countries. One main cause of this alienation is that, in the receptions of their works, they are not appreciated as Jews; their Jewishness remains unarticulated (Glickman, "The Authors Speak for Themselves" 27-28). This state of affairs hints at the double bind Jewish authors often experience: if appreciated as Jews, they are essentialized and ghettoized; if not they are alienated.

Jewish writers frequently write for a small community; their productions are usually published and promoted by small Jewish publishing houses. In the face of the apparently limited resonance and scope of their work, some writers have opted to avoid Jewish themes altogether and "write for the trade market" in order to reach a wider audience (Sadow, Introduction xxvi). Stephen A. Sadow's research shows that "[t]hroughout Latin America, the great majority of [their] sales come from within the Jewish community" (xxvi). Stavans goes as far as to suggest that these writers' works might "be more read by people living in the United States than they are read in Latin America" ("Of Rabbis" 182). Accordingly, literary criticism and reviews of their work habitually come from "Jewish readers who may even be childhood acquaintances" (Sadow xxvi).⁸² At the same time, though in Argentina there have been innovative

⁸² As for Jewish characters in Latin American literature, Stavans explains: they "have been present in [it] since time immemorial, either as villains, unexpected guests, or 'erudite memory carriers.' The list of anti-Semitic novels, or bucolic portrays of Jews is long" ("Of Rabbis 177). Jews also appear in Borges' stories "Emma Zunz," "The Secret Miracle," "The Untruthful Friend," and others. In relation to Borges, Stavans adds: "He envied and admired Jews. But Borges was an anomaly in a continent where the Church is powerful" (177).

readings by Jewish Argentine critics, sometimes criticism of their works by the Jewish Argentine critics and other critics have focused solely on either “the Jews’ perception of life in the New World or the perception of Jewish immigrants by the non-Jewish Argentine population” (Lindstrom, “Problems and Possibilities” 123). Such criticism reinforces the perception of an incommensurable cultural divide between the Jewish communities and the Latin American nations within which they reside.

Latin American Jewish writing has focused “on the questions of marginality and identity” (Barr 1; see also Sadow xxv). In Argentina, Jewish writers have written about the difficulties of being both a Jew and an Argentine. However, identity and marginality “have been examined mainly in male terms” (2). This tendency can be understood in the context of a Jewish tradition which is profoundly patriarchal. In fact, in Judaism, as Miriyam Glazer explains, some women have often felt as “exiles in a culture and a tradition that marginalizes and trivialized (their) needs and desires” (qtd. in Glazer 635).

⁸³ Feminist Jewish scholars have traced the practice of female marginalization back to Moses who, before ascending Mount Sinai to receive the covenant, advised his people they should: “Be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman” (qtd. in Barr 2; see also Plaskow). As a matter of fact, though the Torah addresses the whole Jewish people, the address is expressed in patriarchal terms. In it Moses exclusively “uses the masculine plural command form,” in this way excluding women from the audience (2). In summary, as scholar Lois Baer Barr states: “The Jewish religion, its sacred texts with minor

⁸³For example, in her article “Rabbinic Judaism and the Creation of Woman,” Judith Baskin explains: “Rabbinic discourse is far from monolithic in the views and attitudes it expresses. It includes a variety in competing interpretations and opinions. Given this multivocality, it is no surprising that rabbinic literature expresses a diversity of attitudes toward women. What unites these views, however, is the conviction that ‘women are a separate people’ [...], different from men in innate qualities as well as in social and legal status” (125).

exceptions, its cultural practices as exercised or ignored by the majority of Jews in the twentieth century in Israel and in the countries of the diaspora, is patriarchal” (2-3).

In the Latin American context, U.S. Chilean poet Marjorie Agosín explains, “little is known about what it means to be Jewish in Latin America, and even less about what it means to be a Jewish woman [in the region]” (Introduction, *Taking Root* xiii). In the case of Argentina, a country where Jewish women have faced discrimination in both the Jewish and Catholic communities, the records on “Argentine Jewish history focus on male actions and perceptions” (McGee Deutsch 72). This masculinist approach to marginalization and identity that posits the experience and perspectives of Jewish men as not only dominant but normative has sometimes been qualified as “male Jewish writers talking to men and about men” (Barr 2). Sandra McGee Deutsch reminds us that in Argentina, there is still ignorance as to “what [Jewish] women did or how they perceived the events they participated in or witnessed” (72).

Judith R. Baskin also states that traditional Jewish culture, like many other patriarchal cultures around the world, “strictly limited women’s access to learning and literary accomplishment” and consequently limited their possibilities to record their lives’ stories (“Women of the World: An Introduction” 18). Baskin adds: “To become a Jewish writer was to become a cultural anomaly” and often resulted in “equivocal exile from a male society profoundly uncomfortable with female intellectual assertiveness” (18). Under these circumstances, the history of Jewish women has often been silenced by “the historical patriarchy” that does not view their cultural participation as relevant (Agosín, Introduction, *The House of Memory* 2). Thus, in the Jewish tradition, like in other patriarchal societies: “the distinct experiences and contributions of women have seldom

found their way into history texts, nor, until quite recently, have the voices of women been published and read on a large scale” (2). In order to resist such marginalization, many Jewish women writers in Latin America and elsewhere have reclaimed, rewritten, and reinterpreted the patriarchal Judaic inheritance and values in their own terms. And yet, Baskin reminds us that, in a dominantly male Jewish literary tradition, Jewish women and their writing remain a “little-explored topic” (“Women of the World: An Introduction” 19).

Jewish women writers growing up in the different countries of the Latin American diaspora have had to struggle with the Jewish patriarchal legacy and the strict sex roles assigned to women and men. The gender arrangement has frequently meant the systematic and almost total exclusion of women from history and from cultural and religious life. Additionally, as members of predominant Catholic cultures and societies in Latin American countries, Jewish women writers have also had to deal with the misogyny inherent in the Catholic religion that has played a significant role in the historical subordination of women in Latin America. At the same time, as members of an ethnic minority, Jewish women have had to negotiate a marginal existence as Jewish women writers in a predominantly anti-Jewish Catholic environment. Thus, breaking the silence imposed by the patriarchal Jewish tradition and mainstream Catholic and male-oriented Latin American historical and cultural discourse, these women’s poetry, autobiography, fiction, plays, and biographies attempt to record, recover, reshape, and reevaluate “a censored and almost invisible history” for the great book of Latin American and human history and experience (Agosín, Introduction, *The House of Memory* 4). Their works frequently reflect on their position as contemporary women “within two male-oriented

societies: the traditional Jewish one and the sociopolitical actuality of present day Latin America” (DiAntonio 2). Thus, inscribing themselves into society and into history, their literary productions frequently witness the painful but also often rewarding struggles they have faced as Latin American Jewish women who want to belong on their own terms. As members of a minority that has often been defined in stereotypes, they must “define and create themselves ... discover for themselves the complex meaning attached to being a Jewish woman of Latin America” (Agosín, Introduction, *The House of Memory* 18).

Sandra McGee Deutsch, who is currently tracing “the experiences of Jewish women of Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Arabic-speaking origins and of different social classes, and situating them in their communities and Argentina,” expresses her surprise at the “dearth of studies on Argentine Jewish women” (71). Although her research has elicited enthusiasm among some Jewish and non-Jewish women as well as a number of men, she acknowledges that “not all Jewish women approved of it” and that “many Jewish men [...] could not understand why [she] would restrict [herself] to studying women” (71). Looking for an answer to these reactions to her work, McGee Deutsch’s valuable article, “My Life and Latin American Jewish Studies,” explains some of the common perceptions that may have prevented scholars and critics, not just in Argentina but throughout the Latin American region, from engaging with the study of women’s works and lives and with the study of Jewish women writers’ productions and stories.

Among the responses McGee Deutsch has received was the sense that her subject of study was “too narrow” (71). It was not a far leap from these comments to those bent on exposing her (apparently threatening and unnatural) lack of interest in men and concluding that McGee Deutsch must be a lesbian (71). In fact, her experience confirms

Amy K. Kaminsky's observation in her work, *Reading the Body Politic*, that the "fear [of] being called lesbians" has been a common patriarchal means deployed in the Latin American region to silence outspoken women and prevent feminists from "giving their energy and attention to other women" (xiv). McGee Deutsch's confrontation with the "epithet lesbian" because of her "abnormal" interest in women's lives seems to validate Kaminsky's contention that one of the reasons for the sluggish growth of literary feminist criticism in the region is "women's scholars' fear of having their sexuality impugned" (xiv).

Further, McGee Deutsch has encountered resistance because her interests indicate that she might be "a radical feminist" whose work entails "perhaps even [a] man-hating agenda" (71). In Latin America, though certainly outside that region as well, the commonplace understanding of feminism as a "women against men" movement (hooks ix) and not as one about rights, "sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (viii) is frequently used to discredit feminism. This devaluation of the movement explains why some Latin American women have refrained not only from identifying themselves as feminists but also from supporting other women's causes or from "taking women's lives and their writing seriously" (Kaminsky 19).

Additionally, McGee Deutsch has had the troubling experience of having colleagues with no previous knowledge of her religious affiliations determine that she must be a Jewish woman simply because Jewish women are the subject of her scholarly work. Unfortunately, her colleagues seem to hold the essentialist, ethnocentric, racist, and anti-Semitic view that "only a Jew would study other Jews" (72). Thus, McGee Deutsch's experience would seem to suggest that perhaps some non-Jewish Latin

Americanist scholars have avoided studying the Jewish Latin American literary tradition because of an intellectual commitment to “the hermeneutic circle” (Gumbrecht 253). By this I mean the steadfast conviction that spells “the Other” and “Otherness” with a capital “O” and that honors “the impossibility of a ‘complete’ understanding of phenomena that do not belong to one’s own culture” (Gumbrecht 253). Traditionally, this intellectual commitment has reduced the otherness of the other to an insurmountable particularity and thus renders it a “forbidding otherness” (Kadir 201). I propose that for Latin Americanists, it is imperative to leave the coherence of the Hispano-Catholic mestizo, criollo intellectual “home” and engage with and learn about the specific histories, cultures, traditions, and cultural contributions of “other” Latin Americans, that is, non-Hispanic, non-Catholic, non-criollo, and non-mestizo minorities that have largely been excluded from mainstream historical and cultural grand narratives of Latin American nations.

Thus, McGee Deutsch’s experiences underscore two imperatives. Firstly, the commitment not to invoke the phallogentric, homophobic, and antifeminist taboo of lesbianism against feminist scholars and to work towards a more nuanced understanding of feminism than as “a man-hating movement” that only promotes dissent between men and women. McGee Deutsch’s experiences emphasize the urgent need for women scholars to overcome “fear [of] being called lesbians for giving their energy and attention to other women” (Kaminsky xiv). Secondly, her experience of being “exposed” as a Jew due to her research on the lives of Jewish women draws attention to the ethical responsibility scholars have to contribute to create meaningful connections of solidarity and alliances across cultural, religious, physiognomic, class, racial, sexual and gender

differences that should help us to critique even our own susceptibility to racist, discriminatory, and exclusivist discourses.

3.1.2. Questioning the “Germanness of German Literature”

One of the traditional effects of immigration has been the production of works that deal with the experience of immersing oneself in a new environment, and this is precisely what Turkish male and Turkish women immigrants have done since their arrival in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the beginning, Gastarbeiter (“guest workers”) expressed their experience in the form of “songs, diaries, letters, oral narrative” (Fischer and McGowan 3). In describing Gastarbeiterliteratur of the 1960s, Sabine Fischer and Moray McGowan explain:

much of the literature of *Gastarbeiter* experience has been by writers whose ethnic identity may have exposed them to comparable discrimination but who are not, socio-economically speaking, *Gastarbeiter* themselves, and whose spectrum of reactions to the German host culture’s undifferentiating assumption that they are, contributes to the self-reflective, often ironical textures of this literature. (3)

The 70s saw the emergence of a broader movement when workers started writing “poems, shorts stories and reportage” which were often published in their native languages (3). In the early 80s, writing by immigrants began to be sponsored by the Institute for German as a Foreign Language at Munich University in the form of German writing competitions for foreigners.⁸⁴ In 1983, the institutional support culminated with the inception of the annual “Adelbert von Chamisso Prize” (4). To the present day, the prize is awarded to literary productions in German by non-native speakers or to works

⁸⁴ This idea has been criticized by, among others, Arlene A. Teraoka, in “Gastarbeiterliteratur: The Other Speaks Back,” as a colonialist approach on the side of the German sponsors who seem to imply that without their initiative the foreigner “would remain idle and without literature” (93).

“translated immediately into German in connection with the creative process” (Suhr 74).⁸⁵

In Germany, there have historically been diverse attempts by immigrant, as well as German and Germanist, scholars and writers to categorize the emerging field of literature by immigrant minorities to different and particular ends. The numerous endeavors to define the field of literature produced by non-German authors writing in German and other languages attests to the difficulty of finding a system that allows the neat categorization of these multifaceted manifestations without oversimplification or stereotyping. At the same time, the trouble of establishing, as it were, the “legal status” of these literary productions that resist clear-cut categories also foregrounds the anxiety this literature creates in “the German literary landscape” (Adelson, “Migrants’ Literature” 382). Typically, German literature’s self-perception has posited a uniform German literature and a distinctive “Germanness” in German literature (382).

From the outset, the literature produced by non-Germans was called, among others, “Gastarbeiterliteratur”⁸⁶ (“guest workers’ literature”), “Literatur der Betroffenheit” (“literature of affliction”), “Ausländerliteratur” (“foreigners’ literature”), “Migrantenliteratur” (“migrants’ literature”), Literatur deutschschreibender Ausländer (“literature of foreigners writing in German”), and “eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur” (“a

⁸⁵ The prize is given in honor of “Count Louis Charles Adelaide Camisso de Boncourt, who had to leave France in 1792 as an eleven year old child, and who later became a Prussian officer and then a famous author writing in German” (Suhr 74). Some have criticized this prize and its sponsors: “the naming of the prize is another indication of the attitude of these supporters, just as every literary text by a foreigner may find acceptance as long as it is written in the German, the French count does not have anything else in common with the authors of the Ausländerliteratur aside from the fact that he also wrote in German” (Suhr 92).

⁸⁶ Some immigrant writers have consciously appropriated the term “Gastarbeiter” in order to call attention to the irony: “We consciously use the term *Gastarbeiter* that has been imposed on us, in order to expose the irony within it. The ideologues have managed to shove together the concepts ‘guest’ and ‘worker,’ although there have never been guests who worked. The provisional status that is supposed to be expressed in the word ‘guest’ has been shattered by reality; *Gastarbeiter* are in fact an established segment of the West German population” (qtd. in Teraoka, “Gastarbeiterliteratur: The Other Speaks Back” 300).

not just German literature”). For the most part, these categorizations have been dismissed because they were too constricted in their scope and did not do justice to the multiple positions that many immigrant writers occupied and still occupy. Other categories were viewed as belittling and outright xenophobic or “so general that they erase crucial socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, gender or generational differences between the authors, between the patterns of experience their texts engage, and between the aesthetic possibilities their texts manifest” (Fischer and McGrowan 2). Subsequently, some literary critics have emphasized and idealized “the possibility of genuine intercultural communication” (*The Turkish Turn* 25) as the desirable goal and have thus suggested calling it “intercultural literature” (23). Finally, Leslie A. Adelson has succinctly observed that since “major Turkish writers are now German citizens, the category ‘foreign literature’ would be [...] misplaced” (23). Instead, Adelson suggests naming the category “literature of migration,” which “is not necessarily written by migrants alone” (23).⁸⁷ To this day, attempts to name this body of literature continue. In any case, it is safe to say, as Arlene A. Teraoka acknowledged in the 80s, that this field remains “contested territory, and all claims made about or *on* it are profoundly strategic and political” (“Gastarbeiterliteratur” 299; original emphasis). Teraoka likewise reminds us that when analyzing attempts to name and fix this multifaceted literature it is imperative to take into consideration “who is it that offers the definition, what definition is offered, and [...] what political interests are at stake in the argument over this contested literary territory?” (302).

⁸⁷ For an insightful analysis of the categories “intercultural literature” and “literature of migration,” see Adelson’s *The Turkish Turn* 23-26.

Since the increase of immigration of women after 1973, female guest workers from Turkey, like male guest workers, started recording their experiences as a way to cope with the harsh conditions they often encountered in the guest land and to express their feelings of loneliness and sorrow. Many of these first women came from regions where they had had little or “had been denied an education” (Suhr 93). For this reason, in order to record their experiences, they often needed “mediators” to edit, revise, and publish their narratives (93).⁸⁸ Consequently, as Heidrun Suhr explains: “The miserable fate of these women has been documented and written about but usually not by the women themselves” (93; see also Johnson 261). Their works were also published in anthologies, where writers from different countries and diverse religious and cultural backgrounds are thrown together as if they belonged to a standardized minority culture and compiled under the assumed criteria that “they all want to be integrated” (Suhr 92). However, from the start, the endeavor to make their experiences accessible to German society was characterized by a paternalistic attitude “where the unquestioned standard of comparison is the white German woman and the ‘other’ woman is obviously different and as such inferior” (92). The mediation that their accounts required was often viewed as one where the emotional immigrant woman, in broken German, offered disorganized ideas and arguments to the clear-minded German feminist scholars and critics who, in turn, structured them into coherent and well organized sociological documents and narratives. In fact, the predisposition to reduce and categorize the affairs of “all” foreign women in the Federal Republic to “Turkish women’s concerns,” and the dominant

⁸⁸ In “Talking ‘Turk’: On Narrative Strategies and Cultural Stereotypes,” Arlene A. Teraoka makes this same observation in relation to liberal male writers who, in their attempt to help make the “Turkish experience” in the Federal Republic accessible to Germans, have also ended up reinforcing and ratifying cultural and ethnic stereotypes.

stereotype that has irrefutably defined “Turkish women as silent victims unable to adapt to modern German society without help,” originates from this time (Fischer and McGrowan 12).⁸⁹

As time passed, second and third generation women writers, who have either spent most of their lives in or were born in Germany, began to record their experiences and write their own stories. They have not only begun to inscribe themselves into Turkish and German histories and cultures, but have also articulated their expectations from and demands on a life in the Federal Republic. Nevertheless, at times, women writers from Turkey themselves, for example, the award-winning Saliha Scheinhardt and Alev Tekinay, have also contributed to the perpetuation of the stereotype of the Turkish woman as a confused and helpless victim in need of well-intentioned saviors. In the case of Scheinhardt, despite her commitment to alleviating the damaging aspects of the situation of women from Turkey living in Germany, her protagonists are “so regularly victimized by brutal Turkish men” that her biased and sensational narratives help more “to increase prejudice than to improve the situation” (Suhr 94; Fischer and McGrowan 12-15; Johnson 267-68).

A second example is Alev Tekinay, who sees herself as “Fürsprecherin ihrer Geburtsnation in der Bundesrepublik” (Wierschke 103; “Speaker for her land of birth in the Federal Republic of Germany”). As a woman from Turkey, Tekinay presents herself as an authentic and reliable source of information about Turkish women and Turkish

⁸⁹ In “Migrants’ Literature or German Literature?,” Adelson mentions the apprehension of non-Turkish immigrant writers in Germany who criticize the undifferentiated categorization of all foreigners as Turks. They object to the fact that “foreigners’ concerns are automatically assumed to be ‘Turkish’ concerns” and “foreigners’ literature is assumed to be ‘Turkish’ literature” (383-84). In fact, addressing the marginalization of other immigrant writers in relation to the ostensible acceptance of Turkish writers, Petra Fachinger explains that “German publishers tend to reject manuscripts by migrant writers whose ethnic background is not Turkish with the explanation that cultural institutions subsidize Turkish submissions only” (7-8).

culture in general. Some of her early works portray “a” generic Turkish woman, although scholars agree that the origins of Turkish women in Turkey are so manifold and diverse “daß man nicht von ‘türkischen Frauen’ sprechen könne, sondern stattdessen von ‘Frauen aus der Turkey’ sprechen sollte” (Wanner qtd. in Wierschke 111; “that it is not possible to talk about ‘Turkish women.’ One should instead talk about ‘women who come from Turkey’”). Further, aiming to promote what she understands as the “Liberalisierung” (127; “liberalization”) of immigrant Turkish culture in Germany, Tekinay’s second-generation protagonists, especially young girls and women, typically undergo inevitable identity crises in which they see themselves as victims of their circumstances as immigrants (Wierschke 126-28). But Tekinay believes that “die Dinge so zeigen wie sie – leider- manchmal sind” (127; “showing things the way they –unfortunately- sometimes are”) is the best way to help her fellow Turkish people in Germany. As a result, her accounts have facilitated the dissemination of the stereotype of subordinated Turkish women by unchanging, retrograde, and intolerant Muslim and Turkish cultures. Her productions have also made possible the propagation of the conceptual dual paradigm that posits the immigrant woman as perpetually drifting between two separate and static worlds (Wierschke 127-128).

Other writers from Turkish backgrounds like e.g. Emine Sevgi Özdamar,⁹⁰ Aysel Özakin, and Renan Dermikan have attempted to engage with their own patriarchal

⁹⁰ Turkish-born Emine Sevgi Özdamar was the first non-native speaker of German to win widespread literary recognition. In 1991, Özdamar was awarded the prestigious Ingeborg Bachman Prize for German literature for her novel *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich aus* [Life is a Caravanserei, Has Two Doors, I Came in One I Went Out the Other]. Yet the recognition “was not acknowledged at the time in the literature section of *Der Spiegel* [...] (Fachinger 6). Furthermore, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* called the jury’s choice “a grave error of judgment, describing Özdamar’s novel as naïve and folkloristic” (Fachinger 6). For a detailed analysis of the debate surrounding

tradition “in order to rewrite the female cultural history of the Orient” (Fischer and McGowan 15). They aim to create “counter-images to stereotypical constructions of Turkish womanhood” and “interrogate the legitimacy of the representations of otherness perpetuated by the dominant host culture” (Henderson 226). In this sense, their works help to balance the representations of Turkish women by women writers like Scheinhardt and Tekinay. Many second and third generation German Turkish women additionally draw attention to the patriarchal structures present in their guest country where Christianity is central to its anxious self-definition. Their writings display a nation whose immigration laws have promoted their isolation and prevented their integration into German society. Furthermore, their narratives depict the cultural conflicts that women face in a country that, despite its alienation and exclusion of immigrants, demands, by official regulation, “total assimilation” to the Eurocentric “legal, social and economic order of the Federal Republic of Germany, its cultural and political values” (qtd. in Fischer and McGowan 1). Writing by women writers from Turkey reflects on this paradox and responds to the exclusion and pressures of assimilation in their guest country (1).

After more than forty years in the Federal Republic of Germany, the literature written by immigrants continues to occupy a marginal place in the nation’s literary space.

⁹¹ At times, this literature is still stubbornly called “Ausländer-Literatur” (263);

Özdamar’s acknowledgment, see Karen Jankowsky’s “‘German’ Literature Contested: The 1991 Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize Debate, ‘Cultural Diversity,’ and Emine Sevgy Özdamar.”

⁹¹ Poet Yüksel Pazarkaya explains: “Wir leben am Rande auch der literarischen Gesellschaft dieses Landes. Keinem von uns ist zum Beispiel die Gelegenheit gegeben, als Gastdozent an der Frankfurter Universität über seine Ästhetik zu lessen [...] [D]ie ästhetischen Ansätze unserer Literatur, unserer Dichtung [werden] [...] nicht gewürdigt, von keiner Institution, von keinem Verlag, von keinem deutschen Kollegen, von niemandem” (qtd. in Johnson 263; “We also inhabit the fringes of literary culture in this country. None of us has ever been given the opportunity, for example, to make a reading about his aesthetic as a guest docent at the Frankfurt University. [...] The aesthetic approaches of our literature, of our poetry

“Foreigner’s Literature”) though there have been voices, like that of Fritz J. Raddatz, that have expressed decisive exasperation with this tendency: “Wieviel Unverschämtheit gehört eigentlich dazu, ‘Ausländer-Literatur’ zu nennen, was integraler Bestandteil unserer Lyrik, Prosa, Satire ist?” (qtd. in Johnson 263; “It certainly takes a lot of nerve to call ‘Foreigner’s Literature’ something that is an integral part of our lyric, prose, and satire!”). However, remarks like Raddatz’s have had only modest impact on public opinion. The works of Turkish German writers simply are not recognized as an integral component of German literature and are often “ignoriert” (Yeşilada “Das Empire schreibt zurück” 123; see also Konzett 46-50; “ignored”). The authors, who have been born or spent most of their life in the Federal Republic are not generally acknowledged as German writers. Simultaneously, popular authors like Akif Pirinçci, who refuse to be identified only in terms of this national origin, have been somehow “doubly marginalized” (Fachinger 10). Petra Fachinger explains that his works are not discussed either in “books on migrant writing” or “in books on mainstream German literature” (10).⁹² Nonetheless, some Turkish German artists have also insisted on not having their works labeled as “Gastkunst” [Guest’s Art], for the term carries the connotation of the guest worker who is expected to return “home” sometime in the future (Tan and Waldoff 149). A significant number of Turkish German artists refuse to perpetuate what they view as patronizing “repressive tolerance” (149). Writers such as Yaltıraklı have demanded “that critics should judge by the same strict criteria applied by the artists themselves, and in doing so recognize the claim of Turkish artists to equal and universal treatment” (149).

are [...] not appreciated by any institution, by any publishing house, by any of our German colleagues, by anyone”).

⁹² At the same time, in her article “Migrants’ Literature or German Literature?,” Adelson also suggests that many non-German writers complain that their work is “taken seriously in the publishing world only if their Otherness can be considered somehow ‘Turkish’” (383).

Concurrently, in the “Minoritäten-Eckchen” (“minorities’ little corner”) of German bookstores, despite the increasing production of literary works by minority women writers, their books are less represented and discussed than those by male writers (261). Because of the historical tendency to conceptualize guest workers as male, so-called *Migrantenliteratur* (“Migrants’ Literature”) is still “most frequently associated” with men (Adelson, “Migrants’ Literature or German Literature?” 384). As a consequence, in the literary debates about the writing produced by non-Germans in the Federal Republic, scant attention has been paid to the literary productions of women writers. In the case of women of Turkish descent, the exceptions are the works by Renan Dermikan, Aysel Özakin, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Saliha Scheinhardt, Seyran Ateş, and Alev Tekinav (Johnson 262-64). And yet this marginalization does not preclude the fact that, since 1985, mostly due to the efforts of feminism, the study of Turkish German literature has frequently been based on the treatment of literary texts by women from Turkey. The responses to these works often posit an essentially victimized Turkish woman hopelessly trapped between two cultures: the undemocratic Turkish and the democratic German one. Responses are frequently built around “the assumption that writing in Germany allows these women to find a voice denied them in Turkish culture and society” (Adelson, “The Price of Feminism” 306).⁹³

In fact, in the context of mainstream German feminism, a faction that: a) tends to pay little attention to the significance of nation in its theorizing; b) continues to focus on gender as the favored category of analysis; and c) perceives universal and discrete

⁹³ Indeed, as Adelson points out, “the only group of foreigners the stereotype credits with having significant identity problems before arriving in Germany are Third World Women. The assumption is that their crisis stems not from *losing* their identity in Europe, but from *finding* their “true” selves there (Westernized “emancipation”)” (“Migrants’ Literature or German Literature?” 389).

patriarchy as the unique source of all evils, it seems that feminist intervention may have had a significant impact on the way Turkish German peoples and cultures are perceived and understood in the Federal Republic.⁹⁴ Mainstream feminist criticism has contributed to create an image of Turkish womanly victimhood at the hands of brutal Turkish men that (obscuring the violence that some German women also encounter in relationships) often strengthens “the anti-Islamic prejudices of the German public sphere” and their perception as social burdens (Adelson 307). Scholars Haleh Afshar and Mary Maynard have suggested that despite all the important and undeniable contributions of Western feminist theorizing to better understandings of women’s situations, this form of feminist discourse has often served to make Muslim women “invisible by a veil of misunderstanding and Islamophobia” (811; see also von Braun and Mathes 356-65). The same could be said of the relationship of mainstream German feminism in relation to Turkish men.⁹⁵

In the meantime, as Heidrun Suhr explains, in Germany this literary genre is by no means “limited to small presses” (75). However, Danja Antonovic reminds us, “[e]ven if prominent German publishing houses release this or that relevant book by or about foreigners, most of it remains hidden from the German public” (430). It remains “foreigner work” (430). There are also a number of journals that have engaged with the so-called *Ausländerliteratur*, but as the journals involved are of limited circulation and not widely well known, “almost all authors complained about lack of attention” (75).

⁹⁴ For instance, after the xenophobic tragedies of Mölln and Solingen, the universalizing propensity allowed popular German feminist Alice Schwarzer to express her outrage for “the victimization of German and Turkish women after unification.” In Schwarzer’s view, the victimization of German and Turkish women had its culmination in “the murders of Turkish women and children” (Adelson, “The Price of Feminism” 308).

⁹⁵ See Sara Lennox’s “Divided Feminism: Women, Racism, and German National Identity” 486-87.

Only on very limited occasions have the most important newspapers published reports or reviews of their works. Suhr adds: “Literary prizes are awarded, yet even recipients of these prizes encounter difficulties when they ask to have their books reviewed” (75; see also Fachinger 6; Yeşilada, “Das Empire schreibt zurück” 123). Indeed, Russel Berman has suggested that it would “not be much of an exaggeration to claim that German literary studies still gives priority to ‘the white boys of Weimar’ or subsequent authors who fit the mould” (qtd. in Hestermann 345). It is only reasonable, given the historical and cultural contexts, that the literary works of contemporary Turkish German writers “have become of interest to foreign scholars working on German literature” who engage them “in the context of global diaphora writing” (Hestermann 344). However, as Sandra Hestermann elucidates:

This context has to a large extent been ignored by German scholars in Germany, among whom the recent flood of literary production has sparked little interest. Instead, scholars in departments of German literature still apply the term “migrant minority literature,” thus allocating to these writers a marginal role in the production of German literature. (344)

Moreover, despite the responses of the Goethe Institute and the German cultural embassies to the demand of audiences outside Germany for the work of Turkish German authors, these writers are often merely appropriated “as cultural ambassadors of the ‘multicultural metropolises’ of Germany” (Hestermann 352). Thus, it seems that literary critics still face the task of widening and promoting the study of minority writers that disrupt alleged German cultural and historical homogeneity and fundamentally call “the ‘Germanness’ of ‘German’ literature into question” (Jankowsky 262).

3.1.3. Chinese American Women Writing in the Promised Land

When it comes to the literary production of Chinese Americans, American Orientalist discourse has promoted the idea that Asian Americans can be “top-notch engineers or kung fu fighters but surely not poets, playwrights, or novelists”(Cheung, “Introduction” 2). As a consequence, Asian American writers “may feel ghettoized as second-class citizens in the marketplace,” because they are perceived as “good Asian writers” but certainly not “good writers” (2). Mainstream critics consider Asian American literary productions “narrow” and exotic “specialized work” written by authors who, no matter how assimilated to U.S. American culture and language, simply do not belong to it and, thus, cannot represent it (Kim, “Defining Asian American Realities” 152).

In relation to the Asian American female literary tradition specifically, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana illustrate that

[d]uring the early period of labor immigration, a number of factors made it difficult for Asian American women to create literature: patriarchal values in the Asian countries that militated against women’s literacy and self-expression; the harsh lives of Asian American women as prostitutes, wives, mothers, and/or co-laborers with the men, which made the time and energy needed to write a luxury; and the dominant society’s lack of interest in Asian American women except in ethnographic, missionary, or philanthropic contexts. Only glimpses of early Chinese American women’s lives can be caught in the male-authored texts of the period. (184-85)

However, scholars of Chinese American literature tend to agree that the recently recovered Eurasian Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914), known under the pen name Sui Sin Far, is “the first expression of Chinese experience in the United States and in Canada and the first fiction in English by any Asian North American” (Ling and White-Parks, “Introduction” 2). Annette White-Parks suggests that actually Sui Sin Far might have been the first intellectual to use the term “*Chinese American*” to refer to the Chinese who

lived and worked in the United States (xvi; original emphasis). In her writing, the term Chinese American displays the consciousness of a subjecthood that is neither Chinese nor white U.S. American but an amalgamation of both.

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, in a period of rampant and virulent sinophobia, Sui Sin Far's autobiographical writings include journalistic articles, essays, and short stories confronting racism and classism. Sui Sin Far believed that "race" is an oppressive, unnatural, and confining "social construction" whose effects, as she experienced them, are nevertheless "very real" for the people affected by racial violence and discrimination (White-Parks xiv). Her writing likewise shows her awareness that "Americanization" was seen by white American culture as a one-way process in which Chinese Americans were expected "to relinquish their native traditions and adapt the language, religions, and manners of mainstream America" (White-Parks 127).

In her life, Sui Sin Far rejected exoticism and objected to the advice of people who advised her to "dress in Chinese costume, carry a fan in [her] hand, wear a pair of scarlet beaded slippers, live in New York, and [claim to] come of high birth" in order to become more appealing and marketable ("Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" 230). Sui Sin Far likewise opposed proposals that she "should discourse on [her] spirit acquaintance with Chinese ancestors" in order to become a literary success in the U.S., instead of spending her time acquainting herself with Chinese Americans around her and writing about their immigrant experience (230).

Her accounts aim at presenting Chinese Americans "not as exotics but as ordinary human beings trying to lead normal lives" (Daniels xi). As a Eurasian, with a Chinese mother and an English father, Sui Sin Far, who could pass as a white non-Chinese

woman, never hesitated to identify herself as Chinese.⁹⁶ In her autobiographical account “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian,” Sui Sin Far confronts her racist white American acquaintances and employer who, at lunch, not perceiving her as Chinese, openly express their bias against Chinese Americans. She counters the insults by remarking; “the Chinese people may have no souls, no expression on their faces, be altogether beyond the pale of civilization, but whatever they are, I want you to understand that I am-I am a Chinese” (225). Sui Sin Far often wrote about the bigotry she experienced from both Asians and Caucasians. She writes: “My mother’s people are as prejudiced as my father’s” (qtd. in Ling and White-Parks 2).

As a woman writer who decided not to marry, Sui Sin Far also wrote about the gender oppression that she witnessed and experienced as a single woman. Her stories question traditional gender roles and destabilize gender and racial categories. Nonetheless, she was also well aware of the U.S. popular cultural dehumanization of Chinese men. In her stories, “Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese Man” and “Her Chinese Husband,” she strives to present a positive and complex image of Chinese men that goes beyond the servile, the ludicrous, and the evil. In the first story, Sui Sin Far presents a happy biracial marriage. From the perspective of the white woman it shows that, despite her worries about their biracial little son in a racist society, her life takes a positive turn after marrying the thoughtful and caring, though at times also “arbitrary,” Chinese man Liu Kanghi (77). In “Her Chinese Husband,” she reports the hardships the protagonists from the first story face as a biracial couple due to the

⁹⁶ Unlike Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton, her famous sister Winnifred Eaton (1875-1954), who wrote under the pen name Onoto Watanna, decided to disavow her Chinese identity and ancestry. Her work was devoted to fabricate “a Japanese background” that was more widely accepted by American mainstream society (White-Parks 4).

misunderstandings of prejudiced Americans and Chinese. The account tells how after some years, the husband is eventually killed by angered “Chinese” who, “just as there are some Americans,” were among those opposed to the biracial relationship (83). After her own death in 1914, Sui Sin Far’s work was forgotten and followed “by sixty-one years” of almost total silence (White-Parks 1). In 1975, Sui Sin Far was praised as a pioneer of Asian American literature by the editors of the anthology *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*.

Yet, as Elaine H. Kim reminds us, the Western racist defamation, marginalization, and desexualisation of Asian American men, which Sui Sin Far was so bent on countering, has brought some benefits to Asian American women. The devaluation of Asian American men has to a certain extent contributed to the shaping of new gender identities for Asian American women in the United States. It has also facilitated the advancement of women’s social value. For instance, in the case of early immigrant communities where, according to Confucian thought, the “enforced childlessness for Asian immigrants” meant “condemnation to a life of perpetual boyhood in their own communities,” women and daughters were often esteemed (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 74). Moreover, although the predilection for male children never really lost currency, in a segregated environment, “the possibility of economic opportunities for educated American-born daughters [and] [...] the economic mobility they made possible for their husbands” frequently raised their status in the family (74). However, Kim is careful to emphasize that the relative improvement of Asian American women’s lives was possible simply “because Asian patriarchy was pushed aside or subsumed by an

American patriarchy that did not, because of racism, extend its promise to Asian American men” (75).⁹⁷

Since the mid-70s, “the issue of gender has become a consciously employed identity politics in Asian American literature” that has facilitated the emergence of several women writers as well as male writers, but has also exacerbated a haunting gender divide in Asian American cultures and literatures (Ling 313).⁹⁸ During the Civil Rights Movements and the Vietnam War, a period of dramatic social and demographic change, Asian Americans became increasingly aware of the need to challenge the U.S. American literary canon. In the case of male Chinese American writers who felt marginalized in a society that had bereft them of their masculinity and its prerogatives, some aggressively attempted to vindicate their heroic manhood as Chinese Americans and claim a space within U.S. political and cultural life. To date, the most prominent Chinese American writer who has tried to empower “the Chinese American father” and revive epic Chinese American masculinity has been Frank Chin (Ling 318). Chin decisively rejected the notion of the “dual personality” of the Asian American identity moving between two mutually exclusive and discrete cultures.⁹⁹ He equally disapproved of what he viewed as “the ‘feminization’ of Asian American literature” and

⁹⁷ For an overview of Chinese American women’s writing from 1910 to post World War II, see Wong and Santa Ana, 186-188 (also, see Wong “Chinese American Literature” for an overview of the tradition).

⁹⁸ Before the advent of the civil rights and the feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, “[m]ost Asian American writing did not feature explicit critiques of sexism as a social and political issue. [...] Rather, [i]n this period, a tentative yet persistent search for the meaning of gender is reflected in literary works by both women and men” (Ling 313).

⁹⁹ Frank Chin was inspired by John Okada’s *No-No Boy* in his questioning of the “dual personality” paradigm that had dominated Chinese American identity discourse. Chin exposed the psychic damage that this notion has caused Asian Americans as well as the artificiality of the racist and confining paradigm. He wrote: “Back in 1957 John said things Asian Americans were afraid to hear, much less say today. Things every yellow feels. I’ve known all my life that I am not Chinese and I am not white American. I was brought up to believe there was nothing else for me to be but a Chinese foreigner or a fake white American. ... John Okada shows the ‘identity’ crisis to be totally real and absolutely fake in a book that is still too strong for many yellows to read” (qtd. in Goshert 49).

antagonistically complained about the support of Chinese American women writers by mainstream U.S. American publishers (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 75).¹⁰⁰ Scholars have named the phase that Chin initiated in Asian American literature the “cultural nationalist period” (Wong and Santa Ana 173). This crucial epoch, characterized by the attempt to establish an Asian American sensibility, would be dominated by the cultural debate about the homogeneous, authentic, and heterosexual “Asian American manhood and womanhood” respectively paraded by Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston (173; see also Cheung, “Warrior Women versus Chinaman Pacific;” *Kim Asian American Literature* 173-213; Yin 229-253).¹⁰¹

In the 1980s, Chin openly discredited and denigrated a number of Chinese American writers who he perceived as Americanized sell-outs profiting from Orientalism. Accusing them of perpetuating damaging stereotypes of Chinese in their artistic creations, Chin attacked Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong, Amy Tan, playwright David Henry Hwang, Betty Bao Lord, and especially Maxine Hong Kingston for her “white racist genius” (Chin, “Come All Ye” 27). Failing “to see the entanglements of the socioeconomic oppression of Asian men in America with their cultural oppression in terms of sexism,” Chin thus believed that only Kingston’s internalized racism could have led her to vilify Chinese civilization, Confucianism, and Chinese manhood in her literary

¹⁰⁰ Scholars tend to agree that though controversial, bitter, homophobic, and sexist, Frank Chin remains a force in Asian American and U.S. American literary and cultural studies. Intellectuals acknowledge that Chin’s work and contentious critique of American racism was seminal for the development of Asian American literary studies. (See for example Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s “Chinese American Literature,” 40; Yin 236, 240). Nonetheless, Elaine H Kim also suggests that Chin jeopardizes his pioneer status and risks making his interventions irrelevant by insisting “on a system of binary oppositions that denies women an autonomous selfhood” (“Such Opposite Creatures” 75).

¹⁰¹ Calling attention to the diversity of Asian American literature, Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana explain that, during this period, “[o]penly gay Asian American writers” also began to publish (189). Nonetheless, as the scholars concede, their works were overshadowed “by a debate between heterosexual men and women” that some Chinese American intellectuals have called a debate between “Chinatown cowboys and warrior women” (189). Wong’s and Santa Ana’s article, “Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature,” offers an overview of Asian American queer writing.

work (Ling 320). In his view, Kingston exaggerated the patriarchal aspects of Chinese culture in her groundbreaking and highly controversial autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, 1976.¹⁰² Chin attacked Kingston's personal writing as "the writing of a person without a people" (Chin, "This is Not An Autobiography" 130) and accused her of rampant Chinese cultural betrayal for taking "The Ballad of Mulan" and turning its heroine, Fa Mulan, "into a champion of Chinese feminism" expected to be "an inspiration to Chinese American girls to dump the Chinese race and make for white universality" (Chin, "Come All Ye" 27).¹⁰³ Instead, hoping to maintain patriarchal Chinese American cultural nationalism undamaged, Chin suggested keeping "our conflicts inside the community and resolv[ing] them in terms of community and culture" (qtd. in Kim "Such Opposite Creatures" 78).

Chin's open opposition to Kingston's Chinese American empowered womanhood and his denial of unequal gender relationships in Chinese culture have subsequently and ironically moved many Asian American women writers to articulate their needs,

¹⁰² Experimental and eclectic, *The Woman Warrior* remains the most frequently read and taught Chinese American literary text written by a woman to date. In it, Kingston rereads traditional Chinese stories and myths in order to display the subordination and dilemmas of American-born Chinese women within patriarchal communities. The widely discussed text, which was published under the label autobiography, has been interpreted "as both anti-Orientalist and neo-Orientalist" (Wong, "Chinese American Literature" 50). Kingston has attempted, to no avail, to counterbalance the controversy around *The Woman Warrior* by writing the experimental work *China Men*, a production that celebrates Chinese American men's heroism. As Wong explains, "the controversy rages on; every issue raised by *The Woman Warrior* touches a nerve and exposes a fundamental tension in the Chinese American experience that cannot be resolved through debate" (50; see also Kim 79). Nonetheless, King-Kok Cheung points out that Hong Kingston's work has contributed to the questionable gender separatist tendency present in Chinese American and Asian American literature. Though *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* were "conceived and written" together, Cheung explains, Hong Kingston "separated the female and male story into two books" ("Warrior Women versus Chinaman Pacific" 318).

¹⁰³ At this point, it is relevant to mention *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) by Jade Snow Wong. Wong's work exemplifies the success story that heralds Americanization as the means of liberation from sexism and patriarchal authority. This successful assimilationist work was probably "the most widely read book by a second-generation Chinese until the publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" was recommended as "required reading for all those who are interested in the Sino-American experience" (Yin 135). Maxine Hong Kingston mentions Jade Snow Wong as one of her greatest literary influences and the only Chinese American woman writer she had read before writing *The Woman Warrior*. Unaware of Sui Sin Far's work, Hong Kingston called Wong "the Mother of Chinese American Literature" (Daniels xii).

demands, and differences within the Chinese patriarchal tradition. Inspired by Kingston, women writers have represented women who are “tough, powerful, resourceful, independent and courageous, neither ‘lotus blossom’ nor ‘dragon lady’” (Wong and Santa Ana 194). Likewise, the tradition of Chinese American women writers has often problematized Confucian ideas and practices. Chinese American women writers have tended to present fathers “as distant and silent” and often nameless figures (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 83; see also Wong, “Sugar Sisterhood” 177-79). Attempting to reaffirm their brave womanhood, they have accentuated the presence of mothers as heroic story tellers who are “the daughters’ source of strength” (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 83; see also Wong, “Sugar Sisterhood” 177-79).¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in the post-cultural nationalist period, contemporary women writers attempt “to carry out the task of articulating [their] own concerns and still locate common ground with Asian American men’s interests” (Ling, “Identity Crisis and Gender Politics” 322). Post-cultural nationalist women writers have also tried to move away from essentialist gender opposition towards a more distinctive and inclusive position that reconnects with men and dissolves binary oppositions of ethnicity and gender by deploying “gender ambiguity or gender transgression” in their productions (326). Along these lines, scholars of Chinese American literature welcome the recovery of Sui Sin Far’s invaluable legacy and the increasing popularity that her work is enjoying (Daniels xii). Sui Sin Far is one of “the few writers” that “virtually all Chinese American critics endorse” (Yin 87). Sui Sin

¹⁰⁴ Wong and Santa Ana illustrate the similarities and differences of the masculinist and the feminist projects. They suggest that the projects are similar because “[t]he male writers establish a patriline, the female ones, a matriline, and both turn to the construction of heroic ancestors and the invention of new images to rehabilitate Asian American manhood and womanhood” (195). Concurrently, the projects diverge to the extent that the masculinist project “is fraught with anxiety about proper genealogy, authenticity, ‘traceability,’ and fixity of identity, whereas the feminist project appears more comfortable with fluidity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy of both origin and identity” (196).

Far's writing suggests a possible solution to "the gender wars" that have dominated Chinese American literature for a long time. Her work illustrates that gender tensions can be negotiated without setting Chinese American/Asian American women and men apart or in opposition to one another (Li 125).

Chinese American women's writing has not only engaged with Eastern and Western patriarchy; their writing has also attempted to destroy the controlling and damaging image of the subservient "Oriental Woman" predominant in American popular culture (Uchida 172). Nevertheless, this racist everyday discourse of the foreign "Oriental Woman" that prevails "as if the century of life experiences of Asian women in the United States has had little impact" still demands significant commitment, and critical and artistic refutation from women writers (167). Mary A. Young similarly hints at the still prevailing need for attention to this subject matter in women's narratives when she decries the glaring lack of commitment to the lives of "slave girls" in the writing of Chinese American women writers. Young remind us: "Although aspects of Chinese-American history have been neglected by Chinese American women writers, primary images of Chinese and Chinese-American women in Euro-American fiction remain: prostitution, passivity, and unrelenting evil" (140).

Additionally, Young proposes that by putting substantial emphasis on claiming Americanness without paying due attention to U. S. American historical racism, some Chinese American women writers have preferred to remain oblivious to many negative experiences of the Chinese in the United States: "By reinforcing ties to a Chinese past rather than focusing on an American present or future, Chinese-American women writers do not burden the conscience of the Euro-American readers" (145). Instead, Young adds,

“They make readers feel good about them” (145).¹⁰⁵ By ignoring important aspects of the lived experiences of Chinese Americans, Young suggests, some Chinese women writers have at times aligned “themselves with Euro-Americans” (145).

It is exceedingly difficult for Chinese American women writers to record and narrate their experiences within Chinese patriarchy without being accused of betraying their communities and culture in order to win approval from U.S. American mainstream culture. Because they are often viewed as authentic and authoritative spokespersons for the ethnic experience of their communities, Chinese American women writers frequently see their creative literary works misinterpreted as pure ethnic facts by their U.S. American readerships. Based on the Orientalist framework through which these readers approach their texts, their works tend to be measured “against the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental” (Kingston 55).

Furthermore, Chinese American and non-Chinese American critics often read literary works by Chinese American writers as seeking to expose the immigrant’s “dual personality” (Liu 327). That is to say, critics hunt “the bicultural individual pathologies” of the Chinese American individual that remains “ever split between the two cultures” (Liu 327). More frequently, within what Palumbo Liu has called “the model minority discourse,” readings of Chinese American literature tend to fetishize the “ethnic dilemma” and to pedagogically celebrate the achieved inner “healing” of the ethnic

¹⁰⁵ Young discusses the almost total silence in Chinese American accounts about the children who were born to Chinese prostitutes: “These children were among the first Chinese born in the United States, and they should be an important part of Chinese-American history” (140). Young also refers to the exclusion of “Eurasians, the off-spring of a European or Euro-American and an Asian” from Chinese American narratives (140). In fact, it seems that so far “Sui Sin Far and Diana Chang [are] the only Chinese-American women writers who featured Eurasian characters, male or female” (140).

heroine or hero, usually consisting of the cheerful assimilation of the immigrant regardless of the contradictions that their literary works might expose (396).

It is then no wonder that though some Chinese American writers have received recognition, it does not necessarily follow that “the mainstream publishing industry is now open to the full range of Asian American sensibilities and tonalities” (Cheung, “Re-Viewing” 17). Critics have suggested that some texts are deemed to be more worthy and palatable as representations of the “ethnic experience” (17). King-Kok Cheung proposes that: “the commercial presses seem to have favored works [that are] optimistic, apolitical, autobiographical” (17). Indeed, critics have likewise suggested that the predilection of cheerful narratives that highlight “the ability of Asian Americans to assimilate and to accommodate to the basic rules of American society” is a strategy that aims at two goals. First, this approach attempts to maintain the image of Asian Americans as the model minority that other minority groups should emulate. Second, the political tactic equally tries to keep alive the pervading fantasy of the model minority in order to silence criticism of U.S. American racist practices (Cheung 18). Or as Bryan Niiya has lucidly put it: “If one were trying to prove that the American system works for everyone and that, consequently, it’s their own fault if certain groups fail to achieve ‘success,’ then one could hardly come up with a better vehicle than Asian American autobiography” (qtd. in Cheung 19).

Nevertheless, when it comes to the field of American studies, Amy Ling explains that, in the case of Chinese American female writers, “most scholars of American literature are at a loss to name Chinese American women writers” (“Chinese American Women Writers” 136). Probably the tendency to view Chinese American writing as

biography and ethnography has prevented these productions from “being taken seriously as literature” (Cheung, “Re-Viewing” 19). In fact, addressing the limited coverage of this literature, King-Kok Cheung asserts that “[m]ost readers and instructors are familiar with only a few ‘big names’” that, as a product of institutionalized and well-contained multiculturalism, occupy a place of honor in the “mainstream literary canon (“Introduction” 9).¹⁰⁶

In their writing, some contemporary Chinese American women writers might have at times excluded important ideological, historical, and social aspects of their degradation in the Promised Land, but numerous Asian American women and men working in different fields are and have been defying the forces of Orientalism for a long time. Lately, Asian American scholars also bring to the fore the need for Western consumers, cultural critics, and scholars to take on the collective ethical responsibility of challenging the homemade Oriental myth of femininity. Hinting at the difficulty of dismantling the Orientalization of Asian women, Aki Uchida states: “There needs to be more of the collective effort to denounce the creation, diffusion, and the use of the Oriental Woman” (Uchida 173). Uchida stresses the urgent need to resist a racist practice that negatively influences “the mental and social life” of Asian American women in the United States and many Asian women in other parts of the world (173). The critic emphasizes that this task “should not be placed on the individual women” alone (173) and calls for assistance in order to control a Western stereotype serving to justify racist

¹⁰⁶ In relation to canons and canon formation Wong suggests: “Although there is no end point in the canon-formation process, there are already signs the ‘Asian American’ canon, the one rising from contestations within the community, differs considerably from the one shaped by the publishing industry and the critical establishment” (Wong, “Sugar Sisterhood” 202).

and sexist practices. Uschida's appeal should not be ignored by intellectuals, writers, consumers, or critics.

3. 2. Conclusions

Without assuming a universal feminine experience, and avoiding simplistic comparisons and generalizations about female experience, it can be stated that Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American women, as women writers, are members of minorities that, at some moment in the history of their respective guest countries, were viewed as economically necessary, but were not welcomed to remain as citizens. They are members of societies which have made use of "the ethics of nonhospitality" (Balibar 69); their presence has disturbed "the coherence of universalism and national identity" of the guest countries (69). Though the histories and the circumstances of Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese minorities are by no means identical or even parallel, it is possible to affirm that, at times, the effects of their marginalization have been similar. Their exclusion and stigmatization have resulted in segregation, ghettoization, physical violence, and death. Thus far, their precarious existence, in what many of them have come to view as their own countries, has remained peripheral as they are placed in the role of perpetual foreigners.

Moreover, public statements about Jews, Turks, and Chinese are not only shaped by their perception within their specific guest countries' societies. As stereotyped and permanent outsiders, the well-being of Jewish, Turkish, and Chinese minorities is also dependent on political and social conflicts within the countries that mainstream cultures in their guest countries, consistently though wrongfully, continue to perceive as the immigrants' rightful countries of "origin." These assumptions remain even for those

Jewish Argentines, Turkish Germans or Chinese Americans who have little or no knowledge of the language of the alleged “country of origin” and are similarly unfamiliar with the nations’ cultures. That is to say, their safety substantially depends on the turns, outcomes, and resonances of international and transnational conflicts in which Israel, Turkey, and China might be involved whether they themselves have any associations with those nations or not, and on specific political crosscurrents in their guest countries. For instance, the long-lasting catastrophic situation in the Middle East and its impact throughout the Western world has often unleashed uninformed and generalizing anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic antagonism towards members of these ethnic groups.

Additionally, Helma Lutz reminds us that, in Christian Europe and certainly in other nations of the Christian Western world, after the fall of the “ideologischen Grenzen zwischen Ost und West” (146; “ideological barriers between East and West”), it has become fashionable for politicians, feminists, journalists, and writers to caricaturize and propagate disrespectful, uncensored, and uninformed comments on Muslims. In the case of Chinese Americans, the emergence of China as a world superpower in an era of transnational capital flow and anxious globalization has made possible the reemergence of anti-Chinese sentiments directed against Chinese Americans viewed as potential anti-patriotic enemies within (Palumbo-Liu 386). In this apprehensive atmosphere, the stereotype of “the model minority” has also often been responsible for fueling rage and resentment “against the success some Asian Americans have experienced” (Shanahan 92). Finally, members of these immigrant groups have repeatedly learned that assimilation and citizenship do not protect them from xenophobia.

In these circumstances, Jewish Argentine, Turkish German, and Chinese American women writers have been writing about their experiences and their lives in countries that essentialize them and refuse to treat them as full citizens. The xenophobic and institutionalized racist violence directed towards them partly explain the degree of self-segregation, introversion, and even unwillingness to participate in the culture of the guest country on the part of some Jews in Argentina, some Turks in Germany, and some Chinese Americans in the United States. Incidentally, this attitude has also often been used to question their loyalty to their guest countries or to highlight their inability to feel loyalty towards their guest nations. Their frequent perception as outsiders occupying a historical and cultural non-space in Argentina, Germany, and the U.S.A. has meant that the literary works and stories of women belonging to these minorities have been virtually absent from mainstream analyses of their guest countries' histories and cultures. Moreover, when their narratives have been studied, analyses of their works have often emphasized the opposition of the nation's center and its periphery, exposing the tendency, as it were wishful thinking, to make their literary works and lives less rich and multifaceted and thus more "understandable" for the reader. Or, as Barbara Smith, who views the terms "minority" and "majority" as markers firmly located in a "Western dualistic or 'binary' frame" (337), has expressed: "Constructs like the *center* and the *periphery* reveal that tendency to want to make the world less complex by organizing it according to one principle, to fix it according to an idea which is really an ideal" (341; original emphases).

The next chapters of this project will enhance the reading of immigrant women's writing that so far has remained stuck in the hierarchical binary opposition of the nation's

center and its periphery. This clear-cut concept of self and/or Other denies “a world culture of overlapping and contaminations” (Grumbrecht 254). In other words, such a definition of majority and minority posits two disconnected, even reciprocally exclusive, worlds, as if these two worlds and cultures were the “given nature of things rather than secured by the institutionalized directive signs of an order of discourse” (Wynter 461). This project suggests that criticism of immigrants’ literary works has unwittingly perpetuated the wishful perception of immigrant writers writing outside-- at the margins, the periphery, the borders, or the fringes-- of the nation. In the best of cases, this criticism has presented immigrants stuck “between two worlds” by signifying incommensurable and absolute cultural divides between two discrete, disconnected, and mutually exclusive worlds, or by celebrating the wholehearted assimilation of the immigrant to the mainstream culture. These forms of minority literary analysis have stimulated the exclusion and marginalization of the very immigrants they have sought to study and/or to promote. This practice, in which sometimes immigrant women writers themselves have unwittingly been complicit, has made it difficult to imagine immigrants as something other than perpetual foreigners occupying historical and cultural non-spaces in the guest nations. In this way, such readings have perpetuated stereotypes and intellectual biases rather than rectifying them. Indeed, this literary practice seems to be based on the rationale that second, third, and fourth generation immigrant writers’ imaginations and lives have not been touched and “influenced by many years of living, working, studying, and dreaming” in the countries that they understand as their homes (Adelson, “Against Between” 245).

Aware that the way in which immigrants' literature is read and understood is of immense importance, this project analyzes their works in terms of what the literary critic Leslie A. Adelson calls historical, cultural, and affective "touching tales" (*The Turkish Turn* 20). "Touching tales" is a tool that can prevent us from producing readings about immigrants stuck between two worlds, or of immigrant writers writing outside or at the margins of nations. In this sense, "touching tales" is a literary lens that can promote more imaginative readings of immigrant women's writing that, due to their frequent perception as outsiders occupying a historical and cultural non-space in Argentina, Germany, and the U.S., have been largely absent from mainstream analyses of their quest countries' histories and cultures.

"Touching tales" do not aim to reclaim some kind of assumed national center for the immigrant, an intellectual move that would amount to the reiteration of the notion of a sacrosanct national essence and center to which the peripheral immigrant hopefully and rightfully aspires to belong. Instead, "touching tales," without hiding exclusion, opens up a dynamic world of immigrant literature in flux that exposes interactive transnational and national cultural contexts without overvaluing the transnational over the national or vice versa. Adelson's historical and cultural "touching tales" problematize any form of homogeneous national cohesion by hinting at transnational and local events that deconstruct any reputed sense of national autonomy and cultural purity by drawing attention to points of convergence where histories and cultures touch one another. Moreover, "touching tales" show where so-called discrete and incommensurable cultures merge, creating "ties that bind" (41). Adelson's literary tool of analysis provides a means

to present immigrants as integral members of the histories and cultures of the Argentine, German, and U.S. American nations they inhabit and help to redefine.

At the same time, McClennen's "dialectics of exile" suggests that "literature can be best understood as a series of dialectic tensions, as opposed to a series of mutually exclusive binaries" (28). The "dialectics of exile" can help expose to degree to which binaries can help or curtail the understanding of immigrant women's writing (28). Instead of positing mutually exclusive binaries, the "dialectics of exile" suggest oppositions that are not static, but unstable and in flux, interpenetrating one another. In other words, McClennen's literary tool complicates theories of cultural identity that posit that "the self must be either/or assimilated or dissimilated, national or transnational, essential or different" (221) and helps explain how these authors negotiate contradictory tensions that emerge between the national and the transnational, assimilation and dissimulation, essentialism and multiculturalism, and unity and fragmentation. Furthermore, the "dialectics of exile" help to highlight the writers' efforts to redefine the Argentine, German, and U.S. American nations and show how these writers define their cultural identities in the largely unwelcoming environments they inhabit.

Chapter 4

**Cecilia Absatz and Nora Glickman:
Reevaluating Latin American Identity**

Through an analysis of Nora Glickman's *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, 1983 ("One of her Johns and Other Stories") and Cecilia Absatz's *Los años pares*, 1985 ("The Even-Numbered Years"), this chapter suggests that these two writers do more than disrupt official versions of Argentine national history and attempt to rewrite the roles assigned to women in patriarchal social structures both in "the traditional Jewish world and the sociopolitical actuality of present day Latin America" (DiAntonio 2). This chapter argues that, while Absatz is writing in Buenos Aires and Glickman in New York, their works are interrelated in two ways. First, Absatz's and Glickman's narratives, in addition to redefining Latin American identity, also participate in the continuing debate among intellectuals in Latin America of how to redefine Latin American "Identity's New Frontiers" by moving beyond the enigmas of nationalism and essentialism (Ainsa 60). Second, within the framework of Latin American postmodernist discourses of identity, in their effort to reevaluate modern ideologies of an autochthonous Catholic, mestizo, criollo "Latin American identity," Absatz and Glickman present models of Latin American identity that display the dialectical tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes that have traditionally characterized the debates about the possibility of a Latin American identity independent from imperialistic Western influences.

This chapter illustrates that Glickman and Absatz present two distinct yet convergent positions on the representation of the Jewish Argentine women's experience. Absatz presents a vision of Latin American identity that questions both modernist Eurocentric and essentialist Latin American versions of collective Latinamericanism.

However, this analysis reveals that though Absatz's work aims to resolve the tension between the Western "center" and the Latin American "periphery," by the end of her anti-essentialist critique her work actually builds a dialectical tension between leftist (read: political position that advocates the incorporation of marginal cultural elements) and conservative nationalistic (read: position that tends to dismiss European and U.S. American influences as utterly harmful) approaches to Latin American identity that brings her project close to the traditional oppositional and essentialist versions of Latinamericanism that her project questions.

In contrast, Glickman's stories complicate nationalist and essentialist concepts of Latin American identity by demonstrating that identity no longer has to correspond to official national boundaries, languages, religion or ethnicity. Rather, she suggests a heterogeneous transnational Latin American identity created through alliances and shared experiences. Though Glickman suggests a transnational identity devoid of national attachments and renders nations' boundaries irrelevant, her proposal is also problematic. Not only is it questionable to "posit the end of the nation" in the face of pervasive Western expansionism, but, as Sophia A. McClennen reminds us, "transnationalism actually refers to an even more pervasive spread of Western-based culture," to the detriment of Third World cultures, identities, and economies (24). Thus, in the face of unequal transnational cultural transactions, Glickman's non-essentialist vision of Latin American identity, suggesting that there need be no "Others" or "Aliens" (McClennen 24), can unwittingly fuel oppositional conservative identity positions in Latin America.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ In fact, referring to postmodern intellectual positions in the region, Jorge Larraín explains that "Postmodernism has come to reinforce oppositional and essentialist positions on Latin American identity which since the dictatorships from the 70s have gained terrain" (88). The critic adds: "In effect, the failures of economic development in many Latin American countries and the military dictatorships that followed in

Thus, as this chapter will show, both Absatz's and Glickman's fiction lingers in the unresolved tension between the Western center and the Latin American periphery that has been the bedrock of manifold Latin American intellectual efforts to achieve cultural and economic independence from persistent Western influence. Absatz's and Glickman's literary works, without explicitly claiming to join the Latin American identity debate, simply inscribe themselves into this tradition by participating in the historic quest of Latin American writers and intellectuals: the aspiration to advance Latin American cultural autonomy in relation to Western influence.

4.1. Cecilia Absatz

Cecilia Absatz, of Ashkenazic ancestry, was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1943. Absatz's father immigrated to Argentina from Poland in 1928 after losing his family in European wars. The same year, her mother came with her parents and her older brother from the Ukraine, which at that time belonged to the Soviet Union (E-mail to the author). Absatz studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Buenos Aires. In addition to being a fiction writer, Absatz is a professional translator and a successful editor, journalist, and writer of television scripts. She also translated a dictionary, *The Joys of Yiddish*, by Leo Rosten from English to Spanish (E-mail to the author).

Absatz's first work was the autobiographical *Féiguele y otras mujeres* ("Féiguele and Other Women," 1976) a collection of seven short stories. Because one of the stories includes an explicit discussion of abortion, the compilation was classified as immoral by

their wake, led many intellectuals to a forceful and bitter critique of Western instrumental rationality and to the reappraisal of a different, supposedly original, kind of cultural identity, which would have been lost in the course of history. The main idea of the essentialist currents, be they neo-Indianist or religious fundamentalist, is that the processes of modernization, so desired and sought after in Latin America, could not but lead to failure insofar as they do not respect the Latin American identity, which even though forgotten, continues to be the true essence that has to be recovered" (88).

the Videla regime. As a result, the book was banned just three months after its publication. Despite the censorship of her work, Absatz did not leave Argentina.

Feiguele y otras mujeres begins with the autobiographical short story “Féiguele,” which presents the painful coming of age of the title character. Féiguele is a fourteen-year-old, middle-class, Jewish girl in Buenos Aires. She is a troubled girl, self-conscious about her weight, her name (which continuously forces her to have to explain herself to others), and her Jewishness. In this story, as Absatz explains, the writer herself comes to terms with “el judaismo” (Fingueret, “Ser escritoras argentinas y judías” 20; “Judaism”).

Her second work, the experimental *Té con canela*, 1982 (“Cinnamon Tea”), was published after the period of military rule. The ironic account *Té con canela* continues the topic initiated in *Féiguele*, the female quest for self-definition and self-discovery. In the process of self-fashioning, the protagonist rejects all feminine stereotypes and questions sexist ideals and expectations. Instead, she attempts to create an empowered subjectivity grounded on her individual qualities. The stylistically more conservative novel *Los años pares*, 1985 (“The Even Years”), Absatz’s third book, can be understood as the culmination of the project that Absatz initiated with *Féiguele*. In this narrative, the adult protagonist Clara Auslender finally finds the strength to assume her place in life on her own terms. Absatz’s latest novel *¿Dónde estás amor de mi vida, que no te puedo encontrar?*, 1995, (“Where are You, Love of my Life that I Cannot Find You?”) is based on Absatz’s scripts for the television miniseries of the same name. Unlike her earlier works, the collection no longer makes reference to political turmoil and repression. It

gravitates around diverse failed and successful personal relationships. The work has been criticized for its entirely traditional heterosexual approach to relationships.¹⁰⁸

4.1.1. *Los años pares*

The dominant characters in Absatz's writing are women who attempt to open up a space for an independent female identity in patriarchal Argentine society. It is a point of interest that while not all of her main characters are Jewish, they all share similar life challenges: namely, they have to negotiate romantic relationships and claim their own identities. *Los años pares* is itself evidence against the claim that minority women writers only engage with ethnic matters, since to a certain extent the story of Clara is a universal story of the search for the self. In *Los años pares*, Absatz focuses on four years in the life of the main character, the Argentine Clara Auslender (read: clearly foreigner).¹⁰⁹ Absatz engages with Clara's life between the years 1976-1980, and the Dirty War serves as a backdrop for her narrative. In the work, Clara self-critically analyzes the last four years of her life and her romantic involvement with the Dutch painter Eric van der Möer. The narrative follows a traditional plot line and is divided into four chapters that create a circular structure. Clara's reevaluation of her life begins with the chapter titled "1980," followed by the chapters "1976" and "1978," and rounding up her account with a return to the year "1980."

¹⁰⁸ As a journalist, Cecilia Absatz has written for numerous magazines such as *Claudia y Somos*, and newspapers, like *La Nación*. Her last book is the collection of non-fiction essay called *Mujeres peligrosas: la pasión según el teleteatro*, 1995, [Dangerous Women: Passion According to the Soap Opera], in which the writer examines the ways Argentine culture has been influenced by U.S. American pop culture. In the essays, Absatz examines the representation of women in Argentine, Mexican, Brazilian, and American soap operas. Absatz's short stories have been anthologized in, among others: *The Silver Candelabra and Other Stories*, 1997; *17 narradoras latinoamericanas*, 1996, [17 Latin American Women Narrators]; and *La vida te despeina: historias de mujeres en busca de la felicidad*, 2005, [Life Messes Up Your Hair: Stories of Women in Search of Happiness].

¹⁰⁹ Auslender from the German *Ausländer* [foreigner].

Throughout *Los años pares*, besides attempting to assert a female identity, Absatz engages in two projects simultaneously. First, she revises and expands the official Argentine national history during the years of the Dirty War, a narrative often conveyed from the perspective of exiled artists and intellectuals. Absatz negates the commonly held belief that during the Dirty War all cultural activity had been crushed by the dictators. Secondly, as the name of the main protagonist Clara Auslander suggests, Absatz engages in the project of redefining a hybrid Latin American identity. For this project of identity reconceptualization, Absatz questions diverse ideologies that have been deployed to claim an autochthonous Latin American distinctiveness. More specifically, she examines how this autochthonous Latin American identity rests on the exclusion of non-mestizo, non-criollo elements from definitions of Latinamericanism.

Absatz's *Los años pares* attempts to present an-other face of Argentine history during the years of terror. From the first pages of her narrative, Absatz hints at the repression, intimidation, and censorship that pushed many intellectuals, artists, writers, and activists to go into exile and "huir para siempre" (18; "run away forever") in order to save their lives. However, by calling attention to the ongoing cultural life in Argentina during the dictatorship, Absatz's work more emphatically pays tribute and gives a voice to the artists and the intellectuals who remained in the country. In fact, Absatz's account seems to join David William Foster in suggesting that:

[T]he exiles' visibility as spokespersons on the conditions that had forced them to seek foreign refuge led inevitably to the assumption that their voices were coterminous with all of Argentine culture, and that they were speaking for all the artists left behind whose voices had become silenced or distorted. (*Violence in Argentine Literature* 8)

Joining Foster's scholarly work, Absatz's fiction contributes to the task of correcting the mistaken perceptions of Argentina during the Dirty War years (also known as the Proceso of National Reorganization, the Process). Foster has pointed out that a significant amount of the investigation completed on this period has been based on "documents and texts published outside Argentina" (8). Hence, the novel works to rectify the conviction that "no culture existed in Argentina" during the terror regime (Foster 60). Absatz shows how artistic life was kept alive, not only by the intellectuals and artists, but also by the lawyers and business-men that stayed in the country. *Los años pares* problematizes the notion that exiled intellectuals, writers, and artists were the only source of production of Argentine culture during the Dirty War (61).

Absatz's work emphasizes that people do suffer as a direct result of the Dirty War. For example, Amanda's sister Mercedes has not been able to eat well for months because "le cuesta entenderse con la realidad de las cosas" (36; "she has problems coming to terms with the reality of things"). At the same time, her account suggests that the administration of the "Teatro Municipal" (33; "Municipal Theater") has not undergone significant alterations and continues to work despite the crisis sweeping the nation.¹¹⁰ Supporting Absatz's representation, literary critics illustrate that during this most bloody period of Argentine history, theater continued to thrive:

Although any direct references to the realities of the day were prohibited, playwrights were able to use metaphors to avoid censorship. They were forced to find codes that the public could understand but would pass unnoticed by the censors (never known for their mental prowess). There

¹¹⁰ In relation to Argentine Theater, "a true mark of Argentine pride" that has always occupied a place of utmost importance in the nation's cultural life, Foster explains: "One would have to examine the overwhelming success of the 1981 Teatro Abierto (Open Theater) movement and the parallel phenomena of Danza Abierta (Open Dance), Poesía Abierta (Open Poetry), and Cine Abierto (Open Cinema)." Foster adds: "In defiance of the dictatorship and at a rather favorable moment after the Maldives debacle, these groups were able to demonstrate that not all creativity had been exiled or silenced" (*Violence in Argentine Literature* 61; see also *Culture and Customs of Argentina* 139).

was, of necessity, much symbolism and use of elliptic language. Dramatists had to be as creative as possible and the results were excellent. Cossa, Gambaro, Gorostiza, Monti, Pavlowsky, Halac, Goldenberg, Bortnik, Mauricio, Raznovich, and Kartun all were able to present some of their greatest plays, which mixed realism and vanguardism and became uniquely Argentine. They were doing so in an increasingly chaotic situation in which uncertainty reigned and disappearances were common occurrence. (Foster, Fitch, and Lockhart 139)

Absatz's narrative presents resilient Argentines who do not detach themselves from reality and who, nonetheless, try to adapt themselves to the harsh conditions of their daily lives. In addition to theater, her work calls attention to "galerías" (47; "art galleries") and numerous first-rate "exposiciones" (47; "exhibitions") that display visual art productions. In this way, Absatz likewise gives emphasis to the flourishing production in an artistic field that in Argentina has consistently been overshadowed by the tremendous "dominance of literature on the cultural landscape" (Forster, Fitch, and Lockhart 141).¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Absatz equally presents the inconsistencies and compromises experienced by resourceful people who wanted to sustain and preserve Argentine culture throughout the time of the Process. Her narrative acknowledges that, because of the confusion of the state of affairs in the nation, "ya nadie estaba seguro de qué era reaccionario y qué no" (110; "nobody was sure any longer as to what was reactionary and what was not"). Absatz makes reference to "un concurso de pintura" (37; "a painting competition") sponsored by a U.S. American company that is taking place at a time when it looked like "todo el mundo" (36; "the whole world") was leaving the country. Similarly, readers observe the sophisticated negotiations that the lawyer and theater legal adviser Fernando

¹¹¹ Additionally, as Forster, Fitch, and Lockhart explain: "Argentina typically has been underrecognized for artistic achievement in spite of the fact that many Argentine plastic artists have earned international reputations for themselves. The contributions of Argentine artists to the larger body of Latin American art have been dwarfed by such giants as the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco; the painted artist cum pop icon Frida Kahlo from Mexico; the Colombian Fernando Botero; and others considered to be among the masters of Latin American art" (144).

Suaya must complete in order to help the unofficial art sponsoring organization he represents stay afloat: “Suaya presionaba a los funcionarios con lenguaje ejecutivo, y al empresario anglosajón lo trataba como un secretario de la cultura” (92; “Making use of official language, Suaya would put pressure on civil servants and would treat the Anglo manager as if he were a secretary of culture”).

Finally, Absatz’s narrative makes the reader aware that not all artists who decide to leave the country are victims of dictatorial persecution or even in opposition to the regime. Along these lines, the novel offers the case of the affluent painter Franklin Donato. Apolitical Donato, who “pintaba flores pequeñas de colores apacibles” (48; “painted small flowers in dull colors”), simply decides to leave the country of his own personal accord and whim. Hence, Absatz’s work does not present the intellectual and the Argentine artistic exodus as exclusively the effect of a “draconian political program” installed by the totalitarian regime (Foster, *Violence in Argentine Literature* 60). Indeed, emphasizing human agency, Absatz’s work calls attention to local and transnational touching tales of human resourcefulness and support and requests a more contextualized study and interpretation of Argentine history during the Process.¹¹²

In addition to this historiographical work, Absatz’s *Los años pares* also complicates the notion of stable Latin American identities. The narrative, which Absatz

¹¹² As to Argentine human ingenuity under oppression, Foster expresses: “Someday someone will write the documental history of the radio programs that dared to interview the *non sancti*. The history will be written of how the best forum for sociopolitical commentary was a gutsy humor magazine, *Humor registrado* (Copyrighted humor/Humor on Record), and of how theatrical representations of foreign works became interpretative performances of national issues. It will be the story of the blooming of daily newspapers that had, at times, little mass distribution, but whose particular cultural interests transcended the purely national. The story will be about the literary and criticism workshops that functioned on the margins of the institutions to preserve and stimulate those elements that the institutions, thanks to the corruption by the military, were ignoring. It will be of all the clandestine cultural projects that, precisely for being concealed, did not attract the attention of the international community that has come to believe that the brain waves of the Argentine cultural body marked a fatal, uninterrupted horizontal line” (*Violence in Argentine Literature* 61-62).

has described as “un homenaje a la novela policial” (Flori 92; “a homage to the detective novel”), begins in 1980 on the day that Clara is having difficulties replacing her lost national identity card. At the registrar, the moment Clara says that she is single, the inspector informs her that the new official document cannot be handed out to her because Clara’s information contradicts her old records. As Clara finds out, the document in the officer’s possession dates back to 1976, when she and her Dutch boyfriend Eric had taken a bus trip through several Latin American countries. On that occasion, the couple had randomly been taken into custody under the suspicion of being dissidents. On this occasion, in response to the inquiry about her civil status, Clara spontaneously told the police that she was single, even though she had actually been divorced from her husband Leo for two years. After her marriage to Leo, Clara had never had the time to change her civil status on her identity card. During the subsequent fifteen to twenty interrogations by the police officers in Jujuy, Clara kept telling her inquisitors that she was single because she was afraid of offering contradictory information. Although Clara had nothing to hide, she was plagued by the fear that the lie could mean the difference “entre la vida y la muerte” (90; “between life and death”) for her and her boyfriend Eric. Ultimately, she opened her heart to Eric and told him about her fears about not telling the police that she had been married and was now divorced.

Four years later, in the process of getting her new identity card, the officer explains to her that she is now officially identified as married. Clara finally understands why she and Eric had been released from custody soon after she had told Eric about her transgression. In fact, after all this time, Clara only confirms what she had always sensed since the random release from custody in Jujuy. Eric, the only person who had known

that she had been married, had betrayed her and jeopardized her life. She now understands that Eric had made a bargain with the FBI inquisitors: he would provide them with the truth about the woman and they would let him go. Eric, who “obviamente no era su esposo” (167; “who obviously was not her husband”), had told the officers that Clara was married, as the long telegram that the officer at the register was showing her, four years after it was composed, confirmed. Thus the novel traces Clara’s efforts to understand how she has come to lose her ID, providing an apt metaphor for her search for identity. In this sense, Clara’s pursuit for self-knowledge also allows us to view *Los años pares* as a “novel of self-discovery” (Felski 122). The work’s developmental plot traces the emergence of Clara’s female identity and, in the process, questions and subsequently rejects the heterosexual romance narrative.

Clara and Eric’s experience in Jujuy displays how paranoid tyranny often sadistically paraded its power over Argentine citizens just for the pleasure of confirming and reconfirming the “legalidad” (167; “lawfulness”) of the members of the citizenry it had decided to terrorize in its search for potential enemies. At the same time, Eric’s betrayal of Clara uncovers the double standards and unsoundness of a system that defended and propagated Christian and bourgeoisie family values and is only able to acknowledge Clara’s lawfulness the moment the inquisitors are satisfied with her civil status as a married woman. Most importantly, the confirmation of Eric’s betrayal triggers Clara’s self-critical analysis of her relationship with the European artist. In this process of self-discovery, the critique becomes an angry dialogue between Latin America and Europe. Clara Auslender confronts issues related to her European Latin American identity as she tries to grasp why, even at a time when she did not know the dimension of

Eric's betrayal, she had little by little started to hate "al tipo que el resto del mundo adora" (137; "the guy that the rest of the world adores").

Clara's auto-critique begins by recognizing that, not quite recovered from the pain that Leo's abandonment of her for another woman had caused her, from the start of the relationship with the Dutch artist she had put herself in a subordinate and vulnerable position: anticipating, waiting, cooking, cleaning, understanding, hoping to please Eric's every wish. Buying into the Western narrative of heterosexual romance and unable to believe her luck with the talented Eric, Clara had been eager not to make mistakes this time and to become the perfect partner for the painter. Looking back years later, Clara admits that the role of static art object, which she played for the painter, had been a degradation that actually had felt as if "la muerte [hubiera estado] ganando el juego" (53; "death had been winning the game"). Through her recognition that Eric had never loved her, Clara extends her critique of Eric's Eurocentric disinterest in Latin American and Argentine cultures and histories. At the same time, her confrontation with Eric enables Clara to open a space that allows her to question Latin American ideologies that posit an essential and autochthonous Latin American identity.

In retrospect, Clara now understands that Eric's desire to make the bus/train trip through Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru was just his longing to have the exotic "experiencia sudamericana" (127; "South American experience"). She admits that, actually, at no point on the trip had Eric tried to engage with the people and the reality he encountered during the trip across three Latin American nations, nor had this been his intention. She remembers how Eric experienced the three countries exclusively through the official

narratives about an exotic Latin America region occupying an unenlightened periphery in relation to an enlightened European center.

Clara bears in mind that during the trip, because of Eric's long hair, the couple used to come across as suspicious. Again and again they would be stopped by soldiers, who wanted to see their identity cards and passports. Nevertheless, though the officers repeatedly interrogated the European, Eric always gave the impression that "esas impertinencias no le molestaban, que comprendía" (61; "the impertinences did not bother him, that he understood"). Clara now sees that in his Eurocentric world view, Eric obliterated historical "touching tales" of Western intervention in the Latin American region and remained unable to establish a cultural dialogue with the reality he encountered. For compassionate and ever understanding Eric, the Dirty War, the state of siege in Bolivia, and the perceived lack of education and backwardness of the Andean population remain the natural products of the general foolishness of the region where all its inhabitants are "locos" (174; "crazy"): a perpetually unreasonable bunch of people not yet fit to govern themselves or to achieve social tranquility, progress, and civilization. Clara now believes that Eric had only been able to enjoy "su viaje" (64; "his trip") because of his historical amnesia about the disruption and exploitation that resulted from the European colonization of the region. Indifferent to the disconcerting reality they sometimes encountered, which was not his European one, Eric contemplated the exceptional Andean mountains, where "la guerrilla agonizaba" (64; "the guerrilla agonized"), and immortalized them in his sketchbook. Positing two incommensurable worlds, that is the developed First and the underdeveloped Third, Eric suppressed the fact that the emergence of Western Europe was a largely unequal "joint venture" (Shohat and

Stam 14) between Europe and Latin America. In other words, the European industrial revolutions were partly financed by the exploitation of the very mountains the contemporary artist was belatedly celebrating, by the wealth generated by “Latin American mines and plantations” (14).

Hoping to locate the precise moment when her feelings for the arrogant artist started to change, Clara remembers the song called “*Coroico’s blues*” (173), a piece that Eric had composed in a moment of lyrical exaltation in Bolivia. Exposing Eric’s proclivity to homogenize and deny any form of cultural difference that might disturb his monochrome Latin American fiction, Clara stresses the irony of the fact that the artist enthusiastically celebrated “una nación a pesar de que cruzaron tres fronteras” (173; “one nation despite their having crossed three borders”). Locating Latin America in a Eurocentric universalism that eradicates the context of his particular experience, Eric sings “el perfume de las retamas en Angastaco y luego inesperadamente, el mismo perfume en las afueras de Oruro” (173; “the perfume of the plants en Angastaco and then suddenly, celebrates the same perfume in the outskirts of Oruro”). Clara now recalls herself thinking that the decontextualized lyrical composition exposed Eric’s drive for sameness. The lyrical composition actually celebrated: “Idéntico paisaje, idénticas las cabelleras negras, [...] la gente gris, el aire limpio, la tierra alta, todo un mismo país (173; “Identical landscape, the same black hair, [...] the grey people, the clean air, the highlands, everything the same country”). She equally remembers that Eric was constantly comparing “todo lo argentino con todo lo holandés” (166; “everything Dutch with everything Argentine”). For instance, he remarked, “Los policías argentinos son diferentes de los policías de Holanda” (77; “Argentine policemen were different from

Dutch policemen”). In his comparisons, Eric introduced irrevocable cultural “difference” that rendered Argentina utterly “other” and unknowable in relation to Europe. By concluding that “Holanda es tan diferente” (166; “Holland is so different”), Eric incidentally insinuated the singularity and superiority of Europe and erected absolute barriers between Europe and the Latin American other.

But Clara is not only critical of Eric’s logic of “us” and “them.” Clara articulates her discontent with her French gymnastics teacher who speaks condescendingly about her Bolivian female students to Clara, because: “En ningún momento se le había pasado por la cabeza que Clara fuera sudamericana” (125; “at no moment did it cross her mind that Clara could be South American”). Equally, Clara is uneasy because she knows the French woman is by no means the only one with an *idée fixe* about the way Latin Americans are supposed to be or look. According to Clara: “A los europeos no se les ocurría que alguien de su color y con ese aspecto pudiese provenir de tierras tan bárbaras, y mucho menos lo podían concebir los mismos nativos” (126; “It did not occur to the Europeans that somebody with her skin color and her looks could come from such barbaric lands, even less did it occur to the native inhabitants”). In this way, Clara starts to problematize European and Latin American cultural ideologies about an essential Latin American identity.

Among other ideas, Clara questions the Eurocentric view held by developed First World nations that the Andean region has remained resistant to the universal project of “civilizing” modernity, due to their difficulty in adapting to the emancipatory “transformations of the Western world” (Triviño Anzola 405). In Peru, Clara observes how whenever the train stopped and the Germans jumped out of it to buy the products the

inhabitants of the region offered, the Germans “gritoneaban, se burlaban del producto y por fin lo conseguían a un precio que no llegaba a la mitad de lo que les habían pedido” (125; “shouted, made fun of the product just to end up getting it for a price that was not even half of the amount initially asked for”) and thus celebrated their ability to take advantage of the Latin Americans. But Clara is not interested in representing the inhabitants of the region as perpetual victims of the bad European. Her evaluation does not presuppose that Latin Americans are somehow superior human beings, an intellectual move that would merely amount to turning “colonialist claims upside down” (Shohat and Stam 3). In fact, after the transaction with the Germans, Clara observes that the natives would go away satisfied in the conviction of having sold the “brutal” (125; “stupid”) German something that the European “no deseaba ni necesitaba” (125; “neither wanted nor needed”). However, Clara condemns the Eurocentric tendency to view indigenous practices and customs of Third World nations as symptoms of the “backwardness and barbarity” of Third World cultures in comparison to the superiority and “progressiveness of Western culture” (Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures* 17). Yet, in the same breath, Clara also starts to interrogate Latin America’s essentialist reaction to the European reductionism by attempting to create a modern Latin American identity and propagate the myth of Latin American cultural authenticity in contrast with the invader by recurring to what critics have viewed as “a real cult of origins” (Ainsa 62).

This “cult of origins” manifests itself in Clara’s dealings with the Peruvians, who, because of her European looks, do not recognize her as a Latin American. Moreover, even when she speaks in perfect Spanish to them, they do not listen to or answer her. In fact, with distress, she notices that the natives of the region marginalize her. Clara

explains: “ellos la miraban con una desconfianza amasada durante quinientos años y en el mayor de los casos le contestaban con señas” (126; “they looked at her with a distrust that has been accumulated for five hundred years. In the majority of cases, they answered by making gestures”). Clara thus questions the effort of some Latin Americans to counteract what has happened since the “encounter of two worlds in 1492” by means of an oppositional attitude that posits everything that has followed as “a long process of contamination, degradation, and destruction” of the original state (Ainsa 62). Absatz’s work objects to this reactionary response to the violent impact of modernization on Latin America and does not believe that Latin America should be seen as merely a counterpart to Europe and the United States. Her work seeks to complicate intellectual discourses of Latin America that often set “young” Latin Americans fighting brutish U.S. American imperialism and the ugly European legacy of the region as a way to resist the Eurocentric essentialization of Latin American identity and come to terms with the impact of secularizing and functionalist modernity. In other words, *Los años pares* questions Latin American identity ideologies that have often been born out of the intellectual elites’ uncertainty as to how to react to immigration and imperialist forces or out of their apprehension as to what values to maintain or recuperate from traditional culture. Absatz’s work challenges intellectual elites’ efforts to forge a political and a Latin American identity as a mere reaction to the modernizing project that has often turned writers of the region into “prophets who speak a common language, telling stories of identity” (Rodríguez Pésico 391).¹¹³

¹¹³ Richard reminds us that in order to claim cultural purity: “These [versions of identity] are drawn from the opposition between self (seen as internal identity) and the ‘other’ (identity from outside); for instance, the regional (seen as authentic) versus the international (seen as false), the past (the vernacular roots) versus

As Adriana Rodríguez Pérsico reminds us, in Argentina, there have been writers that have propagated resolute nationalism, such as the anti-Semitic Leopoldo Lugones. Lugones viewed the Indians and the immigrants as the enemies of the Argentine nation. He grieved the loss of the “unity of Spanish America” and longed for a return to a mythical and heroic gaucho past (Rodríguez Pérsico 392). Argentine intellectual Ricardo Rojas similarly wished to create a collective Argentine consciousness and reverse the moral degradation created by the immigrants. Doubting the capacity of Argentina to absorb difference and demanding unconditional assimilation from the foreigners, Rojas wrote: “Todo ha de ser argentino sobre la tierra argentina!” (qtd. in Rodríguez Pérsico 393; “Everything on Argentine soil must be Argentine!”). Rojas’ fiction of identity not only decried the “sorda hostilidad babélica” (qtd. in Rodríguez Pérsico 394; “Babelian state of mutual hostility”) produced by the immigrants, it also recommended territorial expansion of the Argentine nation. In his fiction, Rojas extended the Argentine national borders all the way to Peru, thus “restoring the boundaries of Argentina to those of the ancient Inca civilization” (393). But probably the most influential expressions of oppositional Latin American identity were espoused by Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó and the Cuban José Martí. For Rodó, as Rodríguez Pérsico reminds us, it is clear: “America must be Latin [...] with the egalitarian spirit of Christianity” (395). For Martí, his America was solely “*mestizo*, not European, or African, or Indian,” thus turning against one another the dichotomy “*mezitizo* America” vs. “foreigner” (396), the other America.

the present (seen as the destruction of the binding sense of community)” (“Postmodernism and Periphery” 466).

Instead, Absatz's work disputes the viewpoint of an incommensurable cultural divide between "their culture" and "our culture" (43). Clara understands that this view obscures the fact that if there is some kind of national or cultural essence in the countries of the Latin American region, as Rosalba Campra suggests, "this national essence is a cultural hybrid" (qtd. in McClennen 43). Through Clara Auslander, Absatz questions narratives of essential Latin American authenticity that emphasizes mestizo 'blood' ties as a Latin American identity quintessence. Instead, Absatz argues for a construction of Latin American identity that is an identity-in-process and results from location of birth or long-term residence in a region.

And yet, once Clara confronts Eric's betrayal and Eurocentric disrespect for her and dispels the myth of a unified Latin American identity, she concludes her evaluation (as she is finishing to clean her apartment) by saying "Eric, go home" (174). After achieving psychological transformation in the safe retreat of her apartment, this directive signals Clara's desire to move on with her life. Disappointed in the romance plot and the persons who blindly continue to adore Eric, she now wants to be by herself and enjoy her affirmative female identity and newfound freedom. However, her experience with Eric has been an important catalyst that leads her to reevaluate and revitalize her life. Clara now "se siente fuerte y liviana" (175; "feels strong and light"). In this sense, even if Clara wants Eric to leave for good, Eric remains an integral part of her existence. Clara's desire to polarize the masculine and the feminine spheres seems to propose an oppositional feminist discourse that, suggesting "a radical negation of everything that has gone before" (Felski 58), remains unaware that oppositional discourse "relies upon concepts

and arguments” that originate in the very patriarchal ideology and masculine systems of representation that it seeks to undermine (59).

Moreover, by retreating to her apartment at the end of her journey of self-discovery, Clara displays vestiges of romantic individualism and seems unconscious that “the feminist critique of patriarchal values cannot occur outside ideological and social structures in some *privileged space*, but constantly interacts with the very frameworks it challenges” (59; emphasis added). By proposing gender dualism of self-sufficient masculine and feminine spheres (characteristic of the feminist “novel of self-discovery”), Clara betrays a view of gender that, instead of attempting to conceptualize adequate feminist experiences and practices, rather obscures “the complex nexus of social, ideological, and psychological relation through which gender is constructed” (132). Finally, Clara’s feminist critique seems to suggest that gender is the sole variant that explains social relations. By attempting to enforce gender-based identification, irrespective of class, race, sexuality, religion, etc., Clara’s apolitical and limited feminist analysis does not offer an explanation “of how existing forms of gender inequality can be changed” (59). By focusing her analysis on the variant gender to present her critique of patriarchal structures, Clara overlooks that gender inequality, as Rita Felski reminds us, “cannot be explained purely in gender terms” (59). To rely solely upon the divide female and male to explain gender discrimination fails to acknowledge that gender inequity “is related to a variety of social and cultural factors [...] which are not limited to women, although they will of course affect men and women in different ways” (59).

The expression “Eric, go home,” not only exposes Clara’s inability to engage with the complexities of the gender dialectic: her command is also symptomatic of the

problems that emerge in Absatz's attempts to redefine a hybrid Latin American identity. In other words, the expression "Eric, go home," in a work that questions ideologies that posit a distinctive Latin American identity (ironically, even as she utters a cliché), exposes a fundamental ambivalence and tension between conflicting forms of leftist and conservative cultural nationalism. Moreover, this directive introduces an inconsistency in Absatz's attempt to reinvent a Latin American identity that values difference. In other words, throughout *Los años pares*, Absatz displays a profound commitment and attachment to Latin America. Her work argues for a different construction of non-essential Latin American identity which affirms difference. Her anti-essentialist position posits a different construction of Latin American identity and culture and can be understood as the "leftist variation" of "cultural nationalism," which suggests an identity that does not rely "on a mythical return to origins" (McClennen 22). This leftist political position pleads for a cultural reevaluation where "forgotten aspects of the culture," like for instance the non-criollo, non-mestizo immigrants' contributions to Latin American cultures and societies, no longer have to "remain in the margins" (22).

At the same time, Absatz's expression "Eric, go home" approximates the same conservative cultural nationalist position her narrative seeks to question. Indeed, in their attempt to define themselves in opposition to the imperialism of the United States and Western influence, many Latin American writers and intellectuals have expressed the desire which Clara Auslender now expresses in relation to the European Eric. "Eric, go home," brings to mind the Latin American modernist tendency to dismiss the European and U.S. American component, influence, and experience as thoroughly negative and upsetting. This proclivity, as the analysis of Absatz's work has shown, results in attempts

to find Latin American mythic origins that posit an uncontaminated past before the European disruption and the arrival of the immigrants, and has repeatedly returned to “indigenism, nationalism, thirdworldism” (Richard, “Postmodernism and Periphery” 466). In this sense, it is imperative that the reader rewrite the end of *Los años pares* and affirm that there is no way Eric can go home.

In the same way that the European Eric remains a constitutive part of Clara’s existence, Western culture and values remain a constitutive element of Latin American identities and cultures. Europe and the European immigrants, among them the immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, have made indelible and unquestionable contributions to the histories and cultures of Latin America and Argentina. Absatz’s work exposes the unresolved dialectical tension between the Western center and the Latin American periphery that, again and again, has emerged and continued to dictate the debates on controversial and multivalent Latin American national identity; an identity that has been indisputably founded in Eastern, Central, and Western European, and incorporates Asian, Native, and African cultures and languages. As it were, the dialectical tension between the periphery and the center that emerges in *Los años pares* makes Absatz’s work profoundly Latin American. Next, I turn to Glickman’s proposal for a transnational Latin American identity.

4.2. Nora Glickman

Nora Glickman, of Ashkenazic descent, was born in 1944 in Bernasconi, La Pampa, Argentina. Her grandparents fled the Russian and Polish pogroms and settled in the colonies of the ICA (Argentine Jewish Colonization Association), on lands that were given to them by Baron von Hirsch. At a very young age, Glickman left Argentina, “the

same day as Eichmann,” in order to study in Israel and England before coming to study and work in New York in 1965 (E-mail to the author).¹¹⁴ But, as Glickman explains: “Over forty years after I left Argentina, I am still closely attached to my native country. I travel there almost every year to present papers, to see my plays performed, to visit family and friends, to see my work published” (E-mail to the author). In New York, the city that has become her permanent residence, Glickman has the chance “to be an Argentine, a Latina, a Jew and an American, both separately and in combination, as the circumstances required” (E-mail to the author). Glickman is a literature and Spanish-language professor at Queens College and writes in Spanish and English. A prolific fiction writer, playwright, anthologist, and critic, Glickman is the author of three books of short stories: *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, 1983 (“One of her Johns and Other Stories”), *Mujeres, memorias, malogros*, 1991 (“Women, Memories, Failures”), and *Puerta entre abierta*, 2004 (“Half-open Door”). Her short stories have appeared in anthologies such as *Tropical Synagogues* and *Hispanic Immigrant Writers and the Family* and have been translated into “English, Hebrew, and Portuguese” (Schiminovich 218). She has also published a book of plays: *Teatro: cuatro obras de Nora Glickman*, 2000 (“Theater: Four Pieces by Nora Glickman”). Her plays have appeared in collections such as *Dramaturgas: en la escena del mundo*, 2004 (“Playwrights: On the World Stage”) and *9 Contemporary Jewish Plays*, 2005. Glickman’s theater pieces have been staged in the United States, Argentina, and Israel. With Gloria Waldman, Glickman co-edited *Argentine Jewish Theatre: A Critical Anthology*, 1996; with Robert E. DiAntonio, she co-authored the essay collection titled *Tradition and Innovation Reflections on Latin*

¹¹⁴ The high-ranking Nazi Otto Adolf Eichmann was captured by Israeli agents in Argentina and flown to Israel on May 21, 1960. After his trial in Israel, Eichman was sentenced to death and then hanged in Israel on June 1, 1962.

American Jewish Writing, 1993. Glickman has also written the non-fictional work *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman*, 2000, which includes translations from Yiddish into English. Finally, her scholarly essays on Latin American literature have appeared in numerous journals.¹¹⁵

4.2.1. *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*

Glickman's *Uno de sus Juanes* consists of eighteen multifaceted short stories that express memories and brief moments of human experience. To a certain extent, the short accounts are chronologically organized. The first short accounts are told from the perspective of a little girl and a young adolescent: these episodes shed light on the history of Jewish immigrants in the Argentine colonies. In the rest of the accounts, Glickman portrays adult female protagonists who illustrate diverse roles, among others, as mothers, undocumented immigrants, and scholars in New York.

This chapter first argues that Nora Glickman's collection of short stories, *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, does more than disrupt official versions of Argentine history. In addition, Glickman reclaims and rewrites the story of her heritage over and against the Jewish male perspective. Secondly, Glickman attempts to combat prevailing ideas of an essential Latin American identity by presenting a transnational identity that not only blurs official national boundaries but also dissolves religious, ethnic, and linguistic borders. In this way, Glickman calls for a Latin American identity free from nationalist feelings based on alliances and shared experiences.

¹¹⁵ Glickman's literary essays on Latin American literature have appeared in: *Alba de America, Folio*, and *La revista bilingue: The Bilingual Review*; and anthologies like *Women of the World: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, 1994; *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature*, 1996; *Antología crítica del teatro breve hispanoamericano*, 1997, [Critical Anthology on Hispano American Breve Theatre]; *Prosa y poesía: homenaje a Gonzalo Sobejano*, 2001, [Prose and Poetry: In Homage to Gonzalo Sobejano]; and *Theatre without Frontiers*, 2002; *Luisa Valenzuela sin mascara*, 2002, [Luisa Valenzuela without a Mask].

Glickman's story "El último de los colonos" ("The Last of the Colonists"), from *Uno de sus Juanes*, presents memories from the point of view of a Yiddish-speaking little girl in one of the Jewish agricultural colonies, Bernasconi, a small village in the province of La Pampa. The account touches a blind spot in Latin American and Argentine history that pays scant attention to the presence of non-Catholic, non-criollo or non-mestizo minorities in the region. Reevaluating the concept of *mestizaje*, Glickman presents an other Argentina, one that is not an ethnic monolith made up of descendants of Spaniards and Italians who share Catholicism. The story depicts a cultural space in La Pampa, at the heart of the nation, where its Ashkenazic Jewish inhabitants speak "en idish mezclado con Argentino" (7; "in Yiddish mixed with Argentine"), a linguistic mixture that disrupts the hegemony of Spanish as the dominant language in the republic. The narrative depicts languages as malleable processes that are transformed according to the demands of the specific realities of the speaking communities. Most of all, this linguistic intersection creates another hybrid dialect that interrupts Argentine as the hegemonic idiom of the nation. Yiddish and Argentine are presented as lived and flexible linguistic events. The new language reflects the ongoing cultural contact between the native Argentine and the persecuted Central and Eastern European Jews fleeing the pogroms.

Glickman's short story also vindicates the prestige of Yiddish as the language of many Ashkenazic Jews in Argentina. Her narrative questions the efforts of Alberto Gerchunoff, the first Jewish writer to write in Spanish, to negate Yiddish as the native tongue of Ashkenazic Jews. In his endeavor to naturalize the Jewish presence in the new country, the Russian-born Gerchunoff went so far as to re-invent Eastern European Jews

and himself “as Sephardic”¹¹⁶ (Astro 8) and to proclaim Ashkenazic Jews as inheritors of “the sweet tongue of Spain” (Aizenberg, “Jewish Identity” 108). Glickman’s account attempts to bring back to life a language that nurtures some sectors of contemporary Jewish identity in Argentina. Concurrently, Glickman’s writing, by incorporating words and expressions in Yiddish, also evokes the corpus of Latin American Yiddish texts, which is “surprisingly vast for a minority literature” (Astro 2). These texts were born out of the cultural interaction of Jewish and Argentine cultures, but too frequently have been left out of “works on Latin American Jewish literature” and Latin American history (2). Glickman’s presentation of the interaction of *ídish* and *argentino* is a linguistic “touching tale” that challenges the Argentine fantasy of Western European Hispano-Catholic cultural homogeneity.¹¹⁷ Glickman’s story presents a linguistic event that advances the plurality of Argentine and Latin American literatures and promotes “an Argentine idiom that recognizes not only Latinisms but also words with many consonants and vowels together --Yiddish words, for instance--” (Aizenberg, “Jewish Identity” 107).

The experience of Jewish immigrants in the Argentine agricultural colonies has been well documented and often idealized by male writers who, in large part, portray the immigrants as pioneers in what seemed to be the Latin American Promised Land (the new Zion).¹¹⁸ Likewise, numerous male counternarratives have presented a more sober

¹¹⁶ Gerchunoff claimed that “[h]e had been in exile since the 1492 expulsion from Spain; having arrived in Argentina in 1889 from his native Russia, he was now home” (Sosnowski 266).

¹¹⁷ In his introduction to the book *Yiddish South of the Border*, Ilan Stavans explains that it is easy to count Latin American Jews as Sephardim. But he rectifies this assumption: “Despite common belief, most Jews are not Sephardim and Yiddish has indeed existed in [Latin American] countries.” He concludes: “At any rate, Ladino isn’t as widely spoken a language in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Americas as Yiddish is” (xiii).

¹¹⁸ Alan Astro explains, referring also to the Argentine writer Carlos Grünberg: “Gerchunoff and Grünberg portray Jews in Latin America as continuing the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry” (8). Likewise, Naomi Lindstrom suggests that in Gerchunoff’s writing: “Russian Jews appear to be refugees sheltered by a magnanimous nation, rather than immigrants recruited from their longtime homes by representatives of

and less paradisiacal vision of the Jewish experience in the new land. These narratives challenge Alberto Gerchunoff's triumphalist classic *Los gauchos judíos*, 1908 (*The Jewish Gauchos*, 1910) that, to a certain extent, idealized the experience of Jews in Argentina.¹¹⁹ In "El último de los colonos," Glickman, though not focused on contesting Gerchunoff explicitly, gives her own reading of life in the rural settlements of Argentina. Through the couple Bóruj and Sara Leiserman, Glickman depicts the decline of the Jewish rural settlements. This decline has popularly been attributed to inclement natural disasters, legislative arbitrariness, unfamiliarity with the soil and Argentine weather, murders, eruptions of anti-Semitism, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate machinery to cultivate virgin lands. By way of Bóruj and Sara, Glickman's narrative signifies the failure of some members of a generation of settlers. These settlers were unable to cope with the external factors and hardships that they encountered or with issues that eventually would influence their adaptation to the rural life in the agricultural colonies.

However, Glickman's narrative adds another dimension to the common explanation of the decline of the colonies: the incapacity of some of the colonists, survivors of the Russian pogroms, to come to terms with the psychic burdens they bear as a result of their traumatic past. This psychic component of Jewish Argentine experience cannot be fully grasped in the context of the life in Argentina alone, but requires the larger framework of the Eastern European history of displacement and terror. This additional complication turns Glickman's account into a transnational "touching tale" that

various interested parties" (5). At the same time, Ilan Stavans illuminates that, unlike their coreligionists in Argentina, "the odyssey from Europe to the Pampas was often portrayed in Poland, Lithuania, Rumania, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and other countries, as an expedition to hell" ("Introduction" xiv).

¹¹⁹ For an informed explanation of this deconstructive movement that has been called "Parricide on the Pampa," see Edna Aizenbeg's *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, 17-48. See also: Edna Aizenberg, *A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's Los gauchos judíos*.

integrates Argentina into Eastern European history and vice versa. By way of the silent and withdrawn Sara, who carries her past experience into her Argentine present and future, Glickman paints trauma as a constitutive part of Jewish experience in La Pampa and the Argentine history of immigration.

Through the remembrances of a little girl, Glickman's narrative presents the case of Bóruj's wife, the orphan Sara, who used to spend most of the day in bed because she "siempre andaba cansada" (8; "was always tired"). Back home in Vilna, as the narrative depicts, Sara had witnessed the extermination of the relatives she had been living with at the hands of Cossacks, "y nunca se le olvidó" (10; "and never forgot it"). Once in Argentina, Sara finds herself overwhelmed by the massive loss in her past and her new life at the side of an old widower and his four children. Unable to come to terms with her troubled past and alleviate her posttraumatic symptoms, Sara is hardly able to fulfill her daily obligations and leads a distracted and fragmented life. Although "El último de los colonos" is far from oversimplifying the difficulties women settlers faced and the devastating effects of traumatic experiences, it also avoids the romantization of Sara's fixation on the past and her "melancholic acting out" (LaCapra, *Representing* 14). In fact, Glickman's narrative shows an understanding of the difficulties that the confrontation of trauma at a personal level might bring. In relation to Sara, the girl's mother acknowledges that "cada cual es como es" (11; "that is the way she is"), indicating the awareness that "a victim's recovery may itself depend on the attempt to reconstruct the self as more than a victim" (LaCapra, *Representing* 12). And yet, insisting on placing agency within Sara, the little girl reports disapprovingly that her mother used to suggest that "si Sara quería ser mártir, allá ella" (11; "if Sara wanted to be a martyr, it was her business").

Glickman's timely "touching tale," that by no means limits itself to so-called "things Jewish," problematizes the common tendency in contemporary Western thought and practice to overvalue "not only sublimity but melancholy and even self-victimization" (LaCapra, *Representing* 14). In other words, Glickman's work questions the overinvestment in a reductive and self-defeating position that, by remaining attached to traumatic losses in life, tends to devalue everyday life. This approach is also characterized by the proclivity to dismiss attempts of life restoration as futile and objectionable, in this way, only worsening the lot of the victimized, their families, and their communities. "El último de los colonos" challenges a modern trend that has frequently disallowed meaningful critical reflection and productive engagement with a painful past. That is to say, the trend against the thoughtful "working over and through" (LaCapra, *History* 38)¹²⁰ of traumatic life experiences produced by apartheid, torture, child abuse, sexual abuse, the Holocaust, or other genocides, that resist to be lived down and which, as Dominick LaCapra states, often "threaten to prevent any form of renewal in life" (14 *Representation*).¹²¹ Though Glickman's story does not offer further comment on Sara, it does show that even after years have gone by, the Leisermans have not been able to move out of "Bernasconi Bernascoño" (10; "Bernasconi, damned Bernasconi"). In this way, Glickman's story represents the inability or even refusal of some colonists (who

¹²⁰ Dominick LaCapra explains: "Working through trauma involves gaining critical distance on those experiences and recontextualizing them in ways that permit a reengagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities" (*History in Transit* 45). Nonetheless, in relation to the engagement with traumatic experiences, LaCapra illuminates: "[W]orking through does not mean total redemption of the past or healing its traumatic wounds. [...] But, at least in trauma's historical dimension, we can work to change the causes of this cause insofar as they are social, economic, and political and thereby attempt to prevent its recurrence as well as enable forms of renewal. Insofar as trauma is transnational, we can only learn how to live better with its attendant anxiety and not mystifyingly attribute it to an event as its putative cause or project responsibility for it onto discrete groups of scapegoats" (119).

¹²¹ LaCapra explains: "The abjection and suffering of the melancholic may itself reach sublime heights (or depths), notably when one sees all forms of renewal or reinvestment in life as unacceptable compromises and betrayals of an unattainable ideal or an irreplaceable lost love" (*Representation* 14).

might have preferred to adopt a self-serving form of identity based on victimhood) to take on the desirable ethical commitment and political responsibility of engaging with their psychic burdens and history in a more thoughtful and productive way.

“El último de los colonos” also hints at the dilemmas that Jewish immigrants often faced in relation to the Zionist idea linking Jewish people to the land of Israel and which, from its very beginning, has been far from being unanimously welcomed among Jews worldwide. The story specifically presents two of the many variations of the narratives that have circulated about the new Zion. The girl’s mother prefers “el lado de Israel, del sionismo y del kibutz” (8; “to side with Israel, Zionism and the kibbutzes”). However, in opposition to the girl’s mother, Bóruj “no veía sentido en una patria para judíos” (8; “did not see any sense in a Jewish homeland”). On the one hand, the mother represents the nationalist idea of a “return” to Palestine. This ideal entailed the hope of creating a country that could be a refuge for the persecuted and would represent Jewish survival itself. In other words, the mother longs for a Promised Land where she would “plantar naranjas y a olvidarse por completo de la Diáspora” (8; “plant oranges and totally forget about the diaspora”) and become a component of a national Jewish body. The mother pleads for a place where, working the soil of Palestine, she would “stop having a disembodied existence in exile” and thus recover a harmonious psyche for her personal benefit as well as for the benefit of the Jewish nation as a whole (Biale 283).¹²² The mother’s support of the Land of Israel also represents the desire for self-determination embodied by Zionism; its aspiration to break with the Jewish past; and its

¹²² As Biale explains: “Physical strength, youth, nature, and secularism were the Zionist symbols set against the degeneracy, old age, urban and religious signs of Exile” (285).

resolution to put an end to the existence of Jewish people as a politically disfranchised and scattered minority in the diaspora.¹²³

On the other hand, Bóruj does not hold on to the idea of a Jewish nation. As an alternative, he prefers to deal with “el peso del *góles*, de la Diáspora” (8-9; “the burden of the *góles*, of the Diaspora”). Bóruj acknowledges that: “Un estado judío, rodeado por enemigos árabes, no puede ser democrático por mucho tiempo” (8; “A Jewish state, surrounded by Arab enemies, cannot stay democratic for long”). Bóruj’s position, though bitter in relation to exile and essentializing in relation to Arabs and Palestine (as if there were no Arab Jews or non-Jewish inhabitants native to the desired land), does not sustain the Zionist narrative, an account that has sought to forget that the Jewish biblical story of Abraham “is not one of autochthony” (Boyarin and Boyarin 328) and has proclaimed Jewish redemption exclusively through the possession of the Land of Israel.¹²⁴ Aware of the dangers that a nationalistic enterprise like this carries, Bóruj problematizes the notion “that a people must have a land in order to be a people” (330). Instead, Bóruj prefers a scattered Jewish nation “without myths of autochthony” (328), a nation that maintains a sense of belonging and being rooted to the world through interactive dialogue across borders even in the absence of the political integrity of an established state.

Additionally, Glickman’s accounts also problematize gender differences. Her stories engage in a dialogue with patriarchal cultural verities about women in her

¹²³ At the time, it was common to think that Jews suffered from “psychological abnormalities” that were results not of “racial disposition” but consequences of their minority existence and their “skewed occupational structures” (Biale 286).

¹²⁴ Boyarin and Boyarin suggest that there is no “natural” connectedness between the Jews and the Land of Israel; Abraham had to leave his native land in order to go to the Promised Land. Thus, as they explain, the biblical story is “one of always already coming from somewhere else” (327). They suggest that a characteristic of Jewish people has been “the impossibility of a natural association between this people and a particular land—thus the impossibility of seeing Jewish culture as a self-enclosed, bounded phenomenon” (qtd. in Cohen, *Global Diasporas* 123).

attempts to rewrite and reinterpret them. In “Uno de sus Juanes” (“One of Her Johns”) and “Ese otro Juan” (“That Other John”), Glickman addresses female sexuality. By means of Luisa’s creative imagination, that “le daba un sentido de independencia” (21; “gave her a sense of independence”), the account transgresses taboos of inculcated womanly diffidence. Glickman shows how Luisa, a young girl resisting society’s attempts to form her as a sexually self-effacing girl, takes the freedom to have erotic fantasies with several men she encounters. Playfully, the stories present active female sexuality that complicates the socially attributed role of passive female sexuality subordinated to male desire.

At the same time, in “El último de los colonos” (“The Last of the Colonists”) and “Los Bécquer” (“The Becquers”), Glickman highlights the presence of a strong and resolute mother who, despite the difficulties that she and her family encounter in the new country, refuses to give up. In “El último de los colonos,” the mother helps her husband with the family business. Nonetheless, the mother is presented as an independent person who refuses to be treated as the father’s “empleada” (10; “employee”) or to submit to his arbitrary authority. In the complex world presented in “Los Bécquer,” it is again the resolute mother who decries “la falta de iniciativa” (19; “the lack of initiative”) in some colonialists.

Simultaneously, in “Los Bécquer,” the author presents a young woman’s perspective on the microcosm of assorted immigrants’ experiences in a small town in La Pampa. In this account, Glickman not only presents the diversity of immigrants’ experiences, but also attempts to demythologize the monolithic idea of the perpetually well-functioning “Jewish family” (Hyman 19). In the narrative, Glickman illustrates

familial advancement in the new land, as in the case of the Augustine family, and of hard work, as seen in the Shtarkloff's household. But the narrative also depicts circumstances of deterioration and tragic breakdown. Through the story of Leonard Becquer and his wife Irma, Glickman shows the slow but steady decline of a once honest, promising, and hardworking German family. The short story depicts how, despite Leonard's and Irma's promising start in their life as a married couple, they soon have to cope with the birth of a deformed and retarded child. Devastated by the tragic event, Leonard was opposed to the idea "a que ningún médico tocara al chico" (17-18; "that any doctor would touch the child") and to receiving any form of support from the community. Equally unwilling to accept advice from anyone, his passive wife Irma eventually proves unable to give the little boy any form of intellectual stimulus or emotional support. As in "El ultimo de los colonos," Glickman's "Los Bécquer" once again suggests the need, in both men and women, to avoid and confront excessive self-commiseration in the face of hardship and life experience. The story shows how the couple is incapable of confronting their reality and dealing with their existences. The psychic burden of family life ultimately causes Leonard to become an alcoholic and leaves him "arruinado" (19; "ruined"). Further, it presents an unresponsive Irma who is not able to execute her daily work on the farm to satisfaction or to meet the needs of her husband and their two ill children.

Some of Glickman's short stories also engage in the reassessment of the "Master Motherhood Discourse" (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 8). Her short stories revalorize the experience of motherhood as "a site of multiple contradictions" (Doanne 293). Glickman presents female characters that complicate traditional and socially constructed mother images and myths of the Mother as harmonious completeness and balance. As

alternatives, Glickman's stories depict mothers as complex persons with conflictive needs who also insist on being understood as more than just mothers. In "Recondito" (55; "From the Heart"), a mother, though recognizing the love she feels for her newborn daughter, also expresses ambivalent feelings towards the responsibility of motherhood, for which she feels unprepared. She expounds: "¿Qué debo ser yo? madre, censor, o cuerpo bruto [...]? ¿Cómo enseñarte cosas que yo misma no sé? (56; "What am I supposed to be [...]? mother, critic, or coarse body? How am I supposed to teach you things that I do not even know myself?"). The female character in the narrative complicates the still prevailing idea that mothering is a "natural" thing that comes instinctively for women. "Recondito" hints at the fact that "biological maternity and the social construction of it may not coincide" (Kaplan 293). And though the mother acknowledges that the presence of her daughter has changed her life and is now an integral part of her existence, the narrator rejects the mythical image of maternal fullness and sacrifice: "Quiero ser salvaje, libre, [...] y separarte de mí sin temores" (57; "I want to be wild, free [...] and separate you from me without fear"). By presenting a female character for whom motherhood is just one aspect of her multifaceted and contradictory self, "Recondito" fundamentally questions the assumption that upon giving birth, women automatically become "maternal, nurturing, competent and confident at mothering" (Kaplan, *Motherhood* 174).

In "Palabras con mi hijo" ("Words with My Son"), the complication of idealized motherhood and its endless sacrifice continues. In this case, through an internal monologue with her unborn son, an ambivalent pregnant woman expresses the hope that one day her son will love her "no como mártir, sino como persona" (60; "not as a martyr,

but as a person”). Feeling her boy move inside her body and expressing the awareness that her world has been invaded, the woman is not sure which of the contradictory sensations she feels is primary, “el placer o el dolor” (59; “the pleasure or the pain”), the pleasure to know that the child is alive or the pain that his kick has caused her.

Reminding the boy that he is actually moving inside her body, she says: “Estás moviéndote en mi mundo, en mi vientre. ¿Por qué te moviste así? ¿Lo hiciste sin saberlo, por impulso solamente? ¿O fue para sacarme de mi tristeza, para recordarme que no estaba sola? (59; “You are moving in my world, in my belly. Why did you move that way? Did you do it without intention, was it just a reflex? Or did you do it to take me out of my sadness, to remind me that I was not alone?”). But denying the maternal image of pleasant wholeness and unity, she affirms her human existence as fundamentally separate and independent from his: “¿Pero no comprendes aún? Contigo dentro de mí estoy más sola que nunca (59; “But don’t you understand? With you inside of me I am more lonesome than ever”). While she agrees that after the boy is born she will assume her responsibility and take care of him, feed him, clothe him, protect him, teach him, she does not subscribe to the idea of the self-abnegating mother and the romantic notion of the limitless maternal spiritual and emotional capacity. The woman warns her son: “Cuando me canses, te pondré en manos ajenas y cuando me molestes resentiré tu mera presencia” (59; “When you tire me, I will put you in other hands, and when you annoy me, I will resent your mere presence”). Although she informs him that, because of her insecurities and fears, the road they will go together will probably not always be easy, she ultimately envisions herself as capable enough to continue to take care of herself independently and slowly let her son go.

In “Yo pulpa” (61; *Me Pulp*) and “Quiúbo, Consuelo?” (65; “What’s up, Consuelo?”), Glickman engages with the experience of motherhood from the perspective of children. In “Yo pulpa,” Glickman shows the views of a newly born boy who, in an inner monologue, tells his mother about the discomfort and helplessness he now feels after being born into an unfriendly world that does not understand his needs. In “Quiúbo, Consuelo?” Glickman engages with abusive motherhood that demands immeasurable spiritual and emotional capacity from children. This story illustrates Glickman’s capacity to involve short-distance as well as long-distance events in her work, thus creating transnational alliances, this time, with Colombia.

In “Quiúbo, Consuelo?” Glickman creates a transnational “touching tale” of affinity, through the narrator of the story, an adult woman, who tells the story of the life of her friend Consuelo with her mother Doña Carmela, her drunkard father, and her siblings in Colombia. Through the friend’s account, the narrator presents the circumstances of Doña Carmela’s life at the side of her abusive husband. The narration displays how Doña Carmela preaches to her daughters, “No tengas más de un hijo” (67; “Do not have more than one child”), and begs her sons “No sigas los pasos de tu padre” (67; “Do not follow you father’s steps”). Yet despite the advice she gives to her children and the years of continuous maltreatment, Doña Carmela ends up giving birth to nineteen children by her husband. The story shows how the growth of the family persists to the disadvantage of the rest of her older children who are forced to work in order to help support the ever-growing brood. But the account shows that the family circumstances mostly affect Consuelo, the older sister, who is made to feel “más responsable que el resto” (69; “more responsible than the rest”) for her little sisters and brothers. As the

grown-up boys and girls gradually start to marry and move away to create their own lives, Consuelo, resigned to her life with her ever “madre dolorida” (68; “hurting mother”), rejects potential partners and decides to take responsibility for “los pequeños” (69; “the small children”) and build her whole existence around them.

However, despite Consuelo’s sorry and absurd situation in this maternal melodrama, whenever the mother presents her case to other people, “la madre de Consuelo resulta ser victima; pero también es campeona, heroína y santa” (67; “Consuelo’s mother ends up being not only the victim but also the champion, the heroine, and the saint”). Glickman presents the situation of an all-sacrificing mother who, unable to create a life for herself, embodies a sick heroic motherhood that instrumentalizes her children with images of saintly qualities and blackmails them with masochistic motherly agony. In her subtly honed transnational “touching tale” of affinities, Glickman’s “Quiúbo, Consuelo?” complicates the patriarchal motherhood discourse that often takes for granted the female desire for children. Glickman presents a self-serving motherhood that, paraphrasing Molly Haskell, remains obsessed with children, with the egoistical sacrifice for children, with the use of children, but also with the sacrifice of children as a form of egocentric existence (168).

As a Jewish Latina writer residing in New York, Glickman’s iconoclastic short stories also take on the difficulties that undocumented Latin American immigrants face in the United States. In the ironic account “Dios salve America” (“God Save America”), Glickman presents the immigrants’ marginalization, which, as a Latina writer in the U.S.A., also touches her. The story explores the vicissitudes that immigrants sometimes have to endure at the hands of lawyers, charlatans, and criminals. Such people often take

advantage of the immigrants' desire to escape drastically deteriorating economic conditions in their home countries. Glickman illustrates how unscrupulous swindlers promise desperate people legal support or smuggle them into the U.S.A., just to dispossess them of all their money and belongings and leave them stranded at the border.

Through Consuelo's experience, Glickman exposes some of the U.S.A. government's arbitrary attempts to limit Latino immigration into the nation. The story depicts not only Consuelo's failure to "conseguir visa en Colombia" (71; "to get a visa in Colombia"), but also her cousin Griselda's random deportation despite her having all the required documentation, on the basis that the immigration police found that Griselda had the face of a "futura obrera de fábrica" (73; "potential factory worker"). Allying herself with other Latino communities in the U.S., Glickman humorously depicts the supposed commotion that the many "cubanos" (74; "Cubans") seeking asylum and the antisocial "hispanos drogueros" (74; "Hispanic drug dealers") cause in the state of Florida. With biting wit, "Dios salve America" exposes grotesque anti-immigrant sentiment that stereotypes Latinos in general as dangerous "delincuentes" (74; "delinquents").

Yet despite their life in the unwelcoming Promised Land, "Dios salve America" likewise presents members of resilient Latino ethnic communities who struggle to make a living and to maintain their cultural identity. In New York, as Consuelo tells, on Sundays her relatives and friends get together to cook Colombian food, "se sientan a escuchar las últimas grabaciones Latinas, bailan, conversan (76; "sit to listen to the latest Latin tunes, dance and talk"). They also maintain transnational ties to Colombia, calling their parents in Cartagena for anniversaries and birthdays, and the parents give their children their "bendición" (77; "blessing").

With “Y para colmo es fea” (79; “On Top of Everything She Is Ugly”), from the perspective of a married and working mother of three children, Glickman’s radical project turns to the question of fetishistic female beauty. The ironic “Y para colmo es fea,” alludes to the dangers to which women who seem to embody the ideal of the popular Barbie doll beauty (blond, blue/green eyed and thin) might fall prey. Likewise, Glickman makes allusion to the pressures that women who do not fulfill the fetishized ideal of beauty can face. In this anecdote, the narrator of the story decides to keep an old, grey, and cross-eyed she-cat for good, after her mother, hoping to convince her daughter to give up the unattractive animal, exclaims: “¡y para colmo la bestia es tan fea!” (79; “and on top of everything the animal is so ugly!”). Her mother’s exclamation takes the narrator back to her childhood. She tells the reader that as a young girl, at home, she had always been “la número dos” (80; “the number two”), second to her sister. Her sister had been “una chica lo que se dice popular; amiga de la risa abierta, de los bailes y de los muchachos” (80; “a so-called popular girl; a friend of the open smile, dances and boys”). That is to say, the kind of girl the parents did not need to worry about: a desirable girl who would soon find love with a man who would marry her. In short, a young woman who would make marriage her only aspiration and career: a goal and occupation that her parents seem to view as a more advantageous career than any other (for women).

However, because of the limited scope of body types the parents consider beautiful, they do not think that the narrator will find a man to marry her. Out of concern for her future “cuando llegára a ser mujer” (80; “as a grown up woman”) and in the conviction that the narrator would have to face life alone, very early on the parents started to pay attention to her education. The story narrates how they took her to “las ferias del

ganado, [...] se [le] enseñó a reconocer la buena semilla de trigo y a desechar la mala” (80; “cattle shows [...] they taught her to distinguish the good wheat seed and to get rid of the bad one”). Though the storyteller does not report what happened to her attractive sister, looking at the cross-eyed but satisfied she-cat she has decided to keep, she concludes: the she-cat “parece haber adivinado que de ser linda ya hubiera acabado en una vitrina para la adopción, sospechando que al cabo de unos días alguien la sacaría con una caricia y unas palabritas tiernas y luego la pondría a dormir” (81; “seems to have guessed that had she been beautiful, she would have ended in a glass window put on show for adoption, suspecting that after a few days somebody would have come along to try to win her with a stroke and some sweet words just to put her to sleep afterwards”). “Y para colmo es fea” warns the reader away from the imposed notions of mainstream happiness that celebrate beauty, romantic love, and hedonism as overriding goals. The narration cautions readers against buying the plot of romance and its patriarchal values and ideas wholesale: a romantic bargain that, unwittingly, has often relegated women and children to vulnerable positions.

In the story “La Trampa” (33; “The Trap”), Glickman engages with celebrated but irresponsible speakers who never arrive. In “Maestra sin portafolio” (47; “Teacher without Portfolio”), she deals with the administrative deficits of a utilitarian university system that randomly spends money for courses that do not take place. The stories “Del diario de una condenada” (51; “From the Diary of a Condemned”) and “El torno” (31; “The Drill”) depict the agitations of a monotonous daily life in a hectic and impersonal New York. “Armonía suburbana” (83; “Suburban Harmony”) criticizes the unfriendliness of exclusive neighborhoods whose houses and sterile parks cry out “PLEASE KEEP

OUT!” to the passers by (84). “La cuarenta y dos” (43; “The Forty-Two”) engages with the tawdriness of fortuitous sexual encounters which Glickman’s narrative divests of romantic connotations. “U.S.A. Musa S.A.” (85; “U.S.A. Muse S.A.”), presents the subjective process of literary inspiration and production.

Though taking women as the center of her work, Glickman’s stories do not focus on any idealized community nor do they strive to create a collective feminine identity. Nevertheless, Glickman’s polyphony and narrative fragmentation should not be understood as moves that keep Glickman’s project away from “any community of interest and political action” (Smith 434). In “Puesto vacante” (37; “Open Position”), through the figure of Cora Faustinez, Glickman presents the prejudice and vulnerability that professional women might face in a patriarchal society. Most of all, she conveys the lack of solidarity among women due to the sexism some of them have internalized. The story shows how with the support of other deans, Department Chair Cora Faustinez has set up an ad announcing that “se necesita jugador” (37; “a player is needed”). The narrative shows that Department Chair Faustinez had purposely used the masculine form of player. Faustinez was certain that she “solo quería hombres” (37; “only wanted men”) as candidates for the position. The masculine form, she had hoped, would prevent women from showing up to inquire about the vacancy. However, Glickman’s account starts by presenting an upset Faustinez grumbling about the time she has wasted trying to get rid of undesired candidates and numerous women who have come to criticize Faustinez for her blatant sexist discrimination in the job search.

“Puesto vacante” ends up showing that after numerous interviews Faustinez has not been successful in her search for the adequate male player. The story illustrates how

the chair considers publishing the announcement in a magazine of larger circulation in the hope of improving her chances of finding her ideal candidate: a man who understands her “largo peregrinaje” (40; “long pilgrimage”) and who is willing to unconditionally follow her ideas. In the meantime, she will go on profiting from patriarchy. As Faustinez explains, she will continue to expand her “propio curriculum vitae” (41; “own cv”) and to play “en el equipo de otros” (41; “on the team of the others”) who play her same game. Glickman’s story shows that sexism is not an essentially male position but that women can also use their own power to the detriment of other women. Through this move, Glickman also suggests that it would not be correct to view feminism as a movement created “for women against men” (hooks ix). She exposes both men and women as participants in the consolidation of patriarchal thought and practice that utilizes the belief in women’s natural inferiority to justify the institutionalizing of women’s cultural and social subordination. In fact, by showing how Faustinez derives a sense of being from dominating others, Glickman accurately illustrates that though men enjoy more prerogatives within patriarchy, the institution is also harmful to them. “Puesto vacante” suggests that the feminist struggle to change sexist thought and practice in everyday life is a task that requires the cooperative involvement of both women and men.

Thus, Glickman’s fragmented though collected narrative *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos* calls for a communal feminist practice and political responsibility comprised of both men and women. The transnational positionality of her stories seems to problematize the sense of national and biological (read: sex) collective identity as a “utopian ideal” (Smith, “Autobiographical” 168) that often in the striving for a sense of collective identity “erases differences and contradictory experiences” (168). Glickman’s

multiply positioned stories display a non-unitary subject that suggests an affirming Latin American “identity as movement” that is in process (Butler 447). Glickman’s Latin American identity project proposes an identity that no longer has to correspond with the boundaries of a determined nation nor with the limits imposed by a language, religion or ethnicity. Nonetheless, Glickman’s transnational model of Latin American identity, like Absatz’s, is also problematic. By underestimating the uneven flow of capital and cultural transaction from North to South within the American continent, this transnational Latin American identity sustains the “the pervasive spread of Western-based culture” (McClennen 24) that has often resulted in the return to nationalistic notions of Latin American identity.

Furthermore, in her aspiration to advance Latin American cultural autonomy in relation to Western influence and put forward a model of Latin American identity that recognizes non-Catholic, non-mestizo and non-criollo cultures and ethnicities as constitutive elements of this transnational identity, Glickman’s narrative displays intriguing silences. Glickman’s work convincingly inscribes the Eastern European Jewish presence in Argentine and Latin American histories, languages, and cultures. Nonetheless, unlike many other Argentine critics and writers living outside Argentina, her narrative presents a non-engagement with the overwhelming sociopolitical realities of Argentina, despite her deep attachment to her native land. Taking into account Glickman’s model of transnational, non-organic, and inclusive Latin American identity, her emphasis on the historical aspects of the Jewish presence in the region can be interpreted as signaling her desire to prove and reaffirm Eastern European Jewish belonging to Argentine and Latin American histories and cultures. Likewise, her stress on

history signifies the wish not to engage with Argentina's painful present, including an increase in discrimination against Jewish Argentines. Her silence can be further understood as her unwillingness to confront recent political realities, like the Dirty War, the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, and the destruction of the Ashkenazi Jewish Mutual Aid Society, AMIA, that have tragically affected the lives of Jewish Argentine communities. In other words, her non-engagement can be read as her desire not to deal with painful events that challenge the reality that her work seeks to correct and undermine: the fact that even after over a hundred years of historical and cultural presence in Argentina, Jewish Argentines continue to be viewed as foreigners, "as a marginalized group exemplified by its differences from other communities of immigrants" in Latin America (Agosin, Introduction, *Memory, Oblivion* xiv). As Marjorie Agosin reminds us: "The past was a tortuous path for the Jewish communities since Christopher Columbus's arrival at Santo Domingo, and the path continues to be so in contemporary times" (xiii).

Yet, despite the ambivalences of Absatz's and Glickman's alternatives for a hybrid Latin American identity, their works disrupt the homogeneous whole of a Catholic Latin American identity and foreground the desire "that difference be accepted as a constituent element of being Argentinean," of being Latin American (Sosnowsky 266). Both authors intervene to decisively problematize the exclusionary idea of "[t]he Afro-Euro-Indigenous American" racial and cultural mixture that resulted from the combination of these traditions in the New World and that has been widely celebrated as *mestizaje* (Miller, *Rise and Fall* 11). Their works expose another dimension of the exclusionary nature of the liberal doctrine of Latin American *mestizaje*, which

traditionally emphasizes the superiority of the Hispano-Catholic element over the Native and African components in this cultural amalgamation, and which is often viewed as the quintessential expression of “*latinoamericanismo*” (Miller 6; original emphasis; “Latinamericanism”).

Absatz and Glickman narrate worlds that confirm the accurateness of Peter Wade’s observation that *mestizaje* has been based on the exclusion of “those considered unmixed” (*Race and Ethnicity* 84). In fact, Wade reminds us that within the context of Latin American formation of national identities, this ideology has systematically privileged whiteness and strived for cultural *blanqueamiento* [whitening], which has meant “becoming more urban, more Christian, more civilized; less rural, less black, less Indian” (84). *Mestizaje* ideology has thus promoted the marginalization of the Jewish tradition in the Latin American region where Jewish people “continue to be seen as the other, as the foreign minority” (Agosín, Introduction, *Memory, Oblivion* xiv).

Absatz’s and Glickman’s literary works demonstrate their profound commitment to the Latin American region and to Argentina. They emphasize the need to confront these societies with the presence of “other” Latin Americans who do not possess the characteristics of “rightful” members of the mythical Catholic Latin American *mestizo* race, as defined by traditional Latin American identity discourses. Their narratives question the ideology of a hybrid *mestizo* Latin American identity that, with its tendency to favor Catholic “whiteness,” presents the Western universalistic drive for uniformity that leaves no room to accommodate and acknowledge the difference introduced by non-Hispano or non-Latin Catholic, non-criollo, or non-mestizo immigrants to the region. In fact, in Argentina, where, according to mainstream history (very much unlike the nations

of the Andean region), *mestizaje* “has been judged to be negligible” (Miller, *Rise and Fall 2*), there has been a tendency to suppress religious, racial, and ethnic diversity in the name of Argentineness, the national ideal of a Western European white Hispano-Catholic consciousness and society (Segal; Curtis 19-34; Foster, *Cultural Diversity* 95).¹²⁵ In the context of Latin America, this move towards universalism has denied the presence and promoted the exclusion of the histories and cultural contributions of those who complicate Catholic Latin American *mestizo* or *criollo* cultures and identities. Absatz and Glickman problematize a hegemonic ideology of race and cultural imperialism that has failed to present the cultural plurality, diversity, and complexity of Latin American lands: a consciousness of a *mestizaje* where “Central and Eastern European and Middle Eastern heritages blend, with the traditional Latin American--which itself combines Iberian, Native American, African and other influences” (Agosín, Introduction, *The House of Memory* 3).

¹²⁵ In her work, Marilyn Grace Miller writes about the origins of the celebrated quintessential Argentine tango and its “transformation from black to white” (93). In it, she problematizes “the tendency to rewrite the tango as white [...] and to focus selectively on its European and Euro-American features” (81). Paraphrasing Marta Savigliano, Miller states that the suppression of black roots of the tango is “at the heart of Argentine psychological repression” (94). Miller concludes by suggesting that “[p]erhaps tango has come to stand for what it means to be Argentinian precisely because of the success with which this mestizo form has been dispossessed of its diasporic African character and spirit(s)” (95).

Chapter 5

Seyran Ateş and Yadé Kara:

Interventions in the Debate between “the Orient and the Occident”

This chapter argues that Seyran Ateş’s *Große Reise ins Feuer. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin*, 2003 (“Great Trip into the Fire: The Story of a German Turkish Woman”) and Yade Kara’s *Selam Berlin*, 2003 (“Hello, Berlin”) fundamentally question popular conceptions of Turkish identity in Germany. More specially, these works challenge the paradigms of the victimized Turkish woman and the violent Turkish man torn between incommensurable Oriental and Occidental worlds. Ateş and Kara, as Turkish German women intellectuals writing about the lives and experiences of Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic, problematize Western discourses of a unified, continuous, stable and centered subject. Likewise, their work challenges the humanistic belief that the aforementioned ‘stable subjects’ live in homogeneous cultures which constitute discrete, coherent and integrated wholes. In other words, Ateş’s and Kara’s narratives complicate holistic discourses of unitary subjects who live in enclosed societies protected by impermeable borders. Their works question Western identity discourses that ignore how the multidirectional flow of culture in our transnational world allows the emergence of new identities.

In the German context, homogenizing Western discourses of the self have served to mark the bicultural Turkish German subject as problematic and, as it were, unthinkable. Anthropologist Jenny B. White remarks that, in a large corpus of German writing devoted to the study of people from Turkey living in Germany, German Turks are categorized as “neither Turkish nor German” and therefore as having “a double or

schizophrenic identity” (759; Röhmi 374). Too often their bicultural Turkish *and* German identity is seen as an insurmountable hurdle preventing their assimilation into dominant German culture. This Turkish German self is frequently perceived as an undifferentiated identity in perpetual crisis.

This chapter shows that Ateş and Kara critique the unitary and authentic subject by presenting selves that are multiple. Their narratives display a “shifting subjectivity capable of reconfiguring and recentering itself” in response to the political conflicts, marginalization, and other struggles (Yarbro-Bejarano 11). Ateş’s and Kara’s subject is an engaged and political self. This self does not aim to create or recover utopias, to recuperate some kind of “true essence of [...] being” (15), or, for that matter, to be politically correct. Instead, their subject is in process and his or her only constant is, paraphrasing Trinh T. Minh-ha, an unresolved dialectical back and forth movement across political, religious, ethnic, cultural, and sexual boundaries (qtd. in Yarbro-Bejarano 17). Ateş and Kara present a form of subjectivity that, in the contemporary European and German political contexts, calls for the negotiation of the crisis between Orient and Occident. Their works put forward a subjectivity that seeks to avert the Huntingtonian conception of the unavoidable clash between Muslim and Christian civilizations. Indeed, Samuel Huntington’s notion of the clash of civilizations is an idea incessantly propagated by intellectuals, politicians, and the media, that some observers see as “evident,” obvious, and definitive in the German context (Helicke 175).

And yet, this chapter will also show that, though Ateş’s and Kara’s narratives convincingly question essentializing ideas of national identity and monolithic assumptions about the Turkish population in Germany, Ateş’s autobiography nonetheless

contains moments that threaten acutely to undermine her project of diversifying images of German Turks. Though the subjects in Ates's and Kara's works seem capable of dealing with the dialectical tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes that have emerged between a reformist Islam and a radical Islam, Ates's autobiographical account, unlike Kara's, occasionally employs discursive cultural clichés about Turks and Muslims and thereby problematically aligns with dominant German discourse.

5.1. Seyran Ateş

Human rights lawyer and activist Seyran Ateş was born on April 20, 1963, in Istanbul. Her autobiographical account *Große Reise ins Feuer. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin* is her first literary work. She has also published the theoretical work *Der Multikulti-Irrtum*, 2007 ("The Multicultural Mistake") where she proposes suggestions for a better integration policy in Germany. Her father is Kurdish and her mother is Turkish. Her parents, who went to Germany as guest workers, took Ateş to Berlin-Wedding when she was six years old. Ateş has been living in Berlin ever since. At the age of eighteen, the bisexual Ateş tired of the mistreatment that she received from her conservative parents and decided to leave her parents' house.

An outstanding student, Ateş finished school and went on to study law. To finance her studies, she worked at the Kreuzberg Frauenladen TIO, a counseling office for immigrant women. In 1984, while giving assistance to a female client, Ateş was attacked by a member of the Grey Wolves, an extremist Turkish fascist organization. The man killed Ateş's client and almost took her life as well. Ateş survived the assault with serious wounds leaving her left arm permanently impaired. It took her almost seven years to recover from the physical injuries and the psychological damage of this attack. "In

dubio pro reo” (in doubt in favor of the accused), the perpetrator was declared not guilty and given financial compensation. Ateş, at the time of the crime still a Turkish citizen, did not receive any reparations. In 1997, Ateş was finally able to finish her law degree at the Free University of Berlin. Since 1997, she has practiced as a lawyer in Berlin-Mitte, specializing in family and criminal law. The budding human rights activist not only represents women seeking divorce or victimized by patriarchal traditions such as forced marriages, but also defends women facing the menace of honor killings or forced to veil themselves and wear headscarves against their will.

In 2006, Ateş’s controversial stance prompted repeated death threats from women’s husbands and relatives. However, Yasemin Karakasoğlu has suggested that, to a large extent, the intimidations Ateş has faced are a result of “her publicly expressed opinions on Islam and Muslim men,” rather than her actions (“Anti-Islamic Discourse in Europe” 6). As a consequence of the constant threats, in September 2006 Ateş temporarily closed her office and relinquished her law license. She resumed her work in September, 2007, and continues to engage in politics and deliver frequent talks on human rights. Her feminist work has been widely recognized in Germany. In 2005, Ateş was designated “Woman of the Year.” Her engagement with women’s rights has also earned her the Margherita-von-Brentano Award, 2007 and the Ossip-K.-Flechtheim Award, 2006. Ateş currently lives with her daughter in Berlin.

5.1.1. *Große Reise ins Feuer. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin*

Ateş’s story of her life is presented chronologically in her novel, beginning with her parents’ life in Turkey, their sudden departure from Istanbul to Siemens in Berlin without their children in 1969, followed by the family reunion in Berlin and their

subsequent life in the city up to the present day. Because the narrative takes place largely in Berlin, it belongs to the genre of “Berlin Literatur” (Yeşilada, “Topographien” 331; “Berlin Literature”). Alongside the factual story of her own and her family’s experiences in Germany, Ateş describes how she has come to terms with both the restrictive tradition of her family and a German society that refuses to accept its multicultural reality. In doing so, she avoids the “between worlds/cultures” discourse so often employed to depict and explain the immigrant experience of Turkish Germans. She disagrees with the assumption that Turkish German subjects remain irrevocably caught between two disconnected cultures. For example, in the interview, “Kurze Haare” (“Short Hair”) she asserts:

Wenn ich sage, dass ich in beiden Kulturen lebe, heißt das nicht, dass ich mir aus beiden nur die Rosinen picke. Das geht überhaupt nicht. Man kommt nicht drumherum, auch die negativen Seiten zu nehmen” (see: <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2003/0711/blickpunkt/0002/.>>)

[When I say that I live in both cultures, it does not mean that I only pick the goodies out of both cultures. It does not work that way at all. There is no getting out without taking the negative sides too.]

And her autobiographical narrative displays this contradictory embracing and disdain of both Turkish and German cultures. In her autobiography, Ateş tackles two projects simultaneously. First, in her endeavor to deessentialize images of Turks among Germans and Germans among Turks, she takes a critical approach to the histories, traditions, and cultural attitudes of both cultures, critiquing what she sees as unjust or painful practices in both. And yet, Ateş attempts to embrace both the positive and negative sides of her two cultures without having to renounce either. Secondly, Ateş’s narrative seeks to rewrite official historical accounts of the guest worker experience in Turkey and Germany and to

make the complex experience of Turkish guest workers and their children more real to her readers. As part of this venture, her story, in revealing her very personal experience with Kurdish, Turkish, and German cultures, counters the master narrative that has repeatedly represented immigrant women as passive and unable to adapt to situations of migration.

Ateş starts her autobiography by presenting long-standing “touching tales” of Turkish and German history. Through these tales, she deconstructs the idea of Germany and Turkey as two discrete nations, cultures, and histories. From the beginning, Ateş suggests that transnational and intercultural dialogue is only possible in a historical framework that strives to bring historical “touching tales” to the awareness of readers and would-be participants in this dialogue. Ateş goes back to her childhood in traditional rural Turkey and, by means of her ancestors’ narrative, sheds light on the convoluted history of modern Turkey and the nation’s effort to achieve cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Ateş reminds us that, unfortunately, the modern history of Turkey has included programs of ethnic cleansing and violent resettlements of the numerous ethnic groups that today constitute the nation.

Indeed, only in this historical context is it possible to understand, Ateş suggests, how the Turkish government was able to give land to her Kurdish grandfather Ahmet and his relatives—coming from the East of the country—in Kömürkaya, a former Armenian town. In the ex-Armenian town, her parents, the Kurd Mehmet and the Turkin Hatun, would spend their childhoods and eventually meet one another. Contesting the silencing of her history, Ateş challenges her parents’ refusal to answer questions about the Armenians’ fate in Kömürkaya. She states: “Meine Eltern können mir bis heute auf diese

Frage keine Antwort geben. Sie sagen, sie wissen es nicht. Sie seien zu jener Zeit noch nicht geboren gewesen and könnten nicht sagen, was damals war. Sie verstünden von diesen Dingen nichts” (*Große Reise* 14; “To this day, my parents have not been able to give me an answer to this question. They say that they do not know. They say that they had not been born yet and cannot say what was going on at that time. They declare that they do not understand anything about this stuff”). By challenging her parents’ denial about the extermination of the Armenian population, Ateş problematizes the refusal of the Republic of Turkey to officially acknowledge and take responsibility for one of the bloodiest chapters of its history during the early 20th century: the genocide against the Armenian people between 1914 and 1922.

Ateş’s narrative writes back into history the state-sponsored massacre against the Armenians living within the boundaries of the dying Ottoman Empire and the emerging modern Turkish nation.¹²⁶ During this period, Armenian people experienced violence first at the hands of the Young Turks and later those of the Turkish Nationalists who, though opposed to the Young Turks, nevertheless, like the former, cherished the ideology of ethnic and cultural exclusivity. Ateş’s narrative questions the “schlechtes Gedächtnis” (12; “bad memory”) of mainstream Turkish history that erases from its historical record the executions, massacres, mass rapes, starvation, and other repressive measures deployed against the Armenians.¹²⁷ By inscribing the Armenian genocide into her

¹²⁶ Robin Cohen illuminates the fact that, despite a long history of colonization, invasions, deportations, migrations and subordination to Islamic forces, Armenians had managed “to maintain their distinctive language and two particular brands of Christianity—the Catholic Armenian Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church” (44).

¹²⁷ Cohen further explains: “The modern disaster and dispersion began in the late nineteenth century when a pan-Armenian nationalist and revolutionary movement trying to reunite the three parts of Armenia was met by the Ottoman Sultan Hamid (“The Red Sultan”) with massive violence. Close to 300,000 Armenians were killed in Turkish Armenia between 1894 and 1896.” This was “merely the prelude to an even greater assault by the Turks during the First World War” (44). The most dramatic slaughter started in 1915 “when

account of Turkish history, Ateş brings to light a genocide that largely took place during World War I, that is to say, at a historical point when Turkey and Germany were, borrowing Adelson's term, "brothers in arms" as part of the Central Powers. This "brotherhood" resulted in senseless bloodshed leading to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and leaving behind a debilitated German state. As history has shown, the desperate domestic situation of Germany during the Weimar Republic substantially contributed to the development of Nazi Germany and the outbreak of World War II. Turkish guest workers arrived in post-war Germany after the construction of the Berlin Wall when, in response to the manpower shortage resulting from the division of the country, West Germany entered an agreement with Turkey allowing the importation of labor (Mandel 27-28; Kürsat-Ahlers 113). In fact, echoing Ateş, Christina von Braun and Bettina Mathes remind us that, indeed, Turkey and Germany have a number of historical bonds that are barely acknowledged in public debate and discourse. After all, as von Braun and Mathes illustrate: "haben beide Nationen in ihrer Vergangenheit einen Genozid verübt" (433; "both nations have perpetrated genocide in their past"). Both states struggle, though in different ways, with historical and cultural memory and confrontation with an uncomfortable and, at times, horrific past (433-34). Moreover, Germany did not just tolerate the Armenian genocide. During the time between the two world wars, as von Braun and Mathes remind us, the mass murder was welcomed as a "gelungene Lösung" von "Minderheitenprobleme" (434; "felicitous solution for problems with minorities") by racist and anti-Semitic German politicians and writers.

the Turks initiated the killings of Armenians or their deportation to Syria and Palestine" (44-45). According to Lang and Walker, by 1922 the number of Armenians murdered "may safely be put at around 1,500,000" (qtd. in Cohen 45).

Turkey's inhabitants are an intermixture of a vast number of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups (see Konuk 31-32). Ateş's account details the repression experienced by minorities in the modern Turkish state that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Her narrative suggests a nation that, in its striving for a homogeneous and secularized Turkish culture, is fundamentally opposed to its own ethnic and religious diversity. By revealing the silence that for many years surrounded the origins of her Kurdish grandfather, Ateş explains how, in order to create a uniform and European oriented Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) initiated a process of civilization and state consolidation that required the outright disavowal of the lived realities of Turkish culture.¹²⁸ Ateş explains how her father, Mehmet, "musste sein Leben lang leugnen, Kurde zu sein" (15; "had to deny that he was a Kurd his whole life long"). She likewise shows how fear of exclusion motivated her grandparents' wish that their son Mehmet not learn Kurdish and instead become a "Staatsbürger der Türkei and somit Türke" (*Große Reise* 15; "a Turkish citizen and consequently a Turk").

At this juncture, Ateş's narrative depicts an affinity between the lives of minorities in Turkey and in Germany, two nations that, in their striving for homogeneous Turkishness and Germanness, have demanded unreserved integration from their minorities. While her father's family had to deny that they were Kurds in order to become an integral part of the Turkish nation, Ateş sees her ancestors' story repeating itself, to a certain extent, in the lives of some of her nephews in Germany. The children in question can hardly speak Turkish, and the devalued Turkish culture is not an important part of their lives. Nonetheless, Ateş displays understanding for her German sisters-in-law. By

¹²⁸ In fact, Atatürk maintained that "the new Turkey has no relationship to the old. The Ottoman government has passed into history. A new Turkey is now born" (qtd. in Robins 68).

not encouraging the children to learn Turkish or to engage with Turkish cultures, her sisters-in-law only seek to protect their children from being marked as “Türkenkinder” (16; “Turks’ children”) and thus marginalized in German society.

At the same time, Ateş shows that, though Kurds were forced to comply with the demands of the regime that glorified human community and demanded the wholesale suppression of minority cultures, there is by no means consensus among contemporary Kurds as to the status of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. In fact, she relates her father’s resentment of her solidarity with Kurds and accusations of unpatriotic and antagonistic behavior against Turkey. He proclaims that, in contrast to her: “Er liebe sein Land und sei dagegen, dass fanatische Feinde der Türkei es spalten wollten” (15; “He loves his country and disagrees with fanatic enemies that might want to divide it”). Concurrently, Ateş’s narrative shows the still unresolved conflicts and tensions between Turks and Kurds in Turkey that have also been played out on German territory. The disagreement between the groups is mirrored in the reactions of their Turkish and Kurdish families to the revelation of her parents’ relationship. In fact, the account shows that the unwillingness of the enraged fathers—the infuriated Kurd Ahmet and the equally dishonored Turk Cafer—to find a peaceful solution for their children’s relationship would eventually force the Kurd Mehmet and the Turk Hatun to elope.

Nonetheless, the narrative suggests that simply because in this specific situation the two patriarchs are unable to overcome their ethnocentrism, it would be an overgeneralization to conclude that all Kurds and all Turks share the same rigid and divisive frame of mind. In a culture where the honor of the family often depends on the proper behavior of the daughters, the childrens’ escape and subsequent lawful marriage

could only succeed with the help of other townspeople who wanted to prevent the catastrophic fallout of an honor killing on the members of both families. As Ateş more promisingly relates: “Glücklicherweise gab es in Kömürkaya also auch Menschen, die den Weltuntergang nicht kommen sahen, weil ein Kurde eine Türkin heiraten wollte” (20; “Fortunately, after all, there were also people in Kömürkaya who did not see the end of the world coming because a Kurd wanted to marry a Turkish girl”).

The circumstances surrounding her parents’ marriage and the negotiations that would eventually lead to the payment of the required “Brautpreis” (21; “bride-price”) (in order to restore the honor of the bride’s father) allow Ateş to critique the traditional patriarchal family structure and system in rural Turkey. Such families generally prefer sons and confer to the eldest son the power to rule the family. This account exposes how the traditional institution, though significant for the material and emotional well-being of its members, can also at times be an unbearable burden to both men and women whose needs must be subordinated to the patriarchs’ rule. In the case of her parents, Ateş recounts how, though the young couple succeeded in marrying with the agreement of the heads of their families, this fact did not protect them from the ethnocentric attacks they would have to endure from some members of the traditional Kurdish family. This mistreatment by the family would eventually lead the young couple to relocate to Istanbul and live close to the Turkish family instead.

Once in Istanbul, where Ateş is born in 1963, desperate poverty pushes the parents to try their luck as “Gastarbeiter” (39; “guest workers”) in Germany. At this point, Ateş attempts to convey the trauma that many guest workers’ children underwent when, “ohne jede Vorankündigung” (36; “without any prior notice”), their parents left the

young children behind with relatives in their search for work. Though aware that desperate parents often did not have “die Zeit ... die Bildung oder Einsicht” (39; “the time ... the education or sensitivity”) to grasp the psychological impact of their leaving on the children, the writer explores the devastating consequences of such sudden abandonment:

Eine ganze Menge meiner Altersgenossen lassen sich mittlerweile psychiatrisch behandeln, um diese Trauma zu verarbeiten. Man kann vielleicht von einer Generationstrauma der Migrantenkinder sprechen. Unsere Eltern haben uns zurückgelassen, dann irgendwann wieder zu sich geholt, aber sie haben nie mit uns über diese Zeit gesprochen. (39)

[Meanwhile, a large number of my contemporaries are under psychiatric therapy in order to work through this trauma. Maybe, in relation to migrants' children, it is possible to talk about a generation's trauma. Our parents left us behind, and then at some point took us with them, but still they never talked to us about this time.]

Ateş also elucidates how patriarchal traditions made it difficult for some traditional families in Turkey to understand the decision of women and men who to seek financial stability in Germany. Her account hints at the family struggles that some Turkish guest workers had to face before leaving their homeland and the strength those encounters demanded. Though their parents' and families' support would have been an immense psychological relief for their migrant children, parents at times, like in the case of Hatun's mother, refused to give their blessing to anxious young people wanting to leave and try their luck somewhere else. Furthermore, many believed, as Hatun's father did, that: “Arbeitende Frauen seien Huren. Frauen, die nach Deutschland gehen wollten, um dort zu arbeiten, seien noch schlimmere Huren” (42; “Working women were whores. Women who wanted to go to Germany to work were worse whores”).

Additionally, Ateş's work deessentializes the representation of Turks among Germans and vice versa. Specifically, she corrects the perception that the sole source of immigrants' difficulties in the Federal Republic is the hostility encountered from Germans. Ateş presents a more complex picture of the Turkish immigrant experience by showing how Turkish immigrants' suffering is often exacerbated by Turkish swindlers in Turkish consulates who take advantage of the migrants' hopes, fears, and inexperience by promising work permits and visas for the workers, their partners, and the children left at home.

As Ateş's narrates her family's reunion in Berlin, she shows how the unavoidable transformations and cultural readjustments that the family faces in the new country take their toll. Ateş analyzes the immigrants' experience of cultural dislocation and increased traditional values through her own perspective as the eldest daughter. As the eldest female offspring, she must help her overworked mother run the household. Once the family is in Berlin, the parents begin treating her differently from their sons, giving her far less freedom than her brothers. Describing her dilemma, Ateş writes: "Vom ersten Tag an wurde ich eingesperrt. Ich durfte nicht zum Spielen hinausgehen, ich hätte mich ja verlaufen können. Die Jungs durften aber hinaus –als ob sie sich nicht ebenso hätten verlaufen können" (*Große Reise* 51; "From the very first day, I was locked up. I was not allowed to go out to play; I could have lost my way. However, the boys were allowed to go out—as if they could not have lost their way too"). In the absence of the parents, the older brothers must ensure that their sister does not transgress their parents' rules and supervise her chores. Ateş criticizes the gender bias of her parents who demand strongly

conformist behavior from Seyran and make the eldest brother, Kemal, responsible for his siblings.

On the other hand, the narration exposes the significant degree to which these behaviors are social constructs that come from “die ständige Kontrolle” (55; “the constant control”) exercised over women within the Turkish community in the new cultural environment. Ateş’s account suggests that cultural identity often becomes of more importance in a foreign country. After migration, Turkish communities sometimes create protective boundaries around themselves and propagate exaggerated nationalism, ethnicity, and religious practices. In order to come to terms with their religious identity, some communities have sometimes fostered tenacious adherence to practices and beliefs considered the truest version of Islam. In the process, young women are often coded as symbols of ethnic purity and “honor” to be protected in an environment that is not always congenial and is perceived as too liberal. In Ateş’s case, this patriarchal treatment, that has also been called “lived Islam,” takes place simultaneously with the sexual revolution in Germany.¹²⁹ This fact allows Ateş to comment critically on the ways that immigrant communities occasionally condone essentialist concepts of Turkishness in ways that demand “proper behavior” from girls and, regrettably, trap Muslim women in oppressive conditions.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ See Freyer Stowasser 61.

¹³⁰ Yasemin Karakasoğlu elucidates the social control of women as related “to the changing demographic composition of the Turkish migrant community” (246). As Karakasoğlu explains, in the early communities “strongly religious individuals were the exception rather than the rule.” She adds: “the turn to Islam was in large measure fostered also by the move away from the gender-segregated collective living areas, into the residential areas of the town, which had become necessary by the trend of reunification [with the influx of wives and children] (246). Karakasoğlu concludes: “From now on, it was no longer merely questions relating to the world of work which mattered: concepts such as the honor of the family, esteem as head of the family, and respect, became more important for mutual acceptance within the migrant community” (“Muslims in Germany” 246-47).

And yet, in striving not to present the life of immigrant Turks in Germany as homogeneous, Ateş stresses the specificity of her experience. For instance, she acknowledges that, despite restrictions, her female cousins were given considerably more freedom to move around and play. Concurrently, Ateş shows that even though most of the guest workers came from rural Turkey, they did not uniformly choose self-segregation, as traditional sociological German discourse suggests.¹³¹ Her narrative stresses that not all Turkish guest workers sequestered themselves in ethnic enclaves. After a while, to the discomfort of some compatriots who did not expect their new neighbors to behave like “Stadtmenschen” (62; “city people”), intra-ethnic divisions across linguistic, religious, educational, or class differences led some immigrants to move out of ethnic neighborhoods to places where “nicht so viele Türken gab” (62; “there were not so many Turks”).¹³² Additionally, the narrative clarifies that the inflexible cultural traditions and notions of authority some immigrants revitalize and champion in their new countries are not necessarily inherent in Turkish culture. During the summer holidays, Seyran repeatedly discovered that her “Turkish” education in Germany was far more restrictive than the upbringing of her cousins in Turkey:

¹³¹ In fact, Kürsat-Ahlers reports that studies have shown that most Turks “were interested in developing social contact with Germans. Thirteen percent preferred to live in a segregated neighborhood, while 53 percent preferred to live in a mixed neighborhood, while 33 percent even expressed a preference for neighbors who were solely German. The 1985 survey showed that a mere 9 percent of Turks, given the choice would have opted for a predominantly Turkish neighborhood” (125). Kürsat-Ahlers warns: “The allegation that Turks exclude themselves from German society and culture serves to exonerate Germans from harboring prejudice, whilst appearing to make discrimination against them the fault of Turks themselves” (125).

¹³² In relation to language and how itacerbates the immigrants’ feelings of isolation, scholar Barbara Freyer Stowasser reminds us that a large number of the first Turkish had language and literacy problems. Freyer Stowasser explains: “Few had received a formal education beyond the rudimentary level in Turkey, and thus were not able to read Turkish newspapers. Their physically demanding jobs in Germany, which rarely required linguistic competence, left them little time to expand their knowledge of Turkish beyond the dialectical level or to develop a knowledge of German as a workable second language. [...] This situation changed with the arrival of videos and satellite transmission, especially the latter, connecting the first-generation migrants with the events in Turkey and the world by way of the spoken Turkish word” (58).

Ich war immer sehr erstaunt darüber, wie viel mehr Freiheiten meine Cousinen in der Turkey hatten. Während ich in einem angeblich moderneren Land ein eingeschlossenes Leben führte, verfügten meine Cousinen in Istanbul über weitaus mehr Freiraum als ich. Sie waren auch im Umgang miteinander lockerer. (66)

[I was always surprised at how much more freedom my cousins in Turkey had. While I led a secluded life in an allegedly modern nation, my female cousins in Turkey enjoyed much more independence than me. They were also much more relaxed in their dealing with one another.]

Ateş suggests that this defense of “Turkishness” occurs both because immigrants feel marginalized from the majority society, but also because they want to protect their identity, culture, and traditions, especially once confronted with a new society based in different norms and values. Likewise, Ateş’s account illustrates that this culturally defensive mind-set is not limited to Turks in Germany. She reveals that the wish to preserve cultural values and costumes in a foreign environment is an affinity that many immigrants share: “Auch Deutsche gehen in Ausland und bilden Kolonien, wie zum Beispiel auf Mallorca und in der Toskana. Sie feiern in den USA das Oktoberfest” (215; “Germans go overseas and build colonies, too, like for example on Mallorca and in Tuscany, and they celebrate the beer festival in the USA”). This fact calls attention to Western racism that tends to view communities created by Western nations as an asset to the culture of the guest nation. Ateş illustrates that “civilized Western immigrants” are not viewed as “Ausländer” (“foreigners”) in the guest societies or expected to leave their cultures behind in order to become integral members of the new society (215). Turks and immigrants from third world countries, however, are required to relinquish their traditions and values, because “sonst eine Integration nicht möglich [sei]” (215; “otherwise integration is not possible”). Ateş’s observation exposes the Eurocentric

tendency to see, perceive, and represent non-Western or non-European immigrants as potential problems and as alien burdens to Western guest societies.

However, Ateş also presents a nuanced view about Germans who, in Turkish stereotypes, are often represented as monolithically hostile, godless, heartless, bureaucratic, and materialistic. For example, in her reminiscences about her first year in Germany, she relates how, though there was one neighbor who “war einfach ausländlerfeindlich” (58; “was simply hostile to foreigners”), the majority of her German neighbors were friendly. And despite her parents’ repeated warning to be careful of the Germans since “sie seien ganz anders” (58; “they were very different”), she finds that, contrary to what her parents tell her, “waren nicht alle Deutsche ... abweisend” (58; “not all Germans were ... unapproachable”).

Her experience at school further confirms that it is not possible to make generalizations about “Germans” and “Turks.” As her life at home becomes unbearable and her life at school her only source of strength, it is Ateş’s German friends who support her. She acknowledges her marginalization by some students and the difficulties she faces as the only Turkish girl in the class. However, her German friend Michael, the school’s social worker, is the first person she talks to about her situation at home. At school she also meets Stefan, who would become her long-term lover and the partner, the man who would support and care for her after the attack by the Turkish fascists. Additionally, during her school years, when Ateş feels she is leading a double existence—Turkish at home and German at school—her election and experience as “Schulsprecherin” (83; “school spokesperson”) make her aware that “[m]an seine Rechte nur kennen [musste], um sie vertreten zu können” (83; “a person needs to know her/his

rights to be able to stand up for them”). Her experience as a representative of her German peers is one of the turning points in her life that fuels her decision to become a lawyer.

Nonetheless, Ateş also shows that even though her increasing difficulties with her family make her wish that she did not have any contact with Turkish boys and girls, she also recognizes that she cannot leave her family’s Turkish-Kurdish culture behind for good. Though she believes that her German friends “waren die Einzigen, die [sie] wirklich kannten” (104; “were the only ones who really knew her), she also feels that her family and her culture are integral parts of her self that she is not willing or able to renounce. Instead, she wants to live through and bring together both cultures. At this point, Ateş’s narrative questions the Western feminist assumption that the identities of German Turkish women could be neatly separated into their German and Turkish aspects. This assumption has caused some feminists and social workers to believe that, in order to improve the status of Turkish German women in Germany (or Muslim women in general), these pitiful women simply have to abandon their backward cultures and adopt superior German/European practices and values. Ateş’s exploration of her dilemma resonates with Leila Ahmed’s explanation of the unfeasibility of this idea:

The complexity of enculturation and the depth of its encoding in the human psyche are such that even individuals deliberately fleeing to another culture, mentally or physically, carry forward and recreate in their lives a considerable part of their previous acculturation. (129)

Ahmed further reminds us that, though this notion may seem legitimate and appropriate in the case of Muslim women, even during times when Western women had no rights, Western feminists never called “for the abandonment of the entire Western heritage and the wholesale adoption of some other culture as the only resource for Western women” (128).

In fact, Ateş's experience challenges the binary logic of the Turkishness vs. Gemanness viewpoint which views these two cultures as incommensurable and essentially different and deems "Turkish" and "German" identities as discrete, fixed, unchanging, and stable entities. Ateş contradicts the essentialist idea that an immigrant woman in Germany can be either Turkish or German, or else must be condemned to an undifferentiated state, hopelessly unhinged between the two worlds. Ateş states: "Ich spreche, empfinde, denke und träume in zwei Sprachen und bin geprägt von zwei Kulturen, die sich ergänzen, ähneln, aber auch widersprechen. Das macht mich vielfältiger und offener für andere Kulturen" (250; "I speak, feel, think, and dream in two languages. I am marked by both cultures, which complement one another, that differ from one another, but that also contradict one another. This makes me more diverse and more open to other cultures").¹³³ Her experience problematizes pessimistic debates about Turkish immigrants' ability to integrate into their guest country. Numerous discussions based on a definition of integration that virtually equates with assimilation often view Turks' religion as an obstacle to integration. Such debates seem unaware of "racism [as] a constitutive element of national definitions" (Erel 165). As Umut Erel suggests, they likewise disregard the tendency in mainstream German culture to not "acknowledge any participation in this society that challenges the unity of society and nation through claiming a place in the society without subjecting one self to national assimilation" (165).

¹³³ In fact, the research of anthropologist Jenny B. White has questioned the belief that immigrant women are unable to cope with the demands of reconciling two cultures that sometimes contradict each other. As a way to resolve this cultural conflict, German social programs often remove Turkish girls from their families, but White argues that "while Turkish girls have visions of *Freiheit* (the freedom of German society), their experience is that participation in German society cannot replace the support of the family. They are in any case denied full entry into the German society." White further explains: "While Turks may become 'cocitizens with equal rights' (*Gleichberechtigte Bürger*), they can never become 'German' or participate fully in German society, regardless of where their behavior falls on the scale. German ethnicity and national identity are based on blood, not on behavior. This is true regardless of citizenship status" (760).

In fact, these views have also contributed to the construction and the propagation of the generalized image of Turkish women as pitiful victims occupying a cultural and historical non-space, as it were, outside the German nation.

Ateş believes that a number of problems between Turks and Germans result from the ignorance and stereotypes many Germans have about Turkish people and their Islamic faith. Since many Turks also have “ein verzerrtes Deutschen- und Christenbild” (217; “a distorted picture about Germans and Christianity”), Ateş believes there is a need for cross-cultural education. She suggests that, for example, the German school curriculum be expanded to include religion classes covering both Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, especially in light of the discursive construction of Islamic people as “Monster[s]” (219) after September 11, Ateş believes there is need for a renewed effort to help people understand that extremist beliefs are advanced not by the religion itself, but by individuals who have instrumentalized religion. She emphasizes: “nicht die gesamte islamische Gemeinde dieser Welt deartige blutige und grausame Taten billigt” (248; “not the whole Islam community all over the world approves of such bloody and cruel actions”). Like other scholars, Ateş expresses concern that though Islam has both provided an important support network for the Turkish community and conserved traditional values, it has also created serious religious divisions between Turks and Germans. Scholars reminds us that, although Islam has as many denominations as Christianity, this diversity is consistently overshadowed by the presence of a minority of Muslims who openly segregate themselves from Christians and have “managed to monopolize the debate” about Islam in the nation (Tan and Waldhoff 140).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Up until now, the Republic of Turkey has been responsible for Islamic instruction in Germany, but, ironically, militant Islamic groups have emerged as a reaction to the attempts of the Turkish state to control

Additionally, as Yasemine Karakasoglu explains, in a society where there is often little contact between Turks and Germans: “The public image of Islam has also been blurred by the rivalry between Turkish organizations and groups, all claiming to be the authoritative voice of Islam in Germany, though in reality they only represent factions and sectional interests” (“Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 159). Concurrently, scholars stress that, though Islam is the second largest religion after Catholicism in Germany, it is still not officially recognized. In the majority of German society, knowledge of the religion and its role in the cultural identity of Turks is still surprisingly scant. Ateş emphasizes it is “die Aufgabe der Schule und der Medien ” (217; “schools’ work and that of the media”) to attempt to narrow this knowledge gap. Ateş’s suggestion also resonates with the intervention of other Muslims who seek dialogue with the various religions that coexist in multicultural societies like that of Germany. These Muslims consider religious teaching crucial and would prefer to have Islam “be treated either on an equal basis with Christian religious instruction, or where comparative religion is taught ‘given its full due’” (Karakasoglu, “Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 163). As Karakasoglu explains, Turkish organizations like the Central Council for Muslims in Germany and the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany have also expressed the wish that Islam be “taught in German,” “parallel to the Christian denominations,” so that Muslim children have the opportunity to obtain the concepts and terminology needed to talk productively about religious matters with Germans (165).

and monopolize the religious life of Turks in the Diaspora. As Günter Seufert explains, aiming at “the protection of the true Turkish identity in Turkish pupils abroad,” the Turkish nation views Turkish Germans not as individuals who possess a “migrant identity, but that of Republican Turks with a Kemalist consciousness and the additional benefit of a good command of German” (Seufert 78). In its desire to achieve unity in religious matters and thus to establish a reformed and somehow Westernized “official version of Islam” that is a non-fanatical Islam (Seuhert 75), the Turkish nation state has, partly, triggered the emergence of conservative and belligerent groups like the one created by “Cemalettin Kaplan” that opposes “the Kemalist regime in an unprecedented way” (88).

These associations also state that religious education at school should ideally address the day to day experiences and problems of Turkish children and young people in the German environment (164-65).¹³⁵

According to its advocates, curricular religious education should aim to assist young Muslims in developing their identities as members of German society. As Karakasoğlu notes, education should aid “Muslim children and young people to understand and accept the values and norms of German society and to endure the tension arising from the different value systems of Muslims and non-Muslims” (164).¹³⁶ In other words, without asking children to relinquish their Muslim identity, religious instruction should assist children in acquiring the skills to function in a multicultural and multi-religious German society, where they will be exposed to diverse values, perspectives, and ideas.¹³⁷ In regard to women specifically, Ateş’s account suggests that Muslim girls and women should critically engage with the Koran, a book that, since it is written in Arabic, many have not been able to read. She suggests that women should question traditional and oppressive male interpretations of the Koran deployed to subordinate them. As she

¹³⁵ However, the absence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy in Islam has sometimes made it difficult to put these initiatives into practice.

¹³⁶ Hinting at the liability of this project, Darsun Tan and Hans-Peter Waldhoff write: “Doctrinally at least, there is nothing in Islam to prevent migrants from developing a modern European strand of religion. Every religion tends to absorb aspects of the social practices and cultural orientation of the society in which it exists [...] Varieties of Islam –Arab, African, Indian and Asian Islam, have already developed over the centuries and an American and European Islam has begun to take shape (142).

¹³⁷ Yasemine Karakasoğlu further explains the difficulty in starting this project: “The half-hearted approach to establishing a place for a Muslim religious education in German schools also stems from the lack of consensus in the Turkish minority about the type of religious education they would wish, and the preference of Orthodox Muslims for special Koran Schools” (“Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 165). Simultaneously, Karakasoğlu explains that though some parents send their children to Koran Schools, surveys show that many “are either unable or unwilling to send them to Koran Schools.” She adds: “The common denominator of Koran Schools has been a focus on Muslim orthodoxy that both in style and contents disregard the special situation of young Muslims in Germany. Depending on the organization running them, this has also involved varying degrees of Islamic ideological influence. As a result, Koran Schools in general have acquired the reputation of being hostile to any policy of integration” (166). The establishment of religious education at school has also been complicated by the intervention of the Turkish nation state. See Jamal Malik 10.

explains: “Wie kann ich ein Gesetz befolgen, das ich nicht selbst lesen und verstehen kann? (248; “How can I follow a law that I cannot read or understand?”).¹³⁸

Furthermore, within the framework of an exclusionary Christian European community and the rise of fundamentalisms that spark dangerous visions of “Nation” and “national culture,” often to the detriment of women, Ateş engages with mainstream German feminism. Ateş exposes the paternalistic approach of conservative German feminism toward Turkish women’s realities as also having contributed to the marginalization of these women by the propagation of representations of Turkish women as “helpless victims” of a retrograde culture and not as cultural agents that “in diese Gesellschaft [Positives] eingebracht haben (218; “have made positive contributions to this society”). Ateş states that mainstream German feminists often simply decide “was richtig oder falsch ist” (243; “what is right and what is wrong”) for all women in the Federal Republic, without paying attention to the specific needs of women. In fact, by observing that “die meisten Feministinnen auf die Welt” (243; “most feminists in the world”) tend not to perceive immigrant women as constitutive parts of the national culture of their countries of residency, Ateş points at the marginalization of these women within most mainstream Western feminist theory. Hinting at a gap that antiracist feminists in Germany have been attempting to close, the lawyer expresses her desire that the German women’s movement and immigrant women “würden anfangen, miteinander zu reden” (243; “begin to talk to one another”).¹³⁹ With this intervention, Ateş joins

¹³⁸ Karakasoglu reports that young Turkish Germans are engaging in creating “their own distinctive approach to religion.” The scholar elucidates that the approach of second and third generations is “[m]ore intellectual than the popular Islam of their parents, it includes an emphasis on Arabic as the language of the holy book” (“Turkish Cultural Orientations in Germany” 172).

¹³⁹ Sara Lennox offers insights about these feminists in her article, “Divided Feminism: Women, Racism, and German National Identity.”

feminists like Rosi Braidotti, who has also expressed her concern for the lack of communication between immigrant women and women's movements in Europe. Warning European feminists of the excessive "internationalism" that is celebrated in the European Community, Braidotti reminds feminists that "internationalization begins at home" with critically engagement with the cultural diversity and local realities of immigrant women in their own countries (9). In Germany, feminist Christine Thümmer-Rohr has also expressed her apprehension about the exclusionary tendencies of mainstream German feminism that have reduced "cooperation to those who are the same, who think the same, look the same, talk the same and live the same," forgetting that "the overreaching goal of feminist politics should contribute to the liberation of all women" (qtd. in Rosenberg 145).

Additionally, Ateş's account exposes the lack of knowledge about Turkish cultures that often prevails even in allegedly progressive left-oriented parties, as her experience with the German Green party shows:

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen wusste sehr wenig über die türkische Kultur und wollte von mir und meiner Freundin über türkische Lesben aufgeklärt werden. Uns wurde ernsthaft die Frage gestellt, ob es in der Türkei Lesben gebe und wie sich das lesbische Leben, das wir führten, mit dem Islam vereinbaren ließe. So etwas passierte in 1998 in einem Kreis angeblich aufgeklärter Frauen. (228)

[Alliance 90/The Greens knew very little about Turkish culture and wanted me and my girlfriend to enlighten them about Turkish lesbians. We were seriously asked whether there were lesbians in Turkey and how we reconciled our lesbian lifestyle with Islam. This happened in 1998 with a group of allegedly enlightened women.]

And though Ateş agrees that she and other Turkish women have been victims of oppressive patriarchal attitudes and behavior, she acknowledges something that many German feminists prefer not to hear: "wir sind nicht nur Opfer" (242; "we are not only

victims”). According to Ateş, there are a large number of Turkish German women involved in the reconceptualization of their status as hopeless victims and working in the organization of networks to help women who are victims of violence. More specifically, she states: “[e]s laufen mehr von meiner Sorte rum, als man denkt (217; “there are more women of my kind than meets the eye”).

At the same time, Ateş articulates her discomfort with a decontextualized and poorly understood concept of multiculturalism, tolerance, and religious freedom that is superficial and therefore unable to foster meaningful cultural interaction.¹⁴⁰ The lawyer suggests that, when it comes to “der Schleier” (218; “the veil”) and forced marriages, even some leftist German feminists, under the pretext of respect for difference and a desire to avoid being perceived as intrusive, racist, and arrogant, have remained silent on violence and harmful traditional practices against women of Turkish background. Ateş questions German multiculturalism which “constructs cultures as static, ahistoric and in their ‘essence’ mutually exclusive, from other cultures, especially that of the ‘host society’” (Yuval-Davis 185; see also Radtke 474-76).¹⁴¹ This ideological response to ethnic divisions has often assumed that minority cultures simply “have to be understood, accepted and basically left alone [...] in order for the society to have harmonious relations” (185). Indeed, Ayhan Kaya reminds us that

multiculturalism risks reifying cultures as separate entities by overemphasizing their boundedness and mutual distinctiveness; it also

¹⁴⁰ Elçin Kürsat-Ahlers clarifies: “Only in the late 1980s did the concept of a *multi-cultural society*, which had earlier emerged in the United States and Australia, begin to appear in German political discourse. Migration, of course, had its own twenty-year history in post-war Germany, and the discourse of *multiculturalism* was not intended to recast the German concept of nation or produce a new blueprint for socio-cultural change. It was basically a question of *semantic change*” (114; original emphases).

¹⁴¹ Radtke explains that the “multiculturalism” discourse in Germany has indeed to a certain extent “induced migrant groups in Germany to form homogeneous communities around religious and traditional symbols, not only to protect a cultural identity in an unfriendly and sometimes racist environment. But also to present themselves in the way the majority wanted to see them” (Radtke qt. in Kaya 71).

risks overrating the internal homogeneity of cultures in terms that potentially legitimate repressive demands for communal conformity (108).

Instead of accounting for longstanding socio-economic disadvantages of Turkish immigrants in the Federal Republic of Germany, followers of the multiculturalism ideology [which as Kaya reminds us partly induces “migrant groups to Germany to form homogeneous communities around religious and traditional symbols” (71)] often prefer to stick to the term “culture” as a way to explain these controversial events, thereby promoting so-called ancient cultural traditions, to the detriment of Muslim women living in Germany.

Ateş objects to a non-interventionist attitude that contributes to the preservation of obsolete patriarchal structures that are clearly oppressive of women and that, in the long run, only perpetuate the stigmatization of Turkish minorities as utterly other and alien to the German nation. The lawyer criticizes German humanists that proclaim commitment to values of human equality and freedom, but tolerate the violation of the individual human rights of Muslim women:

Aus einer vermeintlichen Rücksicht vor der Kultur wird zugesehen, wie grundlegende Menschenrechte, die auch Rechte der Frauen sind, mit Füßen getreten werden. Ich nenne das nicht Rücksicht, sonder Ignoranz. Mit diesen Frauen sucht erst recht niemand den Dialog. (*Große Reise ins Feuer* 218)

[Out of alleged cultural respect, it is allowed that basic human rights, which are also women’s rights, are blatantly disregarded. I do not call this respect, but ignorance. With these women, all the more, nobody tries to start a dialogue.]

Simultaneously, Ateş questions the recurring Western practice of constructing Third-World “Traditions/Religions/Cultures” as unquestionably oppressing “Third-World women” (Narayan 51). At this juncture, Ateş asks feminists who would like to have the

clean-cut divide between two incommensurable worlds: “Welche Weltreligion hat Frauen gleichberechtigt angesehen und sieht sie als gleichberechtigt an? (*Große Reise ins Feuer* 248; “Which world religion has viewed or views women as having the same rights as men?”). In fact, Ateş promotes an ethical and political imperative to contest the ahistorical notion of helpless Turkish women and always already liberated German women and to remember that, in the long struggles of Western women to achieve the same human rights as men, an immense number of women had to pay with their lives, “[a]uch Christinnen” (248; “Christian women included”).

Additionally, Ateş shows that when it comes to patriarchy, German and Turkish cultures are not two worlds apart. Indeed, as regards this one institution, both cultures intersect. Patriarchy is not limited to Turkish culture; it is an integral part of German culture and society as well. By sharing that she and the German woman taking the final oral exam with her were given fewer points than an “unfähiger Mann” (210; “incompetent man”) just because they were women, Ateş shows that in the university of the modern Federal Republic it is still possible to find professors who believe that “Jura Männersache sei” (210; “Law is man’s business”). Questioning what is often assumed (by Germans, at least) about German culture, Ateş suggests that in many ways the Federal Republic is still primarily a “Männergesellschaft” (210; “man’s society”).

In spite of her strong critique of German feminist reactions to Turkish women’s oppression, Ateş at times aligns herself with mainstream conservative German feminists, most notably in relation to “[d]ie Debatte um das Kopftuch” (244; “the scarf debate”). Like those conservative feminists who strive to forbid the use of the scarf in public spaces, Ateş interprets the scarf as an unquestionable sign of women’s oppression by

families, husbands, and brothers, ruling out the possibility that women might consciously or purposefully make use of their scarves. For Ateş (as for some conservative German feminists), who apparently understands power relations in the binary terms of oppressor and oppressed, it is a verity that women wear headscarves and veils simply “weil Männer es so wollen” (245; “because men want it that way”). Such a stance unwittingly perpetuates the generic idea of the helpless Turkish woman and violent Muslim man that her work, on the whole, seeks to undermine. Expressing her apprehension in relation to women who wear Islamic attire, Ateş inquires: “Doch wie freiwillig ist die Entscheidung wirklich, ob eine islamische Frau ein Kopftuch tragen bzw. sich bedecken will oder nicht? Und was symbolisiert das Kopftuch für Frauen aus islamischen Ländern?” (245; “But how voluntary really is the decision when a Muslim woman decides whether or not to wear a scarf or to veil herself? And what does the scarf symbolize for women in Islamic countries?”). Ateş does not appear to be aware, as Leyla Ahmed asserts, that the colonizing discourses of the West have often “determined the meaning of the veil” (235) for Muslim women, instead of inquiring what the veil means for them.

Ateş’s narrative does not display cognizance of the veil question’s instrumental role in the rhetoric of Western nations as “proof of the inferiority of Islam and the justification of their efforts to undermine Muslim religion and society” (Ahmed 237). Likewise, she seems unaware of the various ways Muslim women have made Islamic clothing work to their personal, religious and political advantage in Germany. For instance, deploying arguments of the European Enlightenment and accordingly demanding “the right of freedom of religion,” young Turkish Muslim women of second- and third- generations have adopted the Islamic headscarf combined with “brand-name

jeans and brand-name trainers” (Karakasoğlu, “Muslims in Germany” 262).¹⁴² This visual manifestation of “post-modern Islamism” in Germany and other European countries has been interpreted as an illustration of these women’s ability “to follow the European youth culture” while adhering to their religion, thus striving to have their differences acknowledged in a society that would prefer those differences were invisible (262; see also von Braun and Mathes 359-65). Their intellectual move additionally demonstrates the women’s “conviction that certain elements of modernity [...] can be reconciled with Islamic tradition and rules” (262-63).

Moreover, young Muslim women have also often used the headscarf in order to achieve a kind of “sanfte Emanzipation” (von Braun and Mathes 363; “gentle emancipation”). This gradual approach precludes open confrontation or rupture with their parents’ generation, while, for instance, allowing women to go to school, attend college and, in this way, little by little, achieve their desired degree of independence. In any case, as regards religious visual expression, Canan Topçu relates social scientists’ belief that the headscarf some young Turkish German women wear “is in no way a symbol of outdated tradition but is rather the appropriation of an individual life scheme” (see: http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/03-2005/foc_art2.html.) Topçu succinctly points out that if “some daughters of immigrants do develop rigid ideas of Islam, [it] probably says more about German society, which is still frequently felt to be hostile, than about the family’s original culture” (see:

¹⁴² Karakasoğlu also mentions the case of Turkish girls, who making use of the “human rights” argument, were released from the obligation “to participate in physical education classes, on the ground that it is supposed to be incompatible with their sense of shame” (262). In another case, a judge decided that a girl could stop participating in non-segregated physical education classes on the basis “that the right of freedom of religion is more important than the girl’s obligation to participate in physical education classes” (262).

<http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/03-2005/foc_art2.html>). In the end,

Ateş misses that, as Haleh Afshar and Mary Maynard remind us:

Islamic attributes such as the veil, *hijab*, are of themselves neither liberating nor oppressive. The only way in which to understand their impact is to situate and contextualize the power relations that are invested in the veil at specific times and for specific groups. (“Gender and Ethnicity in the Millenium” 817; original emphasis)

Ateş acknowledges that “[d]as Gefühl des Fremdseins, des Nichtdazugehörens” (211)

[the feeling of being an alien, of not belonging] has been with her since she arrived in

Germany. People still congratulate the lawyer for her exceptional command of the

German language and want Ateş to inform them about her experience as an unveiled

Turkish woman. The activist has found that she belongs to the place where she happens

to be. In her awareness that relations between Germans and Turks are largely influenced

by reciprocal intolerance and ignorance about each other’s cultures and religions, as a

multicultural person herself, Ateş understands her task as the promotion of cultural

understanding. As a human rights activist and a lawyer, she defends the human rights of

immigrant women who might find themselves caught in oppressive situations in the name

of religious and cultural traditions. Ateş wants to show that a Muslim identity does not

prevent a person from defending human rights and supporting democracy. At the same

time, she warns against overgeneralizations of the Turkish experience in the Federal

Republic and is well aware that there is no one Turkish female experience in Germany. In

the end, as Ateş acknowledges, the immigrant experience remains “*einzigartig-von*

Mensch zu Mensch und nicht von Volk zu Volk oder von Nationalität zu Nationalität”

(218; “unique from person to person and not from people to people or from nationality to nationality”).

As for the expedient either-or racist cultural ideologies that posit the “psychic dysfunctionality” of the multicultural Turkish German subject (Palumbo-Liu 300-327),

Ateş asserts:

Die berühmten zwie Stühle, zwischen denen wir angeblich sitzen sollen, existieren nicht. Sie existieren in den Köpfen von Menschen, denen es schwer fällt, sich außerhalb ihrer festgefahrenen Strukturen zu bewegen [...]. Sie sitzen auf einem Stuhl ganz starr und unflexibel. Als Migrantin habe ich gelernt, auf vielen Stühlen zu sitzen. Wie setzen uns mal dort-und mal dahin. Dieses Hin und Her zwischen den Kulturen ist keine Zerrissenheit, es bringt uns nicht in ständige Konflikte, sondern bereichert unser Leben. (*Große Reise ins Feuer* 250)

[The famous two chairs, between which we are supposed to be sitting, do not exist. They only exist in the heads of the persons who find it difficult to move outside their rigid structures. [...] They sit on one very inflexible and rigid chair. As an immigrant I have learned to sit on many chairs. We sometimes take a seat here and sometimes there. The moving back and forth between cultures is not a source of disunity; it does not bring us into constant conflict; it enriches our life.]

Thus, in her autobiography, Ateş rejects the prescriptive stable and unified subject position that suppresses contradiction, difference, diversity, and conflict. Ateş’s subjecthood is reminiscent of the Anzaldúan *mestiza* consciousness: it is not a self of endless fragmentation, but rather a plural and shifting subjectivity that “copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity,” by learning “to juggle cultures” (79).¹⁴³ And yet, despite her effort to disrupt the essentializing and homogenizing discourses about Turks in Germany and her wish to advance the cause of women from Turkey, Ateş’s autobiographical account contains another crucial moment where the activist once again unwittingly aligns herself with the dominant German- and, for that matter, Western- discourse by making use of the discursive cultural clichés about

¹⁴³ For the two worlds, two chairs paradigm about women from Turkey, see also Wierschke 128.

Turks, Kurds, and Muslims that have predominated in the ongoing debates and negotiations of the concepts of tolerance, democracy, and multiculturalism in Germany.

When Ateş reminisces about the turbulent time during which she left her first law office and ended her first lesbian relationship, she reverts to the same well known generalizing discourse about Turks and Muslims promulgated in the Western media to explain her desolation. In her endeavor to elucidate the difficulties she has encountered in her lesbian relationships with Turkish women, Ateş presents the alleged macho-like behavior of her aggressive Turkish and Kurdish girlfriends as the main source of conflict. Ateş conjectures: “Überhaupt scheint die Bereitschaft, jemanden umzubringen, bei Türken und Kurden eher ausgeprägt als bei anderen europäischen Menschen” (239; “All in all, it seems that the readiness to kill somebody is more pronounced in Turks and Kurds than in any other European people”). Maintaining that the eradication of this still prevailing irrational behavior among a significant number of second generation Turkish Germans of both sexes (a fact that Ateş views as an insoluble enigma of life) can only be achieved by the adoption of serene and rational German values, she suggests: “[Die Bereitschaft jemanden umzubringen] löst sich nur dort ein wenig auf wo Türken und Kurden viele deutsche Kontakte pflegen” (239; “The readiness to kill somebody only decreases a bit when Turks and Kurds establish a lot of contact with Germans”).

Though Ateş tries to explain that the predisposition to violence, which supposedly unifies the second generation Turkish and Kurdish Germans with their parents’ first one (who in her view could not have known better), is by no means genetic, she can not fully explain her belief in this stereotype. Ateş’s harsh generalization becomes even more problematic since in Germany her account tends to be read as a legitimate and

authoritative contribution to the debate about the integration of Muslims in German society simply because of her status as a successful lawyer and a recognized feminist (see Karakasoğlu's "Anti-Islamic Discourses in Europe;" see also von Braun and Mathes 429; Terkessidis and Karakasoğlu). Her account at times joins the long ahistorical tradition of Western scholars and humanist intellectuals who, in order to come to terms with the "enigma" of the Muslim Orient, have accepted the verity of a distinction between East and West that cannot be bridged. Ateş seems to suggest a form of arrested development in Turks and Kurds in Germany who, as members of an ossified culture incapable of evolving, are unable to adapt to the enlightened German culture. By referring to Turks and Kurds, women and men, in large collective terms, Ateş obscures the human suffering and sense of dislocation that is not merely the result of the unequal power differentials between immigrants from Turkey and the Federal Republic. Her generalization hides the pain that has resulted from not only the subsequent marginalization and degradation of Turkish culture and the Islamic religion in German society and media, but also the daily discrimination that has often perpetuated disadvantage and low economic and social status among many members of this religious minority.

In any case, in a literary work that sets out to promote cultural understanding and question reductionist stereotypes about Turkish and Kurdish peoples in the Federal Republic, Ateş's observations place her project dangerously close to the essentializing German discourse about Muslim Turks and Kurds as irrational, backward, and unsophisticated that she otherwise succeeds in correcting. Her statement on violent Turkish and Kurdish cultures contributes to the stereotype of the violent Turkish man that the German media propagates and that Kara's work, the subject of the next section of this

paper, counters. In any case, Ates's narrative strategies and shortcomings support Ella Shohat's claim that one of the challenges for first world feminists of color "is how to avoid a Eurocentric rescue narrative that substitutes the First World woman of color for the white man (à la colonial narrative) or white woman (à la white feminism) rescuing a dark woman from a dark man" ("Introduction" 9).

5.2. Yadé Kara

Yadé Kara, writer of *Selam Berlin*, 2003, ("Hello, Berlin"), is another Turkish German woman intellectual who attempts to prevent prejudice, stereotyping, and violence by fostering a dialogue between Germans and Turks. Born in 1965, in Cayirli, Eastern-Turkey Kara grew up in Berlin and studied English and German literature. She left Berlin after her studies and has worked as a teacher, manager, actress and journalist in Berlin, London, Istanbul, and Hong Kong. *Selam Berlin* is her first literary work. In 2004, her work was awarded the Deutschen Bücherpreis ("German Book Award") for newcomers. In the same year, Kara's work also received the Adelbert-von-Chamisso prize. Currently, Kara lives in Berlin.

5.2.1 *Selam Berlin*

Kara's work, like Ateş's, takes place in Berlin and belongs to the genre of "Berlin Literatur" ("Berlin Literature"). The story of the nineteen-year-old German Turk Hasan Kazan and his family during the year after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 follows a traditional plotline. Kara's account starts in Istanbul, a city that, like Berlin, is divided into East and West. The story begins on November 9, 1989. The middle-class Hasan and his parents are watching television and suddenly hear the news of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Having just finished high school at the German school in Istanbul, Hasan

decides to return to Berlin, his birthplace, for good and join the celebrations for the reunification of Germany. The narrative covers the first year of Hasan's and his family's life in a perplexed city and a nation in transition. *Selam Berlin* ends on October 3, 1990, the day that the two German states officially merged to become the reunited Federal Republic of Germany.

In her narrative, *Selam Berlin*, Yadé Kara not only joins Ateş's project to deessentialize the Turkish experience in the Federal Republic, but also affirms Ateş's depiction of a multiple and shifting subjectivity. But, most importantly, in a complementary way, Kara's account attempts to complicate the stereotype of the violent "Turk" (Turkish man) who is a danger for both Turkish and German women as well as a threat to the stability of the German nation. Kara complicates the stereotype of the violent Turkish man that goes hand in hand with the stereotype of the victimized Turkish woman; the two are inextricably and damaging for all parties insofar as the idea of the helpless Turkish woman has, to a certain extent, worked to the detriment of men from Turkey in Germany, who are stigmatized as violent, dangerous, and misogynistic as a result of these interlocking stereotypes. Kara engages with a label that, in comparison with the overwhelming intellectual interest displayed for the (victimized) Turkish woman, has been scantily treated by social workers, politicians, feminists, and Islam experts in Germany, if not by the German media.

Reflecting on his experience as a bicultural Turkish German, Kara's main character, Hasan, complicates Western commonsense knowledge about identity formation. This Western concept of identity formation has largely pathologized the

multicultural subject and categorized him or her as abnormal. Hasan challenges this perception when he states:

Eigentlich hatte ich alles von beiden. Von Ost und West, von deutsch und türkisch, von hier und da. Aber das konnten Leute wie Wolf nicht verstehen oder wollten es nicht verstehen. Sie sahen in mir ein Problemfall. Jemanden, der zwischen den Kulturen hin-und hergerissen war, jemanden, der nicht dazugehörte [...] Die anderen versuchten mir Probleme einzureden, die ich nicht hatte. Sie konnten mit so einem wie mir nicht umgehen. Ich paßte nicht in ihr Bild, und sie konnten mich nicht einordnen. (223)

[Actually I had everything from both. From East and West, from German and Turkish, from here and there. But people like Wolf could not understand or did not want to understand it. In me, they saw a problem: somebody torn between cultures, somebody who did not belong. [...] The others tried to convince me that I had problems I did not have. They could not deal with somebody like me. I did not fit in their structures; they could not categorize me.]

Through Hasan, whose life is largely determined by the ongoing East vs. West struggle between his mother and father, Kara's narrative complicates ideas of cultural purity and homogeneity by showing that "cultural contamination" is constitutive of all cultures. Additionally, Kara's "*Wenderoman*," (a novel [ein Roman] that records the cultural transformation and dislocation that took place before and during *the turn* [die Wende] from a divided to a reunified Germany), inscribes itself in a historical moment that has largely been understood as an affair entirely between "German-German brothers and sisters" (Ayim 126).¹⁴⁴ Instead, she begins the narrative in Istanbul, the day of the unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall. Tired of his life being largely determined by his school activities and peers at the German school in Istanbul, the Berliner Hasan wishes to be part of the revolution and decides to settle in Berlin for good.

¹⁴⁴ May Ayim writes on this topic from an Afro-German woman's perspective.

Kara's account corrects the misapprehension that all Turks came to Germany as guest workers and diversifies the experience of immigrants from Turkey in Germany. As a matter of fact, Hasan's parents originally moved from Istanbul to Berlin when his long haired Marxist father, Said, and his best friend, Halim (who looked like Leonid Breschnew), won a fellowship to study aeronautical engineering at the Technical University of Berlin.¹⁴⁵ Unlike the case of Ateş's parents, who had to leave Turkey without psychological support from their families, Said's and Halim's families had been proud of them. Their relatives hoped that the aeronautical engineers would eventually return to Turkey to contribute to the advancement of their culture by bringing progress and technology from the West. Additionally, this account shows that, once in Berlin, Hasan's mother Sevda, who belonged to a rich family, wanted no contact with the other Turks in Germany. "Für sie waren es einfache Bauern. [...] Mit Gastarbeitern wollte sie nichts zu tun haben (120; "For her they were unsophisticated peasants [...] She did not want to have anything to do with guest workers"). Further, Hasan tells his readers that his mother was the type of immigrant who insisted on viewing themselves as guests and did not even try to engage with German life and culture. For Sevda, Istanbul remained the center of her life, despite the fact that her two boys had been born in Berlin, and she always "blickte zu den reichen am Bosphorus" (120; "looked in the direction of the rich people in the Bosphorus").

¹⁴⁵ Though not as popular as American universities, German universities also attract Turkish students. Dursun Tan and Hans-Peter Waldhoff remind us that: "The attractions of Germany may have been boosted by a political history in which Prussian military personnel served for nearly a century as military advisors to the army of the Ottoman Empire which they equipped to German technical standards. The prestigious reputation of technical subjects and engineering at German universities may also be a factor in this, as also the fact that academics exiled from Nazi Germany took up posts in Turkish universities" (151).

Unfortunately, as the narrative shows, Said and Halim are forced to give up their dreams of Marxist progress and, “wie alle Immigranten dieser Erde [mußten sie sich] auf ihren Einfallsreichtum besinnen” (25; “like all immigrants in this world, have to recur to their creativity”) when they run out of money. In their case, the friends decide to open a travel agency in Berlin. However, the narrative also illustrates that though Said had come to Europe to learn Western technology and had wanted to profit from his business in Berlin, he had nevertheless hoped that his two boys, Hasan and Ediz, would remain untouched by Western influences. Said longs nostalgically for Istanbul without noticing the cultural intermingling of East and West in both himself and in Istanbul. For example, Said did not see how in the contemporary Turkish metropolis people watched “Dallas,” women colored their hair with L’Oreal, children met with their friends at McDonald’s, and many young people dreamed of going to the United States. Said insisted that his children grow as true Muslims in “einer heilen Gesellschaft” (28; “in an intact society”). For this reason, when Hasan is thirteen, oblivious of the paradox in their decision, Said and Sevda decide to send him and his brother Ediz to the German school in Istanbul. In accord with the parents’ binary world view, positing German society as degenerate and Turkish society as idyllic and undamaged, Hasan and Ediz were not supposed to become “Kiffern” (“marihuana smokers”), “Hippies” or “Homos” (5; “homosexuals”) in Germany, a country where, according to Said, the younger generation was simply “kaputt” (68; “rotten”). Said’s ambivalence towards the West is an example of the “doublethink” of some non-Westerners in their dealings with the West (Ahmed 237). On the one hand, there is the willingness to profit from Western know-how and to enjoy technological inventions in all fields of contemporary life. On the other hand is the wish

to return to “a culturally pure heritage” that is unique and uncontaminated by Western influences (238). Said can be understood as a non-Western contemporary intellectual radically critical of the West but, nonetheless, reliant on Western political ideas (i.e. Marxism) and Western assumptions (i.e. the binary logic about “us” and “them”) to voice his discontent. This way of thinking ignores Leila Ahmed’s caution that there probably is no “thriving civilization or cultural heritage today, Western or non-Western” that “is not critically indebted to the interventions or traditions of thought of other peoples in other lands” (236). Instead, calling for the need to move beyond the confinement of the East-West paradigm, Ahmed rightfully asks:

And why should any human being be asked to do without some useful invention, political, technological, or of any kind, because it originated among some other tribe, or conversely, be compelled to practice a custom that has nothing to recommend it or even much against it for no better reason than that is indigenous? (237)

Selam Berlin shows how, when Said finally faces the fact that he will not be allowed to return to Turkey because of his Communist past, his longing for his home country becomes incredibly strong, that is, “Die Sehnsucht nach früher, nach Istanbul, nach Meer, Wellen, warmen Winden [...] nach Mutter, Familie, Erde, Heimat, und nach Wurzeln ... (68; “The longing for the early days, for Istanbul, for the sea, the warm wind [...] the mother, the family, the earth, home, and for roots”). By engaging with Said’s nostalgic attempts to come to terms with immigration, Hasan critically analyzes the diverse mechanisms through which immigrants come to terms with their experiences. He is conscious that nostalgia is a component of this experience and is not limited to any specific national group. In the awareness that there is nothing inherently essential about national epithets like “türkisch, deutsch, russisch, spanisch, italienisch, arabisch,

japanisch, mauretanisch, afghanisch, indisch, chinesisches und englisch" (29; "Turkish, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Arab, Japanese, Mauritanian, Afghan, Hindu, Chinese, and English"), Hasan suggests that nostalgia can be a coping strategy by which minority members attempt to lessen their anxiety about which aspects of the home culture should be preserved in the new environment, which aspects of the hegemonic culture should be incorporated into their lives, and to what degree.

And yet, Hasan insists on emphasizing the artificiality and instability of national cultural categories when he comments on German immigrants in Turkey and Turkish immigrants in Germany. In other words, while living in Istanbul, Hasan has noticed that, hoping to stick to what they perceive as their Germanness, the German immigrants in Istanbul "waren [...] deutscher als die Deutschen [...] in Berlin" (29; "were more German than the Germans in Berlin"), in the same way that some Turkish Germans, proclaiming autochthonous Turkishness in Berlin, "waren [...] türkischer als die Türken in Istanbul (156; "were more Turkish than the Turks in Istanbul"). Like Ateş, Hasan suggests that immigrants of all cultures tend to reaffirm what they view as "their" longstanding traditions "true" values and customs when confronted with another culture in a foreign country and accordingly sometimes attempt to erect defensive boundaries around their cultures of origin. Thus, Hasan problematizes a reactive practice which seeks to preserve "authentic culture" in the diaspora and often does not take into account that "[h]istorical circumstances determine identity" and that, therefore, identities are constantly changing and transforming (Mueller 279). Hasan questions an attitude that, taken to extremes, can result in the idealization of static versions of alleged "authentic" cultures, which are solely based on immigrants' memories of a culture they have known

at a certain historical time. As times passes, these so-called “authentic cultures” become reminiscent of cultures “frozen in time” (277), leading to the acceptance and promotion of ahistorical versions of “Germanness” or “Turkishness” which Germans currently living in Germany or Turks residing in Turkey would find embarrassing or outmoded.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Hasan shows how his father’s feelings become “pure Sehnsucht” (163; “sheer nostalgia”), that “[t]rotz Freiheiten und Möglichkeiten” (67; “despite liberties and possibilities”), prevents him from engaging and investing in life in the new environment.

In his comments about the way immigrants attempt to cope with transculturation, Hasan most of all questions the reactionary nostalgia of some Turkish Germans that has led to the idealization of an ancient Turkish culture of origins and the celebration of mythical roots by some of them. He explores this attitude by means of his cousin Leyla, who, in the search for her Turkish roots in Anatolia, celebrates the “Babylonier, Mesopotamier, Römer, Byzantiner, Seldschuken, Osmanen” (168; “Babylonians, Mesopotamians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, Ottomans”) as ancient Turkish civilizations that, unlike German culture, are worthy of pride. Hasan complicates a naïve search for superior primordial roots that has partly resulted from the lack of recognition that Turkish Germans have received in Germany.

Hasan equally expresses his concern that the search for superior ancestry has also been used by some Turkish Germans as a pretext to disengage from problematic German historical realities which some prefer not to perceive as a constitutive part of their own

¹⁴⁶ In fact, Magda Mueller has pointed out that ethnic Germans, coming back to the longed for *Heimat* [homeland] from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, face a problem: they have returned to a postwar Germany that they do not recognize, because the country they find does not match with their “historical memories” (277). Mueller explains: “Their anachronistic understanding of their own Germanness [...] is incompatible with the contemporary liberal rejection of traditional notions of German identity” and, as a result, ethnic Germans are perceived as different (277).

history or as directly related to their contemporary reality. As Leyla expresses: “Hermann Hesse, Hitler, Holocaust ... Ich will mit diesem ganzen Schrott nichts zu tun haben. Ich will alles aus meinem Kopf wischen ... Clean sein. Ich möchte einfach clean sein!” (168; “Hermann Hesse, Hitler, Holocaust ... I do not want anything to do with all this stuff. I want to have all this out of my head To be clean. I simply want to be clean!”). Leyla utilizes her search for an authentic past as a way to distance herself from troubling aspects of German history and its potential impact on her identity formation. In contrast, echoing Zafer Şenocak, a cultural critic and writer who has expressed concern that in the post-Berlin Wall context anti-Islamism might join anti-Semitism as a constitutive element of European identity, Hasan finds Leyla’s attitude indefensible.¹⁴⁷ In the framework of a multicultural Europe that seems to make anti-Islamism socially and intellectually acceptable, Hasan unites with Şenocak by insisting on the responsibility of Turkish Germans to engage not only with the history and future of Germany, but also with the recent history of the Jews, the other largest religious minority in Europe.¹⁴⁸ As Bassam Tibi reminds us: “Migrants cannot share guilt for Nazi crimes with Germans, but they can share the responsibility for ensuring that nothing similar ever happens again” (230). And though Hasan depicts the pitfalls of excessive longing, he also warns about how easy it is to romanticize the past and become a conservative. Amid a city in turmoil that is no

¹⁴⁷ In fact, in his essay “Deutschland-Heimat für Türken?” [Germany-Home for Turks?], Şenocak calls for a critical engagement with German history by asking Turkish immigrants in Germany: “Heißt in Deutschland einzuwandern nicht auch, in die jüngste Vergangenheit einzuwandern?” (16) [Doesn’t immigrating to Germany also mean immigrating into the recent [German] past?].

¹⁴⁸ Mary Fulbrook reminds us that, in the post-Wall period in the Federal Republic: “[t]he Nazi period remained a subject of heated debate [...] with massive public controversies over subjects such as exhibitions about Wehrmacht involvement in Nazi atrocities, the proposed construction of a Holocaust memorial in Berlin, and the contested thesis of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen that alleged a long-term German mentality of ‘eliminationist anti-Semitism’ provided the key to explaining the Holocaust” (Fulbrook 254).

longer the walled Berlin of his childhood, Hasan himself, seeing a constant in his life collapsing and vanishing right in front of him, wishes that the Wall would stay.

Selam Berlin also witnesses the painful effects of reunification, when troubling social and political realities emerge in the new Federal Republic of Germany. The dislocation produced by reunification proved to be far more fundamental than reunification idealists had expected. For many East Germans, the reunification turned bitter because of the “shock therapy” implemented in the region and the resulting anxiety about economic and social prospects.¹⁴⁹ For the old and affluent West Germany, reunification represented unanticipated rising costs, growing competition for jobs, and the need to increase taxation in order to sustain the transformation of the East German infrastructure. In old West Germany, reunification was frequently perceived as jeopardizing “the achievements of postwar western German society” (White, “Turks in New Germany” 763). Kara’s narrative also witnesses the escalating xenophobic attitudes and behavior that for some years following reunification were not “challenge[d] by politicians or prominent intellectuals, including writers” (Kraft 114). As Benjamin Korn expressed in 1995:

During the last year, in texts by Enzenberger, Walser, Strauss, and Heiner Müller, we can find a common denominator that can be defined as something missing. What is missing is the lack of passionate words speaking up for foreigners, asylum seekers, and against Nazis on the part of any of these German thinkers. (qtd. in Kraft 114)

¹⁴⁹ White explains: “From full employment under the socialist system, by 1991 only half of the workforce of 10 million people was fully employed, a rate of unemployment higher than during the depression of the late 1920s and early 30s. It was argued that unemployment and the severe lack of housing (in both east and west) contributed to a sense of social threat. Foreigners were blamed for taking resources. Asylum seekers were believed to be coddled by the state and were accused of theft” (762-63).

Indeed, Kara's work brings back memories of tragic events in which the Turkish community and asylum seekers in general became victims of racist attacks in the aftermath of German reunification.

Between 1989 and 1993, there was a striking increase of anti-foreign violence. In Hoyerswerda, in 1991, Vietnamese and Mozambican workers were attacked by Nazi youths with the approval of bystanders, and in Solingen, in 1993, and Mölln, in 1992, eight Turkish women and children were killed in arson attacks by young right-wing extremists. By depicting Hasan's close encounter with a group of young skinheads in the subway shrieking "[w]ir sind das Vooooolk ..." (333; "we are the people ...")⁸, *Selam Berlin* writes back into history "minor" everyday violence on foreigners that is too often forgotten. To the same end, the narrative presents the xenophobic attack on Hasan's friend Kazim by a band of young Neo-Nazi football fans. By narrating these events, Kara's narrative commemorates the "[m]ore than 5,000 attacks against foreigners that were reported in Germany in 1992 alone" (White 762).¹⁵⁰ It is true that after the xenophobic attacks a great number of Germans showed their solidarity with Turkish Germans by organizing candlelight marches in Berlin, Hamburg, Bonn and other cities. Unfortunately, these violent attacks were portrayed as "human rights concerns" and not as crimes against "German residents" (White 760).¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ As Jenny B. White reports: "Of these, over 2,000 are proven or suspected to have been motivated by right-wing radicalism, almost double the previous year" (762). She adds: "According to the police, most of those arrested for antifoigner violence in Berlin were young, unemployed youth. Two-thirds of those sought for right-wing violence were from the east. While many of those arrested sported right-wing symbols, such as shaved heads, brown shirts, or swastikas, most did not belong to any organized right-wing movement" (762).

¹⁵¹ In relation to these expressions of solidarity, as Helga W. Kraft explains, for example, the writer Frank Böckelmann criticized "such displays of solidarity by so called politically correct foreigner-friendly "multiculturalism" because [...] they displayed a pseudo-tolerance for anything strange." The writer "claimed their 'xenophilic' attitude actually complicates relations with immigrants and asylum seekers because it creates a blind eye to negative realities" (115).

Kara's account also thematizes the social and psychological wall that divides "Ossis" [derogatory term for Easterners] and "Wessis" [insulting term for Westerners]. Like in the cases of Doris, Dora, and Dörte, who find "Ossifrauen [...] zu männlich ... zu plump ... ja irgendwie nicht feminine genug" (199; "women from the East [...] too masculine ... too graceless ... well somehow not feminine enough"). But most of all, Kara's narrative reveals that after almost thirty years of life in the Federal Republic, German Turks remain foreigners in the united Germany where national belonging is still largely viewed as based on blood ties rather than time of residency. Kara shows how, despite the fact that Hasan was born in Berlin and speaks perfect German, he remains a "Turk." As a German woman clearly reminds him: "Türke sind Sie, auch wenn Sie hier geboren sind oder deutschen Paß haben" (189; "You are Turk even if you have been born here and have a German passport"). While looking to rent a room, Hasan experiences that people who, based on his flawless German, identify him as German when he calls them on the telephone reject him as soon as they see him out of fear he might be an "Asylant! Ausländer! Menschestecher!" (190; "Asylum seeker! Foreigner! Mugger!").

Kara's narration problematizes generalized abject clichés about Turks in the Federal Republic. On the one hand, like Ateş, she questions the idea that all (backward) Turkish women wear scarves, a stereotype that Kara exemplifies by way of Frau Schulze who finds Leyla adorable because, "[s]ie is ja nich so wie die andern Türken. [...] Na, die is so modern, so ohne Kopftuch und so ... So anders als die andern" (178; "well, she is not like the other Turks [...] Well, she is so modern, so without scarf and so So different from the others"). On the other hand, *Selam Berlin* also engages with representations of Turkish men, or rather, "the Turk" (the male guest worker), in the

German media. That is to say, Kara's narrative engages with a character to which intellectuals and writers pay little to no attention in the first years of their presence in the German nation.¹⁵² Indeed, initially, in the few cases where the figure of "the Turk" appeared in novels by German writers, the male guest worker is consistently depicted as a character inhabiting the fringes of German society. In these rare occasions, the categorization of the guest worker as marginal to society correlates with the representation of the guest worker by the German yellow press (Baudach 319).

In other words, as Katharina Baudach explained in 1981, the guest worker is simply always already "verdreckt, halbgierig bis an die Grenze des Kriminellen" (Baudach 319; "dirty and greedy to the point of criminality"; see also Sargut Solcun 78). In 1984, joining Baudach and Solcun, Helmut Scheuer expressed disapproval of the lack of critical engagement on the side of German intellectuals with the situation of the male guest worker in German society (62). Scheuer specifically criticized the voyeuristic and sensationalistic journalistic reports used by German critics in their attempt to make German society familiar with the experience of the downtrodden guest worker, the eternal Turk Ali from Anatolia. Questioning the lack of analysis of this material that claims to let reality speak for itself, Scheuer criticizes that "[d]urch die Macht der Fakten" (63; "through the power of the facts"), the producers of this material not only aim to morally appeal to their audience, but also, unwittingly, to absolve themselves from critical reflection and in-depth analyses of the complex situation of the allegedly naturally demoralized guest worker.

¹⁵² For the ways Turkish German men have represented themselves, see Moray McGowan's "Multiple Masculinities in Turkish-German Men's Writing."

Along these lines, Arlene A. Teraoka has suggested that, often, German intellectuals who have attempted to enlighten German audiences about the experience of the Turkish guest worker have portrayed Ali, the Turkish moustachioed man “in a timeless realm untouched by historical and cultural change” (“Talking Turk” 143). In other instances, explanatory undertakings about his pitiful situation on the fringes of German society have advanced the Turk to the position of icon of oppression that, as Teraoka illuminates, is “made to represent oppressed groups everywhere” (151; Zaimoğlu 406).¹⁵³ However, on other occasions, as the scholar points out, projects that seek to correct abovementioned stereotypical representations of the Turk Ali turn him into a remarkably “atypical” subject (143). In these instances, for the first time in his life, Ali (always a man from a poor village) enjoys civilization and cultural progress in the Federal Republic. And his wife does not wear a headscarf.

But these stereotypical images of Turks have not remained static. As Jenny B. White states: “Germans have redefined the Turks to meet their own economic and political needs” (“Turks in New Germany” 761). White adds:

Over the years, the vocabulary of categorization [...] changed along with economic and political currents: *Fremdarbeiter* (foreign workers) and *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) are terms fallen out of use, replaced in part by *Ausländer* (foreigners) [...] *Migranten* (migrants) or *ausländische Mitbürger* (foreign cocitizens), never *Immigranten* (immigrants), as it would imply the right to remain. (761-62)

And, indeed, in the context of contemporary Germany, Kara’s work engages with the current stage of the metamorphosis of the stereotype of the guest worker in the German media: the Turk as the quintessential violent man. Insightfully, Leslie A. Adelson has

¹⁵³ According to writer Aysel Ozakin, these pitiful representations of the guest worker have perpetuated German cultural dominance. Özakin has suggested that “pity” is just “the most refined form of contempt” (qtd. in Freyer Stowasser 60).

suggested that this timely stereotype should be understood as the complement to the stereotype of the conservative “woman in a headscarf” (*The Turkish Turn* 130).

Kara’s narrative displays how naïve Hasan is given the opportunity to play a Turkish character refused by a famous Turkish German actor in the movie directed by the renowned film director Wolf. Soon disenchanted, Hasan finds that the role that he and his half-brother Adem are supposed to play is precisely the role of the Turkish man that the popular German media currently prefers to propagate: the “stereotype of young Turkish males as delinquents or gangsters” (Clark qtd. in Adelson 130). Indeed, as Ayhan Kaya reminds us, prominent intellectuals and major German magazines such as *Der Spiegel* have problematised Turkish German youth as “‘criminals,’ ‘fundamentalists,’ ‘nationalist,’ and ‘traumatic’” (58). Thinkers and the media have likewise openly denounced them as “‘dangerously alien’ and as the cause of the failure of the ‘multicultural society’” (58). It is thus possible to suggest that in our contemporary time the stereotype of the Turk, who had initially been portrayed as at the edge of criminality in 1881, has finally come full circle.¹⁵⁴ In Kara’s account, Hasan realizes that Wolf (who in his hippy years had been in Istanbul and thus feels certain that he knows what Turks are all about) is not really interested in presenting a complex Turkish character. As he finds out, Wolf wants “den Dealer, Messerstecher, den Kriminellen. Sonst nichts” (250; “the drug dealer, the mugger, the criminal. Nothing else”). After once again visiting Kreuzberg, Wolf underestimates the immigrants’ ability to recreate cultures in the diaspora and celebrates Kreuzberg as essentially “ein Stück Istanbul pur!” (239; “an

¹⁵⁴ Ayhan Kaya elucidates that “contemporary discussions on identity are partly related to the dominant regime of representation in the media” (145). Unlike working-class youth, middle-class young people are more likely “to respond to their own representation in the media” (145). As Kaya puts it, they are more willing to “chatter about the chatter about their identity” (145).

unadulterated piece of Istanbul!”). And right in Kreuzberg, the film director confirms what he wants to show his audience: a tough Kreuzberg boy, “ein Macho, der die Ehre der Schwester rettet” (253; “a Kreuzberg boy, a macho man who defends his sister’s honor”).

White has suggested that the timely metamorphosis of the Turkish man from “victim” to the contemporary “perpetrator” and “threat to the welfare of the German nation” can be understood as an ideological construct emerging “out of the anxiety of a nation faced with a painful renegotiation of its own identity (and victim/perpetrator roles)” amid economic difficulties (762).¹⁵⁵ Likewise, Leslie A. Adelson has suggested that the stereotype of the woman with a headscarf has also shifted. In other words, in the Federal Republic, social workers and feminists have traditionally given and continue to give much thought about the possible ways to liberate the victimized Turkish woman from fundamentalist patriarchy. Projects that have aimed at freeing Turkish women have unilaterally and unconditionally been premised on the Turkish woman’s embrace of superior liberal German values. In this sense, as Adelson accurately observes, the Turkish woman has always “represented the possibility of cultural gains” for the German nation and culture (*The Turkish Turn* 130). Consequently, as the scholar insightfully suggests, the current stereotype of the Turkish woman who insists on wearing a scarf and resists German values correlates with the stereotype of the Turkish man with knives. That is to say, in present Germany both representations are unsettling “icons of migrant ethnicity” that illustrate contemporary cultural disorientation (130). Thus, just as the violent Turkish

¹⁵⁵ In the historical German context, it is relevant to remember White’s accurate explanation of to the victim/perpetrator binary: “Victim and perpetrator is a seminal set of concepts that lies at the core of much post-World War II German national soul-searching and that has gained new life after reunification as eastern Germans sort out their roles under the old regime and western Germans confront the east’s different historical construction of responsibility for the Nazi past and its role in the postwar present” (762).

man represents a danger to the well being and stability of the unified German nation, “[t]he woman who claims an Islamic headscarf as a sign of personhood [...] unsettles the cultural economy of German civilization” (130).

Furthermore, Kara’s account critically engages with romantic ideas that automatically ascribe liberalism, democracy, and openness to creative, artistic media workers. Through the immature and naïve Hasan, Kara indicates that these ideas have to be carefully reconsidered. Hasan is confronted with the fact that though Wolf is celebrated for his creativity, the film maker has fixed ideas about Turks that he is uninterested in changing. In fact, Wolf makes clear to Hasan (who in vain tries to convince the intellectual that in Kreuzberg not all Turkish boys carry knives) that he, Wolf, intends to rely on the accurateness of his own personal experience. Wolf emphatically reminds Hasan: “Ich habe doch schließlich in Kreuzberg gelebt ...” (244; “After all, I have lived in Kreuzberg ...”). In this way, Wolf posits himself as some kind of insider to the Kreuzberg scene who possesses the truth about all Turks in the enclave. Bringing to mind the German intellectuals that Helmut Scheuer criticized in the 80s, Wolf, without attempting to enter a dialogue with Hasan, prefers to let the pure facts of his experience in Kreuzberg speak for themselves, regardless of the historical, social, and ideological contexts in which his “truth” is embedded.

Thus, Wolf, assuming the transparency of his experience as an indisputable source of true knowledge (what you see is what you get), does not try to understand how the life of Turkish immigrants in Kreuzberg has been constituted in relation to the ideology of Germannes. Wolf, as Joan Scott Wallach puts it, simply “takes [his experience] for granted” (82), refuses to unpack it, and establishes it as “the fact of

difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world” (85). At no point does Wolf attempt to grasp the material and social arrangements resulting from the inner workings of an ideology that constructs Turkish German as an inassimilable and essentially Other ethnic identity. Wolf remains oblivious that “structural constraints of Germany [have] remarkably shaped the survival strategies of migrants and their descendants” (Kaya 58). Obscuring the politics that have enabled the emergence of some “harte Jungs” (245; “tough boys”) in Kreuzberg, and unaware of the historical specificity of their experiences, Wolf’s film ends up reproducing, naturalizing, and propagating the image of an essentially violent Turkish male identity. Hasan’s painful experience with the German media problematizes the decontextualized, dehistoricized, and unanalyzed knowledge so often produced about Turkish German immigrants, borrowing Mohanty’s term from another context, by alleged reliable “truth-tellers” like the celebrated film director Wolf (“Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle” 34).

Additionally, by depicting Wolf’s “Milieustudie” (253; “field study”) in Kreuzberg, Hasan expresses his uneasiness with the belief that ethnographic field studies are the objective production of authoritative and transparent representations of cultures. Wolf’s infelicitous effort to observe, discuss, and translate the Turkish reality reminds us that in this social science field researchers produce “ethnographic truths” that are “inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete” and not objective verities that bring to life the true essence of the communities represented in their works (Clifford 7; original emphasis). Indeed, tired of Wolf’s superficial inquiry about the way things are with “you Turks” that does not go beyond spectacle ethnography, Hasan ponders:

Was heißt hier “bei euch Türken”?

Dieser Abend ging in Richtung alles erklären, vor allem sich erklären und “die Türken erklären”. Wie sollte ich Wolf 60 Millionen Türken nahebringen. Ich meine, da war alles dabei. Vom alten Schäfer auf dem Berg Ararat bis hin zum New Yorker Yuppie mit Büro am Bosphorus. Wie soll ich alle diese Türken unter einen Hut bringen. (244)

[What do you mean by “you Turks”?

This evening it was all about clarifying everything; especially about making one-self comprehensible and “explaining the Turks.” How was I supposed to make 60 million Turks accessible to Wolf? I mean, you have everything from the old shepherd on the Ararat Mountain to the New York Yuppie with an office in the Bosphorus. How could I reduce the complexities of all these Turks to a simple definition?]

Exhausted with the racism, hostility, xenophobia, and aggression that he encounters in the media and in his day to day life, Hasan admits that at times these experiences “[ihm] die Hoffnung nahmen (190; “took hope away from him”). He also expresses his impatience with people like Wolf who insist on “die irrige Idee von zwei Kulturen, die aufeinanderprallen. Und [dass] so einer wie [Hasan] ja dazwischen zerrieben werden [mußte] (223; “the erroneous idea of the two cultures that clash, and that one like [Hasan] must be crushed between the two”).

But resilient Hasan is not interested in being silent about the situation of the Turkish minority in Germany or in being a passive onlooker in the ongoing cultural debate between Orient and Occident. He cares about Turkish Germans’ place in German culture and history. Stubbornly, Hasan stresses that he is not willing to disengage: Soll ich mich [...] aus allem raushalten? [...] Es ist bequemer-sich rauszuhalten (313; “Am I supposed [...] not to intervene in anything? It is easier not to intervene”).

Hasan is well aware of people like his father Said who, after all the years in the Federal Republic, continue to proudly proclaim essentializing nationalistic notions like: “Einen Türken kann man nicht kolonialisieren. Einen Inder –ja-, einen Afrikaner-ja. Aber

einen Türken kann man nicht erobern oder integrieren. Nie! (127; “A Turk cannot be colonized. A Hindu, yes; an African, yes, but a Turk cannot be conquered or integrated. Never!”). He is also conscious of people like the German Ingrid and her husband, the Turk Halim, who have spent their lives in a constant and taxing “Kulturkrieg” (129; “cultural war”). Likewise, Hasan knows that there are persons like his mother Sevda, who after divorcing his father goes back to Istanbul and cannot get over the “Germanisierung von Halim” (129; “Germanization von Halim”). He is aware of Turks like Halim who, overwhelmed with a unified Germany, become nostalgic and begin to “Ud spielen und Koran lessen” (278; “play the lute and read the Koran”). But Hasan also knows that there are Germans like grandma and grandpa Wessel who can live and share their lives with people from Turkey. And in a united Germany, Hasan recognizes that this diversity of attitudes is topped with the “Nostalgiesoße” (375; “nostalgia gravy”) of Germans East and West, who insist on viewing Turkish Germans like Leyla and Hasan (who were born in Germany, speak standard German, and display an intimate knowledge of German culture and history) as eternal foreigners on their perpetual way back home.¹⁵⁶ Hasan, who decides to stay in Berlin—a city that he loves and hates—is likewise conscious of the bias of some Turks and some Germans who do not even try “nach Gemeinsamkeiten zu suchen (302-03; “to look for commonalities”) between the two cultures. Finally, Hasan is sensitive to the fact that the contemporary debate and cultural negotiations

¹⁵⁶ Current ethnographic studies show that more and more second and third generation Turkish Germans are showing less desire to assimilate either to Germany or Turkey. Özgür Bozkurt for instance explains: “Whether I’m a German, a Turk, or a Chinese is of no importance to me whatsoever. We are entering the twenty-first century, and this question is truly medieval” (qtd. in Lützow 454). Despite the hostility she experiences in Berlin, rapper Aziza A. displays little interest in the categories German or Turkish. She suggests, “I believe that I and many other Turks are a lot further along on the German-Turkish thing. For me, it is no longer a question how much of me is Turkish. We live here in Berlin, and I am a Berliner: it’s that simple!” (qtd. in Lützow 454). Luk Piyas also displays discomfort with the terms “German of Turkish descent” or “German from Turkey,” he asserts: “I am a Cologne boy. One who has his friends and roots there” (qtd. in Hüttmann 464). (See also Römheld 374).

between Orient and Occident, Muslims and non-Muslims, West and East Germans in the Federal Republic is a longwinded, challenging, and difficult conversation. These negotiations are full of tensions, stereotypes, and reciprocal misconceptions about “Turks” and “Germans,” the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West.

Ateş’s and Kara’s works display the struggle for recognition and equality of opportunities by members of a community that are “penalized for the background of their parents” (Kürsat-Ahlers 131). At the same time, Ateş’s and Kara’s narratives show awareness, as Dursun Tan and Hans-Peter Waldhoff have expressed in another context, that the future of Turkish German culture does not lay “in the fundamentalist, conservative or nostalgic clinging to the past, but rather in an innovative change through developing and retaining a bi-cultural approach, a German and a Turkish cultural identity” (153). Their narratives also expose the understanding that: “The prospect for everyday culture and its innovative potential in Germany depend on such an emergence of bi-culturalism among the Turkish minority and *no less strongly on the acceptance of bi-culturalism in the German society of immigration* (153; added emphasis).

Both writers engage in struggle and negotiation, though with some limitations. Both dismantle essentializing identity discourses ruled by binary logic that have posited the pathology of the Turkish German subject for being neither German nor Turkish. Ateş and Kara fundamentally complicate cultural behavior studies that have represented Turkish Germans as embodying schizophrenic selves drifting/crashed/trapped/torn between two incommensurable worlds and two mutually exclusive religions. Amid the negative perception of Islam in Europe and insidious anti-Islamism, Ateş and Kara make use of this visibility not to play the role of go-betweeners linking cultures that remain

static and separate, but instead to take the opportunity to express their concerns and hopes as Turkish German women and to articulate their interests and formulate their claims for equality. By presenting Turkish German identities that go beyond the binary thinking of either-or, their narratives demystify monolithic identity discourses that, because of their multiculturalism, have presented Turkish Germans as inassimilable and in this way obscured the institutional exclusionary mechanism of the German nation.

Like many other Turkish German citizens, Ateş and Kara take a stand against racist discrimination and openly demand rights for the members of their community that go “beyond the ‘human rights discourse’ in which social and civil rights are in the foreground” (Erel 170). Ateş’s and Kara’s accounts complicate celebrated Huntingtonian arguments of the imminent clash of the Orient and the Occident in the Federal Republic. In the dialectical tension and the contradictions between the Turkish and German cultures, between Muslim and Christian religions, Ateş and Kara see a potential source of creativity that can promote the materialization of multicultural selves and prevent the emergence of fundamentalist identities. Finally, in a multicultural and religiously diverse society, Ateş and Kara challenge both Turks and Germans, Muslims and non-Muslims, Germans and non-Germans and call “zu einer ernhaften Auseinandersetzung mit der Kultur, der Sprache, der Geschichte, der Literatur und der Religion” (15 “Deutschland-Heimat für Türken?”; “for a serious engagement with the culture, the language, the history, the literature, and the religion] of their respective cultures”).

Chapter 6

Gish Jen and Sigrid Nunez:

Approaches to Chinese American Identity

This chapter argues that the works *Mona in the Promised Land*, 1996, by Gish Jen and *A Feather on the Breath of God*, 1995, by Sigrid Nunez bear witness to some of the ways Chinese American writers attempt to come to terms with the dialectical tensions between mainstream U.S. American culture and its peripheries and between East and West. In the context of U.S. American common sense knowledge about Asian Americans, generally conceiving them as belonging to a monolithic and essential Oriental culture, Jen's and Nunez's post-cultural nationalist works give a glimpse of the heterogeneity of the Chinese American immigrant experience and the multiplicity of Chinese American identities in the United States.

While this chapter illustrates that Jen's humorous narrative displays the non-essentialist and porous nature of cultures as a means to come to terms with the dialectical tensions between mainstream U.S. American culture and its peripheries and between East and West, it further shows Jen's attempt to demythologize the conservative idea that Asian American families can turn their children into "whiz kids" of formidable intelligence who can easily succeed in school. However, this chapter argues that by presenting the Changs as the U.S. American "New Jews," a move that suggests the felicitous resolution of the tensions between the U.S. American cultural center and the Chinese American minority, Jen's work unwittingly betrays the precarious position of Chinese Americans in the Promised Land. It illustrates that even if Mona has assimilated and adopted U.S. American values, leading her to celebrate the U.S. American right to

self-definition and identification, her experience proves that within the U.S. American racial system not all persons (not even the members of the celebrated ‘model minority’) are protected from racism in daily life or have the same options for identification and self-definition. And yet, though Jen exposes the uncertain position of Chinese Americans within U.S. American society, this chapter simultaneously suggests that the unresolved dialectical tensions between the Orient and the West exposed in her work should not be understood as sites of self-defeating fatalism but rather as sites of potentiality where “we find the possibility of intervention” in the ongoing struggle against racism and cultural prejudice (Palumbo-Liu, “Assumed Identities” 779).

Furthermore, this chapter shows that Nunez’s narrative, like Jen’s, problematizes the notion of cultures and cultural identity as unchanging and enclosed entities. However, Nunez’s work also complicates Jen’s narrative, by engaging in two simultaneous projects. First, in contrast to Jen, Nunez challenges the portrayal of Chinese Americans solely as a model minority. Without denying that there is some truth in the myth of the model minority, Nunez joins scholars in displaying the broad range of experiences by persons of Asian ancestry in U.S. America, thus complicating the essentialist myth. Second, this chapter shows that Nunez’s work engages with ethnocentric identity models and therapeutic practices that construct multicultural identities as inherently conflictive. In other words, Nunez’s narrative dismantles the vision of multicultural Asian American immigrants as schizophrenically torn between cultures, Orient and West, and therefore incapable of becoming loyal U.S. Americans. Instead, Nunez problematizes humanistic identity discourses that imagine nations as homogeneous entities and their societies as closed systems. Identity debates based on the aforementioned assumptions about nations

and societies have likewise seemed to presuppose that the “cultural identity” of an individual is authentic, static, transparent, and accomplished outside history and culture (Hill 222).

As an alternative to the abovementioned identity paradigms, Nunez presents a model of individual and national cultural identity whose only constants are instability and discontinuity. Nunez’s multicultural identity is a place of contestation that dismantles naturalizing metaphors of roots, soil, and kinship as tropes of nostalgia that are inappropriate and restrictive in the theorizing of cultural identities. Her work displays cultural identity as a project that is “always in process,” a contextual and historical “production” never quite accomplished (222). Along these lines, her narrative equally complicates therapeutic practices by ethnocentric therapists, who, in positing a stable Western subject that can be known, have often assumed that the psychic pain some minority individuals suffer is the logical outcome of their multiculturalism and not the result of specific material and social arrangements. By displaying the awareness of a U.S. American culture that does not significantly differentiate among Asian cultures, her narrative urges the reader to appreciate works by Chinese American writers not as documents that bear witness to a uniform Chinese American experience, or as symptoms of cultural “schizophrenia” between Orient and Occident, but as “the outcomes of specific material histories” (Palumbo-Liu 310).

6.1. Gish Jen

Gish Jen (Lillian Jen) was born on August 12, 1955 in Long Island, New York. Her parents, Norman and Agnes Jen, emigrated individually from Shanghai around World War II and met in the United States. Jen grew up in Yonkers, in a family of five

children. As her parents became more affluent, the family moved to the Jewish suburb of Scarsdale, New York. After high school, Jen went to Harvard University, where she earned a B.A. in English in 1977. In 1979, she began studying business at Stanford, but left in order to teach English in China. Back from China, in 1981, she enrolled in the M.F.A. program at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she graduated in 1983. Jen's work engages with crossing ethnic boundaries, interethnic prejudice, cultural tensions, immigration, and the complexities of a multicultural world. Her first novel, *Typical American*, was published in 1991. The narrative tells the success story of the Chinese American family the Changs. In 1996, Jen published her second novel, *Mona in the Promised Land*, where the Changs continue to be the protagonists, this time focusing on their daughter Mona. Jen's next publication was a collection of eight short stories, *Who is Irish?* in 1999. The topics of the stories are varied; they deal with ethnicity, religion and art. Some of the stories originally appeared in publications such as *The New Yorker*. From this collection, the short story "Birthmates," which engages with class and racism, has been widely acclaimed and included in *Best American Short Stories of the Century* (1999). The short account, "Who is Irish?," which deals with cultural tension and prejudice between Chinese and Irish Americans, has likewise been widely anthologized. In 2000, Jen guest edited the fall issue of *Ploughshares*, a journal of new writing. She published her last novel, the multivocal narrative *The Love Wife*, which deals with the new American family and presents the issues of natural and adopted children, in 2004. Currently, Jen lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband, son, and daughter.

6.1.2. *Mona in the Promised Land*

Mona Lisa in the Promised Land is a humorous bildungsroman that tells the story of Mona Chang, the younger daughter of Ralph and Helen Chang. As owners of a flourishing pancake restaurant, Ralph, Helen and their two daughters have become the embodiment of the “Great American Success” (3). As “the New Jews,” the Changs live in the affluent Jewish suburb Scarshill. Their economic success gives Mona’s parents confirmation that “they belong in the promised land” (3). Nonetheless, Mona, coming of age during the Civil Rights Movement, is openly critical of Ralph’s and Helen’s striving to become WASPs. Developing ethnic awareness, Mona openly confronts her parents’ bias against other minorities, especially African Americans. The argument alienates Mona from her parents, and for two years they do not contact one another. The narrative ends when the family reunites at Mona’s and her Jewish boyfriend Seth’s unconventional wedding, where Ralph’s and Helen’s younger daughter becomes Mona Changowitz.

From the start, Jen’s work questions ideas of fixed and authentic cultural identity. At school, Mona challenges her peers stereotyped ideas about the new visiting Japanese student, Sherman Matsumoto. Mona disabuses them of their fixed ideas about the way Japanese people in general are supposed to be, since Sherman’s father was not “a kamikaze pilot,” and Sherman does not “eat raw fish” and cannot “do karate” (12). By narrating her conflictive relationship with Sherman, Mona not only questions fixed ideas about cultural identity but also problematizes organic concepts of national belonging. Mona exemplifies her critique of these essentialist conceptions by showing her disagreement with Sherman’s ideas about essential cultural identity that, positing stable boundaries which allow no cultural contamination between the Self and the Other, rules

out the possibility that he might become Americanized through immersion in the culture of the guest country simply because he was born in Japan and thus remains pure “Japanese.”

In fact, Mona and her American friends are baffled by the certainty and routine with which Sherman decides who and what does or does not belong to a national and cultural group. Sherman assumes that there are clear-cut limits between national cultures and strongly believes that “*All over the world people have their own culture*” (18; original emphasis). Therefore, Sherman feels free to declare with certainty: “Dis American ... Dis Jewish ... Dis Japanese ... Dis Chinese” (14). However, Mona, who identifies herself as Chinese, U.S. American, and Jewish, does not believe that cultural identity can be so easily delineated or that cultures can simply exist side by side without intermingling and altering one another. Accordingly, Mona expresses her annoyance with Sherman’s chauvinist nationalism. Mona narrates how her friend openly expresses his anti-Chinese feelings by stating that during World War II the atomic bomb was “dropped only on one people” and that “[t]he Japanese don’t forget” (14). In this way, Mona not only displays her discomfort with her friend’s selective historical amnesia about the Japanese alliance with Nazi Germany, but also expresses her concern for nationalist ideologies based on organic conceptions of identity that can easily foster conflict.

In fact, in relation to cultural heritage, Mona’s family does not believe in an essential Chinese cultural identity that is continuous and remains unchanged in the diaspora. Helen knows that the immigrant experience requires not only cultural flexibility on the side of the newcomers, but also malleability in the education of the younger generations. Helen admits that to a certain extent she has become “Westernized,” but

understands that being influenced by U.S. American culture is part of the process in adapting to the new environment. Helen believes that immigrant parents “should be like bamboo [...] Not stand there stiff, like a telephone pole” (49). She also claims that parents who think cultural identity is a fixed essence outside history and culture (and thus insist on attempting to remain impenetrable to influences in the new cultural environment in the endeavor to preserve alleged authentic roots and culture) make life “too difficult for the children” (49). These children, who are kept separate from U.S. American culture or forced to resist the pull of the dominant culture, as Helen illustrates via Mark and Carole Louise’s kids, can go through serious identity crises, since their families do not allow them to adapt to the reality of a bicultural identity.

Helen is aware that her family has not remained a discrete and impenetrable small community immune to U.S. American cultural pollution. She demonstrates the cultural blending that has taken place in her home when she tells about her “authentic Chinese home cooking” that has been Westernized, giving room for the creation of “[s]tir-fried beef with tomatoes” (7). Her cooking has incorporated new elements and new ingredients. In the process, Helen’s food preparation has gradually transformed itself, making possible the emergence of new recipes. For instance, Mona tells us that Helen’s “most recent favorite duck dish recipe” is “Peking duck, Westchester style” (186). Her mother’s preferred dish exemplifies the transculturation her cooking has undergone: Helen’s secret to make her Peking duck taste so delicious “is soaking the duck overnight in Pepsi-Cola” (186).

However, despite Mona’s appreciation of her parents’ flexibility in adapting to the new circumstances in the United States without renouncing their Chinese identity

completely or attempting to revive or to stick to an allegedly autochthonous Chinese identity, she is, at the same time, critical of their assimilationism. Mona claims that in their effort to be Americans, Ralph and Helen simply “want to be Wasps” and act as if they were white Americans who “do not have to make themselves heard” (53). Mona disapproves that, in their desire to become Americans, Ralph and Helen align themselves with white Americans’ fear that they might “turn into blacks” if they socialize with African Americans and are thus just as prejudiced towards blacks as white Anglo Americans and white U.S. American ethnic groups (118).

Mona’s narration of her parents’ attitude suggests that Ralph and Helen seem unaware of their own minority status and buy into white U.S. Anglo American striving for cultural hegemony. They seem uninformed that, in its striving for cultural dominance, Anglo American culture has often preferred to downplay non-white and non-Anglo cultural influences, including Asian American cultural contributions that are constitutive to U.S. American identity and history. Thus, Jen’s work questions the parents’ complicity with the white American idea of “an absolute American past,” based on the fantasy that there was “a unified Mayflower-and-Plymouth Rock beginning” (Kim xii). This foundational fiction, as Elaine Klim explains, presupposes “a founding identity or wholeness in America” that “is rooted in the racist fiction of primordial white American universality” (xii). Historically, this racist account has expressed the fear that “American culture” might be “broken down by rowdy brown and yellow immigrants and other people of color who refuse to melt into the final identity of ‘just American’” (Kim xii).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ To illustrate this point, Karen Brodtkin highlights what Kenneth Roberts has said in his defense of a pure Nordic race: “The American nation was founded and developed by the Nordic race, but if a few more million members of the Alpine, Mediterranean and Semitic races are poured among us, the result must

As a result of Mona's discontent with her parents' racist attitude towards African Americans, Mona and her sister Callie attempt to come to terms with their Chinese American identity on their own terms. To her parents' surprise, Callie starts to learn Chinese at Harvard, an activity that her parents view as useless and "a waste of time" (129). While Callie tries to rediscover her true Chinese identity and become more Chinese, to Helen's dismay, Mona decides to convert to Judaism. Mona justifies her choice by arguing that Judaism is a religion about asking questions and not following dogmas. She closes the argument with her mother by explaining to Helen that, after all: "American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish" (49).

Jen's positive approach to Jewish culture and identity is by no means atypical; it has been a longstanding tradition among Chinese Americans. Due at least partly to perceived similarity of values of Chinese and Jewish cultures, such as the importance of education, Chinese American writers have frequently shown interest in the Jewish American experience.¹⁵⁸ As Jen explains in her narrative, the Chinese American "model minority" has also admired Jewish Americans as the "model minority" they should emulate for what some Chinese Americans have perceived as the Jewish "performance of ethnic identity" (Yin 190). Or, as Mona puts it: "we are a minority like it or not, and if

inevitably be a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and Southern Europe" (35).

¹⁵⁸ Additionally, Yin explains that, in the view of Chinese and Jewish intellectuals who have engaged with the immigrant experience of the two groups, Chinese and Jewish immigrants have been brought together for a long time in U.S. America history. Yin explains that already in 1921, after conducting a comparative study about the immigrant experience of the two minorities, an author concluded that "[the] Chinaman is becoming [the] Jew [in America]" (qtd. in Yin 190). Comparisons between Jewish and Chinese peoples have not been limited to the U.S. America. In European and Southeastern Asian racist discourse, Chinese and Jews have been compared and contrasted, sometimes to the detriment of the Chinese, who have been found to be "worse than the Jews" (qtd. in Yin 191). In 1902, in Thailand, "the Jews of the East" (the Chinese) were described as people who like the Jews were able to "endure any privation and perform the vilest deeds [for money]" and charged them of "bleeding Southeastern Asia dry" (qtd. in Yin 191; see also Freedman's "Transgressions of a Model Minority" for a study of the historical construction of Jews and Chinese as similar in the U.S. American imagination. For the treatment and amalgamation of Jews and Chinese in the European mind see Geller's "*Judenzopf/Chinesenzopf: Of Jews and Queues*").

you want to know how to be a minority, there's nobody better at it than the Jews" (53).

Xiao-Huang Yin further explains this appeal:

If the Jewish experience strikes familiar chords and elicits responses from Chinese American writers, it is because they find that Jews have altered the rules of Americanization and given it new meaning. It no longer equates with assimilation into WASP culture; rather, it means integration into a diversified society while maintaining one's own roots. (193)

However, Chinese Americans' admiration of Jewish Americans has not only been based on their performance of ethnic identity and preservation of cultural traditions. Yu Lihua illustrates that Jewish Americans are also perceived as being "highly successful [in American life]" (qtd. in Yin 193). In this context, it is likewise pertinent that Chinese American intellectuals have not been alone in categorizing the Chinese and Asian American communities as the privileged "New Jews" in the United States (Wu 47-48). Jonathan Freedman points out that Jewish American critics have also engaged with the Asian American experience and have concluded that, indeed, Asian Americans have become the "New Jews." In his study, Freedman reports that, for instance, Nicolas Lemann has openly expressed his apprehension and disappointment in Jewish Americans who, in his view, have relinquished their number one position in their striving for academic excellence and, to his dismay, occupy a mediocre "Second Place" (70).

At the front end of the meritocratic machine, Asians are replacing the Jews as the No. 1 group. They are winning the science prizes and scholarships. Jews, meanwhile, at our moment of maximum triumph at the back end of the meritocracy ... are discovering sports and the virtues of being well-rounded. Which is cause and which is effect is an open question. But as Asians become America's new Jews, Jews are becoming ... Episcopalians. (Lemann qtd. in Freedman 70)

Additionally, for the purpose of this chapter, it is also significant that, based on his study of U.S. American racial discourse about Jews and Asians, Freedman reports two crucial

constants in the trajectory of these minorities in the U.S. First, historically, Jewish Americans and Asian Americans have been depicted as “obviously villainous in some crucial way,” hence the Jewish Peril and the Yellow Peril. Second, the members of both minorities have been perceived as potentially valuable for their “transcendent cultural abilities” and their fearsome “intellectual acuity” (90).¹⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, since the last decades of the twentieth century, U.S. American popular imagination has used the allegedly marvelous intelligence of Jewish and Chinese Americans as a means to explain the indiscriminate success of these minorities in the U.S. and excuse the institutionalization of the model minority ideology (91). Indeed, Jen’s work nonchalantly displays how widespread this perception of Asian Americans is among other U.S. Americans. When Mona tells her new acquaintances that she has a sister who goes to college, for her audience it goes without saying that Mona’s sister must be attending an Ivy League school. And, as Andrew correctly assumes, with a “[f]ull scholarship to Harvard” (181).

Similar to assumptions about Jewish culture, according to Mona, her parents are “just smitten with the educational opportunity before them” (4-5). In the process of questioning her parents’ snobbishness in their effort to affirm their belonging in U.S. America, Mona complicates the conservative idea that, due to their reverence for learning, Asian American parents (unlike U.S. American parents and parents from other

¹⁵⁹ In the understudied field dedicated to the “crossings” of the Jewish and Asian American experience, Freedman suggests the following points of convergence between the two groups: “Defined variously and problematically as ‘people of the book’ - or of the restaurant, constructed in strikingly similar ways in terms of gender (the men as hyperphallic or emasculated, the women as exotic seductresses or overpowering mothers) and socio-economic role (merchants, hagglers, bargainers, gamblers), the stereotypical Jew and the stereotypical Asian have long borne a striking resemblance to each other.” Freedman adds: “And the resemblance goes deeper still. The heterogeneous group composing the categories ‘Jewish-’ and ‘Asian-’ American are each made up of a diverse set of peoples, of a wide range of national origins and cultural practices, who have come to be ambiguously marked as ‘ethnic’ others within the binary black/white logic of American race thinking” (72).

minorities) “are able to instill in their children a much greater motivation to work harder,” thus explaining the general success of Asian American children in school (Osajima 222). This racialized idea, positing Asian American families as superior to other U.S. American families, has also been instrumentalized by conservative political discourse that “blames many of today’s social problems on the deterioration of the family” and paints Asian American families as exemplary for U.S. Americans (Osajima 222).¹⁶⁰

Instead of perpetuating the myth of the model Asian American family, Mona criticizes the psychological manipulation used by her parents in the education of her and Callie. They keep their daughters “running the steeplechase,” as she puts it, and push them to excel (100). Mona exposes her parents’ teaching methods as follows: “the Changs understand the basic structure in life to be the hierarchy. Better and worse, number one and number two, more loved and less” (100). As an alternative explanation of Asian American success, going beyond the idea of a better Chinese American family that takes greater care of their children, Mona suggests that Asian American “whiz kids” might also be harmed by the model minority myth.¹⁶¹ As a matter of fact, Mona’s observation resonates with studies about the academic achievement of Asian American children that tend to focus solely on measuring their success but do not to report on how “the journey toward educational achievement is experienced by Asian American youth” or on the negative impact of parental pressures on these students (Allen Lee and Ying 36;

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Sowell has, for example, observed: “Asian parents are teaching a lesson that otherwise isn’t taught in America anymore. When you see a study that says Asian kids study harder than white and black kids and are getting better grades, it tells us something” (qtd. in Osajima 222).

¹⁶¹ Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou highlight that Asian American youth has seldom be “a distinct analytical category” (*Asian American Youth* 1). They state: “Asian American youth still remain on the margins of youth research in the social sciences” (11).

see also Wu 76).¹⁶² Contradicting popular discourse about Asian “whiz kids,” Mona instead suggests that the road to success can sometimes be difficult and psychologically trying for Asian American children.¹⁶³

Similarly, Mona also questions her parents’ ideas about generational kinship support (which she dismissively qualifies as their “family project”) that demands hard work from all members of the family to the point that, at times, Callie thinks “she is sick of being Chinese” (29). After all, as her parents preach: “one generation is supposed to build on the last, ascending and ascending like the steps of a baby bamboo shoot” (100). However, though critical of her parents’ achievement-oriented lifestyle in U.S. America, Mona’s account clearly attributes her parents’ accomplishment with the pancake house (that has allowed them to become the “American Great Success” (3)) to their emphasis on family, hard work, cooperation, community, and education, thereby confirming the myth that the United States is indeed a non-racist land of opportunity. The Changs’ experience as the “New Jews,” that is to say, their movement into mainstream American life,

¹⁶² Elizabeth Martinez also decries the propagation of the stereotype of Asian Americans as “whiz kids” because “it hides so many harsh truths about the impoverishment, oppression and racist treatment they experience” (*The Colors Means All of Us* 15). Martínez adds: “Some do come from middle- or upper-class families in Asia, some do attain middle-class or higher status in the U.S. and their community must deal with the reality of class privilege where it exists. But the hidden truths include the poverty of many Asian/Pacific Islander groups, especially women, who often work under intolerable conditions, as in the sweatshops. Many youths are not students but live on the streets or in pool halls” (15). Similarly, Yen Le Espiritu agrees that the Asian American community “also includes a sizable population with limited education, skills, and English speaking abilities” (*Asian American Women and Men* 71). Le reports: “In 1990, 18% of Asian men and 26% of Asian women age 25 and over in the United States had less than a high school degree. Also of the 4.1 million Asians 5 years and over, 56% did not speak English “very well,” and 35% were linguistically isolated. [...] For every successful Asian American businessperson, there are many others who struggle daily to eke out a living” (71-79).

¹⁶³ An investigation by Peter Allen Lee and Yu-Wen Ying of 153 Asian American adolescents illustrate that “[l]ess than half the adolescents (42.5%) reported a positive attitude toward academic achievement, while over half expressed either negative attitude (13.1%) or mixed positive/negative attitude (44.4%). In contrast an overwhelming majority (83%) of the adolescents exhibited embracing behavior toward academic achievement, while only 1.3% rejected and 15.7% showed mixed embracing/rejecting behavior. Adolescents with non-positive attitudes (negative or mixed) were more likely to show embracing behavior (70.5%) than non-embracing (rejecting or mixed) behavior (29.5%).” They conclude: “The findings suggest significant distress among Asian American adolescents even though, they may be embracing academic achievement” (35-36).

suggests that U.S. America is a fair and open society willing to accept and incorporate all those willing to work hard and assimilate. Their triumph in the Promised Land proposes that U.S. America evaluates and rewards minorities, “not by their color of their skin, but on the basis of their qualifications, skills, attitudes and behavior” (Osajima 216).

In this way, the Changs’ experience not only sets a standard of behavior for other minorities, but also clearly contradicts the claim of black militants that U.S. America is “a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position” (Chen and Yang 464). As a matter of fact, the values that Mona’s parents embody- focus on kinship, hard work, cooperation, community, and education- are the same ideals considered crucial in the allegedly widespread success of Asian Americans in the U.S. and those that, in popular discourse, have come to be known as quintessentially Asian. Yuan Shu reminds readers that since the late twentieth century, in the context of global capitalism and the emergence of Asia as an economic power, the ideology of “Asian values” (purportedly based on ancient Confucian thought and sacred ethics) is perceived to be indiscriminately and uniformly shared “by all peoples, societies, and cultures in East and Southeast Asia” (88). Asian values are perceived not only as seminal in “the achievements of Asian Americans in American society;” but also as “central to the emergence of the Asian economic power” (88).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Yuan Shu argues that “Asian values” have been postulated in timely fashion by “Asian leaders.” Shu explains that the suitable values were created by politicians when “their nation-states were recently independent from European colonial powers” (88). Aiming at creating the right work ethic among their citizenries, alleged Asian values “were defined in relation to a Western modernity that had culminated in advanced science and technology as well as in the restructuring of society and culture” (88-89). That is to say, “many of these values [that the leaders propagated] were shared and promoted by [...] the ‘apostles of the self-made man’ in American history, cultural heroes such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Horatio Alger” (89). Likewise, Asian leaders have promoted “Asian values” as “a strategy to respond to Western ‘decadence’ and as a gesture that tries to define the moral role that Asian nations should play in the global context” (89).

By unwittingly propagating the ideology of Asian values that have allowed Mona's parents to be viewed, at least by some, as the "Great American Success" (3), *Mona in the Promised Land* thereby contributes to the propagation of a doctrine favored by liberal U.S. American discourse in attempts enlighten the world about the uniform "success of Asian Americans in America" (Shu 93). However, in the context of contemporary transnational capitalism, Jen's suggestion that economic success has given the Changes the sense of belonging in the Promised Land becomes particularly problematic, since the very material success of some Asian Americans has paradoxically also been deployed "to suggest the inability of Asian Americans to embrace the American Dream" (Shu 93). Exposing how so called "Asian values" have been made to work against Asian Americans but, most of all, exposing the precarious position of Asian Americans within U.S. American society, Shu remarks that, ironically, "Asian values" have enabled the persistence of the stereotype of the Asian American minority as the "perpetual foreigner" in U.S. American society (93). In other words, Asian values have exposed that, as Frank H. Wu has put it, "Asian Americans cannot win by winning" (68). Sam Chu Lin succinctly elucidates this incongruous state of affairs by presenting the results of a survey called "How America Sees Us," aimed at measuring the attitudes in U.S. America towards Asian Americans, in 2001:

A sizable percentage gave somewhat negative marks to the very negative against Asian Americans regarding such questions as: "Always like to be at the head of things (82 percent); hard to get close to, make friends with (67 percent); don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind (66 percent); so shrewd that other people do not have a fair chance at competition (55 percent)." (qtd. in Shu 93)

In other words, the investigation shows that the evaluation of Asian Americans based on precisely the renowned "Asian values" can backfire on Asian Americans. Confucian

principles can be twisted and deployed to perpetuate the perception of Asian Americans as unable to assimilate to U.S. American society and achieve Americanness. Lin's study illustrates that, when it comes to Asian Americans, "successful performance can be construed as a matter of showing off, cooperation with the individual family as indifference to American society, and interest and expertise as depriving others of opportunities" (Shu 93; Wu 68). Shu further clarifies that research exposes that Americans "resent their economic success" (84). The increasing number of Asian American students in institutions of higher education has also been resented by "white students, who feel threatened" (Osajima 221; Wu 48). Hence, even if Mona's celebration of Emersonian free will leads her to proclaim that, in U.S. America, "anything is possible" (84), further analysis shows that "the general American public" does not perceive Asian Americans as Americans (Shu 93).¹⁶⁵

In fact, confirming Shu's observation, Jen's work reveals that even if the Changs have successfully assimilated, and despite the fact that Callie and Mona have been born and educated in the U.S., the Changs are still perceived as foreigners.¹⁶⁶ To be exact, even if Mona "seems [to be] an enthusiastic proponent of what Sollors terms the 'consent' paradigm and does not favor 'descent' obligation" (Simal González 236), her experience demonstrates that within the U.S. racial system not all persons have the same options for identification and self-definition. Indeed, the African American Alfred (an

¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, Shu explains that: "as the Asian American success story continues to circulate in American society and as more Asian capital flows into the American market, many 'successful' American entrepreneurs, Asian-born and American-born alike, are willing to embrace the American Dream in their own ways and capitalize on 'Asian values' as a convenient way to market their products as well as create their public images" (95).

¹⁶⁶ Scholar Iris Chang tellingly reports the decision of the "Mattel Toy Company not to release an Asian Barbie doll in the year 2000 fantasy collection of future female American presidents, even though white, black, and Hispanic dolls are included" (391). Chang adds the reaction by Professor Elaine Kim to this decision: "People like Asian-Americans dolls in costumes, not as presidents. [...] This tells us how we are thought of" (qtd. in Chang 391).

employee at the pancake house) cannot choose and change his ethnicity at will, despite Mona's proclamation that being American "means being whatever you want" (49).

Regardless of Mona's adaptation to American values, actions, and aspirations, at school her peer Danielle Meyers introduces her as primarily "*Chinese*" (5; original emphasis).

Furthermore, in the liberal Scarshill neighborhood where Mona's parents have their business, Mona is treated, according to her own observations, "like a permanent exchange student" (6). And though Mona takes all the questioning and curiosity about her assumed exotic existence with humor, she remains a Far East object of unusual interest routinely confronted with questions about whether she has been back home to China, "speaks the language," or "misses China," a place she has never even visited (182).

Mona's experiences show that, in popular U.S. American discourse, distinctions between Asians and Asian Americans are non-existent. Or, as Thomas Nakayama states:

The distinction between 'Asian' and 'Asian American' is quietly ignored. Not only are Asian Americans who have lived in this country for generations treated, discursively, as identical to Asians who have never left Asia, they are also distinguished from 'Americans'. (qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 212)

Finally, Jen's novel describes how, based on the stereotype of the superior intelligence of the Chinese, Mona is confronted with the statement that "the Chinese really are going to take over the world [...] They are smarter than everybody else" (183). Thus, the alignment of Chinese Americans with the epithet of the affluent "New Jews" is similarly thorny amid present-day economic globalization and the rise of the People's Republic of China as a superpower. In a period fearful of "sweeping international forces," these economic events have at times had dire consequences for Asian American minorities (Chang 394). As a matter of fact, Mona's friend Eliot expresses a very real contemporary

nervousness at a historical moment when, due to their financial strength, “China and Japan are once again being invoked as evil empires,” some U.S. citizens see a “new Yellow Peril” materializing (Shah xvii; see also Wu 88-90) and the media propagates the imminent “Asianization of the universe” (Wu 117).¹⁶⁷ Yen Le Espiritu explains that contemporary “Yellow perilism,” which presents Asia and Asian Americans as a looming military, economic, social, and cultural threat to the well being of the United States:

takes the forms of the greedy, calculating, and clever Japanese businessman aggressively buying up the U.S. real state and cultural institutions *and* the superachieving but nonassimilable Asian Americans. (*Asian American Women and Men* 90; original emphasis)

The emergence of Asian economic power and increased transnationalism which demands the redefinition of the space of the nation, as Le Espiritu further elucidates, provides white Americans

with a united identity and [an] ideological justification for U.S. isolationist policy toward Asia, increasing restrictions against Asian (and Latino) immigration, and the invisible institutional racism and visible violence against Asians in the United States. (90)

In fact, the subjective perception that China is “going to take over the world” has caused an increase in anti-Chinese sentiment.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, since there is a tendency to assume that all Asians conform to a monolithic Oriental culture, and, consequently: “distinctions about Asians among Caucasians are rare” (Ling 10; see also Osajima 221), attacks on Chinese Americans have risen simply because aggressors cannot “figure out the

¹⁶⁷ Freedman reminds us not only that, in U.S. American history, Chinese Americans have been associated with “rats, disease, opium-dens, sexuality, etc.” but also that “the Chinese immigrant was often feared precisely because of qualities like industriousness and intelligence, which distinguished that figure from Others like African-Americans, Mexicans, and most crucially, the Irish” (81).

¹⁶⁸ Sam Chu Lin reports other findings as to the way Americans feel about China. In an interview of 1,200 people, “68 percent of those polled have a negative opinion of the Chinese government and believe China is a future threat to the United States; 46 percent feel Chinese Americans are ready to pass on secrets to China; 32 percent think Chinese Americans are more loyal to China than the United States; 23 percent are not comfortable with the idea of an Asian American in the White House” (see: http://www.asianweek.com/2001_04_27/news1_committee100survey.html.)

difference between Chinese Americans and Chinese foreign nationals” (Chang 395; Wu 70-74). The stereotype of the affluent Chinese model minority has also often fueled rage and resentment “against the success some Asian Americans have experienced” (Shanahan 92; Wu 39 and 70-74). Studies on the experience of Asian American minorities in U.S. America show that, as Elizabeth Martínez accurately notes: “daily reality shows that no ‘model minority’ myth protects Asians and Asian Americans from hate crimes, police brutality, immigrant bashing, and everyday stereotyping” (*The Colors Mean All of Us* 10). Accordingly, these events confirm the observations made by David Palumbo-Liu: “[e]conomic success and class ascension do not necessarily erase racial distinctions that leave Asian Americans susceptible to being redefined as ‘foreign’” (3).

In relation to Jen’s narrative, Gloria Heyung Chun suggests that, despite “all the drama behind Mona and Callie’s becoming Jewish or Asian American, ethnicity takes a backseat to class interest” in Jen’s work (148). Paraphrasing Sau-ling Cheung, Heyung Chun further argues that “a position [like Jen’s] that trivializes ethnicity in this way is perhaps indicative of someone who is writing from a privileged class position” (148). In fact, Jen’s narrative’s perpetuation of the myth of the Jewish and the Chinese minorities as “model minorities,” as Freedman explains, largely obscures the struggle that these minorities have had “with their own inscription as model minorities” (97).¹⁶⁹ Along these

¹⁶⁹ In relation to conflating the Jewish experience with the Chinese diaspora, Freedman accurately expresses that, though “provoking for both,” the mergence of these minorities’ experiences “disguises the ways Jews and Asian-Americans are equally victims of the model minority myth; discredits the tremendous diversity of each community, downplays their economic and social reticulation; and constructs identity strait jackets for both” (“Who is Jewish?” 221). In addition, scholar Abraham D. Lavender has expressed his concern about the fact that the general U.S. public still “remains in the dark” about many realities about the Jewish experience in the U.S.A. (4). Lavender reminds us that the American Jewish community also encompasses Jewish poor, black Jews, Hassidic Jews, small-town Jews, southern Jews, and Sephardic Jews (4). As for what some scholars have called the homogenizing “ascription of whiteness” (read: white Ashkenazi of German and Eastern European origin) to the Jewish U.S. American minority in the legal and social sense, feminist Caren Kaplan has also highlighted that the creation of this generalizing narrative has

lines, Le Espiritu observes that, though Asian Americans are praised for their assumed success, they “continue to face white racism in the political, economic, and social arenas as well as white resentment and violence for being ‘too successful’-thus reminding them that they are indeed not whites” (*Asian American Women and Men* 109).

Paradoxically, Le Espiritu further suggests that the model minority myth has rendered Asian Americans “among the most exploitable and exploited workers in the United States” (110). Namely, Le Espiritu persuasively contends that the popularity of Asian Americans as “favored workers” has not been a product of Asian Americans being viewed as belonging to cultures that can make significant contributions to U.S. American culture, but is rather the result of “their [perceived] exploitability” (110). In reality, Asian Americans soon find the glass ceiling and become aware that though, they are employed for their work ethic and discipline as employees, they are not sought after for “their assertiveness and ambition as bosses” (Chen and Yang 475).

Finally, Freedman further elucidates that the model minority myth “becomes particularly troublesome in the midst of the debates about access to the halls of high culture to the descents of other immigrations- forced and voluntary” (97).¹⁷⁰ Hence, though Jen’s work presents the Changs as the “New Jews,” whose material success gives them the impression that they rightfully belong in the capitalist and multicultural Promised Land, her entertaining and nervously hesitant narrative simultaneously exposes

been based on the “erasure of Arab, Latino, African, Asian, and South Asian Jews from the dominant narrative of Jewish identity in U.S. contexts” (474).

¹⁷⁰ Scholar Palumbo-Liu also expresses his concern with the recent tendency not to consider Asian Americans as “minorities” in the sense that allegedly they are no longer economically disadvantaged. This political move assumes that “full social, cultural, and political integration” of Chinese Americans has been achieved. As a result, as Palumbo-Liu explains: “the sensitivities of the American political economy are excused from laboring to ‘include’ Asian Americans” (4).

the precarious position of Chinese Americans in U.S. American society.¹⁷¹ By inadvertently celebrating “Asian values,” Jen’s narrative perpetuates the myth of the model minority. It is likewise interesting that, unlike the other women writers studied in this project, Jen’s work does not engage with feminist issues in any significant way. Though it could be argued that Jen presents the coming of age story of a rebellious young girl that contradicts the idea of Asian American women as subservient and docile, it might also be argued that her work simply perpetuates the traditional emphasis on claiming and affirming Americanness without paying due attention to U. S. American historical racism illustrated by previous Chinese American women writers. Like some other Chinese American women writers, Jen also prefers to remain largely oblivious to many negative experiences of the Chinese in the United States. As a matter of fact, whenever these experiences are mentioned in her work- and then only in a cursory way- Jen’s hasty and witty narrative displays the anxiety of a minority that claims to be of America, but whose cultural contributions remain for the most part unrecognized by mainstream U.S. American culture. In crucial moments, Jen’s work betrays the accuracy of Maxine Hong Kingston’s observation: “Apparently many Caucasians in America do not know that a person born in the USA is automatically American, no matter how he or she may look (qtd. in Madsen 241). Her narrative further exhibits the aptness of Iris

¹⁷¹ In fact, scholar Karen Brodtkin states that the economic success, that is the whitening, of Jewish Americans after World War II, was ultimately the consequence of “U.S. postwar economic prosperity with its enormously expanded need for professional, technical, and managerial labor, and on government assistance in providing it” (41). Nonetheless, Brodtkin emphasizes that this economic help was not given to all Americans citizens who deserved it. Referring to the GI Bill of Rights which has been acknowledged as “the most massive affirmative action program in U.S. history,” Brodtkin reminds us that this help was largely assigned to “male, Euro-origin GIs” (41). The scholar emphasizes that the support that legally was supposed to cover all American veterans “was not extended to African-Americans or women of any race” (43). Brodtkin makes this point to signal that “[t]he myth that Jews pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps ignores the fact that it took federal programs to create the conditions whereby the abilities of Jews and other European immigrants could be recognized and rewarded rather than denigrated and denied” (45). Brodtkin closes her article by stating: “Sure Jews needed ability, but ability was not enough to make it. The same applies even more in today’s long recession” (45).

Chang's assertion that, as long as the recognition of Chinese Americans is "linked to the ever-shifting relations between the United States and China rather than on their own particular behavior," the position of Chinese Americans within U.S. American society will remain unstable (Chang 397).

6.2. Sigrid Nunez

Sigrid Nunez was born on March 12, 1951 in New York City, where she currently lives. Her father, Carlos Nunez, was an ethnic Chinese. Though his ancestors had come to from Shanghai, Nunez's father was born in Panama. After the death of his Panamanian mother, Carlos Nunez immigrated to the United States. Nunez' mother, Herta, came from Germany (Christopher 256). Nunez earned a B.A. at Barnard College and received an M.F.A. degree from Columbia University. An English teacher and a writer, Nunez has taught at many different institutions, including Smith College, Amherst College, Columbia University, and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference at Middlebury College. Her short stories have been published in journals such as "Iowa Review" and the "New England Review."

Nunez's work addresses the intersections of class, race, gender and violence. Her work also engages with language; writing, teaching and learning languages; and communication and miscommunication. The main characters of her novels are women. Nunez, as Christiane Schlote writes, delves into "her characters' psyches and examines their emotions and relationships with unflinching psychological clarity" (606). Her first novel, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, was published in 1995. The work engages with Nunez's parents' immigrant life. The Association for Asian American Studies recognized Nunez's novel with the organization's award for Best Novel of the Year. The work also

earned Nunez the PEN/Hemingway Award for First Fiction. The narrative was followed by *The Naked Sleeper*, 1996, which tells the life of Nora, a teacher and author, who writes about her father, a man who had led a double life as a homosexual. The narrative also focuses on Nora's affair. *Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury*, 1998, is the biography of Leonard Woolf's pet marmoset. From the point of view of the animal, Nunez's account likewise offers insights into the Bloomsbury group and the everyday life of Leonard and Virginia Woolf. In the novel *For Rouenna*, 2001, Nunez tells of the main character, Rouenna's, experience as a nurse in Vietnam. Her most recent novel, *The Last of Her Kind*, 2006, deals with the question of class and race during the late 1960's and describes the moment as a period of naïve idealization of poor people and people of color, more specifically African Americans. Nunez has received a Berlin Prize Fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin and other awards such as the Whiting Writer's Award, the Pushcart Prizes, the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award and the Rome Prize in Literature.

6.2.1. *A Feather on the Breath of God*

A Feather on the Breadth of God tells the story of a nameless multiracial female protagonist. The protagonist's biracial parents, the Chinese Panamanian American GI Charles Cipriano Chang (Carlos) and the German war bride Christa, met in postwar Germany. In order to make sense of her present life after her parents' deaths, the narrator revisits her memories of life growing up, during the 1950s and the 1960s, in housing projects in New York with her immigrant parents. Nunez's sober narrative consists of four short stories: "Chang," "Christa," "A Feather on the Breadth of God," and "Immigrant Love."

Like Jen's narrative, Sigrid Nunez's semiautobiographical work engages with the dismantling of ethnic and cultural stereotypes. On the one hand, the work of the Eurasian Latina U.S. American Nunez challenges Chinese American identity boundaries as to the extent to which ancestry or "blood" can influence the recognition of a person as Chinese American. Her work illustrates the communities of multiracial Asian Americans that constitute a diverse sector with which "many mainstream Asian American groups still do not know quite what to do" (Spickard 262). Indeed, as for the socialization with multiracial Asian Americans within traditional Asian American communities, Paul R. Spickard explains: "Asian Americans have, until recently, merely adopted the biases and boundaries set by white America" (262). Nunez's work portrays a group that has begun only in recent times to be viewed as "something like full participants" in Asian American communities and that even more recently has found a place in "Asian American Studies curricula" (262). On the other hand, Nunez's narrative, which has simultaneously been categorized as "Eurasian, Asian or Latino American" (Schlote 603), equally destabilizes the boundaries of quintessential *mestizo* Latin American identity. Carlos Cipriano Chang, the Chinese Panamanian father of the protagonist, complicates the construction of a homogeneous *mestizo* Latin American identity. Nunez's work redefines prototypical Latin American identity that has been partly constructed on the marginalization of and the scarce attention paid to the histories, cultural contributions, and experiences of non-Catholic, non-*mestizo*, non-*criollo* cultures in the countries of the region: that is to say, the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, and other traditions that are also constitutive historical and cultural elements in the formation of the Latin American countries.

A Feather on the Breath of God presents the cultural conflict experienced by children of biracial parents in a time when, in the United States, intermarriage between Asians and non-Asians encountered significant opposition. Such historically racist ideas about multiracial people of Asian descent that have had an impact on “people’s life chances then and now” are the embodiment of “white racism” (Spickard 257). Nevertheless, while white Americans simply ignored them or reacted negatively to “the presence in their midst of multiracial people of Asian descent,” more surprisingly, perhaps, among Asian American communities the aversion to the practice was such that “they shunned not only the intermarried couples but also their mixed children” (257).¹⁷² In her narrative, Nunez more specifically engages with the predicament of biracial children (at that time derogatorily called “half-breeds”) who, because racially impure, are not accepted by their own parents. Nunez’s text describes how the psychological trauma of the unnamed female narrator and the cultural conflict which made her family life so painful, to a significant extent, result from her parents’ inability to overcome their cultural nationalism and racism in their daily family life. Seemingly trapped in the stereotypes about multiracial people predominant at the time, the parents act as though their daughters could be neither Chinese nor German and make it impossible for their racially mixed children to find a place in their respective Chinese and German cultures. In fact, the parents’ inability to accept their racially impure children would lead to the outright exclusion of their daughters from their cultures of origin and prevention of their learning Chinese or German.

¹⁷² As Paul E. Spickard further explains: “Whites were confused about Amerasians and uncertain exactly where to place them. They had a number of stereotypes about multiracial people (Amerasians specially) that were perverse and demeaning. Asian were less confused than whites: generally speaking, they did not want multiracial people of Asian ancestry, and they told them they could not be Asian” (259).

By beginning the narrative with the short story “Chang,” Nunez gives the figure of the father a central position in her narrative, in sharp contrast to the unobtrusive place to which fathers have often been relegated by Chinese American women writers. In this story, the female narrator gathers together the fragmented knowledge she has about her dead father. Her remembrances dismantle essentializing cultural identities and expose the pain caused by racism and cultural nationalism. At this point, she recalls that her father often displayed a so-called Oriental “taciturnity,” but acknowledges that she does not believe her father was always or essentially “the silent, withdrawn man” she knew (5). She instead suggests that displacement, loss, racism, and dislocation might have influenced his reserved character and rendered him silent. According to the narrative, Charles’s dislocation began when he was still a baby. Abandoning Charles’s Panamanian mother, his Chinese father “took him to Shanghai, to be raised by his Chinese wife” (6). Charles returned to Panama ten years later to live with his brother Alfonso and his mother in Colón, Panama.

Trying to make more palpable sense of the events that might have shaped her father’s disposition, the narrator attempts to convey the feelings of marginalization that the frequent forced displacement and cultural dislocation experienced by her father might have caused him. In this light, the narrator questions whether her half-Panamanian father would have been fully accepted or well treated by his father’s Chinese first wife and his two Chinese half-brothers, who enjoyed a superior status as the sons of the official Chinese wife. Aware that her father did not look quite Chinese, she likewise does not believe that her half-breed father would have been recognized as Chinese and accepted as such by his Chinese peers at school. The narrator similarly suspects that coming back to

Panama from Shanghai as a young boy, Charles might not have been able to communicate with his Spanish speaking mother who would die a year after the boy's return to Colón. Hinting at the existence of a Chinese community in Panama, the narrator tells readers that, after the mother's death, Charles and Alfonso would go to live for a couple of years with their Uncle Mee, who "apparently lived in Colón and had a large family of his own" (7). Charles's Chinese family would be killed in the Sino-Japanese War, so he never saw them again. After coming to the United States, at around the age of thirteen, Charles would live for many years as an illegal bachelor in New York, working in several restaurants in Chinatown. Only when he was drafted during the Second World War, at a time when the Chinese American community had the highest draft rate, was Charles able to legalize his situation, as he was granted American citizenship for his service. On that occasion, Charles dropped his father's Chinese last name, took his mother's name, and started to call himself Carlos, well aware of the advantages that change of name represented.¹⁷³

The narrator guesses that her father's silence might have equally been an effect of his unhappy marriage with Christa, his German wife, who he had met as a soldier in postwar Germany. Like many longtime Chinese American bachelors who had spent most of their lives in male-dominated and male-centered communities, Carlos did not seem to be able to sustain his day-to-day relationship with his wife and children. He also

¹⁷³ Chiou-Ling Yeh reminds us that "Chinese Americans were granted the right of naturalization in 1943" (397). Likewise, Iris Chang explains that, during World War II when China became an ally of the USA, the U.S. media created the image of Chinese Americans as "loyal, decent allies" (Chang 223). They were depicted as "hardworking, honest, brave, religious, intelligent, and practical" (223). Simultaneously, the Japanese were presented as "a race of evil spies and saboteurs [...] treacherous, sly, cruel, and warlike" (223). Though the U.S. media concluded that "there is no infallible way of telling them apart, because the same racial strains are mixed in both" (223), it nonetheless endeavored to find ways to physically distinguish the foe from the friend. After the Pearl Harbor attack, before the Japanese "disappeared all together," some bullied and terrified Chinese Americans "started to wear badges to distinguish themselves from the Japanese" (224).

continued gambling, an activity that was a source of significant friction with his wife. Adding to the troubles of the couple, while Carlos persistently longed to return to Shanghai, his wife Christa dreamed “incessantly about going home” (10). Christa had belonged to the Hitler Youth but, given that she had left Germany after marrying Carlos, had not been able to go through the denazification process that took place in postwar Germany. To the detriment of her family life, Christa did not have the chance to confront and work through her Nazi past. Once in U.S. America, Christa can only feel contempt for the American culture, people, and way of life. Feeling culturally superior to the Americans and the Chinese, Christa remains largely unaware of the racism that pervades her relationships with her husband and her biracial daughters. And yet, though the young narrator displays sensitive awareness about her parents’ troubled past, she nevertheless critically questions her parents’ nostalgia and inability to come to terms with their history.

The protagonist describes how her parents’ inability to overcome their ethnocentrism and racism would eventually preclude the development of a shared family life. She recalls her father who, though half-Panamanian, identified himself as Chinese and “[s]urely many times in his life [...] must have wished that he were real Chinese” (17). Thus, in order to cultivate his Chineseness, Carlos, who apparently defined his cultural identity in terms of one culture shared by people with a common ancestry, would eventually base his life in Chinatown during the McCarthy era. The narrator additionally relates the story of her unapologetic mother Christa who, proud of her Germanness, wished that “her children were all German” (17). To realize her wish, she made her three daughters her exclusive property and kept any kind of Chinese influence out of their

lives. Additionally, the narrator reveals that, aiming at cultivating and maintaining her Germanness intact in the diaspora and somehow conforming to the stereotype that people often have about Germans, Christa eventually got “a dog, a Doberman pincher” (90) and emphasized her “[f]ear of impurities, love of obedience, preference of animals to men” (90).

However, although her parents were attached to their personal conceptions of their respective cultures, they do not share their costumes, culture, or language with their daughters. This exclusionary parental attitude creates an emotional vacuum preventing their young daughters from having a sense of belonging. For instance, Carlos, who apparently viewed identity as an “accomplished fact” and not as a process that “is never complete” (Hall 222), firmly believed that only two factors counted in the formation of a subject’s stable and true cultural identity: the first language that a person spoke and the place where the individual spent the first years of his/her life (*A Feather on the Breath of God* 16). Unwilling to learn English and unable to communicate with his American daughters and his German wife, Carlos built a wall around himself. In fact, the narrator believes that, like her mother in relation to U.S. American stereotypes about Germans, her father too wills himself into the U.S. American stereotype of “Chinese inscrutability. Chinese sufferance. Chinese reserve” (16). Carlos believed that his daughters’ desire to understand and know Chinese culture could not be genuine because they were not really Chinese. Isolating himself from his family, he interpreted every question about his culture as a personal attack or a joke played on him by the girls. Though the girls are often confronted with clichés about the Chinese, Carlos did not attempt to teach them about his culture or disabuse his daughters about Chinese stereotypes. The narrator explains:

I am six, seven, eight years old, a schoolgirl [...] I hear something about the Chinese- something odd, improbable. I will ask my father. He will know better whether it is true, say, that Chinese eat with sticks [...] Is it true the Chinese write backwards? [...] Is it true they eat dog? [...] Are they really all Communists? [...] What is a Chinese water torture? What is foot-binding? What is mandarin? [...] A later memory: Panama is an isthmus. Grade-school geography. My father looks up from his paper, alert, suspicious. "Merry Isthmus!" "Isthmus be the place!" My sisters and I shriek with laughter. My father shakes his head. "Not nice, making fun of place where people born!" (5-6-16)

In fact, the only occasion on which she remembers her father being happy was the day when he had the opportunity to play with two "little Chinese kids" (180) who were "real" Chinese. Shocked and hurt at the glimpse of a satisfied and active father, the narrator and her sisters later complained to no avail to their mother about how their father never played with them the same way he had played with the Chinese kids. Incidentally letting her prejudice against her biracial daughters show, Christa dismissed the girls' grief by replying: "What do you expect? You have to forgive him. I would probably be the same with little German children" (180).

Like her Chinese husband, Christa equally resisted instructing her daughters about German culture and the German language. Though wanting her Chinese American daughters to be Germans, Christa, who in Nazi Germany had come to believe "in the dream of a grandiose destiny" for the German nation, was dismissive of everything Chinese (55) and condescending towards American culture (58). And yet, while Christa dismissed other cultures as inferior and unworthy, she discouraged her daughters' attempts to learn German because it was not their language. Suggesting an organic link between language and cultural identity, Christa gave her daughters the impression that "getting German right" was a "very hard thing indeed" (35). Christa suggested that the command of the language was an insurmountable accomplishment for non-Germans:

There are a lot of German words for which you have no English. And it's funny –so often it's an important word, one that means such a lot. *Weltschmerz*. How can you translate that? And even if you study German, you can't ever really learn a word like that, you never grasp what it means. (36)

Likewise, Christa conveyed to her girls the sense that even understanding her Germanness was out of their reach: “It was not to be hoped that any American-let alone an American child-could grasp what this unique quality of being German was all about” (59).

But growing up in housing projects in New York, the narrator is aware that there were other factors besides her parents' ethnocentrism that stood in the way of family happiness. Coming of age in the years of the Cold War, the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War, and McCarthyism, the young woman asserts that her mother was right when she “swiftly disabused” her and her sisters “of the certain notions acquired at school,” among others, that “America is the land of equal opportunity” (71). It is true that during the postwar period many Chinese Americans of the merchant class who had enjoyed college education, as well as some World War II veterans who could earn college degrees on the GI Bill, achieved material prosperity “far above national averages” (Chang 258).¹⁷⁴ But by telling the story of the illiterate and no longer quite young father who did not have the skills to access high-paying jobs, Nunez's work displays another dimension

¹⁷⁴ During this period in a repressive atmosphere, ethnic Chinese, partly because they were worried that they would be labeled as anti-American or Communists, attempted to assimilate and achieve the American Dream. In a booming US American economy, as Iris Chang explains, college educated Chinese Americans “rapidly assumed white-collar or professional as engineers, doctors, accountants, lawyers, and businessmen” (258). Though there was a true exodus from Chinatown into white neighborhoods and white schools, there were numerous cases of “harassment, vandalism, and even violence” in the hopes to drive the undesired newcomers out of white neighborhoods (259). As scholar Chiu-Ling Yeh reminds us, after China became a Communist country in 1949, and entered the War against Korea as the “People's Republic of China” in 1951 (396), Chinese Americans were vulnerable to being perceived as “enemies from within” (397). The fear of stigmatization was exacerbated by the awareness of the camp internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (397). The terror of many Chinese Americans increased after “Congress passed Title II of the McCarran Internal Security Act (Emergency detention Act) in 1950,” which made possible “the internment of Communists during a national emergency” (399).

of postwar immigrant experience in U.S. America during a time that saw a dramatic increase in surveillance and economic decline of Chinatowns across the nation. Nunez shows that, though Carlos unmistakably embodied all of the alleged Confucian virtues of hard work, frugality, endurance, discipline, and family orientation, her father was never able to move beyond “feminized” work in Chinatown restaurants.¹⁷⁵ Although Carlos never took vacations, worked on the weekends and during most holidays, the family remained poor. Since, as a consequence of the fear that the investigations by the INS and the raids by the FBI engendered throughout Chinatown, formerly popular restaurants remained empty and families canceled their celebrations, Carlos was forced to be simultaneously employed in two and, at times, three different restaurants. However, despite Carlos’s permanent work, his family did not live the American dream of perpetual self-improvement and humanistic transcendence. Until after his death, the family was unable to afford to leave the housing projects behind.

And yet, for the narrator, it was not her family’s failure to dream the American dream that made her suffer. Returning to her dysfunctional family life, the narrator criticizes patriarchal psychoanalytical approaches that have determined the irrefutability of the schizophrenic nature of all bi- or multi-cultural individuals. The storyteller emphasizes that the lack of communication and miscommunication in their family caused

¹⁷⁵ As a response to the difficult economic situation and the fear of exclusion in the Chinatowns, some male leaders in San Francisco, hoping to create a safe image of Chinese Americans as culturally and politically harmless, decided to turn Chinatown into an “Orientalist space” that would attract tourists (397). In their effort to present the true, authentic, and non-Communist “traditions of China” and to celebrate “the Freedom of America” to which they were entitled, these Chinese American men created the democratic “Chinese New Year Festivals.” The celebrations, where patriotic Chinese American war veterans paraded, were presented as having had an ancient origin that could be traced back to the time of the mythical Chinese Emperor, Huang Ti (Yeh 395-414). Nonetheless, as Yeh remind us, the festival “did not lessen political difficulties for Chinese American (414).” For instance, in 1956, “the entire Chinese American community” was accused “of engaging in illegal immigration and Communist infiltration” (414). Only in 1979, after the U.S. normalized relations with China, did the situation of Chinese Americans start to improve (414).

her more permanent harm and psychic pain than the precarious economic situation that she and her sisters had to endure. As a matter of fact, she admits that after her father died she “had a nervous breakdown” (179) when she realized that she had irrevocably missed the chance to come to understand that constitutive part of herself that she hardly knew. However, simultaneously acknowledging the specificity of her immigrant life experience, the narrator suggests that her crisis cannot and should not be generalized and categorized as the irrevocable fate that the bicultural ethnic subject has to endure.

In order to relieve her psychic pain, at different times of her life, she “tried therapy,” because it “seemed an obvious thing to do. Everyone else was doing it. Women, especially, swore by it” (177-78). However, the nameless narrator goes on to express the discomfort she experienced with ethnocentric therapists who posited a unified, knowable, transparent, and stable Western subject and assumed that her psychic pain was the logical outcome of her multiculturalism. For example, one female therapist invokes this narrative when she exclaims: “A background like that, no wonder you’re here. You don’t know *who* you are!” (178; original emphasis). The same anxious female psychotherapist, overwhelmed with the multiculturalism of her multiracial patient, brashly suggests that if there was anything good in her family life, “[it] must have come from the father” (178). The narrator similarly objects to the male Chinese American therapist who, instead of helping her to make sense of herself and her family life by analyzing it in relation to both her father and her mother, like the female analyst insists on seeing her mother as “the root of so much trouble” (178).

In this way, through the young female narrator, Nunez’s narrative expresses its discontent with the professionalization of a therapeutic culture that assumes social

arrangements, conflicts, and personal tribulations can be easily solved and cured with therapy, and that, consequently, therapy is all we need. By exposing the tendency of therapists to posit her mother as the unique source of the narrator's suffering, Nunez's narrative equally questions phallogentric and ahistorical Western psychotherapeutic practices that confine the female subject –the mother- to a negative realm of isolation. Her work signifies her opposition to traditional therapists who still remain oblivious to the misogynist ideology that runs through the Oedipal narrative, the bedrock of traditional psychoanalytical theory and practice: the phallic repression of the desire for the mother.

In other words, Nunez problematizes the validity of therapies based on the Freudian model, which conveniently fuse anatomy with “destiny,” emphasizing the privileged status of the father in the symbolic order. These practices consistently represent the mother as biologically inferior and always already castrated for the lack of a “superior” penis and the possession of an “inferior” clitoris (Silverman 138). In fact, Kaja Silverman reminds us that in the natural flow of events in the Freudian narrative, the little girl, out of disappointment in the mother because of the mother's underprivileged status in the symbolic order, is expected “not only to turn away from the mother, but to turn toward the father” (142). Silverman further elucidates that, consequently, in the Oedipal therapeutic practices: “rejection begins with the mother, who is not only perceived as deficient herself, but as the cause of her daughter's deficiency” (142).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Freud puts the gradual rejection of the mother in the following terms: “When she [the little girl] has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining the lack of a penis as being punishment personal to herself and has realized that the sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by the men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man” (Freud qtd. in Silverman 142).

Thus, joining feminist theorists who have challenged the universal legitimacy and validity of the Freudian plot, Nunez's work complicates a theoretical framework that has sought to naturalize or "biologize" the subordination of women in the patriarchal social order.¹⁷⁷ Nunez expresses her concerns about the effectiveness of a cure based on the cultural division of human beings in oppositional and essentialist gender camps. As a matter of fact, Silverman reminds us that this approach demands the displacement of affection away from the mother "ideally" and results "in anti-feminism" (142), since the treatment of patients, replicating the Freudian patriarchal flow of events, begins with the psychic rejection of the mother and culminates with the reaffirmation of a "psychic economy [in which] the father remains absolutely central" (143).

Simultaneously, Nunez work counters narratives by psychologists and psychiatrists that, unable to unsettle their ethnocentric construction of the Other and their monocultural and undynamic worldview, have pathologized the multiethnic and multiracial subject blurring the boundaries between groups, cultures and ethnicities. The narrator's therapist replicates identity discourses that presume an individual can only have one ethnic identity and are consequently unable to "have simultaneous membership and multiple, fluid identities with different groups" (Root 6). The analyst perpetuates dominant ideas about multiracial and multiethnic Asian American subjects that have

¹⁷⁷ Feminists had always challenged the castration fantasy, but few feminist scholars had been interested in understanding the position of the mother or her social role from the mother's point of view. Unwittingly, feminists sometimes perpetuated the Freudian marginalization of the mother by excluding the mother from their theorizing. Caren Kaplan expresses the predicament of feminists in relation to the mother in the 1970s: "The very attractiveness of feminism was that it provided the arena for separation from oppressive closeness with the Mother; feminism was in part a reaction against our mothers who had tried to inculcate the patriarchal 'feminine' in us [...] This made it difficult for us to identify with Mothering and to look from the position of the Mother. From the psychoanalytical point of view, we remained locked in ambivalence toward the Mother, at once deeply tied to her while striving for an apparently unattainable autonomy. Paradoxically, our complex oedipal struggles prevented us from seeing the Mother's oppression, and resulted in our assigning the Mother, in her heterosexual, familial setting, to an absence and silence analogous to the male relegation of her to the periphery" ("The Case of the Missing Mother" 466).

qualified them as “unnatural” and have mainly gravitated around the “myths” of their “degeneracy, confusion, conflict, and despair” (Spickard 258). As Palumbo-Liu has noted, these ideas assume that the borderless ethnic subject “is unable to cope with multiple [cultural] demands” (*Asian/American* 327). Conservative identity narratives can only envision multicultural subjects as “forever split between cultures,” unable to figure out options for her/his schizophrenic self (327).

Assuming the accuracy of their ideas about the general psychological and intellectual landscape of the multiethnic subject, homogenizing identity narratives presuppose the irresolvable “ethnic dilemma” of the minoritarian person (396). Nunez’s work challenges decontextualized Western psychotherapeutic procedures that examine the ethnic crisis in terms of subjective personal choices or a generalized inability to deal with being bi- or multi-cultural, rather than as “*a result of specific material histories*” (310; emphasis added). Her narrative echoes Paul Cohen in acknowledging that in the discipline of psychoanalysis there is still a persistent but glaring “misrecognition especially in the areas of race and ethnicity” (175). Similarly, Cohen expresses the urgency to make “the psychoanalytical profession itself” aware of the need to engage with the workings of racism in the form “of ethnocentric assumptions in its own clinical theory and practice, and in persuading it to tackle the forms of institutionalized racism operating in its procedures for recruiting both analysts and analysands” (197).

Instead of helping the subjects to make sense of the conditions, contradictions, and tensions in their lives in a significant way, traditional practices which reinforce the idea of an inherent ethnic split have been appropriated as an instrument of oppression. These narratives have tended to deny the reality of patients’ psychic pain or to view

patients' the discomfort as the private affairs of the ethnic subject. Instead, as Lola Young has pointed out, prevailing forms of Western psychotherapeutic practice leave the status quo unquestioned and frequently use psychoanalysis as "an instrument of repression and rehabilitation into social conformity," which translates into the assimilation of the immigrant and his or her wholehearted identification with the dominant culture's values (189). In other cases, decontextualized and ahistorical practices have worked to induce self-incrimination in the ethnic subject, who "can only blame itself and a tradition of beliefs for whatever alienation or lack of success he or she might find in America" (Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* 400).

Nunez's work likewise shows how in order to restore "some of the dignity" and the purpose that the protagonist felt "was constantly being undermined elsewhere in [her] life" (99), she decides to start studying ballet, an activity that "was at the opposite end of the world from the projects" (99). As she explains: "Ballet meant finally being taken seriously; meant being allowed to take yourself seriously" (99). The introduction to this period in the life of the protagonist allows Nunez to engage with classic ballet and offer some feminist analysis of the field. Nunez takes on an art form that has had difficulties being recognized "as an area of art" and an "academic discipline," partly due to the fact that it is not "contained by stone or pigment but by the living, moving self" (Caruso Haviland 98). Other scholars have further suggested that dance has become a "minor art" not only due to its elusive nature but also because it is identified as bodied and female (Banes, "Talking Women" 117). In other words, it is a minor discipline because it is considered "women's art" and is still largely avoided by heterosexual men (117). Nunez's work equally intervenes in the theorization of an area of art that "prominently

features women artists” but that paradoxically only “until quite recently” has started to be studied by feminist scholars (117).

Nunez’s protagonist acknowledges that, besides the sense of dignity that ballet gave her, there was another important role for ballet at that time of her life: “It was a “woman’s world” (102). In this world “women not only outnumbered but bested the men” (102). Ballet represented one of those rare occasions in life when, according to the narrator, there was “reason to be grateful to have been born a woman” (102). However, looking back on those years of her life, she also exposes some of the physical abuse that she endured and that ballerinas have often faced: “authoritarianism” in class (98), induced “guilt about eating” (104), and “the anxiety never being thin enough or never being beautiful enough, of being rejected after one reaches a certain age” (104). Like other feminists before her, Nunez’s work presents the world of classical ballet simultaneously as a womanly realm, simply because “women were better dancers period” (102), and, nonetheless, as an oppressive one dominated by men. As the protagonist puts it: “Men ran the school, men ran the company, men did the choreography- men called the shots, as they always do. But who cares? Men didn’t get to go on point” (102). She concludes:

Ballet a woman’s world? But it was men who invented ballet- and the ballerina. It is men who put her feet in those shoes, and who take the food out of her mouth. All this to get the desired creature, more boy than woman, a kind of third sex [...] a woman with a penis, a woman capable of an erection. (115)

And, in fact, “the most celebrated choreographers have been, and for the most part continue to be, men” (Copeland 124; see also McConnell 217). It is also true that dance tends to be considered a secondary art because of its embodied nature (that is, its

femaleness), but Nunez's critique of classic ballet as one-sidedly misogynist with women as eternal victims of oppression is problematic for several reasons. First, feminist critics have problematized the essentialist idea of women as naturally better dancers than men. Indeed, they have seriously questioned the coherence and stability of the universal term "woman" itself, and they have equally questioned "her" generalized and uniform subjugation. In the field of dance, feminist historians have rather preferred to focus their research on the ideologies, the historical, social, and political reasons why in "the course of the past two centuries" dance indeed has become "the domain of women- as artists, as critics and scholars, and as spectators" (Banes, "Talking Women" 117). Secondly, ballerinas themselves have not only been the passive victims of oppressive practices by men. Innovative women dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Mary Wigman, and choreographers such as Bronislava Nijinska and Loie Fuller early on actively responded to conventions that oppressed the female dancing body in ballet and recreated the "socially pernicious image of women" by creating innovative ways of moving and new forms of dance (Copeland 127).

To a certain extent the emergence of "early modern dance" has been understood as "first and foremost a repudiation to late nineteenth century ballet" (Copeland 126). And even in the field of classical ballet, ballerinas have intervened to present complex representations of dancing women on the stage. Attempting to move beyond "the *misérabiliste* interpretation and the celebrationist interpretation of women's roles and representations in history" (2; original emphasis), in her book *Dancing Women*, Sally Barnes analyzes canonical ballet works such as *La Sylphide*, *Coppélia*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* and displays how, despite patriarchal hierarchies, ballerinas have

often tried to “wrest the composing body’ away from the choreographer” (10). As Banes suggests, to a certain extent ballerinas often became co-choreographers: “especially in the nineteenth century, prima ballerinas were often known to interpolate their renowned specialty ‘routines’ wholesale into the choreography of ballets written by men” (10). Thus, this body of scholarship suggests that Nunez’s intervention does not quite hold. Analyses of choreography expose that ballerinas and women dancers have not only been passive objects of the gaze: manipulated, displayed and acted upon. Ann Daly reminds us that “solid research and keen analysis” on dance have undermined the “assumption that classical ballet is an irredeemable enemy to womankind” (336). As a matter of fact, as Barnes suggests:

Whereas the history of fine art is marked by the paucity of acknowledged women artists, dance history teems with accomplishments of great women performers and choreographers. Dance history complicates the standard histories of women’s experience in the arts, and for that very reason it should be studied by feminist historians in all arts. (“Talking Women” 117)

However, Nunez’s work does successfully dismantle other myths about culturally and racially mixed individuals, such as: “Being of mixed race makes you immune to many diseases. Women of mixed races are uncommonly lustful” (86). The narrator complicates the myth that multicultural persons are as matter of fact more gifted than others, a move that once again places them in an exceptional realm, as it were, out of reach of the common U.S. American man. As the narrator humorously comments: “A famous conductor, introducing a half-black, half-Jewish pianist to a concert audience, suggests that the pianist’s talent is a result of being mixed” (86). Nunez’s protagonist likewise objects to the human tendency to simply blame ethnic differences for cultural conflicts and tensions that require and demand negotiation. For example, her Russian lover Vadim

viewed interracial and interethnic conflicts as a *fait accompli*. He blamed the two races for the many tribulations of his marriage to his Jewish Russian wife. Vadim categorizes numerous groups as essentially unified, as for instance, the “German race,” “Jewish race,” or “French race,” along with their corresponding stereotypes. He observes: “It is mistake to marry other race, now I see it.” (133).¹⁷⁸ In another instance, a Chinese American friend disputes the narrator’s claims that she does not play Ping-Pong by replying: “Don’t be silly, of course you do: It’s in the genes” (86). Through these instances, Nunez challenges the romantic concepts of organic belonging based on “Genes, blood, soil” as inadequate tools for determining the objective cultural membership of a subject (86).

Instead, by way of her mother, the narrator displays a more complex concept of cultural identity formation and presents, as Stuart Hall suggests, an identity that is both “a matter of ‘becoming’ and of ‘being’” (225). In other words, like Hall, the narrator admits that cultural identities “come from somewhere” and “have a history” (Hall 225). Accordingly, the young woman is aware that her mother’s attachment to Nazi Germany and her racism are results of her education, which from a very early age was in “the hand of the Nazis” (46). The narrator is likewise conscious that, even if Christa never expressed it openly, having grown up under the sign of the swastika meant that whenever her mother “saw the swastika, she thought of home” (57). After all, Nazi Germany was the only Germany her mother had known. The young narrator thus understands why, when doing her housework, Christa would sing “the Horst Wessel song” (55). Similarly, she senses why her mother would recur to one of Hitler’s favorite quotations when

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion about race and ethnicity, see Werner Sollors’ article “Ethnicity and Race.” Sollors discusses the complex interplay of these two variants that cannot be neatly separated from one another since “the distinction between ethnicity and race is simply not a distinction between culture and nature” (102). Sollors shows that the blurry boundaries of these two categories can be traced back to the origins of the problematic category “race” in the idea of “*limpieza de sangre*” [blood purity] in Spain.

wishing to express her disdain for human beings: “Now I know men, I prefer dogs” (64). Finally, the narrator sees the reasons why, in her overwhelming longing for Germany, her mother would often watch *Triumph of the Will*, a film that Christa had seen many times as a young schoolgirl.

However, suggesting that cultural identities are historical and thus undergoing constant alteration, the narrator explains that, when Christa returned to Germany after twenty years of absence, she could not find the Germany she so longed for. It was not only that Christa did not recognize Germany, as the narrator explains, though Christa did admit, at that time: “The Germany I knew is gone. The Allies bombed it away [...] everything is new” (83). In addition, Christa was distressed by the discovery that, despite her adamant protection of her Germanness over the years (not to mention her complete dismissal of American culture as inferior), she had also changed. Not only had Germany been constantly changing, Christa, who had always presupposed an organic relationship to language, noticed that “she was forgetting her German,” the very language that she had assumed only Germans could command (83). Bewildered, she found herself struggling for seconds to find everyday words when she went into a store to buy something. As the years continued to pass after her first visit, Christa would realize, though she was unable to tell exactly when the shift started to take place, that she was “thinking in English” and not in her native German (84). She would eventually admit that though her English maintained a strong German accent, and though she would still make grammatical mistakes, “German ha[d] become her second tongue” (83-84). After her first visit to Germany, Christa returned a couple of times to visit her native country. Nevertheless, the narrator tells us that her mother never tried to move back to Germany for good, despite

the devastating nostalgia that she had suffered for many years. “Why not? Because it isn’t home anymore,” Christa openly expressed (83). Because most of the people she had known were already dead or had left, Christa felt that she had nobody and nothing to go back to (83).

Christa’s disconcerting experience with her gradually shifting cultural identity confirms Stuart Hall’s observation about cultural identity clichés that are allegedly forever representative of “what we really are” in the diaspora (225). Hall states of cultural identities: “Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject of the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (225). Likewise, as an effect of the actuality that cultural identity, as a product of history, is imperceptibly but nonetheless continually changing, Hall suggests that: “[w]e cannot speak very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’” (225). In fact, Christa’s unconscious but steady transculturalization displays that:

cultural identity is not fixed essence at all, lying outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made a fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return. Of course, it is not a mere phantasm either. It is *something* –not a mere thick of the imagination. It has its histories-and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addressed us as a simple, ‘factual’ past, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always-already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. (226; original emphasis)

The narrator, who at some point of her life longed “to be an all-American girl with a name like Sue Brown” (17), is aware that, despite the disjointed family life with her parents, her American identity is blended with her parents’ traumatic histories and cultures. Nunez’s work denies the reader a harmonious final resolution. The narrator is

aware that she will never be the all-American Sue Brown she once wanted to be. She knows that her identity is a multiethnic and multiracial Chinese Latina German U.S. American one that, for now, will have to get by with the “unbearable few” facts that she has collected about her father (4). The lack of name for the main character suggests the presentation of a self which is a composite in evolution, an identity in the unending process of becoming. In other words, her self is one that is not yet accomplished and, as such, refuses to be fixed or stabilized by a name that would convey the sense of a permanent, reliable, and consummated identity. As a matter of fact, the narrator is aware of the alterations of the self in the face of the inevitable interventions and disruptions of history, culture, memory, and time. She states: “It is not impossible that one day I will have to write my parents’ story all over again” (91).

Nunez’s work compellingly shows the disruption and pain that can be caused by those who, “divided by ethnicity,” are not able to build meaningful communal bonds (Davis 130). Her narrative exposes “the painful disconnectedness” resulting from essential ethnic identities (132). At the same time, she also demonstrates “that the problems [resulting from organic cultural identities] are commonly shared,” and that they are not limited to any particular ethnic or cultural group (132). In a time of globalization and the increasing propagation of ideas of organic belonging and nationalistic cultural identity, like in Jen’s work, Nunez’s narrative calls attention to the imperative to question potentially divisive concepts of cultural identity and belonging.

Similarly to Jen’s narrative, Nunez’s complicates commonsense and apparently neutral romantic concepts of cultural identity based on common roots, blood, territory, etc. that can easily turn into a harmful, if not outright, (self-) destructive nationalism.

Nevertheless, unlike Jen, Nunez complicates the model minority myth that obscures the struggles and discrimination that many members of this minority face in their daily lives. Likewise, contrasting with Jen's work, which almost exclusively busies itself with claiming and confirming the True Americanness of Chinese Americans, Nunez engages with feminist questions. Nunez questions conventional psychotherapeutic practices and thinking that, following the misogynist Freudian plot instead of bringing some kind of relief to female patients, perpetuate the marginalization of women in society. Nunez presents psychoanalysis as a practice that can often become part of the problem rather than part of the cure for women who recur to it. In a less fortunate feminist intervention, Nunez posits the world of classical ballet as unquestionably repressive for women dancers. Her representation of women dancers as solely oppressed by the patriarchal structures that to a certain extent are still predominant in traditional ballet remains trapped in a binary view of power structures as one of oppressed and oppressor. Her tale obscures the fact that early women dancers and ballerinas have questioned the rigid structures imposed by classic ballet and its ideal of female beauty.

In the end, in the awareness of belonging to a U.S. culture where people often cannot tell "one Asian from another" and thus presuppose the sameness of their experiences; and the similitude of their psychological and mental landscapes, Nunez's narrative disrupts simplistic tales about the pathologically confused "schizophrenic" frame of mind of the bicultural Asian American subject (Palumbo-Liu *Asian/American* 313). Her work forcefully exposes therapeutic practices and discourses about the psychic ethnic conflict that have often been used to question the ability of the Asian American

immigrants to become true Americans; to posit their potential disloyalty to U.S. America;
and to dispute their belonging in the American Promised Land.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

My project, as a whole, has aimed to question a predominant trope in literary criticism addressing the works of minority female writers, that is, the perpetuation of the idea of an unchanging and universal “immigrant woman” subjectivity. The introduction to this project posed the following guiding questions: How can we read these women as part of their larger ethnic group without essentializing them? How can we appreciate their differences without losing their links to others? How can we understand their works without limiting them to dichotomies such as inclusion vs. exclusion, majority vs. minority, oppressor vs. oppressed, center vs. periphery/margin/fringe/interstice? In the following pages, I attempt to summarize my findings in considering these questions in relation to the works of the six minority women writers studied in this project: Cecilia Absatz, Nora Glickman, Seyran Ateş, Yadé Kara, Gish Jen, and Sigrid Nunez. I have likewise considered the degree to which their narratives have contributed to sustain standardized representations of “the immigrant woman” as perpetually trapped “between two discrete worlds” or as achieving individual “happy hybridity” independently from the precarious situation of their ethnic groups in the guest country.

For the most part, the literary productions of these women rewrite, resist, and complicate comfortable literary analyses of their works that too often have stripped their productions of diversity and complexity. However, some projects come close to aligning themselves with the dominant discourse about “the immigrant woman.” To a large extent, as we have seen, their literary works likewise show critical awareness about their marginal condition both as women and as members of ethnic minorities living in nations

that insist on maintaining a homogenous conception of their national identity despite their multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural reality. The literary works examined in this project largely contest the traditional idea of “the immigrant woman” forever drifting/torn between two worlds, that is to say, hopelessly trapped between two incommensurable cultures. Broadly speaking, their writings also complicate ideas of individual immigrant women achieving happy assimilation by divorcing themselves from the lived realities of their ethnic groups in the guest countries. Positing the matter-of-factness of an absolute cultural divide between static nations and enclosed cultures, literary criticism has too often presented “the immigrant woman” as occupying a cultural and historical vacuum between the culture of origin and the guest nation and, as such, as forever caught/drifting between worlds. The only other alternative to this schizophrenia appears to be a state of individual happy hybridity, where subjects pick and choose idiosyncratic elements from two or more discrete cultures and create their very own personal cultural amalgamations. Along these lines, likewise presupposing the stability, obviousness, and essential nature of the modern nation, literary critics have tended to conceive and to present writing by minority women writers as being produced at the margins, borders, interstices, etc. of reputed nations and even, borrowing Seyhan Azade’s expression, as “writing outside the Nation.”

Complicating the aforementioned premises, the authors analyzed in this project propose political and multicultural immigrant identities that go beyond the still predominant monocultural either-or identity paradigm (read: Jewish or Argentine, Turkish/Muslim or German/Christian, Chinese or U.S. American) that has declared their biculturalism/multiculturalism as unthinkable. This essentialist and exclusionary identity

discourse has repeatedly pathologized bicultural immigrant identities and theorized them (because they allegedly belong nowhere) as inassimilable, psychologically unstable, and culturally schizophrenic. In contrast, the subjectivities that the writings of the authors here analyzed propose are largely capable of tolerating and negotiating the paradoxes, ambiguities, and contradictions that bicultural subjects might encounter. In the context of a transnational world that, on the one hand, destabilizes the boundaries of nations but, on the other, seems to be fostering the reemergence of religious fundamentalisms, nationalist movements, and the drive towards monoculturalisms, the narratives of the politically engaged women writers here studied complicate organic ideas of national belonging based on traditional nostalgic notions of a country, a territory, blood, genes, and kinship as insufficient for the theorization of an individual's "authentic" cultural identity. Instead, in a time when global flows of information, products, and peoples challenge the limits of the nation and make possible the materialization of complex identities, the literary works here analyzed suggest identities in process that are, among others, Jewish *and* Argentine, Turkish/Muslim *and* German/Catholic, Chinese *and* U.S. American, and whose only constant is, paraphrasing Trinh T. Minh-ha, an unresolved dialectical back and forth movement across political, religious, ethnic, cultural, and sexual boundaries (qtd. in Yarbrow-Bejarano 17). To sum up, all six narratives here studied call for more nuanced literary criticism of immigrant women's writing that no longer sustains the representation (and perception) of a generic "immigrant woman" subjectivity, frozen in time, occupying cultural and historical non-spaces within the guest countries that they understand as integral parts of their selves.

Displaying profound knowledge of the Latin American region, for instance, the Jewish Argentine Cecilia Absatz and Nora Glickman categorically redefine commonplace conceptions and understandings about a homogeneously *mestizo* and uniformly Catholic Latin American identity. Their works intervene and disseminate a conceptualization of Latin America that includes non-*mestizo*, non-criollo and non-Catholic cultures and traditions which, though largely ignored by mainstream Latin American identity, cultural, and historical discourses, have also played an integral and constitutive part in the cultural, socio-political and religious formation of the diverse countries of the region. Absatz's and Glickman's narratives join the endeavor that has traditionally engaged Latin American thinkers: to define a Latin American identity. But, most importantly, exposing the extent of their immersion in multifaceted Latin American history, life, and thought, their theoretically informed narratives hover in the same unresolved dialectical tensions between essentialism and nationalism that have historically haunted and challenged the project of Latin American intellectuals to theorize an autochthonous Latin American identity independent from Western influence.

In the case of Absatz, her antiessentialist Latin American identity project *Los años pares* questions narratives of Latin American authenticity that emphasize *mestizo* "blood" ties as a Latin American identity quintessence. Instead, Absatz argues for a construction of Latin American identity in the process of becoming which results from location of birth or long-term residence in a region. And yet, my analysis has shown that her work ultimately remains trapped, almost undermining itself, in the still prevailing modernist Latin American tendency to dismiss the European and U.S. American component, influence, and experience as thoroughly negative and upsetting for Latin

American countries. This predisposition has typically resulted in attempts to look for Latin American mythic origins that posit an uncontaminated past before the European disruption and has thus again and again returned to nationalism, worship of pre-Columbian origins and thirdworldism as ways to come to terms with persistent Western intervention and influence.

In other words, in her narrative the main protagonist Clara Auslander suggests that her Dutch lover Eric should “go home” in order to be able to once and for all solve the problems of her Latin American female identity. Unfortunately, Absatz’s narrative recurs to some of the same essentialist rhetoric and ideas (which have traditionally been deployed by Latin American intellectuals) as means to solve the tension between the Western “center” and the Latin American “periphery.” Like the habitual expressions of writers and thinkers of the region, and following the premise dictated by the ideology of Latin American *mestizaje*, Absatz seems to recommend the dismissal of the historical presence of those immigrants who are perceived as unmixed in the region, the ignoring of their historical presence in the area, and the silencing of their social and cultural contributions to the cultures of the continent as a way to determine quintessential Latinamericanism.

In *Uno de sus Juanes y otros cuentos*, Glickman proposes a transnational/trans-American Latin American identity devoid of national boundaries and nationalistic attachments and fashioned through alliances and shared experiences. Glickman’s heterogeneous Latin American identity embraces not only Yiddish as another constitutive language of Latin American culture, but also non-Catholic, non-mestizo and non-criollo cultures and ethnicities as integral elements of its formation. However, her

transnational/trans-American identity model, suggesting the dissolution of the nation state and the disappearance of cultural boundaries throughout the American continent, also presents several problems. It is not only that in her effort to reaffirm the Jewish historical presence in Argentina Glickman's work does not engage with the overwhelming contemporary political realities of the country that, time after time, have tragically affected the lives of existing Jewish Argentine communities. In addition, by positing the end of the nation and underestimating the uneven flow of capital and cultural transaction from North to South within the American continent, Glickman's identity narrative unwittingly supports the expansion of Western culture and values into Latin American countries. In the face of globalization, this very irregular cultural and economic transaction between North and South has resulted in the rise of closed nationalisms in some Latin American countries and triggered the return to conservative notions of a lost pre-Columbian, pre-modern Latin American identity free from pervasive Western influence.

Besides conceptualizing Latin American identity, these works equally give prominence to women's experiences and concerns. Absatz and Glickman attempt to theorize the position of women within patriarchal societies and complicate commonplace ideas of a uniform feminine identity. Without privileging the transnational over the national and blurring the First World/Third World, South American/North America binary, Glickman suggests a form of transnational feminism of solidarity that is not necessarily bound to the nation and that moves beyond constraining identity politics. Her project complicates the myth of paradigmatic motherhood that presents women as naturally selfless, all-giving, and understanding by presenting cases of women who

display contradictory and conflictive attitudes towards motherhood. Along the same lines, Glickman's narrative engages with sexism as a condition not only limited to men, since women can also participate in the consolidation of a sexist society. Her work suggests that feminism is a way of life relevant to both men and women.

Not surprisingly, the self-proclaimed feminist Absatz suggests a feminist position symptomatic of the problems that emerge in her attempts to redefine a hybrid Latin American identity. Sticking to the oppositional logic that haunts her effort to rework identity, Absatz suggests a feminist oppositional paradigm that proposes a utopian non-oppressive "feminine" space isolated from a repressive "masculine" one where women can overcome the contradictions and tensions in their lives. Unlike Glickman's feminist project, which moves beyond the binary logic that views power structures in terms of the oppressor/oppressed duality, Absatz's narrative arguably suggests that gender might be the only variable necessary to explain generalized and uniform female subordination. In fact, Absatz's feminist project remains stuck in the same masculine binary scheme of power relations present in the theorizing of some Latin American feminist literary critics. As my research has shown, in their attempt to theorize Latin American women's experience, this stream of oppositional Latin American feminist literary criticism has not only privileged criollas, Catholics, mestizas as the paradigmatic feminine Latin American hybrid identity, but has also from time to time suggested, like Absatz's narrative, the creation of self-sufficient feminine spaces as a way to subvert patriarchal oppression. Such binary views often fail to recognize any form of privilege marginalized subjects might have. Besides generating images of a homogenously oppressed and monolithic Latin American woman, such an approach has also sometimes missed the opportunity to

analyze how gender is reproduced or to offer pragmatic, political suggestions as to how gender inequality can be challenged. Yet again, displaying the extent to which Absatz has been immersed in Latin American intellectual life, the author's work reiterates some of the shortcomings of certain sectors of Latin American feminist literary theorizing.

Displaying substantial knowledge of German history, culture, and society, Turkish Germans Seyran Ateş and Yadé Kara make use of the visibility produced by the negative perception of Islam and insidious anti-Islamism in Europe to express their concerns and hopes as Turkish German women. Ateş's and Kara's narratives complicate homogenizing Western discourses of the self that have been deployed to declare the bicultural Turkish German subject as problematic, that is, as schizophrenic identity in perpetual crisis torn between two worlds: the traditional Orient and the progressive Occident. Instead, their works put forward a subjectivity that seeks to avert the Huntingtonian conception of the unavoidable clash between Muslim and Christian civilizations that observers see taking place in Germany. Their narratives likewise articulate their interests and formulate their claims for equality as members of a minority that Orientalist discourse in Germany has traditionally striped of its complexity and heterogeneity.

In telling the story of her life, the feminist Ateş sets out to de-essentialize the representation of the unquestionably victimized Turkish woman that social workers, the German media, politicians, Middle East specialists and, to a large extent, conservative German feminists have propagated since the arrival of the first female guest workers from Turkey. Unfortunately, though in her narrative, *Große Reise ins Feuer: Die Geschichte einer deutschen Türkin*, Ateş, a successful lawyer, clearly presents a

diversified picture of Turkish cultures and experiences in Germany, my analysis of Ateş's narrative unearthed two crucial moments when the feminist unwittingly, but precariously, joins Orientalist and mainstream German discourse about people from Turkey in Germany. First, though not quite falling back into the traditional victimology discourse of the Turkish woman historically celebrated in Germany, Ateş does present the same limited outlook on the veil question that has characterized conservative feminist discourse in Germany and that ultimately presents Turkish women with headscarves as victims of Turkish men. Apparently unaware of the fact that the West has always colored the meanings of the veil, Ateş's reads Muslim women wearing Islamic headscarves in Germany as in need of "saving" or "liberation" from repressive families and fundamentalist Muslim men. In any case, Ateş's narrative strategies and shortcomings highlight Ella Shohat's accuracy in suggesting that one of the challenges for first world feminists of color "is how to avoid a Eurocentric rescue narrative that substitutes the First World woman of color for the white man (à la colonial narrative) or white woman (à la white feminism) rescuing a dark woman from a dark man" (9).

Secondly, attempting to elucidate the reasons why her lesbian relationships with Turkish and Kurdish women have failed, Ateş equally recurs to rhetorical clichés of a monolithic Turkish/Kurdish/Muslim culture that is essentially violent and backward to explain her lack of success. Ateş blames the difficulties in her relationships on the generalized macho-like behavior of her aggressive Turkish and Kurdish female partners. The writer goes so far as to propose that the willingness to kill another person is more accentuated in Turks and Kurds than in any other people in Europe. Ateş's inscription of the very essentialist discourse about Turks and Kurds that her narrative sets out to

complicate, as this project has shown, becomes especially problematic since in Germany her account tends to be read as a legitimate and authoritative contribution to the debate about the integration of Muslims in German society, simply because Ateş is a successful lawyer of Turkish/Kurdish descent and a recognized feminist.

Like Ateş's narrative, Kara's *Selam Berlin* complicates the still prevailing idea that all Turks in Germany arrived as guest workers escaping poverty in their villages and that women who wear Islamic scarves symbolize general backwardness. But most importantly, in a complementary way to Ateş's work, Kara's account engages with the stereotype of the violent "Turk" (Turkish man). Kara engages with a subject matter that, in comparison to the intellectual output that has resulted from the desire to liberate and empower the (victimized) Turkish woman, has been scantily and uncritically treated by social workers, politicians, feminists, and Islam experts in Germany. Kara's work criticizes the media accounts, sociological work, and field studies that simply assume the alleged innate violence of Turkish German men and boys. Kara's account criticizes "experts" who, attempting to zoom in on the experience of the essentially "troubled" Turkish man, have decontextulized and dehistoricized data.

Through her Turkish German character Hasan, Kara's work displays awareness of the complexity of the contemporary cultural debate and negotiations going on between Orient and Occident, Muslims and non-Muslims, Germans from the East and Germans from the West in the Federal Republic. Hasan is aware that this dialogue is not an easy one. It is full of tensions and paved with stereotypes and reciprocal misconceptions about "Turks" and "Germans," the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West. As a German Turk, Hasan is nonetheless willing to give it a try and become a participant in a

cultural debate that demands that both groups critically engage with the culture, the language, the history, the literature, and the religion of their respective cultures. In the current climate of fanatical schism that we live in, Kara's and Ateş's narratives (despite Ateş's aforementioned limitations) interpret the dialectical tensions and contradictions between Turkish and German cultures and Muslim and Christian religions as potential sources of creativity that can promote the materialization of multicultural selves in place of fundamentalist identity constructions.

In the case of U.S. America, Gish Jen's and Sigrid Nunez's narratives bear witness to the heterogeneity of the Chinese American immigrant experience and the multiplicity of Chinese American identities that mainstream U.S. American culture, partly based on physiognomy, tends to view as belonging to a monolithic and essential Oriental culture. Their productions engage with the unessential and porous nature of cultures as a means to come to terms with the dialectical tensions between mainstream U.S. American culture and its peripheries, and between East and West. However, the writers deal with these dialectical anxieties in different ways.

By calling the Changs the U.S. American "New Jews," Jen's humorous narrative suggests the fortunate resolution of the tensions between the U.S. American cultural center and the Chinese American minority. Nevertheless, her narrative also presents anxious moments that unwittingly contradict Jen's wishful felicitous resolution and expose the precarious position of Chinese Americans in the Promised Land. In other words, by perpetuating the idea of a successful Chinese American Model Minority in democratic U.S. American society, Jen's work shows that the very myth that celebrates them as America's Great Success triggers the forces that brand them as unable to become

true Americans and sentences them to remain perpetual foreigners. So called quintessential Asian/Confucian values of cooperation, family, work ethic, education, and community have been targeted as seminal to Asian Americans' ability to become the model minority. Nevertheless, in the context of global capitalism and the emergence of Asia as an economic power, this very ideology of Asian values has backfired on Asian Americans. "[S]uccessful performance can be construed as a matter of showing off, cooperation with the individual family as indifference to American society, and interest and expertise as depriving others of opportunities" (Shu 93). The success some Chinese have achieved is resented.

Jen's identification of Chinese Americans (read: Asian Americans in general) as the New Jews in the Promised Land is unfortunate for several reasons. She perpetuates the stereotype of Jewish- and Chinese Americans as successful minorities despite the difficulties that members of these minorities have with the homogenizing epithet. Studies on Asian American experience have again and again shown that the epithet "model minority" does not protect its members from everyday discrimination, police violence, poverty, hate crimes, female exploitation in sweatshops, illiteracy, or insidious stereotyping. Economic success in the Promised Land and wholehearted assimilation do not guarantee that Asian Americans are perceived as true Americans. Jen's narrative displays that, despite her celebration of the idea that being American means being whatever you want to be, in reality, Asian Americans do not have boundless options for self-identification and self-definition.

Unlike the other women writers studied in this project, Jen's work does not engage with feminist issues in any significant way. Though it could be argued that Jen

presents a coming of age of a rebellious young girl that contradicts the idea of Asian American women as subservient and docile, it can also be stated that her work simply perpetuates the traditional emphasis on claiming autonomous female Americanness without paying due attention to U. S. American historical racism that some Chinese American women writers have showed in the past. Like some other Chinese American women writers, Jen leaves unremarked the many negative experiences of the Chinese in the U.S., only ever mentioning these experiences in a cursory way. Although her protagonists adopt and proclaim U.S. American values and aspirations, they continue to be perceived as foremost Chinese. Jen's hasty work displays the anxiety of a minority that claims America, but whose cultural contributions remain for the most part unrecognized by mainstream U.S. American culture.

Unlike Jen, Sigrid Nunez challenges the portrayal of Chinese Americans solely as a model minority. Without denying that there is some truth in the myth of the model minority, in her attempt to present a more diverse Chinese American experience Nunez joins scholars engaged in displaying the broad range of experiences of persons of Asian ancestry in U.S. America. The work of the Eurasian Latina U.S. American Nunez further challenges Chinese American identity boundaries as to the extent to which ancestry or "blood" can influence the recognition of a person as Chinese American. Nunez likewise challenges the archetypal *mestizo* Latin American identity that has been partly constructed via the marginalization of the histories, cultural contributions, and experiences of non-Catholic, non-mestizo, non-criollo cultures. That is to say, Nunez reminds readers of the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, and other traditions that are also constitutive historical and cultural elements in Latin American identities,

countries, and cultures. Nunez's work likewise draws attention to the communities of multiracial Asian Americans that only recently have gained acceptance as members of traditional Asian American communities.

As an alternative, Nunez's narrative dismantles the suggestion that multicultural Asian American immigrants are schizophrenically torn between cultures—Orient and West—and therefore incapable of becoming U.S. Americans or, for that matter, Asian Americans. Nunez complicates ideas of static and transparent cultural identities and presents a model of individual and national cultural identity as a contextual and historical process never quite accomplished or complete. Her narrative likewise complicates therapeutic practices by practitioners who, unable to unsettle their ethnocentric construction of the Other, continue to ascribe to the idea of an stable Western subject that can be known. These therapists have often assumed that the psychic pain of people who have blurred the boundaries between groups, cultures, and ethnicities is the logical outcome of their multiculturalism and not the result of specific material and social arrangements that work to exclude them from national, social, economic, and cultural grand narratives.

By expressing her discontent with therapists' tendencies to hypothesize the protagonist's mother as the unique source of her suffering, Nunez problematizes phallogocentric and ahistorical Western psychotherapeutic practices that remain oblivious to the misogynist ideology running through the Oedipal narrative: the devaluation of the mother and the drive to naturalize or "biologize" the subordination of women in the patriarchal social order.

Nunez also intervenes in the dialogue among dance feminist theorists as to the position of women within the field of classical ballet. In this way, Nunez drives the reader's attention to an area of art that to a certain extent has been viewed, as it were, as second class and nonacademic because "contained by stone or pigment but by the living, moving self" (Caruso Haviland 98). Dance theorists have further suggested that the marginalization of this fleeting art has also been influenced by the tendency to identify it as female, because bodied, that is, as a womanly art. However, my analysis shows that in this instance Nunez's intervention is dominated by oppositional binary logic and essentialism. She not only suggests that ballet is a "woman's world" because women are simply better dancers than men, but also suggests that the field has been dominated by men with women dancers occupying a peripheral position; her intervention presents ballet as a one-sidedly misogynist field. My study views her position as problematic for several reasons. First, feminist critics have questioned the essentialist idea of women as naturally better dancers than men. In addition, dance history shows that ballerinas themselves have not exclusively been passive victims of oppressive practices by men. Innovative women dancer and choreographers such actively responded to conventions that oppressed the female dancing body in classical ballet by creating new forms of dancing.

This project has shown that the literary work by Cecilia Absatz, Nora Glickman Seyran Ateş, Yadé Kara, Gish Jen, and Sigrid Nunez expose the ideological production of the Argentine, U.S. American, and German nations and deconstruct hegemonic nationalistic accounts that have propagated their ethnic and cultural homogeneity. In fact, these writers "are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers

of the modern state” (Bhabha qtd. in McClennen 46). Their writing is involved in the transformation of their societies. They are engaged in the reshaping and redefinition of the history of the countries and cultures that form integral parts of their selves. These writers, paraphrasing Adelson, defy in a fundamental way what has been known as Argentina (and Latin America), Germany, and U.S. America and challenge readers to reconceptualize their understandings of the meaning of Argentina (and Latin America), Germany, and the U.S.

At the same time, it is also true that the ethnic groups to which the writers here studied belong are to a certain extent privileged. In the context of Germany, this project highlights the need to study the writing of other minorities besides Turkish German. Partly due to the attention given to the victimized Turkish woman, there is a tendency to assume that the “immigrant problem” is, par excellence, “the Turkish problem” and that immigrant literature is Turkish literature. As a result of this limited perception, very little attention has been given to the literatures of other minority writers of, among others, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Albanian, Chilean, Iranian, and Moroccan descent in Germany.

In the case of Jewish Argentine writers, the historical presence and cultural contributions of Ashkenazi communities have often been emphasized to the detriment or outright exclusion of the Sephardic presence in the country. Absatz and Glickman are both of Ashkenazim descent. However, the absence of Sephardic writers in my project is not the result of a lack of awareness that the predominance of Ashkenazim literature and experience in the Americas has contributed to the marginalization of the experience of “other” Jews, that is, among others, of Sephardic, Black, Hassidic, Arab, African, Asian, and South Asian Jews. This project does not include a Sephardic writer, despite my wish

to the contrary, because, to my knowledge, there are no second generation Sephardic Argentine female writers. The most outstanding contemporary Sephardic Argentine female writer is the fourth-generation Ana María Shua, but her belonging to a more recent generation made her an unwieldy fit for this particular project. Attentive that Jews are, more often than not, perceived as a monolithic prosperous white middle-class community of Ashkenazi ancestry, this project equally calls for research, by Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, that diversifies the study of Jewish literatures and experiences in the Americas and worldwide.

Likewise, among Asian American literatures since the mid 70s, Chinese American literary productions have been objects of great interest. Partly due to the increasing interest in the work by Sui Sin Far, but also to the more mainstream success of some controversial female writers like Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, as well as Gish Jen, Chinese American narratives have been the target of significant academic research and numerous scholarly essays in comparison to, for instance, Cambodian, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Thai literatures. However, in the context of a well-organized U.S. American multiculturalism, the narrow coverage limited to the narratives of some Chinese American “big names” has contributed not only to the isolation of other Asian American literatures from the U.S. American literary canon, but also to the marginalization of other Chinese American writers who do not propagate assimilation as the only way to claim exemplary Americanness. More scholarly attention is due writers who display understanding of the ideological, historical, and social workings that have contributed to their cultures’ degradation in the Promised Land.

This project has shown that literary analyses of immigrant women's literature that insist on deploying the analytical binary paradigms of women trapped between two worlds—writing outside or at the margins, interstices, or fringes of nations or societies—fail to do justice to the complexity of their works. The same applies to analyses that celebrate the happy assimilation of the individual immigrant woman independently from the specific realities of her ethnic group in the guest country. By applying Adelson's and McClennes's literary tools of historical "touching tales" and "dialectics of exile," respectively, this project displays that, in the context of a globalized world facilitating the emergence of complex subjectivities, the oppositional binary logic of incommensurability and exclusivity that has for so long prevailed in literary criticism of minority writing will no longer suffice and requires reconceptualization. I have attempted to begin that large project here.

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VITA

LUZ ANGÉLICA KIRSCHNER

Education

- Ph. D.**, Department of Comparative Literature, Pennsylvania State University, 2008
Minor in Criticism, Theory, and Aesthetics.
- M.A.**, Comparative Literature, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002.
- Magister Artium** [M.A.] Amerikanistik und Literaturwissenschaft [American and Literary Studies] passed with distinction, University of Bielefeld, Germany, 2002.
- B.A.**, Lenguas Modernas [Modern Languages], Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia, 1981.

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